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Under a Long Shadow

Sequels, Prequels, Pre-Texts, and Intertexts

In chapter 1, I offered multiple metaphors by which we can make sense of paratexts—as airlocks, as high priests of textuality, as overflow, as convergence—but on a basic level, we can understand them as intertexts. Intertextuality refers to the fundamental and inescapable interdependence of all textual meaning upon the structures of meaning proposed by other texts. In common usage, *intertextuality* refers to instances wherein a film or program refers to and builds some of its meaning off another film or program, and *intertext* to the referenced film or program. For instance, *West Side Story* invokes the intertexts of *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Colbert Report* relies on its viewers' intertextual knowledge of pundit shows to parody and satirize programs such as *The O'Reilly Factor* (1996–), and *The Sopranos* intertextually plays with and reworks gangster movie tropes. Intertextuality is a system that calls for the viewer to use previously seen texts to make sense of the one at hand. As Laurent Jenny notes, it “introduces a new way of reading which destroys the linearity of a text,”¹ instead opening the text up to meanings from outside, so that often much of (our understanding of) a text will be constructed outside of the text. And while it is more obvious in examples such as *West Side Story*, *The Colbert Report*, or *The Sopranos*, no text creates its entire meaning for itself by itself, as viewers will always make sense of a new text using structures and orders of meaning offered to them by other texts, genres, and viewing experiences. Intertextuality is always at work, with texts framing each other just as I have shown paratexts to frame texts. In this regard, paratextuality is in fact a subset of intertextuality. What distinguishes the two terms is that intertextuality often refers to the instance wherein one or more bona fide shows frame another show, whereas paratextuality refers to the instance wherein a textual fragment or “peripheral” frames a show.

However, paratextuality and intertextuality regularly bleed into and rely upon one another. As Genette uses the word “paratext,” he implies a form of subservience to a greater entity. Even if textually the paratext may prove constitutive of that entity, paratexts are generally outgrowths of a film or program. But what of the instance when a show is seen as an outgrowth of another show, as an extension that is functionally subservient and dependent? In such cases, shows can and should be analyzed as paratexts. Paratextuality and intertextuality, though, are also intertwined in that intertextual frames are not wholly personal and insular. Rather, talk and discussion will circulate intertextual frames, suggesting ways that one might interpret a show, or forming an entryway or in medias res paratext that is as fully realized and powerful as are trailers, ad campaigns, or bonus materials. Intertextuality, in other words, often works through the calcified form of paratexts such as viewer discussion. Thus, this chapter will examine various ways in which paratexts do the work of intertextuality, and various ways in which paratextuality and intertextuality combine.

Michael Iampolski notes that “by creating a specific intertextual field as its own environment, each text in its own way seeks to organize and regroup its textual predecessors,” thereby also creating “its own history of culture,”² but I will examine how paratexts—or shows working as paratexts—operationalize this process. In particular, I am interested in how such “intertextual fields” are created before we even sit down in the cinema or turn on the television. Valentin Volosinov argues that what is important about a text “is not that it is a stable and always self-equivalent signal, but that it is an always changeable and adaptable sign.”³ Tony Bennett explains Volosinov and Bakhtin’s intertextual theory by observing that “the position of any single text in relation to other texts, and hence its function, is liable to constant shifts and displacements as new forms of writing transform and reorganize the entire system of relationships between texts.”⁴ In this chapter, I will focus on how paratexts manage such changes, adaptations, shifts, and reorganizations.

I begin by studying the process of adaptation, specifically how Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* books established a paratextual perimeter around their filmic adaptations for some would-be viewers, paratextualizing the films even before release. Moving from adaptation to more varied forms of intertextuality, I then examine how these films themselves became powerful inhibitors for audiences’ reception of Peter Jackson’s subsequent *King Kong* and of Andrew Adamson’s filmic adaptation of C. S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Of interest to me is how

audience discussion, as paratext, works to cast a formidable shadow, in the form of the previous film, over the reception of the subsequent films. I then chart how such shadows become prominent enough that they can affect even the production of subsequent texts, as I study how *Batman Begins* maneuvered to escape the darkened shroud of Batman's previous cinematic outing, *Batman and Robin*. Finally, I study how intertextuality becomes a communal game, played in the realm of the paratext. I look at how audience discussion surrounding the release of *Lost* and *Six Degrees* created a paratextual perimeter in the form of notions of executive producer J. J. Abrams's supposed scripting style. Fans and once-fans of Abrams's earlier shows offered interpretive schemas for his recent shows, based on their understanding of how his shows worked. In doing so, they communicated intertextual knowledge (rightly or wrongly) to non-fans and non-viewers of that work, thereby illustrating how intertextual knowledge can reside in and disseminate via paratexts, not solely in and via personal viewing experiences.

Overall, the chapter examines the complex hall of paratextual and intertextual mirrors through which meaning and reception must pass, and how in this hall intertextuality will often work through paratexts. Nick Couldry asks the important question, "On what terms can we go on thinking, and talking, about 'texts' *at all* in a culture where, in a sense, we have too many texts?"⁵ As does the book as a whole, this chapter suggests that relational, intertextual and paratextual studies are where our efforts might lie. Finding out which texts, or which parts and iterations of texts, are determinative and controlling of each other can tell us a great deal, and can help us to better understand how and where meaning begins and how it is extended and stretched elsewhere.

A Return to Middle Earth:

Pre-Viewing Lord of the Rings (with Bertha Chin)

In the early months of 2001, Bertha Chin and I conducted a somewhat peculiar research project: we examined audience interpretation of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* nine months before the film was released.⁶ We had not seen the film, nor had any of the audience members under examination; the film, after all, was still in the throes of production. However, though nine months away from cinematic release, the film was at least as many months bathed in hype: amidst continuing and excited press releases, magazine articles, and official website

updates, the movie had announced itself long before its Christmas 2001 release. On the Internet in particular, dedicated *Lord of the Rings* web discussion sites were thriving, often with multiple posts a day, producing a curious situation in which people were congregating to discuss a text that seemingly did not yet exist, often in great detail. Thus, whereas chapter 2 argues that texts often begin with their promos, here were individuals parsing and debating all manner of directorial decisions, talking excitedly about particular scenes, and grumbling about poor acting, long before New Line had released a trailer or poster, let alone the movie. Numerous audience researchers have observed the ease and efficiency of conducting their research online, but here we had an audience waiting for us before the film! If not “viewers” discussing a text, they were at the least “pre-viewers” discussing a “pre-text.” And if, as Espen Aarseth has argued, “like electrons, [texts] can never be experienced directly, only by the signs of their behavior,”⁷ why wait for the text when the “signs of its behavior” were already evident? Chin and I saw this as a golden opportunity to study how textuality begins, where it comes from, and how the text and audience meet.

