Fiend on Film: Edwin S. Porter's Adaptation of *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend*

Matthew T. Jones

Temple University

Fiend on Film: Edwin S. Porter's Adaptation of *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend*

Matthew T. Jones

Introduction

The proliferation of comic art forms (books, strips, graphic novels) that have been adapted to film is a widespread phenomenon. Modern examples range from the mainstream: *Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, The Incredible Hulk, Spawn, Cat Woman, Tank Girl, Barb Wire, X-Men, The Fantastic Four, The Punisher, Daredevil, Elektra, Constantine*, to the relatively obscure: *Ghost World* and *American Splendor*. In fact, the potential for compatibility between comics and film has led some film directors to actively cross-fertilize between media. Kevin Smith, for example, has used the same characters in both his films and his comics. More interesting, however, is Federico Fellini's collaboration with the famous Italian comic artist, Milo Manara on *Trip to Tulum* (1990), which was initially supposed to be a film, but ended up as a graphic novel bearing a subtitle that reads "from a script for a film idea" (Manara and Fellini, 1990: Cover).

Because the specific practice of adapting comic art to film is both interesting in and of itself, and a necessary component to understanding the process by which cultural products are transformed by media structure (not to mention how individuals make sense of that structure) this is deemed a worthy pursuit that stands to have implications for increased understanding of both cognition and culture.

Due to the paucity of scholarly writing on the subject (Daueber, 2002), I begin with a historical overview of the very first film adaptations of comic art which were made between 1898 and 1922, during the era of the silent film. Following this is a discussion

and synthesis of various theories that have been applied to adaptations of literary texts so that these may be commandeered for the study of comic adaptations. Subsequently a content analysis is reported, comparing the themes and devices in Edwin S. Porter's *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (1906) to the themes and devices in "Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend" (first published in the New York *Evening* Telegram in 1905), the Winsor McCay comic strip on which it is based.

<div align="center">Historical Overview</div>

Among the earliest of the early comic strip adaptations was "Ally Sloper," a British caricature created by Charles Henry Ross in 1867 and eventually adapted to film under the same title in 1898 by George Albert Smith. Markstein (2002a) suggests that "he may also have been the first comics character adapted into film" (Ally Sloper). This, however, was only the beginning in a set of episodes starring Ally released in 1921. Director Geoffrey H. Malins and writer R. Byron Webber kept Ally going with additions such as *Ally Sloper Goes Bathing* (1921), *Ally Sloper Goes Yachting* (1921), *Ally Sloper Runs a Review* (1921) with co-writer Arthur Rooke, *Ally Sloper's Haunted House* (1921), *Ally Sloper's Loan Office* (1921), and *Ally Sloper's Teetotal Island* (1921) (http://www.imdb.com/find?q=Ally%20Sloper;s=all).

The "Happy Hooligan" strip, created by Frederick Opper in 1900 and later adapted to film by J. Stuart Blackton (1900 and beyond) under the Edison Manufacturing Company, is likely the first American venture into the realm of comic art to film adaptation. The earliest of these films was titled *Happy Hooligan* (1900), but, as in the case of Ally Sloper, these were soon followed with a host of others, including *Happy Hooligan April-Fooled* (1901), *Happy Hooligan Surprised* (1901), *Happy Hooligan, Nothing But Fun* (1902),

Happy Hooligan Turns Burglar (1902), *Happy Hooligan and his Airship* (1902), *Happy Hooligan Earns his Dinner* (1903), *Happy Hooligan in a Trap* (1903), *Happy Hooligan Interferes* (1903) directed by G. W. Bitzer, and *Happy Hooligan's Interrupted Lunch* (1903) (http://www.imdb.com/find?q=happy%20hooligan;s=all).

In addition to these live-action versions, though, various animation studios produced Happy Hooligan cartoons from 1916 through 1921 (Markstein, 2002b). Some titles included *Happy Hooligan, Double-Cross Nurse* (1917), *Happy Hooligan in the Zoo* (1917), *Happy Hooligan at the Circus* (1917), and *Happy Hooligan in Oil* (1920) all directed by Gregory La Cava and written by Louis De Lorme.

Even earlier than the cartoon adaptations of *Happy Hooligan*, though, are those of *Mutt and Jeff* which began in 1913 under the direction of Al Christie. Created by Bud Fisher in 1907 and sustained by Al Smith between the years of 1932 and 1980, *Mutt and Jeff* is one of the longest running comic strips in history. Animated adaptations of the strip faired nearly as well with over 300 episodes released since 1913.

Other examples of animated adaptations of comics include *Krazy Kat* (through the 1930s and 1960s) and *Little Lulu* (beginning in 1943). George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, making appearances as early as 1910, but fully established in 1913, was adapted to cartoon form and produced by Charles Mintz in the 1930s and later directed by Gene Deitch and others in the 1960s (http://www.toonopedia.com/krazy.htm). Marjorie Henderson Buell's *Little Lulu* premiered in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1935 and went on to be adapted in 1943, by Isadore Sparber, and in 1995 by Greg Bailey, Louis Piche, and Nick Rijgersberg (http://www.toonopedia.com/lulu.htm).

