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TOWARDS A THEORY OF COMIC BOOK ADAPTATION

by

Colin E. Beineke

A THESIS

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# TOWARDS A THEORY OF COMIC BOOK ADAPTATION

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University of Nebraska, 2011

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Contemporary adaptation studies/theories have tended to focus singularly on the movement from the novel/short story to film – largely ignoring mediums such as the theater, music, visual art, video games, and the comic book. Such a limited view of adaptation has led to an underdeveloped and misplaced understanding of the adaptation process, which has in turn culminated in a convoluted perception of the products of artistic adaptation. The necessity of combating the consequences of these limited outlooks – particularly in the field of comics studies – is as vital as the difficulties are manifold. In opposition to this current stream of scholarly oversight and (frankly) unimaginative scholarship, the intention of this study is to construct a theoretical framework for analyzing, understanding, and uncovering meaning in comic book adaptations of canonical works of literature – a framework that partially defines itself by its deviation from the extant methodologies. While this framework will focus primarily on the metamorphosis of the novel into the comic book, the flexibility of the methodology will potentially allow for its application to comic book adaptations of plays, poems, video games, films, and television.

Reading and analyzing canonical texts through the lens of the comics medium allows for (but is not limited to): the tracing of contemporary/popular views of canonical works, the linking/uncovering of previously unattainable meanings within the original text, and even a reexamination/disputation of established arguments/positions. While the theoretical approach I propose to develop will be accomplished through a critical

engagement with literary, comics, art, and adaptation theories, in order to demonstrate the applicability, relevance, and significance of my newly established theoretical framework, a practical application, augmented by close readings and analysis, will be undertaken of luminary comic book artist Bill Sienkiewicz's triumphant adaptation of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. A demonstration of the comic book medium's ability to not only hold a conversation with the literary canon, but its capacity to provoke academic discourse to examine new and uncharted arenas, will serve as a powerful testament to the adroit capabilities and innate ingenuity of the medium.

## TOWARDS A THEORY OF ADAPTATION

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If you think adaptation can be understood by using novels and films alone, you're wrong. The Victorians had a habit of adapting just about everything – and in just about every possible direction; the stories of poems, novels, plays, operas, painting, songs, dances, and the *tableaux vivants* were constantly adapted from one medium to another and then back again. We postmoderns have clearly inherited this same habit, but we have even more new materials at our disposal... The result? Adaptation has run amok. That's why we can't understand its appeal and even its nature if we only consider novels and films. (Linda Hutcheon, xi)

### Introduction

A significant number of contemporary adaptation studies and theories, along with their antecedent methodologies, have tended to focus singularly on the movement from literature to film – largely ignoring other mediums, such as theater, music, visual arts, television, the internet, the comic book, and newer innovations such as video games.<sup>1</sup> This traditional attitude towards adaptation study has, however, recently come under fire from scholars from across a variety of disciplines. These scholars are attempting to overturn the literature/film dichotomy and replace it with a system that allows for a broader exploration of the phenomenon of adaptation. As Linda Hutcheon, a seminal figure in this newly emerging movement, explains in the epigraph to this study, such a limited and constricted view of adaptation has led to an underdeveloped understanding of adaptation and as a result a convoluted understanding of and appreciation for the

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<sup>1</sup> In his provocatively titled article, "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory," Thomas M. Leitch suggests as his first and most prominent fallacy the erroneous notion that "There is such a thing as contemporary adaptation theory." If Leitch's claim, which applies to the movement from literature to film (the most popular and well documented tendency of adaptation), can be considered to be true, what can be said about adaptation theory in regards to those mediums that do not receive as much scholarly attention?

products of adaptation. Additionally, the literature/film approach circumvents numerous opportunities to learn from and about the systems of signification unique to other forms of art and expression. Furthermore, this circumnavigation has impeded fresh, previously unattainable insights into the original manifestation of the adapted text.

Solutions to this academic gridlock have been as varied as they are multiple, yet most progressive scholars have agreed on a few central tenets that must be met for a shift to take place. Foremost amongst these is the need for the inclusion of artistic media – outside of the film/literature dichotomy – within the larger and more generalized field of adaptation studies. However, this acquiescence is not enough; it must be accompanied by new strategies for understanding these previously little studied relationships. In other words, new theoretical models and frameworks must be developed. Hope that these seeds may bear fruit can be seen in the ever growing trend towards interdisciplinary communication within academia, which encourages stronger dialogue between what have become isolated islands of knowledge and interest.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, at a time when scholars interested in intermediality, intermodality, and multimodality are actively debating, deconstructing, and reinterpreting the very notion of “medium,” when the conventionally established borders between the arts are being challenged and questioned, and when “intertextuality” has become the battle-cry of many, the iron has never been hotter for the striking and forging of new models and frameworks for analyzing the phenomenon of adaptation.

In an effort to contribute a verse to this powerful play of shifting ideas, the following two-part study (while indeed dealing with literature and adaptation) will

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<sup>2</sup> While it may be argued that the study of the relationship between film and literature is itself interdisciplinary, it must be taken into consideration that film studies initially arose as an offshoot of English departments and is still often closely associated with literature programs at universities.



engage with one of those oft overlooked mediums, the comic book. Through a critical engagement with literary, comics, film, and newly developed and generalized adaptation theories, a new theoretical framework for analyzing, understanding, and uncovering meaning in comic book adaptations of literary works can be constructed. This model will attempt to demonstrate and explicate how comic book writers and artists have deconstructed and modified the elements of the literary system of signification and reshaped and forged them to fit the comparable yet singular system of comics signification. In order to evince the applicability and value of this newly established theoretical model, the framework will be utilized in a close reading and explication of a specific adaptation – prominent comic book artist Bill Sienkiewicz's triumphant adaptation of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*.

As previously noted, comic book adaptation has not received much attention in mainstream adaptation study; even Hutcheon mentions it only in passing. Nevertheless, within the still somewhat esoteric field of comics studies there have been numerous attempts to analyze adaptations. Unfortunately, when attempting to do so, most scholars tend to approach the adaptation from one of three exclusive directions. I have labeled and grouped these studies into the three following categories: the fidelity review, the survey article, and the pedagogical article.<sup>3</sup> While it is important to understand the efforts of

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<sup>3</sup> The fidelity review styled article is perhaps the most notorious of these three types of studies – its infamy springing from the way in which it falsely presents itself as a constructive and analytical reading of a specific adaptation or adaptations. Instead, it is within these studies that the most derogatory and unproductive criticisms of comics being secondary, derivative, and inferior are made. The survey article typically consists of a pseudo-review-of-literature – a compiling of descriptions and brief analyses of multiple comic book adaptations of single or multiple works by a given author. The weakness of a survey article lies in its focus on a large number of works – because of the sheer number of texts addressed the scholar is limited in regards to the amount of analysis or productive discussion she can give to any single work. Beginning with Albert Lewis Kanter's *Classics Illustrated*, literary comic book adaptations have been utilized by educators as pedagogical instruments, primarily for their motivational capabilities. The

one's scholastic antecedents, the approach taken by this study so strongly diverges from previous attempts that to discuss them in detail would be superfluous. Therefore, instead of going into any lengthy critique or examination of these approaches, it will suffice to say that although each (excluding the fidelity review) has its own merits, and despite the historical and referential value they offer, thus far none has managed to engage the medium on its own terms.

The issue of fidelity in regards to adaptation has been deconstructed, critiqued, and widely disparaged by contemporary scholars to such an extent that it will not be necessary to discuss the topic at great length here. According to Hutcheon, "For a long time, 'fidelity criticism,' as it came to be known, was the critical orthodoxy in adaptation studies, especially when dealing with canonical works... Today that dominance has been challenged from a variety of perspectives and with a range of results" (6-7). In regards to this challenging of "fidelity criticism" Hutcheon notes in particular that,

There are many shared lessons taught by Kristevan intertextuality theory and Derridean deconstruction and by Foucauldian challenges to unified subjectivity and the often radically egalitarian approach to stories (in all media) by both narratology and cultural studies. One lesson is that to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative. (xiii)

Despite the growing irrelevance of fidelity critique, it is perhaps necessary to briefly define the way in which this study views the relationship between original and adapted text – as this view has a direct impact on the proposed methodology. Simply put, this

study will set aside not only any conceptualization that an adaptation *can* or *should* be “faithful” to the original text but also the subsequent, and flawed, supposition that such fidelity is in any way linked to the “success” or artistic merit of the adaptation.<sup>4</sup> As Julie Sanders argues

there is a need to establish a more diverse vocabulary for discussing and describing the relationship between texts and hypertext, source and appropriation...[T]he relationship is often viewed as linear and reductive; the appropriation is always in the secondary, belated position, and the discussion will therefore always be, to a certain extent about difference, lack, or loss. (12)

One method Sanders proposes for rethinking adaptation dialogue is to “think in terms of complex filtration, and in terms of intertextual webs or signifying fields, rather than simplistic one-way lines of influence from source to adaptation” (24). Many view adapters, wrongfully so, as something akin to a car compactor, brutally compressing and disassembling a classic '59 Chevy, reducing it to a cube of scrap metal, unrecognizable

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that a close reading of a comic book adaptation must entirely jettison any relation to the original work – to do so would in fact be fatal. It is impossible to study an adaptation in a vacuum. Hutcheon notes that adaptations are “haunted at all times by their adapted texts. If we know [the adapted text], we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its relationship to another work or works” (6). However, as Sanders notes, studies of adaptations are most productive when they

are not aimed at identifying ‘good’ or ‘bad’ adaptations. On what grounds, after all, could such a judgment be made? Fidelity to the original?...[It] is usually at the very point of infidelity that the most creative acts of adaptation and appropriation take place. The sheer possibility of testing fidelity in any tangible way is surely also in question when we are dealing with such labile texts as Shakespeare’s plays. Adaptation studies are, then, not about making polarized value judgments, but about analyzing process, ideology, and methodology. (20)

Furthermore, M. Thomas Inge asserts that

The adaptation should be evaluated in terms of its success as a comic book and how creatively it uses and expands on the artistic and technical possibilities of the medium. Does it use the full range of verbal and visual techniques peculiar to the comic book as a form of creative expression? (*Cetology* 5)

from its original form. Instead, as Sanders argues, adaptation should be viewed as a more delicate and sophisticated system of transformation, such as filtration, in which an original text is filtered through the creative mind(s) of the adapter(s), resulting in a work that is both identifiable with the original and can yet stand on its own as a substantial and distinct artistic accomplishment.

I stand by Hutcheon's contention that “multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically” (xiii). This premise allows for the production of a link between two texts that does not privilege one over the other, but instead endeavors to explore how each work can illuminate the other. This study will offer insight into both the original text and the adapted text – insight that a study of either in isolation could not produce. Furthermore, it will potentially offer a deeper understanding of the abilities and characteristics unique to each medium, in particular those of comics.<sup>5</sup> Reading and analyzing literary texts through the lens of the comics medium allows for, but is certainly not limited to, the tracing and identification of contemporary and popular views of canonical works, the uncovering and linking of previously unattainable meanings within the original text, magnified examinations of “the little lower layers” of the text, and even a reexamination and/or disputation of established arguments and positions concerning the work. It is important to stress, however, that the benefits of this study do not lie solely on the side of the original work.<sup>6</sup> Rather, a demonstration of the comic book medium's ability to not

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<sup>5</sup> Comic books have long been viewed as something of a literary genre or as an offshoot of “real” literature. This is evidenced by the unfortunate rise of the “graphic novel” moniker. Hopefully, this study, by scrutinizing both the similarities and differences in each medium's systems of signification, will be able to contribute to rectifying these misconceptions.

