

A Never-Ending Squabble: The Role of Fidelity in Book-to-Screen Adaptations

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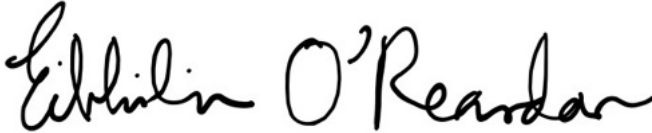
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## Declaration of Originality

This thesis is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Hons) Television. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eibhlin O'Reardon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'E' and a distinct 'O'.

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## Abstract

The research question of this thesis is: What is the role of fidelity in book-to-screen adaptations? Literary sources have been part of the bedrock of cinema since its inception. Some of the most renowned and lauded films are adaptations of books – some of which are “faithful,” some of which are decidedly not. Many critics in adaptation studies advocate for what could be called a “post-fidelity” approach, yet film audiences still seem to consider fidelity to be of high importance. The study is based on the theoretical fields of adaptation and comparison studies, using adaptations of *Dracula*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Fire and Blood* and *Little Women* as case studies, as these works interact with the concept of fidelity in various ways which render them rich examples for such a research project. These texts are analysed using the frameworks of adaptation studies, textual and comparative analyses. Chapter One examines the importance of “infidelity,” Chapter Two the importance of “fidelity”, and Chapter Three how the presence of the source text’s author in the adaptational process affects the work, in relation to fidelity. The conclusions formed are that, whilst radical and creative re-interpretations of existing works can result in adaptations that expand upon and enhance the original text, to completely ignore crucial aspects of the source text can result in poorly-produced, - and poorly received – films or television programmes. Further research should be conducted to find a resolution between the views of audiences and the views of academics so that the craft of adaptation can continue to produce innovative and influential works.

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## Introduction

Since its genesis, literary inspirations have been essential to the craft of cinema<sup>1</sup>. In the first years of film production, many films were adaptations of short moments from well-known canonical works, such as *Duel Scene from Macbeth* (1905)<sup>2</sup>. These films depended on prior audience knowledge of the adapted work, and often referenced other adaptations of the stories, such as paintings and theatre productions.. Due to the time constraints of early one-reel cinema, there was little emphasis on narrative structure. Filmmakers focused instead on adapting “spectacle” scenes from the source text, with the assumption that the audience would be already familiar with the material. According to Thomas Leitch, author of *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ* “The goal of these adaptations is not to provide a faithful transcription of their original sources but to use those sources as inspiration or pretext for a digest, reminiscence, hybrid, or inflation”<sup>3</sup>.



Figure 2. Still from *Duel Scene from Macbeth* (1905).

Cinema was regarded as “cheap entertainment for the masses” – an attitude which arguably remains in some semblance in current discourse. In order to change this perception – and avoid censorship – early producers turned to literary adaptations. Many of these adaptations were initially based on short stories or poems, and many still relied on what Linda Hutcheon labels “knowing audiences” in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*<sup>4</sup>. A “knowing audience” already has a relationship with the adaptation’s source text and is aware of the story and characters, an “unknowing audience” does not. Leitch likens these adaptations to illustrations, relying heavily on “knowing” audience’s existing relationship with the source material and providing little transformation other than interpreting the text with visuals.

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<sup>1</sup> Gunning, Tom. “Literary Appropriation and Translation in Early Cinema.” *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, edited by Colin McCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 41-57.

<sup>2</sup> *Duel Scene from Macbeth*. Directed by (Unknown). American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1905.

<sup>3</sup> Leitch, Thomas. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

As technology developed and longer narrative films were produced, filmmakers continued to turn to literary sources for inspiration, such as Victor Fleming's seminal *Gone with the Wind*, which was based on the novel by Margaret Mitchell<sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup>. Original screenplays were often written by renowned contemporary authors, reinforcing the connection between the filmic and the literary. Iconic "movie monsters" such as *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *The Phantom of the Opera* hailed from novels – but of course, wouldn't have been largely considered above "cheap entertainment for the masses." Alfred Hitchcock based a large number of his films on literary sources, going as far as to "trick" authors into giving him the right to make adaptational changes as he pleased. He has been quoted as saying "What I do is I read a story only once, and if I like the basic idea, I just forget all about the book and start to create cinema"<sup>7</sup>. Whether or not one agrees with this attitude, it is undeniable that it resulted in some of the most innovative and important contributions to the developing art of cinema.

As film studies began to develop as an academic discipline, so did the field of adaptation studies, beginning with George Bluestone's 1957 book *Novels into Film*<sup>8</sup>. Bluestone describes the relationship between novel and film as "overtly compatible, secretly hostile." He proposes that what the filmmaker adapts is a "paraphrase" of the novel, that there is an "inevitable mutation." Crucially, he theorises that "whenever a film becomes a financial or even a critical success, the question of faithfulness is given hardly any thought." There are numerous, highly successful, "unfaithful" adaptations, such as those of Hitchcock, or Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, that seem to prove him correct<sup>9</sup>.

Adaptation studies have evolved to a point where, largely, theorists and critics wish to move beyond a reductive notion of fidelity where "the book is always better"<sup>10</sup>. Prominent works by authors such as Linda Hutcheon, Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan and Thomas Leitch have advocated for what could be described as a "post-fidelity" approach to adaptation discourse<sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup>. However, there seems to be a divide between the views of academics, and those of film-going audiences, book authors, critics and sometimes, filmmakers, where there is still a high valuation placed on the concept of fidelity.

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<sup>5</sup> *Gone with the Wind*. Directed by Victor Fleming. Selznick International Pictures, 1939.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell, Margaret. *Gone with the Wind*. Warner Books, 1936.

<sup>7</sup> Leitch, Thomas. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Bluestone, George. *Novels Into Film*. John Hopkins University Press, 1957.

<sup>9</sup> *The Shining*. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1980.

<sup>10</sup> Hermansson, Casie. "Flogging Fidelity: In Defence of the (Un)Dead Horse." *Adaptation*. Vol. 8, No. 2, pp.147-160. *Oxford Academic*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apv014>.

<sup>11</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Cartmell, Deborah and Imelda Whelehan. *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*. Routledge, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Leitch, Thomas. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

It is this very conflict that the following thesis aims to explore. How does fidelity, when utilised in the adaptational process, affect the work? Does the filmmaker have a duty to preserve the essence of the novel as much as possible? Can straying from the source material enable the adapter to create a superior work? How does the role of the original author, and online fan presence affect the adaptational process? Does the written work fundamentally contain the best versions of a story, crucial details developed by the author who created it from scratch and knows it best? Whilst fidelity is considered to be of high importance in discussions of pop culture, is this an asset or a hindrance to the development of film adaptations as an art form?

The theoretical frameworks utilised in this research are adaptation studies, textual analysis, and comparative analysis. The research will discuss and examine how individual films alter and reinterpret a story in adaptation, using detailed case studies in order to examine different arguments and issues surrounding ideas of adaptational fidelity.

Chapter One will explore how deviations from, and disregard for, the source material can enrich and expand the original story, using the novel *Dracula* and analysing how its themes and narrative are expanded upon and explored in its numerous adaptations<sup>14</sup>.

Chapter Two examines the importance of fidelity to certain aspects of the source material in the process of literary adaptations, using Emerald Fennell's recently released adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* as a case study, to illustrate the pitfalls of adapters choosing not to include vital parts of the source text's story in their re-interpretation<sup>15 16</sup>.

Chapter Three examines the role of the source text's author in the adaptational process, and how the author's presence can impact the filmmaker's approach to the adaptation, and the audience's perception of it. Chapter Three uses *House of the Dragon*, *Little Women* (2019), and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) as case studies<sup>17 18 19</sup>.

An understanding of the true importance of fidelity to an adapted film or television series, both in terms of the quality of the work itself, and its reception amongst audiences, is of huge importance in informing the way filmmakers approach an adaptation. It is also important to understand the rapidly changing relationship of authors and existing fan bases to adapted works, and how this relationship can affect a film's commercial and critical reception. Why is there such a disconnect between the academic view and the audience view of fidelity in adaptation? Do audiences need to

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<sup>14</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897.

<sup>15</sup> "Wuthering Heights." Directed by Emerald Fennell. MRC, 2026.

<sup>16</sup> Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847.

<sup>17</sup> *House of the Dragon*. Created by Ryan Condal and George RR Martin. HBO, 2022-2024.

<sup>18</sup> *Little Women*. Directed by Greta Gerwig. Columbia Pictures, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. American Zoetrope, 1992.

reconsider the importance of fidelity? Do filmmakers need to increase the emphasis they place on fidelity? These questions are hugely relevant in a film culture that is increasingly leaning towards producing film and television works using existing, recognisable intellectual properties.

