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Paul Flesher

University of Wyoming, PFlesher@uwyo.edu

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Being True to the Text: From Genesis to Harry Potter

Abstract

When a book is made into a film, journalists often ask experts, “How accurate is it?” This usually generates a list of “errors” and ends in a negative judgment on the film’s quality. This is the wrong question. Instead, one should explore what the changes to the story mean, or, even more significantly, they should ask, how are a film’s additions, deletions, and other narrative changes combined with its accurate portrayals?

This essay begins by presenting an ancient mode of translation that interwove accurate, literal translation with additions and alterations to create a new rendering in which the changes were hidden within the straight translation. This translation style is known as *targum*, the texts it created are called targums (= *targumim*), and the mode of hiding the additional material is called “hidden midrash.” The essay will explain the six Rules of Targum and briefly show how they work in Targum Neofiti’s translation of the Adam and Eve story.

The translation of books into films, particularly in the case of Scripture films that wish to draw upon Scripture’s authority, provide a parallel case for the use of hidden midrash in the modern period. The essay will look at George Steven’s film, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, and show how the film uses the Rules of Targum to present an authoritative picture of John the Baptist—even as it changes that picture’s details.

Other films that wish to be seen as authoritative and faithful to their originary text, not just Scripture films, may use the technique of hidden midrash. The essay ends with a brief analysis of the recent film *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* to show how it uses targumic techniques to alter the story while maintaining its aura of faithfulness to the book.

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When a new film appears based on Scripture, a reporter may ask an expert—often someone with “professor” in front of their name—whether it follows the sacred text accurately. The answer is usually “No.”

When a new film appears based on a classic work of literature, such as a novel by Charles Dickens or George Orwell, a reporter may ask an expert whether it follows the text accurately. The answer is usually “No.”

When a new film appears based on a historical event, a reporter may ask an expert whether it is historically faithful. The answer is usually “No.”

After the “No,” each discussion usually descends into a list of inaccuracies and leave the impression that the film is damaged by these so-called “mistakes.” The analysis then ends before the interesting question is even asked.

And what is that question? It is the question of, “what do the changes mean?” Understanding a film’s meaning reveals, in a positive sense, what the film aims to communicate, in contrast to a negative list of mistakes which details what it “fails” to convey. Films often portray classical texts or stories in order to comment on important cultural questions of their own day, to put forward a political view, to convert audience members to a particular religious belief, or any one of a myriad of other possible messages or goals. The incisive identification of such strategies is essential to clear-eyed analysis of a film’s meaning.

So rather than ask the prejudicial question “how accurate is the film?” this approach to film analysis begins with the evaluative question “How closely does the film follow the text or present the story?” The answer reveals the extent to which an analysis of the film would benefit from a comparison with its original text. Some films follow the text closely, while others are related only tangentially. Jane Austin’s 1816 book *Emma* is followed closely in the 1996 film *Emma*, while the 1995 film *Clueless*, although based on the book, ranges far from it. Its valley-girl heroine strives to succeed in twentieth-century urban California rather than nineteenth-century rural England. Similarly, Pasolini’s 1964 *The Gospel According to Matthew* follows that Gospel so closely that its entire dialogue comes from that text, while Scorsese’s 1988 *The Last Temptation of Christ* purposely distances itself from Scripture by prominently indicating that it is based on Nikos Kazantzakis’s novel of the same name.

Films that adhere closely to their base text can draw authority and authenticity from the text onto the film itself.¹ If done successfully, they take on some of the text’s status themselves. Mel Gibson’s 2004 *The Passion of the Christ* was particularly effective at this, causing one blogger to observe that the film had achieved the status of “Scripture” among many Christian believers; they would defend it as Scripture itself.² Similarly, films of children’s books can themselves

take on the book's "beloved" character, as in the case of the 1967 *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* or 2004's *The Polar Express*.

If a film convinces its audience that it adheres closely to its text, it does not then follow that the film has no message beyond the text. Indeed, the better a film can hide its message within an accurate depiction of the originary text—or within a seemingly accurate depiction—the more that message is accepted as part of the original rather than an extraneous interpretation introduced by the film. Such an identification authorizes the position as authoritative. This is particularly effective in films portraying Scripture stories, but it also happens in films of other well-known books, although the stakes are lower.

