

Sentiment and Spectacle: An Analysis of Narrative and
Style in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*

by

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CONCERNING HOBBITS: AN INTRODUCTION

J.R.R. Tolkien's epic novel *The Lord of the Rings* has historically been considered unsuitable for adaptation, though many attempts have been made through a variety of media, including radio, stage plays, and unproduced screenplays. Tolkien himself thoroughly believed the book did not lend itself well to adaptation, particularly through the medium of film, as he described in multiple letters. In a letter to his literary and film agent Forrest J. Ackerman, Tolkien argued that "the 'interleaving' of the events in the two main threads, Frodo-Sam and the War...produces a jumble that would be bewildering to any viewers not well acquainted with the book. The latter would not recognize the story as the one that I have told at all: the events, the characters, and the moral significance have all been altered and distorted."¹ However, starting in 1997, Peter Jackson, working with his partner Fran Walsh and screenwriter Philippa Boyens, accomplished exactly what Tolkien had deemed impossible by adapting *The Lord of the Rings* into an epic cinematic trilogy with a comprehensive, "interleaved" narrative.

Howard Shore's score alone won three Oscars and three Grammys; in various categories, *The Lord of the Rings* films gathered an unprecedented thirty Academy Award nominations and seventeen wins. This is only a small representation of the two hundred and forty-nine total awards won by Jackson's films; *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is also in the top five highest-grossing franchises in cinematic history, the exact rank varying between fourth and fifth

¹Prokhorova, 69

depending on the source.² The commercial and critical success of Jackson's films brought the fantasy genre to new heights of recognition: *The Return of the King* is the only fantasy film ever to have won the Oscar for Best Picture, and is tied (with *Ben-Hur* and *Titanic*) at eleven for the record of most Oscars won by a single film. The success of the *Lord* films generated a new interest in Tolkien's book, and the films were among the first of the wave of fantasy adaptations that has been a growing industry trend in popular cinema since the early 2000s.³ New productions like HBO's television show *Game of Thrones* show a clear influence from Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* in both narrative content and formal style.

Given the high level of critical and popular interest in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, it is unsurprising that numerous essays and books have been written on the films. There is a wealth of literature concerning the production and marketing of the films, focusing on the franchise that grew out of them. A significant number of the essays in collections such as *Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in Global Context*, edited by Ernest Mathijs, and *How We Became Middle-Earth: A Collection of Essays on The Lord of the Rings*, focus primarily on the production of the films and franchise, and how the world accepted them in terms of popular culture. These essays fail to thoroughly address the specific stylistic and narrative decisions Jackson made in creating his blockbuster films, discussing the recognition they received without analyzing exactly how and why

²Gathered from a variety of websites and books

³ Approximately 20 fantasy films were produced in the 1990s, versus the over 50 fantasy films produced between 2000-2010, a significant percentage of them adaptations.

the trilogy achieved that success. One could say they're missing the formal "forest" of filmmaking for the "trees" of marketing and post-production commercialization. There is also a high incidence of critical literature that focuses on evaluative analysis of the films in terms of their adherence to, or departure from, Tolkien's novel, without consideration of *why* Jackson made the changes he did, or what the failings of not altering the story might have been. Kristin Thompson's *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood*, and *Picturing Tolkien: Essays on Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings Film Trilogy*, which features an essay by Thompson and is edited by Janice M. Bogstad and Philip E. Kaveny, contain more of a dialogue about Jackson's films in terms of the obstacles he faced throughout the adaptation process; these books discuss how Jackson succeeded in overcoming challenges, rather than evaluating the films' worth based primarily on fidelity to the book and Tolkien's mythopoeia.

These essays will serve as a foundation for the points I raise in analyzing the efforts Jackson, Boyens, and Walsh made to expand the accessibility and appeal of the *Lord* films while staying as loyal to Tolkien's work as possible. Thompson illustrates how the authentic visualization of Middle-Earth was a result of the historical approach Jackson took in researching the design concepts of the films in all areas, including costuming, scenery, and set design. I will expand on her theory that this effort Jackson made to visually establish Middle-Earth with as much detailed realism to Tolkien's mythopoeia as possible was a sort of compromise for the Tolkien fans who might be alienated or put off by the

changes Jackson made.⁴ I will analyze in depth how Jackson negotiated this balance between Tolkien fans and commercial audiences unfamiliar with the *Lord* book; my thesis is not going to discuss the franchise or marketing of the film; instead, by analyzing specific scenes and characterizations, I will break down Jackson's films in terms of the desired and realized effects he achieved through a manipulation of stylistic and narrative devices; in doing so, I will highlight the ways in which Jackson got the audience invested in the trilogy through his use of conventions of melodramatic and popular cinema. I will focus the decisions Jackson made throughout the adaptation and filmmaking processes to achieve this blend, analyzing the films as both three distinct works of cinema, and as a cohesive trilogy, all based respectfully on Tolkien's novel. As this thesis addresses the decisions Jackson made throughout these processes, in broad terms and with specific examples, it will become apparent that his incorporation of melodramatic and popular devices in reconstructing the characterizations and narrative events of *The Lord of the Rings* is what allowed Jackson's fantasy adaptation to triumph critically and commercially.

I will analyze, in detail, the decisions Jackson and his screenwriters made in omitting and fabricating specific events or scenes, and what the filmmakers achieved through those alterations. Building off of and referencing the writings of film theorists and scholars Ben Singer, Peter Brooks, Linda Williams, Steve Neale, and Franco Moretti, I will explore how Jackson manipulated the interaction between narrative and style as well as pathos and action to direct

⁴ Thompson, 86

audiences' expectations and emotions throughout the interleaving narratives. Through the distinctive pattern of crosscutting Jackson employs to navigate between the main and subsidiary plotlines (the Ringbearers and the War, respectively), the director reordered the telling of the story without disrupting the chronology or thematic purpose of the narrative events that are the heart of Tolkien's novel. The transitions between the multiple plotlines are visually demarcated by the clear differences in setting and mise-en-scene, and Jackson's deft handling of characterizations and narrative development allows the audience to follow the layered story without confusion. The beautiful and evocative score reflects and heightens the emotions and tensions stirred by the narrative and formal stylization throughout the trilogy, adding to the dramatic and tonal effect and smoothing transitions between the plotlines. While Jackson maintains the themes of Tolkien's novel in many respects, his films do place a stronger emphasis on the romantic subplot of Aragorn and Arwen and the action and battle sequences of the War of the Ring; in these scenes, Jackson created situations of suspense through parallel editing and visual juxtapositions that are emphasized by the suggestive tone of the score, consistently rising and falling dramatically as situations progress toward a climax. Similarly, Jackson reworked Tolkien's characterizations of most notably Aragorn and Frodo, but also Sam, Merry and Pippin to emphasize their individual journeys and align audiences with all five of them throughout the trilogy. Reflective scoring and mise-en-scene likewise accompany the scenes of individual self-discovery or intimate

exchanges between these characters, heightening the audiences' emotional experience throughout the trilogy.

In adapting a book as long and intricate as *The Lord of the Rings*, there are a number of challenges, in terms of the compromise between fans and mass audiences, as well as the compromises necessitated by the adaptation and filmmaking processes described throughout this introduction. In the following chapter, I will discuss how Jackson overcame these challenges through his skillful restructuring of the narrative and inclusion of direct quotes and events from Tolkien's book. By repositioning some of the more notable quotations from the *Lord* book within in the films' restructured narratives, Jackson underscored the thematic significance and emotional impact of some of Tolkien's most poignant scenes, allowing them to resonate more deeply, even with audiences unaware of their original context. This inclusion and relocation of direct quotations and scenes from the *Lord* book will be discussed in detail, as well as the laboriously detailed realization of Middle-Earth that functions as a compromise for the more obstinate Tolkien fans who might take issue with Jackson's films.

The second chapter will move into an introduction of cinematic melodrama as applied to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, relying on Ben Singer's definition of melodrama as a cluster concept and the theories of Brooks, Williams, Neale and Moretti to highlight specific emotional effects Jackson achieved through his precise treatment of narrative and stylistic devices.

Focusing on Jackson's recharacterization of Aragorn and his transition through

the steps of the hero's journey,⁵ I will consider how the changes Jackson made to his story both advance and add intrigue to the overarching narrative while furthering audience engagement and alignment with Aragorn's character. Jackson's construction of the story placed the turning points of Aragorn's character arc within pivotal moments in the overarching narrative, compounding the film's grander emotional impact with more intimate moments of pathos and self-reflection.

Continuing to reference Seger's ten-step hero myth in the third chapter, I will move into a discussion of Sam's story and how Jackson highlighted Sam's heroism through his recharacterization of Frodo. This chapter will also focus on the trilogy's representation of moral polarity through the opposing forces of good and evil in Sam and Sauron, respectively. Sam is simultaneously the most modest and momentous character in the trilogy, credited as the story's chief hero by Tolkien himself;⁶ Jackson's portrayal of Sam is the films' strongest representation of the Tolkienian themes of self-sacrifice and humble heroism that are the heart of *The Lord of the Rings*. These ideas will be expanded and supported by an analysis of Jackson's alterations to the Ringbearers' journey and the emotional and dramatic effects the director achieved in making those alterations.

The fourth chapter will relate the journeys of Frodo and Sam to those of Merry and Pippin, whose experience through the War of the Ring took them

⁵ The ten stages of the hero's journey are laid out PAGE

⁶ Carpenter, 161

through a very different variation on the hero's journey. The story of Merry and Pippin's relationship is one of brotherly love and mutual growth that many audiences members can recognize and align with; at the moment of their separation and throughout the rest of their distinct, but corresponding journeys, the two provide a source of overwrought emotion and pathos, continually juxtaposed with the evil forces the Company is fighting against in the War of the Ring. Acting as surrogates for the audience at times, Merry and Pippin begin the quest as innocents, drawn in by mere happenstance, and go through parallel adventures and trials before achieving great deeds and establishing themselves as heroes, reborn and renewed.

The final chapter will highlight and analyze the conventions of popular cinema Jackson embedded within the trilogy, specifically honing in on the greater prominence of Aragorn's romantic subplot, and how Jackson use of spectacular imagery throughout the films advances the narrative and engages the audience, appealing to the sheer thrill and entertainment of what Tom Gunning called "the cinema of attractions [and] effects." This chapter will discuss the greater significance Aragorn and Arwen's romance plays in the narrative of the films versus the book; the dialogue in the films includes direct quotations and events from the book's telling of their romance, again demonstrating the balance of mythopoeia and popular conventions Jackson consciously wove throughout the adaptation process. This second half of this chapter will explore how Jackson built and carried momentum through his masterful use of crosscutting between the distinct plotlines and parallel editing within specific

situations of action and pathos. I will mainly rely on examples again from the stories of Merry and Pippin, as the action of the War of the Ring provides more instances of cinematic action through visual effects; through an in-depth formal analysis of one of the most memorable scenes in the last film, I will illustrate how Jackson used editing, mise-en-scene, camera movement and scoring to spectacularly reflect and enhance the effect of suspense, pathos, and tension built by the layered narrative at the moment of Pippin's black moment.

Through his deft understanding and usage of multi-generic conventions, Peter Jackson triumphed where others have failed for decades, adapting J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy epic *The Lord of the Rings* into a rollicking trilogy of emotionally compelling and visually striking films, far surpassing expectations of critics and Tolkien fans alike. Beyond establishing a full and rich diegetic world in his portrayal of Middle-Earth, Jackson took the 1000+-page tome of dense, high fantasy and turned it into a history-making blockbuster, taking the fantasy genre to new levels and pioneering new CGI techniques and technology in the process. The portrayal of the *Lord* story through the breathtaking cinematography and meticulously composed mise-en-scene juxtaposes elaborately built moments of character development and pathos with awe-inspiring action and spectacle to fully engage a wide variety of audiences. This was Jackson's main goal in adapting *The Lord of the Rings*: to find a way to captivate audiences of all ages and interests with a story he loved. When questioned in an interview about his decision-making process in selecting scenes to add or omit, Jackson articulated a very simple and direct aim: "The reasons

why [any given scene was included] is that they're just fun to have in...actually fun is the best way to describe it. I don't make any decisions deeper than that."⁷ And while at first that may seem contrary to all the arguments of theory and intent that I've laid out to discuss across this thesis, in the end, that is precisely what I am proving—the sophisticated construction of pathos and action through narrative and style above all else works to achieve exactly what Jackson described: to take the audience on a truly thrilling ride of sentiment and spectacle through the world of Tolkien's epic adventure.

⁷ Thompson, 73

A BARROW-WIGHT IS HARD TO WRITE: OBSTACLES TO ADAPTATION

In 1957, Forrest J. Ackerman approached J.R.R. Tolkien with a pitch for an animated version of *The Lord of the Rings* novel. Tolkien was impressed with the idea and images and tentatively agreed to go forward with the project on the stipulation that he be granted either “Art or Cash.”⁸ As he wrote in a letter to his son Christopher and wife Faith, he was granted “either very profitable terms indeed; or absolute author’s veto on objectionable features or alterations.”⁹ As it turned out, Tolkien found objectionable features in abundance when he reviewed the first draft of the film’s screenplay, written by Morgan Zimmerman. His chief complaint with Zimmerman’s treatment was the intrusion of elements of “fairy-stories” and a seeming disregard for the serious, historical tone of *Lord*, which Tolkien believed to be one of the book’s main appeals.¹⁰

In his 1958 letter to Ackerman, Tolkien berated Zimmerman for having treated his work “carelessly in general, in places recklessly, and with no evident signs for any appreciation of what it is all about.”¹¹ He continued, “[Zimmerman] has cut the parts of the story upon which its characteristics and peculiar tone principally depend, showing a preference for fights; and he has made no serious attempt to represent the heart of the tale adequately: the journey of the Ringbearers. The last and most important part of this has, and it is not too strong

⁸ Carpenter, 261

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid, 262

¹¹ Ibid, 261

a word, simply been murdered.”¹² For years, no other screenwriter or producer succeeded in adapting Tolkien’s book, though a few attempts were made. In 1978, an animated adaptation by Ralph Bakshi that covered only the first half of the *Lord* story was released, but it was a critical and commercial flop and the second installation was never produced.¹³ Thus, when Jackson began discussions with producers on how to approach the project, they had multiple examples outlining what *not* to do. Jackson learned from the mistakes illustrated by Bakshi and Zimmerman’s failings and was thereby able to overcome the challenges that thwarted these earlier attempts.

The first step in the adaptation process for Jackson and his producers was to bring together a team of filmmakers who were familiar with not only the obstacles presented by adaptation and production, but who also understood the themes and sensibility of Tolkien’s novel and could create films that would reflect those understandings. As executive producer Mark Ordesky says in the extra commentary “From Book to Script” on the extended edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, “virtually everyone in a significant position on the movies knew the books inside out, [and] had been obsessed with them for years.”¹⁴ The interview continues with Jackson and other high ranking members of the cast and crew, such as screenwriter Philippa Boyens and director of photography Andrew Leslie, recounting their first experiences with *Lord*; each describes how profoundly the book spoke to them, even those who first read it at a young age.

¹² Ibid, 262

¹³ Thompson, 20

¹⁴ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, EE, Extra Commentary, “From Book to Script”

The way in which the crew members speak of Tolkien and his book conveys how deeply they all respected and admired the writer, as well as the gratitude and honor they felt in being given the opportunity to create a film based on such a beloved novel. In listening to Jackson, Boyens, and Walsh speak in these interviews and others, it is clear that they are fans making films for other fans; Kristin Thompson quotes Boyens in her book *The Frodo Franchise*:

“I would hope the fans understand what we were trying to do. You can’t not make a decision that you thought was right for the film because you were terrified of what the fans would say... We really didn’t try to change things for the sake of [changing them]. It was always driven by the necessity of telling this story on film and shaping it for film.”¹⁵

This quotation exemplifies the attitude with which the filmmakers approached the process of adaptation; there was a deliberate and motivating desire to represent Tolkien’s work as faithfully as possible, while still crafting three films that work both as a coherent and engaging series and as comprehensible, individual works of cinema. Each choice in the screenwriting, directorial, and design processes was considered and executed with the intent to preserve the themes, tone, and mythopoeia of the *Lord* book without sacrificing clarity or accessibility to the film for audiences unfamiliar with Tolkien’s writings.

In order to make the best possible cinematic representation of *Lord*, Jackson and his crew worked tirelessly to research, plan, and execute even the most seemingly miniscule details of characters, scenery, costumes, and weaponry to immerse the audience as fully as possible in the rich world of

¹⁵ Thompson, 68

Middle-Earth. J.R.R. Tolkien and his children have published extensive works on the lore and long, detailed history of Middle-Earth and its unique peoples, languages, geography, botany, and creatures; Jackson collaborated with Tolkien scholars, artists, translators and artisans who have studied these works, using their expertise to thoroughly craft the world of the Middle-Earth with elaborately detailed sets, props, costumes, as well as innovative Computer-generated imagery (CGI) and visual effects.¹⁶ The intricate and authentic realization of Middle-Earth fully steeps the audience in Tolkien's mythopoeia, giving the films a unique sense of depth and realism. Middle-Earth's profound sense of history and authenticity are largely considered one of the main appeals of *The Lord of the Rings*, in both the book and films; one can fully immerse themselves in the world and story because that world is constructed with such caring precision and fastidiousness in all possible areas. The multiple appendixes in the *Lord* book include calendars, family trees, and topographical maps; as a professor of Anglo-Saxon and historian of languages, Tolkien crafted extensive backgrounds for the development of Elvish and the other languages spoken by the different races of Middle-Earth. Jackson and his team also collaborated with such fan websites as TheOneRing.net and hired Alan Lee and John Howe, the artists who have painted the vast majority of illustrations for Tolkien, to work on design concept for the films, which drew an immensely positive reaction from fans. Through this immense attention to small details and through the scenery, miniatures and CGI renderings of landscapes and locations,

¹⁶ Thompson, 91

Jackson created a cinematic visualization of Middle-Earth that is powerfully evocative of Tolkien's descriptions and illustrations. The gorgeous shots of the New Zealand landscape and the precisely constructed sets are remarkable in their similarity to the descriptions of Middle-Earth in Tolkien's writings, grounding the film in a reality (albeit as fantastic one) through the rich realization of the world. While there are obviously fantastic elements in *Lord*, Jackson's historical approach to the research and portrayal of Middle-Earth allows the story world to feel relatable and realistic despite the presence of Elves, Dwarves, and dragons. Thanks to Jackson's dedicated effort to authentically visualize Tolkien's Middle-Earth, many fans reported seeing in the films the same images of Middle-Earth they'd been seeing for decades in books and posters, the movies' spectacular visuals transporting them to the mythical places of their, and Tolkien's, imaginations.¹⁷ Jackson's success in creating a visualization of Middle-Earth that deeply pleased Tolkien fans and mesmerized audiences worldwide is one of the greatest achievements of his trilogy; not only did the images of Middle-Earth genuinely satisfy even die-hard Tolkien fans, they also generated an entirely new fan base, spurning a repopularization the book and drawing millions into the world of Tolkien's creations.

In working with a book as long and intricate as *Lord*, Jackson was faced with another, quite obvious obstacle: there is simply too much material in the

¹⁷ The co-founder of TheOneRing.net, Chris Piroutta posted the following reaction after seeing a preview of Jackson's film: "I was literally in tears. I just couldn't believe it because it was something that you envision in your head, and someone actually [took] it from your head and [put] it on screen...we as fans should be beaming with excitement." (Thompson, 88)

narrative of the book to be fully incorporated into an adaptation, even across three long installments. In his letter to Ackerman, Tolkien most adamantly takes issue with choices Zimmerman made to consistently hurry and condense the action of the narrative, as opposed to omitting or abridging it. Tolkien directly opposed the idea of contracting the time and changing seasons over which the tale takes place, as *Lord* is set within “the Northern Hemisphere of this Earth: miles are miles, days are days, and weather is weather.”¹⁸ The author was insistent that one of the main appeals of *Lord* lay in its adherence to a realistic world; the changes in seasons and weather delineate the length of the journey and its separate pieces, tying the narrative to a more realistic, and therefore more compelling, world and story. On the matter of scenes and characters that are difficult or unsuitable to filmic representation, Tolkien specifically stated he would prefer they be omitted entirely rather than represented in inauthentic appearances.¹⁹

Ironically, Tolkien fans who take issue with Jackson’s films frequently criticize the director for following this exact advice. Though many concessions had to be made out of necessity, it’s evident in watching the films and attending to the alterations Jackson made that he read Tolkien’s letter to Zimmerman and held true to his advice to abridge or omit scenes rather than make a botched attempt to condense them as Zimmerman did. Rather than briefly introduce characters or plot lines he wouldn’t have the time to fully explain or develop,

¹⁸ Carpenter, 272

¹⁹ Ibid

Jackson chose to eliminate or reorder certain elements of the story to better streamline the narrative of the three films. This opened Jackson up to tough criticism, as many fans felt his decisions to omit certain scenes showed a lack of respect towards the novel; I am referring in particular to the book's sections on the Scouring of the Shire and subsequent death of Saruman, and Tom Bombadil and the Barrow-Wight. Both of these portions of *Lord* were cut from the film almost in their entirety, but their thematic content was represented through additions and changes Jackson made in other areas of the narrative.

Jackson created an original scene at the beginning of the extended edition of *Return of the King*, in which Saruman is killed by his underling Grima Wormtongue, as he is in the book. Though Jackson's scene of the murder takes place in a very different setting and situation than it does in the book, the alteration is made without largely changing the implication of Wormtongue's action, or the themes related to Saruman's death in the novel. In the *Lord* book, to summarize crudely, when Saruman is given free flight from the Tower of Orthanc in Isengard after the Ents' victory, he goes to the Shire and generally wreaks havoc until Merry and Pippin return, and rouse the Shire into a revolt which culminates in their victory against Saruman. Just after the Hobbits banish Saruman, he strikes Wormtongue and insults him as he bids him to follow him; instead, Wormtongue stabs Saruman in the back, killing him. Instead of omitting this death entirely, Boyens and Walsh repositioned the murder to the beginning of *Return Of The King*, when Théoden, Aragorn, Gandalf, Gimli, and Legolas stand before Orthanc to reason with Saruman after he and his armies at Isengard

have been defeated by the Ents. The scene plays out much as it does in the book, up until Saruman's refusal to come down; at this point in the film, Saruman sends a fiery blast towards Gandalf, which consumes him momentarily, but then disappears as Gandalf stares up through it, unharmed and unfazed, calling out, "Saruman, your staff is broken."²⁰ The film cuts to a low angle shot of Saruman, as his staff explodes in his hand and he looks down with furious loathing, obviously defeated. Jackson altered this scene by adding in the fireball and removing a short but powerful part of the speech Gandalf makes at this moment in the book, right before he destroys Saruman's staff. The dialogue in this scene follows that of the book fairly closely, in idea if not verbatim, up until the end when, in the book, Gandalf reveals himself in his new form to Saruman:

"Saruman!" he cried, and his voice grew in power and authority. 'Behold, I am not Gandalf the Grey, whom you betrayed. I am Gandalf the White, who has returned from death. You have no colour to me now, and I cast you from the order and from the Council.'²¹

The point of this passage, and most significantly the change that is noted to come over Gandalf, is represented cinematically by the device of Saruman's fireball and Gandalf's ability to throw it off, untouched. Instead of having storm clouds gather, and the timbre of Gandalf's voice rise to convey his immense power, as at the Council of Elrond when he reads the inscription on the Ring, Jackson uses a visual effect to express the same sentiment: Gandalf is newly powerful and not to be underestimated again. As the fire circles Gandalf and consumes him, a

²⁰ *The Return of the King*, EE, 00:15:12

²¹ Tolkien, 569

reaction shot of the rest of Gandalf's company, shrinking back and looking fearful, works with the aforementioned shot that follows (Gandalf, looking up sternly through the flames as they disband) to emphasize the increased power and authority that have come over him with his change from the Grey to the White. This idea has already been described and shown clearly when Gandalf revealed himself to Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas at the end of *The Two Towers*. As this scene in the previous film has already laid out how and why Gandalf came back as the White Wizard "as he should have been," the scene in *The Return of the King* reminds viewers of that explanation and further demonstrates Gandalf's new power. The destruction of Saruman's staff drives home this point, establishing Gandalf's superiority to Saruman through clear, cinematic terms. The latter's defeat is truly finalized moments later when Grima Wormtongue, after suffering one last insult at Saruman's hands, pulls a dagger from within his tattered robes and stabs Saruman repeatedly in the back.

Some fans have criticized the choice to have Saruman die at all, if not in the proper circumstances, but this critique ignores the importance of Grima's action and its thematic significance. Through the murder takes place out of its original context, the cycle of completion for Grima's character is not possible without his last assault on Saruman, his only somewhat redeeming moment. Though Gandalf did not want Saruman to die this way, the murder allows Grima to finally stand up and overcome his master, signaling the true defeat of Saruman's character: Saruman's power always lay most significantly in his voice and its power of suggestion over others, such as Grima; in allowing Grima to

murder Saruman by literally stabbing him in the back, Grima has overcome Saruman's power, finally able to disobey that voice and act of his own accord, even though it is through violence, not goodness, that he is redeemed. This suggests that others in the story may also be able to overcome evils that confront them, giving hope to the Hobbits' journey and eliminating one of enemies of the Fellowship and the West.

Unlike the death of Saruman, the stories of Bombadil and the Barrow-wight, however, are not present in the films at all. In the book, Frodo is fairly leisurely about his departure Bag-End after Gandalf informs him he and the Ring must leave the Shire; there are weeks spent planning out the trip, and he and Sam leave without a strong sense of urgency. On their way to Bree, they get lost in the Old Forest, and are almost killed by a tree (later named as Old Man Willow) that pulls them under its roots, crushing them. A curious fellow calling himself Tom Bombadil appears, rescues them, and takes them to his home deep in the Forest for recovery. After Frodo and the hobbits leave Bombadil's home, they again lose themselves in dangerous territory and are caught by a Barrow-wight, a malevolent wraith-like being that haunts the Barrow Downs between the Old Forest and the town of Bree. Bombadil again arrives in time to save the Hobbits, after Frodo calls for him as he's on the verge of being taken under the Wight's spell, and with Tom's guidance the Hobbits make it out of the Barrows onward to Bree.

