THE COMIC(S) SHAKESPEARE: KILL SHAKESPEARE AND AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE IN ADAPTATION STUDIES

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In this thesis, I expand upon Linda Hutcheon’s use of the terms “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences that she briefly outlines in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*. Hutcheon suggests that when experiencing an adaptation, one may be a “knowing” audience member, someone that knows the adapted work, or an “unknowing” audience member, someone who is not familiar with an adapted work. Hutcheon proposes the terms knowing and unknowing audiences as a way to reorient adaptation studies to consider the experience and the knowledge of the audience members. This model runs contrary to orthodox adaptation theory or fidelity criticism, wherein the value of an adaptation is determined by its closeness to an original. Theoretical discussions that rely upon studying the closeness of an adaptation to an original text do not provide insight into the text but simply re-establish a hierarchy for an “original.” Thus, Hutcheon’s use of the terms “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences is valuable because these terms provide new language to reinvigorate a field that, according to Thomas Leitch, has been “haunted by concepts and premises it has repudiated in principle but continued to rely on in practice” (63). Thus Hutcheon’s new language presents a step toward redefining the theory and producing scholarship that explores audience literacy or literacies.
To Stephanie and Lauren: A dream team even Sigmund Freud would have envied.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In using the word culture I am thinking of the inherited tradition. I am thinking of something that
is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute,
and from which we may all draw if we have somewhere to put what we find.

D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*

Through its hybrid and spatial form, comics lends itself to expressing stories, especially
narratives of development, that present and underscore hybrid subjectivities.

Hillary Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative & Contemporary Comics*

Historically, both adaptation and comics have been seen as lesser forms of art. Hillary
Chute identifies comics as “a form once considered pure junk” (452), and Linda Hutcheon
claims that adaptations have been defined as “secondary” or “derivative” (2). Recent scholarship,
though, has taken both adaptation and comics into consideration as valuable texts. Scholars like
Chute, Jan Baetens and Aaron Meskin debate the literariness of comics while Hutcheon, Thomas
Leitch, and Deborah Cartmell attempt to redefine the field of adaptation. While there is an
attempt to revalue both the medium of comics and the art of adaptation separately, there is little
scholarship considering the two together. While the discussion of the literary worth of comics
may be new, adaptation is not new to the medium of comics; rather it is intrinsic, as essentially
every superhero is an adaptation of the character type of Superman. However, rather than
lingering over the history of adaptation in the comics medium, the question I pose in exploring
the relationship between these two art forms is, how might comics help scholars to explore new
avenues in adaptation studies?

In this thesis, I expand upon Linda Hutcheon’s use of the terms “knowing” and
“unknowing” audiences that she briefly outlines in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*. Hutcheon
suggests that when experiencing an adaptation, one may be a “knowing” audience member,
someone that knows the adapted work or an “unknowing” audience member, someone who is not familiar with an adapted work. Hutcheon proposes the terms knowing and unknowing audiences as a way to reorient adaptation studies to consider the experience and the knowledge of the audience members. This model runs contrary to orthodox adaptation theory or fidelity criticism, wherein the value of an adaptation is determined by its closeness to an original. Theoretical discussions that rely upon studying the closeness of an adaptation to an original text do not provide insight into the text but simply re-establish a hierarchy for an “original.” Thus, Hutcheon’s use of the terms “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences is valuable because these terms provide new language to reinvigorate a field that, according to Thomas Leitch, has been “haunted by concepts and premises it has repudiated in principle but continued to rely on in practice” (63). Leitch points to the fact that for so long adaptation theory has dismissed hierarchy based on post-modern theories that challenge the belief in an a priori or original. Yet, scholarship has relied significantly upon models of fidelity criticism. However, as Leitch suggests, the same language of fidelity will only return the field to the same conclusions. Thus, Hutcheon’s new language presents a step toward redefining the theory and producing scholarship that explores audience literacy or literacies.

While Hutcheon provides a theory of adaptation that proposes a more productive and provocative reading than traditional fidelity criticism, I suggest that her argument still privileges an original text and is ultimately haunted by theories of fidelity criticism. Her privileging of an “original” in adaptation is perhaps most visible in her focus on the “knowing” audiences’ experience of an adaptation. She seems to suggest that there is an “original” based on their being only one “knowing” audience. Hutcheon posits that “[t]o experience it as an adaptation...we need to recognize it as such and to know its adapted text, thus allowing the latter to oscillate in
our memories with what we are experiencing” (120, emphasis in original). She defines the “knowing” audience as privileged by the fact that they experience pleasure from an adaptation because they know the prior text and thus experience what Hutcheon defines as palimpsestic doubleness,” i.e., pleasure derived from recognizing the adapted work. Ultimately, Hutcheon focuses on a “knowing” audiences experience of the text rather than exploring the alternative knowledges produced by a so-called “unknowing’ audience members.

As an alternative to the dualistic model that Hutcheon proposes through the knowing/unknowing binary, I posit an expansion to Hutcheon’s theoretical schema. In order to subvert fidelity criticism and explore the pleasure(s) derived from palimpsestic doubleness in an adaptation, I propose an exploration of multiple “knowing” audiences based on different prior knowledge(s) that one can have when approaching a text. Rather than simply identifying an audience as “knowing” or “unknowing,” I suggest multiple levels of “knowing” and suggest that even “unknowing” is a type of “knowing.” For example, if one is knowledgeable in regard to the medium in which the adaptation is produced as well as the adapted narrative, then the audience experiences multiple layers of palimpsestic doubleness when encountering the adaption. If a reader approaches a comic book adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, there are at least two possible knowledges being reproduced which suggests two types of knowing. First, an audience member may know *Hamlet’s* plot and thus experience palimpsestic doubleness because of the adaptation of *Hamlet*. Second, an audience member may know the conventions of the comics medium which simultaneously influences their experience of the text. While Hutcheon only privileges plot knowledge, I suggest that audiences with experience in a particular medium derive pleasure from their reading, as well, because they already know other aspects of that medium. For example, readers who know comics would enjoy the palimpsestic doubleness of
comics’ form and character types. Thus, while one may not recognize the particular narrative being repeated, they still may approach the text with their own particular knowledge. There is still the possibility of “knowing” a particular medium that influences a reading of the narrative in a different way. This proposed alternative of considering multiple types of “knowing” subverts the imagined concept of an “original” text that one must know and instead focuses on tracing the history of a particular narrative forms such as genre, medium, character types and other aspects of a text that scholarship might consider.

I chose the medium of comics for this project as a representative media that has its own history and explores the possibility of multiple types of knowing. Because comics’ have dual narrative tracks—the visual and the verbal narrative track—they decenter a preconceived central narrative and thus enable a reinterpretation of adaptation studies. Comics adaptation leads us to ask new questions of the theory of adaptation, including how is a singular narrative adapted to a form that produces two simultaneous narratives? How do we determine fidelity in a medium that has entirely different conventions from other media such as film? In pursuit of this question I turn to what N. Katherine Hayles suggests as a media-specific analysis to demonstrate how forms impact content (29). A medium is not simply a carrier for a narrative but impacts the very expression of the content. I take up this issue because the conventions of a medium and its impact on a particular adaptation are almost never considered in theories of adaptation. Comics in particular beget certain questions of media form analysis because of its self-conscious structure. As Michael Ryan Moore notes, “new media practices encourage us to rethink adaptation in technical terms” (180). This simple yet striking point challenges adaptation studies to think beyond narrative adaptation. Moore also argues, “the study of adaptation is necessarily the study of media itself—of the protocols that support both the adapted medium and the
medium to which a work is being adapted” (191). It seems that the desire to explore these alternative knowledges based around media analysis is inherent in the field but often never practiced. A media specific analysis proposes knowledge beyond plot knowledge, thus suggesting to scholars a more expansive definition of what is considered adaptation. Indeed, adaptation theory then considers the evolution and emergence of literacies through those that consume the texts: the audiences.

Comics’ dual narrative tracks nicely parallel the potential relationship between adaptation theory and an adapted work as neither narrative track is granted privilege in reading but rather is defined by its continual process of shifting perspectives. Comics have the ability to reproduce and adapt a text, yet also explore the possibilities of producing its own narrative separately. In comics, neither the visual nor the verbal are privileged. Rather, “it is impossible to “see” both picture and word simultaneously, the presence of the one necessitates the absence of the other creating a continual, unresolvable play between the two textual forms” (Schmitt 157-58). What Schmitt describes as play is what produces a unique engagement in comics that allows for adapted works to be reproduced without privileging fidelity. In fact, narrative forms such as comics challenge orthodox adaptation theory, which defines an adaptation based on closeness to a text. Similarly, Matthew Bolton argues, “the existence of two distinct narrative tracks in comics creates a larger issue for the notion of fidelity, as each line of communication can have varying degrees of fidelity to the source text” (2). While noting the potential of the medium, unfortunately, Bolton returns to fidelity criticism undermining the potential strength of comics in adaptation studies to transition away from fidelity. Rather than granting privilege to a question of fidelity, comics produces an entirely separate work that is not reliant upon a prior text because any work that is adapted is immediately dissolved in the ongoing shift between narrative tracks.
that never synthesize; the separateness of the two narrative tracks of comics dissolves, disseminates, disrupts and destabilizes discussions surrounding the issue of fidelity. Instead, the potential discussion is focused on how the very medium both reproduces and changes the narrative. Adaptation begins to consider questions regarding how form influences content rather than how content is simply reproduced through different forms.

