Overview. Vigilante justice has always been a staple of popular culture. The heroes of popular culture from Cervantes's *Don Quixote* to Dumas's *Three Musketeers* to Burroughs's *Tarzan* and *John Carter* defend those who are powerless, who are victims of problems too large for a single person or even a community to solve. It is no surprise, then, to learn that the fledgling comic book industry, struggling (as everyone was) to find a way to survive in the depression years of the 1930s, grew overnight into a potent publishing force after the 1938 issue of *Action Comics* #1 featured Superman on its cover. And superheroes in a variety of personalities have flourished since, evolving in accord with the demands of their time.

Course Summary and Central Problems. This course traces the superhero history over a three-quarters of a century trajectory, and in the process it considers how many of the narratives that constitute this branch of American popular culture are quick to raise penetrating questions about the wisdom of vigilante justice. Whether as masked avenger working in secret or as costumed crimefighter publicly declaring a war on criminals or as a superhero gifted with extraordinary powers the attraction of the vigilante is regularly placed in dispute in a number of stories, as if a commitment to justice needs continually to be re-examined. Rather than simple tales of good versus evil, the superhero narrative tends to be a tangled weave of actions improvised out of necessity, often undertaken reluctantly or as a considerable burden.

Central Issues (1): Social Justice (the "public sphere" approach to comics). Especially in the works selected for this course, valuable questions can be asked about justice. Here are a set of questions we should begin to apply to all our readings: Who in this narrative is entitled to exert authority? How does the narrative set about showing the way in which a just action be distinguished from one that is unjust? Another way to phrase this: if the state has a monopoly on violence (the state is responsible for the police, for supporting the law), when in these narratives is it proper to take action against the state? How have new variants on the superhero emerged and are they designed to naturalize the vigilante – that is, not to promote discussion of justice but to shift attention to personality issues? And finally, why do so many features resort to imagining an alternate reality world that parallels our own in many ways? And since it is always wise to look in a narrative for what differences separate that alternate reality world from our own, which of the differences are positive and negative – which utopian, which dystopian?

Central Issues (2): Brands and Commercialism (the critical examination of a popular form). We also need to pursue questions that recognize the vigilante superhero exists within a medium, the comic strip, that has always been wildly popular in America. (In Europe, comic strips are often designed to appeal to an adult audience.) Moreover, comic strip characters in America have always been successful in translating their popularity into other media, most notably into films. How do we evaluate commercialized representations of trademark figures that become familiar from one generation to the next, and that often change considerably across decades? How do we deal with new narratives that feature a familiar figure but acting in surprising new ways? Are there compromises that need to be made to shift a story into a product that is designed for commercialization? Or is it better to see each version as a singular adaptation that reflects the tools available for its presentation? Are any examples in this popular art of narratives that seriously oppose a culture of monetization, in which everything is owned, branded, commercialized and endlessly capitalized? Is there a vigilante narrative that critiques big money, or is the vigilante just another type of entrepreneur?

Central Issues (3): Identities as Secrets (the cultural assumptions that carry underground meanings). At the same time, we will be ready to ask questions that are distinctive to the vigilante superhero as a cultural figure. Why is a secret identity such a large component of this figure? Is a secret identity a way of proposing an alternate reality? What about secret identities as alter egos, as idealized doubles? What does it mean to consider the vigilante as an injured figure, specifically a victim of trauma? Does such a trauma condemn the hero endlessly to repeat the scene of a crime that can never be erased, or is the hero moving toward a process of working-through and confronting a problem that has been deeply-repressed? Are secret identities an assimilation tactic for aliens from other regimes (Superman, Wonder Woman)? Why have these figures from the start tended to gather into groups, to form social units? Most important for this semester's class, how do women and minorities take places within such groups? And finally, is there an
answer to a question that critic Gerald Early has asked: “Has anyone tried to present what a woman would consider heroic action?”

Objectives. Students who take this course will come away with a sharper understanding of how to read popular culture in a way that is both critical and admiring. They will also understand how popular archetypes evolve over decades, often in line with long-term social and cultural trends. They will gain practice in conducting arguments by drawing on precise examples from material that exists in both a visual and a verbal realm. They will acquire experience in moving among a number of different but related media formats, including those in popular culture. Finally, they will have the opportunity, in a discussion course, to question and critique and attend to the ways in which their peers respond to material that has been historically produced by the very young. (The originators of Superman were not much older than many of the students taking this class, and Frank Miller and Alan Moore were in their late twenties when they separately but simultaneously produced two of the seminal revisionary texts of the genre.)