In the film, however, this entire sequence is cut out, and Gandalf rushes Frodo to leave for Bree at once, putting an emphasis on the immediacy of the

threat over both the Ring and Frodo himself. Instead of taking the time to plan their departure over the few weeks described in the book, Frodo and Sam set out the very night Gandalf comes back in the film. Jackson's reasons for cutting this sequence are understandable and well thought out, as explained and defended in his interview in *From Book to Script*:

“The plot of *The Lord of the Rings* in our movie, in its most simple form, is Frodo carrying the Ring; eventually, he has to go to Mordor and destroy the Ring. So, you know, what does Old Man Willow contribute to the story of Frodo carrying the Ring? What does Tom Bombadil really have to do with the Ring? I know there's Ring stuff in the Bombadil episode, but it's not really advancing our story, it's not really telling us things that we need to know.”²²

And he's right; the primary function of the scenes with Tom Bombadil in the book is one of theme and tone. Tom represents the oldest powers of Middle-Earth itself and is not really a part of the story of Sauron and the Ring because he is beyond their reach; not human nor Elvish, but unlike any other creature of Middle-Earth, Tom is a being of ancient and natural power. Tom functions to remind Frodo and the reader of that which is outside of Sauron's power, and to spurn Frodo onward with hope after saving him from two dangerous situations, Old Man Willow and the Barrow-Wight, which have no significant impact on the overarching narrative outside of momentary suspense. Thus these characters and moments are not necessary for the advancement of the film's plot.

Two additional arguments can be made for excluding Bombadil; the first is that his character is really not suited to visual presentation through the

²² *The Fellowship of the Ring*, EE, Extra Commentary, “From Book to Script”

medium of film. Tom is introduced as a character both whimsical and quite serious; he is “the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside.” In Tolkien’s own words,

“[Tom Bombadil] is the spirit that desires knowledge of other things, their history and nature, because they are ‘other’...entirely unconcerned with ‘doing’ anything with the knowledge...He is not an important person-- to the narrative. I would not, however, have left him in, if he did not have some kind of function. The story is cast in terms of a good side and a bad side, beauty against ruthless ugliness...[Tom is] a naturally pacifist view, which always arises in the mind when there is a war...Ultimately only the victory of the West will allow Bombadil to continue, or even to survive. Nothing would be left for him in the world of Sauron.”²³

As old as the oldest forest, non-human and more a part of nature than anything else, Tom Bombadil is unlike any other character in *Lord* because he is beyond the power of the Ring, and due to this elusive characterization, he would be nearly impossible to represent cinematically. As Verlyn Flieger wrote in her essay “Sometimes One Word is Worth a Thousand Pictures,

“Even in a story that includes hobbits, Dwarves, Elves, and walking trees, Tom as a character would be next to impossible to make visual without spilling over into buffoonery and downright silliness. Put on screen, an actual actor engaged in hopping, dancing, and bounding would run the very dangerous risk of disrupting what Tolkien called secondary belief, the acceptance by the audience of the behavior of a secondary world, for such actions would be difficult to enact without eliciting the wrong kind of laughs from the audience.”²⁴

This concisely sums up a significant distinction between literature and film: in literature, one can imagine and understand a character even if it is described with seemingly contrasting qualities. However, with film, the image

²³ Carpenter, 178-179

²⁴ Bogstad, 49

cannot avoid creating a straightforward representation; the whimsy and silliness of Tom movements and mannerisms would undermine the power and dignity essential to his character, and the same would be said for Goldberry, Tom's nymph-like wife. As Tolkien said in the letter responding to Zimmerman's treatment, "I think she [Goldberry] had better disappear than make a meaningless appearance."²⁵ It seems quite clear in watching the *Lord* trilogy that Jackson elected to follow Tolkien's advice and allow the characters of Tom and Goldberry to remain off-screen. Tom's chief importance to the book is the suggestion of natural good forces in Middle-Earth outside of the War. This theme is represented in the films primarily through the characterization of Sam, as he consistently resists the power of the Ring in order to save Frodo.

The second argument for excluding Bombadil is that the inclusion of Tom Bombadil and the chapters of the Old Man Willow and the Barrow-Wight would actually slow down the film's story and dilute the suspense and action generated in the first half of *Fellowship*. This is a result of the nature of cinematic storytelling. In film, as in most other media, stories tend to be structured through three act narratives, consisting of an exposition that introduces the characters and conflicts, a second act that develops and complicates those conflicts, and a third act that brings the narrative to a climax and then resolution. This requires concise delineation of information within each act to advance the narrative and lay out details early on that will be important later on in the story. Storytelling in cinema cannot lag or plod along, slowly progressing toward

²⁵ Carpenter, 272

action, as it can in literature; each frame in every scene needs to work towards a thematic or narrative purpose or the audience will lose focus of the narrative goals and development. In a film as long as one of the *Lord* installments, this is especially true; the audience will notice any lag in the narrative's momentum, and the film will lose their attention. However, this has to be balanced with a realistic progression of action; the exposition of a film has to build gradually toward a dramatic climax; it cannot crowd the opening with action or the audience will quickly become desensitized to it. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the members of the Fellowship and Company²⁶ are constantly in danger as they progress through their respective journeys. Jackson breaks up the scenes of intense action and suspense with episodes of lighter tone, conversation, and moments of humor in the other narratives. The initial threats especially are relatively spaced out and surrounded by slower or lighter scenes in order to heighten the suspense and fear they generate; if the danger came in an unceasing onslaught, the audience would stop feeling scared for the Hobbits and the film would fall in danger of becoming a joke or parody. Jackson's decision to cut the events involving Bombadil and the Barrow-Wight follow this logic; while in the book these events occur far enough away from the pursuit of the Black Riders and incident in Bree, the film could not take the time to lay out all of these events within a reasonable running time. Jackson could have had Gandalf arrive more

²⁶ Throughout this thesis, the "Fellowship" refers to the nine companions who set out from Rivendell: Gandalf, Gimli, Legolas, Boromir, Aragorn, Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin; the "Company" refers to the combined armies of Gondor, Rohan, and the Elves (and the Hobbits) who fight against Sauron in the War of the Ring

casually, as in the book, and used an ellipsis to denote the passing weeks before Frodo left, but this would remove the sense of urgency the film relies on to build emotion and expectations. Instead, Jackson chose to abridge the opening leg of the Hobbits' journey and disperse the action to better suit the narrative of the films.

The introduction of the first Black Rider, whispering "Bagginsss...Shire..." outside of a Hobbit hole only some miles from Hobbiton (where Frodo lives), takes place thirty-four minutes into the film, and is followed by Gandalf interrupting a mirthful scene in the pub to reveal the truths of the Ring to Frodo, informing him he needs to leave at once. Again, by rushing the opening this way, Jackson abbreviates the opening of the book into a more cinematic sequence of events. The visual progression of action from this point is hurried to align with the rush Gandalf has put on Frodo; the scenes play out dynamically and drive the narrative forward to bring in the threat of the Black Riders more quickly, engaging viewers with anticipation and expectations of a confrontation through suspense-generating editing and scoring.

The chase with the Black Riders owes much of its dramatic tension to the fact that it is the first visualized threat the Hobbits encounter. Had Jackson included the scenes with the Barrow-Wight between the Hobbits departure and their arrival at Bree, there would simply be too much action in too short a space of time for either threat to have any weight or carry the momentum forward. The inclusion of the Barrow-Wight scene would thereby have diluted the effectiveness of the fear generated by the pursuit of the Black Riders; the Riders

would not seem as serious a threat to the Hobbits in this scene if they had just escaped another situation of seemingly mortal danger. The film intelligently employs a pacing of action to allow each scene to register within the audience and endows the film with the drama and suspense necessary to engage them.

By removing these episodes from the opening leg of the film, Jackson also allows himself to take more time in static scenes of dialogue crucial to the narrative. Almost ten minutes of running time is dedicated to Gandalf's telling of the true history of the Ring to Frodo and his emphasis to him (and the audience) of the reasons it must not be found. This scene is absolutely essential to the heart of the trilogy: it is imperative that the audience understand the seriousness of the Ring's power, its origins (which includes more detail on the character of Sauron), and what horrors would await Middle-Earth if Sauron should regain the Ring. While some of this information was presented through the prologue, its repetition and reiteration is essential to ensuring that the audience understands the history of Sauron and the Ring, as well as where the story will take them in order to overcome such evil.

The background Gandalf provides in this scene (such as Gollum's involvement, and the descriptions of the Nazgûl, who are already on their way to the Shire) is instrumental, filling in the essential information about the immediacy of the threat for both Frodo and the audience. Jackson's decision to omit the chapters on Bombadil, Old Man Willow, and the Barrow-Wight allow for the film to spend more time carefully laying out these things that are vital to the comprehension of the rest of the narrative across all three films. Cinema is, at its

essence, about dynamic and concise storytelling, and the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* films is constantly mindful of that truth.

Through the use of crosscutting as described earlier, *The Lord of the Rings* easily carries momentum and emotion between alternating plot and character lines to form one cohesive story. The films accomplish this so successfully because of those choices Jackson made to omit those scenes that detract from the primary narrative of the Hobbits' journeys, focusing instead on detailing the most significant information of the narrative in longer, more extensive scenes, mixed in with moments of intense action and emotion. Additionally, through cutting between multiple storylines that are constantly referring to one another in dialogue and theme, Jackson clearly delineates the conflicts and developments in either narrative, while constantly re-establishing how each connects to the others.

In the course of adapting *The Lord of the Rings*, Jackson also made decisions to alter or reposition events and quotes in order to underscore their significance or clarify something for viewers unfamiliar with the book. This is done very subtly at times, as a sort of Easter egg for the Tolkien enthusiasts, but these changes are always made with a narrative importance that lies outside of just pleasing fans; many of the alterations were made in order to add action and melodrama to parts of the story that are slower in the book, reworking it to better suit it to the needs of cinematic storytelling. Decisions made in reconstructing the narrative to raise the melodramatic stakes of the film will be analyzed and discussed at length in the second chapter of this thesis; however,

many changes and alterations were also made with the primary intention of clarifying plot developments and characterizations, in addition to underscoring the themes running throughout Tolkien's work, as reflected by the films.

For example, the film makes a number of changes in the events surrounding the Battle of Helm's Deep and the story of Aragorn in particular, in terms of his physical journey, his gradual acceptance of his role as King and his relationship with Arwen. In *Two Towers*, as Théoden leads his company to Helm's Deep with Gimli, Legolas, and Aragorn, they are ambushed by a cavalry of Orcs and Uruk-hai on Wargs.²⁷ This attack does not occur in the book, but rather is a fabrication of Jackson's invention to liven up a passage in *Lord* which is fairly uneventful. The fight presents an opportunity for a stunning use of visual effects and staging to create a thrillingly violent battle scene, reminiscent of the low budget horror films Jackson began his career working on, but amplified through the resources provided by *Lord's* extravagant budget. This also sets the stage for the overwhelming visuals of the Battle at Helm's Deep, giving the audience a taste of the awe-inspiring action that is yet to come. The Warg attack is preceded by another added scene, in which Aragorn has two flashbacks to conversations he had with Arwen and Lord Elrond;²⁸ this is the first time these scenes have been shown, but they fade in and out on Aragorn's face that bookend the scenes in

²⁷ Orcs are a race of monstrous creatures that serve the Dark Lord Sauron; Uruk-hai are a specialized breed of Orc that are stronger and able to travel in daylight (regular Orcs travel mostly by night, as the sunlight burns them). Wargs are a race of massive, wolf-like creatures that are ridden by Orc/Uruk-hai cavalry.

²⁸ Lord Elrond is one of the Elves on the White Council, along with Lord Celeborn and Lady Galadriel, who rule Lothlórien together. Lord Elrond lives in Rivendell with his daughter, Lady Arwen Evenstar, who is Aragorn's lover (eventually wife).

Rivendell work with the dialogue to clearly mark them as having happened in the past. This works to bring the story of Aragorn and Arwen's relationship into greater prominence within the narrative, highlighting her part in Aragorn's struggle to accept his fate and rise to his rightful place as the King of the West. The emphasis and exaggeration of their narrative fulfills the contemporary audience's expectations for a love story within the films, the romance steeping the narrative more deeply in the melodramatic tendency, an idea that will be further discussed in the fifth chapter of this thesis. Jackson's goal in reconstructing *The Lord of the Rings* through these additions and alternations was to broaden the appeal of the films while maintaining the heart of Tolkien's original concept. While Arwen and Aragorn's relationship and her decision to stay in Middle-Earth with him as her people sail to the Undying Lands are not prominent in the narrative of written volume of *The Two Towers*, their story is told in great detail in Appendix A, The Númenorean Kings, part v, "Here Follows a Part of the Tale of Aragorn and Arwen."²⁹ The conversations between Aragorn, Arwen, and Lord Elrond that take place in Aragorn's flashbacks follow the dialogue between these characters in the tale in the Appendix very closely, if not wholly verbatim. By using the dialogue and descriptions from the book within the context of an added scene, Jackson is giving a nod to Tolkien fans, acknowledging that the alternations might alienate some of them and working in the quotations from the book as a compromise.

²⁹ Tolkien, 1032

This illustrates the prowess with which Jackson handled the adaptation process; through his additions, Jackson presents the audience with key information about Aragorn and Arwen's relationship mid-way through the trilogy, clearly re-establishing the conflicts with which Aragorn is struggling and using specific scenes and dialogue directly from the book to please those fans who recognize them. The added scene of Aragorn's brush with death and the intertwining of his and Arwen's lives act as a segue to Elrond, in voice-over, speaking to Arwen of the future that awaits her should she stay and live a mortal life. The following scenes allow Lord Elrond, and then Lady Galadriel, to act as informational guides for the audience, detailing the stakes of Arwen's decision, and the decision all the Elves must face: whether to abandon the race of Men and the rest of Middle-Earth to their doom or aid in the fight against Sauron. Lady Galadriel, seemingly speaking to Elrond through his thoughts, is used as a sort of omniscient narrator, concisely detailing the central issues of the trilogy at its midpoint in *The Two Towers*.

Her narration weaves together the threats looming ever-lower over the West: Saruman's massive army of Uruk-hai and that of Sauron, encroaching on Gondor from both sides, and the will of the Ring working to return to its master, so close now to Mordor and to the reach of Men, who she reminds the audience, are "so easily corrupted." The information presented by Galadriel fills in any questions or gaps the films have left, establishing as she did in *Fellowship* that "the quest stands on the edge of knife", and posing the final question to Elrond: "Do we let them stand alone?" Through this narration, Galadriel sets up the

narrative questions that the rest of the trilogy will answer: will the quest indeed claim Frodo's life, will the young captain of Gondor be seduced by the Ring's power, will the Elves stand with Middle-Earth, will the risk they all took end in their demise?

While in other contexts this sort of blatancy could undermine the integrity of the film, in a story as long and intricate as *The Lord of the Rings*, the device of narration is incredibly useful and well done. Galadriel is not breaking the fourth wall or actually addressing the audience, but speaking to Lord Elrond; the shots of her looking directly into the camera create a direct intimacy, bringing the audience deeper into the emotionality of the story by placing them with Elrond as he considers the choices he must make. Further, Jackson is using Galadriel as a device to make the film comprehensible for audiences unfamiliar with the story. This narration occurs almost exactly halfway through the trilogy, at a point when audiences may be losing track of the details of the different narrative threads. Galadriel succinctly lays out the main narrative conflicts in a manner that brings information presented early on in the trilogy back to prominence, clarifying where each character's narrative has led thus far, and how the story may go on, dependent on the choices each character makes and the situations they might encounter based on those choices. By adding this scene to *The Two Towers*, Jackson gently guides those viewers unfamiliar with the book to certain questions and understandings, making the film more comprehensible and adding suspense by cutting away from Lord Elrond as he considers the final question.

This question will be answered through another of Jackson's additions in *The Two Towers*, the arrival of Elvish archers at the Battle of Helm's Deep.³⁰ Like his restructuring of the Tale of Aragorn and Arwen, Jackson's decision to bring Elves to Helm's Deep serves multiple purposes; as with the addition of the Warg attack, this scene functions largely as a source of melodrama, intense action and surpasses the Warg scene with an unprecedented visualization of a battle through special effects. However, this coming of the Elves also works as a thematic device to bring elements of the *Lord* book into the film. Though the Elves do not come to Rohan's aid at Helm's Deep in the book, they do fight against Sauron in their own battles in other parts of Middle-Earth. This scene acts as a representation of the Elves' involvement in the War of the Ring, and brings resolution to the question posed earlier by Lady Galadriel. The Elves, though their time is over, do stand and fight against the dominion of Sauron; though this contradicts Tolkien's theme of the Elves fading away at the end of their time, it also works in support of another of the *Lord* book's themes: only through the unification of the free peoples of Middle-Earth can Sauron be defeated. This unification is arguably the greatest victory in the story and the catalyst for Sauron's demise. Thus, the arrival of the Elves at Helm's Deep and the speech Haldir gives clearly about the alliance between Elves and Men affirms that amalgamation, stirring further the emotion built by Legolas and Aragorn's

³⁰ Helm's Deep is a stronghold in Rohan in which the Fortress of Hornburg was built; this fortress is Rohan's place of refuge in times of war.

confrontation and shared apology to create a touching reprieve amidst of the grim coming of war.

Jackson placed another such moment on the eve of the Battle of Pelennor Field in *The Return of the King*, when Lord Elrond arrives in the middle of the night to speak to Aragorn. Elrond warns him of Arwen's fading life, her connection to the fate of the Ring, and also of the fleet of Corsair³¹ ships headed towards Minas Tirith,³² telling him their army is brutally outnumbered. Elrond tells him to take the mountain pass to the Paths of the Dead and call forth the oath breakers, and in doing so reveals to Aragorn the Sword of Elendil, reforged from the shard of Narsil into Andúril, the Flame of the West,³³ bringing Aragorn to actualize his role as the King of Gondor and allow him to command the Army of the Dead.³⁴ This comprises the eighth step of Aragorn's transition through the hero myth, which will be discussed in the next chapter; the decisions involved in the fabrication of this scene go beyond Aragorn's characterization, however.

³¹ The Corsairs of Umbar are a race of evil Men from the South who fight for Sauron in the War of the Ring

³² Heavily fortified present (at time of the War of the Rings) capital of Gondor; also known as "the White City" as it is made almost entirely of white stone.

³³ The Sword of Elendil was the sword that Isildur used to cut the Ring from Sauron's hand during the battle of the Second Age, described in the prologue of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The sword was broken during that battle, and its pieces became known as the "Shards of Narsil." Lord Elrond re-forges the Shards of Narsil in *The Return of the King* into a new sword, Andúril, the Flame of the West. This sword marks its bearer as the King of the West, heir of Elendil.

³⁴ The Army of the Dead, also called "the oath breakers," are ghosts of the Men of the Mountains who betrayed Isildur in the battle against Sauron in the Second Age and did not fight for Gondor, as they had sworn they would at the beginning of the realm. Isildur cursed the Men of the Mountains: "this curse lay upon thee and thy folk: to rest never until your oath is fulfilled. For this war will last through years uncounted, and you shall be summoned once again ere the end." (*The Lord of the Rings*, page 765) The Army of the Dead rest in the aptly named Paths of the Dead, which can only be reached by taking the mountain passes of the Dimholt Road.

By having Aragorn receive the sword in the third film, instead of just after the Council of Elrond (as happens in the book), the story gains melodramatic momentum through the involvement of Arwen and Aragorn's relationship and the visceral rush of the sword's reveal, which is amplified by the scene's heavy stylization. Further, the reveal of the sword has a more powerful impact on the audience by occurring when its significance is most pronounced; had the sword been reforged and given to Aragorn in the first film, the audience would likely have forgotten by the time Aragorn arrived at the Paths of the Dead. Andúril is not relevant until Aragorn is ready to accept his fate as King, which, in the films, he is not prepared to do until Arwen is dying and the fate of the War depends on his command of the Army of the Dead to win the battle. As with the changes discussed earlier, Jackson's decision to include this scene is one of dynamic storytelling; the momentum gained through the film's narrative builds emotion and tension in a way that would not work had Aragorn had the sword all along. He needs this final push from Lord Elrond to complete his character arc as a hero.

This scene is also a beautiful illustration of the screenwriter's attention to detail and thought toward Tolkien's book, including specific details as Easter eggs to Tolkien fans without confusing or alienating audiences unfamiliar with the book. This scene demonstrates Jackson's prowess in building tension and unease through stylization; a gusting wind blows through and around the tent, the resulting movement of fabric and the two characters' hair and clothes build feelings of tension and unease that are echoed in and enhanced by the score,

which arcs and drops rhythmically, adding to the tone of uncertainty and suspense. The images and sound are constructed to augment the apprehension stirred by Lord Elrond's arrival, and when he reveals Andúril, Flame of the West, forged from the Shards of Narsil, in slow motion through a birds' eye shot, the score crescendos in a fast, dramatic rush that matches the sudden change in camera angle and pacing. As Aragorn accepts the sword and turns it over in his hands, the score continues to crescendo and carry on the visceral rush brought on by the reveal. The score quiets as Lord Elrond says to Aragorn: "Put aside the Ranger. Become who you were born to be. Take the Dimholt Road." Aragorn holds his gaze for a moment before dropping it, sighing as his expression conveys a deep sense of doubt; the tent continues to sway and blow in the background, maintaining the tension built throughout the scene. An ethereal ringing comes into the score again as Lord Elrond looks Aragorn in the eyes and says to him, in Elvish, "*Onen i-Estel Edain--*" This is the first half of the last sentence Aragorn's mother said to him before she died, meaning, "I gave Hope to the Dúnedain;" Lord Elrond is reminding Aragorn of the sacrifices his mother, and others, for him and for their people; Aragorn looks up, a light of recognition and emotion in his eyes, and finishes, "*ú-chebin estel anim,*" (I have kept no hope for myself), completing his mother's last words and accepting, from Elrond's outstretched hand, both Andúril and his place as King of the West.³⁵ The significance of the Elvish line is made obvious even to viewer's who don't get the reference, expressed by Lord Elrond's suddenly gentle tone of voice and the

³⁵ Tolkien, 1036

lingering expression on Aragorn's face. The inclusion of Tolkien's quotation is a nod to fans of the book, but works equally well for viewers who don't pick up on the deeper meaning as Elrond simply inspiring Aragorn through the remembrance of the persistence of hope and the sacrifices others have made for the lives of Men.

Similarly, through temporal relocation within the story, Jackson brings some quotes from the *Lord* book to notable turning points in both plot and character development, highlighting their thematic significance within the overarching narrative of the film. The best example of this is Jackson's repositioning of the scene in which Gandalf tells Frodo the story of Gollum's life and his involvement with the Ring. In the book, this happens in the beginning, while Frodo is still in Bag-End. As discussed earlier, Jackson considerably sped up the beginning of the story, largely abridging the time the Hobbits spent in the Shire. Instead of attempting to condense Gollum's story or hurry it into the opening of the film, Jackson broke the story into two sections: Gollum's history, and his role in the story of the Ring. The tale of Gollum's discovery of it are told through flashback at the beginning of the third film, bringing the audience immediately back into the heart of the narrative and saving them from depending solely on information presented in the earlier films by reiterating much of what the trilogy has already established in a concise overview.

Jackson pieces together select quotes from Gandalf and Frodo's conversation in the book after Frodo first notices Gollum slinking behind them in the Mines of Moria. After Gandalf briefly tells Frodo of Gollum (Sméagol), Frodo

says, "It's a pity Bilbo didn't kill him when he had the chance." To which Gandalf replies,

"Pity? It was pity that stayed Bilbo's hand. Many that live deserve death, and some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them, Frodo? Do not be too eager to deal out death in judgment. Even the very wise cannot see all ends. My heart tells me that Gollum has some part to play yet, for good or ill...before this is over, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many."³⁶

This is nearly a direct quote from the book, but a more concise and easily understood paraphrasing that works with the pieces of Gollum's story that have been presented thus far to denote the significant role his character will hold in the story. This is a key moment in the maturation of Frodo's character from a naïve innocent into the tragic hero the quest makes him. The poignant truth of Gandalf's words linger heavily in the air as the camera stays with Frodo as he falls momentarily silent and sits down; Jackson's repositioning places two of Tolkien's most famous quotes in a tense moment of comprehension for Frodo, as he considers Gandalf's words and replies, "I wish the Ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened," and Gandalf responds,

"So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. There are other forces at work in this world, Frodo, besides the will of evil. Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, in which case you also were meant to have it. And that is an encouraging thought."³⁷

The role Gandalf fills as Frodo's guide and mentor is embodied in this quotation, as he reminds Frodo of that which he's fighting for, the good that's left in the world; the same forces that Tom Bombadil represented and that Jackson instead

³⁶ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, EE, 2:08:05

³⁷ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, EE, 2:09:00

instilled in the characters of Sam, Merry and Pippin. After Gandalf falls from the Bridge of Khazad-Dûm, it falls to Sam to take up his role and guide Frodo throughout the rest of the journey, as signified by his refusal to let Frodo leave him behind and again by his repetition of Gandalf's sentiment towards the end of *The Two Towers*:

“By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo, the ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger, they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going. Because they were holding on to something... that there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for.”³⁸

This speech and Frodo and Sam's exchange about their own story at the end of the film are paraphrases of conversations the characters have in the book, again illustrating the meticulousness the screenwriters displayed throughout their adaptation. The relocation of the dialogue better illustrates the films' themes, as Sam's optimism and purity are juxtaposed with the dread and destruction of their surroundings, but matched by the rising tone and brightening light in the visuals that play as he speaks in voice-over.³⁹ The scene invokes a strong, visceral reaction, the pathos of Sam's speech pulling heavily on

³⁸ *The Two Towers*, EE, 3:22:00

³⁹ This scene is analyzed in further detail in the third chapter.

the audience's emotions to align them with Sam and Frodo, the Hobbits' bravery in light of their doomed quest both inspiring and tragic.

