

Adaptation of Comics and Graphic Novels into Movies: Concerning Marvel and DC Cinematic Universes

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Abstract:

Imaginary and vibrant illustrations were developed by creators in the form of comics between and after the world wars. Numerous artists created plenty of comic strips, cartoon corners, comics (also at full length) in book form and later graphic novels since 1837. Primarily, a comic form of writing and sketching was a diverse form among the readers, especially among kids. The development of comics with their content started taking place in bookstores in book form. The stories and characters were not portrayed as shabby but unrealistic. The dialogue of the characters and the storyline developed exaggeratedly when people needed hope in their cognizance. These Comics have played a vital role in their readers' minds. Around 1975 the episodes and stories of comics were started to adapt into animated series and movies. Most Marvel and DC superhero characters were made into animation. Viewers of that time especially kids welcomed the new motion comics open heartily. Simultaneously film industry was also developed in terms of new technologies. A few studios have come forth and made some superhero movies to entertain their audience and they have succeeded in it too. The Foundation of Marvel Studios was in 1993 while DC Films was a subsidiary of Warner Brothers Discovery. On the first of November 2022, just eleven months ago DC Films extended as DC Studios. Before these studios, Marvel and DC Comics were making films, television series and animated series of their own comics in association with different studios like WBD and SONY Pictures. The static graphic narration's adaptation into a motion picture is obtained by their readers. The common plot, elements, settings, cast and characters of these comics are now portrayed in movies with an advanced technology called CGI (Computer Generated Images). This paper will study how this exaggerated fantasy world and fanciful characters of comics and graphic novels are displayed on a big screen with real-life, actors and actresses.

Key Words: Comics – Graphic Novel – Film – Series – mini web series – Animation – adaptation

Introduction:

American comic book publisher brands Marvel and DC both of the largest and oldest comic book companies nowadays are the most popular amongst every group of ages and in almost every corner of the world with the acronym MCU and DCU. MCU is primarily known as Marvel Worldwide Inc., Marvel Publishing, Inc., and Marvel Comics Group later it became Marvel Entertainment and is now worldwide known as MCU. Marvel was started in 1939 by Martin Goodman in Timely

Comics. In the same way, DC Studios primarily known as DC Films is a subsidiary of Warner Bros. Discovery. DC Films was founded by WBD from 2016 to 2022 and on the first of November 2022 DC Films were transformed into DC studios under the control of James Gunn and Peter Safran.

In the nineteenth century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche distinctively claimed that “God is dead”, in a philosophical fiction book called Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 1883. The next century of the published book proves the statement during the world wars. In the imagination of the writers and creators unnatural humans emerged. Marvel Comics creators named these characters Super-human while DC Comics named them Meta humans. A series of this type of Super-human started to take place in magazines, newspapers and in weeklies. To create hope in the human mind and to overcome the satanic behaviour in society these two comic book companies played a vital role in the twentieth century. The battle between good and bad, discrimination, violence, and massacre were the central themes in these comics. They created different characters for different regions, countries, and races. This was the time when Carl Burgos’ (An American comic book and advertising artist) android superhero the Human Torch and Bill Everett’s (An American Comic Book writer) October 1939 issue which was a great success for the publisher because around 9 lakh copies were sold. The effect of WWI was seen in the later publication of Marvel Comics in 1941 when the first patriotic superhero was introduced that was ‘Captain America’. That year the sales reached nearly one million copies and Martin Goodman formed a separate firm for comics named Timely Comics, Inc. Through time and success, gradually it became known as Atlas Comics and in 1961 the Marvel Era began. Similarly, ‘The Shield’ is the name of several superheroes created by MLJ (now known as Archie Comics). Appearing months before Captain America, the Shield has the distinction of being the first superhero with a costume based on United States patriotic iconography. In 2010, DC announced plans to integrate the Shield and other MLJ characters into the DC Universe, but the rights to the characters reverted to Archie Comics in 2011.

The Fantastic Four and other superheroes such as Spider-Man, Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, Doctor Strange, Hulk, Wolverine, Captain Marvel, and many more titles started to be created in Marvel. The creators of the Marvel comics were Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and others who also created some teams for instance Avengers, The X-Men, The Fantastic Four, Inhuman, and The Guardians of Galaxy to save and give hope to the world. In opposite to superheroes, they need to fight against villains so they were also called super villains such as Doctor Doom, Magneto, Thanos, Green Goblin, Galactus, Kingpin, Mandarin and others. DC’s first comic under the DC banner was published in 1937. The majority of its publications feature numerous culturally iconic heroic characters, such as Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern, and Aquaman; as well as famous fictional teams like Marvel; including the Justice League, the Justice Society of America, Teen Titans, and Suicide Squad. In addition to the DC universe, It also features a variety of well-known supervillains such as the Joker, Lex Luthor, Deathstroke, Reverse-Flash, Brainiac, and Darkseid.

