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Stefanie Johnstone – Deakin University

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## More than Three Times: *The Lord of The Rings* and the Fundamental Structure of the Trilogy Form

Stefanie JOHNSTONE

Deakin University

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is not a trilogy. It is a three-volume novel, written with a single narrative that is split into three volumes for publication purposes (Anderson xi; Tolkien 1981:161). Conversely, Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* film adaptations are a trilogy. But just what *is* a trilogy? Do we have a common understanding of its fundamental structure? The trilogy is an old storytelling form, its earliest known example dates back to Ancient Greece. Today numerous trilogies are produced in films and genre fiction. Despite its age and ubiquity, the form's structure has yet to be described or distinguished from other multi-text narratives, such as the three-volume novel, sequels, or series. Claire Perkins and Constantine Verevis champion a nominative approach to the form; they note that the "trilogy precisely demonstrates the conflicting impulses toward limitation and multiplication that characterises the field. The nomination distinguishes and limits a set of films in a manner that is more precise than either 'sequel' or 'series'" (3-4). Elsewhere, serial studies have attempted to define trilogy against other forms, but some are hesitant to make distinctions (Kelleter 129, Brinker 66) because new works contradict any rigid designations, or they do not define seriality as a narrative structure (Mittell, 2018:226). For Thompson, referring to the difference between serial and sequel, such distinctions are not trivial (2003:100) and this is true, particularly for filmmakers. It is important to know what the structural differences are between forms as "you have to know everything about the structure in order to move beyond it" (Dancyger and Rush, 1). A broad definition of the trilogy form is that it is constituted by the three individual texts

and a fourth overarching text. In this paper, I offer a new structural definition of trilogy that expands beyond the assumption of the number three and challenges the notion that the storytelling potential solely resides in its ability to expand a story beyond the bounds of a single text. I focus on the difference between a three-volume novel and trilogy using a single case study: *The Lord of the Rings*.

## Defining the trilogy

How can we define the trilogy form such that we also describe its fundamental structure? A very broad definition of a trilogy is a group of three related works. Like the three-volume novel, length is a feature. Perkins and Verevis note that trilogy can be used “to evade the time constraints of a standard feature film” (9). Alan Sommerstein holds that “trilogy, like epic, can stretch out its action” (39). However, both do not acknowledge the uniqueness of the trilogy compared to other tri-part forms and, in doing so, fail to elucidate its unique storytelling potential.

What makes this form distinct from other tripartite forms is its connective aspect, which can be viewed as a distinct structure in and of itself. Trilogy is at once three individual narratives that are connected by a fourth narrative. These represent Perkins and Verevis’ multiplication and limitation, respectively. The form is created by the dynamic interaction between the different structures. There are trilogies that are connected by other means, such as author, theme or technique, but these are beyond the scope of this paper.

Carolyn Jess-Cooke tacitly acknowledges this structure in stating that “the trilogy is often convoluted by the issue of balancing the films’ singular three-act structure with the larger three-acts of the trilogy” (5). Henderson uses terms derived from formalism, the “macro-syuzhet” and the “macro-fabula”, by which he means the individual and overarching structure, respectively (112). Tally notes that “a *trilogy*, properly speaking,

would require three related books or films that tell a single overarching story, but with the proviso that each book would also have to be 'intelligible on its own', to use Tolkien's language" (176).

### **The three-volume novel**

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* exemplifies that what is called a trilogy may not be structured as one. But why does this distinction matter? For a creative practitioner, there are few resources on developing a novel series and trilogy. What resources there are reside online, and this advice often uses Tolkien's work as the main example for explaining trilogy structure (Dramatica, Keifer, Reedsy). However, there are key structural differences between the publishing format and the trilogy form. The first step in understanding these is to define and outline the provenance of each briefly.

The three-volume novel is a publishing format where a single novel is split into three. It was first popularised as a mode of production during the nineteenth century (Bassett 61). Novels were expensive to print and splitting a single novel into three parts allowed costs to be recuperated quicker and easier than publishing the entire novel (Bassett 61). After a time, "the dominant three-decker lending-library format was replaced by a cheaper one-volume format, and the modification of the 'inner form' of the novel itself" (Buurma 90). The difference between a three-volume novel as a *format* and the trilogy as a *form* is vital for creators to understand. The trilogy as a three-volume novel format is to think of the individual works as defined by their page length rather than narrative structures.

### **Provenance of Tolkien's novel**

Allen and Unwin suggested reviving the publishing format for Tolkien's work during the post-WWII paper shortages, and splitting the novel based on length, rather than narrative

structure, or as Mittell terms it “operational seriality” in his book chapter of the same name (2018:226). The author did not want to publish *The Lord of the Rings* as a three-volume novel. His letters detail his failed attempt to change publishers, from Allen and Unwin to Collins, to ensure it would be published as a single novel together with the second novel in the duology – *The Silmarillion*.

