

## Townie Adaptation: Rhetorical Context

Victoria Thacker

Created in Nathan Holic's  
Fall 2018 ENC 3375 class

### Abstract

This project utilizes a medium that is often treated as the underdog in the academic world, comics. While adapting a song into a comic might be easier if only the lyrics were considered during the adaptation, this project challenges the medium by adapting lyrics and sound, and by incorporating the distortion that the song "Townie" by Mitski offers. The adaptation uses different textures, such as construction paper, on the comic and controls the way the reader can view the comic (much like in a film) by using shots that zoom in and by showing the comic panels in a music video so the amount of time a panel can be seen is limited. Through the intermingling of comics and music mediums, this project argues that comics are a viable academic medium.

For my final project, I chose to do an adaptation. I adapted the song "Townie" by a Japanese-American singer named Mitski. Townie is about the tumultuous period of time we call "adolescence" and describes drunk driving, sleeping around, rebelling, and going to trashy parties. However, in the way Mitski describes these topics it is clear that even after partaking in them, she still feels unhappy, anxious, and confused; Mitski sings that she's "tried hungry," and she's "tried full and nothing seems enough." Given the content of the song, I decided to make the art style bright, vivid, and almost obnoxious to look at. The other element that affected my decision in making this my art style was the distortion effect over Mitski's voice and some of the instrumentals in the song. Aside from drawing the comic, I put each individual panel to music so that the panels can be viewed along with the lyric they're drawn to. My decision put the comic to music is essential so that the reader can look at the comic the way I saw it in my head. The song is fast paced and hard hitting, so the art needs to be seen at the pace that I based my ideas off of.

My adaptation is based off of the art style utilized by many neo-indie groups and that Mitski herself used in her music video for "Townie" which is a series of sequential non-sequiter images set to the song. Within the video Mitski includes images such as herself, lipstick, shot

glasses being filled up, a diagram of how to insert a tampon, a Ouija board, a burger, and a pregnancy test. Many of these images inspired me when I was selecting what kind of drawings I could utilize in my adaptation, and I even recreated some such as the burger and the pregnancy test. The overall feeling of Mitski's video is what shaped the way I approached my comic adaptation of the song, even though I departed from Mitski's video on certain elements such as her choice of including faces on her character and her use of only peach hues and tones within the video. While my comic has no narrative, panels in the adaptation often have resemblance to Mitski's lyrics while in her video Mitski throws flashes of unsettling and almost unrelated images in the face of the audience, likely to add to the inebriation and distortion of the song. To Mitski fans, the choices I made may be familiar and welcomed, to others, they may be disturbing or confusing, which is what I intend especially in context of the song.

My intended audience isn't solely Mitski fans, it would also include people that are in college or younger that listen to indie music. I'd argue that since the experience Mitski sings about is universal in youth and pre-adulthood, anyone that can relate to that feeling can enjoy this work, especially since it is not only a song, it is also a comic. Ultimately, in terms of intended audience my belief is that since there is an all-reaching theme in the song, my

comic will be as well, especially set to music. The necessity of my comic overlaps with its universality. Due to the trying times of teenagehood, it is necessary to cope and feel like the choices we've made and experiences we shared may make you feel worse, or may be regretful, but at the very least you aren't the only one who feels that way.

One work that I read in class that most directly affected my comic was *The Hive* by Charles Burns. Specifically, page 38 in *The Best American Comics*. I really enjoyed the bold and disturbing imagery, and this is something I tried to mimic in my comic in relation to the topics of sex, love, and alcohol. I think these images do a great job of setting a mood in *The Hive*, and I tried to have my images do the same, I really wanted there to be a strong feeling of trashiness in regards to my bright and jarring art style. I furthered this thought by using construction paper for a few panels. I thought the bright colors of construction paper as well as the made at home feeling of hand cut images would lend itself to my overall intended mood. In my adaptation, there is not a specific directional narrative, but there is an idea that follows Mitski's storytelling in the song. For example, I draw people but I never drew faces on purpose. I never wanted to elicit the idea that there was a specific character the story was following. Additionally, I did want people looking at my work to be able to inject themselves into it, so I did feel it was necessary to refrain from following a character based narrative. Many of the images I chose try to relate to the feeling of the lyric and less the explicit matter the lyric is talking about. My genre is most clearly adaptation, but it is influenced by images from the underground comix genre.

In reference to the aesthetic and layout of my panels, in general, the more past paced a lyric is, the smaller I made the pane, so there would be more panels next to each other in succession so the lyric may be followed appropriately. For example, the only row of panels in my entire comic that has four panels is laid out so that the lyric may be read along as quickly as Mitski sings it. The lyric goes as follows: "The boys are gonna go for more, more, more!" So, "the boys are gonna go for" is one panel, with the following three being the three "mores." Again, since the pacing of this song is what makes it so important, I believe the layout of my panels reflected that.

## Works Cited

- Burns, Charles. "Excerpt from *The Hive*." *The Best American Comics 2014*, edited by Scott McCloud and Bill Karta-lopoulos, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.
- Mitski. "Townie." *Bury Me At Makeout Creek*, Acme Studios, 2014.

Victoria Thacker is a 19 year-old from Ocala, Florida who spends a majority of her time watching movies and competing in Mock Trial and Quiz Bowl. Victoria is a political science major and a writing and rhetoric minor and she intends to enter law school in Fall 2020. She has previously spent her teenage years working as a trivia DJ and host at Imagine Trivia where she dealt with many song requests of "Sweet Caroline."