## Chapter One: The Life-Blood of Infidelity

“An adaptation is not vampiric, it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would have never had otherwise.” - Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*<sup>20</sup>.

When attempting to chronicle the history and development of cinema, one could consider *Dracula* a suitable fulcrum to work from<sup>21</sup>. The infamous count, born from the 1897 novel by Bram Stoker, has arguably been adopted from the literary by cinema to become one of its most iconic mascots<sup>22</sup>. The first adaptation of Stoker’s work was 1922’s *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*, directed F. W. Murnau<sup>23</sup>. The beginning of a long tradition of discarding Stoker’s plots and characters, *Nosferatu* was unauthorised, with the characters’ names and the story’s location clumsily changed. The production company was successfully sued by Stoker’s widow, Florence, and all copies were ordered destroyed<sup>24</sup>. Despite the ruling, this innovative and impactful work of German expressionism has managed to survive. The impact of Murnau’s film is such that it has been re-made many times, most recently by Robert Eggers with *Nosferatu* (2024)<sup>25</sup>.

Murnau’s *Nosferatu* established the character of Count Orlok, who has developed into a pop culture horror icon in his own right. Orlok is bald and demon-like, with signature jerky movements and two sharp front teeth. Murnau’s vampire is a slight deviation from Stoker’s, who has grey hair and a moustache, and is described as being unattractive with a strong body odour. The visual identity of the Count was re-interpreted with Tod Browning’s 1931 *Dracula*, the first licensed film adaptation of the novel<sup>26</sup>. Bela Lugosi’s portrayal solidified the Count as a neatly dressed, suave nobleman, with slicked-back hair in the famous widow’s peak, which has arguably become the most well-known iteration of the character since then. These two adaptations created two entirely new characters from Stoker’s work - the repulsive Orlok and the new, alluring Dracula.

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<sup>20</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897.

<sup>22</sup> Wolf, Leonard. *Dracula: The Connoisseur’s Guide*. Harmony/Rodale/Convergent, 1997

<sup>23</sup> *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*. Directed by F.W. Murnau. Prana Film, 1922.

<sup>24</sup> Scally, Derek. “Nosferatu and the fangs of copyright infringement” *The Irish Times*, 5 Mar. 2022, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/nosferatu-and-the-fangs-of-copyright-infringement-1.4814233>

<sup>25</sup> *Nosferatu*. Directed by Robert Eggers. Focus features, 2024.

<sup>26</sup> *Dracula*. Directed by Tod Browning. Universal Pictures, 1931.



Figure 3. Max Schrek as Count Orlok in *Nosferatu* (1922).



Figure 3. Bela Lugosi as Count Dracula in *Dracula* (1931).

The heart of Robert Egger's *Nosferatu* is the heroine's sacrifice<sup>27</sup>. Orlok's Achilles heel is Ellen Hutter, a beautiful young woman with whom he shares a psychic connection. After he launches a reign of death and terror on her city, she tricks him into spending the night with her, so that the morning sun kills him –though she is aware the loss of blood will kill her too. Here we see the introduction of an element that persists in most *Dracula* adaptations – a romantic or sexual attraction between vampire and female protagonist.<sup>28</sup> It has become a foundational element of vampire stories, and can be seen in popular contemporary media such as *Twilight*.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup> *Nosferatu*. Directed by Robert Eggers. Focus features, 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Wolf, Leonard. *Dracula: The Connoisseur's Guide*. Harmony/Rodale/Convergent, 1997.

<sup>29</sup> *Twilight*. Directed by Catherine Hardwicke. Temple Hill Entertainment, 2008.

danger and taboo of a relationship between woman and vampire has continuously captivated audiences over the last century – yet it has arguably stemmed from Stoker’s adapters rather than his own novel.



Figure 4. Edward bites Bella in an attempt to save her life in *Twilight* (2008).

There are two primary female characters in *Dracula* – Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker<sup>30</sup>. Lucy, a lively, spirited, wealthy upper-class woman, is an object of desire for the men in the novel. She is Dracula’s first victim in England – his motivations for attacking her seem to be solely an attraction, or desire, for sustenance - whereas he attacks the meeker and more conservative Mina to undermine his pursuers. Many adaptations combine these characters, and interestingly, it is Mina whose traits can be seen more often in adaptation.

In Francis Ford Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), Mina has a whirlwind love affair with the immortal Prince Vlad – she is revealed to be his deceased wife reincarnated<sup>31</sup>. Ellen Hutter has a spiritual clairvoyance, a connection to the occult, that marriage and respectability cannot dampen down<sup>32</sup>. Browning’s Mina tries to bite her husband, Jonathan, during her time as a vampire<sup>33</sup>. There is something wanting for the dutiful, sexually repressed heroine, a fact that she denies to herself, until the arrival of the vampire in the narrative means she must confront it.

There has been much analysis of *Dracula* through the psychosexual lens, with researchers speculating over how Bram Stoker’s unconscious feelings may have worked their way into the novel, which has undeniably sexual moments and undertones<sup>34 35</sup>. Jonathan and Mina have a respectable, acceptable relationship – but both are tempted to explore forbidden aspects of their sexuality through their encounters with Dracula. Jonathan is seduced by Dracula’s three wanton brides, and Mina seems destined to become one unless the vampire is killed. Lucy, who receives proposals from three separate suitors, expresses a wish she to marry all three to avoid disappointing them.

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<sup>30</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897.

<sup>31</sup> *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. American Zoetrope, 1992.

<sup>32</sup> *Nosferatu*. Directed by Robert Eggers. Focus features, 2024.

<sup>33</sup> *Dracula*. Directed by Tod Browning. Universal Pictures, 1931.

<sup>34</sup> Wolf, Leonard. *Dracula: The Connoisseur’s Guide*. Harmony/Rodale/Convergent, 1997.

<sup>35</sup> Miller, Elizabeth. *A Dracula Handbook*. Xlibris, 2005.

Mina's connection with Dracula is the most transgressive, as she is married to Jonathan, who has been previously terrorised by the Count. Dracula defiles his wife, an affront on Jonathan's masculinity, and an attack on what he loves most. Mina's sexually charged encounters with the Count are direct violations of their marriage, the strength of which is at the core of the narrative<sup>36</sup>.

Stoker's own relationship to his sexuality has been much speculated on. Stoker was married and had a son, but wrote several very revealing letters to the poet Walt Whitman, who boldly referenced romantic relationships with men in his work<sup>37 38 39</sup>. Stoker spent much of his life working for the actor Henry Irving, whom he apparently hero-worshipped<sup>40</sup>. One can certainly read a sexual subtext into Dracula's encounters with Jonathan in his castle. This becomes explicit text in the BBC *Dracula* miniseries, where Dracula seems intent on making Jonathan one of his brides<sup>41</sup>. It is important to note that Stoker seemed to draw inspiration from Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, (whom he worked with early in his career as a civil servant) in which the female vampire and heroine have a clear romantic attraction<sup>42</sup>.

"When I was in my room and about to lie down, I thought I heard a whispering at my door. I went to it softly and listened. Unless my ears deceived me, I heard the voice of the Count. "Back! Back to your own place! Your time is not yet come. Wait! Have patience! Tonight is mine. Tomorrow night is yours!" There was a low, sweet ripple of laughter, and in a rage I threw open the door, and saw without the three terrible women licking their lips. As I appeared, they all joined in a horrible laugh, and ran away." – Bram Stoker, *Dracula*.

The homoerotic undertones have not, unsurprisingly, featured in subsequent adaptations with the same proclivity as the heroine-vampire relationship. What has featured, however, is a feeling of wanting something different than what is deemed acceptable, a relationship that is transgressive in the eyes of society, and makes sense only to the vampire and heroine. Ellen Hutter feels out of place, has a connection to the supernatural and occult, a part of her that can only be fulfilled by Orlok<sup>43</sup>. Could it be that Stoker harboured repressed desires, a longing for something more than what his life could give him, that he wove into the subtext of his magnum opus? Perhaps successions of adaptations have allowed these feelings to rise to the surface of the text.

In the climax of Murnau's *Nosferatu*, Ellen is terrified as Orlok enters her room - even though it is part of her plan<sup>44</sup>. As he enters, she clutches her breast. He backs

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<sup>36</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897.

<sup>37</sup> Schaffer, Talia. "A Wilde Desire Took Me": The Homoerotic History of Dracula." *English Literary History* Vol. 61, 1994: pp. 381-425.

<sup>38</sup> Stoker, Bram. Letter to Walt Whitman. 14 Feb. 1876. Personal collection of Bram Stoker.

<sup>39</sup> Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. Self-published, 1855.

<sup>40</sup> Murray, Paul. *From the Shadow of Dracula: A Life of Bram Stoker*. Jonathan Cape, 2004.

