**FURSCA Research**

Title of Project:

Between Comic and Canon: Analyzing Graphic Novel Adaptations of British Literary Classics

**Abstract**. *Please provide a short (100 words or less) abstract that describes the work that you are proposing in layman’s terms. The abstract should be understandable by a general audience.*

I will examine adaptations of classic works of British literature into graphic novel or ‘comic-strip’ formats, applying existing theories about adaptation to an increasingly popular yet often overlooked form of literary adaptation. The project analyzes adaptations of nine canonical narratives and poems. The goal is to determine the impact such adaptations can have on content, meaning, and aesthetic response as textual works are reinterpreted to incorporate visual elements. I will complete a publication-ready article

for submission to undergraduate journals, prepare presentations for NCUR and the Elkin Isaac Symposium, and prepare for an Honors Thesis on graphic novel adaptations.

Between Comic and Canon:

Analyzing Graphic Novel Adaptations of British Literary Classics

1. **What is the goal of the project and why is achieving this goal important?**

The goal of the project is a better understanding of the graphic novel as a legitimate form of adaptation for well-known British literary works. The graphic novel is a comparatively new artistic medium. Such works are increasingly popular, but they are yet to receive a body of criticism as robust and fully-developed as other forms of narrative art such as novels, films, etc.

Adaptation itself has been well studied, but the focus has been either literary adaptation or film. For this reason I intend on applying relevant theories from the fields of literary, graphic, and adaptation studies to graphic novels. In doing so I hope to provide a better understanding of the ways in which the textual meaning, content, and aesthetics of foundational works of world literature can change when adapted to a contemporary artistic medium.

As an English Major interested in studying contemporary modes of storytelling and communication, I feel there is a need for greater academic study of new responses to old stories. Adaptation has been an integral part of humanity’s creative development, and literary critics such as Linda Hutcheon argue that adapting prior creative expression into new works of art is a common, popular, and influential process: “the act of transposition and what we could call ‘refunctioning’ is as old as art itself […] adaptation joins imitation, allusion, parody, travesty, pastiche and quotation as popular creative ways of deriving art from art” (Hutcheon 109). The study of adaptation offers insight into not only the relative merits and limitations of individual works or mediums, but highlights the ways in which human beings adopt and adapt the stories they find meaningful over time (Naremore 15).

1. **How does this project fit into work that has already been done by you or/and others?**

Since their inception in the late 19th century, ‘comic-style’ or ‘graphic’ narratives have been largely ignored in academic circles. Art theorist Bart Beaty describes this phenomena as academics “still [turning] up their noses at the thought of seriously engaging with comics and other aspects of so-called popular culture” (Beaty 17). Yet he goes on to say, due to their increasing popularity and increasingly sophisticated narratives, “at the present moment it is possible to see that […] the comics world will be able to overcome the historical biases against comics and legitimate [comics] as art” (Beaty 47). In this sense, there are increasingly relevant arguments that comics and graphic novels be interpreted in the same academic manner, and to the same standards as, novels, film, or other forms of narrative art.

The most compelling place to begin this work is by studying adaptations of literary classics. It has become increasingly popular for graphic novelists and comics artists to adapt to a new medium pioneering works like John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Jane Austen’s *Sense and*

*Sensibility*. Despite the popularity of their efforts, the field of adaptation studies, for which the scholarly literature is still developing and “not extensive,” has yet to make a meaningful break from the classic paradigm of “film-to-text” or “text-to-film” commentaries, which focus on the relationships between novel and film (Cartmell et al. 5). Thus research dealing with graphic novel adaptations of classic British works will add to a relatively nascent, but important, growth of adaptation studies from film-to-novel analyses to an influential academic discipline which is truly capable of analyzing any and all adaptations of creative works from one medium to another.

1. **What is the strategy for completing this project?**

My strategy combines extensive reading on adaptation with close attention to my primary texts: the graphic novels and the classic works they adapt. Not only will I apply relevant aspects of textual and artistic analysis to each of the ten adaptations and their source texts, I will also actively review and disseminate theory and critique from scholars of adaptation and comics studies where necessary. This will include aesthetic considerations like spacing, panel placement, page layout, etc., as well as literary considerations such as studying the consistency, veracity, and adherence of the narrative to the original material (Goggin et al. 82-83). This research will also involve the application or transferring of theories of adaptation which might not traditionally describe transitions from novel to graphic novel, such as scene construction, cinematics, narration, etc., to better evaluate and interpret the overall efficacy, faithfulness, and quality of the adaptations in question (Cutchins et al. 75).

1. **What do you wish to gain from this experience?**

Research conducted during this ten-week period would form the basis of my Honor’s Thesis. I also plan to submit my summer’s work to journals interested in publishing undergraduate literary criticism, such as the *Digital Literature Review*, *Oswald Review*, and the *Sigma Tau Delta Review*. If invited, I will present this research at the Elkin Isaac Research Symposium and The National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR). I would also be interested in submitting this research to scholarly journals dedicated to comics and graphic novels, such as the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* or the *International Journal of Comic Art*.