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Yuchen Guo

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# How to Appreciate an Adaptation?

Yuchen Guo 

School of Philosophy and Sociology, Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, Gansu, Peoples R China

## ABSTRACT

An adaptation is a special case of intertextuality or intermediality that usually involves the transfer of a work of art from one medium to another. Adaptation has become a dominant cultural phenomenon – for example, many films are based on novels. This paper explores the nature of the appreciation of adaptations. On the one hand, I argue that, when engaging with an adaptation, people take the same approach as when appreciating a work of art not based on any pre-existing work. It follows that the process of appreciating adaptations is not as special and unique as we think. On the other hand, I argue this special way of appreciating adaptations negatively impacts our engagement with adaptations. Therefore, it should not be adopted by appreciators. I conclude that people do not have a special way to appreciate adaptations and may not require one.

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## Introduction

Stories are born of other stories. Many works of art in one kind of medium are influenced by, derived from or based on other works in other kinds of media. A common case of intermediality is adaptation. Today, many literary works are adapted into films. For instance, Peter Jackson's films *The Lord of the Rings* are the cinematic adaptations of the novel *The Lord of the Rings* by British writer J. R. R. Tolkien; Justin Chadwick's film *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* is based on former South African President Nelson Mandela's autobiography; the Chinese legend of Hua Mulan is adapted in Disney's animated film *Mulan*. It is not difficult to find other forms of intermedia adaptations, such as theatrical adaptations, where a story from another work is adapted into a play (e.g. Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan's play *1984* is based on the 1949 George Orwell novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*); novelization, where another work is adapted into a novel (e.g. *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* is a novel by Quentin Tarantino, and it is based on his 2019 film of the same name); videogames adapted from books, films, and plays

**CONTACT** Yuchen Guo  [yuchenguo17@gmail.com](mailto:yuchenguo17@gmail.com)

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(e.g. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* produced by Koei is based on a Chinese 14<sup>th</sup>-century historical novel); or comic adaptations (e.g. *Alien Resurrection* [1997], published by Dark Horse Comics, is an adaptation of the film series *Alien*).<sup>1</sup> Today, adaptation has been a dominant cultural phenomenon.

Consequently, there is a substantial amount of literature, including dozens of books, thousands of articles, and several journals, related to adaptation studies. These works mostly come from the fields of literary and film theory, literary and film criticism, cultural studies, and communication studies. In contrast, the field of philosophy, especially regarding anglophone aesthetics or the analytic philosophy of art, has produced few relevant studies, comprising only several papers and several chapters in books on adaptation studies.<sup>2</sup> This paper attempts to fill in the gaps, enrich the relevant studies, and explore philosophical problems relevant to adaptation.

In fact, adaptation poses many interesting and important philosophical problems, such as the definition of adaptation, the metaphysical relationship between the adaptation and source material, and the aesthetic value of adaptation. This paper cannot cover all these problems, so instead focuses only on issues concerning the appreciation of adaptation: Is there a special way of appreciation related to adaptation? What process should this special way be understood as? Is it different from the appreciation of non-adaptations?<sup>3</sup>

Published philosophical papers and everyday aesthetic practices suggest people adopt a unique approach to appreciating adaptations, one we do not adopt when appreciating non-adaptations. For instance, when appreciating an adaptation, people seem to consider whether the adaptation faithfully interprets its source, search for similarities and differences between the adaptation and source material, and evaluate which work is more valuable. In contrast, when appreciating a work of art that is not based on a pre-existing work, people do not consider these questions.

This paper argues that this special way of appreciating adaptations is a controversial concept. On one hand, while people are able to appreciate adaptation *qua* adaptation, I argue that what they actually do presents *no* differences from what they do when appreciating works featuring other kinds of intertextuality or intermediality. Hence, there is no special way to appreciate an adaptation. On the other hand, I also suggest that this so-called 'special way' is sometimes understood as having prior knowledge of the original; however, I argue this is not always accessible and may negatively impact the understanding of adaptations. I conclude that appreciating adaptations is not a phenomenon that merits being considered separately and seriously.

This paper is structured as follows. First, I present some of the existing philosophical articles concerning adaptation. I argue that some of them, as well as our everyday aesthetic practices, suggest a special way of appreciating

an adaptation. Then, I explain what process this kind of special appreciation is. It can be understood as a comparison between an adaptation and its source. However, I argue that the same kind of comparison can also be done by audiences when appreciating non-adaptations. Moreover, this kind of special appreciation can also be understood as viewers having prior knowledge of the original, but this kind of knowledge is not always accessible and may have a negative impact on our appreciation of adaptations. Finally, I discuss the implications of my arguments.

### **Contemporary Philosophical Literature, Our Everyday Practices and a *Sui Generis* Way of Appreciation**

Although current literature on adaptation is relatively sparse in the field of philosophy, some works seem to imply that people adopt a special, out-of-the-ordinary, and unique process to appreciate adaptations. In other words, when appreciating an adaptation, people do not simply appreciate the work itself but also appreciate the work qua adaptation, interrogate its relationship with the original, and evaluate how the original story has been transferred to another art medium. I describe this process as special not because it requires us to have a special faculty, a special ability, or a certain special type of emotional engagement but because, when appreciating adaptations, we do something we don't often do when appreciating non-adaptations. That is, when appreciating an adaptation, we not only appreciate the work itself but also consider another work and think about the relationship between the two works.

