



Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism

From Brand: Mariner Books

Download now

Read Online ➔

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism is the definitive collection of essays on Tolkien's masterpiece. The essays span fifty years of critical reaction, from the first publication of *The Fellowship of the Ring* through the release of Peter Jackson's film trilogy, which inspired a new generation of readers to discover the classic work and prior generations to rediscover its power and beauty.

Fans and scholars alike will appreciate these important, insightful, and timely pieces. Fourteen of the fifteen have been previously published but are gathered here for the first time. The final essay in the volume, "The Road Back to Middle-earth" by Tom Shippey, was commissioned especially for this collection. Shippey examines how Peter Jackson translated the text into film drama, shaping the story to fit the understanding of a modern audience without compromising its deep philosophical core.

 [Download Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of T ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of ...pdf](#)

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism

From Brand: Mariner Books

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism is the definitive collection of essays on Tolkien's masterpiece. The essays span fifty years of critical reaction, from the first publication of The Fellowship of the Ring through the release of Peter Jackson's film trilogy, which inspired a new generation of readers to discover the classic work and prior generations to rediscover its power and beauty. Fans and scholars alike will appreciate these important, insightful, and timely pieces. Fourteen of the fifteen have been previously published but are gathered here for the first time. The final essay in the volume, "The Road Back to Middle-earth" by Tom Shippey, was commissioned especially for this collection. Shippey examines how Peter Jackson translated the text into film drama, shaping the story to fit the understanding of a modern audience without compromising its deep philosophical core.

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #168898 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Mariner Books
- Published on: 2005-05-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x .69" w x 5.50" l, .71 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

 [Download Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of T ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of ...pdf](#)

Editorial Review

Review

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

Library Journal

About the Author

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.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Neil D. Isaacs On the Pleasures of (Reading and Writing)Tolkien Criticism

It is almost forty-three years since Rose Zimbardo pointed me toward Middle-earth. I was a relatively late arrival, the phenomenal success of *The Lord of the Rings* having already been well established—to the dismay of some establishment defenders of the traditional canon.

Throughout the sixties, three aspects of that phenomenon seemed to dominate perceptions of the value of the book. One was the persistent resistance by the arbiters of literary taste to afford critical recognition to a work that had proven its abundant appeal to a wide popular and, worse, youthful audience. Another was the fact that the book's commercial success was not the product of hype: the early popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* was produced by a word-of-mouth groundswell that preceded the reactive attention of the mass media. It was a matter of reporting the phenomenon rather than precipitating it, though the reportage added fuel to the fire.

The third was that some of the features and attractions of the book and its created world inevitably elicited an infectious outbreak of “faddism and fannism, cultism and clubbism,” as I called it in “On the Possibilities of Writing Tolkien Criticism.” In that introduction to our first collection of critical essays I was lamenting that these factors, particularly “the feverish activity of the fanzines,” were counterproductive to the development of a climate for serious critical attention to Tolkien's masterpiece.

More than a decade after the novel's appearance, as an example if not a proof of the shocked attention still being paid to a literary phenomenon by an uncomprehending coterie of critics (including Edmund Wilson, Germaine Greer, and Philip Toynbee), the New York Herald Tribune's Book Week published on its front page (February 26, 1967), beginning in large type and accompanied by a cartoon, what amounted to a confession of ignorance by a prominent critic, Paul West. Part of my response in “On the Possibilities of Writing Tolkien Criticism” neatly summarizes, I think, the nature of the problem: On what bases does West attack *The Lord of the Rings*?

1. He is baffled by it, baffled into numbness. I cannot argue with this; he demonstrates both bafflement and numbness throughout.

2. With a nostalgia for the last century's discarded theories, he laments that Tolkien created his world and its creatures alone, without some folksy community origin. But if Tolkien is sole owner and proprietor of Middle-earth, I would prefer to give him all my admiration than to betray any envy for his creative imagination.

