

A Vision of Middle-earth: Contemporary Views in Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings Trilogy

David Goldie

▶ **To cite this version:**

David Goldie. A Vision of Middle-earth: Contemporary Views in Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings Trilogy. Thomas Fornet-Ponse, Marcel Aubron-Bulles, Julian Eilmann. Hither Shore 10: Tolkien Adaptations / Tolkien Adaptionen, 10, Walking Tree, pp.92 - 104, 2014, Hither Shore, 978-3981061284. hal-01405621

HAL Id: hal-01405621
https://hal.science/hal-01405621

Submitted on 2 Dec 2016

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

A Vision of Middle-earth: Contemporary views in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy[1]

David Goldie (Aix-Marseille)

In *The Gods Return to Earth*[2], C.S. Lewis opens his review of LotR by acclaiming the return of Heroic Romance, comparing Tolkien's work with stories stretching back to *The Odyssey* (and beyond). Indeed he goes on to make the claim that the book also represents a revolution for this genre. This point of view in fact reflects a dialectic argument which has faced artistic creation since ancient times. Should we look backwards taking classical inspiration, "standing on the shoulders of giants", as Isaac Newton put it, or forwards, always aiming to "make it new" as Ezra Pound proclaimed, with a modern approach? Of course our own reaction probably says more about us than the work in question. This argument is still relevant today however. As far as Tolken's works are concerned, now relates to six new films. Firstly a there is a new version of LotR in Peter Jackson's original trilogy from 2001 to 2003 and more recently another trilogy based on H, scheduled for annual release between 2012 and 2014[3]. The "right" approach becomes a lot more than just a philosophical or aesthetic argument when you are in charge of major Hollywood productions, particularly ones aiming to adapt two of the most popular books in the world.

While many of the aesthetic points we intend to raise here would apply to both the adaptations LotR and H, we will concentrate our analysis on LotR and consider the implications of approach in three ways. Firstly we examine the question of fidelity in relation to the original texts. Secondly we analyse how Peter Jackson responds to some of the major differences between text and image. Finally we take a thematic approach to focus on changes to two important characters. The overall aim is to see how far we can find a modernising or "Romantic" spirit running through Jackson's vision of Middle-earth.

---

[1] To distinguish between the identical titles of Tolkien's books and Jackson's films, the following abbreviations are used: LotR = the book series; *LotR* = the film series. Individual films are abbreviated in italics accompanied by the year of their release in brackets. For example: LotR I = "The Fellowship of the Rings" by J.R.R Tolkien; *LotR I* (2001) = "The Fellowship of the Rings" by Peter Jackson.

[2] C.S. Lewis "The Gods Return to Earth", *Time and Tide*, 14 August 1954.pp.1082-3

[3] At the time of writing only *An Unexpected Journey* (2012) has appeared in cinemas.

1. The Problem of Fidelity

In addition to enormous commercial success[4], the *LotR* trilogy received widespread recognition within the cinematic industry, winning a total of 17 Oscars. Among critics, the website www.metacritic.com lists a total of 110 positive reviews to just 3 negatives.[5] *Empire Magazine*, for example, gave all three films 5 star "classic" status, hailing *LotR* (2003) as "The resounding climax to a landmark in cinema history." Hannah McGill sums up this mainstream appeal thus:

> Shot back-to-back, the three instalments have a glorious stylistic unity. With imaginative casting, superb special effects, gorgeous landscape photography and nail-biting action, this is riveting stuff, even for those not customarily drawn to elfin fantasy.

On the other hand, Scull and Hammond, in *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*, acknowledge the popular success of the series yet also highlight sharp divisions in the reception of the trilogy among Tolkien enthusiasts. These range from "high praise" to "travesty".

> Points frequently argued include the diminishing or alteration of characters in the film relative to their portrayal in Tolkien's book, emphasis on violent action, the over-use of special effects, and the omission of scenes from the book while incidents invented by the screenwriters have been inserted.

Criticisms of the films relate chiefly to missing or changed elements of the plot. In other words, viewers expecting a close fidelity in terms of a copy of events and dialogue from the original text were inevitably disappointed.

