

**Re-Made in America: Naming in *Great Expectations* (Alfonso Cuarón, 1998)\***

**Shannon WELLS-LASSAGNE**  
**Université de Dijon**

To those familiar with Charles Dickens, discussing names in relation to his work may seem an obvious choice. “Boz”, as he was affectionately called by the Victorians, worked in the great English tradition of evocative proper names that stretches back well before the “Christian” of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and has graced British literature with such memorable and improbable names as the less-than-promising schoolteacher McChoakumchild in *Hard Times*, the garrulous politician Mr. Gusher from *Bleak House*, or the brutish aristocrat Bentley Drummle in *Great Expectations*. Dickens did not restrict himself to purely descriptive names. Indeed, much of the pleasure was as much purely linguistic as it was literary, with characters whose names beggar any belief in pure realism, names like title characters Martin Chuzzlewit, Edwin Drood or Barnaby Rudge. Actor Benedict Cumberbatch notwithstanding, these are not everyday British monikers.

Names, therefore, are a crucial element in Dickens’s style, both comic and grotesque, and though many adaptations of *Great Expectations* have had to do without a certain number of memorable characters, until Alfonso Cuarón’s contemporary retelling of the story,<sup>1</sup> all film adaptations kept the evocative names like Wopsle, Pumblechook, Miss Havisham, Abel Magwitch and, of course, Pip. Cuarón and screenwriter Mitch Glazer chose, on the contrary, to jettison even the most iconic of these names, replacing Miss Havisham with Nora Dinsmoor, Abel Magwitch with Arthur Lustig, and even Pip with Finnegan Bell, and maintains only the names of the heroine, Estella, Pip’s mentor Joe (though the less realistic Gargery is done away with), and of course the title itself. Glazer has a track record in this sense, as his most successful film before *Great Expectations* was also a Dickens adaptation: *Scrooged* (Richard Donner, 1988) was a contemporary version of *A Christmas Carol*, where TV executive Frank Carroll takes the place of Ebenezer Scrooge, and only Jacob Marley retains his name. *Scrooged*, of course, was set in a universe where Dickens’s text exists – Carroll is planning an adaptation for live broadcast on his television channel – so the change of names is unsurprising. Here, however, the adaptation is a more straightforward transposition of what some call “A Gentleman’s Progress”<sup>2</sup> into twentieth-century America, where Pip (or Finn) seeks success as a means to the heart of the quintessential ice queen, Estella. As such, the juxtaposition between the title and the character names becomes fairly striking, since ironically, maintaining the canonical title creates “great expectations” in the

---

\* To cite this article: Shannon Wells-Lassagne, “Re-Made in America: Naming in *Great Expectations* (Alfonso Cuarón, 1998)”, in David Roche and Jean-François Baillon eds., “Terms that Matter: Naming and Labelling in English-Speaking Cinema”, *Film Journal*, 4 (2017). URL: <http://filmjournal.org/fj4-wells-lassagne>.

<sup>1</sup> *Great Expectations*. Dir. Alfonso Cuarón. Written by Mitch Glazer. With Ethan Hawke (Finnegan Bell), Gwyneth Paltrow (Estella) and Robert De Niro (Prisoner/Lustig). dir. Warner Bros., 1998. DVD. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for example Robin Gilmour, “The Pursuit of Gentility”, in Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, Edgar Rosenberg ed. (New York: WW Norton & Co., 1999), 576-582.

filmgoer, and at least some of our expectations are disappointed (much like Pip's). The storyline may be roughly the same (with a typically Hollywoodian emphasis on the love story), but choosing more realistic contemporary names is representative of a desire that largely contradicts any Dickensian aspects: exchanging names like Startop or Drummle for Walter or Owen makes the tale more realistic, indeed, but ultimately is at odds with both the comic grotesque so typical of Dickens and the fairytale elements characteristic of *Great Expectations* in particular. These name changes thus suggest the time-bound (as opposed to timeless) qualities of Dickens's novel.