Adaptation of Comics into Animation:

Comics were very popular and known to most readers worldwide till the 1970s. After the formation of Marvel Comics Group, it first entered the field of animation through licensing to Grantray-Lawrence Animation for The Marvel Superheroes collection series in 1966. The Animation studio adapted five Marvel comic book superheroes which were ‘Captain America’, ‘The Incredible Hulk’, ‘Iron Man’, ‘The Mighty Thor’ and ‘The Sub-Mariner’ named the Marvel Super Heroes in an American animated television series. It was a canopy series of five segments within a children’s TV program. ‘The Fantastic Four’ in 1967 Marvel Comics’ superheroes team was adopted and produced by Henna-Barbera Cartoons, Inc. in an animated series. DePatie-Freleng Enterprises was an American Animation Production Company that produced The New Fantastic Four in 1978 and

Spider-Woman in 1979 in the corporation of Marvel Comics Animation. DC has also been working on TV series for a long time, their first telecast TV series being Adventures of Superman which started in 1952. The New Adventures of Superman is a series of six-minute animated Superman adventures produced by Filmation that were broadcast on Saturday mornings on CBS from September 10, 1966, to September 5, 1970. The 68 segments appeared as part of three different programs during that time, packaged with similar shorts featuring The Adventures of Superboy and other DC Comics superheroes like Batman was telecasted during 1966 to 68 by 20th Century Fox Television, Shazam! telecasted in 1974 to 76 by Warner Bros. Television, The Secrets of Isis between 1975 to 76 Filmation, Wonder Woman between 1975 to 79 by Bruce Lansbury Productions, Ltd., Swamp Thing between 1990 to 93 by Batfilm Productions, Inc., Smallville between 2001 to 11 by Warner Bros. Television, and some teams like Legends of Tomorrow, Watchmen, and Titans were adapted as Animated series time by time. The DC Animated Universe (DCAU, also referred to as the Timmverse series) is a shared universe cantered on a group of animated television series based on DC Comics and produced by Warner Bros. Animation. It initially began with Batman: The Animated Series in 1992 and ended with Justice League Unlimited in 2006.

Adaptation of Comics into TV serial:

Though the Comics and Animated series were popular among kids and teenagers but creators were still looking for the masses to attract to their action saga. From time to time, the characters and plot created by the original authors are weaved across time. New writers adapt the same popular comics as per the plot of the television series and telefilms. A television film was first produced by DC Comics during World War II. Captain Marvel, now more popularly known as Sazam, was first portrayed by American actor Tom Tyler. This TV serial was presented in twelve chapters. ‘Adventures of Captain Marvel’ was produced in black and white as technical devices and TVs were not yet in colour. This was followed by Spy Smasher in 1942, Batman in 1943, Hop Harrigan in 1946, The Vigilante in 1947, and finally DC Comics' popular superhero Superman in 1948, and then TV series was made on other minor characters until 1954. William West Anderson, better known as Adam West, was an American actor. He played Batman for the first time in the 1960s ABC series and its 1966 theatrical feature film. This was the first phase of characters and storylines based on DC Comics characters played by live actors. On the other hand, Marvel Comics also started making television serials. In 1944, the first fifteen-chapter Captain America TV serial was presented by Republic Pictures. Dick Purcell was the first actor to portray the character on television. In terms of Marvel Comics, a TV series based on Marvel Comics characters ran for fifteen episodes in 1943–44. In which the character of Captain America was kept at the forefront. Dick Purcell first portrayed the character of Captain America on television. TV series based on major characters like Spider-Man, Incredible Hulk and Doctor Strange were more popular due to the fact that the era of television films was more in America. As technology has evolved, TV serials based on comics have also seen updates and modernization. The use of visual effects and computers was revolutionary in the world of filmmaking. Most of the comic characters of both the Comics like Captain America, Superman, Batman, Spiderman, Hulk, Fantastic Four, and Flash keep their storylines as they are, weaving the plot of the comics with various social issues.