In France, adaptations of comic art to both animated and live-action films were being produced as well. The character Monsieur Vieuxbois, created by Rodolphe Topffer in 1839, became the animated adaptation *Histoire de Monsieur Vieux-bois* (1922), released in a three part series by R. Lortac (pseudonym for artist Robert Colliard) (Loficier and Loficier, 2004). In live-action, France also produced *Les Pieds Nickelés* (The Nickel-Footed Gang) (1917), directed by Emile Cohl and based on the comic artwork of Louis Forton (1915) (Loficier and Loficier, 2004).

Perhaps the most well-known and critically durable example that emerged during this period of early comic art to film adaptation is the film and comic strip that are the subjects of analysis in this paper: Edwin S. Porter's *A Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* based on Winsor McCay's comic strip "Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend."

Adaptation Theory

Although there has been some work published that deals with the adaptation of comic art to film (see Brooker, 1999; Christiansen, 2000; Daeuber, 2002; Krevolin, 2003; Lacassin, 1992), the preponderance of theoretical investigation into adaptation has regarded primarily literary texts to film (see Andrew, 2000; Bazin, 2000; Bluestone, 1957; Boyum, 1985; Cartmell, 1999; Elliot, 2003; Hark, 1999; Marcus, 1977; McDougal, 1985; McFarlane, 1996; Stam, 2000, 2005a, 2005b; Wells, 1999; Whelehan, 1999).

As Daeuber (2002) observes, a concise and succinct definition of textual adaptation is hard to come by and, in most cases, authors simply assume that the reader knows what is being referred to by the term "adaptation." Despite this, however, there are general trends among some of the loose descriptions posited for adaptation. In the most general sense, adaptation has been defined as "a transition, a conversion, from one

medium to another" (Seger, 1992: 2). Other theorists have been more specific in terms of identifying film as the adaptive medium (see Andrew, 1984; Jenkins, 1997; Wells, 1999), although novels, television programs, and comics have all obviously adapted content that originated in other media.

More specific than noting the conversion or translation from another medium to film, however, is the assertion that in the process of adaptation, some form of *transformation* occurs through interpretation (McDougal, 1985; Stam, 2000; 2005b). Guided by Genette's (1982) concept of "hypertextuality" (in which the adaptive text, called the "hypertext," transforms, modifies, or extends the source text, or "hypotext"), Stam explains that "[f]ilmic adaptations…are hypertexts derived from preexisting hypotexts that have been transformed by operations of selection, amplification, concretization, and actualization" (2000: 66; 2005b: 5).

Deeper than a brief summative definition, however, are a number of wide-ranging conceptualizations that seek to capture the essential nature of adaptation. Six specific concepts of adaptation are discussed by Elliot (2003), but most of these have also been articulated in various ways by other theorists, providing considerable validation to some of her concepts which include: "the psychic concept," "the ventriloquist concept," "the genetic concept," "the de(re)composing concept," "the incarnational concept," and "the trumping concept." For reasons described below, the ventriloquist and incarnational concepts have been combined, and, in addition, I have done away completely with the trumping concept because it makes a value judgment between media forms that is not relevant to the current project.

With the psychic concept, which might be considered the most foundational, it is suggested that there is something essential about the source text that exists outside its original form. Although this is sometimes referred to as "the spirit" of the text (see Seger, 1992; Sinyard, 1986), there is nothing ghostly or paranormal about it. All that is being asserted is that the characters, settings, and situations that are read about take on a life of their own in the mind of the reader, which, if that reader were to create an adaptation, would serve as the essence or spirit to be reproduced in the adaptation.

Extending the psychic concept in a certain regard, the genetic concept delves into the mechanics of precisely how essential elements from the source text are brought into the film adaptation. Here Elliot refers to a deep structure of narrative that is capable of transferring from one medium to another. Based on a nearly identical point, adaptation theorist Brian McFarlane (1996) draws from the narratology of Roland Barthes (1977) to construct a scheme that distinguishes between those elements of an essential text which can be transferred outright, and those which require the more complex and nuanced approach inherent to adaptation that are found in the manipulation of the enunciative apparatus of the adaptive medium.

According to McFarlane's model, there is a distinction to be made between "distributional functions" and "integrational functions," to the extent that the former are concerned with the action and events of the narrative and the latter with the psychological aspects of the narrative, including atmosphere and character state of mind. Divided further, distributional functions include "cardinal functions" that comprise major events or turning points in the narrative and "catalysers," which are supportive actions that facilitate the flow of the narrative. According to the argument, these are directly

transferable from medium to medium because they represent external events. In opposition, integrational functions, for the most part, cannot be directly transferred and must undergo adaptation because they represent internal states. Information such as character names, however, fall under the subcategory of "informants" and are considered transferable, because they are external verbal expressions.

Put differently, distributional functions (i.e. the set of events that compose the narrative) are what constitute the common ground that makes adaptation possible. McFarlane (1996) and Ray (2000) each make this point explicitly. Citing Chatman (1980) and Scholes (1982), Ray (2000: 39) comments that "as a means of organizing information, narrative is not specific to any one medium."

To most effectively discuss the next concept of adaptation, which I will term *embodiment*, it is necessary to collapse several similar concepts. Although Elliot (2003) does make a clear distinction between the "ventriloquist" and the "incarnational" concepts in the sense that ventriloqual refers to the novel's signifiers being attached to the film's signifieds, while the incarnational refers to the film's signifiers transcending the novel's signifiers, for the purposes of this study, they are best considered together because the transition from comic art to film is more of a filling-in or fleshing-out of the iconic sign than a transcendence of that sign.

