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To Start, Continue, and Conclude: Foregrounding Narrative Production in Serial Fiction Publishing

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TO START, CONTINUE, AND CONCLUDE:
FOREGROUNDING NARRATIVE PRODUCTION
IN SERIAL FICTION PUBLISHING
BY
GABRIEL E. ROMAGUERA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

2017

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION

OF

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DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the author-text-reader relationship throughout the publication of works of serial fiction in different media. Following Pierre Bourdieu's notion of authorial autonomy within the fields of cultural production, I trace the outside influence that nonauthorial agents infuse into the narrative production of the serialized. To further delve into the economic factors and media standards that encompass serial publishing, I incorporate David Hesmondhalgh's study of market forces, originally used to supplement Bourdieu's analysis of fields. Additionally, I employ textual criticism, through Tanselle's distinctions of work, text, and document, alongside Shillingsburg's textual performances in order to better analyze the process that authors working within different serial media undertake from having the initial idea for a narrative, through the production of subsequent installments, until the completion of its publication.

Each chapter focuses on a different medium of publication and provides a brief history of how their industry standards affected narrative production. Chapter 2 explains the concept of the author and develops the core principles serial storytelling of renowned print works: *One Thousand and One Nights*, *Don Quixote*, *Great Expectations*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and *Harry Potter*. Chapter 3 details the different aspects of comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels as writer and artist form a joint authorship in the various texts encompassing the character of Superman, as well as other famous newspaper comic strips. Chapter 4 focuses on digital storytelling, primarily in webcomics, and how authors here can start from scratch and find a

following as the work is serialized, especially in *Order of the Stick* and *Goblins* and how interpretive communities do more than passively receive the text.

Throughout this dissertation, I showcase how the industry standards of different media, exerted by different forms of nonauthorial agents, affect the narrative production of serial fiction. Authors adapt their storytelling to these outside factors and interweave these different elements of expectation in order to initiate and maintain the serialization of their works.

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To the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus, my first alma matter and current haven for teaching the next generation of students to think beyond what is expected of them. To all the professors (now colleagues) for continuing in polishing my pedagogical and scholarly skills. Particularly to Ricia Chansky and Eric Lamore for their aid in finding my academic voice through clouded times. Also, to Laura García de la Noceda for her diligent labor as a nonauthorial agent in helping this project make sense to expert and layman alike.

To all my friends and loved ones who have taken an innumerable amount of rainchecks as writing took over my life. Especially, to my beloved Ruth for her patience and understanding as date nights were postponed for writing sessions.

Finally, to my parents, whose constant unconditional love and support have served as an example throughout all my life and have forged me into the person I am today. When things were at their worst, they carried me through the hardships and I have no idea how I can ever repay them for everything they have done for me.

Dedication:

To my paternal grandfather and maternal grandmother for showing the value of family
and hard work no matter your context in life.

Mariano (Nano) Romaguera (1928-2014)

Luisa (Tata) Fernandez de Rodriguez (1918-2013)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Textual production is performed in large part behind the scenes prior to the unveiling of the finished product through publication. The author, be he/she alone or with the feedback of editors and publishers, works carefully to craft his/her work before it is deemed to be ready for readers to consume. Critiques and commentary from readers shape the reception of the text, but rarely is the text itself reformed due to these responses. The relationship between the author and the reader (whether specialized editor or general audience) is an essential element within the production of narrative (inclusive of the writing, editing, publishing, marketing, and receiving of the text); however, it is often difficult to see and appraise exactly how this relationship shapes the text. Serialization is significant in literary studies because it affords scholars the opportunity to examine more transparently this relationship between the elements of narrative production. The incorporation of feedback and editorial advice—as measured through documentary materials like epistolary communications between author and editor (or other nonauthorial agents involved in the publishing process) and author and reader—becomes more evident through the study of the periodical publishing process of serialized fiction and its paratextual elements. Within serialization, the text remains in progress until the narrative concludes with the final installment of the series. Therefore, scholars and general readers can witness (in certain case studies) how the author changes, revises, and shifts the text in progress to better suit the wishes or requests of the reader, editor, publisher, etc.

Renowned French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu establishes in *Distinction* how aspects of the world can be analyzed in distinct yet interconnecting “fields”. A field is defined as:

... [A] network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions.

These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions. (Wacquant and Bourdieu 97).

One field worth noting is that of cultural production, which Bourdieu illustrates in *The Rules of Art* (124) as seen in Figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1 The field of cultural production in the field of power and in social space.

Here, Bourdieu shows how different fields (such as capital and autonomy) are interwoven as part of the social space while differentiating small-scale and large-scale productions. Within large-scale production lies the serial¹, a form of popular literature with a low level of autonomy by those in charge of creating it, i.e. the author. Bourdieu ties the serial to French novelists like Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola (*The Rules of Art* 114-115) but does not go further into analyzing authors or works of serial fiction beyond French writers of the 19th century. The facets of cultural production of serial fiction at first glance may seem universal; however, a detailed analysis shows the intricacies which producers of serialized content face throughout different times and methods of publication. When studied through Bourdieu's fields of autonomy and capital, the relationship between authors and readers becomes more complex as the story goes from beginning to end². Within this framework, this dissertation analyzes the cultural production of popular works of serial fiction in order to better understand the processes that authors undertake from creation to the ongoing publication of their narratives. In order to better study the totality of serial narrative production, I examine the authorial process behind classic and contemporary works across different media, and how the nature of the medium itself affects power relationships among authors, publishers, and the readers.

¹ In the original French, Bourdieu calls the serial a "feuilleton": which "originated in French newspapers as a supplement sectioned out from the main news stories. Although found in the political section of the newspaper, the feuilleton typically included material on non-political subjects, such as art, literature, or fashion. Fiction was sometimes included as well" (Merriam Webster). Feuilleton also refers to a novel printed in installments or the installments themselves, some of which were published in this section of newspapers.

² The transition from writing as an art form into writing as a form of employment is discussed in J.W. Saunders' *The Profession of English Letters*. Richard Colby reviews this work as one where Saunders "traces the transformation of authorship from genteel amateurism to commercialism. A connecting thread for Sanders is the perennial conflict between literary ideals and the demands of the market ('what the public needs versus what the public wants')" (145).

Serialized works are important because they have been and continue to be a prevalent form of writing and reading. I am aware that the decision to focus a dissertation on works of serial fiction may seem outside of the traditional purview of academic inquiry. Analyzing aspects of a form of publication (instead of literary periods or singular authors) have raised eyebrows throughout my research. During my academic career, I have seen how serialization as its own field of inquiry has risen in different scholarly circles, particularly within cultural and media studies. Panels centered on serialized texts (ranging from classics and contemporary works) are featured in different academic conferences, such as the regional and national Popular Culture Association conferences³. Serialization was even at the forefront of The University of Amsterdam's 2011 graduate conference *What Happens Next: The Mechanics of Serialization*⁴. Conference organizer and presenter Shane Denson explains how the growing popularity of serialization has provided it with a new light in academic settings.

Indeed, if the recent changes in serial forms and their media have attracted attention to seriality per se, the result has been an increased awareness of the crucial role played by serialized products, production processes, and consumption patterns in defining the categories of distinction (culture/civilization, high/low, commercial/popular) that structure elitist and populist approaches to culture alike. Accordingly, studies of seriality and serialization find themselves looking beyond the most recent developments in

³ I have been fortunate enough to present at several of these panels on serial fiction while explaining some of the research presented here.

⁴ Details on the conference's proceedings can be found here.
<http://www.jltonline.de/index.php/conferences/article/view/346/1004>

television, print, and digital media, for example, and instead asking much larger questions: for example, questions about the discursive construction and sociocultural negotiation of value in, through, and around serial forms; about the historical ties between modern popular serial entertainment and the serialized production forms that more generally characterize industrial and post-industrial arts and technologies; and about the specific roles of various medial (and inter- and/or transmedial) configurations in shaping the narrative and aesthetic characteristics of serial entertainments in particular and, more generally, the modern lifeworld that informs and is informed by them.

Denson's explanation of serial studies condenses the different approaches that academics are using in this budding field. This dissertation follows a similar line of questioning towards the facets of cultural production behind the process of serialization. While answering every query about the serial process goes above and beyond the limits of this study, I believe that the research and analysis detailed here will help advance the understanding of how stories with multiple installments are produced, published, and read over time.

In order to study serialization as its own unique form of cultural production, I focus on the process that authors undertake from literary idea until the publication of the final installment. For Bourdieu:

[t]he principal obstacle to a rigorous science of the production of the value of cultural goods [is the] charismatic ideology of 'creation' ... [which] directs the gaze towards the apparent producer – painter, composer, writer – and

prevents us from asking who has created this “creator” and the magic power of transubstantiation with which the “creator” is endowed’ (*Rules of Art* 167).

The emphasis on “creator and creation” focuses on the authorial process while often diminishing the effects that outside agents and other factors instill in influencing and shaping the final artistic product. Thus, a proper analysis of the cultural production surrounding serial fiction must involve more than looking back through the author’s thoughts on his/her work (though these ancillary materials do provide invaluable material for this kind of study). Looking back at Figure 1.1, one can observe how Bourdieu establishes that the producers of serial content have a fairly low autonomy over their authorial output, as the publishing process is heavily dependent on capital (economic) rather than capital (symbolic, specific). Thus, an analysis of authorship (and the autonomy of authors) requires economic factors encapsulating the production and reception of serial works of fiction⁵. As Souza explains, “the use of the field notion means to consider the processes of production, reproduction, distribution and consume of the products and practices associated to it⁶ (60). With these parameters in mind, this dissertation examines these contexts of serial publishing (prior to and during) the publication of a text’s installments.

In order to better trace the processes of production and its surrounding factors, I employ textual criticism to evaluate how the text takes shape. Textual criticism

⁵ In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu succinctly defines field as “a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy. The existence of the writer, as fact and as value, is inseparable from the existence of the literary field as an autonomous universe endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works” (163). However, when looking strictly at authorial autonomy in large-scale publications (specifically serials) economic dimensions are prevalent and affect the publications of texts.

⁶ The original quote was translated from Portuguese by Daniela Zanetti in her article, “Repetition, Serialization, Popular Narrative and Melodrama.”

(primarily within the Greg-Bowers-Tanselle school of thought⁷) focuses on outlining the shifts in authorial intention of an author's work by studying the changes that take place throughout multiple drafts and editions. When adapted to serialization, these changes are tracked by studying each of the installments that make up the text and the circumstances surrounding the publication of each one. Works of serial fiction contain "a continuing story over an extended period of time with enforced interruptions" (Hughes and Lund 1) that can vary greatly in amount of installments and stretch of publication on a case by case basis. During these "enforced interruptions" the author can alter the text from what was previously written (or planned) after receiving feedback from editors, critics, and/or readers. Textual criticism provides a tool set to analyze documents outside the serialized text in order to better interpret the factors that affect and shift narrative production throughout the publication of each part. More information on textual criticism and the theorists that I draw from can be found in the methodology subsection of this chapter.

Another critical theory that is essential to my analysis is that of media specific analysis. The impact of the medium of publication in cultural production and serial writing is something that Bourdieu does not fully incorporate into his discourse. One such critique comes from David Hesmondhalgh, who explores how gaps in the study of fields can be filled by analyzing the importance of the market forces surrounding mass scale production and publication.

⁷ More information on the subject can be found at the Institute of Book History at Lyons (Institut d'histoire du livre) through their website. <http://ihl.enssib.fr/en/analytical-bibliography-an-alternative-prospectus/editing-texts>

[C]ultural industry companies engage in increasingly complex activities to try to construct a sense of what this demand is. Without falling into the error of seeing such activities as indicating a vulnerability on the part of media businesses, we can still see it as an attempt to control a high level of risk in the cultural industries. A number of perspectives see such market research as a perennially failing attempt to impose order on a chaotic market. This is one of a number of places where it is hard not to think that “field theory” would significantly benefit from greater dialogue with Anglo-American media theory. (225)

Throughout Hesmondhalgh’s article, he explains how the depth of Bourdieu’s fields could reach a new level if media studies would be applied alongside it. Within the context of serial publishing, analyzing market forces within different media of publication provides producers and writers with the insight to determine if there is a body of readers large enough to justify narrative production and the costs of publication⁸. Furthermore, such studies help determine when to adjust, extend, or even give an early end to the narrative even as authors are willing and able to provide more content. With these aspects in mind, I incorporate an analysis of the development of serial publishing in regards to the industry standards of different media. In addition, I historicize the technological progress of each medium of publication in order to illustrate how the advancement of media sets the stage for a larger scale of publishing. Media specific analysis, alongside the study of market forces, outlines the different

⁸ My own interests in the economic viability of publishing stem in part from seeing my father’s lectures as he taught entrepreneurship at the University of Puerto Rico, alongside my work with entities like SIFE and the International Entrepreneurship Institute of Puerto Rico. With the current interest in areas like Self Employment in the Arts (S.E.A.), analyzing the economic aspects of authorship broadens the reach and reception of this dissertation.

factors that authors of serial fiction undertake with the publication of their literary work with each installment.

In order to further concentrate and delineate my research, I focus primarily on works of serial fiction. Other forms of content can be serialized through selective publishing, but it is within fiction that one can study how narrative production⁹ is constantly changing. In the context of serialization, this process is constant until the narrative has been completed. Serialized style reporting of real life events can show the changing style and perspective of a given author/reporter but these are still limited by real life events. Moreover, such forms of large-scale publishing fall under the distinct category of journalism as described in Figure 1.1. Within fiction, a story can ostensibly be continuously published for decades as new characters and plotlines can be introduced to keep the narrative going. Narrative production continues until the author decides to stop, though new installments can be made should the author decide to return from retirement. Furthermore, almost any literary work has the potential to become serialized should a prequel or a sequel be published later on¹⁰. Because serial publishing can be both rigid and orderly but also unexpected, I study how and why authors continue to expand their stories.

Many authors have published their stories in a serial manner, but analyzing each specific example of this practice falls outside the purview of this study. My analysis of serial fiction as a form of large-scale publishing features a historical

⁹ At its core, narrative production encapsulates all the steps that authors undertake between the initial ideas for a story until it is published. The preparation of a story can be done quickly but the process of revisions and planning of details until it is deemed ready to be written and then for publication (by the author and/or editors) is an arduous task.

¹⁰ Or even an “interquel” or “inbetweenquel” like *Star Wars: Rogue One*, which serves as a transition between *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* and *Episode IV: A New Hope* of the film series.

overview of the narrative production of some of its most recognized works within Western literature¹¹. This study into the roots of the publication of serial fiction shows how storytelling techniques have evolved over the years, often times alongside the development of newer technologies. In some cases, the present-day authors whom I analyze currently continue to add more parts to their narratives with more installments being published periodically. These instances of ongoing narrative production provide an opportunity for fans and scholars to not only study, but to participate first hand alongside the readership in actively critiquing and potentially affecting the development of a story over time.

The media of publication constantly evolve and with it the process of publishing; hence, the production of installments (and their publication) should be adapted to better fit the ongoing technological developments of large-scale publishing in different formats. Authors adapt to diverse standards of publishing and their stories in turn must be reshaped accordingly in order to better fit their narratives into the molds of the medium of publication. To borrow from Marshall McLuhan, if the medium is the message, then changes in media are sure to affect the literary output. For example, the narrative production encompassing standalone complete novels and their sequels (like Cervantes's *Don Quixote*) differs from a novel divided into 20 installments to be published as part of a literary magazine (like Dickens's *Great*

¹¹ This geographical limit is set due to the vast history of serial publishing all over the world, an endeavor that would take more than one dissertation to properly analyze. By focusing on one serialization model over time, we can obtain more insight into the similar narrative processes of the selected authors and works in this study. Some unique aspects of serialization can be seen all over the world and are worth reading if you are interested in a more international perspective. Such classics like Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* were both serialized. Today, Japanese manga and even serial stories by text message are incredibly popular.

Expectations). Both of the above mentioned novels, as well as other works of serial fiction in print, are discussed further on in Chapter 2 of this study.

While authorship and publishing often solely bring to mind the print medium, I believe that other media which provide large-scale serial storytelling should be studied in order to better understand serialized narrative production. Large-scale publishing of serial content occurs across various media as authors and publishers want their works to reach a wide audience. In order to better grasp the distinct factors that facilitate and affect serial publishing, this dissertation analyzes different aspects of authorship and market forces that underlie different media. In addition to print, I analyze comics and digital serial storytelling (mostly in the context of webcomics). Authors and publishers in these media work with large-scale publication of serialized texts, delivering installments of narratives that have been published for many years. Within comics, serial content is mostly published by the two major publication companies DC and Marvel. Both corporations have grown from being publishing houses with writers and artists working on individual series to a business managing multiple interconnecting serial works, alongside their respective movies and merchandise. Characters like Superman have had their stories transformed since the onset of its publication with Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster as the original authors in 1938 to the current teams of writers and artists that are now publishing the various titles where he appears. Comics are traditionally published on paper, which makes them a subset of print. However, comics studies scholars like Will Eisner and Scott McCloud explain that the particular use of images in a specific sequence qualifies it as its own unique medium. In order to maintain cohesion between this dissertation and other studies in this area, I distinguish

comics as their own form of media. While critics debate as to whether comics fall under the purview of literature, one cannot argue its long history delivering serialized content. Authors of this medium produce their works of serial fiction as comic strips, comic books, and/or graphic novels. Comic strips are normally published within newspapers as only a few panels while comic books are sold on their own and have between 28 and 32 pages of content. Graphic novels are normally sold as book length narratives with eventual/possible additional installments. Within each of these subsets of comics, authors have produced stories that span years and even decades. Additionally, the medium of comics provides an example of how serialization can officially continue the narrative beyond the original author, thus showing how a story can extend through the work of multiple writers. This medium is further explained in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Chapter 4 of this study focuses on the digital medium. Digital formats and online publishing add new elements to contemporary serialization, like online distribution, infinite canvas, digital archives, and other elements that are explained later on. With the advent of the 21st century, computers became commonplace and authors had a new tool at their disposal. This technology not only revolutionized narrative production but also how texts could be published. The ease with which one could upload material to the Internet means that authorial autonomy rises as the barriers to publication of other media (editors, publishing houses, etc.) are circumvented and writers can post and publish a myriad of different texts. However, this part of the dissertation centers on works that were designed for publication primarily on the Internet in order to properly analyze how this medium affects

narrative production. For this reason, I chose to limit the study of available texts and not include those that were printed and later published online later on through e-books or other forms of digital distribution. Since there are so many forms of content online, the selection of works of serial fiction are narrowed down in order to better analyze aspects of cultural and narrative production within this medium in a uniform manner.

First, the focus is concentrated on serial texts whose authors have worked on them over the course of several years. To further distinguish aspects of consistent large-scale publishing, the research is fixed on authors who have obtained part or all of their income¹² due to the success of their text at some point of its serialization. These temporal and economic factors help in differentiating between authors those who are just starting out and those who have invested themselves in their literary efforts and have the support of their readership at the emotional and financial levels¹³.

The focus of this study is on the different elements (e.g. narrative production, authorial autonomy, financial factors, etc.) encompassing the large-scale publication of works of serial fiction. With these parameters in mind, much of the content available online does not fit within this study. The majority of blogs work as nonfiction accounts published at intervals, which function more akin to a public journal. Podcasts have a similar format but centered more on audio than on words on a

¹² Many authors of digital content provide their services for free but provide ways for readers to give donations. The semantics between income and donations are complicated but for the sake of this dissertation I am focusing on authors who have acquired some form of revenue from their work; regardless of/in addition to any forms of donations.

¹³ Serial works like fan fictions are thus omitted from this study. While there are many serial texts of this fashion, the fact that is these authors where to obtain revenue for their writing they would be in violation of copyright of the original owners of the texts and characters, thus further complicating large-scale publishing. Let me clarify that an author's classification as "amateur" does not reflect on the quality of his/her work and some do get to professionally publish their own work later on. Researchers interested in the more complex notions of online serialization should consider these works as part of future analytical endeavors.

screen. For example, many of the podcasts currently featured on the *Podcast One* website (which contains “over 200 of the most popular podcasts” (About Page) focus on hosts interviewing guests on a myriad of different topics. *Serial*, one of the most popular podcasts from its title alone sounds like the perfect feature to be analyzed here. However, the series itself explains that “*Serial* tells one story—a true story—over the course of a season” (About Page) which makes it an example of serial reporting rather than serial fiction. Web series on the other hand can be about nonfiction subject matter or serial fiction. These can be filmed with real life actors (like *Video Game High School*), through animation (like *Homestar Runner*), or even with machinima¹⁴ (like *Red vs Blue*). However, these forms of online series are made thanks to a crew of people and without the proper context towards the roles and actions of each person during narrative production; an analysis of serialized texts through textual criticism would not be accurately completed¹⁵. Without a well-defined author, questioning who decides the direction of the storytelling, in what manner, and why becomes much harder to trace and properly examine. For these reasons, these series are not featured in this dissertation.

In essence, the focus of this part of this study centers on online serial works of fiction where a professional (and defined) author has published his/her work consistently over a period of years. Such parameters are best identified within the

¹⁴ Machinima is a portmanteau of machine and cinema, normally using edited footage of video game characters. The repurposing of these sprites and characters can sometimes bring legal between the video game companies and machinima authors. More info on machinima can be found here <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machinima>

¹⁵ A more detailed explanation on the difficulty of analyzing aspects of authorship in production crews is detailed later on.

serialization of webcomics¹⁶. Webcomic authorship highlights the endeavors of narrative production with little to no intermediaries between themselves and their readers. Authors could start publishing once they could upload the installments of their story to a website. Many writers and cartoonists (like the ones studied here) tried their hand at serial fiction before they had a stable readership or even all the details of the story fleshed out beyond the next installment. It is in these moments of serialization without a proverbial net that the study of narrative production can be performed by analyzing how tones and themes change subtly and dramatically over time. These shifts are more identifiable in works of online serial fiction as authors are able to voice aspects of narrative production directly to their readers through blogs and forums that are adjoined to their texts. Tools like email and social media allow for a higher rate of accessibility in the author-reader relationship alongside letting the readership itself come together. This accessibility is evident as authors publish their work little by little simultaneously with reports on their own lives through blog posts and other forms of social media that are updated alongside their stories. In these communications, readers witness biographical moments that are both separate and interconnected to narrative production¹⁷. The readership experiences the growth of the story as (potentially) years' worth of installments build an increasingly more complex narrative. Alongside witnessing the development of the story, readers experience the authors' journey as they hone their craft and become better writers and artists with each installment. The study of this kind of serial works provide researchers like myself with the opportunity

¹⁶ This term also appears as "web comics" and even "web-comics" in different sources. For the sake of uniformity, I will be referring to online comics as webcomics throughout this dissertation.

¹⁷ Many of these interactions performed through social media are easily accessible and are public for the most part. This accessibility allows for readers and scholars alike to look through a vast array of communications that would be private communications in other media/years ago.

to analyze authorial and narrative progression as well as how the relationship between authors and readers become more personal as publication continues.

Bourdieu's concept of authorial autonomy, when applied to webcomic cartoonists, allows for this study of seriality to showcase transition from a small-scale publication to a large-scale endeavor. As computers began to become common tools for narrative production, the ability to publish serial works was available to those with professional authorship experience and newcomers alike, as both groups tried to find the right ways to navigate an uncharted digital landscape. Narrative production is not limited by editors, publishers, or other nonauthorial agents who decide what gets published when the ability to start one's own website has become quite simple. Without these barriers to publication limiting who can or should publish their serial work, the content and quality of webcomics ranges greatly from work to work. There is no major industry standard for this medium or market (like in comics beforehand); this lack of precedent permitted webcomic cartoonists forge their own path. Many followed the familiar style of newspaper comic strips in amount of content and publication schedule. Others dabbled in unique artistic styles that included actual sound effects and even animation. Authors publishing in this medium have the autonomy to tell their stories in their own way, which often includes when serialization stops. Without a publishing house or even a contract to ensure continued publication of installments, authors could choose to cease providing installments. For many authors, serialization of their content online does not provide enough income for it to be one's only profession. Webcomic cartoonists often have day jobs and if "real life" factors occur, it is often the narrative that must be paused. Authors have the

autonomy to restart serialization at any given moment should they so desire, be it weeks, months, or even years after the last installment. Readers who have been following the text from the onset of publication (or later on) can find themselves with a story paralyzed with uncertainty of ever continuing but still hopeful that more content may be published later on¹⁸. This expectation for more content to the story exists in all forms of serialized storytelling, even for narratives that are not planned as serials or whose serialization has already concluded. The desire for authors and readers for narratives to become/continue being serialized occurs in other media as well and is studied throughout this dissertation.

Outside of print, comics, and webcomics, there are other media prevalent with works of serial fiction that I wish could be a part of this study; primarily, television and film. The small screen's programming is filled with stories encompassing multiple episodes and seasons, while movies feature multiple sequels when the original is quite profitable. However, I will not be studying these media because the layers of authorship are too complex to properly attribute aspects of narrative production to any of the individuals of the production crew. While the writer can be adjudicated as the author, the narrative production behind television and film authorship is one where various figures shape the output of the story. Screenwriters produce scripts but directors are in charge of the film itself as producers exert their own share of influence and control. One of the few screenwriters to be open about the narrative production of films is Max Landis. In an interview for the *CinemaThreads* website, Landis sheds

¹⁸ One notable example can be found in Allie Brosh's *Hyperbole and a Half*, a semi-autobiographical webcomic about her life. Brosh posted a long installment regarding the challenges in dealing with depression in October 2011 and then stopped updating her work and her social media accounts. In May 2013, she began posting once again for a short time. The renewed serialization was unexpected but welcomed by her fanbase.

light on how the critiques of the “writing” in films require more insight into the whole process of film making:

Every time I see a critic talk about “the script” in a review it makes me cringe, because unless you have read every draft of the script, and been there during production and editing, you really have no idea what’s a product of the script or the screenwriter or the overall collaboration. The way we talk about movies is kind of generally broken; it’s like experiencing turbulence in a transatlantic flight and writing an angry letter to the person who designed that model of airplane.

Without proper behind the scenes access, it is impossible to properly determine how authorship is being exerted as each television episode and movie installment of a series is being filmed. In the case of television serialization, narrative production takes so long that multiple episodes are filmed prior to publication. Thus, input from the readership at large can’t be integrated into future narrative production until a new round of filming starts, usually after multiple episodes have already aired. For these reasons and others, I chose to leave the analysis of serial authorship of television and movies for future researching endeavors¹⁹.

Research Questions

This study focuses on the cultural production of large-scale publishing of serial fiction in different media. The following chapters focus on the different developments

¹⁹ Video games are another medium where authors can also serialize their works through sequels and prequels. They have similar production crew divisions like in films with the added twist that the intended tract of the “authors” is not necessarily followed by the players; thus, resulting in unique narrative experiences for each person engaged with this form of “text”.

of serial publishing in print, comics, and webcomics respectively. The following questions have guided my research.

1. What are the elements of narrative production that authors undertake prior to, during, and after publication of their serial works have been completed?
What are the factors that lead authors to maintain a large-scale serialization of their stories and to eventually conclude them?
2. How does the author's autonomy to write and publish his/her stories become affected by feedback from editors and their readerships as the work is serialized? How do these outside factors affect the storytelling of the text?
How does the author-reader relationship change as the text is serialized?
3. In what ways does the medium of publication affect the narrative production of a work? How do authors deal with the standards of publishing for each medium, regarding the rates of publication and amount of content?
4. What are some of the economic factors that go into the publishing of serial fiction? What are the market forces that facilitate or hamper serial publishing?
How do authors obtain financial (and other forms of) capital from their serial work outside of publication?
5. How does the notion of authorship change within the context of serial fiction? In what ways does authorial autonomy change if original author is unable/unwilling to continue the story? How do ownership and copyright laws pertaining to different media play a role in the publication of current and future installments should the author's autonomy change over time?

6. Outside of narrative production, what are some of the additional responsibilities that authors take on regarding their work? Can any or all of these authorial tasks be passed on to others as the text is serialized? If so, how? Do electronic publication and telecommunication platforms affect the relationship among authors, publishers, and readers?
7. What is the role of the reader within the publication of serial fiction? How are they taken into consideration throughout narrative production? In what ways does the readership contribute to the creation and development of the text?

Methodology

In order to properly analyze the facets of cultural production within serial fiction, I focus on the producers of these serialized narratives, i.e. the authors of these works. Academics have been studying the figure of the author through various schools of thought and methodologies. Tracing the entire history of how intellectuals have defined authorship and then making my own judgments goes above and beyond the scope of this study. Still, it would be remiss of me not to mention the importance that the writings of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault on this subject have shaped much of the modern discussion on authorship. These French philosophers redefined the concept of the author through their seminal essays, “The Death of the Author” and “What is an Author?”, respectively. Barthes moves away from the notion of the “Author” as the only source of meaning when it comes to exploring the text and calls for the empowerment of the reader. Foucault, on the other hand analyzes the historical role of the author and the many “author functions” that take place when more

knowledge of the person behind the text becomes more well-known and as works of literature no longer have anonymous sources. One scholar that synthesizes Barthes and Foucault in his analysis of contemporary authorship is Sean Burke, specifically through his book, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida*. Burke delves into the concept of authorship and sees that the human element continues to be an important part of its analysis. His investigation shows that at the personal and theoretical level the author and his/her intention have and continue to be important when studying works of literature. This is why I center my definition of authorship based on Burke's, as this outlook best explains how readers still look to the author as an authority, especially within the realm of serial fiction.

The primary critical theory that I will utilize is textual criticism. This theory provides a framework for analyzing how a work of literature takes shape throughout the different incarnations and editions that are done by the author as part of the editing process (usually done with the help of a trusted editor) before the final version is published. I adapt this framework to serial fiction as the text is completed little by little with the publication of each installment. Within textual criticism, one of the main theorists that I draw from is George Thomas Tanselle, who focuses on using ancillary materials like letters and notes alongside multiple editions to discern authorial intention. Tanselle explains in his seminal book, *A Rationale of Textual Criticism*, that there are three stages in which the author conceives his/her piece of literature. These are: the work, the text, and the document. He defines the work as the "ineluctable entity, which one can admire or deplore but cannot alter without becoming a

collaborator with its creator (or creators)” (14). The text is the “tangible records of creativity” (20), and the document is “the received texts of the work” (28). Using these definitions, we find that the work is only accessible to the author, takes shape within the text, and that readers can only interact with it through the document, which becomes available through publication. I use these divisions of the stages of narrative production to clearly demark the phases of the story as it is published. Within the contexts of serialization, the text’s records are problematized because the narrative outcome remains in flux until the final installment is published²⁰. The documents are each of the individual installments, which in their entirety compile the text. For texts that are done by different authors over time, their own “work” consists of the installments that they were responsible for as the overall narrative continues to grow, so long as publication continues. By outlining these divisions in the publication of serial fiction, I illustrate the nuances in narrative production that take place between each of these three stages.

Another prominent textual critic informing my analysis is Peter Shillingsburg, who follows many of Tanselle’s ideas. Shillingsburg, in his book *Resisting Texts*, explains how there are different performances which take place during the development of the text. He subdivides these textual performances into the creative performance where the literary work is first created, the production performance where it is ready to be transmitted or published, and the reception performance where the reader interprets the text (*Resisting Texts*, 76-78). I utilize Shillingsburg’s

²⁰ In an article for *Networking Knowledge*, I discussed how the transition between work, text, and document resembles the three phases of water. The work (vapor) almost imperceptible and without form, text (liquid) taking shape but only within the form of its medium of publication, and document (ice) frozen by the parameters of its medium. “The author condenses and eventually encapsulates the story so that readers can have it.” (3-4)

performances to identify the different actions taken by the author and the readership throughout the publication of a piece of serial fiction. Throughout the journey from work, to text, to document, the creative and textual performances which encompass narrative production come to light. Production performances in particular take into consideration how the story will be shown in the medium where it will be published. In the case of serialization, reception performances involve feedback that can alter the author's trajectory for the narrative. Outside of reviews and critiques, the interest of the readership can be seen in the sales of each installment. High sales show that the readership is currently engaged in the text, while low sales numbers could demonstrate that further publication may no longer be viable regardless of the state of story itself. I highlight key creative, production, and receptive performances in my analysis of the primary literature to show how the state of narrative production is influenced by outside factors, such as market forces and feedback from editors and readers.

One final textual theorist that I use is John Bryant and his concept of "the fluid text", as explained in the book of the same name. Here, Bryant studies how the text is constantly changing between editions and revisions of drafts before it is initially published. This textual fluidity is best seen with the relationship between the author and the editor, who often works as an intermediary between the writer and the publishing house. By studying the exchanges between authors and editors alongside different versions of drafts, we can analyze the transformative aspects of the text. The ancillary texts that can be found in biographies, correspondence, interviews, and sales figures among others regarding the circulating draft²¹ help to trace how authorial

²¹ The circulating draft falls somewhere in the middle between the text and the document as "writers may copy their work for others to read and help edit" (Bryant 90). This limited form of publication is

intent shifts alongside the ongoing publication of a serial work. This material is best described as a paratext by Gerard Genette. He claims that the paratext “constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but of transaction” (2). The progression of the story during serialization and the changes that the narrative and the author go through are illustrated by these paratexts. Furthermore, these “transitions” and “transactions” aid in tracing textual performances in the process from work, to text, and document as authors create and publish their serialized works²².

The textual fluidity of works of serial fiction becomes a more complex as each installment becomes a solid part of the work as it is published. Any mistakes or inconsistencies between installments that were not caught prior to publication cannot be fixed until a future edition is published, usually after serialization (in part or in whole) has been completed. However, the content of prior installments can be revised with the new material provided in future installments. Modern serial authors refer to this technique as retroactive continuity, better known as a “retcon”. The editors of *TV Tropes*, a wiki page that specializes in classifying storytelling techniques of classic and current stories, define retcon as:

Reframing past events to serve a current plot need. The ideal retcon clarifies a question alluded to without adding excessive new questions. In its most basic form, this is any plot point that was not intended from the beginning. The most

akin to a literary soft opening wherein a limited audience previews the text and can suggest alterations prior to the large-scale release to the general readership. Circulating drafts are commonly designed with editors in mind though close friends can also offer input.

²² Paratexts that are included within the document of publication provide specialized information that helps in understanding narrative production, especially as its inclusion is purposeful by the author/publishing house. “Literature is always more than literature, and there are certainly cases in which the writer’s biography stands in a relevant relation to his work. But in order to be usable, this relation must be given as one of the features of the work itself” (Todorov, 145).

preferred use is where it contradicts nothing, even though it was changed later on. (“Retcon: Main Page”)

Retcons provide authors with a way to change past events to better fit into the current direction of the narrative²³. This allows for the story itself to remain malleable even as previously published material remains unchanged. In this way, the text remains fluid even as the documents stay the same. The author’s ability to adhere to the continuity of his/her narrative without the repetitive use of retcons is seen as a sign of good writing. As the serialized text continues to grow, maintaining narrative continuity becomes more complicated for authors. This problem is fairly common in the serial fiction of comic books and is explained in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Since the works analyzed here are published within different media, it is necessary to include media specific analysis in order to better delineate the process by which the text takes shape within the document. Theorists in this field of study the unique properties of each medium of publication on their own or in relation to other media. N. Katherine Hayles is one of the foremost academics in this area and her writings greatly inform how I will analyze serials in print, comics, and online. Each chapter will start with a brief history of the developments of each medium, alongside the standards of publishing within a serial format that authors regularly undertake. By tracing the technological advancements of these three media, one can discern how narrative production changes as the advancements towards the publishing of documents changes over time. Analyzing these changes as they occur while the text is

²³ Authors could also be filling out unknown details of the characters or working long term misdirection of the readership only to make a proper reveal later on. Luckily, many authors admit to retconning their works when asked in subsequent interviews.

still serialized, helps provide greater insight into the constantly changing nature of serial authorship.

While the three media studied in the subsequent chapters are fairly independent from each other, some elements of newer technologies emulate previous forms. To better study how these media overlap, I use comparative media studies to highlight how authors from one medium use elements of others. I believe that such comparisons highlight the textual performances which authors use to maintain a familiarity in their text as the forms of prior media are emulated in the publication of contemporary documents. For example, webcomic cartoonists, like those studied in Chapter 4, publish installments that are the equivalent of comic book page's worth of material in content and in size. This facilitates the reading experience of the text through its online document while also allowing for an easy transition to print publication through compendium editions. Such examples are illustrated to show how authors blur the lines between media even as they publish their serial works (initially) in one medium. Authors and publishers adjust their narrative productions and the development of texts to provide an ease in publication in multiple media as different forms and editions are made available to the public²⁴.

One element that gets glossed over in many forms of literary analysis is the economic side of authorship and narrative production, as noted by Hesmondhalgh. In order to analyze the continued large-scale publishing of a serialized text, the market forces behind the subfields of capital for each medium need to be part of the study. Narrative production of serial fiction requires a longitudinal investment in publication;

²⁴ Additionally, the narrative continuity of a serial work can continue across multiple media of publication. These transmedia narratives demonstrate how storytelling and reading experiences change between the different forms.

which writers, readers, and/or publishing houses may not wish to partake in. Authors and publishing houses divide their narratives in a way where the story progresses with each part while continuously drawing in readers. Serialization provides a unique challenge as the author struggles to write an ongoing narrative; maintaining the interest of a fairly stable readership while keeping the story accessible to new potential readers. The balance required on all ends for authors to keep their readers' interest piqued and their stories progressing provides insight into a narrative production that is constantly being readjusted. If installments are not being sold consistently then the publishing house may step in and cancel further serialization as this narrative venture no longer becomes economically viable; regardless of the story's state or the author's intention to keep writing. These financial factors are part of the realities that contemporary authors face, especially with serial fiction, but they rarely appear in the critical analysis of narrative production. This economic dimension falls within the arguments mentioned earlier by Hesmondhalgh and those posited by Michel Foucault during his lecture series at the College de France. One collection of his lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics* questions the role of neo-liberalism and how regular people must evolve into "homo-economicus". This idea of individual as entrepreneur coincides perfectly with how authors are tempered by business realities during their narrative ventures²⁵. For these reasons, I wish to include this financial element in my study and help fill this gap in the literature.

