

### **“Franchises and Fidelity: Issues of Adaptation in Disney’s *The Jungle Book*”**

In his 2016 article “Dickens, Disney, Oliver, and Company: Adaptation in a Corporate Media Age,” Patrick C. Fleming argues that scholars “must move past comparisons with the original stories and consider...Disney’s tradition of actively engaging with the reception histories of the texts it adapts” into its children’s films (183). Fleming thus urges critics who study Disney film adaptations to look beyond discourses that focus on the films’ (lack of) fidelity to their literary source texts, towards discourses that “tak[e] seriously a film’s purpose in the context of a corporate narrative adjacent to but interacting with” the written text (196). My paper on Disney’s 2016 *The Jungle Book* takes up Fleming’s challenge by focusing on this film’s complex relationship to its literary and filmic sources. Although the term “fidelity” is often understood as meaning fidelity to an adaptation’s literary source text, I argue, following Fleming’s study and Adrienne Kertzer’s 2011 article “Fidelity, Felicity, and Playing Around in Wes Anderson’s *Fantastic Mr. Fox*,” that a film such as the 2016 *Jungle Book* is better understood as a much more fluid site of overlapping and competing fidelities. On the one hand, the film and its marketing do gesture toward fidelity as conventionally understood, touting its photorealistic computer effects as a sign of authenticity and positioning itself as a more accurate adaptation of Kipling’s text than the classic animated Disney adaptation. At the same time, the 2016 *Jungle Book* also flaunts its fidelity to other sources besides Kipling’s: Disney’s 1967 animated *Jungle Book* and the broader corporate narrative of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century fantasy film franchise. Ultimately, many of the places in which the 2016 film diverges from Kipling’s text—particularly the inclusion of “The Bare Necessities,” a song from the 1967 *Jungle Book*, and the 2016 *Jungle Book*’s ending, which leaves room for a sequel by having Mowgli remain a child in the jungle—should be interpreted not as failures of fidelity, but as signals of competing discourses of fidelity besides the textual, particularly those driven by cinematic predecessors, contemporary cinematic genres, and the larger corporate goals of the Walt Disney Studios. While fidelity to tradition is a concept central to the 2016 *Jungle Book*, this film, like many contemporary studio-created adaptations, is a site of multiple overlapping discourses about fidelity, including but by no means limited to the notion of fidelity to a written source.