Fidelity requires clarification. Philosophically speaking, should *mimesis* be the aim of artistic endeavour, a perfect reproduction of reality or is art in fact too far removed from the original idea to be able to represent it accurately? If we regard the original source text as the "real" version, we return to this philosophical problem. Which is more important: the object or the idea?

Dudley Andrew identifies three basic approaches to adaptation.

1. Transforming: the film creates a *mimetic* copy of the events of the text.
2. Borrowing: the film represents the themes and ideas of the text

---

[4] At the time of writing *LotR III* (2003) is 9th in the list of all time worldwide box office earnings with $1,119.9m, *LotR II* (2002) is 23rd with £926m, *LotR I* (2001) is 31st with $871.5m.
See: http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/ (consulted 25/04/13)

[5] It also gives 1,153 positive user reviews to 174 negatives (consulted 25/04/13)

3. Intersecting: the text defies either of the approaches above.

We could equate *transforming* with a classical approach, maintaining the primacy of the text over the film, whereas *borrowing* could be said to be a more modern approach, unafraid to break with the original source to create a new version. It may be reasonably assumed that an audience with knowledge of the text would prefer the transforming approach in deference to the source. Film theorists and academics, on the other hand, often tend towards the borrowing approach. Cinema takes the essence (in other words, the most important elements) of the narrative and makes use of its specific visual and sensory qualities to "improve" on the book.

Kate Egan and Martin Barker analyse the rhetoric employed by Jackson and his production team in DVD bonus documentaries and interviews to present their versions of the story. Initially wary of alienating their audience, the filmmakers err on the side of caution. As such, a spirit of "deference" was applied to producing *LotR I* (2001). Following its success, their confidence gradually grew to the point that they felt justified in making stark changes. By the time *LotR III* (2003) was released they were able to claim not only to have found the heart of the narrative but to have improved on it. Therefore, while the films begin by *transforming*, they move increasingly towards *borrowing*.[6]

How can we define fidelity? Is a cinematic copy which reproduces the action and dialogue of a book any more faithful to it than a film which focuses more on getting to the heart of the text? Here we find a choice which can only reflect our personal taste. However, we should perhaps note the logical conclusion as highlighted by Brian Mcfarlane that the likelihood of any one reader's mental image of the text corresponding with that of its film adaptation's director is extremely small. While he argues that film adaptation should be regarded in the context of intertext and therefore not unjustly compared with literature, it is nonetheless unsurprising that the process and the product of adaptation in general is so often and so fiercely criticised. An adaptation of such a popular work as LotR would inevitably split audiences, according to their own taste and point of view. Any number of individual commentators could find any number of points with which they would not agree. Martin Barker underlines these tensions in his essay *On Being a 60's Tolkien Reader*. In his own views and criticisms, as well as in his discussion of interpretative communities, he points out

[6] This trend continues to an even greater degree with the release of *An Unexpected Journey* (2012). The much shorter original story is now a trilogy, cinematically, at least, of as grand a scale as *LotR.*

that since the story means so much, to so many people and in so many different ways; it would be impossible to find one "true" way to appreciate it.

Tom Shippey's[7] contributions to documentaries accompanying the DVD releases of the films, provide them with critical credibility. While he recognizes some of the essential differences between cinema and literature, his appraisals elsewhere[8] of the films also provide comparison of the text and the films. Shippey dismisses a number of the changes in the action and the characters as merely "playing to the gallery". Events such as Legolas firing off arrows while surfing on a shield down the outer steps of Helm's Deep in *LotR II* (2002), and more importantly, the increased role of Arwen are examples of unnecessary concessions to a contemporary and youthful audience.

In their own interviews to be found on the same DVD releases, Jackson, the cast and production team take great pains to underline the authenticity of the films in relation to Tolkien's vision. This can be seen in the care and attention devoted to making weaponry and costumes for orcs and men at the WETA worshop, the natural proximity of New Zealand's landscape to Middle-earth or by highlighting the "Prime Action" of Frodo's journey with the Ring while providing insight on the "Subsidiary Action" concerning battles and heroes.

