“INFINITE EARTHS”: CROSSMEDIA ADAPTATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTINUITY IN THE DC ANIMATED UNIVERSE

Alex Nader

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2015

Committee:

Jeff Brown, Advisor
Becca Cragin
This thesis examines the process of adapting comic book properties into other visual media. I focus on the DC Animated Universe, the popular adaptation of DC Comics characters and concepts into all-ages programming. This adapted universe started with *Batman: The Animated Series* and comprised several shows on multiple networks, all of which fit into a shared universe based on their comic book counterparts. The adaptation of these properties is heavily reliant on intertextuality across DC Comics media. The shared universe developed within the television medium acted as an early example of comic book media adapting the idea of shared universes, a process that has been replicated with extreme financial success by DC and Marvel (in various stages of fruition). I address the process of adapting DC Comics properties in television, dividing it into “strict” or “loose” adaptations, as well as derivative adaptations that add new material to the comic book canon. This process was initially slow, exploding after the first series (*Batman: The Animated Series*) changed networks and Saturday morning cartoons flourished, allowing for more opportunities for producers to create content. References, crossover episodes, and the later series *Justice League Unlimited* allowed producers to utilize this shared universe to develop otherwise impossible adaptations that often became lasting additions to DC Comics publishing. Concepts developed in this paratextual universe became popular enough to see recursive adaptation in DC Comics ongoing comic book universe and other media, emphasizing the importance of cross-media connections. The continued popularity and success of comic book media is reliant on cross-media synergy and shared universes.
Dedicated to my parents, friends, and my loving girlfriend. Thank you for your support.
I would like to thank the Popular Culture department at BGSU. The faculty and my courses forever transformed the way I think about critical issues, entertainment, and the world as a whole. I would also like to thank my cohort, who supported me through all of this—and I them, I hope.
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INTRODUCTION

The originality of many media is obviously growing increasingly sparse. While accessibility and the sheer amount may be higher than ever (and continually increasing), the majority of media are derivative works. The popularity of these derivative works lies in their built-in potential for finding an audience. Sequels, adaptations of books and comic books, and reboots of the aforementioned material dominate television and film media. These adaptations, sequels and similar texts, while derivative, do have the potential to be both creatively satisfying and financially successful. The overarching goal of this thesis is to examine the success of DC Comics’ animation through the 1990s and early 2000s in order to understand its success. I will discuss how the developers of comic book media have utilized similar tactics in the development of properties that led to longevity and financial success. Furthermore, the popularity of DC’s animation has led to the materials’ adaptation into DC’s other media as the parent company has developed methods of maintaining and growing the audience already acquainted with DC’s television media and its many influences. I will examine these topics through the lens of adaptation studies, which utilize aspects of Julia Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality heavily in their examination of adaptations, their popularity, and the reasoning behind it.

Graham Allen’s *Intertextuality* heavily utilizes Kristeva’s definition of the term, bridging it to popular texts like Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* and the films of Jean-Luc Godard. He espouses the idea of intertextuality—that texts are identified in relation to other texts. This understanding of intertextuality is integral to my thesis; DC’s media specifically affect each other in a direct manner that reflects a changing view of intertextuality. While Allen posited that much of what DC produces—reproduced “versions” of its many franchises—they are continually adding or modifying elements that stand to change the potential for that version’s cultural
relevance and longevity. He identifies one particularly interesting suggestion of adaptations: they rely on new techniques and old patterns (185). The elite mixes with the popular, the new mixes with the old, and they create compelling reasons for readers to view derivative works in order to develop upon their existing connection with the text. Intertextuality in this sense is tied to the growing field of adaptation studies.

Linda Hutcheon’s recent book, *A Theory of Adaptation*, helps to develop the specifics of understanding the adaptation of properties across many different media. Her study is divided into several questions about adaptation (in order): What, Who, Why, How, Where, and When. Hutcheon identifies reasoning behind adaptation around all avenues, clearly delineating many of the important cultural elements that lead to the amount of adaptations we constantly experience. One of her most intriguing ideas suggests that the appeal of adaptation is in the audience’s experience of repetition and difference, identifying Julian Barnes’s supposition that audiences want replicas as inspiration (114). Proven story structures with comparatively small changes continually gain high amounts of popularity and praise from audiences, and thus we see them repeated *ad nauseum*.

Hutcheon develops an understanding of adaptation across many media, understanding that the economy of adaptation is an integral part of its success: “…adaptation across all modes of engagement is economic. Broadway adapts from Hollywood; novelizations are timed to coincide with the release of a film” (30). Specific versions of characters or media can override the reader’s perception of that media. Hutcheon specifically cites *Harry Potter’s* Quidditch as an example of a concept that is influenced heavily by its film adaptation, at least in her view. Her understanding of adaptation takes in account the economic aspects of adaptation. She writes, “[t]he entertainment industry is just that: an industry” (88). Hutcheon’s theory forms a rationale
for the spread, revision and utilization of similar ideas across media—the eponymous theory of adaptation—that I will utilize in this thesis to understand DC’s development of animated properties.

Hutcheon’s exploration of adaptations ties in with Jonathan Gray’s *Show Sold Separately*, a recent book wherein Gray identifies texts that act as supporting documents to other texts. His study of merchandise, spoilers, trailers, sequels, and other supplementary material coincides with my research on DC’s animation properties. As ostensibly supplementary shows—supporting DC comics and films—they are subject to many of the demands that Gray identifies with “paratexts.” The identification of a single prominent text with franchised characters like Batman and Superman is a subject of endless debate among fans and creators. Gray writes,

…Hollywood and its marketers often mobilize paratexts [supplementary material to the ‘main text’] to proffer ‘proper interpretations,’ some preceding the show’s arrival in the public sphere, thereby setting up pre-decodings, and some working *in medias res* to subtly inflect the public understanding of an ongoing and open text (81).

DC Comics, along with Marvel and many other entertainment producers, work endlessly to craft their popularly *preferred* versions of their characters and properties. The various media and producers work together to develop synergistic approaches to their media. I will utilize Gray’s research and theorization about paratexts in the identification of elements that are maintained across media, particularly in the adaptation of characters and new versions thereof.

Julie Sanders discusses adaptation as a process in *Adaptation and Appropriation*. She identifies integral elements that signify that the new text is an adaptation help develop the text into something more than a reproduction. James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, for instance, is a very loose adaptation of Homer’s *Odyssey* with very important structural and stylistic changes (and a very
different setting with different stakes) that intensely differentiate it from its forebear. Its status as an adaptation is far different than film or comic book adaptations of the same text. The array of adaptations is incredibly varied. Sanders’ approach, while important in understanding the popularity and appeal of adaptations, does not wholly work for adaptations of comic books. She suggests that adaptation is an inherently conservative genre; I believe that it is more of a method or a mode of production rather than a genre. Adaptation is generally conservative, though it allows for more potential in existing media’s fruition. While *Ulysses*’ Leopold Bloom is that story’s version of Odysseus, Tim Burton’s *Batman* is that film’s version of Batman. When a company owns these properties, rather than individuals, the discussion of adaptation is difficult to discuss within these boundaries.

Sanders references an essay by T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” that acted as a forerunner to understanding the appeal of adaptation. Eliot’s essay focuses on literature and poetry, suggesting early ideas of intertextuality and the importance of relating texts to their contemporaries and forerunners. He writes:

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead (Eliot).

Eliot’s—again very early but nonetheless impressive and useful—account of an early version of intertextuality is helpful in developing understanding of the popularity and frequency of adaptations. Eliot’s position was that earlier poets colored and inspired future writings. His own work, specifically “The Waste Land,” epitomizes this position. Eliot writes about the great literary tradition of poets, which can (perhaps blasphemously to some) be transferred to the producers of comic book media. Sanders’ development of a theory based around Eliot’s work is
again based around literature, which requires modification in order to apply to media based on franchises and companies. She sets forth “three broad categories of adaptation” (borrowed from Deborah Cartmell): transposition, commentary, and analogue. Adaptations can act as any of these or a mix of two or three (20). This suggestion is paramount to this thesis: DC’s animated media primarily acts as a transposition of existing DC comics. It is a revision—a new version of an existing story for a new audience within a new medium. Similarly, DC’s animation often comments on its predecessors and acts as an analogue for the existing progression of the franchise.Sanders seems to put forth the idea that adaptations are incapable of being unique. While their ideas might not be wholly new, they do offer the potential to revitalize franchises with new ideas and become unique versions or reinvigorated interpretations of franchises or ideas.

Dani Cavallaro’s *Anime and the Art of Adaptation* features several case studies in addition to a thoroughly described rationale for her research. She references the work of theorists Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, and Jean Baudrillard in her delineation of adaptations as compared to originals, though her suggestion is that their ideas are more tenuous in the age of near-constant adaptation. Cavallaro writes, “More recent thinkers have proposed that copies and simulacra should not be unequivocally regarded as inferior to the reality which they are presumed to imitate or simulate” (10). While her research focuses mainly on anime adaptations of literature or time periods, her suggestion (following Baudrillard) that everything has elements of adaptation is tied heavily to the suggestion of intertextuality. Adaptation cannot exist without intertextual elements. Cavallaro’s focus on anime is tied directly to that specific genre; her analysis of adaptation as an art form, however, is applicable to many other arenas, including DC’s animation.
Jason Mittell’s *Genre and Television* focuses on the wide sprawl of genres on network and cable television. The book’s third chapter, titled “From Saturday Morning to Around the Clock—The Industrial Practices of Television Cartoons,” focuses on the changes involved in the development of popular cartoons, from the early 1900s and into the era of Cartoon Network and easily accessible animation on cable television. Mittell writes “as a cultural form, cartoons were still known as they were in the era of the studio system: as entertainment for mass audiences, but with particular appeal to children.” He posits that beyond the Warner Era of the 1950s, the mass appeal of cartoons wore away and cartoons primarily focused on children. He argues that “a number of large-scale factors were partially formative of this shift,” including the transformation of cinematic animation and the increasing popularity of television with families (62-62). Mittell supplies a history of children’s cartoons, through the massively popular Hanna-Barbera cartoons and their endlessly reused backgrounds and premises—he calls the period from the 1960s to the 1990s “a wasteland of Saturday morning knockoffs… from which Golden Age shorts need to be rescued—through the 1990s cartoon renaissance. He cites *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and *The Little Mermaid* as catalysts for the re-acceptance of animation by adults, crediting their all-ages appeal and sophisticated animation (80). He writes, “The success of Disney features with all audiences helped restore the legitimacy and broad appeal of animation, factoring into the genre’s transformation on television.” The returned acceptance of adult content in animated programming, along with the concurrent success of Tim Burton’s *Batman* allowed DC’s animation efforts to flourish in the early 1990s television environment. This newfound (or perhaps rediscovered) legitimacy along with Fox’s risk-taking behavior also contributed to the show’s success (along with the obvious quality of its programming, particularly compared to its contemporaries). This distinction of “all-ages” animation is integral to the success and longevity
of DC’s animated properties, particularly *Batman: The Animated Series*, upon which my research is built.

There has been a wealth of great work in the discussion of adaptation, and even a sizeable amount on the franchising of comic books, the development of shared universes within these media has been relatively unexamined. The aforementioned theorists have worked in the field of adaptation studies and developed solid rationale in understanding the cultural success of adaptations. I hope to merge that realm of thought with an analysis on the conditions required by media within a shared universe in order to understand the pattern established within comic book media and the influences that this pattern has on the production of future texts. The popularity of these existing adaptations and their influence on the current abundance of superhero films is due to an uncannily similar, perhaps even methodical recreation of DC’s tactics within the DC Animated Universe.

The majority of DC’s animation during the 1990s and into the 2000s exists within a shared universe, commonly referred to by creators and fans as the “DC Animated Universe.” In the context of comic book media, a “universe” signifies a shared fictional plane wherein myriad characters exist. This allows for crossovers between titles and events that affect the characters and story lines within the universe. The DC Animated Universe consists of several interconnected series that began in 1992 with *Batman: The Animated Series (BTAS)*. *BTAS* was followed by *Superman: The Animated Series (STAS) (1996)*, *The New Batman Adventures* (a continuation of *BTAS* in 1997, though it aired on The WB instead of FOX due to DC Comics’ parent company’s rights changing), *Batman Beyond* (1999), *Static Shock* (2000), *The Zeta Project* (2001), *Justice League* (2001), and *Justice League Unlimited* (2004). These series often featured crossovers and plot points that bled into each other; for example, Batman’s relationship
with Superman in *Justice League* was heavily influenced by previous interactions in the DC Animated Universe. The performances and “versions” of the characters within the DC Animated Universe have become popular and lasting versions to viewers of DC Animated Universe programming and have heavily influenced subsequent and upcoming adaptations both in content and format.

The interconnectivity of this television universe was helped by the fact that the creators of the first series were heavily involved in subsequent efforts. The consistency of elements within the universe—character design, characterization, plotlines and so forth—benefitted from the involvement of creators throughout the series. Integral parties like Bruce Timm, Paul Dini, Jean MacCurdy and Alan Burnett (among many others) created a tone suitable for all-ages animation that was apparent in all DC Animated Universe series. In any shared universe, the consistency of characters—visually, tonally, and contextually—is vital to the success of the franchise. The consistency lets viewers know that the events of prior series “counted”—that they were directly relevant to the current series, rather than thematically or otherwise pertinent. The familiarity that the audience is acquainted with enhances and rewards return viewers and allows for thematically richer storytelling than many comic book adaptations offered prior to the DC Animated Universe’s conception.

The strategy of the DC Animated Universe was adopted (and modified) from its print counterpart. DC Comics (and other subsequent publishers, most notably Marvel Comics) has maintained constant shared universe continuity (with a few notable continuity reboots) since the 1940s, which has greatly contributed to its success and longevity. The DC Animated Universe demonstrated that the approach worked in another medium, its developers forging their post-*BTAS* shows in the image of both *BTAS* and the existing comic book DC Universe. Many of the
creators worked in comics alongside (or preceding) their roles in the production of the DC Animated Universe; their familiarity with the source material enhanced their adaptations by maintaining important characterization amidst the required changes for both the medium and audience. Strong intertextuality between DC Comics and its franchise efforts in other media benefits both the creators and the audience. This synergy across media and shared universes creates richer experiences and allows for greater audience interaction with texts.

Chapter one discusses the process of adaptation and the necessary steps creators must take in modifying properties for different audiences. I focus on the process of creating a unified look for BTAS (initially) and following entries in the DC Animated Universe. This distinct visual and tonal style worked in tandem with the texts’ content in the creation of a universe. I talk specifically about three types of adaptation: loose adaptations of existing comic book stories, strict adaptations, and the creation of new (albeit derivative) material within the DC Animated Universe. These three adaptation methods comprise the entirety of DC Animated Universe programming. I focus on specific episodes within each method and explain the rationale of their success or failure.

In chapter two I delve into a discussion of intertextuality and continuity across titles and media. The concurrent production and distribution of DC Animated Universe titles acted in a similar manner to its print publication, allowing for (and encouraging) crossovers between titles and a flow of characters into subsequent titles. This changed the environment for adaptations and encouraged shared universes and sequel series in comic book media. The usage and popularity of shared universes is surging; Marvel has created a universe around its films and DC is in the process of following suit. FOX and Sony are, similarly, currently developing shared universes with their film rights to the X-Men and Spider-Man franchises respectively. This highly popular
(and profitable) technique has led to unexpected adaptations like *Guardians of the Galaxy* that have built success on the continuity and intertextuality of titles within the shared universes. Relatively unknown concepts can see adaptation due to their connection to the proven success of previous films in the shared universe (however minor that connection may appear). This discussion leads to the examination of the synergy between media for both DC Comics and Marvel Comics, particularly the free flow of ideas across franchises.

The majority of chapter three is an in-depth examination of the DC Animated Universe original characters Harley Quinn and Batman Beyond, and their re-adaptation into DC Comics’ print publishing and other materials. This analysis builds on my previously identified trend of cross-media adaptation. Both Harley Quinn and Batman Beyond have been successfully transferred to other media; Harley Quinn’s eponymous comic consistently outsells well-known titles like *Captain America* and *Superman* due to the character’s popularity and solid connection to the audience. She has also become an integral part of DC’s video game, animation, and (upcoming) film adaptations. Likewise, Batman Beyond’s comic book presence is growing, having begun with out-of-continuity comics (operating in a “bubble” of sorts away from the main DC Universe) and recently moving into the popular *Futures End* series. I also examine the importance of cross-media adaptation in Marvel’s recent cinematic and television productions, comparing the similar synergy of the character Phil Coulson and his appearances in a huge span of Marvel media. These characters represent the importance and effectiveness of cross-media adaptation—the success of these adaptations in one medium suggests (though does not prove)—that their developers will be able to replicate that success in another. The consistent popularity of DC Animated Universe titles and derivative work—even after the conclusion of the last DC
Animated Universe series *Justice League Unlimited*—has positioned it as a precursor to the now-highly popular concept of a shared universe in an audiovisual medium.

This thesis will examine the synergistic methods taken by DC Comics in creating successful adaptations. The construction of adaptations—including characterization, accuracy of adaptation and addition of new material—was integral to their success as individual series. The maintenance of a shared universe remains an important way for derivative comic book media to reflect its print predecessors and achieve greater critical and financial success. The DC Animated Universe acted as a blueprint for both DC and Marvel to use: it successfully introduced tactics present in comic books to another medium, and these successes resonate today in many ways. Some, like the presence of DC Animated Universe characters and concepts in comic books and video games, present themselves as obvious; others, like the creation and upkeep of Marvel’s Cinematic Universe, are more concealed, yet they owe a clear debt to the ground broken by the creators of the DC Animated Universe.
CHAPTER I: ADAPTING PROPERTIES FOR A NEW AUDIENCE

The process of cross-media adaptation creates cause for established characters and storylines to be streamlined, modernized, modified, conglomerated, abandoned and/or expanded upon in order to create and maintain a new audience. DC Comics’ television adaptations of their properties have utilized the aforementioned revisions to a great amount of success. The Max Fleischer Superman shorts from the 1940s for instance have enjoyed a consistent popularity and remain a high point of quality early animation. The central issue of adapting DC Comics properties is maintaining character consistency across a wide range of media. This concern is tied closely to authorship. DC Comics’ well-known characters are all generally credited to their original creators—often leading to contentious debates on the concept of ownership (as with Superman’s creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster) or unwarranted praise (as with Batman’s, Bob Kane and the often underrepresented Bill Finger)—though they are all the possession of a company. They are products as much as they are works of art or creations, aptly representing the phrase “creative property.” Linda Hutcheon’s observation that these properties exist within an industry is important to remember; they are creatively and otherwise the properties of DC Comics rather than the aforementioned creators or any others who have developed further entries in the franchise. DC Comics’ canons have been expanded upon by hundreds of writers, artists, and editors in the company’s 75-year print publication history alone; when television, film, video games and physical media (toys, clothing, etc.) are included the number rises exponentially. The death of the author as described by Roland Barthes is taken to an interesting new level with this diversity of creators. The limiting effects of authorial intent are at once emphasized and downplayed, as iterations of characters represent numerous corporate and creative concerns simultaneously. This is further complicated by the wide span of media that encompass media
empires like Warner Bros. and Disney (the parent companies of DC and Marvel respectively). The authorship of media, in many cases, is divided so fully that the audience response to authorship is similarly confused and requires individual interpretations of authorial intent. Adaptations of DC Comics media have ushered in a new audience for these properties by honoring the existing material while simultaneously developing memorable inventions and revisions to the existing canon.

Creative Control

Creative control of these characters, concepts, and storylines—again, perhaps better described as “creative properties”—is fragmented, divided among massive swaths of people in control of character development at different artistic and business levels. Developing the canon of a character like Batman thus becomes a tremendous and multifaceted work of collaboration. Grant Morrison, prolific comic writer and collaborator on Batman and numerous other DC Comics, suggests that these characters act more like myths that writers can add their own flourishes and additions to. Morrison’s analogy of collaboration suggests that writing pieces in the DC Universe is similar to music. He postulates that “[Batman and other DC characters] were like twelve-bar blues or other chord progressions. Given the basic parameters of Batman, different creators could play very different music” (118). Morrison’s work often builds on other classic DC stories and builds on past authors; his style is notably his own, as the DC Animated Universe was uniquely crafted by its many authors. DC’s creative properties have become a multimedia conglomerate, evolving into something that is largely modifiable—within DC’s corporate interests and restrictions. The developers of the *Batman: The Animated Series (BTAS)* (and later the DC Animated Universe) had to combat these concerns constantly in their pursuits of a successful show. Batman’s identity—so far as a character and concept can have one—was
fragmented between DC’s multiple properties. Fox, for example, demanded that Robin was featured in every episode in order to give young viewers a deeper connection to the show, and an assumption that “kids sell toys” (Kidd). *BTAS* had a massive toy line, featuring Batman, Robin and their rogues with a tremendous variety of costumes and accessories to drive repeat purchases. *BTAS* did not feature (most of) these accessories in the show, rather relying on exposure of characters like Robin to drive sales of related action figures and related accessories. The proliferation of *BTAS* toys emphasizes the position of *BTAS* and other DC Comics media as aspects of a corporation, their goals of creative success tied unendingly to financial; DC Comics has to operate as a business alongside its creators in order to generate corporate profits and ensure a continuing environment for future media. This business-minded corporate attitude is both responsible for their success and a consistently changing set of depictions and expectations of their properties.