Lastly, I focus on the concept of ownership regarding literary works. The author may be the creator of the work but not necessarily its owner due to the complex

²⁵ Paddy Johnston makes the connection between Foucault's "homo-economicus" and webcomic authorship in his article "Bad Machinery and the Economics of Free Comics: A Webcomic Case Study" and first brought the concept to my attention.

nature of contracts with publishing houses. In the context of serialization, this distinction means that people outside the author can continue to publish installments of the story. For contemporary authors, the 1976 Copyright Law²⁶ is the standard from which further laws are built on. Basically, once the work is completed the artist/author owns it unless they were contracted to do it, i.e. work for hire. For authors of serial fiction, this protects their characters from being used in other works even if the narrative has not reached its conclusion. Rather than a full explanation of the history and development of copyright law, I will use examples of instances where authors had their claim of ownership challenged and how different laws at the time further problematized these notions.

Chapter Outlines

Each chapter analyzes the cultural production of works of serial fiction through the critical lenses of the theories detailed in the methodology subsection. Chapters are divided according to media of publication in order to better study the context behind the serialization of texts in each medium. Chapter 2 focuses on print (e.g. novels and literary magazines), chapter 3 centers on comics (e.g. comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels), and chapter 4 details the development of webcomics. These chapters historicize their specific media and explain how authors serialized their works within them. Since this dissertation studies narrative production and reception of serialized works of fiction, each chapter begins with a discussion of the different facets of the author-text-reader relationship. Chapter 2 delves into different theoretical strata

²⁶ In its simplest form, copyright is quite literally who has the rights to copy a work. These rights are awarded to the owner of the work (usually the author) at the onset of publication. The ability to copy any work, in whole or in part, for personal or business endeavors, is subject to these laws. This is not to be confused with trademark laws which are a completely different manner that exceeds the scope of this dissertation.

regarding the figure of the author, largely through Sean Burke's critiques of Barthes and Foucault. These contrasts between the author in the abstract and the author at a more human level showcase different levels as part of the analysis of the writers of serial fiction in print. Chapter 3 explores the foundations of the text through Wolfgang Iser's notion of narrative blanks juxtaposed with concept of the gutter within comics. Finally, Chapter 4 examines the reception of readers through Stanley Fish's concept of interpretive communities as readers of digital serial works become a more integral part of narrative production in this medium. What follows is an overview of the works of serial fiction that are investigated in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 focuses on the development of serial fiction in the print medium. It provides an overview of serial storytelling alongside the developments of printing technology since Gutenberg's printing press. One of the most famous novels of Western literature is Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and its less renowned sequel. However, many are unfamiliar with the events of how Cervantes was inspired to complete an additional installment of the novel of his titular knight because someone else had printed an apocryphal continuation of the story. I analyze how Cervantes asserts his authorial autonomy through the use of a true sequel which adds to the original story while repudiating the fake one. From there, I move on to Victorian literary magazines as the new standard in serial publishing practices. Authors like Charles Dickens had their stories divided into twenty installments and faced strict page counts and publication deadlines. In between each installment, authors and editors could use the feedback from their readership to adjust their storytelling. One of the most famous examples I analyze is Dickens desire to change the original fate of

Pip in his novel *Great Expectations*, partly due to the emotional connections that readers had made to the character. Furthermore, I study Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series in large part because serialization continued even after the eponymous detective had died. This led to the eventual revival of Holmes, one of the first examples of a continuing story trouncing the finality of death, a trope that has been used in serial storytelling ever since. Finally, as an example of contemporary print serials, I analyze J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series of books. These seven installments were published over the span of a decade but the narrative continues to grow even as publication has officially ceased. Rowling's authorial engagement with her readership allows for continued growth of the story through interviews and other interactions with her fans. Her state of authorship is such that anything she says, regardless of it being printed or not, is immediately considered as fact and canon within the *Harry Potter* narrative universe, aka the "Potterverse". The Potterverse contains the events of the seven primary novels, novels that take place in the same narrative universe though they are outside the main storyline, all of the backstories that are mentioned within them and explained in ancillary materials (like the *Pottermore* website), and the content of any possible future novels which are set in the same world.

Chapter 3 details how authors serialize graphic narratives, specifically within the realm of comics. Comics are divided into comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels. Each subdivision is analyzed historically with examples of some of their most famous serial works. For comic strips, I delve into the case of R.F. Outcault, one of the first comic strip cartoonists. He famously switched from one newspaper to another

while his comic strip *Hogan's Alley* was being serialized, which led to both newspapers continuing to print it. Years later, a major legal battle ensued with Outcault's *Buster Brown* comic under similar circumstances which led to further complexities regarding ownership and authorship. I then analyze how Bill Watterson, of *Calvin and Hobbes* fame, publicly criticized the state of comic strip publishing with his talk, "the Cheapening of Comics". To sum up, syndicates would serve as intermediaries between authors and newspapers and set the tone for what material would receive mainstream publication. The problem was that they not only charged a fee for their services but that they also wanted the ownership of the work, sometimes temporarily but other times permanently; thus dictating the terms of the market and controlling the narrative production of titles that the syndicates deemed best for business. Within comic books, I analyze the texts encompassing one of the most well-known characters of the last century, Superman. Originally created by Jerry Siegel and Joel Shuster in 1938, the adventures of this iconic hero have been serialized continuously for almost 80 years since then. And yet, in that time frame multiple people have been responsible for Siegel and Shuster's literary creation. I investigate this dynamic authorial identity as a point of disruption but also collaboration of narrative production, especially with the "Death and Return of Superman" story arc. Almost fifty installments were published for nearly a year (1992-1993) to show the demise and resurrection of Superman, but this story was written through different titles and teams of writers/artists. Different authors, even as they all work together in the same story, still leave an imprint and I study how these changes in textual fluidity affect the story. The long term author/reader/text relationship is one where the people

on both ends are changing, especially with a narrative that has been serialized for years or even decades, thus providing a setting for the study of how these variations affect the collective literary work over time. Authorial responses and reader reactions (measured by reviews and sales numbers) at crucial intervals in between story arcs show what (re)directions the story will take in the long term, leading to a proper analysis narrative production in this format. For graphic novels, I show how they do not need to follow the strict physical parameters of their comic counterparts. Serialization in this format is not as prevalent but authors are able to write their own stories, even as they add to the overall narrative universe of their companies; such is the case for Alan Moore's *Watchmen* and Frank Miller's *Dark Knight* series, both of which take place in the grand scheme of the DC mythos. Lastly, I explore how comic book storytelling can exist without the need for a strict chronological continuity. I examine the case Brian Klevinger and Scott Wegna, a writer and artist duo that show authorial autonomy outside of a large-scale publishing company through their work, *Atomic Robo*. Their style of narrative production demonstrates how writers can maintain narrative continuity without being burdened by the challenges previously faced by DC and Marvel.

Chapter 4 explains the history of webcomic publication and how its first authors started to publish their serial works there. Not only do webcomic cartoonists create and publish their work little by little but they also need to maintain and update the overall website. I analyze how new tools in this medium, like multimedia options, infinite canvas, and an accessible archive of all installments, are available for authors to use and how they affect narrative production. I focus my research on two works,

Rich Burlew's *The Order of the Stick* and Tarol Hunt's *Goblins: Life through Their Eyes*. Both of these webcomic started their serial runs over ten years ago and continue to this day. Burlew's and Hunt's authorial evolutions are well documented through the paratexts of the webcomic (like the forum and blog within the website) and author commentaries. These can be found in the print compilations of the webcomic (which in turn are serialized in the same style as graphic novels). For all the similarities both webcomics have, I study each author's work individually, alongside ancillary biographical texts, to highlight moments when serialization diverted from the usual. I pay close to attention to instances when the possibility that publication would be delayed or even halted as these show the reactions of both author and reader when the serialization was in danger of stopping. Burlew and Hunt, like many other authors in digital media, began publishing their stories serially with little to no prior professional writing/artistic experience but both found their ways. By following Burlew's and Hunt's authorial journey for more than a decade, readers and researchers witness two of the rare cases of digital authorship achieving critical and financial success slowly throughout this time frame. I analyze these economic factors alongside business models for webcomic publishing financial viability. Here, I pay close to attention to crowd funding platforms, like Kickstarter and Patreon, how they work, and the success and challenges that came with Burlew's and Hunt's forays into these services. Finally, I explore how the readerships' responses to the work go beyond reception performances and begin taking part of production performances, thus creating a more communal sense of authorship.

Chapter 2: From Cover to Cover:

Serial Fiction Print Publishing over the Years

Introduction

The authorial process of writing traditional novels within the medium of print is often considered the standard for narrative production. Through the study of ancillary paratextual materials, one can analyze the ways in which editors, publishers, and readers (hereafter referred to as nonauthorial agents) shape the finished product. Readers receive the finished text written by one author, as designated on the title page, but the feedback from nonauthorial agents has shaped the text in several cases. Serialized narratives are important because they foreground how nonauthorial agents shape the text by reacting to specific installments of it. Furthermore, engagements with the reader are often taken into consideration so that each individual part continues to be appealing throughout the serial publication process. This chapter provides a historical progression of some of the most well-renowned Western authors who have serialized their novels over time. These include Miguel de Cervantes and his *Don Quixote* novels, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock* series, and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* franchise. The study of these particular serialized narratives, alongside the paratextual elements that are written contemporaneously with their publication, support my argument that the serialization process makes the writing process more transparent as additional layers of authorial inclusion (within the author-editor-reader dynamic) become more evident throughout the publication of each part of the text.

Bourdieu explains that authorial autonomy allows an author/artist to create a text without the need to consider outside influences.

It is only in a literary and artistic field which has achieved a high degree of autonomy...that all those who mean to assert themselves as fully fledged members of the world of art, and above all those who claim to occupy the dominant positions in it, will feel the need to manifest their independence with respect to external powers, political or economic. Then, and only then, will indifference with respect to power and honours - even the most apparently specific, such as the Academie, or even the Nobel Prize - and distance with respect to the powerful and their values be immediately understood, and even respected, and therefore rewarded, and consequently those qualities will tend to impose themselves more and more forcefully as the practical maxims of legitimate conduct. (*The Rules of Art* 61)

According to Bourdieu, authors achieve a high authorial autonomy once they are able to write as a truly solitary endeavor and achieve their “independence” from “external powers” and influences. The counterpoint of a low level of authorial autonomy (as illustrated in Figure 1.1) is one in which authors create texts based on financial outcomes (projected or real) and positive receptions of their texts. Within the context of serialization, as seen with Bourdieu’s illustration in the previous chapter, these additional “political and/or economic powers” not only affect the narrative production of a text but are also more accessible to readers when critically analyzing serialized novels. This section of my dissertation examines examples of Bourdieu’s authorial autonomy throughout a historical examination of Cervantes, Dickens, Doyle, and

Rowling and how each of these case studies showcase the dynamic nature of the author-editor-reader relationship throughout the serialized text. Important interrelated points of this analysis include Bowers-Tanselle's shifts in authorial intention, Hesmondhalgh's call for media/marketing studies, and Shillingsburg's textual performances. Foregrounding this study is Sean Burke's analysis of authorship in *The Death and Return of the Author*, where he shifts the reinterpretation of the author by Barthes and Foucault towards a more humanistic perspective.

Burke delves through the works of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault to determine how each of these distinguished thinkers scrutinizes the concept of the author. Throughout his book, Burke analyzes how Barthes and Foucault in their landmark essays call for authorial intention to be removed from the interpretation of texts. However, Burke finds that these theorists look back in their other writings to the figure of the author in order to find meaning in the text.

For example in "Death of the Author", Roland Barthes famously made his eponymous decree. He believed that readers had a limited ability to interpret a text as the author was the sole source of meaning. The deification of the Author was such that critics like Barthes declared that the author must die so that the reader may ascend and different interpretations of the text can be brought forth. "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes 1324). With this transfer of interpretive power, individual readers could find meaning beyond the one that was intended by the

creator of the text. However, Burke explains that Barthes continues to write about the Author-God after his landmark essay:

Two balls must be kept up in the air: the author will return, but the death of the author must stand. The ingenious manner in which Barthes negotiates this problem is through recasting the relationship between author and critic in such a way that an authorial return does not impinge upon the idea of the birth of the reader. Thus the author will reappear as a desire of the reader's, a spectre, spirited back into existence by the critic himself. (28)

Burke's analysis of Barthes shows how, even as the reader has become empowered, the figure of the author can still be a part of the interpretation of the text. Reception performances are not based on authorial intent and yet it continues to be a commonly used tool when it comes to the study of a text²⁷.

Burke goes further in explaining how the empowerment of the readership does not entail a separation from the figure of the author. Drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin, Burke states how:

The author does not need to be God of epic monologism to be an author. Dostoevsky, he says, "creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but rather free people who are capable of standing beside their creator, of disagreeing with him, and even of rebelling against him." The renunciation of the author-God does not do away with the idea of authorship, nor impede the creativity of the author and intensity of his engagement with and within the text. (47)

²⁷ As a student and an educator, I have seen how historical context (through the figure of the author) has been consistently and effectively used to teach elements that would otherwise be glossed over when engaging with a text. For educators like myself, the author's life and time are not the only pillars of context used in the literary classroom but they are central elements in the understanding and teaching of literature.

With this in mind, the reader and the author can coexist as part of the interpretation of the text. The author as creator may no longer be the only foundation of meaning after critics like Barthes called for readers to engage with texts in their own way. However, the death of the Author does not remove the author him/herself from the understanding of the text. Authorial context and intention are (and continue to be) cornerstones of literary analysis both within academic critiques and general understanding of the text.

In addition to Barthes, the figure of the author as a form of meaning behind the text is well observed within Michel Foucault's essay, "What is an Author?". Here, Foucault's genealogical methodology of study looks to expand the concept of the author to mean more than the originator of just a text:

I have discussed the author only in the limited sense of a person to whom the production of a text, a book, or a work can be legitimately attributed. However, it is obvious that within the realm of discourse a person can be the author of much more than a book – of a theory, for instance, of a tradition or a discipline within which new books and authors can proliferate. For convenience, we could say that such authors occupy a "transdiscursive" position. (1485)

Foucault's extended definition of authorship extends the concept of creator not just to a literary work but to ideas and traditions as well. Burke adds that Foucault's extension suggests:

...[T]hat the principle of authorship exceeds the bounds of the body of texts which bear his name. Thus the idea of an author exercising a jurisdiction over his own texts has not only been accepted in principle but is seen as too narrow and restrictive in particular cases. (87)

This extended jurisdiction (and its defense) manifests through the writer's desire to assert his/her authorial autonomy over their works. With the narrative's content extending beyond the discourse encapsulated in one installment/document, the author's endeavors are segmented; allowing for more elements to potentially alter the serialized work. With these components in mind, this chapter details how this grander form of authorship translates to writers going beyond the narrative production of their texts to secure the right to publish and distribute documents of their work. These authorial undertakings manifest in the desire to protect their literary creations from others who wish to take advantage of popular characters and appropriate them in an unofficial manner in their own attempts at serial fiction.

The figure of the author becomes more complex once it is contextualized within the field of serialization. The singular author funnels the feedback of editors, publishers, and readers into the production of the next part of the text while being careful not to disrupt the previously published parts of the narrative. In the respite of the narrative's enforced interruptions, authors sift through the various reception performances to decide which ones will become part of the next installment. From the cacophony of reactions, it is the author who chooses which voices to incorporate into his/her own continued production of his/her serialized work. To study this process, readers may in turn go through the different responses by these nonauthorial agents to filter which parts of the narrative may not originate specifically from the text's "author" but rather one of the many producers who commented on it. This notion of authorship in serialization complicates Barthes's death of the singular "Author," as the

writing/creation of a text is a collaborative effort through the dynamic relationship between authors, editors/publishers, and readers.

The narrative production of these stories places greater importance on how the story is divided in installments. Proper narrative pacing is essential in ensuring that each part is self-contained while still motivating the reader to look forward to eventual sequels. Narrative closure becomes deferred until the final installment is published. Furthermore, the difficulties in starting the process of publication are magnified. The gatekeepers of publication (i.e. editors and publishing houses) judge each installment individually (or through the promise of the series being well received) as each part hits the shelves. The economic viability of publication extends throughout the serialization process as sequels are prepared later on or with the text being divided into a definite number of installments. Authors modify their narrative productions to ensure that each part will be a good narrative investment for readers and publishers until serialization is completed²⁸. However, the finale of a story may become uprooted as new writers can take hold of one's literary creations and continue the serialization process. The transfer of authorship/ownership of texts and characters can be achieved through a proper acquisition or once the original story becomes part of the public domain years later²⁹. New writers may continue to develop events surrounding characters that are not their own, leading to a greater awareness of the initial author's original work.

²⁸ A non-serialized text with uninteresting chapters can still be a great read but one whose installments are hit or miss may have readers lose interest and publishers shut the door on the continued publication of installments.

²⁹ Works and characters within the public domain can be used by any author without limitation. This is why there are a myriad of different versions of classic characters in contemporary publications, such as the case with the characters of Don Quixote and Sherlock Holmes which are explained later on in this chapter. The current system (at least within the United States) has all works published prior to 1923 within the public domain. Works published afterwards normally become free to use 70 years after the death of the author. More info on the subject can be found here: <http://copyright.cornell.edu/resources/publicdomain.cfm>

I. The Development of Printed Documents

The transition from work, to text, to document echoes the process that stems from the initial creative performances until publication (as explained in Chapter 1). Authors who wish for their authorial endeavors to be witnessed by others may show the final version of their text (or a circulating draft) to interested readers through different media. Thanks to the current era of technology, documents can be easily shared through email, uploading the material to a website, or by simply taking a picture with one's phone and sending it via SMS³⁰. Digital documents can be distributed as part of a large-scale publication with ease. This almost instantaneous form of publishing differs vastly with the process that early authors faced. Prior to commercial printing presses, analogue reproduction required that the first written text be copied by hand. Until another physical copy is completed, the writer's manuscript serves as both text and document. In order for the work to be distributed as a large-scale publication, multiple copies needed to be manufactured; a process that requires others to take on Shillingsburg's production performance of publishing the work.

Jeremy Norman explains that the process of creating additional documents was done by hand from the height of the Roman Empire throughout Medieval times:

[T]he medieval economic model of manuscript book production had changed little since Roman times, except that Romans sometimes used slaves, rather than monks or paid scribes and illuminators, to produce manuscript books.

Both the Roman and medieval process usually involved the production of manuscript copies of texts one at a time and to order. It has been suggested that

³⁰ SMS stands for "short message service" and it encompasses standard text messages as well as different forms of messaging apps.

when several copies of an identical text were ordered, groups of scribes, working in the same room, might have copied out multiple copies of the same text from dictation, especially in the ancient world when it is thought that all reading, or nearly all reading, was done aloud. (“Economic Aspects of Book Production and Bookselling”)

The system of dictating and having slaves and monks writing the content was the closest to mass production in Europe prior to the technological advancements that came during the Renaissance. Norman goes on to explain how the transition from monastic development to private sector printing meant a change in the economics of publication at the time:

In classical antiquity, before the production of books moved out of the private sector into monasteries during the Middle Ages, usually a bookseller would receive an order for a text from a client and hire a scribe to copy it out, an artist to produce images if required, and a binder to produce a cover if the book was in codex form.

... Later, in the early thirteenth century, after book production moved mostly out of monasteries back into the private sector, by producing mainly to order, medieval book producers shifted the capital cost to the buyer, who paid for the costly materials in advance, and presumably paid for the labor either in advance or as the manuscript was completed. ...

Printing required a different economic model, in which the capital costs and concomitant risks were shifted to the printer. (“Economic Aspects of Book Production and Bookselling”)

The production of documents requires a large investment due to the temporal and economic costs of reproducing documents. These costs are passed down to the reader, which led to limited accessibility to texts as they were quite expensive for most readers throughout history. With few documents available and high costs of purchase, reading and literacy remained a privilege of the few for a long period of time. It is not until advances in the technology of mechanical reproduction that large-scale publications can become commonplace as the production of documents can be done (and continues to be) cheaper and faster over time.

In the 1440s, Johannes Guttenberg improved on the printing technologies of the time to make a press with movable type. Originally a goldsmith, Gutenberg used his familiarity with metal and machinery to develop a mechanical printing press that worked quickly and effectively. Other machines and techniques existed at the time but none were as efficient or as reliable as this new technology. As the renowned Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle said: “He who first shortened the labor of copyists by device of movable types was disbanding hired armies, and cashiering most kings and senates, and creating a whole new democratic world: he had invented the art of printing” (151). Gutenberg had indeed revolutionized the concept and art of printing. However, it is important to note that his invention did not immediately make the economic side of printing viable at its increasing rates. John Feather notes that:

[Gutenberg] was not only the first printer, he was the first printer to go bankrupt. It was not until the 1480s that printing was established on a sound commercial and financial basis. Printing was ultimately successful not simply because it represented a technical advance on copying by scribes, but because

it became available at a time and in a place where it was economically, socially, and politically desirable. ... The printing press was an agent of change because it was to play an important role in the society in which it was invented and from whose needs it had been developed. (17)

While many point to Gutenberg's press as one of the starting points of the European Renaissance, Feather instead posits that it was because society was ready for this technology and an increase of literary documents that printing rose to prominence. By the early 1500s, different machines across Europe emulated Gutenberg's machinery and more than 20 million volumes of documents were printed (Febvre 58). Hence, improvements in printing technology continuously led to more effective and less costly publishing practices. The potential for readers to have access (and even own) the documents pertaining to the text rose; authors had the possibility for their stories to reach a massive audience as printing presses and publishing houses became more prominent.

The development of Gutenberg's printing press helped the process of making a book become a large-scale operation. Multiple copies of a text could be completed at a fraction of the time and cost compared to previous methods of publication. Authors could reach a larger audience and the economic hurdles towards becoming a reader had been lowered. A copy of a particular title was no longer one of a kind and as print lost its rarity, readers could now access the same text through different individual documents. With books becoming more common, the practicality of learning to read and write rose, which led to higher literacy rates and thus a potentially larger readership (Roser and Ortiz-Ospina). Print publishing had led to a new era of literature

and is one of the figurative landmarks of the Renaissance. As publishing now lead to a more widespread potential readership, authors could expand their stories to go beyond one installment.

II. Serialization and Storytelling over Time

A serialized text encompasses “a continuing story over an extended period of time with enforced interruptions” (Hughes and Lund 1). The story itself can be told for “an extended period of time” from its onset until the author has reached the work’s narrative conclusion. However, it is important to note that even though the story (from beginning to end) can take years or even decades to conclude, this does not mean that audiences have been engaging with the text throughout all that time. Each individual installment is published over time at varying rates of publication depending on the author and other circumstances³¹. Thus, over the period of a decade, one can find multiple variations of how many installments are published of different serialized texts: Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (two from 1605 to 1615), J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (seven books from 1997-2007), *Superman* comic books (520 issues over any ten year period), Rich Burlew’s *Order of the Stick* (921 installments from its start in 2003 until its 10 year anniversary³²), to name a few. Each of the above examples is explained throughout this dissertation.

One of the most well-known examples of serial storytelling can be found in *One Thousand and One Nights* (otherwise known as *Arabian Nights*). The plot

³¹ One story can be told over an extended period of time but the narrative lull that exists between enforced interruptions (measured by rate of publication) can vary significantly with each text. This time rate is measured between moments of publication. Multiple factors can prevent a reader from engaging with the subsequent parts of a serialized text once each installment is published.

³² The comic is still ongoing and (at the time of this writing) contains over one thousand installments.

revolves around Sultan Shahryar³³, who has taken to marrying young women and then ordering their execution the next morning. Scheherazade, an intelligent young woman, volunteers to be his next wife, fully knowing the fate that awaited her. During her wedding night, Scheherazade begins to tell the sultan a story, only to stop at a critical juncture. However, she promises to continue the story the next night. By piquing the sultan's curiosity, her life was prolonged with each nightly installment of her narrative. She continued doing as such for the eponymous number of days while the sultan slowly fell in love with her. The final passage of this text reads:

The sultan [sic] of the Indies could not but admire the memory of his sultaness, who had now for a thousand and one nights, entertained him with these agreeable stories. Her beauty, her courage, her patriotism in exposing her life to his unreasonable revenge, had long since obtained for her the possession of his heart. He determined to renounce a vow so unworthy of him; and summoning his council, he declared to them his resolution, and ordered the sultaness to be considered as the deliverer of the many virgins, who, but for her, would have been sacrificed to his unjust resentment.

The news of his happy event soon spread abroad, and gained the charming

Scheherazade the blessings of all the large empire of the Indies. (Conclusion)

In the end, Scheherazade's storytelling and use of narrative pacing delayed the sultan's wrath until his perception of this captive author changed. Such moments are known as cliffhangers³⁴ due to the suspense of the fate of the characters. Each cliffhanger served

³³ In other versions, Shahryar is referred to as a king.

³⁴ One of the first and most literal cliffhangers occurred in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* by Thomas Hardy. One installment ends with Mr. Knight hanging on for dear life just after saving his love interest Elfride. She saves him in the next installment by using makeshift rope to pull him to safety.

as a stay of execution with no guarantee that positive reception performances toward the serialized stories could keep her alive indefinitely. Scheherazade's literal continued survival with each installment echoes the authorial endeavors of those who write serial fiction, concerned that one bad part can ruin the whole narrative's future.

Foucault uses the example of Scheherazade's serialized narration to show "the kinship between writing and death". He explores how storytelling finds the demise of the writer, contrary to the Greek epic which has heroes accepting an early death though being later immortalized through narratives.

In a different sense, Arabic stories, *The Arabian Nights* in particular, had as their motivation, their theme and pretext, this strategy for defeating death.

Storytellers continued their narratives late into the night to forestall death and to delay the inevitable moment when everyone must fall silent. Scheherazade's story is a desperate inversion of murder; it is the effort, throughout all those nights, to exclude death from the circle of existence. ... Where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains the right to kill, to become the murder of its author. ("What Is an Author?" 1477)

Foucault's use of death as a theme within writing shows the uneasy moment of authorship leading eventually to silence once the story is over. With no more narrative to tell, the author fades only to be summoned by the reader in critiquing the text or should the author publish another work. Taken to a larger extent, the serialization process allows for the continued survival of the author within the context of one text. An ongoing authorship, as exemplified with Scheherazade, remains relevant to the reader as parts of the narrative have not yet come to light. Readers may not take into

consideration authorial intention in their interpretation of the text but during the serialization of a story the author's importance and livelihood (metaphorically and financially) survives until the next part. So long as there is a willing storyteller, an incomplete narrative, and an interested audience, the author-text-reader relationship continues until one of these elements is no longer sustainable. Until that moment arrives, the author staves off his/her death, figuratively and (in Scheherazade's case especially) literally.

One Thousand and One Nights serves as an example of serial storytelling at a rate of one installment per night. While the work itself was not published serially, Scheherazade as the narrator performed each part to her audience of one in a serial manner. Some of the stories would span a few nights while some of the more renowned ones, like the story of "Aladdin", took over two months to complete. The individual stories themselves are not part of the same continuity or even interconnected. Thus, they are a part of an episodic collection of short stories told serially rather than one overarching narrative that spans all the installments in question. The key trait however is Scheherazade's use of pausing the narrative at just the right moment to leave her husband wanting more of the story. Tales would stop at dramatic instances and even mid conversation at different moments, allowing enough curiosity to build and ensure her survival for another night. The sultan's reception performance of desiring to hear the remainder of the story allowed both the narrative and its author to survive for another installment. With no knowledge of how long the sultan would keep being interested in her stories, Scheherazade had to make sure to have another part (or another story altogether) ready to start and pause indefinitely.

Without a predetermined number of installments expected beforehand, the serialization process could go on ostensibly for years without end so long as Scheherazade could continue providing entertaining narrative content and the sultan chose to keep listening. For contemporary producers of serial narratives, so long as the author can keep the story going and a supportive audience exists then the story can extend until a literal death of the author occurs³⁵.

Scheherazade's narrative techniques are the quintessential example of serialization and storytelling done over time, which in turn has influenced authors and their narrative production for those who wish to follow this authorial path. In this chapter, I analyze the circumstances behind the serialization of renowned classical and popular works of literature. The first case study is that of Miguel de Cervantes and his famed work, *Don Quixote*, a novel from the 1600s that was officially serialized by him and unofficially by other authors. From there, I trace how literary magazines, specifically within Victorian England provide a different avenue and model for serial fiction publishing. Specifically, I scrutinize how Charles Dickens in *Great Expectations* and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his *Sherlock Holmes* series alter the endings of their stories to better accommodate their readerships. Finally, I study the case of J.K. Rowling and her *Harry Potter* series as an example of contemporary print publishing and the challenges taken on her authorial rags to riches journey.

III. Don Quixote and Its Sequels

Miguel de Cervantes is one of the most renowned authors in Spain and the world. Born in 1547, this soldier turned author wrote only five novels, some of which

³⁵ The serial process can extend itself further than the lifespan of the author should another writer continue writing in his/her stead. Official and unofficial continuations to the narrative normally result in complex legal conflicts. Examples of such texts having a succession of authors are explained later on.

were serialized³⁶. While there are no surviving ancillary documents detailing the initial reception of his serialized texts, shifts in authorial intention can still be observed between one installment and the next, especially in his most famous work, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* (or *Don Quixote*³⁷ for short) and its sequel. The inclusion of these novels is an important part of this study as they demonstrate how Cervantes was able to correct the errors of his first installment through a subsequent part in addition to the dispelling other authors attempting to usurp his characters and narrative. Cervantes's reactionary urge to correct and exert autonomy over the text demonstrates a model for serial authorship that other writers will draw from as they incorporate retroactive continuity in their own narrative production and foreshadows the eventual literary battles to retain the sole rights of one's characters and stories.

This masterpiece shows the adventures and misadventures of an old man driven mad by tales of chivalric romance, which make him believe he is a knight errant. Taking the peasant, Sancho Panza as his squire, the eponymous protagonist sets out to fight imaginary monsters and right the believed wrongs of the countryside for his beloved Dulcinea. The book ends with Don Quixote's family and friends from his old life conspiring to make him believe he has been enchanted after a failed battle with a "giant". Our protagonist is then taken back to his home in a wooden cage and begins to acclimate to a more normal livelihood, though he assures us that more adventures may yet come. Cervantes leaves his protagonist with a thirst for heroism not yet

³⁶ *La Galatea* was originally published in six books. *Novelas Ejemplares*, which is more a collection of stories than a full-fledged novel, was originally published from 1590 to 1612.

³⁷ The original Spanish spelling of Quixote is "Quijote". For the sake of uniformity, I refer to the text and the character by the English spelling though other scholars use the original version.

quenched and hints that more tales of this character are worth telling. From there, he undertakes the narrative production of writing a sequel alongside other texts he wished to complete. Plans to publish this sequel were delayed as Cervantes completed his other novels; leaving readers to wonder if they would ever find out what happened next. However, any doubts in his plans to potentially not write the remaining exploits of his hero were quelled when another text tries to take its narrative place.

A supposed sequel of *Don Quixote* appears in 1614 that continues telling the tales of the knight errant, which Cervantes denies as his own work immediately. The apocryphal sequel was signed by Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda, the pseudonym of a still unknown author. The new story (aka *Avellaneda's Quixote*) turned the tragic hero into a bumbling buffoon, stumbling across the countryside from one awkward situation into another. By the end, every character that has encountered Don Quixote and Sancho Panza believe them to be fools and failures. They both return to their village in shame and disgrace but believing that perhaps another adventure can turn out differently³⁸. James Iffland believes that Avellaneda's writing serves as a complex reception performance that reflects the mindset of the average reader engaging with Cervantes's original text (72). With few if any surviving historical records of the time, one cannot really be sure of the critical and/or financial successes of Cervantes's *Quixote* or that of Avellaneda's. However, the apocryphal sequel motivated Cervantes in the development and publication of the official second installment; as well as spur the imagination of other writers who wished to continue the titular knight's adventures.

³⁸ The Avellaneda sequel is effectively one of the first forms of fanfiction of a major literary work.

Cervantes, upon hearing of this supposed sequel reaching his readership, decided to take matters into his own hands. His reaction to this unofficial continuation of his text shows how his authorial autonomy becomes diminished, as his authorial creation—the “official” Don Quixote—has been stolen by another author. Under Bourdieu’s guidelines, then, Cervantes’s authorial autonomy becomes lowered as he incorporates the existence of this un(author)ized installment in order to disown and disavow Avellaneda’s attempt at coercing his narrative. In this analysis, the clamor of an audience eagerly awaiting Cervantes’s sequel serves as the reader reception to the overall text—in place of the epistolary and digital communications between author, editor/publisher, and reader explicated within the other case studies in this chapter. Avellaneda’s version also becomes an extended reception and response to Cervantes’s novel, as well as a literary placeholder for the official serialization of the text to a readership anticipating the next part of Don Quixote’s story. The unauthorized edition, in this case, stands in for the reader response that shapes other serialized narratives.

Cervantes, who had already written the majority of the second installment³⁹, was further motivated due to these outside factors to complete and conclude his narrative. Additionally, he made sure to kill off his character so that no other writer could use Don Quixote again⁴⁰. In 1615, a full decade after the original was published but only one year since the dubious sequel was released, *The Second Part of The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* (aka *Don Quixote II*)) made its way to print. The official second part provided a proper and final ending to this narrative,

³⁹ Evidence for this realization late into the writing process can be surmised by the fact that the novel mentions the Avellaneda tales (outside of the introduction) during the final third of the text.

⁴⁰ Because Cervantes’s work now fall under the public domain, any author can instill Don Quixote as a character in his/her work but cannot stop others from doing so in turn.

especially since Cervantes died shortly afterwards. This sequel fell short from the original's literary and cultural success but it did help the author make some corrections to his first book through the brilliant use of metaliterary awareness with his characters. The sequel's prologue contains a direct exchange from the part of Cervantes to the reader where he (as author) confirms the existence of the Avellaneda sequel. Darío Fernández-Morera explains that Cervantes takes this moment to speak not as an author but as a reader and critic of his own work and that of the apocryphal addition to his narrative. "[Cervantes] is not content with starting a discussion between himself and the reader; nor does he want us to remain mere spectators of his clash with Avellaneda; so he turns the reader into a *correveidile*⁴¹, into a tale-bearer in Cervantes' feud with his enemy" (410). Cervantes then says that he bears no ill will towards this would be author by acknowledging how powerful the temptation of fame and fortune through authorship can be. With this message out of the way, Cervantes sets the stage for the proper sequel and ending to his narrative; as well as foreshadowing the direct references and critiques of the text that should never have been written.

The sequel begins with Don Quixote having regained his sanity only to return to his delusions of knighthood once Sancho visits him with news of a book which contains all of their previous exploits (said text is the original one by Cervantes). They find Sanson Carrasco, a university student and fan of their literary adventures, who convinces the knight to don his armor once more. With renewed vigor, Don Quixote becomes a knight errant once again and Sancho follows along with the hopes of

⁴¹ A literal translation to this term is "run and tell him", which turns the reader into a messenger that must make haste in spreading this information.

obtaining governorship of an island, as he was promised long ago. Near the end of the second part, the two protagonists find that more adventures of them had been written but these were completely fabricated and not well liked (this being the Avellaneda version). In this manner, Cervantes uses his sequel to provide corrections to his first text while discrediting the other story. The characters, rather than the author, are the ones to clarify previous points and disavow the apocryphal sequel as a complete lie. Thus, Cervantes asserts his ownership over the *Don Quixote* text and characters; while affirming how all further attempts by others to use his characters should be ignored by readers and publishers alike. Through the serialization of a second installment, Cervantes officially completes the narrative of his Don Quixote while disenfranchising the Avellaneda version.

The sequel also provided Cervantes with an opportunity to set the record straight on his own story. This editing of previous points in the narrative through corrections in subsequent installments is a prime example of retroactive continuity, or “retcon” for short. Retcons (as explained in the previous chapter) allow authors to continue the progression of the narrative without having to amend the former content in a later edition of the document. This technique is prominently used by authors working in other forms of serial fiction publishing, especially in comic books (which will be discussed at length in the next chapter). For Cervantes, questioning and correcting past parts of his story are done quite literally as the first installment exists a work of nonfiction within the expanding narrative universe. For example, when Don Quixote and Sancho first met Sanson Carrasco, their admirer asked about the inconsistencies in the book version of their adventures. One famed error from the first

installment involved Sancho's mule being stolen but then having both characters ride off on their selective mounts by the next page. This was explained by Don Quixote stating that the apparent scribe had been mistaken. Other issues were also clarified throughout the various conversations the heroes had with other characters that had knowledge of their prior adventures and asked similar questions. Cervantes uses the sequel to identify and correct the errors of his first book as he amends them from narrative existence without touching the first documents. However, it is also worth noting that for this sequel to still have narrative relevancy, the first part must remain flawed even as new editions have been published throughout the years. The original primary work continues to be imperfect or else various plot points from the second novel would have to be edited and removed. Cervantes's retcon paved the way for the possibility of a story being partly fixed or even rewritten after initial publication through subsequent parts. Authors have the potential to retcon through serialization, and have these changes retconned as well later on with the next part, which leads to their work remaining in a narrative flux that could always be altered with another future installment. Retcons transform the editing process of serialized texts and other authors who use a similar methodology to amend their works accordingly.