This essay aims to describe a process used by some films to provide an authentic portrayal—or at least an authentic-seeming portrayal—of their source text even as they make changes to it by using a technique known to Jewish Scripture translators almost two millennia ago. I call this technique "Targum" or the "targumic process," after the name of the Aramaic translations in which it was used. This technique enables a film to access the original text's authority, even as it alters that text's story for its own purposes.

The essay's argument takes place in three parts: First, the paper introduces the idea of targum and illustrates how it functioned in the ancient synagogue

translations. Second, the essay looks at how targumic techniques are used in Scripture films, and third it explores how they can be used in films based on non-scriptural texts.

The Targum of Adam and Eve

Targums translate books of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic. Most were composed in Palestine or Babylonia during the rabbinic period, and were most likely read during synagogue worship each week alongside the Hebrew Bible.³

Targums take a particular form, which we in the modern world often find difficult to understand. Since Graeco-Roman antiquity we have classified translations as either literal renderings—reproducing the meaning of each word—or as paraphrastic renderings—reproducing the meaning of each sentence.⁴ Targums do not fit this definition. Targums combine an exactly literal translation of the Hebrew text of Scripture with inserted additions placed to maintain the new translation's flow. Additions are not paraphrase, for paraphrase draws its meaning from within the original text, while additions bring meaning from outside. A description of the targumic process can be best encapsulated in the six Rules of Targum. I term the first two as Primary Rules, for they constitute the basis of the definition.

Primary Rules

Rule 1: When targums translate or present the original text, they do so exactly.

Rule 2: When targums add material, they integrate it smoothly with the translation. These additions range in size from a word or two, to phrases or sentences, to entire paragraphs.

There are four further Rules of Targum, the Secondary Rules, which are practiced frequently, but are not as fundamental as the first two. These are:

Secondary Rules

Rule 3: A word may be substituted for one in the original, without disturbing the surrounding translation.

Rule 4: Occasionally some of the original may be deleted or left out. The translation smoothly adapts to this loss.

Rule 5: A large addition may be placed at beginning or end of story to ensure that the new meaning is clear.

Rule 6: An addition may be drawn from or imitate related material elsewhere in the work.

The Rules of Targum usually function one at a time, but sometimes they work in a coordinated way across a story to change an entire story's meaning, not just that of isolated sentences within it. Let me illustrate this briefly from Targum Neofiti's rendering of the Adam and Eve story found in Genesis 2-3.⁵

Rule Number 1 dominates the targumic story. Although there are frequent insertions of a word or two throughout, Neofiti's Aramaic presents an exacting rendition of the Hebrew text. Since both languages belong to the Semitic family,

the targum can reproduce the original in great detail, copying not just each word, but also its prefixes and suffixes.

The first change affecting the story as a whole appears in Genesis 2:15, where we find just two added Aramaic words. Here is an English translation of the Hebrew, followed by one of the targum. (The italicized text indicates the added words in this and other targum passages.)

And the Lord God took Adam and had him dwell in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.

[Hebrew text, my translation]

And the Lord God took Adam and had him dwell in the Garden of Eden to work *in the Torah* and to keep its *commandments*.

[Targum Neofiti to Gen. 2:15 (McNamara)]⁶

Following Rule #1, every linguistic feature of the Hebrew sentence appears in its Aramaic rendition. Despite this, we see two added Aramaic words that fit neatly into the sentence's flow, giving no indication they are not part of the original—in keeping with Rule #2. But even though there are only two added words, the sentence's meaning has changed. Scripture's comment about farming has become the targum's statement about observing Torah. Additions do not add only their inherent meaning, but they can alter the meaning of a rendering "true to the text."

The Rules of Targum are stated formally, i.e., a passage can take this form. By themselves, they are merely descriptive. When the targumist follows a combination of Rules, however, they have interpretive and performative impact. The interpretive impact is that the Rules enable the targum to remain true to the original text even as the translation adds to it, and thereby alters its meaning.