For instance, Paisley Nathan Livingston's article 'On the Appreciation of Cinematic Adaptations' (Livingston 2010) not only provides a general theoretical approach to adaptation, but also introduces a special process of appreciation. He explicitly asserts that appreciation of an adaptation requires comparison between the adaptation and its source: 'artistic appreciations of adaptations standardly rest on comparisons' (Livingston 2010, 110); and 'given that informed comparisons are a necessary condition on successful appreciation of an adaptation as such, the practice of making informed comparisons emerges as the best-warranted general policy with regard to the appreciation of works belonging to this category' (Livingston 2010, 110).<sup>4</sup>

Gregory Currie and Tzachi Zamir (2018) introduce the concept of reflective adaptation. Unlike common adaptation, reflective adaptation 'comments on, reframes, queries or disputes core themes of the original' (Zamir and Currie 2018, 298). When appreciating a reflective adaptation, audiences can understand the source from the perspective of the adaptation. Currie and Zamir take the examples of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Akira Kurosawa's film *Throne of Blood* (1957), arguing that *Throne of Blood* is a reflective adaptation of *Macbeth*. In *Throne of Blood*, the motives of individuals are determined by situations; no one can change their fate. That prompts viewers to re-think the

same problem in *Macbeth*. In *Macbeth*, however, the characters have many possible alternatives; it is their morality that determines their actions. In this way, audiences capture and rethink the central theme of *Macbeth*. Appreciation of a reflective adaptation – that is, appreciating the original from the perspective of the adaptation – is out of the ordinary because people do *not always* appreciate a separate work from the perspective of another work if the two works are not a source and an adaptation.

Harold (2018) focuses on the fidelity of adaptation and considers the question of whether fidelity is an aesthetic merit. He distinguishes story fidelity and thematic fidelity and argues that only thematic fidelity – that is, preserving the same theme across different media – manifest an aesthetic achievement. Hence, thematic fidelity implies an appreciative norm related to the adaptation: appreciators should consider whether the same theme is preserved across different media because it is the best way to judge whether an adaptation is valuable. However, when appreciating a separate work, people do not make this kind of judgment. Therefore, thematic fidelity also implies a special approach to appreciation.

Sam Cowling and Wesley Cray (2022), in *Philosophy of Comics: An Introduction*, explicitly mention that appreciating adaptations requires people to be familiar with the source:

To fully engage with and evaluate Olivia's film in an informed fashion, not just as a film but as an adaptation, Una and Edie need at least some prior familiarity with Miller's work. [...] the lack of prior experience with the source material seems to rule out a thoroughly informed engagement or a comprehensive critical evaluation. So, if Una has read Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* and Edie hasn't, they simply won't be able to engage together in a robust discussion of the merits of Olivia's film both as a film and as an adaptation of Miller's work. (Cowling and Cray 2022, 284)

It seems that, when appreciating non-adaptations, people do not need to adopt this approach. Thus, Cowling and Cray's notion also implies a special way of appreciation.

People's everyday aesthetic practices also seem to display a special way of appreciating adaptations that differs from the appreciation of non-adaptations: when appreciating an adaptation, people often do more than when appreciating works not based on anything pre-existing. For example, when a work of art is adapted into another medium, people try to compare their differences, consider whether this adaptation is faithful to its source, and judge whether the adaptation appropriately expresses the source's meanings. This differs from the process of appreciating other kinds of works that are independent and not based on pre-existing works. For instance, consider the American fantasy television series *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*. Fans of Middle-earth do not consider *The Rings of Power* to be an independent work but

instead understand it as an adaptation of J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-earth stories. Thus, they always compare the differences between the television series and Tolkien's original works, consider which plots are not faithful to the original, and insist that *The Rings of Power* does not capture their own mental images of Middle-Earth. Yet other independent fantasy films, such as Jim Henson's *Labyrinth* (which is not based on any fantasy novels), are not compared with prior works or evaluated for faithfulness to a certain work.

We stipulate that  $x$  is the adaptation and  $y$  is the source. It seems that people not only appreciate  $x$  or  $y$  but also appreciate  $x$  as an adaptation of  $y$ : consider how  $x$  is transferred to  $y$  and understand  $x$  from the perspective of  $y$  (or understand  $y$  in the perspective of  $x$ , if  $y$  is a reflective adaptation). Is that really equivalent to a *sui generis* way of appreciation? If this kind of appreciation is special, out of the ordinary, or uncommon, then that means that people do *not* always adopt this kind of appreciation when engaging with other works that are not based on pre-existing works. This kind of appreciation must therefore be rare in non-adaptation cases. Otherwise, it cannot be called 'special.'

