The most obnoxious issue in film adaptation studies remains undoubtedly that of fidelity, but nowadays less for the reason that it is an inherently faulty principle and criterion, than for the simple fact that in the last decade many books in the field seem to be obliged to debunk it. Since almost each of their authors thus pretends to be the first to denounce fidelity and thereby to reform adaptation studies, one would surely imagine that the concept is critically outdated by now. However, this is anything but the case, if The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation is any indication. This recent collection, edited by James M. Welsh and Peter Lev, originates with the Literature/Film Association and Literature/Film Quarterly, one of the leading periodicals in the field, and assembles essays by its editors and contributors with the intention to investigate "the present and future of screen adaptation and of adaptation study" (xiii). From its beginnings, the journal was established as a safe haven for the (English) literary views on film, and hence imbued with the "lit-crit values [...] that American film studies had largely abandoned" (329), as Thomas M. Leitch describes. Although its readership has indeed broadened in the last few years, it is clear from this collection that the literary mark on the journal has not always been an interdisciplinary asset but often serves - either overtly or covertly - as an excuse for the so-called superiority of literature over film. But this is not to say that the persistence of fidelity should still be blamed on the origins of adaptation study itself. On the contrary, this new anthology also proves that the field of film and literature as such has made significant progress.

The Literature/Film Reader brings together articles previously published in the journal as well as new contributions. Preceded by a brief introductory overview by Welsh, which scratches the surface of the main issues in the history of adaptation study, the essays are subdivided in five parts: "Polemics", "Classic and Popular Literature", "Politics and Adaptation", "History, Biography, and Memoir", and an "Epilogue: The Future of Adaptation Studies". The two short pieces of the epilogue, Thomas M. Leitch's "Where Are We Going, Where Have We Been?" and Peter Lev's "The Future of Adaptation Studies", are culled from the LFA Newsletter, and provide an excellent reflective 'outro' to the reader. The entire first section, too, consists of programmatic essays about the study of adaptation, and is theoretically the most rewarding. In a direct condemnation of traditional fidelity on the occasion of Scorsese's The Age of Innocence, Brian McFarlane's article "It Wasn't Like That in the Book..." makes a pertinent plea for more attention to
"adaptation proper" and specifically filmic enunciation (7). In "Literature vs. Literacy: Two Futures for Adaptation Studies", Leitch sees adaptation study as a key to a broader discipline of textual studies, which would center around the relations between literature and literacy, surely an admirable goal even though his critique of education seems to hold for the American context only. However, the next essay, Donald M. Whaley's "Adaptation Studies and the History of Ideas: The Case of Apocalypse Now", seems to misuse adaptation theory and Leitch's call for (inter)textual studies to its own end. Whaley's "history of ideas" (36) is merely a new disguise for traditional biographical and genetic criticism, akin to Old Historicism. Under the pretext of cultural and historical contextualisation, "historians of ideas" seek to recreate "the intellectual world behind a film by locating the film's sources in earlier texts" as well as in "social sources of texts" (46), in order to fully illuminate "the meaning of a text" (48). Far removed from Roland Barthes's 'death of the author', this is but a new excuse to give absolute authority to the filmmakers regarding meaning and interpretation. Next in this line-up - and entirely at the other end of the spectrum - is Sarah Cardwell's excellent contribution "Adaptation Studies Revisited: Purposes, Perspectives, and Inspiration". In the same line as McFarlane's more pragmatic argument, her essay advocates a noncomparative approach to the film/literature deadlock - even while she argues that for different, nonevaluative purposes "comparison proves very useful" (59) - in that anti-comparatism inherently implies an emphasis on medium specificity, that is "the study of the unique features of different art forms, those features that distinguish them from one another and constitute their artistic potential." (59) At the same time such a methodology awards a crucial place to adaptations themselves, as they "cross the boundaries; challenge or reassert our notions of medium specificity and art, interpretation, and evaluation; and refresh our intellectual appetites" (61), which stresses the continuing relevance of adaptation studies. The following essay, Walter C. Metz's "The Cold War's "Undigested Apple-Dumpling": Imagining Moby Dick in 1956 and 2001", is a thorough political case study, but seems as such a bit out of place in this first theoretical chapter, although it concisely makes the point that the contemporary significance of a classical novel is its extreme malleability (72). The last essay in this section, "Trying Harder: Probability, Objectivity, and Rationality in Adaptation Studies" by David L. Kranz, effectively provides a historical overview of adaptation theory, accentuating the post-structuralist influences on the deconstruction of fidelity criticism. On the one hand, Kranz confirms that "the post-structuralist challenge to adaptation studies is on solid ground in its effort to expunge the reductive practices of fidelity criticism." (86) On the other hand, in a campaign against "academic silliness" (89), he believes "there are dangers in making post-structuralist and postmodernist theory the basis for adaptation theory and criticism." (88) Overall Kranz chooses the sensible middle way by filtering the theoretical excesses with the ideals of rationality and objectivity. Although in my opinion he somewhat misses the point post-structuralism has tried to make (by literalizing it), I agree with his assessment that Cardwell's inclusive method offers the critically soundest way to continue the study of adaptation. He also emphasises that we must keep "the comparative heart of adaptation studies" (99). True, the comparative approach need not inherently result in fidelity criticism, but Kranz downplays here that it has certainly been tainted by a long tradition of such "unproductive" comparisons (81). It is nonetheless quite surprising that the rest of this reader testifies that recent fidelity criticism in adaptation studies may still be - to contradict Kranz - as diverse and as biased as it used to be.

