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"*Watchmen:* Deconstructing the Superhero"
Annotated Bibliography

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Watchmen is an American graphic novel series written by Alan Moore and artistically designed by Dave Gibbons and John Higgons. The comic book series was published by DC Comics in 1986 throughout 1987 and features original superheroes and historical fiction created by Moore (Reynolds 105). The storytelling of the superhero genre is well-known for dealing with issues of social justice and role-model characters, but Alan Moore's *Watchmen* series challenged the idea of traditional superhero stereotypes through its deep literary narrative, morally conflicted characters, and reoccurring symbols (Flynn 3).

The comic book genre is something that I have been interested in since I was young, but only recently have I become fascinated with graphic novels as an academic writer and literary critic. I decided to research this particular topic because it allows me to think critically about something that I have be interested in recreationally for so long, and it is also just interesting to read and analyze this particular comic book. Not only to I get to apply the literary tools I have learned while pursuing an English major, but I also get to combine that with my studies of popular culture in my Management Communications minor. *Watchmen* in particular is a graphic novel that is loaded with historical fiction and cultural themes that I have studied throughout my college experience, and is a series that has been looked at by scholars and critics from numerous perspectives.

In my paper and presentation, the types of research questions that I will be answering are as follows: How do the characters of *Watchmen* defy traditional superhero stereotypes? How do these characters play a different role in society than that of other superheroes? Answering these questions is important because they recognize the graphic novel genre and emphasizes the cultural importance of comic book themes in our society. Using these questions to analyze this particular graphic novel series, I will highlight how superheroes seem to meet a cultural need in our society.

The following annotations are a collection of sources that I have gathered throughout my continuous research on this particular topic. Aside from having the actual graphic novel series as a primary source of character and plot information, I was able to find a reliable amount of information from scholarly articles, academic journals, and printed books that related to various aspects of the topic. The sources that I will be using fit into a few specific categories that are as follows: character analysis and criticism, literary theory and lenses, and the concept or history of a superhero as a whole. Many of the articles that I will be using involve looking at particular characters in *Watchmen* from different critical lenses or finding themes within the story, which will be used with the other articles and the literary theory references to support my main thesis. The sources that I chose are credible in an academic and scholarly field, and I made sure not to

use anything that is too old or irrelevant. I believe that this collection of sources will allow me to fully explicate my research and support my thesis, and that the information that I have found is well-rounded and reliable.

Annotations

Barnes, David. "Time in the Gutter: Temporal Structures in *Watchmen*." *Kronoscope* 9.1-2 (2009): 51-60. *EBSCO MegaFILE*. Web. 12 November 2012.

This article discusses the narrative structures in relation to time and reality, and applies this idea to the character of Dr. Manhattan and his personal struggle with being unable to change or respond to a pre-determined structure of events. The author examines Dr. Manhattan's mental construction of a unified reality and how his singular experience of time weakens him and isolates him from human existence. According to the author, the narrative structure and literary devices of the comic book create a struggle between the past, present, and future for Dr. Manhattan.

This article was quite insightful when it came to developing ideas about Dr. Manhattan's character analysis and how to go about finding additional information on the other characters for their individual analysis. This article will be used in the project for an in-depth character analysis of Dr. Manhattan and the use of psychoanalytic criticism with all of the characters. This article will also be referenced with the use of the deconstruction theory while looking at the binary oppositions of time and reality in regards to the past, present, and future. David Barnes has been published frequently in the *Kronoscope* journal and is noted for his work in Art, Communications and Theater at Southeastern Oklahoma State University making him a reliable source for this particular topic.

Bernard, Mark and Carter, James Bucky. "Alan Moore and the Graphic Novel: Confronting the Fourth Dimension." *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*. 1.2 (2004). Dept of English, University of Florida. Web. 29 November 2012.

This article analyzes the idea of a "fourth dimension" in the *Watchmen* graphic novel series, and how the space-time continuum is a recurring theme in the series that affects some of the characters. The author uses this idea to analyze the character of Dr. Manhattan in regards to his human existence and his role in society. The author also discusses the dark past of the Comedian and Rorschach, and how the things of their past affect the present story. The author claims that the concept of time and space in the series allows the reader to connect the past, present, and future into one unified reality.