Throughout the adaptation process, the filmmakers kept in mind the necessity to include elements of the *Lord* book in this manner; Jackson altered the narrative as necessary to form a coherent three-part story without informational or narrative gaps, and to make the trilogy as accessible as possible, regardless of audiences' past exposure to Tolkien's book. By working in specific scenes and pieces of dialogue, the screenwriters kept the themes and sensibility of the *Lord* narrative alive, and the stunning realization of Middle-Earth works to captivate even those fans who may be put off by the screenplay's alterations. As the films' editor John Gilbert said in *From Book to Script*, "literal adaptations don't work; I think you've got to find what you think is essential to the book and make a movie of that." By choosing not to spend time on chapters less relevant to the journey of the Hobbits and the War of the Ring in favor of scenes that advance the narrative and emotional impact of the story, Jackson and his team did just that. Jackson meticulously worked and reworked every detail of production to ensure "historic" authenticity and narrative cohesion and clarity, simultaneously broadening the accessibility and appeal of the films while working within Tolkien's own advice for adaptation to please even the most dedicated fans. To inspire audiences' alignment with the main characters throughout the films, Jackson restructured the narratives of Aragorn, Sam, Frodo, Merry, and Pippin around what literary and film theorists call "the hero myth" or "the hero's journey;" the next chapter will focus on Aragorn's progress

through this journey and how Jackson added intrigue and sympathy to the films through his characterization of Aragorn.

FROM RANGER TO RULER: TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF JACKSON'S ARAGORN

In constructing the narrative of his trilogy, Jackson placed a special emphasis on the individual journeys of each of the four Hobbits and Aragorn, creating a web-like narrative of five (nearly) equally compelling protagonists. Each of these protagonists represents the “good” of their side of the War, and each narrative contains lessons in moral legibility through the lens of their experiences. The five protagonists follow the same path for most of *Fellowship*, and when they are eventually divided, the structure of the narrative divides with them. *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King* are constructed through consistent crosscutting between the journeys of the different characters as they fight their respective battles, internal and external, and as each eventually attains victory. Each of these protagonists offers moments of intense pathos and emotion, and each achieves great acts of heroism in his own individual way, building upon one another within the grander narrative of good versus evil.

While qualifying five characters as “protagonists” is unusual, *Lord* comes with a unique set of circumstances. Most screenwriting manuals suggest having three to five significant characters to keep the story comprehensible. *The Lord of the Rings*, however, comes with a daunting cast of twenty-three significant characters, none of whom can be omitted or brushed over: Merry, Pippin, Frodo, Sam, Bilbo, Gandalf, Legolas, Gimli, Lord Elrond, Lady Galadriel, Arwen, Aragorn, Faramir, Boromir, Denethor, Théoden, Éowyn, Éomer, Sauron, Saruman, Gríma,

Gollum, and Treebeard.⁴⁰ Within such a large cast, the five protagonists stand out as such, and their individual stories are salient enough within the overarching narrative that a viewer could identify with any or all of them. Though the names of each character and location in Middle-Earth may take multiple viewings to remember perfectly, Jackson allows each of these major characters a significant amount of screen time. He makes a point of repeating each of their names often enough throughout the trilogy to give audiences a good chance at understanding their different characterizations and roles as ally or enemy.

Each protagonist in *The Lord of the Rings* goes through varying degrees of the intense character development across the course of the trilogy through what film and literary scholars have called the “hero myth.” Taken from idea originally developed in Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the hero myth was has been expanded upon by Linda Seger and David Bordwell. As Seger explains in her book *Making a Good Script Great*, “Myths are the common stories at the root of our universal existence...a myth is ‘more than true’ because it connects and speaks to us all...[The hero myths] show who the hero is, what the hero needs, and how the story and character interact in order to create a transformation.”⁴¹ The hero myth follows ten rudimentary steps that make up the transformation Seger mentions; the character moves through these steps, usually over the course of a three-act narrative, to grow from an innocent or

⁴⁰ Thompson, 72

⁴¹ Seger, 136-137

ordinary character into a hero. In a crude paraphrasing of the hero myth as outlined by Seger's book, the ten steps are as follows:

1. The hero is introduced in a mundane or ordinary world.
2. Something new, typically an inkling of the main conflict, is introduced that establishes the stakes and sets the hero up for adventure.
3. The hero is reluctant to leave, but something occurs to make the issue more personal, pressing the hero to take action.
4. Throughout the journey, the hero receives guidance from a mentor or leader who initiates them into the adventure and helps them along the way. Often, the mentor is a wise, elderly figure, such as Gandalf.
5. The plans for the adventure are laid out as, with the aid of the helper figure, the hero becomes prepared to enter the special world and begin his adventure. This is usually the first turning point of the story, leading into the second act and further plot development as the hero begins his transformation.
6. The hero gets into the thick of the adventure and undergoes tests and overcomes obstacles in the course of achieving his goals, confronted with enemies or obstructions.
7. During the course of these obstacles, the hero is troubled and reaches a "black moment" at the second turning point, the point when the worst is confronted and the action moves toward an exciting conclusion."
8. Emerging from the black moment victorious, the hero seizes the charge and leads into the third act and final confrontation with a plan
9. Often the chase scene leading up to the hero overcoming the final obstacles, the hero takes what he has learned from his journey and integrates it into his actions
10. The hero faces the final confrontation and triumphs; he achieves self-actualization and is reborn as a true hero, the transformation complete. The hero then returns to his own world and is re-integrated and rewarded for his valor.⁴²

In order to dramatize the narrative of the films, Jackson created a new source of pathos and intrigue through his recharacterization of Aragorn. In the book, Aragorn does not doubt himself or hesitate in his actions, but rather

⁴² Seger, 139

accepts the challenge of his inheritance as soon as it is presented to him, claiming his place as the Heir of Isildur and King of the West.⁴³ In the films, however, Aragorn is unwilling to accept his destiny so easily; he worries incessantly that the fallibility of his ancestors lies within him as well, shying away from the path that has been laid out for him by fate. Aragorn's love for Arwen also complicates his decision-making in the films, and the story of their romance plays a much more significant role in the trilogy than in the book, as will be discussed in the fifth chapter of this thesis. In a very deliberate manner, Jackson exaggerated or invented strong feelings of indecision and self-doubt that plague Aragorn throughout the trilogy, dramatizing his journey through the steps of hero myth outlined above. The changes Jackson made to Aragorn's character gradually reveal his worthiness as a king and humanize the otherwise high-mimetic hero, invoking empathy and support from the audience. If the Aragorn in the films were as sure of himself as his character in the book, he would be less relatable and less sympathetic. By giving him feelings of uncertainty and hesitation about his destiny as the King Jackson makes Aragorn a more compelling character; the catharsis of experiencing a character's struggle and then reveling in their triumph can be one of the greatest joys of cinema.

Most significantly, had the films kept true to the book's characterization, Aragorn may have come off arrogant to the point of suspicion. As Richard West wrote in his piece *Neither the Shadow Nor the Twilight*,

⁴³ Elendil was the first High King of Arnor and Gondor; Aragorn is his only living heir, but his identity was made a secret when he was a child to protect him from the Enemy (Sauron). By rights, Aragorn is the King of the West (Gondor and Arnor, the country to the Northwest).

"[In *Fellowship of the Ring*, just before the Council of Elrond] Aragorn tells Arwen that he fears that the weakness whereby Isildur succumbed to the lure of the One Ring flows in his blood too, and she reassures him that the Shadow does not lie on him (nor on her) and she is confident that he will not fail as his ancestor did. He vacillates about this throughout the film trilogy. This could make [Aragorn] seem less resolute a man than his counterpart in the book, but for many in the movie audience his doubts will make him a more acceptable candidate for his eventual kingship. When considering whom to place in a position of power, people are wary of someone who seems too eager for it, feeling a reluctant person is more likely to wield power responsibly."⁴⁴

West's claim is especially relevant in *The Lord of the Rings* because the corrupting strength of the One Ring causes even the slightest grasp for power to seem suspicious, particularly regarding Men. By having Aragorn question himself and consider his potential fallibility early on in the films, his strength of will (and therefore his worthiness) is all the more singular when he is faced with pivotal moments of decision. These instances are often marked by intense close ups on character's faces, as Jackson uses their reactions to guide those of the audience; the score is used throughout the trilogy to reflect and enhance the emotional impact of narrative events, and this effect is more pronounced in scenes of significant character development or action. When Frodo offers Aragorn the Ring at the end of *Fellowship*, he closes the Hobbit's hand around the Ring and sends them both away instead of falling into the same temptation Boromir did when he tried to take the Ring from Frodo in a scene shot with a shaky camera and fast cutting to highlight Boromir's volatility. Because the plot has made such a deliberate effort to establish the Ring's powers of corruption

⁴⁴ Bogstad, 233

over Men, Aragorn's refusal of the Ring is a huge marker of his moral strength and character, and the truth of what Arwen said to him in the scene West references; despite the strength of will demonstrated in this scene, clouds of indecisiveness and self-doubt continue to trouble Aragorn throughout his progress through the hero myth, making his plotline more melodramatic.

Before continuing with this analysis, I need to define what I mean by the word "melodramatic," as the term has had a number of connotations throughout the history of cinema. Though often described as a genre, melodrama is in truth more of a stylistic and narrative mode, as the elements that comprise it vary within and adapt to the context of different films and time periods. Originally, in theatre, melodrama was defined as a dramatic narrative that incorporated music; over the last century, however, the word "melodrama" has been applied by the industry, audiences, and academics and to a wide variety of films spanning multiple genres, with many commonalities as well as inconsistencies. In his book *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, Ben Singer discusses the many forms and facets that melodrama has taken on in film since its conception in the early 1900s, as well as how melodrama works in contemporary cinema. Considering several possible approaches to define melodrama in terms of cinema, Singer highlights a cluster of narrative and stylistic traits that have become associated with the mode, then defines melodrama the way a doctor identifies an illness: through the combined presence of at least two of the following characteristics: pathos, overwrought emotion, moral polarization, non-classical narrative structure, and

sensationalism.⁴⁵ In this section, I will focus on how Jackson infused the *Lord* films with themes and moments of pathos through Aragorn's character development through the hero myth.

Since early in cinematic history, an appeal to the audiences' emotions of pity, sympathy, and empathy are often an integral aspect of melodramatic narratives. Working from Aristotle's definition⁴⁶, Singer describes pathos as "a kind of visceral physical sensation triggered by the perception of moral injustice against an undeserving victim," which, he notes, often, if not always, involves an element of identification with that victim and a resulting sense of self-pity within the viewer.⁴⁷ That is to say, films like the *Lord* trilogy rely on audiences' ability to identify with the challenges characters face throughout the narrative, invoking empathy through the commonalities between the characters' struggles and audiences' lived or imagined experiences. Franco Moretti's analysis of pathos posits the feeling is induced by not in a general tone of sorrow or the presence of suffering characters, but from a shift in perspective that occurs at the exact moment in a film when a character's understanding of reality catches up to that of the audience.⁴⁸ At this moment, any lingering hopes or desires that audience (and/or character) had held on to that a situation, such as another character's death, might be amended or avoided are eliminated, inspiring pathos, and often,

⁴⁵ Singer, 27

⁴⁶ Aristotle's definition of pity, the Greek root of *pathos*, is as follows: "A sort of pain at an evident evil of a destructive or painful kind in the case of somebody who does not deserve it, the evil being one which we might imagine to happen to ourselves."

⁴⁷ Singer, 28-29

⁴⁸ Neale, 7

tears.⁴⁹ In his piece *Melodrama and Tears*, Steve Neale cites a quotation from Moretti that summarizes this theory,

“Time does not stop, and it does not heed anyone's bidding. Still less does it turn back and allow us to use it differently. This is what the protagonist's death is for: to show that time is irreversible. And this irreversibility is perceived that much more clearly if there are no doubts about the different direction one would like to impose on the course of events. This is what makes one cry. Tears are always the product of powerlessness. They presuppose two mutually opposed facts: that it is clear how the present state of things should be changed and that this change is impossible.”⁵⁰

Linda Williams concisely paraphrases this idea in her essay *Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess*: “We cry, Moretti argues, not just because the characters do, but at the precise moment when desire is finally recognized as futile.”⁵¹ The timing of the shift is crucial to the invocation of pathos: in these moments, the audience and character reach simultaneous understandings that there is no potential for their hopes or desires to win out.

These paradigm-shifting moments of pathos often come immediately after the desire for the alternative (now impossible) course of events has been intensified, as is the case with the scene of Boromir's death at the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Boromir's character is relatively volatile throughout the first film, but Boromir truly hits his black moment when he attempts to take the Ring from Frodo, overcome by its power. After he comes to lying on the ground, he realizes his terrible mistake and rises to seek redemption, sacrificing himself to defend Merry and Pippin against an onslaught of Orcs. His efforts ultimately in

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Neale, 8

⁵¹ Williams, 1991, 11

vain, as he is slain and the Hobbits are captured, but his dying act becomes his redemption as he continues to hold off the Orcs to give the Hobbits a chance to escape, knowing it will most likely mean his death. This sacrifice actualizes Boromir as a hero, inspiring the audience to align with him minutes before he is killed, invoking pathos exactly as Moretti described: the film makes it clear to the audience that Boromir, now a character they now see as a hero, should live and save the Hobbits, and it is made equally clear that this course of events is impossible. The effect of Boromir's sacrifice is compounded by Aragorn's arrival only a few minutes too late to save him, adding to the injustice of the situation by teasing the audience with how nearly it might have been avoided had Aragorn arrived a minute sooner. Linda Williams cites this construction of emotions as one of the most prominent tendencies in melodrama: "At its deepest levels, melodrama is thus an expression of feeling toward a time that passes too fast. This may be why the spectacular essence of melodrama seems to rest in those moments of temporal prolongation, when 'in the nick of time' defies 'too late.'"⁵² Put more simply, in the scene of Boromir's death, and in many melodramas and action films, the tension and emotional impact stem from an extension of time during a moment of intense suspense. However, in this case "in the nick of time" defies "too late" for only as long as Aragorn and the Orc fight; when Aragorn comes to Boromir's side, it becomes obvious he is still too late after all, and any lingering hope for Boromir's survival are extinguished.

⁵² Williams, 2001, 35

The resulting pathos is pushed even farther, as, in his last breath, Boromir accepts Aragorn as his king and gives Aragorn the motivation he needed to see himself in that role; the final line of “My brother, my captain, my King”⁵³ is immensely significant to the progress of both Boromir and Aragorn through the hero myth. Their conversation marks a decisive step in Aragorn’s personal acceptance of that role, as he identifies himself as a man of Gondor for the first time, and, in response, Boromir becomes the first man of Gondor to embrace Aragorn as his king. Up until now, Boromir has refused to acknowledge Aragorn’s rightful place as the king; after being told whom Aragorn was at the Council of Elrond, Boromir had sneered, “Gondor has no king. Gondor needs no king!” His attitude had remained the same throughout *Fellowship*, until this last exchange, in which Boromir finally accepts Aragorn as his King, addressing him as such for the first time in the film and (presumably) Aragorn’s life.

The audience’s experience through Boromir’s death and their resulting grief are guided and reflected by first the stylistic elements of the shots and then by Aragorn’s reactions, after he enters the scene; the build up to Boromir’s death is constructed through subjective camerawork, sound, and mise-en-scene to highlight the heroism he displays in his final moments. The sound of Boromir’s horn rings out as Legolas, Gimli, and Aragorn fight a cluster of Orcs high up the mountain slope; recognizing the call for aid, the three race down the mountainside, but a dynamic helicopter shot reveals the army of Orcs outpacing them and setting upon Boromir as he and the Hobbits fight off the Orcs that have

⁵³ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, EE, 1:40:50

already reached them. The camera jumps around a number of angles and positions, disorienting the audience and intensifying the action of the attack. The film cuts between Aragorn's progress down the mountain and the Hobbits and Boromir as they fight, until the camera lingers on a straight-on shot of a hilltop with a noticeable pause in the action. As an ominous chanting interspersed with rhythmic drumbeats arcs into the score, a massive, fierce-looking Orc with the white hand of Saruman⁵⁴ painted over his face steps through a cloud of smoke. The score slows to an ominous chanting interspersed with rhythmic drumbeats as the camera punches in on the Orc's face as he snarls viciously, then cuts back to Boromir. The scene continues through parallel editing, alternating between shots of the Orc, slowly notching an arrow sighted on Boromir, and Boromir himself, still fighting and visibly unaware of the Orc's presence.

The threat over Boromir's life is made painfully clear to the audience through the opposition created by the editing, and the stark contrast of light and dark in between the shots of Boromir and the Orc, respectively, highlights the ominous juxtaposition. The parallel editing also prolongs the advancement of the attack, which heightens the feelings of suspense generated by the narrative; this effect is doubled by the use of slow motion, which comes into effect with the shot of the arrow being loosed into Boromir's chest. The exaggeration of time through slow motion strengthens the audience's impression of Boromir as a hero, as he bravely fights through not just one, but two more arrows before a third brings

⁵⁴ Saruman was originally known as Saruman the White, of the White Council; a white hand is his sign.

him to his knees. The mise-en-scene and score echo the sentiment stirred by his sacrifice throughout the attack; golden light is thrown across the tall statue of a saintly, cloaked figure prominent in the background as Boromir rises and continues to fight through the first two arrows, and the ethereal chanting in the score lends a religious air to Boromir's valiant attempts at continuing to fight. Jackson's manipulation of stylistic elements places audience in Boromir's subjectivity, focusing their attention on his sacrifice through the use of slow motion. The sounds of fighting are muted, but audible under the score, evoking a visceral rush of emotion through the dissonance of the beautiful lilt of the music and the violent sounds of the battle. The temporal prolongation continues as Boromir falls to his knees, swaying and gasping raggedly for breath, and the Orcs stampede past him, taking the Hobbits without a struggle. As the Orc who shot him stands in front of Boromir and notches a final arrow, the film takes a dramatic turn with Aragorn's sudden appearance, flying into the frame (and the Orc), knocking the arrow off-course. The tension-building effect of Aragorn's arrival and the continued temporal prolongation of the scene through his short fight with the Orc have already been discussed. As Aragorn rushes over to where Boromir lay dying on the ground, there is an extremely pivotal moment in Aragorn's progression through the hero myth. When he tells Boromir "I not let the White City fall, nor our people fail," Aragorn is at last embracing his place with Boromir as a man of Gondor, the first step he truly takes in realizing his role as their king. "Our people," Boromir raggedly repeats back to him, and, with his dying breath, he completes his arc as a tragic hero with the poignant promise

that has become one of the trilogy's most quoted lines: "I would have followed you to the end, my brother. My captain. My King." A single teardrop rolls down Aragorn's nose as he kisses the now-lifeless Boromir on the brow, and says quietly, "Be at peace, son of Gondor." As Aragorn stands, his sorrowful expression is lit angelically by the dappled sunlight coming through the trees, his posture and lighting recalling that of the saintly statue in the earlier shot; Aragorn's tears cue the audience to cry as well, as the sad truth of Moretti's two opposing facts resonates within the image and score.

The sequence leading up to Boromir's death is pivotal because it is one of crucial understanding for the audience as well as Frodo, Boromir, and Aragorn; as stated, Boromir's death and Frodo's simultaneous departure mark the first significant steps in Aragorn's actualization as a hero and as the King of Gondor. After Boromir's madness and Frodo's question to Aragorn if he too will try to take the Ring, Aragorn realizes (as Frodo already knows) that the Ring will consume them all in turn if they remain near it. The Ring must be Frodo's burden alone, for the risk of it corrupting the others runs too high; Lady Galadriel explained this to Frodo in the scene in Lothlórien, though not so explicitly that the audience would have necessarily understood what her words meant.⁵⁵ After Lady Galadriel told Frodo, "This task was appointed to you, and if you do not find

⁵⁵ In Lothlórien, Lady Galadriel warns Frodo that "he will try to take the Ring...One by one, it will destroy them all;" close up shots of Boromir in the previous scene, struggling with some internal conflict, are an obvious cue to the audience that he is the one she means. (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, EE, 2:43:40)

a way, no one will," he responded "I know what I must do, it's just that I'm afraid to do it."⁵⁶

"One by one, it will destroy them all--" it is because of Aragorn's understanding of this truth that he tells Frodo to go on alone, and it is the same understanding that he and Boromir share in the latter's last moments. Frodo's decision to leave the Fellowship was made at that moment in Lothlórien, but it took Boromir's madness for him to realize the truth of her words and act on his own. After Boromir attacks Frodo, both of them, and then Aragorn, realize what the audience has been told from the beginning, the same thing Lady Galadriel said in Lothlórien: Frodo, not the Ring itself, is the only weapon that has the potential to save Middle-Earth; given to any other character, the Ring, will bring only death and destruction, and Frodo must bear this burden to the end to ensure that never happens. Hence, the scene of Boromir's death fits into a complicated web of pathos-inducing subplots and themes, each building on the emotional effect of the others to culminate in a poignant moment of grief and self-reflection for Aragorn, as Boromir dies in his arms. Aragorn demonstrated his genuine worthiness as a king in letting Frodo go, and Boromir's recognition of that serves as a cue to Aragorn, and the audience, that he is deserving of the throne and may be able to overcome the fallibility that led to the demise of his ancestors; Boromir's sacrifice and acceptance act as an impetus for Aragorn's advancement through the stages of the hero's journey.

⁵⁶ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, EE, 2:43:50

The development and transformation of Aragorn's character thusly follows unique interpretation of the ten steps of the hero, embellished and dramatized to further the audiences' engagement and interest in his plotline. Upon first glance, there may seem to be more discrepancies than agreements; Aragorn is not introduced as an ordinary character, reluctant to fight or in need of a mentor, but as a mysterious, skilled Ranger who travels alone. He doesn't seem to follow the first couple steps in that he doesn't need a call to action or adventure; he emerges in the midst of it. However, upon closer analysis, his story does not refute the myth, but rather works through a variation on it. Aragorn is not reluctant to join the fighting, because fighting against Sauron *is* his "ordinary world." As outlined in the myth, we are introduced to Aragorn not in what would traditionally be called an ordinary world, but a world that is relatively ordinary, as Aragorn has spent his life ranging the North and fighting the enemy in various forms. The call to action for Aragorn is not simply a call to fight in the War, but a call to lead the armies of Gondor and Arnor by taking up his destined place as the King of the West.

Over the course of *Fellowship*, Aragorn continues to wrestle with these feelings of uncertainty, stuck in between the second and third stages of the hero myth, as, much like Frodo and his decision to leave the fellowship, Aragorn knows what he should do, but is afraid to do it. In the scene before the Council of Elrond where Arwen tells Aragorn is his not Isildur and that "the Shadow does not yet hold sway," doubt clouds Aragorn's eyes and he walks away from the Shards of Narsil, yet unable to answer the hero's call; as mentioned earlier, this

self-doubt is the biggest obstacle Aragorn faces throughout his journey through the hero myth and the trilogy. Aragorn's journey in the second act/film is marked by a stage of inaction; there is never a point where Aragorn reaches a definitive rock bottom, like when Boromir tried to take the Ring. Instead, Aragorn spends the majority of the second movie in a sort of doldrums after he has accepted what he needs to do, but is not yet ready to overcome his hesitations and claim the throne.

The scene of the Warg attack in *The Two Towers* described in the previous chapter was added to dramatize the narrative during a period that is marked, in the book, by inaction; the attack also comes during a period of stagnation and delay in Aragorn's progress through the hero's journey. Though the Rohirrim and what remains of the Fellowship are fleeing to Helm's Deep on the verge of an imminent battle, the journey to the fortress is not particularly eventful in and of itself. Similarly, though Boromir's fealty gave Aragorn his first big push towards accepting his role as the king, he still hasn't followed through and taken command or identified himself as such. As the battle at Helm's Deep begins, Aragorn suggests to Théoden to call to Gondor for aid, but when Théoden refuses, Aragorn does not argue nor does he refer to Gondor as his own people when speaking to Théoden, as he did in his last conversation with Boromir. Though he fights valiantly during the battle at Helm's Deep, that doesn't entail facing any of his real obstacles, as fighting Orcs was a normal part of Aragorn's "ordinary world" as a Ranger, before he joined the Fellowship. The battle at Helm's Deep delays Aragorn's development by filling over twenty minutes of the

film's running time with an action sequence in which Aragorn might as well be any other soldier; despite the remarkable swordsmanship and leadership he displays throughout the fight, as he is not acting in the capacity of the King of Gondor, but under Théoden's command. However, Jackson makes it obvious to the viewer that Aragorn is acutely aware of this situation, and his behavior throughout the Helm's Deep sequence betrays the growing sense of responsibility that marks the beginnings of Aragorn's real progress out of the doldrums; when, in the caves, Legolas tells Aragorn the Rohirrim are all going to die, Aragorn yells back at him, "Then I shall die as one of them!"⁵⁷ This demonstrates Aragorn has begun to see himself as a leader of men; even though they are not, by rights, the men he should be leading, the sentiment he expresses shows that Aragorn has begun to overcome his self-doubt, displaying hints of progress without yet following through.

