Chapter 15
# Traveling Across Media:
## Comics and Adaptations

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the phenomenon of comics and graphic novels being adapted to other media, including film, as well as the movement to comics form from media forms. The affordances of the comics medium are examined. Descriptive in nature, the chapter features descriptions of particular titles and their adaptations that have been part of the author's reading and teaching practice. Additionally, the chapter draws upon an interview with an author/artist who engages in adaptation work before concluding with implications for educational practice.*

## INTRODUCTION

Comic books and graphic novels occupy a textual position in a wider range of visually composed and visually linguistic works (Cohn, 2021). What is more, comics and graphic novels occupy a position in educational practice based on their capacity to engage readers, and to build comprehension skills through their multimodal design (Frey & Fisher, 2008).

As Burke (2012) noted, stories rarely appear in one medium in modern culture, but instead are diffused and proliferate across a diverse range of text types and media outputs. In this chapter, the author lends a particular focus on the affordance of the graphic novel as a transmedial adaptive text. That is, a text which carries across a range of media and has a flexible adaptability between and among a range of textual media. While interview data informs this conversation, the structure and nature of this chapter is more open-ended and is not presented as a formal exercise in scientific research. Rather, it is heuristic and discovery-based in its formulation as an exploration of texts and, finally, of one creator's experience with generating adaptations across forms of media, specifically from canonical prose and play-format texts to updated graphic novel interpretations. This journey from canon to comics page is hardly new, stemming from work done in the 1940s, with a noted emergence of more experimental adaptations in

the 2010s (De Dobbeleer & De Bruyn, 2013). Davis (2017) also noted a relationship between comics and film in terms of adaptations.

This chapter examines the movement back and forth between and among media, with the comics form at center and features a number of comics work examples from the author's literacy history and current reading life. While not a formal measured inquiry into a particular method, this chapter is organized with an initial treatment of adaptation theory, as well as a consideration of research that has been done with adaptation in comics form. The author includes textual examples from the work of Ray Bradbury, Walter Dean Meyers, and others as a canonical and/or historical authors who have either worked in comics form or whose work has been transformed/adapted to the comics medium. The author considers the transmedial treatment of comics texts that have been chosen for their contribution to the overall question of how adaptation occurs across media, with particular attention to comics form.

The chapter concludes with an analytic interview form with an author/artist who engages in adaptation work before offering a set of implications for classroom consideration.

## Adaptation Theory and Research on Adaptation in Comics

Considering this notion applied to comics, the author draws upon Verrone's (2011) use of adaptation theory, while also noting Burke's (2012) consideration of the capitalist and consumer-oriented aspects of comics adaptations, particularly when considering filmed works. This approach to adaptation theory highlights the potential for film to serve as a textual site of adaptation, but the cinematic aspects of celluloid text might be useful in thinking about the comics medium. Cohn (2021) considered both media within the corpus of visual literacy. What is retained, transformed, and reconfigured to work across media is of central concern in adaptation theory. Verrone (2011) commented on the process of adaptation, particularly with moving canonical works to film, a process not unlike translation. Tseng and Bateman (2018) contended the process of adaptation was dependent on the affordances of the media being adapted, with particular media landscapes/textual types limiting or allowing for differences in adaptive process.

Fandom is a source of consideration in the flexibility of adaptation, which again reaches to the consumerism aspect of comics media. Burke (2012) wrote, "The notion of continuity allows comic book fans to adopt a less hierarchical view of the relationships between source and adaptation" (p. 4). Indeed, some media permutations have different affordances which must be conformed to in a range of ways, disrupting a linear move from one type of media to another. Film example, time matters in film as a consumed text that occupies a determined amount of chronological space – it is difficult to view a two-hour film meaningfully in less than two hours, unless the viewer fast-forwards at the optional speed, or unless the viewer skips elements. When it comes to the comics medium, time is expressed differently, often in the space between panels called the gutter (McCloud, 1994). Chute and Jagoda (2014) noted the gutters as "in a sense, unregulated spaces, interstices that are components of meaning for the reader to fill in" (p. 4). This space is an intriguing site for critical analysis, changes in time, and alterations in perception – moreover, the gutter is merely one of many facets of the graphic novel text.

In terms of work that has been done in adapting comics form, Zanettin (2014) examined adaptation process in translated comics. Zanettin (2014) noted, "Visual adaptation may involve changes in publication format, coloring and the drawings themselves, including the appearance of the verbal content" and went on to note "Within a page, adaptation may involve resizing, deleting or adding panels; within a panel balloons and boxes may also be resized, deleted or added, and the size, shape and arrangement of the letters" may be altered (p. 2). Additional considerations, including authentic (re)presentations of

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