This article and its author are credible sources being that the work is published from the University of Florida in an online scholarly journal that focuses on comics studies. The author uses an interesting method to analyzing the past and flaws of particular characters in *Watchmen*,

which will be useful in my research when it comes to supporting the idea of defying superhero stereotypes. Since I will be using the deconstruction theory in my project, this article will be referenced to explain the idea of space and time as binary opposites that affect the characters. This article provides insight to other realms of literary analysis that can be applied to this particular graphic novel series, along with a helpful in-depth character analysis.

Blake, Brandy Ball. "Watchmen: The Graphic Novel as Trauma Fiction." *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*. 5.1 (2010). Dept of English, University of Florida. Web. 14 October 2012.

This article discusses the real-world problems that are presented in the *Watchmen* series and how these issues affect the characters in the form of trauma. The author connects the personal trauma of the characters to the main themes of the story, and claims that analyzing trauma allows the reader to better understand its victims. Dr. Manhattan, Rorschach, and Ozymandias are three characters from the series that the author analyzes in terms of personal trauma, and also connects the characters to different recurring symbols and themes.

This article and its author are credible sources being that the work is also published from the University of Florida in an online scholarly journal that focuses on comics studies. The article shows a different perspective on in-depth character analysis, and provides a helpful insight to looking at the characters through a different type of lens when it comes to my own research. This article will be referenced within the project to properly analyze certain characters and to support the use of psychoanalytic criticism.

Bressler, Charles E. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice.* Fourth Ed. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007. Print.

Literary Criticism is a reference text that serves as a guideline for using various theoretical lenses and approaches to literature, literary criticism, and other areas of humanities. Each chapter focuses on different theories and types of critical approaches that are commonly used in many aspects of studies in English and the humanities. The chapters include a description of each theory, important terms related to the ideas, assumptions and methodology of the specific criticism, critiques, questions for analysis, and examples of how to properly use the particular type of theoretical lens.

This book is a credible resource to my research because it is used by many universities and professors for introducing the concept of literary criticism. It covers many important and widely used theoretical approaches that are used in almost all courses of English Studies and the humanities. The book's author is deemed as credible in regards to his work with Houghton College and association with other various universities and scholars in the United States. It provides a resourceful insight to this particular research when it comes to analyzing the characters of *Watchmen* and knowing what information to look for throughout articles and the

graphic novel itself. This book will be drawn on frequently in my project in order to analyze the characters and literary devices of the graphic novel and to properly support the thesis.

Erickson, Steve. "Superhero Complex." *Los Angeles Magazine* **57.5 (2012): 82-86.** *EBSCO MegaFILE***. Web. 15 Nov. 2012.**

This article discusses Marvel's graphic novel series *The Avengers*, and infamous superhero team created by comic book legend Stan Lee. The author talks about the history of *The Avengers* and the recent popularity of the comic book series with the rise of particular comic book movies. The article provides a detailed history and background information on everyone's favorite heroes in *The Avengers* such as Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, The Incredible Hulk, and briefly touches on Ant-Man and Wasp. Along with discussing the superheroes individually, the author also discusses how they work together as a team and their role in society as a whole instead of individuals.

Steve Erickson's article will be used in my paper to compare and contrast the characters of *Watchmen* to a different team of superheroes from another comic book universe. The article will be useful in explaining the idea of a superhero group and how the *Watchmen* differ as a "team" in comparison to *The Avengers.* This article also led me to other various sources relating to DC Comics and other superhero analyses that can be compared to the characters of *Watchmen.* Steve Erickson is a credible author considering his work with various literary journals, his work as a film critic for *Los Angeles Magazine* and his contributions to magazines such as *Rolling Stone, Esquire,* and *The New York Times.*

Flynn, Tyler. "Discovering the Literary Relevancy of *Watchmen:* **A Review of the Graphic Novel's Philosophical Themes."** *Digital Commons* **2012: 3-30.** *Digital Commons Online.* **Web. 16 Sept. 2012.**

Tyler Flynn's article discusses the major themes in the *Watchmen* graphic novel series and how they shape the characters and their role in society. He claims that the characters of *Watchmen* are unlike that of other typical heroes, and uses psychoanalysis and the works of Friedrich Nietzsche to emphasize his argument. Flynn also discusses different reoccurring symbols of the graphic novel and the concept of good versus evil, and how they shape the identity and reality of each character. Tyler Flynn analyzes each character and their backgrounds to prove how they are flawed as heroes.