However, our everyday aesthetic practice is highly blurred and ambiguous. In the following sections, I analyze the nature of this kind of appreciation and demonstrate that people also *often* adopt this method when engaging with *non-adaptation* works. Hence, I suggest there is no special way of appreciating an adaptation. Besides, my goal is not to correct or revise everybody's aesthetic practice but to argue that our aesthetic practice does *not* really imply a *special* process of appreciation. In other words, we think people adopt a special way to appreciate adaptations, but we are unaware that people also adopt the same method to appreciate non-adaptations.<sup>5</sup>

It may be argued that it is easy and common to watch a film without knowing its source. For example, you do not need to read *The Lord of the Rings* in order to watch Peter Jackson's film trilogy. However, appreciation is not simple enjoyment; it requires audiences to consider the work of art as an artistic achievement and form evaluative judgments. Appreciation of a work of art requires knowledge of the category the work belongs to (see Walton 1970). For example, to appreciate a comedy, one needs to recognize it as a comedy as opposed to another genre and need to know some standard features of comedies. Thus, when appreciating an adaptation, one also needs to recognize the work as an adaptation and know some standard features of the adaptation. This requires more effort, ability, knowledge, and training than simple enjoyment. As Livingston explains 'No doubt many spectators have greatly enjoyed cinematic adaptations while remaining oblivious to the existence of the sources. For some purposes, there is nothing wrong with this kind of enjoyment in which an adaptation is not recognized as such. Yet for other purposes – for example, if one's concern is to appreciate the film as an artistic achievement – the rules of the game change' (Livingston 2010, 106).<sup>6</sup>

## Comparisons and Appreciation

Many articles related to adaptations implicitly or explicitly suggest that appreciation involves a kind of comparison: when appreciating an adaptation, audiences compare the similarities and differences between the adaptation and the original. For instance, Livingston claims that ‘artistic appreciations of adaptations standardly rest on comparisons’ (Livingston 2010, 110). Currie and Zamir also state, ‘The reframing a reflective adaptation provides is not achieved merely by framing the narrative in a new way; it must invite a sustained comparison between the new and old frameworks’ (Zamir and Currie 2018, 299–300). Gracia (2007) explains how Dracula, a horror monster, is transformed into a tragic hero in different film adaptations of Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula*. Grasping this form of transference also relies on a comparison. Only by comparing the different works and finding their differences and similarities can one understand the transference process. Harold’s thematic fidelity also implies comparison, although he does not explicitly mention it (Harold 2018). For instance, Harold notes, ‘Successfully preserving a theme across different media, therefore, is an accomplishment deserving of our praise and attention’ (Harold 2018, 98–99). To consider how the same theme is preserved across media, one must compare the different works. Pratt (2024) focuses on the possibility of comparison between film adaptations and comic sources and argues that film adaptations can be compared to their comic sources.

Comparison is often understood as having some positive evaluative relation. For example, to compare two works,  $x$  and  $y$ , is to hold some evaluative judgements, such as ‘ $x$  is better than  $y$ ’ or ‘ $x$  is worse than  $y$ ’ (e.g. Pratt 2024). However, in this paper, I only consider the simplest meaning of the term ‘comparison’: To compare two things is to find their differences and similarities regarding a certain parameter. I do not think comparison necessarily entails certain evaluative judgements. For instance, in the novel *The Lord of the Rings* and Peter Jackson’s film series *The Lord of the Rings*, the principal character Aragorn has many differences. By comparing the two works, audiences can find that Aragorn in the movies shrinks away from his duty and always doubts his ability to lead. However, Aragorn in the book never has these issues and doubts. Regarding the character of Aragorn, which interpretation is better? Merely comparing the two works cannot provide a satisfying answer. To hold an evaluative judgement about the character in the works, you not only need to consider the works themselves but also the context of evaluation and appreciation, the author’s intention in creating the work, the limitations of media, and even subjective taste and human nature. Often, merely comparing two works cannot provide an evaluative judgement.<sup>7</sup>

What is the content of this comparison? When people compare the source and the adaptation, which features should they consider? Comparison can be divided into two types: a medium-related comparison and a general, non-medium-related comparison. The former involves the role the specific medium plays; it is concerned with how different media contribute to the work's aesthetic effects. The latter does not involve the specificity of any media and is instead concerned with the work's narrative content, characters, historical and social backgrounds, and other aesthetic features.

Gracia's notion of comparison is not related to the media. He specifies, 'These and other differences resulting from a change of medium are significant and pose interesting questions. Here I shall not deal primarily with these, but rather with changes that are not particularly medium-related' (Gracia 2007, 216). When comparing Stoker's *Dracula* and its film adaptations, he does not consider the change of medium but rather focuses on the changes to location, the point at which the story begins, and characters' traits and morals.

In contrast, Livingston explicitly explores the roles media play: '[...] a kind of artistic problem confronted in the making of a work in one medium can be solved in an adaptation in a different medium' (Livingston 2010, 117). For example, Livingston compares Polanski's *Tess* and Hardy's original novel. By comparing the roles different media endorse in tackling the same problem, Livingston concludes that Polanski, in using a cinematic device, better resolves this problem than Hardy.<sup>8</sup>

Currie and Zamir also mention medium specificity, claiming, 'To a large extent, it is the medium-specific beauty of the film that animates its narrative and binds an audience to it [...] The narrative's global emphasis on episodes of survival-driven betrayal is mirrored in images of cyclical movement, repetition, and entrapment [...]' (Zamir and Currie 2018, 303).