The performative aspect arises when we envision the targum being used in its typical setting, being read aloud to a group of listeners, whether in a formal synagogue service or in a informal gathering. The purpose of this reading is obvious, but we should not overlook its implications. Targum translates the Hebrew Scriptures into Aramaic because people do not know Hebrew, or at least not well. So would people recognize these words as added when they heard them read in the synagogue service? Probably not. First, even if listeners knew some Hebrew, they would probably not notice the addition. Second, if listeners did notice additional material, they would assume that the additions were original, and they had forgotten the Hebrew's exact wording or had failed to understand it accurately in the first place. Thus, by interweaving additions with translation, the additions hide in plain view. This "hidden interpretation" is understood by its aural audience as being Scripture.⁷

This treatment of Genesis 2:15 forms part of a larger reshaping of this story which next appears at Genesis 3:15. Here, an addition links Torah observance to

the offspring of the woman and the snake. The two will be antagonistic, as indicated by Scripture, but the superior party will be determined by the humans' adherence to Torah.

And I will put hatred between you [i.e., the snake] and the woman and between your sons and her sons. And it will come about that when her sons observe the Torah and do its commandments they will aim at you and smite you on your head and kill you. But when they forsake the commandments of the Torah you will aim and bite him on his heel and make him ill.... And to the woman he said,...

[Targum Neofiti to Gen. 3:15-16 (McNamara)]

This addition is larger than the previous one, and would be noticed by someone who knew the Hebrew text. But few who lack Hebrew skills would have been aware of it. It fits smoothly with the text's flow, beginning with a literal rendering, moving into the addition, and then coming back to literal rendering at the start of the next verse. There is no formal indication of its additional character.

A large addition inserted into the story's closing verses reveals the workings of Targum Rule #5, namely, that additions are often placed at the end of a passage to emphasize the shift in meaning. In Genesis 3:22, the translator adds a large explanation which explains the Targum's emphasis on Torah. I cite only the relevant portion.

Numerous nations are to arise from him [i.e., Adam], and from him shall arise one nation who will know to distinguish between good and evil. If he

had observed the commandments of the Torah and fulfilled its commandment he would live and endure forever like the tree of life. And now, since he has not observed the commandments of the Torah and has not fulfilled its commandment, behold we will banish him from the Garden of Eden....

[Targum Neofiti to Gen. 3:22 (McNamara)]

This addition reveals that Torah practice determines one's afterlife experience. Those who follow Torah gain eternal life, but those who do not are banished from the Garden of Eden—as heaven is characterized in the targum. Adam has failed and will be banished. However, the story now predicts a people who will in the future “know how to distinguish between good and evil”—a clear reference to the Jews themselves.

Since the observations I have made here about the ancient practice of targum also apply to modern film, let me summarize them: First, targum translation conforms to a limited set of characteristics that we have defined in the six Rules of Targum. Sometimes these rules also apply to films' treatment of Scripture and other texts. Second, targumic additions can alter the meanings of entire stories, not just the sentences where changes appear. And it is this alteration of meaning that is analytically significant. Third, because of the targumists' highly literal renderings of the original text, when alterations appear, they mostly go unnoticed by an audience unfamiliar with the original. They are “hidden interpretations,” that is, interpretations hidden in plain view.

Targum in Biblical Films: An Example from *The Greatest Story Ever Told*

Above, I stated the definition of targums in Jewish antiquity as this: Targums combine an exactingly literal translation of the Hebrew text of Scripture with inserted additions placed to maintain the new translation's flow. The definition requires only a slight recasting to make it applicable to film: Films use the targumic process by combining a literal rendering of an original story, sometimes from Scripture, with inserted additions placed to maintain the new rendering's flow.

In our recent book, *Film and Religion*, Robert Torrey and I explore how the targumic process is used in a number of films that portray Scripture.⁸ These include Cecile B. DeMille's 1956 *The Ten Commandments*, Nicholas Ray's 1961 *King of Kings*, and Mel Gibson's 2004 *The Passion of the Christ*. These films share the targumist's problem, how to make a short story more intelligible, and they address it through adding material. The targumic manner in which George Stevens' 1965 *The Greatest Story Ever Told* introduces its audience to John the Baptist illustrates this well.

The Greatest Story constitutes the last film of the biblical epic genre and reacts against the films that preceded it. Instead of using additions to take liberties with the story or introduce concerns about current issues—the way *The Ten Commandments* and *King of Kings* address questions of the Cold War and the

atomic bomb, for instance—director George Stevens focused his attentions on the internal tensions of Jesus’ story.