We were not the first researchers to discuss the consumption of a text before it occurs. As described in chapter 1, Tony Bennett and Janet Woolcott conducted a landmark study of James Bond as a “dormant signifier, inactive most of the time, but capable of being periodically reactivated.”⁸ Bond’s multiple textual appearances, they argued, created an interpretive shorthand for audiences: when a new Bond film is on the horizon, we already have a clear sense of what to expect, and we already have a set of reading strategies and frames ready for use:

The process of reading is not one in which reader and text meet as abstractions but one in which the inter-textually organised reader meets the inter-textually organised text. The exchange is never a pure one between two unsullied entities, existing separately from one another, but is rather “muddled” by the cultural debris which attach to both texts and readers in the determinate conditions which regulate the specific forms of their encounter.⁹

Performing audience research into the “unsullied entity” of *Judge Dredd’s* (1995) would-be audiences in 1995, Martin Barker and Kate Brooks examined how numerous audience members discussed the film before watching it. In particular, Barker and Brooks were able to isolate

various reading frames, ranging from, for instance, Stallone-followers, to action-film aficionados, to fans of the 2000 *A.D.* comic books on which the film was based. High expectations and hopes, as well as expectations to be disappointed, were commonplace, and yet as they note, all such reactions pointed to the presence of an *ideal* text, suggesting the degree to which audiences use available intertexts (Stallone as star, blockbuster, 2000 *A.D.*, etc.) to project outward an image of the text to come, one that they can “consume” and with which they can engage before the actual film is released.¹⁰ How would the *Lord of the Rings* pre-viewers confirm, further illustrate, and/or challenge these findings?

Given the plethora of discussion in online forums, we felt it unnecessary to contact specific posters. Moreover, whereas media studies have long read viewers and the nature of viewers off the film or program, in a flip of this rubric, here we were attempting to read the text off its viewers. Since our intent was not to make sense of the individual viewers, we did not seek to contextualize their comments within the broader life histories to which one-on-one interviews give researchers greater access. We recorded and coded discussion from the film’s official discussion board—www.lordoftherings.net—as well as from two Yahoo Groups boards (“*lotr*” and “*lord_OT_rings_movie*”) and from www.tolkien-movies.com. Each of these sites is, of course, its own communally authored paratext and could be studied for its general framing of the *Lord of the Rings* books as text, but we aimed to cut a specific path through the wealth of material at each address. Of prime interest to us was any talk that constructed an image of the film, and hence that would provide insight into how a (filmic) pre-text takes form and becomes a text: we were not seeking a representative response or even series of responses, but rather were interested in the form(s) that the text took during early pre-release discussion.

Immediately apparent was that all posters appeared to be devoted fans of Tolkien’s books. Elsewhere, Ian McKellen, Liv Tyler, Peter Jackson, or fantasy fans, say, were undoubtedly conducting their own dialogue, but these posters displayed the utmost familiarity with and regard for Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. Many posters adopted Tolkien(esque) names, such as Éowyn, princeimrahil, Ms. Took, theprecious, and Mithril1960. Most filled their posts with references to the book, as when, for instance, one poster noted that s/he would “wait and watch carefully, like Elendil waiting for Gil-Galad.” Outright statements of fealty to the books and/or to Tolkien were also commonplace, as when one poster wrote of how s/he “will always return to the books over and over”; another proposed, “If [the

movie] use[s] a narrator I think he should sound like Tolkien.” On one level, we might see such verbal tags as expressing a certain sense of “guilt” over posting about the film, as if to do so was to “betray” the books, and thus performed to other posters a faithfulness to Tolkien and the books. On a simple level, though, they also show how many of these posters were longtime Tolkien fans who had come together as an online community with their love of the books as the common factor.

The posters were united by their love for the books, but opinions on the films diverged, ranging from those who raged about the adaptations to those whose excitement could barely be contained: as one poster noted gleefully, “when I found out they were making the movie I could have peed!!!!” To the purists (those who were not peeing with excitement), the films represented a considerable threat to the books, since they saw the story as the books, and any attempt to transplant that story elsewhere as a crime against the text. For instance, one poster explained:

I’m afraid I’ve¹¹ been gun shy of any movies, etc, of LOTR [*Lord of the Rings*]. Several years ago, I caught an animated version of the hobbit on TV. I couldnt bear to watch it, though, because the elves were purple. PURPLE! sorry, but in my book, they are not purple, or green, or any other color. Then, I had the misfortune of reading a play adaption of the Hobbit, which butchered the story beyond all recognition.

The poster’s choice of terms—“gun shy,” “butchered beyond all recognition”—signifies the degree to which the television and play adaptations were seen to perpetrate *violence* on the story. Similarly, others wrote of their fear of “Hollywoodification”: “you know,” wrote one, “having all the women run around with no clothes on, gratuitous sex scenes, getting rid of complicated concepts, etc.” To these posters, the text of *Lord of the Rings* was immutable, best honored and respected by being left alone. “I can’t help but feel,” wrote one poster, “that it’s gonna be screwed up and wrong. And be a total veggie effort.”

Nevertheless, if only for the fact that these boards had been set up to discuss the film, complete and uncompromising purism was rare. More common was a negotiated position, whereby Tolkien fans *hoped* for three great films and were willing to allow the filmmakers some leeway in translating the beloved books to the screen, but remained somewhat skeptical and fearful. This sense of anxiety was particularly evident in the many postings that made predictions regarding specific scenes or characters.

Of the books' ending, for instance, many felt that New Line and Jackson would cut the last hundred pages or so, ending instead with the great victory at Mordor. "I think," wrote a poster, "that [using Tolkien's ending] will confuse the general film-going public"; another poster echoed, "The filmgoing public likes 'good' closure," and thus "would freak out and cry foul, as they have not the insight to see the true message here." Besides generalizing the "uninitiated viewer" in order to affirm the posters' own roles as acolytes of Tolkien and of Sense, statements such as these expressed an awareness that the text as these Tolkien fans knew and loved it would likely change along with the shift in medium and intended audience. Tolkien fans realized that the text could not translate *as is*, and their discussion and supposed ability to predict such changes became a way of preparing themselves for change.