Adaptation of Comics into Feature Films:

New writers also adapt the same popular comics as per the plot of the films with appropriate changes and updates. Thus, the new era of this film flourished more in the first decade of the twenty-first century, but even before that, the producers who had tried to bring fictional characters and stories to life in the medium of films with the help of the devices available at that time. The first feature film based on a DC Comics character was the 1950s Superman and the Mole man, released

in 1951. Thus, George Reeves, who played the role of Superman on the big screen, became the first actor. He is also best known for portraying Superman from 1952 to 1958 in the television series Adventures of Superman. This was the era of DC Comics feature films where Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman comics started to become popular along with animation and TV serials. Superman and Batman have been close characters of DC Comics, as can be seen from their film series. Since 1951, an estimated eighteen films have featured Superman and Batman in individual films or films based on other DC characters. In addition to these characters, author Ellen Moore, who has made notable contributions to the graphic novel field in addition to comics, first made a 1982 movie based on the comic Swamp Thing. Moreover, DC Comics' female-centric metahuman characters like Supergirl, Wonder Woman, Catwoman, and Batwoman have also been made into films and have been successful.

However, for four decades no feature film was made on Marvel characters or stories. In 1886, Marvel's 'Howard the Duck' was first produced by Universal Studios, and in 1989, The Punisher became the first powerful hero on the big screen and in 1990, films based on character of Captain America were presented. Films based on Marvel Comics began to be made and became popular mainly in the 1990s. In which the film Blade made by New Line Cinema was praised by the people. Subsequently, 20th Century Fox Studios made extensive use of special effects in the early stages of the multi-starrer X-Men film series, which was one of the highest-grossing films of the millennium year. Columbia Pictures then released a Spider-Man film with the same title as the character in 2002, which was also nominated for an Oscar. By the time Marvel Studios was established in 2008, films on the characters had been released by different producers, such as Daredevil in 2003, Punisher in 2004, Fantastic Four and Elektra in 2005, and Ghost Rider in 2007, and other parts of these films were also released during these years. Since Sony Pictures owned the rights to most of the Marvel characters before Marvel became its own studio, many films were also made under the Sony banner.

Both Marvel and DC have established their own studios at the dawn of the digital age, with DC a decade behind Marvel, but DC Comics' partnership with Warner Bros. has so far been successful. While films under the banner of Marvel Cinematic Universe have been attracting all corners of the world for the past decade and a half, DC has also won Oscars for its superhero films with serious themes that cover social and political issues.

Adaptation of Comics into Web Series on OTT Platforms:

After animations, television serials, and movies, both these comics craze has become a new pattern in this post-modern digital age that is web series. The revolution in the field of internet and smart phones has affected all three forms of entertainment, radio, movies and serials. Wireless streaming took off after the advent of the fourth generation of the Internet and has packed the world into a tiny six-inch device. Most of the content these days is released on OTT platforms, resulting in side storylines of films based on comics that are not directly related to the films themselves but also have their own individuality. Web series have created series based on minor Marvel and DC Comics characters that are smaller in size than TV series and larger than films such as novellas.

In 2013, the MCU (Marvel Cinematic Universe) aired the Agents of SHIELD series on Netflix. The main character of this series was modelled after the side character of the Agents of SHIELD in the MCU films. A two-season series featuring Agent Carter, Captain America's girlfriend was then aired. This was the first phase of the airing web series and was followed by a web series of superhero groups such as Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, Iron Fist, Punisher, Inhuman and The Defenders. After the founding of Marvel Studios, Marvel's owners bought Disney's OTT platform. They began converting their own comic book series into web series, and during the fourth phase of 2021, Wanda Vision, Loki, Hawkeye, Moon Knight, Miss Marvel, and She-Hulk. An

independent web series was created by putting them in the centre. Unlike Marvel, DC Comics does not have its own platform, but web series featuring sideline characters from DC Comics are aired on HBO Max's OTT platform. Mainly Titans which is a web series based on a team of Batman's assistant Robin. Apart from this, Swamp Thing, Doom Patrol and Stargirl have been aired.

The unique feature of web series is that the characters are not only presented as action heroes or superheroes but also the personal lives of those characters, their moods, their personal ideologies and among all these the use of the unique powers that the characters have as part of their duty in the society. Above all, society's expectation of a responsible person and its interpretation of every incident in their own lives and the lives of those around them is very subtle in this web series.

Conclusion:

These characters created to instil moral values and hope in people through the medium of entertainment have now become larger than life. These characters are not only playing the role of action heroes or superheroes, but they are serving the selfless duty of superheroes against the evils and terrorist activities going on in society, the reasons behind it, and the mentality of the terrorist. A lot of things are studied by the writers and producers before all these things are lifted from the pages of comics and put into society as TV serials, films or web series. Taking the characters and stories of comic books and making films or serials based on them is a challenge. It is also a challenge to present the same stories with the characters written almost seven decades ago in a contemporary plot. But above all, it is important that the audience of this time will witness each creation.