But the whole Saga of the Three Jewels and the Rings of Power has only one nature; division into two parts (each about 600,000 words): *The Silmarillion* and other legends; and *The Lord of the Rings*. The Latter is as indivisible and unified as I could make it. (161)

Tolkien continues:

It is, of course, divided into sections for narrative purposes (six of them) and two or three of these, which are more or less equal length, could be bound separately, but they are not in any sense self-contained. (161)

Tolkien was, however, unsuccessful. He stayed with Allen and Unwin and agreed to publish the work as a three-volume novel. This decision, Tally stresses, “has had lasting effects on both the text and its readers” (184). He discusses how this initial publishing format led to three *Lord of the Rings* films and three *The Hobbit* films. Yet, he does not discuss the specific additions, deletions, and alterations to *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy that render it distinct from the novel. Tolkien’s novel is structured using six “books,” two per novel volume and this is why the novel endures as a three-volume work. The same cannot be said for other novels which had a similar split, such as Shea and Wilson’s *Illuminatus! Trilogy* and Murakami’s *1Q84*, that are both now published without Mittell’s “gaps” (2018:229).

The internal structures of *The Lord of the Rings* novel are useful to understand the film adaptation. Jackson’s *The Two Towers* uses six of the eleven chapters from Book III and seven of the ten chapters from Book IV. The majority of the content is adapted in *The Return of the King*, with a single chapter, “The Departure of Boromir”, moved to *The Fellowship of the Ring*. These alterations are one example of the difference between the

novel format and trilogy form. A three-part split does not simply achieve a trilogy and changes to the narrative structure are required to facilitate the transformation.

### The Lord of the Rings adaptation

Peter Jackson's adaptation tells the same story of Tolkien's work with relatively few additions or deletions (to use Bluestone's terms). However, there are prominent deletions, plus the significant rearrangement of plot-points compared to the novel structure, demonstrating what trilogy structure entails. Bluestone's terms neatly encapsulate the key changes made to the story that altered a tri-part publishing format into a trilogy narrative form. In her book on the franchise, Thompson notes that Jackson "has continued to insist that, like Tolkien's novel, his version is one story told serially" (*Frodo Franchise*: 29). However, Jackson and his colleagues use rearrangements, additions, and deletions to alter *The Lord of the Rings* from a three-volume novel to a trilogy. Effectively, the adaptation creates three films with individual narratives from what was a single narrative. The single narrative remains within the adaptation as the fourth connecting structure. These changes include creating new character journeys, such as Aragorn's journey in *The Two Towers* and rearranging the plots from the last two novel volumes into two new narratives.

This case study takes the much-used fidelity approach and uses it to ask an important question: what can the differences between the films and novel tell us about the trilogy form? For Leitch, a "fidelity" understanding of *The Lord of the Rings* would be impossible:

the standard tactics of adaptation – selecting some obligatory speeches, characters, scenes, and plotlines and dropping others; compressing or combining several characters or scenes into one; streamlining the narrative by eliminating digressive episodes ... are clearly inadequate. (129)

However, this paper does not intend to discuss the inability of adaptation to remain faithful to the original work but rather to use these differences in telling the same story to understand how a trilogy can be structured from a single story. This analysis is limited to changes to the story structure, as opposed to aesthetic changes or heightened dramatic moments, such as the horrification or heightened monster interactions and changes to Gandalf's character, as Thompson describes (*Frodo Franchise*, 49–50). Additionally, my analysis is limited to the narrative choices made by the filmmakers rather than the franchising aspects of the films' development.<sup>1</sup>

### ***The Fellowship of the Ring***

Of Bluestone's three aspects to adaptation, deletion is the most often used to describe the first film in this transformation from a three-volume novel to trilogy. Key characters are not included, such as Tom Bombadil and the elf Glorfindel. The Bombadil chapters are omitted entirely and Arwen replaces Glorfindel's ride with Frodo to Rivendell. These changes are the ones most often remarked upon by the fans. However, other subtle changes from the novel to the film are key to creating an individual narrative of the film and the two films that follow. Namely, changing the film to be more "Frodo-centric", a term borrowed from Paxson (85), and moving Boromir's death from Tolkien's *The Two Towers* volume to *The Fellowship of the Ring* film. In "From Book to Film", screenwriters Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens and Peter Jackson note "the first one did not work until they focused on Frodo's point-of-view" (Jackson). Minor changes in the film evidence this change in perspective. In the film's opening sequence, Frodo and Gandalf are introduced before Bilbo. The Council of Elrond transforms from a lengthy discussion on the History of the Ring and Middle-earth to a key turning point in Frodo's journey. Amid the cacophony of arguing Elves, Men and Dwarves, Frodo exclaims, "I will take it," and volunteers to take

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent overview of this part of the filmmaking process, see Thompson's *Frodo Franchise*.

the Ring to Mordor. Sam, Merry and Pippin burst in soon after and shout that they are “coming too”. As I will detail later, this becomes the midpoint of the film and the inciting incident of the fourth text. Additionally, in the film, Frodo is given more agency and choice than in the novel. He makes the decision to take the path through the Mines of Moria and he solves the riddle to open the door to the mine. In the book, Gandalf performs both actions.

