

TAYLOR SWIFT'S *ALL TOO WELL* TWO LIVES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TAYLOR SWIFT SELF ADAPTATION ACROSS HER SONG AND SHORT FILM

Ramadita Putri Ananta, Adiva Alzahra Alwi, Dewi Meyrasyawati

English Literature Major, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga

ramadita.putri.ananta-2022@fib.unair.id adiva.alzahra.alwi-2022@fib.unair.ac.id
dewimeyrasyawati@fib.unair.ac.id

Abstract

Taylor Swift's *All Too Well* (2021) has evolved from a song into an emotionally layered short film, offering an interesting case study in self-adapted storytelling. This article aims to explore Swift's creative agency in reinterpreting her own narrative across the two mediums, analyzing changes in thematic focus and emotional resonance. Through close textual analysis of the song's lyrics, the short film's visual, and narrative techniques, this analysis identifies key contrast such as the short film emphasized on nostalgia and gendered power dynamics while underscoring Swift's consistent authorship. Findings reveal how the expansion into film allows Swift to reclaim her autobiographical narrative with broader nuance, challenging reductive interpretations of her work.

Keywords: *Adaptation, Reinterpretation, Comparative Literature, Taylor Swift*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In this digital era, popular songs not only come in audio form, but also in visual form such as music videos that add a narrative dimension and help listeners understand the meaning of the song more deeply. One example of a musical work that strongly reflects the transformation from audio to visual is *All Too Well* (10 Minute Version) by Taylor Swift. The song is not just adapted into a music video, but is presented as a short film that expands and deepens the emotional narrative contained in the lyrics. This approach makes it a special and different work from the usual music videos.

To understand how the meaning and emotions in this song move from verbal to visual form, this paper uses the adaptation of theory approach. Linda Hutcheon in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* explains that adaptation is not simply the transfer of content, but a creative process that involves reinterpretation, context adjustment, and reprocessing to form new meanings in different mediums.

Originally released in a five minute version on album *Red* 2012, *All Too Well* was extended as a 10 minute version in album *Red (Taylor's Version)* 2021, presenting a more complex narrative. By directing the short film, Swift reclaimed creative control, creating a story that centers feminine

perspective and challenges industry gender norms. She is turning personal heartbreak into both and artistic and cultural statement.

Using Hutcheon's Theory, this analysis explores how All Too Well (10 Minute Version) transforms into a short film that not only conveys the story, but also reveals deep emotions through visual elements. This article also reveals how adaptation, even when it comes from the same author, it can be changed through times, adding new cultural and thematic layers.

II. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with close textual analysis as the primary method, examining Taylor Swift's All Too Well song and its self adapted short film. The analysis combines three key theoretical frameworks:

1. Close reading of lyrics and emotional tone in the song
2. Film Analysis on mise-en-scène, cinematography, and narrative structure in the short film
3. The theory used is Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory, focusing on "repetition with added layers" which views adaptation as a creative process rather than just copying

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Lyric analysis

Taylor Swift's All Too Well (10 Minute Version) tells the story of a person who keeps recalling memories of the past with an ex-lover. Through the lyrics, it appears that the character in this song is reflecting back on the best and worst moments of the relationship. The phrase "*all too well*" reflects how all those memories still feel so obvious and imprinted. The song conveys that past love stories are part of life's journey that cannot be erased. Even if the relationship was short-lived, forgetting such deep emotional experiences often takes a very long time.

In this song, Taylor Swift uses quite narrative and poetic language to describe a relationship filled with many memories. Lines like "*Dancing in the refrigerator light*" describe a simple yet meaningful moment of intimacy, showing that the little things in a relationship can leave a very meaningful impression. Taylor Swift also presents a strong emotional contrast through the line "*You kept me like a secret, but I kept you like an oath,*" which emphasizes the inequality in commitment between the two characters. The use of simple yet symbolic language makes this song feel very personal and emotional. It allows the listener to imagine and feel the meaning of this song more deeply.