The scenes of Helm's Deep illustrate how Jackson placed significant breakthroughs in the protagonists' hero journeys within pivotal points in the overarching narrative; he does this again with the scene that marks Aragorn's eighth step through the hero journey, when he accepts Andúril from Lord Elrond, officially recognizing his place as the King of the West. A low angle shot of Aragorn's hands deliberately sheathing the sword and gripping its hilt is followed by a similarly positioned shot of his hands cinching his horse's saddle-pack in a similarly brusque motion; this sequence of shots clearly conveys that Aragorn has finally accepted his destiny and is taking the Dimholt Road to seek

⁵⁷ *The Two Towers*, EE, 2:40:12

out the Army of the Dead. As the film continues, Gimli and Legolas follow Aragorn into the mountain passes and, after a sensational Indiana Jones-esque escape sequence, succeeds in mustering the Army of the Dead to fight for Gondor. They make it to Pelennor Fields just in the nick of time to secure victory over Sauron, but the battle for Minas Tirith is not Aragorn's final confrontation. After the victory at the Pelennor, Aragorn looks into the palantír⁵⁸ and finally asserts himself as the King of the West, revealing Andúril to Sauron and challenging him outright. He then leads the remaining strength of the free peoples of Middle-Earth to the Mordor to face the armies of Sauron, and near-certain death. The climax of his narrative, and the entire trilogy, occur in the last act of the film as Aragorn leads this host of Men to the Black Gate to distract the Great Eye of Sauron while Frodo and Sam fight their way up the last leg of their journey to Mount Doom. The scene moves between extreme wide angles and helicopter shots, building tension through the juxtaposition of the relatively small army lead by Aragorn and the vast, black masses of Sauron's servants. Bright, white light reflects from the helms and arms of the Company, emphasizing their righteousness in contrast to the Orcs and monstrous creatures that come out to represent Sauron. The Mouth of Sauron, a representative of the Dark Lord, rides out and throws Frodo's armor⁵⁹ at Gandalf, telling him "the halfling suffered greatly at the hands of his host," meaning Sauron; the Mouth

⁵⁸ The palantír are seeing-stones of old; when one looks into a palantír, they can communicate directly with the mind of whoever holds the other. The only palantír mentioned in the *Lord* films belong to Saruman and Sauron.

⁵⁹ The armor had been given to Frodo by Biblo and was repeatedly discussed in *Fellowship* and *The Two Towers*; when Frodo was captured by the Orcs (after being stung by Shelob at Cirith Ungol), the Orcs stole the armor and took it away before Frodo came too and escaped with Sam

then turns to Aragorn and, mocking him, says it takes more than a broken Elvish blade to make a king; Aragorn responds by swiftly beheading him and riding back to his position, rallying his men with one of the most moving speeches of the trilogy:

“Sons of Gondor, of Rohan, my brothers! I see in your eyes the same fear that would take the heart of me. A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship, but *it is not this day*. An hour of wolves and shattered shields, when the age of men comes crashing down, but *it is not this day!* This day we fight! By all that you hold dear on this good Earth, I bid you stand! Men of the West!”⁶⁰

This speech is the completion of Aragorn’s hero arc; through his words, he demonstrates that he has truly “put aside the Ranger” and embraced his place as the King of the West, leader of the free people of Middle-Earth. The image cuts between the reactions of the Company and Aragorn, as he paces back and forth as he speaks bravely and from the heart; the score builds to match his vigor and inspiration as he shouts out the last lines and rears his horse and turns to face the Black Gates. The camera moves with him, framing Aragorn in Mordor’s open gates, the glowing orange eye of Sauron centered between them. Fiery streaks of light reach through the haze of smog and smoke directly behind Aragorn in the frame, as he lifts his sword to the sky in defiance of the dark mass of Orcs pouring from the gates, the change composition now gives the appearance that the bright light is emanating from Aragorn’s upraised sword, completing the quintessential image of Aragorn as the hero-king he has fully become. The film

⁶⁰ *The Return of the King*, EE, 3:50:00

then cuts to Sam, using the last of his strength to carry Frodo up the fiery mountain, and then to an extreme wide shot that reveals how small the Company's army is, surrounded by the companies of Mordor. As the image returns to Aragorn, the camera pulls in on his expression in slow motion as a slow, whispered chanting rises with a resonating ringing in the score; the word "*Elessar*" is clearly discernable,⁶¹ before the ringing fades out and Aragorn looks back towards the camera, the hint of tears shining in his eyes, and says, in a calm and steady voice, "For Frodo." He then charges forward, singularly leading the attack against the host of Mordor without any trace fear or hesitation.

All of the suspense, pathos, and general overwrought emotion built by the protagonists' journeys is suddenly released in a cathartic explosion as Merry and Pippin charge out after him, and the rest of the Company follows in a flood of flashing armor and defiant battle cries. The scene is a remarkable visual feat, using CGI, helicopter shots and aerials to encompass the magnificent clash of light and darkness, good and evil, that overwhelms the frame. The pathos of Frodo's sacrifice and Sam's selfless courage are highlighted by the cross cutting between the charge and his and Sam's last push up the mountain as the score arcs and crashes into arguably the most evocative crescendo in the trilogy; the combined effect of these narrative and stylistic releases is a visceral momentum

⁶¹ *Elessar* is Aragorn's Elvish name, meaning "the Elf stone;" Sauron refers to Aragorn by this name, thus the use of it signifies the chanting is placing the audience in Aragorn's subjectivity as he hears the telepathic "voice" of Sauron calling him forth in the same way Lady Galadriel and Lord Elrond communicate in *The Two Towers*.

that carries every emotion built throughout the trilogy, the sacrifice and fortitude of the Company culminating in this spectacular, climactic moment.

Aragorn's narrative arc and his variation on the hero myth come to a close with the scene of his coronation atop Minas Tirith; though not as heavily stylized as the scene of the climax, the peace and resolution of coronation scene are marked by Jackson's use of soft lighting and focus, emphasized through the high, honeyed melody in the score, to reflect his rebirth as a hero and a king. The image fades in as the camera moves in from extreme wide angle shot of the entire city of Minas Tirith, up over the long, pointed courtyard on top of the city, revealing the massive crowd gathered there. As the score arcs and lopes in a hopeful Gandalf tone, the image cuts to Gandalf as he slowly places a crown upon Aragorn's head and declares, "Now come the days of the King, may they be blessed," smiling as he whispers the last part to the new King.⁶² As Aragorn stands he is genuinely transformed from the hooded and mysterious Ranger to the true King of the West, a romantic hero: his appearance now befits his legacy as his hair and beard are cleanly trimmed and his manner and dress are both stately and regal to match the polished crown that sits atop his head. The gathered crowd applauds and shouts their approval, and white flower petals begin to rain from the sky, the camera panning across the crowd to highlight their joyful acceptance of the King. Aragorn begins to chant in Quenya⁶³ as he

⁶² *The Return of the King*, EE, 3:43:20

⁶³ Quenya is the language Elvish was derived from; the song Aragorn chants as he walks down the aisle is the same song his ancestor Elendil sang upon his arrival to Middle-Earth. This is

walks down among his subjects and his companions; the camera pans to Faramir and Éowyn as each smiles, and to Éomer as he steps forward in turn to walk beside the new King through the soft shower of petals. The scene is slightly washed out, the soft focus and prominent use of white throughout the mise-en-scene reflecting the purity of the new world, cleansed as it is of Sauron's darkness and bathed instead in goodness and light. Aragorn's reunion with Arwen during this scene finalizes the completion of his character arc, bringing resolution to his romantic subplot as well as his transition through the hero myth.⁶⁴ Aragorn then comes to where the four Hobbits stand in finer versions of their simple clothes from the Shire, looking as small and innocent as when the story first began. The experiences they've gained through the journey run far deeper than their appearances, and their nicer but traditional attire suggests their forthcoming return to the Shire as renewed, heroic versions of their old selves. As the Hobbits begin to bow to the royal couple, Aragorn interrupts them, tears again shining in his eyes as he says, "My friends, you bow to no one," and respectfully drops into a low bow of his own. The camera moves in on the disbelieving and touched reactions of the Hobbits and then sweeps up and away; a stunning aerial shot reveals the vast movement that ripples through the crowd atop the city as the entirety of the assembled peoples follows Aragorn in bowing to the four Hobbits. The arcing music of the score works with the sweeping upward movement of the camera to enhance the visceral rush of emotion

another example of Jackson including minute details from Tolkien's mythopoeia as a nod to his fans.

⁶⁴ The romantic subplot of Aragorn and Arwen is discussed in detail in the fifth chapter.

brought on by the beautiful aerial shot that carries the audience away from Minas Tirith, and from Aragorn, as his part in the story is now complete.

Though the true resolution of the Hobbits' story doesn't come for another twenty minutes, the stories of Aragorn and the War are concluded here with the final, spectacular shot of the White City and its peoples as they bow to their little saviors; each separate narrative thread of the trilogy has come together in a unifying moment of heart-wrenching pathos and triumph, aided, as always, by the guiding tone of the score. The simultaneous completion of the protagonists' hero's journeys, the resolution of Aragorn's romantic subplot, and the victory over Sauron come together with epic emotional impact, tying together the last threads of the disparate narratives. As Jackson has done throughout the trilogy, he combines the emotional force of these separate sources of pathos and joy, enhancing the audience's experience through the overlapping and overwhelming emotions. Jackson's manipulation and combination of these melodramatic tendencies is equally visible in his characterizations of Sam and Frodo; most notably, Sam's story best encompasses the moral polarity in *The Lord of the Rings*, a theme at the heart of Tolkien's novel. The next chapter will explore these concepts, highlighting the narrative and stylistic patterns Jackson employs in portraying Sam and Frodo's variations on the hero's journey as Ringbearers.

THE BATMAN RISES

Since its early beginnings, one prominent aspect of melodrama has been its concern with what Peter Brooks called “a quest for moral legibility,”⁶⁵ suggesting all melodramas are centered around, or in the end convey, a lesson of proper morality: a subtle or obvious demonstration of good conquering over evil. Linda Williams expands on this theory in her text *The American Melodramatic Mode*. Building on Brooks’ ideas, Williams posits that in the early 1900s, as society’s reliance on spirituality was diminishing, people were forced to look elsewhere for lessons in morality.⁶⁶ As she puts it, “the theatrical function of melodrama's big sensation scenes was to be able to put forth a moral truth in gesture and picture that could not be fully spoken in words.”⁶⁷ Melodrama rose in cinema, as in theatre, as an expressive outlet that gave spectators an exciting experience -- within a tale of morality, feelings of pathos and agitation, stirred by the narrative, are heightened through sensational visualizations and the evocative use of music. While this was particularly true of melodramas in the early 1900s during the expansion of secularity, it is still true of many contemporary films, and *The Lord of the Rings* is a standout example. The concept of moral polarity in these films is most deeply embedded within the story of the unexpected hero Samwise Gamgee, but let’s briefly explore the moral legibility illustrated across the entire trilogy before moving into Sam’s story.

⁶⁵ Williams, 2001, 18

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Ibid

As Brooks wrote in his book *The Melodramatic Imagination*, “melodrama is indeed, typically, not only a moralistic drama but the drama of morality: it strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to “prove” the existence of a moral universe which, though put into question, masked by villainy and perversions of justice, does exist and can be made to assert its presence and its categorical force among men.”⁶⁸ That is to say, the narrative of a melodrama seeks to somehow illustrate that there is a universal moral code of good prevailing over evil that exists within all societies and people. And, in our case, among Elves, Dwarves, Orcs and Hobbits as well, for even though *The Lord of the Rings* is a high fantasy epic, the fantasy elements do not overwhelm the realism of Middle-Earth that characterizes the story and that was so meticulously upheld by the filmmakers. To again reference Tolkien’s quotation on the subject of realism: “*The Lord of the Rings* might be a ‘fairy-story,’ but it takes place in the Northern Hemisphere of this earth.”⁶⁹ Though it has elements of magic, the story’s characters live in the real “world,” and the moral universe Brooks speaks of is beautifully portrayed through the narrative, the fight between good and evil ending in a triumph of justice and the annihilation of all evil-doers. The films shift smoothly between moments of action-based suspense and character-based pathos, all made more compelling by the integration of clear moral purpose. To borrow again from Singer’s *Melodrama and Modernity*,

“[o]ver and above the poignant emotion of pathos, melodrama thrives on stimulating the sensation of agitation...the agitation that comes from

⁶⁸ Brooks, 20

⁶⁹ Carpenter, 272

observing extreme moral injustice...when we see vicious power victimizing the weak... Melodrama was designed to arouse, and morally validate, a kind of primal bloodlust, in the sense that the villain is so despicable, hated so intensely, that there was no more urgent gratification than to see him extinguished.”⁷⁰

There is no better illustration of this concept than *The Lord of the Rings*: though intricate in their construction, the basic narratives of both the book and trilogy are premised upon a simple story of innocence and good versus pure evil. The free peoples of Middle-Earth, represented by the Fellowship and the Company, must unite in order to defeat the Dark Lord Sauron and the army of monsters he created to terrorize and control Middle-Earth. Sauron is a quintessential fantasy villain: a fallen angel of the Ainur,⁷¹ he is a literal embodiment of darkness, and evil pervades every facet of his character. There is no question of injustice in killing any of the enemy “soldiers,” as they are dehumanized visually and through their actions; the audience is shown their disgusting breeding pits in *Fellowship*, establishing their inhumanity, and the vicious brutality they display at all times, even amongst themselves, leaves them entirely unsympathetic. Orcs are the monsters that lurk in our worst nightmares; they are sadistic, foul, and quick to violence, and therefore there is no hesitation or guilt in rooting for their utter annihilation.

The opposition of good versus evil is explicitly established in the opening of each film-- each of the three begins with a flashback that not only re-immerses the audience immediately in the narrative, restating significant information or

⁷⁰ Singer, 24

⁷¹ Defined in a footnote in Chapter 1

events, but also unambiguously illustrates the dichotomy of good and evil at work in the narrative. The prologue of *The Fellowship of the Ring* provides the background information about the diegetic world and its history to bring unfamiliar audiences up to speed and, in doing so, clearly sets out the polarity between “the free peoples of Middle-Earth” and the Enemy, the Dark Lord Sauron, his minions, and the One Ring, “into which [Sauron] poured his cruelty, his malice and his will to dominate all life.”⁷² This prologue leaves no ambiguity about the story’s main points, introducing the villain and the conflict in obvious opposition to the side of “good,” both through the narration and the visual presentation of either side in starkly contrasting usages of dark and light, respectively.

The Two Towers similarly brings the audience right into the heart of the conflicting moralities as it opens with a flashback of Gandalf’s fight against the Balrog, a fire demon in the service of Sauron. In a series of dizzying shots that speed downward with the two as they struggle, the visual contrast between Gandalf’s shrunken figure and the Balrog, a monstrosity wreathed in shadow and flame, acts a clear representation of the ongoing battle between good and evil in Middle-Earth. The suspenseful action of the flashback culminates with an extreme wide shot of Gandalf and the Balrog falling through an underground cavern in slow motion; the gorgeous composition of the frame is centered around the demon as Gandalf is indiscernible, overwhelmed by the fiery light that radiates from them as they fall through the air before crashing into the

⁷² *The Fellowship of the Ring*, EE, 00:02:05

water. This scene pulls the audience back into the trilogy through a combination of dramatic action and emotional appeal, as a cut reveals that the flashback was actually a nightmare Frodo had, confronting the audience with pathos in Frodo's grief--and grief of their own, for it has not yet been revealed that the fallen wizard is still "alive." All of these effects work within the context of moral polarity, as the Balrog is an embodiment of wickedness and Gandalf's self-sacrifice is a tragic demonstration of morality, a selfless act for the sake of the greater good.

The first scene of *The Return of the King* similarly draws the audience in with an intense combination of action and emotion, opening with a flashback that expressly sets out a moral truth while providing narrative background and ominous foreshadowing. The last film of the trilogy opens with flashback that reveals Sméagol's murderous inheritance of the Ring and his subsequent and complete deterioration. Like that of *The Two Towers* and *Fellowship*, the opening of *The Return of the King* highlights the polarity between the two sides of the War of the Ring and reiterates the information most relevant to the present narrative. In moving on to focus on Sam and Frodo's relationship and narratives as demonstrations of moral polarity, the opening of *The Return of the King* holds a special significance compared to the others, as it draws a significant parallel between Gollum and Frodo.

The story of how Sméagol killed his friend and lost himself to the Ring illustrates the dark, metamorphic corruption that consumes those who bear the Ring long enough, a blatant warning to the audience that a similar fate will await

Frodo should he fail in his journey and succumb to the power of the Ring. Jackson relies heavily on techniques from his background in horror to portray the transition from the Hobbitesque Sméagol to the emaciated and creeping Gollum, utilizing an eerie, shadowy mise-en-scene and sinister score to reflect the darkness that is overcoming Sméagol. This scene reveals how very similar to the Hobbits Sméagol used to be, and his progression from that creature to Gollum (as he is in the present narrative) is deeply disturbing, aided heavily by the use of special effects make up in creating Gollum's eroding face. The suggestion of a parallel between Gollum and Frodo that the flashback presents to the audience is furthered by the first scene in the present story of the film, which opens with Sam asleep and Frodo awake. As the camera pans over Sam to rest on Frodo, he pulls at his shirt collar and, after looking around, furtively pulls out the Ring and stares at it with an expression of conflicted longing. After the warning embedded within the flashback, this demonstration of Frodo's vulnerability to the Ring is painfully clear. Gollum's call moments later that the Ringbearers must be on their way because there is "no time to lose" not reminds the audience of the urgency of their quest, but also references how little time remains before it will be too late for Frodo to escape the Ring's power.

Due to their relationship and the fact that Frodo and Sam are together for almost the entire trilogy, their experiences fit into the hero myth in a distinctly intertwined variation, and, as mentioned, it is their shared story that best exemplifies the moral polarity within the narrative. Sam and Frodo are not confronted with the same challenges and opportunities of battle and heroism

that the others face in the War of the Rings; they face more personal obstacles that they must overcome through strength of will and character. Though as Boromir stated flatly at the Council of Elrond, “one does not simply walk into Mordor,” Sam and Frodo struggle more with internal conflicts than with the dangers they encounter along the road. Though internal conflicts are inherently specific and personal, Sam’s main conflict is in truth the same as Frodo’s: Frodo’s struggle is against the corrupting will of the Ring, and Sam’s struggle is to stop Frodo from succumbing to the Ring’s will and the hopelessness it inspires in him. Though, as the films progress, their relationship grows into more of an equitable friendship, Sam is first and foremost Frodo’s servant, and Sam’s main, if not only, motivation throughout the quest is his duty and devotion to Frodo.⁷³ Sam also faces an external obstacle in Gollum, who works ceaselessly to poison Frodo against Sam and eventually succeeds, if only for a brief while.

In discussing the relationship between Frodo and Sam in the films, there is often a question of love—why is Sam so dedicated to Frodo; does he follow him simply from a sense of duty, or is it because he truly loves him? Sam is not a warrior and he does not enter the War to answer any fateful calls to glory or great deeds; he goes because it is his duty to serve and protect his Mister Frodo, and Sam stakes his honor and his self-worth on his ability to do so. This topic was brought up during an episode of the podcast “The Tolkien Professor” with Corey Olsen and Tara Holste, “On Masters and Servants,” that is focused on Sam’s

⁷³ Olsen

characterization and his bond with Frodo. As discussed on the show and mentioned earlier in this essay, though Sam and Frodo do become friendly and almost partners over the course of the journey, in the films especially, their relationship is based in a master-servant dichotomy.

This relationship is based on the social class structure that existed in Britain at the time Tolkien was writing, although in that society “servant” did not have the same pejorative connotations that it does today. In the class structure the Shire is modeled after, a servant, or “batman,” as the position was more often referred to, was a proud, dignified job.⁷⁴ Batmen served their masters faithfully and with honor, and often, as with the Gamgees, these posts would pass down father-to-son, with serving families keeping the same position for generations, creating an intimate bond between the two. To again paraphrase “The Tolkien Professor,” the master-servant dichotomy in their relationship may seem classist or offensive to American audiences especially, so it is unsurprising the films played it down somewhat. However, aside from changing “Master Frodo” to “Mister Frodo,” the films maintain the distinction in their relationship, as in multiple scenes Sam’s devotion allows him to channel the moral good that he represents in the films⁷⁵.

Jackson instilled in Sam the hope and purity of soul that counteract the corrupting will of the Ring and allow Frodo to make it as far as he does, providing Frodo with not just a manservant, but with a true, devoted friend; an

⁷⁴ Olsen

⁷⁵ Ibid

example of shining moral good. Sam demonstrates his unyielding bravery and selflessness over and over again. When Frodo sets out to leave on his own at the end of *Fellowship*, Sam throws himself into the river after Frodo, disregarding his inability to swim and knowingly risking his life in an attempt to follow his master. In *The Return of the King*, Sam fearlessly confronts first Shelob⁷⁶, and then the guards of the tower atop Cirith Ungol⁷⁷, alone and without any hope of help. He does not do these things for glory or recognition, but to save and protect Frodo, his master and friend.

Sam's devotion to Frodo is what drives him, but his sense of duty to Frodo is the only context in which he understands that devotion.⁷⁸ "A sense of responsibility for Frodo drives Sam to follow him on the journey that Merry and Pippin do not share; they fall into the story by happenstance and go along in support of Frodo, as his friends and equals, while Sam is naturally relegated to a supporting role.⁷⁹ Thus, though Gandalf brings Frodo into the quest and guides him through the early stages, it is undeniably Samwise Gamgee who truly acts as Frodo's guide and, ultimately, his savior. When Frodo begins to deviate from his course and fall off the path of the hero myth, Sam supports him, and it is only through their joined efforts that Frodo makes it as far as he does before succumbing to the Ring.

⁷⁶ Shelob is a monstrous spider that lives in a lair atop Cirith Ungol

⁷⁷ A pass through the mountains surrounding Mordor largely constructed out of stairs built into the rock of the mountain; a very dangerous place, as it is guarded by Orcs, Shelob, and the Nazgûl.

⁷⁸ Olsen

⁷⁹ Ibid

In the films, Sam embodies the same forces that Tom Bombadil represents in the book. He is the good that opposes the evil of Sauron, the selfless servitude that opposes Sauron's desire for dominion; for what is the absolute opposite of dominion if not servitude?⁸⁰ According to Tolkien himself, Sam is the chief hero of the story, not Aragorn or Frodo.⁸¹ This may seem perverse to some, as Aragorn is clearly heralded as the King and greatest fighter among them all, whereas Sam is Frodo's gardener and manservant, but it is because of, not despite, this humble background that he shines out so brightly-- after all, the most admirable and relatable stories about heroes are typically those about an underdog who achieves greatness far beyond anything expected of him (or her).

As Lady Galadriel says to Frodo in Lothlórien, "even the smallest person can change the course of the future,"⁸² and while at the time it may have seemed she was referring to Frodo, the Ringbearer would have never come close to accomplishing his task without Sam. Sam is an embodiment of the "good" that inspires hope in the audience and reminds them, and Frodo, of what the Fellowship is fighting for; his lower-class status as a gardener adds to his heroic sensibility because it makes his strength of will and his accomplishments all the more impressive. The idea that the real heroism come from the smallest, humblest of people was one of Tolkien's more foremost themes, and one that Jackson insinuates throughout the trilogy. Chronologically, Bilbo was the first of

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Carpenter, 161

⁸² *The Fellowship of the Ring*, EE, 2:45:50

Tolkien's underdogs with his adventure in *The Hobbit*: a small Hobbit of humble beginnings compared to his companions, he was incredibly doubtful of his abilities, but loyal and brave when he needed to be, even in the face of terrible enemies. Bilbo's story is mentioned in passing a few times at the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, and over the course of the trilogy, Sam follows in Bilbo's footsteps, saving Frodo numerous times, from enemies and from the side of himself brought out by the burden around his neck.

When all seems dark and doomed in the story, Sam always remains pure; he is never tempted by the Ring's power, and because of this, he is the only force in the world that allows Frodo to carry on. In the end, in fact, the metaphor is brought to life: when Frodo's strength has left him, it is Sam who carries him up the last stretch of Mount Doom and fights off Gollum while Frodo goes on to the entrance of the Cracks of Dooms. The scenes of Frodo and Sam's intimate moments of personal struggle are some of the most moving and powerful in the trilogy; drawing on pathos not only as Moretti or Williams defined it, but through the visceral feelings stirred by watching the two Hobbits overcome an insurmountable task together, Sam's deep devotion to Frodo saving both of them, and the quest, multiple times. Fulfilling the role that melodrama serves in a secular world, according to Williams, the film shows us that Sam's moral example is one that all people should strive to emulate, not just within Middle-Earth but in the real world as well. Sam is not just a dutiful servant or friend, he is a gallant and courageous model of humanity, willing and ready to risk anything to do what he believes is right. He brings in hope and righteousness in

moments of darkness and despair, helping both Frodo and the audience remember what the Company is fighting for and what all people should keep in mind during troubled times: they will pass and that the darkness will be overcome by light.

At the end of *The Two Towers*, Sam tackles Frodo to stop him from putting on the Ring and revealing himself to the Nazgûl just on the other side of the battlement; Frodo, entranced by the will of the Ring, reactively draws Sting and poises the sword's edge over Sam's throat. When Sam calls him back by tearfully pleading, "It's me, it's your Sam; don't you know your Sam?" Frodo blinks and, realizing what he's doing, falls back with a horrified expression of shock and grief; overwhelmed with understanding of what the Ring could make him capable of, Frodo drops Sting and sinks to the ground. "I can't do this, Sam," he says, anguish clear in both his expression and voice. In response to Frodo's attack, Sam is apologetic and unfailingly empathetic, answering Frodo's despair with a monologue that captures his heroism, optimism, and faith.⁸³ As he speaks, the film cuts between the action occurring at Helm's Deep and Isengard, using the victories of the Company to support and validate Sam's words of hope; the score builds throughout the scene in a reflection of his emotion and tone. "I know. It's all wrong." Standing from the ground where Frodo knocked him, Sam continues, choking through tears. "By rights, we shouldn't even be here." The camera moves back slowly as it cuts to a wide shot with the fiery skies of Mordor

⁸³ Sam's speech (which occurs in *The Two Towers*, EE, beginning at 3:22:00) is quoted in full in Chapter 1

visible in the background, cracking with thunder, as the score rises in slow, high notes.