Numerous postings included expressions of "understanding" why changes must be made. As mentioned above, the general viewing public and their supposed desires for a film were frequently listed as the guilty party, but as one poster stated, "I am not thrilled with the changes [. . . but] I am inclined to be the voice of reason." Along similar lines, another poster wrote, "Everyone should know that to condense such a huge book, with all of the background information into a Movie would be impossible." Or, using a different strategy to predict and reason away differences, many posters engaged in exaggerated and humorous predictions. One board, for instance, had an active thread in which posters offered alternative casting, including the proposal that television's Ally McBeal, Calista Flockhart, might play the shriveled-up monster Gollum. Amidst such anxious play, predictions, expressions of "understanding," and preparations for disappointment, as did Barker and Brooks,¹² we saw the omnipresence of ideals for the film: posters knew the text they wanted to see, often created images of texts they feared they might see, and then had to somehow make these different texts cohabit.

Just as with the coming film's detractors, though, all images and creations of the filmic text were conducted under the long shadow of the *Lord of the Rings* books. While fears and anxiety showed the obvious presence of an ideal text against which the films would be measured, so too did excitement operate under the book's long shadow. Central to the joys of what the adaptation might entail were hopes that the films might "bring the books to life" or "*keep* them alive"—the most commonly noted phrases in our research. "Finally," wrote one poster, "my favorite books of all time are coming to life!!" Another posited, "I'm not interested in

details about the movie. I'd rather think that Peter Jackson's work could be a good reason for us to re-think Tolkien's books in today's scenario"; a third poster hoped that "future generations will find enough merit in the story to re-film with special effects 50 years on." Many looked to the movies as breathing new and continued life into the books and reassuring their place in cultural history and their importance for years to come.

There was even an element of self-vindication in these glowing endorsements of the films, a feeling that "our only hope is [. . .] that [family and friends] see the movie. Then we can set back, smugly and say 'see that's what I'm talking about!'" "I am so glad," added another, "that [the movies] will draw even more attention to the books." A clear desire of many posters, then, was that the movies would contribute further to the *books'* popularity and cultural presence, expanding *Lord of the Rings* with yet more (para)text. One poster in particular offered an analysis of his and his fellow fans' interest in the films as being

based on a desire to extend, validate and prolong our own experience of the [books]. Having had our imagination fired, our emotions stimulated and our intellect piqued on the journey through Middle Earth, can we then just leave it behind? [. . .] Was Phantom Menace a good film (by Star Wars Standards)? No, It was not. Did it enhance the Star Wars experience? Yes, It most certainly did. Will Peter Jackson's version live up to expectations? I don't know, but come December, I intend to be one of the first people to find out. Will it enhance the Lord of the Rings experience? Look around you, it already has.

What we see happening here is a subjugation of the films under the long shadow of the books, or what this poster calls the "Lord of the Rings experience," accepting the extension of *Lord of the Rings* from a literary tale to a transmediated franchise. Similarly, another poster offers that "the entertainment value of an adaptation is indeed in anticipation," again signaling the degree to which the adaptation is tucked under the wing of the "original" text.

Whether the fans would ultimately revile the films, watch tentatively, and/or enjoy them immensely, the web discussion suggested that their reactions to the films would continue the experience of *the books*. To these fans, the films were functionally junior to the books, and any response to the films, to a large degree, *pre-exists* the films, belonging as much to the books. In Tolkien's *The Two Towers*, our heroes Frodo and Sam have

a deeply metatextual discussion about the ways in which stories are told, and to Sam's question, "Why to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end?", Frodo responds, "No, they never end as tales. But the people in them come, and go when their part's ended. Our part will end later—or sooner."¹³ Here, a similar process is at work, as the *Lord of the Rings* books, and reactions to or decodings of them, promised to live on in the shell of the *Lord of the Rings* films. John Fiske refers to intertextuality as "ghost textuality,"¹⁴ a phrase that suggests texts living beyond their time, always with unfinished business to perform. The films might ultimately, as one poster proposed, "inform, expand and improve my vision [of Middle Earth]," but this paratextual vision was first and foremost a vision from, and affiliated with, the books.

The viewers whose responses we recorded may not have been "pre-viewers" of the films as much as they were simply viewers of the books, engaging with a text in a new textual body, anticipating one *with* the other, already reaching to one *by way of* the other. If we asked which text was primary, clearly the films were corollaries to the books. Bennett suggests that intertextuality can work as sedimentary layers,¹⁵ yet these viewers' responses demand that we not limit our analysis of any text to its topmost, freshest layer. Rather, an "underground" layer may prove to be considerably more important to any given audience member, serving as bedrock to any new layer of silt, text to an adaptation's paratext. Of course, the degree to which different layers of sediment become controlling and determinative of the reading process will change from reader to reader, viewer to viewer. Furthermore, audiences will not share all of the same "layers": anyone who had not read *Lord of the Rings* or had not cared for it would approach the films without such "bedrock," just as a diehard Peter Jackson fan would arrive at the films with a completely different bedrock, or as a *Lord of the Rings* reader who is *also* a Peter Jackson fan may arrive with yet more complex striations and sedimentary history. But here, the films were turned into paratexts to the books' text.

The Ten-Ton Balrog in the Room: King Kong and The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe

The subsequent worldwide success of the *Lord of the Rings* films hardly needs recounting. According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb.com), as of early 2009, *Return of the King* held the second spot on the all-time worldwide box office list, *The Two Towers* the ninth spot, and

Fellowship of the Ring the sixteenth, combining for approximately \$3 billion. Our research uncovered many Tolkien fans declaring all-out war on the box office record set by *Titanic* (1997), calling on Tolkien fans to unite to ensure that their beloved text would sit atop the textual universe. While ultimately no single *Lord of the Rings* film beat *Titanic*, the trilogy's remarkable success still proved just how lucrative textual shadows can be for Hollywood's balance books: when loyalty to a pre-text sends viewers to the cinema with determination, Hollywood can only win.¹⁶ Meanwhile, as chapter 3 examined, its DVDs became their own sensation. Thus, we might expect that while Tolkien's shadow loomed over the trilogy in early 2001, by the time the films had been released, they had become mega-blockbusters casting their own formidable shadows. In particular, when in 2005 Peter Jackson and New Line were set to release their next film, *King Kong*, and while Disney and Walden were gearing up to release an adaptation of C. S. Lewis's much-beloved *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, (pre)fan discussion of both films, and later reviews of them at IMDb suggested that the *Lord of the Rings* films had become their own powerful intertexts, framing and prefiguring the reception of these two new films. Whereas the title *Lord of the Rings* served as the intertextual bridge between books and films, now director Peter Jackson, his effects studio Weta Digital, and actor Andy Serkis bridged *Lord of the Rings* to *King Kong*, while *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* was bridged to *Lord of the Rings* by virtue of being a fantasy directed by a Kiwi in New Zealand, and as a result of Tolkien's well-known relationship with C. S. Lewis. Quite simply, too, these were two of the biggest blockbusters to hit the world since *The Return of the King*, and so comparisons to the last big thing were perhaps inevitable.