Thus, for the present purposes, the incarnational, the ventriloqual, and the "Pygmalion" (Stam, 2005a: 24) concepts all represent the embodiment of the source text through the corporeal presence of the film's characters, objects, locations, and actions. Specifically, filmic embodiment of the source text functions to bring it to life for the audience in such a way that their symbolic imaginings of characters and situations are

brought to life onscreen through detail and motion (Boyum, 1985; Burgess, 1975; Cartmell, 1999).

Finally, what Elliot (2003: 157) labels the "de(re)composing" concept of adaptation is useful in terms of investigating reception and cognition. Under this model, the adaptation becomes "a composite of textual and filmic signs merging in audience consciousness together with other cultural narratives and often leads to confusion as to which is novel and which is film." Boyum (1985) and Stam (2005a; 2005b) similarly discuss the entangling of textual and filmic signifiers to the extent that recall of the narrative by readers/viewers can no longer be ascribed specifically to its filmic or textual source. Boyum goes so far as to describe a "fusion" that occurs when the scene from the film augments our memory of the book in such a way that one is not distinguishable from the other. Film, in particular, has a strong tendency to retrospectively impose itself on the text because of the comparatively rich detail present in the rendering of scenes. It is conceivable that this imposition occurs to the extent that one cannot revisit the source text without reconstructing the experience of the film in the process (Elliot, 2003; Stam 2005b).

<div align="center">Structural Differences</div>

Thus far, we have discussed the various ways that adaptations can be conceptualized. However, the actual transforming of the product from print to screen is not a simple or uniform process, because the structural and perceptual aspects of the divergent media (whether they be novel and film or *graphic* novel and film) are not directly compatible.

Several noteworthy distinctions emerge from observations regarding structural differences between text and film. Right from the start, it is plain that film is a primarily visual medium while text is linguistic (Bluestone, 1957) and that this key distinction is the reason for a number of automatic structural differences between them (Stam, 2005a).

First, is that film is structured in such a way as to provide an abundance of detail to the spectator through subtle variations of light, inflections of color, and nuances of physical expression that are available through photorealistic rendering. This capacity lends itself well to maintaining a focus on specific details as opposed to larger concepts and themes that might be more central to the novel. Several theorists have observed, along these lines, that film requires a "unity of action, not just of theme" (McCaffrey, 1967: 14), and that, for the most part, action takes precedence over theme (Jenkins, 1997; Seger, 1992). It might be suggested, based on this, that film's structural demand for action is what makes it an ideal medium for adaptation, since, as previously discussed, the distributional (i.e. action) functions are most easily transferred from one medium to another.

A second crucial structural difference between film and text has to do with the difference between a linear experience and a simultaneous experience. Whereas text must unfold word by word through a single channel that gradually constructs scenarios through description, film is able to simultaneously reveal the immediate appearance of characters, settings, objects, and actions while at the same time presenting dialogue, sound effects, and intoning music (Bluestone, 1957; Marcus, 1977; Mendilow, 1952; Seger, 1992). One important byproduct of film's capacity to weave various tracks together into a collage of real-time sensory experience is the ability to inflict dissonance

through channels that present contradictory information (Stam, 2000; 2005a). By making

use of multimodal sensory information in this way, film can offer an immediate

experience that is rich in visual, aural, and linguistic complexity. This differs drastically

from the sequential and hierarchical structures of text, which, although nuanced and

complex, are far less immediate because they are not simultaneous.

A final difference in structure that warrants mentioning is the way in which the

medium is engaged. When reading a novel, for instance, the reader holds the book in

hand, turns pages, perhaps marks sections, and starts/stops reading at will. In this sense,

the reader has far more control over the text than the viewer does over the screen

(Marcus, 1977; Richardson, 1971). Although DVDs and certain digital cable services

have placed a greater degree of agency in the hands of the viewer in terms of the capacity

to make closer inspection of particular segments of the film, it is still, by and large, a

product to be experienced in an uninterrupted fashion under conditions where the flow of

its barrage of simultaneous experiences is not interrupted. Therefore, due to the higher

level of agency, one might consider the act of reading as inherently more private and

intimate compared to the relatively public and spectacular act of viewing a film. What

follows will suggest that this is due to the fact that film spectatorship is largely an

external perceptual experience while reading is an internal conceptual experience.

Perceptual Differences

Because of the differences between how text and film are structured, there are

accompanying perceptual differences between them which affect the way that they are

ultimately received. Probably the most basic issue here is that it is debatable as to

whether text is "perceived" at all. Bluestone (1957) and McFarlane (1996) each make

specific references to the perceptual quality of film as opposed to the conceptual quality

of text. Similarly, Stam (2005a: 6) observes that "[w]hile novels are absorbed through

the mind's eye during reading, films directly engage the various senses." What is

common to these observations is that the film is experienced directly and viscerally

through physical response, whereas text requires an additional cognitive step. Even

though, in a literal sense, text is consumed visually, what is consumed must be

subsequently constructed in the mind of the reader.