Cervantes could have (in theory) continued to write stories with Don Quixote through the use of prequels or perhaps having Sancho take on the role of a knight errant regardless of his protagonist's fate at the end of the second book. However, the narrative conclusion of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* was further cemented with the passing of its author a year after its publication. And yet, this would not be the last time that the character of Don Quixote would appear in a story as other authors considered

making their own unofficial continuations of Cervantes's novel but were dissuaded for a time. Nevertheless, the fame of Cervantes's character grew so much that other writers made their own versions of the story. A French translation of both official parts of *Don Quixote*, by Filleau du Saint-Martin, contains an additional third part of the story which was written by the translator. He erased the knight's death from the story and instead wrote his own sequel of even more adventures (Gonzalez 223). This version has a rather abrupt ending due in large part to Saint-Martin's untimely death. Robert Challe would continue these adventures with another sequel that is not part of the official *Don Quixote* narrative universe. Much like the Avellaneda version, Saint-Martin/Challe depend on Cervantes's past narrative for their own sequel to mesh within the serialization of the overall story. These unofficial narrative additions further complicate Tanselle's concepts of work, text, and document as multiple authors write their own version of additional installments to *Don Quixote*, rather than a full retelling⁴². Other regional continuations and imitations followed suit over the years as different authors tried to write their own take on the character or made their own quixotic protagonists. Theatrical presentations of *Don Quixote* that performed parts of the original with new scenes and adventures were produced in Spain and abroad shortly after the death of Cervantes and continued over the years⁴³. Current

⁴² By today's standards, only the original author has the autonomy to continue the serialization of a text and any authors that attempt to write sequels may face legal troubles for their attempts to publish off the ideas of others. One interesting example can be found with John David California (pen name for Fredrik Colting) who wrote, *60 Years Later, Looking through the Rye*, the unofficial sequel to J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Salinger, who is quite reclusive about his works and his life, sued to stop the publication of this unauthorized sequel within the U.S. and Canada, though the book is available for purchase elsewhere. More info on this case can be found here:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/02/books/02salinger.html?_r=0

⁴³ The most well-known American reinterpretation is the *Man of la Mancha* musical by Dale Wasserman, with lyrics by Michel Leigh, and music by Joe Darion. It technically serves as an authorial

reincarnations of the character and the story can be authored the world over thanks to the work's consideration as public domain within contemporary copyright laws.

The fame of *Don Quixote* the novel and Don Quixote the character inspired countless adventures by other writers. While some texts purport to be continuations of the original story, the texts themselves do not become part of the original's narrative continuity. For all the attempts to change the original and make it fit within the installments written by other authors, only Cervantes's retcons amend the official narrative accordingly. Still, these authors provided more adventures of the celebrated knight, something which readerships across centuries and all over the globe continue to read and enjoy this day.

IV. The Victorian Serials

Cervantes's case provides a classic example of print serial publishing; wherein the author writes one installment and decides later on to add another part to the text. However, serial fiction remained a rarity in Western literary publishing as evident by the low number of printed serialized works prior to the 1800s. It was not until the 19th century when serialization became a viable format for authors to produce their narratives. Printing technologies had reached a point where multiple publications could be made by authors and purchased by readers at regular intervals. But the arrangement of the narrative had taken on a different shape than the format seen with *Don Quixote*. Rather than having a stand-alone text with possible additions published later on, authors were designing stories that were divided into parts from its onset.

prequel to the main work where Cervantes is explaining a draft of his novel and acting it out while being imprisoned by the Spanish Inquisition.

Narrative production of serial fiction prior to this shift was centered on the author's endeavors towards creating a finished work encompassing one document. A sequel to the story was a rarity and its future date of publication was unknown to readers (and even the author) until it was ready. Publishers in the 19th century developed a new formula for publication that reshaped serial fiction. Readers would only receive a fraction of a text at a time, knowing full well that more parts would be published later on. The rate of publication and the amount of installments was fixed so there was no sense of mystery as to how much of the narrative remained to be told. In the moments between publication, readers had the chance to further analyze each part of the story. "The time between installments in serial literature gave people the opportunity to review events with each other, to speculate about plot and characters, and to deepen ties to their imagined world" (Hughes and Lund 10). This temporal gap allowed for more nuanced and communal reception performances by readers. The fairly quick rate of publication structured the narrative as well as the reading of the text, something that previous forms of serialization did not accomplish.

With this textual structure in mind, publishers required a more controlled and disciplined narrative production from their authors, which left writers with little literary room for maneuvering. Editors had a requisite amount of pages per installments and a preset number of installments at a precise rate of publication. Authors were under a strict contract; the most common one consisting of 19-20 installments of a set number of pages at a given interval, i.e. weekly, monthly, etc. Each part of the story would be sent in advance to the editors of the publication who would suggest potential revisions, and rewrites had to be resubmitted, all before the

upcoming deadline of every installment. The stern limit for pages was not a direct indicator of content since authors were still free to pad⁴⁴ their narratives with additional descriptions when plot necessary material for a given installment was insufficient. The reverse situation of having information be rushed was also a problem during plot critical chapters as they could not go beyond their page limits. These outside factors further limited the freedom and autonomy that authors had to have their serial stories printed according to the standards of the publishing practices of the time (or not at all). The reason for these limits was due to the fact that many of these works of serial fiction at the time were not published on their own. Rather than the narrative having the document to itself in its entirety, it now had to share space within the covers of a literary magazine.

The composition of a literary magazine from that time can best be described as a smorgasbord of all things available in print⁴⁵. The average magazine provided content that spanned local news, poetry, advertisements, interviews, and (perhaps) most famously, installments of serial fiction. Authors who wished to publish their work serially had to follow these uncompromising guidelines for their texts to find a way unto this all-encompassing document. Readers had access to works of fiction, nonfiction, prose, poetry, and details surrounding their current lives. Thus, publishers did not have to design content for a niche readership and authors hoped that this wide ranging audience could find their works as part of their engagement with the

⁴⁴ Narrative filler is incredibly subjective amongst authors, editors, critics, and fans. What one may consider to be unnecessary details may well be important material for another with no real way of discerning its value.

⁴⁵ A cursory look at the index of literary magazines shows how varied the material that this document can have. The first volume of *Bentley's Miscellany* traverses the literary gamut, as one can observe here. <https://archive.org/stream/bentleysmiscell07unkngoog#page/n11/mode/2up>

magazine. A well-received serialized novel would later be printed as its own singular document after the final installment was published with the hope that a significant part of the magazine's overall readership would purchase the story in its new form. Thus, authorship and readership connects through a two tiered serialization of the text, first through the magazine and then as a standalone novel⁴⁶.

What made literary magazines so distinctive was the variety of material contained within. Multiple stories were serialized by different authors conterminously so that even as one narrative was coming to a close another would start up. With so much content available, the selling point of the magazine was no single element, which meant that even if a high number of purchases were made, this did not equal just as many readers for any single author. Accessibility to earlier installments of the story was tied to the previous issues of the literary magazine, which for all its content was still a periodical and not intended for long term keeping⁴⁷. Even with only twenty installments total, authors were weary of producing a story so complicated that it could have a negative reception performance. As with all forms of serial storytelling, the more installments are published, the harder it is for readers to jump into the story with minimal confusion. This dilemma of advancing the narrative while still keeping the story accessible to new readers is a predicament that continues to this day in all forms of serial fiction, as detailed in further sections of this study. With limited accessibility to prior installments found in older documents, readers faced an uphill

⁴⁶ A contemporary example of this form of double serial storytelling is found in television, where episodes of a program can be seen one at a time and/or through a DVD containing an entire season. This practice is also common with comic books being reprinted as graphic novels or omnibus editions, as explained in Chapter 3.

⁴⁷ Readers who could not find physical copies of these documents would have to settle for retellings by other readers to understand previous events until another edition of the text was possibly published later on.

climb if they wanted to engage with a serialized text that was already underway in its publication.

The ideal scenario for serialization is one where readers have been receptive to the narrative since the onset of publication and continue to engage with each installment until its conclusion. However, as explained before, not all readers start reading from the beginning and not everyone who starts continues until the end. For the latter group, authors attempt to be entertaining enough through a dynamic story that would keep the audience wanting more. One common practice to hook one's audience was to end an installment before a plot point in question would be concluded, thus enticing readers to purchase the next part and find out what happens next. Some of the more common ways to end installments include: marriage proposals, revelations of pregnancies, shocking secrets, uncertain life or death circumstances, and the untimely death of a character, a character presumed dead is actually alive, to name a few⁴⁸.

One of the more famous cliffhangers of Victorian literature came with the serialization of Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Marcia Eaton explains how the finale of the novel proceeded to break the collective hearts of its readership. The protagonist, Little Nell, had been sick (thanks in part to her constant struggles) and the narrative was pointing towards a miraculous recovery or a tragic end by its final installment. Readers wished to learn the character's fate from other readers before engaging with the text themselves. Anxious readers clogged New York Harbor when

⁴⁸ It is important to note that cliffhangers can exist in texts that are not serialized though the temporal factor of having to wait until the next installment is available adds to the dramatic effect of reading. There's a big difference between waiting for weeks, months, or even years between one installment and another and having to turn a few pages to discover what happens next.

the upcoming installment reached American soil and famously clamored, “Is little Nell dead?”. Nell’s depleting health had been part of the dramatic tension of the novel and in the end she did not survive. The final scene minced no words: “She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life; not one who has lived and suffered death ... Dear, gentle, patient, noble Nell was dead” (Dickens 640).

In the case of readers waiting at the docks, resolving the mystery of the cliffhanger has priority over the actual purpose of purchasing and engaging with the text. The reception performance of that anxious readership yearning for the answer did not necessarily translate into a purchase of that magazine. The problem with the creative and production performance of designing a narrative that creates twists with every installment is that one of these cliffhangers may be a wrong turn. The story may become too dramatic or just sensational for sensationalism’s sake, potentially alienating part of your readership. Hearing the fate of a character, like Little Nell, prior to a purchase/reading could mean that the reader stops interacting with that text for that installment and then possibly for the remainder of the story. Thus, the chain of serialization becomes severed and its continuation from beginning to end is broken at one of these junctures. The story may continue to be told but part of the readership may decide to no longer follow the narrative path the author has outlined.

With these factors in mind, we find that the balance between steady and sudden changes in the story is one of the main challenges in creating a dynamic narrative with enforced interruptions. The production performance of pausing the story

at crucial moments, just like how Scheherazade did to save her life, made it so that readers would be interested in what happens next. But to continue the analogy, any one of the many cliffhangers throughout the *One Thousand and One Nights* could have incited an emotional reception performance in the sultan for which curiosity was no longer enough and Scheherazade's life would end⁴⁹. Luckily, large-scale productions of serialized works are aimed at a mass appeal to the readership, rather than satisfying any one individual reader. A winding narrative path may lose some readers along the way, but as long as enough of them continue to purchase installments, the story's publication will remain economically viable. These cliffhangers became a staple of serial authorship and continue to be utilized by authors to entice the audience to keep coming back for the next part.

The publication of serial fiction began for many stories within literary magazines but they were not limited to these documents. Some of the more popular texts of the time were republished almost immediately following their original run and could now be found as three volume novels. This format reshaped the spatial boundaries of the physical text while still having a separation of the documents. In turn, this creates a secondary serial run of the text, though one where the initial narrative pauses between installments had dwindled from 19 to two. While the waiting period had been erased (as all three volumes are published simultaneously), the author's desire to sell all of the volumes still made the strategic cliffhanger important. Publishers continued to require specific amounts of pages per volume which meant

⁴⁹ For example, many television programs purposefully construct their season finales around cliffhangers with the hope that enough curiosity will get viewers interested and network executives will continue airing the program. However, this is not always successful endeavor and there are many stories that have ended without reaching a proper narrative conclusion.

that the text had to take a certain form. Novels that were originally published serially in twenty parts now had to be separated in thirds. Authors whose stories were not initially serialized faced similar struggles to fit into these publication molds. Katherine Saunders details how Charlotte Brontë encountered many challenges from publishers to get her novels published. It is with these publication standards in mind that she:

... [W]rote *Jane Eyre* with meticulous care to meet the word and page count of a triple-decker novel. She measured her sheets of paper and most likely drew guidelines on her writing surface, so even and clean are the pages of her manuscript. She meticulously wrote by hand the same number of words per line and the same number of lines on each manuscript page, so that she could confidently anticipate how long the narrative would be when set in type. (82)

Brontë's painstaking narrative production was done to ensure that her novel would be published according to the guidelines of the publishing house. By following these parameters, Brontë was able to determine the end point of each volume and ensured that proper cliffhangers were placed at the end of the first and second documents. Saunders quotes Barbara Heritage in her assertion that, "Instead of letting a publisher arbitrarily divide her work into three parts, Brontë, true to form, determined the breaks herself" (82). Brontë's production performances of controlling the content of each page uniformly and meticulously ensured that her novel would be published but also that her narrative would not be haphazardly broken to fit into the three volume mold. By being aware of the standards and practices of print publishing and publishers of the time, Brontë maintained the integrity of her text regardless of the document it would later inhabit, something that not all authors of the time kept in mind. These issues

between authors, editors, and publishers regarding the specificities of the medium of publication are even more complex in the realm of comics (Chapter 3) and almost nonexistent in digital publishing (Chapter 4).

After the original magazine runs (and after the three volume versions were printed), single volume editions of initially serialized works were published and the full story would be accessible from cover to cover in one document. The transition between editions allowed writers and editors to come together once again in order to revise the text in favor of a more authoritative one. Previous rounds of editing, prior to the onset of publication, had already helped shape the abstract work into the text; fitting the rigid borders of serialized installments within the original document of publication. Without the original publishing restrictions, the form and content of the text could be altered as part of this new publication, though the original cliffhangers would be remediated as part of chapter breaks. George Thomas Tanselle distinguishes that there are two types of editing: horizontal and vertical (*The Editorial Problem* 193). Horizontal edits refer to changes in grammar and punctuation, which help editors hone the author's message without imposing their own intention. On the other hand, vertical edits change the direction of the work and show the editor's intention rather than the authors'.

Without the strict page counts of chapters and installments, authors were able to shorten and lengthen their content in this new format to better fit with the direction of the narrative, rather than previously vertically changed serialized editions. Early mistakes in the story, which were retconned in future installments, could be changed horizontally in both parts. All of these changes help to create a more authoritative text

than the one that was initially published during a strict narrative production to fit the publisher's standards. The editing from the original serial version to the three volume and one tome editions shows a textual metamorphosis to a more appropriate rendition thanks to the implemented horizontal and vertical edits which better suit the undivided novel. This "new" version of the text is the one that would be republished over the years in perpetuity. The changes from the original are rarely mentioned in current readings with the exception of certain critical editions of these texts. J. Don Vann, in his book *Victorian Novels in Serial*, is one of the few scholars who outline the original serialized divisions of these works with chapter breaks and detailing the amended passages between both editions. By comparing the differences between both forms of the texts, one finds distinctions in authorial intention but also how the first version of the text was meant to be read as it was serialized⁵⁰. The enforced interruptions between installments were now lost as readers were free to engage with the text at their own pace, rather than the one instilled by the publication schedule. Cliffhangers were still present at the end of certain chapters but without the temporal pause preventing the turning of the page, readers were not afforded moments to react and reflect upon major revelations. Conversations with other readers did not have uniform stops in the narrative as the author no longer had power over any narrative breaks⁵¹. These pauses provided an additional layer of meaning that gave gravitas to particular

⁵⁰ One element that varies wildly between editions is the presence of the original images and illustrations that existed in the serial run. Some versions have only a few of the images while others none at all. The drawings sometimes appear as chapter divisions, alongside the accompanying passage that it illustrates or as appendix ancillary to the text. Fortunately, most of these images have been preserved and digitized and are thus accessible online for those who seek them out.

⁵¹ The closest contemporary environment of segmented reading of a previously serialized work with interruptions for discussion among a group of readers can be found within classrooms. Still, there is nothing to stop students from reading ahead and learn a character's fate before it is pedagogically planned.

moments in the story. The enforced interruptions allowed for readers to reflect and gave them an opportunity to potentially alter the direction of the narrative. “[W]hen the audience voiced its opinion about the serial’s content as it was appearing, the author who responded negatively or positively, was compromised in the control of artistic material” (Hughes and Lund 13). Without these interruptions the text was no longer received as it was intended during its serial publication. The fate of the characters had already been printed just a few pages away, rather than still under narrative production and pondered by the author. It is in that uncertainty that readers had hope, but more importantly, they had a voice in the narrative’s direction.

A. Readers Redirecting the Narrative

Before a publishing house accepts an author’s proposal for a work of serial fiction, many of the creative performances regarding the story need to be outlined. Still, the narrative production of each installment remains in flux until each part is sent to the publishing house. With this in mind, vertical revisions could originate from the reception performances of editors, publishers, the author, and even the readership. Because there were so many texts encompassing a literary magazine, sales figures for each issue did not provide enough information as to whether any single given installment of a piece of serial fiction was the determining factor for a high or low number of purchases. Reviews and critiques from other authors and literary experts offered an analysis of a narrative’s literary merits up to its current point of publication. Letters to the author and the publishing house showed the different views of the readership and what their thoughts were on a given story. Such letters also provided an outlet for readers to voice their concern over the future of their favorite characters.

Popular opinion was not enough to derail the direction of the narrative but it could influence its outcome; thus, implementing their own vertical revisions of the finished literary product.

Perhaps one of the most famous examples of reception performances altering the ending of a story is Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, originally published in *All the Year Round* in 1860. In this twenty installment serial novel, readers witnessed the trials and tribulations of a young boy named Phillip Pirrip (aka Pip) as he rose from poverty, fell in love, only to have it all taken away from him. The epilogue shows Pip as an adult accustomed to life in the working class. As he is taking care of his young nephew, a carriage appears with the love of his life from earlier in the story, Estella. The two reminisce about their lives and go on with the hope that they have changed for the better and that perhaps a romance could be rekindled. This was the ending that readers obtained but not the one that Dickens had originally envisioned. The original ending had Estella be married at the time of their reencounter, thus leaving Pip disheartened. The revision came in large part from comments made by friend and novelist, Edward Bulwer-Lytton (Schlicke 260). Dickens later wrote to John Forster that "... I have no doubt the story will be more acceptable through the alteration" (*Letters to John Forster*).⁵² Dickens believed that his readers had felt their own great expectations for the character and assumed that it would be a disservice to the narrative to end it on such a sad note. While he does not mention any specific correspondence or interactions with readers (outside of Bulwer-Lynton and Forster) to

⁵² This correspondence exemplifies the power of the circulating draft (Bryant 90). The soft publishing to close friends in a literary circle can shift the direction of the narrative. These friends become editors and a stand in for the readership at large. Analyzing these forms of communication allow researchers to better trace authorial intent throughout the publication process.

motivate the change, the author's consideration for his readership is still evident. The story had already reached its conclusion so the financial motivation to keep readers interested in future installments was a non-factor. This happier ending provides readers with a return on their narrative investment since a sad finale may make one question whether to engage in serial texts again. Having witnessed the distress caused in the readership with the death of Little Nell twenty years ago, Dickens knew all too well the power an ending can have in the reception of a narrative. For the sake of the reader, rather than that of the author, the story was changed and it is only through critical editions of the text that the plans for the original can be seen. With the knowledge of both versions, contemporary readers can compare both finales for themselves and determine whether Dickens' choice was the right one⁵³.

By modifying the finale, Dickens' decision showcases how the (expected) reception performance of the text weighs on the outcome of the narrative. In this manner, the readership's reactions influence the narrative production of the serial, even if story has reached its conclusion. Thus, the audience becomes another factor that affects storytelling even as the commercial factor is phased out, since there are no more installments in line to further write/sell. Here we see how author's autonomy (as per Bourdieu's argument) continues to diminish as more and more elements influence and mold how the author develops his/her story from work, to text, and finally document. While the reader's opinion about the text is usually inferred as part of the writing process, the serial format allows for these outlooks to build and develop over

⁵³ A similar foregrounding of narrative production between what was published and what was intended by the author can be seen with alternate endings and deleted scenes that are now a main feature of many film purchases. Director's Cut editions provide a glimpse as to how the movie could have been had producers and executives allowed it. In the context of serialization, it is the originally published movie that is part of the series' canon.

time. Had *Great Expectations* been written as non-serialized novel, then perhaps Dickens would have kept his original ending since feedback would encapsulate a circulating draft amongst close colleagues, rather than the overall readership. Instead, the voice of the readership became part of the narrative's production as one of the many nonauthorial agents who influence the finishing touches of the story until its finale.

Another more overt example of readerships redirecting the path of a serialized work occurred with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his *Sherlock Holmes* series. His first story, "A Study in Scarlet" is a full length novel that was first published in the magazine *Beeton's Christmas Annual* in 1887. This installment was the first to showcase the adventures of Sherlock Holmes and James Watson as they solved mysteries through deductive reasoning. Other full-fledged novels and collections of short stories were serialized in *The Strand* before being published in their own documents. What makes Doyle's authorship so curious was that his decision to kill his famous detective did not stop the serialization of his adventures. Originally published in 1893, later as part of the compendium *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, "The Adventure of the Final Problem" was designed to be just that, an end to Doyle working with his famous text. He desired to go in a different direction and tell different stories but readers demanded more adventures surrounding Sherlock Holmes. After an authorial hiatus, Doyle decided to publish another Sherlock Holmes novel to be serialized in *The Strand* in 1901. The events of the narrative take place prior to his protagonist's death which allowed the story to still fit into the official timeline.

However, fans continued to clamor for more stories and installments as the death of their favorite character had had quite the effect on the readership.

British society dressed in mourning. Black armbands were worn to commemorate the great detective's passing. People cancelled their subscriptions to *The Strand* (the newspaper that then published the Holmes stories), but not before sending piles of angry letters. Even more piles of pleas and petitions arrived on Doyle's doorstep. Obituaries appeared in newspapers. Accusations of murder flew through the air. (Klimchynskaya).

The clamor for more stories eventually led Doyle to resurrect the literary detective. In 1903, "The Adventure of the Empty House" served as the initial story for the collection titled *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. Years after Holmes' supposed death; he reappears to Watson's surprise and explains his miraculous survival. This is one of the first retcons to involve the revival of such an important character. This decision opened the door for other authors of serial fiction to employ similar techniques to resurrect their characters (as explained later on in Chapter 3). However, it was not Doyle but rather the readers that pushed for serialization to continue. Doyle wanted to the end his series much like Cervantes did, but popular demand was too much to endure⁵⁴. The desire to continue serialization made its way from the readership to the author; contrary to the traditional writing and publishing format. Had Doyle decided not to continue the story then other writers would have tried their luck at making their own detective stories with the famous character, which happened after Doyle's death.

⁵⁴ Vocal audiences and fandoms will continue to push for a series' renewal for continued publication long after it has concluded. Television programs in particular are the target of wishes for more serialization. Some shows, like *Veronica Mars* were able to return as a film for its final installment thanks to fans providing funds to do so in a successful Kickstarter campaign (more on crowdfunding in Chapter 4).

Doyle continued to publish Sherlock Holmes stories until 1927. A serialization run spanning more than three decades would comprise 56 short stories⁵⁵ and four full length novels. Other non-official stories continued to be published, long after Doyle's death in 1930, all over the world as Holmes became one of the most famous characters in literature. Doyle's descendants maintained the rights to the character but that did not stop the multiple iterations of the compulsive detective to exist in various texts from thereon out. One of the few authors, who had the proper permissions to continue the serialization of *Sherlock Holmes* was Doyle's son, Adrian Conan Doyle. He alongside Doyle's biographer, John Dickson Carr, wrote *The Exploits of Sherlock Holmes* in 1952. Much like with his father's documents, this text was a collection of short stories though they were not serialized. While Holmes as a character may be in the public domain, this particular book is not (for the time being).

Similar to the case of Cervantes, Doyle's character had become so popular that readers wanted more adventures. They wanted the stories to continue and luckily the original author was still able to provide them with this content after a period of clamoring. However, history repeated itself and Sherlock Holmes the character outgrew the official *Sherlock Holmes* narrative. Outside of the official canon written by Doyle, dozens of authors from all over the world have devised their own stories centered on the famous detective⁵⁶. Current copyright and trademark laws (as of the time of this writing) allow other writers to use the Sherlock Holmes character and

⁵⁵ One curious aspect about the stories is that outside of the death and resurrection of the protagonist, the individual cases can be read without knowledge of previous or future events. This allows for non-chronological readings through a more episodic storytelling format that successfully avoids continuity lockout.

⁵⁶ A list of different authors who have written their own versions of Sherlock Holmes can be found here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_authors_of_new_Sherlock_Holmes_stories

stories as they are currently in the public domain. Big budget adaptations like BBC's *Sherlock* series make sure that they are in the good graces of the Doyle estate, which remains vigilant as to whom can use the character and makes sure that materials from stories that are not yet in the public domain not be adapted/reused⁵⁷. The legal ramifications over the last century of other publications while the series was still under copyright did not stop other authors from publishing their own versions of the story with the legendary detective. In many cases, this is due to the Doyle estate not taking formal actions to stop them. Thus, while the official canon of *Sherlock Holmes* is finite to Doyle's texts, the corpus of works sharing the character continue to grow. These additional sequels, prequels, and retellings are not part of the official narrative line; hence, they do not add installments to the original series. Serialization may continue for these texts by other authors; yet, while their narrative pasts share the same origin, their literary futures are not interconnected.

B. The Development of an International Copyright

Within "What Is an Author?", Foucault explains how publication equaled ownership of a text but only after authorship was identified as part of punishment for improper writing. From a historical perspective:

Speeches and books were assigned real authors, other than mythical or important religious figures, only when the author became subject to punishment and to the extent that his discourse was considered transgressive. ... [Discourse] was a gesture charged with risks long before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values. But it was at the moment

⁵⁷ More information on the literary estate of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and their mission to preserve his legacy can be found here: <http://www.arthurconandoyle.com/copyrights.html>

when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century) that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature. (1482)

Authors during the Victorian era had to juggle additional responsibilities beyond the initial serial publication and complete editions of their texts, namely in using the copyright laws to assert their authorial autonomy over the publication rights of their works. Philip Allingham explains how different copyright laws existed during Victorian England, especially The Copyright Amendment Act of 1844 (otherwise known as The Imperial Copyright Act or The Talford Act) which shaped publishing at the time and whose ramifications extend to contemporary laws. These rulings helped to protect the intellectual property of authors for a number of years beyond the initial publication of the text. The author's primacy regarding the publication rights over one's texts was protected by the courts; this extended to ensuring that one's characters would not be used by other writers. However, as literary influence could extend beyond a country's borders with a popular story, the task of making sure that no one was stealing one's literary works became far more complex. The enforcement of these copyright laws was difficult due to the fact that there was no single international copyright law at the time. Instead, England had "reciprocal copyright treaties with other nations were authorized by statute in 1838 and 1844. The most important of these early reciprocal accords was that between Britain and Prussia in 1846, which eventually led to The Berne Convention of 1886" (Allingham). While many European

countries validated and asserted each other's copyright laws, other countries did not play by the same rules.

One of the worst offenders of allowing literary piracy to go unchecked was the United States of America. Reprints of literary magazines, novels, and other works were being distributed without providing royalties to the original author. "American publishers continued to regard the work of a foreign (i.e. non-resident) author as unprotected 'common' property" (Allingham). These pirated editions could then be exported back to England and often times be purchased at cheaper prices than the original British versions, due in large part to the lower quality of these American counterfeit documents. Authors could not legally protect their works from being stolen in this manner and thus advocated for more concrete laws to ensure that they would be properly compensated for their literary endeavors. It was not until American authors like Mark Twain joined the cause for the United States to adopt international copyright laws and help to protect an author's intellectual property that the legal system would change to assist writers and their works. Their argument was simple; cheap British reprints were being favored over American works. This led to the United States' Congress officially joining the country to the international copyright union by 1896. Prior to this, the International Copyright Act of 1891, otherwise known as the Chace Act, allowed British authors to legally obtain the copyright to print and distribute their works in the United States; although, this required additional production performances as the American documents had to be made with American printing presses and be submitted to the Library of Congress prior to publication elsewhere ("Must Know: International Copyright Law of 1891 Overview"). Still, by the beginning of the 20th

century most of the English speaking world had proper copyright laws and global regulations were well under way. Authors would still have to fight to protect their literary creations from being stolen but at least now they had the courts on their side.

Copyright laws continue to be updated to this day to help protect one's intellectual property from being distributed/published by unauthorized agents. Authors depend on the expertise of their legal teams (either their own or those of the publishing house) as well as automated services to monitor and handle cases where their copyright is being infringed upon. While there are readers who violate these laws, there are also those who help enforce it by contacting authors when they witness works and characters being used inappropriately. All in all, there is no surefire prevention method for literary theft but authors have tools at their disposal to ensure that attempts to counterfeit their documents or make unauthorized installments to their series are met with legal repercussions.

V. The Post-Victorian Serial

Serialization continued to be a popular method long after Dickens, Thackeray, and Collins, alongside other authors, made it a recognizable format for storytelling in print. The technology of the 20th century had made new media available; and with it, the documents and practice of serializing for authors had changed drastically. Radio gave us *The Lone Ranger* and other action/adventure programs which captivated imaginations for years. Film serials like the *Perils of Pauline* had viewers going to movie theaters at a weekly basis to see each action packed installment of about 20 minutes' worth of content. Movies would later make more direct sequels and prequels as the serialization of shorts gave way to more

feature length serialized content. Comics would provide a consistent form of serialization for decades for iconic characters (see Chapter 3). Television has dramas, sitcoms, soap operas, cartoons, and many other genres of serial fiction which have filled the airwaves over the years as more content became available across the years. But even with all these advancements, traditional print publishing continued. Literary magazines had fallen to the wayside but individual books with direct sequels and prequels were common and inexpensive to the point where there was no longer a need for solitary stories to piggyback off another document and its broad array of content. The serializing format was no longer set in stone and authors were now free to write their books at a rate more in keeping with their narrative production and in agreement with their publishing houses.

Literacy rates continued to rise across the globe in the 20th century and publishing technologies continued to improve. However, the state of printed serial fiction was no longer high in demand. Narratives divided in installments were becoming more and more common in other media, and yet book publishing began to favor stories that started and ended in one single document. The one avenue that continued to provide an outlet for serial content was books designed for children and young adults. With these readers in mind, authors could produce fairly short installments of a series of books with self-contained stories surrounding the same cast of characters. Reading the installments in chronological order was preferred though not necessary as the events from one part did not alter the landscape of the narrative enough to dissuade readers from purchasing parts of the series regardless of its place

within the grander continuity⁵⁸. A tonal shift towards more complex narratives occurred with the turn of the century as one series of books gained worldwide recognition soon after its publication began.

A. The Serialization of Harry Potter

In 1997, Bloomsbury Press in England decided to take a chance on an unknown female author and publish a novel that had been rejected by several other publication houses. However, she had been working on the initial parts of her work years earlier (Gillett). After an arduous authorial journey, J.K.⁵⁹ Rowling's *Harry Potter* series began its publication and soon found critical and financial success. The series would expand into seven official books which were then adapted into eight feature length films by Warner Bros. Entertainment⁶⁰. Rowling's achievements helped to reignite an interest in serialization for authors, publishers, and readers alike as other print series were developed soon afterwards to various degrees of praise.

Rowling's case exemplifies contemporary authorship of serial fiction, not just because of her success, but rather due to the textual performances that she has undertaken prior to and after publication. Before writing what would be the manuscript for *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*⁶¹, Rowling decided to map

⁵⁸ One example that comes to mind is *The Babysitter's Club* series by Anne M. Martin. There are over 200 novels within the collection spanning from 1986-2000, though the majority of these installments were ghost written while still having Martin as the main author (Firestone).

⁵⁹ The J.K. stands for Joanne Kathleen. Bloomsbury believed that gender neutral initials might work towards attracting as many readers as possible. Rowling actually has no middle name but decided to use her grandmother's first name to fit the role. (Gillett)

⁶⁰ In the process of this dissertation developing from work, to text, and finally to document, the *Harry Potter* series also added a play to the series. *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* serves as an official 8th part but was written by Jack Thorne with Rowling's blessing. Additionally, a new series of films that occur in the same narrative universe but prior to the original series' events is under production, though there is no set number of installments yet. In addition, there are constant rumors as to whether Rowling will decide to write more stories concerning her titular protagonist.

⁶¹ American audiences might know it better as the "*Sorcerer's Stone*" thanks to a decision by Scholastic books (the publisher in the U.S.) to alter the title to better reflect the magical nature of the narrative.

out every detail of the narrative universe she was creating. Her desire to outline the various elements regarding magic and the history of it comes from the fact that she wanted her narrative to be consistent from the beginning. In a radio interview with *The Connection*, Rowling explains that:

... [I]t is a lot of work to create an entire world and it was about five years to finish the first book and to plot the remaining six books, because they were already plotted before the first book was published, and book two was started before book one was - was finished. Erm - Yes, so - so I spent an awful lot of time thinking about the details of the world and working it out in depth.

(00:08:12-00:09:46)

Rowling believed that her story would go beyond just one installment and did not want to revise and retcon her narrative as new parts were added to it. In a work of fantasy, narrative production requires not just the direction of the plot but the world building minutiae of how things are and how they came to be. Not every detail had to be preplanned, but Rowling made sure to outline how her wizarding world exists alongside the real life “muggle” world of contemporary England⁶². Her narrative production to map out the rules of her story as well as the broad strokes of the overarching plot show the many steps that authors take prior to the construction of even a circulating draft. The series had been planned out prior to knowing if the first installment would garner enough success to merit the continued publication of further books. Rowling’s preparation mimics the planning that Dickens and other Victorian authors employed to show how their stories were ready to be fleshed out into multiple

⁶² Observant readers have pointed out some discrepancies between details in the installments but for the most part the narrative is consistent from beginning to end.

installments, though she was not given such a guarantee first hand at the onset of publication. Still, she believed and her literary groundwork served her well as the series continued through multiple books and texts in other media.

The publication of the books themselves show how each installment grew in importance as more readers flocked to the series. American editions of the first two books were published almost a year after the original British release dates. By the fifth book, release dates had become a worldwide phenomenon, including midnight sales in many bookstores. Rowling and the publishing houses chose these publication dates to obtain the largest possible audience⁶³ and to foster a sense of community between all readers as they all progressed through the story at similar levels. With the growth of the Internet and social media, fear of spoilers being published after the book's release but prior to one's individual reading grew. One infamous example came with the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* whose ending contains the shocking betrayal of Severus Snape killing the beloved headmaster Albus Dumbledore. The phrase "Snape kills Dumbledore" was jarring people left and right throughout the second half of 2005, even to those who weren't reading the books. While these documents were available for purchase in bookstores all over the world as part of midnight releases, the difference in time zones allowed for information about the book's ending spreading before the publication had technically started in other parts of the globe. People actually went to the lines of eager readers waiting to purchase the

⁶³ A publication date in the middle of summer vacation allowed students to obtain the books when they had time off from their studies and parents did not have to worry about their children focusing more on *Harry Potter* than on their schoolwork.

book and spoiled the finale right there and then⁶⁴. This moment shows a unique inversion to the “Little Nell” revelation in the docks of New York over a hundred years ago. Rather than readers desiring to learn a character’s fate prior to the purchase of an installment, others forced that knowledge upon them, regardless of desiring that information or not. This reception performance, to effectively ruin the perception of the text, is not new to this moment of storytelling but the rate of occurrence rose for this particular literary moment⁶⁵.

Expectations of more characters meeting their demise in the seventh and final book in the series were confirmed once its title was revealed, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Rowling warned her fans to brace themselves as the finale would be deadly to multiple characters. Spoilers for the book read like a cemetery, detailing each character’s cause of death and the page where it could be found. Rowling had no way to control the readers’ reception of disseminating this information but she did highlight that the best way to avoid the story being ruined was to read it for yourself as early as possible. The final book sold over 11 million copies between the UK and the US so her advice was well taken. (“Harry Potter finale sales hit 11m”) Contemporary readers actively avoided information about these new installments unless it came through firsthand exposure to the narrative or from Rowling herself.

Rowling’s voice as an author is one that readers clamored for as serialization of her work progressed and even after it had stopped. Interviews and press releases served to inform the reader of what would be happening without spoiling the events of

⁶⁴ One such video of a passerby shouting the dramatic ending can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x_WUb68RQo

⁶⁵ A banner with “Snape kills Dumbledore” was unfurled over a footbridge in England with this message. It was removed in a few hours (Morris).

the story. As the film adaptations were under development, Rowling took time away from the narrative production of the actual novels to make sure that her vision would not be tarnished in this new medium (Cary). While she is the creator and author of the books, the movies had different directors and screenwriters with each installment. Rowling's role was more editorial rather than authorial when it came to this version of the story⁶⁶. As author and owner of the characters, she had final say in many facets of the story thus providing vertical revisions to make sure the adaptation stayed true to the original⁶⁷. Rather than the cases of Cervantes or Doyle explained beforehand, other writers did not have to claim the text as their own, even if they wrote the screenplay adaptation or directed the films. Additionally, while there may be multiple forms of fan fiction surrounding the text, no major publications which use these characters have been made (at least not without Rowling's blessing, as is the case with *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*).

After the completion of serialization, Rowling's voice continues to reshape her text. Anything she says about the story, be it in informal or formal settings is considered to be a fact. One such moment involved the acknowledgement of a fan theory that established that Dumbledore was actually gay through a tweet. She admitted that she wrote the character as such even though it was never explicitly stated in any of the books (EdwardTLC). Other answers provided in interviews and other venues are taken as additions to the text even though the documents remain unchanged and serialization has ceased. Her power as an author is one where she can alter her

⁶⁶ She is officially listed as a producer for only the final two movies of the *Harry Potter* series (IMDB "JK Rowling").

⁶⁷ Rowling had a chance to work more directly in the production of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* as its screenwriter. This movie is not based on any previously written book in the Harry Potter narrative universe but the script is currently available for purchase as its own document.

work in an instant, so she remains cautious about any comments regarding her story and her characters. Because readers take her authorial voice as absolute, they have catalogued almost anything she has had to say about anything and everything. The website *Accio Quote* catalogues almost every public utterance on record so that fans can comb over Rowling's words outside of her serial work. This wiki illustrates how the author-reader-relationship becomes one of celebrity status. Rather than a text being open to interpretation, it is the author and only the author that can speak to the content and implications of what has been published. Other critics can add their opinion but their voice is secondary to the absolute power that comes from the author. Few writers have this sort of utter authority over their works like Rowling but readers continue to defer to the original author's words to determine intentionality and other aspects of a literary text. The nature of contemporary serialization is one where the still living and writing author can publish new parts to the story; thus, whatever he/she states about the story before, during, or after publication is outright fact.