<sup>6</sup> Whether it is the result of the rise of the “graphic novel” or not, it cannot be doubted that there has been a recent increase in popular attention in regards to comic book adaptations of literature. For example, two recent articles from “Publishers Weekly,” entitled “Novel to Graphic Novel: Turning Popular Prose into Comics” and “New Books from Old: Turning Classics into Comics,” both written by Ada Price, address the rise of the comic book adaptation.

only hold a conversation with the literary canon but also provoke academic discourse that examines new and uncharted regions will serve as a powerful testament to the adroit capabilities and innate ingenuity of the medium.

As Dirk Vanderbeke has observed of a comic book adaptation of Paul Auster's novel, *City of Glass*, "[This adaptation] is not faithful to the novel, but to its own reading of the novel, and it affirms that sequential art can not only join the discourse on Auster's text, but also take its position as a work of art in its own right" (109). This will indeed be one of the contentions of this study: the notion that adaptations are "readings" of an original text that, when properly interpreted, can add to the existent scholarly discourse. In a similar vein, Paul Ferstl contends,

In addition to the manifold ways that famous literary plots are manipulated to create innovative graphic novels, literature is sometimes used in comics to provide a basis for rather experimental visual expression. *An experimental graphic vocabulary is then used to interpret the text while relying on its familiarity to the reader. Graphic associations and the visualization of metaphors and comparisons offer the reader additional information as well as the possibility of re-reading a familiar text while at the same time presenting the medium's potential. The use of a well-known text also strengthens the comic artist's control of the narrative as he is able to manipulate likely expectations. (my emphasis, 65)*

The "experimental graphic vocabulary," "graphic associations," and "visualization of metaphors" to which Ferstl refers are roundabout means of identifying the complex system of signification unique to the comics medium. Ferstl's use of these inadequate

labels is symptomatic of a larger issue within comics studies. As Hutcheon observes, “it seems that no art can acquire cultural capital until it has theorized itself as medium-specific with its own formal and signifying possibilities” (34). Comics studies, particularly in the United States, has been hampered by the inability to draw from theory that deals specifically with the comics medium. Instead, most scholarship is forced to turn to the established theories of literature, film, and even music to engage the comics medium. The exception to this rule is the Franco-Belgium school of comics studies, which, pulling primarily from the field of semiotics, has developed a specifically comics based theory of signification and meaning. This study will draw primarily from the theories that leading French comics scholar and theorist Thierry Groensteen has developed in his seminal work “The System of Comics,” one of the few Franco-Belgium texts available in English translation.

Finally, it is necessary, briefly, to delineate the exact species, genus, and phylum of comic book adaptation with which this study is concerned. Firstly, this study will exclusively address literary adaptations, i.e. novels, novellas, short stories, narrative poems, etc., while drama and short poems will be largely excluded.<sup>7</sup> Attention will be given primarily to works of substantial length – monthly comic books, “graphic novels,” etc. – while short comics forms such as comic strips and single panel cartoons will be largely excluded. However, the most important distinction to make is between adaptation, with which this study is concerned, and appropriation, literally meaning “to

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<sup>7</sup> Dramatic and theatrical texts pose a particular problem. Largely accepted as literature, they are nevertheless meant to be performed, and while Shakespeare is one of the most oft adapted writers, drama will be excluded from this study. Simply put, the theater has its own unique conventions and systems of signification that are not within the scope of this study to address. Short poems pose their own difficulties and comic book adaptations of such works have thus far produced works comparable to children's literature – merely illustrations accompanied by corresponding illustrations.

make one's own.” The line between the two can be very fine at times.<sup>8</sup> Appropriation (aside from causing fidelity critics to pull out their hair) can be considered an extreme form of adaptation, and while it is not within the scope of this study to identify or demarcate the point at which a work stops being an adaptation and becomes an appropriation, generally any comic book adaptation that presents an extreme shift in genre, time, location, and so on, has been excluded. Furthermore, while appropriation is comparably as popular within comics as adaptation, an understanding of how literary conventions and techniques are transformed to their respective comics counterparts is best attained via more “straightforward” adaptation, and not appropriation.

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<sup>8</sup> As Sanders explains, “An adaptation signals a relationship with an informing sourcetext or original,” while “appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from this informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain” (26).

## Part One

If all media were fundamentally different, it would be hard to find any interrelations at all; if they were fundamentally similar, it would be equally hard to find something that is not already interrelated. Media, however, are both different and similar, and intermediality must be understood as a bridge between medial differences that is founded on medial similarities. (Lars Elleström, 12)

### Intermediality and Recoding

Analyzing adaptations that cross over “medial boundaries” requires a close understanding of the capabilities and limits of each medium involved. As Hutcheon explains,

In many cases, because adaptations are to a different medium, they are re-mediations, that is, specifically translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images). This is translation but in a very specific sense: as transmutation or transcoding, that is, as necessarily recoding into a new set of conventions as well as signs. (16)

This notion of “recoding” the meaning or significance of a work created in one medium for representation in another at first sounds somewhat overly scientific and mathematical for the symbolic and creative arts. Dudley Andrew phrases this difficulty in different terms: “More difficult is fidelity to the spirit, to the original's tone, values, imagery, and



rhythm, since finding stylistic equivalents...for these intangible aspects is the opposite of a mechanical process” (32). Indeed, while such a systematic approach cannot fully account for the affective responses of the audience to a certain work, it does manage to successfully unravel and clarify many of the technical aspects of transmedial adaptation.

Andrew ponders this difficulty:

Can we attempt to reproduce the meaning of the Mona Lisa in a poem, or of a poem in a musical phrase, or even of a musical phrase in an aroma? If one accepts this possibility, at the very least one is forced to discount the primary articulations of the relevant language systems. One would have to hold that although the material [...] may be of a different nature [all] systems may construct in their own way, and at higher levels, scenes and narratives that are indeed commensurable. (32)

It seems that if one concedes that all media are (relatively) equally capable of representing the same meaning or narrative, then one must face the repercussions of lost individuality amongst the arts and the associated arguments for selecting one medium over the other for any given project. There are, however, ways of buying ourselves out of this dilemma without discounting the distinct and unique natures of various art forms. After all, it is precisely *because* each medium presents meaning and narrative uniquely, and is thus capable of realizations that others are not, that this study is being undertaken.

One solution is to divide the process of adaptation into two separate operations. Brian McFarlane explains this approach succinctly by making a key distinction between two different levels of transference, or rather,

those elements of the original novel which are transferable because [they are] not tied to one or other semiotic system – that is, essentially, *narrative*, and those which involve intricate processes of adaptation because their effects are closely tied to the semiotic system in which they are manifested – that is, *enunciation*. (20)

In other words, McFarlane is separating *what* is being transferred – the narrative – from *how* it is being transferred – the mode of enunciation, or system of signification (the medium). Adapters must of course make important decisions concerning what parts of the narrative will be included and to what extent other parts will be jettisoned. However, these judgments, while viewed as vital to fans and fidelity critics, are less significant in a discussion of cross-medial adaptations. Each variation and manifestation of the various arts is limited, partially by their materiality and partially by their temporal conventions, in regards to *how much* narrative can be rendered. Therefore, it is the question of *how* the narrative is relayed and not necessarily *how much* of the narrative is adapted that is most pertinent to this study.<sup>9</sup>

An understanding of how one system of enunciation attempts to “reproduce” the effects of another is intriguing not only because of what it reveals pertaining to each system of signification but also because of how the use of a different system of enunciation allows for the relaying of meaning and the uncovering of signification that was previously unattainable. While we will see concrete examples of this in the case

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<sup>9</sup> According to Hutcheon, “Usually adaptations, especially from long novels, mean that the adapter’s job is one of subtraction or contraction; this is called a ‘surgical art’ for good reason” (19). In this regard, this study will contend that it is the narrative the adapter(s) choose(s) to include that is of immediate importance, and not that which is “cut.” By focusing in on specific narrative events, scenes, characters, themes, etc., and discarding others, the process of adaptation actually allows for a *magnification* of the included elements. As Sanders explains, “The aim is not replication as such, but rather complication, expansion rather than contraction. In scientific terms, we might speak about the crucial difference between a clone and a genetic adaptation” (12).

study below, the following framework will attempt to detail not only how literary narrative is recoded into the comics medium but also how this act of recoding can potentially allow for the formation of previously unlooked for connections and linkages of signification.

Given the vast array of techniques, conventions, and methods innate in the narrative structures and systems of both literature and comics, the following framework is by no means comprehensive; it is merely the first leg of a much larger and extended voyage. In light of this, the following framework will focus on a number of the more fundamental and universal of these components and relationships: similarities and differences in reading methodologies; the transition from literary ekphrasis and description to visual comics representation; visual style and visual allusion, narrative point of view; characterization; and recurring patterns such as themes, motifs, and symbolism. A strong understanding of how these fundamental literary conventions either shift or are completely transformed so as to be transplanted to the respective techniques of comics will open the door for exploration into how the more intricate and subtle conventions of the literary medium are adapted.

### Differences in Reading Practices and Approaches

An appreciation of how the experience and practice of reading a comic book differs from that of reading a work of literature is vital to understanding how a comic book adaptation interprets a literary text. The reading of a comic and the reading of a novel each require their own distinct approaches, just as different sets of interpretive and analytical skills are employed while watching a film, attending a play, or viewing a painting. Although the way in which one reads a work of literature is both similar and dissimilar to the way in which one reads a comic book, because the comic book shares a physical shape and materiality to that of a novel – a rectangular or square shaped series of pages presenting an ordered narrative – it is often assumed that anyone capable of picking up and carefully reading a novel is just as capable of, for lack of a better word, competently reading a comic book. Unfortunately, and primarily because of their association with children, comics are generally assumed to be “easier” to read than literary works. However, to dive into a comic book and surface with the largest and brightest pearls of meaning and enjoyment requires a specialized set of reading and interpretive skills.

To a certain extent, a comic book can be viewed as a puzzle to be solved or a code to be broken – particularly when the creative team behind a comic has a strong grasp on the complex capabilities of the medium. In this sense, a comic book reader has much more *active* role than the casual reader of a novel. When reading a novel one takes part in the linear act of moving one’s gaze across the page from left to right and up to down. In this regard the reader is constantly taking in information in the exact order and pace that the author dictates. While it is always possible to re-read sentences and paragraphs,

or even to skip ahead pages or chapters at a time, ultimately the reader's comprehension and reception of the narrative is dictated as a straight line, just as in watching a film.

Unless a reader makes the effort to “rewind” or otherwise manipulate the schema of narrative order – an act that will unavoidably lead to confusion and disruption – she is forced to always move forward, to always play by the rules set by the author or filmmaker. This is not inherently so with the comics medium.