3. The Lord of the Rings is a game, only a game, and has no bearing on humanity. Now this is a serious objection, to which I would offer a pair of categorical adversatives: first, without the sense of play as an essential element in literature, we would have to do without much of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Joyce, Proust, Nabokov—for in a sense all art is a game, the game of putting form to matter; second, the game of The Lord of the Rings is miraculously designed to be played and won by anyone who takes part, but the reader who doesn't see the significance of its urgent bearing on humanity will always be a loser.

4. The society from which people must escape into Tolkien's world is very bad indeed. I offer no comment on this argument, but I wonder if West hasn't simply used Tolkien's popularity as a way to make this last general point; it has no direct (or logical) bearing on the relative excellence of the book.

It may be unfair to hold West up as epitomizing the negative attitudes toward Tolkien. After all, few attentive readers had actually been driven to the simplistic notions that the book features "a virtue that triumphs untested," an "evil that dies uninvestigated," and one protagonist, Frodo, who is "the goodie hobbit." But even West acknowledged that the cultism and clubbism were irrelevant to—indeed barriers to—considerations of literature, that is, serious criticism.

In such a climate, Rose Zimbardo and I designed Tolkien and the Critics as a small contribution toward a major project, saving what we believed was a great novel from the "faddists and button makers" whose enthusiasm contributed to clouding some critical judgment.

An obligatory if presumptuous request to Professor Tolkien to consider supplying a brief foreword for the collection brought a gentle but firm response:

I am very grateful for your attention and interest. But I am wholly occupied, or should be, with new work of my own, and I am obliged to say "no" to all requests for articles in reviews, opinions, forewords, or anything of the kind. I think it is essential to a writer who is still writing to avoid the distraction of external criticism, however sensitive or well-informed.

That the contributions to our book were to varying degrees "sensitive and well-informed" may be attested to by the warm welcome it received from reviewers. The fourteen essays, about equally divided between original pieces and reprints of the best available material, formed what one review (perhaps the least flattering of all) called "largely an unstructured dialectic on the meaning and value of the whole trilogy." What was most gratifying to us about its success (as measured within the limited aspirations of academic, university press publication) was its threefold accomplishment: its samples of general appreciations by prestigious writers, its examples of illuminations of specific aspects of the novel by critics with focused interests, and its anticipations of an abundance of critical attention yet to come. In a way, the collection was an announcement of assurance that, in due course, The Lord of the Rings would have to be given its rightful place among the major fictional works of our time.

Within the following decade an astonishing amount of critical work on Tolkien appeared. The variety of critical approaches that Middle-earth had spawned was as great as that of the imagined species in Tolkien's world, a kind of secondary "sub-creation." There were doctoral dissertations and papers at professional meetings, guides for innocent readers, collections of learned essays, memoirs, bibliographies, explorations of

source material, and contextualizings from one perspective or another. The enormous appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* had spread to include not only its increasing mass audience but also a cottage industry of scholarly study. Medievalists and philologists had a 'old day mining the rich veins of their disciplines' ore with tools both venerable and au courant. Allegorists of many persuasions, especially of the Christian and historical orientations, had their innings. And the psychological, the archetypal, and the structuralist schools were staking their claims.

Into this thick growth Zimbardo and Isaacs ventured once more, proposing a second collection. Dissuaded from calling it "Tolkien and the Critics II" or some variation of "The Second Generation," we settled for *Tolkien: New Critical Perspectives*. If we had been motivated the 'rst time around by the wish to justify Tolkien's admission to the canon, we now faced the more formidable task of separating well-intentioned appreciations of *The Lord of the Rings* and the proliferating attention to extraneous, external, tangential, devotional, and personal matters from what we regarded as appropriate approaches to the book that would foster substantial literary criticism.

In most ways, the second collection was as good as the 'rst.

Equally divided, again, between reprinted and original material, it may have lacked the clout of contributions by C. S. Lewis and W. H.

Auden. But it made up for that, in part, by including a chapter from Paul Kocher's *Master of Middle-earth*, at that point the best booklength study of Tolkien's work, and an original essay by Verlyn Flieger, her 'rst published work on her way to a distinguished career as a scholar of Tolkien in particular and of fantasy and Faërie in general.

