STUDIO GHIBLI ANIMATION AS ADAPTATIONS

INVESTIGATING HOW THE JAPANESE ANIMATION POWERHOUSE REIMAGINES STORIES

Edited by Dominic J. Nardi and Keli Fancher

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The release of this volume is the culmination of many hours of hard work put in by numerous individuals, to all of whom we owe a great debt. Chief among these are our contributors who worked to write and refine chapters that meaningfully contribute to the fields of animation and adaptation studies. As we state in the introduction, we believe that this area of academic studies on Studio Ghibli is greatly underserved. We sincerely hope that this volume is just the first of many to come that focuses on this topic. We thank you readers and future scholars for participating in and moving this discussion forward.

This volume would also not have been possible if it were not for Corey Olsen and Signum University through which we first met. The origins of this book started at Signum's Mythmoot IX conference in 2022, where we began discussing Studio Ghibli and adaptations, having both recently presented on the topic. These conversations slowly grew over time, and eventually the plans for this book were formed. We will always be filled with gratitude to Corey Olsen, Signum University, and the Mythmoot Team for fostering a community that is welcoming to new scholars and open discussions.

When considering which publisher to approach for this volume, we had two primary aims. First, we wanted this work to be readily accessible to as many fans and scholars as possible, not only to large academic libraries. Second, we hoped to find a publisher that already had experience with works in the field of animation studies generally, if not on Studio Ghibli particularly. As such, Bloomsbury Academic became a natural choice. Its volumes are more accessible than most academic publishers, and it already has the "Animation: Key Films/Filmmakers" series of works with two closely related volumes: *Hayao Miyazaki* (2018) and *Princess Mononoke* (2018). It is our extreme pleasure to be contributing to the expansion of Bloomsbury's scholarship on Studio Ghibli. Special thanks are given to Stephanie Grace-Petinos from Bloomsbury, whose work with us throughout the process ensured that everything ran smoothly and on time.

This volume would not have been possible without the directors and animators themselves. Isao Takahata, Hayao Miyazaki, and other Studio Ghibli artists have used the skills of their craft to draw us into their worlds for decades.

They have demonstrated their love for animation and storytelling, for which we will always be grateful and inspired. The care with which they drew from original and beloved stories to create adaptations that are equally beloved is what initially inspired us.

Finally, we thank our spouses and families for indulging us as we pursued this passion project. We spent much of our limited free time during the evenings and weekends doing research and proofreading drafts. We hope they enjoy the finished product. Thank you.

Introduction

Studio Ghibli Animation as (Re)creative Adaptations

Dominic J. Nardi and Keli Fancher

Risk-averse studios increasingly seek to build on preexisting fanbases by adapting stories from other media rather than develop projects based on wholly original story concepts. As we write this introduction in mid-2024, *Dune: Part Two* became the third film adaptation of Frank Herbert's science fiction novel; FX aired the second TV adaptation of James Clavell's *Shogun*; and HBO announced plans for a third TV show based on George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels. Several of the highest-grossing film franchises in history, including Marvel, Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings, and Jurassic Park, have their origins in comic books or novels. With this plethora of adaptations dominating cinemas and television programming, film criticism has increasingly taken to mourning the death of originality in mainstream Hollywood.

This line of film criticism implicitly assumes that adaptations cannot be new or creative. Yet, as Lauren Rosewarne argues in *Why We Remake*, adaptations and remakes—nominally unoriginal stories—have made significant contributions to film history and creativity in the industry.[1] The adaptation process can bring new perspectives to older stories by combining plot and dialogue on the page with acting, sound, music, special effects, and cinematography. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)—both an adaptation of Frank Baum's 1900 novel and remake of the 1925 film—pioneered the use of Technicolor and created a memorable musical score. Creators can also recontextualize the genre or setting of the source material, often to make the adaptation more relatable to audiences. For example, *West Side Story* (1961) retains much of the plot of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, but relocates the setting to 1950s New York. Some film adaptations, such as Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972) and Disney's *Pinocchio* (1940), have become milestones in film history and overshadow the texts on which they were based.