As we had found with the *Lord of the Rings* films in 2001, for many viewers *King Kong* and *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* seemed unable to step out of the shadow of *Lord of the Rings*. A scan through the several thousand reviews of *King Kong* at IMDb, for instance, reveals that for many, *Lord of the Rings* was a natural, obvious, and inescapable intertext for *King Kong*. One reviewer registers disappointment, elaborating that it is "maybe because I love Lord of The Ring trilogy so much that I expect Peter Jackson to make god like creations every time." Another complains that, "while there is no question Peter Jackson is a special effects master this film lacks the intrigue of the Lord Of The Rings series." Again and again, reviewers cannot discuss *King Kong* without reference to *Lord of the Rings*, illustrating the degree to which the trilogy

had prefigured their expectations and hopes and/or the degree to which, as reviewers, they assume that their readers *expect* to hear comparisons to *Lord of the Rings*. A reviewer notes sadly that “I didn’t feel the same way of what I felt in ‘Lord of the Rings,’” as if the new movie *should* have replicated the effects and affects of the trilogy, a response echoed by another reviewer, who asks, “So what has Jackson achieved? A remake which adds nothing, looks bad in places but has great landscapes well shot that just make us wish we were watching Lord of the Rings again. Sorry, I wanted to like this movie but I see little point to its existence.”

Even some of those who loved the new film have the vocabulary and scenes of *Lord of the Rings* closest to hand when trying to explain how it succeeds, as when a reviewer glows that Jackson “was also able to masterfully capture some very frightening scenes in the movie, similar to what he did for Shelob’s Lair in Lord of the Rings.” Over the course of the three *Lord of the Rings* films, many viewers had come to know what to expect, and to like the familiar pleasures, gratifications, and affective registers of these films; the release of *King Kong*, along with its intertextual bridge to *Lord of the Rings*, allowed and encouraged them to project these pleasures onto the new film. Then, whether they found *King Kong* to live up to *Lord of the Rings* or let it down, those projected meanings and pleasures proved at least in part determinative of their viewing, interpretation, and reception of *King Kong*, as *Lord of the Rings* set up a perimeter around *King Kong*. Similarly, many of those who hated *Lord of the Rings* projected their dislike and dissatisfaction onto *King Kong*, forming again a framework for interpretation and reception that could not easily be avoided. Reading through IMDb’s mass of *Lord of the Rings*-based reviews of *King Kong* thus affirms that long shadows are by no means the sole provenance of adaptations: though *King Kong* was of course a remake, *Lord of the Rings* references proved just as dominant, if not moreso, in reviews as did references to the previous *King Kong* films.

In such discussion, not only do we see *King Kong* function as junior to *The Lord of the Rings*, but as is similarly evident in the *Two Towers* bonus materials discussed in chapter 3, we also see the construction of Peter Jackson as author. Jackson becomes a brand and hence an inter- or paratextual framing device, a matrix of other (inter)texts that served a paratextual role in directing interpretation. In short, Jackson becomes a paratext that manages a broader textual system.

Meanwhile, however, December 2005’s other blockbuster, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, similarly fell heavy prey to the *Lord of*

the *Rings* effect and shadow. Undoubtedly, *Lord of the Rings*' success was instrumental in opening up a window of opportunity for Andrew Adamson, Walden, and Disney to adapt C. S. Lewis's stories, making *Lord of the Rings* not only an intertext but a precondition for *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*'s existence on screen. Lewis and Tolkien have often been talked of as a pair, given their friendship, their interest in fantasy from within the hallowed walls of Oxford University, and their mutual interest in using fantasy to serve as religious allegory or national mythology. Just as *Lord of the Rings* helped create room for *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, the latter's producers similarly clearly hoped to tap into the sizeable *Lord of the Rings* market, and thus the film's trailers, posters, and marketing all borrowed heavily from *Lord of the Rings*-type battle scenes, elaborate CGI, and general look. New Line had, four years earlier, actively hoped that Tolkien fans would project their reception of the books onto the films, and now Walden was similarly encouraging a projection of the pleasures and meanings, not just of the *Chronicles of Narnia* books, but also of *Lord of the Rings* onto *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*.

To judge from reviews at IMDb, this attempt at setting up an intertextual bridge was highly successful, though ironically perhaps *too* successful, so that *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* ended up pinned down under the weight of *Lord of the Rings*. One reviewer declares, "If you're like me you'll find yourself thinking 'why does this feel like a third rate LORD OF THE RINGS?'" This sentiment is echoed by numerous others:

Adapting a book that so many audience members have read and cherish is surely a daunting task, but I believe it is also a great responsibility. Recently, Peter Jackson set the bar pretty high in this regard with the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy. Unfortunately, Adamson's "Narnia" wasn't quite up to snuff.

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe is a wonder, a delightful film, but it hasn't the visual richness of Lord of the Rings, nor has the story the complexity of Tolkien's elaborate mythology, or its immense variety, its real magic.

Already spoilt by mega war scenes from the Lord of the Rings trilogy, *Chronicles* doesn't go one up against what audiences already experienced, safe to substitute Uruk-hais and various Orcs with animals and mythical creatures like the centaurs.

Comparisons are inevitable. So here it is: Is this the new “Lord of the Rings”? Bloody hell, no.

The other main gripe I have with the movie is its mimicry of the Lord of the Rings movies. Lots of armor and weapons and posturing and clashing of armies. Unfortunately, it’s all pretty dull and hackneyed.

Just as many of Barker, Arthurs, and Harindranth’s *Crash* viewers proved unable to watch that film free of the frames posed by critical reviews and the British censorship drive,¹⁷ here *Lord of the Rings* (both films and books) clearly provided a list of demands and expectations for *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* that prefigured how at least some audience members would respond to and make sense of it.