At first viewing, the film’s presentation of John the Baptist seems to hold close to the gospel story. Of course, since there are four different Gospels, the film may—sometimes must—choose among the elements of all four. To illustrate how targum works in this situation, let me show you the introductory passages for John the Baptist as presented in three gospels; the fourth, that of Matthew, contains no additional information relevant to the film.

Mark’s introduction of John the Baptist is short, taking just seven verses. It appears in Mark 1:2-8.

It is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way”—
“a voice of one calling in the desert,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”

And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I,

the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”⁹

Mark actually begins by citing two lines from Malachi 3:1, “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way,” before bringing in Isaiah 40:3, “a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” The passage continues by identifying John’s main message—calling for repentance. It describes those who go out to him, as well as John’s clothes and food, and ends with John contrasting himself with the one who is to come. Note the humility of John being unworthy to untie his sandals, and the difference between his baptism of water and the coming baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Luke’s version is similar, Luke 3:1-18, but its additional items make it twice as long. I leave out some of the material irrelevant to the film.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the desert,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for him.

Every valley shall be filled in

every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight,

the rough ways smooth.

And all mankind will see God's salvation.''"¹⁰

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Luke's version begins with a date, then like Mark talks about John's call to repentance and cites Isaiah—two verses this time, Is 40:3-4. The story again ends with the same description of John's unworthiness before the one who will come, and the distinction between baptism by water and by the Holy Spirit—this time being characterized as fire, an element incompatible with water.

The Gospel of John's version, which appears in John 1:6-28, differs from these two in several ways. Again, I give only the relevant sections.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light...

John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.'"

Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ. "

Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"

Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

"I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

John's Gospel lacks the description of the Baptist we saw in Mark and concentrates instead on the question of John's identity. He is a witness to Jesus, but he ranks lower because Jesus came before him of old. John himself cites Isaiah 40:3, rather than leaving it for the narrator. When asked why he baptizes, John testifies concerning the one who will follow, again by indicating his own

unworthiness with the sandal analogy. The comparison of water and Holy Spirit is missing.

The film *The Greatest Story Ever Told* melds these three gospel passages into a single, coherent scene, one which uses the targumic process to hide an addition in plain sight and sound of the viewers. Indeed, a powerful way to experience the power of targum—instead of merely reading this essay’s description—is to stop reading at the end of this paragraph and watch the scenes in *Greatest Story* that introduce John the Baptist, trying to identify the additional material. Better yet, introduce the three passages above to a class of students, and then have them watch the film scene and try to spot the addition. (On the DVD, start with Scene Six, which begins with a sacrifice in the Temple, and the voice of Charlton Heston, who portrays John.)

The first scene begins with a close-up of an animal about to be sacrificed. Then the camera pulls back to an aerial view of the altar in the Jerusalem Temple. Through an overlay technique, the film then moves to view people walking to the Jordan, and finally arrives to view John the Baptist standing in the water preaching. John’s voice has been speaking across all three scenes, saying the following. (I identify the Scripture references for ease of analysis.)

Repent.

I desire steadfast love, not sacrifice. (Hos. 6:6)

Knowledge of God and not burnt offerings. (Hos. 6:6)
Repent, repent.
Come near, and listen to the voice of one crying in the wilderness. (Is. 40:3)
Every valley shall be filled (Is. 40:4)
every mountain and hill be brought low. (Is. 40:4)
All flesh shall see the salvation of God. (Is. 40:4)
Prepare ye the way of the Lord. (Is. 40:3)
Make straight in the desert a highway for our god. (Is. 40:3)
Behold, I send my messenger, who shall prepare the way. (Malachi 3:1)
Let the earth hear, and all that is in it and all things that come from it. (Is. 34:1)
Repent, come near, and listen to the voice of one crying in the wilderness. (Is. 40:3)
Repent, the anger of the Lord is upon all nations. Repent. (Is. 34:2)
There is one coming who will baptize with fire, and the Holy Spirit. (Luke 3)
One whose coming has been of old, from time everlasting, soon to be among us. (Version of John 1:7)
Greater than all of us. (Version of John 1:7)
One whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. (From several gospels)

When I teach this scene to students, I discuss with them the three gospel passages, carefully walking them through the details of each one, and then immediately show them the film clip. Some of them will notice the addition of Hosea 6:6 at the beginning where the camera lingers at the Temple, but none of them have ever noticed the addition of Isaiah 34:1 and 2.¹¹ By combining Targum Rules 1 and 2, the film targumically hides the addition in plain view. Its invisibility is helped by Rule 6, taking the addition from elsewhere in Scripture. Thus, the film's targum works perfectly here. The addition's meaning reached the viewers, and presumably impacted their brains, but did not appear to them as added. The interpretation was hidden.

