



Adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* in War on Terror Era

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Received 18 February 2017; accepted 16 April 2017
 Published online 26 May 2017

Abstract

This paper looks at the success and popularity of Jackson’s adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* in light of its context of reception. *The Lord of the Rings* had to wait for more than forty years since its first publication in 1954 only to enter Hollywood after the 9/11 attacks when a global War on Terror was declared with Bush’s famous statement “you’re either with us, or against us”. During the past few years there has been a growing tendency towards fantasy films mostly adapted from novels and other literary forms. *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, *Spiderman*, *The Hobbit* and *The Vampire Diaries* are only some out of many examples. Knowing this, it is now a concern of scholars of Literature and Cinema alike to study the ins and outs of this newly formed trend. Using the theories of Adaptation hand in hand with media-cultural studies, this paper means to argue that *The Lord of the Rings* owes much of its fame and success to its context of reception. The film resonates with many contemporary concerns of the post 9/11 era such as the issue of “vulnerable boundaries”, “faceless “Other” terrorist”, “Good vs. Evil”, and the destructive force of war over power in general.

Key words: *The Lord of the Rings*; Adaptation; War on terror; Post 9/11; Other.

Khalilian, Z., & Moosavinia, S. R. (2017). Adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* in War on Terror Era. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 14(5), 31-41. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/9561>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9561>

INTRODUCTION

This study intends to demonstrate the ways in which rightness of historical moment can be influential in reception and popularity of a certain adapted work. Tolkien’s epic fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings*, was first published in 1954, but was not adapted into a Hollywood movie until almost forty years later when a global “War on Terror” was declared. The world was experiencing a real-life “Good versus Evil” battle and the time was right for *The Lord of the Rings*—a film that tells the story of a question on the side of Good ones to abolish Darkness in the Middle Earth.

Looking at the success of *The Lord of the Rings*’ adaptation in light of its screening after the 9/11 attacks, provides one with an opportunity to study the ways in which the psychological, socio-political and ideological make-up of a society can affect that society’s understanding and reception of a certain film. In case of *The Lord of the Rings*, the significance of context is highly intensified because the film itself features many war scenes and revolves around the theme of “war against Evil” and the context is that of great social—and historical—change and unrest.

Knowing that the post 9/11 cinema saw a significant change in viewers’ taste of genre, this study intends to address the ways in which this change of attitude could have been the result of the change in socio-political situation of the U.S. Among the most likely—and logical—reasons for the sudden popularity of Fantasy films, “creation of parallel worlds” and “resonating with key historical events” are addressed. The aforementioned subjects are specifically investigated in *The Lord of the Rings* as one of the first two successful fantasy films after 9/11—the other being *Harry Potter*. Issues such as “vulnerable boundaries”, “faceless Other as Evil”, “famine”, “stereotyping East as Evil”, and the dichotomous division of the world into “Us” and “Them”

are only few issues addressed in this study as shared concerns of the film with its contemporary era to show how this resemblance and resonance could have been effective in the film's success and fame.

1. METHODOLOGY

In its simplest and best known definition of the term, adaptation is the act of copying from one art form into another. This is the most basic yet the most popular way of defining the term. For instance, in her *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Sanders (2006) defines the term as a "transposition practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself" (p.18). She then goes on to explicate the features of adaptation, claiming that the adapted work is repeatedly trying to provide commentary on a source text.

In her efforts to justify the ways in which the adapted work tries to be a distinct entity and, at the same time preserve its relation to the primary source Sanders mentions some features of adaptation that are of specific interest to the argument of this study. Offering a revised point of view by "adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized" (p.19) is the first characteristic of adaptation that Sanders mentions. For instance, Tolkien does not give any specific place to female characters. In fact, they are rarely found in his book. And he is quite stereotypical in his representation of them; The Elven queen, Lady Galadriel is a wise, beautiful lady who remains mostly passive in the novel, whereas in Jackson's version of the story the lady Galadriel proves to be good warrior who actively participates in the most important decision makings of their realm as well as the battles.

In Jackson's version of *The Hobbit—The Lord of the Rings* prelude—a young Elven lady is introduced with awesome fighting skills who are as well a master with the bow, Tarell. This character does not exist in the novel at all and is a creation of Jackson. One good reason for this might be that the socio-political status of "Women" in Jackson's time has changed from that of Tolkien's, and Jackson finds it necessary to find a good place for women in his film both to give them a voice, and add to the attractions of his film for the audience. Jackson's women are both warriors of great skill and women of rare beauty whose background love story with male characters can be of interest to a specific group of audience.

Of more relevance to the aim and scope of this study is the way adaptation tries to "make texts "relevant" or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating" (Sanders, 2006, p.19). This, in fact, is the first step that any adapter might consider taking, in order to make their work appeal to the taste and demand of the audience of their time. Updating might simply be applied to the setting alone

but it can go farther if needed, to encompass political concerns and ideological agendas.

