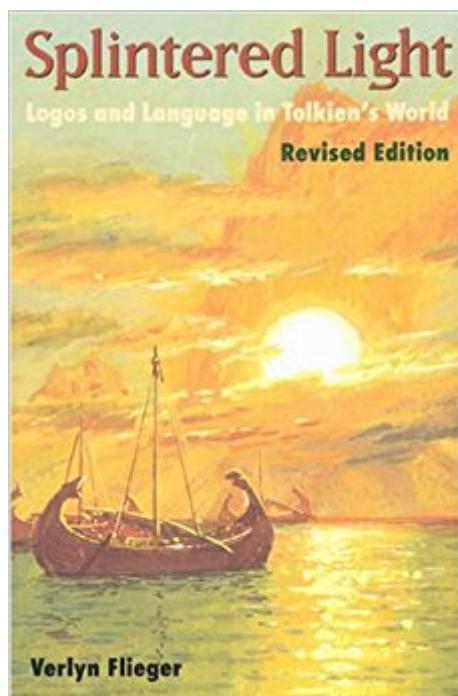


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Splintered Light: Logos And Language In Tolkien's World



Synopsis

J. R. R. Tolkien is perhaps best known for *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, but it is in *The Silmarillion* that the true depth of Tolkien's Middle-earth can be understood. *The Silmarillion* was written before, during, and after Tolkien wrote *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. A collection of stories, it provides information alluded to in Tolkien's better known works and, in doing so, turns *The Lord of the Rings* into much more than a sequel to *The Hobbit*, making it instead a continuation of the mythology of Middle-earth. Verlyn Flieger's expanded and updated edition of *Splintered Light*, a classic study of Tolkien's fiction first published in 1983, examines *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* in light of Owen Barfield's linguistic theory of the fragmentation of meaning. Flieger demonstrates Tolkien's use of Barfield's concept throughout the fiction, showing how his central image of primary light splintered and refracted acts as a metaphor for the languages, peoples, and history of Middle-earth.

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Customer Reviews

Verlyn Flieger is professor emerita of English at the University of Maryland where she teaches courses on Tolkien, medieval and modern literature, and comparative mythology. She has written three books on Tolkien: *Splintered Light*, *A Question of Time*, and *Interrupted Music* (all published by The Kent State University Press). She has also edited a critical edition of Tolkien's novella *Smith of Wootton Major*, and an expanded edition with notes and commentary of Tolkien's most influential theoretical essay, "On Fairy-Stories." •

Verlyn Flieger first published this book in the early 1980s, only a few years after the publication of *The Silmarillion*. It was the first important study of Tolkien's great story, and this Revised Edition, published twenty years later, has additional value because the longer time period allows deeper perspective. Many of the essays in this work deal with Flieger's analysis of the influence on Tolkien of his fellow Inklings, Owen Barfield. Barfield had developed a linguistic theory of the fragmentation (or splintering) of meaning, which caused Tolkien to rethink many of his own ideas on philology. Flieger demonstrates that Tolkien used Barfield's concept throughout his writings, but most especially in the stories and tales which became *The Silmarillion*. Flieger's masterly retelling and analyses of many of those tales, especially those dealing with Feanor's creation of the Silmarils, their theft by Morgoth after his destruction of the Two Trees of Valinor, and the ensuing rebellion of the Noldor breathe fresh life into words that I have dearly loved ever since first reading them in 1977. *Splintered Light*, like the rest of Flieger's work, is a highly scholarly but accessible and fascinating work. All lovers of the worlds created by J.R.R. Tolkien owe it to themselves to read and savor Flieger's fascinating analyses.

I have read enough about and by Dr. Tolkien that it is difficult for me to find something fresh or new. But this book goes back to the first parts of Tolkien's creation to the Music of the Ainur and how it informs everything that follows - even to the singing of Tom Bombadil to show how really old he is. This is not a book for me to read in one sitting. It takes some thought and in some way is more like a text than a review or survey. But if you seriously want to know about Tolkien's vision and his desire to revive a English mythology, this is the book for you. It is all there from Music to Light to Language.

This is another of Flieger's book that focuses on a specialized aspect of Middle-earth as the other book, *A Question of Time*, did. This one is more centered on *The Silmarillion* and on the idea of language. It speaks of Feanor's creation of the Silmarils and what happened because of that event and his inability to let go of his possession, as later Frodo will be unable to do, and of Beren and Thingol and much else in that immensely detailed tapestry of the early history of the Elves, Dwarves and Men. It has also in the later chapters much of interest to say about Frodo and how he was "broken by a burden of fear and horror - broken down, and in the end made into something quite different," as the Professor wrote in one of his letters. "Filled with clear light" he was to become, though we see but the beginning of that transformation and can only guess that it continued after he

went West. There is also an analysis of "The Sea-Bell" poem which is my favorite of mine due to its association with Frodo. Another very interesting book from Flieger and my favorite of hers. If you only read one of hers, read this one!

A wonderful work of literary criticism and scholarly analysis of Tolkien. Flieger delves deep into Middle-Earth and inspects all facets of Tolkien's world. I highly recommend this for all Tolkien fans interested in the linguistics behind the mastermind.

Finally a book that explains the differences among the Vanyar, Sindarin, and Noldorin elves; who the Calaquendi and Moriquendi were; why the story of Maeglin was important; in short, this book really put the *Silmarillion* into perspective for me. As other reviewers have noted, Dr. Flieger explains not just Tolkien's literature, but also Tolkien's philosophy. Anyone stumped by the *Silmarillion* should read this book. Anyone who loves Tolkien must read this book

Excellent insights into Tolkiens use of mythic language.

highly recommended

The original 1983 edition, long hard to find, was one of the first books to discuss The *Silmarillion* in detail, and one of the most insightful: it showed Tolkien applying to his mythology Owen Barfield's principles of the deep relationship between language and the nature of reality, and using fragmented light as a metaphorical depiction of fragmented language. The revised edition is not a quick touch-up, but a massively extended rewrite that delves into much more detail and takes into account much that had not been published in 1983. Even the remainder of the old book has been re-written to improve clarity and flow. Along with Flieger's second Tolkien study, *A Question of Time*, which does for time and dreams what this one does for language and light, *Splintered Light* resumes its place as one of the half-dozen essential critical monographs on Tolkien. Her third study, *Interrupted Music: Tolkien and the Making of a Mythology*, is due from Kent State in the spring of 2005, and I'll await it eagerly.

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