DC Comics creative properties tend to have at least some shared atmospheric similarities amongst their media. The developers of *BTAS* based the show on many aspects of the extremely successful film adaptation, *Batman* (1989). Director Tim Burton was able to develop an interpretation of Batman that was similar to many then-popular comic adaptations, but radically different than the Batman that existed at that point in DC’s multimedia zeitgeist. The cultural remnants of Batman’s campy 1966 television series and his previous animated *Superfriends* depiction hung heavy around the character. Burton’s film essentially had to reinvent the filmic concept of Batman. Jonathan Gray explains in *Show Sold Separately* the necessity of new adaptations to distance themselves from older adaptations, describing the stigma of previous adaptations as “an intertextual wake” (131). Similarly, Linda Hutcheon suggests that the process of adaptation is “…an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of
interpreting and then creating something new” (20). The 1989 *Batman* film was subject to this process, having to eschew the image of Adam West’s Batman in favor of a much darker look.

Tim Burton had recently directed the successful *Beetlejuice*, his second feature film, and first of his directorial efforts to begin earnestly developing the “Tim Burton aesthetic”—that is, a very specific and unique visual dynamic for his films, rife with black and white contrasting lines, thick makeup and dark, enclosed sets. He brought this signature artistic composition to *Batman* and its 1992 sequel, *Batman Returns*. The success of both films is a potent mix of Burton’s unique aesthetic and Danny Elfman’s dynamic music, along with the impressive portrayals of Batman and The Joker by Michael Keaton and Jack Nicholson, respectively. Many Batman fans initially disparaged Keaton due to his track record in previous films. However, he managed to achieve critical success in his “dual” role as Batman and Bruce Wayne. Nicholson’s influence on the Joker stretched to subsequent adaptations as well, including Heath Ledger’s interpretation of the character in 2010’s *The Dark Knight* and Mark Hamill’s highly regarded portrayal in *BTAS* and ensuing DC Animated Universe shows (and other DC Comics adaptations). The duality of Bruce Wayne/Batman’s character is extremely important to the Batman mythos, and a competent actor is of equal importance to the aesthetic and writing of the media. Kevin Conroy—longtime Batman performer in all DC Animated Universe series and multiple other adaptations, equal to Hamill in amount and distribution of roles—was able to effectively convey both aspects of the character; Grant Morrison suggests that “[Conroy] perfected the self-assured, trustworthy cadence of a sane, truly adult Batman that didn’t give kids the creeps or adults the excuse to go see another movie” (341). Conroy has portrayed Batman in all of his DC Animated Universe appearances and has reprised his role in many other DC media adaptations, perhaps most successfully in the *Batman: Arkham* and *Injustice* video game series. Both series take much of
their inspiration from the DC Animated Universe, though they is implied to take place in a separate universe through many cues within the text, specifically in costuming and the appearance of “new”—that is, not introduced within the DC Animated Universe—characters. The *Arkham* series is currently on its fourth installation, while *Injustice* has spawned an upcoming sequel and popular digital comic tie-in series, currently on its third year of publishing. The inclusion of returning actors and similar characterizations to the DC Animated Universe, in both series, remains an extremely profitable and well-received continuation of the influence of the DC Animated Universe on DC Comics’ properties.

Many of DC Comics’ characters have become well known by large, diverse segments of fans that have varying amounts of familiarity with the original comics. Certain aspects of the character must remain constant in any adaptation in order for the specific depiction to be recognized and accepted as a fitting version of that character. These aspects take many forms, specifically in plotting and the origin stories involved. Umberto Eco broaches this subject in his influential essay “The Myth of Superman.” He suggests that characters like Superman and Batman have become modern myths in themselves, and demand a certain structure in the telling and expansion of their stories. Batman’s parents have to die, he has to wear a bat costume, he uses gadgets and innovative equipment due to his wealth, he has no superpowers, and he is driven to fight crime. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio describe this as Batman’s “hegemonic position,” which is ultimately reinforced through his myriad appearances in multimedia adaptations (207). Various media, generally comics, do not always adhere fully to this set of expectations. Stories that avoid or change those and other aspects often do them in a manner that runs fully contrary to the established norm—many of DC’s Imaginary Stories and later Elseworlds (alternate reality) comics do this, imagining a Batman that doesn’t subscribe to
all of the expected norms of the character and depicting the intertextual confusion that the (modified) characterization creates. These are temporary means to “find continually new narrative stimuli,” according to Eco, that can temporarily satiate the audience while the “main” DC Universe continues its ongoing storytelling (934).

The Batman present in an Elseworlds comic may have superpowers—Batman has succumbed to vampirism in *Batman: Red Rain*; he has the powers of Superman in *Superman: Speeding Bullets*. He may kill his enemies, as in the aforementioned *Red Rain*, or he may not start his fight on crime as Batman, shown in *Batman: Thrillkiller* in which Bruce Wayne is a member of the Gotham City Police Department. These alternative adaptations of Batman and other DC characters rarely see development in other media, as they cater to the relatively niche comic market and often feature significant impediments for the possibility of a continuing story in that universe.¹ The process of successfully adapting or creating a “regular” depiction of Batman—that is to say, not modified in order to make a point about the character or show him in a different time period; a version adhering to many (if not all) of the aforementioned important aspects of the character—hinges on the portrayal of character and content within the adaptation. The ability of content creators to hold to important elements is often complicated by “real-world” requirements on the production of the content, specifically in the perceived demands of the media’s target audiences. The developers of *BTAS* and the later DC Animated Universe faced many of these restrictions based on their format alone, though they were able to develop stories

¹ There are occasional looks at alternate futures in DC Comics media, however they are far outnumbered by the amount of “regular” adaptations.
around and outside of these issues, even catering to fans of Imaginary Stories and Elseworlds with episodes of *STAS* and *Justice League* featuring alternate universes.²

*BTAS* was originally syndicated on network television on weekday afternoons. The show’s producers faced directives from the network regarding content to be produced, as with the aforementioned Robin example, and many more restrictions regarding content that *couldn’t* be shown. Dini and Kidd recollect their myriad issues with Broadcast Standards and Practices (BS&P) as something necessary to the production of network television. Dini does acknowledge that “[Broadcast Standards and Practices’] restrictions on *Batman*, both at Fox and at the Kids’ WB!, [were] much more lenient than at any other network…the idea of Batman as a dark, sometimes violent crime fighter has generally been respected by BS&P, which we appreciate” (Kidd). *BTAS* was able to develop on the mature themes inherent with the Batman character while avoiding content deemed inappropriate for younger viewers. Jason Mittell approaches animation in his book *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*, suggesting that he “…regard[s] the shifts in the 1990s to be predominantly positive developments for the genre, working against the genre’s stigmas by making cartoons a legitimate form for adult fans” (91). Mittell’s genre study emphasizes the success of animated films like *The Little Mermaid*, citing their widespread appeal as heralds of more adult animation. The DC Animated Universe acted as true all-ages entertainment in a manner similar to Max Fleischer’s *Superman* shorts in the 1940s, focusing on broad appeal to enrapture many segments of the audience.

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² *Batman Beyond* acts as an alternate interpretation of the franchise of sorts, though its status as an “official” continuation of *BTAS* (and its multiple references in *Justice League Unlimited*) implies that it is not separate, rather just another series, set in that universe’s future.
“Dark Deco” and the Revision of Properties

The producers of BTAS developed its version of Batman, Gotham City and its rogues in its initial 65-episode first season. The series clearly delineated the important aspects of the character within the first episode of the series, even within the opening sequence. Great lengths were taken by the creators and animators in order to create a consistent visual identity for the show and its characters. The “dark deco” aesthetic of the show permeated most of its visual elements. Tall, deliberate, geometric architecture along with 1940s-style vehicles (including a particularly streamlined Batmobile) dominated the visuals within Gotham City. The non-super powered or costumed characters were generally clothed in suits or evening dresses, save for the police, to emphasize the divergent worlds inhabited by Batman and Bruce Wayne. Several aspects of BTAS were modernized while maintaining this look as well; Batman’s computer was a very important part of his crime-fighting crusade, frequently appearing in episodes while Batman was researching his suspects. Batman’s villains were often victims of science gone tragically wrong, resulting in superhuman abilities. These accidents were often shown in BTAS in order to create layered, nuanced characters. Further appearances characters like Clayface, Mr. Freeze, and Two-Face would ostensibly be enhanced by viewing their tragic transformations into disfigured villains. The modernized elements meshed very well with the art deco styling of the show, creating a “timeless” look. Umberto Eco suggests that time breaks down within superhero media, its narrative structure specifically avoiding the passage of time. He claims “…the concept of time breaks down” (934). Stories are told in relation to one another, in a bubble, separate from the passage of actual time. Animation helps transfer this notion to other media; the aging of actors is

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3 Futuristic elements include robots, even a robot that was impersonating Batman for an episode. Superman and Justice League both have a larger focus on showing futuristic technology, robotic villains and various alien species. Justice League, for example, includes three separate alien members in its initial lineup (Superman, Martian Manhunter, and Hawkgirl) and a member of an intergalactic police force (Green Lantern).
much less noticeable when they are heard, but not shown. The “timeless” look in much animation assists in a constant technological aesthetic as well. The science fiction elements were done in a manner akin to retrofuturism; this is especially visible in the 1993 animated film *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*, in which Bruce Wayne visits Gotham’s World’s Fair in a flashback. His visit suggests technologies that will later become integral to Batman’s armory, including a supposed precursor to the Batmobile. The Gotham City in *BTAS* could have existed at various points in time, preventing it (to some extent at least) from becoming as dated as a setting bound in the early 1990s. This approach is similar to Burton’s two *Batman* films, and likely based on their success. Burton’s films, constructed primarily on large sets created a claustrophobic and manufactured look for Gotham City that again suggested timelessness. The visual designers of *BTAS* amalgamated visuals from the character’s comic book and film past to make a “combined” version of Gotham City.⁴

*BTAS* was also constructed in a manner that allowed narratives that could work individually. Because *BTAS* was developed for syndication by Fox, its episodes aired well out of production order. This method of syndication may have led to some narrative confusion, but episodes were generally more procedural than serial and featured only one- or two-episode storylines.⁵ The show’s long first season introduced an already-developed Batman to its audience, already assuming a familiarity with the character. He had been fighting his “war on crime” for (presumably) several years and was already working with an adult, college-bound Robin. Interestingly, Robin was still identified as a “kid” character, specifically with producers and fans, and his presence grew through the series. Dini recollects that this happened after the

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⁴ Similarly, *BTAS* used Danny Elfman’s music to create an intertextual aural connection as well.
⁵ An early two-part episode, *The Cat and the Claw*, was aired weeks apart, undoubtedly leading to confusion for viewers.
first season, claiming that “[Fox] laid down the law—no story premise was to be considered unless it was either a Robin story or one in which [he] played a key role” (Dini and Kidd).

Robin’s two-part origin story, “Robin’s Reckoning,” received an Emmy award for BTAS, due to its effectiveness in conveying a mature subject (the death of Robin’s parents) and functioning well as two episodes of television. Batman’s origin is touched on in several episodes, but is not the focus of any specific episode.6 BTAS’s Batman is a larger-than-life figure. The majority of the information that the audience needs to know about the character, at least initially, is in the opening credits, in which Batman foils a bank robbery and leaves the perpetrators for the police. The sequence clearly identifies Batman as a vigilante hero, delineating the basic premise for nearly every episode: Batman stops crime. Batman’s parents have died, he is rich, he has the civilian identity of Bruce Wayne; all of these aspects of the character are important, and already known to many viewers of the show. Even without this previous knowledge, most episodes could easily stand alone, similar to episodes of a procedural TV show like Law & Order. The status quo was scarcely changed at the end of an episode, allowing for the drastic differences in the show’s order. This approach fell out of use in later DC Animated Universe series—specifically Justice League—in favor of longer-form storytelling shown in multiple-episode stories and season-long arcs.7

BTAS’s first season found its highest measure of success in the above-mentioned two-part “Robin’s Reckoning” episode, which told the origin story (in flashback and against a current case-of-the-week) of Batman’s sidekick, Robin. The plot revolved around Robin’s attempt to get revenge on the man responsible for killing his parents while showcasing their

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6 Batman’s origin is expanded upon in the film Batman: Mask of the Phantasm, though it portrays his early years more than his “origin” story.
7 This was possible due to Justice League’s consistent timeslot and the configuration of Cartoon Network programming.
death and Robin’s subsequent adoption and early training by Batman. These episodes follow the same general plot as Robin’s comic book origin, while modernizing and streamlining the story for an hour of television rather than its many retellings in comics. *BTAS*’s producers developed a concise, evocative version of Robin’s origin. The character proved to be so popular that Fox demanded a larger presence in the second season, essentially mimicking or recreating the development of his comic book counterpart’s popularity.⁸

“Robin’s Reckoning” adapted Robin’s origin story while modernizing it for its new audience. Its content was also shifted toward an audience comprised primarily of children, though its widespread success suggests that it fit into a more “all-ages” niche as described by Mittell. This practice of taking the “choice” storylines, situations and characters from DC Comics’ rich history manifested in three general styles of adaptation throughout the DC Animated Universe series. The first of which is the “loose” utilization of existing characterizations as in “Robin’s Reckoning,” while the second style takes form in more “strict” adaptations, and the third style consists of “new” material, often including new villains or plotlines, and in the case of *Batman Beyond* a new time period and setting. Adaptations that develop characters within the DC Animated Universe saw much more frequency than the strict adaptations, as their flexibility allowed for stronger episodes within the various DC Animated Universe series.

**Loose Adaptation**

The developers of DC Animated Universe properties had more than fifty years of interpretations and adaptations of DC characters from which to craft their several series. According to Bruce Timm, “[the producers] had the luxury of looking back over the 50 years of

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⁸ Robin later led the Teen Titans in their eponymous series, as he did in DC Comics many years prior.
Batman and it was the best R&D lab ever. We could see what worked and what didn’t, what kind of worked and what we could improve on (“Timm and Dini’s 'Batman' influence lives on in new toys”). Paul Dini suggests that BTAS’s success resulted from their “[synthesis of] the best elements from previous film, TV and comic book incarnations of the character” (Kidd). The producers developed their own interpretations of the characters available to them, often developing into versions that superseded their progenitors in popularity and often saw recursive adaptation on DC Comics, as in their revision of Superman’s origin and the unique visuals of Krypton. Superman’s origin had been through many incarnations and redesigns at the inception of Superman the Animated Series (STAS) in 1996, and the producers were able to synthesize these and add their own elements, as in the organic architecture, to create an effective origin story for Superman that set the tone for the series. STAS’s influence is seen in comics like Mark Waid and Leinil Yu’s Superman: Birthright, its bright aesthetic for Metropolis replicated in print. STAS also developed a more consistent and deliberate move into serial storytelling for the DC Animated Universe. The series begins with the aforementioned origin story for three episodes, and features recurring elements throughout the series, including plot threads that built into recurring plotlines within Justice League and Justice League Unlimited.

STAS was the initial expansion from a single product, BTAS, into a universe spanning multiple programs. Its popularity along with WB’s desire to develop a television show to tie in with the then-upcoming Batman & Robin film led to BTAS’s revival as The New Batman Adventures, which aired alongside STAS and featured a large amount of interconnectivity between the titles. Batman appeared in several episodes of STAS. These crossover episodes developed a relationship between the two heroes and connection between their cities and
villains.\footnote{Batman’s return to television features his visit to Metropolis and a doomed romance with Lois Lane, as well as a team-up between Lex Luthor and The Joker.} \textit{STAS} also expanded DC Animated Universe’s scope, featuring The Flash, Green Lantern and Aquaman in individual episodes, hinting at a larger universe than \textit{BTAS}’s Gotham City or \textit{STAS}’s Metropolis. These episodes along with others in \textit{STAS}, \textit{BTAS} and \textit{Justice League/Justice League Unlimited} utilized preexisting stories and aspects of the characters they are developing in order to create a streamlined product with the potential to sustain a working universe among titles.

Loose adaptations comprise the majority of the DC Animated Universe, allowing the producers more freedom to choose their most desirable traits and stories about the involved characters. An early example of this in \textit{BTAS} is the two-part episode “Feat of Clay,” which showcases the tragic origin of the villain Clayface. \textit{BTAS}’s version of Clayface is a combination of two separate versions of the character from DC Comics. \textit{BTAS}’s producers were able to avoid Clayface’s messy continuity—there have been more than eight versions of Clayface—and create a composite character that fit into the show’s new continuity.\footnote{\textit{BTAS}’s Clayface was called Matt Hagen, after the second Clayface. He exhibited aspects of several of his comic counterparts, though his design was created specifically for the show and utilized in many future adaptations of Clayface in the comics, most recently with Basil Karlo’s revision in DC’s New 52 comics.} The DC Animated Universe was able to streamline and distill characters in a similar manner to DC’s 1989 “Crisis on Infinite Earths” as well as their recent “New 52” initiatives. The DC Animated Universe essentially rebooted the universe, though across media. Characters, comics, and programs were in each case able to launch or relaunch series in order to make them more easily approachable by new audiences. Relaunching and restarting characters has a longstanding tradition in comic book history; “bold new eras” are frequent, especially in media wherein the window for captivating the target audience is very slim. The generational nature of all-ages television creates a necessity,
or at least a perceived one, for this practice. The DC Animated Universe managed to develop new ideas and fresh takes on characters for younger audiences while maintaining enough continuity and connections to past series in order to create a thread between them. New viewers are able to enjoy an episode of *Batman Beyond* without the prior knowledge of *BTAS*, for instance, though their viewing will be enhanced based on prior knowledge of Batman’s character arc from the prior series within the DC Animated Universe.

The revision involved in the DC Animated Universe adaptation of characters was generally met with positive response, as shown with their adaptation back into comic books. Like Clayface and Mr. Freeze, DC Animated Universe interpretations of Green Lantern (John Stewart) and Martian Manhunter were also reflected in comic continuity. Dini, Timm and the other creators of the DC Animated Universe had the benefit of developing their universe in the sequence of their choosing. The DC Animated Universe producers developed on their earlier approach of creating episodic content, and they focused on serial storylines by the time *STAS* came on the air in 1996. *Justice League* is comprised almost entirely of two- or three-episode arcs that built off of one another. *Justice League’s* first arc of three episodes has several immediately identifiable influences, combining the origin story of Martian Manhunter along with the Justice League’s first formation and plotlines adapted from Grant Morrison’s popular 1990s *JLA* series. The three-episode “Secret Origins” story arc opens the series; it appropriately

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11 John Stewart was brought back into DC Comics publishing with Geoff Johns’ *Green Lantern* and its spinoff *Green Lantern Corps*, reflecting his recent television adaptation.

12 *Justice League* features only one one-episode story: a Christmas special in which the League’s holiday traditions are examined.

13 The first incarnation of the Justice League was developed in 1960’s *The Brave and the Bold* #28, featuring Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Martian Manhunter, Green Lantern (Hal Jordan), Aquaman and The Flash (Barry Allen). Morrison’s *JLA* debuted in 1997, its team consisting of the same members as the original lineup albeit with Green Lantern and The Flash’s successors, Kyle Rayner and Wally West respectively. Both “origin” stories have the League fighting alien invaders, the massive Starro the Conquerer in the 1960’s original and an evil race of White Martians in Morrison’s revision.
serves as the League’s “origin story,” bringing its initial seven members together for the first time. This is paradigmatic of a long tradition of heroes gathering to defeat a threat that is more severe than any one of them could handle alone. This mirrors several other versions (and reimaginings) of the formation of the Justice League, specifically their first appearance in 1960’s *The Brave and the Bold* #28 and 1997’s *JLA* #1. In prior situations, the heroes were generally familiar with one another prior to the formation of the league. *Justice League* was able to incorporate the first appearances of Hawkgirl, Green Lantern (John Stewart), Wonder Woman, and Martian Manhunter into the DC Animated Universe along with the established Batman, Superman, and the previously seen Flash.\(^{14}\) Thus the audience is able to begin experiencing a greater amount of stories within the DC Universe at a practical and equitable cost of entry.

In the prior Batman and Superman series, the characters’ wide mythos were open for interpretation. Granted, there were more than fifty years of stories available for both, but they must maintain the confines of those characters. *Justice League* let Timm and company play with a much wider range of continuity, its seven main characters and multiple guests contributing a huge amount of material to adapt and modify. The short history of the DC Animated Universe as well as the previously identified world building efforts of *BTAS* and *STAS* let *Justice League* develop its characters in episodes that utilized elements of each character’s history. The team-based environment of the Justice League often let members take the forefront while others acted as secondary supportive characters. Characters who would never receive exposure on television received screen time in *Justice League* and *Justice League Unlimited* alongside the already-popular Superman and Batman.

