



In/Fidelity: Essays on Film Adaptation

David L. Kranz and Nancy C. Mellerski

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This volume explores a timely and controversial theoretical issue in cinematic adaptation studies: the necessity and value of fidelity as a yardstick by which to measure film adaptations of literary and dramatic works. Recent publications in the field have argued that adaptation criticism has been too focused on fidelity and unjustly privileges the literary source over the film adaptation. Film theorists who object to this perceived bias recommend that criticism of film adaptations develop a more intertextual paradigm, following the tenets of post-structuralist literary theory. Yet this approach risks throwing the field into chaotic relativism. The essays in this volume suggest, rather, that there is now a continuum of critical perspectives that use fidelity, or the comparative methodology which is its essence, both more and less as a benchmark for critiquing and evaluating film adaptations. Similarly, cinematic adaptations themselves have for some time operated on a spectrum of more or less fidelity to their primary literary or dramatic sources. A plurality (rather than an infinity) of critical approaches allows the field of adaptation studies to express a breadth of perspectives and interests while still maintaining the relational heart of the enterprise. All the chapters in this book were initially plenary lectures, individual papers, or panel presentations (with discussion) heard at the Literature/Film Association annual conference held at Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 2005. The in/fidelity continuum is organized as follows. Early essays express the desire for fidelity in film adaptation and/or demonstrate the ways in which several films, despite some textual and contextual interference, manage to remain relatively faithful to literary sources in one way or another. The next essays show how textual and contextual influences draw film adaptations into infidelities of various kinds. Later chapters offer examples of cinematic adaptations which have tenuous connections to their alleged sources or critique central elements of those sources. After a post-structuralist analysis of adaptation theory, the panel and following discussion provide some arguments both for and against fidelity criticism, including reasons for its persistence and ways to break its continuing, though changing, spell.

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