This article is extremely relevant to my topic because it provides an in-depth character analysis that will aid the main argument of my research topic. The article comes from a scholarly journal in an online database and contains a competent amount of information relating to my topic, which is why I believe that it is a credible source. Flynn's article also gives me insight to other areas of research I can pursue in relation to my topic, and is closely related to the other sources I plan on using in relation to character analysis, graphic novel conventions, and literary criticism.

**Hughes, Jamie A. ""Who Watches The Watchmen?": Ideology And "Real World"
Superheroes."** *Journal of Popular Culture* **39.4 (2006): 546-557.** *EBSCO MegaFILE*.
Web. 15 Nov. 2012.

This article focuses on the idea of comic book superheroes being a part of the real world, particularly looking at the *Watchmen* series. The author explains the historical aspects of the series and it's affect on the plot and characters, and how the superheroes in *Watchmen* are as common as everyday people. He explains that the characters are unlike those of other fantastic worlds and abilities, and that they struggle with the different types of ideologies within the series. The author claims that the characters all have different motives for their actions, and that their role in the "real world" society is unlike characters of other worlds.

This article will be useful in explaining how Alan Moore's characters in *Watchmen* are unlike those of other comic book universes, and how the idea of them being a part of the "real world" will help explain their duty to society with the application of the new historicism lens. This source was insightful by providing specific examples about superheroes in the real world, and lead me to find a few other sources that I plan on using for the paper in terms of cultural roles and new historicism. The *Journal of Popular Culture* is a noted scholarly and academic journal, and Jamie Hughes is a freelance writer and also a professor of literature and composition in Florida. She is also a credible academic writer in *The Journal of Popular Culture* and *The Journal of Evolutionary Psychology.*

Itzkoff, Dave. "Behind The Mask." *The New York Times.* **20 November 2005. Web. 12
November 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/20/books/review/20itzkoff.
html?_r=1&oref=slogin**

This article discusses the historical aspects and cultural events of Alan Moore's *Watchmen* series, and how Moore's work shaped the comic book genre as a whole. The author explains that the complex psychological profiles of the characters make the graphic novel series unique to the genre, and how Alan Moore's creation shaped the contemporary superhero. The author claims that Moore's work with the *Watchmen* series tears down boundaries and creates new ones that have left a legacy in the comic book genre.

This article will be useful in my paper to reference the author's description of the characters' psychological profiles with psychoanalytic criticism, and to provide background information for the comic book itself. Dave Itzkoff is an editor at *Spin Magazine* and a frequent contributor to *The New York Times,* making him and the article a credible and reliable source of information for this particular project.

Lesher, C.W. "Philosophy of the Superhero: An In-depth Analysis of the Superhero and His Origin" *Yahoo! Voices.* **22 July 2008. Web. 15 October 2012. http://voices. yahoo. com/philosophy-superhero-1696019.html?cat=38**

C.W Lesher's article for *Yahoo! Voices* discusses the significance of the superhero in our society, and the role that superheroes have come to serve in our everyday lives. Lesher gives a detailed explanation of what we have come to know as the "typical superhero" and the types of characteristics they tend to possess, as well as the different lessons that superhero stories have taught readers over the course of their existence. The author also discusses the types of responsibilities that superheroes are supposed to have, what they stand for, and the idea of truth versus fact in the comic book genre.

This article will be quite useful in my project in order to draw on different types of superhero stereotypes that will be compared to the characters of *Watchmen* and how they defy them. The article will also be referenced to analyze the role that the characters of *Watchmen* play in society, and the types of responsibilities they hold in terms of social justice and moral order in comparison to what the author deems as "typical." This article provides a lot of insight to other aspects of research regarding what it means to be a superhero, especially when it comes to being able to compare and contrast the characters of *Watchmen* to superheroes of other universes. *Yahoo! Voices* is a credible source that is used by millions of people daily, and the author of this article with his university work in popular culture and frequent references to classic hero stories such as Gilgamesh, Greek mythology, and even other stories from the DC Comics universe.