However, given the age in which the films were made, a more contemporary feel is hard to avoid. While the Medieval setting of the books is recreated in sometimes painstaking detail, many of the most dramatic scenes could only have been made with the most modern of special effects technology. Jackson has acknowledged the debt he owes to special effects pioneers like Ray Harryhausen[9].[10] Yet he has also pointed out that he is glad to be working in cinema now with the benefits that twenty-first century technology brings to the process of image creation. For example the scale of the battles at Helm's Deep and Pelennor Fields was

---

[7] "Tolkien"& "Book to Script", Extended version DVD's, Wingnut Films, The Saul Zaentz Company 2006

[8] Tom Shippey *Peter Jackson's Film Versions,* Appendix C in *The Road to Middle-Earth* Revised and Expanded edition, HarperCollins, London, 2005

[9] His numerous works include: *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), *First Men in the Moon* (1964), *One Million Years B.C.* (1966), *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (1974), *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (1977), *Clash of the Titans* (1981)

[10] See: *The Hobbit Interview Special*, Interview, Film 4, UK, broadcast 12/01/13 and *On The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, Interview, Film 4, UK, broadcast 27/03/1

only possible with the invention of the *Massive*[11] artificial intelligence program while Gollum was the first CGI character brought to life through motion-capture of an actor.

We will concentrate the next part of our analysis on some of the perhaps more visually obvious differences between the text and the films. With this in mind, we now turn our attention to the problems created for a filmmaker by some of the more essential differences between cinema and literature.

2. Showing and telling: from the Sublime to the ridiculous?

While both cinema and literature are narrative arts, the fact remains that cinema can only show what literature has to tell. Hamburger demonstrates the limits of images as narrative. Even if an extract of text contains no dialogue and consists entirely of description of setting or objects which can be filmed, there will always be something missing from the text in the on-screen image. She demonstrates this with an example of an extract from Joseph and His Brothers by Thomas Mann. Word play and associations create linguistic effects which quite simply can never appear in an image, even with an exact representation of the setting and objects within the passage. In this way Hamburger highlights, very effectively, the fundamental opposition and problems that exist between telling a tale and showing its events.

In an article for *Cinéma Action: Contes et légendes à l'écran* , the French aesthetician, Isabelle Smadja, praises the high quality of landscape photography in *LotR I* (2001) which frequently creates a vision of the Sublime. At the same time, however, she also highlights the challenge for Jackson of representing the beauty and depth of Tolkien's language. In her opinion, Jackson cannot match it and therefore replaces it with the recurrent theme of sublime and grandiose landscapes, striking in their savage beauty. The landscapes evoke a journey towards the infinite, just like the journey that Frodo is on. The fertile cultivated land of the Shire is opposed to the wild and untamed lands into which he travels. In another striking example from the opening shot of *LotR II* (2002), the audience is treated to a vision of magnificent mountains while hearing Gandalf defying the Balrog in Moria from *LotR I* (2001) as a voiceover. In Smadja's opinion, instances such as these give a visual expression of Rilke's phrase: "For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror".

[11] Multiple Agent Simulation System in Virtual Environment

Smadja continues by highlighting the importance of fairytale. The Medieval setting of LotR serves to enhance the atmosphere of an ancient tale that yet contains hidden depths and universal truths. This is true for the early part of Peter Jackson's trilogy. The idyllic Shire shares many of the characteristics of a marvellous fairytale setting. Describing the genesis of the book, Carpenter highlights the fact that as the narrative progresses, the aesthetic turns darker, reflected not only by the passage of the characters towards greater danger and darker times, but also a linguistic development in Tolkien's prose towards more archaic terms, indicating the growing seriousness of the situation and the themes treated by the text.

To some extent these changes are reflected in the films. Mirroring the characters' individual journeys, the general aspect of the landscapes and settings changes over the course of the trilogy. At the beginning the viewer is struck by the verdant lushness and simple beauty of the Shire which gives way to progressively darker and more desolate landscapes. In *LotR III* (2003) rapid shifts of time and place are accompanied by radical shifts of colour and atmosphere. For example Gondor's defeat at Osgiliath is represented in harsh grey, followed similarly in tone by Frodo and Sam on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol, before warmer colours return as the forces of Rohan muster at Dunharrow, where hope, albeit slim, remains.

