The Role of the Reader is to Fallow: Responding to the Negative Reception of Paul Verhoeven’s Film Adaptation of Starship Troopers

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Recommended Citation
Meyerstrom, Julian, "The Role of the Reader is to Fallow: Responding to the Negative Reception of Paul Verhoeven's Film Adaptation of Starship Troopers" (2021). Undergraduate Research Symposium. 86. Available at: https://irl.umsl.edu/urs/86
The Role of the Reader is to Fallow: Responding to the Negative Reception of Paul Verhoeven’s Film Adaptation of *Starship Troopers*

Robert A. Keinlein’s science fiction novel *Starship Troopers* (1959), and its film adaptation of the same title directed by Paul Verhoeven (1997), received mixed critical reactions. Both pieces came across as supporting fascistic ideals to most critics upon release, despite the two creators opposing political and moral beliefs. Using Louise Rosenblatt’s reader response theory as a framework for analyzing both the novel and film adaptation, this paper postulates the film adaptation fails to deliver an accurate critique of the novel by placing the burden of moral knowledge on the audience. Keinlein’s novel guides the reader into his moral sensibilities, whereas Verhoeven never pushes the audience into the mindset necessary to understanding his movie. Furthermore, the film also requires the viewer to disassociate with the main characters and their values, in stark contrast to traditional cinematic language. Ultimately, this presentation argues that the film’s failure to communicate this disassociation between the audience and film’s main characters helps us understand why the film was slammed by critics at release and in 2013 was labeled by *The Atlantic* as “One of the Most Misunderstood Movies Ever.”