For instance, in recent adaptations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the setting has changed from that of old Denmark to the more modern contemporary time and the prince is a wealthy art student. The play within play is represented as his course assignment and all in all the play has been altered in many ways to come closer to the contemporary audiences' understanding of the world. The same is true of *The Lord of the Rings*. Although the film is still set in the Middle Era, other elements have been added to it to make it appeal to the taste of the contemporary audience. The computerized character of Gollum, and the socio-political concern of the film are a few examples that resonate with that of the film's contemporary time that will be discussed in more detail later.

According to Sanders the reason behind this updating and proximation is that the "movement of proximation" brings it closer to the audience's frame of reference in temporal, geographic, or social terms" (Ibid., p.21) which is a quite enough obvious reason. But this simple clarification leads to a more specific definition of adaptation which, according to Sanders, is "relocation of an "original" or source text's cultural and/or temporal setting, which may or may not involve a generic shift" (Ibid., p.19). From this explanation one can see the significance of context—what Sanders refers to as "cultural and temporal setting"—for any adaptation—both as the process and the product.

Changes that are made in the process are considered as an "attempt to find contemporary resonance for [the] audience" (Hutcheon, 2006, p.142). The reason for that is that adaptation is always framed in a context—a time and a place, a society and a culture. As Hutcheon advocates, if an adapted work is to find popularity, the context of reception must be prepared for it. An adaptation never takes place in a vacuum. It happens in a society and in a specific historical moment. And according to Hutcheon, "readiness to reception and to production can depend on the "rightness" of the historical moment" (Ibid.).

Time, as Hutcheon says, changes the meaning as always has.¹ By this she means that even in a specific culture and at a specific era, some events can change the situation and affect the context. An event like the 9/11 attacks can cause more permanent and drastic changes both in society and the politics and it did. Changes like that can affect the audience's perception of what they see. Or to put it in Hutcheon's words "contemporary events or dominant images, condition our perception as well as interpretation" (Ibid., p.149). *The Lord of the Rings* is no exception to this rule. Wasn't it for the special context of reception the film was born into, it might have simply been viewed as an escape fantasy that would have been

¹ See Linda Hutcheon *A Theory of Adaptation*.

appreciated solely on the basis of its filmic qualities and would not have encouraged so many political and allegorical readings.

As mentioned briefly above, the context of creation and reception are two influential factors in the success and the interpretation of any adaptation. The more an adaptation bears cultural and historical relevance to the overall theme of its contemporary era, the more successful it—most probably—becomes according to Adaptation Theories. Relying on these theories, this study intends to analyze *The Lord of the Rings* adaptation in post 9/11 era and discuss the ways in which this context affected the interpretation of this film. And how these interpretations and the historical relevance helped the film in its success and popularity.

One might argue and rightfully so, that the film was a working process before the 9/11 and when the filming started the director and the rest of his group had no idea what was awaiting them, therefore one cannot claim that the choice was specially made according to this factor. I shall clarify that it is not the intention of this study to address adaptation as process, rather it is adaptation as *product* that is the focus of this study. Yet, one should not forget that even at the time that Jackson decided to adapt Tolkien's novel for the big screen, America was already in war with the East and his forces were everywhere in Iraq and Afghanistan claiming to be fighting for global peace and annihilation of Terrorism—the East has been stereotyped as Terrorist long before the 9/11 attacks, and the attacks only intensified all that was already going on.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Post 9/11: War on Terror Era

As mentioned earlier, this study intends to examine the role of context in popularity and success of a certain adapted work. The significance of context of reception in success of any adapted work is emphasized in the Adaptation Studies. Jackson's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* went on screen in a time known as "a moment of historical rupture" (Holloway, 2008, p.1). It was in that particular context that the film earned so much fame and success—which resulted in Jackson's determination to film the second and the third parts as well as *The Hobbit* trilogy. The significance of context in this study leaves one with no choice but to provide a relevant sum of information on 9/11 events and their outcomes.

2.2 Foreshadowing

There are many different books, report sheets and news articles on the issue of 9/11 attacks, each holding a different—unique in its own special way—view of the event. If there is one thing that almost all of them agree upon is that it didn't come "out of the blue" (Ibid., p.4)—to use their own term. Though each author has their own

understanding of the situation, they all share the belief that 9/11 attacks were foreshadowed repeatedly and if Bush's administration hadn't failed to deal with it in the proper time and manner, the end of the story would have changed radically.

Before the 9/11 event in 2001, Bin Laden had declared Jihad against the U.S twice. First in August 1996 and then again in February 1998. Bin Laden referred to America's occupation of Mecca and Medina—the two holy cities of Islam—as "a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims. And [that] Ulema have, throughout Islamic history, unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries ..." (Ibid.).