While there is little doubt that Dickens' character names were outlandish even at the time, and that this may have created a gap in suspension of disbelief as to the realism of the events, it was also a source of proximity with his audience, an inside joke that the reader shared about the nature of Dickens's grotesques<sup>3</sup>. However, their now-iconic nature has diminished this effect; we might think that rather than attempting to increase the film's proximity to the audience through realism, the filmmakers were simply trying to reestablish these comic elements, stripping away the familiarity that robbed them of their comic value. After all, though Owen, Walter, and Joe are common names, Ragno (the Jagers character) and Arthur Lustig (Magwitch) are not, and Dinsmoor (as a replacement for Havisham) has a certain evocative absurdity to it that would have been at home in the novel<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, if we refer to producer Art Linson's recollections of previous versions of the screenplay, the original intention was to name Pip Pompei, a change that would have broken with the original, but remained as unusual and childish as Pip for Philip Pirrip.<sup>5</sup>

However, ultimately the comic or grotesque element seems less prevalent than a wealth of intertextual references, notably to accommodate the tale to its new American setting. *Great Expectations* is after all an attempt at rising above one's station to unexpected success: Pip's attempts to become more than the blacksmith's boy, to become a gentleman (and win the heart of the lady), is ultimately what we commonly refer to as the American dream<sup>6</sup>, so the contemporary American setting may seem appropriate. By naming the

---

<sup>3</sup> Robert M. Polhemus, *Comic Faith: The Great Tradition from Austen to Joyce* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 93-95.

<sup>4</sup> The character is introduced dancing wildly to a record playing loudly, suggesting that she is indeed one to create quite a din – in the room, and in Finn's life.

<sup>5</sup> Producer Art Linson has written extensively on the subject of the film, though he seems to disagree with my reading of the possible meanings of the name Finn: "The Dickensian name of Pip was discarded early by Mitch, who renamed him Pompei in the earliest of his drafts. Cuarón, who struggled with the name Pompei, got Mitch to change it to Jimmy. Ethan, who had been prepping in Florida for several weeks, and who was deliberating over the 'right' wig to make him look sixteen for the early scenes, was also concerned with the 'right' name for his character. When Ethan started rehearsals, he didn't like either name. He told us he was going to work on it. Two days before photography began, Ethan decided that the character's name had to be changed to Finn. No one particularly liked this choice (I truly hated it), but call it jet lag, call it pathetic capitulation to your lead actor, or being distracted by other problems, we decided to go with Finn. I heard later that it was the name of a dog that Ethan had had when he was growing up in Texas." Art Linson, *What Just Happened? Bitter Hollywood Tales from the Front Lines* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2008), 96-97.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, as Jim Cullen makes clear, "beyond an abstract belief in possibility, there is no *one* American Dream", and this ideal has evolved as American society has changed. One might say that the desire for both material success *and* celebrity status is, as Cullen insists, one of the more recent forms of the quintessential

protagonist Finn, rather than Pip, by having the opening shots of the film take place on the water (Pip is exploring the seashore and drawing whatever catches his eye) and having Finn's seemingly foolish but ultimately wiser companion Joe also be associated with the water (Joe in this rendition is a fisherman), the film inevitably points to another canonical text from American literature, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where Huck and escaped slave Jim float down the Mississippi river on a raft towards freedom.<sup>7</sup> Of course, *Huckleberry Finn* is far from depicting the American Dream; the Twain novel's comic depiction of the United States' profound injustices towards blacks point to the class disparities touched on in Cuarón's film. In this screen adaptation of *Great Expectations*, the glamour of New York and the crumbling mansion of Paradiso Perduto (the film's rendition of Satis House) contrast with the cheap motel and ramshackle home that Finn inhabits.<sup>8</sup> Given the problematic happy endings of both *Great Expectations* and *Huckleberry Finn*,<sup>9</sup> the reference may also suggest that the tale will not end well, and that the expectations Finn has about his future will not meet the reality.