When reading a comic book there is not a “correct” path that leads from point “A” to point “B.” While the creative team behind any given comic does structure the comic to be read along certain lines, there is always plenty of room left open for detours, backtracking, side-trips, and deviations. As Groensteen explains, “Every comics reader knows from experience that, in practice, even when the gaze functions like an ‘irremovable beam,’ the eye’s movements on the surface of the page are relatively erratic and do not respect any precise protocol” (47). Depending on the way in which any given page is constructed, whether divided into a highly structured 3x3 panel grid or a more open splash page, the “path” of reading can range anywhere from a left to right, up to down pattern, similar to reading a novel, to a completely free-flowing and random circuit of the page.<sup>10</sup> There is one component of the comics page, however, that does serve to firmly guide the reading experience: the appearance of text – whether in word boxes, captions, word balloons, or onomatopoeic insertions. Groensteen contends that

the balloon is perhaps the only element of the paginal apparatus on which  
the gaze definitively stops (except when leafing through the comic without

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<sup>10</sup> According to Groensteen, “A page of comics is offered at first to be a synthetic global vision, but that cannot be satisfactory. It demands to be traversed, crossed, glanced at, and analytically deciphered. This moment-to-moment reading does not take a lesser account of the totality of the panoptic field that constitutes the page (or the double page), since the focal vision never ceases to be enriched by peripheral vision” (19)

reading it). It is a point of anchorage, an obligatory passage. Because of this the reading can be directed to a certain degree, driven by the network that connects the occupied positions of the successive balloons across the pages. (79-80)

As we will see below, this network of texts can be utilized to accomplish certain rhetorical gestures that directly impact the way in which single images, series and sequences of panels, and entire pages are read. Along with textual insertions, panel frames can set the pace, route, and order of the reading:

The 'text' of comics obeys a rhythm that is imposed on it by the succession of frames – a basic heartbeat that, as is seen in music, can be developed, nuanced, and recovered by more elaborate rhythmic effects stressed by other 'instruments' (parameters), like those of the distribution of word balloons, the opposition of colors, or even the play of the graphic forms. (45)

This is not to say that comics are of free-floating form, without structure or aim. However, the relative freedom of reading offered by comics leaves them more open to active readerly interaction than narrative mediums such as literature or film. Not only will reader A's reading differ from reader B's reading of the same text in the traditional subjective/interpretative sense, but the two readings will also differ in terms of progression and ordering of the gaze, time spent on particular images/panels/pages, regressions, digressions, and any other number of differences resulting from the approachable and interactive nature of the medium.

The consequences of these differences in reading approach pertaining to comic book adaptation range from the concrete to the rather abstract, and while it is not the purpose of the study to develop a theory exploring how readers interact with comics, it is possible to focus on a few of the basic factors that must be taken into consideration when transitioning between these two unique methods of review and apprehension. Firstly, as a general rule the comics page of an adaptation is highly episodic, often attempting to encompass entire scenes and occurrences in a single or double page, scenes that comprise numerous pages if not complete chapters of the original text. This is not at all to suggest the practice is merely one of condensation and summary – quite the contrary. Utilizing illustrations, text, the unique symbiosis of the two that comics have developed, and the multitude of other tools accessible to the medium allows for the transmission of a good deal of information and meaning in a relatively limited amount of space. More importantly, however, an entire scene (including its relevant themes, tensions, ironies, tone, characterizations, etc.) can be magnified and deconstructed using the comics page. For example, a common technique for representing a single scene or incident in comics is to employ a splash page (a page that is dominated by a single illustration, essentially one giant panel) in conjunction with numerous inset panels.

Take for instance the following page from Chantal Montellier and David Zane Mairowitz's adaptation of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. Seated at his desk, pondering the absurd situation in which he finds himself, a visibly disturbed K. is surrounded by circular inset panels, which contain both realistic and surreal representations of the characters and events he has been witness to since his "arrest." The reader's gaze moves

freely from inset to inset, following no assigned order, and the reader is therefore free to connect any of the characters/scenes in any multitude of ways.



Furthermore, the large number of inset serves to reinforce the weight of K.'s situations and its multifaceted and absurd nature. While in Kafka's corresponding text of K.'s musings mentions of these various characters and events are to be found, by undermining, inverting, and generally disrupting the traditional linear reading mode found in literature the adapters are able to present the reader with the opportunity of seamlessly interacting with K.'s thoughts. Essentially, comics can reproduce the literary technique known as stream of consciousness in a manner that forces readers to actually experience this stream themselves.



A final aspect of the practice of comic book reading that can be utilized in adaptation is the simple turning of a page. The turning of a comics page contains within its very action the potential for sudden shock, revelation, and transformation. When turning a page in a novel the reader is simply met with the continuation of a sentence or a new sentence. While in theory it would be possible to intentionally end one page with something of a “cliff-hanger” and begin the next with a sentence of disclosure, not only do publishing practices limit this, but the effect is still weakened by the need to temporally read the sentence. In comics, however, the possibility of drastic and affective change is much more profound. For example, a page of relatively stable and peaceful narration, ended with a small unobtrusive caption in the lower right hand corner, containing a series of texts that ends in an open-ended ellipses, can contain on its reverse side the visual and narrative equivalent of a mushroom cloud. Employed thusly in the adaptation of a literary text, such as George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, the grotesque and climactic scene in which the pigs have become so like humans that it is not possible to tell the difference between the two can be ultimately enhanced and intensified.

Ekphrasis and Literary Description → Visual Comics Representation and Allusion

As a narrative media the comic book is comprised not solely of textual elements but also of visual components. In crafting these illustrations the adapter(s), I contend, takes part in something of a “reverse-ekphrasis.” By this I mean that the adapter(s) study and judge the physical and metaphysical world(s) described by the poet or author and manifests these descriptions into corporeal being upon paper, canvas, etc. In accomplishing this task, the comic book artist is theoretically able to draw from any of the countless manifestations of visual representation and art. However, since its inception comic book art has been largely dominated by the artistic approach known as cartooning – hand penciled or penned illustrations that are filled with color using various methods. Groensteen contends that

the artist is free to modify the entire regime of his graphical writing, detailing one motif while others remain at the sketch stage. Nevertheless, this possibility is generally theoretical, and these significant occurrences are few in number – it seems to me that they are mainly found in the pages of young artists...or in the work of a baroque artist such as Bill Sienkiewicz. The rule that prevails everywhere is that of the homogeneity of style. (123)

It seems that this “homogeneity of style” is twofold – the first is the homogeneity described by Groensteen, that of an unfluxuating and consistently maintained style throughout a work. The second I would identify as the homogeneity of comic art as a whole, i.e., the dominance of cartooning in the medium.

There are both strengths and weaknesses to either deviating from or ascribing to these dual conventions. For example, while it is the case that artists tend to sustain a single style throughout a work, it is not as negative a reality as Groensteen makes it out to be. Many artists have made a name for themselves by establishing a style that can easily be identified as a Crumb or a Kirby. Maintaining a single style can be particularly effective when that style reflects and enhances the tone and nature of the story being rendered – take for instance Frank Miller’s *Sin City* series, whose gritty noir style is perfectly reflected in Miller’s dark, black and white illustrations. In regards to adaptation, an artist interpreting a childhood narrative such as Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* may choose to illustrate the escapades of the scoundrel protagonist by means of Norman Rockwell or children’s literature inspired artworks – thus highlighting the bildungsroman and childhood nature of the tale.

The use of a consistent style – whether it be cartooning or not – can unlock to the artists a variety of rhetorical possibilities. For instance, retaining a set artistic style throughout a comic can create not only a tone complimentary to that of the narrative but also one that is ironically or contrarily disengaging from the tone and theme of the original. In his adaptation of Joseph Conrad’s novel *The Secret Agent*, artist John K. Snyder maintains a colorful and caricature-like style throughout that disarms the reader, granting the darker and more fatalistic elements of Conrad’s work an increased effectiveness, while simultaneously constructing a grotesque and carnival-like atmosphere that allows for an alternative reading of the original.

The weakness of utilizing a singular style is loss of the variation that can allow for sudden and abrupt shifts in tone – similar to that seen above in regards to reading

practices. Although referring to shifts in page and panel layout, the following observation by Groensteen can be just as easily applied to a comic that employs multiple styles:

A regular page layout...possesses the ultimate virtue of handling the possibility of sudden and spectacular ruptures from the initially given norm. In a book in which all the other pages are regular, a page that is suddenly distinguished by a special configuration carries and extremely strong impact. (97)

For example, in Art Spiegelman's widely-acclaimed *Maus*, the holocaust narrative – drawn in a markedly cartoony style – is at one point interrupted by the insertion of one of Spiegelman's earlier works, still done in cartoons but drawn in the darker and much more surreal style of the comix movement. The reader, having become accustomed to the comfortable cartoon style (despite the subject matter), is impacted even more acutely than if she were approaching this material in isolation. When this method is utilized in adaptations, say for instance in a rendering of a tale in which the protagonist is haunted by nightmares such as in a horror story by H.P. Lovecraft, the daytime narrative may be rendered in a rather subdued and realist style, while the horrific dream sequences can be suddenly illustrated using the horrific capabilities of the surreal and symbolist movements.

Opposing the traditional comic book method of cartooning is the relatively new school of comics artists who have turned to the world of fine and visual art for inspiration and technique. In theory, comic book art is open to virtually any artistic media, style, technique, or movement. Bill Sienkiewicz, (who Groensteen mentions and whose work

will serve as the case study for this project) especially because he works in mixed media in collage, is able to utilize the strengths of practically any style or movement within visual art. As Inge has noted concerning Sienkiewicz's work, "abstraction, cubism, collage, and surrealism figure into the series of pages, as well as realism, to create a veritable anatomy of modern art and its movements" (11). The collage and mixed media style approach utilized by Sienkiewicz and a growing number of other comics artists has revolutionized comics and allowed the medium to appropriate all of the strengths and capabilities of fine and visual art. In this sense, artists such as Sienkiewicz are not only freed from the homogeneity of cartooning but also from the homogeneity of a singular style. They are able to shift style and media from scene to scene, employing postmodern surrealism at one moment and traditional oil painting the next, lending the signifying capabilities of these approaches to their renderings.

The practice of comics visualization, however, is not without its limitations and drawbacks. Groensteen contends that there is a certain loss that occurs during the process of "reverse-ekphrasis," that by giving what had been a literary description a concrete visual representation, the openness and generality of the detailed description is lost: "it seems to me that comics (and the visual story in general) are not apt to produce, by itself, an equivalent of the operation known in the literary domain known as description" (124). Furthermore,

We see at once that an image cannot be descriptive in the technical sense of the term. If it shows the constitutive parts of a certain object, as well as the properties of these parts (forms, materials, colors, etc.), these details do not add to the presentation of the object; they are themselves

consubstantial. Indeed, it is the distinctive feature of the visual monstration to present the 'particular' rather than the 'general.' (123)

In this regard the novel will always be able to do that which any of the visual mediums, including comics, cannot – that is, to allow readers to utilize the full potential of their imaginations by envisioning within their unique minds the invented worlds and characters described by the author.

The visual component of comics also opens up distinct possibilities for the inclusion of visual allusions. Similar to the literary allusion, a visual allusion is a method for bringing directly to a text the meaning and implications of another established work. In comics, visual allusions can be made to a practically unlimited number of subjects, ranging from references to films, the fine arts, other comics, popular culture, real life figures, and so on. These linkages to existing centers of signification allow for limitless possibilities in adaptation – so much so that it would be difficult to make any sort of generalization concerning their application. Therefore, the instances of allusion presented in the case-study below will merely serve as examples of the ways in which this technique can potentially be utilized.