<sup>41</sup> *Dracula*. Created by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat. Hartwood Films, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Le Fanu, J. S. *Carmilla*. British and Colonial Publishing, London, 1871.

<sup>43</sup> *Nosferatu*. Directed by Robert Eggers. Focus features, 2024.

<sup>44</sup> *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*. Directed by F.W. Murnau. Prana Film, 1922.

her onto the bed, where the shadow of his hand grasps her breast – and she twists in pleasure. The next we see of her, her face is turned away as Orlok bends over her – we don't know if she is alive or dead. When Orlok realises he has been tricked, he rises, attempts to escape, and turns to dust in the sunlight. Ellen's fate is still unclear. Only when Orlok is gone does she rise and reveal her face again, living long enough to die in her husband's arms. What occurred between her writhing in pleasure and Orlok's death is an intimate encounter known to them only.



Figure 5. Ellen holds her breast as Orlok approaches her.



Figure 6. Ellen twists in or pleasure as Orlok's shadow touches her.



Figure 7. Orlok drinks Ellen's blood.



Figure 8. Winona Ryder as Mina Harker in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992).



Figure 9. Winona Ryder as "Elisabeta" in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992). This character is not present in Stoker's novel.

In Robert Egger's 2024 adaptation, Ellen is tortured over the course of the film by her conflicting feelings of disgust – and desire – for Count Orlok, with whom she has had a psychic connection since her youth<sup>45</sup>. In the final scene, Orlok declares that they will finally be together physically as well as spiritually. They begin with a kiss, and when Orlok bites her, she moans in pleasure. When he realises that she has

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<sup>45</sup> *Nosferatu*. Directed by Robert Eggers. Focus features, 2024.

tricked him into exposing himself to sunlight, he looks at her in betrayal, as she smiles in triumph. Yet she embraces him as he convulses and seizes. There is a deliberate ambiguity to Ellen's motivations – does she desire the vampire, or is her sole motivation to stop Orlok's plague infecting Germany? Is it a mixture of both? Ellen dies, but she has finally found peace from her spiritual torment and fulfilled the desires at the core of her being. There is a sense that Ellen never quite belonged to the mortal world she inhabited with her husband Thomas. The compassion she shows towards the vampire in death has its roots in *Dracula*. At the end of the novel, as Dracula dies, Mina states:



Figure 10. Ellen embraces Orlok as he dies in *Nosferatu* (2024).



Figure 11. In the final shot of the film, Ellen and Orlok embrace, deceased and at peace.

*“I shall be glad as long as I live that even in that moment of final dissolution, there was in the face a look of peace, such as I never could have imagined might have rested there.”* Bram Stoker, *Dracula*<sup>46</sup>.

The above has touched on only a fraction of re-interpretations of *Dracula*. Often regarded as the original vampire story, one could argue that all of our contemporary plethora of vampire fiction is, in a sense, an adaptation of Stoker's novel. In the article “Film Adaptation as the Art of Expansion,” Polina Rybina argues that “it is of utmost importance that a film adaptation be regarded as a way to expand

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<sup>46</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897.

the literary original through other media means and resources”<sup>47</sup>. She discusses how an individual director’s style and perspective can tease out new aspects of a story. Hutcheon describes an adaptation as being “lovingly ripped off” from the original – there is perhaps no better example of this than *Nosferatu*<sup>48</sup>.

*Dracula* explores themes of religion, friendship, the strength and endurance of love – but the underlying forbidden desires seem to have captivated audiences and adaptors the most<sup>49</sup>. Adaptors produce sexually charged *Dracula* adaptations, which appeal to audiences, who demand more, authors and filmmakers respond by creating and expanding the “vampire romance” genre. Linda Hutcheon describes adaptation as “repetition but without replication, bringing together the comfort of ritual and recognition with the delight of surprise and novelty.” She theorises that the desire to re-tell and re-interpret stories is an integral part of the human condition.

As attitudes towards female sexuality have changed and progressed over the last century, so has vampire fiction. Stoker’s novel is something of a sandbox, the meaning of which scholars are still trying to decipher over a century later<sup>50</sup>. There is something in the story which speaks deeply to audiences, as powerfully today as it did in 1897. Through adapting and re-interpreting Stoker’s material, filmmakers have told stories that speak to different, unique facets of the human experience – whether it be shame and fear of our own desires, the torture of a romance that can never end in a happily-ever-after, the crushing nature of grief, or the quiet courage of an overlooked woman’s enormous sacrifice.

Had stoker’s novel been more well-known, would half of these seminal films exist? Florence Stoker was alive to object to the unauthorised use of his story, and while the vast majority of audiences would agree that authorial consent in adaptation is essential – it is a net benefit for cinema as a craft that *Nosferatu* has been salvaged<sup>51</sup><sup>52</sup>. How many incredible and insightful expansions of existing works have not been made because filmmakers are fearful of an audience who seems to value fidelity above all else?

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<sup>47</sup> Rybina, Polina. “Film Adaptation and the Art of Expansion.” *English Literature*, Vol. 5, Dec. 2018, DOI:[10.30687/EL/2420-823X/2018/01/004](https://doi.org/10.30687/EL/2420-823X/2018/01/004)

<sup>48</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897.

<sup>50</sup> Wolf, Leonard. *Dracula: The Connoisseur’s Guide*. Harmony/Rodale/Convergent, 1997.

<sup>51</sup> Scally, Derek. “Nosferatu and the fangs of copyright infringement” *The Irish Times*, 5 Mar. 2022, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/nosferatu-and-the-fangs-of-copyright-infringement-1.4814233>

<sup>52</sup> *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*. Directed by F.W. Murnau. Prana Film, 1922.

## Chapter Two: The Enduring Need for Fidelity

In the article “Flogging Fidelity: In Defence of the (Un)Dead Horse” Casie Hermansson argues that it is heedless to ignore the role of fidelity criticism in adaptation<sup>53</sup>. She laments that adaptation analysis that incorporates the source material is often lumped in unfairly with “the book is always better”-style reductive criticism. The article posits that there is an element of defensiveness amongst scholars of adaptation studies, that leads critics to ignore fidelity criticism in any sense, even that which is in good faith. She defines “fidelity criticism” as “adaptation criticism that uses fidelity – as it has been broadly defined, in different ways, and for a variety of purposes.” The critic Christopher Orr states that “the literary source does affect the production and consumption of the film adaptation, and we run the risk of impoverished film studies by ignoring this fact”<sup>54</sup>.

If one purchases a copy of *Wuthering Heights* translated from English to French, one would hope that the translation is as accurate as possible<sup>55</sup>. The aim is to make the same writing accessible to those who don’t speak the original language. A reader purchasing such a translation wants Emily Brontë’s work authentically represented, not a re-interpretation. Of course, the art of book-to-screen adaptation is much more complex than the art of translating a text from one language to another, no matter how faithful a filmmaker wishes to be, as Bluestone asserts in *Novels into Film*:

“The reputable novel, generally speaking, has been supported by a small, literate audience, has been produced by an individual writer, and has remained relatively free of rigid censorship. The film, on the other hand, has been supported by a mass audience, produced co-operatively under industrial conditions, and restricted by a self-imposed Production Code. These developments have reinforced rather than vitiated the autonomy of each medium.” George Bluestone, *Novels Into Film*<sup>56</sup>.

Despite these challenges, there often seems to be a desire amongst audiences for fidelity almost to the point of translation<sup>57</sup>. Audiences are arguably the most important party to take into consideration during the filmmaking process – it is the audience who decides if millions of dollars of investment pays off, or is lost. Whilst many critics are eager to move beyond this in contemporary discussion, fidelity is still clearly highly valued by audiences. Therefore it is an important consideration in the creation of adaptations and adaptation studies. The point of a film is after all, to entertain, inspire and move an audience – not provide fodder for critics. In the essay “Literary Adaptation and Appropriation in Early Cinema,” Tom Gunning writes that “...discussion of filmic adaptations seems to me to remain stuck in a defensive posture set by earlier generations of film critics anxious to maintain the value of cinema against the cultural hegemony of literary studies”<sup>58</sup>. He uses the term “literary

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<sup>53</sup> Hermansson, Casie. “Flogging Fidelity: In Defence of the (Un)Dead Horse.” *Adaptation*. Vol. 8, No. 2, pp.147-160. *Oxford Academic*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apv014>.

<sup>54</sup> Orr, Christopher. “The Discourse on Adaptation.” *Wide Angle* 6.2 (1984): 72-76.

<sup>55</sup> Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847.

<sup>56</sup> Bluestone, George. *Novels Into Film*. John Hopkins University Press, 1957.