Our second collection received much less attention from reviewers, but one astute critic, in an otherwise favorable notice, took me to task for an "ill-tempered" introduction, "On the Need for Writing Tolkien Criticism."

He was right; the book was marred by my approach, which focused not on the strength of the collected contributions but on carping critiques of material we had deemed unworthy of inclusion.

Looking back, I 'nd this indefensible, but I believe I know the reason for my critical distemper (though I would leave the differential diagnosis of mood disorder or personality disorder to others). It was that the publication of *The Silmarillion*, some four years before our second collection, had altered both the public perception of, and the critical climate for, Tolkien's work.

The problem was a double-edged sword. On one hand, critics with negative attitudes toward *The Lord of the Rings* used *The Silmarillion* to bolster their positions, disregarding the wholly different natures of the two works and illogically applying their distaste for the latter to the former. On the other hand, devotees used *The Silmarillion* to range far beyond *The Lord of the Rings* in their enthusiasm for Tolkien's created world, thereby de'ecting attention from, and appreciation for, a major work of 'ction, in precisely the ways we had feared. Of the provision of new scripts for video games to come I will not speak here.

There may well have been as much sadness as anger in my mood vis-r-vis Tolkien scholarship and readership at the time, as a couple of short passages from my review of *The Silmarillion* featured in the *Washington Star* on Sunday, September 11, 1977, will attest:

The Silmarillion is a sacred text. It is an editor's attempt to set forth in an orderly way a great body of traditions, lore, and mythology that stands behind the great narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*. It is cosmogonical, cosmological, and apocalyptic. It is also a seemingly endless series of names (personal and place) and events chronicled without the distinction of detail that would temper the repetitiveness. Above all

it is solemn, as befits a sacred text.

Readers who love *The Lord of the Rings* for its narrative power, its droll charm, its intricate playfulness, and the physical and psychological details that give life to its fully realized world will not be very happy with *The Silmarillion*. Its style will stun many, particularly those who know Tolkien as the author of “*Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics*,” still the most lucid and readable essay in all Old English scholarship. This book is persistently Biblical. The Book of Numbers comes most often to mind. And so it is that, beyond all hope, Christopher son of J.R.R. has brought the new Tolkien to light in the world of men.

That the ill temper faded over time I attribute not to any mellowing but to an appreciation for later developments. With Christopher Tolkien’s gathering, editing, and publishing of successive volumes of the history, legends, lore, and mythology of Middle-earth, there came a plethora of rewards for the devotees. But the voices of carping critics faded in large part, I think, because the attention of serious literary scholarship to *The Lord of the Rings* reinforced the book’s importance and won its canonical recognition even as it attracted new generations of a mass readership.

One great fear remained. Translated to the screen, I thought, the book would be reduced and its meaning lost to serious readers. However, as soon as we saw Peter Jackson’s *The Fellowship of the Ring* all such fears dissipated. Indeed, the monumental triumph of Jackson’s movies has given us a road back to Middle-earth, a road already well traveled by yet another generation of appreciative readers.

From the moment Rose Zimbardo first suggested to me that it was time for us to conclude our own trilogy of Tolkien essay collections, I have thought of this edition as a “greatest hits album.” Such an enterprise has its own built-in pitfalls for the compilers, not to mention the writer of the liner notes. Why the obvious “*Pretty Woman*” for the Roy Orbison selection and not the more representative “*Ooby-Dooby*”? Why the Licia Albanese reading of Puccini’s “*Vissi d’arte*” and not a remastered Claudia Muzio? In any case we are obligated to spell out our general criteria for choices—which are certain to be challenged.

Our first decisions were nearly automatic. We intended to collect the best critical work available that focused on *The Lord of the Rings*. Moreover, we had no intention of presenting a “balanced” view. There would be no representative of those voices—strident, cynical, sardonic, dismissive, supercilious, condescending—that articulated negative views of the book. All the naysayers had one thing in common. Whether they objected to prose style, poetic insertions, assumed allegorical simplicities, self-indulgent allusiveness, character stereotyping, derivative clichés, sociopolitical bias, Christian apologetics, or puerile taste, to make their case they all had to shift focus away from the story.

