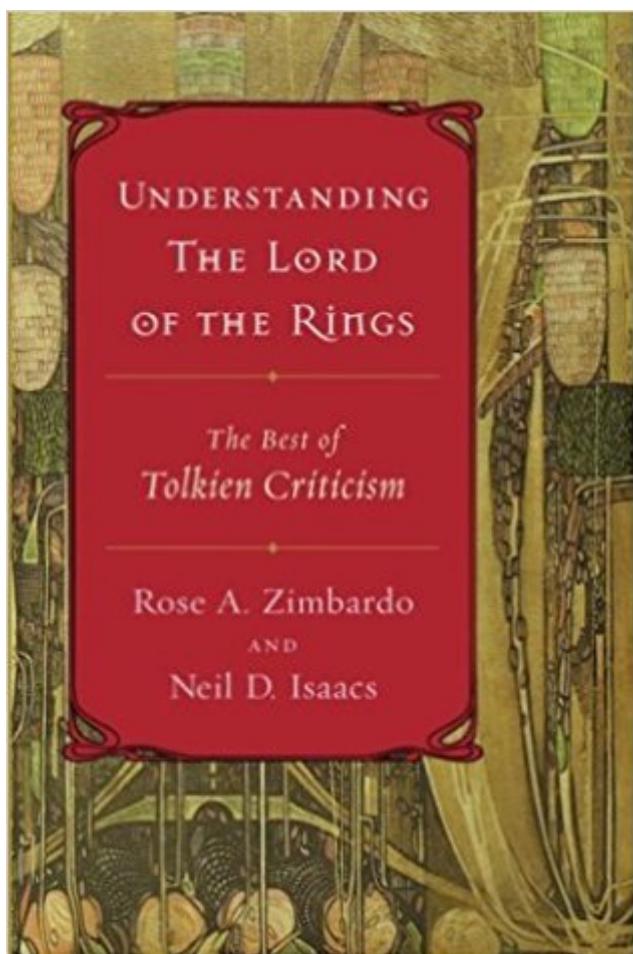


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# Understanding The Lord Of The Rings: The Best Of Tolkien Criticism



## **Synopsis**

When first published, *The Lord of the Rings* stood far from the mainstream: no one had seen anything like it for decades. Tolkien's almost stridently antimodern tale needed valiant defenders, vocal admirers who understood its sources and relished its monumental scale. While such champions of modernism as Edmund Wilson mocked Tolkien's archaic structure and language, W. H. Auden -- a great modernist poet in his own right -- rose to his defense with a spirited essay on the true nature of the Hero Quest. Edmund Fuller's essay collected here discusses the nature of the fairy tale, returning to the roots of the term to remove the treacle of Disney and restore the value of realistic enchantment. Tolkien's friend C. S. Lewis takes up the question of why, if you have a serious comment to make about real life, you would drape it in a never-never land of your own. He shrewdly argues that it is because real life does have mythic and heroic qualities -- in abundance. This collection also includes, among others, essays by Marion Zimmer Bradley, Verlyn Flieger, Paul Kocher, Jane Chance, and each of the editors, as well as a brand-new essay by Tom Shippey that shows us how to process all this vast learning, adding to it the many delights of the film versions of Tolkien's epic masterpiece, so we can relish his achievement all the more.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Fans will find much in these essays to enjoy and ponder. *Library Journal*

Neil D. Isaacs, Professor Emeritus of English language and literature at the University of Maryland,

lives in Colesville, Maryland. Rose A. Zimbardo, Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus of English at Stony Brook University, has been a noted Restoration scholar for more than forty years. She lives in San Francisco. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

This collection of essays is a great way to understand Tolkien's works in depth. I've read most of what Tolkien's wrote and have been working my way through the various critiques and analyses of his legendarium. Well-written, the essays give me things to think about and a reason to re-read the books.

Great insights into the world of Tolkien full of praise and response to his critiques. It's full of interesting tidbits and I learned a lot on writing in general. It's very thought provoking. I especially liked what C.S. Lewis had to say on power, as well as some of the commentary on different archetypes. Check out The Letters of JRR Tolkien as well to see Tolkien's own thoughts and commentary.

Full of amazing essays. I found useful in many research areas for studying Tolkien and his Middle Earth. I loved it.

The book is in perfect condition, and the delivery was really fast, I could not be more satisfied. Thank you!

A well written academic work about The Lord of the Rings. I especially like the article written by Tom Shippey.

This book opens one's eyes up to the different themes going on in LOTR. The articles are not overly long, yet they are still very detailed. I think it is an excellent companion piece to the trilogy.