### Narrative Point of View

When making the transition from literary text to comic book, the issue of third-person narration is rarely a problem. Just as the film lens can serve as the objective observer, so too can the comics page present the third-person point of view. The difficulty of shifting the first-person perspective into the comics medium, on the other hand, at times presents difficulty and has thus garnered some attention. According to Ferstl,

generally speaking, a text narrated in the first person is inevitably drawn toward a third person point of view in the adaptation, even if parts from the original are prominently featured in the comic. This is due to the almost unavoidable graphic depiction of protagonists referred to as ‘I,’ which widens the gap between reader and narrator and make identification and the classical perception through the eyes of the first person narrator more difficult. (62)

Vanderbeke concurs with Ferstl's view, arguing that, “it is almost impossible not to show the main character in adaptations of *Moby Dick* and *David Copperfield* and thus to depart from the narrative point of view in the novel” (110). Ferstl and Vanderbeke both contend that to include a visual representation of a first-person narrator within a comic book adaptation is fatal to maintaining a first-person perspective – as if a reader of a novel imagines herself as looking out through the eyes of the narrator and fails to incorporate some kind of “narrator-image” into her mental visualization. Film adaptation has attempted to meet the difficulty of first-person narration with techniques such as voice over and subjective camera shots. However, these approaches, because of the temporal

and linear nature of film, cannot be sustained for long or used excessively without testing the patience of the audience or completely demolishing the fourth wall.

It seems that comics are much more capable of representing first-person narration. Indeed, comic book artists and writers have developed a number of methods for maintaining the first-person perspective that Ferstl and Vanderbeke see as challenged by the visual components of the medium. As a hybrid, when seemingly limited by one of its components, comics can simply turn to another of its facets to compensate. While what I have described as “reverse-ekphrasis” images comprise much of the narrative process, they cannot always serve to relate some of the more subjective elements of the first-person narrative, such as the narrator’s internal or introspective thoughts and emotions. Therefore, most solutions to the first-person dilemma revolve around utilization of the textual elements of the medium.

In opposition to the word balloon, which is linked temporally/physically to a given scene, the caption or word box can be severed from the restrictions of time and thus be employed in rendering a first-person perspective. The word box can provide immediate narration and information, insight into the musings of the narrator, subjective commentary, and reminiscences. In this sense, the word box can be viewed as being related to the voice-over technique found in film. However, unlike the voiceover – which can be used only sparingly – the word box can be exploited throughout the entirety of a text. Furthermore, the use of word boxes and captions can serve to negate whether or not the first-person narrator is even physically depicted in the work. While comics can and do employ the subjective view shot found in film, this technique seems at times to hamper the notion of first-person narration rather than direct it.



As we will see in our case-study below, when a first-person narrative is adapted to comics and the narrating figure is rarely or never seen represented as an image, it is possible to reach something of a compromise between the subjective shot and full-blown third-person perspective. It is easily assumed that the narration found in word boxes and captions of a first-person comic book are derived from that singular point of view; not as easy to accept, however, is the idea that *so are the illustrations*. While not strictly depicting a “character’s-eye” view of the narrative events, the way in which any given scene is illustrated can be said to be reflective of the narrator’s perspective in regard to that scene. For example, when one scene rendered using bright water colors is followed by a scene rendered using black and white minimalism, an immediate contrast in the mood and attitude of the first-person narrator can be related to the reader.

### Characterization

Comic book adaptation offers the prospect of conducting in-depth studies of one or more characters. Particularly in a text in which a significant number of characters co-exist, such as in a Dickens or Brontë novel, so-called “minor” characters can easily be overlooked and underappreciated. By dedicating even a single page or recurring pagenal elements to a specific character, the comic book artist can flesh out these characters and reintroduce them to the reader – whether it be in some new light that allows for new understanding of the character, or a more straightforward representation that merely reminds the reader of the role the character plays in the larger narrative.

Comic books are of course able to replicate rather straightforwardly the techniques of characterization utilized by literature – character appearance, thought, action, manner of speech, etc. Because of their ability to pull from the more abstract and fantastic elements of visual art comic books are especially capable of directly rendering the inner mind, psyche, and subconscious of characters in a particularly effective way. As Vanderbeke astutely notes, comic books,

like literature, [are] in no position to compete with photography or film in the representation of external reality, but [are] particularly well suited to present individual subjective experience that includes distortions and internal deviations. Especially the internal construction of non-standard focalizers, such as madmen, drug addicts, religious fanatics, and children in the magical stage of their psychological development. (112)

As Venderbeke accurately argues, this is especially useful when portraying characters whose minds deviate from the “norm” of those characters around them and enter into

those realms of psychological condition and development that have garnered particular attention in various schools of visual art. Utilizing the techniques and capabilities of such artistic movements as abstraction, surrealism, and neo-expressionism, the comic book artist is able to visually replicate or mirror not simply the concrete thoughts of a character but the more abstract cognitive and affective processes we describe as the mind of the character.

### Themes, Motifs, and Symbols by means of Framing, Braiding, and the Double Page

I have grouped together the narrative components of theme, motifs, and symbolism for two reasons. Firstly, all three of these components are linked together by the patterned and repetitious manner in which they appear in a literary text, popping up again and again to remind the reader of their significance. Secondly, these conventions are related in an intimate and complementary system; recurring motifs and symbols are used to emphasize and highlight thematic elements while themes in turn often draw attention to single symbols or subtle motifs. Most important to this discussion, however, is the fact that comics book adapters often utilize similar techniques and methods to represent these elements in the comics medium. Again, while it will not be possible to explicate and touch on all of these conventions, the dominant techniques of braiding, the double-page, and framing will all be discussed and generalizations about how they relate these literary components will be put forth. It is also important to note that these comics techniques can be utilized to relate other literary expressions such as characterization, tone, etc., and are being singled out in relation to theme, motif, and symbolism solely because of their recurring use by comic book adapters to such ends.

When scanning or glancing over a comics page, one may discern that certain iconographic shapes, patterns, devices, etc, are repeated across panels. This visual alliteration can range anywhere from an easily transparent network to a more complex and subtle tessellation of images. What I have given the label of visual alliteration, Groensteen conceptualizes under the term “braiding.” Braiding, a technique used to connect or associate a grouping of panels, concerns the utilization of a series as opposed to a sequence. Groensteen differentiates between a series and a sequence by

providing the following definitions: “A *series* is a succession of continuous or discontinuous images linked by a system of iconic, plastic or semantic correspondences,” while “a *sequence* is a succession of images where the syntagmic linking is determined by the narrative project” (146). In other words, while a sequence of images being read together conveys a relatively clear narrative project, a series consists of images that appear dissociated and do not immediately move the narrative of the text forward, at least temporally.

To a series can be applied the technique of braiding, which Groensteen defines by explaining that

braiding deploys itself simultaneously in two dimensions, requiring them to collaborate with each other: synchronically, that of the co-presence of panels on the surface of the same page; and diachronically, that of the reading, which recognizes in each new term of a series a recollection or an echo of an anterior term. (147)

In this definition the similarity between braiding and the utilization of recurring motifs and symbols is instantly recognizable. Braiding can be used to enhance the reader’s perception and understanding of these recurring components. For example, an adapter of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* could use the already recognizable symbol/motif of the red letter “A” within a series of panels by utilizing the physical letter itself as the iconic point of linkage. This not only would heighten the reader’s recognition of Hawthorne’s recurring motif, but could potential assist in illuminating the larger themes of adultery, community, shame, and religion.

Another common technique used for analyzing and developing themes is that of framing, or the placing of a frame around a panel (the basic unit of a comics page). As Groensteen explains, “Every portion of the image isolated by a frame reaches, by the same fact, the status of a complete utterance. To dedicate a frame to an element is the same as testifying that this element constitutes a specific contribution, however slim, to the story in which it participates” (56). The frame serves the purpose of creating a rhythm for the reader – it catches the reader’s gaze and holds it; “When he ‘meets’ a frame, the reader is taken to presuppose that, within the perimeter that has been drawn, there is a content to be deciphered. The frame is always an invitation to stop and to scrutinize” (54). This “invitation to stop” on an element signifies a “specific contribution” to the narrative and can be easily, yet complexly utilized to highlight and evaluate any given theme or motif of the story. Furthermore, the design of the frame itself can inform the reader as to how a certain panel or series of panels should be read. As Groensteen has accurately observed,

the frame of the comics panel can connote or index the image that it encodes. It can go as far as to instruct the reader on what must be read, or even as far as to supply a reading protocol, or even an interpretation of the panel. Indeed, if the frame and the image are often unified by a relationship of transparency or redundancy, the frame can also connote a certain form of irony or denial. (49-50)

Another often utilized technique for highlighting or explicating thematic elements is what Groensteen labels as the “double-page.” As he explains, “pages situated opposite each other are dependent on a natural solidarity, and predisposed to speak to each other.

The layout, the color, and the effects of interweaving are the principle parameters implicated in this conception of ‘doubling’” (35). This communication between two parallel pages often takes the form of a mirroring – with each page constituting a similar layout with echoes of physical as well as signifying elements linking the two. These pages can also set up unique dichotomies and ironies that serve to explicate or make clear thematic elements by means of contrast and opposition.

## Part Two

At a deeper level, [Sienkiewicz's adaptation] may be considered even a critical reading or interpretation of *Moby-Dick*, perhaps the first piece of criticism done mainly in pictures. (M. Thomas Inge, 11-12)

### Melville and Sienkiewicz

The decision to employ an adaptation of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* as the case-study for this project was done so deliberately and with precise intent. As one of the great American novels, *Moby-Dick* has maintained a lofty position in both academia and popular culture and is thus (on varying levels) familiar and accessible to a wide audience. Regardless of the fact that M. Thomas Inge has referred to the work as “the great unread American novel,” many of the key narrative elements of *Moby-Dick* are nevertheless familiar even to the “uninitiated” (3). Although it may sound clumsily empirical, *Moby-Dick* was also selected because of its sheer length – the original text is comprised of a lengthy collection of epigraphs, 135 chapters, and an epilogue – as well as its intense intricate complexity. Demonstrating that the comics medium, a medium that is of much “shorter” length, can tackle such a large text and come away victorious on a number of fronts will speak volumes for the capabilities of the medium.

*Moby-Dick*, arguably more than any American novel, has garnered significant attention from visual artists, who have produced works in veins ranging from illustrated editions of the text to postmodern sculpture and painting interpretations. In regards to



these illustrated editions, Elizabeth A. Schultz, in her textbook sized and indispensable study, *Unpainted to the Last: Moby-Dick and Twentieth-Century American Art*, notes,

Since 1896, seventy diverse illustrated editions of *Moby-Dick* have been printed in English, the most recent in 1994; included in this figure are eight comic book versions with variant reprint editions, four editions with photographs from movie versions of the novel, and five editions with maps, diagrams, historical engravings, and photographs. Illustrated editions of the novel have also appeared in thirty-one languages, with as many as 132 artists having translated it into pictures. (3-4)

The breadth of illustrated versions of *Moby-Dick*, made evident by these numbers, indicates a continued popular interest in visually interacting with the text. An in-depth exploration of one of these visual depictions may provide answers regarding what it is about Melville's work that lends itself not only to visualization but also to representation on such a large and varied scale. Furthermore, and as we will see below, the tradition of visualizing *Moby-Dick* has at times taken on something of an informal correspondence and exchange of techniques and approaches, with subsequent artists drawing inspiration and support from those who preceded them.