Because of this distinction between direct processing and cognitive processing

(Boyum, 1985; Marcus, 1977), there is an additional shift between media with regard to

subjectivity. Because the novel tells the reader, it communicates through the relay of

subjective experience. Conversely, because the film shows the viewer, it presents an

objective experience (Seger, 1992). This difference in perceptual bias gives readers of

text one sort of direct experience from the material that viewers of film do not receive:

human thought. Bluestone (1957) and Seger (1992) make the point very clear that film

cannot give access to a character's feelings and psychology the same way that text can.

For example, "stream-of-consciousness" thought can be used by writers in such a way as

to give the reader the impression of experiencing the writer's thoughts directly

(McDougal, 1985). Because thoughts tend to exist as abstractions, the reading of a flow

of thoughts as they connect spontaneously to one another comes very close to the

experience of the thoughts as they initially occurred to the writer.

These perceptual biases, however, do not mean that text and film are

incommensurate. They do, though, move in opposite directions in terms of cognition and

perception. Film tends to be inductive in the sense that the spectator moves from specific

imagery to general thoughts and feelings: "from the givenness of a world to the meaning of a story cut out of that world" (Andrew, 2000: 32). What strikes the spectator first is always the sensual perception which is only later contextualized and processed through cognition.   Conversely, text has a tendency to work deductively, coming to life through the reader's cognitive construction of specific imagery based on the general codes of language. Viewed this way, film begins with the percept and gives way to the concept, whereas text begins with the concept and gives way to the percept (Boyum, 1985; Levinson, 1960; Linden, 1970; Marcus, 1977; Stam, 2005a).

Narrative Differences

The differing structural and perceptual qualities of text versus film give way to different sets of options with regard to the transmission of narrative. Point of view and time, two crucial elements of narrative can be used quite differently in each case.

There are three types of duration that occur across literature and film: duration of the reading/viewing, duration of the narrator's telling, and duration of the narrative events (Bluestone, 1957). In terms of the duration of the reading, the elapsing of time in text is under the control of the reader, since it is the reader who determines the pace and interval of reading (Bluestone, 1957; McDougal, 1985; Seger, 1992). This makes the experience of time abstract since the reader must piece it together and imagine a continuous flow that is uninterrupted by the temporal irregularities of the reading process. Conversely, film, bound as it is in the present tense (Bluestone, 1957; Seger, 1992; Whelehan, 1999), grants not only a sense of immediacy to the experience of watching, but allows the creator to exercise a considerable degree of control over the spectator's sense of time through

manipulations in frame rate (McDougal, 1985), but also soundtrack, focal length, and camera movement.

In the end, the adaptor must be able to manipulate the elasticity of film duration in order to move from the realm of imaginary/abstract time used in text to the ongoing conveyor-belt of real time used in film.

Like time, point of view is an important aspect of narrative; perhaps even more because it determines the avenue through which the reader or viewer is accessing the story. While there are a variety of ways that point of view can be expressed in both film and text (e.g. omniscient, third person, first person, etc.), film has the capacity, if not the necessity, to present more than one. On one level, there is the psychological point of view that belongs to the narrator, and on the other, the literal point of view that the camera provides (Marcus, 1977; Stam, 2005a). It tends to be, however, the point of view of the camera that takes priority, since it permits the spectator to observe first-hand and rely to some limited extent upon his/her own perceptions.

Perceptual Similarities

Although there are some undeniable structural differences that exist between text and film that give way to clear perceptual and narrative differences, each form is ultimately processed cognitively (Bluestone, 1957; Boyum, 1985). As mentioned earlier, this occurs as the first step for text (moving from cognition to perception), and as the second step for film (moving from perception to cognition). Discussing the capacity for both low-immersion (e.g. text) and high-immersion (e.g. film) media to allow an experience of being in a mediated environment, Schubert (2002: 3) explains that "[t]he content presented in the media is only the raw source of the mental model building."

Along these same lines, Boyum notes that "just as we have to make sense of the little black marks that make up letters and words, we also have to organize the lines, the shapes, the colors, and the optical patterns that make up any cinematic image" (1985: 24). Here specifically, comic art's relationship to both literature and film becomes clear as it appears to mark a half-way point between the divergent media, hybridizing conventions and making especially suitable material for adaptation to film.

Comic Art and Adaptation

Thus far, the major points of adaptation studies have been covered in terms of literature and film because the overwhelming quantity of adaptation studies deals with literature to film adaptation. And while the previous discussion is applicable in many ways to the issues that confront film adaptation of comic art, there are also some differences owing to comics' special status as a hybrid medium composed of words and drawings that are (in many cases) contained in panels.

Although accurately described as a half-way point between literature and film, comics are much more than this, since they have the plasticity to achieve narrative tasks that are both literary and filmic. More specifically, comics share with film the ability to maintain an external "pro-filmic" point of view through drawings that use perspective and capture a visual scene that is complete with depth of field and aspect ratio. In addition, comics are similar to film in their emphasis on distributional functions (i.e. action) as a means of telling the story. In a chapter instructing students how best to adapt comics to film, Krevolin (2003) writes, "Compared to other genres, comics may be the most similar to screenplays" (156), and that "[t]he comic book industry [like the film industry] is one that relies on a clear and creative presentation of action" (159). On the

most basic level, however, they "both employ sequentially arranged elements for narrative purposes" (Coleman, 1985: 90).