The filmography of Studio Ghibli, the popular Japanese animation powerhouse, exemplifies this potential to infuse adaptations with creativity. Ghibli's adaptations of novels, manga, and other texts have seldom directly translated their source material to animation, but instead transformed the stories to incorporate themes or imagery central to the studio's sensibilities. And, unlike Disney's tendency to retain the Western European aesthetics of classic fairy tales, Ghibli's adaptation efforts have usually reinterpreted and recontextualized Western stories for Japanese audiences.

Despite this, Studio Ghibli films have received limited critical attention from the field of adaptation studies. *Studio Ghibli Animation as Adaptations* is the first English language volume to focus on how Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata, and other Ghibli storytellers have approached the process of reimagining novels and manga for animation. This focus enables us to provide fresh scholarship from a variety of perspectives about literary adaptations and Japanese animation. The chapters in this volume cover how the medium of animation, the need to appeal to Japanese audiences, and the animators' artistic and political sensibilities affected the studio's adaptation choices.

Adaptations before Studio Ghibli

Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki's careers in the animation industry predated Studio Ghibli's founding by almost two decades, and many of the projects they worked on during this period foreshadowed the animation styles, tropes, and themes that later came to prominence through Studio Ghibli. More importantly, for this volume at least, many were also early attempts at literary adaptation.

Of the two, Takahata was the senior and first to enter the animation industry. Takahata's interest in animation began relatively late, when he watched *La Bergère et le Ramoneur* (1952) as a student at the University of Tokyo and saw the appeal of using the animated medium as a means of storytelling.[2] In 1959, after graduation, Takahata joined Toei Animation as an assistant director. During his first couple of years at Toei, Takahata assisted with several works, including *Wolf Boy Ken* (1963). By 1965, he was respected enough within the company that he was asked to direct *The Great Adventure of Horus, Prince of the Sun*. This marked his directorial debut when it was finally released in 1968. *Horus* is an adaptation

of the Japanese puppet play *The Sun Above Chikisani*, which was first performed in 1959 and is itself based on an earlier epic. While regarded as a landmark release in Japanese animation, the film was a commercial failure, and Takahata was not asked to direct any more films at Toei.

Hayao Miyazaki, by contrast, became interested in graphical storytelling from an early age. He was initially interested in becoming a manga artist, and it was not until high school when he watched *The Tale of the White Serpent* (1958) that he developed a professional interest in animation.[3] After graduating with degrees in political science and economics in 1963, Miyazaki joined Toei Animation as an in-between artist.[4] Even though *Wolf Boy Ken* was the first project that credits both Takahata and Miyazaki, the pair did not begin working together in earnest until *Horus*. Not only was *Horus* Takahata's directorial debut, but it was also the project that allowed Miyazaki to start taking a more active role in production. Takahata approached film development in an egalitarian manner, which gave Miyazaki more opportunities to contribute to the project. *Horus* marked the start of a partnership that would last more than five decades. While at Toei, the pair worked on several other projects that were adaptations, but mainly under the guidance of other directors or the studio at large.

Following some difficulties at Toei Animation, Takahata, Miyazaki, and several other animators left the studio in 1971. Upon leaving, they began preproduction work on what could have been their first large-scale adaptation project: an animated version of Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking books. However, even after extensive planning, including a location-scouting trip to Sweden, they were unable to receive licensing rights and had to drop the project.[5] Not long afterward, Takahata and Miyazaki were approached by Zuiyo Eizo—later Nippon Animation—to work on an adaptation of Johanna Spyri's novel *Heidi*. The TV show *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974) became a worldwide phenomenon. The pair went on to work on several more animated adaptations through Nippon Animation, many under the branding that would eventually become *World Masterpiece Theater*.

Miyazaki joined Tokyo Movie Shinsha (TMS) in 1979, where he directed his first feature-length film, *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro*, based on the popular *Lupin III* manga (he had also codirected episodes of a Lupin anime with Takahata during the early 1970s). Miyazaki directed six episodes of the show *Sherlock Hound* until a copyright dispute with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's estate led to a halt in production. The show would eventually air in 1984, after

Miyazaki left TMS. Miyazaki and Takahata were also involved in efforts to adapt the *Little Nemo* comic, but disagreements between the Japanese and American project teams led the pair to leave the project and TMS itself.