Melville himself was particularly fascinated and even enamored with the visual arts. According to Schultz, "Contemporary critics and biographers indicate that throughout his life Melville appreciated diverse art forms. He lived with art at home; he visited artists' studios and art museums abroad, he discussed art with his friends, and he delivered a public lecture on Roman statuary" (7), and as Douglas Robillard notes, "To a degree probably unusual for his time and situation, [Melville] read art criticism, art

history, and studies of works of individual artists and schools of art” (x).<sup>11</sup> This knowledge of and interest in visual art had a profound impact on Melville's approach to writing. Particularly in *Moby-Dick*, one can read in his descriptions and narrative a strong tone and tincture of ekphrasis, find a multitude of references to both popular and obscure artworks, and sense the presence of a mind saturated by the visual.

For instance, Robillard has noted that in *Moby-Dick* “[Melville] sometimes depicts people as if they themselves were works of art, comparing them to statues or paintings or even architectural masterpieces. He defines them as characters by associating them with the artworks they encounter in the various events of their lives” (4). While Melville was able to make allusions to the visual arts in order to define and elucidate his characters through his words, the comics artists is capable of fully realizing the potential of this approach by literally portraying characters *as art* and firmly representing those artworks they encounter. Although the general abilities of visual representation in comics has been addressed, it is important to note that the capabilities of this representation become especially clear and pertinent when dealing with an artistically inclined writer such as Melville.

Comparable to the selection of *Moby-Dick* as originating text, the decision to analyze artist Bill Sienkiewicz's 1990 *Classics Illustrated* adaptation is based on a number of considerations. Sienkiewicz, along with fellow artist Dave McKean, introduced and popularized the possibility of deviating from the traditional cartooning of comics and bringing to the medium the various techniques, styles, movements, and media

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<sup>11</sup> Two brilliant studies exploring Melville's relationship to visual art have been produced – *Savage Eye: Melville and the Visual Arts*, ed. Christopher Sten, and *Melville and the Visual Arts: Ionian Form, Venetian Tint*, by Douglas Robillard.

utilized and developed in the wider realm of fine and visual art. Sienkiewicz, however, chose not only to appropriate these concepts but also to implement them simultaneously – at times employing a single style on a page and at others weaving together any number of movements and physical media, giving rise to his unique and instantly recognizable collage style.

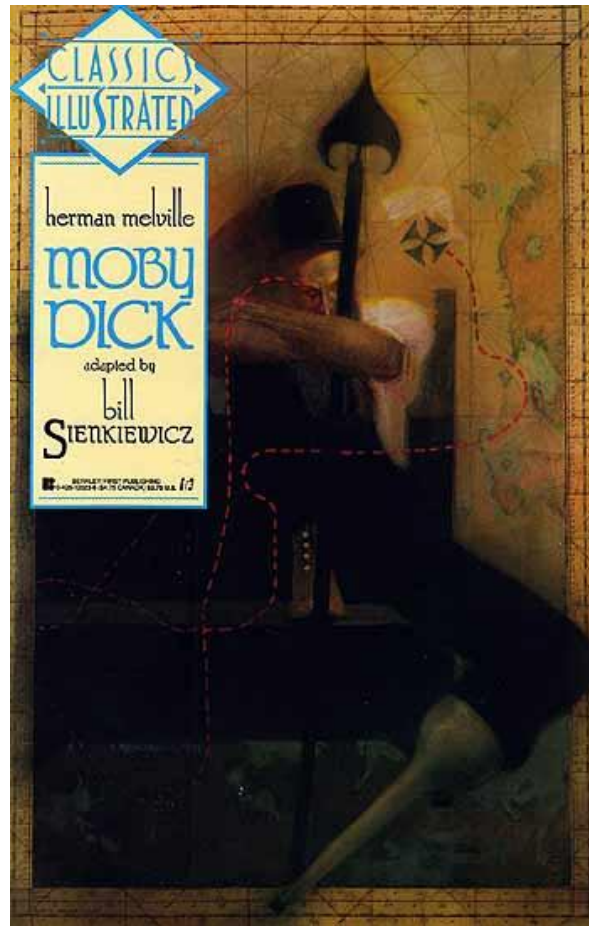
Sienkiewicz's collage approach is especially well suited for adapting *Moby-Dick*. Written in a variety of genres and modes, ranging from sea-adventure to scientific treatise and philosophical debate to epic poem, Melville's great text is something of a literary collage or mixed media project in its own right. Sheila Post-Lauria identifies *Moby-Dick* as belonging to the mixed form narrative tradition, "a minor but frequently noted type of novel popular with different audiences of [Melville's] day" (303). Among the strengths of this approach is the ability to "simultaneously present different perceptions of experience" (303). And as Post-Lauria notes as well, "[d]ifferent literary genres come to represent alternating perspectives of reality" (309). As we will witness, Sienkiewicz's mixed media style can be viewed as an attempt to reproduce or emulate these effects. Indeed, it can be argued that the various media and methods that Sienkiewicz employs serve to inform the reader as to Ishamel's shifting and developing views of reality.

Finally, Sienkiewicz's adaptation was also chosen because it has received, for better or for worse, a relatively ample amount of attention from scholars in comparison to other comic book adaptations of literary works. Whether praising its ingenuity or criticizing its lack of fidelity to Melville's original, all of these studies tend to agree that Sienkiewicz's adaptation is by far one of the most complex and proficient comic book adaptations that has ever been produced. My hope, therefore, is that by working with

such an esteemed and progressive text, this study's arguments will be made especially intelligible and accessible. With these thoughts of our two artists in mind, let us now forge ahead in to Sienkiewicz's adaptation.

### The Case Study

From Sienkiewicz's cover spring various foreshadowings concerning the themes, characters, and tone that his reading of *Moby-Dick* will articulate within its covers. Ahab is depicted in a sitting position, seemingly in deep meditation, with his intact leg drawn up to his chest and his arms hugging a dark and shadowy harpoon. This image of Ahab is imposed on and framed by a collage of nautical maps and charts and appears to be rendered by a combination of oil paints and chalks/pastels. This choice of media and coloration allows for a dark and brooding effect that mirrors, at times, Melville's own narrative style, and immediately alerts the reader to the adaptation's primary tonal tinge. Despite the collage method of the cover, Ahab is seamlessly integrated into the map and chart background by means of the red dashed line that traces the journey of the *Pequod* towards its ultimate goal – symbolized by the vivid black cross and the less conspicuous and faint, almost ghostly, figure of the white whale itself.



Of primary symbolic significance are the departure point and source of the dashed line, Ahab's own eye, as well as the enigmatic and ethereal portrayal of the white whale, Moby Dick. The symbolic significance of Sienkiewicz's focus on Ahab's eye(s) will be demonstrated in detail below, so let us now focus on the significance of the black cross and the white whale – both of which appear in immediate proximity to one another, almost to the point of overlapping, as well as directly over the shoulder of the scheming Ahab, suggesting their weight in his mind. According to Schultz, the cover

depicts a brooding Ahab over whom is superimposed a surrealistic map; a dotted red line darts forth from his eye, following a crooked path toward an X over which the white whale leaps, simultaneously revealing the

*Pequod's* path, its captain's obsession, and the possible imperialistic implications of his endeavor. (85)

Because she does not elaborate on this point, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how the X or the whale signify imperialism – if anything, it could possibly signify mercantile or economic implications, given the nature of the whaling voyage. Nevertheless, Schultz accurately notes the complexity and multiple undertones of the image. The marking of the map with two “X’s” denotes the difficulty of (one of) the missions of the *Pequod* – the conflict between Ahab's mad passion and the practicality of attaining such an ambitious endgame. In this sense, the bold and clear black cross represents the strength and certainty of Ahab's motivation and desire. However, paired with this precise marker is the foggy, ethereal, and almost overlooked white whale. The immaterial nature of the whale, especially in contrast with the cross, simultaneously signifies the mysterious and illusory nature of the white whale, the seeming impossibility of his capture, and the godlike or metaphysical status he obtains. Thus, without even opening the adaptation, a close analysis of the cover allows the reader to immediately become (re)acquainted with both the most basic premise of the narrative and its subsequent complexity and multifaceted nature.

Opening to the title page of Sienkiewicz's text, the reader is met with the artist's first visual allusion(s). Dominated by an underwater view of an impossibly large Moby-Dick, moments away from breaching the surface beneath a miniscule *Pequod*, the title page, much like the cover, introduces one of the larger themes of the text. The ill-proportioned representation of Moby-Dick's size in comparison to the *Pequod* is frequently seen in artistic rendering of the whale, particularly in the work of Rockwell

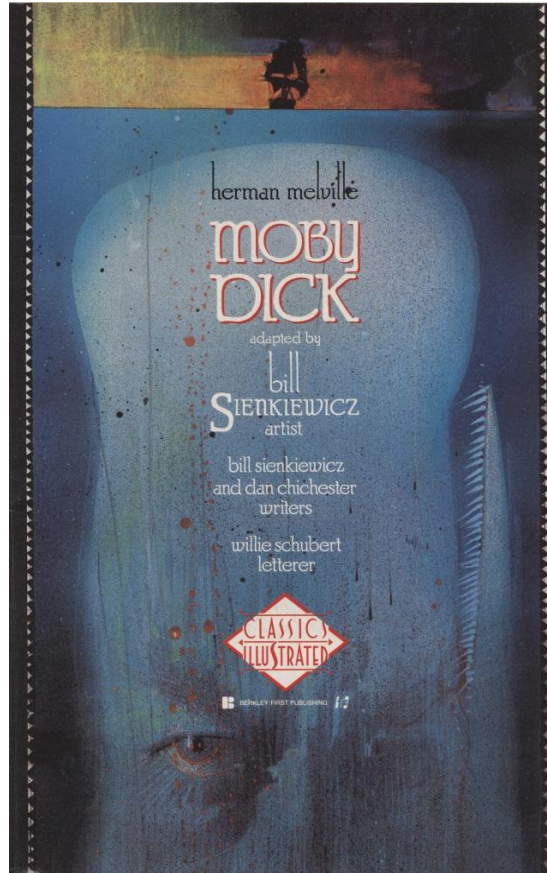
Kent, one of the earliest illustrators of the novel. According to Schultz, “occasionally, an artist has replicated earlier illustrators’ or artists’ responses to the novel or alluded to them in his works, thereby elevating the visual interpretation” (11). By tapping in to Kent’s and other’s work Sienkiewicz is able to appropriate the meaning and interpretation previously established by them.<sup>12</sup>

Returning to the title page, we can also observe that the image shares similarities with the iconic poster from the film *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1976), which also features a large, highly aggressive aquatic antagonist. This allusion in particular does a lot of work for Sienkiewicz’s introduction. Even readers who are not acquainted with the original story of *Moby-Dick* are most likely familiar with the pop-culture phenomenon that is *Jaws*. Borrowing from this pop-consciousness, Sienkiewicz not only familiarizes the uninitiated with the bearing of Melville’s novel but also hints at the possible influence of *Moby-Dick* on the film and the development of the novel into the archetypal stock of the collective creative (un)conscious.

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<sup>12</sup> Among these artists are Robert Shore, Rockwell Kent, Claus Hoie, Edward Laning, and Robert Del Tredici. For further discussion of these artists and their work see Schultz’s text.