The lyrics of All Too Well (10 Minute Version) are structured like a storyline. The song opens with a depiction of sweet memories, as in the line "*I walked through the door with you, the air was cold, but something about it felt like home somehow.*" The lyrics serve as an introduction that introduces the setting and atmosphere of their relationship. However, as the song progresses, conflict begins to emerge, characterized by lyrics such as "*Maybe we got lost in translation*" which implies miscommunication and emotional tension between their relationship. The culmination of the song is reflected in the line "*You kept me like a secret, but I kept you like an oath,*" which shows the pain and betrayal in the relationship. This part of the song also includes the line "*Fuck the patriarchy,*" which, although seemingly spontaneous, reflects the narrator's awareness of the gendered power imbalance she experienced. It adds a subtle layer of critique toward the cultural norms that often marginalize women's voices in relationships. The final section of the song displays the realization that all the memories are still alive in the character's mind, as emphasized through the lyrics "*I remember it all too well.*" This line emphasizes that the trauma and memory of the

relationship is still vividly remembered. With a poetic and emotional narrative, the lyrics of All Too Well (10 minutes) provide a strong foundation and are very effective when adapted into visual form.

2. Short Film: The Palimpsestic Layers

In Hutcheon's views, this short film adaptation of All Too Well is not just illustrating the song, it is reinterpreting it. Through mise-en-scène, cinematography, and subtle performances, Taylor Swift builds a visual that complements and extends the emotional tone of the lyrics, adding new layers to it. The first thing that we noticed from the beginning of the film is the age gap relationship between the two characters. Even though it is mentioned in the lyrics, "*You said if we had been closer in age maybe it would have been fine*" the scene explicitly shows that the relationship is between a younger female character with an older male character. These scenes show an uncomfortable age gap from her with an imbalance of power, creating psychological depth and broadening the narrative from personal memory to relational dynamic.

Moreover, as its lyrics are already narrated like a storyline, the film is divided into chapters titled such as "*The First Crack In the Glass*", "*The Remembering*" and time card "*Thirteen years gone*" mapping the emotional journey more explicitly than the song. The scene on "*The First Crack In the Glass*" shows the situation where the female character is not acknowledged by her partner around his friends, then later igniting the extended fight dialogue scene or the "crack" between them. These additions make the existing lyrics more profound into noticeable acts, giving form to the temporal jumps in the original lyrics. It later explains more "*You kept me like a secret, but I kept you like an oath*," the pain and the betrayal mentioned is shown from that scene, how her partner neglected her and acted differently around his friends as if being secretive of their relationship.

Furthermore it can be analyzed how Taylor Swift visually translates her song into a more emotional narrative by utilizing lighting, color palette and also blocking. Cold and rather darker lighting are used like in the fight scene and also the chapter where the tension is happening with blues and grays dominate the scene. Contrast this with the warm and golden lighting in earlier "happy scenes" between her and her boyfriend. Most scenes in the video also use specific placement of female characters, where she is often physically placed in the center of the frame while the male lead or other characters move across her, reinforcing the power imbalance she experienced and how she lost herself even though she is the subject of the scene.

IV. CONCLUSION

Taylor Swift's *All Too Well: The Short Film* demonstrates how a song can be transformed into a visual narrative through adaptation that not only tells a story but also raises deeper emotional resonance. What started as a heartbreaking song became a cinematic story about love, growing up, even feminist insight and critiques of power imbalance in a relationship. With adding new layers, like added chapters, the intense fight scene and the biting "*fuck the patriarchy*" moment, it proves that great art can evolve, taking on new meaning when seen through a different lens. By applying Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory, this analysis reveals how Taylor Swift visualizes her lyrics, not just a transfer of content but a creative reinterpretation that also adds cultural commentary and new meanings. The song will always hurt, but the short film makes that pain unforgettable.

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