Likewise, the foreign names, like Ragno, Lustig, or Paradiso Perduto, suggest both the multicultural nature of a twentieth-century United States, and the international or universal nature of the tale. This is, of course, all the more relevant for a Mexican director who initially hesitated to take on the project because of the impact that David Lean's famous adaptation (Cineguild, 1946) had on him personally. The fact that Dinsmoor repeatedly insists that Finn needs to learn a foreign language, as she prances about to a cover of "Besame mucho" (Steve Lawrence, Eydie Gormé, 1998) and deciphers Ragno's name for him, and that Estella speaks French when she has no desire for Finn to understand her, all suggest that these names are key to a crucial aspect of this adaptation: given that these iconic figures have been renamed with monikers from various foreign languages, a sort of linguistic equivalent

---

American ideal. Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), Thomas Cooley ed. (New York: WW Norton & Co., 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the first meeting with Estella's future husband, a character named Drummle by Dickens and Walter by Glazer and Cuarón, makes concrete this association between naming (or rather, making a name for oneself) and privilege: "A long time ago, there lived these two artists: geniuses. And one day one of them was painting out in the forest, and he came upon this little dog who was obviously lost. A puppy. [...] So he couldn't concentrate anyway, so he scooped the puppy up, and he took him back into town to find his rightful owner, who turned out to be the prince of the entire kingdom, who was eternally grateful and very wealthy, and that artist's name was Michelangelo. The other artist's name was... nobody knows, because he was never heard from again". This social inequity was something that Cuarón reportedly insisted on heightening; the initial screenplay focused on the story of unrequited love, leading the director to comment, "most Americans will deny the problems of class in their own country". Pamela Katz, "Directing Dickens: Alfonso Cuarón's 1998 *Great Expectations*", in John Glavin ed., *Dickens on Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 97.

<sup>9</sup> Twain famously found himself unable to finish the book, and put it off for years before writing an ending that most specialists agree mars the achievement of the book's first pages. Dickens wrote a more somber ending to *Great Expectations*, before caving in to pressure from his readers and his friend and colleague Edward Bulwer-Lytton to write an ambiguously happy ending, where Pip meets his Estella again and "saw the shadow of no parting from her", a sentence parsed for meaning by many a Dickens specialist. Cf. Edgar Rosenberg, "Putting an End to *Great Expectations*", Rosenberg ed., *Great Expectations*, 491-527. Victor A. Doyno, "From *Writing Huck Finn*: Mark Twain's Creative Process", in Cooley ed., 337-348.

of the American melting pot, the film posits that *Great Expectations* can no longer be considered simply a British treasure, and that it is indeed no longer that novel. As such, critics rightly point to the opening of the film as both paying homage to previous versions of the tale (be it the source text or the Lean film) and forging its own path<sup>10</sup>: thus the film opens on the Florida coastline, where the sea is apparently teeming with life, rather than the graveyard that has been a standard set piece in all other adaptations, when young Pip is attempting to create memories of the dead (paying his respects to his dead family, present only in the texts inscribed on the tombstones). To a certain extent this is in fact reminiscent of another radical rewriting of a Victorian classic, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which also insists on the Edenic lushness of the setting being in fact post-lapsarian.<sup>11</sup> Finn is not frightened by his surroundings, as he is in the source text – rather, through his drawings in his sketchbook, he dominates his surroundings, essentially creating them anew on the page. This sketchbook represents the link between the Lean film and this more recent rendition: while Lean's film opened with an image of the text of Dickens's novel, highlighted as the actor read the first words (appropriately condensed for the screen), here the text recounting the past has become images, a sketchbook that will be rediscovered at the end of the film that we can imagine inspired this recollection of the past: the memoirist Phillip Pirrip has become the artist Finnegan Bell.

The opening, however, brings up another crucial element of this particular Dickens text and a problem particular to film adaptations: narration. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens focuses not only on the importance of names, but on the importance of *naming*. Famously, his novel opens on our main character as a sort of Georgian-era Adam, first naming himself, and then giving names to his surroundings:

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip. [...] My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such time I found out for certain that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana, wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dikes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Michael Johnson's comments on this are but one example: "By emphasizing the way Finn constructs the world (and the narrative of the film) through his own subjective gaze, *Great Expectations* (1998) goes farther than the earlier film in creating a cinematic equivalent to the novel's first-person narrative." Michael Johnson, "Not telling it the way it happened: Alfonso Cuarón's GE", *Film/Literature Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (2005): 63.