From the moment the hobbits leave the Shire in *LotR I* (2001), the narrative continues almost exclusively in darkness. A pleasant walk through Farmer Maggot's field in the sunlight ends abruptly as Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin are chased onto the Road and their first encounter with a Black Rider. The whole environment darkens in reaction to the presence of evil. The film cuts to night as the hobbits are chased through thick forest before a temporary reprieve at the Buckland Ferry. From now on darkness reigns almost exclusively until the arrival of Arwen. Making her appearance after Frodo is struck on Weathertop, she appears like an angel in white, bathed in glorious light. Day has dawned again as she outrides the Black Riders to Rivendell. The contrast in luminosity upon Frodo's re-awakening there is striking. This continues for the majority of the time the hobbits spend in Rivendell, firmly contrasting this place of temporary rest with the evil to be encountered in the world outside.

This technique serves to underline one way in which Jackson answers the problem of showing rather than telling. The natural world of Middle-earth consistently reflects the tone of the narrative. Both Isengard and Mordor are represented predominantly in the dark. Saruman's evil industry takes place in the depths of the earth and it is almost pitch black when Frodo and Sam climb the stair of Cirith Ungol to enter Mordor. Despite the apparent hurdles

presented by the description of Tolkien's settings in print, the images should not be automatically considered inferior to the text. Jackson manages to give authentic physical portrayals of place while at the same time create differing and contrasting atmospheres which do reflect the overall development of the narrative.

In 1956 George Bluestone highlighted a central paradox of literary adaptations when he classified their relationship as "overtly compatible, secretly hostile". For Bluestone particular problems arise in the representation of thought and time on film. The reader is in a privileged position compared to the film viewer. Through his words an author can choose precisely what information to give. The director is at a disadvantage in this respect as his images can only show a scene. He will never be able to provide the direct access to a character's inner life as is possible for the author. In cinema, rather than seeing through the eyes of a character, it may be more accurate to say that we are invited to try to see into their eyes. Close-up views and other visual effects may give clues to their thoughts but otherwise the limits of the image for representation of thought are plain to see.

Smadja feels that Jackson may have struggled with this aspect, almost trying too hard to fit modern concerns into the Tolkien's narrative context. She criticises the way Jackson chooses to show the Ring's effect on those who come into contact with it. For example when Bilbo and Frodo experience sudden feelings of jealousy over it, their voices, eyes and faces begin to eerily resemble Gollum. These physical transformations on screen in reaction to the Ring seem almost comical caricatures, like cartoon animations of shock.

Yet this is a rather harsh judgement. Physical transformation accompanying psychological anguish around the Ring is a repetitive visual element in the trilogy. Jackson provides a full representation of Gollum's story that allows the viewer to make a definite comparison between him and his former self in Sméagol. The full physical horror of the Ring's power is thus demonstrated in a way that is implied in the text. Gollum in fact represents one of Jackson's major successes. His duality is rendered very effectively on screen. At several points his inner battle is made obvious as he talks to himself; Sméagol arguing with Gollum. At one time this is done through reflection in a pool; at another the screen is effectively split by a tree trunk where each half of his personality addresses the other. Here as much is imparted by the construction of the image as the dialogue.

Finally, as Frodo refuses to throw the Ring into the Crack of Doom in *LotR III* (2003), we recognise that it has finally taken possession of him. The text gives a precise description, without recourse to monstrous transformation. In the films, it is possible to compare the innocent young hobbit of the Shire with the emaciated individual we now see. However, Jackson does not treat the viewer to visual pyrotechnics here. The image of Frodo before the Crack of Doom does reflect Tolkien's text while adding an expression in his eyes suggestive of demonic possession and transformation. This is reminiscent of the look we see in Isildur's eyes as Elrond recounts the first failure to destroy the Ring in *LotR I* (2001). In the end though, perhaps it is the fact that Frodo has undergone a prolonged and subtle change, progressively portrayed over the three films, which makes this final realisation that he has succumbed all the more powerful.

Despite the comparatively limited possibilities of description in film images, Jackson makes a real attempt to live up to the heights achieved by the text. However the characters' relationship with their surroundings is only partially successful as it leads simultaneously towards conclusions about their inner lives and also serves to highlight one of the inherent problems of translating text into images.