This authorial status harkens back to the previous discussions on authorship related at the beginning of this chapter. Analyzing the text of the *Harry Potter* series by engaging only with the printed books overlooks a significant amount of material regarding the narrative. Rowling's commentary serves as Genette's paratexts, further fleshing out the story. A study of her novels is incomplete without taking these ancillary materials into consideration, thus having the figure of the author remain present. Furthermore, since Rowling continues to engage with her readership through these forums we see how forms of analysis and interpretation can reach the author. Her public response to reception performances opens up a new layer in the author-

reader-relationship as interactions expand the story and reveal additional aspects of narrative production beyond the publication of the novels. Hence, the author (especially of serial fiction) persists in how meaning is made/interpreted regarding the text, often times at the behest and blessing of the readership.

J.K. Rowling is indeed a powerful figure in writing but only because her fans imbue her with this power. Fame and success run parallel to the incredible sales figures regarding the series (close to \$25 billion all included⁶⁸ according to the Statistic Brain site). But Rowling's devout fandom is the one that maintains her status as the sole authority when it comes to her literary text. They are the ones who created and update the *Accio Quote* website. Furthermore, they are the ones that use it as the primary source for any questions regarding the text, citing the author with a sense of finality. Interpretations and theories extrapolated and posted by readers may be judged for their merit but should Rowling comment on it favorably then it is considered to be practically factual. Should she as an author decide to write on the subject and incorporate the theory then the reader has effectively added another element to the story through an initial creative performance surmised by another writer. Consider the case of Obversa, a redditor⁶⁹ who commented on how Harry Potter's paternal grandparents died and how thunderbird feathers were an important part of magic for Native Americans. Both comments were made in the Harry Potter subreddit as part of different conversations. A few days after each posting, Rowling wrote entries on her website *Pottermore* expanding on both topics and seemingly following Obversa's lead

⁶⁸ This figure includes book sales, movie tickets, toys, merchandise, etc.

⁶⁹ An editor on the popular website *Reddit*, an online community with a category or "subreddit" for almost anything you can think of. The site averages around 15 million unique page views a month ("About Traffic Page").

(“The Potter Family” and “History of Magic”) While there is no way to confirm that Obversa provided a creative performance towards these theories, the fact that Rowling expanded elements of her narrative universe with similar information shows how fans interpretations can be added to the official lore of the story. Even after serialization, reception performances can still reshape the narrative so long as the author acknowledges a change to the text via official or unofficial additional publications.

Rowling continues to grow her narrative without having to add installments to the story. As mentioned before, her interviews and tweets are archived by her adoring readership. But for more detailed addendums to the lore, she uses her online platform, *Pottermore*. This website was published in 2011 as the sole digital distributor of *Harry Potter* e-texts and audiobooks. As the site is owned by Rowling, she also becomes the publisher within a different medium. Beyond a portal to sell the digital documents of her text, the site provides additional information regarding different aspects of the story (“About Us”). Article entries penned by Rowling expanded the lore of miniscule details and explained commonly asked questions regarding the “Potterverse”, as fans have dubbed it. In its inception, the site created a new reading experience as users could interact with new parts of the text, play games, and communicate with other readers. These additional parts were free to use for anyone. *Pottermore* served as an addendum to the text that motivated reader to engage with each installment once again and relive their favorite parts of the story, now with extra material. The site alongside the documents (be they the original print or digital ones) fostered a secondary serial run of the text, much like in the previous cases analyzed throughout this chapter. The additional information promoted a more authoritative version of the text, juxtaposed

with Rowling's additional musings. Furthermore, new articles and activities were added periodically to the site, which in turn promoted continued interaction with the text over time in an almost serial manner.

Unfortunately, the current landscape of Pottermore is no longer the one that was explained above. The site was originally part of a partnership with Sony, which was dissolved in 2014 (Pottermore News). In 2015, a new version of the site was unveiled that lacked all of the interactive elements of its predecessor. The additional information from Rowling remained and continues to be unique to the site. Old and new readers lost access to the games and other activities without warning as the new digital document transformed. More material continues to be added but the site has lost much of its original attractions. Plans to restore these features are not currently underway. One of the benefits and drawbacks to Rowling being the owner of *Pottermore* is that she has control of all aspects of the site and should she decide to add or remove them then decision is final and instant. A more in depth analysis of digital publishing is found in Chapter 4.

In short, J.K. Rowling's authorial undertaking incorporates traditional and new textual performances regarding the serial publication of her work. From the initial creative performances to the continued additions to the story, her narrative production continues to cover multiple facets of authorship. Further publications regarding her eponymous protagonist have ended but new characters and adventures are added through a new series⁷⁰ that takes place in the same narrative universe. Not to mention all of the extra tidbits of information that she reveals in writing or in interviews that

⁷⁰ The first installment is *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* which will be published as films. Rowling has stated there will be five films in this series, though this is subject to change.

continue to reshape the lore regarding the narrative. These ancillary performances show serialization continues even as official publication has ceased. However, there is always the possibility that she changes her mind and decides to publish further installments to the series. As Rowling is fond of saying, “never say never.”

Conclusion

The dynamics behind serial storytelling have stayed close to Scheherazade’s example throughout the development of printed literature. Enforced interruptions in different forms of documents continue to serve as physical and temporal borders that shape the story. Authors frame their stories accordingly with cliffhangers to incentivize readers to learn what happens next in the narrative through the purchase of the next installment. These respites also serve to gauge the readers’ responses to the current state of the text, allowing authors to adjust their narrative path accordingly. These outside influences, marked by sales numbers, reviews, and direct communication with the author), alongside the traditional feedback by editors and publishing houses prior to publication, affect how the author produces his/her narrative throughout the serialization process. By studying this segmented storytelling, one can better trace in which ways (if any) did the impact of these nonauthorial agents change the author’s narrative trajectory.

The viability of serial publishing is one that came to be thanks to advances in printing technologies and growing readerships. With the development of more efficient printing presses, the cost of producing books decreased and made them more accessible to the populace. Authors realized the potential of an ever growing readership and proceeded to write stories that would go beyond the publication of one document. The fate of the text’s future depended on both the author’s and the

readership's desire to continue adding parts to the narrative. In some cases, the popularity of famous characters reached levels that other authors would write their own versions of the story; regardless of whether they were legally allowed to be an author of a literary creation they did not originally create. The initial author attempted to assert his/her authorial primacy over the literary work though this did not stop imitators who wished to continue these stories. These unofficial forms of serialization are not accepted as part of the original narrative's continuity but they continue to add to the character's fame, and by association to the true text and primary author.

In publishing the serial text, the author shapes the text as to make each installment meaningful while still incomplete. The desire to know what happens next should entice readers to continue to engage with the text by purchasing further installments. This expectation helps authors anticipate their readers' desire and potentially change the story accordingly. While narrative production often includes inferring how readers would react, serial fiction and its use of enforced interruptions foreground the responses of the actual readership of the text. Thus, the text remains malleable throughout the serialization process and feedback from fans and editors guide the author's hands as the work is continuously shaped until the story has concluded. However, the potential for renewed serialization (officially or unofficially) keeps the narrative in flux, thus fomenting an author-text-reader relationship where all entities remain in dynamic states.

Be it with Cervantes, Dickens, Doyle, Rowling, or any other author of serial fiction, the narrative production of designing, writing, and publishing a story in parts is a unique and familiar experience. Readers and fans of serialization will desire for

the story to continue indefinitely and some may take this wish and make it a reality through their own authorial endeavors. The narrative may expand in official and unofficial ways but the status of initial authorship remains intact even as the original serial reading experience becomes a thing of the past.

Chapter 3: Dividing and Agglomerating Authorship:

The Development of the Author as Writer, Artist, and Corporation

Introduction

Throughout the previous chapter, I have explained how the authorial process (specifically in regards to serial fiction) is one where multiple factors continuously affect the narrative production of the text. Nonauthorial agents (e.g. editors and publishers) serve as the initial gatekeepers to publishing and their influence remains throughout the publication of each installment. Furthermore, the reception performances of the readers with each enforced interruption provided a moment for authors to adapt the text to these reactions as the narrative was still in flux. The weight behind these external factors exemplifies Bourdieu's criteria for low authorial autonomy in large-scale publications, specifically for the publishing of serial works. The author's ability to converge these outside voices into the production of his/her narrative throughout the continuous publication of a serialized text becomes even more complex outside the medium of traditional print publishing. This chapter showcases the journey that authors undertake to publish their serial works in comics in order to highlight the unique challenges faced within this medium and industry.

The narrative production of serial fiction within the realm of comics follows similar parameters as the ones analyzed in Chapter 2. The serial publishing model of comics is most similar to that of literary magazines, made famous during the Victorian era. Authors who wish to publish their serial works in comics (usually) sign a contract for a large number of installments with a strict publication schedule and stern special

limits of how much content is delivered each time⁷¹. Additionally, authors of comics often find themselves having to adapt their stories (prior to and during publication) at the behest of nonauthorial agents who control what gets published. Throughout this chapter, I highlight different examples of authorship within the medium of comics and its subsets to illustrate the serial narrative production employed in the transition from work, to text, and finally to document.

One important element to keep in mind is how comics are conveyed through written language alongside a series of images. Within the context of authorship, these juxtapositions result in the author serving as both writer and artist or that these production performances are undertaken by two (or more) different people⁷². Thus, the narrative production of comics is one where the text encompasses the written word (usually in the form of dialogue) placed within the landscape of images. Authors craft their comics by placing these images in a deliberate sequence in order to move their stories forward. The narrative of comics requires that readers complete the connection between each individual image (i.e. panel) in a process similar to one described by Wolfgang Iser where readers use their imaginations to fill in the blanks within the text. In *The Act of Reading*, Iser describes the process of readers engaging with a text as one that hinders on closure of “narrative blanks” or gaps. In the process of reading the narrative from beginning to end, readers develop a sense of expectations for what will happen next. Iser explains that:

⁷¹ The exception to these expectations is graphic novels as authors who write them have far more freedoms when it comes to narrative production, as explained later on in this chapter.

⁷² One term that is often used to denote one author doing both the drawing and writing is cartoonist, though such a distinction is not universal in comics scholarship.

[T]his blank is not a given ontological fact, but is formed and modified by the imbalance inherent in dyadic interactions, as well as in that between the text and the reader. Balance can only be attained if the gaps are filled, and so the constitutive blank is continually bombarded with projections...

If these possibilities are to be fulfilled, and if communication between text and reader is to be successful, clearly, the reader's activity must be controlled in some way by the text. (167)

Finding and trying to fill these gaps becomes a reception performance that takes place during the reading of a text. An author's storytelling and narrative production promotes and builds anticipations; setting up paths for the plot with twists and turns as readers engage with the text. Authors thus engage in what Matt Hills refers to as "fanagement".

[T]his "fanagement" – the attempted management of fan readings, responses and activities – does not merely give fans what they want, i.e. coherence and narrative consistency. Instead, it protects brand value by responding to fan criticism regarding continuity errors, and anticipating possible fan critiques. (425)

These forms of anticipation in fan expectations are part of the narrative production, so that "the strategies [of narrative gaps] have to maneuver the reader into the right position, so that all that he has to do is adopt the attitude mapped out for him" (Iser, *The Act of Reading* 190). The application of these gaps and their execution within the story serve as an intermediary between narrative production and authorial intent

(discussed in Chapter 2) and an implied readership with interpretive communities (to be explained in Chapter 4).

In the context of serialization, the production of narrative blanks is one where reader and the author know that the gap will not be crossed within one installment.

Iser explains that:

The serial story, then, results in a special kind of reading. The interruptions are more deliberate and calculated than those occasioned by random reasons. In the serial story they arise from a strategic purpose. The reader is forced by the pauses imposed on him to imagine more than he could if the reading were continuous, and so, if the text of a serial makes a different impression from the text in book-form, this is principally because it introduces additional blanks, or alternatively accentuates existing blanks by means of a break until the next installment. (190)

Narrative blanks exist in the form of enforced interruptions, keeping the rest of the story (temporarily) beyond the reader's reach. The gaps become cliffhangers and the next part of the story is separated by time and space from the current document with which readers interact. As explained earlier on, the narrative continues to be in flux until its publication has been completed; the story's trajectory may be mapped out but nothing is set in stone until it is published. Even then, new events in the narrative can retroactively affect previous plot points, which hinder the resolution of previously published moments in the story and their respective gaps. As more parts of the serialized work are published, readers' expectations can vary between a desire to continue engaging with the text to see how current and future gaps are concluded or as

a story that requires too much effort to fill in the holes⁷³. For stories that have been published over many years, the narrative gaps extend into the past as accessibility to previous installments may not be available to all readers. In these cases, readers face the challenge of engaging with the text at the earliest available installment knowing full well that the story (for them) is incomplete.

The difficulties in producing and bridging narrative gaps are well exemplified within the medium of comics. The concept of blanks and gaps is an instrumental facet in the production of stories in this format. Renowned comics studies frontrunner and cartoonist Scott McCloud, explains in his seminal book, *Understanding Comics*, how closure allows readers to fill in the narrative gaps in between panels:

[Within comics] there lies a medium of communication and expression which uses closure like no other... A medium where the audience is a willing collaborator and closure is the agent of change, time, and motion ... See that space between panels? That's what comic aficionados have named "the gutter." And despite its unceremonious title, plays host to much of the magic and mystery that are the very heart of comics! Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea. (65-66⁷⁴)

The reader's ability to provide closure between still images is a more immediate form of filling in narrative gaps. Storytelling in comics makes use of these blanks within the gutter to propel the story forward. Additionally, narrative gaps are common place

⁷³ In this way, the serial reading experience resembles a dotted line, a progression constantly and evenly being separated by blanks.

⁷⁴ It is important to note that this book by McCloud, as well as others within his series of explaining comics, are written and drawn as a comic book. Thus, quotes presented here include the text from dialogue balloons and not the images that encompass them.

within the serialized texts of comics; specifically within works that have been published continuously for years and even decades. Authors (in the form of writers and artists) use these gaps in the short term to have an audience complete the series of events between panels and in the long term to entice readers to purchase the next installment and find out whether or not their expectations are met.

Outside of the storytelling, the design of comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels requires taking advantage of a limited space to convey writing and images. What makes the narrative production of graphic narratives so unique is how authors keep in mind the importance of spacing and visual elements. The author as artist transforms the page into a canvas, which is then subdivided into different panels in comics. Space is properly allocated for the characters, the background, and any writing e.g. speech and thought bubbles⁷⁵. Comics provide a platform where authorship can be undertaken on one's own, through a partnership between writer and artist, or with an entire team. The production performances of writing, drawing, coloring, and inking within the narrative production of this medium that one author or many can undertake to publish one text.

This chapter analyzes the narrative production within the different facets of comics. Each subdivision of the term is studied individually, though the basic methods for storytelling are shared between the three, i.e. comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels. A brief historical overview of each subset of the medium, as well as the development of popular stories within each one, are provided to familiarize readers

⁷⁵ Similar care and framing can be seen through the cinematography in movies and television shows. As explained earlier, film and television fall under the purview of graphic narratives, but the authorial roles within them are too interlayered to allow for a proper analysis of authorship within their narrative production and publication.

with the changes that have occurred as this form of large-scale publishing has progressed over time. By analyzing the serial authorship of prominent comics, I show how narrative production in this medium is one where the industry standards of the document and the business behind its publishing continuously affects the authorial process.

I. The Different Shapes of Comics

The term “comics” is somewhat troublesome and requires some further elaboration before going forward in this explanation. Noted cartoonist Will Eisner coined the term graphic narrative as “any story that employs image to transmit an idea” (*Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* xvii). Eisner groups comics as “a form of sequential art, often in the form of a strip or a book, in which images and text are arranged to tell a story” and sequential art as “images deployed in a specific order” (*Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* xvii). Scott McCloud expands the term even more and defines comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or an aesthetic response in the viewer” (*Understanding Comics* 9). Authors are able to convey information through the use of images as a way to tell their stories but not all comics are created equally. Comics itself serves an umbrella term for the three subdivisions of print graphic narratives depending on their specific publication format. These three are: comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels. Each one contains certain physical limitations that the author takes into consideration, which ultimately affect the narrative production and reception throughout the serialization of these different styles of texts.

A. Comic Strips

Comic strips are the oldest and most familiar form of comics for many readers. These consist of only a few panels (three or four, though single panel comics are not uncommon). Individual comic strips are rarely found on their own⁷⁶, due in part to aspects of print publishing that would not make it viable for a single author to make hundreds of minute documents, which would be difficult to distribute/sell. Thus, comic strips became a small part of a larger staple of traditional print publishing, namely newspapers. Comic historian Brian Walker emphasizes how the advancement's in printing technologies advanced the popularity and outreach of newspapers, and with it comic strips:

The technological progress of the industrial age created an acceleration in the evolution of graphic communication. As printing and distribution methods became mechanized, periodicals and newspapers replaced broadsheets⁷⁷ as the prime vehicles for cartoons and illustration. Circulation climbed as literacy increased and as publishers discovered that entertainment sold better than enlightenment. It was during the 19th century that the comic strip took its current form. (8-9)

Comic strips published as illustrations and political cartoons have been present within periodicals in one way or another since the 19th century. And yet, for all the popularity of comics they are considered a secondary feature within these types of document.

Comic strips (mostly of the single panel variety) serve as an adjunct to the narrative, to the editorial viewpoint, or even as standalone short stories. And yet, they are still a

⁷⁶ "Bazooka Joe" comics found in the titular candy's wrapper are a noteworthy exception, though they are seen as ancillary material of the candy purchase.

⁷⁷ Walker places "broadsheets" as the precursor to printed comics. When movable-type printing was first developed, the process for publishing set type and drawings was so different that the latter had to be printed as single separate pages (8).

minor fraction of the overall content of the periodical. For example, the English humor magazine *Punch* used illustrations throughout its articles as part of its jokes. One such comic strip by E.H. Shepard called “The Inspired Musician and the Christmas Ham” appeared in the magazine’s final installment (view Figure 3.1 below). More serious publications like Victorian serial magazines featured illustrations as part of the storytelling but comic strips as individual stories would not find their fame here. Still, cartoonists had a chance to show their artistry in this format as the medium developed.

(Figure 3.1 From Project Gutenberg’s entry on *Punch* Vol 159.

Originally published on December 29, 1920)

The first work of serial fiction to be published as a comic strip is often attributed to *Hogan’s Alley* by Richard Felton Outcault. His work quickly gained popularity thanks to topical storylines, a consistent and memorable set of characters, and the bright colors that made characters like the Yellow Kid stand out. However, Walker challenges this claim by establishing that other works had these same features before the 1896 debut of *Hogan’s Alley*.

In fact, Richard F. Outcault's, starring the Yellow Kid, did not introduce any of the important elements we now associate with newspaper comics: speech balloons, sequential narrative, recurring characters, regularly titled series, color printing, adaptation to other media, and product licensing. Speech balloons had been combined with graphic images for centuries, and sequential narrative was well established in many forms. American newspapers had been publishing cartoons since the late 1860s, and Sunday sections were printed in color before the Yellow Kid made his debut. Recurring characters, regularly titled series, and successful merchandising of cartoon "stars" had been pioneered by other artists. (8)

Walker further traces the history of comic strips in America back to satirical cartoons in various humor magazines published throughout the mid-1800s, following the trend of British magazines like the aforementioned *Punch* (9). The first daily newspaper to feature comics was "James Gordon Bennett's *New York Evening Telegram*, starting in 1867" (10). With the advancement of photo reproduction technologies, *The New York Daily Graphic* set out in 1873 as a fully illustrated newspaper which heavily featured comics (10). This particular newspaper continued publication until 1889, but its influence and popularity led to other newspapers having larger sections of comics be part of their work. This complex history shows that the stage for comics had already been set long before Outcault debuted *Hogan's Alley*. What Outcault did accomplish was that he adapted the individual elements of prior comic strips into his own work. The sudden popularity of *Hogan's Alley* served to codify the features of comic strips to a rising readership through the same text. Outcault may not be the first author of

newspaper comic strips but his singular influence on the style cannot be ignored. The fame of *Hogan's Alley* extended to its main character, the Yellow Kid⁷⁸; a figure that many other authors replicated soon after. Outcault tried to extend the ownership of not just his story but also his protagonist when he applied for copyright registration to the Library of Congress in 1896, only a few months after the first installment's publication.

Although many historians claim that Outcault obtained legal ownership of the Yellow Kid, records at the Library of Congress indicate that his request was never officially granted, due to an irregularity in the application process. Consequently, he was never able to prevent widespread exploitation of his character by other artists and manufacturers. (Walker 13-14)

Here we see that ownership not only meant protection from other authors that could plagiarize the work but also from those wishing to make money through merchandising and other facets outside of publishing. Outcault's authorial legal issues would continue as explained later on. As comic strips and newspapers continued to develop throughout the 20th century, so too did the complexities of publishing serial fiction through this outlet.

With the popularity of comics, one would think that they would be peppered throughout the newspaper to assure that readers would go through the entire document⁷⁹. Editors of Victorian serial magazines divided the installments of novels to appear at various points of the document (as explained in Chapter 2), so one would think that this publication practice would continue within newspapers. However,

⁷⁸ His official name is Mickey Duggan but he is commonly referred to by other characters within this story and by other authors as simply, the Yellow Kid.

⁷⁹ Or that even if readers wanted to avoid the comics, different cartoonists still had a chance to be seen.

newspaper editors decided to conglomerate all of these minute graphic narratives in one section and called it “The Comics” or “The Funnies”. Different authors were now stacked together via medium. As authors decided to branch out to different styles and genres throughout the years, the comics page became a potpourri of cartoonists’ works placed together as talking animals, superheroes, pranksters, and detectives (just to name a few) were packed alongside each other. Sunday editions provided their own special section, which usually meant that they would be in color and have twice or even triple the space they would have to the simpler weekday editions. Daily editions of comics would only contain a few panels and be printed solely in black and white, thus establishing an interesting serialization model for authors of comic strips to follow. Six installments would have less content and art quality while the seventh one would have additional space and options to work with. Since most comic strips had a “gag a day” format that was concentrated on telling a joke per installment rather than on producing an ongoing story, the narrative production of these works of serial fiction was not too problematic. However, once the focus from humor had been relaxed and newspaper editors decided to include action, adventure, and even some dramatic comic strips, authors became more aware of the production performances that would allow each of the daily installments to mesh together and fit with the Sunday shift in style. This varied rate of publication translated to changes in the availability of narrative space for each installment, which leads to variations in the amount of content and the overall pace of the narrative. Comic strip authors that were hired to only do Sunday issues, or all days but Sunday, had a more uniform style for

drawing/writing all installments but they would take into consideration the larger temporal gap for their fans.

Engaging in the reception performances of serialized comic strips has certain advantages and disadvantages for readers that wish to partake in this form of storytelling. Economically, as long as one was already planning on purchasing a particular periodical or newspaper then one's reading of comics would not incur an additional expense. The initial document is easily obtainable but as time goes by the accessibility of particular periodicals decreases rapidly. Finding a previous day's newspaper, or from even earlier, was not an easy task since most periodicals are considered to be disposable after an initial reading and past events had lost their importance as need to know information. Karen Fang writes that, "Explicitly identified with time in their very name, periodicals were the subject of Romantic distaste due to their serial and rapidly obsolescent nature" (180). If old news was essentially disposable then the comic strips inside them were even more so. Missing an installment meant that one would miss all the comics for that day, albeit it would only a small amount of content, but that brings up a more interesting point when it comes to backtracking through earlier documents.

If one was not reading since the onset of publication, a plot heavy comic could reach a point where it could become too complicated to start from any future moment onward as prior narrative gaps grew. Readers could try to read each installment from the moment when they decide to engage with the text and attempt to decipher the narrative content from there⁸⁰. However, without the accessibility to previous

⁸⁰ In my own experience with reading comic strips I remember Nicholas P. Dalliss's *Rex Morgan, M.D.* I took interest in it just before the big wedding storyline in 1995, knowing full well I had missed the

documents/installments readers may avoid the comic altogether. This reading phenomenon is known as continuity lock-out and it is defined as when:

The writers have let the mythos or stories they have generated get so thick and convoluted that a new reader/viewer has very little chance of understanding the significance of anything. They are 'locked out' of understanding the story by all the reliance on continuity” (TV Tropes editors).

With no real archive of previous installments of comic strips, an insurmountable narrative gap could appear as serialization continues. Consider the case of *Prince Valiant*, a Sunday only comic strip by Hal Forster that started in 1937 about an Arthurian knight that goes on fantastic adventures. The strip continues to this day after Forster passed on the authorial torch unto its current holders, writer Mark Schultz and artist Thomas Yeates (*Prince Valiant* wiki editors). With close to 80 years of material behind it, the narrative complexity and rich history are almost impenetrable to new readers. Issues regularly contain brief recaps of the events of the previous installment, but even since its early years the story became quite complex to readers as new characters and storylines were introduced. The titular knight (who was five years old when the comic started) got married and had children; who would begin their own adventures in the same comic, thus adding to the narrative’s density. The gaps grew with each installment and the possibility of continuity lockout increased as the story’s past kept mounting.

developing romance of Dr. Rex Morgan and his nurse, June Gale. It was not until much later that I learned that the comic had been running since 1948. Even though the local newspaper that carried it to my home went out of business, Dr. Morgan’s adventures continue to be serialized to this day under writer Woody Wilson.

Compilations, compendiums, and collections of *Prince Valiant* consisting of a few years' worth of material have been published as the story has progressed but these do not encapsulate the majority of the narrative. For example, Fantagraphics (who publishes compendiums for this strip and other famous comics) has published sixteen volumes (as of this writing) since 2009; each compiling a year's worth of installments but these only cover the narrative content of *Prince Valiant* until 1968 (Fantagraphics website). Foster, like many other authors creating comic strips, have compilation editions in mind during the narrative production of their work. However, as the text grows to the point that years' worth of material are available, readers who have been present since initial publication dwindle. New readers can catch up to the narrative through compendiums and new editions, which in turn create a secondary serial run of sorts through new documents. This in turn creates a new reading experience as individual readers collect their own archive of the story over time through these newly published documents, rather than the originals. Authors and publishing houses take advantage of these compendiums to circumvent continuity lockout as well as to obtain more sales from content that is already available.

Creating and maintaining an archive of a particular comic strip was not a common authorial responsibility for emerging cartoonists. The possibility of a future compilation publication did not heavily alter narrative production but it did change the expectation of the readership and their reception performances. Creating a comic strip's archive was a task done by individual readers who were passionate enough to collect and care for all those newspaper clippings of the original document of publication. This reception performance of compiling a personal collection attempts to

create a new document to contain the text but it's availability to other readers is almost nonexistent. On the other hand, professional compilations that are published are done with higher quality paper, art, and minor edits to help streamline the story. These additional production performances change the text to make the reading more straightforward, much like the case of the volume editions subsequent to the serialized run of Victorian novels. Additionally, this new document contains a larger part (if not the entirety) of the text. This ensuing edition provides the author with a space for his/her text on its own, no longer having to share the physical page with others. Of course, the publishing house, rather than the newspaper editors, will still exert their influence as nonauthorial agents in the production of new documents, even as the text remains (for the most part) unchanged. In the case of *Prince Valiant* compilations, there is no longer a need to remind the reader of the events that transpired pages ago (rather than weeks ago) but the installments would be incomplete without them. Removing the markers of past and future points of the narrative would involve altering every single installment for this new publication, something that would require unnecessary artistic changes throughout. In order to better mimic the original serial reading experience and to ease this new publication process, the recaps and other paratextual elements remain in this new edition of the text.

Because comic strips are just a fraction of the overall newspaper or periodical; the control of publication is not on the shoulders of the author but on the editors. It is these editors who choose how many comic strips are part of the comics section, which authors get picked, and whether particular installments are fit to be printed. There is not necessarily an exclusivity clause in the publication contracts

between authors and editors since a particular comic strip can be picked up for syndication to a variety of newspapers simultaneously. Still, editors employ control and can heavily alter a particular comic strip as they see fit. One particular practice worth noting involves the Sunday edition, where authors normally have more space for their text. The average Sunday comic strip features a larger panel layout (about half of a newspaper page as seen in Figure 3.2) of which the first panel usually provides the title and author's name. As the cost of printing rose, editors decided to put more content per page. The first and second panels should now have a throwaway joke that connected to the overall comic strip but was not integral to it. This way, the editors have the option to remove the top third of the comic strip, place the title and author's name as a small banner in the margin, and thus have more comics per page. Thus, authors had minimal control even after publication had been accorded that their text would not be altered. To ensure that the same comic could be published in newspapers that could leave the installment as is or modified, cartoonists altered their style to accommodate a possibly fractured text. These adaptable installments translated into cartoonists of Sunday comic strips preparing installments that could be understood in its full version or with a third of it removed. Here we see a different form of textual fluidity, one of adaptability to the changing nature of comic strip publishing and one where readers could see two versions of the same text depending on the newspaper they purchased.

(Figure 3.2 represents a standard half page
format for Sunday comic strips)

i. Control and Ownership of Comics Strips and Their Characters

In order to get their works published, comic strip cartoonists have to convince those in charge of the newspaper comics' section that his/her work is of high quality and can be serialized continuously. This production performance can be undertaken by the author or through a literary agent. This aspect of publication is not unique to comic strips but what the author gives up by hiring this intermediary goes above standard publishing in any other medium. Different groups and companies specialize in representing cartoonists, which are commonly known as syndicates. They are the ones tasked with getting as many newspapers as possible to publish one's work. The syndicates become nonauthorial agents in their own right and add their own influence towards narrative production to make sure that the work has mainstream appeal, thus lowering the cartoonist's authorial autonomy. This form of editing means that the syndicates themselves can become gatekeepers towards publishing. Following Hesmondhalgh's ideals of studying the economic parameters and media industry behind cultural production, we can follow how syndicates reshape the publication

model of comic strips and further complicate notions of authorship and publishing as a whole.

This intricate connection (and its perils) between authors, syndicates, editors, and publishers is best exemplified by Bill Watterson (creator of *Calvin and Hobbes*) in a speech titled “The Cheapening of Comics”. Watterson addressed the 1989 Festival of Cartoon Art in Ohio to express his thoughts on how the current business model of comics publishing was a detriment to the author and to the medium itself.

The comics are a collaborative effort on the part of the cartoonists who draw them, the syndicates that distribute them, and the newspapers that buy and publish them. Each needs the other, and all have common interest in providing comics features of a quality that attracts a devoted readership. But business and art almost always have a rocky marriage, and in comic strips today the interests of business are undermining the concerns of the art.

Here we see how the authorial process is a negotiation between the creativity and economy as the authors’ story is continuously affected by the commercial side of publication. Watterson goes on to explain that the business model is fairly simple for comic strip publishing. Authors and syndicates split the income that comes from newspapers purchasing the comic strips for publication. But going into this partnership entails that the author continues the labors of narrative production as the syndicate obtains ownership of the intellectual property of the text.

Today, comic strip cartoonists work for syndicates, not individual newspapers, but 100 years into the medium it's still the very rare cartoonist who owns his creation. Before agreeing to sell a comic strip, syndicates generally demand

ownership of the characters, copyright, and all exploitation rights. The cartoonist is never paid or otherwise compensated for giving up these rights: he either gives them up or he doesn't get syndicated. ...

Now, can you imagine a novelist giving his literary agent the ownership of his characters and all reprint, television, and movie rights before the agent takes the manuscript to a publisher? Obviously, an author would have to be a raving lunatic to agree to such a deal, but virtually every cartoonist does exactly that when a syndicate demands ownership before agreeing to sell the strip to newspapers. Some syndicates take these rights forever, some syndicates for shorter periods, but in any event, the syndicate has final authority and control over artwork it had no hand in creating or producing. Without creator control over the work, the comics remain a product to be exploited, not an art. ("The Cheapening of Comics")

Publishing thus meant a loss of ownership, a deal which many authors of comic strips felt that was worth the price of large-scale publication in order to potentially achieve artistic and financial success. As the rate of comic strips published in newspapers continues to shrink, so too do the authors' dreams of reaching a massive readership. Thus, obtaining syndication at a grand scale might just be worth giving up the ownership and authorial autonomy regarding one's literary creation.

This loss of ownership was seen way back at the onset of the medium, as detailed by R.C. Harvey in his article "Outcault, Goddard, the Comics, and the Yellow Kid." To sum up, R.F. Outcault left the New York World newspaper in 1896 to make comics for the New York Journal but found that he could not take his work, *Hogan's*

Alley, with him. The World would employ George Luks to continue the artwork for *Hogan's Alley* as Outcault created *McFadden's Row of Flats*. Interestingly enough, the copyright laws regarding the drawing of a character were not as strict as they are now regarding the publication rights of an author. Thus, both comic strips featured the famous Yellow Kid character until both works ended their serial runs in 1898.

Outcault encountered a similar situation when he made the *Buster Brown* comic strip for the *Herald* in 1902. His new comic became a huge hit and Outcault used that success to license the likeness of his characters to sell a wide array of products. "In 1904, Outcault went to the St. Louis World's Fair and sold licenses to some 200 companies to use Buster Brown to advertise their products⁸¹" (Harvey). As the creator, Outcault believed he owned the comic and rights to the character though not by any actual legal precedent or document. This claim was challenged after Outcault left the *Herald* in 1905 for the *American* and brought *Buster Brown* with him. The *Herald* continued to publish *Buster Brown* with different artists, which led to Outcault suing them for the rights to the character and the text. Harvey cites Mark Winchester as one of the few people knowledgeable about the ensuing court case. The *Herald* in turn counter sued the Star Company (parent company of the *American* newspaper) "for the trademark of the Buster Brown title and the right to continue the feature employing any artist of their choice." The court's decision became a landmark case that set precedent for most forms of comics publication⁸². In short, since the *Herald*

⁸¹ Perhaps the most famous of these products was the Brown shoe company who established Buster Brown shoes brand. The footwear would contain a small image of the main character and his dog. The image no longer appears but the brand and the shoes continue to be sold to this day.

⁸² Other cases regarding comics are often mentioned but no court documents about are attainable, thus making these alleged cases ineffectual and inadmissible for the sake of law and proper academic research.

copyrighted each issue of the paper, all of its content, including the *Buster Brown* title and images, were part of their intellectual property. “But the characters in general (including elements of likeness, costume, and demeanor) were not tangible enough to merit copyright nor trademark. Outcault and the Star Company were free to use the character of Buster Brown but not the name or the title” (Winchester). Thus, Outcault continued to make his comic strip but all instances of the Buster Brown name were replaced with the image of the titular character. In the meantime, the *Herald* continued to publish the *Buster Brown* comic with the actual name and other artists. Interestingly enough, Outcault later went on to employ assistants to do the actual drawing of the text as he shifted his attention towards the creation of his own advertising agency. He would continue to provide the creative performance as part of the narrative production of *Buster Brown*, while others would take the reins regarding the production performances of the work. As author and owner (in his eyes), Outcault continued to license his character for years and employed several lawyers to stop anyone else trying to use the Buster Brown likeness without his consent. The law may not have given Outcault the official ownership of his work but his title of creator and author provided the gravitas to avoid possible legal troubles. He took on additional authorial responsibilities, so much so that the traditional authorial roles became secondary to further monetizing his work. Outcault’s case illustrates the business acumen that goes beyond narrative production as one’s characters can be used outside of the text to extend the author’s income outside of the serial publishing of one’s work.

With all the success that comes with licensing one’s characters, it’s easy to see why syndicates would want to obtain the ownership rights of a comic strip and its

characters. Much like with the case of finding newspapers to publish one's work, the syndicates served as an intermediary between author and publisher when it came to finding product tie-ins; thus, increasing revenue for all parties. As explained earlier with Outcault's case, obtaining and maintaining licensing arrangements soon took over his authorial responsibilities and assistants were employed to take on more, if not all, aspects of narrative production. Over the years, comic strip authors signed on with these syndicates in order to assure initial publication and arrangements with other companies to achieve authorial and financial success. But with declining numbers of newspaper sales, licensing deals rose incrementally especially during the 1980s.

Walker notes that:

According to *The Licensing Newsletter*, between 1978 and 1982 annual retail revenues from all licensed products rose from \$6.5 billion to \$20.6 billion, and comic properties accounted for approximately 20% of this business. In 1982 *People* magazine estimated that there were over 1,500 *Garfield* products on the market that had earned between \$14 million and \$20 million. (559)

Jim Davis, the author of *Garfield*, of course only obtained a small royalty from those many millions of dollars on products that ranged from coffee mugs to animated television shows⁸³. The syndicates obtained their own share of the royalties for Davis's and other cartoonists' work, as previously accorded by the contracts both parties signed. However, as the potential for licensing deals rose, the importance of the narrative diminished when it came to syndicates taking on new authors. This new

⁸³ In June 2007, I went to a licensing show in New York City where characters and products came together in ways that seem farfetched even now. Agencies representing intellectual property were out there for consideration of products while other companies show the possibilities for how new products can be tied to preexisting characters.

standard made it so that syndicates would be more selective but also that authors would design their works with merchandising in mind more than on crafting the best possible story. An author's autonomy was reduced even more as these nonauthorial agents favored texts that could be marketable, rather than publishable. This was one of the many critiques that Dave Watterson made during his talk on "The Cheapening of Comics" discussed earlier. He does mention the benefits that come with licensing that go beyond the financial benefits.

The character merchandise not only provides the cartoonist with additional income, but it puts his characters in new markets and has the potential to broaden the base of the strip and attract new readers. I'm not against all licensing for all strips. Under the control of a conscientious cartoonist, certain kinds of strips can be licensed tastefully and with respect to the creation.