In Syd Field’s influential book, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, he describes *The Lord of the Rings* film character plotting as such:

In *The Lord of the Rings*, do you know who the main character is? Is it Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, or Aragorn? Or is it all of them. If you aren’t sure, just ask yourself: Who is the story about? In *The Lord of the Rings*, you could say, with good cause, that Aragorn is the main character because he leads the Fellowship, makes the decisions, and becomes the king. But take away all the trappings and the story is really about returning the ring to its place of origin, Mount Doom, so it can be destroyed. That is what the story is about; therefore, Frodo is the main character. (47)

Field conflates the fourth plot, the destruction of The Ring, with the plot of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. This designation might seem like a slight distinction, but Field’s argument that only Frodo is the main character of the trilogy discounts the structural changes that the filmmakers made to *The Two Towers*, such as featuring Aragorn as the main character as opposed to Frodo. That said, Field’s manner of considering or conflating the main character of *The Fellowship of the Ring* as the main character of all structures within the trilogy is to think of the films as a three-volume novel. He does not reckon with a change in the story structure from a single story into a trilogy. As a trilogy, the decision to make Frodo the centre of the first film influences the structure of the other two films.

Nevertheless, Field’s analysis of the three-act structure of *The Fellowship of the Ring* provides a departure point from which to discuss the narrative arrangement or plotting of the trilogy, which is useful for creators or critics to understand the DNA of the form. Field’s model of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2006:48) offers a concrete example of

Jess-Cooke's assertions on the act structures within trilogy (5) and provides a diagram through which the distinct structures can be visualised. Field's paradigm is not without its critics, Thompson is critical of the timings and suggests a four-act structure, splitting the second act into two (27) and Dancyger and Rush offer other ways to structure a screenplay. I do not suggest that the filmmakers use this structure, nor do I wish to imply that using the three-act paradigm is the only way to structure a narrative trilogy. Indeed, the filmmakers' approach is more akin to a sequence model, as Gulino suggests (199). In recognition of the limitations of the three-act structure, in my analysis of *The Two Towers* I also consider the addition of a hero's journey for Aragorn's character.

In Figure 1 below, I have used close readings of the film and novel volume and screenplays to map the first film using the three-act structure. I follow Field's structure for the most part, except that I include a midpoint as it serves an important function in distinguishing the first film's narrative structure from the overarching fourth narrative structure. Therefore, Field is a model through which to visualise the distinct and interacting structures within a trilogy and I counter his implied, and others' explicit assertions that there is nothing more to trilogy beyond the number three.

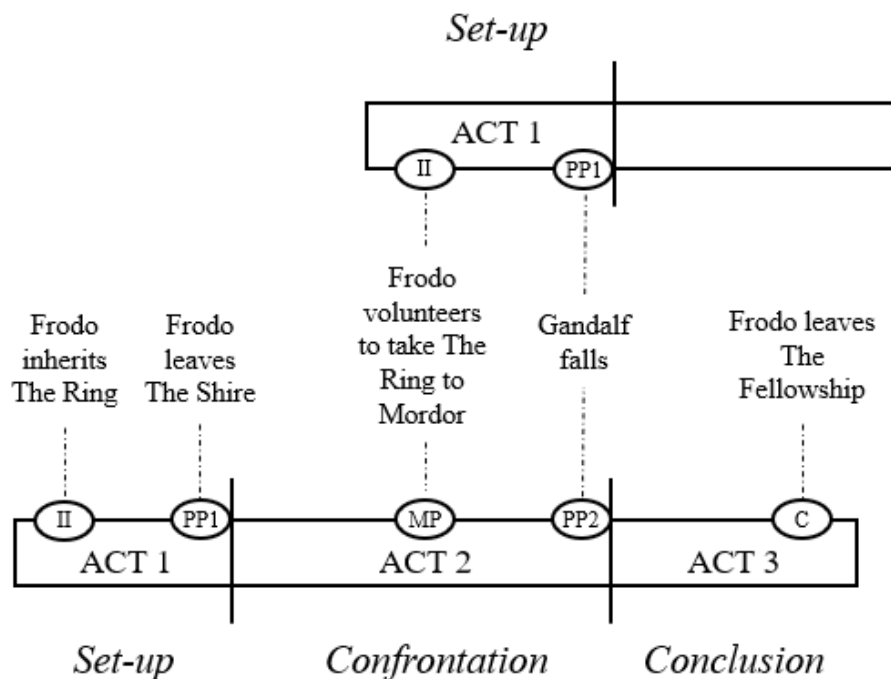


Fig 1.