The Lord of the Rings is an adventure story par excellence, and as such it is one of the great works of twentieth-century fiction. If it has elements of myth, archetype, epic structure, and adolescent fantasy, not to mention deep moral, psychological, and geopolitical insights, so much the better for its performance as narrative. This collection assumes that argument about the value and power of *The Lord of the Rings* has been settled, certainly to the satisfaction of its vast, growing, persistent audience, but also of a considerable body of critical judgment. (For a summary of the case, with explicit refutation of the losing arguments, we refer readers to Tom Shippey’s book *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*.)

Tolkien: Author of the Century.)

Another early decision was to eschew biographical approaches, of which there are many available. From personal memoirs to carefully documented accounts, this material is often charming or illuminating, particularly when it places Tolkien’s experience in such broader contexts as the group of his fellows called *Inklings*, his experiences in World War I, and his immersion in medieval languages and literature. Without

denying the validity of the many connections between the author's life and his work, we determined to focus on the latter. That decision has cost us the option of reprinting an excerpt from Humphrey Carpenter's estimable biography, but that book is still available in print.

We extended that principle of focus into a much broader criterion of exclusion. Many worthy pieces of individual scholarship exploring specific aspects of Tolkien's work—linguistic discoveries, individual sources and analogues, the poetics of the interpolated verse, the evolution of invented flora and fauna, the rich realms of the naming of things and creatures, and even a herd of hobbyhorses ridden by idiosyncratic interpreters—can provide insight into particular features of the novel. But the typical tendency in them is toward digression, and our intention was to choose the work of critics who kept their focus on the main chance, whose eyes were ever on the prize: general appreciation of Tolkien's narrative art. This decision may have cost us some intriguing slants upon the work, but it also shielded us from the onslaught of continuing allegorical interpretations and assumptions.

We were ever mindful of the need to avoid superfluity and redundancy.

The final choices, however, should exemplify our standards of importance, timeliness, and the likelihood of enduring value. In other words, we have chosen essays that we believe already are, or are likely to become, classics of Tolkien criticism. The final selections speak for themselves. They all maintain focus on the central issues of the artistry of *The Lord of the Rings*. (Rose Zimbardo's headnotes to the essays provide precise indications of that focus and concise accounts of the context of each.)

We were faced, however, with a thorny problem in the presence of serious book-length studies of Tolkien's work. Those of Joseph Pearce, Patrick Curry, Verlyn Flieger, and, preeminently, Tom Shippey will come to mind. Of particular interest to us was Jane Chance's *Tolkien's Art*, originally published in 1979, for it persuasively argued two major points: that Tolkien's creative and scholarly work was all of a piece, a comprehensive, coherent, cohesive, interrelated corpus; and that the central intention of his art was to construct, in the phrase of her subtitle, "a mythology for England." The revised edition (2001) supports her argument with extensive documentation derived from work published in the decades since the first publication of her book, including Tolkien's letters. Chance's chapter on *The Lord of the Rings* can stand alone; we reprint it here, with minor adjustments, from the revised edition. It was rare in our experience to find a separable chapter that could be isolated and retain the integrity of its critical focus.

Let me demonstrate the essence of the problem. I studied Shippey's *Road to Middle-earth* and *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* in an attempt to isolate passages that met our criteria. I found three that were tantalizingly close: from *Road*, the first fifteen pages of chapter 5, "Interlacements and the Ring," and from *Author*, the subsections "the ironies of interlace" and "the myth of Frodo" plus "Timeless poetry and true tradition." But the very presence of the word "interlace" in the titles of two of these selections identifies the problem, because a critical analyst attempting to do justice to Tolkien's work will inevitably produce works structured by critical interlace.

And such excerpting as I contemplated would do great injustice to Shippey's accomplishment. It is the nature of great works of literature to attract critics of the first rank and criticism of the highest quality, which becomes essential accoutrement to the works themselves.

Dostoevsky has found his Joseph Frank, James Joyce his Richard Ellman and Stuart Gilbert, Nabokov his Brian Boyd, and Tolkien his Tom Shippey.