This thesis attempts to provide a representative but surely not comprehensive analysis of the intersection between comics and adaptation studies. I investigate IDW’s *Kill Shakespeare* as a case study in order to explore how the different knowledges an audience may bring to a text affect the experience of palimpsestic doubleness. By using myself as a basis for this study, I concede to Hutcheon’s binary so that I might approach adaptation from both sides of the “knowing”/“unknowing” binary in order to ultimately destabilize it by demonstrating that there is not a binary but a multiplicity of knowledges present in any one text that might be experienced by an audience members. Rather than using adaption theory as a way to determine how close an adaptation is to an original, scholarship might explore and trace literacies of emerging and evolving narrative forms.

In the first chapter, I establish the theoretical implications of “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences and identify different levels of “knowing” audiences. Rather than suggesting that knowledge is hierarchical, I demonstrate how comics make us aware of simultaneous and multiplicitous knowledges. In order to suggest this point, I identify what I call a Shakespeare-knowing audience and a comics-knowing audience. Two of many potential “knowing” audiences that are not opposed to one another but rather often overlap in terms of knowledge. Instead of reifying the binary of knowing-unknowing, I propose different levels of knowing that destabilizes hierarchy and decenters fidelity as the focus is no longer on the
repetition of a particular narrative being important to define a text as an adaptation. Instead, adaptation studies might focus on the multiple voices and histories of a text. Included in these histories are how the conventions of media have evolved including character types. These questions ask us to consider experience beyond narrative repetition.

The second chapter explores the implication of identifying an “unknowing” audience in Hutcheon’s terms, or what I call a comics-knowing audience. An audience that does not know the adapted narrative(s) but is aware of the medium that the particular text is produced in and stresses the influence that the knowledge one approaches a text with impacts their reading of the narrative. Even if one is not aware of the particular narrative being adapted that is not to say that the audience goes in without a sense of “knowing.” I explore the possibilities by reading Kill Shakespeare as a member of a comics-knowing audience before I have read Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

The third chapter of the thesis explores how a Shakespeare-knowing audience might read Kill Shakespeare. I read Kill Shakespeare again, this time after having read Shakespeare’s Hamlet so that I demonstrate how different knowledges explore different aspects of a narrative in adaptation studies. Because Kill Shakespeare is arguably a sequel to Shakespeare’s Hamlet I re-read the graphic novel through this lens in order to see it from a new perspective. In doing so, I also take up the role of sequels and prequels in adaptation studies in order to produce a more expansive vision of adaptation studies.

As I will suggest in this thesis, adaptation studies have potential beyond fidelity criticism and the binary of “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences. In fact, it appeals to larger questions not only about literacy but literacies. The question becomes not only what narratives are being
told, but how are they being told? What forms are perhaps the most popular and used to tell the
same stories over and over? I posit that tracing the evolution of adaptation through different
narrative forms, shifts the focus from defining an “original” text and instead is interested in
experiences and knowledges that emerge out of different adaptations.
CHAPTER II: “THAT PERPETUAL MARRIAGE OF GRANITE TO RAINBOW”:
TOWARDS A THEORY OF COMICS ADAPTATION

In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon posits that adaptation in its broadest sense is “repetition with variation” (4). Hutcheon qualifies her theory of adaptation by outlining three key characteristics that must be met in order to define a text as an adaptation. These include “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works;” “a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging;” and finally “an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (8). Adaptations are thus defined as texts that are consciously aware of their indebtedness to an adapted work. Because adaptations generally announce themselves as adaptations or because the adapted work is visible in the adaptation, Hutcheon suggests that adaptations are palimpsestuous, which she defines as “works haunted at all times by their adapted texts” (6). Hutcheon suggests that audiences derive pleasure from recognizing source text(s) and that it is this palimpsestic nature of adaptation that attracts audiences—the “ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise” (4). While Hutcheon is interested in adaptation and the pleasure derived from repetition, the definition she provides is limited solely to “narrative and thematic repetition” (4). A theory of adaptation which focuses solely on narrative and thematic repetition excludes other forms of adaptation such as how a medium might adapt over time, how character types may adapt to particular genres and it even excludes adaptations such as sequels or prequels (9). A sequel for example does not replicate its source text but rather continues the source text, thus Hutcheon claims that these cannot be considered adaptations either. While Hutcheon’s achievement in producing a more expansive theory of adaptation should be recognized, her definition still excludes important critical discussions. Thus, I wish to expand the discussion of adaptation to include other forms of adaptations in order to see what we might
learn about not only the evolution of narratives but narrative forms and the audiences that are interested in these different narratives forms.

While by no means an exhaustive or definitive discussion of the theory of adaptation, the aim of this chapter is to outline some of the key issues in relation to adaptation theory and audience experience. In this chapter, I strive to expand the work of Linda Hutcheon in order to challenge current definitions of adaptation theory. First, I will outline what Hutcheon defines as “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences and how this language can be useful in order to propose a more expansive theory of adaptation. Next, I will discuss how a case study of the medium of comics is useful in the discussion of adaptation theory. Comics is useful because it challenges the traditional, hierarchical view of adaptation theory as well as being representative of the potential of adaptation and new media studies. Finally, once I have established how comics challenges current definitions of adaptation theory, I outline how the field of adaptation might gain insight by considering less traditional aspects of adaptation such as medium, genre and character type adaptation. My purpose is to explore bodies of knowledge in adaptation theory that have previously been ignored due to the fact that they are not traditional and challenge definitions of what is an adaptation.

I suggest that in order to expand Hutcheon’s definition of adaptation, as scholars we should turn to her theory of “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences in order to redefine what might be considered “repetition with variation” (4). In her book, Hutcheon suggests the use of the terms “knowing” and “unknowing” when discussing audience experience of an adaptation. While Hutcheon does not directly engage in an extended analysis of “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences, she does provide new language and a new space to explore the emerging definition of adaptation based on audiences’ experiences when approaching a
particular text. The change in adaptation studies is marked by a shift from establishing a hierarchy based on an “original” text to a theory based on audience experience. Hutcheon writes that audiences approach adaptations as either “knowing” or “unknowing.” For example, “knowing” audiences are defined by the fact that they “know the adapted text,” while “unknowing” audiences do not (120). Hutcheon separates the “unknowing” audience into two separate subgroups: those unaware of the source text and those aware but not familiar with the source text. However, Hutcheon’s definition is somewhat limiting as it does not consider the multiple levels of “knowing” that an audience can possess when approaching a text. This is best seen when Hutcheon poses the question, “[w]hat if we are utterly new to the artistic conventions of the adaptation, say of opera? What if we are unknowing audiences in other words?…[I]n these instances, we simply experience the work without the palimpsestic doubleness that comes with knowing” (127). In response to Hutcheon, I ask is it possible that palimpsestic doubleness may arise because of conventions beyond narrative repetition? Perhaps an audience member may “know” a specific genre or media very well and experience adaptation with a difference. Thus, the critical discussion might focus on how other aspects of texts are adapted and not solely focus on how a particular narrative is adapted.

According to Linda Hutcheon, “knowing” audiences are able to “fill in the gaps” when experiencing an adaptation. Hutcheon continues and explains that “[i]f we know the basic story outline of Shakespeare’s play *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, for instance, we are likely to fill in the gaps necessitated by the distillation of the plot in opera or ballet versions” (121). Because Hutcheon focuses solely on how audiences might fill in the gaps of a narrative when experiencing adaptation, she ignores other methods of “filling in the gaps” (121) that are possible by those audiences member who might know specific character types that repeat in the particular
medium or those that might be very familiar with the medium itself. For example, there is a
certain level of “knowing” that avid ballet watchers possess, which might influence their
appreciation or engagement with a particular adaptation, such as a production of Midsummer
Night’s Dream that Hutcheon references above. However, Hutcheon does not discuss the
audience that “knows” the particular medium but rather privileges narrative repetition in a very
fidelitous critique. Hutcheon invokes fidelity criticism because her analysis is focused on how an
audience member that is watching ballet may recognize an original version of Shakespeare’s
Midsummer Night’s Dream rather than exploring the many possibilities that we might learn
about adaptation as it crosses genres and media. Thus, in order to expand Hutcheon’s discussion,
I suggest that we might take into consideration other types of “knowing” audiences because
different audiences engage with different adaptations in different ways. For some audiences
rather than filling in the gaps of the narrative an audience member might follow the conventions
of the medium and follow the character types in a different adaptation. In fact, I suggest that
repetition with variation of narratives, mediums, genres, or character types is akin to following a
guide through an adaptation. It is possible to assume that whether the text announces itself to be
an adaptation or not, the audience’s prior knowledge and experience when approaching a work
might guide them through their experience and thus invoke palimpsestic doubleness.

In her book Hutcheon acknowledges different types of “knowing” that involve familiarity
with other aspects of texts beyond narrative repetition but does not present a particular case
study. For example, Hutcheon writes, “the institutionalization of medium, in other words, can in
itself create expectations” (124). Hutcheon further extends the discussion as she argues,
differently knowing audiences bring different information to their interpretations of adaptation”
(125). While Hutcheon does provide this language, she does not engage in an analysis of this
work, instead she simply leaves it for discussion to be had by other critics. It is then important to ask, could Hutcheon’s definitions of “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences then be expanded to include other types of repetition in a text? How might we transition the field away from a focus on narrative repetition that fueled fidelity criticism for so long? And by considering other modes of “knowing,” could we expand the definition of adaptation to include, for example, sequels and prequels? Hutcheon’s use of the metaphor of “palimpsestic doubleness” (21) invokes the thought that it is not just one layer of “doubleness” but like the palimpsest, there are multiple layers to peel back and explore. Instead of simply suggesting a binary of “knowing” and “unknowing,” we might acknowledge different types of knowing. For example, in the case of this project I will refer to two possible (of many possible) knowing audiences, specifically a “Shakespeare-knowing” audience and a “comics-knowing” audience. Thus, I suggest that there is not a singular body of knowledge that defines adaptation but multiple bodies of knowledge influence the experience of adaptation. These two types of “knowing” audiences that I have outlined, as I will demonstrate in chapter 3 of this thesis, are not exclusive either as they can often overlap because knowledge is not divided into the “haves” and “have nots” but rather is multiple.

In Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation*, the medium of comics is mentioned briefly and a specific case study on the graphic novel or comics in general is not considered. Hutcheon justifies this, though, by arguing that her intention is not to focus on any one specific medium (xiii). However, in this thesis, I will focus specifically on comics and consider how adapting a text or texts into this emerging narrative form affects the definition of adaptation in relationship to audience awareness. My intention is to direct attention toward the medium of comics and how its very structure influences the adapted work as the form structures the content and the content influences the form. As Margaret Jane Kidnie argues, “a recognition of Shakespeare’s work—
both what one thinks it is and how one comes to know it—is caught up in, and shaped by, technologies of production” (104). The technology of production in the case of *Kill Shakespeare* is comics, which then structures and guides our reading experience.

Comics exemplify new media’s ability to challenge priority and hierarchy. Hillary Chute defines comics as a “word-image form in which words and images create unsynthesized narrative tracks; that is to say, it is not an illustrative form in which each is redundant of the other” (108). Because of its dual narrative tracks, comics can reproduce multiple source texts while not privileging one over the other.\(^1\) Because when reading comics an audience member must shift between narrative tracks while reading it as neither is given privilege. Thus, comics neither privileges the verbal narrative nor the visual narrative track, rather, “it is impossible to ‘see’ both picture and word simultaneously (Schmitt 157). The metaphor of shifting perspectives that comics employs is best suited for a discussion of adaptation because focusing solely on one aspect of an adaptation excludes others. Scholars who focus solely on one aspect of adaptation studies such as narrative adaptation exclude other possible histories that might emerge by ignoring these other bodies of knowledge. It seems necessary that to truly understand an adaptation and the experience of the audience, one must continually shift perspectives, just as the comics media forms suggests.

Recent comics scholarship has explored the possibility of comics’ ability to challenge the hierarchy of orthodox adaptation theory. For example, Matthew Bolton posits, “the existence of two distinct narrative tracks in comics creates a larger issue for the notion of fidelity, as each line

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\(^1\) Despite some critics desire to privilege the visual narrative track over the verbal track, comics is a medium that does not privilege either narrative track, but is a medium where the two narrative tracks are reliant upon one another in order to produce a narrative. For further discussion of see Thierry Groensteen’s *The System of Comics*, where he argues that the visual narrative track is privileged in comics over the verbal. As an alternative David Lewis claims, comics, “narrative duplicity and duality, what we might call narrative polyphone, can therefore be employed to amplify the themes and messages of the shared fabula* (90).
of communication can have varying degrees of fidelity to the source text” (Bolton 2). Because of the two narrative tracks fidelity is decentered in comics adaptation. Even if one narrative were to focus exclusively on fidelity to a source text, the shifting between the two narratives decenters a single narrative. The shifting between narrative tracks in comics is best described by Ronald Schmitt who defines it as “unresolvable play between the two textual forms” (Schmitt 157-58). Schmitt describes the narrative experience of comics as “play” because the two narrative tracks are forever working with and against one another, through the use of the gutter, the space between panels. The shared space between the two narratives allows for interaction and a creative engagement between narratives. The endless play of the two narrative tracks expands the possibilities for not only the medium itself but also for adaptation because the decentering of the two narratives challenges the hierarchy established by adaptation theory that an original should retain priority in adaptations.

Different media forms each have their own distinct conventions, including not only technical aspects of the medium but also genres and character types that might be adapted to other media forms. For example, opera has different character types that are defined by vocal range and these character types might be different than those in another medium such as comics. Indeed, comics has its own specific character types, which can be seen in something such as the genre of superhero comics, where it is common to recycle typographic heroes and villains seen in various narratives. Thus, for those that know comics it is possible to not know the narrative but still experience a text as a type of adaptation. Donald Ault discusses the possibilities of character types and how they might guide a reader through a particular narrative as he writes, “a comic, ‘character’ is analogous to an alphanumeric letter or piece of punctuation in a conventional language that takes on significance only relationally or differentially as it is repeated and gather
upon into signifying clusters” (4). In other words, these characters act as guides to help audiences in the same way that a letter helps a child (or an adult) sound out a word. Thus, repetition of character types in particular medium creates a new language for the audience member, one that they must learn, like other forms of repetition seen in adaptation. It is nearly impossible to limit an audience’s knowledge and experience. Instead, it is important in adaptation studies to acknowledge the presence of repetition seen through these different aspects of a text and to trace their own histories to learn how texts evolve and adapt over time rather than limiting adaptation through fidelity.

As a representative, but by no means comprehensive example of the possibility of adaptation studies beyond narrative adaptation, I analyze IDW comics’ Kill Shakespeare in chapter 3 of this thesis. Kill Shakespeare is a graphic novel that appropriates many characters from Shakespeare’s oeuvre and places them into a single narrative. Characters from Shakespeare’s plays such as Lady Macbeth, Juliet, and Falstaff all appear in the same story. The narrative is set during Shakespeare’s Hamlet, specifically between acts IV and IV. While it might be easy to simply claim Kill Shakespeare as a sequel or a pastiche, there are many possible avenues to explore that Kill Shakespeare outlines for the field of adaptation and multiple layers of palimpsestic doubleness to be peeled back. Kill Shakespeare as an adaptation explores the conventions of the emerging medium of comics and how palimpsestic pleasure is derived due to its unique location as both a sequel to William Shakespeare’s Hamlet and a repetition of the medium of comics.

I approach Kill Shakespeare as a member of a “comics-knowing” audience, one that “knows” the medium of comics and in turn certain characteristics of the medium such as character types. Thus, I acknowledge that I am aware of what Art Spiegelman calls the “Ur-
language of comics,” the “strict regular grid of panels” (qtd. in Hutcheon 34). I also approach the text as a “team” story in comics or what Jeremy Strong would describe in film as: “works that inevitably bring together a group that is heterogeneous with strong differentiation between members” (44). The “team” graphic novel is a common genre in comics, so I approach the character types present in *Kill Shakespeare* already knowing other team narratives such as *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman*, or even *The Justice League* and *The Avengers*. All of these narratives which are examples of the “team” genre, wherein heterogeneous characters with their own respective histories work together for a common cause. *The Justice League*, while it does not have a “literary” history takes different DC Comics characters, such as Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman, and places them on the same team. Each character then fulfills a certain role in both the narrative and team structure. While something such as *The Justice League or the Avengers* is simply about superheroes, a text such as *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman* is an example of a comic that also appropriates many characters from literary history and places them on a team to fight for a common cause. For example, *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman* appropriates characters from literary history including Virginia Woolf’s titular character Orlando from the novel of the same name, and Bram Stoker’s Mina Harker from *Dracula*. Because I know these comics, along with multiple other examples, I approach something like *Kill Shakespeare* knowing that each character will fit into conventions of character types present in this genre. Therefore, I approach the text with different levels of knowing. Doing so allows me to understand the text and also experience other levels of palimpsestic doubleness from *Kill Shakespeare*.²

² For an extended analysis of what it means to be a “knowing” audience of Shakespeare, continue to Chapter 4.
As scholars, if we consider these characters as not only appropriations of Shakespeare’s work, but also as appropriations of comics, then there is a multiplicity of new dimensions to be analyzed in adaptation studies that is not entirely reliant upon narrative repetition. *Kill Shakespeare* is not just an adaptation of Shakespeare’s characters adapted to comics but a merging of different source “texts.” The medium itself becomes a source text merged with Shakespeare’s characters that exposes a new relationship with audiences as different forms of repetition are occurring. While the medium appropriates Shakespeare’s work, there is the simultaneous act of Shakespeare’s characters appropriating the medium as well. Not only is Hamlet being redefined by the conventions of comics but the conventions of comics and its characters must adapt to Hamlet.