Three-

act structures of *The Fellowship of the Ring*

For Field, the inciting incident is the film's prologue. This seven-minute prologue voiced by Galadriel relates some of the histories of the One Ring and Middle-earth. Conversely, this prologue is a very long narrative hook and the inciting incident (II), and the true beginning of the film is when Bilbo passes the Ring onto Frodo.

The prologue nevertheless serves an important function in the film and hence transforms it into a trilogy. Gandalf's battle with the Balrog forms the prologue to *The Two Towers*, the action of which culminates in three confrontations: Helm's Deep, Isengard, and Frodo and Sam at Osgiliath. Likewise, *The Return of the King* features the sequence of Sméagol murdering his friend for the Ring and becoming Gollum, which foreshadows Frodo succumbing to the power of the Ring and refusing to destroy it. Therefore, the prologues serve to underline an important facet of this adaptation from single narrative to four interlocking narratives.

I agree with Field that the first plot-point (PP1) is when the Hobbits leave The Shire. However, the film's midpoint, the Council of Elrond, with Frodo agreeing to take the One Ring to Mordor, is not considered in Field's structure. Partially due to the original Book I and Book II split in Tolkien's novel, the midpoint of the film version of *The Fellowship of the Ring* – the point on which the narrative hinges – can also be said to form the inciting incident of the trilogy's fourth narrative structure. These differences are subtle when considered in the first film, because Frodo's journey to Rivendell and the journey to Mordor are closely aligned. However, in the latter two films, the fourth structure will function as a subplot of *The Two Towers* and then forms the second climax in the latter half of *The Return of the King*.

The midpoint of the first film becomes the inciting incident of the fourth structure: Frodo's decision to take the One Ring to Mount Doom to destroy it. This fourth structure highlights that narrative plot-points in a trilogy can take on different meanings, depending on the structure in which the plot-point is acting. If Frodo's volunteering is part of the Fellowship, it is the midpoint. If it is considered as part of the fourth structure, it becomes the inciting incident. Not all plot-points or scenes in an individual film will be part of the fourth structure. This is a demonstration of the dynamic interplay between the individual structures and the fourth narrative. It also shows that the fourth narrative structure is distinct from the entire trilogy. The fourth structure here begins at the midpoint of the first film. Therefore, it does not span the entire length of the trilogy. It is an indication of the fourth narrative structure's distinction from the trilogy as a whole.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the distinction between the first and fourth structures can also be demonstrated with the scene at Weathertop, before Frodo arrives in Rivendell and the Council of Elrond. In this scene, the Nine Wraiths attack the Hobbits and Aragorn. Frodo is stabbed. This "death" moment or approach to the innermost cave, to use Campbell's hero's journey terminology, is repeated in the fourth narrative structure

when Frodo is attacked by Shelob (RotK). Frodo has two hero's journeys: from The Shire to Rivendell and from Rivendell to Mount Doom.

Field ends the second act with the Fellowship leaving Lothlórien. I disagree and mark the end of the second act as when Gandalf falls to his "death" at the Bridge of Khazad Dûm (PP2). It serves as a mini-climax, and there is a depression in the tension after this moment. The film then builds again to the true climax of Frodo leaving the Fellowship. The death of Gandalf presages the breaking of the Fellowship. Frodo loses his protection, and Gandalf's death exposes Frodo to the danger of Boromir.

Thus far, *The Fellowship of the Ring* film closely follows the novel volume, albeit with some deletions and minor rearrangements to present the film from Frodo's perspective. The climax of *The Fellowship of the Ring* presages more significant rearrangements and departures from the novel. The confrontation with the Uruk-hai, the death of Boromir and his funeral were related in the novel's second volume, but the screenwriters moved it to the end of the first film to form part of the climax. Likewise, Aragorn letting Frodo go, saying, "I would follow you to the end, my friend," is an addition to the film. These are both essential changes from the novel that mark the three films as a trilogy because, in a trilogy, each film must have a complete narrative of its own, with its own climax.