In the case of Flieger, while *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World* and *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* are justly admired books of Tolkien scholarship, we bridged the dilemma by reprinting her earliest published essay, "Frodo and Aragorn: The Concept of the Hero," which appeared in our *New Critical Perspectives*. In the case of Shippey, we found a most promising solution. We

commissioned an original essay, the only one in the collection.

“Another Road to Middle-earth: Jackson’s Movie Trilogy” explores the process by which the screen version of the novel would lead to new generations of readers.

Here, then, in one volume, in addition to the Kocher, Chance, and Shippey pieces, is a great deal of material unavailable elsewhere now: essays by C. S. Lewis, Edmund Fuller, W. H. Auden, Patricia Meyer Spacks, Rose Zimbardo, Marion Zimmer Bradley, R. J. Reilly, J. S. Ryan, Verlyn Flieger, Patrick Grant, and Lionel Basney. Besides providing handily packaged availability, the book offers some happy unintended results of our criteria of selection. It contains works of criticism from Australia, Canada, the U.K., and the U.S. It contains works of criticism, not only by general critics, medievalist scholars, and another Inkling, but also by a world-class poet, an acclaimed writer of science fiction/fantasy, a prominent folklorist, a devoted environmentalist, and two esteemed scholars of eighteenth-century literature.

And among its fourteen contributors are six who are no longer with us, so that part of their legacy lives on in their appreciation of yet another sub-created world.

We have passed from the “possibilities” of Tolkien criticism (now richly fulfilled but viably open to enrichment), through the “need” for Tolkien criticism (now satisfied by a commonly accepted recognition of *The Lord of the Rings* as a masterwork), to the “pleasures” of what is gathered here (with the promise of more to come).

Enjoy.

Copyright © 2004 by Rose A. Zimbardo and Neil D. Isaacs.

Introduction copyright © 2004 by Neil D. Isaacs. Published by permission of Houghton Mifflin.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Frederick Warren:

This *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism* book is not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you receive by reading this book is definitely information inside this e-book incredible fresh, you will get info which is getting deeper an individual read a lot of information you will get. This *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism* without we comprehend teach the one who studying it become critical in imagining and analyzing. Don't possibly be worry *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism* can bring any time you are and not make your carrier space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it inside your lovely laptop even phone. This *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism* having very good arrangement in word as well as layout, so you will not feel uninterested in reading.

Robert Goddard:

As people who live in often the modest era should be up-date about what going on or facts even knowledge to make these individuals keep up with the era which is always change and advance. Some of you maybe will probably update themselves by reading books. It is a good choice for yourself but the problems coming to you actually is you don't know which one you should start with. This *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism* is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why,

since this book serves what you want and want in this era.

Antonio Batts:

Now a day those who Living in the era wherever everything reachable by connect to the internet and the resources inside can be true or not require people to be aware of each information they get. How a lot more to be smart in having any information nowadays? Of course the correct answer is reading a book. Looking at a book can help people out of this uncertainty Information specifically this Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism book as this book offers you rich info and knowledge. Of course the data in this book hundred % guarantees there is no doubt in it you may already know.

Rena Campbell:

Reading can called imagination hangout, why? Because while you are reading a book particularly book entitled Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism the mind will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in each and every aspect that maybe unidentified for but surely will end up your mind friends. Imaging each word written in a reserve then become one type conclusion and explanation that maybe you never get prior to. The Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism giving you another experience more than blown away your brain but also giving you useful facts for your better life in this particular era. So now let us demonstrate the relaxing pattern this is your body and mind will be pleased when you are finished examining it, like winning a. Do you want to try this extraordinary spending spare time activity?

**Download and Read Online Understanding The Lord of the Rings:
The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books
#9MTYR54ZEPS**

Read Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books for online ebook

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books Free PDF d0wnl0ad, audio books, books to read, good books to read, cheap books, good books, online books, books online, book reviews epub, read books online, books to read online, online library, greatbooks to read, PDF best books to read, top books to read Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books books to read online.

Online Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books ebook PDF download

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books Doc

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books Mobipocket

Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism From Brand: Mariner Books EPub