Also engaging about this initial image of Moby-Dick is the human eye that Sienkiewicz has placed in the white whale's head. As Schultz notes, “Moby Dick's face, strangely human, is turned toward the viewer. With a human eye and a massive brow...this face stares out at the reader from the first page” (88). Schultz also suggests that the face of Moby Dick may resemble that of Ahab, presumably because of the presence of a human eye and the red paint that bubbles from and encompasses it – a motif that will be explored below. While this red-eye motif does link Moby-Dick to Ahab, there is a much more subtle and evasive “image within an image” to be found concealed within this rendering of Moby Dick.<sup>13</sup> This whale-as-human, or human-as-whale notion,

<sup>13</sup> Through the application of faint shadowing and shrewd coloring, Sienkiewicz has carefully hidden a vertical human visage within the body of the whale surrounding its eye. Looking directly to the right of the human eye, one will notice delicate shading that resembles the bridge and midsection of a human nose.

depending on one's interpretation, is a phenomenon to which Sienkiewicz pays particular attention, one I will discuss in detail below.

The order to "Call me Ishmael" is one of the most famous opening lines in all of literature – immediately revealing both the first-person perspective of the narrative and the candid relationship the narrator intends to develop with his audience. Sienkiewicz of course maintains this opening line and utilizes the first page of his text to assert his intent to conserve the first-person perspective of Melville's original. In an attempt to account for the narrative perspective of Sienkiewicz's adaptation, Vanderbeke provides the following analysis of the first page of the comic (reproduced in whole because of its debatable nature);

In the first panel of his adaptation, Bill Sienkiewicz presents a man with white hair looking distractedly upon a street, probably Nantucket, where a younger man has just arrived. The first line is not in a speech balloon, but in a banner, and so the times of experience are clearly divorced, and it even remains questionable whether the elderly man is, actually, Ishmael. And as this figure is clearly an external element in the panel, the time and location of narration remain uncertain. Moreover, the graphic novel only contains four panels in which Ishmael can be clearly identified, one of which the last one with Ishmael floating on Queequeg's coffin. We therefore recognize a subjective perspective or, in later passages, the possibility of some kind of disembodied narrator to be present even in situations where Ishmael cannot. (110)

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Slightly further to the right is a slight, blue crescent that serves as a second eye. Further subtle shading just above both eyes suggests the presence of eyebrows. The image that results from the combination of these elements is the upper half of a human face, staring intently and directly at the reader.

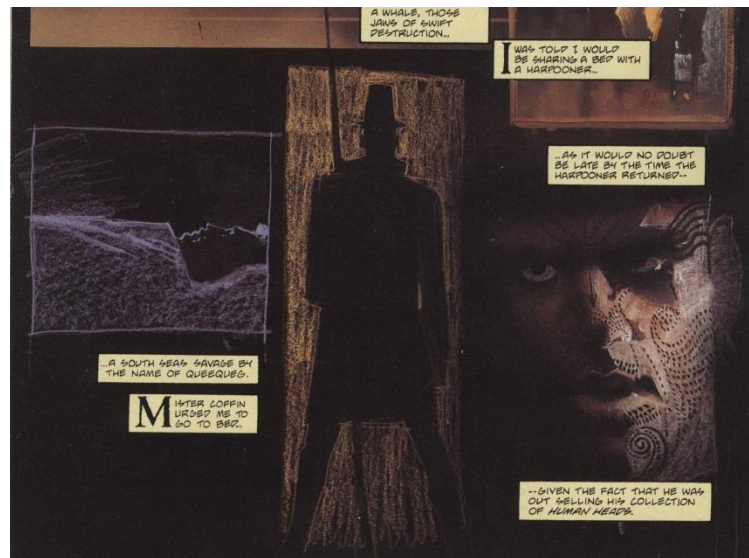
The “man with white hair” is undoubtedly our narrator, Ishmael, as evidenced by his prominent position on the page and the extremely close proximity of the caption, “Call me Ishmael.” Indeed, in all of his few appearances Ishmael is distinguished by this white hair. Furthermore, the “younger man” (how Vanderbeke is able to judge the age of a shadow is uncertain) is also certainly Ishmael, bringing up the end of a funeral procession. There are a number of ways in which to interpret Sienkiewicz's decision to portray Ishmael with white hair, a signifier of old age, in terms of narrative perspective. It could be supposed – because in fact Ishmael is telling the tale after an unknowable amount of time – that our now aged narrator is picturing his contemporary self taking part in his previous adventures, a notion that serves to reinforce rather than dismiss the idea of first-person narration. Also, because no real hints are given to his age apart from a brief history of his employment, Ishmael’s true age at the time of the voyage is uncertain.



Vanderbeke also suggests that the appearance of a narrative line in a “banner” as opposed to a word balloon signifies something of a gap in time and actual experience and thus in some way discredits first-person perspective. Considering that *all* of the text in Sienkiewicz’s adaptation appears in captions, even direct statements made by characters that are obviously temporally linked with the respective image, this claim falls somewhat short. Furthermore, there *is* a temporal difference between the events of the narrative and when they are being told. In fact, the stripping away of word balloons is one of the important ways in which Sienkiewicz endeavors to maintain the first-person temperament of the narrative. When a character speaks in the text, he is doing so *through* Ishmael. All of the caption boxes in the comic are Ishmael’s own words, whereas the words of his fellow adventurers appear in quotation marks, just as in the original. Ishmael himself

only appears in physical form when he, as narrator, is contemplating his own specific role in the narrative.

The famous bedroom scene where a nervous and unsure Ishmael first meets his soon to be bosom friend Queequeg incorporates elements of Melville's original description as well as an overlooked visual allusion to the tattoo design most often associated with not only Queequeg but also the text of *Moby-Dick*. Two side-by-side panels, the first horizontal and depicting a recumbent Ishmael, the second vertical and showing the shadowing outline of Queequeg in the doorway, are colored in such a way as to recall Melville's description of Queequeg's skin, "It was of a dark purplish, yellow color" (33), especially when one considers that Queequeg's shadowed visage makes up the third panel of this sequence.



The early portion of Sienkiewicz's adaptation focuses intently on Ishmael and Queequeg's relationship, and as a result, spotlights the issue of a Christian/pagan dichotomy. The pair's first joint excursion into the streets of New Bedford is presented by Sienkiewicz as a series of three panels. As previously illustrated, a series differs from

a sequence in that a series does not necessarily operate within the forward moving temporal mode as does the sequence. Instead of being associated by a narrative progression a series is linked by a single iconic element. Briefly, the first panel depicts Ishmael and Queequeg standing together upon the harbor boardwalk, the second, Queequeg's upraised harpoon upon which is speared a raw steak, and the third the steeple of what can assume to be Father Maple's church.

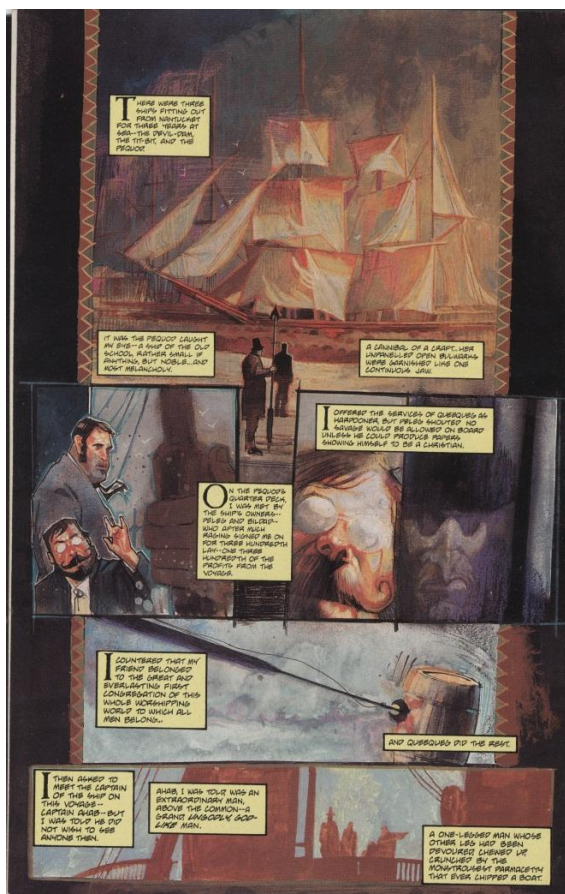
The images depicted in these panels do not form a coherent narrative sequence, yet all three are connected as a series through the repeated "iconic[...]correspondence" of the vertical, skyward-reaching, spiked images of the harpoon and the steeple. The harpooned steak and the church steeple represent, respectively, Queequeg's pagan religion and the Christian religion of Ishmael. Though viewed as conflicting ideologies by Melville's readers, and possibly by contemporary readers, Melville himself endeavors early on in his novel to stress religious tolerance and even communion. This series of three panels subtly yet solidly reflects this notion when read as a whole; the upward pointing icon that connects them visually also connects them thematically, suggesting a bond and linkage between not only Ishmael and Queequeg but also their respective religions.



Sienkiewicz dedicates an entire page to Ishmael and Queequeg's selection of the Pequod as their vessel, their meeting with her primary owners – the Quakers Peleg and Bildad – and their subsequent hiring on for the voyage. This page is notable for two reasons: it contains the first visualization of Ahab, and it presents a clear example of how the image/text relationship is used in both characterization and thematic emphasis. The image of Ahab will be analyzed in conjunction with discussion of Sienkiewicz's characterization of the captain, so let us now turn to the instance of image/text signification.

Found near the bottom of this page is a wide yet squat horizontal panel, depicting a whaling harpoon that has just been flung from the reader's left towards a large barrel on the reader's right and becomes embedded in a barrel. This panel is a perfect example of how the comics medium synthesizes elements from visual and textual representation to create a newly structured hybrid, capable of signifying in a way that neither of its components could in isolation. To demonstrate, remove the captions from the panel and the image appears out of place and without meaning in the sequence of images; remove

the image from the panel, and Ishmael's captioned narration, left alone, leaves the reader wondering what it was that Queequeg did. It is only in concert that the elements of the panel are able to completely signify.



At first not wanting to hire Queequeg because of his cannibal and pagan nature, Queequeg's quick demonstration of his ability – striking a small spot of oily water with his harpoon – has the two owners clamoring to sign him. While the scene is amusing in Melville's original text, Sienkiewicz's adaptation of it is particularly effective. Sienkiewicz's choice of a more stable image of the barrel – as opposed to the spot of oily water that appears in Melville's text – allows him to make a rather subtle yet effective rhetorical flourish. The reader's gaze is led from left to right by the word boxes, first settling on Ishmael's tongue-in-cheek statement about unity, then following the length of



the spear to the second word box. This second box, the sharp and amusing statement, “and Queequeg did the rest,” is made all the more piercing by its immediate proximity to the head of Queequeg’s spear, which is biting into the barrel.