Here I am expanding on Jess-Cooke's assertion of the four distinct act structures. Moving Boromir's death into the first film bolsters a somewhat lesser climax of Frodo leaving the Fellowship. Doing so gives *The Fellowship of the Ring* a more satisfying ending, for the antagonists are not defeated, the Nine still ride, Saruman is not defeated, but the more immediate antagonist of Boromir is redeemed. He attempts to protect Merry and Pippin from the Uruks and admits his failings to Aragorn. Not only that, but he accepts Aragorn as his king, which forms a key aspect of Aragorn's journey. This rearrangement also frees the film *The Two Towers* from beginning on an anti-climax in the narrative

structure and allows it to focus on the coming war between Saruman and Rohan, and Aragorn's protagonist journey.

### *The Two Towers*

If *The Fellowship of the Ring* was "Frodo-centric", the adaptation of *The Two Towers* is transformed to be "Aragorn-centric". The addition of a hero's journey for Aragorn has faced criticism. However, this addition and its attendant drastic rearrangements of the plot from the novel, which contains just over half of the content from the volume, are essential to constructing the narrative of the film. They give the second film its narrative instead of just being a "bridge" between films one and three. In this trilogy, the fourth structure forms the subplot of the second film. The main plot of the film is given over to Aragorn and the events in Rohan. This can be demonstrated in the three-act structure mapping of the film, which is plotted below in Figure 2. The inciting incident, plot-point 1, midpoint, plot-point 2 and climax all focus on the events in Rohan. Aragorn is transformed into a key point-of-view character in this film and given a hero's journey.

Transforming the narrative to be Aragorn-centric encapsulates and in some way solves the issues that both Tolkien and the filmmakers had with the middle volume of their works. Tolkien's problem with his second volume was that there was "no real connecting link between Books III and IV" (1981:193). Book III follows Aragorn and takes place in Rohan and Book IV continues Frodo's journey. The filmmakers solved this issue by taking a similar approach to Sibly's BBC radio production (1981), they cut between the two storylines of Book III and Book IV. Aragorn's journey and the events of Rohan are used to build the act-structure of the film and Frodo and Sam's journey forms the subplot. That is to say, the fourth structure, the bridging elements of the trilogy, in this film does not drive the main action line.

The narrative elements contained within the second film that acts as a “bridge” between the first and third films are part of the fourth narrative structure, i.e., Frodo and Sam continuing their journey to Mount Doom. The act-structures of *The Two Towers* shows that the main action of the film centres on Rohan. It is almost as if Frodo’s overarching journey becomes the subplot of Aragorn’s second film. The main plot points – the attacks on Rohan, the return of Gandalf, the Battle of Helm’s Deep, and convincing Théoden to “ride out one last time” – are all functions of Aragorn’s story, not Frodo’s. Yet the midpoint of the fourth structure focuses on Frodo and Sam: Faramir captures them. This narrative subverting of the overarching structure into the subplot is skilful writing and leads the screenwriters and editors to move half of the novel volume into the third film. Philippa Boyens notes that Frodo’s climactic confrontation with Shelob at the end of Book IV was moved to the third film because if it were included at the end of *The Two Towers* film, it would have “cancelled out” the climax of the Battle of Helm’s Deep (DVD extras).