Other than that, there were other Al-Qaeda related attacks in which Americans lost their lives before the 9/11 event. In 1996 the U.S. military barracks near Khobar Tower was blown up by a bomb. In 1998 the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania resulted in death of twelve Americans, and in October 2000, suicide bombers blew a hole in the side of the destroyer *USS Cole* while the ship was chained at Aden, in Yemen (Ibid., p.1). Clearly, 9/11 attacks were only the most catastrophic of a chain of anti-U.S. attacks by Al-Qaeda in the name of Islam.

Moreover, in his *From 9/11 to Terror War*, Kellner (2010) refers to a report by CBS news in May 2002 that claimed that "the CIA briefed George W. Bush on August 6, 2001—when he was vacationing at his ranch in Texas—about the bin Laden networks plans to hijack airplanes" (p.7). He also brings other evidences of warning Bush against the possibility of hijacking planes and terrorist attacks on U.S. and holds Bush's administration responsible for not doing anything to prevent them. He briefly mentions that "during May 2002, a Phoenix, Arizona, FBI memo horn summer 2001 was released that warned of the dangers of Middle Eastern men going to flight school in order to gain the skills necessary to hijack planes..." (Ibid.) and believes that the "arrest of Zacarias Moussaouri, the alleged Al Qaeda hijacker who had also been taking flying lessons and acting suspiciously, in August 2001 should have raised warning signals" (Ibid.).

2.3 Attacks on the Twin Towers and the WTC

Tuesday, September 11, 2001, was not meant to be a normal day. Airlines of the United States were unaware of the fact that they were being the offstage to a drama that meant to—literally—shake the world. Hijackers were preparing the ground for the completion of their "Jihad". From Boston's Logan International Airport, United 175 and American 11, from Dulles Flight 77, and from Newark Flight 93 were hijacked and then crashed into the US' landmarks—the Twin Towers, the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. It is said that the plane that was meant to level the White House failed and crashed in a deserted land.

The importance of being aware of “how” 9/11 happened lies in a simple but determinant strategy designed by the attacker to insult and frighten its target in every possible way. Knowing that to accomplish their goal, the attackers hijacked planes of the U.S. itself and then crashed its symbol of economics and military force with the very same planes, brings several ideas to one’s mind at the same time. One cannot help thinking that by hijacking four planes in one day the attackers intended to highlight the vulnerability of the U.S. airlines and their security system. At the same time, one cannot ignore the fact that by hijacking the planes of the U.S. itself to attack its own soil, the attackers intended to send a message implying that they were powerful enough to accomplish all they wanted, losing nothing themselves. Last but not least is their choice of target. By attacking the “mythically shaped pentagon” (Kellner, 2010, p.1) and the Twin Towers, the attackers meant to attack the very “symbols of American global wealth and power” (Ibid., p.44), thereby undermining America’s global status a World Power.

All these resulted in a sense of fear never felt by the American’s before. Being vulnerable to “outside” dangers within the borders of America—one of the world’s most powerful countries—was more than frightening to its citizens. The problem of “vulnerable boundaries” — another shared concern of the post 9/11 U.S and *The Lord of the Rings*—issued from here. The traumatic event took only about two hours, but the results seem never-ending to this day. The scope of the attacks seemed to be limited within the boundaries of the U.S, but the aftermath found a universal scope.

2.4 Media Representation of the Attacks and News Covering

Mass media and the television news are the main sources of information for the majority—if not all—of the people. People’s understanding of what is going on in today’s world is deeply influenced by the media representation of the events. Media decides what issues to focus on and what others to ignore and therefore it is the media that controls *what* is important—“Agenda Setting” function of the media—and *how* people should perceive and react to a certain event—“Framing Function”. And more importantly, as Nacos quotes Katz: “Terrorism events are obvious co-productions of perpetrators and broadcasters” (p.108). Therefore, in making of new terrorism, media plays a significant role. For this, it is important to, briefly, review news coverage of a traumatic event like 9/11 and discuss the role of media in the world’s reaction to it.

The news tended to report the event in terms suggesting “war”. In fact CNN’s sources found the word “war” repeated 234 times in the first twelve hours of coverage, or once every three minutes on average (Holloway, 2006, p.62). The media tended to represent the U.S. as a poor nation victimized by a hostile villain. Provoking even more anger and fear in the audience which sounded

obviously necessary to prepare the public thought and lead the public feelings for and towards military answer to the problem. Donna Andréolle reports in her article “Media Representations of “the Story of 9-11” that “the terminology of description in the headlines [of the press] revolves around the theme of war (It’s war/ This means war / Acts of war) and [its] variations with the use of “attack” in different forms (Under attack, Attacked!) and “terror” (Terror hits home/Terror strikes)”². It seems that the media has already made its choice; “legitimate war” against those who brought this misfortune upon “us”. In this, the media was following Bush’s lead who “articulated the escalating patriotism, vilification of the terrorists, and demand for stern military retaliation” (Nacos, 2007, p.108) which is quite disappointing because in a Democracy, it is the job of the media to question the authorities and even stand up for their own ways and ideas— if they have any—not being a tool at service of state power.

