

Marty Gould

Associate Professor, University of South Florida

Marie Curie Fellow, Brunel University

mgould@usf.edu

Communal Connections in Cinematic Adaptations of *Great Expectations*

Twentieth-century cinematic transfers of *Great Expectations* have tended to turn Dickens's *bildungsroman* to larger nationalist purpose. A story of identity and development, of desired and unwanted affiliations, of grappling with the traumatic legacies of the past and of forging a new future, *Great Expectations* is teeming with potential political resonance. My paper looks at the representation of the individual's relationship to community in two twentieth-century film adaptations of *Great Expectations: An Orphan's Tragedy* (1955) and *Mr. Pip* (2012), the film adapted from the Lloyd Jones novel of the same title.

Filmed in Hong Kong and starring Bruce Lee as young Frank (the Pip figure), *An Orphan's Tragedy* offers a reading of its source text as a critical commentary on social inequality under Western capitalism. As a Western writer, Dickens was regarded with suspicion in post-revolutionary China, but *An Orphan's Tragedy* recuperates *Great Expectations* as a realist text that endorses communal service over individual self-interest, an anti-capitalist message in line with China's communist ideology.

New Zealand novelist Lloyd Jones's novel *Mr. Pip* is an object lesson in adaptation—how active readerly engagement transforms static texts into portable cultural property. Adamson's film adaptation, also entitled *Mr. Pip*, refines that message, exploring how adaptations make literary texts available for individual and communal appropriation. The film

demonstrates an active form of literacy that gives readers access to literary texts as structures with which they can frame their own life experiences and understand their cultural histories. In the process Matilda finds herself torn between different communities, the community of Dickens readers and the community in which she has been raised. Where Jones ends his novel ambiguously, Adamson offers more concrete evidence that Matilda ultimately manages to reconnect her adopted readerly community with the community of her birth.

Biographical Sketch

Marty Gould is Associate Professor of English at the University of South Florida and a visiting Fellow at London's Brunel University. His first book, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Encounter* was published by Routledge in 2011. He has published articles on Victorian drama, on Dickens and popular culture, and on literary adaptation. His current research on theatrical and cinematic adaptations of Dickens is supported by a Marie Curie Fellowship. His talk today is part of a larger study of Dickens and global cinema.