However, comics have a great deal in common with literature in the sense that they are read and, thus, have direct access to the reader's thoughts. Carrier (2000: 73) observes the importance of the word balloon, noting that it, "by externalizing thoughts, makes visible the inner world of represented figures, externalizing their inner lives, making them transparent to readers."

In spite of (or perhaps because of) comics' plasticity, there are some fundamental ways in which they differ from film, making adaptation an exercise in translating one set of conventions into another.

One of the primary concerns in adapting comics to film is their frequent lack of photorealism. Even though some comic art has made use of computer imaging, airbrush techniques, and even digital photography to achieve a realistic look, most use iconic caricatures to convey reality and emotion simultaneously (Eisner, 1985; McCloud, 1993). Following from this point, Christiansen (2000: 114) suggests that film's "invisible control of enunciation maintains the audience's impression that it is actually entering the diegesis: so here, at the enunciative level, the kinship with the graphic art [comics] is lost." But, while it is true that when we look at an expressionistic caricature, we are not convinced of its reality in the same way as we are when we look at film, the caricature conveys the gravity of an emotional tone through exaggeration that would be almost impossible in the strictly photorealistic format. Thus, to capture the often exaggerated and expressionistic characteristics of comic art on film, resort to some modified

enunciative strategy may be in order. Specific examples might include computer animation in films such as *The Mask* (1994) and *The Incredible Hulk* (2003).

A second critical, and perhaps even more obvious, way in which comic art differs from film is found in the way that motion is depicted. While it is clear that no true motion exists in the "motion picture" (only a series of static frames being run through a projector) it is also clear that film comes much closer to empirically capturing the illusion of motion than do comics.

In comic art, motion can be suggested two ways: through the use of what has been termed a "motion line" or "zip ribbon" (a line drawn on the page to represent a rapid movement) (McCloud, 1993: 111), or through incremental changes that occur between successive drawings. McCloud (1993) identifies six types of transitions, of which two ("moment-to-moment" and "action-to-action") are capable of suggesting motion in such a way.

Methodology

What strategies does Edwin S. Porter's film, *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* employ to adapt Winsor McCay's comic strip, "Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend?" Because this question is necessarily vague due to its exploratory nature, I will focus also on two subordinate questions: 1. Which narrative devices, if any, are carried through from the comic strip to the film? 2. How is the depiction of movement translated from the comic strip to the film?

Edwin S. Porter's *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* is used as an early example of adaptation because there are likely to be considerably fewer confounding influences on this work that would detract from the filmmaker's primary goal of setting the comic into

motion on the screen. For one thing, the film was produced by the Edison Company at a time when relatively few tools were at the filmmaker's disposal, and innovation within the confines of silent and grainy black and white images made for a sense of goal-oriented clarity of purpose: to produce a film version of a popular comic strip. In addition, as a new art form, the cinema of this era had not yet fully developed the practice of subtle intertextual reference, leaving the focus very much on the goal of telling the story at hand. Finally, the film was produced only a year after the comic began printing, providing a consistent cultural context. This is particularly important because, as adaptation theorists have noted, cultural context has a powerful influence on the way works are adapted (Brooker, 1999; McFarlane, 1996; Stam, 2000, 2005a).

Early on in adaptation studies, Bluestone (1957: ix) established a very particular procedure for analysis, which others have adopted and expanded in various forms:

> The method calls for viewing the film with a shooting-script at hand. During the viewing, notations of any final changes in the editing were entered on the script. After the script had become an accurate account of the movie's final print, it was then superimposed on the novel. Passages in the book which in no way appear on the screen were deleted; descriptive scenes which show up in the film were bracketed. Dialogue which was carried over into the film was underlined, added characters noted in the margin, and so on.

However, one of the principal challenges to adapting comic art (especially comic strips) to the screen is that they tend to be episodic and often do not contain a single, cohesive story that unites all of the individual episodes (Daeuber, 2002; Krevolin, 2003). In fact, it is stated explicitly in the publisher's note section of the "Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend"

reprint (1973: vii) that, "each *Fiend* sequence is self-contained." So, although there is

one strip in particular (number 11) that provides the basis for the film, the purpose here is

not to isolate this single strip, but to understand the larger context of how narrative

devices and movement from the strip emerge in the film. To ascertain this, a dual

procedure was used: one to account for the use of narrative devices and another to

account for movement.

Devices

First, a coding sheet was developed and refined to count instances of the use of

particular narrative devices. Deriving from neoformalism, a device is any individual

aspect or structure that plays a role in the narrative (Jenkins, 1997; Thompson, 1988).

Fortunately, several devices already seem to be informally mentioned in the publisher's

note, including: dreaming, flying, the distortion of sizes, the distortion of shapes, and

emphasis on death and dismemberment, among others (Publisher's Note, 1973).

Informed by this, I then proceeded with two thorough readings of the material in search

of additional devices or lack of evidence to support devices mentioned in the publisher's

note. Upon completion, a coding sheet was made to tally up the number and type of

devices used in each strip. The coding sheet included the following: "dreaming" (when

the events in the strip occurred within the context of a dream), "animation of objects" (for

instances when inanimate objects are made to come to life), "size distortion" (when

people or objects grow or are depicted to be extremely large or extremely small) "shape

distortion" (when people or objects are or become distorted in shape), "dismemberment"

(when people or objects are disassembled), and, finally, "flying or falling" (when people

or objects are depicted as flying or falling through the air). Two coders then performed

the coding, and discrepancies in coding were resolved through discussion.