Miyazaki moved to Topcraft in 1982, but grew frustrated with his lack of feature film projects. He started writing the manga *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* to generate ideas for an animated film. Topcraft eventually agreed to produce *Nausicaä* as a feature-length film and released it in 1984.[6] Miyazaki later expressed mixed feelings about adapting his own work, telling one interviewer, "I would not encourage anyone who has completed a story in one format . . . to then try to render it into another format."[7] Nonetheless, the film's critical and commercial success allowed Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki, along with producer Toshio Suzuki, to form their own animation studio on June 15, 1985: Studio Ghibli.

Studio Ghibli's Adaptations

During the past four decades, Studio Ghibli has animated twenty-four feature-length films and a TV series, of which nineteen are adaptations (see Table 0.1). Most of the source material belongs to the fantasy or fairy-tale genres, but the studio also adapted semi-autobiographical accounts of Japanese citizens before and during the Second World War. Some of this variety probably comes from the differing sensibilities of Ghibli creators; Isao Takahata tended to draw on traditional Japanese stories or manga, while Miyazaki was more enamored with Western children's literature. In addition, according to Dianne Wynne Jones's literary agent, Studio Ghibli had an informal policy of never adapting more than one book by the same author, until it released *Earwig and the Witch*—the second of Jones's novels to be adapted by Ghibli—in 2020.[8] Other Ghibli films were significantly inspired by literary sources, albeit not direct adaptations of a preexisting story.

Every literary work draws on external influences and inspirations, but for this volume we only count those Studio Ghibli films that attempt to retell a story from another medium, no matter how faithfully, and have a relationship with the source text that goes beyond fuel for creativity. At the very least, the creator of an adaptation must acknowledge the source text as the basis for the new work. Mere similarity is insufficient; for example, Miyazaki claims any similarities between *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Alice in Wonderland* were unintentional,

Table 0.1 List of Studio Ghibli Adaptations (Including Early Works of Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata)

Title	Release Year	Director	Source Material	Source Material Media	Culture of Source Material
The Great Adventure of Horus, Prince of the Sun	1968	Isao Takahata	*The Sun Above Chikisani* by Kazuo Fukazawa	puppet play	Japanese
Heidi, Girl of the Alps	1974	Isao Takahata	*Heidi* (1880–1) by Johanna Spyri	novel	European
Anne of Green Gables	1979	Isao Takahata	*Anne of Green Gables* (1908) by Lucy Maud Montgomery	novel	Canadian
Future Boy Conan	1978	Hayao Miyazaki	*The Incredible Tide* (1970) by Alexander Key	novel	American
Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro	1979	Hayao Miyazaki	*Lupin III* (1967–9) by Monkey Punch	manga	Japanese
Sherlock Hound	1984–5	Hayao Miyazaki[9]	*Sherlock Holmes* (1887–1927) by Arthur Conan Doyle	short stories	European
Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind	1984	Hayao Miyazaki	*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1982–94) by Hayao Miyazaki	manga	Japanese
Studio Ghibli founded on June 15, 1985					
Castle in the Sky	1986	Hayao Miyazaki	*Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift	novel[10]	European
Grave of the Fireflies	1988	Isao Takahata	"Grave of the Fireflies" (1967) by Akiyuki Nosaka	short story	Japanese
Kiki's Delivery Service	1989	Hayao Miyazaki	*Kiki's Delivery Service* (1985) by Eiko Kadono	novel	Japanese

(*Continued*)

Table 0.1 (Continued)

Title	Release Year	Director	Source Material	Source Material Media	Culture of Source Material
Only Yesterday	1991	Isao Takahata	*Only Yesterday* (1982) by Hotaru Okamoto and Yuko Tone	manga	Japanese
Porco Rosso	1992	Hayao Miyazaki	*The Age of the Flying Boat* (1989) by Hayao Miyazaki	manga	Japanese
Ocean Waves	1993	Tomomi Mochizuki	*Ocean Waves* (1990–2) by Saeko Himuro	novel	Japanese
Whisper of the Heart	1995	Yoshifumi Kondō	*Whisper of the Heart* (1989) by Aoi Hiiragi	manga	Japanese
My Neighbors the Yamadas	1999	Isao Takahata	*Nono-chan* (1991–7) by Hisaichi Ishii	manga	Japanese
The Cat Returns	2002	Hiroyuki Morita	*Baron: The Cat Returns* (2002) by Aoi Hiiragi	manga	Japanese
Howl's Moving Castle	2004	Hayao Miyazaki	*Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) by Diana Wynne Jones	novel	European
Tales from Earthsea	2006	Gorō Miyazaki	*Earthsea* (1968) by Ursula K. Le Guin	novel	European
Ponyo	2008	Hayao Miyazaki	*The Little Mermaid* (1837) by Hans Christian Andersen	folk tale/short story	European
The Secret World of Arrietty	2010	Hiromasa Yonebayashi	*The Borrowers* (1952) by Mary Norton	novel	European
From Up on Poppy Hill	2011	Gorō Miyazaki	*From Coquelicot Hill* (1979–80) by Tetsurō Sayama and illustrated by Chizuru Takahashi	manga	Japanese