Watterson himself opposed the licensing of his strip, *Calvin and Hobbes* in almost all forms. There are many compilation books of installments divided by year and topics but there are few if any official memorabilia⁸⁴ available for purchase. This decision to limit his work's presence outside of the text irked Universal Press Syndicate, whose representatives wanted him to follow the merchandising path of other cartoonists like Jim Davis. Watterson decided not to license his characters and feared that other cartoonists who depended too much on this practice would lose their artistic and authorial integrity along the way.

⁸⁴ Perhaps the most commonly found unofficial piece of *Calvin and Hobbes* regalia is the decal of Calvin urinating on something. These stickers are technically illegal and having them has gotten people arrested. More details on its history can be found in an article by Phil Edwards found here <https://triviahappy.com/articles/the-tasteless-history-of-the-peeing-calvin-decal>

Some very good strips have been cheapened by licensing. Licensed products, of course, are incapable of capturing the subtleties of the original strip, and the merchandise can alter the public perception of the strip, especially when the merchandise is aimed at a younger audience than the strip is. The deeper concerns of some strips are ignored or condensed to fit the simple gag requirements of mugs and T-shirts. In addition, no one cartoonist has the time to write and draw a daily strip and do all the work of a licensing program. Inevitably, extra assistants and business people are required, and having so many cooks in the kitchen usually encourages a blandness to suit all tastes. Strips that once had integrity and heart become simply cute as the business moguls cash in. ... Licensing has made some cartoonists extremely wealthy, but at a considerable loss to the precious little world they created. I don't buy the argument that licensing can go at full throttle without affecting the strip. Licensing has become a monster. Cartoonists have not been very good at recognizing it, and the syndicates don't care. ("The Cheapening of Comics")

As we can see, the narrative production was affected to better fit the financial factors of publishing by prioritizing the potential for licensing. According to Watterson, authorial autonomy decreases as the storytelling of comics became secondary to marketing potential. Comic strips that feature overarching storylines do not offer the potential a distinctive panel that could translate well outside of the comic and unto merchandising. Producers of serial fiction in this medium would thus have another hurdle for complex storytelling to be published in newspapers.

The syndicates have control and ownership (given to them by the author) over the work outside of narrative production and incorporate additional business ventures beyond publishing. Authors can take this path without intermediaries but licensing and even publication in such a competitive format is difficult enough without initial claims to fame. Of course, not all authors believe that these practices are a bad thing and that there's nothing wrong with financial success. Many cartoonists and syndicates believed that Watterson would change his tone once he obtained more success or once he obtained a better deal with Universal Press Syndicate. After a small hiatus in 1992, Watterson indeed renegotiated his contract but not in a way people were expecting. Not only would *Calvin and Hobbes* have almost no merchandise but each Sunday installment would be published as an unbreakable half page. Newspapers had to provide this space as part of their comics section or his syndicate would not give them the rights to publish that installment or any other. Because Watterson had achieved such fame, the syndicates accepted this new contract and newspapers would acquiesce to these stipulations. His authorial autonomy had risen but only because he was in a position of power due to the fame of his work, allowing Watterson to emerge with a one of a kind deal. However, few if any other cartoonists could ask for these conditions without heavily limiting their potential for widespread publication. Watterson continued to be critical of comic strip publishing even after he stopped working on *Calvin and Hobbes* in 1995. Unlike other comic strips whose authors had retired or died, no other cartoonist would continue the work as Watterson was quite clear that no one should or could carry on the story that he had concluded⁸⁵. Of course,

⁸⁵ Several unofficial sequels can be found online as fanworks and parodies that barely skirt through copyright law. One notable title by Phil Berry called *Hobbes and Bacon* follows the adventures of

this experience is almost an outlier when looking through the history of notable comic strip publishing.

Time and time again we see how the publication of comics in newspapers is one where singular authorship transforms into a more corporate style approach to narrative production and publishing. Characters and their stories (especially in extended serial fiction) can easily outlast their creator's desire/ability to keep writing them and many times outlive them. Other cartoonists, employed by newspapers and syndicates can continue with the creative and production performances to ensure the work continues. Hence, the continuation of comic strip authorship is one that extends beyond the authorial autonomy of one person and more to the author as a corporate entity. This business and authorial model are taken to a new level with narrative production of comic books, which will be explained shortly.

As stated before, comic strips exist primarily as an ancillary feature of a larger medium. Newspapers flourished throughout the 20th century as the printing technologies improved and the population of potential readers rose. But with improvements in technology also comes the rise of entirely new forms of media. Television and the nightly news programs made the afternoon editions of newspapers obsolete. And with the increased availability of home computers and the Internet, print itself was losing ground with the advent of the millennium. The continual decline of print newspapers and periodicals over the years meant that fewer and fewer comic strips were present each day, to the point that they may just disappear entirely. Authors' dreams of making a comic strip that would get picked up by a large paper

Calvin's precocious daughter once Hobbes passes on to her possession. The first installment can be found here, <http://www.pantsareoverrated.com/archive/2011/05/10/hobbes-and-bacon/>

and then nationally syndicated are at their scarcest. Many current and would be authors of this form of serial fiction have now emigrated from print and now venture into the digital realm for their publication aspirations. An in depth discussion of digital publishing is discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation.

B. Comic Books

If comic strips are a garnish within a larger literary plate then comic books are their own meal. No longer having to piggyback off a larger periodical, comic books exist within their own documents. One of the first comic books was *The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats* which was published in 1897 as a 196 page compilation of the newspaper comic strip by Outcault (whose case was analyzed earlier). According to Jamie Coville in his exploration of the Platinum Age of Comics⁸⁶, this book was not compiled by Outcault but rather by “the G. W. Dillingham Company with permission from Hearst, the newspaper that had *Hogan's Alley* at the time”. The back cover of this book states one of the first utterances of a “comic book”, thus coining the term. Other reprints of comic strips would be republished in new hard cover documents over the years. Soon afterwards, original content became the rule for comic books and authors were free to do a complete storyline per installment (commonly found in super hero adventures like *Superman*), the equivalent of several short stories (humor centered ones like *Archie* used this format), or some combination of the two. The document itself consisted of a standard of 28-32 pages of content that could be published at various intervals, e.g. weekly or monthly, both factors depending on the particular

⁸⁶ In different forms of comic scholarship, the different “Ages of Comics” are placed in relation to the most popular time period of comics, i.e. the Golden Age of Comics that started with the initial publication of *Action Comics #1*, the first appearance of Superman. The “Platinum Age” demarks how this comic predates this moment.

publishing house. The strict page count included the various advertisements that were scattered throughout the text but these rarely share the same page of the actual content. Comic books were originally sold as hardcover compilations of comic strips but as they moved to original content, the quality of the periodical lowered as mass economic publishing became the norm. Comic books were once available for purchase almost anywhere but as time went on the increase in printing quality and quantity of titles made it so that dedicated comic book stores would be a reader's best chance to find both recent and rare titles.

The art of storytelling for comic books requires attention to the physical dimensions of the document. With page count and sizes being quite strict, authors had to use each panel in connection to the others so that reading from left to right and top to bottom could be streamlined, especially with word balloon placement. As a cartoonist and a critic of the medium, Will Eisner grappled with what he called the "reader's wandering eye". This broad vision leads to the tendency of seeing the page as a whole, which risks that readers may see something outside the intended reading order of panels. The minimal content of comic strip installments did not have this problem but the layout of comic books means that authors should consider how their story could be read outside of the designed path. As Eisner explains:

In sequential art the artist must, from the outset, secure control of the reader's attention and dictate the sequence in which the reader will follow the narrative. The limitations inherent in the technology of printed comics are both obstacle and asset in the attempt to accomplish this. The most important obstacle to surmount is the tendency of the reader's eye to wander. On any given page, for

example, there is absolutely no way in which the artist can prevent the reading of the last panel before the first. The turning of the page does mechanically enforce some control, but hardly as absolutely as in film. (*Comics and Sequential Art* 40)

Critical moments in both the images and words can be discovered too early and a dramatic reveal can be ruined. An unintended reception performance can take place and distort the placement of narrative gap and its conclusion. Eisner and McCloud among several other veterans of comic book writing suggest that the act of physically turning the page is the true division between the many parts that make up a comic book. “[Seasoned artists] learned to tailor the last panel on the right-hand page to act as a tease for the next page (whether the story requires it or not)” (McCloud, *Reinventing Comics* 221). This production performance shows an understanding of the medium and how the content should be placed in a way that best takes advantage of the pages. However, there is no way for an author to make sure that a reader engages with the text in an intended/specific way regardless of format or style. An errant glance by the reader can push an image or an utterance before it is narratively ready. Quickly flipping through the pages of a comic book can lead to a glimpse of the major dramatic points of the story. In a traditional print novel, authors do not necessarily need to take in mind the readers’ wandering eye with so much of the text present that key sentences are harder to stand out unless written as such. Still, it is ultimately up to the readers to decide whether to follow the narrative path and gaps presented before them or whether they will find another way to maneuver the text.

While comic strip authorship mostly relies on one person taking the role of cartoonist, comic book authorship is more commonly found as a joint venture between a writer and an artist. The division of creative and production performances between the words and images that make up the text shows a clear partition of the labors each person undertook. Other roles such as colorists, inkers, pencillers, and letterers would later become employees tasked with their eponymous production performances. However, the writer and the artist are those that take the brunt of narrative production. This dual authorship is a collaboration that shows a negotiation between writer and artist, though the former tends to have more control of the final product and is ultimately accountable for the storytelling. The writer produces a script with varying levels of detail for each installment and the artist accommodates the creative and production performance by creating the images and panels. Both work together for that project but down the line the writers and artists can take on different projects and even collaborate with others. These momentary partnerships are considered the norm in contemporary comic book narrative production as writers and artists work together for only a few years before taking on other projects.

One notable variant to the one writer, one artist model per text can be found in the publications of Marvel comics during the 1960s. In that time, their head writer was the legendary Stan Lee, who would have several artists working with him. Lee took charge of the creative performances of the main events of different installments of each title, e.g. *Thor*, *X-Men*, *Spiderman*, *The Hulk*, *Iron Man*, *Daredevil*, *The Fantastic Four*, etc. The artists would then do their part of the production performances by drawing out the comic book of their respective texts. Lee would then

provide feedback, artistic revisions were made, and then he as writer would add in the dialogue afterwards. The inkers, colorists, etc. would then finish the document to prepare it for publication. This form of narrative production would later be known as the “Marvel Method”, aka “Stan Lee Method”, and he would be responsible for most of Marvel’s comic book writing throughout that time frame. In an interview for the *Web of Stories* website, Stan Lee described how the system allowed for the artist to design the content of the installment with only a minimal guiding hand by the writer. Lee explained that this method was great for both the writer and artist:

[B]ecause the artist wasn't handicapped by... or inhibited by my descriptions.

The artist could tell the story visually any way he wanted, and once I got the pages back and I was looking at the drawings, it was so easy for me to pinpoint the dialogue and make it exactly fit the expression on the character's face, and so forth. ...

[S]ee a writer has a lot of freedom. If the illustration was very beautiful I'd put very little or no dialogue in, 'cause I wanted the illustration to show. If we had an area where you had a few panels that not much was going on, and they weren't that interesting, I'd put in as much dialogue as I could, and sound effects, and I spaced... see I laid out the balloons too. I would put the balloons in such a way that they seemed to be part of the design, and they made the panel look more interesting than it was. (“The Marvel Method” interview transcript)

Here, the creative performance is an initial push from the writer which the artist then interprets as he/she sees fit, thus providing a fair amount to authorial autonomy to both

parties. The writer (in this case Stan Lee) would then react to the imagery and panels and continue the production performance of adding dialogue and sound effects. While this one writer and different artists (like Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko) were the creative force behind the texts published by Marvel at that time, Stan Lee would still be the considered the originator for the characters and plots. Lee's position as the creator and author of all these texts would be disputed by these artists later on. The Jack Kirby Museum and *The Kirby Effect* cite multiple instances where Kirby challenged Lee's and Marvel's claims of authorship, something that Kirby's children tried to sue Marvel for in 2009 (Fritz "Heirs file claims to Marvel heroes") but was ultimately settled (Patten "Marvel & Jack Kirby Heirs Settle Legal Battle Ahead Of Supreme Court Showdown"). The complexity of authorship and ownership by writer, artist, and publishing house is a complicated manner, as evident by this and other cases discussed later on in this chapter.

Marvel would later switch to a traditional co-author style of comic book story development but the namesake's method is still available and viable for others to adapt and use for their own narrative production. Whether with dual authorship or something more akin to Stan Lee with varied artists, the relationship between writer and artist coming together is vital for the narrative production of comic books. The nature of serial fiction in comics is one where this joint authorial venture is expected to last as long as there is still more content to be published. However, as the business of publishing comics changed, so too would the idea of authorship of long running works and their characters.

The complexity of authorship in serial fiction within comic books grew over the years alongside an ever expanding narrative. Writers and artists were originally focused on writing a self-contained story that could be told beginning to end in each individual installment. The events of previous issues had little to no relevance to what could happen next. This form of storytelling was more episodic than serialized according to Jason Mittell who defined the former as:

Episodic series present a consistent storyworld⁸⁷, but each episode is relatively independent – characters, settings, and relationships carry over across episodes, but the plots stand on their own, requiring little need for consistent viewing or knowledge of diegetic history to comprehend the narrative. (163)

This is the opposite to what Mittell calls serial narration which “features continuing storylines traversing multiple episodes, with an ongoing diegesis that demands viewers to construct an overarching storyworld using information gathered from their full history of viewing” (164). The idea of comic books being closer to short stories with a recurring set of characters is best exemplified in Umberto Eco’s “The Myth of Superman”. In it, Eco describes how the narrative status quo needs to be maintained so that more stories can continue to be made. For example, imagine that in one installment Superman stops his nemesis Lex Luthor from robbing a bank and sends him off to jail. The next installment has Superman trying to stop Lex Luthor from completing a doomsday device with no mention as to how his antagonist got out of prison or even of his previously foiled plan. Without direct consequences, the potential

⁸⁷ The concept of a storyworld is common when discussing serial fiction but the terminology changes with different critics. One of the more common variations is the “narrative universe” of a particular title; for example, the Harry Potter Universe aka the Potterverse discussed in Chapter 2. Since the “[Blank]verse” term is more widely used in fandom circles (but varies between academics), I choose to stay with the former except when referring to another author’s thoughts on the subject.

for stories was near infinite but there was no real reason to keep reading as the narrative and the characters barely developed during its publication. Narrative continuity was almost nonexistent and the narrative gaps were minimal in this form of comic book storytelling. Thus, there was an uneasy balance between authors and readers where anything could happen in the short term but no real developments would take place in the long term.

As time went on, comic book authors decided to phase out the episodic format and proceeded to use various installments to weave complicated story arcs towards eventually creating a continuous narrative throughout the overall text. This transition allows for authors to tell their stories without having to worry about being stopped by the 28-32 page limit of the document. To keep their readers interested in purchasing the next installment, authors went with the tried and true method of their serial ancestors by having the last page usually end on a cliffhanger. This format meant that a recap introduction would be necessary for almost every installment to familiarize current and new readers with the current plot line. As we saw with Hal Foster and the narrative production of *Prince Valiant*, this meant that there would be less available space for the story to unfold. Comic books had more pages to work with but as the narrative expanded, the recapitulations and flashbacks to catch up readers and bridge previous narrative gaps became more and more common. On an issue to issue basis, the storytelling was fairly streamlined but once the plot grew to be measured in years, there were parts that even devout readers could be unfamiliar with once enough time had passed. This led to the creation of a type of footnote that could be inserted into panels without disrupting the reading experience, serving as a

reference point to previous storylines. For example, in “Superman in Action Comics #684”⁸⁸, the Man of Steel’s battle with the monster Doomsday takes them to a forest where the trees are actually artificial structures of something called “Habitat”. The reference is accompanied with an asterisk that leads to the footnote stating that, “The tree-city grown by creations of The CADMUS Project. Superman was last seen here in the landmark Action Comics #655” (124). Of course, the reference is only helpful if the reader has access to said installment. If one is unfamiliar with the current friends and enemies of Superman then the footnote does little to inform the reader and might raise more questions about the matter at hand⁸⁹. The troubles encompassing authorship and storytelling the iconic character of Superman will be further discussed in a later section of this chapter.

The difficulties with reading comic book serial fiction are similar to those found in comic strips but with other dimensions now in play. Comic books are of a slightly better paper quality than newspapers but are designed to be periodicals with a limited lifespan on the stands. For readers interested more on the overall narrative, having access to the entirety of the ever growing text of a particular character means making your own archive. In the case of long running texts, this means that there are hundreds of installments ranging over decades. And if a reader had not been reading since its onset then the mental and physical archives of the story are most likely

⁸⁸ Please note that this installment, as well as many others discussed later on, are derived from the *Death and Return of Superman Omnibus* (published in 2013) which contains multiple comics that make up that storyline. Hence, page numbers that are referenced are done with this edition in mind and not those from the original publications.

⁸⁹ For those wondering, Project CADMUS is named after the legendary Greek hero, famous for sowing the teeth of a dragon to form the Spartan people. In DC Comics lore, this organization uses that principle as a part of their mission to genetically engineer powerful creatures. After Superman’s fight with Doomsday, CADMUS made a clone of the hero, affectively named Superboy by the populace of Metropolis.

incomplete. It is also worth noting that purchasing a comic book is just that; there is no other narrative content within this document that is not about the title character.

Keeping up with the story is not just an investment of time but a financial one as well. Comic book collecting slowly became an avid activity for emotional and/or financial reasons for readers. The intrinsic value of a particular comic book could always be judged by rarity, condition, and other factors but prices ballooned considerably over the years⁹⁰. A further analysis of the economic aspect of comic book publishing and collecting continues further along in this chapter.

C. Graphic Novels

This particular form of comics is fairly straight forward when compared to the other iterations of graphic narratives presented beforehand. Since graphic novels share many similarities with traditional print publishing of novels while following an analogous path of narrative production to comic strips and comic books, I will not delve as deep within this form of comics as the previous analysis of the former. The author goes through the process of turning his/her work into a manuscript which is then taken to publication houses. After acceptance and editing, it is taken to print and documents are sold to readers later on. Based on the number of purchases and if the narrative has room to grow, further installments for potential publication can begin production. Publication dates for any kind of serialization are based on the completion of the next installment rather than on a fixed schedule, though different contracts may still have deadlines. Content wise, there is no predetermined amount of pages that

⁹⁰ Prices ballooned until the crash of comics in the mid-1990s but classic issues are still quite valuable. Recently, an issue “Action Comics #1” which contains the first adventure of Superman was sold at auction for over \$950,000. In 2014, a mint condition version of the same comic sold for over \$3.2 million. More info on both sales here: <http://comicbook.com/dc/2016/08/05/action-comics-1-sells-for-more-than-950-000-at-auction/>

need to be met as a minimum or maximum limit. The narrative in the installment should be self-contained enough so that the story can be read independently of sequels or prequels that might be in production but are not guaranteed to be published. The pages and binding of this document are of a much higher quality than other forms of comics and are not meant to be disposable at all. The themes of graphic novels are also meant to be more serious. While comic strips are almost inseparable from comedy or comic books from super heroes, graphic novels do not have that supposed overall predisposition for their content. Subject matter is meant to be for an adult audience, allowing for greater authorial autonomy towards writing and drawing in different themes and genres⁹¹.

One of the complexities of graphic novels is that many texts that are called as such are actually a compilation or omnibus editions of comic strips and comic books. Previously existing but no longer easily available collections of comic strips or a particular comic book storyline are republished in a new edition in graphic novel quality and are often sold with that moniker. Consider the case of Alan Moore's and Dave Gibbons', *Watchmen*. It was originally published serially as a twelve issue miniseries of comic books starting on September 1986, but obtained its greatest fame once the document compiling all installments was sold as a graphic novel in October 1987. Many critics consider it one of the perennial texts of the graphic novel format because of its serious nature and deconstruction of superheroes. *Time* magazine even

⁹¹ Outside of superheroes, one of the most renowned graphic novels is *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. It was originally serialized within *Raw* magazine and later republished in two novels, though compendiums including the whole series are sold as *The Complete Maus*. Spiegelman's work was awarded a Pulitzer Prize, thus helping to elevate the medium of comics as a storytelling platform. Unfortunately, it's designation as a work of nonfiction means that it goes beyond the previously accorded parameters of study for this dissertation and not studied further herein.

called *Watchmen* one of the top ten graphic novels of all time and one of the top 100 novels published after 1923. However, few critics acknowledge its roots as a twelve issue comic book miniseries published by DC⁹². The serial element is almost lost as independent installments become chapters and the enforced interruption between each installment is now accessible with the turn of a page. Still, reprinting the series as one graphic novel makes it far more accessible to readers than selling more copies of the individual installments. The *Watchmen* narrative universe continued to expand with the publication of the *Before Watchmen* series of comic books by DC though this was done by a different team of writers and artists. This shows how serialization is often part of the past and future of graphic novels as texts become published in different forms of documents and authors develop sequels/prequels to further expand their narratives.

Another graphic novel that is lauded for its departure from its comic book origin is Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight* and its sequels *The Dark Knight Returns* and *The Dark Knight III: The Master Race*. The story takes place in a dystopic future where an older Bruce Wayne must become Batman once again to save the world. All three are miniseries of comics that are later republished as graphic novels. The story takes place outside of any of the regular continuities for the title character which means that no event from the comic books can alter the story or vice versa, even as the narrative background for them is still the same. Miller purposely wanted to create a much darker and violent version of the character because he felt that, "It was really up

⁹² Moore originally tried to sell the idea to DC using some of its more famous characters but the executives told him that there was no room for that story to be told due the characters' ongoing and future narrative arcs. But they convinced him to create new characters so as to have more freedom on where to take the story. More info on this origin can be found here:
https://web.archive.org/web/20130121113337/http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1120854_2,00.html

to people of my generation to basically give Batman his balls back” (*Comic Book Superheroes Unmasked*). The contrast in tone from the kid friendly comic books or the campy television show propelled *The Dark Knight* to notoriety and fame. This darker tone of storytelling led the way for other Batman graphic novels like Alan Moore’s *The Killing Joke* to provide an in depth exploration of a story element that could derail the entire serialization of the main narrative. These graphic novels allow for a return to Eco’s mythology of superheroes where new stories can be told of popular characters without having to follow the rules of continuity beyond just an “Elseworld⁹³” story told in 28-32 pages. Interestingly enough, each of the three entries are decades apart in publication. The trilogy’s installments were published in 1986, 2001, and 2015 respectively (with the last one still ongoing) and Miller states that he will work on an upcoming fourth entry to the series later on⁹⁴ (Rogers). Miller’s version of Batman is one that coexists with the official main narrative that has been continuously published since its debut in 1939; thus showing how multiple variants of serialization can diverge from a principal story. Graphic novels, like Miller’s iteration of (and addition to) the Batman character and text, can serve to expand the direction of an already established story or to create original content. Without page limits and (relatively) low instances of outside influence from nonauthorial agents, this form of comics allow writers and artists to produce their graphic narratives with a higher degree of authorial

⁹³“Elseworld” refers to stories that are not part of the main continuity or storyline within serialization, especially in comics. Such stories can appear in a narrative vacuum or they can take place in a parallel dimension of sorts that is still technically part of the main story. For example, the recent *Spiderverse* story arc in Marvel ties in many Elseworld renditions of Spiderman for them to work together against a common threat to their existence.

⁹⁴ Hopefully it won’t take almost 15 years to come out if one were to follow the current publication history of the series.

freedom than those of comic strip and/or comic book authors; especially once considering the history of the creators of *Superman*.

II. Up, Up, and Away: The Case of Superman

One character that is both iconic and representative of the entire medium of comics is Superman. The Man of Steel, the Metropolis Marvel, the Last Son of Krypton, the Man of Tomorrow, and the Big Blue Boy Scout, or by whatever other superhero sobriquet he is known by, this character is emblematic for fictional heroes. The history of Superman is long and complex but rather than provide a summary of the overall narrative that has been published for almost eight decades, I wish to focus on the creators of this character and how the title of authorship changes throughout the years of publication. This analysis will also center on the various changes that occurred during throughout its comic book publication by multiple writers and artists and one of the most landmark story arcs of its serialization, “The Death and Return of Superman.”

A. The Siegel and Shuster Era

In the 1930s, writer Jerome “Jerry” Siegel and artist Joseph “Joe” Shuster, came together to make a character that could be a larger than life hero. Comic books had just become commonplace and authors were trying to find the next big thing that would make sure their periodicals would jump off the newsstands. An Associated Press article for the 75th anniversary of its debut relates the difficulties of Siegel and Shuster in their attempts to get their character published and their narrative serialized. They pitched their concept of “Superman” to different comic book companies until Action Comics decided to take a chance and have him be on the cover of their first

issue⁹⁵. Superman made his debut among other characters like Zatara the Sorcerer within the same document but each having their own story. Superman was far from being the first superhero in comics or any other medium but he soon became the symbol for the term. However, in the early days his powers and backstory were far more limited than what they currently are⁹⁶. Over the course of many years throughout its serialization, the *Superman* narrative grew and was modified multiple times throughout that time. Still, the iconic figure remains a symbol for superheroes and for the genre which comic books became synonymous with.

As the years went on, super heroes had become commonplace and an essential subset of comic books. Detective Comics Inc. published *Action Comics* (who had Superman) and *Detective Comics* (who had Batman) and later merged with National Comics, the resulting company being DC Comics though it did not officially have that name until 1977 (Sims). With so many popular characters under the same publication house, the potential for crossovers of characters between individual stories had escalated exponentially. Since characters are the legal property of their creators according to copyright law then one author cannot use another author's intellectual property without proper permission or face legal troubles. Even if the authors themselves could agree to it, their respective publishing houses might voice their objections and put a stop to the process. However, with the creation of DC, major legal hurdles were bypassed and the possibility of Superman and Batman joining

⁹⁵ You can read Superman's first adventure here <http://www.reading-room.net/Action1/Action1Cover.html>

⁹⁶ Fun fact, when Superman was first published he couldn't fly. Narratively, they explained that he was getting stronger and gained that power over time. Except that in the *Superboy* prequel comic book line he was already shown flying with little difficulty. This gap in the narrative continuity of the series would later be amended through the copious use of retcons.

forces with other heroes not only became a possibility, it would soon become a reality. Authors now had autonomy over their own characters as well as any other within the same parent company but only with the permission of the company's head editors. Crossovers in the form of cameos (brief appearances in another character's storyline) and team ups (wherein story lines from both titles' installments would merge and have characters freely appear) led to the creation of another comic book entirely where the heroes would be working together from the start. In 1941, *World's Finest Comics* hit the shelves and it showed Superman alongside Batman and Robin as a team that would go on many adventures to save the day, mostly from the United States' enemies during World War 2. Later on, Wonder Woman joined the team and the inclusion of other heroes would later influence the creation of another title with multiple characters from other DC comic books, *The Justice Society of America*. However, few if any of the original authors of these titles were the writers and artists behind these conglomerations of characters.

Siegel and Shuster would continue to be the main writer and artist of *Superman* for many years but only in the main series within *Action Comics*. They were responsible for the narrative production regarding the serialization of the story but the authorship concerning Superman and comics as a whole was changing. As part of the contract to develop and publish *Superman* through DC, Siegel and Shuster sold the rights and ownership of the character to the company (Kobler). They would remain developing the stories for the character as part of their ten year contract but it was DC and its executives who would have creative control and ownership of the characters from thereon out. This leads to what I call a corporate model of authorship, wherein

the company employs various writers and artists to complete creative and production performances regarding the story but ultimately it is the corporation itself that decides the direction of the narrative and has the function (though not the outright title) of the author.

Siegel and Shuster would continue to work for DC through the length of their contracts but continued to be quite vocal about not liking their deal of selling off their prized character. Before their time had expired, they tried to sue their employers over the rights to the *Superman* text and the character in 1947⁹⁷. Both of the original authors of Superman eventually decided to seek employment elsewhere and stopped trying to sue after they were given a settlement by DC which included that they could not fight the claim again. The courts had already decided that DC had the rights to the character, which Siegel and Shuster could appeal, but decided to take their former employers offer. However, their names as creators of Superman would be erased from future publications. In the mid-1970s, Siegel and Shuster decided to protest DC in a public manner. Investigations from journalists covering the case brought to light that both men were living in deep poverty (Inge). Fans of Superman took their side as they witnessed that their desire was more based on subsistence than greed. In the end, DC decided to take action outside of the original court rulings. The company gave Siegel and Shuster a stipend and health benefits to help them get back on their feet. Both men accepted this olive branch and ceased any further legal action⁹⁸. DC also decided that the phrase “created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster” be included in every Superman

⁹⁷ Conclusions by the presiding judge J. Addison Young can be found here: <https://www.scribd.com/doc/298839638/Young-April-12-1948-Findings-of-Facts>

⁹⁸ Interestingly enough, Siegel’s widow and daughter went into an extended legal battle with DC and Time Warner over copyright issues regarding Superman and ownership of Superboy for most of the 2000s.

story from thereon out, regardless of its medium of publication. This recognition by DC of the original authorship of the Superman work, alongside caring for the real life initial authors, shows the creators of the character still have a historical and emotional authorial connection to the text long after other writers and artists have continued the serialization of the narrative.

B. The Crisis of Continuity

As explained earlier, the initial serialization of comic books was not focused on making each installment connect narratively to the next one. Eco's concept of "narrative redundancy" extended far beyond his example of Superman and was a staple of the medium. However, with the supposed end of the "Golden Age" of comics in the 1950s, a greater focus on making an overarching storyline with direct consequences emerged. This idea of a strict narrative timeline became riddled with narrative gaps, especially once one takes into account the fact that the characters owned by DC share a spatial and temporal universe. The consortium of publications made it so that Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Aquaman (to name only a few of the heroic characters the company had at its disposal) could fight crime together but also that their own individual problems were occurring simultaneously. The concurrent serialization of these characters' stories (and many other characters that entered the fray over the years) meant that writers and artists had to take care not to overstep their boundaries in order to avoid raising a narrative gad that the authors had not intended to make of fill. After all, why would Superman have to fight a monster at the bottom of the ocean when Aquaman should have dealt with it beforehand? Or if a crossover issue between Batman and Green Lantern were to take

place, it would look strange that the story happen in one character's document while the other is doing something completely different in their respective storyline. A serious unyielding continuity was not in place until the 1970s with the "Bronze Age of Comics", though DC started hiring editors since the Silver Age in the 50s to ensure that individual storylines still made sense collectively. This additional production performance at the corporate level made for a more uniform narrative across all titles. However, this meant that writers and artists had to constantly check with their editors ahead of time to see if their stories could be viable in regards to long term narrative production. Authorial autonomy (as per Bourdieu) decreased at an individual level though a more collective form of authorship emerged

In serialization, as with all literature, the task of keeping consistency is ultimately that of maintaining narrative continuity. Being able to keep track of all past events and their connections to current story lines is a difficult endeavor for readers if they have not been part of the serial reading experience since the onset of publication. Authors try to introduce enough flashbacks and exposition of past events to address the narrative gaps that may arise for new and veteran readers alike. And yet, given enough time the narrative becomes so convoluted that even writers and editors have difficulty keeping up with all of the events and continuity lockout emerges (just like in comic strips beforehand). The Silver Age of Comics (ranging from 1956-1970) was fairly loose when it came to keeping track of continuity between installments but DC had established that all of their heroes inhabited the same narrative universe. This meant that they not only shared a moment in space but that all adventures were occurring concurrently to each other. Once the 70s came so too did the Bronze Age of

Comics and a turn for more serious storytelling was taking place. Continuity was a staple of the storytelling, which meant Superman's primary storyline was saving Metropolis in this title, while other comics like *Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen* and *Superman's Girl Friend, Lois Lane* would be phased out. Appearances in any of the iterations of the Justice League and other cameo appearances would still be acceptable though. Authors in the Bronze Age wanted to keep the narrative path straight but that meant that stories had to fit within the proper continuity which caged their creative freedom in the name of maintaining the main narrative in its serial structure. DC executives had the idea that characters could do adventures adjacent to the primary storyline by saying that they take place in parallel dimensions. Hence, the same narrative universe contained multiple forms of planet Earth, each with their own version of DC characters, both classic and original ones. This decision allowed for new stories to be told but added far more layers to the narrative complexity of overarching continuity that DC was building.

Several DC titles had decades of history at this point, but even as continuity was being strictly followed for a fraction of the time, some of the main characters had stories that even diehard fans had trouble understanding. With multiple planet Earths having different versions of these iconic heroes, the executives used their authorial powers to do something drastic. In 1985, a huge crossover event taking place over an entire year involved almost every character from multiple dimensions that would culminate in all realities merging together. This was heralded as the *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. There would now only be the main continuity and all other forms would no longer exist in the context of the narrative and in publication.

Narrative accessibility had been reestablished and continuity lockout had been resolved as new readers could now approach DC titles in a “post crisis”⁹⁹ world. However, this decision to restart the story alienated their existing readership, which felt betrayed. All that narrative investment was gone as the narrative slate was wiped clean. Interestingly enough, this allowed for backstories to be retold but no drastic changes were made to the characters' pasts. Other narrative resets occurred over the years which include: *Zero Hour: Crisis in Time!* (in 1994), *Infinite Crisis* (in 2005), *Final Crisis* (in 2008), and *Flashpoint* (in 2011). The events of *Flashpoint* led to the creation of *The New 52*, the name given to all DC titles until *Convergence* occurred during the time of this writing. As of now, writers and artists can write their own stories (as per DC’s permission), some of them being serialized, regarding any character without having to state a specific universe or continuity for their existence in tandem to their “main” storyline. Thus, there was now a shift where strict continuity storytelling regarding every single character and storyline could coexist with a more episodic storytelling format. Narrative production of long-form serial fiction alongside limited runs could exist without having to contort the story to fall under the guidelines of a strict and uniform continuity between all DC properties. Time will tell if the transition will lead to an increase in sales and critical acclaim or whether another game changing event will rewrite the DC¹⁰⁰ universe once again down the line.

⁹⁹ The original *Crisis* storyline serves as a benchmark when discussing many of DC’s characters even as other moments have reshaped the narrative universe over the years. Thus, “Pre Crisis” and “Post Crisis” become a form of BC and AD for discussions of DC properties.

¹⁰⁰ The choice to recreate the past of a collection of serial fiction is not exclusive to DC editors. Marvel has recently completed its own continuity collision as their original world, the “Ultimate” universe, and a few other narrative realms of existence are set to come together. The resulting continuity after the events of “The Secret Wars” is now one timeline with various characters changing as known and unknown elements of comic book worlds of the Marvel Company merge.

One important thing to consider is that once a narrative event horizon has been scheduled by the higher ups in the company's authorial roles, writers and artists need to finish up the current storylines of their characters so that they may be available for the crossover event. Authorial autonomy for writers and artists in comic book storytelling are reduced even more once a major decision is taken by those in charge. However, if a character does not need to be present then writers and artists can make a proper conclusion to a story arc knowing fully well that its serialization is about to conclude. At this point, writers and artists can be free to definitively kill off a character, a course of action that rarely occurs in comic book serial fiction since that would limit future stories. One particular example comes from the case of Marvel icons Wolverine and Deadpool, who both officially died in their respective titles in 2014 with "Death of Wolverine Vol 1 #4" and in 2015 in "Deadpool #45: The Death of Deadpool", respectively. What makes their cases interesting is that both characters have a high level healing factor (a super power that allows them to regenerate from fatal wounds) which renders both of them seemingly immortal. After decades of surviving the impossible, both of them would finally meet their demise. But rather than have their deaths come as a shock when serialization would suddenly come to a halt, Marvel issued press releases proclaiming the eventual end for two of their most beloved characters. Not only that, they provided the definitive date of their deaths months ahead of time and even a countdown of their remaining installments. Much like an advertised series finale on television, the announcement served to prepare the readership for the end but also to spur interest, which hopefully translated into additional sales. A definitive narrative gap was introduced for the readership to engage

in with a preset conclusion. The news was taken with a grain of salt by comic book savvy readers since characters in Marvel and DC have died only to be revived some time later for any multitude of reasons. The revelation from the company a short time later that their own “Crisis” style event named “Secret Wars” was coming soon left many wondering just how long Wolverine and Deadpool would stay dead. Within a year, Deadpool had already returned though Wolverine remains officially deceased even as other characters are currently trying to resurrect him.

From a sales standpoint, the reboots worked because new readers (who probably would not have started due to all of the history behind the narrative) have fewer barriers towards narrative entry. But with each action of erasing the slate, the prior readership feels like their serial reading experience and investment in the story had been for naught. A new story starts fresh but it does not mean that the past was deleted. Those previous installments (if the text is available through original documents, reprints, and/or digital editions) still have stories that subjectively range from astounding to almost unreadable, which continue to show the serial progression of the character. Take for example the case of Supergirl, the cousin of Superman with nearly identical super powers. During the events of *Crisis of Infinite Earths* she bravely sacrifices herself to ensure the survival of many of the other heroes at the end of the seventh issue of the series. A touching tribute is made by many of her super powered friends during her funeral. A few installments later, the reshaping of the narrative universe effectively erased her character from existence as reality itself was rewritten. For all intents and purposes, the character of Supergirl was retconned out of the history of all DC titles but her memory lived on through the readership. Supergirl

would eventually return years later as an almost completely different character¹⁰¹ only to later return to her roots further down the line. Many other characters backstories were also heavily altered throughout the years within the context of the story but each version continues to live on through the readers. In many ways, this form becomes the opposite of a fluid text as stages of the narrative become rewritten and readers witness all the versions but the story itself is technically only the most recent incarnation which will likely be changed soon. Hence, the atmosphere of comic book narratives is one where simultaneously too many changes occur and things stay mostly the same throughout serialization. Particular storylines can become memorable but the story as a whole remains in flux as eventual executive meddling will alter everything down the line.

