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The Classic Novel: From Page To Screen



Synopsis

This book critically examines the long established tradition of adapting classic novels to film or TV screen. An emerging area of interest - the relationship between film and literature and the way cinema and television have translated classic novels into moving pictures from the 30s to the 90s. A wide-ranging but focused collection that is bang up to date and free of media jargon that looks at both the film and the book. Includes discussion of: The English Patient, Pride and Prejudice and Middlemarch, Pickwick Papers, Dracula, Dickens, Conrad, Hardy and Waugh.

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Customer Reviews

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The field of adaptation studies has been stuck in the infernal loop of useless case studies for decades. Researchers after researchers produce articles comparing a book and its adaptation, more often than not concluding that the book is better and that the novel has got "brutally butchered". Fine. But then what? FROM PAGE TO SCREEN follows meticulously this non-productive way of doing research that does not seem to accumulate any knowledge whatsoever. Instead, the writers seem more interested in defending their precious Academy against the "brutal forces" of brainless mass media, forgetting the point of film adaptation research altogether. (In fact, the Introduction by Sheen does state clearly that "adaptation encapsulates the dilemma of institutional identity"). And this, indeed, is what FROM PAGE TO SCREEN is really

about - not film adaptation. The point of a book on film adaptation should be, of course, to study the adaptations passionately, and conclude something about what film adaptation is, how it relates to the surrounding society and how exactly the adaptations themselves work. Instead, the articles include several highly biased views on film, including a "fact" about the "congenital inattention of audiences" that forces "most violent compressions and excisions" in the adaptation (as Inglis puts it). And Selby praises the adaptation for carefully rendering a Hardy novel page by page even though the strict textual fidelity "seems to slow the film almost to a stop". Would anyone else but Selby himself consider that a good thing in a film? In other words, the articles suggest almost non-existent knowledge of film and how it works and affects its viewers. Surely the writers are proficient in analysing literature, but are they proficient film "readers" and well-informed in the processes and the history of film? No, they are not. They seemingly have not realised that what works on the pages of a book, does not work as such on screen. Yet they insist on textual fidelity and judge harshly any deviations that the adaptors might have made. Thus, the conclusion again is the classic "the book is better". And again, one is forced to ask: "Really? ...And?" There are a couple of informative articles in the collection, however (such as Sinyard's article on A PASSAGE TO INDIA). Yet, if you are looking for unbiased writings about film adaptation, some theoretical relevance or interesting findings, go look elsewhere. (I suggest getting Sarah Cardwell's ADAPTATION REVISITED (2002) for starters. Cardwell has some fresh ideas to present while concentrating on other aspects than keeping the academic fort and defending the oh-so-precious literary classics against the brutality of the outside world and the ugly proceedings of the greedy film industry.) The unquestioned "book good, film bad" attitude of the majority of the writers in FROM PAGE TO SCREEN does not quite meet the realities of today. By realities I mean concepts such as intertextuality, which is gaining more and more prominence in research nowadays. And intertextuality is - as terrifying as it must be for Giddings et al. - slowly but surely breaking the barriers between "high" and "low" culture.

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