

To Make a Short Story Long: Theories of Adapting Short Fiction

The adaptation of short stories goes back to the beginning of cinema and continues today, yet the practice receives relatively little critical attention. While much energy has been spent theorizing film adaptation of the novel, there exists virtually no systematic treatment of the practice of adapting short fiction.¹ Despite this lack, a close look suggests that the adaptation of short fiction represents differences of kind, and not just of degree, from that of the novel, differences that yield fertile ground for the adaptation-critic. Andre Bazin's "Adaptation, or Cinema as Digest" models film adaptation around the acts of cutting, streamlining, and condensing a source, a system that works extremely well with the novel. But as Linda Hutcheon points out, "[N]ot all adaptations involve simply cutting. Short stories in particular... have had to expand their source material considerably." In discussing her approach to adapting "Brokeback Mountain," Diana Ossana points to the compact nature of the short story as an enabling asset: "We did not have to streamline or condense. We had the luxury of using our own imaginations to expand and build upon the blueprint, rounding out characters, creating new scenes, fleshing out existing ones."

Potential approaches: Beyond adaptation-as-expansion, the adaptation of short stories suggests many avenues of critical exploration. For instance, as practiced by auteur filmmakers like Jean Renoir and Robert Altman, it allows critics to interrogate notions of authorship; recombinant adaptations of the work of authors like Raymond Carver, Haruki Murakami, and Angela Carter complexify the adaptation process by using multiple stories to construct their narrative; the fact that short fiction generally has little or no pre-soldness removes much of the need for fidelity and invites engagements with a range of industrial concerns; there is also short film to consider (Wes Anderson just adapted four Roald Dahl stories into short films, one of which won an Academy Award²); and most fairy tales, which are consistently adapted in myriad ways, are also short fiction. Adapters have been creatively processing short stories for centuries, this collection invites essays that explore the cultural dynamics and critical implications of that adaptation.

This book seeks to rehearse and develop a series of innovative theoretical models that derive from the cultural process of adapting short fiction. As such, essays should demonstrate working knowledge of contemporary adaptation studies and a commitment to adding to that discourse. Contributions may examine individual adaptations, adaptation cycles, or other approaches, but always with an eye toward the various ways a focus on adaptations of the short story can add to our theoretical understanding of the act of adaptation.

Send inquiries to Glenn Jellenik (gjellenik@uca.edu). 500-word abstracts and 2-page CVs due by December 1, 2024 via email.

Tentative schedule:

December 15, 2024: Abstracts Due

February 28, 2025: Authors contacted for inclusion in volume

July 15, 2025: First drafts full essays

¹ The scant existing criticism consists mainly of case studies of specific adaptations.

² *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* (Netflix, 2023)