The choices by writers, artists, and executives behind any of the “Crisis” events are ultimately those of achieving narrative accessibility once again to a long running work of serial fiction that encapsulates multiple publications. Serialization leads to complexity as the text is divided amongst its documents and the struggle to appease new and current readers reaches a point where it is no longer feasible. Starting again may seem insulting to those who have dedicated years to the story already but without an influx to the readership sales numbers will eventually drop and publication might cease entirely. Reception performances through sales figures and critiques continue to shape the ongoing serialization of these characters and help determine when another reality altering event is on the horizon.

¹⁰¹ In the early 90s, she was a shapeshifting alien that followed Superman’s example of heroism and thus shifted her form to look like the character of Supergirl and taking that name. She was also the lover and bodyguard of Lex Luthor Jr, who was actually the original Lex with a new body. As explained before, continuity lockout happens quickly as the story progresses.

C. The Death and Return of Superman

The corporate model of authorship is even more complex once one considers just how high the ownership totem pole goes. DC owns the rights to all of its characters and can publish their stories within the print format of comic books and graphic novels. However, DC is still owned by Warner Bros. which is part of Time-Warner. This junction did not lead to cameos and crossovers between each company's characters but it did mean that there are more layers of influence that led to things outside of the narrative world altering the story's path and further hindering authorial autonomy. The best example of this can be found in the events that led to the *Death and Return of Superman* story arc.

The introduction to the omnibus edition of this story published in 2013 recalls the history of how the idea for this famous event took place. In 1992, the yearly summit of all *Superman* writers, artists, and editors took an unexpected turn. Together they had planned out the overall plots for the year's storylines that would culminate in the event that everyone had waited for: the marriage of Clark Kent/Superman and Lois Lane. However, a call from DC executives came in that derailed those plans. A live action television program had been green lit for production, *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*. The higher ups believed that the eventual marriage between the titular characters on television would be bolstered if the same event was happening in the comic book world. Having to start anew and with little time left, the summit considered different narrative trajectories until they finally decided to kill the iconic hero. Of course, he would be brought back to life by the end of the storyline but the

contemporary trope of a revolving door afterlife in comic books started with this event. Readers honestly believed that this was the end of their beloved Superman.

Since the Man of Steel's death would have immense narrative ramifications to all DC properties, all other titles had to be informed and they too scrambled to adapt their storylines for the coming year. For several months' worth of installments, almost every main DC character wore a black armband with a red S in remembrance to their fallen friend¹⁰². Other titles were used to segue into Superman's demise storyline thanks to the coterminous continuity in the serialization of DC characters. The Justice League of America would be the first to face off against the monstrous Doomsday, a mysterious mindless behemoth whose true origin story would not be revealed until years later¹⁰³. The JLA was all but finished even with Superman's help, other heroes in Metropolis came to help the cause, but the final battle was just between the two of them and the Man of Steel would be broken as he sacrificed his life to stop Doomsday. What made the countdown to the end more ominous was the fact that each installment leading up to it contained a specific number of panels on each page (starting with four per page in "The Adventures of Superman #497") all the way until the last pages of "Superman #600" with two epic double page splash panels to illustrate the end of an era. The production performance of deciding between the different artists and writers to make a specific number of panels created a sense of foreboding foreshadowing that prepared readers for what was coming.

¹⁰² A similar armband was packaged with the initial publication of the installment where Superman met his end at the hands of Doomsday.

¹⁰³ Long story short, Doomsday is a hyper adaptive being with a penchant for destruction on a massive scale after surviving on a prehistoric Krypton, made its way to other planets, and was eventually stopped in an alien world. It was shackled and sent it into space until crashing on Earth. For a far more complex history of the character, go here [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doomsday_\(comics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doomsday_(comics))

It is important to note that there was no sense of warning that Superman would die (if only temporarily). On a cold November morning in 1992, newsstands and comic book shops lined their shelves with a special installment of “Superman #75” encased in a black bag with a bloodied S on the front. Millions of copies were sold that day as a tragedy had taken part in the world of comic books. What made this release even more interesting was that it was being reported by almost every major news channel. In a rare instance, writers and editors of DC had to go on the air to explain themselves. This is one of the first moments when the authorial responsibility of having to defend your decisions made the national media spotlight. Up until this moment, the only major character in comics to have died outside of the Crisis events was Jason Todd, the second person to take up the Robin mantle. And that moment was one determined by the fans thanks to a phone poll that would determine whether Batman’s sidekick would survive or not a deadly trap set by the Joker. There was a lot of backlash by the readers and critics but ultimately the writers were responding to the reception performance of the readership’s votes. Ultimately it was their choice, not the authors’, to kill off the character. But in Superman’s case this was a deliberate decision, one that many interviewers considered to be a ploy to increase sales. Many writers actually answered this critique by saying that that was indeed the case. The purpose of telling a story serially is to sell enough copies of installments to keep it going. It was almost as if DC held Superman hostage and if people did not buy enough copies; though this time the fans had no idea that their hero’s life was in their hands. Readers had apparently failed Superman but the writers, artists, and editors knew that

this absence would be temporary, even as they told reporters that this was indeed the end.

While Superman the character was gone, *Superman* the text would continue to be serialized. Titles like “Action Comics”, “The Adventures of Superman”, “Superman: The Man of Steel”, and the simply titled “Superman” continued to be published as they already had been to continue the story of the aftermath of the iconic hero’s death. DC published eight installments depicting what happened next, which included Superman’s funeral between four installments titled “Funeral for a Friend”. It is in this miniseries that one notices an artistic and stylistic mismatch between installments. Each of these titles has a different writer, artist, letterer, penciller, inker, and colorist with the only position in common between the four documents being the editor, Mike Carlin. “Superman: Man of Steel #20 aka Funeral for a Friend #3” has various DC heroes come to attend Superman’s funeral and burial, including an adult muscular Robin who helps save Jimmy Olsen from some mafia style extortionists. The next installment in the chronology of Superman’s narrative “Superman #76 aka Funeral for a Friend #4” now has a much younger and less imposing Robin with much shorter hair. Even with a possible haircut, the latter depiction of Batman’s sidekick is noticeably more timid as his brief appearance consists of him thinking “I liked him too, but I’m afraid that if I say anything I’ll sound like an idiot!” (256). It is in this contrast that textual fluidity, or rather a lack thereof, becomes apparent. With the text of *Superman* being divided by four groups undergoing the same production performances, there are going to be minor differences in the way these are completed even as the narrative progression is uniform and planned out. Close readings of minute

details in the art and lettering reveal that the depictions of these characters and their language changes ever so slightly between the four titles; none of which are as readily apparent as the Robin example from above.

In short, corporate authorship requires that different artists and writers be employed to uphold the production performances necessary for narrative production to continue. Serialization at a weekly rate of publication required that multiple documents, each with its own team but with common editors, be ready without necessarily having full knowledge of every detail of previous and future installments. In the case of *Superman*, especially within this storyline, finding an error is rare but when one exists it sticks out. While narrative production may be the labor of the writers and artists following the broad strokes of the executives' creative direction, it is the editors that take on the authorial role of ensuring that all the pieces between installments and documents flow and do not disrupt continuity.

After the funeral, established heroes like Supergirl and The Guardian stepped into the spotlight to become the saviors Metropolis needed but the ensuing crime wave was too much. An entire group of emerging heroes appeared in their own series, "Superman: The Legacy of Superman" trying to fill the void but none of them could inspire the populace. However, DC focused on four new characters to emerge with the desire to become the authentic Superman. All four of the previously mentioned titles detailed the events of the storyline known as "The Reign of the Supermen". Four characters with the iconic "S" logo on their chests appeared and they all vied to be the one true Superman. The Eradicator¹⁰⁴, Superboy¹⁰⁵, Steel¹⁰⁶, and Cyborg Superman¹⁰⁷,

¹⁰⁴ The Eradicator originally appears calling himself "The Last Son of Krypton" is actually an android.

as they are more commonly known, all have a claim to the heroic mantle but the citizens of the comic world are split as to who they should cheer for. After a complex series of events that resulted in the destruction of Coast City and the death of its inhabitants at the hands of Cyborg Superman, he is revealed to be evil and has plans to destroy the world. The original Superman with very limited powers reemerges from his "healing coma"¹⁰⁸ with only a fraction of his powers but with the help of the other Supermen he ends up saving everyone and getting back to top form. The general reception of Superman's return was negative as people felt their emotions had been played with and that it was all just a marketing ploy. For almost a full calendar year since the emergence of Doomsday, readers were taken on a wild ride filled with narrative gaps but they ultimately arrived at the same familiar conclusion of Superman saving the day yet again. Interestingly enough, the biggest effect that this storyline had on the grander scale of the DC universe was that the destruction of Coast City led to Hal Jordan, the Green Lantern of Earth, becoming consumed with grief, turning evil, and came close to destroying the universe before being stopped by a large group of heroes, including Superman. And yet, even this event was temporary and eventually erased from the overall narrative.

The death of Superman was a historic event that took away one of the most recognizable characters in fiction. A resurgence of comics followed as people believed

¹⁰⁵ He actually insists that he not be called Superboy but other names for this CADMUS created clone of Superman did not stick with the fans or any of the other characters.

¹⁰⁶ His real name is John Henry Irons, a regular human being who crafted an "Iron Man style" armor to fight crime but is the most in spirit and attitude to the original Superman.

¹⁰⁷ This is actually Hank Henshaw, a scientist who was trapped in cyberspace but cloned himself a part robot, part Superman body in what is clearly the most complex and strange backstory of the four.

¹⁰⁸ The explanation of a healing coma being a state which Kryptonians achieve when being near death but is indistinguishable from being dead to human perception made sense within the narrative world but not to the readers.

that the story had run its course and suddenly the once disposable periodical of comic books had become a collector's item. Upon Superman's return, the fans felt lied to and their disapproval was easily reflected in DC's rapidly freefalling sales numbers. The ripple effect of the Death of Superman inflated the comic book industry bubble which burst upon his Return. Comic book collecting returned to being a hobby for passionate readers, rather than the next get rich quick scheme, as the comic book juggernauts DC and Marvel would lose a significant amount of their capital, to the point that the latter had to file for bankruptcy¹⁰⁹. Still, these repercussions pale in comparison to the change that had now occurred in serialization. Superman's revival had led the way for other characters to be killed off and brought back again so long as there was a reason within the story for the revival to take place. And in a world where the fantastic is common place there was always an explanation available. Perhaps Max Landis, the creator of the comedic retelling of "The Death and Return of Superman" short film said it best: "The sacred suspension of disbelief, as far as death, had ended. 'Death of Superman' didn't kill Superman; it killed death."

In conclusion, the "Death and Return of Superman" story arc illustrates a moment when serial fiction had brought together a multitude of readers by eliminating the central character from the narrative. Publication continued but the apparent resurrection of Superman meant that acknowledgement of past events and overall continuity could be taken away. Much like in the "Crisis" events, the finality of death had lost its power. So long as there are writers and artists able to continue narrative

¹⁰⁹ In order for Marvel to financially stay afloat, they had to sell the movie rights to many of their most popular characters. This is why the current "Marvel Cinematic Universe" does not contain the *X-Men*, the *Fantastic Four*, or *Spiderman* (though a new partnership between Sony and Marvel has emerged for the most recent edition of films for this character).

production and readers willing to support its publication through purchases, the story and the characters within them will continue. It is also important to remember that the initial cause for such a story to take place was due to a forestalling of the original planned narrative arc by DC executives, who later approved this event. The consortium of authorship, not just for the text of *Superman* but for most of DC titles, had come together to redirect the story and in a way alter storytelling in comic books as a whole.

III. The Case for a Nonchronological Continuity

While the comic book industry is almost synonymous with DC and Marvel, there are many other publishing companies that produce graphic narratives. One particular work that takes a wholly different approach when it comes to continuity is *Atomic Robo* by Brian Clevinger and Scott Wegna. Originally published by Red 5 Comics but now on its own, this comic book showcases the adventures of the titular protagonist, a hyper intelligent super strong robot made by Nikolai Tesla. The premise of the story is fairly commonplace by comic book standards; the sentient robot known as Robo fights off enemies and conquers challenges with his¹¹⁰ intelligence, wit, strength, humor, and the help of his friends. However, the storytelling premise done by Clevinger and Wegna goes against the conventions of serial publication. The narrative in *Atomic Robo* is not told chronologically outside of major events during a particular storyline. During Robo's century long life span the story does not go in a linear path from creation until his eventual destruction. Instead, we see one adventure from any moment in that timeline being told in installments with no need for narrative filler

¹¹⁰ Establishing gender identity in robots is a problematic issue. Considering that Robo's physical design is male and that many characters refer to him as a "he" rather than as an "it", I will refer to the character as male as well.

between the most important events. In fact, Clevinger and Wegna have specifically stated that their comic will not contain filler.

Why should we devote a month of our short lives to creating an issue if it isn't worth reading? And then why should we try to sell you an issue that isn't worth buying? The main source of filler issues seems to be due to moving set pieces from the aftermath of one event to set up the next one. Since we have no reason to follow Robo's life as a linear chain of events, we're free to jump straight from one adventure to the next. Maybe Robo fights a sea monster. Maybe we follow the lives of Action Scientists when off duty. But it ain't filler.

(“About” Page)

Without a particular chronological order, this publication format resembles an episodic model like the one used during the Golden Age of comics. And yet this is far from the truth as Clevinger and Wegna have actively tried to maintain a strict continuity throughout their years as the creators and authors of *Atomic Robo*. They even have a “No Reboot” rule that reads as follows:

They [reboots] are frustrating, unnecessary, and a jarring reminder that all fiction is a thinly veiled series of lies. The major events of Robo's lifetime were plotted years before we worked on the first page of the first issue.

Anything Scott [Wegna] and I add to that has to fit organically into the existing framework. If it doesn't fit as naturally as if it'd been there all along, then we skip it and move to the next idea. Everything that happens will fit into the larger mythos; everything that happens will happen for a reason; and nothing that happens can be "undone." (About Page)

This dedication to continuity is further cemented by the presence of a timeline feature on the main *Atomic Robo* website. There, one can follow in chronological order the events contained in each of the current installments and in which documents these took place. Other adventures that are set to occur in future publications are currently marked as “Top Secret”, including future volume number of when it will take place from a publishing perspective. The inclusion of a timeline demonstrates an authorial attempt to show transparency in continuity, wherein major moments are permanent in time and current gaps might soon be filled up with stories yet to be told. The fixed timeline still limits authorial autonomy for Clevinger and Wegna but only for stories that were not previously planned out beforehand. The definite sequence of events also modifies the general expectations of narrative gaps. With readers having definite knowledge that Robo will survive any ordeal prior to the last point in the narrative’s timeline (2017 as of the time of this writing) be invested in the story? The experience of engaging with the narrative shifts from the classic premise of “if the hero survives” to one where readers wonder “how will Robo succeed?”

The storytelling in *Atomic Robo* goes in a different style and so does the authorship model. Brian Clevinger is the lead writer and Scott Wegna is the lead artist but both are considered the co-creators to the work. They have been working together to make the best possible story long before the first installment was published. Both share the title of author, just like Siegel and Shuster almost 80 years beforehand. While one may be in charge of words and the other of art (as evident by the cover page of each installment), it is their joint work that creates the text. Clevinger and Wegna also have different inkers, letterers, and colorists under their employment

which goes to show that even in a back to basics comic book publishing, the author(s) still can't go it alone. Red 5 Comics was in charge of *Atomic Robo*'s publication and distribution until February of 2015. According to a recent blog post by Clevinger, he says that:

We allowed our publishing contract with Red 5 Comics to expire and Atomic Robo's fate now squarely rests on Tesladyne LLC. Going 100% digital is something we planned for a couple years. Red 5 Comics and the Direct Market were very good to us. I mean, an indie book like ours that came out of nowhere by a couple of nobodies doesn't survive in this industry for seven years and nine volumes without the retailers and publisher doing everything they can for it. ("Behold a Website")

Their current plan is to continue to sell print and digital editions of their already available material and to publish new installments of *Atomic Robo* as a webcomic with trade paperbacks being sold as a compendium every so often. The webcomics model of authorship is discussed in depth in the next chapter.

One final authorial layer worth commenting on is the communication that both of these co-authors have with their readership. Both Clevinger and Wegna have used various social media platforms before coming together to work on installments of *Atomic Robo* and they continue to do so till this day. They are most vocal through Twitter where they share updates on shipping problems to distributors, other people's reviews of their most recent installments, what new storylines are in development, in addition to the general ramblings of someone on the Internet. The most interesting feature comes when one follows them both and you can see the creative process in

action. Their interactions are highlighted by the fact that both use Robo's face as their Twitter profile icons (Clevinger's facing to the right and Wegna's to the left) which gives a nice visual element to the back and forth banter between the two. This communication usually comes in the form of jokes but every so often one finds hints at future storylines through comments about their current "research". Since Clevinger and Wegna live far enough apart that speaking face to face is impractical to say the least, using social media makes sense. However, the fact that many of their exchanges are visible to the general public demonstrates outreach and transparency into the narrative production of their work.

Conclusion

Authors of serial fiction adapt the initial creative performances of their upcoming works to the behests of nonauthorial agents prior to the onset of publication and throughout the narrative production of installments. As I have explained throughout this chapter, writer and artist work together as words and images are placed together to tell a story. The freedom to tell this story largely depends on whether editors, publishers, executives, and syndicates deem it to be publishable; not necessarily on the merits of its quality but on whether or not it is marketable to the largest possible audience. Furthermore, artistic freedom is further inhibited by the story itself as narrative continuity becomes more complex throughout the progression of serialization. Hence, Bourdieu's notion of authorial autonomy is lowered even more in these circumstances as the economics of sales figures and merchandising are prioritized by the gatekeepers of publication in comics. This (financial) capital centered narrative progression ultimately leads to attempts to (re)gain one's readership

through grandiose events to increase sales temporarily but these moments end up hurting author-text-reader relationship in the long term. A story that peaks only to start again at the narrative status quo cannot sustain a devoted readership, as seen with the example of “The Death and Return of Superman.”

From the mechanics of narrative production, the serialization model for graphic narratives is one that requires a certain discipline for authors and readers when it comes to both space and time. In the case of comic strips, the limited amount of content and the minimal amount of time between each installment means that their narrative development and complexity needs to remain simple to facilitate the serial reading experience as much as possible. Comic books have more room within their documents to advance the story while still having enough downtime between installments that readers have a temporal window to accommodate their serial reading experience. Graphic novels do not have to follow any specific industry standards when it comes to length of the text or the length of time between publications, much like the format of traditional serial print publishing. Authors within each subset of comics have their own problematics when it comes to the narrative production of their works of serial fiction. The singular author now becomes subdivided into writer and artist with more roles credited to those responsible for each of the production performances completed throughout the publication process.

Within comics, especially in comic books, the genre of superheroes preempts an almost formulaic standard of storytelling. Authors would place their characters within a particular adventure that would be resolved by the end of one installment or over the course of several of them. While creators of characters generally have

ownership of the content they create, comic book publication houses like DC bought the rights to these famous superheroes as they continued to employ their creators to continue the serialization process. The change to a corporate model of authorship leads to stories which could ostensibly continue indefinitely by hiring people to undertake the creative and production performances of each work. However, the final say on determining narrative direction lies within executives and editors rather than writers. As a corporation, DC ensures that all of its titles maintain narrative continuity in the context of each other. The ability to further develop storylines that exceed a set number of installments adds layers of complexity and nuance to the narrative but it came at the price of readers becoming uninterested and confused if some installments were not to their liking or unavailable. Narrative blanks spread both into an abstract future and a more nebulous past as more and more installments are published. Major events, like the “Crisis on Infinite Earths”, clean the narrative slate to begin anew with the hopes of getting new readers but at the risk of alienating their currently faithful readership. These concerns were magnified exponentially with the “Death and Return of Superman” storyline, which rose comic books to an age of success like no other but made it crash soon after. The ability for writers to resurrect their dead characters without having to restart the narrative had been codified and in effect normalized. The finality of death had lost its power and with it, the reader’s sense of connecting to a story with no real danger for their favorite characters’ wellbeing. Even if the narrative and the editors establish a character’s end, readers had a meta-awareness of the genre and knew that a revolving door had been installed in storytelling’s afterlife.

Serialization within comics is ultimately a struggle between keeping the narrative structured within its own boundaries and having it stay accessible to an existing (and potential) readership. As time goes on, authors progress the story to the point that it may become unrecognizable to readers who may know the basic information of the characters but are not following the events themselves. These narrative growing pains limit creativity, as the story must maintain a linear progression, and make it so that new readers need a history lesson to understand the current events. Authors of new characters, like Atomic Robo, can still encounter these difficulties if they do not plan beforehand. Classic characters will continue to have their past because, even as the story may restart within the context of the narrative, some readers lived through that original serialization. New readers can experience those events with the help of omnibus editions or a proper archive like those found online. Even with all the history of comic storytelling, it is a wonder that there is still new narrative ground to cover but there will always be another installment coming soon.

Chapter 4: The More Things Change:

Digital Authorship and Webcomics

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have explicated how the serial author faces many hardships in the process of initiating and maintaining the publication of his/her works. Nonauthorial agents require that the text be shaped in certain ways in order to fit the publishing format of the document or that the content be suited for better profit margins, e.g. through merchandising. Thus, while the author may be the creator of the narrative, he/she must metaphorically paint between the lines placed by editors, publishers and others who set forth the industry standards of the medium. Authors have the ability to circumvent these outside factors through self-publication, which more closely resembles the small-scale publications described by Bourdieu in Figure 1.1. Here, authors are not hampered by the expectations of others but will have access to an incredibly limited readership. Advances in technology currently facilitate the ability to publish on one's own and potentially still have a large readership through direct online publication. Serial fiction published through the Internet can be found in many formats; however, the one that best exemplifies the complex nature of authorship is best explored through webcomics.

Much like in the previous chapter, narrative production of comics is achieved through the narrative production of one or more authors using images and words to push a story forward. Webcomic authorship is unique in that the author-text-reader relationship is one where the latter has a larger influence over the content as they are the only nonauthorial agents present in this process. Authors can continue to publish

without taking their readers into consideration but in order to achieve both financial and cultural success through their work, incorporating their feedback is critical. In order to best analyze the impact of the readership can have on narrative production, it is important to study them not as individual consumers of the serialized text but as a community actively engaging with each other and with the author.

In “Interpreting the Variorum”, Stanley Fish examines how an intended reader becomes the target audience for the author as he/she produces the text. According to Fish, these “interpretive communities” give shape to the text through the act of reading and interpreting through strategies that are common between them.

Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. (484)

The interpretation strategies as a group effort coincides with the narrative gaps that readers face, according to Iser (as explained in the previous chapter). An interpretive community can be seen as a group of like-minded readers, trained by society to analyze and understand according to strategies that are prevalent within one’s grouping. For authors and publishers, the interpretive community takes the form of an intended group of readers for whom the text is aimed at and wishes for them to engage with the text by the simplest reception performance, buying a copy of it. In a sense, this becomes the first step towards being part of an interpretive community. Publishing houses discern what the text’s potential audience can be in order to determine if the

current market for such a text is viable and that a positive reception through sales can be achieved.

In the context of serialization, the interpretive community can be seen as the readers who continue to ensure the publication of the text through the purchasing of installments. After all, a negation of interpretation can be easily expressed by not buying the documents which contain the text. For publication to ensue, readerships through interpretive communities must make a continued financial investment to keep the serialized narrative afloat as the first step to engage with the text. Without a big enough base of support at these levels, authorial endeavors may not be viable and there is no text for an interpretive community to engage with.

As explained in the previous chapter, the desire for authors and publishers to appeal to their current fanbase while maintaining the ongoing story accessible to new readers promotes drastic changes in the narrative's continuity (see the "Crisis" events). In the case of webcomics, the intended interpretive community can be more niched as the costs of initial and continuing publication are far less in the digital medium. While authors would love to have a large-scale publication reaching all Internet users as potential readers, the reality is one where a supportive and loyal (though small¹¹¹) fanbase can provide enough financial capital to maintain the author with enough money to sustain his/her authorial endeavors and livelihood. In this manner, the interpretive community is visible and identifiable through their actions to maintain the author and the text going for as long as possible. This chapter analyzes how authors of webcomics undergo narrative production with their stalwart readerships in mind and

¹¹¹ One figure that authors in this medium use is that of one thousand dedicated readers as the minimum to build upon in order to maintain a sustainable income through online serial publishing. This concept is further developed throughout this chapter.

how readers can directly and indirectly aid in the ongoing serialization of these narratives.

I. The Ins and Outs of Webcomics

The history of webcomics is fairly short compared to other storytelling formats that arose during the 20th century but it is still quite complex. The following segment serves as a concise introduction to digital comics to familiarize readers with their progression over the last few decades and how authors have been producing their narratives on this format¹¹². It is important to keep in mind that during the incunabular stage of computers and the Internet, few people had access to this kind of technology. Early on, the limits to authorship and publishing in the digital medium were centered on the miniscule availability of these new tools of narrative production. Even those that had access and proficiency in the medium struggled to find a committed readership, especially for authors wishing to produce works of serial fiction. Access to the text through online publishing meant that readers needed to have a computer Internet access first and foremost, a rarity at the time. For authors and readers, one of the few places that could provide the tools and technology to produce and receive these texts was universities.

The equipment for digital media was starting to become available at college campuses throughout the United States of America during the 80s and early 90s and what little webcomics were available catered to the tech savvy community that had regular access to computers. Joseph Campbell illustrates the case of Hans Bjordahl, a

¹¹² Many of the ideas and concepts that follow are taken largely from Troy Campbell's *A History of Webcomics*, Brad Guigar's et al's *How to Make Webcomics*, and Guigar's *The Webcomic's Handbook* in addition to my own observations. I highly recommend these texts if you wish to read more about their eponymous foci.

cartoonist from Colorado who attended Boulder University and made a comic strip titled *Where The Buffalo Roam*, which “first appeared in Boulder's *Colorado Daily* in 1987, where it chronicled the seamy underside of undergraduate life with such gritty and hilarious accuracy” (“The WTBR Story”). Bjordahl was later convinced to upload his strip on USENET, a descendant of ARPANET.

And a strip that had never left Colorado before got readers from as far away as... Ohio. And Michigan. And NASA, but mostly because of its Colorado University alumni. Even in 1992, just before the Web exploded in popularity, the Internet showed almost no signs of what was coming. It was still limited almost exclusively to college campuses, military bases and research facilities. And therefore, so was Bjordahl's audience. (Campbell, “From Out of the Desert...”¹¹³)

Where The Buffalo Roam is an example of a publication being repurposed to an online market. This publishing model of providing print texts to an online readership is fairly common for authors who disseminate their content on the Internet after/in addition to an initial print publication. Bjordahl's production performance included preparing his text for print and the limited audience of his university as well as online publication to a still limited but potentially more expansive readership¹¹⁴. The interpretive community could now extend beyond the initial readership of those in Boulder, Colorado even as college students remained the intended audience.

¹¹³ Campbell's book (strangely enough) does not have any page numbers. Rather than counting the pages of the book myself and putting their number here as part of the citation, I provide the appropriate subchapter title for easier searches of this source. Any other print material with unnumbered pages will be cited in this manner as well for the remainder of this study.

¹¹⁴ If you currently search for his webcomic you will find a limited archive of some installments with encouragement that the rest can be found in book format that is ready for purchase.

Bjordahl's case is one where the document of his text is serialized in print through the newspaper, digitally, and in print format through the compendiums. Many others authors of webcomics (like those discussed at length in this chapter) begin publishing their work online and then through print compilations that encompass a portion of the text. This two pronged serialization format allows authors to show their online content (in most cases) for free to a large audience with the hopes that a fraction of the readership will in turn purchase the print books. The model of authors republishing their works of serial fiction is one that has been present in Victorian serials first as magazines then as full length novels (Chapter 2), comic strips and comic books being repurposed as omnibus edition graphic novels (Chapter 3), as well as with other media¹¹⁵. Hence, the serialization of these texts can take many forms even as they are aimed at the same interpretive community, who interact with the text across different media.

The potential for having an audience receptive to a digital text is marked by the digital divide, which was far more prevalent during Bjordahl's serialization. With computers being heralded as the wave of the future, investors in the late 1990s sought the next digital trend; the idea of monetizing webcomics enticed authors to create different services to help publish the new digital generation of comics. As Campbell points out:

In 1999, Web companies saw "communities" as pure gold, and unlimited hosting as the mining tool. Geocities, Tripod, and Xoom offered free hosting to millions of users, also known as "community members." No one was quite

¹¹⁵ For example, television serial programs whose seasons become available for purchase after their initial airing. Another curious example is how musicians publish part of their albums on the radio with the hopes that the audience will buy the album later on.

sure how these members would translate to millions of dollars... (Introduction Chapter 4)

By early 2000, the Federal Reserve “now worried that the dot-com boom’s had exceeded its grasp.” And by 2001, online advertising spending had dropped 17.7% (Campbell, “Crash and Consequences”). The economic bubble of cyberspace had officially popped by then and the dream of webcomics becoming an instant gold mine was lost. However, that did not deter many authors from continuing to publish their works or for new ones to start their serial endeavors. Webcomic authorship was no longer a clear path to success but the technology was still there to mark the journey viable for many aspiring writers and artists.

The prevalence of software like Adobe Photoshop and other image editing programs has already made the 21st century a time when the tools for webcomic production are widely available to those on the appropriate side of the digital divide. Amateur, established professional, and anyone in between who wishes to publish serial fiction online tend to follow similar steps in their narrative production. As explained earlier, this chapter focuses on established webcomic cartoonists that have been publishing their work consistently for years because they illustrate the dynamic process of authorship and how they and their text have changed over time.

A. Authorial Responsibilities beyond Narrative Production

The path that each person undertakes on their journey from narrative production to publication is a unique one due to the many circumstances that surround each individual author. In many cases, these are one person operations where the author takes on the creative and production performances for each installment while

tackling many other aspects surrounding the text to make sure the reader can access his/her work. These additional labors include, but are not limited to:

- Creating and maintaining the website where their work is published
- Moderating forums
- Developing merchandise which they must then store and ensure delivery of for each purchase
- Fostering a sense of community with the current readership
- Advertising to gain new readers
- Staying active in social media to keep readers informed
- Traveling to different conventions for further reader interaction and merchandise sales

Each author decides how much time to spend on each of these labors in addition to what has already been invested in narrative production. During the early days of webcomic publishing, authors had no real idea how exactly any of these additional responsibilities were helpful. Currently, there are communities of webcomic cartoonists helping veteran and up and coming authors prioritize all of the tasks that come with serializing online¹¹⁶. For example, Brad Guigar, author of *Greystone Inn* and its spin off sequel *Evil, Inc.*, runs *Webcomics.com*, a site that “has established itself as a tremendous resource of practical information for webcartoonists” (“What is Webcomics.com?”). Here, he and other veterans of the medium post articles on

¹¹⁶ For merchandising creation and distribution, many webcomic cartoonists turn to TopatoCo, aka The Topato Corporation, who caters “exclusively for established, original, independent internet creators with a proven record of solid updates and a considerable existing audience” (“What is TopatoCo About Anyway”). This certainly beats authors having to store merchandise and mail it on their own, a common practice that continues to this day according to many webcomic producers and other online personalities.

different facets regarding the textual performances and authorial responsibilities that comes with serially publishing webcomics. The site itself has been running since 2007 with a detailed archive of all its articles, though one must pay a yearly fee to access it¹¹⁷. Still, a lot of that advice originates from the trial and error period that came beforehand, a path that that many webcomic authors stumble through as they publish their serial works. This community of authors provides a way to mentor and counsel writers and artists in a way that the audience's reception performances may not be able to articulate in a helpful manner. In a realm of publishing with few barriers of entry, these forms of feedback serve as the guiding hand of editors for ensuing serial narrative production and other facets of digital authorship.

B. The Screen as the Page and More

The history of webcomics and web publications contains several examples of authors adapting their work to fit the molds of previous forms of media while at the same time trying to reinvent the wheel for these new digital avenues. Webcomic authors looked to comics as a model to follow on how to divide and publish their stories. However, the style of comic books and graphic novels entailed prolonged periods of narrative production between installments. These modes of publication require authors to deliver the next part of their stories after lengthy pauses, which meant that readers would not be incentivized to visit the website at regular intervals, e.g. daily, bi-weekly, etc. Scott McCloud in his book *Reinventing Comics* explains how many of the first webcomic cartoonists were lost when attempting to transpose their narrative production into the digital format and how to deliver these stories to the

¹¹⁷ Brief abstracts of the articles are viewable to all. If you are interested in making your own webcomic and/or are interested in this type of serial authorship, I recommend paying the subscription to go through the vast material presented therein.

potential reader. “One of the more obvious solutions is to treat the screen as a page, alongside the link to the following page... each page has roughly the same amount of visual information as a half page of printed comics” (214). McCloud illustrates a clear adaptation that simplifies both narrative production and the reading experience of webcomics by staying close to a well-known format. This choice by cartoonists maintains a familiarity of comics’ construction based on a longstanding tradition of reading and creating texts following the status quo of panel progression and alignment. However, the mindset of print for webcomic development limits narrative production if authors do not use the additional tools that are available for these digital graphic narratives to be told. McCloud goes on to say that:

The page is an artifact to print, no more intrinsic to comics than staples or India ink¹¹⁸. Once released from that box, some will take the shape of the box with them but gradually, comics creators will stretch their limbs and start to explore the design opportunities of an infinite canvas. (222)

McCloud coined the “infinite canvas” as any moment when an author chooses to do something that goes beyond the traditional page format. Instead of splash pages or creative panel layouts like in print, elements like sound, movement, and panels that could stretch indefinitely provide an ability to tell stories in new and inventive ways. These new features allow webcomic cartoonists to construct a text that do not have to follow the expectations of comics or the physical dimensions of the page. Thus, interpretive communities are able to interact with texts that follow previous reading standards in a new medium of publication.

¹¹⁸ “India ink (or Indian ink in British English) is a simple black ink once widely used for writing and printing and now more commonly used for drawing, especially when inking comic books and comic strips. India ink is also used in medical applications” (Wikipedia, “Indian Ink”).

With traditional print comics, the author has to be wary of the reader's wandering eye during narrative production (Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art* 40). As explained in the previous chapter, the reception performance of comics is one that can be offset by the readers' vision wavering outside the designated reading path¹¹⁹. Webcomic cartoonists that do not follow the traditional page format and use infinite canvas have a more guided way to direct the wandering eye. According to Corey Blake of *Comic Book Resources*, the infinite canvas provides readers with more conscious control of their reception of the text while allowing authors with ways to produce their stories beyond their comic book predecessors.

While this simple change retains the language of comics, it fundamentally alters how the comics read and how they're created. The writers, and probably more so the artists, have to re-think how they approach their storytelling techniques. There are benefits. Surprises can be controlled better because there's no risk of a reader's eye scanning over the opposite page and seeing the reveal of the big monster. Page breaks become clicks. Layering is one of the biggest advantages. Instead of a sequence taking place from left to right, it can happen in the same spot, with additions to the image adding more information with each click. For the letterer, the reading order of dialogue can be controlled more. There's less chance of confusing the reader over what to read next when you can have the dialogue become visible in the correct order.

The developments of digital technology provide new tools for authors to create and produce their stories in ways that once seemed impossible. Production performances

¹¹⁹ The same problem exists in texts with prose but a few words or sentences that can jump out from the intended reading path of top left to bottom right is not necessarily as eye catching as one of the dozen or so panels (twice as much if you have both pages open) with something that clearly draws your attention.

can direct the reception performances down a more straightforward reading path for the interpretive community to follow; thus preventing one's sight from wandering off. And yet, it is the reader who clicks and swipes that controls the pace of the text, much in the same way with the act of turning pages. Both author and reader exert more control over the text's reception when features like infinite canvas are created to ensure a new yet still familiar reading experience.

As digital technology provides new features during narrative production, it also allows for new ways for readers to engage with the text. For example, ComiXology is "a cloud-based digital comics platform" (About Us) that digitally distributes old and new comics. One of their main features is that their "Guided View™ reading technology transforms the comic book medium into an immersive and cinematic experience." It works as an app for mobile devices which shows panels appearing on the screen in sequence as if one were reading, including having some images change or even disappear as time goes on. The dimensions on a standard tablet are not that different from a regular page or small computer screen so we see a similar format with a new twist that greatly resembles motion comics shown on television and film. One interesting caveat is the case of smartphones, whose screens are a fraction of those dimensions and resizing the images would easily result in something too small to read. Their corresponding app for such smaller devices resolves this problem by showing each panel one at a time, thus controlling the reader's wandering eye. However, the change from a reading style left to the individual reader and a more "cinematic experience" creates another production performance as authors further establish the visual and temporal parameters of timing and pacing of one's document. These

additional elements of narrative production help in creating a more unique reading experience but at the cost of more time and energy being invested into making each installment¹²⁰. For authors to maintain their publication schedule as consistent as possible, the decision to incorporate multimedia elements into their list of production performances means that the requirements to make each part increase. This course of action translates into more dedication towards narrative production and/or incorporating assistants (paid or unpaid) to help in making each installment ready for publication.