Another function of the media in this traumatic situation was to deliver the messages of their leader to the people deeply in need of consolation and assurance that “this” is not happening again and that the government has a good plan to handle “this”. In the evening of September 11th, G. W. Bush appeared on TV to make his first speech—which was not so reassuring after all. In his speech Bush addressed the nation “from every walk of life [to] unite in our resolve for justice and peace” (Selected Speeches of G. W. Bush, p.57). The nation was to “stand together to win the war against terrorism” (p.58). Then he addressed other countries of the world and asked them to stand by him in his war against Terror. “You are either with us or against us” Bush announced to the world, leaving no shades of gray.

The way the “leaders” are those to suggest “war” and how “people” have to pay for it, is an old story. In faraway history, in today’s world and even in *The Lord of the Rings*, people fight their leaders” war, many of them having no idea what they are really fighting for or against.

2.5 Post 9/11 Socio-Political Situation and the Role of the Media

Those who witnessed the event suffered from psychological trauma and nightmares for months after the attacks. For those who watched it, the spectacle provided “a powerful set of images that would continue to resonate for years to come” (Kellner, p.54). The image of the planes crashing into the soaring buildings, the towers bursting into flames, the fireballs falling on people who were at the time passing by at the foot of the towers, the innocent victims” last attempts to survive by jumping off the windows from the higher parts of the tower were not easily forgettable. These images would stay with the viewers for a lifetime recurring again and again in their

² See http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/artic23/andrea/3_2003.html

worst nightmares and even coming back to life as soon as they faced similar occasions.

The whole situation seemed like a drama being performed on a massive scene alive especially with media representation of it and its use of sound effects, slow-motioning the moment of the crash of the planes into the buildings and their bursting into fire, and showing people's terrified faces shouting and running to survive the collapsing tower, children crying and trembling at the sight of the firing buildings, people crying at the loss of their loved ones and the fire fighters risking their own lives to rescue some other's.

The political side of the debate was so hot and the government were so focused on that alone, that they failed to notice the harms their acts were bringing to social and civil life. As Kellner puts it, after the terror attacks "the economy was declining, Bush had lost control of the Congress and the political agenda, and questions were beginning to be raised about his legitimacy and competency to be president" (p.49). Other than his foreign policy that twirled around "War on Terror", imposing a variety of threats and hardship on the nation, Bush's inland policy brought other, more disturbing, troubles upon the nation.

After the terror attacks the government grew suspicious of almost everyone and in its attempts to find and stop the "suspected terrorists"—those of the people that might have helped the terrorists or may do so in future—by arresting them, Bush's administration created a feeling of anxiety within the nation. Other than that, for a long time, the "hunt for Bin Laden" continued as the "number-one figure in global terrorism [and] a sworn enemy of the U.S." (Kellner, p.152) with no success and therefore, the fear of "an unknown presence everywhere" hunted the people. Meanwhile other problems emerged as the result of the new condition and war.

In pursuit of its goal to free the world from terrorism through military acts, Bush administration needed to reinforce its army and police force. To that purpose the state "resources [were] redirected towards financing the military-industrial complex, while social programs have been slashed..." (Chossudovsky, 2005, p.8). Therefore, a new economic condition dominated the U.S. Government budgets were reconstructed and the money raised from the taxes were specified to the benefits of the police and domestic security apparatus.³

Meanwhile the global economic crisis and raising tide of unemployment worsened the economic conditions for a great majority of the people, causing extreme poverty and famine in many parts of the U.S. Apart from the amount of money taken from social benefits in favor of security apparatus, the "free market" system reinforced the economic depression in its own ways. This new economic

condition resulted in a drastic fall in living standards, and even outbreak of famine in some areas. Yet, Bush administration remained ignorant to that and was ready to sacrifice anything to establish the "New World Order"—another shared terminology between *The Lord of the Rings* and post 9/11 U.S.

2.6 "Terrorism"

The features and characteristics that are given to the term "terrorism" may vary from time to time or one place to another, but there are some shared features that are the basics. It sounds both interesting and relevant to see how FBI defines it and what is considered as an act of Terrorism for the FBI which is after all the most important security organization of the U.S. FBI provides the "Definitions of Terrorism in the U.S. Code"⁴ on its website drawing a line between International and Domestic Terrorism. In its attempt to define International Terrorism, FBI ascribes the following three features to it:

(a) Involv[ing] violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law.

(b) Appear[ing] to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by *mass destruction*, assassination, or kidnapping.