Harold also explicitly considers the role of the medium. For example, when he compares Hitchcock's film *Strangers on a Train* and Highsmith's original novel, he considers how media specificity conveys the theme of the story: 'Highsmith is able to use techniques like free indirect discourse to convey these themes, but in order to faithfully preserve these themes across different media Hitchcock had to make creative, artistic use of the distinctive features of the film medium' (Harold 2018, 98–99).

Pratt (2024) mentions two kinds of comparisons: those 'within medium-grained categories' and those in 'cross medium-grained categories'. The former is like a non-medium-related comparison, and the latter is a medium-related comparison. He also argues these two types are possible because we can find some common 'covering values', according to which a comparison between different works can be made. He also provides examples; for instance, the comparison between the comics *Hellboy* and the comics *Hulk* and *Venom* (Pratt 2024, 6), as well as that between the *Hellboy* films (2008, 2019) and the original comics.



Thus, Livingston (2010), Zamir and Currie (2018), and Harold (2018) endorse medium-related comparison, while Gracia (2007) advocates for non-medium-related comparison; Pratt (2024) accepts both. In the following paragraphs, I argue that neither kind of comparison implies a special way to appreciate an adaptation because people often take the same approach in appreciating other independent works that are not based on pre-existing pieces.

Adaptation occurs as a special case of intertextuality or intermediality. However, intertextuality and intermediality include not only adaptation but also many other cases, such as parody, pastiche, homage, retellings, allegory, quotation, calque, or even plagiarism. In the latter cases, people can also make the same kind of comparison. Consider the case of pastiche. Many authors of detective films and novels deliberately imitate *Sherlock Holmes*. Many hero films feature Greek myths and heroic epics. Italian director Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* is a pastiche of early American westerns. Pastiche is also a case in which different authors tackle the same problem using different styles and media. It is therefore easy to compare a pastiche and the work it imitates in the same way that an adaptation and its source can be compared. For example, nothing prevents you from comparing *Once Upon a Time in the West* and other American westerns, such as the novel *Riders of the Purple Sage* by Zane Grey. You can explore the difference between the two works, explain how their media divergence leads to a different aesthetic effect, and consider which better captures the theme of American westerns. In almost all cases of intertextuality or intermediality, audiences can make a comparison.

One can even progress further. Literary critic Julia Kristeva (1980) proposed that no text is uniquely original and that intertextuality is found in many forms of literature. Deliberate intertextuality exists when a text purposely contains references to other works, but latent intertextuality also exists, wherein references occur unconsciously. Kristeva's notion implies that every written text has some form of influence borrowed from other literary works. If one accepts Julia Kristeva's viewpoint that almost all works contain some forms of reference to another work, all works can be compared to each other, regardless of whether they are deliberate adaptations. For example, Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and chivalric romance address the same theme, namely the adventure of a knight. However, one is about heroic idealism, another is anti-heroic and a critique of the Spanish society at that time. Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, and Phillip Roth's *The Breast* treat the same theme of transformation; but the former describes changes in the interpersonal relationships and psychology of the main character, while the latter is about the main character's reflection on why he is transforming. Although these works are not adaptations, it is possible to compare their similarities and differences and judge which is more aesthetically valuable.

It is also possible to make media-related comparisons of non-adapted works as well. For example, Stoker's *Dracula* and Neil Jordan's film *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) are two separate works, but both of them involve vampires and thus enable comparison of the same theme across different media. In the novel, Stoker uses the main characters' first-person reports in the form of diaries to portray Dracula as a diabolical, repulsive, and ugly non-human. In contrast, in *Interview with the Vampire*, two famous actors, Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt, portray the vampires Lestat and Louis. Lights and cameras show their young and handsome faces on the screen as creatures similar to humans, not terrible monsters hunting us for food. Thus, audiences become more easily empathized with the vampires, care about their fate, and begin to feel pity for their loneliness. The film *Interview with the Vampire* seems to be more successful to make audiences to go into the vampire's inner world.<sup>9</sup> In this way, the two works are comparable across media.

It is also possible to compare Disney's *The Lion King* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Although they are not adaptations, they tackle the same theme: self-doubt and hesitation toward revenge. In *Hamlet*, the reason for the prince's hesitation is complicated; it is not only related to his personality but also to the social and historical context of the time. Conversely, in *The Lion King*, the reason is relatively simple: Simba's uncle's lies make him falsely believe that his father's death is his fault. Unlike *Hamlet*, in *The Lion King*, the motion pictures and the sound are used to express Simba's inner world. Given that *The Lion King* is made for people of all ages, including children, cinematic techniques are used to render the theme of revenge easier to understand than in the text of *Hamlet*.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, even if a work is not an adaptation, if it features the same theme as other works, these works can be compared in the same way as comparing an adaptation and its source by focusing on the specific aesthetic problem and how the different pieces interpret it. In this sense, the 'special' approach to appreciation when comparing an adaptation and its source is only a kind of intertextuality or intermediality. Audiences can make the same comparison for other works that are not based on any pre-existing pieces. For this reason, there is no *sui generis* way of appreciating an adaptation.