\(^{14}\) Flash races Superman in an episode of the latter’s series, though his characterization is a bit different, as is his voice actor.
The architects of the DC Animated Universe used the environment provided by the mass of characters in order to tell focusing stories on the main seven members and their villains, with the other members of the Justice League often acting in supporting roles. Every member of the Justice League was not featured in every episode, often leaving the episode to focus on one or two members dealing with villains or, frequently, other heroes. Aquaman, Metamorpho, and Doctor Fate are among the heroes with dedicated episodes in Justice League’s first two seasons. The split focus was heightened in the three-season Justice League Unlimited, in which the League’s membership grew exponentially. This let the show’s developers create episodes like “The Greatest Story Never Told,” in which the B-list hero Booster Gold is given the spotlight. The episode is not specifically based on any one story, rather using aspects of Booster Gold’s history within DC Comics in order to create a new story that is true to the character while also working for a different medium. “The Greatest Story Never Told” features a conflict between the entire Justice League and the villainous sorcerer Mordru, in which B-List hero Booster Gold has been assigned crowd control due to Batman’s interpretation of his fame-centric behavior. Booster Gold’s crowd control is quickly interrupted as he is embroiled in a plot to stop a pair of scientists’ malfunctioning “black hole device” from destroying the planet. He succeeds in his mission, receiving no credit from his fellow league members, though impressing one of the scientists, receiving a kiss from her (and the suggestion of the beginning of a relationship). This episode succeeds in relaying the important aspects about Booster Gold and his characterization in the Justice League International comics of the early 1990s. The feasibility of an animated adaptation of Booster Gold’s adventures is possible within a show like Justice League Unlimited, in which a set of expectations had evolved through more than a decade of preceding television. The strategy of “loose” adaptations of comic book storylines and plotting was most accessible
and successful for the DC Animated Universe, though other methods of episode development saw various levels of success and utilization.

Strict Adaptation

The “strict” adaptation episodes—episodes that directly adapted the plot of DC Comics issues—exist within most of DC Animated Universe series. Obviously they began in BTAS, as the series explored many options of adaptation; they enjoyed less frequency in STAS, which favored looser variations and the development of more serial plotlines through its episodes. Their most frequent prominence exists in BTAS, though the strongest effort to follow this format occurs in Justice League Unlimited. Fully adapting a comic book story is difficult in a different way than the “loose” adaptations. The closeness of the adaptation as well as any changes, additions, and omissions are subjects of major scrutiny from fans. Several early episodes of BTAS use plots taken directly from issues of Batman or Detective Comics, including “The Cape & Cowl Conspiracy” and “Moon of the Wolf,” among others. Their quality, both in accuracy of adaptation and effectiveness as a television episode, varies significantly between episodes. The burden of success lies on a variety of factors, specifically related to the difficulties in adapting something across two media.

Elliot S. Maggin wrote both BTAS’s “The Cape and Cowl Conspiracy” and the comic on which it’s based, “The Cape and Cowl Death Trap,” originally published in 1975’s Detective Comics #450. The episode follows the same plotline as the comic, though with a few story beats changed to lengthen the tale. In the comic, an assassin named Wormwood is accused of killing a US Senator. Batman enacts a plan to discern the identity of the man responsible for hiring Wormwood. He disguises himself as a businessman and hires Wormwood to retrieve Batman’s cape and cowl for an unspecified reason. Wormwood manages to lure Batman to a wax museum,
barring him inside and trapping him under a massive sun lamp meant for melting the wax figures. This trap appears to work for Wormwood; Batman leaves the scene sans cape and cowl. Wormwood takes these items to his employer who manages to ease Wormwood into telling him the identity of his previous boss. As Wormwood turns his back, the employer dons the cape and cowl and is revealed to the reader as Batman! Batman and Wormwood have a brief fight, concluding with Wormwood’s defeat and the arrival of police at the scene. Batman informs the police of Wormwood’s former employer’s identity, and Wormwood is taken to prison.

“The Cape and Cowl Conspiracy” has the same basic format as its comic predecessor. The initial story is actually quite brief, encompassing only 12 pages in a 34-page comic. “The Cape and Cowl Deathtrap” is simply not enough material for an episode of *BTAS*. Maggin therefore had to build upon the events in the comic, along with changing a few elements to make the episode more palatable to its young audience (and Fox’s censors). The story is basically the same—Batman tricks Wormwood into revealing damning information about his previous employer by dressing as his current employer. The additions are primarily to extend the story. The episode begins *in medias res*, showcasing Wormwood’s skills with the completion of his prior contract. Many Batman episodes used this technique in order to validate the villain’s aptitude and enhance the viewer’s reading of Batman’s skills when he inevitably defeated the villain (or villains). Wormwood’s previous crime is changed as well—he was guilty of stealing a large amount of bearer bonds from a diplomatic courier rather than murdering a senator. The previous crime is largely irrelevant to the plot, as it is just a device to set Batman in motion to catch the criminal. Batman’s impetus for defeating Wormwood does not change his method; he disguises himself as a baron and gives his cape to Wormwood in a wax museum, defeating him later after he learns the location of the bonds. These changes unfortunately did not add much to
the story or its efficacy in its adaptation. The episode is poorly paced and unnecessarily stuffed with extra plot, and the conflict between Batman and Wormwood—and Wormwood himself—is largely forgettable.\textsuperscript{15} The plot change from “assassination” to “theft of bearer bonds” is also at fault in the episode’s impact and lack of quality compared to \textit{BTAS}’s other adaptations. There seems to be no pertinence or urgency in Batman’s quest to find these bearer bonds, dragging the episode into a series of contrived doldrums.\textsuperscript{16} “The Cape and Cowl Conspiracy” is ultimately an example of the necessity of content producers to modify and create new material for different media. The addition of material to the story did not add anything save for length and confusing story elements, and suggested that strict adaptation work better when pared down rather than expanded beyond the grasp of the original story. While this is not always true, later adaptations in the DC Animated Universe suggest that the format is benefitted by this method.

Unlike “The Cape and Cowl Conspiracy,” \textit{Justice League Unlimited}’s “For the Man Who Has Everything” was forced to pare down the content present in its original story—also titled “For the Man Who Has Everything”—in order to fit its story into a single-episode space. “For The Man Who Has Everything” was originally printed in 1985’s \textit{Superman Annual} #11.\textsuperscript{17} “For the Man Who Has Everything” was written by Alan Moore with art provided by Dave Gibbons, who would later go on to develop \textit{Watchmen}, one of the most popular graphic novels ever written. \textit{Watchmen} is the only graphic novel to be chosen for \textit{TIME}’s top 100 novels list, and holds a large degree of prestige within the medium. “For The Man Who Has Everything” presents an early example of their creative synergy. Moore and Gibbons developed a story in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Wormwood does not appear in any further episodes of \textit{BTAS} or in any Batman comic; The Riddler generally uses similar techniques with greater frequency due to his popularity.
\item Bearer bonds are a rather obscure concept, specifically for children. Their prominence in American culture is greatly reduced from their former use as a money-laundering tool—this is not explained well in the episode, leading to a particularly confusing plot point for child viewers.
\item Annuals are typically longer than regular issues, and often contain a single story—something enticing for irregular readers of the title.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
which Batman, Robin, and Wonder Woman have journeyed to Superman’s Fortress of Solitude in the Arctic in order to visit him for his birthday. When they arrive, they find the door open and Superman immobilized inside, presumably by the large black plant they find clung to his chest. Batman, Robin, and Wonder Woman begin investigating the plant, and determine that it has rendered Superman in a comatose state. They find an empty box near Superman and deduce that it must have come into the fortress as a gift. Their suspicions are confirmed with the appearance of the hulking alien tyrant Mongul, who reveals himself as Superman’s assailant. Mongul tells the trio that Superman is in the thrall of the Black Mercy, a semi-sentient plant that attaches to its prey and “feeds them a logical simulation of the happy ending they desire” (Superman Annual #11).

Superman’s fantasy is shown between the action in the Fortress; he is happily living in an intact version of Krypton, married to a woman very visually similar to his old flame Lana Lang with two children. His father is alive as well. Superman’s fantasy isn’t perfect; his mother has died and there is a political uprising occurring on Krypton that threatens his family and causes his cousin Kara (the fantasy’s version of Supergirl) a severe facial wound. As Superman’s fantasy continues, Batman and Robin attempt to figure out a way to remove the Black Mercy from his chest while Wonder Woman distracts Mongul, scarcely wounding him as their brawl takes them through the walls of the Fortress of Solitude. Batman’s attempt to remove the Black Mercy from Superman works, though Superman is forced to knowingly sacrifice his life on Krypton along with his family. As Batman removes the Black Mercy, it turns on him, forcing on him a similar fantasy world (in which his parents were still alive.) Superman furiously engages Mongul in combat, savagely beating him and burning him with his heat vision as Robin takes
care of Batman, removing the Black Mercy with a discarded pair of Mongul’s gloves. Robin is able to contain the Black Mercy and force it upon Mongul at the issue’s climax, forcing him into his own fantasy state in which he has defeated Superman and assumed dictatorial control of the universe.

“For the Man Who Has Everything” was a very successful comic in both Superman’s lore and Alan Moore’s career. It has been collected in several publications and reprinted as a seminal Superman tale. Its success as a stand-alone story led to the positive reception of the episode, while also notable as a successful transition of a comic book into a different medium. “For the Man Who Has Everything” is the second episode of *Justice League Unlimited*, the retooling of the DC Animated Universe’s *Justice League* show that allowed the producers to develop episodes and storylines with more freedom. The setting of *Justice League Unlimited* posits that the Justice League has expanded its membership in order to more efficiently protect Earth from its threats. Thus, the show began to focus on episodes with minor characters of the DC Universe, often those who would not be able to carry their own shows, as in the earlier-described case of Booster Gold. The shared universe cultivated by years of maintenance across shows and networks along with the prestige gained by its success made it possible for *Justice League Unlimited* to have an episode focusing on largely unknown heroes along with those about more familiar heroes. *Justice League Unlimited’s* first episode, “Initiation,” showcases the expanding roster of the Justice League. It sets the tone for the series both in length—*Justice League* had been almost entirely two- or three-episode arcs, while *Justice League Unlimited* is largely stand-alone episodes—and content. Many B- and C-list heroes are introduced in the episode through newcomer Green Arrow’s point of view, though the original members take strong supporting

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18 Moore’s scripting is particularly evocative of the sheer strength that Superman and Mongul are outputting: “Their enmity can only be measured in the skipped heart-beats of distant seismographs,” among other colorful descriptors.
roles. This remains is the format for many episodes within the series, though many episodes return to the original focus of the Justice League’s main member. As in “The Cape and Cowl Conspiracy,” the story of “For the Man Who Has Everything” is largely the same as its comic book forebear, save for the lack of Robin. Its changes were however not detrimental to the storytelling within the episode, and serve to streamline the adaptation and place it within the DC Animated Universe’s alternate continuity.

In the adaptation, Batman and Wonder Woman arrive at the Fortress together (in Wonder Woman’s invisible plane) in order to emphasize their then growing, potentially romantic relationship and they enter through an underwater entrance that aligns with the Fortress’s prior appearances. Batman also is given the line “I mean, what do you buy for the man who has everything?” in order to incorporate the title into the episode (it appears prominently within the comic’s footnotes). Alan Moore’s name is attached to the animation, a rarity for adaptations of his work due to his general distaste for the comic book industry, specifically DC and its various media franchises. Superman’s Black Mercy fantasy is more streamlined, showcasing a single day in Superman’s life on Krypton. The political uprising is cut out, while Superman’s relationship with his son is expanded upon, as is his happy relationship with his wife. Superman’s realization that his fantasy is false is emphasized with a longer, more emotional conversation between Superman and his son, which follows more hints that his life on Krypton was not real. Wonder Woman is responsible for saving Batman from the Black Mercy and using it to defeat Mongul, and the necessity for Mongul’s gloves to handle the plant is replaced by

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19 Robin was, at that time, busy in Teen Titans, also airing on Cartoon Network but not within the DC Animated Universe canon.
20 In another recent example, Moore’s name is absent from Marvel Comics’ current reprints of his Miracleman series. He is credited as simply “The Original Author.”
21 His wife in the JLU adaptation is named Loana, and designed to look more like Lois Lane than Lana Lang. Lois has had much more development in the DCAU programming than Lana.
Wonder Woman’s strength. Robin’s absence is also adapted to in a way that allows for both the enhancement of Wonder Woman’s character and ease of pacing. Wonder Woman’s conflict with Mongul is decidedly less one-sided in the television adaptation, reflecting the inner and physical strength and skills that the character had developed throughout *Justice League* and *Justice League Unlimited*. The changed parts of the story contribute to the episode’s success in adaptation, both in terms of *Justice League Unlimited’s* continuity and the pacing of the episode. The tighter continuity of *Justice League Unlimited* is a much different environment than DC Comics’ 1985 continuity. This adaptation followed a successful format of “show, don’t tell,” in regards to tightening the events of the plot into a manageable 20 minutes. *Justice League Unlimited* doesn’t have the benefit of narration boxes and Alan Moore’s colorful dialogue to explain the gravity of Superman’s fight with Mongul, for instance, though its climactic fight does benefit from the brief, heightened animation of the enraged Superman. This adaptation was successful because it worked as both a revision of the source text and as a text within the DC Animated Universe.

**Consistency, Change, and New Material**

“The Cape and Cowl Conspiracy” suffered from its additions to its story, though it was necessary in order to extend the story adequately for the episode. “For the Man Who Has Everything” had the benefit of its original story being a highly regarded story in the Superman canon with enough content to successfully modify into a different medium. There are also several elements at play beyond the subject of primary material that helped the *Justice League Unlimited* in regards to its adaptations. Elliot S. Maggin, author of “The Cape and Cowl Conspiracy” had little experience in television, especially compared to the writer of “For the Man Who Has Everything,” the late Dwayne McDuffie. McDuffie had a wealth of experience
with television adaptations, having recently developed his comic *Static Shock* into a show for Warner Brothers. In addition, “For the Man Who Has Everything’s” adaptation occurred nearly twelve years after “The Cape and Cowl Conspiracy’s” adaptation, allowing the producers to benefit greatly from their experience. Both episodes however feature important elements inherent to adaptation of specific stories rather than adapting characters. The DC Animated Universe on a whole can be considered an “adaptation” of DC Comics creative properties; it is the transfer of these properties into another medium, as are non-DC Animated Universe series like Max Fleischer’s *Superman* shorts and even films such as *Batman Begins* or *Man of Steel*. Linda Hutcheon describes adaptation as both a process and a product; she emphasizes the need to distinguish from the two. This distinction becomes more difficult to identify within the DC Animated Universe as well. Hutcheon’s definition, when applied to adapted universes, requires revision. These episodic adaptations achieve a second level of adaptation within DC’s animated efforts. They need to both adhere to elements of the original story—specifically those that are plot-related—while maintaining the characterizations developed for the DC Animated Universe.

The consciousness of continuity led “For the Man Who Has Everything’s” adaptation to greater success than “The Cape and Cowl Conspiracy’s” because it works well as an episode of *Justice League Unlimited* in addition to acting as a strong adaptation of its source material. Batman’s well-developed relationship with Superman is shown in his concern for his health as he attempts to free him from his fantasy, while the flirtatious relationship between Batman and Wonder Woman is developed with her determination to remove the Black Mercy after it attaches to his chest. These relationships are much more important in a tightly focused series than a one-

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22 *Static Shock* is also part of the DC Animated Universe, though more tangentially connected, save for a few episodes in which members of the Justice League appear to assist Static. He later appears in a few episodes of *Justice League Unlimited*, albeit in an alternate future and heavily aged.
shot comic from the DC’s massive publishing catalog in 1985. Ultimately, the end-goal of DC Animated Universe adaptations is the importance of observing the established roles of characters within their modified continuity while utilizing and honoring their comic book counterparts. It is integral to the process of adaptation to keep these roles consistent, as it is in the original medium. The creators of the DC Animated Universe had a much smaller realm to watch over than DC Comics, so their need for oversight is balanced by the tight focus and consistency of creative teams. They were able to balance their adaptations of existing characters with the creation of new stories and properties. The aforementioned relationship between Batman and Wonder Woman was an invention for Justice League Unlimited in a similar effort to the addition of new characters like Renee Montoya and Harley Quinn in the earlier BTAS. New relationships and characters led the DC Animated Universe to become more than a direct lift of DC Comics. The several shows under the DC Animated Universe umbrella became a fully realized universe in a way impossible for prior animated efforts. A major benefit of adaptations is their ability to act as a second chance to try ideas. The DC Animated Universe merged the new and the old into a hyper concentrated rendition of the DC Comics continuity that offered not only a dependable version of beloved characters, but also enough inventions to the text that it appealed to larger audiences. The innovations present in DC Animated Universe programming fits Kristeva’s suggestion that the media is increasingly made for its audiences, rather than a blank slate. The audience for BTAS, STAS and other DC Animated Universe shows is presumed to have some connection with DC media before developing their connection with the above-mentioned shows. The spread of comic book media is reliant on the audience’s intertextual relationship with the multitude of available media. If we take a step back to look at these relationships, it becomes a mosaic of versions of comic books, pieced together by creators over decades. It fits Mikhail
Bakhtin’s ideas on intertext and Claude Levi-Strauss’s identification of media as bricolage. Though these popular entertainments may not initially appear to be in the same world of literature to which Bakhtin was referring, they have become massively important and increasingly artistic in their presentation. The references and connections present in the DC Animated Universe emphasize its existence in a plane higher than its individual series, and the additions to the myriad stories in DC’s stable have become tremendously important to their continued success.

New material in the DC Animated Universe is difficult to identify—or, at least to differentiate. Technically, the DC Animated Universe is both new and old at once. Hutcheon writes, “[a]daptation is repetition, but repetition without replication” (7). She emphasizes the idea that these adaptations are new entries in the franchise rather than duplicates of existing material. This is clearly true for the DC Animated Universe’s “loose” adaptations, and holds up in the “strict” adaptations as well. Both of my previous examples featured creative changes to the original text—other than the obvious necessary steps to transfer something from print to television—in order to create more diverse programming for viewers. The addition of new material reached its conceptual apex with the BTAS sequel series *Batman Beyond* in 1999. *Batman Beyond* saw the DC Animated Universe team utilizing the continuity built in their preceding shows, *BTAS* and *STAS*, in order to create a largely new experience. *Batman Beyond* was set 50 years after *BTAS*, starring a new Batman, high-school student Terry McGinnis. McGinnis was equipped with a futuristic costume, a flying Batmobile and a new cast of characters, including his mentor, an elderly Bruce Wayne, again voiced by Kevin Conroy. The elder Batman acted as mission control for McGinnis, developing a familial relationship throughout the series. Since *Batman Beyond* was an original DC Animated Universe property, it
had fewer opportunities to take inspiration from storylines present within DC Comics existing media, thus requiring new (though obviously derivative) material with much higher frequency. The Batman of the future faced several of his predecessor’s foes, including an elderly Mr. Freeze and a revitalized Ra’s Al Ghul, but his adventures focused primarily on new adventures and villains.

Comic book journalist Chris Sims suggests that “[t]he key to Batman Beyond is that it’s basically ‘What if Spider-Man was Batman in the future?’” suggesting that the two share many similarities (Sims). McGinnis’s position as a high-school student allowed plotlines to focus on different aspects of heroism than BTAS, while developing a logical extension of Bruce Wayne’s storyline. McGinnis was able to face newly created villains alongside updated versions of the original Batman’s villains, culminating in the film Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker, wherein a revived Joker returned to Gotham City many years after his apparent demise. Again, Batman Beyond was able to introduce conclusions and additions to many longstanding plotlines within the DC Animated Universe. Speculative futures are frequently utilized in comics, but their serialized nature makes their longevity and stability questionable. Batman Beyond is much more definitive, as it is one of a comparatively smaller realm of material. Whereas DC Comics’ Legion of Superheroes imagined the future of the DC Universe in the year 3000 (and has been rebooted numerous times), Batman Beyond focused on the future of the characters developed in BTAS alongside a new cast. The concreteness of its position in DC Animated Universe continuity was emphasized on several occasions in both Justice League and Justice League Unlimited. This gives certain gravity to the actions of characters within the DC Animated Universe, with a specific chronological and narrative destination predefined for many characters. Appropriately, Batman Beyond featured the DC Animated Universe’s first appearance of the Justice League,
albeit their future descendants, in the two-part episode “The Call.” As Terry teams up with the Justice League in order to face a rogue Superman, the elder Bruce Wayne recalls his time in the team, which then became the next series in the DC Animated Universe. This first appearance of an incarnation of the team battled Superman, then mind controlled by the alien Starro, the first foe faced by the Justice League in DC Comics. “The Call” acted like a backdoor pilot, showing the concept for a future series before its (inevitably) reworked series premiere. Bruce Timm has called the episode “almost a trial run for a Justice League show” (Modern Masters 71). The interconnectivity between titles allowed for the revisions of established characters, storylines and plots to mesh with new ideas, creating a successful thematic universe while maintaining each show as a singular entity. Again, this is all alongside a stronger sense of intertextuality that links the DC Animated Universe to other DC Comics media.