The Tale of the Princess Kaguya	2013	Isao Takahata	"The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter" (ninth–tenth century)	folk tale/short story	Japanese
The Wind Rises	2013	Hayao Miyazaki	*The Wind Rises* (2009–10) by Hayao Miyazaki and *The Wind Has Risen* by Tatsuo Hori	manga and novel	Japanese
When Marnie Was There	2014	Hiromasa Yonebayashi	*When Marnie Was There* (1967) by Joan G. Robinson	novel	European
Ronja, the Robber's Daughter	2014–15	Gorō Miyazaki	*Ronja, the Robber's Daughter* (1981) by Astrid Lindgren	novel	European
Earwig and the Witch	2020	Gorō Miyazaki	*Earwig and the Witch* (2011) by Diana Wynne Jones	novel	European
The Boy and the Heron	2023	Hayao Miyazaki	*How Do You Live?* (1937) by Genzaburo Yoshino[11]	novel	Japanese

possibly expressions of recurring motifs in "our deep psyches."[12] Even a short homage to another text—such as how the cloud of planes in *Porco Rosso* (1992) echoes Roald Dahl's "They Shall Not Grow Old" (1946)—does not render the entire film an adaptation if the broader work does not attempt to engage with the themes, characterizations, and plot of the source material.

The primary source media for Studio Ghibli's adapted works is written prose. Be they Western novels like *Howl's Moving Castle* or Japanese legends like "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter," Studio Ghibli has masterfully transformed many literary works into film and television media. Creating moving images from the written word is a challenging, but also freeing, process. Animation adds audio and visual components not present in the original version of the story. How should a character look and sound? What expressions and gestures would convey the same feelings as a paragraph of text? What type of soundtrack should underscore the emotions of the story? These questions all assume the animator has chosen to pursue a faithful adaptation, which is often not the case with Studio Ghibli. As Miyazaki said, "if you're dealing with a work with such a high level of perfection that it requires a very strict interpretation, then you're better off not trying to turn it into a cartoon series in the first place."[13] Instead, Ghibli animators have tended to adapt the tone, theme, or narrative context of source texts, while altering major plot, setting, or character elements.

Many Studio Ghibli adaptations, especially during the 1990s, have originated from Japanese manga like *Only Yesterday* and *Nono-chan*. As with adaptations of novels, directors can choose to be faithful or unfaithful in their adaptation. Unlike novels, however, manga is already a visual medium with existing art elements that provide cues for character designs, scene layouts, and even storyboards. If the animator chooses to remain faithful to those elements, the primary choices become more limited to those of movement, voice acting, sound design, and—for black-and-white manga—color schemes. Some of these source manga, such as the aforementioned *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, were originally authored and then adapted by Hayao Miyazaki himself. In these cases, with the creator being the same, the medium itself becomes the primary differentiator. What allowances does animation have beyond manga? Is the same story being told? And most importantly, how does the same creator reinterpret his own work?

Finally, some films that are technically not adaptations are sufficiently inspired by or in synergy with prior works to warrant critical examination in adaptation scholarship. For example, while *Castle in the Sky* (1986) is not a retelling of

Gulliver's Travels (1726), the titular castle Laputa is taken directly from Jonathan Swift's flying island of the same name. Miyazaki also engages with many of the same critiques of modernity and technology as Swift.[14]

Although *Studio Ghibli Animation as Adaptations* is one of the first volumes that focuses on the works of Miyazaki, Takahata, and Ghibli creators as adaptations, other scholarship has touched on this aspect of the Ghibli filmography. Susan Napier's seminal *Miyazakiworld* covers the various influences on each of Miyazaki's films and has an entire chapter comparing his manga and anime versions of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*.[15] Raz Greenberg's study of Miyazaki's pre-Ghibli works discusses *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* and *Sherlock Hound*, neither of which is covered in this volume.[16] However, these studies have tended to take a biographical approach, examining adaptation choices primarily as a function of Miyazaki's artistic or political sensibilities rather than the nature of the adaptation process itself. Far fewer studies have focused on the life and filmography of Takahata.