One might argue that when appreciating an adaptation, people not only simply compare the original and the recreation, but also consider the piece from the perspective of the other work. For example, as Currie and Zamir explain, audiences can appreciate *Macbeth* from the perspective of *Throne* and better understand the characters' motives in Shakespeare's play: it is the characters' morals that result in the tragic ending, not their situation (Zamir and Currie 2018). However, we can always evaluate a work from the perspective of another work. For example, nothing prevents us from using the perspective of *Interview with the Vampire* to evaluate Stoker's *Dracula*. In

*Interview with the Vampire*, vampires, like humans, are depicted as both good and evil and have complicated emotions and moods; however, in Stoker's *Dracula*, vampires are purely evil. When considered in relation to the film, Stoker's description of vampires seems simplistic and superficial.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, when comparing an adaptation and its source, people's aim is not to identify similarities and differences but rather to consider whether the adaptation is faithful to the source (Harold 2018). For example, when appreciating the American television series *The Rings of Power*, audiences can compare it with Tolkien's original and find similarities and differences. All the audiences aim to do is to consider whether the series is faithful to the original. However, I do not believe fidelity is a concept merely limited to adaptations. One can ask whether a work is faithful to a certain theory, ideology, character type, or other ideas. For example, one can ask whether the *Twilight* series are faithful to the classic image of a vampire given that the vampires in the *Twilight* series do not fear sunshine and some of them are vegetarians, whether the movie *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is faithful to the typical symptoms of someone with a mental health condition, or to what extent the plot of *Hamlet* is faithful to the Oedipus complex. Opponents might suggest that fidelity should be limited to artworks. However, it appears one can also find many counterexamples. For example, one can consider whether the oil painting *The Sirens and Ulysses* by William Etty is faithful to Homer's *Odyssey* in detail. Nevertheless, we do not believe that this painting is an adaptation of the *Odyssey*. It is only a depiction of the epic poem, not an adaptation.

Finally, some might argue that, when appreciating an adaptation, comparison enables us to find more similarities than other kinds of intertextuality or intermediality, such as pastiche. However, a high degree of similarities is neither sufficient nor necessary to compare an adaptation and its source. Suppose that a work is an adaptation of many works and so has a mix of sources. Its similarity to any single one of the source works will not be that great. Moreover, translation and reproduction have many similarities to the source, but they are not adaptations.

## Prior Knowledge of the Source

It seems that the comparison between an adaptation and its source is sophisticated – not all readers and spectators can, like critics, compare different works in detail and evaluate a work from the perspective of another work. Appreciation of an adaptation may then require the audience to have prior knowledge of the source; only when one understands the original work can one appreciate the adaptation qua adaptation. The question then becomes: what is the prior knowledge of the source? What must appreciators do to acquire prior knowledge of the source?

One could argue that this kind of prior knowledge requires that audiences fully understand the original. If a film is based on a pre-existing novel, this argument requires that audiences have read the novel in order to appreciate the film as an adaptation. However, this argument is too strong. In fact, many sources of works are not accessible. For example, Christopher Nolan's film *Memento* was based on his brother Jonathan Nolan's short story *Memento Mori*. But, interestingly, *Memento Mori* was not published until the film was released. The many people who enjoyed the film before the story was published therefore had no way to read the source of the film, but they were still able to appreciate the film as an artistic achievement. Additionally, many classic works of literature, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Kafka's *Castle*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*, are hard to read, but audiences can still appreciate their cinematic adaptations.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, understanding the source can sometimes negatively impact one's appreciation of an adaptation. First, it can cause a kind of 'emotional exhaustion' whereby one no longer feels the appropriate emotions towards things that previously caused emotional responses. For example, when you experience your first breakup, you may feel miserable. However, after the second or third time, the pain fades, and you might even become indifferent. When people repeatedly face the same situation, their emotional responses fade little by little. Prior knowledge of the source can lead to a similar case of emotional exhaustion. After reading the source and knowing when and why a tragic event happens, you would become numb when watching the film adaptation and no longer feels the same complicated emotions. Second, reading the source can be a 'spoiler' for audiences, causing them to lose the feeling of suspense and immersion in the story. When you know the ending of a film because you have read the novel, you are no longer absorbed by the story because you are already familiar with the plot. Additionally, familiarity with the source can cause audiences to create certain stereotypes, which negatively affect the appreciation of the adaptation. For example, after reading Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, readers might think all elves have white skin, because some expressions in the books imply that proposition.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, viewers might interpret Arondir, an elf with black skin, as a misunderstanding of the Middle-earth tales when watching *The Rings of Power* and, thus, ignore the anti-racist idea and moral progress in the Amazon series.<sup>14</sup> Finally, understanding the source can make you unconsciously consider the adaptation from the perspective of the source and therefore ignore certain differences. For example, *Throne of Blood* (1957) is a cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, but the two also differ. Macbeth kills King Duncan due to Lady Macbeth's instigation and his own ambition, but Washizu murders his lord Tsuzuki, because he worries about being

executed when his lord learns the prophecy. Thus, the motives of the main characters are different in the two works. In *Macbeth*, the characters' traits lead to the murder, whereas in *Throne*, the character's fate and situations determine the murder. By previously reading *Macbeth*, audiences might unconsciously understand *Throne* from the perspective of Shakespeare's play and interpret Washizu's murder as an action resulting from the individual's character traits, ignoring the different situation and importance of destiny.