The DC Animated Universe began with the relatively loose adaptation of the Batman mythos in *BTAS*. Its producers were able to combine many aspects of previous print and film versions of the franchise in order to make a composite adaptation that appealed to a large audience. The development of the DC Animated Universe as a universe—expanding its continuity beyond that of a single show—started with the position of *STAS* in the same universe as its predecessor. Separate entities tied together through the same narrative universe, sharing characters and often plotlines and developing narratives and relationships through crossover episodes, initially, and the culmination of plot threads. The DC Animated Universe’s developers were able to further expand the reach of their universe by introducing new characters and settings with *Batman Beyond* and combining and building on their past success with *Justice League* and *Justice League Unlimited*. The loose style of adaptation along with the addition of new material allowed the developers of the DC Animated Universe to create something that was
an adaptation of much more than a single character. Both Linda Hutcheon and Julie Sanders espouse Deborah Cartmell’s three categories of adaptation—transposition, commentary, and analogue—of which the DC Animated Universe functions in some capacity as all three. Bakhtin and Levi-Strauss’s ideas regarding intertextuality apply remarkably well to adaptations; they are intensely, obviously paired to earlier works, both within franchises and across media. The ability for the audience to separate iterations of franchises is however integral to the idea of a shared universe and the effectiveness of references and influences on a given adaptation’s material.

The idea of a shared Universe was successfully transferred into a new medium, using aspects from the long history of other adaptations and the history of the franchise. The combination of ideas and the virtue of hindsight allowed the producers to develop an adaptation that honored and changed its predecessor, and its development acted as an analogue to the original development of the DC Universe. Its success has been shown in a wealth of subsequent multi-media adaptations of DC Comics properties along with the recursive adaptation of DC Animated Universe characters and developments back into DC Comics’ print media. DC Comics and Marvel have also replicated the successful adaptation and creation of a shared universe for a new audience with their current live action film developments. The persistent efforts of the creators of the DC Animated Universe to maintain a consistent universe among titles stand alongside the strength of their product as prime contributors to their long-term success and fruition, with the attention to continuity crucial to the efficacy of adaptation and shared universe maintenance.
CHAPTER II: INTERTEXTUALITY AND CONTINUITY BETWEEN SERIES

Comic books are inherently sequential—storytelling in individual issues follows a path of images and storytelling in a series that usually requires following one or more titles in parallel. Comic stories and characters are adapted to fit into several tracks of continuity at any given time. Obviously there is an assumed chronological continuity inside series; however, existing within a shared universe alters the creators’ obligations. Characterization should remain constant among titles, and events need to be incorporated in the universe(s) in a way that makes sense to the reader. This inclination creates natural difficulties for said creators. Continuity is paramount; observing fans’ expectations and preexisting story developments creates what Jason Dittmer has designated “the tyranny of the serial” (252). Dittmer paraphrases Richard Reynolds, outlining three types of continuity in comic books: serial (events in comics cannot contradict prior events in the continuity), hierarchical (characters must maintain constant power relationships between each other), and structural (linking together various books within a line) (252). Continuity in comics often inhibits lasting progress of characters, though this can often be accomplished with alternate interpretations of the characters and storylines: parallel universes and continuities. Thus Batman is able to grow old in Batman Beyond and develop new relationships in a manner not possible in DC Comics main continuity. Were Batman allowed to age from his initial appearance in 1939, he would be well in his 100s (and likely unable to continue fighting crime). Instead, Batman remains perennially young, collecting an ever-growing assortment of life experiences, villains, and Robins in a constantly shrinking timescale. His latest revision in DC’s “New 52” reboot of the DC Universe suggests that he’s been a vigilante for about five years, gaining no fewer than five sidekicks within that short period. The company-wide strict adherence to comics’ continuity follows the power relationships as outlined by Dittmer, allowing consistent interaction
between characters and titles. However, the revision inherent in DC’s New 52 created a number of issues for fans. While some titles were completely retooled, as with Superman and Wonder Woman, other titles—specifically the Batman and Green Lantern titles—attempted to continue ongoing storylines prior to the reboot. Timeline and continuity confusion ran abound due to the number of titles in play, causing an editorial need to address these issues in subsequent storylines. The DC Animated Universe was able to strictly monitor these issues of continuity through their relatively limited structure, running (at most) three shows simultaneously. This was furthered by the consistent team of producers in creative control of the direction of the franchise. The development of alternate continuities across different media allowed many opportunities for creators to reimagine and modify relationships between characters and stories, and the popularity of DC’s characters has developed a widespread (although unrecognized) intertextuality between their media. Julie Sanders writes, on the concept of intertextuality, “[a]ny exploration of intertextuality, and its specific manifestation in the forms of adaptation and appropriation, is inevitably interested in how art creates art, or how literature is made by literature” (1). This chapter discusses the importance of continuity in the DC Animated Universe; it was critical to the success of the universe and has since been utilized as a template for subsequent animated and live action productions by both DC and Marvel, generating great financial and critical successes for both companies. I also examine the intertextual elements within the DC Animated Universe and their benefit to the growing multimedia composition of DC’s franchises.

The array of media across which comic book media have spread represents an interesting type of intertextuality amongst characters. This chapter focuses on the methods developed within the series of DC Animated Universe to maintain continuity and the importance of intertextuality across DC’s properties. Intertextuality is, broadly, the tactics that media producers use to connect
their products to their forebears. Jonathan Gray, writing about the peripheral texts surrounding television shows in his recent book *Show Sold Separately*, describing the idea and connecting it to modern media. He writes, “In common usage, *intertextuality* refers to instances wherein a film or program refers to and builds some of its meaning off of another film or program, and *intertext* to the referenced film or program” (117). Whereas the text of something like *The Lord of the Rings* (*LOTR*) is monolithic—that is to say the original three books are the only text being strictly adapted—its cross-media adaptations are scrutinized far more than looser adaptations of comic book properties.\(^{23}\) He uses a concept called “intertextual framing devices,” citing preexisting media as frames to newer media. His example is *LOTR* as an intertextual framing device for the Narnia movies—the comparisons are inevitable. Such devices are abundant in comics—especially in film, more so than television. But as *LOTR* set a precedent for epic book based adaptations, so did the DC Animated Universe for shared universe comic book adaptations. It became paradigmatic of the potential success for these franchises, and was heavily reliant on intertextuality within DC’s already-popular comic book universe for its success.

French philosopher Julia Kristeva coined the term “intertextuality” in her 1966 essay “Word, Dialogue, and Novel.” Ostensibly a shortening of her term “intersection of textual surfaces,” she used the term in relation to the “space between” words in the reading of novels and other text. Graham Allen, in *Intertextuality*, discusses the concept in-depth, utilizing Julia Kristeva’s definition and comparing it to Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin’s earlier work. Allen attempts to connect the concept to popular media, writing:

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\(^{23}\) Viewer reactions to the strictly adapted texts, as described in chapter 1, are put under much stricter scrutiny than looser adaptations.
Intertextuality is an illuminating concept to bring to a reading [of a text] that utilizes a number of culturally significant codes and conventions and also refers as a text to the environment within which it is displayed (178).

Allen’s utilization of intertextuality suggests that any text can be restructured in order to provide responses from its readers based on their experiences with prior related (and often tertiary) media (177). He discusses the new wave films of Jean-Luc Godard, spaghetti westerns and Kurosawa, explaining that intertextuality can be cross-cultural and include adaptations and reimaginings of earlier work. Comic books present an interesting take on intertextuality, as the sheer amount of titles and the longevity of properties has caused the need for more nuanced approaches to storytelling and media selection in order for critical and commercial success. Thus, DC is able to produce animated versions of its famous characters that are heavily based on its previous creations, as discussed in Chapter 1. They avoid being simple replications of their comic book counterparts due to their status as reimaginings along with their transference into a new medium.

Writers are free to adapt stories wholesale from other media; in a tradition similar to *West Side Story* and many early Warner Bros. cartoons, classical themes and plays are often utilized in interesting ways that create a sort of bricolage based on past experiences. Allen discusses how creators manage this feat, writing: “Postmodern architects practice what we can style an intertextual architecture which appropriates styles from different eras and combines them in ways which attempt to reflect the historically and socially plural contexts within which their buildings now have to exist” (185). While Allen’s outlook on the reliance of intertextuality and the lack of unique popular creations is rather bleak, it does allow certain opportunities for readers to enjoy adaptations in a new way, with the knowledge of earlier renditions of DC’s characters (in this case) flavoring their take on future adaptations. Allen discusses the concept of
hypertext briefly, suggesting that media utilizing systems of intertextuality along with the connectivity and access provided by new technology influences the reader’s perception of a text (202). Thus, the version of the text with which the reader is most familiar is most important to the reader, and more popular texts influence larger sects of readers. This is an exponential effect: as stated earlier, Fleischer’s Superman shorts influenced Timm’s work on the DC Animated Universe, which influenced DC Comics, further influencing DC’s current animated output. The new approaches to characterization and continuity, based on previous efforts, create compelling pairings for readers to experience new versions of known media, absorbing and comprehending (even if only subconsciously) multiple versions of comic universes at a given time.

The DC Animated Universe maintained continuity within titles, as several of their titles were running concurrently and occasionally on separate networks. Batman and Green Lantern both appeared in Kids WB’s Static Shock on various occasions, and Static found himself in Batman Beyond’s futuristic Gotham City, meeting an older version of himself among other superheroes.24 The crossover potential of these titles was allowed and even encouraged by the conventions of the superhero genre; team-ups are very frequent, serving as a way for heroes to unite into one title, or occasionally to drive sales for struggling titles. Thus, the well-known Batman ventured into the world of Static Shock, giving the program a “Batman bump.” BTAS is the first show canonically to be developed within the DC Animated Universe, though its film25 and several episodes take place chronologically before the show’s opening. Prequels and sequels

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24 Their appearances were more catered to the style of Static Shock, including the use of Static Shock’s musical style and slight differences in animation.
25 Batman: Mask of the Phantasm presents Batman’s early career as a vigilante, running parallel with a present-day plot based around Batman’s universe. The film offers insight into Batman’s motivations and a brief look at The Joker’s life before his transformation into the crazed criminal mastermind he was in BTAS.
in an ongoing universe allow for more opportunities of character development and fully utilize the pool of adaptation.

The DC Animated Universe developed in a similar manner to the comic-based DC Universe. Both instances began with a title (or series) following the adventures of a single hero followed by other heroes culminating in a title showcasing the adventures of a team of heroes. This historical manifestation has been seen in the DC Comics universe with Superman’s debut in 1939 followed closely with Batman’s in 1940. The first appearance of the Justice League occurred twenty years later as mentioned in the first chapter. The progression in the DC Animated Universe began with *BTAS* in 1992, *STAS* in 1996, and the *Justice League* in 2001, amidst the other intermittent series. This progression mirrors the comics, though on a much shorter timescale. The development of a *universe* specifically started when the producers of *BTAS* and *STAS* developed both programs concurrently, airing in a one-hour block. *STAS* greatly expanded the DC Animated Universe’s development of serial plotlines. *BTAS* used this minimally; it was more often played out of order, especially during its earlier years on FOX, which created the necessity of stand-alone episodes. *STAS* had season-long arcs, specifically involving the alien tyrant Darkseid and the clandestine technological developments and machinations of Project Cadmus and STAR Labs. This was possible with the evolution of the storytelling approach by the DC Animated Universe’s creators and the freedom Timm, Dini and the other producers were allowed from Kids’ WB as opposed to FOX. “World’s Finest,” a three-part episode of *STAS*, showcased the possibilities their new approach allowed, featuring the first meeting between Batman and Superman along with the meshing of their styles, plots, and worlds. *STAS* continued to build a larger universe in its following episodes. It later introduced

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26 The Justice League is evocative of the efforts of DC’s forebears, the Justice Society of America, which tied together many Golden Age superheroes into a team in the 1940s.
other heroes to the DC Animated Universe, including The Flash, Green Lantern, and Doctor Fate, characters who would reappear several years later (and on a different network) in *Justice League* and *Justice League Unlimited*. Furthermore, STAS’s aforementioned utilization of universe-building plotlines would later tie into *Justice League* and *Justice League Unlimited*’s episodes and its own season-long plots.

Shared universes have been consistently utilized in non-print, comic-related media since the DC Animated Universe’s inception, their success owing ostensibly to the DC Animated Universe’s popularity and accomplishment. The popularity of the DC Animated Universe’s narratives has coalesced with the company’s many other narratives in order to create culturally dominant versions of the characters. The popular versions of superheroes, their characterization and dominant narratives fit a structure similar to the one applied to fairytales by Julie Sanders in *Adaptation and Appropriation*, wherein fairytales become “eminently adaptable into new circumstances and contexts” (83). Superheroes have become something more than their initial conception; certain aspects have been canonized and others discarded based on cultural and critical successes and failures.

The development of this shared continuity benefited its creators and ushered the prominent style of comic book storytelling into an audiovisual medium. The popularity of shared continuities has grown exponentially in the years since the cessation of *Justice League Unlimited*’s final season. Consistency in plotlines and character portrayal, as well as visual style, has led to increasingly successful media portrayals of superheroes for Marvel, DC, and their parent companies. The production of these shared continuities have also gained widespread critical acclaim and ushered in the possibility of more experimental film and television efforts.
Visual Consistency

The DC Animated Universe expanded with the three-part *STAS* episode “World’s Finest.” *BTAS* had of course been on for years on FOX before its revival on Kids’ WB, and *STAS* was well into its second season. Both shows were however separate entities until their storylines crossed with the aforementioned three-part “Worlds’ Finest” episodes. The creators of the DC Animated Universe had careful plans in place before this first meeting that tied directly to its creation. Specifically, the change in design and direction (while maintaining series continuity) in *BTAS* signified its introduction to *STAS*’s universe. *STAS* additionally contains a line in its third episode in which Superman’s mother refers to Batman as “that nut in Gotham,” alluding to their shared universe. Elements that initially appear as throwaway lines or subtle inferences can often result in (or signify) an addition to the universe. In *STAS*’s case, the reference to Batman in the pilot was later expounded upon in the team-up between Superman and Batman and their shared universe. *BTAS*’s revival on Kids’ WB came a year after *STAS*—both shows ran together as a block on Kids’ WB titled “The New Superman/Batman Adventures.” *BTAS*’s characters and setting were revised in order to reflect the change of network and to create a similar atmosphere to *STAS* (Kidd). This collaboration allowed their animation styles and character designs to mesh well in their multiple crossovers and (perhaps coincidentally) their later sequel series.

“World’s Finest” begins with The Joker’s theft of a statue that is formed of Kryptonite with the intent to use it in pursuit of Superman’s demise. He takes the statue to Lex Luthor and suggests to Lex a proposition akin to that in *Strangers on a Train*; should the villains “trade,” each attempting to defeat the other’s hero, they will meet more success than their numerous

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27 Marvel’s Cinematic Universe has a wealth of this type of references, ranging from the appearance of a character’s name on a computer to outright references to future (planned) films or appearances of characters.

28 The block allowed the many crossover episodes to air together, reducing the presence of cliffhangers.
failed attempts. The Joker also requests a large sum of money from the billionaire Luthor in exchange for his services. Joker’s presence in Metropolis, along with a sudden business partnership with LexCorp, brings Batman/Bruce Wayne to the city. He quickly acquaints himself with Lois Lane, as they engage in a romantic relationship, to the ire of Superman/Clark Kent. Batman and Superman are initially at odds, though they cultivate a friendly rivalry after discerning each other’s secret identity and joining forces against their enemies. The heroes work together to defeat Luthor and The Joker, the status quo naturally returning at the conclusion of the three-episode arc, though with major ramifications to the status of the two series. “Worlds’ Finest” created a basis for later crossovers and eventually the Justice League and Justice League Unlimited series by melding the narrative worlds.

The visual and aural consistency between BTAS and STAS was critical to the crossover and development of a shared universe, more so than its importance in comics. The redesign of BTAS allowed its characters to match STAS; their visual styles meshed well in crossovers, despite the design differences between the settings of both programs. Gotham City maintained much of its “Dark Deco” architecture during its transition to the new animation style, while simplifying many aspects in order to preserve consistency with STAS. Its Metropolis featured similarities to futuristic, utopian designs seen in 1950s science fiction films and pulp novels. Batman’s adventures generally took place at night, while Superman’s were during the daylight hours, often while Clark Kent was working at the Daily Planet. Metropolis and Gotham are both often equated to New York City, as their position in the fictional world would dictate. However, the cities differ greatly, essentially showing two dynamically different versions of the same city. Their heroes and the contradictory approach to storytelling further highlight the dynamic differences between the two fictional cities, building on stark differences in design and
characterization mimicking dark and light. Bruce Timm reflects that the lighter art style was more in line with Superman’s character, rather than the grim nighttime world of Batman (45). The maintenance of a consistent look between titles was integral to their continuity in an even stronger capacity than in comics. The similarities in style and tone contrasted with the two heroes to give each show a unique feel.

The differences between the shows are obvious in the narratives and heightened in crossover episodes. The Joker’s approach to fighting Superman is radically different than Luthor’s manipulative, heavily planned attempts in prior episodes of STAS. Batman’s villains often operate on a much smaller scale than Superman’s, though their schemes often have similar aims—destabilizing the economy, killing their city’s resident superhero(es), and a host of other traditional super villainous goals. Superman’s rogues occasionally fit the profile of Batman’s, but his STAS incarnation regularly faced would-be galactic conquerors and massively powerful beings such as the aforementioned Darkseid and Mongul. Justice League and Justice League Unlimited allowed both types of villains to be used across heroic lines, acting much in the same way as “World’s Finest” did in order to meld the characters’ worlds together. Batman thus assisted Superman, Wonder Woman, and other superheroes against galactic threats in a capacity that would not have thematically succeeded in BTAS, while other heroes found themselves facing Batman’s more deranged foes to their consternation. Marvel utilized a similar tactic in bringing Captain America and secret agents Black Widow and Hawkeye to the screen in The Avengers—using a crossover to introduce unfamiliar elements to familiar characters, playing on the juxtaposition of elements to achieve a very positive, visceral reaction from fans. Thus it is rare

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29 One of Superman’s odder villains, Toyman, seems more suited to Batman. Toyman is a disgraced toy manufacturer who appears as a human-sized doll. In his STAS appearance, he kidnaps Lois Lane and dresses her as a doll, forcing her to “play house” with him.
for Batman to venture into deep space in the DC Animated Universe and in DC Comics, and completely absent from the character’s eight films. Should he find himself paired with any of the spacefaring members of the Justice League, the storytelling potential is changed. Conversely, Superman is able to act in a similar capacity when paired with Batman—fighting crime outside of the characters’ specialization results in unique scenarios only possible within a shared universe. The huge amount of published material and relatively low cost of producing comics has allowed DC to experiment with these scenarios countless times, canonically and otherwise. In an audiovisual medium, it is critical to maintain consistency between titles, both to appeal to a younger audience and to create something with which fans are easily able to identify and connect.

The conglomerate television block for WB’s airing of STAS and the revitalized BTAS was titled “The New Superman/Batman Adventures.” It featured two shows with very similar visual styles and related creative teams, and thus were easily identifiable as shared (but different) shows. The voice cast of both titles was shared as well during crossovers—the omnipresent Kevin Conroy voiced Batman across every DC Animated Universe series, while Tim Daly and later George Newbern (with a very similar timbre to Daly) voiced Superman. Mark Hamill consistently voiced The Joker, Clancy Brown became a long-standing voice actor for Lex Luthor, and Dana Delaney was an excellent Lois Lane.30 The preceding characters represent only a small segment of the characters present by Justice League Unlimited’s conclusion. The aural consistency helped in a similar manner to character design, characterization, and plot adherence in the universe’s development. Events could not happen on a massive scale in STAS, as they

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30 Delany also provided the voice for Andrea Beaumont, the titular “Phantasm” of the film Batman: Mask of the Phantasm, with whom Bruce had a troubled relationship. This adds some aural congruity to his later attraction to Lois Lane.
would eventually need to be reflected in *BTAS* (and later series); Darkseid and his minions could never take over the entire planet in *STAS*; the fallout of such an event would need to be dealt with in *BTAS*. Darkseid was however able to briefly seize control of Metropolis and murder Superman’s confidante Detective Dan Turpin prior to his defeat by Superman. The maintenance of a shared universe puts requirements on the developments within each specific text, similar to the commercial demands of sequential art. Lasting change in the comic book universes requires action and commitment in all related titles.

