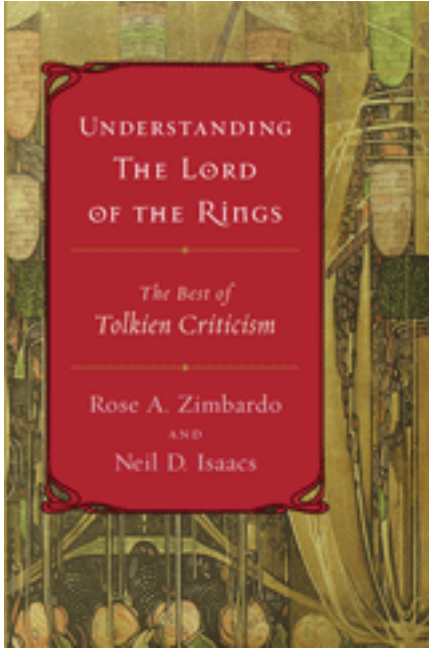


## Press Release

# Understanding The Lord of the Rings

edited by [Rose A. Zimbardo](#)  
and [Neil D. Isaacs](#)

- [About the Book](#)
- [About the Editors](#)
- [Praise](#)



## About the Book

---

October 21, 2004, marks the 50th anniversary of the first U.S. publication of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first part of J.R.R. Tolkien's epic *The Lord of the Rings*. It has been called the greatest book of the twentieth century, an unforgettable adventure story that has captivated generations of readers since it was first published in 1954. As we approach this historic 50th anniversary milestone, Houghton Mifflin, Tolkien's official U.S. publisher for over sixty years, is proud to publish *Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism*.

Edited by Rose A. Zimbardo and Neil D. Isaacs, this definitive collection of essays on Tolkien's masterpiece spans fifty years of critical reaction, from the first publication of *Fellowship* 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. (More than 25 million Tolkien books have been sold in the United States alone over the past three years.)

Fans and scholars alike will appreciate these important, insightful, and timely pieces, including works of criticism from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, and from a wide range of voices — not only general critics but medievalist scholars, an acclaimed science-fiction writer, a prominent folklorist, and a devoted environmentalist, among others.

Fourteen of the fifteen pieces 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.

Also included in the volume:

- **W. H. Auden's** classic, admiring essay on the true nature of the hero quest
- **C. S. Lewis** on the value of myth
- **Edmund Fuller** on the nature of the fairy tale
- **Marion Zimmer Bradley** on hero worship
- **Jane Chance** on the conflicting moral poles of ultimate good and evil

Completing the collection are penetrating and thoughtful pieces by **Verlyn Flieger, Paul Kocher, Patrick Grant, J. S. Ryan, R. J. Reilly, Lionel Basney, Patricia Meyer Spacks,** and each of the editors.

All students of Tolkien, new and old, are sure to enjoy and learn from these accessible and enlightening essays, which help us to relish Tolkien's monumental achievement all the more.

## About the Editors

---

**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.

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

## Praise

---

### **Praise for *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Being the first part of *The Lord of the Rings*)**

"No fiction I have read in the last five years has given me more joy." — W. H. Auden

"Filled with marvel and strange terrors . . . an extraordinary and distinguished piece of work." — *New York Herald Tribune*

"A unique, wholly realized other world, evoked from deep in the well of Time, massively detailed, absorbingly entertaining, profound in meaning." — *New York Times*

### **Praise for *The Two Towers* (Being the second part of *The Lord of the Rings*)**

"An extraordinary work — pure excitement, unencumbered narrative, moral warmth, bare-faced rejoicing in beauty, but excitement most of all." — *New York Times Book Review*

"One of the best wonder tales ever written." — *Boston Herald*

"Here is a wonderful story, set in a world which paralyzes the imagination, and told in magnificent prose. What more can an author give?" — *Chicago Tribune*

"[Tolkien's] imagination can create regions that really are ghastly or really heavenly. He can create creatures that are incredibly credible. His is a never-never land that seems real while you are in it." — *Boston Globe*

"The author writes with wit, humor, imagination, and a profound understanding of human nature — or just nature . . . *The Two Towers* is written by a person with a deep perception of the world of living things — what is, might be, or might have been." — *Hartford Times*

**Praise for *The Return of the King*  
(Being the third part of *The Lord of the Rings*)**

"There are very few works of genius in recent literature. This is one." — *The Nation*

"A triumphant close . . . a grand piece of work, grand both in conception and execution. An astonishing, imaginative tour de force." — *Daily Telegraph*

"In the highest and most complimentary sense, this is escapist fiction at its finest, yet at the same time it has profound relevance to our troubled age." — Arthur C. Clarke