<sup>57</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

<sup>58</sup> Gunning, Tom. “Literary Appropriation and Translation in Early Cinema.” *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, edited by Colin McCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 41-57.

appropriation” to describe the act of a film deliberately pronouncing its ties to a literary predecessor (eg. “based on the novel by..”), claiming that the existing relationship between film and text “plays an important role in experiencing the film”<sup>59</sup>.

In the essay, “The Economics of Adaptation,” Dudley Andrew argues that “...because the practice of adaptation chiefly involves literary sources, we can’t avoid looking into the moral claims of fidelity in the theory and practice of adaptation”<sup>60</sup>. He describes a “vertical” and “horizontal” model for examining adaptations. The horizontal method is the postmodernist attitude, where “every text is valued for the way it vibrates the horizontal network of neighbouring texts, none of them to be taken as “superior” not even the novel that may lend its name plot and characters to a film.” Andrew is sceptical about literary adaptations, stating that “something has gone awry when producers buy up literary properties only to convert them into poker chips.” He prefers the “vertical” model, which views the adaptation as stemming from, or tethered to, the source text.

In Emerald Fennell’s recently released auteur adaptation of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, this vertical line is almost completely severed<sup>61 62</sup>. The film faced severe backlash for casting Jacob Elordi, a white man, to play Heathcliff, a character who is described as racially ambiguous in the novel<sup>63</sup>. He is found on the streets of Liverpool, which was a prominent slave port at the time, and is described initially as a “dark-skinned gipsy”<sup>64</sup>. To explore the academic debates over Heathcliff’s ethnicity is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, on examination of the novel, it is arguably safe to assume that the character is a person of colour (POC).

Fennell is far from the first adaptor to do this – of all previous adaptations, Andrea Arnold’s 2011 adaptation is the only mainstream English-language film to accurately cast Heathcliff as a person of colour<sup>65</sup>. Fennell, is, however, the first to do so in the current era of social media’s proliferation of information and discourse. The advent of the internet has blurred the lines between Hutcheon’s ideas of “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences<sup>66</sup>. Soon after the casting announcement, descriptions of Heathcliff from the book and its scholarly debate were posted and spread on the

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<sup>59</sup> Gunning, Tom. “Literary Appropriation and Translation in Early Cinema.” *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, edited by Colin McCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 41-57.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew, Dudley. “The Economics of Adaptation.” *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, edited by Colin McCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 27-39.

<sup>61</sup> Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847.

<sup>62</sup> “*Wuthering Heights*.” Directed by Emerald Fennell. MRC, 2026.

<sup>63</sup> Murray, Conor. “Why Is the New ‘Wuthering Heights’ Movie Stirring Controversy? Casting And Marketing Draw Criticism” *Forbes*, 4 Sep. 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/conormurray/2025/09/04/why-is-the-new-wuthering-heights-movie-stirring-controversy-casting-and-marketing-draw-criticism/>

<sup>64</sup> Von Sneidern, Maja-Lisa. “Wuthering Heights and the Liverpool Slave Trade.” *ELH*, vol. 62, no. 1, 1995, pp. 171–96. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30030265>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2026

<sup>65</sup> *Wuthering Heights*. Directed by Andrea Arnold. HanWay Films, 2011.

<sup>66</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

internet. An prospective viewer did not have to have read the book to be “knowing.” It is perhaps almost impossible to divorce an adaptation from its literary source in the age of the internet.

From the outset, Fennell has been keen to make clear that the 2026 film is her personal vision, inspired by her experiences of first reading the novel as a teenager<sup>67</sup>. She has gone so far as to put the title in quotation marks, to clearly distance her interpretation from the original, (which, arguably, is more than many filmmakers have done when creating adaptations)<sup>68</sup>. In many ways, Fennell’s approach to adaptation is what scholars such as Hutcheon argue for – focusing on, and expanding, specific aspects of a text to create a fresh presentation of the story<sup>69</sup>. Yet, as Gunning points out, a literary appropriation cannot exist outside of the context of its literary progenitor<sup>70</sup>. Fennell’s film cannot escape its vast differences from the source text - its audience refuses to ignore them.



Figure 12. Laurence Olivier as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (1939).

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<sup>67</sup> Chuba, Kristen. “‘Wuthering Heights’ Director Emerald Fennell on Breaking With the Book to Cast Jacob Elordi as Heathcliff: ‘There Are So Many Different Takes.’” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 29 Jan. 2026. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/wuthering-heights-emerald-fennell-jacob-elordi-heathcliff-1236488149/>

<sup>68</sup> “*Wuthering Heights*.” Directed by Emerald Fennell. MRC, 2026.

<sup>69</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

<sup>70</sup> Gunning, Tom. “Literary Appropriation and Translation in Early Cinema.” *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, edited by Colin McCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 41-57.



Figure 13. Timothy Dalton as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (1970).



Figure 14. Ralph Fiennes as Heathcliff in *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights* (1992).



Figure 15. James Howson as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (2011).



Figure 16. Jacob Elordi as Heathcliff in Emerald Fennell's "Wuthering Heights" (2026).



Figure 17. Jacob Elordi as Heathcliff (post-transformation) in "Wuthering Heights" (2026).

Heathcliff's racialised identity is key to every aspect of the novel – his otherness is the reason why he cannot marry Catherine Linton, and their destructive attachment drives the plot of the novel<sup>71</sup>. His mistreatment drives him to commit his acts of cruelty and violence later in the narrative. *Wuthering Heights* is a complex novel that explores many different themes – generational trauma, class, misogyny – and race<sup>72</sup>.

Fennell claims that she wished to focus on the "pseudo-masochistic" and sexually charged elements of the story<sup>73</sup>. Visually the film resembles a Mills&Boon novel come to life – Heathcliff riding off in flowy shirtsleeves, against an artificially saturated orange sunset, Cathy's pantomime-like costumes, the (literal) bodice-ripping nature of the sex scenes<sup>74</sup>. Fennell has added scenes that were not present in the book, such as a young Cathy witnessing a man becoming erect whilst he is being executed

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<sup>71</sup> Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847.

<sup>72</sup> Michie, Elsie. "From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1992, pp. 125–40. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1346001>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2026.

<sup>73</sup> Youngs, Ian. "'Primal and sexual': *Wuthering Heights* director on bringing Brontë to life." *BBC*, 27 Sep. 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly0nnrr48ko>.

<sup>74</sup> "*Wuthering Heights*." Directed by Emerald Fennell. MRC, 2026.

by hanging, and a teenage Cathy and Heathcliff secretly watching whilst two of the servants incorporate horse bridles into their erotic dalliance. A core theme of the film seems to be the celebration and exploration of aspects of the female sexuality that are usually shunned and repressed in western culture<sup>75</sup>. Taking this to the extreme, Fennell recasts Isabella Linton, Heathcliff's battered wife, as a willing submissive participant in an elaborate BDSM dynamic<sup>76</sup>. The final scene in which Isabella appears depicts her tied and collared, acting like a dog – and winking at the novel's narrator Nelly, to make clear she is thoroughly happy with this situation.



Figure 18. An angry Heathcliff rides away into the sunset.



Figure 19. Cathy and Heathcliff admit their feelings for each other.



Figures 20, 21, & 22. Cathy's exaggerated, fairytale-esque costumes.

<sup>75</sup> "Wuthering Heights." Directed by Emerald Fennell. MRC, 2026.

<sup>76</sup> Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847.

For a myriad of reasons, it comes off as extremely distasteful to make such a choice – a character who was treated incredibly cruelly in the novel, who managed to escape, depicted as gleefully allowing it to happen – perhaps because this Heathcliff is a romantic hero, and to depict him as committing domestic violence would shatter that image, and undercut the film’s story<sup>77 78</sup>. Fennell seems to be using “*Wuthering Heights*” as a template for which to explore themes that don’t really exist in the novel. Arguably, hers is a misinterpretation of the novel, whether willfully or otherwise.



Figure 23. Isabella Linton, willingly tied up and wearing a collar.

Fennell seems very attached to her vision of “the experience she had reading the novel as a teenager”<sup>79</sup>. A non-white Heathcliff could easily fit into that vision – but non-white men are rarely depicted as romantic heroes in media<sup>80</sup>. Elordi’s Heathcliff oozes sexuality and seduction – Cathy’s obsession with him cannot be quenched by her marriage to another man or their years of absence from each other. He convinces Isabella to leave behind the life of luxury, and the family she adores to be willingly degraded and debased.

The film portrays Cathy’s husband Edgar as weak and foolish. Unable to sexually satisfy her, he is adoring to the end. Almost completely oblivious to her attachment to Heathcliff, he is easily and effectively cuckolded. Linton is played by Shazad Latif, who is a mixed-race man. Thusly, the weak, sexually impotent Linton is brown, and the attractive, dangerous Heathcliff is white – the reverse of the novel. Not only does this choice subvert many of the novel’s themes, it – intentionally or not – feeds into stereotypes rooted in racism. Is there no place for a non-white romantic hero in this fantastical, erotic, exploration of female sexuality?