Perhaps the most common use of infinite canvas is the sequence of long vertical panels to represent a large fall. The reading experience is one that requires an almost synchronized movement between eye movement and scrolling down the page. It keeps the wandering eye from accidentally revealing the finale at the bottom of the page where the character's fate is shown. The process is simple enough for authors to make and readers to follow, though conveying this descent in print is vastly more complicated than through a digital platform. Zach Weinersmith, author of *Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal*, switches styles between singular panel comics and those that can take up multiple screens worth of information. The physical dimensions of the

¹²⁰ Furthermore, there are some elements with infinite canvas and multimedia features that actually hinder the way one interacts with the document as opposed to a print publication. One of the most renowned graphic novels of all time, *Watchmen*, written by Alan Moore and drawn by Dave Gibbons, is often used in the comics' classroom for both its amazing story and visual elements. The 2008 motion comic adaptation of the same name, which tried to stay as close as possible to the source material, featured voice work and the ever changing nature of Rorschach's mask. These elements were interesting but academics and teachers of graphic novels worry that viewers may miss out on some of the artistic intricacies of the graphic novel. The best example that comes to mind is that of Chapter 5 "Fearful Symmetry", whose pages are parallel reflections from beginning to end. Seen page by page, or even panel by panel, it is difficult for readers to appreciate the detail of realizing that the first and last pages are almost identical. The classic print version allows readers to manipulate the document to identify the matching nature of the different pages, which is difficult to replicate in other media. Hypertext and other digital versions of such texts modify the text in the transition from one document to another. As with all adaptations, there are some elements that are best appreciated within one medium that can be imperceptible in the other.

print compilation do not mirror Weinersmith's original design, something that tarnishes the reader's engagement in this non-digital document. Reception performances, as evident through reviews within the book's Amazon page, highlight this break in reading style. While most reviews are positive, E. Coffey writes regarding Weinersmith's second print compilation that:

The only problem I have with this book is the layout. Many of the pages that contain multi-panel strips don't make good use of space, and, as a result, the strips feel cramped and are sometimes difficult to read (hence the 4-star rating). Keep in mind that this is only an issue on a handful of pages, but it does become a little annoying.

While webcomics are not hindered by the limits of the page, their publication beyond a cyber landscape requires something beyond the traditional page to encapsulate installments that are published outside standard formats. Authors who make reprint compilations of the original text (like Weinersmith) attempt to accommodate these variant installments accordingly to avoid negative reception performances. Authors can also choose to disregard said installments entirely from compilations and leave them in their original digital documents.¹²¹ However, in the case of long-form webcomics with an overarching narrative, authors cannot leave out pages worth of material and keep the story whole. These are some of the complicated decisions that authors undertake when designing installments that will be published in online and print documents as the text is serialized. Thus, imperfect transitions from screen to

¹²¹ One potential middle ground is through posters. Weinermith and other webcomic authors specifically sell those giant comics as part of their merchandise. Other installments in some cases are also available for physical purchase through print on demand services like those offered by Hiveworks.

page must remain in the narrative's integrity even if it leaves the text with an unintended form from the original.

Ultimately, while there are many parallels between the page and the screen, they need not follow the same rules and can accommodate traditional visual elements as well as the infinite canvas, movement, and even sound. Webcomics carry with them the potential for authors to explore once impractical structures of storytelling, though this is a choice that many authors use sparingly within their work. In my research of various webcomic cartoonists¹²², I have found that this is a conscious choice by many authors to provide a familiar reception to interpretive communities, minimize production time between installments, and ease a potential transposition to a print publication.

Still, for all the developments in the technology encompassing the narrative production of webcomics, not all authors are creating avant-garde artistry with each new installment. For example, Rich Burlew, a webcomic cartoonist to be discussed in depth later on, draws his characters as stick figures. He explains that he was far more worried about the writing and serializing of his work than creating a visual masterpiece.

I really just write this story the way that I think it would be most interesting, without too much regard for writing theory or structure. I mean, the idea of a serialized one-page-per installment story (that almost always ends in a punchline) isn't really directly analogous to most other media anyway – a TV

¹²² In November 2010, I took part in Webcomics Weekend and interviewed almost every author there as part of my research within this area. Unfortunately, the audio files in my recorder were later found to be corrupted. The information provided there coincides with that of other readings within forums of this community of authors and the webcomic cartoonists studied in depth in this chapter.

show dispenses an hour a week, while a comic book gives you 22 pages per month. Even a double-length OOTS comic has room for only a fraction of the plot advancement of either format. Thus, I'm usually stuck trying to adapt my story to this format without any guidelines – I'm always flying without a net. How many strips is too many to focus on the villains? Do I need to recap previous plot points, or do I trust them [the readers] to figure it out on their own? I have struggled with many of these questions over the last few years, with no clear cut answers yet appearing. (*War and Xps*, "How I Didn't Learn to Write a Plot")

For both the artistic and writing components, webcomic cartoonists have more tools at their disposal but they do not necessarily have the proficiency or desire to use them. Whether they are following the page, doing something completely new, or just trying to find their way, authors need to be adept at storytelling, drawing, and various computer programs. This combined skillset for narrative production was especially important for the authors who first ventured into the digital frontier since the technology was not as user friendly as it is today. As new tools are developed, the limits and expectations of digital serial fiction publication are just as in flux for readers and authors alike.

C. Publishing in Cyberspace

Another choice that webcomic cartoonists make, which is normally out of the hands of many authors in different media, is the publication schedule of their work. Other forms of serialization have this decision premade as part of the "industry" standards of the medium, at least when it comes to publishing in the United States of

America. Newspapers come out every day, movies are in cinemas just before the weekend, and comic books have new installments every Wednesday. DVDs and other films to own are available on Tuesdays. Traditional print books do not have a standard publishing day though many do hit the shelves on Tuesdays. Chad Upton surmises that the reason for Tuesday release dates for different media is due to the tracking of sales figures.

It's because DVD, Blu-ray, CD and video game sales are tracked by SoundScan, a company that compiles sales data on these items. They're like Nielson TV ratings, except for music, movie and video game sales. In fact, SoundScan is even owned by Nielson. ... [For books] there is no standard, although Tuesday is fairly common since they are also tracked by Nielson. They are often on shelves before their official release date, unless there is a large advertising campaign that indicates a specific date.

They measure the number of weekly sales starting on Tuesday through to the following Monday. Publishers release new items on Tuesday so the first week of sales data is seven days; that means sales from that week can be compared to sales data from following weeks in an accurate way.

The traditions of publishing, rather than individual authors, dictate the moments for publication. It is only in rare cases, such as J.K. Rowling with the later installments of her *Harry Potter* series of books as seen in Chapter 2, where industry standards do not need to be followed. Online publications are not analyzed by SoundScan or other services so authors in this medium are free to publish when they see fit. Webcomic cartoonists elect not only the date of publication, but also its frequency as part of their

production performances. Since most webcomics fall under the category of microserialized, wherein each installment contains less than one percent of the total finished text, authors calculate how often they can provide updates. These estimations take into effect various factors: average time of narrative production, current workload, narrative pacing, and the amount of content per installment, etc.

Professional webcomic cartoonist Brad Guigar, author of *Evil Inc.* and *How to Make Webcomics*, advocates for consistency and a strict updating schedule to keep readers and authors focused on delivering installments on a regular pace. In a post for his website *Webcomics.com* titled “What about Long-Form Comics?”¹²³, Guigar states the following:

Make every comic as significant as possible: Translated for a long-form dramatic comic, this should read as such: Make sure every update is a satisfying experience for all of your readers. For a humor comic, it’s a well-crafted punchline. For a dramatic comic, might be a strong plot hook or a significant cliffhanger. But here’s the rub, that update has to be satisfying to both your regular readers as well as the ones who are arriving at your site for the first time that day. In other words, it has to be significant without the aid of your archives. If you can achieve that, you can hold the new readers your site attracts.

Guigar encourages instalments that can be independent enough from the rest of the text to capture the attention of the current interpretive community as well as any new potential members. Regular updates, preferably through new installments of the text,

¹²³ As stated before, the majority of the content of this website is only available after obtaining paid membership into it. Abstracts are available for free.

provide an incentive for readers to continue to visit the webcomic's site regularly. In addition, it provides an air of authenticity to the author's narrative endeavors as a schedule evokes professionalism and a seriousness to their work.

Guigar advocates for authors to be weary of F/C/S (Frequency, Consistency, and Significance) when it comes to all form of online publishing. However, I believe that there are minor advantages to providing new installments only when they are ready and not rushed or forced for the sake of being on time. A "random system" encourages visits to occur more regularly, thus increasing views and potential advertising revenue¹²⁴. Additionally, a strict schedule means that the majority of your readership will go to the site with each new installment as it comes out. This sudden jump in viewers can potentially crash the website itself if the servers cannot handle that much traffic at one time. Furthermore, webcomic cartoonists can change their publication schedule whenever it suits them, thus being able to shift between forms as they see fit, though they do so at the risk of confusing/alienating their current readership. Ultimately, the publication schedule should be one where the author can do his/her job at a desired pace. Specific variations of publication schedules are discussed further on in the chapter.

It is also worth noting that, since there are generally no editors or publishing houses for webcomics, there is no real way to ensure that the serialization process continues. If webcomic cartoonists are indeed running a one person operation, then the only incentive to keep the text going is a personal motivation and the desire to keep the readership happy. Since many webcomic cartoonists start publishing for free or

¹²⁴ It is important to note that this works best once a loyal readership has been established. Authors can also provide content beyond additional installments of the narrative to further entice readers to regularly visit their websites.

with minimal monetization of their work, authorship does not equal an immediate form of employment as the text becomes published. No one is going to “fire” a particular self-publishing author for falling back on the publication schedule or if the writing and/or art become lower in quality. One might obtain a few angry emails and lose some readers, which results in a loss of revenue, but the digital author can still continue to do shoddy work or even stop altogether, ultimately making the narrative suffer. There is no physical contract that forces the webcomic cartoonist to write the story. Unlike the case of corporate authorship (as detailed in Chapter 3), other writers and artists cannot be employed to replace unproductive ones. If the author chooses to go on hiatus or quit, then the story becomes frozen until the serialization continues at some point in the future, if ever. In fact, many webcomic cartoonists start with an interesting concept but later realize that the amount of work necessary to run their work is just more than what they expected and/or can handle. Thus, one of the important facets for webcomic cartoonists’ narrative production is the discipline in order to continue to provide installments at a regular pace with a consistent overall quality to their readerships, however big or small.

What follows is an in depth analysis of two webcomic authors and the challenges that they have faced as part of the ongoing serialization of the work. My research into both texts encompasses years of following every installment as well as ancillary texts to analyze the textual performances that are undertaken throughout the progression from work, to text, to document. While both case studies are unique, they do serve to illustrate the different facets of webcomic authorship and contemporary serial fiction publishing online.

II. Webcomics Case Studies

A. Rich Burlew and *The Order of the Stick*

Burlew's *The Order of the Stick*, hereafter referred to as OOTS, started on September 29, 2003 and the story continues to be updated after more than a decade of publication. As both an academic critic and a fan of Burlew's work, I make sure to visit the "Giant in the Playground" website at an almost daily basis to see if a new installment is available, much like many other members of the interpretive community of this text. Burlew is known by his readers as the eponymous "Giant" from the website's name, which is his name on the webcomic's forum. Many online authors maintain a colloquial tone with their readership through these aliases, which double as their social media personas, and serve to make a distinction between personal and professional lives, if only in name¹²⁵. As evident through the following examples, the author/reader relationship in this form of serialization is one where both parts come closer together as time goes by.

For a story that features plot lines being set up years in advance, one would be surprised to find that Burlew's authorial endeavors were largely accidental. As he explains in the introduction to his first print compilation of OOTS:

I came up with the idea to do a comic strip for my website, because honestly, my website was kind of lame. Sure, there were game articles¹²⁶, and an [SIC] ghost town of a message board, but there wasn't much reason for people to

¹²⁵ To maintain consistency in relating to both aspects of authorial analysis, I will refer to him and other such authors by their legal names throughout this study.

¹²⁶ Gaming in this context relates to the activities and styles of the players during table top roleplaying games. As with many other games and sports there is vast difference between knowledge of the rules and its application, especially with an open form game like *Dungeons & Dragons*. Burlew originally wanted to be a professional designer of fantasy settings and rules but had no luck before starting OOTS. Afterwards, he obtained the opportunity in 2007 alongside Jason Puhlman with the writing *Dungeonscape*, a supplemental book for D&D.

come back. ... I decided to make a comic to try to give readers a reason to come back regularly to the site; I figured it could drive traffic to the important stuff: the game design articles. As it turned out, the comic soon took over the spotlight, becoming the main focus of the site in only a few months. (*Dungeon Crawlin' Fools* "Birth of OOTS"¹²⁷)

Burlew recognized the opportunity to shift his authorial identity and decided to focus more on serial fiction. By the time issue #13 "Plot, Ahoy!" was published, the turning point from a purely humorous to a story with punch lines was set with the introduction of Xykon, an evil undead sorcerer who would be the group's main antagonist. Burlew continued to write gaming articles alongside his work of serial fiction until the end of 2006¹²⁸. This focus and dedication to OOTS was reflected in his writing as the story slowly but surely changed to a more serious tone as marked by the deviation from strictly humorous tenor over time.

OOTS began as a parody of gaming within the context of an adventuring group on a quest within a typical *Dungeons & Dragons* style setting. Over the years, jokes about the rules stopped being the primary focus of the strip as the narrative began taking center stage¹²⁹. The comedic story underwent a dramatic turn towards a more serious tale with jokes thrown in periodically. This type of change is not uncommon in many webcomics and is collectively known as "Cerebus Syndrome", named after

¹²⁷ Burlew's compilation books do not have page numbers. Content is identified through the issue number pertaining to each installment. Information found in the author commentary is identified in this study through the subheadings established for each one.

¹²⁸ The articles themselves don't have a set time of publication. One can only observe changes in the website thanks to the *Wayback Machine*, an Internet archive that takes snapshots of webpages at different times.

¹²⁹ Part of my MA thesis on storytelling and webcomics involved a quantitative analysis of the appearance of such elements over time within OOTS. The shift towards a more serious could be observed when looking at the text over the years of publication. Informal observations after that study show that the text ebbs and flows between themes of dramatic tension and comedy to this day.

Dave Sims' epic *Cerebus, the Aardvark*, which also underwent such dramatic changes in storytelling over its publication. Webcomic critic Eric Burns coined the term and explains that "boredom is generally the key to a Cerebus Syndrome attempt. After a while, even a successful webcartoonist gets tired of fart jokes and sight gags and wants to make these characters more than they've been" (FAQ: Lexicon). Burlew acknowledges the transformation by name in issue #242 "Chekov's Law Realized" when two of the characters realize the danger they are currently in with the following exchange.

Haley: Geez! We were a lot safer when we just made fairly obvious jokes about the rules.

Vaarsuvius: I blame Cerebus.

The seriousness of the narrative has continued to the point that members of the interpretive community through the webcomic's forum page (myself included) admit that certain installments have evoked tears over what has happened to the characters at said moments. Burlew himself acknowledges in various commentary posts in the print compilations of OOTS that he has moved beyond D&D jokes to provide the best story he can possibly deliver. As his story has changed, so too has his role as an author.

The most evident change that longtime readers have witnessed is the publishing schedule. Burlew began providing installments of OOTS on every Tuesday and Thursday and stuck to it fairly well. Early on, he made an exception when plans for six duel strips between the heroes and their evil counterparts. Each installment would cover each individual battle, an epic moment that would be hindered by the twice a week schedule that would effectively:

[K]ill all the story momentum I [Burlew] had built. That's three weeks of story when you post only two new strips a week... Rather than alter my plans, I merely accelerated the timetable and announced that for one week only it [OOTS] would run every single day. (*Dungeon Crawlin' Fools* "Drama, Comedy, and the Linear Guild")

This modification to the serial model allowed for the story to go at a preferred pace, something that would be impossible if the text were published in another medium. Later on, the schedule would change to Monday, Wednesday, and Friday updates and would continue for years. However, by going through the forums, one notices that the time of each individual publication would often be late into the evening of each day, sometimes past midnight of the scheduled date. With updates becoming less stable over time, Burlew announced that he would change the publication format to random intervals after a mini vacation/hiatus in late 2007.

I've gotten a few emails from...let's call them, "passionately concerned readers"...who were under the mistaken impression that once my vacation was over, OOTS would return to a regular Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule. Just to clear everything up, no, OOTS's update schedule will remain random for the foreseeable future. Taking three weeks off was very good for me, but it doesn't actually change any of the facts that caused me to switch to a random schedule in the first place. (Blog post 10/14/2007)

These "passionately concerned readers" are a subset of the larger interpretive community. They are often times the first to ask via the website's forum or through social media "where is the new update?" and "why isn't it out yet?" These types of

reception performances show impatience in the readership that wants the next part of the story as soon as possible. Because digital publishing means instant access to the text by the readership, the expectation is that the newest installment will be available the second the day starts. Unless authors program their websites to update as such, this is rarely the case. For Burlew, the time needed for narrative production, other authorial responsibilities, and a life outside of authorship meant that previous publication schedules were not realistic to maintain. Even for webcomic cartoonists who have their work as a full time job, there just simply aren't enough hours in the day. Serialization thus becomes a race against the clock for authors where readers await with their critique in hand even before the text is published.

As of this writing, Burlew continues to publish updates at random intervals though the three installments per week ratio are no longer standard or expected. Extended periods of time without a new installment raise levels of worry in the readership, as noted by forum posts asking what happened to the comic and/or Burlew. These reception performances show concern and center not just on the narrative (what will happen next to the characters) but also for the author himself. This personal level of empathy shows a deeper connection in the author-reader relationship found within webcomics; more examples of this are found later on this chapter.

Another point worth noting is how vocal Burlew has been as an author and how these levels have changed over time. At first, Burlew would complete each installment and then actively engage with the readers in the forums of the "Giant in the Playground" website. He would also make regular announcements over the blog portion of the website and continue to provide other material, such as gaming articles

and short stories. One particular moment came when Burlew asked for support in trying to win an Eagle Award for “Favourite Web Based Comic” and “Favourite Original Graphic Novel¹³⁰”, the latter for his print only prequel OOTS story, *Start of Darkness*. “Unlike the WCCA’s, the Eagle is a fan-selected award that covers the entire comic book industry” (Blog post 4/11/2008). The interpretive community was asked at this moment to engage with the text beyond a traditional reception by helping to promote the work to a larger audience through this award. Burlew announced a month later that he won the former through another blog post and thanked the fans for their support. (Blog post 5/13/2008). Such communication between appealing to the reader’s to elevate the perception of the text to people outside the interpretive community and the readership’s successful actions shows that the author has sway over his/her base of support. This shows how the author-reader relationship expands within the context of the text and continues to grow in other facets as well over time.

Additional information by Burlew would be posted almost solely within the website’s forums. Early on, if a particular update would be late, he would post something on there to inform his readers of the delay and he even had a few mini-comics of this style ready for the occasion. In addition to online communication, he would go to various comic book and gaming conventions to help spread the word of his webcomic and sell merchandise. However, over the years Burlew would quiet down a bit on the labor based outside the narrative production of OOTS.

Notwithstanding the act of posting that a “new comic was up”, his forum posts were few and far between; mostly to clarify an important point in the story. For example, at the conclusion of issue #251 “A Piece of His Mind” a fight between the protagonists

¹³⁰ To quote Burlew, “since the Eagle Awards are British, they come with bonus ‘U’s’.”

and their captor Miko Miyazaki occurred completely off panel. This was odd since in issue #200 “The Confrontation” a previous battle between them was incredibly detailed. Upon calls of disbelief of a second defeat without explanation from the interpretive community, Burlew went to the forum and described a blow by blow combat with all those involved to prove that “people don't think I didn't give it some thought” (Re: Order of the Stick: November II #489). This kind of response showcases how issues within the text can be resolved without having to be placed within the narrative itself. These events are considered to be part of the canon of the text (similarly to the explanations in Chapter 2 as to how J.K. Rowling’s comments in interviews would be official parts of the Harry Potter narrative universe from thereon out). Interpretive communities regularly accept these points as factual within the story, though some detractors may voice dissatisfaction.

Burlew’s communication, as part of the additional authorial responsibilities outside of narrative production, continued to decline as the reception of the text thrived. Other auxiliary material to the webcomic had stopped altogether (as noted by the fact that the FAQ page was last updated in 2005) and blog posts were now reserved for important announcements like new OOTS merchandise for sale. It was not until early-2012 that he set up a Twitter account and even then his tweets are more about his work than his personal life. Still, Burlew had enough of an authorial identity established with his readership that he did not need to be as vocal as before. The sense of community had already been instilled by the author over time and long-time readers know that Burlew is hard at work even if communication outside of continuing

serialization is minimal. This type of authorial clout is evident during his Kickstarter campaign which will be explained later on in this chapter.

B. Tarol Hunt (Thunt) and *Goblins*

The other webcomic that this analysis focuses on is that of Tarol Hunt-Stephens's, better known as Thunt to his readers, *Goblins – Life through Their Eyes* (hereafter referred to as *Goblins*). Hunt began his still ongoing webcomic on June 26, 2005 as he told the story of a group of the eponymous monstrous humanoids who subverted the fantasy genre which established that they were solely evil. Heavily based on the concepts of and ideas behind *Dungeons & Dragons*, much in the same way that OOTS is, *Goblins* is primarily a work of humor whose story slowly shifted away from the jokes. Hunt's narrative production and authorial identity contrast with Burlew's even as the content and genre of both works is quite similar. Over the years of researching *Goblins* I have witnessed how the changes that occur within the narrative and in Hunt's life are an interconnected part of the serial reading experience of this work.

The *Goblins* website has undergone various changes since the onset of the webcomic's publication but it still has the same overall format. The online document contains the work of serial fiction but also other texts that are not part of the narrative text. Among the ancillary paratexts outside of the story are the blog posts, which sometimes get updated more than the webcomic itself. While Rich Burlew might update the main page of OOTS's blog once every few months with important announcements, Hunt would write something new at a weekly basis or greater. Hunt's posts normally revolve around his personal life in addition to news regarding his work.

Another element that puts the spotlight on the author rather than the story is his Twitter feed. Between the blogs and the tweets, the interpretive community is taught about “Thunt” the person, rather than just “Thunt” the author. His personal life becomes just as much a part of the serial reading experience of following the Goblin Adventuring Party (GAP) as he calls his protagonists, as it is about seeing the progression of his life. Over the years, one can see how this work traces the evolving nature of the author/reader relationship in truly unique ways.

Tools like social media (e.g. Twitter) allow authors to communicate with their readership outside of the serialization process. This form of communication provides authors with a way to contact and keep in touch with their respective (and prospective) interpretive communities outside of the serialization process of the text. Individual readers may use this online communication to interact with the author as well. These reception performances serve as feedback from the readership as a whole, which in turn may change the direction of narrative production, should the author choose to take them into account. These exchanges can revolve around the story and about one’s personal life as well. The latter serves to foreground the life and circumstances of the author as serialization of the work ensues. The regular updates of Hunt’s life are a conscious choice; one that reveals an authorial performance of communication with one’s base. Other authors may maintain a professional distance between the writer and reader, often times making the only point of contact between the two being the publication of the work itself. However, Hunt evokes a sense of familiarity and connection that makes him as a person an integral part of reading *Goblins*, though not one that is required to keep up with the story. What ensues is a closer form of the

author/reader relationship where information at the personal and narrative levels is shared on both ends. The interpretive community engages with the complexities of the narrative in addition to the challenges and triumphs that Hunt faces. The textual and financial dimensions of narrative production (if only for a moment) become secondary to genuine interest and curiosity into the author's life as readers wonder about more than the state of the upcoming installment.

Blog posts and tweets help readers gain more insight into the author's life. However, many of the motivations behind creative and production performances are not so easily accessible. Such details are usually present within the print compilations of a webcomic, which serve as a key feature for readers to purchase these anthologies. These types of foregrounding are notably found as part of "behind the scenes" features in many DVDs, which contain commentary from the cast and crew of the movie or television series. In Hunt's case, there are only two books (as of the time of this writing¹³¹). These print documents contain this additional information, much in the same style that Burlew and other webcomic cartoonists provide insight into their creative performances. The origin of the concept behind *Goblins* is one of the main features of the first print book.

What is now the first update of the *Goblins* web comic was originally created as one of my many comic submissions to be sent out to various publishing companies. ... After I'd sent copies of the entire *Goblins* series (all six pages of it) to a number of publishers with no luck, I shelved the comic and moved on. A couple of years went by until one of the players from my D&D game

¹³¹ The *Goblins*' website contains an archive of each installment published so far. It is divided into mini chapters within the grander story arcs which are referenced as "books". However, these sub divisions are not exactly up to date. All installments are available but not easily accessible.

showed me a fairly new web comic calling itself *The Order of the Stick*. ... I mentioned my new comic in a D&D forum and was amazed and delighted to find that people were responding positively! Not only that, but they wanted to see more of those “misfit” goblins. This was an idea that had never occurred to me. More of those temporary goblins? Hmm... Suddenly the story began to run through my mind as though I were watching someone else’s movie. I liked this movie a lot and wrote it down. (*Goblins: Life through Their Eyes. The Book One Package* “Some Inside Info on¹³²”)

Hunt provides glimpses like this into the narrative production of *Goblins* through these ancillary publications. His process from concept to publication was delayed because of the gatekeepers of another medium. With the inspiration of OOTS, he decides to attempt to continue his work yet again, more or less on his own. While Hunt explains in his blog and tweets that the story and many of its details were written long ago, he explains that the original idea was barely developed as the first installments were published. Feedback from some of the early readers gave him the direction he needed on some of the additional characters he wanted to introduce to the story. The choice to expose the narrative in almost its barest of shapes harkens back to the idea of Bryant’s textual fluidity and the circulating draft. Hunt asks for and implements the advice his early readership gave him, thus showing that narrative production can be influenced, especially when author are still developing the narrative. The process is one that normally the writer and his/her close friends and editors go through but the process of serialization and the accessibility of digital publishing open that part of the writing

¹³² Again, this is another book without actual page numbers. My copy of this book is in PDF format, so at least I can provide an approximate number of page 136/175 based on my file for easier access.

process to the readership. This communal editorship shows how the interpretive community helps to shape the text through the early reception performances of the work, in a way that is far more democratic than the traditional relationship between author and editor.

Another element of narrative insight that Hunt provides throughout the serialization of *Goblins* is a webcam which he uses to broadcast himself through “Twitch¹³³” as he is preparing upcoming installments. The author thus unveils the production performance of the actual creation of narrative production in real time. Readers now become active viewers and spectators to the writing/drawing process. However, their role here is not a passive one. The live broadcast contains a real time chat feature which allows the interpretive community to interact with each other and with Hunt as well. During this time, Hunt mostly has a regular conversation about his life while drawing¹³⁴ while actively avoiding talking about unpublished material though some past or future material may be part of the conversation. There are often visual spoilers of future narrative events present in the next installment via the textual production or the conversation that ensue; readers are aware that these glimpses into narrative production can spoil upcoming parts of the story. Details that are revealed (either visually or through chatting with Hunt) are generally accepted as canon for the details of the story as seen earlier with Burlew and his forum posts.

¹³³ Twitch is “the world’s leading social video platform and community for gamers, video game culture, and the creative arts” (About Page). Mostly catered to video game players, streamers provide content as spectators browse through different channels of content. Real time commentary from streamers and interactions are part of what makes Twitch an appealing service for artists, gamers, and viewers alike.

¹³⁴ The few times that I have personally been a part of this process I have seen how readers, mostly present under anonymous randomly generated IDs or pseudonyms, are cordial and are there to keep him company.

One example in the case of *Goblins* shows how interactions between authors and fans help to fill in the gaps within the narrative. At one moment in the story, Hunt presented some of his protagonists going through The Maze of Many, where multiple versions of themselves from alternate realities compete against one another. Some realities are explained in detail during the actual story, while others are barely mentioned. A fraction of these additional realities are explained during the actual story and in further detail in singular paratextual installments called “Altsplanations”. Each one starts as follows: “There are currently 218 alternate realities running through the maze of many. Each reality has a backstory with their own goals, fears, and details” (Altsplanations #1-#8)¹³⁵. However, since Hunt cannot discuss in detail every single alternative reality without further delaying the narrative progress of the story, some descriptions and backstories may never be revealed to his audience. Readers have asked Hunt to provide more information through various forms of communication, e.g. social media, email, forum posts. It’s when these questions were asked through the chat of a live drawing session that he provided some responses. These streams offer an opportunity for the author to expand the background elements of his story, even if it is to a limited percentage of his readership. The (un)official altsplanations were then added to the public forums of the webcomic by these keen readers and are now available to the rest of the interpretive community. These reception performances of archiving the author’s words serve to expand the facts surrounding the text.

Considering that Hunt and other webcomic cartoonists have control over the content

¹³⁵ The altsplanations were originally published as updates to the story in lieu of a given installment at random intervals. These ancillary descriptions of the story are no longer found in the archive as they are meant to be featured in an upcoming potential print only book. Still, the basic information of the different dimensions can be found in the webcomics forums thanks to diligent readers who maintain an active thread on all past explanations.

of the website's forums and can delete posts from fans, shows that they have no problem with these comments being transcribed for others to see. Hence, the author-reader relationship grows through additional portals of interaction beyond the text. These forms of communication can be completely casual in nature but information regarding the past, present, and future of the narrative is considered to be truthful and official unless stated otherwise.

Hunt's additional explanations, and the fact that those extra details for those alternate realities exist, exemplifies how the creative performances of narrative production do not necessarily get to appear within the story itself. Aspects of the world building phase of storytelling may never be a part of the published material. And yet, through the author-reader relationship that exists outside of serialization these potentially secret elements can be shared. Divulging those details as part of the interaction with one's interpretive community through a digital connection shows a willingness to share that information. Furthermore, by providing such explanations outside of the serialization of installments, authors like Hunt can provide additional material without disrupting the narrative pacing of one's work¹³⁶.

As with many other serial works online, the rate of publication for *Goblins* has changed multiple times throughout its publication. Hunt went through a few years of determining when updates should be made, culminating in an unconventional publication schedule. The original format that ran for years at a rate of twice a week (Tuesdays and Fridays) was too much of a struggle to keep up with him, as evident by

¹³⁶ This particular moment in the story arc had already been marred with delays. Further use of "altspanations" being used in lieu of an installment would slow the narrative progression to the point that I would have considered taking a break from reading this webcomic.

many late postings and missed updates alongside Twitter and blog post apologies¹³⁷.

Hunt considered changing to once a week updates but feared that this would slow the pacing of his narrative too much. With this in mind, he explained on a blog post in mid-2013 that:

Let's be honest. *Goblins* is never on time. I mean, sometimes it happens, but not often. I've been asked many times "why don't you slow down the schedule?". Well, without going into too much detail, I couldn't before, but now I can. ... This is a schedule clock. Once it's set up, it'll be prominently displayed at the top of the site, where it will count down to the next update. This will remove my need to adhere to a weekly schedule where twice/week is too much and once/week is too slow. With this baby, I can update every 4 or 5 days and with a quick glance at the clock, you'll know exactly how long you have to wait. No more late updates and I can have a day off every now and then! ... You guys deserve so much better than all of these late updates. ("Big Changes for Goblins")

The fact that Hunt states that he could enjoy a less grueling work schedule and that the readership deserves so much better showcases the stresses and hardships that come with serial fiction. Keeping a consistent publication schedule while maintaining a work life balance is a difficult task for webcomic cartoonists, from that are starting out to those that are already professionals. As Hunt explained two months later, the change seemed to be working well.

¹³⁷ Looking through the blog archives one can see that 2011 had many complications for Hunt which resulted in late or missed installments as reported there.

So this five day schedule seems to be working out well. Y’see, the problem with twice a week, was that I couldn’t keep up with that schedule and my updates were always late (as you know). The problem with once a week, is that it just feels too slow for the story. Five days seems to be the current sweet spot. ... I have to say that for the first time in many years, I feel like I’m in a position where I can get on top of things! (“Countdown Clocks and Dragon Slaying”)

For the next few months, this new and somewhat unconventional publication schedule had only a few delays or missed updates, which considering the previous format is quite an improvement, until suddenly everything stopped.

i. An Unexpected Hiatus

For all the openness that Hunt exhibits, there are still moments when information is not made available publicly to the interpretive community. Such an event occurred right after the publication of an installment on February 12, 2014. By following his Twitter feed, which is a feature in the *Goblins* main page, one finds that there is a teaser by Hunt for the next day’s installment with the following tweets:

- “I really don't like to brag about my own work or swear. Knowing this, you can understand the gravity of my next tweet.” (04:30:54 PM February 15, 2014)
- “The next three pages of *Goblins* will blow your [expletive] minds.” (04:32:17 PM February 15, 2014)

After a few more tweets about his everyday life, his authorial voice went silent for an extended period of time. The update clock was left blank and readers were left

wondering what had happened. Hunt had shared pretty much every detail of his life beforehand so the general consensus was that it had to be an almost extreme circumstance to keep him from his work and his fans. His wife, Danielle Stephens, had also stopped posting things in her respective avenues of social media. Her Twitter biography during this time showed that “I manage & colour *Goblins Comic* and make geeky things go¹³⁸”. Here we see that at the personal and professional level, Stephens assists Hunt in the narrative production of his work so any news from her would be reliable. On February 26th, the following message was placed under the main websites blog posts: “Very soon there will be a blog post from Tarol Hunt (Thunt), explaining what’s happened and what’s going on with the *Goblins* updates. This is not that blog. –Danielle”. Shortly thereafter, the countdown timer had a message indicating that updates were on hold for now. The message was later changed to say: “Updates are on hold for now, due to urgent, private reasons. More info will arise eventually! Please be patient. Thanks!” The updated version came once rampant speculation from the interpretive community took hold of the forums about what the author’s situation could be. On March 22nd, over a full month after the last instalment, Hunt arose on Twitter and provided some details as to what happened.

The abbreviated version of the situation is that he had a nervous breakdown which left him emotionally distraught and unable to work on *Goblins*. While this explanation sufficed most of the fans’ curiosity, Hunt insisted on publishing the full version of what had happened as he tweeted that, “The blog will be posted purely

¹³⁸ During the initial drafts of this chapter, that was indeed what her bio stated but the current incarnation of it reads differently and now says “I play colouring books and make believe for a living. I like crafty things (paper sculpture, yarn, food & living history), space exploration & sciencey stuff.” Notably, her website information is still that of the *Goblins* webcomic.

because you [the readers] deserve to know why I just walked away from my responsibilities without a word for 5 weeks” (Mar 22, 2014). This tweet encompasses the dynamics of author-reader relationship within serialization as this dissertation has explained since the beginning. From the author’s perspective we see that there is a duty to continue to serialize over time and to keep the readership informed of the process. Hunt’s choice to say that “you deserve to know why” is not done as part of a contractual obligation but rather because he believes that the interpretive community who has stuck with him through all other aspects of his narrative production and personal life should be informed. Hunt tweeted a few days later directly responding to the support that the readership had given him.

I know “friends” isn't the most realistic word to describe most of you, since honestly, I don't know many of your faces or names. But “fans” is such a crap term too. You helped me with the down payment to buy my house. You helped me become a better artist/writer and now you've played no small part in helping me through... whatever you call this. You've literally saved my mind, if not my life. (March 29, 2014)¹³⁹

The lack of a proper identity for the reader as part of Hunt’s gratitude shows that there is more to the readership of a particular work than just being the passive receptors of communication through literature. The interpretive community offers support at the financial level (helping to buy a house) alongside the emotional aspect which in Hunt’s case has helped him overcome the most grueling challenge of his life as an author and as a person.

¹³⁹ This is a compilation of a series of tweets made one after the other on this day.

On May 8th, the long awaited blog post titled “I Quit” was finally published on the *Goblins* website. The incredibly long and detailed explanation provided many details as to how for the better part of two months Hunt’s emotional demons were too much to handle; serialization and his life were on pause. He expounds how his sense of guilt over not being to achieve deadlines for new installments as well as other responsibilities had gotten to the point where he isolated himself from his readership and his life. The struggles (which he personifies in the blog post as “Guilt Vader”) engulfed Hunt in paralyzing worry where no work could be done on the webcomic and his interpersonal relationships began to be at peril. In the end, his wife Danielle helped him get out of his shell of misery. She exemplifies a reception performance of support and maintaining an emotional well-being on which authors depend on their loved ones and indirectly from their readers. In many ways, this kind of performance is assumed and taken for granted, to the point that it goes as being part of the responsibilities of being in an author’s inner circle. In the case of Hunt and his wife, we see a clear support system in place that is essential for keeping narrative production and life itself from stopping.

The titular declaration of Hunt’s post came near the end of blog post where he explains that he no longer wants to have the current relationship he has with his readers.

From the very beginning, I’ve treated my readers as my bosses. After all, that’s where my income originates from, right? And when I’m late, it’s you the readers who are tapping your watches disapprovingly. And in a way, you could fire me simply by not reading my comic anymore. The relationship fits! And

for years, it's felt as though I'd be disrespecting my readers if I were to treat the relationship any other way. But there's been a problem with this dynamic... But while this can work in a lot of business situations, it's downright destructive in the reader/webcomic author relationship. I mean... let's be honest, the internet is not an air-tight bastion of complete, unwavering good advice. There are some bad ideas floating around out there. ("I Quit")

Hunt goes on to say that he felt that each moment of feedback from the interpretive community as if it were coming from one of many bosses. He had reversed the long established concept that the author was above the reader and had given them all the power in this relationship. From this perspective the author was not dead; he was subservient to the reader and to a point could feel bullied and even enslaved. The readership becomes as demanding and influential as any other nonauthorial agent present in other media and publishing standards. Hunt's declaration of quitting is not about ceasing to be an author but rather of changing the dynamic he had developed and fostered. "I mean that I no longer work for any of you. I'll no longer create *Goblins* with a fear of failure looming over me." While the financial and emotional dimensions of webcomic serialization are still in play, Hunt states that he will continue his narrative for his readers but that he will no longer treat them as his superiors.

I'm still creating *Goblins* and I'm still fully respecting those that deserve my respect. I'm still listening to advice and criticism and I'm still as interactive with my readers as I can be. The only difference is that I no longer consider any of you to be my boss and as a result, I now have a right to place my own opinions about myself and my work, above yours. ("I Quit")

By shifting the power dynamics of the author-reader relationship, Hunt establishes that his work will not be published for the sake of success but rather because he wants to continue telling his story and hopes that his interpretive community will still be there for him. Hunt also admits that the publication schedule will continue to be erratic for the foreseeable future and he knows that this may cause some to cease the serial reading experience of *Goblins* and as he states, “I completely understand and I’ll respect your decision to walk away. I won’t respect your angry emails, because I don’t work for you anymore. I quit.”