Because comics is an emerging form not only culturally but also scholastically, there is very little written on character types in the medium. Thus, I rely on Peter Coogan’s work on superhero comics to define the character types present in *Kill Shakespeare*. While not specifically a superhero narrative, the graphic novel *Kill Shakespeare* is still in the medium of comics and participates in a genre, which is common to both comics in general and superhero comics: the “team” narrative as I have outlined above. The conventions of the “team” narrative have a history with comic books from the creation of superhero teams such as The Avengers, or The Justice League. It then seems logical to argue that these are character types that might be recognizable by audience members familiar with reading comics. Readers are presented with a merging of characters appropriated from literary history as they are merged with character type conventions present in comics. Repetition occurs as the character types are repeated with slight variance as to fit the narrative.
In his book, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre*, Coogan focuses specifically on villain character types and designates five types: “the monster, the enemy commander, the mad scientist, the criminal mastermind, and the inverted superhero supervillain” (61). Three of these villain types that Coogan outlines are found in *Kill Shakespeare*. The comic series adapts three of Shakespeare’s characters to fit the particular conventions of the comics medium and the “team” genre. Coogan’s system of categorization suggests that for comics readers might experience Richard III, Lady Macbeth, and Iago as (super) villain character-types seen often in comics. Richard III is the enemy commander as he “controls the state” (67): “I am Richard the third, lord of this land” (*Kill Shakespeare* 1:22). Lady Macbeth is the equivalent of the “mad scientist” first because of her use of magic as the evil witch might be the early modern version of the contemporary evil scientist, but also as Coogan suggests these are characters that are defined by “obsessive behavior and the employment of extremely dangerous or unorthodox methods” (Coogan 67). Iago says to her “M’lady, you are too cavalier” (7:1). Finally, Iago is the “monster” of the group, which Coogan describes as having “no moral sense of right or wrong, or a perverted one, which is symbolically expressed by the monster’s lack of a soul” (Coogan 62). Not only can readers identify Iago as fulfilling the characteristics of this category, but he also says himself: “I have always been a serpent” (12:5), suggesting his relationship to evil and monstrosity. The typographic villain characters are recognizable for the reader to follow, producing a level of palimpsestic doubleness for the reader that might not know Shakespeare per se but does know the comics medium and particular genres. The character types here are replications or repetitions with variation of standard villain characters seen in comics. Thus, a reader not familiar with Shakespeare’s works is still able to follow along with the graphic novel, even though the text claims Shakespeare as its source text.
In contrast to the villain team, *Kill Shakespeare* features the hero team of Hamlet, Juliet, Othello, and Falstaff. Coogan does not identify hero character types in the medium, so instead I will construct character types for these characters based on their stories and because the villain “is a reverse of his foe” (68). First, Hamlet would be the opposite of Richard III in *Kill Shakespeare* because he also has the backing of state, but he has the backing of the actual people who aim to overthrow Richard III and his tyranny. Hamlet is the protagonist of the text, but he is what one might consider to be a “reluctant hero” type. He is not very eager to take up his role as hero and has to grow into it over the course of the narrative. The “reluctant hero” is a common character type in comics as Hamlet’s character resembles other characters such as Tom Taylor of Mike Carey’s *The Unwritten*, or Bigby Wolf in Bill Willingham’s *Fables*. Both of these characters are relatively known characters and are also part of the genre of team narratives that acquire characters from literature and folklore and place them all into one singular narrative.

Juliet is then best described as the female protagonist in the narrative, acting as both Hamlet’s counterpart, but also the leader of the revolution as he is the one who is able to “inspire these peasants” (12:11). Juliet’s opposite in *Kill Shakespeare* is Lady Macbeth. If Richard III and Lady Macbeth are the main villains of the narrative, then their opposites are Hamlet and Juliet. Juliet, however, unlike Hamlet is not insecure in her mission, but is rather driven by her mission as leader of the revolution. Juliet supports Hamlet in his mission and helps him to become the hero of the narrative. The relationship that Juliet has with Hamlet is the exact opposite to Richard III and Lady Macbeth because it is eventually Lady Macbeth who betrays Richard III. Juliet resembles other characters such as Lizzy Hexam from *The Unwritten* or Snow White from *Fables*. Both Snow White and Lizzy Hexam support the protagonist as well as having their own driving force. Characters such as Juliet, Lizzy Hexam, and Snow White are not really sidekicks
in the traditional superhero sense but are often romantic interests of the male protagonist that help to support the male protagonist and help the male protagonist become the hero of the narrative.

The last two characters have more of a secondary role in the narrative but still are part of the core hero team are Othello and Falstaff. If Iago is defined as a “monster,” a character who betrays his own team and is morally corrupt, then Othello in opposition is the trustworthy strong-man character as seen in *Fantastic Four*’s “The Thing” or *X-factor*’s “Strong Guy.” These are often the strong, stalwart, stoic characters that have triumphed over an abusive or tumultuous past. They are often seen as best friends, and the muscle of the team. Finally, a clear opposite does not exist for Falstaff in the text, though, he fulfills the role of a messenger-like character. He is the caretaker of the team and is often sent off to be a messenger. Falstaff has a similar role to the character of Pip in Peter David’s *X-factor*, or Ma Hunkel in Geoff John’s *JSA*. While the character does not always participate in the main action of the text, they are often helpers and support the team. These different character types are recognizable to the avid comics reader and thus guide a reading of an adaptation of a Shakespearean play even if the reader does not know the adapted narrative.

A focus on other aspects of an adaptation, such as character types, suggests a more expansive theory of adaptation, which asks new questions about intertextuality and the evolution of narrative forms. Rather than using adaptation theory to assert the “greatness” of an original text, scholars might see adaptation theory as a way to trace the evolution of not only narratives but of media forms as well. If adaptation studies were more expansive scholars could trace histories of repetition to discern how different aspects of texts evolve. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, *Kill Shakespeare* represents possibilities for adaptation studies that
destabilize fidelity and hierarchy. I am suggesting a shift in adaptation studies from solely asking why are we so interested in telling the same story over and over and instead we might ask why are certain media forms more fitting for certain narratives? Or why are certain characters ubiquitous? Are we so interested in adapting Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* or is it the character of Elizabeth Darcy who captures our interest? Also, how do stories evolve through different media forms? Just as there is no definitive version of a Shakespearean, neither is there a definitive definition of adaptation. Thus, adaptation by definition is multiplicitous and so are its readers and the knowledges these texts are able to produce.
CHAPTER III: *KILL(ING) SHAKESPEARE: HOW “UNKNOWING” IS “KNOWING”*

In the previous chapter of this project on adaptations and audience experience, I suggested that there is more than one way to consider a work as an adaptation beyond narrative repetition. A more expansive theory of adaptation might focus on forms of adaptation that relate to genre, medium, character types and beyond in scholarship. Thus, in this chapter I take up the graphic novel *Kill Shakespeare* not as a Shakespearean adaptation but as a comics adaptation. This opens up new avenues for adaptation studies. For example, as a comics adaptation, *Kill Shakespeare* is then not simply a sequel to *Hamlet*, or second to *Hamlet* but is an adaptation of form as well as content. As I mentioned in the last chapter, depending on the definition one uses for adaptation, sequels and prequels are often not accepted as adaptations. For example, Linda Hutcheon would not consider *Kill Shakespeare* as an adaptation because it is a continuation of *Hamlet* rather than a repetition of the narrative of *Hamlet*. However, an arbitrary definition of what is and is not adaptation only limits scholarship in the field. And in this case limits the intersection between comics studies and adaptation. Indeed, as I have suggested in the previous chapter, by expanding Hutcheon’s definition of adaptation based on “knowing,” and “unknowing” audiences, we might reconsider sequels and prequels as adaptations. *Kill Shakespeare* is one example of many that when considered as an adaptation, despite being a sequel, allows scholars to ask new questions about the theory of adaptation.

In this chapter I read *Kill Shakespeare* as a comics-knowing audience in order to see what we might learn about adaptation by exploring new avenues in adaptation theory. Shakespeare is put aside because upon first writing this chapter I had never read Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. I approached the graphic novel as a reader of comics and one that does not “know” Shakespeare. As I will demonstrate in this essay, one does not need to “know” Shakespeare to experience
palimpsestic doubleness. For example, while I do not know Shakespeare, my own knowledge still influences my reading of the text and thus I experience the text as a type of adaptation. First, I will outline what it means to be a comics-knowing audience. Once I have established what it means to be a comics-knowing audience I will show how the production and marketing of the graphic novel influence the “knowing audiences” who consume the text. After this, I will analyze key scenes from the graphic novel to suggest different ways that comics decenters and challenges orthodox adaptation theory. Comics interrupts and destabilizes what has traditionally been accepted as adaptation in order to produce a new narrative.

*Kill Shakespeare* first identifies itself as an adaptation by appropriating characters from Shakespeare’s works as well as through its acknowledgment of Shakespeare in the title of the graphic novel. Like most adaptations, *Kill Shakespeare* announces itself as an adaptation; however, *Kill Shakespeare* is different from what might be considered a traditional adaptation because it does not simply adapt a single narrative. According to Hutcheon's definition, *Kill Shakespeare* might not be considered an adaptation because it is not an “extended intertextual engagement” with one particular narrative. However, for an audience member who knows the medium of comics, a comics-knowing audience, *Kill Shakespeare* might be experienced as appropriation of the conventions of the medium and a creative appropriation of the character types of the medium as Shakespearean characters. In this manner, a “source text” is not limited to being defined by narrative but a source could refer to conventions of a medium, or the conventions of a genre. Thus, I suggest that we might consider *Kill Shakespeare* as an extended engagement with not only Shakespeare’s characters but with the conventions of comics, expanding what might be considered a “source text” based on different “knowing” audiences. While not adhering to specific requirements of narrative repetition, this new formulation of
adaptation theory considers repetition based on possible audience perceptions, rather than defining awareness solely by repetition of a narrative.

If we explore different types of ‘knowing” audiences, then the study of adaptation transitions away from fidelity criticism and instead focuses on different pleasures gained from adaptation. This alternative supports Hutcheon’s claim that “[p]erhaps a way to think about unsuccessful adaptations is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of lack of the creativity and skill to make the text one’s own and thus autonomous”(20). Scholars can then explore the different way adaptations interact in different mediums and how the relationship with different forms of repetition are constructed and challenged in adaptation studies. If adaptation as adaptation produces pleasure based on its palimpsestic doubleness (Hutcheon 21), then different levels of knowing audiences can potentially experience more levels of pleasure from a text and expands discussion of adaptation studies.