Does the film have a purpose for this addition? Absolutely. John's call for repentance is aimed at Jews, and specifically, the Jews of his time. Why should a modern audience care about the problems of the far away province of Judea nearly 2000 years ago? The targumic addition addresses that question, making John's call apply to everyone of all nations by drawing in Isaiah 34:1-2. Thus John's call, and ultimately the film's entire message about Jesus, becomes relevant to the audience who watches it. It is a call to them about Jesus' mission for them. The modern audience is called to repentance to escape the Lord's anger along with the depicted ancient one.

Targum in non-Biblical films: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

Targumizing a biblical story into a movie can be effective in persuading its audience of the film's accuracy and authenticity. But a film does not have to portray a sacred story to make use of the targumic technique. Films of other kinds use targumic techniques in varying degrees: films of classic novels or of Shakespeare's plays, for instance. But rather than using a "classic of the canon" to illustrate how targum functions in films based on non-biblical texts, let me instead turn to something lighter, the film of the first *Harry Potter* book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001).

At the time of its release many critics panned the film for following the book too closely—it was wooden. The fans appreciated what the critics did not, for the “faithful” reproduction—accomplished in part by the targumic interplay of literal renderings and additions—convinced them that the film was “true to the text,” and so launched its box office success.

Two dominant themes run through the *Harry Potter* series. They are Voldemort’s repeated attempts to kill Harry, and Harry’s ongoing need to find a suitable family substitute to replace his dead parents. Across the books, these two themes are handled differently. First, each book addresses one attempt on Harry’s life orchestrated by Voldemort and, in each one, Harry triumphs over his attacker to bring this theme to closure. By contrast, Harry’s problem with his absent family continues without resolution from book to book.

The film of the first book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, addresses head-on this lack of closure and uses the targumic process to establish it. The search for Harry’s family substitute takes advantage of a key difference in the use of the targumic process between Scripture stories and novels. Whereas Scripture stories are short and hence emphasize addition, novels are long and so films must make extensive use of deletion—as in Targum Rule #4—and excise characters, scenes and even entire sub-plots. Scenes included in the film providing a literal rendering of speeches from the book are thus no longer a neutral given, but reveal positive

choices about the film's meaning. So when the *Sorcerer's Stone* film repeatedly presents literal versions of speeches highlighting Harry's possible family substitutes, we know this is a conscious decision concerning the film's message.

After the death of Harry's parents, his blood relatives, the Dursleys should step into the breach, since "They are," as Dumbledore says, "the only family he has." This is an abject failure in terms of providing him the loving family and home a child should have. The Dursleys hate Harry and treat him accordingly, without love or nurturing. The Dursleys' home is not a suitable family substitute.

Other attempts at family substitutes provide Harry with a better situation but do not replace his absent family. Arriving at Hogwarts, the first possible decision about family arises when Draco Malfoy offers to help Harry identify the "wrong sort" of wizarding families—those to avoid. Harry expresses the choice he realizes he has already made, rebuffing Draco and his family to link himself with Ron and the Weasleys.

The second choice is that of the school houses, a possibility raised when Professor McGonagall explains to the students that "your house will be something like your family at Hogwarts." The Sorting Hat's exchange with Harry guides him towards Gryffindor when Harry rejects Slytherin.

Harry gains friends through his choices, but he still longs for a family. When he discovers the Mirror of Erised, it reveals reflections of his loving parents. The images are not real, but portray Harry's deepest desires. As Dumbledore explains, they are neither "knowledge or truth." The Mirror is the wrong way to look at his parents and it is taken away.