(c) Occur[ing] primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S., or *transcend national boundaries* in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum.⁵

"Transcending boundaries" and affecting the government by "mass destruction" are somehow the two most interesting features ascribed to Terrorism by the FBI as far as the focus is on 9/11. More interestingly, both are serious concerns of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Generally, there are two parts to Terrorism. The concrete and the abstract. The force of Terrorism lies not in the visible Terror act alone but in the abstract fear it creates. Thus, "terror spectacle is part of the game of Terrorism" to put it Kellner's words (p.53). The more dramatic and attention getting the spectacle is, the more the fear it generates, hence; the chance of achieving the desired intention increases.

Another feature of Terrorism that remains in line with creation of fear lies in the government's attempts to identify the Terrorist face. Because this attempt remains mostly futile for a long time after the Terrorist acts, and that no "one" person can be identified as the only responsible person the government's identification of the Terrorist moves toward an inevitably abstract definition:

³ See Michel Chossudovsky.

⁴ <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/terrorism/terrorism-definition>

⁵ Ibid.

The Evil. Even, according to Holmes, “Terrorism is misleadingly represented as a struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil” (p.118).

As mentioned earlier Bush put the blame on Bin Laden and al-Qaida as soon as he got the news and represented him as the terrorist leader who planned the attacks. But more than the mere declaration of the identity of the responsible person, the way he represented him is noteworthy. In his first speech in the evening he used the word “Evil”, five times. And then he went for a dichotomous division between “us” and “them”. In his efforts to provide a face for the enemy, Bush actually added to its abstractness by giving it the name of Evil and created an “other” to put the blame on.

From among all the features ascribed to terrorism, the use of weapons of mass destruction could be the most significant and concern-raising issue for many. To define the weapons of mass destruction one shall bear in mind the fact that it—as almost every other terminology—does not have one single, universally agreed upon definition. Therefore, following the same strategy of the foregoing discussions, the most common and basic definitions will be covered briefly.

According to Presbey, weapons of mass destruction typically refer to nuclear, chemical and biological means for killing people in large numbers. This definition varies from one to another specialist, ranging from two extremes of “any weapon that can kill as much as one person” and “weapons that can eliminate the human race from the face of the world”. But the most appropriate definition would be something moderately placed between the two extremes.

DISCUSSION

Now that the importance of context of reception in understanding and interpretation of an adapted work has been clarified and the logic behind the claim that cinema can affect the society just as it can be affected by it is explained, the time seems right to go to the main point of this study. As mentioned earlier, *The Lord of the Rings* owes much of its success to the rightness of historical moment—in other words, the film resonated with key historical events of its time and this gave it extra force.

As mentioned in the introduction, *The Lord of the Rings* could have been and was seen as an allegory of its time because it resonated with many ongoing events of the era. The first resemblance could be that of “foreshadowing” and the leaders’ failure to see the signs of the upcoming disaster in its proper time and stop it from happening or at least think of some strategies to decrease the harms to minimum.

The events foreshadowing the 9/11 attacks have been discussed in detail, providing evidence that Bush has been warned about the probability of Terror attacks and yet,

failed to take precautions. Wasn’t it for his ignorance, the nation would not have had to face such a great loss. The rising of Sauran to power in *The Lord of the Rings* is—similarly—the consequence of the leaders’ failure to see the signs when there was still time to prepare for what was to come.

In *The Hobbit*, which serves as a prelude to *The Lord of the Rings*, as the Dwarves and the hobbit Mr. Baggins are on their quest to claim the treasure of the King under the Mountain—the forefather of one of the Dwarves—many signs and warnings are given that foreshadow the rising of Sauran. For instance, they come across three Trolls in the middle of the jungle, get attacked by Wargs that accompany the Orcs, and learn of the presence of a Necromancer in Dul Guldur—all of which are considered as signs of a dark power being at work.

Gandalf, who’s been busy putting all the signs together, rushes to Rivendell to warn the leaders of the Middle Earth, only to find them much too reluctant to even consider the possibility of their “hard-won, watchful peace” being disturbed. All in all, against Gandalf’s best efforts, the leaders of the Middle Earth will not take his words seriously and their ignorance results in great peril to all inhabitants of the Middle Earth. They choose to turn a blind eye on the signs and dally Gandalf’s advices. A decision whose consequences are to be revealed sixty years later—quite a long time to lose when one can wisely use it to plan and prepare to defeat the enemy. Sixty years later, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, we witness Gandalf’s prediction coming true; the dark lord Sauran has regained his power while the leaders decided he could not.

As can be inferred from what was just said, a great part of *The Lord of the Rings*’ collection focuses on foreshadowing the rise of a very powerful and dangerous enemy and showing how leaders—satisfied with the peace, and sure of the security of their homes—are reluctant to even consider the possibility of such a threat. Their denial of the signs and warnings, costs them many lives—in some cases even their own. This was a familiar remorse to post 9/11 viewers who were dealing with a catastrophe that many believed could have been prevented if the warnings were taken seriously by Bush Administration.