When a reader first approaches Kill Shakespeare, the “back matter” announces the graphic novel as an adaptation of not only Shakespeare’s work but also an adaptation of comics form. I focus first on the marketing of the graphic novel because as Chris Louttit posits in his essay, “Cranford, Popular Culture, and the Politics of Adapting the Victorian Novel for Television,” the way a particular text is marketed as an adaptation also influences how it might be experienced as an adaptation”(36). Louttit notes that when adapting Bleak House, BBC played the 2008 adaptation at a new time, “rather than being shown in sedate hour-long episodes during the traditional Sunday costume evening drama, Bleak House was broadcast in the form of fast-paced soap-sized, half-hour episodes after East Enders” (36). In this particular case, the time change influences not only the experience of the adaptation but also to whom the adaptation is being marketed. Thus, it is important to note not just the text itself when considering works of
adaptation in popular culture but how they are marketed and how this might establish a type of “knowing” with an audience before even beginning an engagement with a particular text.

IDW Comics identifies *Kill Shakespeare* as a “dark take on the Bard” (back matter) suggesting that this is a work of Shakespearean adaptation. The summary suggests that those that know Shakespeare might be interested in this particular work because it is a new version of Shakespeare’s familiar characters in a new take on an old story. The “back matter” of the graphic novel introduces the reader to the text and thus establishes a pact with the reader, letting them know what they are about to experience. The first volume of the graphic novel, *Kill Shakespeare* is described as follows: “[t]his dark take on the Bard pits his greatest heroes (Hamlet, Juliet, Othello, Falstaff) against his most menacing villains (Richard III, Lady Macbeth, Iago) in an epic adventure to find and kill a reclusive wizard named William Shakespeare” (back matter). The “dark take on the bard,” suggests first that this graphic novel might be marketed to those of a Shakespeare-knowing audience because Shakespeare is called “the bard,” rather than Shakespeare for those that might know Shakespeare well enough. It does not seem like it is marketed to the student in high school that reads Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* as a requirement.

As a member of an “unknowing” audience, I experienced the “back Matter” of the text differently than a Shakespeare-knowing audience would. The description splits Shakespeare’s characters into hero and villain groups even before one has begun to read the text. Thus, those who “know” Shakespeare well enough might recognize these characters and the distinction between the villain and the heroes. As a comics-knowing audience member, one that does not know Shakespeare, it is useful that the two groups were split apart on the back of the graphic novel because I was given an outline of how I might read the text according to my knowledge of
the medium. I understood right away without actually knowing much about any of these characters how the story would unfold and what I needed to know. My knowledge then guides my experience of the text, while those with a knowledge of Shakespeare are guided through the adaptation differently. Thus, differently knowing audiences experience texts differently, suggesting that there is not a singular reading of an adaptation but multiple.

By the second volume of the graphic novel, it becomes more apparent that the text is being sold as not only an adaptation of Shakespeare but one of comics as well. The quote on the front cover of the second volume also echoes the point that it is a narrative not only constructed for Shakespeareans: “[g]ripping, violent, and dark fun, even if you're not fully versed in Shakespearean lore” (Gustines, front matter). My pleasure as a comics-knowing audience, along with others who do not know Shakespeare derive pleasure from seeing characters like Richard III as the “enemy commander,” (61) a character type typical in graphic novels as I mentioned in the previous chapter. As comics-knowing audience members, we are able to “fill in the gaps” based on the conventions of the comics medium and character-types being reproduced even though we may not “know” the narrative source text(s) of Shakespeare.

*Kill Shakespeare* not only markets itself to different types of knowing audiences but the narrative itself appeals to both a comics-knowing audience as well as a Shakespeare-knowing audience. Throughout the course of the narrative Hamlet and Juliet become romantically involved and this romance culminates in a balcony scene in *Kill Shakespeare* where Hamlet is standing upon the balcony and is greeted by Juliet (Fig 1.). Most readers would recognize this scene without having read the adapted narrative as the balcony scene from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. However, this scene is in fact not the same one but rather reverses Juliet’s role in the balcony scene and transposes Hamlet for Romeo. Thus, *Kill Shakespeare* engages in what
Hutcheon would call a creative engagement with an adapted work as *Kill Shakespeare* takes a well-known narrative and adapts it for its own purposes. The adapted text, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, describes the scene as follows: “Romeo [coming forward]…. Enter Juliet aloft” (2.1.44). The scene is acted out in the graphic novel with a creative interpretation in *Kill Shakespeare* as Hamlet appears above at the window and Juliet enters in the scene.

While the balcony scene is a direct transposition of a key scene from *Romeo and Juliet* into a new context there are still issues that prevent *Kill Shakespeare* from being viewed as an adaptation critically. Hutcheon might suggest, according to her theory of adaptation, that this scene is a homage to *Romeo and Juliet* but it is not an “extended engagement. “As I mentioned previously, though, it is difficult to know exactly what constitutes an “extended engagement.” Hutcheon does not really define what an extended engagement is but instead briefly defines what it is not. Hutcheon asserts that “allusions to and brief echoes of other works would not qualify as extended engagements, nor do most examples of musical samplings because they recontextualize only short fragments of music” (9). In response to Hutcheon, I suggest that as scholars if we were to further pursue what it means to define an extended engagement, it might be useful to begin by defining it as particular to each distinct medium. In his essay, on adaptation, Mark Fortier responds to Hutcheon and asks, “[w]here exactly is the line between the same story and a different story? Are we so interested in patrolling that line?”(5). In the same manner, where is the
Figure 1 From *Kill Shakespeare* 8.16 Art by Andy Belanger © IDW Comics
line between an engagement with an adapted work and an “extended engagement?” I do not mean to suggest that everything is an adaptation but that limiting definitions not easily defined or applied such as “extended engagement” do not necessarily expand our discussion of adaptations.

Thus, if we are to suggest that what constitutes an extended engagement is unique to each medium, I turn to a reading of the balcony scene in *Kill Shakespeare* as an example of adaptation in comics form. If we focus first on the visual narrative of the balcony scene in *Kill Shakespeare*, the scene is an adaptation of the famous balcony scene from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* narrative, which might oscillate in a readers mind as they engage with the text. The male and female characters in the balcony scene, which the readers know as Hamlet and Juliet are repeated numerous times in the scene presenting the reader with numerous incarnations of the same character in a two page spread. Additionally, for those that are not aware of the source narrative, the scene presents a way to experience these characters as character types common to comics.

The scene pays tribute to the adapted narrative but because of the shifting perspectives, it is not necessary to understand the adapted narrative to understand the story in *Kill Shakespeare*. In fact, one only gains another layer of palimpsestic doubleness if they are both a comics-knowing audience and Shakespeare-knowing audience but for those that are not aware of the source narrative they will not be lost. The implications for adaptation studies suggested by this scene is that multiple source texts are present and there are multiple layers of palimpsestic doubleness to be experienced by the reader but a reader is not impeded for not knowing the “original.” If each audience member brings a unique body of knowledge to a particular text then what defines a text as an adaptation might be defined by these particular bodies of knowledge or “knowing” rather than an arbitrary model of those that “know” and those that do not.
Because comics is an interactive media form, the experience of the audience is dependent upon their active engagement with the text. The visual narrative track of comics presents readers with multiple incarnations of the same character in different moments in time, in what Donald Ault calls a “kaleidoscopically dispersed gaze” (4). This gaze is “aided and abetted” by what Scott McCloud calls the “gutter” or the “space between the panels” (66). The gutter, a convention of comics, allows the reader to enact closure on the scene where the same character is presented numerous times. The reader must determine how times passes in a scene in comics. Continuing the analysis of the balcony scene in *Kill Shakespeare*, the male character in the scene is presented to the reader fifteen different times in the course of four pages from many different perspectives. This is akin to a film-goer having the same scene presented to them fifteen times from different perspectives at one time on the screen. What separates the graphic novel from a film, however, is the fact that closure in the graphic novel is voluntary, whereas in a film closure is involuntary, leading the reader to have more of a pivotal role in what occurs in each scene. Scott McCloud, while employing some hyperbole makes it clear that “to kill a man between panels is to condemn him to a thousand deaths” (McCloud 69). McCloud provides the example that to kill a man between panels is to condemn him to a thousand deaths because what happens in between panels occurs ad infinitum as per the reader’s choice and construction of the narrative. Thus, what might be considered an extended engagement is reliant upon the reader’s experience and their own active construction of the narrative that is unique to comics form based on the gutter.

The balcony scene in *Kill Shakespeare* is complicated, however, because the narrative that the visual repeats is not the same as the verbal narrative. While this scene presents a repetition of the *Romeo and Juliet* narrative through the visual narrative, it is also telling another
story: the continuation of the search for Shakespeare and the battle against Richard III. The two characters in this scene, Hamlet and Juliet, are discussing going off to war together. Juliet says “I feel like I will never be alone again” (8:17). The balcony scene both begins the romance between Hamlet and Juliet as well as solidifies their partnership in battle. Thus, *Kill Shakespeare* continues the story of Hamlet and Juliet readying for the battle against Richard III, while still interacting with the source text of the scene through the visual narrative. The two narratives allow for two different acts of repetition: a repetition of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet* and a repetition of character type conventions of comics, which Hamlet and Juliet fulfill. In this particular scene, the reader that knows the graphic novel recognizes these character types and gains pleasure from the palimpsestic doubleness of these repeated character types as many other hero characters oscillate in our minds. “Knowing” audiences can read the text as an interaction between a male hero and female hero character-type and thus are able to follow along in the narrative. What oscillates in readers minds of a comics-knowing audience, at this moment, are other scenes like this such as scenes involving Superman and Lois Lane. Readers are not bound to Shakespeare as a source text but rather we are given numerous source “texts” that contain similar character types that we might recognize as integral to comics.