We can diagram this series of possible family substitutes with the following outline:

Wrong Family: Dursleys

Choice 1: Wizarding Family

Wrong: Malfoys

Right: Weasleys

Choice 2: School House

Wrong: Slytherin

Right: Gryffindor

Choice 3: Seeing family

Wrong: Mirror of Erised

Right: ??

Right Family: ??

In his search for the right family substitute, Harry has found three choices: wizarding families, school houses, and seeing his parents. The first two provide two

alternatives, and although he attains the right one each time, they do not turn out to be a viable substitute. So he must keep searching. The third option, that of seeing his parents, still lacks closure and that will remain open until the film's end and the entire search for the right family is completed.

At this point in the film and the book, however, the search for a suitable family substitute remains unsatisfied. Further exploration of this theme must wait until an investigation of how this theme of Harry's dead parents interacts with that of Voldemort's antipathy.

In the film, Harry first learns of Voldemort's enmity in Olivander's wand shop, juxtaposed against information about his parents. Olivander's opening words welcome Harry, saying "It seems only yesterday that your mother and father were in here buying their first wands." These words join Harry's first wand to his parents' first wands; he is following the family tradition. But matters take an ominous turn, for the wand that chooses Harry is paired with Voldemort's.

Olivander. I remember every wand I've ever sold, Mr. Potter. It so happens that the Phoenix whose tail feather resides in your wand gave another feather. Just one other. It is curious that you should be destined for this wand when its brother gave you that scar.

Harry. And who owned that wand?

Olivander. We do not speak his name. The wand chooses the wizard, Mr. Potter. It is not always clear why. But I think it is clear that we can expect

great things from you. After all, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things. Terrible...yes, but great.

What does the pairing of the wands mean? Olivander's comment about the scar suggests opposition, but the remark about doing "great things" may suggest cooperation, imitation, or something else.

In the book, these prophetic remarks remain open ended. When Harry finally confronts Voldemort—as a face on the back of Professor Quirrel's head no less—there is no reference to them. The book has Voldemort belittle Harry's parents, sneeringly using the term "bravery" to imply terror and fright.

"Don't be a fool," snarled the face. "Better save your own life and join me...or you'll meet the same end as your parents...They died begging me for mercy...."

"LIAR!" Harry shouted suddenly.

"How touching..." it hissed. "I always value bravery.... Yes, boy, your parents were brave.... I killed your father first, and he put up a courageous fight...but your mother needn't have died...she was trying to protect you.... Now give me the Stone, unless you want her to have died in vain."

"NEVER!"

"SEIZE HIM!"¹²

Voldemort confronts Harry here, offering him submission or death. If Harry does not give him the Sorcerer's Stone, then he will join his parents in death.

By contrast, the film rendering of this scene picks up on Olivander's words and explores what a pairing between Voldemort and Harry might be. Through the targumic process, the film subtly reshapes the encounter. Instead of violent confrontation, Voldemort makes two invitations to Harry. He offers a partnership, and he offers to resurrect Harry's parents. The first is necessary in Voldemort's proposal for the second. If Harry gives Voldemort the Stone, then Voldemort and Harry can work together and bring his family back.

In the book, Voldemort's comment about bravery is mocking, "How touching." In the film, Voldemort uses bravery to offer Harry a deal. This is how it functions targumically. Voldemort says:

Bravery. Your parents had it too. Tell me, Harry, would you like to see your mother and father again? Together, we can bring them back. All I ask is for something in return. That's it Harry. There is no good and evil. There is only power and those too weak to seek it. Together, we'll do extraordinary things. Just give me the stone!

Just as the targumic process worked with Scripture translation, the passage here begins literally, brings in the addition and then links it back into literal citation at the end. This interweaving gives Voldemort's speech the sound of authenticity, even as it alters the comment's meaning.

The film's Voldemort makes an offer because Harry's bravery reminds Voldemort of Harry's parents' bravery. Harry sees through the lie—helped by the

sudden appearance of his parents in the mirror—and rejects the offer. The restoring of his dead parents to life, perhaps corrupted by the grave, will not satisfy Harry’s need for a family substitute.

The partnership Voldemort offers is loaded as well. Not only is true partnership doubtful, but its basis will be power, not friendship. As such, it would require the relinquishing of his friendships with Ron, Hermione, Hagrid and others since they are “too weak to seek [power].” Harry chooses his friends over Voldemort. The conflict ensues, with Voldemort being defeated and Harry fainting as he triumphs.