3. A Romantic Spirit?

How far then could we regard the film versions as modern interpretations of Tolkien's original and does a *borrowing* approach automatically mean something is lost from the original source? Lewis invites us not to overlook the "Romantic" spirit running through LotR and indeed makes a claim for Tolkien's own revolutionary status within the genre of Romance. Let us consider briefly how nineteenth century Romanticism could relate to a *borrowing* approach.

In contrast to the idea of educating people through literature and classical studies, the nineteenth century Romantics wished for a return to nature. They tried to rediscover the lost world of tales, legends and folklore of the Middle Ages. Inasmuch as they sought to break with the past, the Romantics were taking the first steps towards Modernism, reaching beyond classicism and elevating a revived medievalism. Tolkien's universe clearly has much in common with the aims of the nineteenth century Romantics. Could we say that Peter Jackson has, in some ways, adopted an equally "Romantic" spirit in his vision of Middle Earth in comparison with Tolkien's original source? His *borrowing* approach already places him in

rupture with the text. We have also seen how his use of sublime landscape photography seeks to point out certain themes.

We will now consider the effect of some of the most radical changes made in the films and ask whether they automatically mean concession to a new audience or in fact serve the story better. Since Shippey provides much analysis on a variety of themes in his essay *Peter Jackson's Film Versions*[12], we propose to take up one of his points: the position of women, a theme on which Tolkien's works have received much criticism, to discuss the potential significance of such changes in the films.

The story of Aragorn and Arwen is played out on screen via flashbacks and insertions into the main narrative. From a commercial point of view, a love interest caters for the female viewers and therefore significantly increases the potential audience, thereby creating a completely new interpretative community. Yet is the elevation of a female character in respect of her position in the text merely a commercial ploy? The female characters, as a whole, are substantially different in the films and we should not forget that while Jackson directed the trilogy he co-wrote the screenplay with his wife Fran Walsh and their collaborator Philippa Boyens. Were their decisions based on demographics or a real will to "correct" the narrative in a way they saw would better serve the story?

Arwen's role is significantly altered in the films. She appears much more regularly and in two guises. The first is as an ethereal being. Frodo sees her in a vision after his wounding at Weathertop. She calls to him, giving him the strength to withstand the poison of the Morgul blade. She appears again in a similar fashion to Aragorn in an event invented for *LotR II* (2002). As the people of Rohan come under attack by Warg Riders on their way to Helm's Deep, Aragorn is lost in battle, seemingly tumbling to his death over a cliff. We soon learn, however, that he is floating unconsciously down a river, eventually coming to rest on a shore, far from his comrades. It would seem that he is seriously injured and while still unconscious Arwen visits him in a vision. She apparently breathes life back into him with a kiss. Though this may just indicate the deep union of Aragorn and Arwen's souls, this episode also inverts

[12] Tom Shippey *Peter Jackson's Film Versions,* Appendix C in *The Road to Middle-Earth* Revised and Expanded edition, HarperCollins, London, 2005

the story of *Sleeping Beauty*. Peter Jackson here reverses the roles traditionally ascribed to the princess and the handsome prince, while also adding another layer of interest to Arwen's character as she seems to possess magical healing powers.

At these times, she appears as an ethereal Pre-Raphaelite beauty, a fairy tale princess bathed in a soft white light. She maintains these qualities when we see the story of her love for Aragorn on screen. She also becomes a somewhat tragic heroine. She is willing to give up her mortality for the man she loves and even disobeys Elrond's wishes when the elves begin their exodus from Middle-earth. Under these circumstances we can see her both as an ideal of feminine beauty and a woman asserting her own opinion over her father's, no matter the consequences. This aspect of her character may not be vastly different from the books. However the reality of choosing mortality is seen on screen in a lucid vision which brings vividly home to the viewer the consequences of aging and losing her lover.