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<sup>77</sup> Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847.

<sup>78</sup> “*Wuthering Heights*.” Directed by Emerald Fennell. MRC, 2026.

<sup>79</sup> Chuba, Kristen. “‘Wuthering Heights’ Director Emerald Fennell on Breaking With the Book to Cast Jacob Elordi as Heathcliff: ‘There Are So Many Different Takes.’” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 29 Jan. 2026. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/wuthering-heights-emerald-fennell-jacob-elordi-heathcliff-1236488149/>

<sup>80</sup> Gray, Herman. “Black Masculinity and Visual Culture.” *Callaloo*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1995, pp. 401–05. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3299086>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2026.

“Race-blind” casting has become increasingly popular in recent years, for example, in the alternative history/regency series *Bridgerton*<sup>81</sup> <sup>82</sup>. Representation of diverse groups of actors is obviously a positive, but casting without consideration of race becomes much more complicated when the project is a “literary appropriation” of a novel in which race plays such a central role<sup>83</sup>. Fennell’s “*Wuthering Heights*” centers whiteness in its depictions of sexual desire, relegating the characters of colour to the blatantly non-erotic characters – Nelly and Edgar<sup>84</sup>. Race depictions in media have a dense and complicated history, and every semiotic element has a connotation – especially in a story based during the British Empire<sup>85</sup>.

Are there “pseudo-masochistic elements” present in *Wuthering Heights*? Violence certainly plays a key role, yet it does not seem to have a sexual connotation, nor provide enjoyment for its recipients. Cathy and Heathcliff are wild and angry, and hurl accusations and angry words at each other when they meet again after Cathy’s marriage – but is this “pseudo-masochism,” or anger at how their respective choices have prevented them from being together? Violence and anger has a role in their dynamic – but in their sexual encounters in the film, it does not play a role. What, then, is Fennell expanding on? Transgressive and taboo explorations of female sexuality is a worthy subject for a film – but should that involve contorting and twisting the characters and plots of an important, existing work to fit a new theme? It seems that Fennell aimed to adapt the feeling she had whilst reading, rather than the book itself.

Whitewashing one of gothic literature’s most notable non-white characters does not feel like creative choice – it feels like a writer ignoring the aspects of the source text she does not wish to examine so that she may create a very different story. Issues of race and class don’t just simply disappear from the fabric of *Wuthering Heights* because the adapter ignores them<sup>86</sup>. To try and address class differences divorced from race is impossible as both are intertwined, especially given the colonial setting of *Wuthering Heights*. In the novel, Heathcliff’s racialised identity means that no amount of money or respectable mannerisms will enable him to assimilate into the society that adopted him. In the film, Cathy marries Edgar to save her family from bankruptcy. Yet Heathcliff returns a very rich man, and, as he is white, he can assimilate with some ease. Given Heathcliff had this ability to make his own fortune, would a marriage with Cathy really have been so catastrophic for her?

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<sup>81</sup> *Bridgerton*. Created by Shonda Rhimes. Shondaland, 2020 - 2026.

<sup>82</sup> Kinney, Rebecca J. “‘But I Don’t See Race’: Teaching Popular Culture and Racial Formation.” *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, vol. 24, nos. 1–2, 2014, pp. 40–55. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/trajincschped.24.1-2.0040>.

<sup>83</sup> Gunning, Tom. “Literary Appropriation and Translation in Early Cinema.” *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, edited by Colin McCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 41-57.

<sup>84</sup> “*Wuthering Heights*.” Directed by Emerald Fennell. MRC, 2026.

<sup>85</sup> Michie, Elsie. “From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference.” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1992, pp. 125–40. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1346001>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2026.

<sup>86</sup> Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847.

Fennell's adaptation ends, like many others, at the halfway point of the novel – the story is unfinished<sup>87</sup>. There is not even the potential for a sequel because Cathy and Edgar's daughter, a key player in the novel's plot, is miscarried in Fennell's story. The film falls flat. Its story is a doomed love affair between two people who cause intense emotional pain to those around them in order to be together, ending with Cathy's death as she, heartbroken, voluntarily succumbs to illness. There is no meaningful narrative resolution – Cathy is dead, and that's it. The effect this has on the other characters is not explored.

Andrew likens film adaptations to religious icons, pale imitations of the force they purport to represent<sup>88</sup>. In the case of "*Wuthering Heights*", there is weight behind his argument. Had Fennell incorporated the themes and plot of the novel in her literary appropriation to a greater extent, she may have been able to make a stronger case for her particular vision, and avoid receiving the intense levels of criticism that she did<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> "*Wuthering Heights*." Directed by Emerald Fennell. MRC, 2026.

<sup>88</sup> Andrew, Dudley. "The Economies of Adaptation." *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, edited by Colin McCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 27-39.

<sup>89</sup> Murray, Conor. "Why Is the New 'Wuthering Heights' Movie Stirring Controversy? Casting And Marketing Draw Criticism" *Forbes*, 4 Sep. 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/conormurray/2025/09/04/why-is-the-new-wuthering-heights-movie-stirring-controversy-casting-and-marketing-draw-criticism/>

## Chapter Three: The Author, the Auteur and the Adapter

“Rising from the ranks of metteurs-en-scène to the status of auteur depends on an alignment of several marketable factors: thematic consistency, association with a popular genre, an appetite for the coordination and control of outsized projects, sensitivity to the possibility of broad appeal in such disparate media as movies, television, books, magazines, and T-shirts. Perhaps the most indispensable of these factors is a public persona— Hitchcock’s archly ghoulish gravity, Kubrick’s fiercely romantic quest for control, Disney’s mild paternalism— that can be converted to a trademark more powerful than the other authorial trademarks with which it will inevitably compete.” Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptations and its Discontents*<sup>90</sup>.

In a blog post published in 2024, (and hastily deleted some hours later) author George R.R. Martin publicly condemned Ryan Condal, the showrunner of the television series *House of the Dragon* - which is adapted from his novel *Fire and Blood* - for the adaptational changes made in the series’ second season<sup>91 92 93</sup>. The programme’s first season had also made several severe changes – but Martin had no objections to them, in fact, he publicly praised the work.

The source text, *Fire and Blood*, provides a unique challenge to the adapter, in that it is drily written as a history, pieced together by a fictional scribe, attempting to create a factual document from several unreliable sources. There is little dialogue or room for in-depth character development. To create a compelling programme, the series turned these pseudo-historical accounts into straightforward narrative drama, without a meta-narrative or framing device as in the novel, making *House of the Dragon* a unique case study of the issue of adaptational fidelity.



Figure 24. Alicent and Rhaenyra, two teenage girls who initially have a close friendship in *House of the Dragon*. In the novel, they have a larger age gap and no familiarity in their relationship.

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<sup>90</sup> Leitch, Thomas. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

<sup>91</sup> Hibberd, James. “Heavy is the Crown: George R.R. Martin on His Triumphs and Torments.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15. Jan. 2026. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-features/george-rr-martin-interview-thrones-winds-dragon-knight-1236473519/>

<sup>92</sup> *House of the Dragon*. Created by Ryan Condal and George RR Martin. HBO, 2022-2024

<sup>93</sup> Martin, George R.R. *Fire and Blood*. Bantam Books, 2018.



Figure 25. Alicent and Rhaenyra have an illicit conversation in an attempt to prevent a war between the two factions of their family. The rift between them and its consequences is one of the central conflicts of the series.



Figure 26. Helaena shows an assassin which of her and King Aegon's twin children is the male. In the novel, she has two sons and is forced to pick which is to be murdered. The assassins then kill the one she chose to save.

In order to create a serviceable television storyline out of the sparse source material, the adapters are obliged to make changes, to expand and invent. By the very nature of this work, the core story cannot be transposed or translated. It must be reinvented. Yet some of these expansions and inventions are apparently acceptable to the author, whilst others are not<sup>94</sup>. Martin's criteria for judging the changes thusly are unclear. The fictional history of *Fire and Blood* is deliberately "unfaithful"<sup>95</sup>. It avoids asserting one cohesive narrative. One could assume that such a template would mean an adapter could have free reign to take the story in whatever direction they pleased.

In the complex transmedia franchise that has grown from Martin's writing, is *House of the Dragon* a canonical true account of this fictional history, intended to fill in

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<sup>94</sup> Hibberd, James. "Heavy is the Crown: George R.R. Martin on His Triumphs and Torments." *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15. Jan. 2026. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-features/george-rr-martin-interview-thrones-winds-dragon-knight-1236473519/>

<sup>95</sup> Martin, George R.R. *Fire and Blood*. Bantam Books, 2018.

the gaps<sup>96</sup>? Or, is it a different writer's re-interpretation of loose and vague source material?