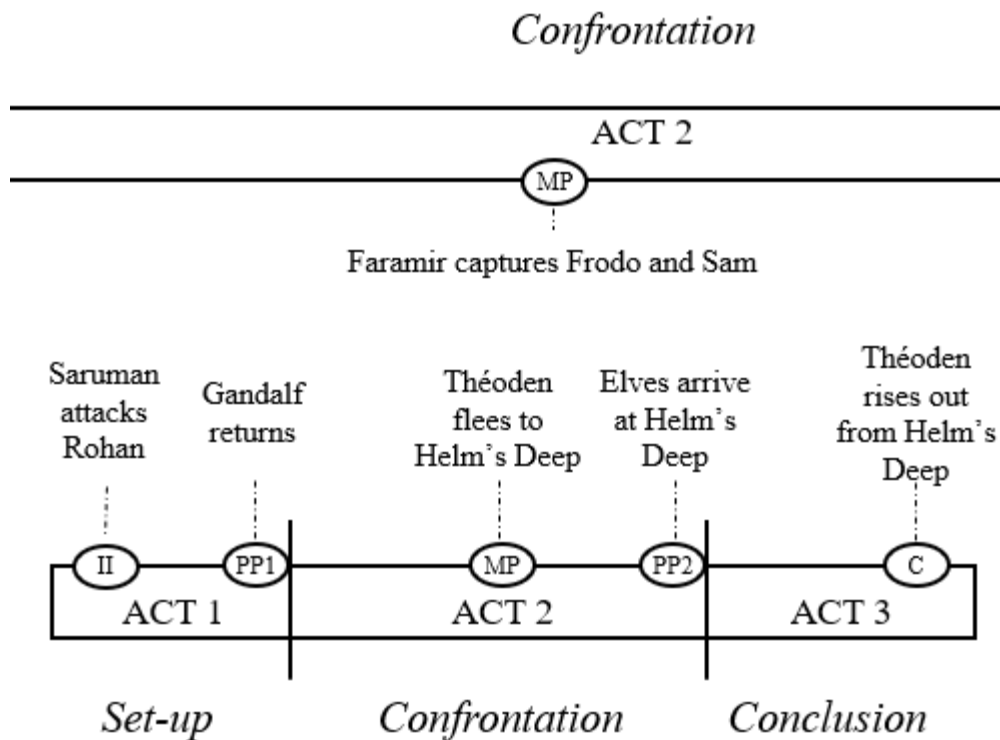


Fig. 2. Three-act structures of *The Two Towers*

Critics of the film have said that Aragorn holds less of a kingly stature compared to the novel. Ford and Reid compare the two Aragorns as a notion of medieval European kings, i.e., earning the right to be king via ability versus having the divine right to kingship through birth. They argue that Aragorn in the novel has a “narrative arc [that] traces his attempts to prove his luck and his supernatural qualities in order to be recognised as king” (75). Conversely, the film “is shown as fearing what he inherited from his lineage as a weakness that might render him unfit to rule” (78). This observation is because the filmmakers constructed a hero’s journey for Aragorn to take him from a wandering Ranger to the King of Gondor in *The Return of the King*.

I disagree that this makes Aragorn a “weaker” character, but rather see it as a difference in storytelling between Tolkien and the filmmakers. Both *The Hobbit* and *The*

*Lord of the Rings* form part of "The Red Book of Westmarch", a book in Middle-earth written by Bilbo and Frodo, with additions from Sam, which Tolkien wrote in the found manuscript style. Author and former student of Tolkien, Diana Wynne Jones, likens Tolkien's style to the medieval romances of King Arthur (10-11). Medieval tales are externally focused narratives and usually have little character introspection or opportunities to voice any inner doubts that a character may feel. This criticism or framing of Aragorn as a "weaker" character directly results from the filmmakers changing Aragorn's story. They use a hero's journey to structure that story in *The Two Towers* and the trilogy, but the main character development occurs in the second film and is essential to its structural success.

The change to make Aragorn the protagonist, or perspective character, is another means of tying the two separate storylines together. In the documentary "From Book to Screen", Fran Walsh comments that one of the changes to *The Two Towers* was to make Aragorn "more prominent" as a character (DVD extras). The films have key additions and rearrangements that point to Aragorn being given a hero's journey. Paxson notes the "evolution of the character of Aragorn offers a perfect opportunity to examine the process of revision in the book and film" and that "the film's increased emphasis on his actions and motivation provide one of the most significant changes in vision" (90).

The changes to make Aragorn "more prominent", as Walsh terms it, can be categorised as a hero's journey addition and first appear in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. In the novel, Aragorn departs from Rivendell and intends to follow Frodo as far as Gondor on his journey to Mordor. Aragorn carries the reforged shards of the sword with him, a symbol of kingship and acceptance of his birthright. Conversely, in the film, Aragorn rejects the path of kingship, his "refusal of the call." Elrond notes that "he turned from that path long ago" and Aragorn is given a foil in Boromir, son of the steward of Gondor, in saying, "Gondor has no King, Gondor needs no King." The reforged sword is brought to

Aragorn in *The Return of the King* after he has proved himself worthy of it by defending Helm's Deep an addition. It is with Boromir's death that Aragorn answers the call and begins his journey. As he lies dying, Boromir acknowledges Aragorn as "my King," and Aragorn takes Boromir's Gondorian arm guards symbolising that he is ready to take up his kingship.

At the first plot point of *The Two Towers*, Gandalf returns and sets Aragorn on a different path to finding the Hobbits (meeting the mentor). Gandalf says the Hobbits have their own path to walk and that Aragorn must travel to Edoras to help the King of Rohan, Théoden, defend against the turncoat Saruman. At the film's midpoint, Théoden evacuates Edoras with his people, travelling to Helm's Deep. On the way, they are attacked, and Aragorn falls from a cliff, presumed dead (approach to the innermost cave). Unconscious, he dreams of Arwen. This scene, along with other flashbacks in *The Two Towers*, inserts Aragorn and Arwen's love story into the main body of the film. The love story is an insertion developed from material in the novel appendices. On the way to Helm's Deep, Aragorn sees Saruman's army and brings this knowledge to Rohan and Théoden. When all seems lost, it is for Aragorn that the Elven army comes from Lothlórien (an addition). It is Aragorn who convinces Théoden to "ride out one more time" to meet the enemy. Encouraging and supporting Théoden in his time of need shows how Aragorn has grown as a leader.