Once the coding of devices in the comic strips was complete, attention was turned

to the film. Before applying the identical procedure and instrument to the film, a rough

shooting script was reconstructed based on the film (see Appendix A).

Movement

Because the rendering of movement is one of the most obvious ways in which

film and comics differ, it represents a clear point of departure for the film adaptation of

any comic. However, in examining the techniques that the comic artist uses to create the

illusion of movement, there is an opportunity for understanding how the film borrows

movement styles from the comic.

Since McCay makes no use of the "zip ribbon," a content analysis was performed

on panel to panel transitions. McCloud (1993: 70-72) categorizes six types of panel-to-

panel transitions. These include transitions that suggest movement, such as "moment-to-

moment" transitions, which function through slight increments, and "action-to-action"

transitions, which function through the depiction of specific actions. Additionally,

transitions that do not depict movement include "subject-to-subject" transitions which

move between subjects within the same scene; "scene-to-scene" transitions which move

between locales; "aspect-to-aspect" transitions which change perspectives on the same

subject, and "non-sequitur" transitions that depict no specific relationship between

panels. Based on the distinctions between these categories, each of the 454 transitions

that compose the 60 comic strips in "Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend" was coded.

Movement was coded in the film by recording the types of transitions that occurred between shots. This task was complicated by the fact that (due to the age and condition of the film) there were numerous, seemingly inadvertent, jump cuts. As a result, only the most clear and obvious transitions were coded.

Results

Devices

In the broadest sense, the most fundamental device that links the strips and the film together is the dream context. The events depicted in each of the 60 strips are bracketed within the context of a dream provoked by the subject consuming "rarebits" (seasoned cheese that is served melted on toast). Not surprisingly, the film used this same premise. So on the subject of the dream device, there is a one to one correspondence between the strip and the film.

Animation of objects: Five of the 60 strips (8.3 percent) used the device of an inanimate object coming to life, while four of the ten shots in the film (40 percent) used this device. Objects animated in the strips include a purse (strip 4), a bed (strip 11), a statue (strip 12), a skeleton (strip 13), and a furnace (strip 59), while objects animated in the film include shoes (shot 4) and a bed (shots 6, 7, 8).

Size distortion: Fourteen strips (23.3 percent) used the device of size distortion, while one shot in the film (10 percent) used this device. Within the strips, nine instances occurred in humans, five in animals and two in objects. In the film, the only instance that occurred involved humans.

Shape distortion: Ten strips (16.6 percent) used shape distortion as a device, while the film did not use this as a device at all. Within the strips, five instances occurred in humans, one in an animal, and four in objects.

Dismemberment: Ten strips (16.6 percent) used dismemberment as a device, while the film did not use this as a device at all. Within the strips, five instances occurred with humans, one with an animal, and six with objects.

Flying or Falling: Eleven strips (18.3 percent) used flying or falling as a device, while two shots in the film (20 percent) used this device.

Movement

Of the 454 panel transitions that compose the 60 comic strips of "Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend," 149 are moment-to-moment, 145 are action-to-action, 148 are scene-to-scene, and 4 are aspect-to-aspect. There are no subject-to-subject or non sequitur transitions. Of the nine transitions that were coded in the film adaptation, seven are scene-to-scene, and two are aspect-to-aspect. Numerous additional splices and jump cuts also exist but were not coded because of their lack of clarity.

Discussion

With regard to the use of devices, *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* seems to have adapted several of them with varying levels of correspondence. The device of the dream context was obviously the most influential since it served as the premise for the film and all 60 of the comic strips. The "flying or falling" device appears to have been adapted consistently as well, with a correspondence of 18.3 percent in the strips to 20 percent in the film. "Animation of objects" and "size distortion" also emerged in the film, although

with less correspondence to their initial presence in the comic strip. "Shape distortion" and "disfiguration" did not emerge at all in the film.

It seems likely that the high correspondence of the dream context derives from the fact that the comic strip is defined by that context, and any departure from it would call the film's status as an adaptation of the comic strip into question. The high correspondence of the "flying or falling" device likely exists because the film draws heavily from one particular strip (number 11 in the series), which depicts the subject flying on and falling off of a bed. An alternative or complementary explanation might point out that "flying or falling" accurately invokes a state of intoxication, which is the central device of both comic strip and film. The same might also be said for "animation of objects" and "size distortion."

In terms of movement, the vast majority of transitions used by McCay in the comic strip were moment-to-moment, action-to-action, and scene-to-scene. In fact, only four transitions out of the 454 did not fall into one of these three categories. This indicates that (aside from scene-to-scene transitions that are necessary to most narratives), McCay tends to suggest movement through an elliptical, action-based strategy that reveals the subject performing in sequential steps, with each one following through into the next. This style seems to almost yearn for film's capacity to put the pieces together and turn the frozen instances into fluid movements. Porter's adaptation performs this function in several scenes. For instance, in shot three, the fluid movement that, at the time, only film could provide was critical to the dizzying effect created when the subject staggered drunkenly around the utility pole. Similarly, the bed spinning in shot six and flying in shots seven and eight relied heavily on the authenticity of

movement inherent to the persistence of vision exploited through film. This is also true for shot nine where the subject is rotating on the weather vane which has snagged his nightgown. (See Appendix A for numbers and descriptions of shots.) This animation of the frozen ellipsis of the comic strip, however, does not seem to be the only way that the film represents movement.