As explained earlier, Bin Laden, who was the main figure behind all that happened in the 9/11, did not participate in the attacks. Instead, he had four suicide hijackers do the task for him. He himself remained mostly a name, a figure to be feared by the global society. At the one hand, knowing that the enemy is not alone and has followers ready to die for them swaggers the power they possess. On the other hand, having a faceless name as one’s enemy intensifies the fear of it because one never knows who might be serving the enemy and where one might come across them. “Fear of a faceless enemy”

played a significant role both in the 9/11 attacks and in the buildup of the horror that terrorized the nation ever since.

In *The Fellowship*, after the Dark Lord regains his strength and returns as The Eye, he sets out to find his Ring as his spirit is bound to the Ring and in order to get back his full physical existence he needs the power of the Ring. To that end Sauran sends out his Nazguls—nine half-alive riders in black—to hunt for the Ring. The riders known as Ring-wraiths are drawn by the power of the Ring and can therefore locate the Ring wherever its power is being used.

In *The Fellowship*, Frodo is attacked several times by these Riders in the course of his mission to destroy the Ring. While Sauran does not involve personally in the war he is leading, his servants play their roles and help advance his plans for him. Sauran remains not only unharmed but also a faceless fear that is present everywhere through the presence of his numerous and varying servants. Fearing the presence of the enemy wherever they went, terrorized the Fellowship—a group of companions, consisted of three Hobbits, an Elf, a Wizard, a Dwarf and a Ranger, and a Man that got together to follow and help Frodo in his quest.

Besides the possibility of coming across the enemy's agents anywhere and anytime, Frodo fears the presence of The Eye. Frodo and his companions are aware that "The Eye is watching" (*Two Towers*), though they cannot be sure where and when. This doubt and fear keep them on the edge all along. As discussed, this is a feature of Terrorism—to cause and spread fear in hearts and mind of people rather than giving them the advantage of "facing" the fear. Interestingly enough, it is not only Sauran who is represented as a faceless being, or merely an Eye. His most fearful agents—the Nazguls—are represented in the film as faceless riders in black hoods. There are times that as a result of fast movements when fighting, or the flow of the wind when riding fast, the hood goes slightly back. Even in these scenes the only thing beyond the hood is darkness—shapeless darkness. Not a masked face, nor even a face-like circle is devised for the riders—only thick black air that shapes the hood.

Fear of a "faceless enemy" was introduced as one of the features of Terrorism, an issue that the Americans were engaged with for a long time after the attacks as a result of CIA's failure to locate Bin Laden. In response to that, and in his efforts to find and fight the enemy, Bush used the word Evil to refer to Bin Laden. This made him even more abstract. The same name is repeatedly given to Sauran over the course of the film.

Also, in his first speech after the attacks Bush announced that "today our nation saw Evil" (*Selected Speeches*, p.57) and he asked "friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war..." (p.58). Aside from

"Evil making" this speech is very much like Lord Elrond's at the council of Rivendell in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Elrond starts his speech addressing the company as "strangers from distant lands, friends of old..." and goes right away to explain the aim of the gathering; "you've been summoned here to answer the threat of Mordor... you will unite, or you will fail!" (*Fellowship*).

The same way that Bush, as the leader of the nation, called upon "friends and allies" to join forces with "all those who want peace in the world" and help America win the war against Terror, Lord Elrond invites strangers and friends to unite against a common enemy. This speech might be one of the most remarkable scenes in resonating with a familiar contemporary event. It seems that where ever a war over power is at work, the same strategies are taken.

Stereotyping the East—where the leader of the attacks came from—as Evil and Terrorist, was another issue of the War on Terror Era. Interestingly enough, in the very beginning moments of *The Fellowship* we are informed of "a shadow in the East..." that threatens the peace and security of the Middle Earth. Of the four Farthings of the Shire, *Westfarthing* is the dwelling place of the race that can save the Middle Earth from Evil. And Mordor, where the Evil lies, is located on the East. This stereotyping is not limited to mere geographical borders, rather the difference between the races and their representation—by Tolkien and Jackson alike—is a telling element in stereotyping the East as Evil. As an explanation let this suffice that all good characters are given Western features—white skin, colored eyes, blond or brown hair color, etc. While the "Bad ones" are given Eastern characteristics. As Said suggests "the East is always the West's opposite" (Steuter & Deborah, 2008, p.24). If the West is white, the East is dark. All the characteristics given to Evil characters of the series are in line with the characteristics that—according to Orientalism—the West ascribes to the East. Amongst them "stereotyp[ing] of the Eastern man as a violent primitive" (Ibid.) and as "an enemy to be conquered" (Ibid., p.25).

Through stereotyping the East as Evil, the film creates an Orientalist Other. This Other, is the enemy against whom the Fellowship should fight. Therefore, the imaginary world of the film is dichotomously divided into Us and Them—just like Bush's dichotomous division of the world in his war against Terror into "with Us" and "against Us"—Other. It can be inferred that the war that Bush brought up was about Good versus Evil nature, just like the war in *The Lord of the Rings*.