Although not actually present at the muster of Rohan in either the book or the film of *LotR III* (2003), Arwen contributes symbolically to Aragorn accepting the mantle of the King. She asks Elrond to re-forge "The sword that was broken" and thus, like Arthur and The Lady of the Lake, becomes instrumental in calling Aragorn to meet his destiny. From this point onwards Aragorn will increasingly take his rightful place as Isildur's heir. Producing Andúril in front of the King of the Dead proves his right to command the Army of the Dead which is decisive in the battle of Pelennor fields. Following this, Aragorn increasingly takes a lead in decisions. In fact in the film he (and not Gandalf) instigates the final march on the Black Gate.

This chain of events is again somewhat different from the book where Halbarad the ranger arrives in the aftermath of the battle at Helm's Deep bringing a gift from Arwen. She has remade the King's banner which will eventually be unfurled as Aragorn arrives by river to save Gondor. Substituting both the object and the time it is presented in the film serves a dramatic purpose. While a coat of arms is of course symbolically significant, it is probably not as strikingly powerful an object as a sword.

In another instance we see Arwen in a substantially different way, as active against the forces of the Dark Lord as the male characters. She takes the place of Glorfindel in *LotR I* (2001). She has gone out to search for Aragorn and the hobbits despite the danger of the Ringwraiths. She then proceeds to outride the nine Black Riders and causes their downfall by invoking the power of the Ford at Rivendell. This is the first time the viewer meets Arwen in

person. Dressed like a ranger she strikes the viewer as adventurous and heroic, in stark contrast to the ethereal beauty we see at other times. As the Ringwraiths begin to ford the river she sits on her white horse, sword aloft, defying them, shouting that if they want Frodo they will have to come and take him by force.

Gender politics being substantially different now than at the time of Tolkien's writing, Shippey [13] consigns this incident in particular to the level of "playing to the gallery". However in conjunction with the other instances previously mentioned, it seems clear that Arwen's enhanced role is more than simply symbolic. Despite this, the increased presence and participation of the female characters is perhaps even more remarkable with Éowyn.

In her commentary of LotR, Smadja is scathing of Tolkien's treatment of women, arguing that he uses the Medieval context to portray an outmoded and outdated view of them. Concentrating her analysis on Éowyn in LotR II, Smadja emphasises how she is required to stay in Edoras while the Riders go out to face Saruman's forces at Helm's Deep. In other words, it is the women's duty to stay at home while the men decide their futures on the battlefield. In response to such charges, Curry's reply is "guilty as charged". However, he goes on to point out that, "…there are the characters of Galadriel and Éowyn, without whom The Lord of the Rings would be seriously impoverished…".

The screenwriters go some way to try to redress this problem. In the films, Éowyn's role is promoted. While the book narrative does allow her to assert herself and join the men, albeit secretly, it also places a good deal more emphasis on her love interest. After this initially remains unrequited with Aragorn, she eventually falls for the courtly love of Faramir. This is all but removed in the films. The audience is therefore guided to focus on her as an assertive female. She rejects the suggestion of being forced into union with Wormtongue and once he has been disposed of, we see her increasingly as a warrior princess. She knows how to ride and fight. Her attraction to Aragorn could even be described as assertive, since she recognises him as a kindred spirit and chooses to make her feelings known.

As Edoras is evacuated in the film, the whole of the city moves to Helm's Deep, including the women and children. Despite the fact that she is left in charge, Éowyn is left

---

[13] Tom Shippey *Peter Jackson's Film Versions,* Appendix C in *The Road to Middle-Earth* Revised and Expanded edition, HarperCollins, London, 2005.

behind in the book and her role is diminished as the battle rages. Furthermore, in the film, leadership is thrust upon her, when the company comes under the attack of Warg riders. As the Riders of Rohan fly to the attack, King Théoden asks Éowyn to lead the rest of the company through the wilderness to Helm's Deep. Although she wishes to join the attack, she responds with firm action and immediately begins marshalling the convoy. Finally, perhaps more symbolically significant than anything else, Théoden chooses to name her (and not Éomer) as his successor before the ride to Gondor. We should note, however, that the effect of this is slightly undone by him then wishing her happiness in love and that this twist in the plot remains undeveloped.