The combination of sound and image gives a broad impression of their conflict, the rising notes of hope in the score juxtaposed with the ominous image of Mordor so nearby. The image cuts to a medium close up on Sam as he walks forward, framed in the battered doorway of the battlement, bringing attention back to him and his words as he continues to speak. "But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo, the ones that really mattered." The image reverses to again before returning to the close up on Sam, the contrast between his small figure and the dirtied white walls of the city with Mordor's darkness heightened by a Nazgûl beast, prominent in the frame as it flies away, again highlighting how small the Hobbits are and making the wisdom and courage of Sam's speech all the more impressive. When Sam addresses him by name, the image cuts to Frodo, who is still staring listlessly toward the ground, his chest rising and falling heavily. As the score continues to build, notes similar to those of the Shire melody begin to flow into the music, endowing the scene with an instinctive feeling of budding hope as Sam continues in voice-over. "Full of darkness and danger, they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy?" Frodo looks up, tears shining in his wide, light eyes before the film cuts to a chaotic shot of Orcs fleeing from Helm's Deep as Sam continues. "How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened?"

As if to answer Sam's faraway question, a resounding call of "Victory!" rings out in Théoden's voice and the image cuts to shots of him and Gandalf smiling and cheering as they fight off the last of the Orcs. Their obvious triumph corroborates Sam's optimistic words and matches the rising tone of encouragement in his voice and the music of the score as he says: "But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow." The film cuts to Isengard as the river released by the Ents floods across the land and down into the fire-pits, extinguishing Saruman's fires and continuing to answer Sam's optimism with cathartic justification: "Even darkness must pass." The image moves to Merry and Pippin, perched atop Treebeard, as the narration continues: "A new day will come, and when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer." This line is brought to life in the shot of the Hobbits-- as they stare and gape at the chaos of the flood, the clouds in the sky behind them are breaking up, and a golden patch of light becomes visible, the sun shining out just when Sam says it will.

As the image returns to the wide shot of Isengard, the score triples the effect of the narration and image as it arches in an expressive crescendo. The Ents hold fast in their places as the waters rush and crash around them, destroying Saruman's hold and, with it, all of his power, literally as much as symbolically. The kineticism of the deluge of water rushing around the Ents as they stand their ground matches and intensifies the rising emotion of Sam's narration, aided continually by the inspirational arcs in the score as it builds passionately towards a crescendo with his narration. The optimism of Sam's speech and the score are validated by the following shot of Saruman, looking

frantically down from his tower before running inside, his desperate fright solidifying the Ent's victory in the eyes of the audience and giving credence to Sam's words as he continues: "Those were the stories that stayed with you, that meant something, even if you were too small to understand why." As the score reaches a crescendo that matches the feverish tone coming into Sam's narration with this line, the film cuts to an aerial shot that pulls back and around Isengard, encompassing the full scale of its destruction and releasing the catharsis built through the score and Sam's speech laid over the images of the battle. "But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now."

As he nears the end of his monologue, the camera tracks slowly in on Sam's face, the movement directing attention to his determined, tearful expression and pulling the audience into the present of his and Frodo's narrative, carrying and focusing the emotional momentum built by the montage on Sam and his message. "Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going. Because they were holding on to something." To further the pathos of the moment, the camera returns to Frodo, looking dejectedly at ground, tears glittering in his eyes as he looks up at his companion and asks, "What are we holding on to, Sam?" This shot places the audience in Frodo's position, bringing in elements of the self-reflexive pity described by Moretti and Singer that compel the audience to sympathize with Frodo and look to Sam for inspiration, as he does. The score pauses with a single, ringing note to focus the attention on the image and allow the effect of this shot to be absorbed before the film cuts to a low angle up on Sam, then to Gollum, an

earnest curiosity in his eyes, adding to the pathos and anticipation introduced with the shot of Frodo. The camera follows his gaze to Sam as he helps Frodo from ground and looks him in the eyes, the sentiment in his expression matching the rising feeling of hope in his speech and the score as the camera pulls slowly in on his face, drawing the audience into his words. "That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for." The score rings out again to allow the impact of Sam's speech to settle, and the camera movement is repeated in a reverse shot on Frodo to highlight the difference in his expression, the despair ebbing into a nascent expression of hopeful understanding. The effect of Sam's words is furthered by a brief shot of Gollum, his expression clouded as he lowers his gaze, signifying the continuation of his internal struggle and the effect Sam's speech may have had on him. The image returns to Frodo as tears well in his eyes and the Shire melody rises clearly in the score, conveying how deeply Sam's speech has moved Frodo and restored his hope in their abilities. Faramir, too, is moved by Sam's words and lets the Hobbits go, saying to them only, "I think at last we understand one, another Frodo Baggins." This scene also functions to highlight the Tolkienian theme of the humble hero -- it is only and directly as a result of Sam's speech that Faramir allows the Hobbits to leave, again highlighting how profound an impact the smallest of people can make, continuing Sam's heroic characterization in the Tolkienian sensibility.

In light of this characterization, it makes sense that Sam's story has one of the most conventional heroic resolutions. He is, as stated, the chief hero, so it makes sense that he has a hero's conclusion, the happy ending so conventional of

the action-adventure genre. After the quest is won, he is able to reintegrate into a contented life in the Shire and is rewarded for his heroism with a beautiful wife and family, his own little “happily ever after” in the Shire. Though Frodo’s surprise departure at the Grey Havens certainly adds an element of sadness to Sam’s resolution, the scene makes clear that he knows Frodo made his decision and Sam would never think it his place to question that. With his departure, Frodo gives Sam the book he’s written on their journeys, truly passing the story on to Sam and making it his story in the end.

Frodo’s decision to pass the story on to Sam is a representation of his gratitude to and love for Sam; he recognizes that Sam can do what he cannot, can move on and lead a happy life, and in giving Sam the book to finish, he is saying good-bye and relinquishing Sam from his position as a manservant. The inscription he leaves Sam is narrated in Frodo’s voice with the last shot of the film, as Sam comes home to his wife and children: “My dear Sam, you cannot always be torn in two. You will have to be one and whole for many years. You have so much to enjoy and to be and to do. Your part in this story will go on.” In the book, Sam follows Frodo across the Sea years later, after Rosie has died, to honor his role as a Ringbearer and reunite him with Frodo in the Undying Lands.⁸⁴ The book also describes how Sam goes on to plant the seeds given to him by Lady Galadriel “for his own garden” all around the Shire, essentially

⁸⁴ The Undying Lands, also known as the Blessed Realm, are a land across the Sea from Middle-Earth; it is inhabited by the Ainur (defined in the second chapter) and the Elves, after they depart Middle-Earth. Mortals are forbidden there, but Frodo and Bilbo (and later Sam) were granted exceptions.

making him the gardener of the entire Shire, a servant devoted to all the people of his homeland. This is the essence of Tolkien's interpretation of heroism; an outstanding and deep devotion to helping those around you at any cost, the pinnacle of morality. Though these specifics of Sam's story are not clearly conveyed in the end of Jackson's trilogy, the narration over the final scene of Sam's return home after the Grey Havens instills the same sense of completeness and resolution in Sam's journey, and Frodo's narration in the book and his gift of it to Sam to finish marks him as the chief hero of the story.

To portray the polarity between Sam and the chief villain, Sauron, as effectively as possible, Jackson had to establish a long-running, harsh juxtaposition of the two sides through the Ring and its gradual effect on Frodo, using Gollum as a constant reminder of what the Ring could do to him should he give in. The Ring provides the natural means for Jackson to contrast Sam's purity with corruption, and in order to dramatize the stakes of the quest, Jackson altered Tolkien's characterization of Frodo much the same way he did with Aragorn. In the book, though of course the burden of the Ring weighs heavily on Frodo, and, in the end, he is unable to relinquish it to the Cracks of Doom, Frodo is not as vulnerable or weak as he is made to seem in the films. In order to better portray the power of the Ring, Jackson intentionally weakened Frodo's characterization in the films, giving him less resolve or confidence than Tolkien's character in order to emphasize the toll the Ring was taking on him and to make his eventual corruption not just believable, but foreseeable.

The increased vulnerability of Jackson's Frodo highlights his sacrifice and resulting degeneration. It also functions to increase his victimization by Sauron, through the Ring, adding to the agitation "that comes from observing extreme moral injustice...when we see vicious power victimizing the weak."⁸⁵ Thus, by heightening the extent to which we as an audience see Frodo as weak, Jackson automatically heightened the extent to which we see Sauron as vicious and villainous, increasing the emotional and dramatic effect of the narrative's opposition and our total alignment with Frodo, Sam, and the Company. In making Frodo's internal battle with the Ring more dramatic, Jackson also underscored his characterization as a tragic hero. In the middle of *The Two Towers*, Lady Galadriel tells Lord Elrond that "in his heart, Frodo begins to understand the quest will claim his life,"⁸⁶ and yet Frodo does not shy away from this fate or try to evade it; he has recognized that the Ring will consume anyone who bears it and he deteriorates over course of the quest as he contains the corruption of the Ring to prevent anyone else from falling victim to its will. Frodo sacrifices himself, much as Sam does, for the greater good, containing the evil of the Ring and making himself the weapon used to destroy it.

Though Frodo struggles more and is, at time, weaker than his character in the book, Jackson's Frodo still allows himself to become a sacrifice to enable the Ring's destruction; the changes made to his characterization don't undercut Frodo's heroic sacrifice, they simply work to make the story of that sacrifice even

⁸⁵ Singer, 24

⁸⁶ *The Two Towers*, EE, 2:13:10

more compelling. The presence of Gollum throughout their journey is a constant reminder of the potential of Frodo's demise. He also provides a source of constant suspicion and suspense, as the audience never knows which side of Sméagol/Gollum is in control, and it is clear by the end of *The Two Towers* that Gollum will betray the Hobbits as soon as he reaches the ideal opportunity. As the story progresses, Gollum begins to further complicate Frodo's struggle by strategically poisoning him against Sam, leading to the most notable distinction between Frodo's characterization and journey in the book and those in the films: his dismissal of Sam on the Stairs of Cirith Ungol. Though Gollum attempts to turn Frodo against Sam in the book as well as the film, Jackson took it a step farther than Tolkien and allowed Gollum to eventually succeed, causing Frodo to send Sam away.

This alteration to the story serves a number of purposes: it aligns the audience with Sam and further dramatizes the scope of his devotion to Frodo, it illustrates all of the corruption taking hold in Frodo and poisoning his judgment, and it leads to a more melodramatic, prolonged sequence of action and suspense when Frodo becomes ensnared in Shelob's lair, and Sam is still making his way back up the stairs. At this point in the film, their narrative is intercut with the action of the War of the Ring around and within the city of Minas Tirith and the Rohirrim camp. The parallel editing functions to draw out the suspense of Sam's race to Frodo and of Frodo's entrapment and escape attempts, each scene redirecting and amplifying the emotion built by the previous scene, culminating in Sam's fight with Shelob.

Frodo's dismissal of Sam constitutes a shared rock bottom for the two Hobbits; Frodo has lost himself to the Ring, if only temporarily, and Sam has lost the only motivation he had. Their separation marks a serious turning point in their narrative, one that Frodo never fully recovers from. However, instead of breaking Sam, Frodo's dismissal gives him an opportunity to once again demonstrate his unfailing moral fiber, coming back from his black moment and taking charge of not just his life, but Frodo's as well. Sam returns to save Frodo after he finds the *lembas*⁸⁷ and realizes Gollum had thrown it; this validates all of his suspicions about the creature and forces Sam to turn back and continue to do his duty in protecting Frodo. Though it appears at first Sam is too late to save Frodo from Shelob, he still fights valiantly against her, and then the Orcs in the tower, in order to save Frodo. He also carries the Ring and gives it back to Frodo without any sign of desire for it himself. Sam is unique in that he never seeks to possess the Ring; among all the characters in the story, Sam is the only one on whom the Ring has no tangible affect. This is a hugely significant point in his character, and is a manifestation of his pure heroism; he does not seek power or dominion over others, but only takes the Ring when he absolutely has to, thinking Frodo dead, and Sam is hesitant to return to it Frodo only because of the hungry greed he sees in Frodo's eyes as he pulls the Ring from under his shirt.

The scene of Sam's battle with Shelob occurs about halfway through *The Return of the King*, and perhaps best demonstrates Jackson's prowess in horror

⁸⁷ *Lembas* is an Elvish waybread that is especially filling and does not get stale.

filmmaking. The mise-en-scene, shaky camera, and imposing music of the score work together to reflect the tension of the narrative situation and heighten the effect of the dramatic narrative. The dark, slimy walls of rock and blue-green tint to the mise-en-scene reflect the ominous tone of the score, heightening the dread and tension built through the narrative. After Shelob has stabbed Frodo and is in the process of wrapping his limp body in webs, the audience has no reason to think Frodo might live. Nor do we have any idea where Sam is on the stairs, so there is a thrill of anticipation and excitement when the camera pulls back to reveal him, wielding Sting in one hand and the Light of Eärendil the other, as he growls at the great monster, "Let him go, you filth." The flow of information between Sam, Frodo, Shelob, and us as an audience endow the scene with both suspense and surprise. The backward movement of the camera adds to the effect of the reveal by providing kinetic energy that naturally increases the rush of emotion brought on by Sam's reveal.

The ensuing fight is suspenseful, the terror inspired by Shelob's stabbing, massive, pincers and Sam's close escapes echoed by the use of a shaky, fast-moving camera, and the drops and arcs in the score. After Sam has fought Shelob back into her lair and goes over to Frodo's body, the tension built through suspenseful fighting breaks; it seems Sam's victory is too late, for Frodo shows no signs of life. As Sam kneels, weeping next to Frodo's body, the film again creates a situation of pathos through Moretti's two mutually opposed facts, "that it is clear how the present state of things should be changed and that this change

is impossible.”⁸⁸ However, Jackson plays with the audience’s emotions by revealing moments later that Frodo is not dead, only paralyzed, undercutting the pathos with surprise and relief, much as he did with Aragorn’s near-death in *The Two Towers*. As the Orcs reveal this information to Sam and the audience, and then take Frodo away, Jackson smoothly translates the tension and emotion back into suspense. Sam is thrown immediately into another melodramatic situation, rising from the black moment of his dismissal to literally seize his sword and save his master.

Frodo, however, cannot pull himself up and continue as Sam can; on top of his wound from the Witch-King’s blade and the burden of the Ring, Shelob’s attack is too much for Frodo and something inside him becomes broken beyond repair. Though he does find strength enough to continue the journey up until they reach Mount Doom, Frodo has begun to fade and it is only through Sam’s help and support that he makes it as far as he does. As Sam wrestles with Gollum on the rocky slope of Mount Doom, Frodo races up the mountain with a sudden, last burst of will power and enters the pathway to the Cracks of Doom. But when Sam finds him standing on the precipice over the smoldering sea of lava, and screams at him to destroy it, the will of the Ring finally overwhelms its bearer.

The scene of the Ring’s destruction is incredibly visually striking, the drama of the narrative action reflected and intensified by the mise-en-scene and quaking movement of the camera to create a situation of suspense and horror. The scene cuts between close ups of Sam and Frodo, interspersed with wider

⁸⁸ Neale, 8

shots that show the expansive of the fiery abyss that surrounds the thin path they stand on. The wide shots also function to highlight again how small the Hobbits are, each barely noticeable within the swirling smoke and shadowy lighting of the wide shot of the cavern. The mise-en-scene is expressive; the setting establishes a tone of fear that is exaggerated by the editing, composition and movement of smoke and light within the frame, as well as the movement of the camera. A tone of dangerous instability is established by the shuddering camera movement and the flickering orange-red light that emanates upward from the lava and casts harsh shadows that are intermittently thrown back by bright flashes, while smoke and dust whip violently through the air and around the Hobbits.

Frodo's submission to the Ring progresses visually across a series of shots that draw out an escalating sense of panic and doom through the layering of sound and image. Frodo stands on the precipice of the cliff, holding the Ring on its chain out over the flaming sea of the Cracks, and the scene cuts between close ups of both his face and Sam's. The contrast between their expressions sharpens as Frodo begins to give in to the Ring's power; a bright light reflects in his eyes, almost as if it is emanating from the Ring itself. As Sam calls at Frodo repeatedly to destroy the Ring, the close ups juxtapose Sam's frightened confusion with the emotion that battling across Frodo's expression, and the volatility of the camera and lighting endow the scene with feelings of chaos and dread. A stand-out birds-eye shot centered on Frodo holding the Ring over the

edge reveals the sheer scale of the drop below Frodo to add to the fast-growing tension as a single note resonates in the score.

The image moves from another shot of Sam to a close up on the Ring, and the thundering sounds of the Cracks are drowned out by a haunting ringing sound, layered with a muted chanting that grows louder with the following shot—the Ring is calling to Frodo, and, as the next series of shots reveal, Frodo is finally answering. Frodo’s expression transforms over the course of two shots, another close up on the Ring coming between them as the deep sound of a drum beating rhythmically begins to rise in the score under the whispered chanting that calls to Frodo from the Ring. As the pace of the chanting quickens and Frodo stares, transfixed, at the Ring, a cacophony of hellish noises comes in through a blurring of the score and diegetic sounds. As Frodo goes through a Jekyll and Hyde-like struggle of emotions, conveyed clearly through his convulsing expression, the demonic symphony of noises culminates in the booming chanting associated with arrival the Nazgûl throughout the trilogy. The sound mixing greatly heightens the treacherous tone of the scene and signals Frodo’s total submission as clearly as the demonic expression that lights across his face as he turns and tells Sam in a close up, “The Ring is mine.”⁸⁹ It is only thanks to Gollum’s interminable, possessive desire for his “precious” that the Ring is destroyed; he comes in at the last moment to play the very significant role Gandalf predicted he would in *Fellowship*. As Sam helplessly stares at where Frodo disappeared, he is knocked unconscious by a rock held by a long-fingered

⁸⁹ *The Return of the King*, 3:30:35

hand. Gollum's role in the story is not unlike Frodo's in the end—in his all-consuming desire for the Ring, Gollum inadvertently makes himself the last weapon in its destruction as he tumbles, victorious and gleeful, over edge of the cliff and into the lava, an insane smile lighting his face even as he falls.

The decision to have Gollum destroy the Ring in this way fulfills a number of purposes, allowing Frodo's submission to the Ring to occur along with its destruction without either resulting in Frodo's death, and delaying the destruction of the Ring with another moment of prolonged suspense and action. The fight between Gollum and Frodo also creates an opportunity for Sam to demonstrate his heroic devotion one last time, as it leaves Frodo hanging from the cliff one handed. Sam pulls Frodo up over the edge and then supports him as the two run out of the imploding volcano in an extreme wide shot that moves forward and around the path as it crashes apart just behind their steps, lava crashing upwards in waves and bursts. The shot is strongly reminiscent of the Fellowship's escape from the Bridge of Khazad-Dûm in the first film, with the same crushing threat of doom over the Hobbits as they desperately flee from the rock and fire exploding around them. In a scene right out of an *Indiana Jones* film, the Hobbits make it across the collapsing path and out through the mouth of the tunnel, leaping onto an outcropping of rock only seconds before a massive river of lava rushes out behind and around them.

The shots that follow portray a poignant scene of pathos and love between the Hobbits, the effect of which is strengthened by the tonal juxtaposition of the Armageddon-like environment and their tender exchange;

the evocative notes that arc high and haunting in the score resonate with the bittersweet tragedy of Sam and Frodo's love and support of one another in the face of what they believe are their last moments. The scale of the wide shots again draws attention to their diminutive size as they lay caught within the violent storm, flaming rocks twice their size flying down around them, and leaves little to no hope for their survival. A series of close ups bring the audience into their subjectivity as Sam cries about the girl he would have loved, and Frodo for once takes the supporting roll as he pulls Sam onto his shoulder and says, "I'm glad to be with you, Samwise Gamgee, here at the end of all things." The frame lingers on this last shot, the two Hobbits with their heads bowed, tears streaking through the dirt and ash on their faces; the diegetic sounds of the eruption are muted under Sam's crying and the music of the score as it swells in slow, loping notes, and rises in an ethereal melody that carries over as the image fades to black for almost a full ten seconds.

The black screen overlaid with the music of the score allows the audience to absorb this last scene, and, for those who don't know the story, this seems to be the ultimate moment of pathos, the lives of two friends and heroes coming to a close with a tragic victory, dying, as Boromir did, after their finest moment and far too soon. The melody in the score decrescendos to a low hum that resonates for a few seconds before building back up, as a high, reverent voice begins to sing in Elvish. As the hymnal-esque melody plays over the black screen, the image fades slowly back in; the little bodies of the Hobbits lay on the rock center of the hellish sea of lava, the sounds of the eruption still audible in a slow, muted way

under the singing. The ethereal Elvish hymn evokes a strong religious sensibility that is reinforced as the image becomes clear, and a bright white light breaks through the clouds, the silhouettes of three eagles emerging through the light as their shrill call rings out during a pause in the song. As Gandalf is revealed riding the lead eagle, and the Hobbits are picked up and carried away, a final shot of Frodo opening his eyes reveals he is not yet dead, and the encouraging melody of the score gives the scene a new hope that is answered as the image cuts to the healing houses where all four Hobbits are reunited with one another and the Fellowship. As the film comes to a close, the scene in the house of healing leads to the coronation described in the second chapter, the climactic moment of triumph for all.

As the shot sails over the map back to the Shire and the Hobbits return home, the film makes apparent that unlike his companions, Frodo is not able to reintegrate back into his old life. The scene of Merry, Pippin, Frodo, and Sam in the pub signifies this distinction, as they sit alone at a table, looking around them and at each other with wistful, contemplative expressions. The camera pans over an eye line match of the Hobbits next them, laughing and drinking without a care; when the image returns to Frodo, watching them, it is clear he cannot reenter the life he left behind. Though all of the Hobbits were marked by their experiences, the other three are able to complete their transformations through the last step of hero myth and return to their lives in the Shire-- though those lives will be different as a result of their experiences, they find new places for their new selves. But for Frodo there is no reaching the tenth step; the wounds of

the quest have scarred him too deeply and, as he says at the Grey Havens, “We set out to save the Shire, Sam. And it has been saved. But not for me.”⁹⁰ So Frodo departs, ending the film, as discussed, with a bittersweet note of pathos and love as Sam returns home to his new wife to finish the book and begin living a new story, that of his life with his family. Sam’s ending is that of the conventional romantic hero, completing his character arc and the moral lesson of the film, the evil vanquished and the good rewarded with his own, perfect happily ever after.

The moral legitimacy and pathos that are invoked by Sam and Frodo’s narrative work to advance the narrative, and captivate and inspire audiences through the two Hobbits’ bravery and dedication, both to the quest and to one another. As Sam’s unshakable devotion to Frodo proves time and time again, it is not a slain dragon or a bejeweled crown that makes a real hero-- it’s an unflinching selfless desire to do good in the world and help those who need it. As Lady Galadriel said, even the smallest person can change the course of the future, and that is a lesson that all audiences can carry out of the theatre with them, remembering the altruism of Samwise the Brave, the humblest of heroes. These storylines of the Hobbits’ personal struggles and triumphs, of their friendship and love, make *The Lord of the Rings* much more than just an epic fantasy; they make it, at its deepest levels, a story of compassion and humanity that entralls and captivates a wide range of audiences through their emotionally compelling journey. The stories of Merry and Pippin as they progress through their own hero’s journeys similarly guide audiences through the films; their brotherly

⁹⁰*The Return of the King*, EE, 3:56:10

relationship is one many audiences can relate to and identify with, and Merry and Pippin at times act as stand-ins for the audiences, directing audiences' attention and reactions throughout the trilogy.

TO THE EDGE OF NIGHT AND BACK: PARALLEL JOURNEYS OF HEROISM

Continuing the analysis of Jackson's manipulation of melodrama, I will now focus on the stories of Merry and Pippin and the transformation of their characters through the hero's journey to highlight how their corresponding experiences generate pathos and guide the audiences' reactions through the trilogy. The character arcs of Merry and Pippin follow the hero myth in interpretations that vary slightly from Aragorn.⁹¹ The parallel stories of Merry and Pippin are striking because they both begin as innocents; they join the Fellowship of their own volition, but they don't seem to know as much about what they're getting into as Frodo or Sam do. Yet the emotions inspired by the journeys of the four Hobbits are not so different; like those of Sam and Frodo, Merry and Pippins' narratives are filled with moments of inspiring bravery, devoted loyalty, thrilling suspense and heart-wrenching pathos, conveyed through the lens of their parallel journeys.

The hero myth applies very similarly to Merry and Pippin, as the two remain together until the beginning of *The Return of the King*, and even after their separation, they follow parallel paths. Both fight in the War of the Ring as soldiers (of a sort), though for different kingdoms and through different situations. Merry sneaks into battle hidden on the side of Rohan by Éowyn, who is herself disguised, and ends up stabbing the Witch King in the leg, allowing Éowyn to kill him once and for all, an enormous victory in the War. Pippin, taken

⁹¹ The ten steps of the hero myth are laid out on page 42

to Minas Tirith, gives himself to the service to Denethor, the Steward of Gondor, in honor of Boromir's sacrifice, as Denethor was his father. Tolkien himself is quoted as saying the stories of the four Hobbits are the heart of his book, and Jackson deliberately focuses each film's intercut storylines around their character arcs. Though there is much more time spent on battles of the War of the Ring in the films than in the book, Jackson places crucial moments of character change and development during intense action sequences within the narrative of the War, endowing these scenes with a Tolkienian sensibility that furthers the audiences' alignment with the protagonists, and works as a part of the compromise Jackson negotiated with Tolkien fans discussed in the first chapter.