Some more recent scholarship has engaged with the phenomenon of Japanese animation studios adapting Western literary works. Maria Chiara Oltolini's *Rediscovered Classics of Japanese Animation* explores how the translation of Western children's fiction during the late nineteenth century—a period of rapid industrialization—and postwar importation of Disney films based on children's books influenced *World Masterpiece Theater*, leading to "interesting cases of linguistic, medial, and cultural hybridizations."[17] Catherine Butler's *British Children's Literature in Japanese Culture* has a chapter about Studio Ghibli's adaptations and notes that, unlike *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) and *When Marnie Was There* (2014), *Earwig and the Witch* was the first Ghibli adaptation of British literature to retain its British setting.[18]

Analyzing Adaptations

While formal knowledge of adaptation theory is not required to engage with and enjoy the chapters in *Studio Ghibli Animation as Adaptations*, a brief overview might be helpful to readers new to the field.[19] Adaptation theory seeks to understand how these texts interact and inform one another across mediums and cultural contexts. The informal study of literary works as adaptations has a long history, but formal academic study did not fully emerge until the latter half of the twentieth century. With the emergence of postmodernism, traditional

notions of authorship and originality were being challenged. Given the inherent intertextuality when considering an adaptation, it is only natural that the idea of authorship would come into question. Additionally, the sudden rise in film studies emphasized the importance of medium specificity, particularly concerning the relationship between literature and film. This encouraged scholars to consider what happens when stories transition mediums, and further helped to formalize the study of adaptation. This volume is not committed to any specific literary lenses or core elements of adaptation theory, but most of the chapters focus on Studio Ghibli's adapted works through one of four principal elements of adaptation theory: fidelity, medium specificity, authorship, and cultural and historical contexts.

When it comes to mainstream discourse, initial reactions are often based on perceptions of how faithful an adaptation is to the source text. Among some fans of the source material, an adaptation is a failure if it is not close to the original. In the essay "Adaptation and fidelity," David Johnson defines fidelity as "the extent to which a given aesthetic object—traditionally, in adaptation studies, a film—reflects a faithful understanding of its source—traditionally, a literary text, especially a novel, play or short story."[20] This consideration of fidelity and departure is at the heart of many adaptation studies, but it is often misleading. As Linda Hutcheon states, this "is based on the implied assumption that adapters aim simply to reproduce the adapted text."[21] In her opinion, an adaptation does not need to be close or faithful to be a good adaptation. Instead, it should repeat the same narrative points, themes, or motifs without replicating the original work. Rather, she argues that unsuccessful adaptors have a "lack of creativity and skill to make the text one's own and thus autonomous."[22] Most of the chapters in this volume do not treat fidelity to the source text as the only or primary goal of adaptation. Studio Ghibli's adaptations are often not faithful adaptations, but they are seldom called bad adaptations. Miyazaki, Takahata, and other Ghibli directors have mastered the art of transforming a source text into their own work.

The second core element of adaptation theory addressed in this volume is that of medium specificity. Cross-media adaptation has been one of the most common forms since the advent of motion pictures, and is also frequently a focus of scholars. Adaptation theory recognizes that there are differences between media forms and explores the limitations and affordances when adapting across them. As discussed earlier, all of the works considered in this volume are cross-media adaptations, either from written prose or illustrated manga. In both

cases, animation has limitations and advantages when compared to the original media.

Another element of adaptation studies that chapters in this volume consider is that of authorship. An adaptation usually has at least two authors: the originator and the adaptor. This raises the question of what role the original author has in the adapted work. Who is the author when authorship is shared between at least two people across multiple versions of the same story? Given the large number of artists, voice actors, and producers required to create a feature-length animated film, the question of authorship becomes even more complex. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the critical examination of Studio Ghibli adaptations can yield unique insights for the broader field of adaptation studies because Hayao Miyazaki was both the originator and adaptor for three of his films.