Darkseid’s actions are expanded upon in *Justice League* and *Justice League Unlimited*, though they remained separate from *BTAS* as it was operating as a separate entity. Batman was able to fight Darkseid alongside the Justice League in *Justice League Unlimited*, per the possibilities of the shared universe. The inclusion of Darkseid and similar villains is otherwise impossible for the Batman franchise in most cases, as it does not generally fit the tone of most Batman media. It is the introduction of a larger shared universe that includes aliens and superpowers and other fantastic elements that expands the potential crossover appeal of shared universes. DC Comics has been publishing books since the 1940s that conglomeration these worlds. The DC Animated Universe reached its greatest amount of similarity with DC Comics’ universe during this time in the mid-1990s in which it had several shows running concurrently, analogous to the publication of titles like *Batman* and *Superman*, along with the huge amount of other titles that frequently crossed over.

The necessity for continuity by different artists across comic titles is integral to the ongoing success of the medium. Other elements, specifically casting, design, and characterizations are of chief importance in the television medium. The volume of titles running concurrently in print creates the need for editorial coordination between the many creators in
order to get large amounts of material produced in a timely manner. DC currently publishes more than 50 monthly titles, most of which exist simultaneously in a shared universe and continuity. Maintaining this universe is necessary to allow crossovers to occur easily—the ongoing maintenance might initially seem like more effort than a cavalier approach, but it allows for straightforwardly explainable events that fans are readily able to embrace. These crossovers are created for a variety of reasons, often using popular characters like Batman to drive sales of books that are selling fewer titles. Crossovers also tend to promise “universe-changing” storylines, as in 2009’s Final Crisis, which culminated in the (temporary) death of Batman. The utilization of crossovers in the DC Animated Universe built a dynamic shared universe. The DC Animated Universe’s crossovers are fairly limited, at least when compared to the huge amount in DC Comics. The “big events” generally occurred in the season (or series) premiers and finales of each series in a tradition more common with television productions. Justice League and Justice League Unlimited specifically used the culmination of events portrayed through their seasons in order to develop finales in which plotlines were tied up and ongoing points addressed.

Serial Storytelling

The development of serial storylines within and across several shows has been vital to the continued existence and financial fruition of the DC Animated Universe. The consistency of visual design and characterization is connected to the development of these serial plotlines and allows for their development. BTAS featured some serial elements in many of its two-part episodes, specifically with the creation of its villains. Harvey Dent appeared in several episodes before the two-part “Two-Face” episode in which his skin was doused with acid and transformed into his villainous persona—the titular Two-Face—which he maintained through the rest of the

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31 DC’s other published comics are either out-of-continuity titles or published by Vertigo, DC’s “mature” imprint.
show’s run on FOX and into its design and format change into *The New Batman Adventures* on Kids’ WB.

*BTAS’s* long first season included several “sequel” episodes: “Feat of Clay,” Clayface’s origin and first appearance, was followed by “Mudslide,” in which Clayface’s body decays due to the accident that gave him his powers in the earlier episode. 32 The episode “Heart of Steel” featured the villainous computer H.A.R.D.A.C. and its development of robotic duplicates. “Heart of Steel” was followed several episodes later by “His Silicon Soul,” building on similar themes and the fallout of the preceding episode, including an antagonistic robotic duplicate of Batman. These could be watched separately (and were made to be experienced in that format) but they follow the trend of allowing more intrinsic gain from prior knowledge. Harvey Dent’s descent into insanity set the deranged tone of Batman’s encounters with him in future episodes. Clayface’s plight in “Mudslide” was based on his deteriorating sanity and vanity from “Feat of Clay,” recalling the psychological effects caused by ability to transform his appearance and the difficulty of retaining his shape as his body crumbles. “His Silicon Soul” delves into the efforts of H.A.R.D.A.C. to defeat Batman on a more personal level, as the robotic Batman duplicate has taken warped versions of Batman’s morals and combined them with goals from its prior episode. Again, these episodes work as singular entities though the antagonists have been developed into stronger characters through the limited seriality provided by the creators. The storytelling potential was benefitted from the prior episodes, allowing more opportunities for character development and audience experience. It is possible for the viewer of DC Animated Universe programming to experience the text in many ways; the viewer’s prior experiences with the

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32 As referenced in chapter 1.
material in an adaptation influences their reaction. Graham Allen suggests that there are multiple levels to the ‘reading’ of any text, writing:

Reading… takes place on two successive levels: first, a mimetic level which tries to relate textual signs to external referents and tends to proceed in a linear fashion; second, a retroactive reading which proceeds, in a nonlinear fashion, to unearth the underlying semiotic units and structures which produce the text’s non-referential significance. (116)

The reading of an adaptation of DC Universe stories is a complicated affair. The linear fashion described by Allen is more closely related to the serial storytelling in *STAS* and *Justice League*—it is less used in episodic, “one-shot” content like *BTAS*. The nonlinear fashion is more pervasive, a pertinent part of the reading of any text. The retroactive reading of widespread characters and concepts in DC Comics media that have seen numerous adaptations calls upon reader familiarity (or lack thereof) in order to influence their expectations for any given viewing. Retroactive, nonlinear viewer experiences pervade most media; the introduction of serial storytelling between episodes invokes the viewer’s potential for experiencing a stronger connection to the text through return viewing.

*STAS*’s utilization of serial storytelling radically changed the approach of the DC Animated Universe’s plotlines while maintaining adherence to some of the techniques introduced in the prior series. *STAS* developed similar character-based continuity to *BTAS*—many villains’ origin stories were told in earlier episodes and built upon in subsequent episodes. The perennial Superman villains Lex Luthor, Brainiac, and Metallo were all introduced in different forms in the first episode of the series, the latter two in roles significantly different than their comic counterparts. Brainiac appears as an antagonist to Superman’s father Jor-El on Krypton, and is partially responsible for its destruction (or at least the death of its residents.) He
eventually appears at the end of the three-part arc, heading towards Earth to face Superman later in the season. Metallo appears as the mercenary John Corben. Corben steals a robotic suit for a group of terrorists, attacking Superman in the suit before his defeat and apprehension by the Metropolis police. Corben’s next appearance is four episodes later in “The Way of All Flesh,” in which his previously explored relationship with Luthor is expanded upon. Corben’s new status as a convict eager for power and revenge on Superman allows Luthor to transform him into Metallo, a mostly-robotic cyborg with a kryptonite heart. Metallo’s character arc throughout STAS focuses on his loss of humanity and hatred of Superman as he becomes increasingly more robotic. STAS focused on building important character arcs for Superman, his supporting cast, and his many antagonists alongside serial plots that flourished in Justice League and the future series Justice League Unlimited.

The serial elements developed in STAS culminated in the series finale, “Legacy.” Legacy features Darkseid’s final effort to defeat Superman, in which he brainwashes the hero and encourages him to attack Metropolis facing Supergirl and destroying much of the city. Darkseid’s vow to refrain from conquering Earth in season two’s “Apokolips…Now!” two-part episode, along with his urge to get revenge on Superman, created his necessity to use Superman as a pawn. Supergirl’s efforts to protect the city with Superman robots (a longstanding tradition in Superman comics; Superman robots defend Metropolis when Superman is out of town) fail when Superman and the forces of Apokolips arrive. Supergirl is heavily injured during the battle, requiring her treatment of injuries by Emil Hamilton at STAR Labs, a recurring character and element respectively within STAS that had helped Superman several times through the show’s four seasons. Superman later regains his memory, escaping from federal prison and finding his way to Apokolips to confront Darkseid, defeating him and ending his antagonism (until his
reappearance in *Justice League*). Darkseid’s previous attempt to conquer Metropolis served as a motivation for Superman’s rage and assault towards Darkseid—the latter’s murder of Detective Dan Turpin is specifically cited (along with the brainwashing) as Superman’s motivation towards ending Darkseid’s reign, alongside the obvious heroic motivations omnipresent in Superman’s myriad depictions. “Legacy” was referenced several times in *Justice League* and *Justice League Unlimited*, often tied to a general distrust of superheroes held by much of the United States Government. This continues to reference Graham Allen’s dual levels of reading, calling upon viewer familiarity with the text at hand along with contextual, cultural renditions of superheroes within the DC Universe. The public distrust of superheroes is a common theme in superhero comics. The impetus for this distrust changes based upon the writer, themes in the universe, and other factors; however viewers familiar with this concept can watch the finale to *Justice League Unlimited* and read common themes both within the long sequence of texts leading up to that point in-universe and recurring themes in DC Comics.

The finale of *STAS* features the formation of Project Cadmus—then called Project Achilles—by the US Government in conjunction with Lex Luthor. Project Cadmus began as a government response to super powered heroes and villains alike, with Superman’s invasion acting as a catalyst. Cadmus’s role expanded greatly in its subsequent appearances in JL and *Justice League Unlimited*. Cadmus took great lengths to develop contingency plans to deal with and ultimately replace superheroes, surging to a climax throughout several episodes and cementing a running plotline throughout *Justice League Unlimited*.

The Cadmus arc was planned to several degrees, though much of its span can be attributed to a later piecing-together of prior plot points. DC Animated Universe architects Bruce Timm, Dwayne McDuffie, and James Tucker, in an interview with Mark Hamill featured on the
Justice League DVD release, suggest that much of the second season of Justice League Unlimited was focused on the Cadmus arc, either in snippets or themes within episodes to those heavily featuring Cadmus or its members as antagonists. Timm suggests that “[Cadmus] expanded the scope of our show beyond just Justice League Unlimited, it expanded backwards to [STAS], [BTAS] and even forward to Batman Beyond” (“Cadmus Interview”). Cadmus’s efforts to counteract the Justice League’s perceived threat are tied specifically to Superman’s actions in the second season finale of STAS as well as the Justice League Unlimited episode “A Better World,” in which an evil alternate version of the Justice League termed the “Justice Lords” find themselves in the main universe, specifically threatening the government and their lax behavior towards crime.33

Project Cadmus acted as a conglomeration of several comic book entities, including Jack Kirby’s Project Cadmus, which Timm refers to as “more of a science think tank,” and Task Force X, a government-controlled team of villains commonly known by their comic title Suicide Squad. The DC Animated Universe’s Cadmus was tied into all of the previously shown “shadow government conspiracies” in the DC Animated Universe, though a number of the connections developed after the fact. Timm suggests, “instead of these all being separate conspiracies, they could all be part of the same conspiracy” (“Cadmus Interview”). This includes the aforementioned Project Achilles from the STAS finale and the antagonistic relationship developed with the government by the Justice League in several prior episodes. These callbacks and references provide stimulating rewards for a constant viewer—having seen prior shows and holding the knowledge of the roots of the Cadmus conspiracy and its plot connections to prior series. It also creates a more interesting level of intertextuality between the DC Animated

33 The Justice Lords had murdered President (in their universe) Lex Luthor and taken control of the United States.
Universe and its print-based relatives, heightening the benefit of familiarity with a larger span of DC Comics media and emphasizing Allen’s suggestion of dual layers of reading. Lynn Spiegel and Henry Jenkins describe the layers of reading as a “situational context,” their nostalgic properties evoking strong reactions from viewers and encouraging repeat viewing and the return to future entries in the universe (134-135).

Some elements may have been coincidental, although the creative plotting was such that it allowed open-ended components to be modified as a benefit for the shared universe. The DC Animated Universe’s overwriting or modification of previous plotlines and story elements is an example of establishing “retroactive continuity,” commonly referred to by the sobriquet “retcon.” The retcon phenomenon is usually attributed to Roy Thomas having heard the term at a comic convention, and has been used in comics to great lengths.\(^\text{34}\) The previous examples involving Cadmus establish a retroactive continuity; modifying the existing material by expanding on missing or exempt elements. This process is not unique to comic book media—it is heavily utilized in serial television (ABC’s \textit{LOST} used this process extensively in the development of character backstory, especially in later seasons), novels (Arthur Conan Doyle’s \textit{Sherlock Holmes} series resurrected the hero after his apparent death in \textit{The Final Problem}), and films (\textit{Star Wars} and its many sequels and prequels). The clever establishment of retroactive continuity can strengthen plots and characters, allowing the unraveling of a conspiracy or the defeat of a criminal mastermind to affect the viewer much more substantially. The outcome is more apt to elude a strong reaction from the viewer when the remuneration of his or her time is perceived as more valuable due to the more consequential payoff.

\(^{34}\) Its first recorded use was in the letters column of All-Star Squadron \#20, written by Roy Thomas.
Justice League Unlimited’s producers made a conscious effort to compose episodes as stand-alone, allowing casual viewers to tune in and enjoy a single episode story alongside the underlying sequential plots. Often this is developed through expository dialogue and flashbacks; one of STAS’s later episodes, “The Demon Reborn,” is a crossover episode with BTAS, in which the centuries-old criminal mastermind Ra’s Al Ghul and his daughter Talia attempt to use an ancient magical scepter to take Superman’s powers and imbue them into Al Ghul. His history of immortality and frequent revivals, as well as a portion of his history with Batman, is revealed to the viewer through flashbacks that show Al Ghul using the world’s mystical Lazarus Pits to rejuvenate himself (unsuccessfully, since the pits had dried up, driving Al Ghul to seek Superman’s vitality.) The use of these Lazarus Pits had been shown at length in several episodes of BTAS, though a new viewer (or perhaps one who had only watched STAS) would not be aware of these developments. “The Demon Reborn” introduced new elements to the DC Animated Universe continuity in the destruction of Al Ghul’s Lazarus Pits and successfully merged the character into Superman’s universe, adding gravity and rationale for Al Ghul’s actions.

Similarly, Cadmus’s long-spanning history added to their authority as a counterpart to the Justice League, having been seen in different incarnations as a threat in prior series. Timm claims that the Justice League Unlimited episode “Task Force X” acted to strengthen the menace of Cadmus: “If Cadmus is going to be a credible threat, they’re going to need to win one” (Cadmus Interview). “Task Force X,” follows a team of villains employed by Cadmus and led by Colonel Rick Flagg (begrudgingly) on a mission to steal a suit of armor from the Justice League Watchtower. Timm and McDuffie describe the episode as a heist movie, in which it follows the basic structure of “plot, execution, and something going wrong.” Task Force X accomplishes their mission, though they lose a member of their team to the Justice League. The episode’s coda
suggests that a member of the Justice League’s Watchtower staff had leaked information to Cadmus; the League could no longer trust anyone in their employ, again raising stakes and heightening conspiracy for future episodes. The various appearances of Cadmus, its associates and offshoots throughout the DC Animated Universe emphasize their gravity as well as their status in the comic book DC Universe. As an “all-ages” text, fitting the term as described by Jason Mittell, the version of Cadmus figures into the DC Animated Universe in a different capacity than their comic book counterpart. They are still however able to evoke memories and reactions from viewers familiar with other texts related to distrust of superheroes. Pervading themes create predicative behaviors for viewers. The conscious use of intertextual elements builds on material that has been proven as successful in its derivative media—in this case, DC Comics—alongside proven techniques in the television medium.

Timm, McDuffie, and Tucker suggest that their use of the Cadmus storyline allowed them to raise the question of the necessity of superheroes in their fictional world and their place in relation to the government. They were able to include this storyline and the minutiae of the group’s actions through the years of success and goodwill that they had built on previous networks and on Cartoon Network through Justice League and the first season of Justice League Unlimited. Justice League Unlimited also allowed the creators expanded abilities to include characters otherwise unavailable to animation (as discussed in chapter one) regarding Booster Gold’s heroic turn in “The Greatest Story Never Told.” Joaquim Dos Santos, writer for DC Comics and Justice League Unlimited, expressed his enthusiasm for the freedom to use minor characters, claiming that “[Justice League Unlimited] is no holds barred…you’ve got every character you’ve ever wanted to see animated” (“Making Justice League Unlimited”). While Dos Santos’s enthusiasm might be a bit hyperbolic, the structure of Justice League Unlimited
allowed for stories based on DC Animated Universe and DC Comics lore. “This Little Piggy,” an early episode of *Justice League Unlimited*, features the witch and DC Comics villain Circe (also of Greek mythology) turning Wonder Woman into a pig, forcing Batman and Zatanna, among others, to roam the city at night in search of a pink pig clad with Wonder Woman’s bracelets. The episode was largely light-hearted and humorous (concluding with a lovely rendition of the jazz standard “Am I Blue?” as performed by Batman) but allowed for an examination of Batman and Wonder Woman’s romantic relationship as they paired alongside one of Batman’s old flames, Zatanna. She had been introduced several years prior in *BTAS*. Batman and Zatanna’s past relationship is alluded to within the episode, but it is built on preexisting DC Animated Universe “lore” that serves as another example of continuity allowing character development and growth. The DC Animated Universe’s adherence to continuity, whether Cadmus or character-based, created a fully realized universe in Jason Dittmer’s sense as well as an analogue to DC Comics’ print media. Preexisting characters and plotlines have been established; they are a foundation for more complex stories to be told through issues or series in any format and allow audiences to achieve an intertextual relationship with these franchises.

**Vital Retroactive Connections**

*Justice League Unlimited*’s second season finale, “Epilogue,” is a de facto finale to the entire DC Animated Universe, and a definitive chronological finale. “Epilogue” focuses primarily on Terry McGinnis—the titular *Batman Beyond*—and his efforts to understand the Cadmus conspiracy and its implications to his development as a person and as Batman. The episode begins a subtitle stating “65 Years From Now;” it follows McGinnis as he infiltrates a guarded home and confronts an elderly Amanda Waller, known to viewers as the head of
Cadmus in *Justice League Unlimited*. McGinnis demands she reveal the details of the “Batman Beyond” project. The episode is mostly dialogue-driven, allowing McGinnis—notably older than his last appearance in *Batman Beyond* or his cameo in the *Justice League Unlimited* episode “The Once and Future Thing: Time Warped”—to question Waller about Cadmus and its efforts to clone Batman. McGinnis finds that Waller used nanomachines to overwrite his father’s reproductive material with Bruce Wayne’s, making McGinnis and by proxy his younger brother “sons” of Batman. Waller reveals that Cadmus’s plan was to find a family with similar attributes to the Waynes in order to create a Batman for the future, ensuring the protection of Gotham (and Earth) beyond her years. Cadmus and Waller had plotted for the continued existence (or legacy) of its greatest superhero mastermind, and in doing so admitted defeat. Their activity during the brunt of *Justice League Unlimited* was fervently anti-superhero. Cadmus hires an assassin to murder McGinnis’s parents—a cameo role played by the Phantasm, Batman’s first love—though she isn’t able to follow through with the request; the Batman Beyond project is scrapped. As the events of *Batman Beyond*’s pilot episodes indicated, tragic events led McGinnis to Batman’s acquaintance and eventual acceptance of the mantle without Waller’s interference. McGinnis suggests that it was fate; Waller disagrees, reinforcing the fact that McGinnis isn’t Batman’s clone, rather his son, and emphasizing that he has agency and free will. The only appearance of *Justice League Unlimited* characters occurs in a flashback sequence wherein Waller recounts an incident in which Batman “cleaned up one of her old messes.” In the flashback, Batman consoles Ace, a dying child and member of the villainous Royal Flush Gang as Waller demands he kill her before her impending brain aneurysm triggers extreme manifestations of her psychic powers that

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35 *Batman Beyond* takes place 50 years after the end of *BTAS*; this episode is 15 years into McGinnis’s career as an established hero within Gotham City. He has become a full, yet reluctant member of the futuristic Justice League, as teased in the season 3 *Batman Beyond* episode “The Call.”
would cause the death of anyone within several miles. Batman opts to speak with Ace to diffuse
the situation, and she deactivates her powers before passing away peacefully as Batman sits
beside her on a swing set. The episode ends with McGinnis accepting his status as Bruce
Wayne’s son as well as his role of Batman, flying through the futuristic Gotham skyline to meet
Superman regarding a case he’s working.

“Epilogue” is structurally presented as an episode of *Batman Beyond*. It is able to
incorporate elements developed in the Cadmus storyline and by proxy *Justice League* and *Justice
League Unlimited*, both of which aired after *Batman Beyond*’s conclusion. The utilization of
retroactive continuity reveals that Batman is a genetically modified son of Bruce Wayne through
the nanotechnology developed by Cadmus, rather than a successor to the mantle in the vein of
Batman’s former sidekicks Robin and Batgirl. Numerous other connections were developed in
“Epilogue”: Cadmus was revealed to have been responsible for the nanotechnology used to
resurrect the Joker the film *Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker*; the titular villain of *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm* was the assassin meant to kill McGinnis’s parents after a showing of a
“Gray Ghost” film, a fictional pulp hero developed for *BTAS*; and the futuristic Justice League
from *Batman Beyond*’s “The Call” was seen fighting several of Batman’s futuristic rogues. The
most compelling connection to previous continuity is the final shot of the episode. It is a shot-
for-shot remake of the first scene of *BTAS*, albeit with Batman flying through a futuristic Gotham
City as opposed to Man-Bat flying through *BTAS*’s “Dark Deco” Gotham City.