The journeys and character transformations that make up Merry and Pippin's variations of the hero myth are marked by one definitive aspect of their relationship: Merry is Pippin's older cousin, and as such, he is protective of the younger Hobbit, who is so prone to folly, curiosity and accident. Pippin's innocence and foolhardiness are emphasized repeatedly throughout the trilogy as his curiosity leads to more than one situation of serious consequence. First, in *Fellowship*, he knocks a skeleton into a well in the Mines of Moria, alerting the Orcs to their presence, and in *The Return of the King* he takes the palantír from Gandalf as the wizard is sleeping. Both of these seemingly minor actions have serious consequences: the first starts a chain of events that leads directly to Gandalf's death, and while the second at first seems as though it will lead to another tragedy, in the end it is more beneficial than problematic. Through

Pippin's vision in the palantír Gandalf learns that Sauron plans to attack Minas Tirith and this revelation raises the dramatic stakes of the film in that it directly puts Théoden in a position to aid Gondor, which he refuses. This action of Pippin's is also incredibly decisive because it leads to his separation from Merry; Gandalf needs to ride immediately to Minas Tirith and he takes Pippin with him because, as Merry explains to him, Sauron now believes Pippin has the Ring and they have to get him out of Isengard. The moment of the cousins' parting is one of sweet sorrow; at first, Pippin doesn't understand Merry isn't coming with him, and the expression on his face as the truth hits him is heart wrenching. As Gandalf throws Pippin astride his horse, Shadowfax, Merry keeps a cool expression and hands Pippin a leather pouch of pipe weed. Merry smiles sadly up at the younger Hobbit, and tells him in a chiding, brotherly way, that he knew Pippin had smoked all of his. As Gandalf spurs Shadowfax out of the barn and across the field, Merry's demeanor breaks and he pushes past a guard, racing up a tower to watch his friend ride away. The film cuts to Merry's point of view, briefly placing the audience in his subjectivity as Gandalf and Pippin tear off into the distance; the complete openness of their surroundings further direct the audience's attention on their departure. There is a bittersweet edge to Merry's voice as he looks up at Aragorn and says, "He's always followed me, every where I went, since before we were tweens. I would get him into the worst sort of trouble, but I was always there to get him out. Now he's gone. Just like Frodo and Sam." Though he looks distressed as he looks up at Aragorn, the latter reassures him that in his experience, Hobbit's "are a most hardy folk," and Merry smiles as

he looks back across the field and replies. "Foolhardy, maybe. He's a Took." This exchange and the wistful pride that comes over Merry's expression convey that, though he is scared for his future and those of his friends, he has faith in their strength and ability to endure; Merry's optimism is reflected by the sun shining on his face and predominance of warm golden hues in the mise-en-scene. The Shire melody arcs in the score as he looks out on the field, the music recalling other moments of pathos and love between the Hobbits earlier in the films. The relationship between Merry and Pippin is one of the most accessible sources of sympathy in the trilogy; the tender affection and brotherly support Merry provides for Pippin makes both characters incredibly relatable, as do their struggles to find their places within the companies of Rohan and Gondor, respectively.

Over the course of the trilogy, Merry is characterized by moments of wisdom and conviction, and he demonstrates an impressive amount of courage even before he is thrown into the midst of battle. The scene of the Entmoot mentioned earlier covers a blurring of the third and fourth steps of the hero myth for both Merry and Pippin; though they have been on the adventure since its beginnings in the Shire, and have already tried to fight and survived the kidnapping by Saruman's Uruk-hai, they haven't fully "answered the call to action" because they have not entered directly into the war of their own volition. The two Hobbits' involvement in the war thus far has mostly been in passive action; they did not control where they went and they did not go there willingly. Though they did join on the quest willingly and stand and fought with Boromir

as best they could, neither Merry nor Pippin went into the adventure with a full understanding of what they were getting themselves into, and they have not yet found their true roles in the story.

Merry is a bit ahead of Pippin in his progress through the hero's journey, as he starts out as less of an innocent and understands the seriousness of their situation much more quickly and fully than Pippin, who really only comprehends what's happening after Merry has expressly informed him. In Fangorn Forest, Merry and Pippin await the Ents' decision after having implored Treebeard to rally the Ents and join in the War of the Ring; this scene plainly illustrates the distinct characterizations of Merry and Pippin through their reactions to Treebeard's decision.⁹² When the decision is finally made, Treebeard tells the Hobbits, "the Ents cannot hold back this storm. We must weather such things as we have always done" (meaning from the outside, in passive inaction). The film cuts to a slightly high angled close-up of Merry's face - his expression is fierce, eyes blazing as he bites out a question through gritted teeth: "How can that be your decision?" An indignant fury radiates from his expression as the scene continues to cut between Merry and a wider shot of the clearing in which they've gathered. When it becomes clear to Merry he cannot sway the Ents' decision, the fierceness fades from his face and is replaced with frustrated doubt. The image moves to a wider shot of Merry from the side, Pippin now visible in the background. As the first few notes of the Shire melody rise and fall in the score, Pippin moves forward in the frame. His expression and slowed movements

⁹² The following scene occurs during *The Two Towers*, EE, 2:58:06-3:00:00

betray how deeply he has taken Treebeard's dismissal to heart. "Maybe Treebeard's right," Pippin says dejectedly as he moves to stand behind his cousin; though the shot is focused on Pippin, the framing directs attention to Merry's expression as he listens to Pippin. "We don't belong here, Merry. It's too big for us. What can we do in the end? We've got the Shire. Maybe we should go home." The focus racks to Merry as, in a solemn, almost regretful voice, he makes Pippin finally understand the gravity of the evil that has been seeping throughout Middle-Earth: "The fires of Isengard will spread and the woods of Tuckborough and Buckland will burn. And," he turns, the camera position flipping with him, as he looks Pippin in the eye and speaks to him in a deliberate, brotherly fashion, emotion gleaming in his eyes. "And all that was once green and good in this world will be gone... There won't *be* a Shire, Pippin."

The shot reverses and lingers on Pippin's face as he absorbs Merry's words and begins to truly understand how high the stakes of their quest are and what their failure would mean for not only them or the Shire, but all of Middle-Earth. The weight of the War of the Ring has begun to fall on Pippin's shoulders, as it looms ever lower over his head. Treebeard then tells Merry and Pippin he will take them safely home instead of venturing into the war. Pippin suggests they pass by Isengard in order to evade capture or confrontation: "The closer we are to danger, the farther we are from harm."⁹³ When Treebeard reaches Isengard and sees the burned forest, he decides to go to war, taking Merry and Pippin with him into the heart of the attack, and allowing them to be a part of the

⁹³ *The Two Towers, EE, 3:06:20*

action. It is by pure chance that his suggestion results in Treebeard's discovery of the burned parts of the forest, leading him to muster the Ents and attack Isengard in vengeance. This differs greatly from the book, in which the decision to go to war is made at the Entmoot, and the story of their attack on Isengard is described in great detail by Merry and Pippin to Gandalf and the others when they arrive after victory at Helm's Deep. The battle at Isengard is shown in present time in the film and is certainly an exaggeration of the descriptions Merry and Pippin give in the book, but is based upon the same essential series of events. By changing the reason behind the Ents' decision to go to war, while leaving the events of the Last March of the Ents fundamentally the same, Jackson prolonged and dramatized the Ents' decision and involvement.

As stated, the changes Jackson made to events of the Entmoot and the Last March of the Ents in *The Two Towers* serve a distinct narrative purpose for Merry and Pippin; their reactions to Treebeard's decision highlight the character differences that distinguish them at this point in the film, and their involvement in the battle itself allows them to genuinely enter into the thick of the war for the first time. Though they have obviously been involved in the action, having been kidnapped by the Orcs after trying to fight at the end of *Fellowship*, this is the first time Merry and Pippin are participating in the fighting in their own right. Treebeard leads the attack and the Hobbits ride on his shoulders, leading with him, even if more in spirit than physical attack. This moment is a notable turning point for both Merry and Pippin, as the Hobbits begin to truly face the trials and tribulations their quest holds for them. This is the first instance of the Hobbits

actively participating in the fighting of the War of the Ring, and really begins their transformations from innocents to soldier-heroes.

However, the heroic progress shown in the Last March of the Ents on Isengard is somewhat undercut by the last scene of Merry and Pippin's narrative in *The Two Towers*. The penultimate scene in *Towers* depicts a victorious Merry and Pippin raiding Saruman's stores and finding two massive barrels of Longbottom Leaf pipe weed, with which they immediately pack their pipes and sit around giggling. Their laughter and silliness accentuate the sweet, child-like appearances of the Hobbits and reflect the purity that still remains a part of them. It is the gradual loss of this innocence that marks Merry and Pippin's transitions through the hero myth as each character delves deeper into the War and finds their respective place. This scene is strategically placed toward the end of *The Two Towers*, closing the film and early stages of their journeys, as well as Frodo and Sam's, with tender moments of loving friendship and ephemeral happiness.

Throughout their parallel journeys, the imbalances within their brotherly relationship are highlighted through the natural juxtaposition of their character arcs and experiences. The vulnerability Pippin continually demonstrates is contrasted against Merry's blind bravery, each complimenting the other throughout the trilogy. Where Pippin is unsure of himself and apprehensive, Merry is brave even when he is knowingly at a disadvantage. In the scenes of the Entmoot and of their separation at Edoras, Merry acts as a mentor for Pippin, slowly guiding him toward the strong, hardened soldier he has to become as he

enters into the midst of war. The intimacy of their relationship makes both characters very relatable and sympathetic. It's a relationship many viewers can identify with, and it's this element of self-identification and accompanying vicarious suffering that makes the story engaging even in moments without intense action or visual spectacle, drawing on Singer's definition of pathos as a self-reflexive emotional reaction. The melodrama that Jackson wove throughout the trilogy works through the narrative of each character to make the films compelling for audiences who are less interested in high fantasy elements of the story. For many audiences, these intimate, emotional moments in the Hobbits' relationships are much more gripping than the intense scenes of battles and warfare, as discussed in the previous chapter with reference to Frodo and Sam.

The tone on which *The Two Towers* ended is picked up after the prologue and opening scene of Frodo and Sam at the beginning of *The Return of the King*. As the title credits fade out over an aerial shot of Isengard, Aragorn, Gimli, Legolas, and Théoden come upon Merry and Pippin "sitting on a field of victory, enjoying a few well-earned comforts" from Saruman's stores, much as they had been at the close of the previous film. The Hobbits are still fresh from their victory and much of the seriousness Merry had shown in *The Two Towers* seems to have washed away with the Orcs and fires. The light-hearted greetings between the Hobbits and the Company are followed by the scene of Saruman's death described in Chapter 1, and then by the scene of Pippin and the palantír, which leads directly to the separation of the cousins. These scenes entail the sixth step of the hero myth for Merry and Pippin, as each begins his own journey

in earnest: Pippin in Gondor and Merry in Rohan. As the two set out with their respective companies, the similarities between their situations are obvious; both Hobbits want to help in the fight against Sauron, but neither is sure exactly how to do so. Merry is more confident than Pippin, immediately hoping to be a part of the attack. As he rides off with Gandalf to the White City, Pippin is not so bold; his isolation from Merry and the incident with the palantír have made him unsure of himself and his place in the war.

With their separation, the story becomes divided into three separate narratives, which presents a challenge for a director: how do you keep an audience engaged equally by all three? How do you maintain and carry momentum and emotion across the disparate storylines without losing interest in those not being presently shown? This was one of Tolkien's main trepidations in making a filmic adaptation of the novel. As quoted in *Letters*, Tolkien broke the action of the book down in a simple structure, "The narrative now divides in two main branches: 1. Prime Action, the Ringbearers. 2. Subsidiary Action, the rest of the Company leading to the "heroic" matter. It is essential that these two branches should each be treated in coherent sequence. Both to render them intelligible as a story, and because they are totally different in tone and scenery. Jumbling them together entirely destroys these things."⁹⁴ Tolkien combines the narratives of Merry and Pippin in the subcategory of "subsidiary action," which is understandable in the context despite the fact that they are two separate

⁹⁴ Carpenter, 275 (The fragmentation of sentences is due to illegibility in Tolkien's writing when the letters were published.)

journeys undertaken by the pair of Hobbits. It may seem contradictory to introduce this reference, as this is one piece of advice Jackson went decisively against; however, due to his reorganization of events and skillful manipulation of editing, Jackson was able to keep all of the narratives intelligible and maintain the key thematic aspects of each through his thorough attention to detail and tone. Tolkien cites the obvious differences in tone in scenery as an issue to the “interleaving” of the narratives, but Jackson actually uses the stark differences in setting and tone to clearly mark the different narratives and make it easy for the audience to situate themselves based on the changes in coloration, location and scoring as the film cuts between the “prime” and “subsidiary” action.

Jackson’s use of cross cutting to accomplish this interleaving is discussed in the following chapter with a formal analysis of Pippin’s black moment (the low point from which he must either rise as a hero or fail in tragedy), which occurs as he sings to Denethor, who feasts grotesquely in his Great Hall while his son Faramir is also experiencing his black moment, leading a company on a suicide mission to try and reclaim Osgiliath⁹⁵ from Sauron’s army on his father’s callous command. The pathos of Pippin’s black moment is compounded by its context, as this scene of his and Faramir’s simultaneous black moments occurs just after Sam has hit his own rock bottom after Frodo told him to go home. The pathos generated by the suffering of each character builds upon that of the others to culminate in a moment of extremely high tension and emotion; the

⁹⁵ Osgiliath is an ancient capital of Gondor; though mostly in ruin, it is the last defence between Mordor and Minas Tirith

formal analysis in the following chapter outlines how Jackson manipulates the audience's reaction to the narrative through the stylistic elements of the scene, compounding the effect of the sentiment through spectacle. The parallel editing between Faramir's charge and Pippin inside the Hall prolongs the duration of the scene and the action of Faramir's plotline contrasts with the pathos of Pippin's, exemplifying the "spectacular essence of melodrama" that rests in temporal prolongation, as described by Linda Williams in the second chapter.⁹⁶

The focus on Pippin during this scene is significant because he is functioning as a stand in for the audience, portraying the helplessness, fear, and sorrow the audience feels in watching Faramir sacrifice himself for his father's approval. Up until this scene, Pippin has managed to hold on to much of his innocence; despite his kidnapping, he has not truly experienced the dark reality of battle in person, which has enabled him to evade the metaphorical rock bottom. He hasn't until now witnessed the grief of widows and children as they watch their husbands and fathers riding to their death, and then sung to their supposed leader after he heartlessly sentenced his son to die. This scene is a pivotal moment in Pippin's development through the hero myth; as with Aragorn, there is no action that directly effects or is caused by Pippin that brings him to his rock bottom, but rather it comes in the form of feelings of hopelessness and a shift in his understanding of reality. Pippin, in the service of the Steward, is now fully immersed in the war and has seen firsthand the atrocities it involves. He has also now come close enough to Mordor to see its

⁹⁶ Williams, 2001, 35

shadow and feel its reach; the naivety he had retained in Isengard has been completely shattered and blown away.

Though he has actually already had a huge impact on the course of the war by lighting the first of the beacons of Gondor, in a move typical of his character, Pippin has no idea of great the consequences of that action; he was simply acting on Gandalf's instruction. Though he has played a pivotal role in the War of the Rings already, it isn't until the scene in the Great Hall that Pippin gains true understanding of the cruel reality of war and continues to question his role in it. To actualize as a hero, Pippin has to overcome these feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy in order to pull himself out of his black moment and move on; the black moment forces the hero to re-evaluate their circumstances and somehow find inspiration and motivation to regain control and carry on toward the climax.

Merry's black moment, not unlike Pippin's, is caused by a stymied sense of efficacy in the war, and for him it really is only a moment. The brevity of Merry's black moment is fitting in contrast to the four minutes spent portraying that of Pippin; Pippin has displayed far more naivety throughout the trilogy, so it makes sense it takes him longer to experience and overcome his lowest point, as Merry has long understood the realities Pippin is only now comprehending. Rock bottom for the older Hobbits comes when Théoden tells Merry he cannot ride into battle; "Little Hobbits do not belong in war, Master Meriadoc...None of my riders can bear you as a burden." Merry gapes back at him before arguing indignantly, "All my friends have gone to battle. I would be ashamed to be left

behind... I want to fight!" Théoden simply replies, "I will say no more of this," and rides off, leaving Merry humiliated and heart-broken, his place in the war swept away with the horses that thunder by him as he stands, small and alone, amidst the departing riders. Though the camera lingers on this shot for about five seconds to allow Merry's despair to sink in, the mood is abruptly turned around when a rider grabs Merry and hauls him up into saddle. The camera jerks up with Merry's movement as the rider leans forward to whisper "Ride with me," in Éowyn's voice, a helmet obscuring her face. As Merry turns around and grins, it is clear the Lady of Rohan has saved him from his black moment and will carry him onward to heroism. This is significant, as Éowyn has just suffered the same rock bottom as Merry in being told she could not fight in the war; the parallel drawn between the two places Merry again in a pair, setting him up to later watch out for Éowyn as he did for Pippin.

After this scene, the film cuts away from the Rohirrim for quite a while, focusing instead on Aragorn's progress through the Paths of the Dead and the siege of Minas Tirith, satisfying some of the expectations built in these narratives while drawing out the anticipation built in Merry's story by directing attention away from that plotline after raising questions with Éowyn's action—Will she and Merry be discovered? Will they prove Théoden and Éomer wrong and if so, how? The action occurring in these disparate places is deeply intertwined as each is still within the subcategory of "subsidiary action," in reference to the events of the War of the Ring rather than the quest of the Ringbearers. Merry and the Rohirrim are riding to Minas Tirith, so the shots of the battle ensuing

there relate to Merry as well as to Pippin; the worse the situation appears to be getting in the white city, the more dangerous a situation Merry will be riding into. The film moves from Minas Tirith to track Frodo's progress alone through the tunnels at the top of Cirith Ungol, where he is quickly lost and tangled in webs, just as Gollum planned. As Frodo gathers new strength and forges on, the film returns to Merry and Éowyn at an encampment on the way to Minas Tirith. This time it is Éowyn who despairs, and Merry gives her hope, signaling he has moved beyond his own moments of despondency and is ready for the battle to which he and the riders are called as the scene ends. So it is with a mutual re-gaining of control and self-efficacy that the Hobbit and the Lady ride out for battle in secret, seizing their swords literally and figuratively. This parallel is reinforced by the similarities in Merry and Éowyn's costuming, and a pair of close ups framed on each of their faces, determined which only a hint of trepidation as they ride out with the others.

The eighth stage of Merry's hero myth (the moment when he takes charge again and heads toward the climax) is heralded by the resounding blast of the Rohirrim horns that precedes the Rohirrim as the riders appear over the crest of the hill that rises above the Pelennor. The ride of the Rohirrim is a thrilling scene of spectacle and narrative action that Merry is notably at the head of, clearly defying the warnings he "had no place in battle." As Merry progresses through the eighth stage of his hero journey, so too does Pippin; Jackson continuing to draw a parallel between them and, in doing so, allows the progress of one to stand in for that of the other as the film alternates between their plotlines--

when the audience sees Merry triumphantly charging into battle, it furthers expectations that Pippin will soon triumph as well and continue his own progress through the hero's journey. And he does so as the film returns to the halls of Minas Tirith, where Gandalf and Pippin throw open the doors of the pyre room just as Denethor is lighting it on fire with Faramir on top, unconscious but alive. Gandalf knocks Denethor aside and Pippin jumps on the flaming wood to push Faramir's body out of the blaze and safely on the to ground, where he awakens, coughing. This act, saving Faramir's life, is the ninth stage of Pippin's character arc, and illustrates a new autonomy and bravery in Pippin, bringing him ever closer to the climax of his character arc.

Merry's journey continues shortly thereafter with another act of bravery, solidifying his own transformation into a hero: Merry stabs the Witch-King, the leader of the Nazgûl, in the leg, allowing Éowyn to vanquish him forever with a stab of her sword. As the battle rages across the field of the Pelennor, the film focuses in on Théoden, shouting to his men to reform their ranks. Only seconds after he begins this effort, the Rohirrim freeze, looking beyond the camera with expressions of horror. The film cuts to Théoden's perspective, revealing one of the Nazgûl's winged fell beasts coming straight at them. The Witch-King wheels the beast about as it crushes Théoden and his horse between its jaws and throws them to the ground. Éowyn jumps in front of her father, trapped underneath his dead horse, and cuts off the head of the beast with two slashes of her sword. The Witch-King hits her shield arm full-on with his mace and she falls to the ground, and the film cuts away to the river where a host of Orcs greet the empty Corsair

ships pulling up to the shore. Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas suddenly launch themselves up over the side of the boat, and the massive, ghastly Army of the Dead pours after them, swallowing the host of Orcs easily.

This diversion from the action with Éowyn and the Witch-King has the same effect as the cross cutting during Pippin's race to find Gandalf, drawing out the suspense and thereby increasing its effect. The cut leaves Éowyn in a horrifying cliffhanger, the danger of her situation made all the more tangible by the placement off-screen; in cutting away from the action on the Pelennor, Jackson is inviting the audience to fill in the blanks and imagine what is happening with Éowyn for themselves. The thrill of excitement invoked by the sudden rush of the Army of the Dead builds on this suspense, adding to the overall tension of the scene. When the action returns to the Pelennor with a tightly framed shot on Éowyn on and the Witch-King, the composition augments this growing sense of doom, as a tight framing closes in on her face and there is no sign of help emerging in the peripheries. The Witch-King grabs Éowyn by the neck and growls, "You fool. No man can kill me! Die now!" A sudden jump cut reveals Merry just next to their feet before he lurches up and stabs the Witch-King in the back of the leg. Merry's blade crumbles to ash and he grasps his arm in agony, but the Witch-King is distracted by the injury long enough for Éowyn to reveal her identity by pulling off her helmet—"I am no man!" — and stabbing her sword into where the Witch-King's face should be. A twist of light flashes in his helm, and then a Witch-King lets forth a strident wail, his helm twisting violently in on itself before he crumbles to the ground and into nothingness. As

this is occurring, the image cuts to Merry; though he is writhing in pain on the ground, his arm injured by stabbing the Witch-King, Merry has surpassed any doubts or fear he may have once had and acted in an essential, heroic role in the defeat of Sauron's most powerful servant.

These great deeds of courage are not the culmination of Merry and Pippin's hero journeys, however; there are two significant events that compose the climax of the Hobbit's arcs. After the battle has ended, Pippin's actualization is highlighted through a touching role reversal, as he becomes the caretaker and Merry the one in need of looking after when Pippin finds his older cousin in the field and takes him into his arms, injured and half-conscious. Pippin tearfully promises Merry he will look after him just as Merry always had for Pippin. This subversion of their relationship shows in Pippin's character a clear transformation and new efficacy, in addition to providing a moment of touching pathos that capitalizes on the emotion built through the intense action sequences. The climax of Merry and Pippin's hero journeys occurs just before the climax of the entire trilogy (the destruction of the Ring and Sauron's subsequent demise), with their fearless charge with Aragorn at the Black Gate of Mordor. Aragorn's speech (quoted in full in the second chapter) and the scene of Sam carrying Frodo up the mountain (described in the third) have been carrying the audience on a wave of intense, escalating suspense, pathos, and anticipation when the film returns to the Company outside the Black Gate. When Aragorn charges toward the army of Mordor after a simple dedication of, "For Frodo," Merry and Pippin are the first to follow, screaming and brandishing their swords

furiously as they rush out behind the new King of Gondor. The shot pulls out to highlight their advance, their figures dwarfed by the company of Men who pause only fleetingly before taking up their charge, battle cries ringing out across the field. Though they are soon overwhelmed by the chaotic advance of Men and not taken into the thick of the fighting, Merry and Pippin's courageous actions during the war and this valiant charge have established the completion of their transformation into heroes, just before Gollum bites off Frodo's finger, taking the Ring to their shared doom. The suspense, fear, and anticipation that has been building not just throughout these last scenes, but over the entire narrative, is now released in an epic, cathartic rush, as the Tower of Barad-dûr comes crashing down in a series of astonishing low-angle and wide shots, the image cutting to Merry as he lets loose a triumphant cry of "FRODO!" before returning to an extreme wide, moving view of Mordor as it falls into ruin. In this shot, Merry and Pippin are truly reborn as heroes and soldiers of the Company, fighting alongside the Men of Rohan and Gondor in the sigils of their respective, adopted houses.

When Merry and Pippin burst into Frodo's room in the House of the Healing after the Ring is destroyed, the soft lighting and predominantly white mise-en-scene emphasizes the rebirth the Hobbits have gone through in their transformations into heroes, though Frodo's separation from the others and the distinct bruising and dark circles on his face suggest his rebirth is not as complete as theirs. The coronation described in the second chapter truly encompasses the height of the Hobbits' rebirth and achievement. Merry and

Pippin are transformed physically as well as in character as both have grown in stature from drinking the water in Fangorn Forest, their younger age no longer apparent as they stand with Frodo and Sam. A close up on the four companions' bewildered expressions conveys their disbelief and amazement, and the sweeping movement of the camera as it rises up to a stunning aerial of the city matches the triumphant emotion of the moment as Jackson has done throughout the trilogy. As the image fades from the white city to a moving shot over the hand-drawn map from the opening of *Fellowship*, Frodo begins to narrate in voice-over. "Thirteen months to the day since Gandalf sent us on our long journey, we found ourselves looking upon a familiar sight."⁹⁷ The image fades on the gold-tinted green hills of the Shire as the Hobbits ride in on ponies. Merry and Pippin are dressed in beautiful velvet livery of their respective realms, the white tree of Gondor glittering brightly on Pippin's chest as he nods at the grumpy Hobbit sweeping his steps and shaking his head at their odd fineries. The Hobbits' reintegration into the Shire is not immediate or easy, but the ghosts that haunt Frodo do not plague either Merry or Pippin, as neither ever held the Ring even for a moment. Merry and Pippin are each marked and changed by their own experiences, but they are still able to fit in with the innocent Shirelings who live in ignorance of the outside world and its perils. Though they have grown in height and spirit, which might offend some Hobbits, Merry and Pippin were already members of the more adventurous families, the Tooks and Brandybucks, and are able to find their places in the Shire upon their return.