The final element of adaptation theory is adaptation across cultural and historical contexts. Of the twelve films discussed in this volume, half of them are based on source material that originated in Western Europe or North America. Others, though Japanese in origin, are older stories; some relatively recent Second World War accounts, and some from millennia-old folklore. In both instances, the adaptor had to choose how to bridge the gap between the original story and the receiving audience. Sometimes this involves recontextualizing older or foreign stories to address contemporary issues relevant to the audience. Other times, adaptors incorporate Japanese aesthetic forms into an otherwise Western narrative.

Book Overview

Although this volume focuses on the animated adaptations released by Studio Ghibli, we believe that this cannot be done in good faith without also considering Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki's earlier works. These experiences not only honed their skills as animators, but also informed their approaches to adaptations. Miyazaki's work on the TV show *Future Boy Conan* (1978) was not only his directorial debut, but his disagreement with the source material also shaped his reluctance to adhere closely to it, leading him to proclaim, "It's probably better to think of the original story as just the trigger for the ideas in the cartoon series."[23]

Part I of *Studio Ghibli Animation as Adaptations* focuses on scholarship about the faithfulness or fidelity of these adaptations to the source material. River

Seager's "Apocalyptic Beauty" (Chapter 1) calls *Future Boy Conan* an antagonistic adaptation because of how it sidesteps the Cold War commentary of Alexander Key's *The Incredible Tide* (1970) and instead celebrates the postapocalyptic return to nature. Miyuki Yonemura pushes back against criticisms of Miyazaki's deviations from source material in "Hayao Miyazaki as a Magician of Adaptation" (Chapter 2), claiming that his 1989 film's changes to Eiko Kadono's *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1985) were consistent with and reinforced themes from the book. For example, Kiki's loss of ability to understand her cat Jiji's speech—which did not happen in the original novel—became a symbol of the spiritual independence that she had achieved in the novel. Adam McLain's "The Balance of Creation and Ruin" (Chapter 3) proposes that reading Gorō Miyazaki's *Tales of Earthsea* as part of the same secondary world as Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea novels can increase our understanding of both stories and possibly redeems what is widely perceived as Studio Ghibli's least faithful adaptation.

Part II of our book explores how Takahata and Miyazaki translated Western stories for Japanese audiences—both literally and figuratively. In "Japan's Swiss *Heimat*" (Chapter 4), Keli Fancher traces the history of nostalgia and how *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* used depictions of the Alps to make a Swiss story relatable to Japanese audiences struggling with a loss of national identity during the 1970s. Likewise, in "My Bosom Friend Diana" (Chapter 5), Patrick Carland-Echavarria shows that Takahata's reimagining of the Canadian novel *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) into a TV show (1979) reflected the difficulties faced by Japanese students. Yosr Dridi's "From Postmodern Fairy Tale to Anti-Modern *Shōjo*" (Chapter 6) shows how Miyazaki transformed Diana Wynne Jones's deconstruction of gender norms in *Howl's Moving Castle* into an equally subversive anime with pacifist and anti-modern themes. In "Western Stories, Japanese Structures" (Chapter 7), Zoe Crombie examines how Miyazaki's retellings of Western stories conform to Japanese narratological theories, from the pacing of *Howl's Moving Castle* to the unusual degree of agency afforded to the child protagonists of *Ponyo.*

Part III of *Studio Ghibli Animation as Adaptations* covers several Ghibli films that had their origins in Japanese manga. Dalila Forni's "Postapocalypse and Solarpunk" (Chapter 8) finds differences in how Miyazaki balanced postapocalyptic settings and optimistic overtones through visual narratives in the manga and anime versions of his *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, suggesting that the same creator might make different creative decisions in different media. Hsin Hsieh's "Adapting Nostalgia" (Chapter 9) focuses on Takahata's willingness to experiment with different artistic styles when adapting manga, comparing

his decision to adopt a more realistic animation style for *Only Yesterday* (1991) against his fidelity to the manga art style in *My Neighbors the Yamadas* (1999).