I do not normally extend my reading of Tolkien criticism beyond that of Tom Shippey or Verlyn Flieger having come across a couple of rather woeful efforts at reviewing the Lord of the Rings. However, both these authors have contributed essays to this book, and I must say that all the essays here are fascinating and thought provoking. Even Patrick Grant's exploration via Jungian psychology (something I most certainly wouldn't normally be interested in) is quite fascinating. Basically, if you like the various works that Tom Shippey has put out on Tolkien or the Lord of the

Rings, I think that you will find this book compelling reading.

This is an excellent collection of essays on various aspects and interpretations of Tolkein's Lord of the Rings. I would first like to highlight some of the high points of specific essays and then highlight some of the overarching conceptualization of Tolkein's themes. C.S. Lewis offers an excellent essay on the Dethronement of Power which explains in as clear a manner as I have ever read, the Christian philosophical underpinning and explanation as to the corrupting nature of power. Why does power corrupt? Lewis asserts that all earthly power is illusion and frail in comparison to the source of all true power, which he sees as God. Thus, when given access to this force, even when intentions are good, the power corrupts because it is not in the hands of its rightful owner, God in Heaven. Whether one believes or does not believe this concept, it does correspond with Tolkein's world view expressed in the Lord of the Rings. W. H. Auden's essay on the Quest Hero resonates with the works of Joseph Campbell especially when he analyzes the concept of the heroic friendship, using Frodo and Sam as the example. Auden links the heroic quest to the quest of all human beings for transcendence. He sees human nature as a nature continually in quest of itself, 'obliged at every moment to transcend what it was a moment before'. Two essays, written separately by Rose Zimbardo and Patricia Meyer Spacks deal with the relationship between moral vision, meaning in existence, and the embedded existence in a moral universe. A moral universe is one that reveals God's signature and unveils the infinite good news that God plays an active role in the universe and the conditions of men. Thus a pre-Christian universe in Tolkein's vision, would be one in which God plays a major role upon the universal stage, much like the conception of the Universe established in the Old Testament as conceptualized by religious Jews. This world, expressed by St. Augustus, is one in which nothing is created evil, in fact evil is good that has been perverted. This world view also then brings up the issue of individual responsibility which is thus seen not only as to one's own individual integrity but is a cosmic integrity. This responsibility is justified by the existence of some vast unnamed power for good. Marion Bradley writes a compelling essay on the relationships embedded in the text, focusing on Merry and Pippin; Eowyn and Arwen; and ending with a superb analysis of the friendship between Frodo and Sam. Verlyn Fleiger writes of the vast differences in heroic behavior between Aragorn and Frodo. Read this essay after reading the Auden essay since they deal with similar themes. Patrick Grant does a superb job of interpreting Lord of the Rings from a Jungian perspective, acknowledging that the work can not be totally rendered or reduced into Jungian terms and concepts. Grant demonstrated both mastery of Jung and Tolkein and I felt Grant actually had enough concepts packed into one essay that he could have written a

book. I especially liked the point that Frodo was on an inner quest of individuation and that certain characters were excellent examples of Jungian archetypes, such as Gollum as the Shadow; Galadriel as the Anima; Gandalf as the Wise Old Man; Aragorn as the Heroic King; and Shelob as the dark Anima. Grant however also integrates Milton into the analysis and points out the theme of the Christian epic in which the true hero is on a spiritual quest, growing in faith and hope which is based on charity. Grant also points out the realm of fairie is the realm of dream and myth where interior journeys through the psyche occur, stabilized by archetypal structures. Jung used the term 'enantidromia' to mean that evil leads to good. Grant points out that this concept resonates in Tolkein's work. Jung saw man's quest as individuation, the realization of the whole man. Jung also realized that great darkness could arise from the psyche and that numinous, impressive, dangerous archetypes rise from the unconscious. Thus archetypical characters of good have a corresponding archetypal character of darkness; an example being the fellowship of the ring balanced by the Ringwraiths; or Gandalf by Saruman. Tom Shippey is the final essay with a wonderful defense of the film trilogy with which I agree 100%. Some themes flowed throughout the essays. These included the quest of the hero, the moral universe, and linking Lord of the Rings to historic facts and forces. Whereas all the authors related that Tolkein hated allegory, there were certainly linkages between Mordor and the blight of the industrial revolution as well as Tolkein's experiences in World War I and the gloom of Nazism and Communism. Several essayist quoted the wonderful timeless lines when Frodo says: I wish it need not have happened in my time, to which Gandalf says "So do I...and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide." Very well written and clear, these essays offered comprehensive interpretations of Tolkein's great work.

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