Harry’s awakens from his swoon in Hogwart’s hospital wing. The conflict with Voldemort over, the film now returns to the theme of Harry’s absent family. In the book, four people visit Harry while he is recovering in the hospital; in the film, only Dumbledore comes. The film moves out the interactions with Ron, Hermione, and Hagrid to make it clear that these characters interact with Harry out of friendship, not out of sympathy for an injured boy.

The film has Harry meet Ron and Hermione on the stairs, where they wait to accompany him to the end-of-year feast. They have a typical kids’ conversation; saying little but expressing a great deal.

Harry. All right there, Ron?

Ron. All right. You?

Harry. All right. Hermione?

Hermione. Never better.

The repeated “all right” and the “never better,” accompanied by wide smiles, says it all. The three are true, devoted friends to each other.

But it is the train-side departure scene in which the film brings the family substitute issue to a close as the film ends.

Hagrid. [Shouting to the crowd of students milling on the train platform.] Train’s leaving. Go on. Go on with you. Come on, hurry up.

[Harry and Hermione run to train door, then Harry runs up to Hagrid.]...

Hagrid. Thought you were leaving without saying goodbye, did you? [Hagrid reaches into his pocket, pulls out a book with a fancy cover.]

Hagrid. This is for you. [Hands the book to Harry.]

[Harry opens the book, and sees wizard photo of himself as an infant being dandled by both his parents. Everyone is smiling. The camera lingers on the photo, indicating Harry’s interest.]

Harry. Thanks Hagrid. [They exchange a look and then Harry hugs Hagrid.]

Hagrid. [Gruffly.] Go on. On with you. On with you now. [Pause.] Oh, listen, Harry. If that dolt of a cousin of yours, Dudley, gives you any grief, you could always threaten him with a nice pair of ears to go with that tail of his.

Harry. But Hagrid we’re not allowed to do magic away from Hogwarts. You know that.

Hagrid. I do. But your cousin don’t, do he? Hey?

[Harry heads back to the train car, with Ron and Hermione are hanging out the door.]

Hermione. Feels strange to be going home, doesn't it?

Harry. I'm not going home. Not really.

Three elements require comment. First, Hagrid's gift of the photo album appears as taking place between two friends, despite their age difference, not as a gesture of sympathy for someone bed-ridden.¹³ Harry responds with a hug, the strongest physical expression of caring in the film, a stronger reaction than even the book describes in this scene. The album connects Harry to his family through its photos. The photo shown to the viewer shows Harry with his parents; Harry is not separated from them. Thus it is through his friends that Harry accesses his parents—in this instance through Hagrid. This has been true all along. Hagrid told Harry about his parents' protection of him when they were killed. Hermione showed Harry that his father had been a winning Quidditch Seeker. Dumbledore returned to Harry his father's Invisibility Cloak and shared the mirror of Erised with him. Even Olivander talked about his parents getting their wands. The film shows that Harry's friends are the link to his family.

Second, while the book presents Harry as grateful for the album, it does not seem to affect him further. Too much else is happening. Indeed, the book ends on a mischievous note, with Harry commenting that he will trick Dudley over the

summer by threatening to do magic. But the film targumically moves this remark to Hagrid, enabling Harry to provide a more uplifting final reflection.

And finally, it is that reflection which ends the film and brings the family issue to a close. As he stands boarding the train with his two friends, Ron and Hermione, Harry looks back and waves to Hagrid. Hermione says, “It seems strange to be going home. Doesn’t it?” Harry responds, “I’m not going home. Not really.” This added remark indicates Harry realizes that the Dursleys and their house are not home. Home instead is Hogwarts and his friends there. The friends include not only Ron, Hermione, and their mates in Gryffindor, but people from all over the school. Hagrid and Dumbledore to be sure, but others as well. Friends may not replace his birth parents, but Harry realizes —this is the key point, Harry realizes— that they provide him the love and caring he has missed since his parents’ death. It is the realization and appreciation of this that the film has targumically added to the story over the book’s presentation.

The table below diagrams how the theme of Harry looking for a family substitute works out in the film.