As comics-knowing audience members we are able to engage with the text in ways beyond narrative repetition that still constitute the requirement of repetition with variation, which is the definition of adaptation. *Kill Shakespeare* presents the reader with a particular narrative in comics that is expressed by the medium’s unique capabilities. The balcony scene represents one of many ways that comics is able both to adapt a narrative and decenter fidelity. The scene I have identified also demonstrates a merging of both the character type repetition and the narrative repetition. Two different knowing audiences come together in this scene. If the pleasure comes
from experiencing an adaptation as an adaptation then we only derive more pleasure from seeing certain aspects repeated as knowing or unknowing audiences. The implication of understanding character type repetition instead of focusing solely on narrative repetition leads scholars to new understandings of adaptation. We do not need to know the original text to appreciate an adaptation, nor do we need to know the adapted narrative of a Shakespeare play to experience adaptation as adaptation. There are other levels of palimpsestic doubleness that allow us as audience members to enjoy an adaptation as adaptation. Can we instead look at the pleasure gained from repetition of the scene instead of judging a work based on its extended engagement with the plot of the adapted work? By focusing on different types of knowing audiences, scholars are able to move away from fidelity and propose a new understanding of adaptation that is not reliant on specific narrative repetition, but rather is based on the medium. Therefore, we do not need to know Shakespeare to read *Kill Shakespeare*; we are able to enjoy an adaptation of Shakespeare without actually “knowing” Shakespeare.
CHAPTER IV: I KNOW, THAT YOU KNOW, THAT I KNOW HAMLET:
PALIMPSESTIC PLEASURE AND REPRESENTATIONS OF WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE’S HAMLET IN KILL SHAKESPEARE

In the previous chapter of this study on audience experiences of adaptations, I explored how an audience member does not need to “know” the adapted narrative to experience palimpsestic doubleness or pleasure derived from repetition, when engaging with an adapted text. As I have previously noted, Hutcheon suggests that pleasure comes from the fact that “knowing” the narrative establishes a “set of norms that guide our encounter with the adapted work we are experiencing” (Hutcheon 121). While writing the previous chapter, I was what Hutcheon would consider an “unknowing” audience member, meaning that I was unfamiliar with the narrative of William Shakespeare’s Hamlet and many of his other plays that are adapted in Kill Shakespeare. Contrary to Hutcheon’s claim, though, despite not being part of what she would define as a “knowing” audience, I was not locked out of palimpsestic pleasure, nor did I view Kill Shakespeare as something separate or entirely new. My lack of knowledge regarding the story of Hamlet was offset by my knowledge of the comics medium; thus, I still experienced a type of palimpsestic doubleness, due to my own history with the media form. While I was not a Shakespeare-knowing audience, I was a comics-knowing audience. Writing this chapter I am now both a comics-knowing and a Shakespeare-knowing audience member. If Hutcheon is correct in her assertion that pleasure in adaptation is derived from repetition, then experiencing multiple types of repetition at once, should suggest more pleasure. Thus, my re-reading of Kill Shakespeare, now “knowing” Shakespeare’s Hamlet and simultaneously “knowing” comics only adds another layer to my experience of palimpsestic doubleness.
In this chapter, I suggest that re-reading *Kill Shakespeare* through the lens of being a Shakespeare-knowing audience not only changes my perception of the text but also expands the theory of adaptation. As Hutcheon argues, being a knowing audience “suggests being savvy and street-smart as well as knowledgeable, and undercuts some of the elitist associations of other terms in favor of more democratizing kind of straightforward awareness of the adaptation’s enriching, palimpsestic doubleness” (120). Hutcheon’s more democratizing approach as she calls it, suggests that different bodies of knowledge help scholars understand adaptations. For those who “know” Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, they will recognize *Kill Shakespeare* as an adaptation immediately because the narrative begins with Hamlet having been exiled from Denmark. The first scene also depicts Hamlet remembering the death of his father and the marriage of his mother to his uncle. Thus, the reader who “knows” Shakespeare is situated in a familiar knowledge base and is reminded of the narrative of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in this new adaptation.

While *Kill Shakespeare* is not a “complete” re-telling of *Hamlet*, the graphic novel still fulfills the requirement of repetition with variation as integral plot point of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* are repeated with a difference in the sequel. These include Hamlet being requested by a ghost to avenge the death of his father, a reproduction of the mise en abyme, *The Mysteries of Gonzago* and other key points of the revenge narrative plot. By approaching the text as comics-knowing audience the first time the reference and repetitions of *Hamlet* went unbeknownst to me. In this chapter, however, I will suggest that re-reading *Kill Shakespeare* through the lens of a Shakespeare-knowing audience provides insight and an argument for seeing sequels and prequels as adaptations. I will discuss how expanding the limits of adaptation theory and the limits of a text allow one to expand the knowledges that are produced by different audiences. I will demonstrate how *Kill Shakespeare* makes an argument about *Hamlet* and the role of the ghost
and eventually provides an alternative ending to the *Hamlet* narrative providing readers with repetition with a difference. Finally, *Kill Shakespeare* when read through these different “knowing” audiences suggests a more non-hierarchical vision of adaptation theory that considers different types of knowledges that are able to illuminate a text.

I identify *Kill Shakespeare* specifically as a sequel to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* because the main plot of *Kill Shakespeare* is focused around the character of Hamlet and his journey after being exiled from Denmark. Like most adaptations, *Kill Shakespeare* “signals its identification overtly” (121). A sequel, like any adaptation, announces itself as an adaptation by the fact that it claims to continue a previous text and by asking “knowing” audience members (in this case, a Shakespeare-knowing audience member) to continue the story. A sequel such as *Kill Shakespeare* requests that audience members experiencing the adaptation to refer back to the adapted work through the use of allusions, repetition and references to the adapted narrative.

Thus, the palimpsestic doubleness that occurs in a sequel or prequel is not the same as a more traditional adaptation; however, it seems that even with a sequel or prequel, “knowing” audiences are continually asked to refer back to an adapted work, thus they are experiencing repetition with a difference. As Shakespeare scholar, Stephanie S. Gearhart suggests in her article “Lear’s Daughters, Adaptation, and the Calculation of Worth,” a sequel is able to “push at a narrative’s boundaries, forcing audiences to confront before or after alongside now and then”(8). As per Gearhart’s argument, sequels and prequels ask audience members to rethink the boundaries of a text, suggesting that the audience member is still working within the narrative and experiences repetition with variation. However, as I have previously noted, Hutcheon’s definition of adaptation theory does not include other forms of adaptation beyond “traditional” adaptation, which only limits the theory. Therefore, rather than viewing a sequel as secondary to
the “original,” I argue, by expanding the definition of adaptation to include sequels and prequels, adaptation studies benefits from exploring different knowledges produced by alternative adaptations.

Mark Robson posits that “[a]ll rewritings of Hamlet, then are first of all readings of Hamlet to the extent that they constitute a response and recognize their responsibility to respond” (1). If Robson is correct in his assertion, then it seems that adaptations suggests a way to read a text, similar to the way scholarship suggests how a text might be read. In fact, readings of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, whether it be a sequel, a traditional adaptation or suggested through the genre of the academic essay, all have the ability to influence the reading of the adapted narrative, as Hutcheon notes “palimpsests make for permanent change”(29). Therefore, Scholarship might consider how knowledges are produced and disseminated through these different forms when considering adaptations, such as Kill Shakespeare. Thus, as I re-read Kill Shakespeare as a Shakespeare-knowing audience, I consider different readings of Hamlet from different types of Shakespeare-knowing audiences. Because the scholarship focused around Shakespeare’s Hamlet is expansive, I will focus specifically on the relationship between Hamlet and the ghost. Hamlet is never able to avenge the ghost of his father in either narrative, but Kill Shakespeare attempts to redeem Hamlet by challenging and reinterpreting the ghost’s original request.

Kill Shakespeare challenges the boundary of Shakespeare’s Hamlet by telling the story of Hamlet’s exile from Denmark as the graphic novel fills in the gaps in Shakespeare’s play. In an interview with the website, “Bleeding Cool” the authors of Kill Shakespeare claim that the narrative takes place between Acts IV and V of Shakespeare’s Play. The authors attempt to tell the story of Hamlet’s time away from Denmark and simultaneously write an alternative ending to Shakespeare’s text. After being exiled from Demark, Hamlet is shipwrecked and found in the
land of Richard III. Hamlet is then prompted by Richard III to take up the mission of finding the
great Bard Shakespeare because Richard III wants Shakespeare’s magical quill. Richard III
promises Hamlet that he will raise Hamlet’s father from the dead in return for the magical quill.
In order to persuade Hamlet, Richard III proceeds to show Hamlet his great powers by
resurrecting one of Hamlet’s crewmen from his shipwrecked ship. Richard III then says to
Hamlet, “See this power? As he is renewed, so too shall your own father be. Trust me. Save my
people. Quill for father? Is the prize not worth the price?” (Fig 2). This meeting sets up the
narrative for Hamlet’s quest to find “Will Shakespeare” so that Richard III might resurrect
Hamlet’s father. Once again, Hamlet is determined to kill a man in order to avenge the death of
his father.

The narrative of *Kill Shakespeare*, like Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, is driven by Hamlet’s
promise to the ghost of his father. The night after Richard III requests that Hamlet kill Will
Shakespeare, the ghost of Hamlet’s father visits Hamlet in his sleep (Fig 2). The scene depicts
Hamlet dreaming and while dreaming, he says “father” out loud multiple times, finally leading
him to scream “Father!” The visual narrative suggests that the dream is a nightmare because
Hamlet seems to be struggling in his sleep. While this particular scene does not rely upon an
audience member being a Shakespeare-knowing audience, knowledge of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*
can influence how this scene is read. While being an “unknowing” audience member I read the
scene based on the information from *Kill Shakespeare*. I understood that Hamlet’s father had
been murdered because of the information provided by the text. However, “knowing” the
Figure 2 From *Kill Shakespeare* 1.31 Art by Andy Belanger © IDW Comics
adapted work, I now understand that Hamlet has been haunted by the ghost of his father. It is also this key plot point that led to Hamlet's exile, which is where *Kill Shakespeare* begins.

