Robert Giddings, Erica Sheen (eds.): The Classic Novel from Page to Screen
Manchester: Manchester University Press 2000, 243 pp.,
ISBN 0-7190-5231-9, $ 19.95

The book's blurb presents this collection of essays as an extensive and updated account of audio-visual adaptations of some of the most famous English novels, and of the complex relationship between literary and visual texts. Indeed, the first look at the index will confirm the publisher's confidence: the essays explore a very wide range of literary and filmic materials, each focusing on specific issues such as, for example, the treatment of sentimentality, history, landscape or sexuality both in the novels and their adaptations. The selection of literary texts, presented in the chronological order of literary history, covers the last three centuries of English literature, from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, and it is fair to say that the spectrum of the chosen novels is representative enough of the literary tradition, without being too unoriginal and obvious. (Despite the inclusion of Edith Warton's *The Age of Innocence* and Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, the focus is definitely on the English literary canon.) The inclusion of authors such as Waugh and Ondaatje, who, according to Erica Sheen, „have an ironic relation to the English literary canon" (Introduction, p.11), and the parallel absence of some of the mostly discussed film adaptations in history, such as, for example, Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*, Richardson's *Tom Jones*, or Hitchcock's *Rebecca* do indeed constitute an element of novelty.

The essays share a common preoccupation with the notion of 'fidelity', or 'faithfulness to the text'. Yet, the interaction between literary and filmic material is explored in a complex way, pointing not only to the more or less effectual visual rendering of the literary texts, but also to the economic and social mechanisms that affect a novel after being adapted for cinema or television. In most essays the discussion of the film adaptation becomes both a tool and a prompt for a fresh approach to the literary material, although not all the authors manage to avoid passing a judgement on whether a film's interpretation of its source is 'right' or 'wrong'.

Amongst the many good chapters, I would like to signal Jonathan Bignell's exploration of the figure of Dracula in film and literature, which, within the framework of a thorough and concise account of the Gothic novel and its theoretical readings, provides a very useful history of the literary and cultural sources for

Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and of the cinematic background of Francis Coppola's film.

Laura Scuriatti (Reading)