Another weaker account is to claim that audiences do not need to fully understand the original; they only need to learn certain key points concerning the plot and the characters. That is to say, the only prior knowledge needed to appreciate the adaptation is to know the original's obvious features; here it is not necessary to have actually read the original. I admit that this kind of prior knowledge can be necessary and help audiences appreciate the adaptation. However, like my discussion concerning comparison, it does not imply a special approach to appreciation because people must also know the plot or other artistic characteristics to appreciate certain works that are not based on anything pre-existing. For example, the film *Fellini-Satyricon* (1969) is based on Petronius's work *Satyricon*. *Fellini-Satyricon* (1969) ends abruptly not because it is defective but because the film 'was intentionally given a gappy quality' to imitate Petronius' style (Livingston's example, see his 2010, p.108–109). To appreciate the film, the audiences must know the original work is intentionally given an abrupt quality; otherwise, they might interpret *Fellini-Satyricon* as poorly made and the filmmakers as incapable. Here, knowledge about the original, namely, knowing that its abrupt end is intentional, has a primary function to enable better understanding and evaluation of the film adaptation, even without reading the original. Similarly, consider the British television series *Downton Abbey*, which is not based on any pre-existing works. In the third season (Pratt 2012), two main characters, Sybil Crawley and Matthew Crawley, die suddenly without any foreshadowing in the previous seasons. Audiences may interpret their deaths as a failure of screenwriter Julian Fellowes, but in fact the two actors no longer wanted to portray the characters and moved to Hollywood. Thus, the filmmakers had no choice but to let the two characters 'die.' Here, knowing that the characters' deaths result from the actors' intentions endorses the same functional role as knowing that Petronius's work *Satyricon* has a gappy quality when appreciating the film *Fellini-Satyricon*; it enables audiences to better understand the drama and evaluate it. Therefore, I claim that knowing some characteristics of the original has a similar role to knowledge related to a work's characteristics, such as a plot summary, someone's testimony, or a trailer. This aims to enable viewers to better understand the work but does not imply a special way of appreciating the work.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion and Implications

We can assess the problems regarding adaptations in three areas: in the relation between adaptations and other kinds of works which are not based on any pre-existing work; in the experience of the appreciator in engaging with the adaptation; and in what the critic might think about the adaptation. These three areas can be named as ‘ontology’, ‘experience’, and ‘criticism’. I do not deny that adaptations make a difference to ontology: the relation between adaptations and sources will be different from other cases of intertextuality or intermediality. For example, adaptations and sources have a causal relationship (if the source does not exist, then the adaptation also does not exist), and adaptations more resemble their sources in various aspects. I also do not deny that adaptations make a difference to criticism: critics can interpret an adaptation in a special way.<sup>16</sup> What I am more sceptical about is whether adaptations make much difference to experience. That is, I deny that there is any essential difference between the appreciator’s experience of an adaptation and their experience of an independent work. Audiences do not and do not need to adopt a special approach for adaptations. When appreciating an adaptation qua adaptation, what they do is only a kind of general, common appreciation. Hence, there is no significant difference between the appreciative norms related to adaptations and the norms related to independent works. We only need a general theory to deal with the problem of adaptation appreciation, and we do not need to develop a *sui generis* theory for adaptation appreciation.

The points of view presented offer several key implications. First, Livingston (2010) endorses strong truism and weak truism, which say that knowledge of the source is either necessary or optional but beneficial to appreciation. Weak truism says ‘[...] that knowledge of the source is optional but sometimes of value to appreciation’ (Livingston 2010, 106); and strong truism says that ‘[...] knowledge of the source (which means knowledge that there was a source, as well as knowledge of its identity and relevant features) is necessary to a thorough, apt appreciation of an adaptation’ (106). My points imply that the two truisms are both implausible: knowledge of the source is not always accessible, and therefore it is not necessary; it is also not always beneficial because it sometimes negatively impacts one’s appreciation of an adaptation. Therefore, I am inclined to embrace the position opposing Livingston’s two truisms. The special approach to appreciation should not be encouraged, because it is difficult, too demanding or negatively affects the appreciation of an adaptation; it can make audiences *misunderstand* the adaptation.<sup>17</sup>

Zamir and Currie propose the concept of reflective adaptation (Zamir and Currie 2018), which is a special sub-category of adaptation appreciation. But I deny that appreciating a reflective adaptation requires a special way of

appreciation. For any works of intertextuality or intermediality, appreciators can understand work *X* from the perspective of *Y* as well as understand *Y* from the perspective of *X*. Thus, the boundaries of reflective adaptations are highly blurred.