IMDb reveals a whole host of other intertexts, though, as did the discussion board at www.narniaweb.com. At the latter, upon early announcement of the film, it was the author or brand function of Disney that concerned many posters more than Tolkien or *Lord of the Rings*. Though Walden would *make* the film and Disney *distribute* it, this distinction was lost on many fans, as a separate thread was set up to gripe about Disney’s involvement. Disney was seen to be saccharine, juvenile, and too definitively “mass” media for many at the site who found the books to be more sophisticated, dark, and elite. Yet other intertexts joined the mix, too. One poster maps out her reactions to various intertexts:

First reaction to hearing about the film: awesome! [smiley emoticon]
Then I hear Disney is doing the movie: oh [worried emoticon]
Then I hear Walden is doing the film: yeah! [smiley emoticon]
Then I see the trailer for [Walden’s] *Around the World in 80 Days* [worried emoticon]

Andrew Adamson’s selection as director, meanwhile, scared those who felt his previous films *Shrek* (2001) and *Shrek 2* (2004) were unlikely to give him the skill-set needed for a serious live-action film, though his directorial history pleased others. As the release date neared, and as *Lord of the Rings* parallels became more commonplace, so too did *Harry Potter* comparisons race back and forth. Being yet another adaptation of fantasy material by an English children’s writer laid *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* squarely under the large shadow of the *Harry Potter* franchise, and thus pre-release discussion and post-release reviews often framed

Adamson's film in Potteresque terms. Even *Passion of the Christ* figured heavily in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* viewer discussion, given that both films were Christian epics (and both contain sacrifice on Calvary scenes that many viewers found to be deeply anti-Semitic), and Tilda Swinton fans heralded in other intertextual shadows by discussing her acting and characterization in such films as the gender-bending *Orlando* (1992). *Lord of the Rings* was, therefore, only one of the intertextual framing devices behind *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, as a huge network of intertexts and of audiences' memories of those intertexts converged on the text at hand, invoked and recommended by the paratexts of audience discussion, and making it, as Julia Kristeva argues of textuality, "an intersection of textual surfaces," not a fixed point or meaning.¹⁸

IMDb and fan discussion boards in general become some of the key paratexts through which many of these intertexts, links, and preferences are offered to the public, serving as the evidence of past intertextual readings at the same time as they share those readings with others. In the next chapter, I will turn to a closer examination of how audiences use paratexts to prefer and proffer their own readings and interpretations.

For the time being, though, and looking back on our research from 2001, alongside viewer responses to *King Kong* and *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, I am also struck by how *competitive* viewers can be with their intertexts. In 2001, Tolkien fans feared that the films might usurp the books, and yet hoped that they would eclipse *Titanic's* success. Years later, a different set of fans of the *Lord of the Rings* films prickled at the notion that either *King Kong* or *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* could "better" their beloved trilogy. And one of the IMDb reviewers of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* notes, "As a loyal Harry Potter fan, *it pains me to say this film totally blows all four HP films off the map*" (emphasis added). Elsewhere, *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* fans have endured a long feud, their divergent textual galaxies seemingly unable to cohabit in one universe. Not only, then, do texts cast shadows, but many viewers become invested in *how much* of a shadow they cast, often wanting their own beloved text to stand tallest, basking in the light as a dominant intertext, and attempting to reduce others to the status of sequels, copies, weak paratexts, and pale comparisons. Hollywood in part conditions us to think in terms of competition via the incessant reporting of box office records and the yearly parade of Oscar, Golden Globe, BAFTA, and countless other award ceremonies, all of which often seem more important for the second-guessing and competitive cinephilia that they induce than for the actual awarding of excellence. The industry is deeply invested in encouraging

us to “vote” for our favorite films at the box office. But to reduce a battle of the intertexts to industry programming would be insulting to the intelligence of movie viewers and to the rich affective involvement inspired by well-told stories. Powerful intertexts are those that some audience members find involving and elaborate enough that they can preside over many intertextual interactions, much as the Bible or Homer (the Greek poet or the Simpson patriarch) have. In this regard, as much as intertextuality and paratextuality are about framing and the prefiguration of textuality, they are also about, and are motored by, fans’ (and others’) desires for certain texts to stay alive continuously, reflected off, informing, and inspiring all manner of other texts.

A Dark Shadow over Gotham: Batman Begins

Thus far, I have considered the role of intertexts as pre-texts primarily when they are beloved and when they have inspired fandom and significant affective investment. However, texts can also cast dark shadows when they have been panned and hated. Here, I turn to the example of *Batman and Robin* and the intertextual pall it cast over the Batman film franchise. *Batman and Robin* is by most viewers’ accounts an atrociously bad film, too bad even to be camp. At IMDb, the combined ranking of over 60,000 reviewers rates *Batman and Robin* 3.4 out of 10, and as one reviewer caustically comments of director Joel Schumacher:

He treats the entire Batman franchise like a joke. Even if it was funny, this would be betraying the name of Batman. But here, seeing as it’s NOT funny, it only succeeds in becoming the worst of the Batman movies, and, arguably, the worst film ever created[. . .] Seriously, I’d have more respect for Schumacher if I discovered that he hated Batman, and had intentionally ruined it with this garbage. Then, this might actually be just his own personal joke. Instead, it borders on a travesty of good cinema.

Of course, as the reviewer reminds us, *Batman and Robin* came in a long line of Batman comics, films, television series, and toys related to the much-revered intertext and popular hero.¹⁹ Former Batman screenings suffered mixed reviews, with a general furor surrounding the casting of Michael Keaton for the first film in 1989, and many a fan of the dark, gritty character reinvented by Frank Miller in his 1986 graphic novel, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, grimacing at reruns of the “BAM! KERPOW!” sixties television Batman. Thus, *Batman and Robin* came in an already-turbulent

intertextual wake. But the previous films had at least been lucrative for Time Warner, resulting in a steady pace of one film every two or three years and plenty of spinoff merchandising. *Batman and Robin's* near-universal panning, on the heels of poor reviews for the previous entry, *Batman Forever* (1995), finally appeared to have killed the franchise altogether, even when superhero films became all the rage, with hits such as *X-Men* (2000) and *Spider-Man* (2002). Then, in 2004 came the news that Time Warner was back with Batman, having hired Christopher Nolan to direct *Batman Begins*.

The tale of *Batman Begins* is one of how to escape a dark shadow. Audience and critical reception of *Batman and Robin* had been so near-universally caustic that it had set up a strong paratextual perimeter and a flaming hoop through which any subsequent Batman text would need to pass. *Batman Begins* and Time Warner needed to apologize for *Batman and Robin* and to erase any semblance of an intertextual connection: only Batman himself could remain, albeit radically reconfigured. They also needed to create for themselves a different paratextual perimeter and invoke a different set of intertexts. With this in mind, the studio hired Nolan to write and direct. Nolan was best known for his dark and edgy work on the tale-told-backwards *Memento* (2000) and on his adaptation of the Norwegian serial killer study *Insomnia* (2002), and thus was seen as untainted by big-budget Hollywood, regarded instead as a storyteller with considerable interest in character exploration. Casting similarly sought to veer away from the A-list car crash that was *Batman and Robin*. Nolan hired as his Batman Christian Bale, an actor who had grown up on screen, yet often in independent films and/or character roles, and who was most famous for his eerie portrayal of yuppie serial killer Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (2000). A director of a serial killer film and the star of another serial killer film were uniting. Nolan's love of Batman in his Frank Miller-inspired Dark Knight form was widely publicized, as marketing and hiring for the film announced that this movie would be a "return" to the brooding noir aesthetic and sensibility of Batman, skipping over his cinematic and televisual history.²⁰