<sup>11</sup> "Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild." This is in obvious contrast to the narrator's vision of England, which is, she says, "made of cardboard". Rhys's novel is of course a prequel of the Brontë novel, but both adaptations imply that their tales cannot begin with the same innocence our more canonical authors may have had (however relative that innocence was, given the political significance of both texts to their time). Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Judith L. Raiskin ed., (New York: WW Norton, 1999), 10-11; 107.

<sup>12</sup> Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 9-10.

To take my cue from Peter Brooks, whose article “Repetition, Repression, and Return: The Plotting of *Great Expectations*” has partially inspired this article, it is obvious that Pip has first named himself, and then created the setting in which this first part of the text will take place by naming each and every one of these elements, and thus calling them into being<sup>13</sup>. Naming and narrating overlap in the text, leading to a heightened awareness of a narrator (an older and wiser Philip Pirrip) who is very much in charge of the language, and very aware of creating the image that we will see, even if the character Pip does not control the world around him.

The centrality of narration in relation to naming and to the novel as a whole of course evokes one of the major problems with adapting *Great Expectations* to the screen. In film, narration is problematic in and of itself. Though there are vastly different schools of thought, from Metz’s belief that film is a language<sup>14</sup> to Bordwell’s insistence that the spectator is in fact in the situation of the narrator,<sup>15</sup> everyone can agree that the inevitable subjectivity of narration is rendered complex in the objective gaze of the camera. The heightened subjectivity of first-person narration is, of course, even more difficult to translate and constitutes a second of the major difficulties of adapting Dickens’s novel (specific to this novel in a way that the comic grotesques are not). No one technique is entirely satisfying: voice-over is of course a sop to the source text, and if over-used will distract from the images, or worse, make them redundant; point-of-view shots if over-used will distance the viewer from the viewpoint they are supposed to be taking, as experiments like *Lady in the Lake* (MGM, Robert Montgomery, 1947) prove<sup>16</sup>. As these techniques are a delicate balance to master, and generally are only used periodically in a film, they ultimately beg the question

---

<sup>13</sup> “There may be sociological and sentimental reasons to account for the high incidence of orphans in the nineteenth-century novel, but clearly the parentless protagonist frees an author from struggle with preexisting authorities, allowing him to create afresh all the determinants of plot within his text. [...] ‘So I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.’ (Chapter 1) This originating moment of Pip’s narration and his narrative is a self-naming that already subverts whatever authority could be found in the text of the tombstones [bearing his parent’s names].” Peter Brooks, “Repetition, Repression, and Return: The Plotting of *Great Expectations*”, in Rosenberg, ed., *Great Expectations*, 679-680.

<sup>14</sup> Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 29.

<sup>16</sup> The debate on what constitutes a cinematic narrator are of course ongoing, primarily in the distinction made by Seymour Chatman to David Bordwell’s assertion that the audience is essentially creating the narration in film, creating causality, or associating the images spatially or temporally. Chatman suggests that there is a cinematic narrator, but that it is a non-human agent created through editing, mise en scène, cinematography, and soundtrack. Regardless of the exact nature of the cinematic narrator, attempts to recreate the textual homodiegetic narrator are inevitably more complex because they must account for the narrative voice as both narrator and focaliser, something Silke Horstkotte notes in her article on the subject. Seymour Chatman, “The Cinematic Narrator”, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 124-138; Silke Horstkotte, “Seeing or Speaking: Visual Narratology and Focalization, Literature to Film”, in S. Heinen and R. Sommer eds. *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter), 170-192. Available online: [https://www.academia.edu/215809/Seeing\\_or\\_Speaking\\_Visual\\_Narratology\\_and\\_Focalization\\_Literature\\_to\\_Film](https://www.academia.edu/215809/Seeing_or_Speaking_Visual_Narratology_and_Focalization_Literature_to_Film).

of when subjectivity stops, and the story, rather than the character's story, begins (or if it does).