Because I recognize the *Hamlet* narrative not only has my reading of the graphic novel changed but it also challenges my reading of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* because I am asked to reconsider the boundaries of that text. For example, the narrative of *Kill Shakespeare* proposes to illuminate my understanding of Hamlet’s motivation to return to Denmark in Act V of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Therefore, not only has this changed how I read *Kill Shakespeare* but also how I read *Hamlet*.

For “knowing” audience members, the first scene where Hamlet meets the ghost of his father in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is a defining moment because Hamlet is given the task that drives the narrative of not only Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* but also *Kill Shakespeare*. In this scene, the ghost of Hamlet’s father comes to him and asks Hamlet to avenge the death of his father. The ghost says to Hamlet “To ears of flesh and blood. List, Hamlet, list, O list!/If thou didst ever thy dear father love—/…Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder” (I.v.22-23). After the ghost tells Hamlet what has occurred, the ghost leaves, but not before leaving Hamlet one last task. The ghost says to Hamlet, “Adieu, adieu, Hamlet. Remember me” (I.v.91). Not only is Hamlet given the important task of taking up revenge against his uncle but the ghost of his father gives him the task of remembering.

The second request of the ghost, to “remember me,” becomes a point of contention for Shakespeare scholars. For example, Stephen Greenblatt argues that it is “faintly ludicrous” to believe that Hamlet would have forgotten his father (207). Thus, it seems that the request to remember is more than about just remembering the ghost as Rhodri Lewis posits. Lewis suggests that it is through the “brilliant device of having a ghost instruct Hamlet not to revenge but to remember and therefore revenge, Shakespeare bypasses dramatic crudity and shifts attention of
his audience to the disposition of his prince’s emotional life” (612). Shakespeare’s brilliance lies not in the revenge narrative but in adapting the revenge narrative to a more psychologically driven narrative. In the vein of a more psychological reading of the text, scholars then have become interested in what the ghost meant by “remember me” and have turned to the Freudian interpretation of “remembering” by considering Freud’s famous essay “Remembering, Repeating and Working Through.” According to Nouri Gana, Hamlet is “incessantly asked by the ghost of his father to remember and to wreak vengeance: he is repeatedly asked to repeat (64, emphasis in original). However, repeating is not remembering, rather the compulsion to repeat “does not guarantee, as Freud prudently shows, the fulfillment of mourning” (Gana 70). Instead, Hamlet is a character, who has not been able to mourn his father but is continually repeating the wishes of a ghost. Because Kill Shakespeare is an alternative ending to Hamlet, the act of remembering is important because the authors of Kill Shakespeare posit a rewriting of Hamlet's task to fulfill the wishes of the ghost. In Kill Shakespeare, Hamlet is asked to repeat once again but as the readers will see, he repeats with a difference.

Kill Shakespeare begins as a revenge narrative and it is this plot point that drives the narrative of Kill Shakespeare and allows Hamlet to meet Juliet, Falstaff, Iago, and Othello. However, it is the second task given to Hamlet by the ghost, the request to “remember,” that ultimately leads to the change in narrative structure and transitions Kill Shakespeare from a revenge narrative to a hero quest narrative. When Hamlet finally “remembers” in Kill Shakespeare, the plot changes and the readers are presented with a new ending. We are no longer simply reading an adaption of the Hamlet narrative, where the character of Hamlet is haunted by a ghost that asks him to avenge the death of his father but audience members are presented with a new narrative that relies upon Hamlet’s remembering his father. Thus, Kill Shakespeare engages
with the audience members' ability to recognize the adapted work but because it is a sequel, the promise of something new is still followed through in the narrative. The repetition with a difference is that Hamlet does not ultimately repeat the same mistakes of the adapted narrative through his remembering his father.

Hamlet meets with the ghost of his father again in *Kill Shakespeare* and is reminded of his task to avenge the death of his father. In the adapted scene in *Kill Shakespeare* (fig. 3), Hamlet is peering into a lake as the ghost of his father appears and attacks him. The ghost of Hamlet’s father immediately asks why he has not yet been avenged. The scene with the ghost is adapted creatively to fit with the narrative of *Kill Shakespeare*; members of a “knowing” audience of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* will recognize the scene as similar to scenes from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. This meeting in the graphic novel resembles the second meeting of the ghost with Hamlet from Shakespeare’s play, not because of the action or location but because of what is said by the ghost to Hamlet. In the scene from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the Ghost reminds Hamlet: “Do not Forget. This visitation/Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose” (III.iv.100-101). In the graphic novel adaptation of this scene, the first question the ghost asks Hamlet is why he has forgotten his father’s face. It seems that the act of remembering, takes precedence over revenge, as the focus of the scene is on remembering before the ghost of Hamlet’s father asks Hamlet if he has completed the revenge. The focus of the two meetings between Hamlet and the ghost of his father is on forgetting and remembering. If the first meeting with the ghost in both the narrative of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Kill Shakespeare* is focused on taking up the task of revenge, then the second meeting is focused on guaranteeing that Hamlet completes his given task. These scenes suggest that the task to remember is more important than the revenge. The reader that “knows” both *Hamlet* and *Kill Shakespeare* might experience this reading of the text.
For a “knowing” audience of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, this scene makes an argument about the adapted narrative. The scene from the graphic novel suggests a previous meeting between the two characters as the ghost asks Hamlet, “Hamlet why hath thou forgotten thy father’s face?”
Even though Hamlet has not said a word to his father’s ghost at this point, his father’s ghost still asks him this question immediately. Not only has Hamlet not said anything regarding not recognizing his father but for an “unknowing” audience member at this point, this is the first time that we as readers have seen the ghost of Hamlet’s father approach Hamlet and talk directly to Hamlet. Prior to this scene, the ghost of Hamlet’s father had only been suggested to have visited Hamlet in his dreams as I previously noted. However, this scene suggests recognition of prior knowledge for those that “know” the narrative of the adapted work. For those who do not “know” the narrative, it is understood that the ghost is appearing because Richard III uses his magic to animate the ghost, however, for those that do know Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* the scene suggests a prior meeting between the ghost and Hamlet. Hamlet asks his father’s ghost how he has gotten here. For an “unknowing” audience member, prior to this scene, Hamlet had only seen the ghost of his father either in his dreams for those that only know *Kill Shakespeare* or in the castle in Denmark for those that know Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. From whichever history the audience approaches the narrative, the focus of the scene in *Kill Shakespeare* is on Hamlet remembering the ghost of his father. *Kill Shakespeare* suggests that the main purpose of the ghost is to have Hamlet remember. Hamlet’s second meeting with the ghost in *Kill Shakespeare* is the last time that Hamlet sees the ghost, because after this, Hamlet’s remembering transitions from remembering the ghost of his father to remembering his father as is made evident later in the graphic novel. Ultimately this act of remembering ends what Gana calls “Hamlet’s endless mourning” (71) seen in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The sequel produces a reading of the adapted work, thus making its own argument about how the adapted work should be read.

While *Kill Shakespeare* begins with a focus on Hamlet’s task to avenge his father’s death, the second half of the narrative shifts to Hamlet helping Juliet and the revolution fight
against Richard III. The narrative shift from a revenge narrative to a traditional hero quest narrative occurs in the graphic novel when Hamlet is forced to act in a production of the play, *The Murder of Gonzago*. The story within a story, the *mise en abyme*, the production of the *The Murder of Gonzago*, is seen in both *Hamlet* and *Kill Shakespeare*. The difference between the two scenes is that in *Kill Shakespeare*, Juliet forces Hamlet to act in the production of *The Murder of Gonzago*. Thus, what differentiates this scene from the one in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is that rather than Hamlet putting on the play, which Hamlet does in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, instead he is forced to participate in the play this time. Hamlet is no longer the director, who requests that the players, “Speak the speech...as I pronounced it to you” (III.ii.1). Instead, as a participant, Hamlet must “speak the speech” himself and remember his father. However, Hamlet does not finish the play, because he ends up running away to a house of mirrors because while acting in the play he begins to remember the murder of his father. He says to the director of the play, “[h]ow can ye know this? How do ye know how my father was murdered”(7:15). However, before receiving any answer Hamlet runs off the stage and finds himself in a house of mirrors. Hamlet is forced to change positions and see his own history differently because he is no longer the director but the actor.

Hamlet runs into a house of mirrors during the production of the play *The Murder of Gonzago* and begins to remember not only his father but his own story (Fig 4). During the production of *The Murder of Gonzago* in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Hamlet remarks to the players that the “the pur-/pose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and/ is to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her,/ own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body/ of the time his form and pressure”(III.ii.18-22). In this scene in the graphic novel, the mirror is turned on Hamlet as he is forced to look at himself. His first remark upon
running into the house of mirrors is “what image are these in front of me” (7:16). Hamlet is forced to look at himself from multiple angles, in a kaleidoscopic gaze. Juliet follows him into the house of mirrors and Hamlet says to Juliet “I am damned to spy a villain in every glass and mirror I pass” (7:20). Being surrounded by mirrors, Hamlet is forced to look at himself in these mirrors and rethink his past. It is in the house of mirrors that Hamlet says to Juliet, “perhaps my father was not worthy of it, but I loved him and because of my miscast love, I killed for him. I spilled blood for a father who saw me not as a child to love and cherish, but as a rival to defeat” (7:21). Finally, for an audience that has followed Hamlet, through the Shakespearean play, and through *Kill Shakespeare*, the reader is given a conclusion to the narrative of the ghost plot as Hamlet finally moves beyond the death of his father. Alternatively, for those experiencing *Kill Shakespeare* as what Hutcheon would consider an “unknowing” audience, the narrative follows the plot trajectory of a “reluctant hero” type that overcomes their past in order to then move on to battle. While the narratives stands on its own for those that do not know Shakespeare, there are other layers to the text, granting the reader pleasure by recognizing the adapted work ending in a new way.