The book concludes in Part IV with scholarship that raises questions about boundaries or genres in adaptation, or even what constitutes an adaptation. Brian Milthorpe's "Rediscovering Laputa" (Chapter 10) argues that even though *Castle in the Sky* is not strictly an adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels*, the film is ultimately more faithful to Jonathan Swift's satire of mechanistic philosophy and scientific developments precisely where it appears to depart from the book. In "True Stories, Theater Tropes, and *Hotaru* Mythologies" (Chapter 11), Kendall Belopavlovich shows that *Grave of the Fireflies* blends Akiyuki Nosaka's short novel (1967) with Takahta's personal experiences during the Second World War, a different take on the "Shinju" narrative trope of seventeenth-century Japanese puppet theater, and an infusion of *Hotaru* (firefly) mythology. Finally, in "A Kettle of Fish on a Warming Planet" (Chapter 12), Colin Wheeler argues that Miyazaki's *Ponyo* (2008) subverts the distinction between human and nonhuman found in Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* (1837), which is less tenable in a post-Darwinian Anthropocene.

For *Studio Ghibli Animation as Adaptations*, we chose to collect academic essays that yielded fresh insights into the studio's filmography rather than try to cover all Ghibli film adaptations, which would have limited us to providing at best a superficial treatment of each. In doing so, we realize that the book omits some of the Ghibli adaptations often overlooked in the scholarship. *The Secret World of Arrietty* (2010), based on Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* (1952), in particular deserves a reexamination as one of the studio's highest-grossing films. There is also the recently released *The Boy and the Heron* (2023), which goes by *How Do You Live?* in Japan and references the 1937 novel of the same name by Genzaburo Yoshino. While we believe there is room for considering this work as an adaptation, it is not included in this volume because the film had not yet received its international debut at the time we started this book project.

Finally, this volume does not cover various adaptations of Studio Ghibli films into other media. Studio Ghibli regularly publishes tie-in novels or comics based on its films, and these generally remain faithful to the source material. The studio has also licensed a vast amount of toys, clothing, and other merchandising, all of which involve adaptational choices. Meanwhile, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, and *Spirited Away* have been adapted as stage plays, using actors, props, and stagecraft to render the magic from these films in front of

live audiences. Perhaps most interesting, the manga version of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* was adapted as a kabuki play in 2019, the first-ever adaptation of the complete manga and an interpretation of the manga from someone other than Miyazaki himself.[24] We leave it for future scholars to analyze these works as adaptations and as part of the Ghibli branding.

Notes

1 Lauren Rosewarne, *Why We Remake: The Politics, Economics and Emotions of Film and TV Remakes* (London: Routledge, 2020).
2 Isao Takahata, "Isao Takahata on the Film that Inspired Studio Ghibli," *British Film Institute* (April 30, 2014), accessed March 25, 2024, https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/film-inspired-studio-ghibli.
3 Also known as *Panda and the Magic Serpent*, this film is an adaptation of a Song Dynasty folktale.
4 An in-between artist is an animator who draws all of the frames between the keyframes drawn by the principal animator.
5 Some of this work was later incorporated into their film *Panda, Baby Panda* (1972).
6 *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* was later rereleased and marketed by Studio Ghibli, and is usually considered part of the Ghibli filmography.
7 Hayao Miyazaki, *Starting Point: 1979–1996*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: VIZ Media, 2014), 7.
8 Catherine Butler, *British Children's Literature in Japanese Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 143.
9 Miyazaki only directed six episodes before a copyright dispute with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's estate halted production in 1982.
10 *Gulliver's Travels* technically precedes the European novel as a form and most scholars consider it a "proto-novel" or "prose satire." However, Miyazaki read a version of the story adapted as a novel for children.
11 Ghibli producer Toshio Suzuki has said that Miyazaki only used the title of the book for his film and that *The Boy and the Heron* was not meant to be an adaptation. However, Miyazaki said the book was one of his childhood favorites and earlier news reports suggest he originally intended to make a more direct adaptation.
12 Hayao Miyazaki, *Turning Point: 1997–2008*, trans. Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt (San Francisco: VIZ Media, 2014), 268.
13 Miyazaki, *Starting Point*, 340.