Of course Tolkien had already allowed Éowyn to be integral to the plot when she secretly accompanied the Riders to the Battle of Pelennor fields. It is foretold that no man can defeat the Witch-King yet two apparently weak individuals, a woman and a hobbit, are chosen to defeat the leader of the Nazgûl. Quantitatively in comparison with the deeds of the male characters, this may seem like a small concession. However, placing Éowyn and Merry in such crucial roles could be seen to be particularly forward-looking by Tolkien. He was not some sort of proto-feminist of course. Yet one of the most important messages that comes through the narrative is not to underestimate anyone, especially those outwardly appearing weak and insignificant. The reader is constantly reminded how hobbits have hidden resources and resolve. Ultimately they are the ones upon whom the whole future of Middle-earth depends. Through affirmative action a female character is able to empathise with another marginalised one, joining forces with them. Éowyn is recognised as being as courageous as any man, she possesses the essentially feminine quality of empathy which gives her another kind of strength and permits her to ultimately succeed where men would have failed.

Texts are rarely entirely independent from previous creations. Even if a director wants to stamp his own mark on his creation, it is impossible to erase the traces of what has gone before. Genette points this out with the term *palimpsest* to discuss the concept of intertext. In the Middle Ages, when parchment was in short supply, scribes would use pieces with text already on them. Carefully erasing the original text left a fresh page. However, the traces of what had been written before still existed under the surface. Cinematic adaptation of literature further demonstrates this and requires the audience to consider the question of intertext.

Writers, their texts and their readers are inter-dependent and not separate from directors, their films and their audience.

As one of the most technically and politically audacious of the New Wave directors, Jean-Luc Godard helped to create a rupture with cinema's past, rewriting the rules of narrative. In comparison with New Wave cinema the *LotR* trilogy forms a central part of the Hollywood movement of "family" movies as described by Brown[14] which includes other series like Disney's *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Warner Brothers' *Harry Potter*. According to Brown *LotR* represents classic Hollywood narrative cinema focussing on spectacle, emotion, an overall optimistic message and broad audience suitability. After collaborating with Godard on *Le Mépris* (1967), Fritz Lang was recorded in conversation with the French filmmaker[15]. Among the subjects of their conversation was their differing styles of filmmaking. At one point, Lang, who was most definitely a classical narrative director, labels Godard a "Romantic". While the *LotR* trilogy remains predominantly in this classical tradition, Jackson's vision of Middle-earth is unafraid to make changes to the original text and to modernise it. Whether this is a result of essential differences between cinematic and literary narrative, a desire to reach the heart of the story or a pragmatic approach to attracting a contemporary audience, it seems clear that this "Romantic" spirit also prevails in his interpretations.

Does this mean that in C.S. Lewis' eyes, the film versions of *LotR* would be regarded as equally revolutionary as the original texts? In terms of popular success, they are on a par with Tolkien's work. In the book when Frodo and Sam discuss their own story on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol, the point is made that each of us has our favourite versions of tales. We attach our own significance to them and characters which attract us. Underlining the role of our personal taste in such questions reminds us that whether it is a case of an aesthetic opposition such as classicism versus modernity or something as simple as preferring one character over another, our appreciation of any work of art is subjective.

The question of adaptation reveals that there are many factors involved in bringing a literary work to the screen, not the least of which are the essential differences between literary

---

[14] Noel Brown, " 'Family' Entertainment and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema" in *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies*, Issue 25, February 2013

[15] André S. Labarthe « Cinéastes de notre temps » *Le dinosaure et le bébé, dialogue en huit parties entre Fritz Lang et Jean-Luc Godard* (1967).

and cinematic narratives. Peter Jackson has made a huge effort in this respect. Although not always successful, he has managed to introduce a certain psychological depth to the characters despite the problem faced by showing the story rather than telling it. While it may be difficult for us to accept Jackson positioning himself as a "corrector", emboldening Tolkien's original vision, he is not merely "playing to the gallery". Jackson's vision of Middle-earth certainly demands serious consideration and should not be dismissed simply because of a lack of fidelity to our own. Even if we do not agree with all his changes, the fact that we notice them and react to them cannot fail but to reengage us with Tolkien's story. As such, the discussion and evaluation of the text that the changes in the films provoke can only be positive.