One post 9/11 social problem was that of vulnerable boundaries mentioned earlier along with the discussion of its psychological impacts. The U.S. citizens came to realize that, even as one of the world's safest countries, their homeland is still liable to Terror attacks which intensified the sense of fear and insecurity after the

attacks. This finds resemblance in *The Lord of the Rings* in more than one way.

Preoccupation with “boundaries” is a prominent issue in *The Lord of the Rings*. The inhabitants of the Middle Earth are quite exact about their boundaries. In one distinct example, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when Frodo and Sam set out to start their journey, after traveling a certain distance, Sam suddenly stops and says “this is it” (*Fellowship*). In response to Frodo’s confused posture, Sam continues: “If I take one more step, it’ll be the farthest away from home I’ve ever been” (*Fellowship*).

Another representation of the importance of boundaries to the people of the Middle Earth is the mere existence of Rangers. Rangers are a special race of men who are blessed with long life. They dwell in the boarders and make sure of their safety. Through Strider—the Ranger who is later called Aragorn – the audience learns that the boarders are not safe anymore and it is hard for Rangers to protect them. The very night that Frodo enters the Pouncing Pony—the inn in which Strider finds them—after the gate-keeper closes the wooden doors of the city’s gate, the Nazguls who were in pursuit of Frodo invade the city to hunt him. The gates and the borders cannot keep the people safe from outside dangers.

In another scene, in the Shire, Hobbits are drinking and talking about the possibility of “war brewing”, and they agree that “it’s none of our concern what goes on beyond our borders” (*Fellowship*). They are that sure of being safe within their borders—not a strange feeling for Americans. Just then, a Nazgul passes by the door of a Hobbit and asks him “Shire? Baggins?” and the terrified Hobbit point towards the West. Through a dramatic irony, the audience learns something that the characters do not know yet: the war is not so far “beyond [Shire’s] borders” after all. Post 9/11 spectators of the film do not even need a dramatic irony to learn this. They are already familiar with the delusiveness of feeling over-confident about one’s safety in a world of chaos. It seems that there are no “boundaries” to the damage war can bring upon the world—neither in reality nor in Fantasy.

As mentioned earlier, after the 9/11 attacks Bush declared a global War on Terror. He was the one who ordered the war, and innocent people—both American and non-American—had to pay for the consequences. Among the consequences of war were economic problems and loss of many innocent lives. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the leaders repeatedly order their army to prepare for the battle ground. Different war scenes in massive scale are presented in which different folks die on numbers beyond measure. The warlords do not actually seem to care to explain the reason of the war they are ordering. One cannot help thinking that most of those who lost their lives in different battles had no clear idea of what they were fighting for, or against. Instead of giving their agents information, the leaders of the war try to rally their

emotions—using patriotism, pride and valor as their tool. Interestingly enough, no matter how high the number of casualties, the leaders remain unharmed. Sauran, Gandalf, Lord Elrond, Aragorn, and the king of Rohan who lead the wars always survive its fire even though they do participate in person.

Famine, as a result of economic problems brought upon people by war, was another problem of the War on Terror Era—especially in some inferior parts of the U.S. In the film, we come across a character, Gollum, who is so thin that his ribs and back bones are showing under his extremely pale skin. Gollum has suffered a long time of loneliness and famine in the tunnels under the mountain he used to hide. This character, though meant to be Evil, evokes sympathy from the audience. One popular view about Gollum is his resemblance to survivors of Nazi concentration camps. Mathijis, Kellner, and Kelly all point to this resemblance. Kelly argues that “the contemporary audience is familiar with Holocaust imagery. While [Gollum’s] emaciated appearance connotes famine, the ubiquity of media, and internet images (that were unavailable at the time of Tolkien’s novel), now make these sights [more] familiar” (*Fantasy Film*, p.25). Yet I believe famine—rather than concentration camps which belonged to a long time before the 9/11 attacks—is more relevant to post 9/11 Era.

In one remarkable scene, as Frodo and Sam are eating some Elvish bread and Sam is nagging “I hate this place. It’s too quiet. Has been no sight or sign of a bird for two days”, Gollum mourns “no, no birdses to eat. No crunchable birdses” and cries “we are *famished*. Yes, famished we are precious!” and suddenly stops, looking eagerly at something the audience cannot see and then with a quick move he catches something, a worm, and eats it alive.

Sam looks at him with disgust, but Frodo pities him and throws a piece of the Lamba at him. Childlike he jumps and eagerly he picks up the bread and puts it in his mouth, but then he starts coughing and cries “it tries to chokes us! We can’t eat Hobbit foods!” and mourns “we must starve” (*Two Towers*). Sam replies, quite cold heartedly, “well starve then! Good riddance!” then the camera zooms in Gollum who with his thin, troubled face and his pale blue eyes filled with tears, says into the camera: “oh... cruel Hobbit! There’s no care if we be hungry. There’s no care if we should die!”