“Epilogue” was able to join thematic elements with ongoing plotlines in order to craft an
effective “ending” for the DC Animated Universe. During the production of the episode, Timm,
McDuffie and the rest of the *Justice League Unlimited* producers had not been renewed for their
third season, and had thus anticipated that “Epilogue” would be the final episode of *Justice
League Unlimited and potentially the DC Animated Universe as a whole. Story elements from BTAS, STAS, Justice League Unlimited and Batman Beyond combined in order to make the most compelling narrative possible to the writers. Seemingly minor nods (as with the above-mentioned “Gray Ghost” film) are important in the development of a cohesive universe. Their inclusion notifies the viewer of potential gateways of information based on their prior experience. The DC Animated Universe is rife with examples of hailing in relation to observing continuity in action, specifically in the adaptation of preexisting works in different media and recalling elements of previous shows.

“Epilogue” aired in 2005, 13 years and three networks after the first BTAS episode. It would be difficult to watch without knowledge of DC Animated Universe continuity, however, contrasting Justice League Unlimited’s other, generally accessible episodes. The only subplot that stands relatively singular is Waller’s recollection of Batman’s solution for the Royal Flush Gang, which constitutes less than half of the narrative. The story is cohesive, though the swift introduction Terry McGinnis would likely cause minor confusion to viewers of only Justice League Unlimited. The suggestions placed upon the viewer in order to gain full intrinsic value from “Epilogue” are demanding, requiring hours of television watching and several different series to have the background knowledge necessary for all of the references and plot points. Julie Sanders writes on the benefits of adaptations utilizing elements of their predecessors, suggesting:

It is this inherent sense of play, produced in part by the activation of our informed sense of similarity and difference between the texts being invoked, and the connected interplay of expectation and surprise, that…lies at the heart of the experience of adaptation and appropriation (25).
It is an exhilarating process for readers to experience the stories and characters that they are familiar with reinterpreted and reforged with elements and inspiration from a myriad of resources. Elements and references play on one another, based upon films, comics, and other existing material in order to offer the audience a stronger connection to the text. As postulated by Henry Jenkins in his book *Convergence Culture*, the barriers between media are becoming cluttered and leading to a wider reach of media franchises. Batman exists in considerably more media than he did in the 1940s, but the comic book Batman from that time period still matters to today’s audience—even if they are not conscious of that character’s influence. The process of creating new continuities with divergent paths from the already known conclusions present in DC Comics evokes strong reactions from fans, leading to the continuing popularity of the DC Animated Universe.

Later Developments

Batman’s characterization through the several DC Animated Universe series is the most constant visual element, though his designs for subsequent programs differ slightly in order to fit the tone and match animation uniformity of each series. Batman and his voice actor, Kevin Conroy, remained a constant presence in the aforementioned shows as well as several appearances in *STAS* and *Static Shock*. If a viewer were to turn on any given episode of DC Animated Universe programming, the visual look of Batman and the consistent animation would clue the viewer first that it is a DC Animated Universe show and—upon further scrutiny—which show. Batman’s and Superman’s reliable appearances in DC Animated Universe programs allowed the characters and their actors to dominate as brand ambassadors. *Justice League* was a team show, but it had goodwill conjured for several years prior by *BTAS* and *STAS*. To further emphasize the connection between series, *Justice League*’s first on-screen superheroes in the
premiere episode “Secret Origins” are Batman and Superman respectively, mirroring their appearance in the universe (in their own series). Batman and Superman’s own programs previously introduced members of the Justice League prior, though their appearances and voice actors were revised for their appearance in JL. In Green Lantern’s case, Kyle Rayner was replaced with John Stewart; The Flash featured slightly different costume coloring and a different voice actor. Superman’s voice actor changed as well, though George Newbern’s voice was not a drastic departure from Tim Daly’s. Batman and Superman were portrayed as heroes with a wealth of experience, forming the Justice League along newcomers—“Secret Origins” acts as an origin story for Martian Manhunter, Wonder Woman, and Hawkgirl, showcasing their first (or early) introductions into the public eye within the DC Animated Universe. Justice League utilized the existing DC Animated Universe and created a constant presence of teamwork and consistency, continuing the DC Animated Universe approach of utilizing existing DC stories to dig deeper into the possibilities afforded by adaptation, including the aforementioned scenarios that pushed characters to exist outside their comfort zones.

The approach used by the DC Animated Universe has been successfully adapted in many other cases, including at a later point within DC’s cross-media efforts. As delineated earlier, DC Comics rebooted their entire publishing line in 2011, bestowed their new slate of titles the moniker The New 52, and focused on more cohesive universe building. This reboot followed a crossover, Flashpoint, wherein The Flash found himself stranded in an alternate universe. The “Flashpoint Universe” featured dark twists on many DC heroes. Aquaman and Wonder Woman were at war, Superman had been held in captivity by the US government, and Bruce Wayne had died as a young boy, leaving his father Thomas to take the mantle of Batman. Flash managed to “fix” the timeline, resulting in The New 52 universe. This series of events was reimagined in
DC’s animated films as *Justice League: The Flashpoint Paradox*. This film retells and condenses its comic counterpart and its many tie-in comics into a shorter tale, as a hybrid between the strict and loose adaptations delineated in chapter one.

DC Comics’ animated films have been produced since 2007 under the inclusive banner of “DC Universe Animated Original Movies” (an odd grammatical choice). They encompassed many preexisting storylines within the DC Universe, either adapting them wholly or utilizing aspects in the creation of new stories. Again, they offer stories based on the most popular elements that fruitfully connect audiences with DC’s franchises. The first of these films was *Superman: Doomsday*, which loosely followed the 1990s storyline “The Death and Return of Superman,” condensing elements in order to tighten the focus to the length of the film. Prior to the release of *Justice League: The Flashpoint Paradox*, DC had released 17 films under this banner, with little-to-no interconnectivity. *Justice League: The Flashpoint Paradox* ended as its comic book counterpart did, with the introduction of a New 52 film universe, replete with costume designs echoing their recently refreshed comic counterparts. The last shot at the end of *Justice League: The Flashpoint Paradox*’s credit sequence teased the next film, *Justice League: War*, an adaptation of the first story arc in *Justice League*, the first and flagship comic of The New 52. Elements were changed from the comic, but the overall story and characterizations were very similar.\(^{36}\) The developers of DC’s animated films have embarked on a more concentrated effort to achieve intertextuality—the end of *Justice League: War* featured a similar teaser to *Justice League: The Flashpoint Paradox*, though teasing the next arc in Justice League’s comic universe, “Throne of Atlantis.” The next film, due in 2015, is *Justice League: Throne of Atlantis*. DC’s current efforts to create a new animated universe echo the DC Animated Universe. Further,

\(^{36}\) The Justice League featured Aquaman in the comic, who was replaced by Shazam in the film.
the next animated Batman film, *Son of Batman*, utilized the same actors and design in the portrayal of Batman, existing within the same universe as well. This is almost a total reverse of DC’s earlier pattern of universe building in the DC Animated Universe—beginning with a massive crossover, moving to the Justice League, and then tightening the focus on solo heroes.37 The New 52 approach is likely to continue into upcoming films, developing a synergistic approach to many of their animated works and building on or reimagining existing storylines and lore.38 The strictness of these adaptations—acting as direct counterparts to comic storylines—is a departure from the mass of DC Animated Universe programming, though it will ideally (for its producers) create an environment wherein all of DC’s recent media is connected immediately and obviously to the viewer.

Other media have slowly adapted the “comic book” approach of developing several contiguous series and occasionally joining them together. The DC Animated Universe used this approach to great effect, and DC’s current approach is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The most successful current example of this trend is its use in Marvel Comics’ cinematic universe. This progression again follows a similar pattern to the DC Animated Universe. The Marvel Cinematic Universe began with *Iron Man* in 2008, consciously inaugurating the development of both the Iron Man franchise and adjoining films. *Iron Man* featured Phil Coulson, agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., and his futile efforts to speak with Tony Stark and his company regarding future initiatives. Coulson was an original character, but his attempts to get Stark to work with the government were reminiscent of similar approaches in Iron Man comics years prior wherein the self-absorbed hero refused to coalesce with the government’s pleas. The film’s

37 As delineated in the introduction of Batman to STAS.
38 DC’s next animated feature is called *Batman: Assault on Arkham*. It is supposedly set in—or “inspired by,” according to its trailers—the *Batman: Arkham* games, featuring Kevin Conroy as Batman’s voice actor and character designs based on the game series, in addition to the Arkham Asylum setting.
greater connection to a larger Marvel Universe occurred in its post-credits scene, wherein Nick Fury—the director of S.H.I.E.L.D.—tells Stark that he is “part of a bigger universe,” phrasing it very literally and suggesting that there are scores of superheroes in the world. Fury tells Stark that he wants to talk to him about the “Avenger Initiative,” at which point the scene cuts to black.

*The Incredible Hulk* followed *Iron Man* later the same year. It featured a post-credits scene in which Tony Stark appeared in a similar capacity to Nick Fury’s cameo in the former film. *Iron Man 2* in 2010 and *Thor* and *Captain America* in 2011 followed the prior two films, each expounding on the role of Nick Fury and delicately developing connections to each other while telling stand-alone stories. Iron Man, Hulk, Thor, and Captain America and elements of their varied universes reprised their roles in 2012’s *The Avengers*, joining together to face a threat too great for any one hero, alongside supporting characters Hawkeye and Black Widow. The shared continuity created a narrative (and lucrative) potential for a character like Captain America—a soldier frozen in time for decades—to face an onslaught of murderous aliens alongside Loki, the Norse God of Trickery himself.

*The Avengers* echoes the above-described series premiere of *Justice League*: both narratives feature invading aliens and utilize the specific aspects of each member of the team in order to defeat the threat. Extraterrestrial threats are common in superhero media; all three examples—*Justice League’s* series premier, *Justice League: War* and *The Avengers*—feature aliens as a motivation for the teams to form. This is an intertextual theme running throughout this genre of media, loosely defined as it is by Jason Mittell. The adaptation of recurring elements continues to bolster their popularity and serves to propel these themes into even more widespread use. The “unknown threat” creates cause for heroes to overcome their “loner” attitudes and focus on saving innocent civilians. The second *Avengers* film is, as of this writing, currently in
production; *Iron Man, Captain America* and *Thor* have had sequels with further films planned, incorporating elements from their earlier films along with *The Avengers*. Marvel has developed plans for other films to exist within the universe, including the surprisingly successful *Guardians of the Galaxy* and the upcoming *Ant-Man*. Marvel’s films work both as sequels and companions to one-another—the ongoing story of *Iron Man* is reliant on actions in his solo films along with his appearance in *The Avengers*. *Iron Man 3* utilizes Stark’s newly developed post-traumatic stress disorder as a significant plot point for his character; this is contingent on his near-death experience in *The Avengers*’ climax. The Marvel Cinematic Universe develops continuity to push its developed audiences towards franchises with uncertain appeal. *Thor*, a Norse god-turned-superhero, seemed an unsteady concept for a movie that would cost millions to produce, but the success of *Iron Man* and the other preceding Marvel Cinematic Universe films allowed Marvel Studios to develop *Thor*, and its blockbuster success in turn progressed into *The Avengers*, the third highest-grossing film ever produced. The power relations as delineated by Jason Dittmer (and referenced in the introduction) are clearly portrayed in both the DC Animated Universe and Marvel Cinematic Universe. Iron Man, Thor, Captain America and the other heroes maintain constant relationships with each other and their universe. Their success is integrally tied to the strict adherence of their relationships within their universe and the structure that Marvel has worked to create and maintain, just as Superman, Batman and the various heroes of Justice League worked within the DC Animated Universe. Both the DC Animated Universe and Marvel Cinematic Universe were able to use the cultural credit that they had achieved through years of financial success in their prior series in order to bring lesser-known heroes into the forefront, as in *Justice League Unlimited* and Marvel’s *Guardians of the Galaxy* movie; both star lesser-
known heroes who are able to headline their own media via the success of previous entries in the franchise.

Marvel’s utilization of a shared film universe is perhaps a more precarious endeavor, as their headlining characters were (initially) much more obscure names than DC’s Superman and Batman. The quality and financial success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe has seemingly elevated their characters to a higher level of public recognition, however. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* swiftly made more money at the box office than DC’s *Man of Steel*, banking on the critical and financial success of the prior movies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the development of the universe within the film’s narrative in order to expand upon the characterizations of Captain America, Nick Fury, Black Widow and other characters established in antecedent films. Black Widow’s first appearance was in *Iron Man 2*, followed by an expanded role in *The Avengers* and a major role in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* centered on the interactions between the aforementioned characters as they fought against S.H.I.E.L.D., which had been infiltrated by the terrorist organization Hydra. The film ends with the dissolution of S.H.I.E.L.D., creating a drastically different environment for future Marvel Cinematic Universe media.

The fallout from S.H.I.E.L.D.’s demise was seen almost immediately in the MCU’s television show *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, focusing on the reaction of the eponymous agents to the events of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*’s first episode to deal with the consequences of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s infiltration and the other events of the film aired only four days after the premier of the film, therefore requiring the viewer to maintain a strict schedule in his or her consumption of entertainment, lest spoilers arise. The show gave an immediate in-universe perspective from tertiary characters, along with some
answers to questions posed in the film about the future of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. These episodes with closer ties to Marvel’s films gained much higher critical response. The series serves as a placeholder; a companion series to the Marvel Cinematic Universe’s main films thriving on its connection. It acts as a paratextual element to the films, supporting and enhancing their reach. As I specified in the introduction to this thesis, Jonathan Grey suggests that “Hollywood and its marketers often mobilize paratexts to proffer ‘proper interpretations,’ …working in medias res to subtly inflect the public understanding of an ongoing and open text” (81). Grey’s analysis suggests that even the existence of Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D and other supporting material acts as media that enhance the popularity and reach of Marvel’s films. They act as the DC Animated Universe did; coinciding with major releases in order to strengthen their appeal and reach. The various multimedia adaptations cannot work alone; the intertextual nature of adaptations presupposes some passing knowledge with the franchise at the very least, and the “proper interpretations” suggested by film companies are subject to a huge amount of interpretation and discernment from viewers.

Marvel has established their filmic continuity to great success, and continues to develop films and television series in order to create unprecedented financial gains. In addition to the recent summer blockbuster Guardians of the Galaxy, a sequel to The Avengers is currently in production, with other films slated for the next several years, many of which are also spotlighting lesser-known properties including the mystical sorcerer Doctor Strange and the size-changing Ant-Man. Marvel’s television approach is also expanding; they have made a deal with Netflix to develop four separate limited series with a fifth series to join their narratives together, which are currently in the casting phase. Furthermore, ABC has renewed Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.
for a second season; they have also made a full series order of *Marvel’s Agent Carter*, spinning off of the *Captain America* films and taking place in the 1940s.

Marvel’s recent efforts to develop a cohesive cinematic universe have paid off greatly, due to the internal consistency of continuity and quality, along with the connected elements between their film and comics universes. They have managed to utilize the abundance of characters already developed within their comic continuities in order to compensate for their lack of film and television rights to some of their biggest characters (Spider-Man, the X-Men and the Fantastic Four) with great success. Their approach was almost out of necessity due to the fragmentation of rights within their media franchises, but it allowed them to develop concurrent yet separate versions of characters in an approach reminiscent of DC Animated Universe, yet tailored for a much larger scale.

DC Comics is currently in the process of crafting a similar approach to their film and television franchises. The latest Superman film and reboot of the franchise, *Man of Steel*, featured references to characters not present but involved in the universe, including Lex Luthor and Batman. The film’s sequel will be released in 2016, titled *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*; the film will feature the titular heroes along with Wonder Woman, Cyborg, and Aquaman, leading into a planned *Justice League* film in 2017 with the same actors and director. DC is clearly following the ultra-successful model enacted by Marvel, aiming for one large franchise counter to several competing franchises. DC has the potential to create a more cohesive universe than Marvel due to their solid retention of media rights; their most popular characters lie with DC Entertainment and Warner Bros., at this time only requiring the cultural, critical and economic capital to build on their success. Their plans for continuity appear not to extend to television presently; DC has several series lined up for the Fall 2014 television season, though
only two will appear on the same network with definitive continuity between series, the others are expected to be fragmented between time periods and networks. These concerted approaches to the characters and settings of both comic companies and their move to establish continuity in media beyond comic books evoke the methods taken by the DC Animated Universe. The prior examples all work towards team-based superhero films while maintaining successful stand-alone media. Viewers can watch BTAS and/or STAS, and Iron Man and/or Captain America independently. The viewer of one is likely to see and relate to the other, and more likely to see the collaborative sequels of Justice League and The Avengers. Both are effective as stand-alone media, effectively introducing and utilizing ideas specific to the film and building on relationships and plots from other media within the franchise. The overwhelming critical and commercial success of The Avengers and the surging popularity of Marvel’s “Phase 2” films exemplify this configuration of media, and the importance of connecting the plots and characters within franchises across media in order to attain the greatest measure of success possible. The various pieces within the franchise don’t require the viewer to see everything; rather they reward viewers with character and plot development, to be presumably tied together in future films.

Marvel’s sweeping approach to universe and franchise development has utilized many aspects of the similar, earlier development of a universe within the DC Animated Universe. In both cases the popularity of aspects introduced or emphasized within the films and series have been recursively adapted into their respective comic universes. Iron Man’s characterization in Marvel comics changed sharply following Robert Downey Jr.’s approach to the role, matching his film counterpart’s tone and physical appearance. The DC Animated Universe affected DC

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39 The CW’s Arrow and its upcoming spinoff The Flash take place in the same universe; the titular character of The Flash appeared in two episodes of Arrow’s second season in an introductory capacity. DC’s other shows include Constantine on NBC, Gotham—exploring the youth of Bruce Wayne and Jim Gordon’s early career—on FOX, and iZombie on the CW.
Comics in myriad ways, including the changing characterizations of Mr. Freeze, John Stewart, and others. Furthermore, characters introduced specifically for films and series have been solidly adapted in all cases to the comics. The above-mentioned Phil Coulson has been introduced in Marvel’s main universe and its Ultimate Universe, as well as the *Ultimate Spider-Man* animated series and several of Marvel’s recent video games; he has become one of the lead characters of Marvel’s recent *Secret Avengers* comic reboot wherein maintains character relationships with pre-existing characters. This is reminiscent of DC’s utilization of Harley Quinn and Detective Renee Montoya (among others) and their adaptation into their comic universes. Both Quinn and Montoya have been subjects of their own solo series and members of teams in various capacities in their adaptation. Harley Quinn’s comic book application has been especially successful, with her current solo comic (*Harley Quinn*) maintaining very high sales since its debut in November 2013, consistently outselling titles like *Superman* and other DC mainstays. DC’s utilization of recursive adaptation allows the company to revitalize properties for their existing audience along with the potential to move viewers of their animation to more traditional and long-running media. The Harley Quinn audience has begun purchasing her solo series en masse, and the character has been featured in many other comics including *Suicide Squad* and its upcoming relaunch (aptly titled *New Suicide Squad*). The crossover appeal of characters developed in derivative media allows for easy adoption into the comic companies’ long-standing continuity. The characters’ quirks were adapted into versions that echoed their original creators’ characterization and the adaptation necessary in order to consolidate cleanly into the huge amount of ongoing stories.

Creating characters and universes that exist in parallel forms across media is an extremely important piece of the strategies of both Marvel and DC. Maintaining
characterizations within and between adaptations is critical to the popularity and longevity of their media franchises, as well as honoring and building on prior developments in the various canons for each character. As Pearson and Uricchio have described the hegemonic Batman, so exist hegemonic versions of all characters within DC Comics’ media empire. The intertextuality of titles is fortified by the growth of different parts of the media franchises that come from the disparate adaptations and appropriations of comic book media. The popularity and success of DC Animated Universe titles, characterization and characters is due to the company’s concentrated efforts to spread their line through multiple media outlets while maintaining consistency in quality and continuity (or lack thereof). The influence of the DC Animated Universe is apparent in many examples of DC Comics’ media franchises today. Many of its original characters have been adapted into comics, film and television, as have its versions of existing narrative and visual elements of the franchise. The addition of these elements to DC Comics’ multimedia strategy has, along with the echoed resonance of the DC Animated Universe’s approach to continuity, increased the longevity and importance of the DC Animated Universe’s numerous innovations and successes in garnering a new audience.
The all-encompassing atmosphere of the entertainment industry creates a need for participating players to create multimedia saturation. In other words: in order for a franchise to become and remain critically and commercially successful, it must pervade multiple avenues of entertainment. The entries within a franchise work together to entice customers to purchase all “versions” of that franchise. The multiple “versions” of a franchise’s entries exist within and alongside each other, with the “main” version of any given franchise often a part of great debate. Fans tend to tie themselves to the version of the character that they are most familiar with (or attached to). To use a non-comic example: James Bond is currently played by Daniel Craig in a partial reboot of the franchise, but the current movies adapt and retrofit concepts from prior films. The “definitive” version of Bond varies widely across the fanbase, allowing for a wide spread of influence. This happens with comic book franchises with great frequency, though Doctor Who and the recent abundance of Sherlock Holmes media indicative of this trend pervading non-comic media.\footnote{Recent Sherlock Holmes media—specifically BBC’s Sherlock and Guy Ritchie’s two films with Robert Downey Jr.—have turned the character into a sort of deductive superhero, almost a Batman-type character. Perhaps this transformation suggests the pervasive success of superhero media.} DC Comics utilizes these different media forms, with its print publishing acting as the oldest continuing element. However, their films have made considerable amounts of money and influence on the popular opinion of their superheroes and other franchises, as have their television productions. The fluctuating nature of media popularity suggests that each franchise entry can grow to become vitally important to the company, its fans, and the overall intertextuality of their properties. This chapter will specifically discuss the fruition of DC Animated Universe’s original characters and concepts in other media. I will be focusing on the character of Harley Quinn and the series Batman Beyond, and expand into the...
development, success and popularity of DC Animated Universe elements within the larger scope of the comic book industry.

