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"Now that I see him, I do pity him": Gollum's Literary and Cinematic Development(s)

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Abstract:

Peter Jackson's 2002 film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Two Towers* (1954) has gathered a great deal of attention from both academic and fan communities for its portrayal of the character of Gollum. Though the detailed rendering of the character through motion capture technology has been generally praised, scholars like David Bratman and Kristin Thompson disagree as to whether Jackson's Gollum is reflective of Tolkien's vision for the character. What these discussions often ignore, however, is that Tolkien's conception of Gollum changed significantly as he wrote and revised *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, resulting in a more ethically compromised character than initially introduced to the reading public. In Jackson's *Towers*, various elements of "*mise-en-scène*" (Hutcheon 55) have the effect of accentuating Gollum's humanity and pitiable qualities, and of highlighting the character's virtues without softening his malevolent qualities. Motivated by considerations both creative and commercial, Jackson and his collaborators make a number of changes and expansions in adapting their source material that, explained in the terms of adaption theory, grant greater "access to" Gollum's "consciousness" (qtd in Hutcheon 55) than the narrator of *LOTR* allows. Jackson maintains this proximity by capitalizing on Gollum's status as a victim of physical abuse at the hands of others, and of self-inflicted psychological abuse. Using a theoretical framework derived from scholarly works of adaptation studies, like Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2nd ed. 2013), this presentation examined how Jackson's cinematic depiction of Gollum both expands on Tolkien's characterization while simultaneously reemphasizing the admirable aspects of the character present in the first edition of *The Hobbit*.

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