Moore, Alan. *Watchmen.* **New York: DC Comics, 1986-1987. Print.**
Watchmen is an American graphic novel series written by Alan Moore and artistically designed by Dave Gibbons and John Higgons. The comic book series was published by DC Comics in 1986 throughout 1987 and features original superheroes and historical fiction created by Moore. The story takes place in New York City in 1985 and follows a second-generation of the "Minutemen" superhero team, consisting of Dr. Manhattan, The Comedian, Nite Owl, Ozymandias, Rorschach, and the Silk Spectre. This particular group of characters has disbanded and gone their own separate ways over time and come together to investigate a series of "masked murders" of superheroes, including the murder of the Comedian. Rorschach, Nite Owl, Dr. Manhattan and the Silk Spectre work together through a series of unfortunate events before they discover that their time on earth is limited. The characters meet up with their old partner Ozymandias in his secret lair, where he reveals his doomsday plot to essentially blow up New York City and kill millions of people in order to bring the United States and the Soviet Union to peace. They also discover that Ozymandias was the vigilante behind the "masked killings" in order to make sure that none of the other previous superheroes could interfere with his plan for mass murder. The ending of the graphic novel is a twist within itself as New York City does indeed suffer mass destruction and the characters adjust to a new lifestyle.

This book consists of the entire *Watchmen* graphic novel series, and all issues (1-12) will be referenced in my project to draw on character dialogue, quotations, narrative, plot analysis, and will mostly be used as a guideline to the research process as a whole. Alan Moore is a

credible author due to his groundbreaking work with the graphic novel genre, and DC Comics has been responsible for creating some of America's most famous and well-loved superhero stories over the last multiple decades. The series itself gives plenty of insight to different areas of potential research, and is a helpful resource when it comes to searching for articles related to the overall topic.

Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice.* **London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 2002. Print.**

This book is a useful guide to using the deconstruction theory in the most appropriate context, and discusses various topics relating to the subject. The author describes the deconstruction theory as the constant reminder of the relationship between "crisis" and "criticism" and also uses the theory in terms of structuralism, new criticism, Marxism, and post-modernism. Norris also connects the deconstruction theory with the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as apply the theory to American society.

This source will be used in my project when applying the deconstruction theory to the characters of *Watchmen*, as well as finding the binaries and opposing forces within the text. The book is insightful when it comes to conducting further research on the deconstruction theory and what else to look for in terms of analyzing the characters of *Watchmen*. Christopher Norris is a credible philosopher and literary critic, is one of the world's leading scholars in deconstruction and is noted for his work with universities in Europe and the United States.

Prince, Michael J. "Alan Moore's America: The Liberal Individual and American Identities in *Watchmen***."** *Journal of Popular Culture* **44.4 (2011): 815-830.** *EBSCO MegaFILE.* **Web. 8 Nov. 2012.**

Michael Prince's article discusses Alan Moore's representation of the American image and culture with his work in *Watchmen*, and how the individual characters of the graphic novel series exemplify the theme of American identity along with that of their own identity within society. Prince evaluates each character's ideology and how they struggle with their individuality versus the ideas of "the collective", and also how certain characters handle the notion of good versus evil. The author discusses these ideas in regards Dr. Manhattan, The Comedian, Ozymandias, and Rorschach and how they go about dealing with social crisis.

The author of this article is deemed as a credible source because of his work with different colleges and universities around the world, and is also a professor of American Literature and Culture. The journal that the article is published in, *The Journal of Popular Culture,* is also credible along with the author due to its wide range of topics in popular culture, and because of its frequent use by scholars and academics. This article will be used in my project to discuss the roles that each character serves in society, how they deal with social justice and the idea of good versus evil, and the overall ideology of certain characters and how they are unalike

traditional superheroes. The article also touches on psychology and social issues, which will be used in the project in terms of psychoanalytic criticism and new historicism.

Reynolds, Richard. *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology***. United States of America: University Press of Mississippi, 1992. Print.**

In this book, Richard Reynolds explores the origins of the superhero and how the graphic novel genre has become a staple of American culture. Reynolds explores the historical and cultural context of what it means to be a superhero, the types of characteristics that audiences have grown to expect of them, and what makes superheroes such pragmatic figures in popular culture. The author explores these ideas by evaluating three popular comic book series: *The X-Men, The Dark Knight Returns*, and *Watchmen.*

Richard Reynolds' book is a reliable source when it comes to having a foundation for analyzing traditional superhero characteristics and applying them to the characters of *Watchmen*, in order to support the idea that those particular characters defy superhero stereotypes. Reynolds' book will also be used to compare and contrast the characters of *Watchmen* to other superheroes mentioned in the book and those of other universes. This book is an insightful reference that has given me ideas on what to look for when it comes to comparing and contrasting characters, and how to expand my research on superhero stereotypes. This book is a credible resource with the author being a frequently published writer on history and popular culture, and it's use in various universities around the nation.