By introducing the Christian/pagan dichotomy that so fascinated Melville early on in his novel through the earlier short yet effective application of braiding, Sienkiewicz is able to present readers with a more complex and innovative reading of this binary. Utilizing the double page immediately following the braiding, Sienkiewicz not only endeavors to invert this dichotomy in a manner consistent with Melville's own attempts but in a way also does away with the opposition entirely and instead illuminates Ishmael's notion of “the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world; we all belong to that; only some of us cherish some queer crotchets no ways touching the grand belief; in THAT we all join hands” (84). Each of the pages that constitute this particular double page mirrors the other in panel layout, each comprising two vertical panels, the left being wider than the right in both cases. Thereby, without even analyzing the images or text encompassed by the parallel frames, the reader is immediately notified of the intended link between the two and the suggestion that the pages be read in conjunction.



Inge says of one of these two pages, “In one brilliant juxtaposition, Father Mapple’s sermon is portrayed alongside Ishmael’s thoughts on Queequeg’s pagan god, the one in effect commenting on the other but locating the basic roots of all religions in obedience to God and compassion for mankind” (11). Inge’s observation concerning “the basic roots of all religions” is indeed seen echoed in Melville’s original text, where Ishmael contemplates whether he should pray to Queequeg’s idol:

I was a good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church. How then could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood? But what is worship? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth—pagans and all included—can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible! But what is worship?—to do the will of God—

THAT is worship. And what is the will of God?—to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me—THAT is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him in his; ergo, I must turn idolator. (53)

The use of two full, corresponding pages in order to achieve a sort of juxtaposition or reflective effect is, when an artist has the space to dedicate, a highly effective if not somewhat subtle rhetorical device. Melville often uses Ishmael as the vessel of his critique of Christianity, who can be found throughout the text making such short and witty observations as: “Better sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian” (36) and “I’ll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy” (56).

Each of the two pages involved in the doubling is divided into two vertical panels, each of which corresponds to a panel on the opposite page, as well as informing its counterpart within its own page. The left page, as Inge has observed, does indeed comment upon the common ground held by Christianity and Queequeg’s paganism. However, when considered in relation to the right page it takes on greater meaning. The dark, somber, and formal atmosphere of Father Maple’s congregation and sermon is sharply contrasted with the bright, tropical, and lively scene of Queequeg’s homeland. These contrasting panels serve to make the pagan religion of Queequeg appear more appealing and freeing than Christianity. The images are reinforced by the text within Queequeg’s panel, which has Ishmael explaining that Queequeg had intended to learn

about “advanced religion” from the Christians but has instead become “fearful that Christians had unfitted him from ascending the pure and undefiled throne of thirty pagan kings before him” (5).

The left page panel depicting Ishmael kneeling before Queequeg’s idol Yojo is linked to the right page panel that portrays the aftermath of Queequeg’s rescue of a white Christian sailor who had fallen overboard. In both panels Queequeg is shown as standing in a position of superiority and authority to both Ishmael and the rescued sailor. Ishmael is assuming a position of prostration before a Christian cross and the pagan idol, while the sailor mirrors this image by placing himself on all fours, attempting to recover from his near death experience. The corresponding description of Queequeg’s rescue of the sailor in Melville’s original work serves to reinforce and support Sienkiewicz’s depiction of the pagan “superiority” to Christianity:

[Queequeg] only asked for water—fresh water—something to wipe the brine off; that done, he put on dry clothes, lighted his pipe, and leaning against the bulwarks, and mildly eyeing those around him, seemed to be saying to himself—“It’s a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians.” (63)

As previously stated, adaptation is an opportunity for adapters to magnify and analyze those aspects of a literary text they find most intriguing and subsequently wish to explore and expound. For Sienkiewicz, it is undeniable which facet of Melville’s tome most caught his imagination; his adaptation is a romantic and intense character study of Ahab taken to such an extent that (echoing the sentiments expressed by Inge in the epigraph to this section) it could potentially rival any purely textual examination of the

captain. More page space, narration, and development is bestowed upon Ahab than any other character in the narrative; time and time again Sienkiewicz reaches into his comics toolbox and retrieves a new technique for developing this captivating figure.<sup>14</sup>

Sienkiewicz first offers an image of Ahab in a scene in which Ahab does not physically appear. Paired together side-by-side in a divided frame are the visages of a sun drenched Peleg and an ashy gray Ahab. This is the first physical depiction of Ahab in the text and, though he is mentioned by name further down on the page, his representation in this shared panel may at first seem out of place. Indeed, Ishmael does not describe seeing Ahab in his narrative until the Pequod is well underway. Turning to the text connected to this frame, Sienkiewicz's handy work is made clear. Peleg's contention that "no savage would be allowed on board unless he could produce papers showing himself to be a Christian," while meant to pertain to Queequeg, is instead applied to Ahab by the image/text association. In this manner, the irony of Peleg's statement is made clear to the reader in a way that it is not in Melville's original. Highlighting both the limited knowledge that Peleg and Bildad have of Ahab's growing madness and Sienkiewicz's decision to focus on the demonic reading of Ahab, this small panel serves to introduce one of the major themes of Sienkiewicz's adaptation.

Following this foreboding introduction, Ahab is subsequently portrayed either in large and detailed portraits or within the major reoccurring motif of Sienkiewicz's text, which Schultz describes as

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<sup>14</sup> In terms of Sienkiewicz's ability to relate Melville's engaging and distinct characters, Michael Berthold is characteristically negative, stating that Sienkiewicz's "characters are enigmatic, half-present, crepuscular. Sienkiewicz is less interested in character than in visage; the comic's actors are a series of penumbral talking heads" (6).

a psychological presence[,] with shards of his face, like slivers of a broken mirror, thrust between pictures. These shards, which appear at random, often several times on a page and with increasing size and frequency, become more blurred and streaked with red. They seem evidence of Ahab's psychic control over events in the narrative as well as of the intensification of his crazed and destructive will. (84)

While Schultz contends that the "shards" appear "at random," a closer examination of their frequency and location will prove this not to be the case. The insets, which Schultz designates as shards, could be said to begin with the single paired panel previously discussed. This panel, despite its dark and shadowy nature, is nevertheless relatively complete and intact, and thus represents the disturbed yet somewhat stable nature of Ahab's psyche at the beginning of the journey. As the comic progresses these panels become more frequent and slowly begin to degrade and become streaked with red, signifying Ahab's descent into madness. It is important to note that these disintegrating panels do not represent Ahab's literal, physical presence, but his growing madness, desire, and obsession.



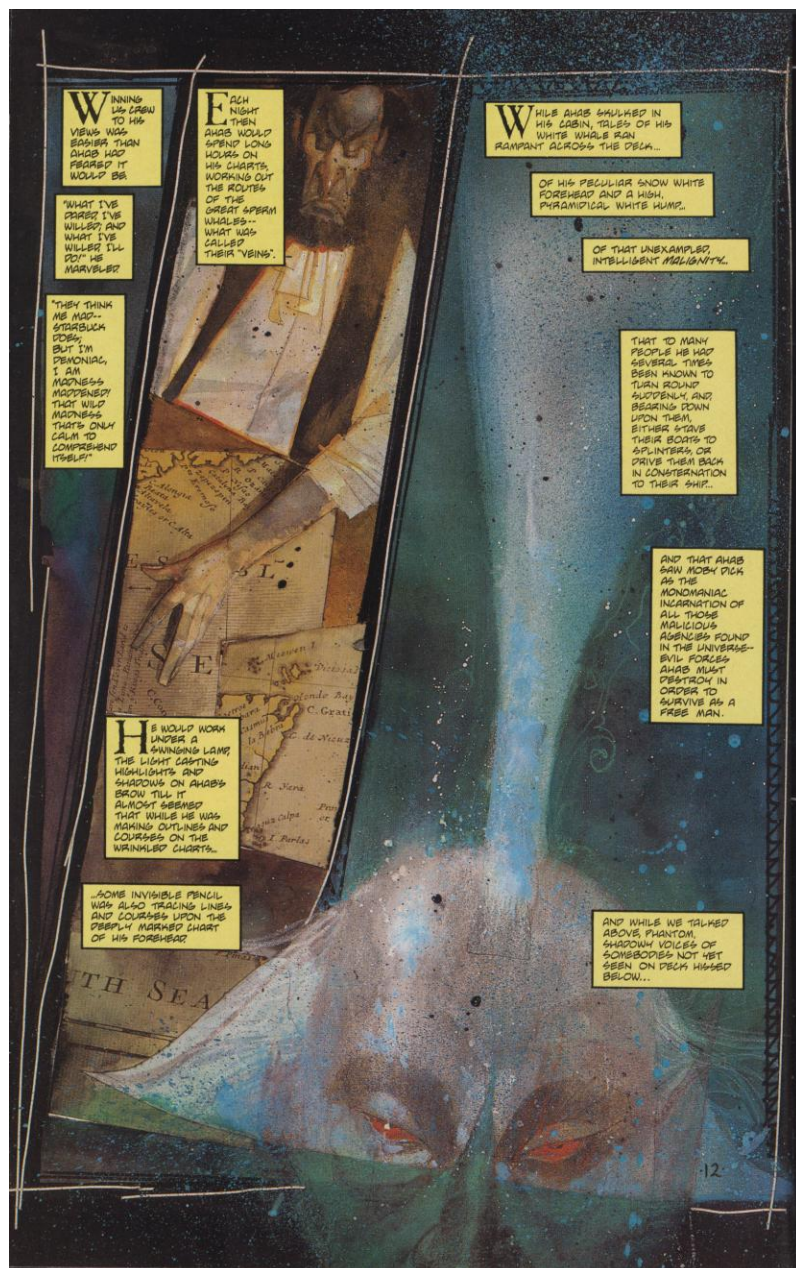
The first major appearance of the Ahab-insets occurs within a double-page that begins quietly with Ahab's anxious pacing of the deck and ends violently with the captain and the crew's frenzied cry of “God hurt us all, if we do not hunt Moby-Dick to his death” (11). This rather abrupt shift in tone, which constitutes a number of chapters in Melville’s original, is made less abrasive by the presence of the Ahab shards. In fact, their absence from the page would rather hamper the narrative progression. Beginning in the upper right hand corner of the left page and then proceeding in a rightward moving and lowering diagonal line towards the lower right of the right page, these descending and incrementally darkening and reddening images of Ahab serve to remind the reader that even when he is not immediately seen, Ahab is always driving the narrative.

Sienkiewicz's most powerful, surreal, and visually suggestive presentation of Ahab occurs on a page in which he pairs together the calm and calculating side of the

captain's mind with the more obsessive and maddened craving of his psyche. The two slightly slanted vertical panels that comprise the page serve to present the entirety of Ahab's actions while clearly delineating the method and the madness into their two seemingly paradoxical components. The left panel presents Ahab isolated in his cabin, carefully and mathematically studying his maps, tracing the known routes of sperm whales and the corresponding sightings of Moby-Dick himself.

In contrast to the rational and even logical method Ahab implements in his hunt for Moby-Dick is the mad impulse and motivation that drives him to take such calculating measures. Rising, partially submerged, and breaking the lower frame of its panel is a ghostly pale, red-eyed, disembodied head – a powerful mist of sea-water spouting from the top of its head. As with many of Sienkiewicz's images, there are a number of ways to interpret this rendering. For instance, the first question that must be addressed regards exactly whose head this image represents. Is it Ahab, as suggested by the red-eye motif, or is it Moby-Dick personified, as hinted by Ishmael's corresponding narration of Moby-Dick's “peculiar snow white forehead and high pyramidical white hump...of that unexpampled intelligent malignity” (12)? Both readings are possible, and one either enhances understanding of Melville's original themes or prods the reader to develop previously neglected connections and linkages.