⁹⁷*The Return of the King*, EE, 3:47:55

They laugh and smile with Sam at his wedding, and all three are able to settle happily back into their homes despite their dark experiences.

Merry and Pippin's parallel hero journeys are marked by a series of melodramatic situations, some taken or exaggerated from Tolkien's book, others fabricated by Jackson, that highlights the Hobbits' frequent placement as surrogates for the audience, their reactions often used to guide the audience through the narrative of the War of the Ring. The layering of stylistic and narrative devices used to create these scenes will be discussed in the following chapter, with multiple references back to the narratives of Merry and Pippin, as well as those of Aragorn, Sam, and Frodo. The next chapter focuses on this integration of spectacular images and effects trilogy as a part of the effort Jackson made to broaden the accessibility and appeal of the *Lord* films, along with the greater prominence of Aragorn and Arwen's romantic subplot in the narrative of the films.

THE POWER OF ATTRACTION: APPEALS THROUGH ROMANCE AND EFFECTS

While I have discussed, at length, the compromises Jackson made throughout the adaptation and production processes to appease Tolkien fans who might have been alienated by the alterations he made to the story, I have not fully delved into the compromises Jackson made to engage those audiences unfamiliar with Tolkien's book, audiences of popular cinema. The expansion of the *Lord* trilogy's accessibility and appeal was absolutely necessary for the project's success, as the fan base of the book is not nearly as large as it is devoted. Thus, in order to create films that captivate a wide range of audiences, Jackson relied primarily on two significant conventions of popular cinema: the romantic subplot and the cinema of attractions/effects. The love story and its typical "happily ever after" ending is one of the oldest traditions of cinema, delighting audiences with vicarious feelings of joy and contentment. Though the *Lord* story is by no means centered on a romance in either the book or films, Jackson brought the romantic subplots of Aragorn and (to a lesser extent) Sam, to a more prominent role in the films' narrative, providing an easy hook for fans of popular cinema. The cinema of attractions and effects requires some explanation, and will be explored after the discussion on romance.

Though the story of Aragorn and Arwen's relationship is present in the *Lord* book, it is told largely in Appendix A, with only a few references throughout the novel itself; through a series of conscientious decisions, Jackson and the screenwriters took details from the appendix and reworked them into a

compelling, comprehensible love story that is threaded throughout the trilogy.⁹⁸ The inclusion and heightened importance of their romance makes the story more appealing to popular audiences. Arwen, and Elrond acting on her behalf, really act as the impetus that eventually forces Aragorn to embrace his destiny, and his love for Arwen is a constant source of motivation and determination throughout the trilogy.

As described in the earlier chapters, after a Warg carries Aragorn over a cliff during the skirmish, the rest of the company, and briefly the audience, believe he has died. The film follows Théoden and his company as they continue to Helm's Deep, cuts briefly to the smoldering cracks of Isengard, and then comes to a scene Merry and Pippin with Treebeard, each narrative building upon the tension of the previous scene, prolonging the suspense of Aragorn's situation, as the audience has no more knowledge about Aragorn's whereabouts or well-being than the Company. The greater significance of Aragorn's fall, however, lies in the vision of Arwen that seemingly pulls him back, bringing their romance into a role of greater significance within the overarching narrative. When the film returns to Aragorn, his seemingly lifeless body is floating down a river; a low, Elvish chant rises hauntingly in the score as Aragorn washes up on the shore; a vision of Arwen appears over his face, and she kisses him lightly as she says in voice over, "May the grace of the Valar protect you,"⁹⁹ as Aragorn opens his eyes, revived. As gets back on his horse and makes his way toward

⁹⁸ The story is told largely in Appendix A, Annals of the Kings and Rulers, part (v): "Here Follows a Part of the Tale of Aragorn and Arwen" (Tolkien, 1033-1038).

⁹⁹ Valar

Helm's Deep, the use of canted angles and hand-held camera subjectively expresses Aragorn's disorientation and exhaustion, as well as highlighting his isolation within the vast, open fields of Rohan.

Aragorn's fall from the cliff and the vision of Arwen that pulls him back are placed in a crucial time in the film's plot, as it marks the beginning of his delayed progress through the hero's journey; the vision of Arwen and subsequent scene at Rivendell signify her involvement in his eventual progress through the hero's journey. The link between Arwen's life and Aragorn's is established through the editing and the dialogue in the scene at Rivendell that follows Aragorn's "revival", as well as the motif of the Elvish chanting that connects the disparate settings: the lives of Arwen and Aragorn are inextricably tied together through their love, and no distance can impinge on that connection. The scene underscores this idea, as Elrond narrates passages from the "Tale of Aragorn and Arwen" in voice over. The images of the future he describes for her underscore the pathos of her struggle and the tragic fate she will suffer should she stay and choose a mortal life with Aragorn. This sequence leads into the exchange, narrated in voice-over, between Lord Elrond and Lady Galadriel, described in the first chapter; their exchange outlines the conflict and questions surrounding not just Arwen's fate, but the fate of all Middle-Earth, raising the dramatic stakes and creating suspense by leaving these questions to dangle, unanswered. The scene is a direct product of the greater emphasis Jackson placed on Arwen and Aragorn's love story, so their romance works not just as a draw for popular audiences, but also advances the overarching

narrative of the trilogy and adds depth to Aragorn's characterization. In reference to his vision of Arwen after the fall, Boyens explains, "We wanted to keep [Aragorn] and Arwen apart, as Tolkien, did, because that was actually much truer to that sensibility of saga storytelling, and because we thought it would be very interesting to see if we could actually break that genre and actually tell a love story with two people who must endure a separation, that it could be a more mature love story."¹⁰⁰

Thus, the vision of Arwen after the fall allowed the filmmakers to reinforce the importance of their connection to his survival and steers the narrative in melodrama through the overwrought emotion of their tragic separation, as well as the pathos invoked from watching the two lovers grieve for one another and the life they could have shared together; the intrinsic turmoil of their story increases the dramatic stakes of the films, both in relation to Aragorn's character development, the fates of both him and Arwen, and the role of the Elves in the narrative of the War. When the films' story opens at the end of the Second Age, the Elves are waning, leaving Middle-Earth forever and sailing West across the Sea to the Undying Lands¹⁰¹. Lord Elrond wanted Arwen to leave with her people, but she is torn, wishing to separated from neither her kin nor from Aragorn. Though the films do not show the first meeting of Arwen and Aragorn, the films lay out what the appendix says in plain language: Arwen has to decide if she will remain in Middle-Earth with Aragorn and subject herself

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, 72

¹⁰¹ See Appendix

to a mortal life, or if she will go with her kin across the sea to the Undying Lands. She will not stay unless there is hope for the world (unless Aragorn takes up his place as King), and this sentiment is played up in the films to complicate his character arc. The story of their romance acts as an impetus for Aragorn throughout the film, with Arwen acting as both his love interest and his guide, even if mostly through flashbacks, dreams, and visions.

It is fitting, then, that the most significant turning point in the story of their relationship also comprises the final push that breaks Aragorn out of his prolonged black moment: Arwen's vision of her child with Aragorn and her subsequent decision to stay in Middle-Earth this leads Elrond to re-forged the Shards of Narsil at her insistence and deliver the new sword, Andúril, to Aragorn. The interweaving of pivotal moments in Aragorn's romantic narrative and hero's journey enables Jackson to channel emotions from a variety of narrative sources into one moment of intense development and cathartic emotional release. Our knowledge that Arwen's life is tied to that of the Ring and our understanding of the fate she has sealed herself to compel overwrought feelings of pathos for her suffering, as well as for Elrond, knowing her decision means their inevitable separation; the scenes of Arwen in Rivendell are colored with distinct, cool tones of blue and silver that reflect the sadness of her story. Arwen is often pictured in close ups that reveal tears welled in her wide, expressive eyes, drawing sympathy from the audience and furthering their alignment with Aragorn by establishing alignment with his lover.

The closure of Aragorn and Arwen's tale with their reunion during the coronation scene also adds a sweet taste of the conventional romantic ending seen in many action-adventure films. However, their ending is not the film's "happily ever after," as the film does not end here; upon any serious reflection the audience would know the tragic fate Arwen foresaw for herself will still come to pass, but for the moment we are able to smile with the couple as they kiss and bask in the relief and happiness of in their reunion and victory. The real "happily ever after" in the *Lord of the Rings* belongs to the story's chief hero, Samwise Gamgee. The decision to place the resolution to Sam and Rosie's romantic subplot after Aragorn's also suggests this focus on Sam as the main protagonist in the same way the decision to place Sauron's death after Saruman's marks him as the chief villain. Though Sam's romantic subplot is short-lived (though she makes a brief appearance in *Fellowship*, Sam doesn't verbalize his feelings Rosie until after the Ring has been destroyed and he and Frodo are stranded on an outcropping of rock), its ending fits perfectly within the conventions of popular cinema, closing the trilogy out with an image of Sam and his new family smiling as they go inside their happy home. This ending provides closure to those audiences who might not fully understand the significance of the scene at the Grey Havens, allowing the film to end on a comprehensible note of resolution that satisfies the expectations of popular cinema.

The second appeal Jackson made to popular audiences comes in the spectacular form of visual effects and situational sensationalism. Historically, sensationalism and spectacle have been associated with the type of non-classical

narrative described by Singer as relying more heavily on in-the-moment excitement than a logical cause-and-effect narrative, and are therefore often considered to work in opposition to the development of such a narrative. In the last few decades, this theory has been reiterated by film theorist Tom Gunning, whose piece *The Cinema of Attractions: Early film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde*,¹⁰² coins the phrase “cinema of attractions,” referring to early cinema’s emphasis on the appeal spectacle over narrative diegesis. Gunning describes the appeal of cinema’s “illusory power... and exoticism”¹⁰² for audiences of early films such as *La Roue* (Abel Gance, 1922) which thrilled, and at times terrified, audiences with the experience of moving pictures that appeared to be coming right at them. Gunning asserts that this preference for “attraction” over narrative has not entirely disappeared from contemporary cinema, but has evolved into what he calls the “Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola cinema of effects.”¹⁰³ Though most films that utilize special effects or grandiose visuals do generally have coherent, causally driven narratives, certainly some films place a higher stock in the appeal of spectacle over narrative. Gunning would argue the trite, predictable plot of a film like *Avatar* was not what drew or impressed audiences; it was the sheer awe inspired by the innovative CGI techniques and stunning images they created.

While the visualizations of battles, chases, and landscapes throughout *The Lord of the Rings* certainly endow the trilogy with a tremendous appeal to the cinema of effects or attractions, the films defy the idea that these moments of

¹⁰² Gunning, 64 (From book: *Wide Angle*, vol 8, no. 3-4, fall, 1986)

¹⁰³ Gunning, 70

spectacle inherently come at the expense of the narrative. Instead, Jackson makes use of spectacular appeal during dynamic situations that occur naturally within the story, crafting scenes of intense suspense, excitement, and astounding visual effects that function to advance the narrative rather than distract from it. Though balancing emphasis on both spectacle and narrative, Jackson effectively engaged audiences of popular cinema and Tolkien fans alike, capitalizing on the interplay of the sensational narrative moments of the story and the sheer thrill of the inventive CGI effects, aerial shots, and rich settings. The scenes most reliant on spectacle are often marked by melodramatic situations, a term that needs further clarification before I continue with this discussion. A tricky word in film analysis, the “situation” in melodrama refers to a specific instance of narrative action and delay, characterized by suspense, excitement, and an eventual escape. To quote Singer in *Melodrama and Modernity*:

"*Situation* is a rather difficult concept to narrow down, but it could be defined as a striking and exciting incident that momentarily arrests narrative action while the characters encounter a powerful new circumstance and the audience relishes the heightened dramatic tension. Situation often entails a startling reversal or twist of events that creates a dramatic impasse, a momentary paralysis stemming from a deadlock or dilemma or predicament that constrains the protagonist's ability to respond immediately."¹⁰⁴

Throughout the trilogy, the protagonists of *The Lord of the Rings* find themselves in situations of imminent suspense, danger, and pathos that are established and advanced through the use of cross cutting within and across the divided narrative; Jackson cuts between the multiple plotlines to contrast and

¹⁰⁴ Singer, 25

prolong the situations of multiple characters at once, such as in *The Two Towers* when Jackson cuts between the raging battle at Helm's Deep, and Merry and Pippin's slow progress with the Entmoot, highlighting the tension and suspense building in both narratives. Parallel editing is used in multiple iterations to different, but similar, ends, cutting within a situation occurring in a single narrative; such as when Faramir leads the charge on Osgiliath or during the ride of the Rohirrim. Parallel editing intensifies the effect of the temporal prolongation and increases the payoff when the two opposing sides finally meet in a clash of steel and bodies—or, alternatively, leads to an even greater sense of anticipation and agitation by cutting away from the action before the clash, furthering the emotional impact of the battle through its omission; this concept will be developed further later on in this chapter. The device of cross cutting is thus used to multiple ends, stirring suspense within each present narrative as well as building tension through the glimpses of the stories and situations progressing off screen. In this sense, and inherently through the structure of a trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings* recalls the manipulation of suspense and expectations seen in early serial films.

Relying again on the words of Ben Singer, "the notion of situation also evokes the serial film's cliffhanger climaxes where narrative action is suspended not only while the wide-eyed protagonist assesses a grave peril but indeed for a full week until the next episode resolves the predicament."¹⁰⁵ In *The Lord of the Rings*, cross cutting between the plot lines endows the film with multiple brief

¹⁰⁵ Singer, 26

cliffhanger situations, and the year-long wait between the release of each installment of the trilogy provided Jackson with the opportunity to end each film with a similar situation of prolonged suspense and unanswered questions. Giving the audience a reason to come back, Jackson ended each film with moments of pathos embedded within grander situations that have not yet been resolved, starting the next film somewhat *in medias res* and bringing the audience back quickly into the diegesis with flashbacks that reiterate significant information. These overarching situations make up the main narratives of the story, focused around the five protagonists.

Allowing the audience to transition fluidly between the multiple narratives, Jackson's employment of cross cutting throughout the films is probably the most notable cinematic device used in the trilogy. Each film, and the trilogy overall, has to continually move forward through multiple, interwoven narratives with sequences of thrilling action and suspense as well as scenes of slower-paced dialogue; Jackson navigates through these multiple narratives through his deftly handled use of crosscutting. Clear fluctuations in tone and setting unambiguously mark the transitions between plotlines of each film; the separate narratives of the Hobbits (and other characters) are easily distinguishable by the obvious differences in coloration and scenery. This visual differentiation orients the audience immediately with cuts between the plotlines, clearing away the concern for confusion Tolkien warned against in his letter. The crosscutting also serves to break up the action in any given narrative, raising questions that are left to dangle unresolved while the film's attention moves to

focus on another narrative. Jackson maintains the audiences' interest by moving between the narratives, always on the cusp of, during, or just after situations of intense and prolonged anticipation, pathos, or suspense. The use of cross cutting thusly allows Jackson to simultaneously tell the stories of the Ringbearers and the War without letting interest lapse in either through the strategic timing of the cuts and cliffhangers. As discussed earlier, Jackson makes a point of ending both the first and second films at pivotal moments in each storyline, based in alternating sequences of pathos and action. By establishing situations of unsatisfied anticipation and suspense, Jackson effectively draws the audience into the next film and compels audiences to watch the trilogy in its entirety. In order to maintain engagement during the sequences of inaction described earlier, Jackson uses the same device of unsatisfied situational suspense throughout the individual films. This is particularly notable in *The Return of the King*, as the film consistently moves between the three storylines at moments of intense buildup and tension, denying the audience a release and carrying the momentum into the next scene.

The scene that comprises Pippin's seventh stage of the hero myth – his black moment – is a beautiful illustration of the ideas laid out in the previous paragraph. This scene is comes at an immensely important point in the film. Frodo has just provided Sam with his own black moment by sending Sam away after Gollum has succeeded in poisoning Frodo against him. This scene is intensely emotional, engendering pathos from Sam's utter heartbreak and a conflicted pity for Frodo, who has clearly begun to succumb to the corrupting

power of the Ring. The film cuts from Cirith Ungol to Minas Tirith, where, upon Lord Denethor's orders, Faramir is leading a company out of the city to try and take back the city of Osgiliath from Sauron's army. As the army marches out, Pippin is in Lord Denethor's hall, acting in service as the Steward sits before a small feast.

The film moves between Faramir's company as it rides out and Pippin in Denethor's hall, where the Steward commands Pippin to sing for him as he feasts. The use of cross cutting amplifies the build up of emotion in both scenes as they advance simultaneously; as described by Linda Williams in her essay *The American Melodramatic Mode*: "'Big 'sensation' scenes, whether prolonged 'feminine' pathos or prolonged 'masculine' action, do not interrupt the logical cause-effect progress of a narrative toward conclusion. More often, it is these spectacles of pathos and action that are served by the narrative's cause-effect.'"

The scene of Pippin and Faramir's concurrent black moments encompasses this idea; Jackson used parallel editing to construct a scene that takes advantage of the sensationalism in the story and matches the emotion of the diegesis with a haunting juxtaposition of violence and beauty in the images, heightened by the evocative use of scoring. The visceral effect of the images is intensified by the narrative context of the scene; having just cut away from Sam, abandoned by Frodo (who is in turn being deceived by Gollum) to Faramir, riding out to near-certain death without the love or approval of his father, intercut with Pippin as he sits uselessly and helplessly in Denethor's hall, waiting for the battle to reach him. As the image pauses on the final shot of Sam, broken

and sobbing against dark cliff of Cirith Ungol, the score rises in haunting, melancholic notes. The profound sorrow of Sam's situation carries over through the score as the image cuts to a high angle shot that circles around a battlement of Minas Tirith. There is a jarring contrast in coloration to the scene on the stairs; the shot of Minas Tirith is brightly lit and a bit overexposed, giving a washed out, almost glowing, effect in the white rock of the city and sunlight that reflects brightly from the knights' armor and banners. The shot begins behind knights standing guard on a battlement over the path out of the city, and pans around them to reveal the columns of Faramir's company as they march to battle at Osgiliath. Jackson then cuts to a shot at street level, which moves up the body of a horse to focus on its rider to reveal him as Faramir, staring ahead into the distance with a detached, faraway look in his eyes.

This close up is followed by three shots of the crowd of women, children and the elderly standing along side the path. The women in the first shot are looking up out of frame at the passing knights with sad, solemn expressions, while the women and men in the following two shots all have averted their eyes, looking down sorrowfully. Jackson continues to cut between the crowd and the knights, using low angles and slow motion to drag out the march and highlight the grief of the people of Minas Tirith. There is a slow pan up the flower-strewn street as the horses slowly trod by, followed by a close up of a woman crying as she looks up, beyond the camera, handing flowers to a passing knight. The emotion on the woman's face is raw, as is the contrast between the softly lit faces

and flowers, the whiteness of the horses and walls, and the dark, metallic weapons and armor the knights wear.

The imagery creates haunting juxtaposition of innocence, beauty and war, reflecting the grief of Faramir's sacrifice, as well as the lingering pathos of Sam's dismissal. Most of the shots between the women in the crowd and the faces of the passing knights are framed through eye line matches, highlighting the heroic image of the knights going to battle and leaving behind those unable to fight for themselves. The women, children, and old men in the crowd serve as a representation of the emotion of Minas Tirith, and of the tragedy of war, emphasizing the sacrifice the heroes, the knights of Gondor, are making for their people, and grieving already for the losses they know will come. The score is as poignant as the images throughout this scene and adds greatly to its emotional appeal to the viewer. The orchestra hums and grows gradually, the wind section building in high notes to create a tone of visceral grief and beauty in combination with the images the score is laid over. The sorrow and suspense naturally stirred by the music of the score echoes that emphasized by the softly lit shots of the mourning crowd and slow, melancholic trod of the horses feet over streets littered with bouquets. The shots are kept tight; there is no master shot of the path or battlements in full, but a focus instead on small areas at a time, and using different angles.

In a low shot on the battlement, moving in opposition to the opening pan, Faramir marches at the head the company as Gandalf's voice calls out his name off screen. Jackson cuts to a close up on Faramir as he looks toward the sound,

followed by a shot of Gandalf making his way through the crowd to reach Faramir as he repeats his name. Jackson cuts to a wider angle of the same shot as Gandalf reaches Faramir and cuts between medium-close up shots of the two of them as they speak. Both characters' eyes are incredibly expressive, the tight framing emphasizing their wistful emotion. As Faramir refuses Gandalf's pleas not to ride out to his demise, his deliberate suppression of emotion conveys how deeply his father's words have truly struck him: "Where does my allegiance lie if not here? This is the city of the men of Númenor; I would gladly give my life to defend her beauty, her wisdom, her memory." The image cuts from Gandalf, left looking after Faramir as he passes, to a close up on Faramir, maintaining his stare, but with newly wet eyes. The wizard stares after him and calls out, "Your father loves you, Faramir--" The close ups convey indirect but clear subjectivity through the expressions and words of both Faramir and Gandalf. The final shot of the conversation is a close up on Gandalf, looking older and more concerned than he usually appears, as he continues to the departing captain, "--He will remember it before the end." The deep sadness, of the characters and the entire city, is conveyed beautifully through the soft lighting and overexposure of the scene, the score, and Faramir's deep, haunted expression as he rides to what the audience can see he has accepted will be his end. The emotive lingering shot is something Jackson uses repeatedly throughout the trilogy, allowing the emotion of the scene to set in and resonate with the audience after an action or conversation has ended, as with Pippin at the Entmoot.

The full effect of the oncoming battle manifests as the company reaches the gates of Minas Tirith. The city doors are swung open, revealing a white path leading straight ahead across the vast expanse of the Pelennor to the city of Osgiliath, set against the huge, black mountains of Mordor and a stormy sky lit up with a fiery red glow. This terrifying land of darkness lies at the end of a perfectly centered white path, the image of which is set through the aperture framing of the washed out, white stone walls of the gateway. The juxtaposition creates a jarring sensation of impending doom as Faramir leads his company out of their last vestige of safety. The shot is held for nine seconds, allowing the audience to fully take in the image of the path stretching out before the company as they march out. The symmetry and aperture highlight the terror of Mordor that has spread to Osgiliath, emphasizing the imminent threat of its expansion over not just Minas Tirith, but all of Middle-Earth. Jackson then cuts to a low, wide shot of the company in a diagonal row as they begin to cross the Pelennor; the camera moves leftwards, revealing an increasingly broad view of the city of Minas Tirith as it rises up behind the riders. The film cuts to one of the white city's battlements, lined with knights and waving flags; the camera pans in the opposite direction it had in the previous shot, furthering the development of tension and emotion throughout the scene's progression.

The film continues to evade full presentations of the company or the field, preventing the audience from orienting themselves spatially and adding to the tension built through the kineticism of the camera and riders. The film cuts to a beautiful shot of Faramir, close in the foreground as he moves up and down in

slow motion with the rhythm of his horse's gallop, with the rest of the company stretching out to his side. The image then cuts to a shot from the same angle, but framed on the torsos and legs of the horses as they increase their gait. The score builds throughout the scene, rising and falling, and overlaid with the loud sounds of the horses steps, their whinnying, and the clanking of the company's armor. The image then cuts to a wide, high angle shot on the company from behind, now full-on galloping toward Osgiliath, which grows closer in background as the camera moves down and over company as they ride, dust rising up in their wake. This is the first shot to spatially establish the company and reveal the diminishing distance between them and the walls of Osgiliath; the movement of the camera accentuates the intensity of the company's advance across the Pelennor and the ever-growing sense of anticipation and suspense as the company approaches Osgiliath, and battle.

At first only the score is audible, but the sound of horses galloping increases as the camera moves down over the company; a loud whinny carries over into the next, brief, shot of the company from a low angle, the horses and riders stretching diagonally across the frame from the right side. This cuts quickly to the same medium close up on Faramir, riding in slow motion with a determined expression showing through his helmet, and the company spanning out behind him. Jackson moves from this shot to the ruined battlement of Osgiliath, where a single, bloodied Orc steps close into the foreground of the angled frame, his heavy breathing audible over the still-building music of the score. The shot is asymmetrical; the ruins are empty except for the lone Orc

prominent in the right side of the frame, and the walls of the city are broken off and jagged. The line drawn by the top of the foremost battlement creates an oblique angle opposite to that drawn by the horses and riders two shots prior. This opposition creates further visual contrast between the two sides, good and evil, adding to the tension building in the scene.

From here, Jackson cuts to a wide shot of the advancing company and the full scale of Minas Tirith is finally visible behind them: massive, symmetrical, and white, with sunlight reflecting from the stone of the city as the knights of Gondor advance in a straight line across the golden field. The tension being built throughout the scene through the narrative and amplified by the tight framings and opposing angles, releases as the full visual of the city and the company is revealed from the perspective of the Orc. The symmetry and massive scale of this frame are particularly striking because every shot in the scene leading up to this moment has been composed with diagonal lines and continual movement, except the notable shot held on the gates of the city. These two shots give the perspectives of either side of the War, and the symmetry and beauty of the wide shot on Minas Tirith echoes the “good” the company is fighting for, especially when opposed to the menacing shadows and fiery sky that have been shown hanging over the land of the enemy.