Aragorn's hero's journey is not fully resolved in *The Two Towers*. There are still elements of his story that appear in *The Return of the King*, but he has little character development, considering the film is named after him. Changes in the third film include Elrond returning the reforged sword to him, in the novel it is Elrond's sons, and they bring a banner with the White Tree of Gondor (a symbol of the King). The key part of Aragorn's return is healing the sick and wounded which is diminished in the third film, but he plays a

crucial role in leading the remaining army to the Black Gates of Mordor to draw Sauron's eye away from Frodo and Sam.

### *The Return of the King*

The filmmakers' changes to *The Two Towers* dramatically alter the structure of the third and final film, *The Return of the King*. For Timmons, "Jackson diverges so extensively from the source text that comparative analysis is difficult" (141). His assertion assumes a direct mapping of the third film with the third novel volume, and this neglects the nature of the original novel and does not consider the changes already made to *The Two Towers*. If viewed through the lens of transforming a single narrative structure into four, comparative analysis of the source material is possible.

The changes made to *The Two Towers* film narrative change the nature of Aragorn's character, the climax of Helm's Deep, and render the fourth structure as a subplot; they also profoundly affect the structure of *The Return of the King*. The filmmakers use plot points from Book III and Book VI (at Isengard, the death of Saruman and Pippin looking into the Palantir) to craft the opening of a third film. They augment the new protagonist of Gandalf with a more significant foil in the Steward of Gondor, Denethor. Following the climax of the third film – the Siege of Gondor and Battle of Pelennor – the action turns again to the fourth structure and culminates in the destruction of The Ring. The material for the fourth narrative structure here is taken from Book IV and Book VI of the novel. To further discuss *The Return of the King's* structure, I have completed the plotting structure using the three-act structure. The tension between Gandalf and Denethor builds with the battle sequence of Pelennor Fields, and it culminates in Aragorn's arrival with the ghost army. This plot point is a useful reference marker to see how the third structure and conclusion of the fourth structure are arranged in the film.

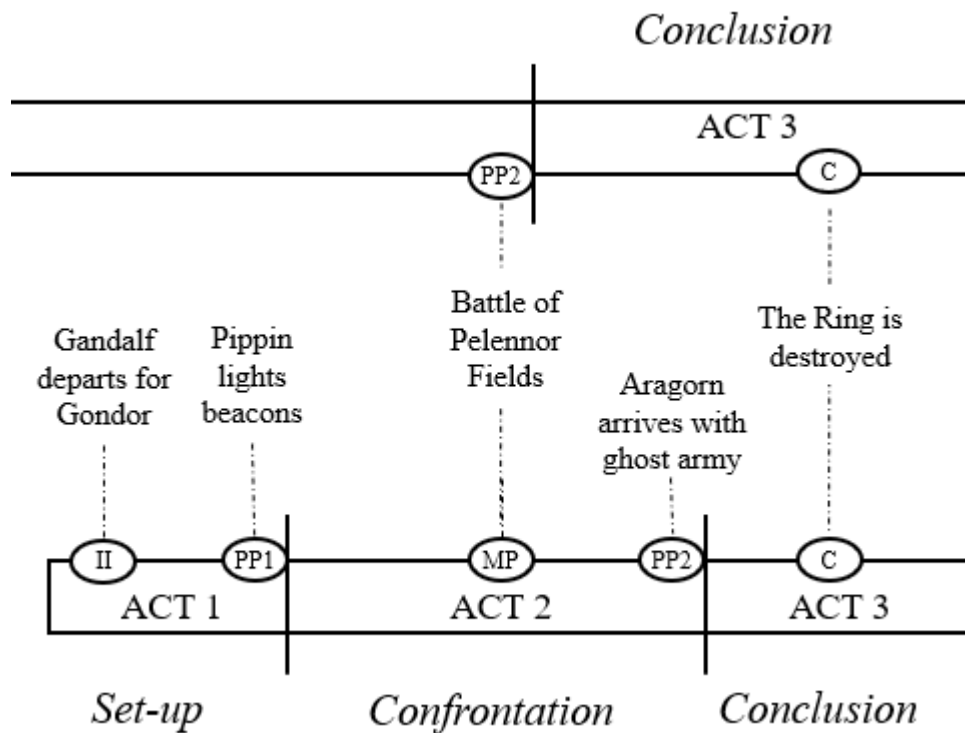


Fig. 3. Three-act structures of *The Return of the King*

After the death of Saruman at Isengard (an alteration), Pippin looks into the Palantír and sees the Eye of Sauron. This precipitates the inciting incident in which Gandalf departs from Edoras for Gondor, taking Pippin with him. These events are the last chapters from Book III and the opening chapters of Book V. The filmmakers developed these scenes into the inciting incident of the final film. The first act turns when Pippin defies Denethor and lights the Beacons of Gondor (calling for Rohan's aid). This film sequence is a cinematic alteration. The Beacons are already lit in the novel, and they send a red arrow to Rohan for assistance. However, this change also sets up Denethor as a more major foil or minor antagonist for Gandalf. The Siege of Gondor, and the Battle of Pelennor Fields, begin when Gandalf hits Denethor on the head with his staff. Denethor had finally seen the troops of Mordor at the gates of Gondor and sent his men into a minor panic. This event