Why is there no special way to appreciate adaptations? This might be because the concept of adaptation is ambiguous and has no exact boundary: we cannot precisely distinguish pastiche, allusion, satire, adaptation, and other cases of intertextuality and intermediality. Perhaps all cases of intertextuality and intermediality exist on a continuum with reproduction or copy on one end and unconscious intertextuality and intermediality on the other. Parody, pastiche, adaptation, and allusion are along the continuum. Adaptation is closer to reproduction than parody. Intertextuality or intermediality requires a special type of appreciation, but appreciating an adaptation is no different from appreciating a parody, pastiche, or other kinds of intertextuality or intermediality.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, these points also imply something about the category of adaptation. It is agreed that the appreciation of a work of art requires the knowledge of the category the work belongs to (Walton 1970). Thus, appreciating an adaptation requires the knowledge of the category of adaptations. One must be able to distinguish whether a work of art is an adaptation or not; otherwise, one cannot appreciate an adaptation qua adaptation. Livingston claims that ‘such an appreciation requires an understanding of the work’s most salient artistic features, including those by virtue of which it belongs to the category of adaptations’ (Livingston 2010, 104). I suggest that to grasp the work’s most salient features, one does not need to completely understand the work or to be fully engaged with the work. It is enough to simply recognize some of the essential artistic features by reading a plot summary or hearing others’ testimony.

## Notes

1. Must an adaptation be cross-media? In this paper, the relevant examples of adaptation I mention are cross-media, but I do not claim that adaptation must be cross-media. For example, Yoshimitsu Morita’s *Tsubaki Sanjûrô* (Gracia 2007) is an adaptation of Akira Kurosawa’s *Sanjuro* (1962). Although the two works are films and involve the same plot, they have different style: the former is in color, the latter is black and white. However, it should also be noted that not all theorists agree with my position; for instance, in *Philosophy of Comics: An Introduction*, Sam Cowling and Wesley Cray state that distinct mediums must be involved in adaptations (e.g. Cowling and Cray, 2022, 282).
2. They are : for instance, Gracia (2007), Livingston (2010), Zamir and Currie (2018), Harold (2018), Cowling and Cray (2022) and Pratt (2012, 2023, 2024).



3. What is an adaptation? In this paper, I do not provide a theoretical definition, because I am inclined to think the concept of adaptation is ambiguous and has no exact boundary (see Conclusion and Implications). I resort to our intuitive understanding of adaptation – the transfer of a work of art from one medium or one style to another. In addition, it is important to note that Sam Cowling and Wesley Cray distinguish two types of adaptations: story adaptation and character adaptation. The former means ‘a story originally told in one narrative medium is later told through another narrative medium’ (Cowling and Cray, 2022, 281). The latter is understood as a case in which ‘a character originating and typically associated with one narrative medium is used as a primary focus in an original story first told through another narrative medium’ (Cowling and Cray, 2022). In this paper, the concept of adaptation refers to ‘story adaptations’. I focus on the appreciation of the story adaptation, not the character adaptation.
4. Henry John Pratt (2024) defends the point that film adaptations can be compared with their comic sources and accounts for why they are comparable. Furthermore, he explains that this type of comparison requires the existence of covering values, including narrative, pictorial, historical and referential values, as well as fidelity, and he explains how they can be applied to film adaptations. However, he does not think this type of comparison is limited to adaptations. For instance, he mentions the comparison between the comics *Hellboy* and *Hulk* or *Venom*, which are not adaptations of each other.
5. This specialness stems not only from our ‘ambiguous’ or ‘not very reliable’ aesthetic practice but also from some current philosophical literature on adaptations. Therefore, it is not a poor candidate based on some vague examples.
6. Appreciation is not only being able to read, enjoy, and understand a work; it also requires audiences to hold some evaluative judgements concerning the work. For example, you are attracted by the story of *The Lord of the Rings* and watch the entire film series. In this case, you only enjoy the film, but if you judge that Samwise Gamgee is Frodo’s closest and most loyal companion, you appreciate the film because you come to hold an evaluative judgement. Additionally, appreciation differs from criticism; the latter requires much *more* knowledge, training, and skills. As Carroll (2009) argues, criticism involves many activities, such as description, evaluation, elucidation, classification, contextualization, and interpretation, which are based on reasoned evidence and require objectivity; critics’ work is to enable readers to find the value of the work. I suggest that these activities are difficult for many regular audiences and require more knowledge, training, and skills than appreciation. Therefore, I claim that appreciation is an intermediate activity between enjoyment and criticism.
7. This point differs from Pratt (2024), who states that comparison involves an evaluative relationship. My point is that comparison itself does not involve evaluative judgments. Evaluative judgments concerning a work are produced by the coordination of comparison and other elements. However, it might be argued that those examples concerning the appreciative comparison I provide in this paper, as *Dracula* and *Interview with the Vampire* or *Hamlet* and *The Lion King* do involve evaluative judgments. While I admit this point, notably, I do not claim that comparison is entirely insulated from evaluation. Evaluative judgments result from the combination of comparison and other



elements; however, *merely* comparing two works does not provide evaluative judgment.