From this wide shot, the film cuts to an extreme close up of the disfigured, lop-sided face of the Orc general, with the black and red armor of Orcs visible but out of focus behind him. The juxtaposition between the symmetrical white city of towers and balanced line of horses, and the grey and broken battlement of

Osgiliath and the prominently disfigured, asymmetrical face of the Orc continues the visual metaphor of good and evil, the moral opposition unambiguous in the imagery. Jackson cuts from the Orcs' close up to another low shot of the horses galloping, mouths frothing and hooves stomping loudly with the sounds of clashing armor as the company rides to battle. The score crescendos as the film cuts between the horses advancing, to the battlement as Orcs rise up behind the walls, and Faramir's face as he rides forward into the frame. The emotion carried by the editing adds to the growing energy and suspense of the eminent clash between the two armies; the framing used on the last shot of Faramir riding forward in the frame is composed in contrast to the shot of the Orc general as he steps forward. Through the space that lies between the Orc and Faramir has been made quite clear through the shots in between the two close ups, the reverse framing exaggerates their movement towards one another, their movements echoing the forthcoming clash of the two opposing sides of the War of the Ring.

Just as the action appears to be coming to a climax, the score rings out and falls silent and the film cuts to a wide-angle shot inside Denethor's hall. The Steward is sitting and eating at the same food-laden table from which he commanded his son to battle. Pippin is sitting to his right, in the background. The frame is tight; the table and Denethor himself take up most of the fore and middle ground, and Pippin looks particularly small behind him due to the tall black pillars and large white statues that surround him and the use of a wide lens and forced perspective. The hall, which has previously been presented

through wide shots and high angles to emphasize its vast emptiness, is now shown only in small pieces through the tight framings on Pippin and Denethor. The camera moves slowly around the space as it focuses first on Denethor, and then on Pippin, furthering the reduction of space into small areas centered on the Steward and the Hobbit.

Denethor, in his high-backed black chair and luxurious black furs and robes, looks almost a part of the hall itself, fitting in with the pillars and marble; Pippin, though dressed in the livery of the citadel, has strong eye- and backlighting, his golden hair haloed and his expressive green eyes sparkling with emotion. As Pippin tells Denethor he has “no songs for great halls and evil times,” the camera pulls into a close up on him as he says the last two words staring at Denethor, whose profile is out of focus but visible in the foreground of the shot. The loud, wet sounds of Denethor chewing heard throughout the scene emphasize his callousness toward the battle outside and the life of his son. As he responds to Pippin, Jackson cuts from a medium close up of Denethor at the table from Pippin’s point of view to a close up on Denethor’s face, red wine or juice running in a line down his chin from his mouth as he chews and commands Pippin to sing him a song. Denethor is lit only from the front right, creating noticeable contrast on his face; his eyes are shadowed to an almost lightless black, and his profile is sharply focused against the blackness of the hall behind him as he eats, the frame cutting off the top of his head.

This is juxtaposed against the soft lighting used on Pippin, which acutely highlighted his innocence and child-like appearance. Pippin looks up at Denethor

with an expression of confusion as he's told to sing; Jackson cuts from this shot of Pippin to a closer shot on Denethor's face as he bites a cherry tomato, juices and seeds splattering out of his mouth into the air and dripping down his chin. The image cuts twice more between the softly lit shot on Pippin and close ups of Denethor, in profile, as he violently tears a piece of bread with his teeth, the red stain dark down his chin. The camera returns to focus on Pippin as he begins to sing in a slow, high, and hauntingly beautiful voice.

"Home is behind, the world ahead--" Pippin's voice carries over as Jackson cuts to a low shot of the horses' legs as they gallop, the sound of their trampling feet loud under the song. This is followed quickly by an equally tight shot of the horses' heads and torsos of the knights, their heads cut off by the top of the frame. As earlier in the scene, Jackson shows only small pieces of the greater picture, generating tension through intercutting and the use of slow motion on the advancing company. We as an audience cannot orient ourselves spatially or know how close to Osgiliath, and battle, the company is getting. The rhythm of these cuts creates a building of beats, each cut revealing new details of the scene and building towards the moment the entire picture will be made clear, all overlaid with the visceral emotion of Pippin's singing.

"And there are many paths to tread--" The intense energy from the slowed down movement of the horses galloping and the crowded movement of their heads being thrown back as they ride is heightened by the loud sound of galloping and whinnying, meshing with the clanking of the knights' armor as they move up and down in slow motion with the gallop of their horses as

Pippin's song pauses for a breath. As he starts again, Jackson cuts from the same shot on the battlement of Osgiliath as earlier in the scene, but now there are many more Orcs lining the walls. The score is silent, but the sound of steps and crunching rock as the Orcs stand is audible under Pippin's voice as he sings. Jackson cuts back to the a bright shot on the advancing company in an oblique line across the frame, the sounds of horses breathing and galloping again loud under the song, presenting the sound in the same fractured manner as the images.

Jackson then cuts back to the battlement, now swarming with Orcs, the bloodied Orc general in sharp focus in the foreground. The suspense built by this cross cutting is immense; the difference in scale between the wide shot of Osgiliath with deep staging to highlight the multitude of Orcs in the dark and ruined city clashes powerfully against the kinetic energy wrought by the oncoming line of Faramir's company, the grass and sky around them bright and overexposed, casting a glowing light off the horses and armor as they ride. The visual contrast between the two sides is jarring, and aided by the silence of Osgiliath in opposition to the sound of the horses galloping, all overlaid by the poignant sound of Pippin's voice as he sings. As the powerful tension between the armies continues to swell, Jackson cuts to a straight on, low angle close up on Denethor as he shovels meat wetly into his mouth, staring blankly downwards and to the side.

"Through shadow, to the edge of night-- " Jackson cuts from Denethor to Faramir, drawing his sword and opening his mouth in a battle cry unheard, back

to a close up on Pippin singing, eyes cast downward, as the camera moves around him, candles flickering in the background as he draws out the notes.

“Until the stars are all aligned-- ” A high angle tracking shot from above and behind the company, finally revealing their position in the Pelennor as the advance upon Osgiliath, the camera moving with them toward the smoky, dark city; the sounds of the stampeding horses is muted but audience beneath Pippin’s voice. In a series of fast cuts, Jackson moves between shots of the Orcs as they raise their bows, Faramir as he raises his sword and shouts silently.

“Mist and shadow, cloud and shade-- ” The fast cutting continues with a shot of Denethor’s hands as he rips apart a piece of meat with a sickening crack, and then a low angle on the horses as they gallop again in slow motion, the noises of their stomping and snorting growing in timbre. He then cuts quickly to a close up on an Orc drawing a bow, and pauses on an extreme close up on the arrow point, as Pippin’s voice arcs with “shade,” drawing the word out; the softness of his voice creates a natural juxtaposition with the violent image of the arrow point. As Pippin holds the note, the image cuts to Denethor in profile, biting down on the torn piece meat, then to a straight on shot of a different Orc with an arrow notched.

“All shall fade—” The image moves back to a low, slow motion shot of the horses and then to a close up on Faramir as he rides forward into the frame in slow motion, the shot centered on his eyes. A high ringing from the score comes in under Pippin’s voice with this shot of Faramir, bringing the swell of suspense to a climax as the image returns to the Hobbit.

“All shall--” Jackson quickly cuts back to a close up on the disfigured Orc general seen earlier as he silently commands his army to fire. This shot is followed by fast montage of Orcs releasing arrows, and then an extreme close up on Denethor’s mouth. As the song pauses, the noise of his chewing is grotesquely loud and red liquid bubbles from his mouth and runs down his chin, a painfully obvious allegory for the blood of Gondor that is spilling in battle.

“--Fade.” As Pippin sings the final line of the song, Jackson cuts back to the close up on the hobbit, as the score fades in Jackson cuts to Pippin’s POV on Denethor as he bites again, and back to Pippin as he closes his eyes, a single tear rolling down his cheek. Jackson’s mastery of sound in this scene is incredible; the omission of sounds generated by characters, such as Faramir’s battle cry or the Orc general’s command to fire, in favor of Pippin’s song and the sounds of horses and weapons creates a palpable tension and extraordinary emotion. The haunting words and mournful tone of Pippin’s song are laid powerfully over the violent, spectacular images to emphasize the disquieting emotions that have been built up throughout the scene. The combatant layering of Pippin’s song and the subdued battle sounds match the contrast in the gorgeously composed, softly lit slow motion shots and those of the Orcs, both highlighting the increasingly imminent threat of violence and brutality in the battle to come.

The shots of Denethor tearing into food with a line of what clearly is meant to resemble blood dripping down his chin convey the cruelty and callousness with which he treats his son’s sacrifice, and those of the men he leads. The interjection of these images of Denethor also works to further the

suspense wrought by the intercut shots of the battlement at Osgiliath and the advancing army. The choice to omit the actual battle after so much build up is incredibly unusual and extraordinarily powerful after dedicating three minutes to steadily establish emotion and suspense. The use of cross cutting and sound create a visceral crescendo of chilling suspense and deep pathos, and instead of satisfying the expectations set up through the opposition of Faramir and the Orc, Jackson subverts them, focusing on the reactions to violence rather than the violent act itself: a close up on Denethor's mouth immediately follows the shot of the Orcs releasing their arrows. The blood red stain stands out starkly against the pale of Denethor's face as juice trickles down his chin, bringing the battle to a bloody climax without any actual images of fighting.

By representing the violence and death of battle inside the halls of Minas Tirith instead of actually showing the fighting commence at Osgiliath, Jackson destabilizes the progression of the audience's emotion throughout the charge and the battle. The anticipation and expectations of action built by the intercut shots of horses, knights, and Orcs, are undercut by the symbolic presentation of the consequences of war instead of battle itself-- the great sorrow of the city in Pippin, and the cold, cruel bloodshed in Denethor. The omission of the battle at Osgiliath forces the audience to imagine it for themselves, filling in the blanks in the off-screen action with their own guesses at what's happening. This undermining of the audience's expectations also redirects the tension developed throughout the scene from a prolonged sequence of action to one of pathos; the last shot of the scene lingers on Pippin as a single tear rolls down his cheek and

he drops his gaze to the floor in sorrow. His reaction and clear anguish are driven home through the use of song and score, the words and tone of his song matching that of the diegesis and setting the melancholic tone.

Through his deft manipulation of stylistic and narrative devices, Jackson endowed the scene with thrilling sensationalism and spectacle, appealing to audiences of the cinema of attractions and effects as well as those more interested in the pathos and character development illustrated in the narrative. The spectacle works with the narrative instead of against it, furthering the emotions wrought by the characters' circumstances and portraying Faramir's ride out through a series of evocative shots that are built through fragmented spaces and frequent camera movement to disorient the audience, increasing the suspense and tension they feel as a result of the events of the narrative. Sequences such as this demonstrate Jackson's skill as a filmmaker by revealing the intention behind the composition of each shot through the successful evocation of specific reactions and emotions, such as suspense or pathos.

The effort Jackson made to appeal to audiences of popular cinema is evident in these spectacular sequences and his inclusion of the romantic subplot, increasing the trilogy's relevance and significance within cinematic history by broadening its accessibility far beyond fans of fantasy and Tolkien. Aragorn and Arwen's love story gave the films a romantic hook for popular audiences to latch on to and identify with throughout the trilogy; their relationship provides a source of empathy and pathos that lasts arcs across all three films and advances the overarching narrative at noteworthy points in Aragorn's hero journey. The

level of critical and commercial acclaim generated by Jackson's trilogy is a testament to his prowess in balancing Tolkien's mythopoeia with conventions of melodrama and popular cinema to create a trilogy that engaged audiences of all ages and interests.

CONCLUSION

Through his epic film trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, Peter Jackson expanded a fantasy adaptation far beyond its niche fan base through a skillful combination of conventions and devices from various cinematic tendencies and genres, illustrating a deep understanding of both narrative structure and formal style. Jackson demonstrates a mastery of cross cutting, and tonal correspondence between narrative and style, using the mise-en-scene and score to advance and enhance the effect of the narrative. The *Lord* trilogy employs tools and traditions of melodrama, action-adventure, comedy, and horror to creating a series of films that captivated and delighted audiences of popular cinema and diehard fantasy fans alike. The lessons we can learn from Jackson's adaptation similarly span a wide variety of genres and tendencies, and the influence of the trilogy can be seen in contemporary films and television shows, now over a decade after the release of the last film.

Throughout the process of adapting a novel to cinema, there are always challenges that must be overcome by the filmmakers; there are inherent, unique qualities of both literature and film that do not easily translate from one to the other. Characterizations, descriptions, and pacing can all present obstacles in cinematic realization. The immensity and specificity of Tolkien's mythopoeia pushes these obstacles to a new level, as not only did Jackson have to restructure the story to fit within a reasonable running time, he had to concisely establish a comprehensible diegetic world for audiences unfamiliar with Tolkien's book. There are characters and events that would require fairly long, complicated

portrayals and explanations, such as Tom Bombadil and the Barrow-Wight scene, that Jackson had to decide if and how to address. As with the production process of any adaptation, there are decisions such as these that force the filmmaker into a position of adhering to the book as closely as possible without sacrificing the dynamism of the film. For Peter Jackson and his team, these challenges were complicated by the fact that Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings* book have an incredibly dedicated fan base; any attempt to adapt the film successfully would have to simultaneously please these fans while broadening the accessibility of the story to increase its popular and critical appeal.

In order to accomplish this, Jackson had to establish the world of Middle-Earth and the most basic information of the diegesis within the first few minutes of the film to immerse the audience within Tolkien's mythopoeia and make them care about the characters and their goals. As discussed in the first chapter, the prologue of *The Fellowship of the Ring* accomplishes this initial immersion through a combination of narrative and formal devices; the flashbacks narrated by Lady Galadriel introduce the audience to the trilogy with a captivating visualization of the history of the Ring, and clearly establish the dramatic stakes of the narrative, foreshadowing obstacles that the Fellowship will face over the course of the trilogy. The rich realization of Middle-Earth places the story as more historical fiction than fantasy, humanizing the characters and making them more relatable and sympathetic to the audience, while concurrently dehumanizing the enemy (Sauron and the Orcs) so as to negate any sympathy the audience might feel for them. The filmmakers' meticulous attention to detail

in settings, props, and costuming allow the audience to fully immerse themselves in Middle-Earth, steeping the film in its own unique sense of realism. This rich portrayal of Middle-Earth worked to appease fans who might have been displeased with some of Jackson's alterations to the narrative; the filmmakers also communicated with fan websites and organizations and worked with artists who had been doing illustrations for *The Lord of the Rings* for decades in order to make the films as attractive to Tolkien fans as possible.

To broad the appeal and accessibility of his trilogy beyond those fans, Jackson threaded elements of melodrama throughout the three films, in sequences of both action and pathos, relying alternatively on situational suspense and anticipation, and character-driven moments of intimate emotionality. The journeys of Sam, Frodo, Merry, Pippin, and Aragorn have been outlined through the lens of the hero myth in the previous chapters, and analysis of Jackson's interpretation and portrayal of their experiences reveals a discernable intention to heighten and underscore the dramatic stakes of the films through both narrative and stylistic devices. Jackson's decision to "interleave" the plotlines of the War of the Ring and the Ringbearers journey goes against Tolkien's advice for adaptation, but succeeds through his employment of cross cutting. Though Tolkien suggested a film that alternated between perspectives on the action would confuse the viewer, Jackson used clearly differentiated patterns of mise-en-scene across the distinct settings and plotlines so the audience can easily orient themselves with each cut between the narratives. The repetition of prominent melodies in the score, such as those of

the Shire and of Mordor, work with these visual patterns to recall emotion from earlier scenes in the trilogy at moments of intense action and character development. Jackson also employs parallel editing within individual melodramatic situations, prolonging the build up to a final release shot that is, more often than not, omitted in order to redirect the tension and emotion as the film cuts to a different plot line.

The interplay of spectacle and narrative throughout the trilogy demonstrate Jackson's ability to pull aspects of different genres and tendencies together to create shots and scenes that appeal to audiences on multiple, complimentary levels. The narratives of the Ringbearers and the War of the Ring are advanced and augmented by the more spectacular scenes that bring in appeal of what Gunning's called the "cinema of attractions" with captivating settings, cinematography and CGI. Sequences such as the lighting of the Beacons of Gondor in *The Return of the King* are demonstrations of how narrative and visual effects can work together in shots that both have direct, significant consequences for the narrative (Rohan answering Gondor's call for aid). The initial shot of Pippin igniting the first Beacon is followed by a series of soaring helicopter shots. The camera moves continually, circling and sailing over the impressive mountain ranges the Beacons sit atop as they blossom into flame, one after the other. The drama of the Beacon's significance is reflected by the massive snow-capped mountains, rising majestically through a sea of clouds, and topped by the fiery glow of the Beacons; the rising music of the score matches the visceral beauty of the landscape, which intensifies as the sun sets and the

skies darken to rich blues making the fiery Beacons stand out ever more brightly, a reflection of the growing hope their fires bring to the fight the darkness enveloping Gondor.

The contest between the spreading darkness of Mordor and the “light” of the good side is continually presented by the pure moral good of Sam’s heroism, and Frodo’s tragic plight underscores the juxtaposition of Sam and the evil of the Ring. Jackson manipulates conventions of melodrama and portrayals of moral legitimacy to emphasize this theme in Sam, again directing audiences’ emotional reactions through both narrative and formal devices, as discussed in the third chapter. The contrast is most deeply embedded within the narrative’s characterization of Sam, but the score is an incredibly influential device in directing the audiences’ emotions during Sam’s most powerful scenes, such as his speech at the end of *The Two Towers*, analyzed in the third chapter. The story of *The Lord of the Rings* fits neatly within Peter Brooks’ contention that all melodramas are centered on a quest for moral legitimacy; the decision to end the trilogy with the “happily ever after” of Sam’s story both represents Tolkien’s assertion that he is the chief hero and the reward that is granted to those who live their lives by a code of proper morality.

Tolkien cites the events of the Ringbearers to be the heart of his story, but the journeys of all four Hobbits play almost equally significant roles within the film. Merry and Pippin act as surrogates for the audience throughout the trilogy, bringing us into and through the action from an equally uninformed position compared to the rest of the Fellowship and Company. Merry and Pippin

gradually transition from innocent by-standers to active participants in the War, establishing themselves as soldiers and heroes by the end of the trilogy. As the main Ringbearer, it goes without saying Frodo has, superficially, the most important role in the story, but it is a role that is often not fully understood. Frodo doesn't simply fail at the end of the quest, he knowingly becomes a sacrifice made for the greater good, allowing himself to eventually fall victim to the Ring in order to prevent anyone else from ever suffering the same fate. The tragedy of his story a significant source of pathos throughout the trilogy and again works to highlight the heroism of Sam, who continually enables Frodo to carry on and provides the audience with a continual perspective of hope and inspiration to contrast Frodo's deepening despair. Each of the four Hobbits provides the film with a source of pathos and love that the audience can relate to and identify with, expanding the accessibility of the characters beyond those fans familiar with Tolkien's work and compelling their narrative with emotional momentum.

The alterations to the characterizations and stories of the Hobbits highlight again how Jackson decisively balanced appeals to Tolkien fans and audiences of popular cinema throughout his adaptation progress. The inclusion of romantic subplots, throughout the trilogy with Aragorn and Arwen, and in the traditional "happily ever after" ending with Sam and Rosie, functions to increase *Lord's* appeal to commercial audiences, while still working within Tolkien's mythopoeia. Jackson's changes to Arwen and Aragorn's story do not adversely affect the portrayal of their experiences, but rather heightens the dramatic

stakes of both their relationship and the fate of the War. For example, Jackson's decision to tie Arwen's life to the fate of the Ring provided Aragorn with the final incentive to accept his place as the King of the West when Lord Elrond brings him Andúril in *The Return of the King*. The added emotion of their love story combines with the tension that has built throughout the trilogy as he wrestled with his fate, culminating in an extraordinarily expressive and thrilling scene.

The scene of Andúril's reveal also illustrates one of the most prominent devices the screenwriters used in restructuring the *Lord* story cinematically, the raising of questions that are deliberately left unanswered to prolong and dramatize the emotional tension of the narrative-- Will Aragorn stop doubting himself and rise to the crown? What will the consequences of Arwen's departure be for the War of the Ring and for Aragorn? -- Boyens and Walsh establish these questions and expectations through each film, resolving only a few and leaving to dangle, stirring further suspense and increasing our desire to see the answer unfold. This teasing of anticipation and satisfaction heightens the suspense and engagement of the narrative, delaying the gratification until later in the film or trilogy so the reveal will have a stronger emotional impact on the audience.

The reflection of narrative theme through mise-en-scene, scoring and camera movement throughout the trilogy enhances the films' build up of emotional effects; the shots' formal aspects grow increasingly stylized during scenes of particular narrative tension or significance, amplifying the emotional affect of the diegesis and stirring visceral reactions through the layered use of image and score. In addition to repeating melodies within the score to evoke

emotions of past sequences, Jackson establishes patterns of mise-en-scene and camera movement across the trilogy to both summon emotion from earlier scenes and stir new reactions in situations of melodramatic action and pathos. Jackson uses a shaky camera repeatedly during many scenes of danger or suspense to heighten the tension built through the narrative, and he consistently cuts to close ups on characters' eyes and faces during pivotal moments for them personally and within the overarching narrative. The patterned usage of these formal devices also functions to draw parallels between different characters in moments of concurrent despondency or triumph, as with the shots of Sam, Pippin and Faramir's black moments and the reactions of the Ringbearers and Company, respectively, during the fallout from the destruction of the Ring, both analyzed in the fifth chapter. The corresponding emotional experiences of the characters helps to make the intricate narrative more comprehensible; the spatial and temporal shifts between the plotlines are carried by the fluid emotional tone and aided by the score to create parallels within the divergent narratives of the protagonists.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy demonstrates Jackson's adept understanding and employment of cinematic devices and his analytical proficiency in establishing themes and tone through mise-en-scene, editing, and camera movement. The narrative of each film is developed through a three-act structure, and the three installments of the trilogy naturally make up the acts of the overarching narrative. Jackson carefully structured the character arcs of the five protagonists to grow and develop across the trilogy, emphasizing their

concurrent transitions through the hero myths by drawing parallels through formal devices such as cross cutting, close ups, and scoring. The fluctuation between moments of action and pathos carries the narrative's momentum across the multiple plotlines after the Fellowship divides, and the meticulous detail put into each and every shot pays off in how deeply we as an audience are pulled into the richly realized diegetic world and brought to care about each of the characters and their goals. The success of Jackson's trilogy can be attributed primarily to this ability to enthrall the audience and maintain their captivation, even over the course of almost twelve hours of film, due to the devotion Jackson and his team put into every aspect of adaptation and visualization of the story.

The Lord of the Rings stands out within a larger trend in contemporary cinema and the industry, a rise of fantasy adaptations and the epic trilogies. Since the time of the release of the *Lord* trilogy in the early 2000s, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of films adapted from fantasy books, and many of these adaptations come in multi-part series, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, or *The Hunger Games* series, which is still in production. *The Return of the King* was the first fantasy film to ever win the Academy Award for Best Picture, elevating the genre and opening the doors for a new wave of melodramatic fantasy adaptations. Peter Jackson's new series of films based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* is the most obvious example of *Lord's* influence, as the project was a direct product of the trilogy's success, but it is not the only reflection of Jackson's trilogy in contemporary cinemas.

The early 2000s were an influential time in recent cinematic history—in addition to the *Spider-Man* and *The Lord of the Rings* franchises, the highly anticipated *Harry Potter* films began debuting in 2001 and the last installment was released in 2011. While the first installments of the *Harry Potter* films were in production and then theatres at the same time as *The Lord of the Rings*, the films released after 2005, starting with *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, reflect a clear influence by Jackson’s trilogy. As the story of *Harry Potter* grew more mature with the aging characters, the films became more deeply steeped in melodramatic sequences of action and pathos, and the later films’ usage of CGI and aerial shots is reminiscent of the spectacular visuals in the *Lord* films. The layering of a personal, character-based narrative within an overarching story of good versus evil also reflects a *Lord*-like aesthetic, though the diegetic world of *Harry Potter* is far less fantastical than that of Jackson’s trilogy.

The Chronicles of Narnia, *Eragon*, *How to Train Your Dragon*, and *Game of Thrones* were all adapted from book series and achieved success through narrative and formal devices and techniques pioneered by Jackson’s adaptation of Tolkien’s high fantasy epic. These films (and show) are all set in worlds other than our Earth, falling into the narrative genre Tolkien coined as “mythopoeia,” works of fiction set within an invented mythology. The aforementioned works of cinema all, to varying extents, follow Jackson’s example in crafting a richly detailed realization of their unique worlds and mythologies, allowing each film to establish a comprehensible reality within their own contexts. Before Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings*, these types of films would have had a hard time getting

past production—there was not thought to be a viable commercial audience for fantasy cinema, as fandom had always been condensed to niche populations. *Lord's* critical and commercial achievement gave producers a newfound interest in the mythopoeia genre, and the wave of fantasy films sparked by Jackson's trilogy is still gaining momentum, as *Game of Thrones* has won ten Emmy Awards so far and continues to grow in popularity as the show approaches the start of its fourth season. The influence of *The Lord of the Rings* present in *Game of Thrones* is extensive; the books the show is based on, *A Song and Fire and Ice* by George R.R. Martin, themselves show a Tolkienian influence, and the television show adapted by HBO reflects the aesthetic of Jackson's *Lord* trilogy, captivating audiences with layered sentiment and spectacle through a melodramatized fantasy epic.

Further research and analysis is needed to delve into the influence of *The Lord of the Rings* on cinema over the last fifteen years; the examples listed above certainly reflect lessons the trilogy demonstrates in both formal and narrative aspects of filmmaking, but exactly how these lessons are applied needs additional investigation before any concrete conclusions can be drawn. However, as demonstrated and supported throughout the six chapters of this thesis, there can be no doubt that Peter Jackson established himself as a master filmmaker through his adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, creating three films that can stand alone or work together as an illustration of the emotionally thrilling and visually stunning cinema that results from adroit interweaving of sentiment and spectacle.

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