For American viewers who know that economic problems and famine are growing by the day and troubling more and more people of lower social stance, this scene should have evoked a feeling beyond sympathy. Familiarity and contempt, are one possible feeling that this scene can arise in the spectators. Gollum’s hope and confidence in receiving support from his “master”, Frodo, which immediately turns out vain is a familiar notion for a nation troubled with the outcomes of a war ordered

by their “master” in claims of protecting them against Terrorism.

Empowering the army, another familiar issue for post 9/11 viewers of *The Lord of the Rings*, is also one of the main concerns of Saruman the White in the films. In *The Two Towers*, Saruman clearly announces that “the Old World will burn in fires of industry...and a New Order will rise” (*Two Towers*). He announces this while the camera is moving around to show his Orc servants making weapons, cross-breeding soldiers and cutting down the trees in large scales to prepare for war. Sauran continues: “we will drive the machine of war with the sword and the spear and iron fists of Orcs” (*Two Towers*). A new world order which is in line with the leaders’ intention of war is a familiar notion in the War on Terror Era that finds analogous scenes like the one mentioned here in *The Lord of the Rings* series.

As you should recall, the most noticeable features in defining Terrorism were “creation of fear”, “transcending boundaries”, and “use of violence” and “mass destruction weapons” to achieve a political aim. The first two issues—fear creation and invading borders in *The Lord of the Rings*—have already been covered. The forthcoming lines intend to cover the use of violence and mass destruction weapons in the film.

As mentioned earlier, chemical, biological and nuclear weapons are considered as weapons of mass destruction. In *The Lord of the Rings*, biological weapons and genetic engineering are plainly at work. “Genetic engineering is the process of human intervention to transfer functional genes (DNA) between two biological organisms” (Schneider, p.253). In *The Fellowship* and *The Two Towers* there are some irritating scenes when Sauran is cross-breeding Orcs and Goblins to produce a new creature called the Uruk-hai. They benefit from the powers of both races, without sharing the weak points—they possess the fierceness of the Orcs and benefit from the huge body of the Trolls.

Other than the issues discussed above, there are other less remarkable subjects that may resemble some concerns of post 9/11. Among them some war imageries and issues such as doubting one of your own can be named. As mentioned earlier, after the 9/11 attacks the government grew suspicious of almost everyone and started arresting many Americans for the possibility of being a potential terrorist. In *The Return of the Ring*, as a result of the Ring’s consumption of Frodo’s will and Gollum’s duplicity, Frodo doubts Sam’s honesty—his most loyal friend—and they have a fight.

Film imageries that might resemble some of the 9/11 events are not rare but definitely short in length. Amongst them a scene at the beginning moments of *The Fellowship*, when in Bilbo’s 111th birthday one of Gandalf’s fireworks takes the shape of a dragon is a popular one. In her *Fantasy Film Post 9/11*, Kelly likens the dragon to a

plane that “elicit inevitable recall of 9/11 events” (p.25). In this scene, Merry and Pippin fire Gandalf’s fireworks without his knowing and one takes the shape of a plane while the other explodes into missile-like flames” (*Fantasy Film*, p.25). At this horrible sight the tiny hobbits become terrified. They try to run away from the flaming dragon while looking upward with fear. Kelly believes that the “viewers may identify with this scene, as footage of 9/11 constantly featured onlookers running away and looking upward in a similar manner” (Ibid.).

Another scene is the final moments of *The Two Towers*, when a suicide bomber attacks the stronghold of Rohan. In this scene a great part of the fortress explodes along with the suicide bomber and many innocent villagers who are fighting for their city without any prior military training. The way this bomber chooses to carry out his mission and its outcome are very much alike what suicide hijackers did in 9/11.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this study, context is an important factor in success and reception of films as cultural products. Films that are adapted from other literary works are no exception to this. In fact, according to theories of adaptation, one important factor that should be taken into consideration in success of a certain adapted work is the rightness of historical moment called the “context of reception”.

The Lord of the Rings was written during the war. Yet Tolkien rejected any influence upon his work by that context against all its other indications. Forty years after that, Jackson’s team brought the novel to Hollywood in a time when, again, a war over power – however in a different manner— was going on. Once more the audience of the work tended to view it as an allegory of the war they were witnessing: War on Terror. Many critics argued that the film’s resemblance to contemporary historical events had been a significant factor in its success, believing that its screening after the 9/11 attacks had affected people’s perception of the film.

The Lord of the Rings, speaks on behalf of a contemporary war scenario and resonates with many contemporary concerns of its viewers which resulted in its pronounced reception on part of the film goers. *The Lord of the Rings*, an escapist fantasy that could belong merely to the realm of imagination, could find a greater significance for its post 9/11 viewers only because it tells the story of war over power and was screened in an era burdened with the same problem.

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