Blair Davis. *Movie Comics: Page to Screen/Screen to Page*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2016. 296 pp.

During the last decade, films adapted from comics have fueled worldwide box office successes, from Robert Rodríguez's *Sin City* (2005) and Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* trilogy (2005-2012) to the massive Marvel Studio film universe. Audiences and critics alike might see this comic-to-screen phenomenon as exclusively contemporary. However, as cinema and media studies scholar Blair Davis announces, "the idea that comics characters have never been more prevalent in Hollywood is a fallacy" (251). Indeed, this is the central premise of Davis's *Movie Comics: Page to Screen/Screen to Page*—a book that invites readers to look back to the earliest days of the film and television industries and examine the profitability of the alliance between comics and these media.

While adaptation studies has increasingly grown as a scholarly field over the last decades, scholars still have lot of work to do in the area of understanding the history and process of adapting comics to the screen. Since the publication of George Bluestone's *Novels into Film* (1952), scholars have tended to approach film adaptation from different critical perspectives (semiotics, structuralism, and formalism, for instance), but always treating the novel as the primary source. With the many adaptations from comics into film and television, we need to add here comics, and not just the superhero comics that fuel today's cinematic blockbusters. This is where Davis's *Movie Comics* enters the picture and why it is so valuable. His study primarily focuses on the period from the 1930s to the 1950s, regarding adaptations of comic books through the earliest years of the talkies era to their leap to the small screen. Importantly, Davis situates these adaptations within changing viewing patterns as well as the political and economic climate that shaped the comic and film and television industries.

Chapters 1 and 2 of *Movie Comics* focus on the 1930s—an epoch when Hollywood moved from silent to sound filmmaking and the apprehension surrounding the hearing of characters' voices otherwise only read as text in comic books. Production companies had to convince audiences that the screen would bring the comic strip to life as "alive and kickin' and talkin' characters" (17), that audiences would actually be able to meet their heroes. As Davis demonstrates, many of these early cinematic attempts to produce sound screen versions of popular comic strips did not live up to either studios' hopes at the box office or moviegoers' expectations. And this largely as a result of miscasting of actors along with technical issues, including some basics like misapplied make-up. As Davis goes on to argue, after initial bumps in the road (also including the film industry's deep suspicion of the popularity of comics), the comic and film industries began to increasingly join forces. They realized that together "the visual appeal held significant promotional value" and that "comics were not a competing medium but a way of drawing readers to the theater" (87). In chapters 3 and 4, Davis turns his sights to the 1940s when there

was a proliferation of adaptations from comic books and strips to "chapter play serials from the smaller Hollywood majors [and] B-films and serials" (89). Since comics lacked the critical respect of novels and plays, low-budgeted adaptations seemed reasonable to Hollywood. Davis also explores how economic and technical constraints led to the exercising of creative liberties when it came to making comic movies. No matter the deviations from the comic book original, moviegoers enthusiastically embraced the screen versions. Comic fans were, Davis writes, "just happy to have a film made from their favorite characters" (103). As the decade came to an end, different forms of cross-media interplay involving film and comics grew. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the rise of television. With suburban lifestyles and baby boomers blooming after World War II, there arose broadcast entertainment that led to a dramatic drop in those seeking entertainment at the cinema. In reaction, Hollywood developed a new strategy for getting people out to the movies: the casting of big-name stars in big-budgeted, widely distributed films. B-films, serials, and animated shorts were the format for comic strip and comic book adaptations, and audience attendance to these were in sharp decline. The result: the increased presence of comic book adaptations in television. In the fifties, television remained the media space for comic book adaptations. Davis also includes discussion and analysis of how comic book adaptations survived the 1954 Comics Code Authority censorship as well as its increasingly transmedia realizations in the form of movie-based books that would continue a given "show's continuity" (207). Finally, Davis examines how media conglomerates acquired Hollywood studios and comic publishers, turning comic books into a repository for visual-auditory storylines entertainment. As Davis's *Movie Comics* so masterfully proves: the modern explosion of comic book movies cannot be understood without looking at the origins of this dynamic and vital comic-screen alliance.

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