Meanwhile, Oscar winners and highly respected "austere" actors Morgan Freeman and Michael Caine were cast, as were the well-respected Liam Neeson, Tom Wilkinson, Gary Oldman, Rutger Hauer (famous for his villain role in the noir *Blade Runner*), and, hot off their breakthrough roles in *The Last Samurai* (2003) and *28 Days Later*, respectively, Ken Watanabe and Cillian Murphy. Casting and the hiring of production personnel is a deeply intertextual act, as producers bring together a whole host



Fig. 4.1. A prone Bruce Wayne is laid low and punished by Ducard in *Batman Begins*, paying for the crimes of *Batman and Robin* while earning his right to be Batman.

of intertexts through the stars' personae and histories.²¹ Many of us create images of a film and its potential based solely on our knowledge of its cast and their former roles. By marshalling a host of "serious" actors and a "serious" director, *Batman Begins* and its early hype strategically overloaded the text with intertexts that they clearly hoped would contrast markedly to the casting of the former film, signaling a new era, and that would overload the film with intertexts other than *Batman and Robin*. Certainly, Batman aside, the prospect for many filmgoers of seeing a Nolan film with Bale, Freeman, Oldman, Caine, Wilkinson, Neeson, Watanabe, Murphy, Hauer, and (for measure) Katie Holmes may have been enticing.

Aside from the pre-production of *Batman Begins*, though, it is also possible to see the weight of the *Batman and Robin* fiasco on the plot of Nolan's film. The film opens with a weary and beleaguered Bruce Wayne struggling with his playboy status and living in the shadow of his father, unable to replicate Gotham City's savior and patron saint. Wayne seeks revenge against the men he believes to be behind his parents' death, but ultimately fails, instead fleeing Gotham. We next see him in a Chinese prison, having wandered aimlessly from home, fighting anyone without concern for his life, clearly a broken man. Liam Neeson's Henri Ducard arranges his release, encouraging him to climb a nearby mountain to a training facility, where Wayne is taught to fight with precision, discipline, and purpose. When Ducard reveals his ultimate plan, to lead an army of highly trained soldiers to destroy Gotham from the inside out, Wayne burns the training facility to the ground and returns to Gotham, where he

resumes his playboy lifestyle on the outside, while developing and designing the visage of Batman to wage war on crime and to protect Gotham by night. A running theme throughout the film involves the interrogation of who one “really is on the inside” (with the suggestion that Wayne becomes Batman’s mask, not vice versa).

It is easy to read this first hour of the film in the frame of *Batman and Robin*, as a sign of Wayne, Nolan, and Time Warner serving penance for the crimes of Batman’s previous cinematic outing. Wayne is a soulless playboy, emblematic of the mindless Hollywood blockbuster that was *Batman and Robin*, lost and without direction, mindful only of how far he has strayed from his father’s footsteps, just as the Batman franchise had left its roots and what it “should” be, with films that took away from rather than added to the diegetic world of Batman. The pre-TomKat Katie Holmes serves as moral beacon (and film critic stand-in?), telling him that he is a disappointment. And thus he, Nolan, and Time Warner cannot simply *be* Batman—they must *earn* the right. Removed from home, battered in a prison, left to climb a snow-swept mountain in prison clothes and without equipment, and forced into an arduous training regimen that frequently belittles him, Wayne appears to be paying for Time Warner’s past “sins” (fig. 4.1). Fresh from his role as Jedi trainer in the *Star Wars* prequel *The Phantom Menace*, Liam Neeson is seemingly invited to reprise his character, in order to make Wayne (and hence Batman) anew, and Wayne must similarly learn from Freeman and Caine (two wise old men of the film industry) before he is “ready” to become Batman. Of course, the myth of becoming has proven popular in superhero films, but given that this was the fifth film in the franchise, the choice to return to the drawing board was by no means natural. Meanwhile, Wayne is beaten and fashioned into Batman more significantly than other superheroes, many of whom discover their powers and responsibilities quite excitedly. The film is at pains to show us that he is haunted and tortured by his past and struggling to be who he should be. Thus, when Bale finally utters, “I’m Batman,” well past the hour mark of the film, he and the filmmakers have performed a long and careful cleansing ritual attempting to earn the right to make such a declaration.

Moreover, the film ends with Batman promising to look into the rise of a super-villain, The Joker. A clear allusion to an impending sequel (*The Dark Knight* [2008]), this scene is also important for its act of trying to completely erase the prior four *Batman* films from the record: the first *Batman* (1989) not only featured the villain, but famously offered Jack Nicholson in the role, and thus for *Batman Begins* to announce its

intentions to “do over” both that film and Nicholson’s performance is a bold statement that a new Batman exists.

Ultimately, then, *Batman Begins* exhibits the pressure placed on a film, not just in its reception, but also in the casting, hiring, writing, performing, directing, and promotion, when a previous film and its critical panning has cast a dark shadow over it. *Batman Begins* was faced not only with the task of winning audiences, but of winning them *back*, of recalibrating its intertexts, and of reinventing Batman. Influence, allusion, and intertextual borrowing have existed in all forms of art since time immemorial, but here we see an instance of a text that potential audience members arguably *required* to speak back to its intertexts, to delineate and announce its intertextual allegiances (the comic book Dark Knight over Schumacher’s Batman), and hence to pull itself out from under a given intertext’s long dark shadow.

In the wake of its success and popularity, *Batman Begins* may even have taught a trick or two to the production staff behind *Superman Returns* (2006) and *Rocky Balboa* (2006), two other franchises that returned after lengthy hiatuses and dismal otherwise final chapters. *Superman Returns* forced the diegetically five-year-absent-from-Earth hero to convince Lois Lane that the world once more needed him, while simultaneously bathing itself in the more austere elements of Superman’s filmic past. Promotions for the film ignored outright *Superman 3* and *Superman 4* by positing it as a sequel of sorts only to the first two films, and its teaser trailers used little more than a voiceover of Marlon Brando’s instructions to Superman from the 1978 film and John Williams’s famed soundtrack. For its part, *Rocky Balboa* opened with Rocky emotionally battered by the loss of Adrian. For Superman and Rocky, then, onscreen penance was also required for the sins of the intertexts.