Key to Martin's complaint was the absence of one of King Aegon's infant children, a character with no lines and no actions<sup>97 98</sup>. The character indeed serves a political function, as the king's heir after his elder son is murdered. This has knock-on effects in the rest of the story, as Martin points out. Yet the adaptational changes made in season one also had knock-on effects that Martin did not object to.

A book character can surely serve as a political function – but a Maegor, portrayed by an actual flesh-and-blood child, has different implications. Martin assumed that Maegor could later be born, if Helaena fell pregnant in season two. That would mean subjecting the screen character, who is tangible and personified to the audience, to the traumas of additional marital rape, and childbirth. *Game of Thrones* received much criticism for its portrayal and use of sexual violence in its plots<sup>99 100</sup>. In an emotionally detached history book, it is easy to inflict all kinds of heinous misfortune on the characters. The case is very different on screen – where human children, and a human actress, would have to re-enact it.

In the book *Adapting Bestsellers: Fantasy, Franchise and the Afterlife of Storyworlds*, Ken Gelder states that “the canon itself is now a matter of franchise storytelling, which keeps on giving: more sequels, more prequels, more spin-offs and more merchandise.”

Martin's decision to publicly announce his displeasure with the adaptation of his work is interesting. He willingly signed the rights to adaptation to HBO, he hand-selected Condal as showrunner, he is financially profiting from the existence of *House of the Dragon*<sup>101</sup>. *Fire and Blood* still exists in its original form – any viewer can read Martin's convoluted version of the story.

*House of the Dragon* is part of a complicated transmedia ecosystem born from Martin's writing. *Game of Thrones* adapted his books, but soon outpaced his still-unfinished series. The latter seasons were adapted from an outline of his planned endings. The line between what is “canonical” and what is a separate interpretation is blurred in this “storyworld.” Perhaps that explains Martin's upset – but why, then, did he agree to the drastic changes made in the show's first season? Those changes arguably established the series as a non-canonical entity, separate from the literary universe – why, then, can Condal not change whatever he wishes to?

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<sup>96</sup> *House of the Dragon*. Created by Ryan Condal and George RR Martin. HBO, 2022-2024

<sup>97</sup> Hibberd, James. “Heavy is the Crown: George R.R. Martin on His Triumphs and Torments.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15. Jan. 2026. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-features/george-rr-martin-interview-thrones-winds-dragon-knight-1236473519/>

<sup>98</sup> Martin, George R.R. *Fire and Blood*. Bantam Books, 2018.

<sup>99</sup> *Game of Thrones*. Created by David Benioff & D.B. Weiss. HBO, 2010 – 2019.

<sup>100</sup> Gelder, Ken. *Adapting Bestsellers: Fantasy, Franchise and the Afterlife of Storyworlds*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Who is allowed act as auteur, and how is auteurship defined when discussing a work that already has an “author”? As previously discussed, filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock are considered auteur of their works, many of which were based on novels, with blatant disregard for authorial intent<sup>102</sup>. The role of the author in the film adaptation is intricate and fraught. As a showrunner, is Condal not to be considered auteur in the same manner? It seems as if Martin wishes him to be purely the metteur-en-scène of Martin’s fractured, convoluted vision.

Unlike Robert Eggers or Emerald Fennell, who, given the Stoker and Brontë are deceased, could freely create without the fear of authorial objection, Condal is seemingly beholden to Martin’s wishes. Yet Fennell has been held by some audiences to a standard of perceived authorial intent<sup>103</sup>. Is the deciding factor in whether or not an adaptor is allowed act as auteur simply how well-known the source text is, how established and active its fanbase? Does iconophobia (bias against icons, the view of cinema as a lesser form of art) play a role, or are audiences justified in their concern for what the author intended<sup>104</sup>?

Martin is author, creator, of his expansive storyworld – there does not seem to be room, in public perception or what appears to be his own perception, for multiple people to be auteur. However, there several examples of auteur adaptations that embrace the role of the author, and their involvement in the text.

Greta Gerwig’s 2019 film *Little Women*, an adaptation of the classic novel by Louisa May Alcott, focuses on the theme of coming-of-age, from a distinctly female perspective – a theme at the forefront of most of Gerwig’s directorial work<sup>105 106</sup>.

*Little Women* is a meta-textual commentary that positions Alcott’s novel front and centre. The film opens with a quote from Alcott, and borrows some of its dialogue from Alcott’s letters<sup>107</sup>. The title card is the cover of the novel, with Alcott’s name visible. The novel was reprinted with film tie-in covers featuring the same design. The opening scene shows Jo March meeting with a publisher who informs her that to get a story published, “if the main character’s a girl, make sure she’s married by the end.” Thus begins the film’s conflict – how women struggle to pursue freedom, autonomy and creative ambitions in a society that actively discourages it.

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<sup>102</sup> Leitch, Thomas. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

<sup>103</sup> Murray, Conor. “Why Is the New ‘Wuthering Heights’ Movie Stirring Controversy? Casting And Marketing Draw Criticism” *Forbes*, 4 Sep. 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/conormurray/2025/09/04/why-is-the-new-wuthering-heights-movie-stirring-controversy-casting-and-marketing-draw-criticism/>

<sup>104</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

<sup>105</sup> Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. Roberts Brothers, 1868.

<sup>106</sup> *Little Women*. Directed by Greta Gerwig. Columbia Pictures, 2019.

<sup>107</sup> Nicolaou, Elena. “Why Greta Gerwig’s *Little Women* Movie Radically Changed the Book’s Ending.” *The Oprah Magazine*, 3 Feb. 2020. <https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/a30186941/little-women-ending/>

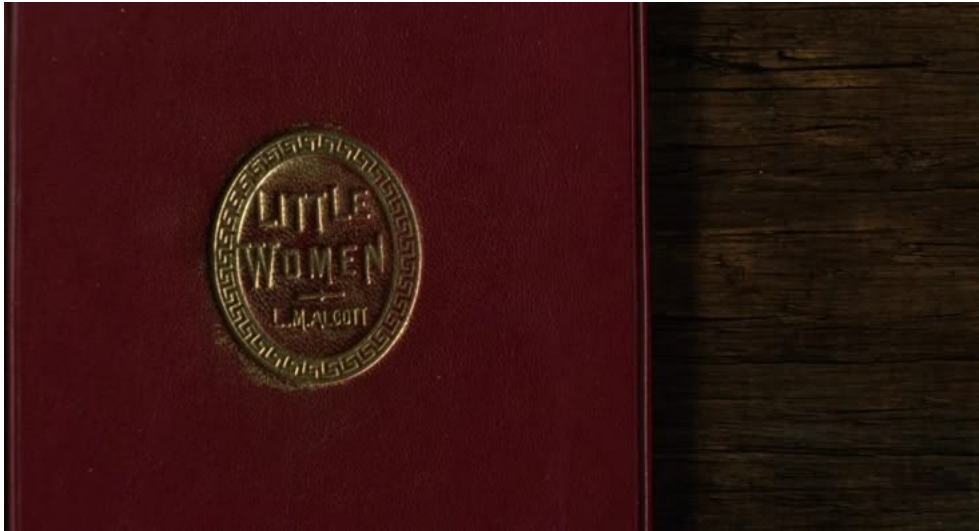


Figure 27. The title card of Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019), referencing Louisa May Alcott.

Jo expresses repeatedly how she does not feel suited to marriage, how she only wants to be a writer<sup>108</sup>. In the film's most emotionally charged scene, she laments how women are suited for more than just love and marriage - but that she finds herself to be unbearably lonely. She wants to be loved. Going against the grain has left her isolated. It is this that encourages her to consider reneging on her refusal of Laurie's proposal, but by then, her sister, Amy, has married him. When Laurie did propose, Jo seems surprised – it has not occurred to her that a man and a woman couldn't have a friendship as equals, that there was a romantic undertone to his interest in and regard for her.

After Beth's death in the latter half of the film, and the resolution of the Jo-Laurie-Amy love triangle, – all of the characters have completed their arcs - except Jo. She is the last one who hasn't left their home – their childhood. She has yet to come of age.

Jo begins to work on the novel she started for Beth, drafting and obsessively redrafting, dressed in a lurid green military-style jacket – a decidedly masculine costume. Aunt March has died and left Jo her house – now she can write, and have a place to live without needing to rely on a man or a relative. She contemplates turning it into a school. Her happy ending seems complete when Jo's publisher accepts her book, which is based on the events of the film – but insists the heroine – Jo – is married.