I would like to suggest that the filmmakers of the 1998 adaptation make savvy use of various audio-visual techniques in order to suggest that the whole of the film remains subjective. In Charles Dickens's text, as we said, as Pip names things, narrator Phillip Pirrip essentially brings them into being. In Cuarón's film, this identification of one's surroundings has become visual, though as in the book, where Pip sees things and appropriates them through language, in the film, young Finn appropriates his surroundings through drawings. We see Finn's drawings (created by Italian painter Francesco Clemente) before we see Finn himself, his depiction of the world surrounding him before the camera allows us to see this world for ourselves. Once we see Finn in his boat, we might be tempted to think that the shot is no longer subjective, and that the voice-over is the only remnant of the character's point of view, but the events that follow make clear that we should be wary of such assumptions, that realism is not as clear-cut as it may seem: while the convict of Dickens's text seems to appear out of one of the graves, in this version his apparition is just as sudden, but even more physically impossible. Finn is seen in a fairly long montage alone on the shore, wading through the shallow water and drawing what he sees, until his eyes focus on a man lying still and silent under the water, who suddenly rises up to threaten the child. We know that unless the adaptation is adding a merman element to the film, Lustig appearing from nowhere out of the water is simply untenable, and thus that we are reliving this experience through Finn's eyes. Visuals add to voiceover, then, to insist on the subjectivity of the film narrative. The elements that we see here – sea and sky, fish and starfish – are repeated in the drawings featuring in the credit sequence and in Finn's notebook, and will recur throughout the film, associated with our protagonist Finn, now a commercial fisherman rather than a blacksmith's boy, and Estella, his star, respectively<sup>17</sup> (again joining names to narration). We can see this in the opening paintings, first of the boy and girl rising out of the mouth of a fish and a star, respectively, to kiss, and then in another painting of a head full of stars. However, the subjectivity of the tale is not limited to what are diegetical examples of the character's artwork (and therefore necessarily personal expression), but also manifests itself visually, as for example in the prevalence of green throughout the film (associated with Florida, and therefore suggesting that Finn will not escape his background) or in one of the more inspired sequences of the film, a shot of Estella, newly married to Walter, and seated among the stars in a plane whisking her off on her honeymoon (reflecting her exalted and inaccessible state for the protagonist).

If this retelling is purely subjective, then, to what extent does the viewer have to be wary of Finn's narration? Are we limited to Finn's perspective? Cuarón makes careful use of some set pieces to suggest that the viewer must recognize the limitations of Finn's perspective, and attempt to see past them. Thus, in a scene that seems very far from the Dickensian original, the idealized image of Estella is subjected to analysis: Estella poses for

---

<sup>17</sup> The recurrent references to fish and stars are something that is highlighted by Antje S. Anderson in her article on the film. Antje S. Anderson, "Transforming *Great Expectations*: Dickens, Cuarón, and the Bildungsroman", in *Beyond Adaptation: Radical Transformations of Original Works*, Phyllis Frus, Christie Williams, eds. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 69-82.

nude portraits for artist Finn, allowing us to see the character as he sees her. Michael Johnson's article on the adaptation is very convincing when dealing with this sequence<sup>18</sup>: he notes that though Estella smokes throughout the posing scene, Finn's drawings do not reflect that; instead, he draws her as he wants her to be, not as she is. We can see this in relation to (and as a refutation of) Laura Mulvey's idea of the "showgirl", the recurrent device of woman exposing herself to a male character's gaze – and incidentally to the spectator's<sup>19</sup>. As Johnson suggests,

The image that dominates the scene is the Estella on Finn's sketchpad, an Estella that he can control and whose body he can touch at will. In close-ups of his drawings, we see Finn's careful attention to Estella's intimate body parts: sketching in pubic hair, tracing the curve of her breast, gently adjusting the shading of a nipple with his finger. For the most part, Estella appears on-screen in wide-angle shots that include her whole body. Finn (as revealed through his sketches), rather than the camera, fragments and fetishizes Estella's body.<sup>20</sup>