Although jump cuts were not coded because of the difficulty in discerning whether they were the result of film deterioration or director's intentionality, they very well may have been a strategy used to suggest movement in a way that borrows from the style of the comic strip. For example, the first scene of the film presents us with the subject eating his rarebits and drinking alcohol. Approximately half way through, he performs the actions of spitting, pouring, and drinking with no motion between them, much the same as action-to-action transitions in the comic strips. Although it is not impossible that this is just the result of some missing segments of a very old film, it is doubtful that this is the case, because only the key moments of each movement are preserved while the transitional movements are lost. Even more convincing, though, is that the stop-motion technique is used in shot four with obvious intention. As the subject sprawls intoxicated in his bed, his furniture rolls away in jagged, clunky, stop-motion cuts, much the same sort of transition that, in comics, McCloud (1993) would term "moment-to-moment." Thus, although Porter's film does, at points, actualize the motion that can only be suggested in McCay's comic strip, it also may borrow directly from the strip itself exposing the conventions of comic art through the medium of film.

Conclusion

Among the preliminary observations one might make about comic art to film adaptation in general (albeit based only on the observations of this example) is that they make use of a dual process of selection and expansion.

Beginning with selection, it is clear that the film *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* could not have effectively fit all elements of the original comic strip into a cohesive narrative, most especially because "each *Fiend* sequence is self-contained" (Publisher's Note, 1973: vii). Therefore (particularly regarding comic strips which are highly episodic), material must be selected in terms of its usefulness to the narrative at hand (Bluestone, 1957; Krevolin, 2003). At the same time, however, the material selected should be "essential to [the] reproduction of [the] core meaning" (Whelehan, 1999: 7) of the original work if a faithful adaptation is sought.

Expansion, on the other hand, involves the filling out of details that have lost their richness and authenticity when extracted from their original context.   Elliot (2003: 144) notes, "While film adaptations typically do cut and condense, they also add the semiotic richness of moving images, music, props, architecture, costumes, audible dialogue, and more." This is especially true for adaptations of comic art, because the source material, by definition of its status as caricature, is particularly suited for the filling-in function that film performs. This brings us back to the embodiment concept of adaptation because that filling-in is accomplished with real locations, objects, and bodies.

Embodiment in literature (as opposed to comics) is more an exercise of assimilation since, when reading the novel, readers are apt to have supplied their own rich set of specific details that either do or do not match with the images on the screen (Boyum, 1985; McFarlane, 1996; Stam, 2005a). What sets comics apart is the way the

embodiment occurs. Through a filling-in or fleshing-out process in which the film's

detail of location, character, object, and action proliferates within the shell of the comics'

icon, the viewer attempts to fit the embodied details into his hollowed out conception of

the comic book icons. This, of course, *is not* to say that the comics reader initially

experiences the world of comics as hollow, just that the details projected into the icons by

the reader can be retrofitted for the film's details if they are convincing enough.

References

Andrew, Dudley. 2000. "Adaptation." In *Film Adaptation*, edited by James Naremore.

New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. Original work published in

Dudley Andrew, 1984. *Concepts in Film Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University

Press.

Andrew, Dudley. 1984. *Concepts in Film Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image Music Text*. New York: Hill and Wang. Trans. by Stephen

Heath.

Bazin, Andre. 2000. "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest." In *Film

Adaptation*, edited by James Naremore. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University

Press.

Bluestone, George. 1957. *Novels into Film*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Boyum, Joy Gould. 1985. *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film*. New York, NY: Universe

Books.

Brooker, Will. 1999. "Batman: One Life, Many Faces." In *Adaptations: From Text

to Screen, Screen to Text*, edited by Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan.

New York: Routledge.

Burgess, Anthony. 1975. On the hopelessness of turning good books into films. *New York

Times*, 20 April, 1975, section 2 page 1.

Carrier, David. (2000). *The Aesthetics of Comics*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania

State University Press.

Cartmell, Deborah. 1999. "Introduction." In *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to

Text*, edited by Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan. New York: Routledge.

Chatman, Seymour. 1980. "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)."

    Critical Inquiry. 7: 1.

Christiansen, Hans-Christian. 2000. "Comics and Film: A Narrative Perspective." In

    Comics & Culture edited by Anne Magnussen & Hans-Christian Christiansen.

    Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press.

Coleman, Earle J. 1985. "The Funnies, the Movies and Aesthetics." *Journal of Popular*

    Culture, 18 (4): 89-100.

Daeuber, Ben. 2002. "Mental Movies and Action Heroes: The Adaptation of Comics to

    Film." Retrieved Oct. 9, 2005 from

    http://www.bendaeuber.com/comicbookpaper.pdf

Eisner, Will. 1985. *Comics & Sequential Art*. Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press.

Elliot, Kamilla. 2003. *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge

    University Press.

Genette, Gerard. 1982. *Palimpsestes*. Paris: Seuil.

Hark, Ina Rae. 1999. "The Wrath of the Original Cast: Translating Embodied Television

    Characters to Other Media." In *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*,

    edited by Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan. New York: Routledge.

Jenkins, Greg. 1997. *Stanley Kubrick and the Art of Adaptation*. Jefferson, NC:

    McFarland & Company, Inc.