Suddenly, the film's tone deliberately changes, its obtrusively upbeat music and characters discordant with the previous scenes of sorrow and mourning. Jo seems out of character, in a scene where she realises that she is in fact in love with her housemate, Friedrich, and races to confess her feelings for him. Sickly-sweet music plays, Jo embraces her lover in the rain, and a deliberately awkward cut between two jarring angles presents the moment where they kiss twice – intercut with scenes of Jo debating the “selling of her heroine into marriage.”

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<sup>108</sup> *Little Women*. Directed by Greta Gerwig. Columbia Pictures, 2019.



Figure 28. Jo finishes writing her novel.



Figures 29 & 30. Jo and Friedrich embrace and kiss in the rain, cut between two nonsensically different angles.



Figure 31. Jo carries a cake and wears a pink dress.



Figure 32. Jo's novel is bound and printed, identical to the title card, but with her name instead of Alcott's.



Above: Figure 34. Jo watches as her novel is bound.

Figure 43. Jo holds her newly-bound novel close to her.



The final scene opens with a floral cake –a blatant symbol of traditional domestic femininity<sup>109</sup>. Jo wears a pink dress, another nod to her assimilation into traditional feminine roles. There are happy children running around. All the heterosexual couples are in their pairs. Jo has opened her school – but has she continued writing? Intercut with this scene is Jo watching her book, *Little Women*, being printed. It is the same book as in the film's initial title card, with Jo's name instead of Alcott's. A pensive, saddened, yet resolved expression crosses her face as she clutches the book to her.



Figure 35. Jo, in masculine clothing, argues with her publisher about the percentage of royalties she is to receive.

Gerwig's adaptation inserts the author into the text, merging her with the film's heroine, as she wished to "give Louisa May Alcott an ending she might have liked," stating that "she (Alcott) did it because she thought that was the thing she had to do to please her readership and her publisher and to make it financially successful"<sup>110</sup>.

There is some historical evidence for this, but it is impossible for anyone to truly know how Alcott felt about the novel she wrote. Despite underlining the film's reverence for Alcott, this film is a work of auteurship. Gerwig is making a statement

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<sup>109</sup> *Little Women*. Directed by Greta Gerwig. Columbia Pictures, 2019.

<sup>110</sup> Nicolaou, Elena. "Why Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* Movie Radically Changed the Book's Ending." *The Oprah Magazine*, 3 Feb. 2020. <https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/a30186941/little-women-ending/>

about female repression, creativity, and autonomy – a theme that underlines much of her work<sup>111</sup>. Like many auteurs, she is renowned for having a specific style, an interest in a specific theme. By choosing to use Alcott’s novel to make a bold statement, to decide the true ending for the story, she asserts herself as the author of the film<sup>112</sup>.

To return to the case study in Chapter One, Francis Ford Coppola’s 1992 film, *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, directly invokes the author by naming him in the title<sup>113</sup>. On the surface level, the film seems to honour the source text in many ways – it is one of the only adaptations to feature the letters and journals that make up the novel, and all of its named characters, such as Quincey Morris, who is usually discarded by filmmakers<sup>114</sup>. It follows most of the main plot beats – including Quincey being the one to fatally stab Dracula – but the addition of a romance plot between Mina and Dracula changes the meaning of the story completely.

On a surface level, this is a good example of adaptation as expansion. Coppola blends this additional plotline into the main plot without having to rearrange the core story beats. Yet its addition fundamentally changed the story, and is clearly not what Stoker intended when writing the novel. Dracula, the romantic hero, is a depiction that has largely emerged from derivative works. Coppola ostensibly links Dracula to the historical figure Vlad Dracula (often referred to as Vlad the Impaler). There has been much scholarly debate on whether Stoker’s character is based on this figure, but it is most likely that it was simply his name that Stoker used<sup>115</sup>. Yet Coppola’s the film further solidified the fictional character’s connection to this historical figure in the public consciousness<sup>116</sup>.

Given that the plot of Dracula is not widely known, Coppola’s adaptation arguably altered its perception in the mind of the viewing public, so much so the 2025 film, *Dracula: a Love Tale*, claims to be based on the novel, but in fact uses characters, plot and aesthetics from the Coppola film, which never appeared in the novel<sup>117</sup>. Do adaptations have a responsibility to accurately represent the author, if they directly invoke them in the work? Yet don’t all literary appropriations invoke the author solely by the fact that they are re-interpreting their work<sup>118</sup>?

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<sup>111</sup> Ferriss, Suzanne. *Greta Gerwig: Filmmaker*, Edinburgh University Press, 2026. <https://doi.org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.3366/9781399553520>

<sup>112</sup> Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. Roberts Brothers, 1868.

<sup>113</sup> *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. American Zoetrope, 1992.

<sup>114</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897.

<sup>115</sup> Miller, Elizabeth. *A Dracula Handbook*. Xlibris, 2005.

<sup>116</sup> Bogutskaya, Anna. “Horror in fancy clothes: the 1990s cycle of prestige monster movies.” *British Film Institute*, 14 Dec. 2022 <https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/horror-fancy-clothes-1990s-cycle-prestige-monster-movies>

<sup>117</sup> *Dracula: A Love Tale*. Directed by Luc Besson. Luc Besson Production, 2025.

<sup>118</sup> Gunning, Tom. “Literary Appropriation and Translation in Early Cinema.” *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, edited by Colin McCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 41-57.



Figures 36 & 37. Mina and Count Dracula spend time together in London in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, (above) and *Dracula: A Love Tale* (below). Note the similarity in the costuming and production design. This encounter is not depicted in the novel.

Despite its disregard for the novel's original plot, Coppola's adaptation is still, arguably, an act of expansion<sup>119</sup>. His distinct visual poetics, as Rybina calls them, and the overt sexuality in the film bring forth an element many scholars believe is very present in the novel<sup>120</sup>. The expansion here adds further to the expansion of the genre of vampire fiction, which Stoker himself arguably launched<sup>121</sup>. The success, and distinctive visual style of the film reinvigorated the gothic horror genre, which has provided further ideas and inspirations to filmmakers and writers<sup>122</sup>. Vampire fiction revives and retells folktales and stories which have been present since antiquity, and provides new perspectives on themes of repression, desire, and our relationship with death. Coppola's additional lore has bled into the constantly expanding amalgamation of modern vampire lore of which Stoker was a formative contributor. Perhaps the invocation of the author's name is a way of paying homage to the original, before expanding and updating the work for a new age.

George R.R. Martin seems to believe that the text is the authority, and the adaptation is an expansion, or transposition of the text, not its own distinct artwork<sup>123</sup>.

<sup>119</sup> *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. American Zoetrope, 1992.

<sup>120</sup> Rybina, Polina. "Film Adaptation and the Art of Expansion." *English Literature*, Vol. 5, Dec. 2018, DOI:10.30687/EL/2420-823X/2018/01/004

<sup>121</sup> Miller, Elizabeth. *A Dracula Handbook*. Xlibris, 2005.

<sup>122</sup> Bogutskaya, Anna. "Horror in fancy clothes: the 1990s cycle of prestige monster movies." *British Film Institute*, 14 Dec. 2022 <https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/horror-fancy-clothes-1990s-cycle-prestige-monster-movies>

<sup>123</sup> Hibberd, James. "Heavy is the Crown: George R.R. Martin on His Triumphs and Torments." *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15. Jan. 2026. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-features/george-rr-martin-interview-thrones-winds-dragon-knight-1236473519/>

Gerwig and Coppola have the freedom to act as auteur, given the fact that Stoker and Alcott are deceased, the audience's knowledge of the source texts, and, to a degree, the amount of previously produced adaptations. Crucially, *Dracula* and *Little Women* are in the public domain, and there are many faithful and beloved adaptations preceding those being discussed here— if a spectator does not like Gerwig's approach, they can simply watch another filmmaker's<sup>124</sup> <sup>125</sup>. However, Ryan Condal is the only person who can currently make an adaptation of *Fire and Blood*<sup>126</sup>.

Are audiences owed faithful adaptations? Why shouldn't Condal, who has been entrusted by both Martin, and HBO, who own the rights - which Martin sold them - approach the story any way he chooses? Martin has opened Condal up to a myriad of criticisms through his dissatisfaction with the adaptation. Martin told Condal "this is not my story anymore"<sup>127</sup>. Arguably, once the rights were sold, it never was.

It is unclear whether *House of the Dragon* is intended to canonically fill the gaps in *Fire and Blood*, or simply act as a screen adaptation<sup>128</sup>. It is unclear whether, in its creator's mind, the transmedia franchise is cohesive, or the screen and literary universes exist separately. Would the second season of *House of the Dragon* have been as negatively received by the knowing audience if they weren't "knowing"<sup>129</sup>?

We can never know the authorial intent of an author who is dead. But how much weight should be given to the stated intent of a living author, once the adaptational rights have been sold? Should adapters be allowed the same creative freedom as those using original screenplays, or does the act of adaptation mean filmmakers have a duty to the original "author?"