*Sharing the Island with Others:
J. J. Abrams and Collective Knowledge*

The above examples examine how any given film, while supposedly a singular event, is often framed and interpreted by other films, especially when it is a sequel, prequel, spinoff, adaptation, or part of a series, but also due simply to its actors or other creative personnel. If films prove to be porous entities, however, as was argued in chapter 1,²² television shows are especially porous and open to inter- or paratextual intrusion, given that we must piece them together bit by bit over long stretches of time during

which our reading frames may change. Thus we might expect to see long shadows aplenty on television, and we might expect that some intertexts would act like reference books for television reception, continually offering ways to make sense of what is happening in the here and now. As we saw in the case of Peter Jackson as film author, television authors similarly become paratexts in their own right, constructed by the industry, creative personnel, and viewers alike as signifiers of value—as was noted in chapter 3—but also serving as interpretive decoders and frames for viewers in various ways. Over time, for instance, Jerry Bruckheimer has become shorthand in both film and television for high-concept action populated by rugged, heroic men and petite but gutsy women; David E. Kelley is known for legal dramedies with outlandish cases and often explicitly liberal politics; Dick Wolf is known for a considerably more somber, neo-conservative, and morally binaristic vision of law and order; and so forth. Viewers fashion notions of authors out of their previous work, creating an author function that works as a paratext of sorts and as a mediating figure through which intertexts affect current interpretive strategies.

Such was the case for *Lost* and *Six Degrees*, two shows executive produced by J. J. Abrams. In the early days of each show, fans and other viewers congregated to make sense of them online, and there viewers of Abrams's *Alias* in the case of *Lost*, and of *Alias* and *Lost* in the case of *Six Degrees*, offered predictions and evaluations of the new show at hand based largely on Abrams's earlier work. Elsewhere in this chapter, we have already seen how the author as paratext constructs expectations for future viewing, but my interest in the case of *Lost* and *Six Degrees* lies in how, through the prominent online television discussion site *Television Without Pity*, viewers of Abrams's past shows shared various versions of the Abrams paratextual frame with non-viewers. Thus, whereas it may seem that intertexts and paratexts rely on the vagaries of a person's previous viewing experiences, the case of *Lost* and *Six Degrees* shows that through audience and non-audience discussion, paratexts can be passed on to others who do not have the same viewing experiences (at either the film/television or paratextual level), thereby extending the reach of their long shadow. Particularly in the case of *Lost*, *Alias*'s niche fan audience was able to propose and share a series of viewing strategies and expectations with the broader, more mainstream audience that greeted *Lost* in its first season.

Writing of *Twin Peaks* (1990–91) discussion groups in the Internet's early days, Henry Jenkins noted with excitement how the advent of such

groups now allowed audience researchers “to pinpoint specific moments in the shifting meanings generated by unfolding broadcast texts, to locate episodes that generated intense response or that became particularly pivotal in the fans’ interpretation of the series as a whole.”²³ As Stanley Fish had noted with frustration (see chapter 1), too often analysts make sense of a text in its entirety after the fact, but online fan discussion allows a running catalogue and minute-by-minute register of how meanings are circulated, how the text is being interpreted, which intertexts are invoked, and, for our purposes here, how various paratexts are being discussed and activated. This becomes increasingly important in an era in which, as Jenkins has also observed, audiences are interpreting in groups, as a “collective.” Drawing on Pierre Lévy’s notion of “collective intelligence,”²⁴ Jenkins explains:

The fan community pools its knowledge because no single fan can know everything necessary to fully appreciate the series[. . .] Collective intelligence expands a community’s productive capacity because it frees individual members from the limitations of their memory and enables the group to act upon a broader range of expertise.²⁵

Yet fans are not alone in this respect, for increasingly, all sorts of viewers regularly “lurk” at supposed “fan” discussion groups, peeking to see what has been said or thought by others, and dipping into this collective knowledge. Hence, though till now this chapter’s discussion of intertextuality, paratextuality, and interpretation may have implied a fairly personal, individualistic process of reception, such sites show us how quickly paratexts can spread through talk, making both reception and paratextuality deeply communal processes.

From its beginning in 2004, *Lost* seemingly demanded talk. A genre-bending program, *Lost* opens with a plane crash on a remote South Pacific island. As the survivors gather their wits, they become aware that a strange creature lives in the jungle. Then, as the show develops, viewers learn of a mysterious hatch on the island, leading to a research station, of a series of “cursed” numbers that have caused problems for the “Lostaways,” and of a strange group of “Others” on the island who occasionally kidnap, study, and/or kill members of the group. All the while, each episode offers a flashback to the pre-crash lives of one of the characters (or, later, a flash forward to the post-rescue lives), hence adding a chronological element to the already firmly packed mystery. Given this

plethora of perplexing plot points and the lack of any definitive answer from the show to its many mysteries, many viewers of *Lost*, as did *Twin Peaks* viewers before them, have turned to the Internet and to others for help. Particularly in the show's early days, though, significant discussion and puzzle-solving at *Television Without Pity* revolved around mobilizing the author function that is Abrams and the intertext of his previous show, *Alias*.

Alias had involved a convoluted mystery surrounding a series of "Rimbaldi artifacts," and thus many fans posited that the set-up and resolution of the Rimbaldi mystery on *Alias* might offer the key to interpreting *Lost*. To begin with, some floated the idea that the two shows might literally be connected, offering, for instance, "Perhaps [the] Island is the Horizon or part of Rimbaldi's artifacts." But beyond such suggestions—often more whimsical than serious—many *Alias* viewers waded into ongoing debates about *Lost*, using *Alias* scripting as evidence of what to expect. Thus, when fans had heard that the show was due to kill off a character, and speculation had turned to its being Charlie, one poster offered, "I've yet to see JJ actually kill off a main character (but please correct me if I'm wrong)." Or, in response to numerous fan suggestions that the Island might be Purgatory, or that the events may otherwise be interpreted within a religious framework, another poster insisted, "I highly doubt that this is what Abrams and Co. are trying to do, because the only 'religious' stuff that they've adhered to in the past is the imaginary Rimbaldi stuff on *Alias*." *Alias*'s use of the occult and mysterious Rimbaldi figure (a sort of Da Vinci meets Nostradamus) led many to look for or expect such thematic crafting on *Lost*. Other posters joined in by noting the presence of supposed Abrams "issues," such as one character's "Daddy Issues," or the love triangle between three others, and both cases required elaboration upon how *Alias* (and Abrams's earlier *Felicity*) might give clues regarding how such issues would be resolved. Frequently, such posts were met with curious replies, by those who had not watched *Alias*, and often lengthy explanations of intricate plot points from *Alias* followed, as posters worked to create a "collective intelligence" with fellow viewers, bringing them up to speed with Abrams's history and intertextual resonance. As Virginia Nightingale has noted, "The text, as work, has a finite quality[. . .] But there is another text, just as important but infinitely more elusive. It is the text which lives in the community of its users and which 'enters into life.'"²⁶ Here we can see the second text forming.