This is one of many examples that show us that Finn's vision, like his narration, is not to be trusted, and that the viewer must parse meaning out of the details of the image in order to attempt to overcome the narrative bias. After all, this protagonist of *Great Expectations* has gone further than any of his predecessors, in that he is not just a biased narrator, he is a fabulator: he asks for media exposure for his gallery opening (these are the "great expectations" that Lustig provides, rather than simply giving him money to make him a gentleman, as Magwitch does for Dickens's Pip), and then proceeds to tell outrageous tales (notably about Joe being a drug dealer, who spent time in jail, whom he eventually found dead of an overdose, and so lost the apartment and had to live in his car). This story, of course, guarantees his success in the media – and in the art world – before his art has actually been exposed, suggesting the unreliability of our narrator on the one hand, but the seductiveness of his outrageous tale on the other: melodramatic stories like *Great Expectations* continue to sell and fascinate us.

In so doing, the film also points to the subjective nature of the fiction film, forcing the viewer to recognize that though this adaptation might be a particularly aggravated case, there is always narrative bias in a film, a point of view that must be discerned (though not necessarily discredited, as is Finn's). Though Estella might be his muse, Lustig is his benefactor, the person that forces him back into artistic expression by offering him a gallery opening, and Lustig is repeatedly associated with audiovisuals: as we have seen, he is the first element calling attention to the way the camera can lie, representing the biased

---

<sup>18</sup> Michael Johnson, "Not telling it the way it happened: Alfonso Cuarón's *Great Expectations*", *Film/Literature Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2005): 62-78.

<sup>19</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, "Not telling it the way it happened", 70. Given that the film does not include any questions about Estella's origins (Dickens makes her the daughter of convict Magwitch and Jagger's maid Molly) or her fraught relationship with her adoptive mother (except as it relates to her ability to respond to Finn), the control that Finn has is even more absolute than Pip's. For more on this idea of Pip dominating Estella's narrative, see Hilary Schor, "If He Should Turn to and Beat Her": Violence, Desire, and the Woman's Story in *Great Expectations* in Janice Carlisle, ed., *Great Expectations* (Boston: St. Martin's Press), 1996, pp. 541-557.

recollections of the narrator rather than the objective representation of the past, and he is only given a name after he is recaptured and shown on the television news. When he meets up with former colleagues (because of course this version of the convict has earned his money not through shepherding in Australia, but through his Mafia connections), he is told that his long hair and beard make him look like Howard Hughes, whose roles as entrepreneur, filmmaker, and visionary seem appropriate to this context. Finally, when he reveals himself to Finn, his reenactment of their first meeting creates visual and aural echoes, recreating the past just as the film itself is doing. Lustig's role as mentor becomes a means of highlighting visual and verbal storytelling in the film and in Finn's narration.

Therefore naming in this rendition of *Great Expectations* is at odds with itself in the narrative, demonstrating a fundamental conflict in the adaptation: while names eschew the Dickensian grotesque and appeal to an attempt at realism, naming and narration reinforce this unreality, emphasizing the subjectivity of the film as a whole and thus its fairytale associations. In this sense, Finn becomes a version of the director, who also guides our viewing, our understanding of the narrative presented, through language and visual art.<sup>21</sup> Though Cuarón's *Great Expectations* is not an entirely satisfying adaptation, it is an interesting example of the impact of first-person point of view in novel and film, obliging us to question what is before our eyes.

---

<sup>21</sup> There are a few critics who suggest that the arrogance of Pip before he is humbled is one shared by Cuarón, and that the negative reception the film received is the disappointment of his failed great expectations: "The moral tale of *Great Expectations* could be applied to Cuarón himself: the emergent artist discovered in an exotic land moves to Hollywood in order to pursue an artistic career. Sydney Pollack is the godfather that Pip/Finn has, but, in the end, the artist reveals himself as a hoax. Who was he trying to fool?" José Zarandona, "Alfonso Cuarón", *Senses of Cinema*, February 2009, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2009/great-directors/alfonso-cuaron/#b18>, consulted January 2013.