The production of the play *Murder of Gonzago* in *Kill Shakespeare* allows Hamlet to finally remember. The scene becomes a turning point for the narrative, because Hamlet begins to open up and discuss his past with Juliet. It is in this moment that Hamlet does fulfill his father’s wish to “remember me” in *Kill Shakespeare* and it is in the moment of remembering that he finally frees himself from the ghost and from his past. Hamlet finally tells Juliet that “my father was not a wise king. He was rash, suspicious, and like the miser, he grew to believe that all
sought to steal what was he felt was his” (7:20). Hamlet remembers how his father truly was and actually tells the story of his father. Finally, Hamlet also says to Juliet,
You spoke of ghosts before, Lady. It is funny, is it not? Ghosts of one sort or
another always emerge from one’s past. Upon seeing them, our vanity calls us to
believe they seek to pull us back with them—to a place better left forgotten. But
why could we not choose to hear these spirits’ messages differently? (7:20)

Hamlet tells Juliet that ghosts always seem to reappear. He suggests that perhaps he had
misunderstood the intentions of these ghosts. He ran in fear from the ghost because he worried
that the ghost would take him down the wrong path. However, it becomes clear that it is only
upon thinking through and remembering his father that Hamlet is finally freed of his need to
revenge his father and is freed of the ghost. Kill Shakespeare redeems Hamlet and tries to correct
the mistakes of what had happened before by having Hamlet rethink the requests of his father
and rewriting the ending to Shakespeare's Hamlet, providing readers with an alternative ending
than the repetition that leads to Hamlet's death.

For adaptation theory, audience experience becomes a crucial issue because it provides a
discussion for the multiplicity of knowledges that a text can produce. The multiplicity of
knowledges range from traditional adaptations, to sequels and prequels and even scholarship. As
scholarship on Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Kill Shakespeare suggest the theme of memory is a
critical point in the Hamlet narrative. The different readings of the texts that are produced by
different knowing audiences simultaneously illuminate the text. This second reading of the text
demonstrates how my being both a comics-knowing audience and a Shakespeare-knowing
audience only provides multiple layers to my reading. There is no singular understanding of a
text, nor is there a definitive adaptation or approach to a text. These different bodies of
knowledge all comment upon the text and the different experiences that an audience member has
with a text. Kill Shakespeare provides a separate reading of the Hamlet narrative that exists
simultaneously with the scholarship. All of these readings of the *Hamlet* narrative provide critical insights whether it is a sequel to *Hamlet* or scholarship. Adaptation studies reconsidered through different audience experiences produces non-hierarchical bodies of knowledge rather than a singular reading of a text. Just as comics ask readers to continually shift positions, adaptation studies considers different bodies of knowledge and how they influence the experience and understanding of different texts.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

In this project, I shift my focus on adaptation studies from a discussion on narrative adaptation to a more exploratory model of adaptation studies. This shift elicits new questions regarding not only the evolution of narratives but also popular literacy. Adaptation theory is no longer driven by fidelity criticism; instead, adaptation scholars are motivated by understanding how different audiences consume adapted texts. For example, one might ask, how do different “knowing” audiences or literacy groups experience different adaptations differently? As I have argued throughout this thesis, different experiences of texts are based on different knowledges and the different types of audiences that consume these texts. These knowledges may be based on the plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for instance, or the medium of comics. Ultimately, knowing audiences are defined by their knowledges or literacies. Thus, knowledge is not singular, but rather multiplicitous. Like the comics form that incorporates multiple narrative tracks, knowledge ought to be defined by its simultaneous presence in multiple locations; it can only be understood by shifting perspectives between the different locations.

When adaptation theory considers multiple types of knowing audiences, it provides insight into discussion on popular literacies. As Linda Hutcheon notes, “adaptations are everywhere today”(2). Therefore, if adaptation is defined as the process of making something new again, it is difficult to determine what adaptation is without considering popular fiction and popular literacy because adaptation is inextricably tied to the concept of the popular. In fact, adaptation is not a new phenomenon, but rather a process of making old things new. It is important to remember that even Shakespeare adapted many of his plays from other narratives, making them new again (Fischlin and Fortier 1). With this assertion in mind, adaptation studies is not a question of defining what is and is not an adaptation. Rather, adaptation studies has the
ability to consider how texts evolve over time, and in multiple directions at once. Linda Hutcheon, in a more recently published essay co-authored with biologist Gary Bortolotti, even suggests that adaptation resembles biological evolution in many ways. There is not only one direction for these adaptations to evolve, much like biological evolution (444). And much like the multiple types of knowing audiences, there are many types of popular literacies to be explored. Rather than defining an ur-text, adaptation scholars have the potential to branch out and explore multiplicitious knowledges produced by different texts.

Throughout this thesis I have suggested that there are multiple type of knowing audiences and multiple types of knowledges that emerge out of an adaptation. This more expansive vision directly contrasts previous models of adaptation theory because we have changed perspectives from comparing adaptations with adapted works to a focus on the reader or audience experience. In terms of popular literacy, which is so intertwined with adaption, the place of the reader or the audience is often misunderstood or goes unacknowledged in scholarship. Indeed, in the introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction*, David Glover and Scott McCracken argue that a "reader's experience probably remains the least understood dimension of popular fiction"(9). My thesis strives for a revaluing of the more embodied perspective of the reader and their own analysis of a text. Therefore, I read *Kill Shakespeare* from my own perspective as both scholar and reader, contrary to orthodox adaptation theory which suggested an "objective" point of view. My thesis is a case study documenting how my many perspectives and knowledges influence my experience of an adaptation such as *Kill Shakespeare*.

Through this study, I have concluded that comics suggests the multiplicity of knowledge and experience. Knowledge is not fragmented but located in the position and the experience of the individual. My focus on an audience’s knowledge and the reader’s response to these
adaptations invokes Donna Haraway's concept of “situated knowledges” (374). She suggests that knowledges are situated in particular perspectives and experiences, as is the case with my own response to the graphic novel. My method of producing and documenting knowledge is also similar to Judith Halberstam’s approach in *The Queer Art of Failure*. Halberstam suggests that she actively seeks out “new forms of knowing” based on alternative knowledges. She determines that these knowledges emerge from the process of shifting perspectives of one’s own understanding of a narrative. She shifts between “high” and “low” theories in order to demonstrate how different perspectives might illuminate new meanings about a text. In fact, Halberstam relies heavily on the “art of summary” in order to make her argument (xi). She suggests that one's own understanding of a text understood through summary and other embodied knowledges explore “new narrative zones of possibility (xi). While Halberstam is interested in broader questions of gender and sexuality, she still pursues non-normative knowledges by pursuing these embodied knowledges that have for some time been discussed in theory but not employed. This directly contrasts theory as an all-encompassing model, which orthodox adaptation theory had suggested. In fact, my own situated knowledge that I document in this thesis provides alternative methods in adaptation theory. Thus, my reading of *Kill Shakespeare* from my different perspectives illuminates the possibility to see knowledge as embodied and multiple from my own perspective.

As I have suggested, comics as a narrative form is one of many new media examples that appeals to an emerging consciousness that is not singular but multiple. Comics participates in a shift from the singularity of the novel to more multiplicitous, serialized texts. The multiplicity of knowledges noted in our own multiplicitous consciousness is what Donna Haraway discusses when she suggests that "subjectivity is multidimensional; so therefore is vision. The knowing self
is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another” (375, emphasis in original). Comics is perhaps one of only many examples that will surface out of the emergence of new media, but it is significant because it captures the process of adaptation and its potential to define knowledge as multiple. Because of its unique process of disseminating knowledge in multiple narrative tracks, as well as its importance in popular literacy, comics appeals to the discussion of expanding knowledges in adaptation studies. It is then important to consider how Shakespeare is being retold once again in this new form for audiences to experience the bard. In fact, Kill Shakespeare is only one example of many in the literary canon of comics. The appeal of Shakespeare in the medium of comics is only beginning to produce more adaptations. The first issue of a sequel to Kill Shakespeare was just released in February. While it is both a sequel to the previous narrative, this series also adapts Shakespeare's The Tempest. The popularity of Shakespeare in a new medium demonstrates how Shakespeare's narratives evolve in different media forms to appeal to different consciousness over time.

Adaptation theory, comics, and Kill Shakespeare are three unique texts that connect a variety of different aspects of popular literacy. Hutcheon opened the discussion by proposing the idea of “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences. Individual experience also helps to clarify what an adaptation is and how it has evolved. This emerging space allows scholars to question the experience of different readers. How do we experience a text and how do our experiences differ? What do we learn from those that are consuming the text rather than defining what is a “faithful” adaptation? My goal for this project is to help generate these productive questions and usher in a new and more productive phase in adaptation studies. Rather than claiming that a text is not an
adaptation because it is a sequel or based on arbitrary models, scholars instead ought to look to audience experience and knowledge to learn from adaptation.


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