Abrams and *Alias* further served to worry many *Lost* fans, who saw *Alias* as having “jumped the shark” with its overelaborate mysteries and prolonged failure to offer answers, and thus this framework was imposed on *Lost*. Early in *Television Without Pity’s* *Alias* deliberations, one poster noted, “If I hear one thing which remotely resembles ‘Milo Rimbaldi,’ I swear I’m going to shoot someone,” clearly signaling intertextually inspired fear. Another echoed that “the [cursed] numbers are going to be *Lost’s* Rimbaldi,” implying that the show was headed for doom. A third complained:

“The Swan” and “The Dharma Initiative”: Have you learnt NOTHING from doing those horrendous storylines—Rimbaldi and now Prophet Five (pardon if I got the names wrong. I really hate *Alias* and so obviously know nothing) on *Alias*? Does that mean *Lost* would turn into a show like *Alias*? I’m really scared now.

More generally, multiple posters expressed dismay that they cared about *Lost* and its mysteries but felt that *Alias’s* (to them) overdrawn process of revealing its own answers meant that they may be problem-solving in vain, since “Abrams and Co.” may not even have answers to give. Interestingly, though, as is hinted at in the above non-*Alias*-fan quote, through *Alias* fans’ drawings of intertextual links, many non-*Alias* viewers were able (and *encouraged*) to work with such intertexts themselves. Here, then, we see the construction of interpretive communities, and the establishment of communal paratextual frames, as viewers share not only viewing experiences but interpretive strategies based on these experiences.

Two years later, when *Six Degrees* was released, again we had an ABC and J. J. Abrams show that attracted viewer speculation based on *Lost* and *Alias*. By this point, some viewers had given up hope that Abrams could ever be trusted to provide answers, or to sustain a show, so that one poster, for instance, griped, “I’m digging this show. I probably shouldn’t since [. . .] Abrams is good at creating compelling TV, but sucks at sustaining it. (Everything he touches seems to collapse within two seasons).” Another vented, “If we’re supposed to believe that the interconnectiveness [between characters] is meaningful—then I think we’ll be disappointed because—hello! JJ Abrams!!” A third noted, “I’m dying to know what’s up with Mae though, but knowing JJ, I’ll be probably finding out in S[eason] 2.” Meanwhile, those for whom *Lost* and/or *Alias* were not worrying intertexts once again invoked Rimbaldi, and now the numbers or the hatch

from *Lost*, to make sense of a character's mysterious box, and they culled information from *Lost*'s interconnecting flashbacks to make sense of *Six Degrees*' fondness for interconnection and serendipity. Some posters even bypassed *Lost* and *Alias* to return to Abrams's *Felicity* or looked to his concurrent *What About Brian?* (2006–7) to enable a whole different set of intertexts of urban romance, not otherworldly mystery. Once more, too, the viewer discussion online often involved significant attempts to provide an interpretive decoder for those who had not seen the earlier show(s).

Considerable irony exists in the *Lost* and *Six Degrees* postings, given that, despite being an executive producer of both shows, Abrams was by most insider accounts only tangentially involved in either. As *Lost*'s star rose in popular culture, increasingly it became known as the product of Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, not Abrams, and as *Six Degrees* plummeted, Abrams can be thankful that the press was careful to spell out his lack of involvement. At the time of these postings, Abrams was a strong paratext, even though, in retrospect, his previous work was unlikely to provide answers to how these shows' writers and active producers scripted or planned their series. Watching *Lost* or *Six Degrees* through an Abrams filter would likely have proved unhelpful and misleading. Thus, as was seen with the *Six Degrees* hype and the *American Sweet Hereafter* trailer in chapter 2, paratexts can often lead audiences down blind alleys, and should by no means be considered inherently helpful, just as not every clue that detectives find at a crime scene will aid their investigation. Nevertheless, beyond appraisal of the relative helpfulness of Abrams as paratext lies the fact that viewers not only used them but circulated them to others, creating a perimeter and airlock around the new shows, and proposing set frames of interpretation and decoding.

Managing the Textual Realm

As this case renders clear, paratextuality and intertextuality are not always self-motoring systems. Harold Bloom has written of influence as requiring a text to engage in an Oedipal battle with its forefathers and predecessors,²⁷ but like numerous literary studies theorists of influence and intertextuality,²⁸ Bloom sees the intertextual paths and connections between texts as obvious, self-evident, and unavoidable. At times, Bloom is bound to be correct: sequels with numbers, for instance, implore us to consider the former (leading to the apocryphal story that Alan Bennett's play *The Madness of King George III* lost its roman numerals when adapted into a

film [1994], lest audience members be concerned that they had not seen the first two films!). Or, even more obviously, adaptations hit us over the head with intertexts, so that presumably few needed tipping off that *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* was based on Tolkien's hugely popular book of the same name. However, beyond the simple and obvious intertexts lie a vast realm of other intertexts that any given viewer can reference, and it is paratexts that quite often manage this realm. Intertextuality can play a determinative role in textual reception, and paratexts frequently conjure up and summon intertexts. Hence, the collective intelligence of an online discussion board could inform a would-be *Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* viewer that Disney was behind it, that director Andrew Adamson had previously directed *Shrek* and *Shrek 2*, that Tilda Swinton had been in *Orlando*, that the lion would be voiced by *Phantom Menace* and *Batman Begins* guru figure Liam Neeson, or that they should watch for biblical imagery. So too could reviews, previews, interviews, or any other paratext share such information, and in so doing, invoke intertexts, pointing to all manner of long shadows. As such, paratexts are not only forms of intertextuality, but they can control the menu of intertexts that audiences will consult or employ when watching or thinking about a text.

This chapter has involved consulting sites of audience discussion, both as a sounding board for how viewers are using and constructing texts, intertexts, and paratexts, but also as paratexts themselves. Inevitably, though, once one consults audience discussion, one starts to see both how radically and how subtly it can toggle, dismantle, or revise the careful planning of Hollywood's textual systems. At one level, this should remind us that any film or program's paratexts are no less contingent on the peculiarities of reception than are the films or programs themselves, and that the film and television industries' paratexts must always compete with other interpretive communities and modes of reception already under way. At another level, it also highlights the need to examine in greater detail viewer-created paratexts and their own intricate constructions of the text, a task to which chapter 5 now turns its attention.