On September 17th 2014, a full seven months since the last installment of *Goblins*, a new issue was finally published. The publication schedule slowed to an almost monthly basis for a while afterwards but serialization continued. As of the time of this writing, Hunt continues to write and draw his story with no clear publishing schedule or a timetable for an ending. He continues to keep his readership informed about *Goblins* and his life, including what happened when a successful crowdfunding venture went horribly wrong.

III. Crowdfunding: A More Direct Monetization of Readerships

Tanya Prive in an article for *Forbes* magazine defines crowdfunding as, “the practice of funding a project or venture by raising many small amounts of money from a large number of people, typically via the Internet”. One of the most popular platforms for crowdfunding, and the one that I focus on this discussion, is Kickstarter. The website serves as a large-scale funding intermediary between authors and readers. To simplify their “Terms of Service” and the crowdfunding process, “Project Creators” submit a project with a funding goal. The hope is that people donate/invest

money for the author/creator of said project to have the starting capital to go forth in this venture. “Backers” can give their support with payments from their credit cards or with another online service like PayPal. Should the initial goal be met within a specific time period (usually thirty days), then the payments are finalized. However, if the collected money does not meet this requisite quantity, then the project does not materialize from this point and no money is transferred from anyone. Successful Kickstarter campaigns give 10% of the total amount of money received to the Kickstarter website once all funds have been collected. This form of crowdfunding extends the authorial responsibility of securing starting capital (much like a producer would do when making a film) towards the readership, which now takes on the larger role of investors in the work. The financial dimensions of the author-reader relationship now become more organized and formalized during this period of funding, which shows an extension of their respective roles.

What makes Kickstarter so interesting for readers is the promise of different “rewards” for the various tiers at which people donate. The minimum pledge is that of one dollar, though this category rarely gives any kind of physical reward for the supporters of this level. From there on out, different amounts allow for additional rewards, many of them being cumulative. Take for example the Kickstarter campaign of Rob Balder and Xin Ye’s webcomic *Erfworld* titled, “Erfworld Year of the Dwagon¹⁴⁰”, to publish a compilation of their strips into a physical book. The most common reward at the level of ten to twenty dollars includes a digital or physical copy of said book. Backers obtain these documents much earlier and probably cheaper than

¹⁴⁰ The variant spelling of “dragon” is a purposeful choice done by Balder as the fantastic creatures in his webcomic have similar modifications in their names.

what a future purchase could be obtained for; a large number of the readership's support is done at these levels. Higher tiers provide additional materials such as: signed copies, hard cover editions, previous books, and other forms of extra merchandise. There are even higher levels of donations that have a limited level of backers, which border on the extreme. In the case of this *Erfworld* Kickstarter, one of the highest level tiers can be seen as follows:

Pledge \$5,000 or more

0 backers Limited (5 left of 5)

Dance For Me, Author-Boy! –

I (Rob Balder) will fly out to visit you (North America and Caribbean only)

and spend a day or so geeking out with you and your game group or whatever.

I will bring goodies and surprises and I don't (just) mean booze. You will also get the armored dwagon plushie, hardcover book, DVD/Blu-ray and Stupid Meal¹⁴¹.

The reward level exemplifies an author going above and beyond his responsibilities outside of narrative production in a way that extends to the personal level of going out to meet an incredibly limited amount of potential readers who were willing to provide the \$5,000 pledge. The fact that no readers pledged at this level during the Kickstarter campaign goes to show that authorial accessibility at such a level can be made available, but not necessarily attainable to even the most dedicated members of an interpretive community. While readers have no initial cost of purchase to engage with

¹⁴¹ This is a transcription from the final reward tier after the crowdfunding campaign had ended. The Stupid Meal is a parody of the McDonald's Happy Meal, the protagonist of *Erfworld* received one early on in his adventures that contained magical 3D glasses and a sword. For the Kickstarter campaign, it was a reward for \$25 and above pledges which contained: "a sticker set of *Erfworld* characters, plus the signed postcard, e-book download, and site badge."

the text, there may come a time when authors call upon them as part of a financial endeavor. Balder's Kickstarter provided easily attainable pledge goals and rewards for those willing and able to help. The price of definitive access to the author through pledge goals like the one mentioned above show that the writer is willing to halt narrative production and spend time with certain readers, but only for the right price.

One particular situation worth noting with Kickstarter is what happens once the initial monetary goal has been set but there is still time within the allotted funding period. Outside of obtaining rewards, there is no need or motivation for the readership to keep spreading the word and getting additional backers, besides helping better fund the project itself. Authors at this point include "stretch goals" which give additional rewards to current and future backers if another monetary objective is achieved. If these are met, there is a possibility that the author will add more stretch goals along the way until completion. Consider the case of Rich Burlew's Kickstarter campaign, which lasted from January 22, 2012 to February 21, 2012. Here, he asked readers to help fund a reprint drive for *War and XPs*, the third print compilation of OOTS installments and required a bare minimum of \$57,000 to do so. To help convince readers to support the project, Burlew offered a prequel story for O-Chul, a secondary character in the story, to be sent digitally to all those who pledged ten dollars or more. As a fan and a critic of his work, I was intrigued and immediately pledged that minimal amount to witness firsthand the development of the Kickstarter campaign. Within the first 24 hours of the project's announcement, the initial goal was surpassed and stretch goals of further reprints of other OOTS books were given. Stretch goals were being added at an almost daily level. In the end, the Kickstarter project acquired

almost 1.2 million dollars and was funded at 2,000% from the initial level. The added stretch goals provided that same \$10 pledge to include five additional PDF stories¹⁴² and other perks that helped non-backers of the interpretive community of OOTS as well, such as eight days in a row of new installments.

Burlew's Kickstarter campaign is one of the top grossing funding projects for under the category of Comics and the only one to obtain over one million dollars in pledges (Kickstarter Stats). This campaign shows the impact that a committed readership can provide to an author that was constantly being surprised by pledge after pledge. Still, there are those that argue that the Kickstarter triumph was not as clear a financial success as one might initially believe. These concerns were confirmed by Burlew in a message to backers marking the four year anniversary since the campaign was completed to celebrate and update the status of all ongoing projects.

The other dubious milestone passed since the last update is that the very last of the money raised by this project has now been spent. At the start of the fulfillment phase, I divided the money into two accounts: one for postage, and one for everything else. The "everything else" fund is long gone, having gone toward printing, taxes, and a bunch of other fulfillment costs before the end of 2013. The short version is that expenses exceeded the amount raised, even including the "surplus" that was raised at the end of the project (which ended up being used just to cover unforeseen costs; I never got a new computer or anything), but the print runs that were financed allowed me to cover the "loss" with regular sales through Ookoodook and game store distribution.

¹⁴² During the final editing process of this dissertation, Burlew announced that the primary O-Chul story would be published soon.

Even with over a million dollars in money collected, Burlew is barely able to continue creating the rewards for this project without going into a financial loss. Rising shipping costs explain the miscalculation of the original funds set aside for just that, thanks in part to the many physical items added to each backers rewards. Four years after the fact, it is evident that crowdfunding was not the silver bullet to defeat the problem of financing a large-scale serialized publication. OOTS continues to be serialized even as the additional Kickstarter story rewards are still under narrative production. Without this hindsight, many other authors followed Burlew's example with the hope that they too could find a vast readership ready to help fund their dream projects.

Such campaigns by webcomic authors sprung up soon after but never quite came close to the original expectations. These campaigns had achieved their initial funding goal a few times over but one could tell that the authors' ambitions did not quite get there. Take for example the case of Tarol Hunt's Kickstarter campaign for the creation of the board game based on his webcomic, *Goblins*. One of the special stretch goal rewards was only available should readers fund the project within the first twenty fours from its start. This shows an anticipation that his readership would come through in high numbers from the get go and Hunt was successful in doing so. In the end however, we can see that the Kickstarter campaign did achieve the project's goal but not necessarily the author's. From the beginning, Hunt made a map that showed different stretch goals and would only reveal the next reward and funding level to meet once the previous one was set. The original map contained over a dozen potential goals but only about half were achieved. Hunt's Kickstarter resonates with other

campaigns that had a fairly attainable initial goal but whose desires might not have been truly satiated. But even when a victory, big or small, is achieved, the chasm between obtaining the money and completing the orders for all backers was vast. Each case provides its own unique challenges to overcome as rewards are produced and delivered.

One such challenge is determining whether or not your funding campaign was financially successful or not. At first glance, Burlew's 2,000% funding seems prosperous enough for the author but one needs to look at some further intricacies to get the full picture. Stretch goals provide rewards to people that have already funded from their initial pledge, so they obtain more for their money. This is a good deal for backers but it that means that the author needs to pick up the tab for additional items. Take for example Brian Clevinger's and Scott Wegna's Kickstarter campaign to make a "Tesladyne Field Guide" based on their comic book series *Atomic Robo*. In the end, anyone who pledged enough to obtain a physical copy of the book also received extra merchandise like drawings, posters, stickers, and even a lanyard. All these added items now needed to be made and shipped to their respective backers, which meant that Clevinger and Wegna had to take on that additional responsibility and cost. Clevinger explains these worries in an interview as his campaign was still being funded:

Some folks have a weird attitude about Kickstarter campaigns. They'll see the minimum funding amount and the current much larger funding amount, do some quick math, and call the gap between those figures PROFIT. That's not how it works. Every backer increases the number of items you need to make and to ship, so your costs are going up all the time. This is part of why so many

campaigns, especially wildly successful ones, end up costing more than they raised. The scale gets out of hand and little costs add up fast.

Beyond the financial aspect, the additional creation of said items, and in this specific case adding more pages to the book, incurs on the author's time and energy; which ultimately hinders narrative production that should be focused on the primary work. In Burlew's case, that meant additional stories that needed to be written, drawn, and digitally delivered to select readers. Resources normally invested into narrative production needed to be diverted towards ensuring that rewards were sent out properly. Thus, the serialization of OOTS becomes affected, which is felt by the entirety of his readership, not just the backers to the Kickstarter campaign.

One final point about monetary success comes from critics who argue that Burlew's Kickstarter reveals a financial failure. The fact that so many readers were more than willing to fund his project at various levels shows that that the author had not tapped in to the financial power of his readership beforehand. The 1.2 million dollars reflects a desire from readers to obtain this kind of merchandise that should have been quenched long before through other projects. It demonstrates a lack of foresight on the author's outlook that could obtain more capital through sales beforehand. With all the money he got through Kickstarter, potential backers might be hard pressed to make future purchases since they may now (wrongly) interpret that Burlew doesn't really need the funds anymore after becoming a millionaire of sorts.

As mentioned earlier, Hunt tried his own hand at making a Kickstarter campaign with a board game using characters from his work, *Goblins*. The actual developers of the game would be Evertide Games, a company that had already

produced other board games in the past, including through Kickstarter funding. The campaign surpassed its original goals but that was only the beginning of the ensuing chaos. Evertide Games provided updates to their backers throughout the campaign and beyond to keep those that have helped them informed as to the general status of the project. By following only this page, backers would find that development of the game had hit a few snags and that delivery of the game would be delayed. Later on, a message by Richard James, President of Evertide Games, said that the company was no longer financially stable.

Despite the release of our first Kickstarter project earlier this year, the company's expenses in 2014 have significantly exceeded our revenue and the cost of our efforts at publicity and promotion throughout 2013 far outweighed the tangible benefits from doing so. On top of that, the time required to oversee operations over the past year has compromised my ability to finalize product design and led to a lot of product release and production delays, most notably for our project for Goblins. So, in order to make sure that the company becomes cashflow positive, avoids running out of cash and fulfills all our obligations, we have had to resort to some drastic measures.

In April, I ended all our ongoing contract work and in May, I laid off our employees. I cancelled our convention appearances this summer and I closed down our office at the end of July.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ This message is only available to backers of the project. It used to be displayed on the Kickstarter campaign page but that has been locked down due to ensuing legal issues surrounding Hunt and James. I still have access to the message thanks to all updates being sent in whole through email as well as to the page itself.

This is the last public message by James or Evertide Games. Hunt, in the meantime, attempted to contact James and those at Kickstarter to better understand what happened with the licensing deal regarding his characters. As far as Hunt can surmise, James had disappeared and the funds that were raised were long gone. In a blog post titled “Lowtide: The Undead Kickstarter Campaign”, Hunt chronicles the apparent disappearance of James and how Kickstarter customer service cannot do anything to locate him. Hunt also vows to complete the production of the game and its delivery to all backers even if it means putting up all the funds himself. Kickstarter has officially placed the original page for the project as unavailable due it being “the subject of an intellectual property dispute.” Hunt uses his status as creator of the *Goblins* work and owner of its copyright to claim that he should have access to the Kickstarter page and takeover the project that James had failed at. He shared this message directed at Kickstarter executives with his readership.

I am Tarol Hunt, the creator and owner of the webcomic, *Goblins* and all the characters portrayed on your Kickstarter page... I also own the rights to the game *Goblins: Alternate Realities*. Richard James and Evertide Games do not own any aspect of *Goblins*, nor do they have the rights to any of my artwork in any form. They do not have the right to sell merchandise with my name on it or the name of any of my creations. They do not have the right to fund or finance any *Goblins*, *Goblins: Alternate Realities* or *G:AR* Kickstarter projects.

Richard James and Evertide Games do not have the right to the following money... \$177,850 falsely gained through Kickstarter.

Hunt asserts his authorial stature over the text and the project by defending the integrity of his intellectual property and of his fans by personally taking on the matter at hand. Kickstarter campaigns fail even with the financial support of backers fueling the project due to unforeseen circumstances. These are the perils that come with this type of up front financing and why projects need to include what sort of risks are involved in the part of creators for completion. Had Evertide Games been more transparent then maybe the project would just be another failed startup. Instead, Hunt has taken it upon himself to right the wrongs that others have done to an extension of his work of serial fiction. He has taken responsibility for the project and hopes to eventually complete and deliver all those board games, which in turn diverts even more resources from narrative production. Hunt illustrates that authorship of serial fiction goes beyond the continued publishing of installments by taking the author/reader relationship to a new level. He wants to make sure that his readership is not cheated regarding the text, even if the board game itself was his in name only. Much like the completion of *Goblins*, readers will continue to wait and see what the next step may be, hoping that Hunt will continue to live up to his authorial endeavors until the narrative and any other issues are completed.

Crowdfunding websites like Kickstarter provide authors/creators with the ability to host a campaign drive to achieve the necessary funds for an upcoming project. In the process, readers take on some of the financial responsibilities for making sure the process gains enough starting capital and gain some rewards in the process. However, this model works for relatively large-scale projects. On the other hand, there are other forms by which authors can obtain further monetary backing

from their readerships. One such service is Patreon, a website that lets one become a patron of the arts in a more focused manner. The process is relatively simple; authors sign up and offer readers the opportunity to give them ways to provide financial backing during regular intervals. It is essentially a subscription service by which readers agree to pay a finite amount every week, month, or installment (intervals are chosen by the author) through online transactions via credit card or online payment services like PayPal. Also, readers have the freedom to change their payment plan as they see fit. Much like Kickstarter, should readers choose to contribute at certain levels then they are eligible to obtain certain rewards which can affect them personally or the readership of the entire work.

Back in the turn of the century, many believed that a system of micropayments would allow for webcomic cartoonists to flourish without the middlemen of traditional publishing serving as intermediaries at the financial and other levels between authors and readers. Scott McCloud in 2001 in his book, *Reinventing Comics* lauded micropayments as the way of the future.

The Web, at first glance may seem every bit as convoluted a system as today's comic market and one might expect it to siphon money just as quickly – but the money in this case is pure information and can travel through the network without losing one iota of its value. That means IF our online creator could find a method of payment with, say, a ten percent transaction cost, he could be making ninety percent on each sale. 9 times as much as his paper and ink peers. (183)

Different forms of micro transactions emerged since the year 2000 but few truly took off. Years later, during the 2012 keynote address McCloud gave at the Rocky Mountain Conference on Comics and Graphic Novels (ROMOCOCO) he admitted that the idea was a bust¹⁴⁴. Of course this was before the rise of Patreon as a financing system but other forms did exist at that moment. For instance, donation drives were set up by webcomic cartoonists sparingly and only during a time of great need because they did not want to bother their readers with the financial struggles of their personal lives unless it was a last ditch effort. Tarol Hunt did just that when it seemed like he and his family might end up homeless.

Near the onset of *Goblins*, Hunt set up a spin-off comic titled *Tempts Fate*, about a death defying goblin whose adventures would result in his demise if certain funding goals were not reached within a short period of time. The economic centered paratext would arise at different times as a donation drive to ensure that he could continue to be a full time author. At one moment, Hunt was in such dire need when he and his family were close to being evicted from their current home. To obtain enough money to put a down payment on a potential house, he wondered whether or not to use *Tempts Fate* once again to obtain the necessary funds through his readership. After much deliberating, Hunt chose to call upon his readership once again to gain the much needed monetary support and they responded in kind. When the call to aid started he said that "... if we got this house, it'd belong to all Goblins fans and therefore if you're ever in the area, you're welcome to come and hang out, play D&D or whatever. Well, we may not be getting the house, but our offer still stands!" (Blog Post April 24,

¹⁴⁴ I personally attended and presented a paper at this conference. McCloud's talk was unfortunately not transcribed.

2011). Hunt was able to obtain enough money to obtain the house and the standing invitation to all of his readers continues. This case shows how an invested readership is truly a sustaining factor for authors to continue to publish their work. This connection can take place thanks to the evolving nature of the author/reader relationship that has been fostered over years by continuously publishing the text and providing a sense of community for all involved. Because Hunt acknowledges how gracious and helpful his readership has been, he continues to go above and beyond as an author to keep his interpretive community informed of the status of his work and his own life. Be it after the battle with depression or the ongoing legal issues with the board game, Hunt will continue to serialize his text and update his readers on all aspects regarding his authorship.

In short, one of the most difficult aspects of digital authorship is the ability to provide one's work to the entire interpretive community for free while still remaining financially afloat. Online authors and content creators, especially those who publish online, have wondered what is the best way to keep providing access to content without resorting to begging; or at least, not begging at a constant rate. Crowdfunding, be it for large projects like with Kickstarter or with regular subscriptions like Patreon, give authors the ability to foreground their financial need and for readers to take on a more direct role by pledging money to keep these texts running. The interpretive community thus becomes even more directly responsible for the continued serialization of their favorite texts. However, authors entice their readers to contribute not just by the goodness of their hearts but through rewards based on their contributions which incentivize their pledges. This reward system (in addition to the

installments of their works) provides authors with more of a reason for readers to help take on their financial burdens without having to look like they are reaching for a handout.

IV. Ascended Readership

Throughout this chapter, I have analyzed various ways as to how authors create their works of serial fiction and make them available to their readership. Through these arguments, we see how the interpretive community is more than just the passive receivers of the text; in fact, they take on their own part to assure that the narrative continues to grow. Beyond just viewing installments and buying merchandise to show support for the author, readers convince their friends to join the readership and thus provide advertising and positive reviews of the text. This is a normal part of fan culture as devoted readers of up and coming narratives (and even established ones) will volunteer their services to take on some of the textual performances that have been explained throughout this study. Webcomic cartoonists who have their plates full will be more than glad to pass on some of these responsibilities and accept their help. Thus, readers engage not only in reception performances but in other aspects of authorship as well.

Readers come in many varieties, they range from the casual to the obsessed, from the devoted, to the indifferent, and even to those that participant in “hate reading¹⁴⁵” of every installment. For digitally distributed material, every view of the website represents a small gain of ad revenue (that is if the webcomic has advertisements at all). However, a webcomic cartoonist can find some success with a

¹⁴⁵ Hate reading refers to the action of reading, listening, or watching material that you disagree with at almost every level. More info here: <http://nymag.com/scienceofus/2014/09/why-we-hate-read.html>

small but loyal readership. C. Spike Trotman, webcomic cartoonist for *Templar, Arizona*, claims that one of the goals to achieve success is to obtain “1,000 true fans”. She explains that “1,000 true fans is a popular concept in a lot of creative circles. In this context a ‘true fan’ is a reader willing to spend \$100 on your work a year (“This Is Everything I Know”). This figure of ostensibly \$100,000 a year would make it seem like webcomic cartoonists are quite wealthy but this potential amount does not take into consideration costs like website services¹⁴⁶, merchandise production, book printing, and other overhead expenses. As Spike goes on to say, from an indie/self-publishing perspective “comics is a ten year line” and at the end a comic or webcomic can bring you “enough [money] for rent **and** groceries. Livin’ th’ dream over here!” Success is never guaranteed but working hard on honing your artistic craft and trying to find your “1,000 true fans” relates to your storytelling prowess. It also depends on the additional work outside of narrative production that webcomic cartoonists undertake, like those previously mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Readers provide direct feedback to authors through their financial contributions/purchases. However, there are a lot of other ways that readerships can help authors than just through their wallets.

The interpretive community now becomes divided between casual readers and the “true fans”. The latter comes in many varieties and means different things for different authors. One of the more common ways that the readership helps contribute to the work is via communication with the author and amongst themselves.

¹⁴⁶ Bandwidth costs become quite expensive once enough readers are visiting your site. For example, a top notch dedicated server working only to handle the traffic to a particular website costs about \$80.00 month for 5TB of bandwidth through the standard hosting plans of services like Bluehost and Dreamhost.

Communication in this manner can occur face to face at conventions, through phone calls, or even by old fashioned letters, but the way that the reader's voice can expand quickly and received by the intended audience is through online forums and message boards. Webcomic cartoonists know that these interactions amongst their interpretive communities take place and will facilitate it through having such forums up and running on their own websites. Readers now take on the role of "forumites" where they serve as critics to the webcomic and the ones quick enough to post something first help edit the text by indicating potential art or spelling errors. One of the additional labors of online authorship previously discussed was how authors would go through the forums to be able to gauge the readers' reactions and respond when appropriate. The problem comes once the readerships' tone of civil conversation potentially turns into a raucous of disruptive digital screaming matches. Authors want to keep the forums a courteous place for the readership to come together but one discussion can go too far or a particular forumite might be insulting and bordering on the offensive, so an additional responsibility of policing comments is necessary. As the number of readers grows, so too do the forumites, which can turn into a lot more time diverted into these additional tasks; fortunately, there are those who go above and beyond and wish to assist in this endeavor. Some forumites actively take the time to make sure that posts and comments follow the proper rules of the forum and will call out unruly people on their unacceptable behavior. Be it by volunteering or by being deputized by the author, these select members of the interpretive community are promoted to an ascended tier of the readership and take on the role the author once had with his/her authority.

These new select readers not only help the work and its ancillary features run well, they help the author so that the development of the text and its installments can continue. Obtaining startup capital, serving as a patron, spreading the word, and moderating forums are just a few of the ways that readers are taking a share of authorial burdens off the back from their favorite writers and artists. In this form, the readership grows in its importance as an expansion of the role of authorship occurs simultaneously. Even with these new responsibilities, the dividing line between author and reader is still quite prominent, since no matter how appreciative one can be the mantle of authorship is still quite fixed. However, this division is not insurmountable given the right circumstances. Consider the case of *Erworld*, a webcomic previously mentioned in this chapter originally created by writer Rob Balder and artist Jaime Noguchi. After completing the installments for the first major story arc of their webcomic (otherwise known as Book 1), Noguchi decided to leave *Erworld* just before the summer of 2009 to take on other projects. (*Erworld* archives). Balder, who for all intents and purposes is the primary author and owner of *Erworld*, as all images and content are under his copyright unless otherwise noted, continued the serialization of the text through the summer of that year but in a different format from the usual comic book page style installments. These installments were almost completely text based and accompanied by one image. Without Noguchi, Balder asked his readership who had already done their own artistic takes on the webcomic (more commonly known as fan art), to provide drawings for these unique installments.

I was posting plain texts that covered some of the narrative ground between Book 1 and what I planned for Book 2, while talking to a foreign illustration

studio (which never did work out). Without an artist, I opened the floor up to Erfworld fans to illustrate these short texts, and got a flood of over fifty volunteers. One of them turned out to be Xin Ye, who illustrated Summer Update #23. Her obvious talent floored me, and I asked her if she'd like to become *Erfworld's* new artist. The rest is history. ("Summer Updates Redux")

Here we see a temporary call to aid from the author to the interpretive community, in this specific case for continued illustrating for a short amount of installments, and the opportunity for one person out of those volunteers to take on the role of author, if only through the artistic side of dual authorship in this webcomic. The announcement of Xin Ye's promotion to the new artist of *Erfworld* was done just before the new official story arc of Book 2 started production and was reported at the same time as the departure of Noguchi as artist. Hence, for a period in time none of the readers knew that there was an authorial vacancy, much less that one of them could take on the role or that art submissions were being done as an application process. Later on, a new artist, David Hanh, was put in charge of drawing and coloring *Erfworld*. Rather than a reader taking on the role, Balder hired Hanh for the task and describes him as "a longtime comics industry pro" (*Erfworld* "About the Comic")¹⁴⁷. However, it is worth noting that Hanh's services were paid for in large part through a Kickstarter for the webcomic to secure funds for a print run of the Book 2 storyline and to make Book 3 altogether. Whether fans are personally taking up the pen or financially supporting the work, readers are assuring authorship for future installments of their serial fiction.

Conclusion

¹⁴⁷ As of the time of this writing, Balder continues to be the writer and main author of *Erfworld*, the penciller is Xin Ye and the inker and colorist is Lauri Ahonen.

Over the past 30 years or so, the digital format has provided a new portal for authors to bypass the gateways and gatekeepers of publication that exists in other media. Without the need for the story to be economically viable prior to its printing, the high level of economic capital for a large-scale publication (as illustrated by Bourdieu in Figure 1.1) is no longer a requirement for serialization. Online serial publishing (specifically in webcomics) as a business has a model where readers do not usually purchase installments and authors do not receive sufficient income from their work to sustain them as their only form of employment. Thus, digital serial fiction becomes a longitudinal investment wherein only a small fraction of one's readership financially support the publishing of the text but not until the author has provided content for them (free of charge) as the author-text-reader relationship matures, often times for years.

Authors chose to transpose and create new works of serial fiction to cyberspace and the webcomic arose as a popular form of storytelling. With this new format came new rules and expectations for authors and readers alike that resulted in more authorial performances being added to the process of storytelling. Webcomic cartoonists adapted their authorial styles and ambitions to make sure that their texts could continue to be published without starving along the way. The model of publishing their digital documents for free with the hopes of gaining a readership that could eventually be monetized made it so that much like their serial texts, the good parts would come in due time. Keeping Hesmondhalgh's arguments in mind, we see that the upending of the economics and publishing standards of online media allow for innovative models for narrative production of digital fiction and new ways for readers

to receive this content. Members of the interpretive community did not have to make an initial financial investment, as is the case with other media, to begin engaging with the text. As purchases no longer initiated the author-reader relationship, financial success would occur long after a stable fanbase was present. Advertisements, merchandise, and now crowdfunding have become the most popular ways for authors to be able to call their digital work the sole source of their income. While all forms of publication in one way or another are funded through sales of documents, webcomic authors provide free access to their digital document with the hopes that this can translate into future financial success.

As digitally focused authors take on more responsibilities to ensure the economic viability of their narrative production, the author-reader relationship changed considerably. More of the readers' money would go to the author because there are fewer intermediaries between them but this is also true for the other facets involved in narrative production. Authorial accessibility rises thanks to email and social media, to the point that authors could contact all their readers easily and individual readers could have a direct line to the author. While other forms of publication also benefit from this digital connectivity, readers communicating with the sole author of a webcomic could directly influence the text. This way, readers become the editors for the circulating draft that is the webcomic and make sure typos and art mistakes could be fixed quickly for future digital readers and for the potential eventual transition into a print compilation. Readers take on some of the additional authorial performances as unofficial volunteers but can eventually obtain official titles by the author and even become actual employees thus being an even more direct part of the

narrative process. As success increases, so too do the magnitude of authorial performances, which leads to additional people being recruited through select persons within the interpretive community and/or people that need to be put on payroll. During the transition from a small-scale to a large-scale publication, we witness how authors voluntarily give up Bourdieu's notion of authorial autonomy to include the readership as nonauthorial agents, direct patrons of the serial, and even to assistants of narrative production. Whatever rise in readership leads to additional work by the author (that can be and usually is passed on in part to others) though this may not lead to a higher number of readers and thus the chain increasing exponentially. Some webcomics may never have more readers than the author's closest friends and family, some may plateau in numbers regardless of additional advertising or branching, others will rise and fall, but all of them have the potential to find an audience and expand to the point where it can achieve critical and financial success.

In the analysis of Rich Burlew and Tarol Hunt, the case of two similar thematic works with two completely different authorial styles is highlighted. Both of them have changed dramatically in the way they interact with their readers and the devotion to the respective stories. Both webcomics started with a humorous tone, underwent Cerebus Syndrome, and have had unexpected hiatuses due to unexpected health problems. Still, these two authors fostered a community with their readership that could endure all these changes over the years and become an integral part of the success of their work at all levels. For Burlew, the narrative of OOTS has reached the final storyline and after a decade of storytelling the stick figure heroes are soon to save the world with the last installment on the horizon. Hunt's story has been preplanned

for years before *Goblins* became popular but we the readers have no idea how much of the text is left to cover. Whether the end is in sight or not, devoted members of the interactive community will wait in narrative anxiety for the next installment time and time again while doing more than just interacting with the text to make sure that the work keeps going as long as it can.

In short, digital publishing creates a new form of interpretive communities, where readers may become a direct part of the authorial process. Authors can begin to publish without the initial need of readers/consumers of their work that other media require. The text becomes accessible and malleable in this digital document, especially in serial fiction as archives grow with each upcoming installment. The economics are different as initial purchases are now deferred towards potential subsequent compilation books and other merchandise. But beyond the differences in publication processes and business practices, the nature of authorship is transformed thanks to the work of webcomic cartoonists. While physical proximity and face to face communication are further distanced, digital publishing provides an unparalleled narrative accessibility to all installments in a work of serial fiction. In addition, since webcomics are regularly solo authorial endeavors, readers have the ability to communicate directly with the author and vice versa on all aspects regardless of relevancy to the narrative. There may be no faces or even real names involved but the author-reader dynamic is now more personal on both sides. A fan could never meet a particular webcomic cartoonist but still knows know him/her and have done their part as a reader to ensure the survival of his/her work. The mask of digital anonymity does not deter familiarity between individual authors and readers as they get to know each

other and a trust is formed. Authors can be late with new installments and readers can buy a new item as part of merchandise expansion. The “Author” as an absolute entity may be dead as Barthes so famously declared; however, the author as a real life human being is more alive than ever even thanks to the (in)direct contact present in digital publishing. The reader becomes empowered as authorial responsibilities are passed unto them and they feel personally responsible for the work’s growth. With each new installment of a work of serial fiction, the author and reader become closer narratively and personally. New readers may feel odd about the connection at the onset, but thanks to the work being readily available until its most current installment, they can catch up and soon join to be a part of the interpretative community and aid in ensuring the continued serialization of the work.

In short, the serialization of webcomics foregrounds the process of authorship for readers to witness and assist in its production. The tacit contract between author and reader becomes more direct as there are fewer intermediaries to influence how content is created and delivered from work, to text, and finally to document. Authors can (in theory) publish their stories online and ignore the reception performances of the readership (whatever size it may be). But more often than not we see connections arise as the author-text-reader relationship grows with the publication of each installment. Hunt’s case in particular shows a personal sense of gratitude and dedication to one’s readership, casting aside traditional expectations of the interactions integral to serial publishing. Readers, as interpretive communities and as individuals, aid in the continuous publication of the serial text (especially in the context of

webcomics) through the use of expanded reception performances to directly assist the author in helping the story start, continue, and eventually conclude.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I have explicated how the serial publishing format adds new dimensions to the author-reader relationship. The ongoing narrative production of serial works of fiction is one where receptions by editors, publishers, and readers continuously influence the direction of the text. In the previous three chapters, I focused my analysis within the context of different media of publication. At this moment, I would like to synthesize the findings of this study at a more global scale in order to better display my overall argument.

As first shown in Figure 1.1, Pierre Bourdieu illustrates how producers of large-scale publications have low authorial autonomy, due in part to the economic dimensions inherent in these forms of publishing. The publication of serial fiction in particular exemplifies how the narrative production of these texts is continuously affected by nonauthorial agents. These layers of influence are evident through the analysis of letters, reviews, and other epistolary communication between the author and those closest to him/her throughout the writing process. Studying these receptions as Genette's paratexts shows how these outside elements help shape the initial text and the continuous reshaping that takes place with the publication of each subsequent installment until the narrative has concluded. Thus, the author pieces together his/her story with external parts over time even as most readers are unaware of the near seamless patchwork of the ongoing text.

The transition from idea to publication (or from work, to text, to document as Tanselle describes it) is one where narrative production solidifies the abstract into the final literary product. The end result is ultimately published into a medium which has

its own standards and practices for publication. Drawing from Hesmondhalgh's argument for a more expansive notion of Bourdieu's fields, media and market factors were analyzed as part of this study. The history of these media, explained in the previous chapters, showcases how authors adapt their stories to better fit the standards for publishing their documents. Each medium of publication has its own parameters when it comes to production and publication of serial works of fiction. The gatekeepers of these media impose strict page limits on authors' instalments, as explained in literary magazines, comic books, and in a far stricter manner within comic strips. The document's spatial borders, alongside stern rates of publication, demark the author with definitive boundaries in both space and time to complete narrative production of each part of the story. The industry parameters of other media provide the author with more freedom to determine when and how much narrative material to provide to their readers; however such liberties may allow for inconsistent updating schedules or even stories that become effectively abandoned. However, the serial process allows for a continuation at some point down the line even after a longer than usual temporal gap. In the cases of Cervantes and Hunt, we see a narrative paused with an extended hiatus in the media of traditional print and web publishing, respectively. And yet, once publication continued their respective readers returned to see the new directions the story had taken. Still, in order to achieve some form of success as an author of serial fiction, consistency of content and updates (as explained by Guigar) are recommended, regardless of the medium of publication.

Stability in publishing large-scale publications is principally dependent on the economic viability of the author's endeavors. A text whose installments are not well

received by the readership (be it through bad sales figures or negative reviews) may not be worth continuing according to those in charge of the publication. Publishing houses can make these decisions even if the author has not concluded his/her narrative, leaving the story in an awkward limbo that could be finished eventually, though not likely. A complete cessation of the text is rare but these financially minded reception performances can influence authors to shift the ensuing direction of the story. Low sales figures, coupled with continuity lockout, led the editors of DC Comics to develop world shattering narrative events in attempts to attract new readers to their multiple titles. Authors who have more control over their content (like webcomic cartoonists) can choose to change their stories; however, if the business side of serial publishing falters then perhaps one's endeavors might best be suited elsewhere. The counterpoint to this economic dimension is stories that are quite successful and thus continued publication becomes further incentivized. Publishing houses can extend contracts with authors so that more installments can continue to be sold. J.K. Rowling's continued success has propelled her *Harry Potter* series beyond the original heptology of books and into a series of prequel movies set within the same narrative universe. Hence, stories can continue to expand as long as authors, publishers, and editors wish to proceed in the narrative production and reception of serial texts. However, should authors wish to cease writing their stories, publishers can obtain the rights to continue the narrative with other writers in the helm (as seen within multiple comics). Additionally, the unofficial sequels of *Don Quixote*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and *Calvin and Hobbes* show how other writers can fill in the gap for more content surrounding a readership's beloved characters. Thus, the readership's desire

for more installments will propel the narrative forward, even when the story is being told by authors who were not the text's original creators.

The ability for other authors to continue the narrative production and publication of one's work further complicates the notions of authorship and ownership of texts. The development of copyright laws, such as the Talford Act, the 1976 Copyright Act, and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act [DMCA] , provide authors with legal standing to make sure one's literary efforts are not stolen (wholly or in part) by other writers. In the case of serialization, these laws prevent and discourage other writers from continuing a story that is not their own. This also prevents texts that were never intended to be serialized to have sequels, as was the case with *Catcher in the Rye*. Still, this unofficial sequel was written and published, thanks in part to skirting the laws by printing and selling these documents in limited countries. Authors and publishing houses employ legal teams to take action against these cases of literary theft as evident through the various lawsuits that Rowling and her team, D.C., and Marvel have issued over the years to protect their intellectual property¹⁴⁸. However, authors who do not have these resources, like webcomic cartoonists barely making ends meet, may not be able to devote time and money into the additional authorial responsibility of enforcing the copyright of one's works. Fortunately, one of the benefits of an active readership is that they can take on these manners via reporting the distribution of content without providing credit to the author and even taking further

¹⁴⁸ R.F. Outcault's legal battles over who owned the characters of the Yellow Kid and Buster Brown, as well as later on with the lawyers he had to enforce licensing issues with the latter, can be seen as an extension of the complex laws surrounding authorship.

action if need be¹⁴⁹. Thus, readers can both expand the scope of an author's copyright but also circumvent it through digital piracy and plagiarism. These opposite ends of the spectrum of reception performances show how readers can help in supporting/destabilizing the ongoing publication of serialized works and the economic viability of serial authorship.

In essence, the context of serialization distills the author-text-reader relationship with the publication of each installment. In traditional publishing, the author discusses economics, expectations, and media standards with nonauthorial agents throughout the narrative production of the text and the response from the readership is assumed and taken as an after the fact reaction. The serial format is one where readers actively react within the space of enforced interruptions between themselves and directly to the author as each new part is added to the text. The reception performances encompassing serialized works of fiction foreground the process of authorship and authors in turn segment their own experiences regarding the narrative production of his/her story. This ever progressing relationship is such that even new authors can continue developing the serialized as an amalgam of new and old readers continue to support the publication until text reaches its definitive conclusion.

¹⁴⁹ Webcomic cartoonist Dave Kellett gave a talk called "The Freeing of Webcomics" as a sort of spiritual sequel to Watterson's "The Cheapening of Comics." Among many topics, Kellett describes how one reader not only found an improper use of his comic's characters but that this reader also initiated the cease and desist paperwork.

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