

Public Abstract

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Title: "This is not Dickens": Fidelity, Nostalgia, and Adaptation

Fidelity discourse, or the practice of judging a film adaptation based on its faithfulness to its literary source, has long been the common language of adaptation studies, despite its shortcomings and the repeated calls of film scholars for its demise. In this project, I examine the responses of filmgoers to three film adaptations of Victorian novels: Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), Roman Polanski's *Oliver Twist* (2005), and Alfonso Cuarón's *Great Expectations* (1998). In doing so, I explore the ways in which fidelity discourse functions in the film reviews of both professional film critics and the "citizen critics" who post reviews on the Internet Movie Database, and I contend that much of the fidelity discourse evident in these reviews is bound up in contemporary filmgoers' nostalgia for the Victorian past.

My findings in this project serve to illustrate how pervasive fidelity discourse is in film reviews, but the project also reveals that fidelity discourse is often more complicated and more useful than its opponents characterize it to be. My research also shows that we look to film adaptations of classic novels as authoritative sources by which we construct our visual conceptualizations of a long-gone past. Essentially, my project enters into the adaptation studies discussion by pushing adaptation scholars to reconsider the potential of fidelity discourse and also to recognize the burgeoning body of citizen film reviews as a rich site for studying the workings of fidelity discourse and nostalgia.