Whereas the programmatic section thus presents a critically challenging overview and evaluation of film/literature studies, the
practical application leaves much to be desired. Among the case studies, two major tendencies can be discerned. The first is that the field of adaptation study is being systematically ignored, together with its critical development. For instance, many of the authors do not account for any theoretical, methodological or formal issues surrounding adaptation, only concentrating on a thematic comparison between book and film. Of course, this is their good right, and may lead to outstanding readings, such as J. P. Telotte's "Heinlein, Verhoeven, and the Problem of the Real: Starship Troopers". But in an otherwise decent article like "The Oak: A Balancing Act from Page to Screen" by Odette Caufrman-Blumenfeld, one would hope for a more in-depth conceptual discussion of the relation between politics and adaptation, especially since that is the title of the section in question. Further, the thematic approach runs the risk of resulting in plot summaries outweighing analysis, as in the essays on The Quiet American. Also, some essays, like Linda Costanzo Cahir's "Literary Hardball: The Novel-to-Screen Complexities of The Manchurian Candidate", just refer to the study of adaptation once or twice as a compulsory acknowledgement, without adding anything substantial to the field itself. All in all it is not always as clear why certain articles warrant an inclusion in a reader of this allure. For that matter, it is not at all specified why John C. Tibbetts's article about the biopic St. Louis Blues, "W. C. Handy Goes Uptown: Hollywood Constructs the American Blues Musician", is part of this collection - its own merits aside of course - and, more particularly, what its relevance is to adaptation studies. (Is it being implied that the biopic is an adaptation of 'life'?) A basic problem of the reader, this lack of critical reflection on adaptation is most visible in the chapters on "Politics and Adaptation" and "History, Biography, and Memoir".

The second tendency is that here and there the strenuous progress which the field has made over the years with regard to the fidelity issue is being entirely discarded. In those cases, the original book is invariably considered superior to the film adaptation, whether this is made explicit or not. Incidentally, the Production Code Administration often functions as diversion and apology for the author's traditional verdict that the book is better. For example, Brian Neve smuggles into his article "Adaptation and the Cold War: Mankiewicz's The Quiet American" a certain presupposition of the book's supremacy in the form of a regret that due to "the political resonance of the book's reception, the process of translation into the film medium was always likely to be problematic." (235) Likewise, despite his strong denial of the accusation that as a performer of "transformation studies" he would be "outraged by difference" and see the "ur-text [...] as a sacred entity which must not be defiled by any alteration" (245), C. Kenneth Pellow does exactly that in his essay "All the Quiet Americans", which is basically a run-down of the changes in Joseph Mankiewicz's film and Philip Noyce's remake. Consider his statement that the former "captures some of the novel's best achievements but badly distorts others" while the latter "restores what the first one missed but downplays or disregards other salient aspects of the novel" (245), for Noyce "does not quite get it all." (249) In the end, regardless of individual pertinent points, the author always estimates the film's quality in terms of its correspondence with the book. (A final question poses itself on the sudden unexplained shift in discipline: what is transformation studies? And how - or why - does it differ from adaptation studies?) The chapter on biography, memoir and history takes the return to fidelity yet one step further - not too unexpectedly, since Welsh writes in his introduction that "[f]idelity, accuracy, and truth are all important measuring devices that should not be utterly ignored or neglected in evaluating a film adapted from a literary or dramatic source." (xxv) The problematic title of William Mooney's contribution "Memoir and the Limits of Adaptation" already indicates his prejudice against film adaptations of memoirs,
namely that "the written memoir [...] inherently resists adaptation into film by someone other than its author." (294) Instead of putting into practice his own observation that an adaptation is "to be viewed and evaluated as a completely different kind of work" (294), Mooney laments the differences as such, hiding behind the (apparently) increasingly popular yet easy argument of the so-called resistance of a text against adaptation. The section on history, the blurb on the back cover reads, "offers a new departure for adaptation studies, suggesting that films about history - often a separate category of film study - can be viewed as adaptations of records of the past." Indeed, John C. Tibbetts argues in his second essay "Plains Speaking: Sound, Sense, and Sensibility in Ang Lee's Ride with the Devil" that the adaptation process should be considered "as something that lies beyond the mere translation of a novel to the screen", because it is "also an adaptation of history itself, in all its visual and aural elements." (319) Yet, once again, he values Lee's film highly, contrasting it with other Kansas-Missouri Border Wars films, exactly because it translates both book and history "faithfully" (308). Similarly, Frank Thompson contends in his article "Getting It Right: The Alamo on Film" that 'historical' films (about the Alamo) - case in point here is John Lee Hancock's The Alamo - are superior if they are "authentic and accurate" (302), dismissing other "cinematic depictions" as "pure fiction" (299). He does touch upon the real issue here, admitting that complete accuracy and authenticity is "simply beyond the capabilities of a single film, on any subject" (302), which forces him, however, to justify through the backdoor his preference for Hancock's film, arguing that it "embraces the "emotional truth" [...] while respecting the "historical truth."") (304) Since, according to Thompson, this "is probably the best we can ever ask of a movie with a historical subject" (304), it is clear that for him film will always be a second-rate medium that one has to put up with anyhow. (On a side-note, I would rather have had Thompson talk about the novelisations he has written, which could have supplemented this reader with an additional perspective on the literature/film relationship.) In sum, the authors in this section seem to be too fixated on their presupposition of historical fidelity and on a given film's deviation from history to discuss what I believe to be the actual points of interest, namely the mediated relations between film, adaptation and history. After all, is film not in the first place an art form, and is history not always unattainable, so to speak? Thus, in the context of the reader, it would perhaps be more relevant to see how film adaptation functions as an additional level of mediation. Finally, I feel slightly uncomfortable to take issue with the two articles by editor James M. Welsh, which in my view represent the fallacies of traditional adaptation studies. In "What Is a "Shakespeare Film," Anyway?", he claims that Shakespeare adaptations that "ignore Shakespeare's language while exploiting his plots and characters" are derivative and "should be considered misguided and corrupt" (105), whereas good adaptations should be ""poetic" in style and substance." (112) Crucially, his central concept of what the film " sounds like" (112) is somewhat ill-defined and critically vague. His other essay, "Sucking Dracula: Mythic Biography into Fiction into Film, or Why Francis Ford Coppola's Dracula Is Not Really Bram Stoker's Dracula or Wallachia 's Dracula", is even more pronouncedly saturated with the condition of fidelity. Condemning Coppola's film as a "glorious shipwreck of a film" (172), Welsh attacks practically each of its differences with Stoker's novel. Quick to dismiss changes as "outrageous and absurd liberties" (172), he judges films on the basis of their degree of divergence with the source material. Basically, he seems to be offended by instances of cinematic specificity, in that this is in most cases here clearly the antithesis of fidelity.