Wrong Family: Dursleys

Choice: Wizarding Family

Wrong: Malfoys

Right: Weasleys

Choice: School House

Wrong: Slytherin

Right: Gryffindor

Choice: Seeing Family

Wrong: Mirror of Erised

Choice: Resurrect Family (Targumic addition in Film)

Wrong: Partnership with Voldemort

Right: Refuse

Right: Photo Album

Right Family: Friends link Harry back to his parents

After the Mirror of Erised incident, the film ties Harry's conflict with Voldemort into the family substitute theme. Voldemort offered to bring Harry's parent's back from the dead. It is another way to "see" them. Harry saw this was not the correct way to link to his parents and refused. The gift of the photo album at the film's end finally provides the right way to bring closure to Harry's search for a family substitute. The pictures in the album enable Harry to see himself within his family, and that view is given to him through his friends.

In the end, this quick tour of the principles of targumic interpretation as they apply to different media illustrates how this process, which was developed some

2000 years ago, is essentially the same as that again created by modern film for authoritative adaptation of text into film. It has seen extensive use for Scripture films, but as we demonstrated with *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, it also applies to non-religious stories that aim to draw upon the authority of the text and bring it to the film. By studying the use of the targumic process in both ancient and modern media, we can more fully understand how one can be “true to the text” even as one changes the story and makes key additions to it.

¹ For further discussion of this point, see Flesher, P. V. M. and Torry, R., 2007, *Film and Religion: An Introduction*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, pp. 71-85. For our analysis of *The Passion of the Christ*, see pp. 159-176.

² General Stuff blog wrote on March 22, 2004, “T here has been an unfortunate crusade (yes, I will use this word fully aware of its meaning) to present this film as a second revelation of Scripture.” URL: <http://blogs.salon.com/0003158/categories/generalMovies/2004/03/22.html>. Accessed August 9, 2008.

³ Targum scholars debate the role of the written targums in the synagogue service. The evidence makes clear that the Scripture reading was accompanied by a spoken translation of it into Aramaic, but it is unclear whether or how this was linked to a written translation. So while it is reasonable to assume the written targum was used in the synagogue service (and there is certainly no position accepted more widely), the evidence does not quite support that conclusion. For a summary of the discussion and further bibliography, see Smelik, W. F., 1995, *The Targum of Judges*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 31-39; and York, A. D., 1979, “The Targum in the Synagogue and the School,” *JSJ* 10.1. 74-86.

⁴ In Roman writings, these categories were known as *verbum e verbo* and *sensus de sensu*. See Brock, S., 1979, “Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity.” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 20. 69-87, esp. p. 70.

⁵ For a fuller analysis of the targums’ treatment of the Adam and Eve story, see Paul V. M. Flesher, P. V. M., 2000, “The Resurrection of the Dead and the Sources of the Palestinian Targums to the Pentateuch.” *Handbuch der Orientalistik, Judaism in Late Antiquity, Part 4, Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection & The World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity*, Avery-Peck, A. J., and Neusner, J., eds., Leiden: Brill, pp. 311-331.

⁶ All English translations of Targum Neofiti come from McNamara, M., 1992, Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

⁷ For a fuller treatment of the notion of hidden interpretation in the targums, see Flesher, P. V. M., 2005, "Pentateuchal Targums as Midrash," in *Encyclopedia of Midrash*, Neusner, J., and Avery-Peck, A. J., eds. Leiden: Brill. Vol. 2, pp. 630-646, esp. pp. 636-639. See also Flesher, P. V. M., 2002, "Targum as Scripture," in *Targum and Scripture*, Paul V.M. Flesher, ed. Leiden: Brill. pp. 61-75.

⁸ Flesher and Torrey, *Film and Religion*.

⁹ All Gospel translations into English are taken from the New International Version.

¹⁰ Luke here gives the rendering of the verse found in the Greek Septuagint ("all flesh shall see the salvation of God") rather than that of the Hebrew Masoretic text ("And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"). There are interesting Hebrew/Greek translation issues here, but they stand beyond the ability of this essay to address them.

¹¹ The one time I gave a presentation about this passage to an audience of religion and biblical scholars, they failed to notice Isaiah 34 as well.

¹² Rowling, J. K., 1997 & 1998, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, New York: Scholastic. p. 294.

¹³ The book places this scene in the hospital wing, p. 304.