The DC Animated Universe began as an ostensibly supporting text to the franchise development of DC Comics. It was a paratext—a supplementary text that supported the larger (more lucrative) franchise, as specified by Jonathan Gray. In fact, it was a paratext that spawned its own subsequent paratexts—toys and comics and video games all emerged during the runs of DC Animated Universe series in order to support the fruition of the franchise. Gray writes “[h]ype, promos, and synergy can easily remind us that a film or program is first and foremost a product of a studio machine, especially when their pitches start to look and sound remarkably similar” (82). The status of the DC Animated Universe as an outlier allowed its producers to try new things—within the scope of all-ages animation, of course. Requirements for content—no blood, nor cursing, and the inclusion of Robin for younger audiences—dictated certain necessities. The producers were able to work within these restrictions and appeal to a large audience. Thus, the DC Animated Universe has become a template for successful adaptation, as well as a popular, stand-alone version of the DC Comics mythos; the DC Animated Universe is a version that has used the inherent intertextual elements in its production to develop a separate version of the DC Comics Universe that that carries a lot of cultural capital that has influenced (and continues to influence) DC’s multitude of comics, films and television series.

Many future DC adaptations have drawn inspiration if not direct elements from the DC Animated Universe. DC Comics has introduced characters like Harley Quinn and Renee Montoya to other media (and subsequent television adaptations). The DC Animated Universe is, like any single version of James Bond, the most known and culturally relevant version of the DC Universe to many of its fans. Lesser-adapted elements are particularly remembered by fans as
they have less competition for cultural memory, as with the many members of the Justice
League—there are far fewer Green Lanterns in DC’s media compared to their many versions of
Batman.

The DC Animated Universe’s popularity, success, and overall quality has developed its
reputation into an honored predecessor to current efforts, influencing and contributing stories and
elements into future adaptations in the vein of Fleischer’s Superman or Tim Burton’s Batman
films. As a source, the DC Animated Universe has contributed characterizations (Mr. Freeze,
John Stewart, and many others), characters (Harley Quinn, Renee Montoya, Mercy Graves) and
most spectacularly (and still developing) the entire setting and series of *Batman Beyond*. DC
Comics’ utilization of shared continuities, cross-adaptation of popular elements and strong
intertextuality within DC Animated Universe titles and their other properties emphasizes the
importance of synergistic relationships. Any comic book media must simultaneously distance
itself from, connect to, and honor its predecessors. The intertextual associations held by
audiences influence their opinions on new entries in the franchise. Similarly, producers and
actors are respectively attached to the styles and roles that they have taken within a universe.
Thus, each subsequent show had the intertextual benefit of preceding series within the DC
Animated Universe, along with 50 years of comics from which to glean inspiration for
characterizations and plotlines. The benefits of this wealth of material combats the intertextual
baggage of prior DC Comics programming, specifically the campy *Batman* and *Super Friends*
series of the 1960s and 1970s respectively. The realm of adaptation is a constant battle for
legitimacy as well as the potential to become a piece of the ever-changing fabric that influences
the cultural direction for these massive media franchises. The realization of concepts across
media is suggestive of this success, especially when ideas introduced supplementary paratexts find their way into the “official”—or perhaps, more well-known—arms of the franchise.

Harley Quinn

Harley Quinn evolved from a one-off side character into a character with one of the highest-selling monthly comics, multimedia saturation and a massive following. So, how and why did this happen? Harley started as a one-off character in the season one episode of *BTAS* “Joker’s Favor.” The villains in *BTAS* often had henchmen, and Harley appeared alongside a few other thugs, assisting The Joker in a supporting capacity in his scheme to murder Commissioner Gordon. Her role was similar to The Joker’s other goons: a body to be swiftly defeated by Batman. However, the creators liked her enough to continue using the character in subsequent Joker-centric episodes. Paul Dini suggests that she “became a favorite character of the audience, the crew, and her creators” (Kidd). Harley was, in addition to becoming a favorite character, a humanized Joker. Dini suggests that “[w]ith Harley in his life the Joker has become susceptible to the previously alien emotions of jealousy, inadequacy, and humiliation” (Kidd). Like many other aspects of the DC Animated Universe, Harley Quinn was developed at the right time for the right audience. The character was given the opportunity to develop within the series and into fruition throughout *BTAS* and (though in a reduced capacity) in subsequent DC Animated Universe programming. As *BTAS* was targeted to younger audiences (while maintaining adult audiences, as detailed in chapter 1), the character was able to grow and develop with her audience. The audience grew up and began to play video games and read comics, media where Harley Quinn and other DC Animated Universe elements have successfully transferred. Harley Quinn’s popularity guaranteed the character new life beyond the conclusion of DC Animated Universe programming. The free flow of information across DC Comics is also of great
importance to Harley Quinn’s growing popularity. The versions of Harley Quinn developed in video game and comic books are fairly close adaptations save for costuming and other universe-related changes. Like the “Hegemonic Batman” delineated by Pearson and Uricchio, the “Hegemonic Harley” fits many roles in adaptations of the character. She (and her writers) is very early in the process compared to DC’s other properties, though DC’s designs to create line-wide synergy have moved her process much more quickly. They have encouraged the development of preferred versions of Harley Quinn and her role in associated franchises.

Harley Quinn was different than other female villains of the time period. Developed through the lens of Warner Bros. animation, her characterization hybridized superhero sidekicks and Looney Tunes characters. Her antics alongside the modified (and often kid-friendly, though still nefarious) activities of The Joker evoked a new type of character that could only see conception in the universe cultivated within *BTAS*. Harley Quinn had a striking design and clear characterization, which evolved as the series progressed. Her relationships with other characters, specifically The Joker and later Poison Ivy, developed the character as an important part of the DC Animated Universe. She acted as a sidekick and often as a foil for The Joker, and occasionally a surprisingly effective villain. Her relationship with Poison Ivy was developed in multiple episodes, as Harley made multiple attempts to remove herself (often unsuccessfully) from The Joker’s influence. She gained a friend, which allowed the creators to develop a female friendship in animation, a rarity in the early 1990s. Harley is popular for many of the same reasons that the various Robins have achieved success, as they act in supporting roles to their “boss,” allowing a point of view similar to the viewer’s. As Dini claimed, she was used often to humanize The Joker, but grew to become a character that could work separate from him. Harley’s adaptation to wider-reaching media, like all adaptations, changed the character.
Linda Hutcheon suggests that the movement of concepts “must use all available persuasive means at its disposal to do so” (128). Thus characters are changed for a number of reasons, commercial appeal obviously paramount among them, along with creator input. The additions to her characters in the DC Animated Universe followed to comics and video games, though her origin story is a particularly interesting case of adaptation across media.

Harley Quinn’s first major comic book release was the one-shot graphic novel *Batman: Mad Love*, by her creators Paul Dini and Bruce Timm. While it was not based in the main DC universe, it was popular enough to achieve critical acclaim, including a Eisner award (the most prestigious in comics). In *Mad Love*, Dini and Timm developed Harley’s origin story explaining her background and rationale for her behavior. *Mad Love* reveals that Harley Quinn had previously been Dr. Harleen Quinzel, a psychiatrist in Gotham’s Arkham Asylum. Quinzel, assigned to treat The Joker’s insanity, instead fell in love with the villain. She abandoned her career and entered a life of crime alongside The Joker. Harley then enacts a (successful) plan to kidnap Batman and present him in a deathtrap to The Joker. Unfortunately for Harley, The Joker is furious at this gesture and the two fight, allowing Batman to escape and apprehend Harley while The Joker escapes. *Mad Love* was later adapted back into *BTAS*, nearly verbatim other than a few time-related omissions. This is an interesting development; Dini and Timm’s graphic novel acted as a paratext that supported the series, utilizing the same designs and thematic styles at the same time the show was exuding similar characteristics as DC’s comics and films. It similarly worked as a resource for the producers to take a “strict” adaptation (described in chapter one), essentially using the comic as a storyboard. *Mad Love*—both the comic and the episode—expanded Harley’s role as an important character within Batman’s cast, expanding on

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41 Paul Dini, Harley Quinn’s creator, wrote the first two *Batman: Arkham* games. He thus kept her characterization very close to her *BTAS* counterpart, though her design was radically different.
her increasingly consequential role within the Batman franchise. As the character proved strong enough for both media, she was included in more episodes, crossovers (as in her Superman appearance as described in chapter 2), and ultimately her incorporation into a wider range of DC media. The origin story is important to the longevity of characters, allowing the potential for more character development based upon their actions.42 Harley’s origin was adapted in DC Comics publications numerous times following Mad Love, and each building upon the graphic novel and its adaptive episode while maintaining internal consistency with its specified continuity.

In the twilight years of BTAS, Harley’s appearances in other media began to increase. She was a main character in the early webseries Gotham Girls. She appeared in supporting roles in crossovers with STAS, Static Shock, and Justice League, with a cameo in the Batman Beyond movie Return of The Joker, wherein her (twin) granddaughters have become legacy villains, menacing the future Batman. Her comic appearances, outside of the BTAS supporting comic and the aforementioned Mad Love, started with yet another alternate universe. An alternate version of Harley Quinn appears as a lover of a wildly different (additionally female and slightly more stable) Joker in Howard Chaykin’s Thrillkiller. The “main universe” version of the character more closely related with her counterpart in the DC Animated Universe premiered in Batman #570 in 1999, working alongside The Joker during the “No Man’s Land” storyline where Gotham had been leveled by a devastating earthquake. In the following years, Harley starred in her self-titled, 38-issue series and acted in supporting roles in several Batman books. Her final appearances before the New 52 were in the Dini-written Gotham City Sirens, which had significant influences from BTAS and the characters’ relationships therein. Harley worked in a

42 Or lack thereof; The Joker’s origin stories are often kept purposely vague, in order to benefit the character’s unstable persona.
team of anti-heroes, including Catwoman and Poison Ivy, working towards their own goals in Gotham City.

While The New 52 initiative by DC left many elements of the Batman portion of the DC Universe unchanged, Harley Quinn’s role in various comics rose to greater importance than in comics prior. She starred in the relaunch of Suicide Squad, as a member of the titular team tasked by the US Government to carry out various missions against their will. This revision of the character was further removed from The Joker, which allowed more flexibility in her appearances and the evolution of her character traits. Harley was a vital member of the team, though certainly a wild card. Her tenure in the Suicide Squad led to a connection between the two versions of the character—the recent Batman: Assault on Arkham animated film cast Harley as a core member of the team, building on both the BTAS and New 52 versions of the character, as the aforementioned assault is stymied due to her attachment to The Joker. Subsequently, she has joined the cast of another relaunch of Suicide Squad (appropriately titled New Suicide Squad) and stars in one of the highest selling monthly titles. Jonathan Gray calls the expansion of ideas across texts “obvious storytelling extensions for a new brand of media creator,” suggesting that this method of incorporating aspects of characters in adaptations to such a degree represents an important shift in the behavior of adapters (220). He goes further into the idea of paratexts, calling these texts that are supportive of the “main text “incorporated” paratexts. Batman: Assault on Arkham would be considered in this view an incorporated paratext in relation to the Batman: Arkham video game series. It is not required as an entry of the franchise, but it supports the popularity of the series as a whole and contributes to the current image of Harley Quinn and Suicide Squad. Their popularity—and Harley Quinn’s position on the team—is in the process of a strong push by DC Comics producers. There is a Suicide Squad film scheduled in DC Comics’
massive film universe for 2016, reportedly based upon these modern adaptations of the team. Margot Robbie was recently cast as Harley Quinn, and it is likely that her role will relate more closely to her recent appearances.

Harley Quinn’s popularity has reached its highest surge, thanks to the multimedia approach to the character and the expansion of her role beyond “The Joker’s sidekick.” Her monthly comic has consistently ranked extremely high in sales, outselling older and more prominent characters like Superman with regularity. Harley’s character is built to appeal to a wide variety of audiences. Her solo comic is largely removed from (but still privy to) the goings-on of regular continuity, focusing on Harley’s hijinks and her own issues. Conversely, her role in *New Suicide Squad* puts her in closer proximity to other titles and characters (literally and conceptually). This is a tactic often utilized in comics—multiple titles allow for multiple, simultaneous interpretations of the character, even within a consistent continuity. Harley’s multiple concurrent appearances in comics, animation, and video games create a level of multimedia exposure for the character beyond a plethora of longer-lasting and well-established characters in DC’s canon.

Comic writers have categorized Harley into The Joker’s mythos as his sidekick, much like the association of Robin’s character being eminently tied to Batman. Both Harley and the various Robins have, however—through writer dedication and fan desire—become properties capable of driving their own series, as seen in *Harley Quinn’s* monthly sales figures. These ascended sidekick characters are invariably linked to their mentors, though obviously able to exist (at least in part) outside of their influence. Like Nightwing, Robin and their associations with teams like the Teen Titans, Harley was popular enough to stand on her own and with the Suicide Squad, but maintained an integral connection to her old mentor. Even in ‘going solo,’
The Joker’s influence hangs heavy in most Harley stories, be it in her divergent feelings towards the relationship or appearances within the story. This awkward relationship between mentor and pupil is comparatively similar to the relationship between the DC Universe and the DC Animated Universe: the latter was developed to support the former, but elements of its success have allowed it to supersede its “mentor” in popularity. The DC Animated Universe’s audience moved from animation to comic books and video games, and thus is largely responsible for the ongoing success of many of DC’s franchises. The intertextual relationships between the DC Animated Universe and the DC Universe (and the incredibly popular video games) have reached tremendous levels. The comic book world is constantly adapting from itself, and the DC Animated Universe has emerged as one of the paramount resources for popular material.

The audience that is buying Harley Quinn’s books and leading to her appearances in video games and DC’s original animation is built upon the success of the *BTAS*, *STAS* and *Justice League* audience. The form used in the DC Animated Universe —all-ages animation— allowed a Warner Bros. style character to fit into the Batman franchise and lead to a potent addition to DC Comics. Jason Mittell’s genre study again comes into play; the broad appeal of the DC Animated Universe has gone on to influence the approach for other adaptations, targeting large groups while maintaining adult themes. He writes on Cartoon Network’s large spread of programming:

…Cartoon Network has explicitly targeted both children and adults in the 1990s, attempting to reach a broader audience than cartoons had traditionally enjoyed on network broadcasts. Certainly Cartoon Network is still a narrowcaster, as ‘people who like cartoons’ is a niche, but the genre’s history suggests that the master narrative of ‘mass to niche marketing’ does not apply across all television genres (93).
The transfer of DC programming to Cartoon Network allowed the spread of ideas in the form of Justice League, which aired alongside reruns of other DC Animated Universe shows which fit the mold well. These shows may be targeting a smaller audience than a program like Scooby-Doo, but their audience is often pulled towards the other creative efforts, either by paratexts or the massive amount of DC Comics material in other media.

The popularity and financial success of franchises dictates what stays and goes in the cultural canon. To continue with Harley Quinn, her costume has changed due to consumer reaction. Her costume throughout her DC Animated Universe appearances was a red-and-black bodysuit with a playing card diamond motif and white face paint. Her later appearances in the successful Batman: Arkham games modified her appearance into a very revealing modification of a nurse’s outfit and later into a provocative leather bustier in the second game. These games were very successful, with Harley’s role integral to their plots. The upcoming Arkham Knight—the latest game in the Arkham series—even features Harley Quinn as a playable character, again clad in salacious garments. Her design in The New 52, beginning with Suicide Squad, reflected this aesthetic change, continuing to show more skin and reflect (perceived) audience interests. Harley’s characterization has remained fairly constant, though modified for more adult audiences, and her aesthetic changes have allowed more diversity in cosplay, artwork and other expressions of fandom.

As stated in chapter 1, the popularity and success of BTAS developed continuing audiences in its adaptation and created cause for further intertextual adaptation of its enhanced and added elements. The DC Animated Universe contained a wide variety of departures from the DC Universe’s continuity, many of which have found fruition across DC’s media. The sort of ‘proven’ popularity of characters like Harley Quinn, Mr. Freeze or John Stewart moved the
characters (or new interpretations) into the cultural canon, adding (or replacing) previous versions to many viewers or readers. Mr. Freeze, for instance, changed from a gimmicky villain with a freezing gun to a darker character with a tragic past. The DC Animated Universe had certain requirements that created the necessity for the change and addition of pre-existing elements. This unique sort of adaptation is seen in reverse with Harley Quinn; her current characterization is notably different than her BTAS origin, as the comic medium allows for creators to exhibit and develop more adult elements within the character and her storylines. Readers can still see the base of her character and many similarities, but writers are allowed more freedom in terms of content; she is recognizable as Harley Quinn, but her roles away from The Joker and within the Suicide Squad have changed the character. The structure of DC Animated Universe programming required restrictions in terms of content, but the developers were able to allude to more adult elements and develop new concepts tailored to the medium. The series referenced and included these elements in a manner that fit their programming restrictions, and characters were able to flourish within the medium. The non-permanence of events within the DC Animated Universe—that is, the fact that nothing in the series would affect the characters in DC Comics print media—granted it opportunities to enact radical decisions relating to character arcs and the continuing continuity between series.

Batman Beyond

The process of adaptation across franchises as diverse as DC Comics is extraordinarily complicated. Multiple creators working in many media produces a mélange of interpretations at any given point in time. As described in the case of Harley Quinn, the fluidity of character and popularity (or popular elements) creates a need for some elements to be consistent while allowing for change. New additions to the canon will often find themselves subject of expansion
and resurgence, be it of creatively or financially positive intent. Additions could occur within media or around it. Thus, the DC Animated Universe is an addition in and of itself, as it exists to support the fruition of DC Properties in a multimedia capacity. It additionally contains its own additions to the ever-growing spate of concepts present in comic book publishing. Changed characters and revised origin stories are prominent within the DC Animated Universe, but the addition of new characters that rose to great popularity are most emblematic of the DC Animated Universe’s success. The new elements often took the form of entirely new characterizations, storylines, settings, and in the case of *Batman Beyond*, all of the above. When looking at Harley Quinn or *Batman Beyond*, the paratext becomes an incorporated paratext. The initial appearances of these characters heavily define their current directions.

*Batman Beyond* centers on the adventures of Terry McGinnis rising to the mantle of the titular hero in the future of the DC Animated Universe. Bruce Wayne, the elder Batman, is “beyond” the physical capability of crime fighting. He has suffered physical and mental stresses that have made it impossible to continue being Batman. Through a series of events, Wayne and McGinnis’s lives collided, resulting in McGinnis’s theft of Wayne’s advanced Batman suit in order to avenge his murdered father. Seeing that his and McGinnis’s priorities are similar, Wayne agrees to mentor the young hero and begins his war on crime in Gotham City anew, though stuck in the Batcave due to aging infirmities. Wayne still has the do-or-die hardline attitude that he has always had, though weathered by age into becoming an embittered curmudgeon. He mentors McGinnis over the course of three seasons and a film, facing adversaries from Batman’s past along with new threats.

The resulting futuristic story is an exciting, comparatively new setting. *Batman Beyond* followed a logical progression for the Bruce Wayne character, though one not seen in comics at
such depth. The in-universe aging of popular characters like Batman would seriously cripple their marketability and approachability. However in a possible future, these progressions can be envisioned without as much consequence. Akin to an ongoing, largely out-of-continuity comic book series, *Batman Beyond* imagined Gotham City’s future, bereft of the Batman’s intervention for many years and rife with crime. The city is full of futuristic clothing, flying cars, and invented slang; Gotham’s redesign seems to incorporate many elements from *STAS*’s Metropolis, including rounded architecture and taller buildings. The design moved away from *BTAS*’s art deco roots while maintaining the grim look of the city, albeit one with perhaps an unrealistic amount of technological advancement.