Conversely, the reader also contains a number of excellent case studies, which often prove to be entirely at odds with the previously discussed essays concerning methodology, analysis and viewpoint.
For instance, "Returning to Naples: Seeing the End in Shakespeare Film Adaptation" by Yong Li Lan and "Pop Goes the Shakespeare: Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet" by Elsie Walker could both be read as most intelligent and nuanced responses to Welsh's disparagement of the bulk of Shakespeare adaptations. Wendy Everett's "Reframing Adaptation: Representing the Invisible (On The House of Mirth, Directed by Terence Davies, 2000)", too, illustrates how comparative criticism can still be exerted usefully and analytically in adaptation studies, without resorting to a fidelity approach or simplistic binarism. It is even still possible, for that matter, to critique a particular film adaptation, as Joan Driscoll Lynch's article "Camille Claudel: Biography Constructed as Melodrama" proves, as long as the arguments are on solid critical grounds. How come, then, those other essays fail, in the sense that they do not live up to the standards set by the programmatic section? Personally I believe that authors are often not familiar with the field of adaptation studies and its history, but nevertheless end up automatically in this academic circle when publishing a simple case study about an adapted novel or a film adaptation. Although Peter Lev's contribution on "Vertigo, Novel and Film" shows that it is perfectly feasible to interweave pertinent close readings and relevant reflections for adaptations and adaptation studies in general, I would argue that the immediate main problem still is bridging the gap, or "rift" (19), between theory and practice.

In my opinion, this is exactly the function of a 'reader' in a given field. In one respect, this collection succeeds in bringing the theory of adaptation up to date. In another respect, though, it is not always successful in applying that theory to concrete cases. Finally, I would like to ask the question whether the obvious return to fidelity in this collection is perhaps partially also a side effect of a basic principle of Literature/Film Quarterly, namely its promotion of "readability" (xxvi) by avoidance of "theoretical jargon", as the back cover suggests. Could this point of departure result in a suppression of a closer theoretical scrutiny of concepts that would otherwise uncover flawed prejudices in the practice of close readings? Still, praise must go to the polemic section of this book, which does take into account the entire baggage of adaptation theory, as well as to a number of progressive and thorough case studies compiled here, which may be seen as representing the practice of adaptation studies. That is, after all, a trademark of the field.

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Ultimately, The Literature Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation provides an excellent overview of this critical aspect of film studies. The first section presents essays on the hows and whys of adaptation studies, and subsequent sections highlight films adapted from a variety of sources, including classic and popular literature, drama, biography, and memoir. The last section offers a new departure for adaptation studies, suggesting that films about history--often a separate category of film study--can be seen as adaptations of records of the past. The anthology concludes with speculations about the future of adaptation studies.