

“THIS IS NOT DICKENS”:
FIDELITY, NOSTALGIA, AND ADAPTATION

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ABSTRACT

In this project, I examine the responses of filmgoers to three adaptations of Victorian novels: Joe Wright’s *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), Roman Polanski’s *Oliver Twist* (2005), and Alfonso Cuarón’s *Great Expectations* (1998). I explore the ways in which fidelity discourse manifests itself in the reviews of both professional film critics and the “citizen critics” who post reviews on the Internet Movie Database. Despite adaptation scholars’ designation of fidelity discourse as analytically unproductive, I argue that fidelity discourse can be a constructive evaluative method, particularly amongst citizen critics.

I also contend that contemporary filmgoers’ nostalgia for the Victorian past feeds much of the fidelity discourse evident in these reviews. Viewers of Victorian novel film adaptations often rely on fidelity criteria in their evaluations because they expect the films to develop their visual conceptualizations of the Victorian era; thus, the reviews are frequently determined by how successfully the films meet those expectations.