*Batman Beyond* was also appealing to younger audiences in a manner very similar to Spider-Man. In fact, the series utilized many elements similar to Spider-Man, Robin and other younger heroes in order to bring its characters ages closer to those of viewers. The new Batman, Terry McGinnis, is a young hero (in high school), with a single parent. His father, murdered in the series’ premiere, dies in a manner akin to Spider-Man’s Uncle Ben, though with Terry at fault less than the impetuous Peter Parker (and driven to become the Batman by revenge rather than responsibility). Conversely he is also in a mentor relationship with Bruce Wayne, similar to Robin’s relationship to the former Batman. Robin’s success in *BTAS*, as detailed in chapter 1, suggested that placing the emphasis on younger heroes could lead to ratings success with younger viewers. *Batman Beyond* and its contemporary *Static Shock* were emblematic of this line of thinking, both focusing on younger characters (though in very different situations and time periods). Batman Beyond’s costume visually resembles Spider-Man’s black costume, built for a lithe combatant with a focus on stealth. This is in conjunction with familiar Batman characters and concepts, including a Batmobile (though flying) and exploding Batarangs. His similarities to
Robin were presented in his relationship with Bruce Wayne, who contributed his equipment and wealth of knowledge to the younger Batman’s crusade.

Bruce Wayne’s mentorship was crucial to the show’s success, presenting a relationship similar to (but differing significantly from) the Batman-Robin partnership in other DC media. The role occupied by Bruce Wayne in *Batman Beyond* built upon his mentorship to two Robins and Batgirl in *BTAS* and extrapolated those relationships to their inexorable end. Wayne had not spoken with former Robins Dick Grayson and Tim Drake for decades and his relationship with former Batgirl Barbara Gordon—now Police Commissioner and frequent unwilling participant in the young Batman’s crime fighting—is heavily strained. *Batman Beyond* was able to examine the long-term consequences from the characters’ tenuous crime fighting relationships by greatly expanding the storytelling scope far into the future. The interpretations of these characters along with their relationships are built upon existing elements in *BTAS* and, to a much smaller degree, *STAS*. Bruce Wayne’s changing attitude towards crime fighting and teamwork is later expanded upon in *Justice League* and *Justice League Unlimited*. The writers were able to incorporate aspects the character’s inevitable future into storylines, allowing for greater depth in characterization. The second-season finale of *Justice League Unlimited*, *Epilogue* (detailed earlier) returns to the *Beyond* time period, creating an even further future and tying all of the titles together. While it capped off the series (and the DC Animated Universe as a whole), it left much of the *Batman Beyond* universe unexplored. The character and setting would later be returned to in comics, which allowed for additional incorporation of ideas into the speculative future.

*Batman Beyond* is, like Harley Quinn, a very popular concept that has seen transition into other DC media. The show was popular enough to spawn a spin-off—*The Zeta Project*—though
the spin-off does not seem to have the lasting potential of its antecedent. Terry McGinnis also appeared in multiple episodes of *Justice League Unlimited*, aside from the “Epilogue” episode, in cameo roles possible due to time travel. The character transferred into DC Comics realm of print publishing in several out-of-continuity appearances before settling into a role in the current, main continuity. *Batman Beyond’s* process of re-adaptation exemplifies DC’s utilization of constantly burgeoning intertextuality; creators are constantly mixing elements together in order to tell more immersive stories.

Julie Sanders writes “As connections and interconnections of these kinds proliferate in our argument, we need, perhaps, to think less in terms of lines of influence and more in terms of webs or networks of allusion and (mutual) influence” (152). The influences of *Batman Beyond* are many, and can range from network demands to creator suggestion to Spider-Man. Sanders’ argument is even more pertinent with *Batman Beyond’s* appearances in DC Comics print media. The case of *Batman Beyond’s* adaptation is clearly very similar to Harley Quinn’s, though necessarily taken to a much larger scale. Harley Quinn’s (and her contemporaries—the also-adapted Renee Montoya and adjusted character traits of characters like Mr. Freeze) introduction was to a pre-existing continuity, and the difficulty was not in the introduction of a new character but in the maintenance of her existing characteristics. *Batman Beyond’s* transfer requires the introduction of new characters along with a new (albeit derivative), futuristic setting. Because the adaptation into comics requires a new setting or, as with the character’s most recent appearances, the movement of the character into DC’s contemporary and ongoing continuity, it is thus a more difficult case for adaptation than other DC Animated Universe concepts.

*Batman Beyond’s* initial appearances in comic books were, like its DC Animated Universe predecessors, confined to paratexts and supporting documents. The first *Batman*
Beyond comic premiered in 1999, coinciding with the show’s airing on Kids’ WB. It was set alongside the series’ continuity, supporting the show and essentially acting as an advertisement in a similar role to the BTAS comics. Subsequently, the character (or at least his costume) made multiple cameo appearances in other series for several years, before the launch of the 2010 Batman Beyond miniseries. This series was outside of regular continuity, set in a version of the television continuity that was able to incorporate more comic book elements due to the amount of freedom and lack of limitations inherent to DC’s publishing strategies. The initial Batman Beyond miniseries led into two following miniseries and the currently ongoing Batman Beyond 2.0. The success of these series later spawned other series set in the futuristic take on DC’s continuity: Justice League Beyond and Superman Beyond. Batman Beyond 2.0 and Justice League Beyond are currently running in a digital format that is collected monthly in print. These series act as a continuation of the animated series, displaying a possible future for Terry, Bruce and their associates. The creators follow the continuity as displayed in the DC Animated Universe programming, rather than a revised version set in the future of the DCU comic book universe, yet incorporating elements from both versions. This strategy references the “web” set forth by Sanders; the free flow of information dictates that all material is up for grabs (within copyright and editorial demands) in order to make a compelling story. The new, print version of Batman Beyond’s universe is obviously removed from DC’s main continuity, with its authors utilizing the continuity presented in the DC Animated Universe to build stories alongside new elements that they may adapt in order to create new conflict in a similar manner to the writing of DC Animated Universe programming. The 2010 Batman Beyond miniseries was able to use the comics character Hush, not present in the DC Animated Universe, in an effort to create a comprehensive continuity. These comics provide an outlet for creators and readers to experience
the *Batman Beyond* characters and setting in a new medium. Subsequently, elements of *Batman Beyond* (including the titular character) have been introduced to DC Comics’ main continuity, increasing the interconnectivity between Batman Beyond and the main universe and continuing to build upon the multimedia reach of DC franchises.

Alternate universe versions of the future are very common in superhero comics. The long form, sequential nature of shared universes creates much confusion in regards to timelines and makes the stability of tales set in the future questionable and subject to constant revision and change with more frequency than the main continuity. As specified above, Batman Beyond has appeared in cameo roles\(^43\), references\(^44\), and different alternate futures.\(^45\) Most recently, the character has become a focal point of DC’s *Futures End* weekly comic, acting as an envoy from the future sent to the past in order to prevent a catastrophe. This version of the character retains many elements from his animated counterpart, though a number of his character traits and backstory were changed to fit the story, as its setting is an apocalyptic future far removed from the futuristic, comparatively stable setting of the *Batman Beyond* animated series. The characterization, name, and costume however remain the same, allowing for the character to interact with (futuristically-removed) versions of characters from DC’s main continuity. The growing success of the *Batman Beyond* concept and character emphasizes the importance of synergy between DC’s many avenues of publication. Ideas can no longer exist in a bubble—they are subject to revision and re-adaptation in order for its parent company to benefit from its

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\(^43\) Including a tale involving Superman following his appearance in “The Call,” in an alternate future displayed in *Superman/Batman* #23.

\(^44\) The suit appears in *Batman* (vol. 2) #20, though worn by Bruce Wayne.

\(^45\) Terry McGinnis appears in *Batman* #700, albeit in a future where Bruce Wayne’s son Damien has taken his father’s position as McGinnis’s mission support.
saturation. This is inevitable when creative concepts are the properties of companies rather than individuals.

While Harley Quinn is enjoying great success in print (and other) media, *Batman Beyond*’s comic adaptation is still in the initial phase of the process. The character is seven years newer than Harley, with adaptations currently in a very intermediate phase. Creators are trying new things and attempting to create a revision of the character and the setting that ensnares the interests of new audiences, though meeting less success than the similar effort with Harley Quinn. The conclusion of *Futures End* is, as of this writing, upcoming, though it is likely to follow the tradition of prior DC events with several series with the fallout resulting in several new series based on characters integral to the “universe-wide” events present in the series. The creators of the DC Animated Universe created something radically different than their other series with *Batman Beyond*, gaining a following that transferred media. The process is comparatively straightforward in comics, though it has also been successful in other media, specifically with DC’s recent *Arkham* video games.

Blueprint for Success

The utilization of recursive adaptation and intertextuality throughout DC Animated Universe texts has been highly successful, and the repercussions of the television adaptations’ success are seen in all avenues of DC’s current media productions. Characterizations and ideas developed in the DC Animated Universe have seen fruition and further success in print, as in the successes of Harley Quinn and *Batman Beyond*. The adaptation of DC Animated Universe material has spread to video games as well, with the *Batman: Arkham* series utilizing many aspects of the DC Animated Universe versions of DC characters—and achieving critical and commercial success. The first two games in the series—*Arkham Asylum* and *Arkham City*—are
both written by Paul Dini, one of the many writers integral to the DC Animated Universe’s core concepts, including the characterization of Batman, Superman, and the development of Harley Quinn and the *Batman Beyond* universe. Dini’s writing is very similar to his work in the DC Animated Universe, though necessarily changed in order to fit the medium. Much of the DC Animated Universe voice cast reprised their roles in the *Arkham* games as well, contributing to the aural consistency that alludes to the prior series.

The *Arkham* series follows a similar pattern to the *Batman Beyond* comics; they created and continue to utilize a new universe, though one based upon both DC Comics’ main continuity alongside the DC Animated Universe. This ‘hybridized’ continuity allows for audiences to experience a new version of the character and universe while maintaining important links to prior versions that they may be familiar with. The *Arkham* series’ approach is similar to the digital *Batman Beyond* comics mentioned earlier, utilizing the entire realm of Batman comics and characters to make a composite version that appeals to many targeted groups with varying familiarity. This familiarity is an essential part of the series’ appeal, driving sales and critical reception favorably. There are other elements at play of course—the production quality of the game and other criteria are also critical to the success of the game. In the continuing fruition of DC’s intertextuality, comics based on the games have been released alongside a standalone animated film set in the same universe: *Batman: Assault on Arkham*. The multimedia bombardment of the *Arkham* franchise again creates an environment beneficial to the success of DC’s properties, mirroring the strategy used with DC Animated Universe. This approach has proven in several cases to be financially and critically successful, and has led other companies to follow a similar blueprint.
Marvel has utilized a similar approach to DC in multiple cases. Their “Cinematic Universe,” detailed in chapter 2, follows many similar conventions to the DC Animated Universe. Its success has similarly led to original characters seeing insertion into Marvel’s comic books, particularly in the case of S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent Phil Coulson. Coulson appeared in the first MCU film, *Iron Man*, and has appeared in an expanded capacity in subsequent films. Following the character’s apparent death in *Marvel’s The Avengers*, he was seemingly resurrected for the MCU companion show *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, where the character enjoys a starring role. *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, like *Batman: Assault on Arkham*, serves as an incorporated paratext as specified by Jonathan Gray; not vital, rather a supplementary text that is enhanced by continued familiarity with the universe. Phil Coulson’s future appearances in films, should he make them, will likely be explained within the film with a bit of expository dialogue that viewers of the show already know. Coulson’s introduction into the television series isn’t adaptation, rather emblematic of the continual efforts of Marvel to maintain a consistent, related universe. The character has, however, been adapted into Marvel Comics. The Comic-Coulson started in a similar manner to Film-Coulson, first appearing as a supporting character and moving on to larger roles. He is presently a member of one of Marvel’s (many) Avengers comics—*Secret Avengers*, where he is a spy much like his film and television counterpart. He is set to star in the Marvel Comic Universe’s version of *Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (simply titled *S.H.I.E.L.D*), and frequents other books. Again, we see a similar process of re-adaptation as with Harley Quinn and *Batman Beyond*: popular elements from other derivative media have been reformatted to fit their predecessors.

The creators of the DC Animated Universe were able to expand upon elements from DC’s existing print media and create a successful new avenue for the company that was only
possibly (initially) in television. Characters and settings like Harley Quinn and *Batman Beyond* sprung from audience desire but ultimately thrived due to the commitment of the creators and their ability to write for their audience. As this audience ages, these elements have been successfully transferred to other media, allowing for further fruition of these characters and their incorporation into DC Comics’ popular canon. While most elements have seen the inevitable changes inherent to comic book media, they have retained much of what has made them popular and reformatted it for a new audience. Harley Quinn’s current ongoing comic routinely outsells longstanding concepts and comics like *Superman*; *Batman Beyond* is in the process of developing a catalog of comic material similar to Harley Quinn; the *Arkham* games have reconfigured ideas from many of DC’s existing books along with the DC Animated Universe in order to create a financially and critically successful series. Marvel Comics has begun to aggressively utilize this process of recursive adaptation as well, with elements from its highly successful films seeing adaptation into its comic books and onto television.

The free flow of ideas throughout comic book media is integral to the ongoing success of DC, Marvel, and other publishers. It is a web of inspiration, paratexts, and intertextual elements. The development of “definitive” versions is ever changing, and their media is clearly not confined to print media. Multiple avenues of publication create the necessity for a variety of interpretations of franchise elements, and the intertextual elements contained therein assist in viewer recognition of these adaptations. The success of shared universes and the flow of ideas between “versions” of comic book concepts has a huge potential for success, as seen in the continuing popularity of Marvel’s adaptations and the upcoming slate of DC’s shared universe of characters. The re-adaptation of new concepts into the original comic book universes emphasizes
the company commitment to the success of these concepts, opting for saturation of similarity if not outright universal canonicity.
CONCLUSION

The era of adaptation and intertextuality that we live in is colored by a huge amount of media by any given company. As always, competition drives innovation. DC Comics and Marvel Comics have begun to adapt strategies of continuity and adaptation in the pursuit of (now) cinematic success. These methods are based on the proven success of franchises in many media, specifically taking influences from decades of comic books. These books still maintain dozens of titles in shared universes, with crossovers between titles enjoying great popularity and frequency. DC utilized the comic book method extremely successfully in the creation and maintenance of the DC Animated Universe. The several shows, video games and comics that tied in with the DC Animated Universe remain popular far beyond their conclusion. The elements of adaptation, continuity, and intertextuality therein have survived and developed well beyond their initial scope, emphasizing the importance of shared universes and their maintenance. This thesis focused on the position of the DC Animated Universe as a fundamental part of DC’s publishing. Utilizing the work of other theorists, I developed the suggestion that the DC Animated Universe is an important predecessor for DC and Marvel’s current cinematic strategies. The creators of the DC Animated Universe cobbled together a number of texts in order to make something very important.

This thesis focused initially on the process of adaptation and the resulting shows. Certain aspects had to remain constant, others changed, and others were added. The DC Animated Universe has three types of adaptation: strict, loose and new. Some aspects of adaptation, like the “Hegemonic Batman,” were constant throughout. The synergy of these types of adaptation created a wealth of unique (though, by-nature, derivative) episodes of television. Loose adaptations and the creation of new material allowed the creators a huge basin from which to
draw ideas and inspiration that could combine with their network demands and creative aspirations into the successful run of animation that we can still experience. Aural and visual consistency across titles, particularly with voice actors and designers, were additionally crucial to the success of the DC Animated Universe as a universe.

The continuity developed within the multiple series involved in the DC Animated Universe was radically different than other adaptations of the same time period and many preceding—if nothing else, it was more successful. The unique methods they were able to use compared to comic book counterparts, and later developments in the same vein by DC and Marvel comics. It set a successful precedent for conscious adaptation that deftly handled the demands of all parties. *BTAS*, while mostly episodic, featured a number of serialized elements within its construction (particularly in the origins of Robin and many of Batman’s villains) that carried over throughout the series. *STAS* moved into season-long arcs and drastic changes for characters within the universe, and introduced Superman to Batman; effectively placing the two similar shows concretely within the same playing field. The revision of *BTAS’s* animation style emphasized the visual consistency across titles. Serial storytelling came to an apex with *Justice League*, which was almost entirely composed of two- or three-episode arcs that focused on a larger cast of characters within the universe; its sequel series, *Justice League Unlimited*, utilized a hybrid of episodic plots and season-long arcs in order to tie narratives from all prior DC Animated Universe series together. The DC Animated Universe was a then-unprecedented triumph of adaptation, achieving much more than mere replication and creating unique interpretations of characters along with new concepts.

Harley Quinn and *Batman Beyond*, among other varying adaptations from the DC Animated Universe, now flow freely throughout DC’s multimedia empire. These concepts have
proven popular and have been incorporated as inspirational materials in many cases. DC Comics animation and live action television efforts have the DC Animated Universe as an obvious ancestor, and many of its concepts and stylistic choices have been transferred to comic books and upcoming films as well. Both examples are prevalent in DC Comics’ print comics and Harley Quinn’s success has transferred to film and video games as well. Julie Sanders’ suggests that the adaptation setting in which we live is very complicated; a web of inspiration flows across franchises and inspirations, creating an interesting and exciting, though difficult environment for the reader of adaptive, intertextual texts.

The mutable media realm that comics have evolved to serve has helped to lead adaptations to success. The environments in which the DC Animated Universe programming were developed allowed and encouraged high levels of intertextuality between the shows and their comic book predecessors. The development of parallel shows—the concurrent *BTAS* and *STAS*—collided with the high levels of popularity and crossover potential in order to please creators, fans, and advertisers. The open flow of information and influences across DC Comics media encouraged further developments in the growth of Batman, Superman, and others in various visual media. Audiences grew with their technology, demanding synergy between titles. This was directly responsible for the movement of concepts from more derivative works to their ongoing predecessors. Derivative works have continually grown more popular. The assuredness of financial success with media franchises creates an impetus for companies to continually rework properties known to be successful. While this may stifle creativity in some ways, it does force creators to work within certain parameters that can lead to very interesting adaptations and unprecedented success. The DC Animated Universe was not the most financially successful shared universe—that title belongs to the currently-thriving Marvel Cinematic Universe—but it
remains a bold example for companies trying to recreate similar success in television and film media. The DC Animated Universe excelled as an adaptation of characters and ideas, though it achieved greater success in becoming an adaptation of concepts and styles of publishing. The shared universe tactics worked in comics but the medium was becoming less enticing to its younger audience; the developers of the DC Animated Universe changed the medium but kept the tactics in order to appeal to large audience groups—the children watching Saturday morning cartoons and the adults who had already developed a connection with DC properties. The bifurcated approach came in an age of broader franchising and smarter targeting. This technique espouses Henry Jenkins’ concept of convergence culture. The various arms of DC Comics production produce content across media and platforms, casting a wide net for audiences. The interconnectivity of titles leads the audience to seek more, should they be pleased with their findings. Jenkins suggests that “…convergence represents a shift in cultural logic, whereby consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections between dispersed media content” (1). The dozens of years of lore, character development and stories are honored and emphasized in shared universe. These references encourage the audience to continue their relationship with DC Comics, even if subsequent “renditions” of the franchise do not fit in with the continuity of the initial piece of media. This level of convergence is possible thanks to the tremendous success of comic book media and the important changes in distribution of media. Saturday morning cartoons and later a network dedicated to animated programming (Cartoon Network) provided a space for these innovative approaches borne of comic book media to flourish and evolve.

I am hopeful for the continuation of continuity and adaptation of these comic books into other media. Julie Sanders espouses knowing participation in adaptation:
It is this crucial notion of participation, cultural, social, and ethical, that I wish to suggest, and hope to have indicated in the examples cited in this volume, adaptation and appropriation represent and perform as artistic and aesthetic processes. (152).

Sanders suggestion that adaptation is an ever-changing process is particularly apt to the changing landscape of comic book media. We are consistently subject to a growing number of adaptations in all media. DC and Marvel each have films lined up into 2020, as well as several live action television series and animation efforts at any given time. These multimedia empires are built on adaptation and the understanding of intertextual elements within the derivative texts. If a Batman film does not hold true to Pearson and Uricchio’s “Hegemonic Batman,” as in the reviled Batman and Robin, it will be met with criticism and often financial and critical failure. The model put forth in the DC Animated Universe is one that is, consciously or otherwise, being utilized by comic book companies in the pursuit of, ultimately, more viewers. The amount of comic readers is miniscule compared to the size of the audience for a film like Man of Steel. However, the comics on which it these films based hold a level of prestige. They are dynasties, bastions of storytelling potential from which these films draw inspiration. Understanding adaptations and the demands of a shared universe is more important than ever before for these creators, and the continuing glut of comic book media will thrive or die on the creators’ ability to maintain consistent universes within their multimillion-dollar franchises.