Krevolin, Richard. 2003. *How to Adapt Anything into a Screenplay*. Hoboken, NJ: John

    Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Lacassin, Francis. 1972. "The Comic Strip and Film Language." *Film Quarterly*. 26: 11-

    23.

Levinson, Andre. 1960. "The Nature of Cinema." In *Introduction to the Art of the*

    Movies, edited by Lewis Jacobs. New York: Noonday Press. Original work

    published in *Theatre Arts Monthly*. Sept. 1929.

Linden, George William. 1970. *Reflections on the Screen.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lofficier, Jean-Marc and Randy Lofficier. 2004. *Shadowmen 2: Heroes and Villains of*

    French Comics. Encino, CA: Black Coat Press.

Manara, Milo and Federico Fellini. 1990. *Trip to Tulum: From a Script for a Film Idea*.

    Catalonia (Spain): Catalan Communications.

Marcus, Fred H. 1977. *Short Story/Short Film.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Markstein, Don. 2002a. "Ally Sloper." *Toonopedia.* Retrieved Dec. 1, 2005 from

    http://www.toonopedia.com/sloper.htm

Markstein, Don. 2002b. "Happy Hooligan." *Toonopedia.* Retrieved Dec. 1, 2005 from

    http://www.toonopedia.com/hooligan.htm

McCaffrey, D. W. (1967). "Adaptation Problems of the Two Unique Media: The Novel

    and the Film." *The Dickinson Review*. 1: 11-17.

McCay, Winsor. 1973. *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend.* New York: Dover Publications.

    Original work published in 1905.

McCloud, Scott. 1993. *Understanding Comics.* Northampton, MA: Tundra Publishing.

McDougal, Stuart Y. 1985. *Made into Movies: From Literature to Film.* Philadelphia,

    PA: Harcourt Brace Javanovich College Publishers.

McFarlane, Brian. 1996. *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation.*

    Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Mendilow, Adam Abraham. (1952). *Time and the Novel*. London: P. Nevill.

Porter, Edwin S. (Director). 1906. *The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend.* [Motion picture].

(Available from Kino on Video, 333 West 39th Street, New York, NY 10018)

Publisher's Note 1973. *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend*. New York: Dover Publications.

Ray, Robert B. 2000. "The Field of 'Literature and Film'." In *Film Adaptation*, edited by

James Naremore. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Richardson, Robert. 1971. "Verbal and Visual Languages." In *Film and*

Literature: Contrasts in Media, edited by Fred H. Marcus. Scranton, PA:

Chandler Publishing Company.

Scholes, Robert E. (1982). *Semiotics and Interpretation.* New Haven: Yale University

Press.

Schubert, Thomas. 2002. "Five Theses on the Book Problem: Presence in Books, Film

and VR." Paper presented at Presence 2002 – 5th Annual International Workshop

on Presence. Porto, Portugal.

Seger, Linda. 1992. *The Art of Adaptation.* New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Sinyard, Neil. 1986. *Filming Literature: The Art of Screen Adaptation.* London: Croom

Helm.

Stam, Robert. 2000. "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation." In *Film Adaptation*,

edited by James Naremore. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Stam, Robert. 2005a. "Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation." In

Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation,

edited by Robert Stam. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Stam, Robert. 2005b. *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of*

Adaptation. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Thompson, Kristin. (1988). *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis.*

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Wells, Paul. 1999. "'Thou Art Translated': Analysing Animated Adaptation." In

Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text, edited by Deborah Cartmell

and Imelda Whelehan. New York: Routledge.

Whelehan, Imelda. 1999. "Adaptations: The Contemporary Dilemmas." In *Adaptations:*

From Text to Screen, Screen to Text, edited by Deborah Cartmell and Imelda

Whelehan. New York: Routledge.

Matthew T. Jones resides in Philadelphia and is currently a Ph.D. student at Temple

University, studying mass media and communication. His research interests include

comic art, presence theory, and sexuality. For more information please visit

www.mattsmediaresearch.com.

Appendix A

The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend (1906)

1. Int. Restaurant: The fiend is becoming intoxicated by binging on rarebits and drinking. (Jump-cuts used when spitting and pouring and drinking).
2. Ext. Restaurant: The fiend walks out on the street drunk and stammering. (Jump cut while walking).
3. Ext. Steeple: Superimposed panning shots depict the fiend's drunkenness as he whirls and flies about. He keeps falling and can't keep his balance. He seems to be flying and falling as he clings to the steeple.
4. Int. Bedroom: The fiend arrives in his bedroom, still drunk. (Jump-cut of his bed being unmade while he is off-screen). Finally, lying in bed, his shoes drag away by themselves. Using stop-motion, his furniture tumbles away (two chairs and a table).
5. Close-up of the fiend's head as three miniature devils emerge from a lantern and pick at his head with a pitchfork, a pick, and a hoe. He covers his head.
6. Int. Bedroom. His bed begins to whirl around in circles before it shoots out the window.
7. Ext. Sky: The fiend is floating weightlessly above the city in his bed.
8. Ext. Sky: The fiend flies high over a steeple.
9. Ext. Sky: The fiend is dropped on the steeple and whirls around on the weather vane.
10. Int. Bedroom: The fiend comes crashing through his own roof and falls back into his own bed back in his bedroom.