8. The original novel *Tess* involves an episode in which Tess writes a letter to Angel Clare to recount her past, but she ultimately discovers the letter has not been read. Hardy and Polanski use different media to describe Tess's inner world at that moment. Livingston writes, 'What the narrator has to give us here is a description of the moment when the horrible dread of losing Angel suddenly returns to Tess with all its force. Hardy's curt reference to a "feeling of faintness" hardly seems adequate. [...] but Polanski's solution to the analogous artistic problem is, by contrast, nothing short of brilliant' (118). Livingston therefore makes a comparison across media and concludes that Polanski better tackles the same scene compared to Hardy.
9. It should be noted that the evaluative judgement that *Interview with the Vampire* is more successful at triggering our empathy does not entail that *Interview with the Vampire* is aesthetically more excellent. This evaluative judgement applies only to the context of appreciation, not that of criticism.
10. Pratt (2024) provides more examples concerning the comparison across media: "Grifter #1 is a much worse artwork (a very coarse-grained category) than various artworks in medium-grained categories other than comics, such as novels (e.g. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*), music (e.g. The B-52 s' 'Rock Lobster') and, notably for our purposes, film (e.g. Jordan Peele's *Get Out*)" (Pratt 2024, 7)
11. Regarding the portrayal of vampires, *Interview with the Vampire* is more successful than *Dracula*, but this does not mean the former is aesthetically more excellent. To judge one work is aesthetically more excellent than other works, it is necessary to consider and weigh many aspects. *Dracula* is still a classic, and *Interview with the Vampire* is only a work of mass art.
12. The opponent might introduce a concept of full appreciation. Full appreciation of the adaptation requires audiences to understand the original, while a lesser degree of appreciation does not require this. Thus, when the source is inaccessible, full appreciation is impossible, but 'less full' appreciation is possible. I have two responses. First, the 'full appreciation' cannot circumvent my second objection. Even if one could understand the original, one's understanding would negatively impact one's understanding of the adaptation. Second, given that the originals are inaccessible in many cases, many audiences struggle to reach a full appreciation. To achieve this, we must acquire the relevant knowledge, learn the relevant facts, and devote time and effort to accomplishing this. Here, excessive requirements for having a full appreciation would lead to a risk of confusing criticism and appreciation.
13. For instance, see the following link: [https://www.reddit.com/r/tolkienfans/comments/swjao/did\\_tolkien\\_say\\_that\\_elves\\_were\\_fair\\_skinned\\_or/?rdt=46821](https://www.reddit.com/r/tolkienfans/comments/swjao/did_tolkien_say_that_elves_were_fair_skinned_or/?rdt=46821). Some people find quotes that describe elves as being 'pale' or 'white'.
14. Interestingly, in Tolkien's novels, there is no absolute definitive statement that there were no elves with dark skin.
15. It might be argued that we do not only know some characteristics of the original work, but also know that it is the source of the adaptation. One does not hold the latter knowledge when appreciating non-adaptations. However, I suggest that knowing that a work is a source of another work does not matter because it does not help audiences understand the adaptations. What helps us understand the adaptation is our knowledge about the characteristics of the

original. Merely knowing that two works have a relationship of adaptation without knowing their artistic characteristics or reading the original can barely help understand the adaptation.

16. Although I do not deny critics can interpret an adaptation in a special way, the conclusion of this paper might imply it is *not* as special as critics believe. Consider fidelity: Pratt (2024) and Harold (2018) state that fidelity is an important factor particular to adaptations. Therefore, a work that possesses fidelity is more valuable than one that does not. However, as demonstrated, fidelity is not limited to adaptations; even if two works do not have a relationship between an adaptation and its source, critics can also judge whether a work is faithful to another work. Thus, critics can evaluate a non-adaptation and an adaptation in the same way.
17. English-American scholar and writer Geoffrey Wagner (1975) suggests three different types of adaptations: transposition, commentary and analogy (see also Andrew 1980 for a similar distinction). Transposition is a case ‘in which novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference’ (Wagner 1975, 222); a ‘transformation’ does not add anything new to the original. Commentary is a case in which ‘the original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect’ (224); a ‘commentary’ alters the original slightly. Analogy ‘must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art’ (226); in this sense, an analogy only uses the original as a point of departure, and it is rather a different work from the original. Regarding the three types of adaptations, maybe *only* the case of ‘commentary’ raises a significant question related to the necessity of understanding the original. If transposition is almost identical to the original, then understanding the original when appreciating the adaptation seems redundant, because all the key plots in the original have been transferred into the adaptation. Since an analogy and its original are two independent works, then understanding the original also becomes redundant. Thus, only commentary raises a significant question about whether understanding the original is necessary for appreciating the adaptations. Yet, as demonstrated, the original is sometimes not accessible and can negatively impact our appreciation of the adaptation. Therefore, concerning the case of commentary, understanding the original is not necessary.
18. An anonymous reviewer suggests that this concept of the continuum implies that some works at the far end of the spectrum of intertextuality *do* require special appreciation while other works at the other end do *not* require this. This implies a weaker conclusion than my claim that no special way to appreciate adaptations exists. Yet, I believe the concept of the continuum also implies a different conclusion: from one end of the spectrum to the other, we perform the same kind of appreciative activity; that is, we make a comparison or consider fidelity between works. However, this kind of activity manifests in varying degrees. When appreciating reproduction or copy, one makes fewer comparisons or considers fidelity only in specific circumstances (for example, consider the difference in the brightness when appreciating a digitally restored version of the old film). Yet, when appreciating adaptations or pastiche, one makes *more* comparisons and considers fidelity *more frequently*. Therefore, regarding those works showing intertextuality, it is not that some require special appreciation and others do not require this, but

only that some require more while others require less. This point does not contradict this paper's conclusion because one performs *the same type* of activity regardless of the degree. I believe this point is more suitable to the concept of the continuum.

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## ORCID

Yuchen Guo  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7441-0948>

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