14 The original release also includes a direct reference to *Gulliver's Travels* in the film, although some English language rereleases have omitted this.
15 Susan Napier, *Miyazakiworld: A Life in Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 158–75.
16 Raz Greenberg, *Hayao Miyazaki: Exploring the Early Work of Japan's Greatest Animator* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).
17 Maria Chiara Oltolini, *Rediscovered Classics of Japanese Animation: The Adaptation of Children's Novels into the World Masterpiece Theater Series* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024).
18 Butler, *British Children's Literature in Japanese Culture*, 97–146.
19 For readers interested in a more detailed introduction, we highly recommend *A Theory of Adaptation* by Linda Hutcheon, which is considered a seminal work in the field.
20 David Johnson, "Adaptation and Fidelity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 87.
21 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 7.
22 Ibid., 20–1.
23 Miyazaki, *Starting Point*, 399.
24 As of June 2024, Miyazaki said that he was working on another film, and has indirectly hinted that it might be a sequel to *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*.

Part I

Faithfulness and Fidelity

1

Apocalyptic Beauty

Future Boy Conan and How Hayao Miyazaki Adapts Apocalypse

River Seager

Though not extensively covered in English language anime scholarship, the fact that the TV series *Future Boy Conan* (1978) has had a large impact on the industry is clear. *Future Boy Conan* is one of many 1970s science fiction works that helped form the first major wave of *otaku* fandom. Along with *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974) and *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979), it has come to signify a more enduring type of anime that fans did not age out of, works that created increasingly consistent and layered worlds, and paved the way for the science fiction "grand narrative" fetishism of the 1980s.

Within Hayao Miyazaki's filmography, the series also looms large. As well as being one of his earliest directing roles, its motifs and concepts would reoccur throughout his works. It is a postapocalyptic series, with similar themes to *Nausicaä and the Valley of the Wind* (1984), such as nature reclaiming a post-Anthropocene world, and a conflict between technology and agrarianism. Much of *Conan*'s mechanical designs would be reworked in later Miyazaki anime, particularly in *Castle in the Sky* (1986). *Conan* has also had an outsized effect on the adventure genre in anime as a whole, becoming a template for a specific style of adventure storytelling within the medium, particularly during the 1990s and 2000s. For instance, the series *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* (1990)—directed by Hideaki Anno and whose success laid the groundwork for *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995)—was inspired by *Future Boy Conan*'s visual style and maritime concept. In this sense, *Conan* is a *continually adapted* work, both within Miyazaki's oeuvre and in the anime industry as a whole.

But *Future Boy Conan* is itself an adaptation. The series is loosely based on Alexander Key's novel *The Incredible Tide*, which was released in 1970 but has since become obscure in comparison to the series. In the 1970s, Japanese television company NHK was looking for more animated television series and animation studio Nippon Animation pitched several works for which it had the rights, including Key's novel. However, director Miyazaki was not a fan of the source material. As he quite diplomatically put it:

> if you're dealing with a work with such a high level of perfection that it requires very strict interpretation, then you're better off not trying to turn it into a cartoon series in the first place. It's probably better to think of the original story as just the trigger for the ideas in the cartoon series.[1]

More directly, Miyazaki stated in the same interview that he only took the job "on the condition that I would be able to make changes."[2] Miyazaki went on to criticize Key's novel, stating that he disliked its "pessimistic" tone, its political outlook, and its narrative conclusion.[3] And Miyazaki's adaptation does indeed feature many drastic shifts in the plot structure and events of the novel.

Adaptation scholars Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen note that from the outset of adaptation studies, the field's central question has been "that of fidelity." However, they argue that most scholars in the field have concluded that fidelity is not a valid or useful metric of adaptational success:

> scholars have criticized the idea that faithfulness is the most interesting and productive instrument with which to confront adaptations; early on, critics have argued that fidelity is both difficult to ascertain and problematic for normative evaluation.[4]

In anime and manga studies, questions of fidelity are arguably complicated by the media mix, which often involves a greater degree of reimagining and reiteration of story structure. *Future Boy Conan* was produced in the context of popular *World Masterpiece Theater* television series, which included other literary adaptations such as *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974) and *Dog of Flanders* (1975). Due to the length of these series (usually about fifty-two episodes), a high degree of anime-original content was expected. Still, even within this context, *Future Boy Conan* was a remarkably loose and at times antagonistic adaptation of its source text.

This chapter analyzes *Future Boy Conan* in relation to *The Incredible Tide*, focusing on Miyazaki's adaptation choices and how they lead to differences in