Less concrete and more speculative is the notion that the spouting head presents something of an Ahab/Moby-Dick hybrid, a complex reading of the relationship between the captain and the whale. Melville scholars have at times tentatively attempted to define Ahab's connection to the white whale and vice versa as a literal "becoming," both Ahab taking on whale traits and Moby-Dick demonstrating human characteristics. This is supported by Ahab's apparent becoming part whale through the acquisition of his whale-

bone prosthetic leg as well as the more grisly fact that Ahab's own leg becomes a part of Moby Dick through ingestion and digestion. However, Sienkiewicz's illustration seems to take these traditionally conceptualized notions of becoming a step further. The image of the Ahab-whale is not meant to depict an actual or literal occurrence of becoming. Instead, its surrealist and abstract appearance suggests a less literal interpretation.

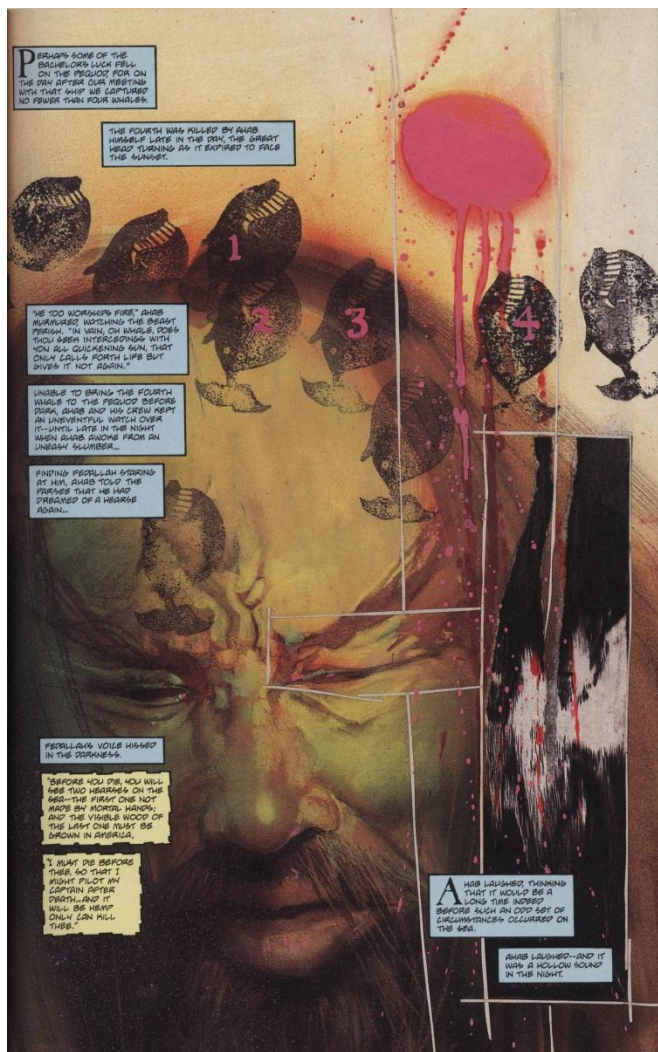
Theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have given the relationship between Ahab and the white whale particular attention in regards to their own theory of "becoming." According to the pair, "*Moby-Dick* in its entirety is one of the greatest masterpieces of becoming; Captain Ahab has an irresistible becoming-whale, but one that bypasses the pack or the school, operating directly through a monstrous alliance with the Unique, the Leviathan, Moby-Dick" (243). Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of becoming is not a literal/physical becoming or transformation. As they phrase it:

That is what Captain Ahab says to his first mate: I have no personal history with Moby Dick, no revenge to take, any more than I have a myth to play out; but I do have a becoming! Moby Dick is neither an individual nor a genus; he is the borderline, and I have to strike him to get at the pack as a whole, to reach the pack as a whole and pass beyond it. (245)

As the pair explains, becoming is neither an instance of "imitating" or "identifying with" nor is it "an objective analogy between assemblages" (258). Instead, the becoming of Ahab reveals that he is attempting to kill Moby Dick in order to overcome *all* whales and thus free himself of them and his madness.

While Ishmael endeavors to stress its importance in his narrative, and a number of scholars have dedicated detailed studies to its relevance, Ahab's romantic and mad pursuit

of the white whale tends to vastly overshadow the true economic and mercantile purpose of the Pequod's voyage. For an artist obsessed with Ahab's mania, Sienkiewicz is to be commended for including his own commentary on this aspect of the narrative. In true collage style, Sienkiewicz covers sections of panels and pages with stampings of two distinctive whale designs – very likely from rubber stamps Sienkiewicz crafted himself. The first of these designs appear in a thin, vertical panel in which a tiny Pequod and fellow whaling ship, the Town-Ho, are seen taking part in a gam. Sienkiewicz populates the large expanse of ocean beneath the two minuscule ships with a multitude of reddish-pink whale stamps. Whales, in the eyes of whalers, are first and foremost a resource or commodity to be exploited – a notion highlighted by Sienkiewicz's use of stamps, a media that is used to reproduce a single image or text in mass quantities. Furthermore, stamps are closely associated with the world of business and economics, adding to the mercantile endeavor of whaling.



**P**ERHAPS SOME OF THE BARKLORDS WERE FELT ON THE PRODUCE FOR ON THE DAY AFTER OUR MEETING WITH THAT SHIP WE CAPTURED NO FEWER THAN FOUR WHALES.

THE FOURTH WAS KILLED BY A WHALE HANGING LATE IN THE DAY, THE GREAT HEAD TURNING AS IT ENDEAVOR TO FEEL THE SKY.

HE TOO WORMS' FIRE' AWHAS MURDERED WITHIN THE BEAST PERISH. "IN VIEW ON WHOLE, POSS YOU BEEN INTERESTED WITH HOW ALL QUACKENBUND SUN, THAT ONLY LEAVE FOUR LIFE BUT NEVER IT NOT AGAIN."

UNABLE TO BRING THE FOURTH WHALE TO THE PRODUCE BEFORE DARK, AWHAS AND HIS CREW LEFT AN UNWARRANTED WATCH OVER IT--UNTIL LATE IN THE NIGHT WHEN AWHAS AWOKEN FROM AN UNREST SLEEPER.

FINDING FROBILAM STARED AT HIM, AWHAS TOLD THE PHOENIX THAT HE HAD OBSERVED OF A HEAVY ADAM.

FROBILAM YOU WISHED IN THE DARKNESS.

"BEFORE YOU DIE, YOU WILL SEE TWO WHALES ON THE SEA--THE FIRST ONE NOT MADE BY HUMAN HANDS, AND THE SECOND ONE MUST BE BROKEN IN DARKNESS."

"I WANT DIE BEFORE THERE IS THAT I MIGHT PILOT MY CAPTAIN AFTER DARK--AND IT WILL BE HEAVY ONLY CAN ILL THIS."

**A**WHAS LAUGHED, THINKING THAT IT WOULD BE A LONG TIME BEFORE SUCH AN ODD SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES OCCURRED ON THE SEA.

AWHAS LAUGHED--AND IT WAS A HOUSHAW SOUND IN THE NIGHT.



**I**T WAS AWHAS'S CUSTOM NOT TO JOIN IN A GAM WITH ANY SHIP THAT DID NOT BOAST KNOWLEDGE OF MOBY DICK, BUT WITH THE WHALER TOWN-HO THE CAPTAIN RELENTED AND THERE WAS A REGULAR GAM.

NEVER TOLD TO CAPTAIN AWHAS WAS THE SECRET TALE OF THE TOWN-HO--HOW THE WHITE WHALE HAD APPEARED LIKE SOME SORT OF DIVINE JUSTICE INSTEAD OF HIS EXPECTED DARK EVIL, RIGHTING A WRONG BY DEVOURING A MULTITONNED WHALE.

This notion is enhanced in the second appearance of the stamps. In this instance, the stamps, appearing over the visage of a prophesying Fedallah, are actually numbered, reflecting the monetary and numeric value of the creatures. In these ways Sienkiewicz brings the reader's attention to the original intent of the Pequod's journey and its contrast with Ahab's own mission – in a way echoing the warning that Starbuck gives to Ahab:

I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? it will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market. (139)

Read carefully in a contemporary and ecologically conscious manner, Sienkiewicz's use of a multitude of stamps seems to suggest an endless abundance of whales, reflective of the common conception of Melville's day that whales provided an endless supply of blubber and oil, and in turn offers a critique of this idea. The multitude of identical and interchangeable whales also serves to further highlight the singularity of Moby-Dick. Moby-Dick is unique, he is different from all other whales, who next to him are nothing but a resource to be exploited.

## Conclusion

Given the limited length of this study, there were a number of topics and issues that I was not able to address at greater length. While references were made to a few comic book adaptations other than the case study, a longer and more detailed study would benefit from the inclusion of a wider range of original sources. This would allow for inclusion of the best possible examples of specific techniques and would allow for the tracing of patterns and recurring methods/approaches. Nevertheless, this study has attempted to lay the groundwork for a potentially exciting and progressive new school not only for analyzing and appreciating the complex relationship between works of literature and the comics medium, but also for approaching the study of comics on the medium's own terms.

Thus far when scholars unfamiliar with this system have attempted to examine specific works of comic book adaptation they have done so in a manner comparable to “judging a book by its cover,” drawing their conclusions and inferences from surface impressions without bothering to delve deeper. They have applied the reading and analytical approach they utilize when writing about literature, but as we have seen, even the very practice of reading a comic book differs so much from reading a novel that to begin any analysis on such terms is immediately detrimental and misleading. Recognition of the unique signifying capabilities of the medium and the resultant application of relevant theory – both practices of which are largely absent from contemporary comics adaptation study – has allowed not only for the rectification of previously erroneous methods of analysis but also for the introduction of new modes of investigation and understanding. A better understanding of *how* the system of comics

establishes and maintains meanings ultimately leads to a greater appreciation of *what* is being signified.

There are a number of potential pedagogical ramifications of this study. The first step in incorporating the notions of this study into the teaching of literature and/or comic books is for educators to accept the ability of comic books to act as critical readings of canonical works of literature instead of merely entertaining segues or introduction. If this idea became commonly accepted comic books could be utilized in classrooms in a method similar to scholarly articles and readings – encouraging students to engage texts in novel and enjoyable ways. Not only would this allow for comic books to become more integrated into English and literature curricula, on whatever level, but this “foot in the door” will potentially allow for the development of Comics Studies programs in English departments similar to the way Film Studies has long been associated with English programs. Similarly, comic books, especially in light of the multitude of film adaptations of comic books that have been produced in the past ten to fifteen years, could also be potentially integrated into Film Studies courses. The two mediums share similar capabilities and often face the same challenges of signification and narrative.

As scholars in the field such as Vanderbeke and Ferstl continue to examine the literature/comic book relationship and note its significance to the study of both mediums, new opportunities for academic progression will become available. This new approach promotes acknowledgement of the differences between literature and comic books – an important step in assisting the recognition of comic books as their own distinct medium. As has often been noted throughout this study, film and literature, two of the major narrative mediums, can do things that comics cannot while comics can do things that

neither of the two mediums can. In regards to narratology, a study such as this can help not only to understand and appreciate the comic book medium but also to shed light on these other media, as well as on the study of narrative as a whole.



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