Perhaps Alcott would despise Gerwig's work, perhaps Stoker would adore Coppola's take on his. Living authors are now more involved than ever with the adaptational process – the internet has blurred these lines and boundaries. Author E.L. James weaponized her influence with the online fanbase of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, threatening to discourage them from watching the film adaptation if she did not have

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<sup>124</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897.

<sup>125</sup> Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. Roberts Brothers, 1868.

<sup>126</sup> Martin, George R.R. *Fire and Blood*. Bantam Books, 2018.

<sup>127</sup> Hibberd, James. "Heavy is the Crown: George R.R. Martin on His Triumphs and Torments." *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15. Jan. 2026. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-features/george-rr-martin-interview-thrones-winds-dragon-knight-1236473519/>

<sup>128</sup> *House of the Dragon*. Created by Ryan Condal and George RR Martin. HBO, 2022-2024.

<sup>129</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

control over certain creative decisions<sup>130 131 132</sup>. Leitch states “Stanley Kubrick ... earned his auteur status the old-fashioned way: by taking on authors directly in open warfare”<sup>133</sup>. If Condal wishes to become an auteur, perhaps he is on the right path.

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<sup>130</sup> James, E.L. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Vintage Books, 2012.

<sup>131</sup> *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson. Universal Pictures, 2015.

<sup>132</sup> Child, Ben. “Fifty Shades of grating teeth: EL James ‘threatened boycott’ of film if dialogue rewritten.” *The Guardian*, 6 Feb. 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/feb/06/fifty-shades-of-grey-el-james-dialogue-sam-taylor-johnson>.

<sup>133</sup> Leitch, Thomas. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

## Conclusion

The aim of this project was to explore the role fidelity plays in book-to-screen adaptations, and the discourse that surrounds them, by examining various case studies and differing arguments on the topic. Whilst literary inspirations have been integral to the craft of filmmaking since its inception, the entertainment industry is currently heavily reliant on producing films and television programmes based on existing intellectual properties, such as remakes, reboots and spinoffs<sup>134</sup> <sup>135</sup>. With the proliferation of social media, fidelity has become a more urgent issue for fans and filmmakers alike. Audiences are more vocal and organised in expressing their displeasure at adaptational changes, and production companies are easily made aware of it. Whilst the field of adaptation studies seems to be pushing for a post-fidelity approach, the same cannot be said for audiences<sup>136</sup>.

Adaptation and re-interpretation can expand on a work, enriching and enhancing its story and messages. Several of cinema's most celebrated and influential works are adaptations that are "unfaithful." Yet the source text plays an important role in the formation of the adaptation. According to Hutcheon, by announcing themselves *as adaptations*, adaptations will never escape comparison to their source text<sup>137</sup>. Like all art, adaptations are subjective – whether or not they retain enough of the original essence to be successful is a matter of opinion that depends on multiple factors: whether the audience is "knowing" or "unknowing," how attached the audience is to the source text, whether or not the source text is in the public domain, and the level of authorial involvement in the adaptational process.

The fact that this research examines multiple case studies necessitates that it is unable to examine the full scope of their functions as adaptations. The works examined here are all from English language films. Approaches to adaptations will differ across different cinematic and literary cultures. There are a number of issues which are beyond the scope of this thesis – the relevance of the textual history of the source text, adaptations as a way to "correct" or "modernise" stories that contain elements which are incompatible with contemporary values, and the social and political factors that determines what works are adapted - to name but a few.

It seems that there must be some resolution made between two apparently inhospitable ideals: that audiences want to watch faithful visual representations of the stories they love on screen, and that filmmakers who are allowed to disregard "fidelity" are emboldened to create new, expansive, valuable work. Is there a possibility that the general opinion of the viewing public will begin to change? Many academics in adaptation studies have decried the tired "fidelity model" for decades - but they are academics. The scholarly opinions in adaptation studies have yet to cement themselves into mainstream cultural discourse. It seems futile to continually assert ideas that have yet to find footing in public opinion. The audience is the most

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<sup>134</sup> Gunning, Tom. "Literary Appropriation and Translation in Early Cinema." *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, edited by Colin McCabe, Kathleen Murray and Rick Warner. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 41-57.

<sup>135</sup> Gelder, Ken. *Adapting Bestsellers: Fantasy, Franchise and the Afterlife of Storyworlds*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.

<sup>136</sup> Hermansson, Casie. "Flogging Fidelity: In Defence of the (Un)Dead Horse." *Adaptation*. Vol. 8, No. 2, pp.147-160. *Oxford Academic*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apv014>.

<sup>137</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

powerful factor in deciding success and failure in cinema<sup>138</sup>. If the audience continues to value fidelity, what does that mean for adaptation studies?

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon emphasises how the ability to re-tell and re-interpret is essential for the advancement of human art and storytelling<sup>139</sup>. This, therefore, is the appeal of adaptations: “repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise.” Perhaps if more filmmakers felt confident to create experimental, transformative adaptations, audiences would begin to appreciate the act of toying with and changing pre-existing work. A “bad” adaptation can tell us as much about the source work as a “good” adaptation. Fennell’s “*Wuthering Heights*” highlights how integral the class and race discussions are to the original story, by virtue of its absence in her adaptation<sup>140 141</sup>. The backlash drew attention to the failures of previous adaptations to address these issues<sup>142</sup>. It is reasonable to assume future adaptors will pay closer attention to the relevance of Heathcliff’s racialised identity<sup>143</sup>. Fans of the novel *Dracula* may hope that a filmmaker may someday produce a “faithful” adaptation – which will undoubtedly owe its inspiration to its hundreds of unfaithful predecessors<sup>144</sup>.

The way in which audiences and filmmakers approach the creation and critique of adaptations depends on a myriad of unpredictable and contradicting factors. There are no criteria that will determine the emphasis on fidelity that a filmmaker or audience will place on a given adaptation. The relationship between literature and screen adaptations is volatile and symbiotic. George R.R. Martin may have objections to the way his writing has been re-interpreted – but those re-interpretations propelled his writing to an exponentially wider audience than he would have enjoyed otherwise<sup>145</sup>.

Surely all parties in this discussion would benefit from an end to moral values being assigned to adaptations. If audiences were encouraged to view adaptations as expansions, discussions, and “loving rip-offs,” perhaps they would be more receptive to adaptational changes.

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<sup>138</sup> Leitch, Thomas. *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to the Passion of the Christ*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

<sup>139</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

<sup>140</sup> Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847.

<sup>141</sup> “*Wuthering Heights*.” Directed by Emerald Fennell. MRC, 2026.

<sup>142</sup> Murray, Conor. “Why Is the New ‘Wuthering Heights’ Movie Stirring Controversy? Casting And Marketing Draw Criticism” *Forbes*, 4 Sep. 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/conormurray/2025/09/04/why-is-the-new-wuthering-heights-movie-stirring-controversy-casting-and-marketing-draw-criticism/>

<sup>143</sup> Michie, Elsie. “From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference.” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1992, pp. 125–40. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1346001>. Accessed 9 Mar. 2026.

<sup>144</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. Archibald Constable and Company, 1897.

<sup>145</sup> Hibberd, James. “Heavy is the Crown: George R.R. Martin on His Triumphs and Torments.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15. Jan. 2026. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-features/george-rr-martin-interview-thrones-winds-dragon-knight-1236473519/>

To find a path towards this resolution, further research is clearly required. Investigating further the factors that determine the emphasis placed on fidelity, through surveys or analysis may unearth enlightening context, or the affect an “unfaithful” adaptation has on an “unknowing” audience’s perception of the source text. Hutcheon writes that “Audiences need to learn – that is, to be taught – how to be knowing audiences in terms of medium”<sup>146</sup>.

But who is to do this teaching? Is it up to the authors, like George R.R. Martin, to step back and allow filmmakers free reign over their “children?”<sup>147</sup> Is it on filmmakers to announce their intentions more broadly, as Emerald Fennell did when titling her film “*Wuthering Heights*”<sup>148</sup>?

Perhaps the discourses in adaptation studies should be shared to a wider audience. The theories and explanations scholars have devised will not change the minds of audiences, or authors, until there is an attempt to popularise the issues of adaptation studies amongst the general public. Films, and film adaptations, are art for the masses. The masses should have access to their discourses as well.

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<sup>146</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.

<sup>147</sup> Hibberd, James. “Heavy is the Crown: George R.R. Martin on His Triumphs and Torments.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15. Jan. 2026. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-features/george-rr-martin-interview-thrones-winds-dragon-knight-1236473519/>

<sup>148</sup> “*Wuthering Heights*.” Directed by Emerald Fennell. MRC, 2026.

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