is also the second plot point of the fourth structure. The construction of a third structure avoids the pitfall of the novel's third volume, which contains all endings if the novel is "read" as a trilogy instead of a three-volume novel.

The two plot points in this film are both additions: Pippin lighting the Beacons and Aragorn arriving at Gondor with the ghost army. These are both important augmentations by the filmmakers that give important narrative points to the third film. The ghosts are only used to destroy part of Saruman's army in the novel. The second plot point almost serves as a mini-climax. After the battle is concluded, the fourth narrative structure – the destruction of The Ring – reasserts itself from a subplot status to become the main narrative once more. The final climax of the film is a double climax, that of the third structure and that of the fourth structure. It is part of the storytelling potential of the trilogy. That potential is not determined by length but by the interaction between the four narrative structures.

## Conclusion

The adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* into a film trilogy demonstrates the difference between a three-volume publishing format and the trilogy form. While Tolkien's novel is structured in six books that allow it to be readily split into three volumes, key differences reveal the creation of individual narrative structures and transformation from a single novel into a trilogy of films. Splitting it into three films could be thought of in trilogy structures: the fourth structure was already present, and it was the individual film's structures themselves that needed to be created or plotted. The filmmakers used the adaptation techniques of deletion and minor additions and rearrangements in such a way as to create new narrative structures. To fulfil its narrative duties, each film within the trilogy must stand on its own, and it must have a beginning, middle and end *and*

accommodate the fourth structure. The combined three-act structures of *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy* are presented below.

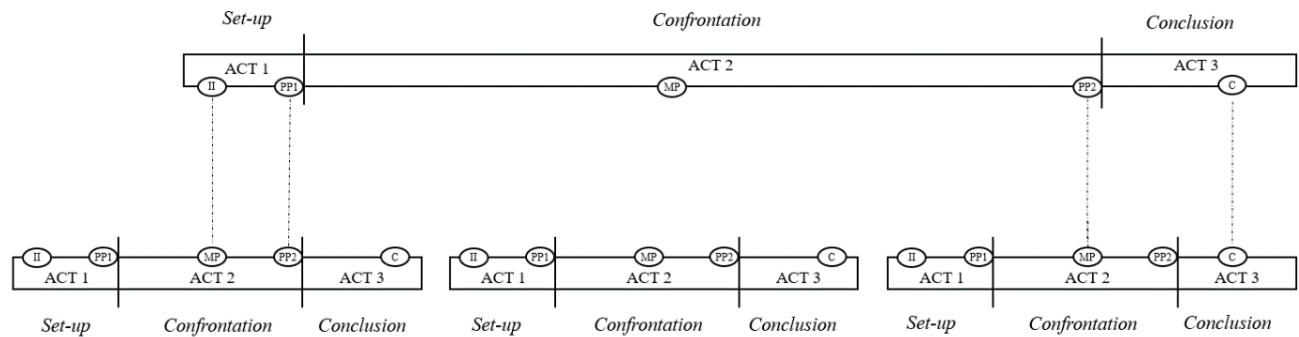


Fig. 4. *The Lord of the Rings* three-act structures

How does my structural definition fit within seriality studies more broadly? While Kelleter, Mittell and Brinkler resist narrative determinations of the form, when considering the development of story, understanding structural elements of trilogy are of vital importance. Speaking of US television series, Mittell suggests a privileged “narrative model in which a successful series never ends” (2007:16). I suggest that the power of the form lies in its duality of being constructed of both open-ended individual texts *and* an overarching text that does, in fact, end. It is this tension that creates the storytelling potential in the form. As a foundation text for modern fantasy and one that is sighted as a defining example of “trilogy” Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* that must be contended with. Both versions of *The Lord of the Rings* are unique works in their serialisation. Tolkien as a three-volume novel that retains, for the most part, its original distributed format, and Jackson’s films in how they were produced. My structural analysis using Field as a diagrammatical structure is intended to showcase the difference between a trilogy and three-volume work and demonstrate the proposed trilogy structure of three distinct narratives connected by a fourth structure.

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