Grading. Students will be assessed for their work in this class as follows:

- several brief response essays written in class in reaction to a question arising from the day’s reading (10%)
- an in-class presentation about ten of fifteen minutes long with one or two other students that summarizes the useful information from a critical or scholarly essay assigned over the course of the semester, answering questions raised by class members (10%)
- an analytic paper of 4-5 pages comparing what constitutes the idea of justice in two graphic novels from the 1980s by Alan Moore and Frank Miller (20%)
- an in-class group presentation (with 2 to 3 the group) for about fifteen minutes on a current example of a superhero publication (20%)
- an in-class group presentation (with 3 to 4 in the group) for at least thirty minutes that uses examples developed for print and media culture to present in detail a proposal for developing an original superhero narrative centered on a group, with designs for costumes, back stories for all characters, an origin tale, and an outline of a story to appear in the second issue (25%)
- a “final comment” (as a final exam) on the value of investigating a popular form as a basis for conversation about serious problems and issues that the culture may have trouble confronting openly (2-3 pages)

Distinctive Traits. While courses on comic strips and graphic novels are now a part of most university and college programs, these courses have usually restricted the publications they examine, limiting them to material published by either up-scale New York publishers, many of whom specialize in art books, or in the two non-commercial presses (Fantagraphics and Drawn & Quarterly) that dominate the market for “independent” comics. Indeed, this university’s English 206A, as developed for the Core Curriculum, follows just that format. But what is distinctive about this Honors course is that it focuses critically on the superhero tradition as it has developed in different media, usually in commercialized formats, over an extended time-frame. Of course it too leads the class toward some recent works by writers and artists of comics that have turned the innovative texts of the 1980s into a powerful trend. Although these recent works have also been examined by scholars (and the class will always be reading scholarly evaluations of these texts), they are rarely taught outside graduate school seminars.

We will be able to access most of our reading by downloading material on line or from Comixology, a commercial website that offers numerous introductory issues of superhero comics. But there are a handful of print culture texts we should acquire from the bookstore, the comic book marketplace or buy on line:

**Graphic Novels**


I’ll make available other material as needed in the course.

**General Policy.** If a paper will be late, talk to me ahead of time and get an extension; don’t wait to hand in late work – a late paper loses 5% of its grade for every class period that elapses after it is due. Papers may
be submitted by e-mail, but you should print out a back-up paper copy in case some problem arises. Plagiarism is using words written by others and presenting them as your own; plagiarized work results in a failed grade. If you have any uncertainty about this policy, ask me to clarify. You are allowed two unexcused absences; after that, each unexcused absence will lower your grade by 5%. To be excused from class, you must contact me before the class begins – e-mail is appropriate or a phone call to my office which, if I’m not there, will ring over to the English Department so you can leave a message. You must also have a valid excuse that you would be willing to document.

Syllabus

How to Read this Syllabus: The material described following the date is what we’ll be discussing that day, so you should come to class with the text or texts that are appropriate, prepared to talk about them and write commentary about that material. In addition, in every class meeting please have in mind a page from the work or works that we’ve read that you understand, from your point of view, to be central to the overall story, and whose highlights you can point out to the class (that is, its centrality to the story, and how words on the page go together with the pictures).

PART ONE

In this segment we’ll focus on the two revisionary texts from 1985-1987 that transformed the superhero concept into a postmodern form, Frank Miller’s The Dark Knight Returns, a reconceptualizing (in four issues) of both Batman and Superman, and Alan Moore’s Watchmen, a reconceptualizing (in twelve issues) of a group of largely-invented superheroes that evoke aspects of superheroes from various publishers. Both productions take place in an alternate-reality future, initiating a trend in which traditional back-stories can be disrupted and replaced with counter-narratives. We’ll end this section with a paper (due February 23) in which the class compares and contrasts what each work associates with justice.

Week One

1/19. Introduction. We’ll introduce each other and I’ll offer a basic summary of the overall class and offer examples of the traits that characterize the graphic narrative in comic book form. We’ll examine two or three pages from the text we’re beginning to read. I’ll introduce to you the “table of contents” material on the D2L site. We’ll briefly write on a defining aspect of the superhero narrative.

1/21. To prepare for the general approach we’ll be taking, consider some basic ideas for processing graphic narratives. We’ll also look at the earliest versions of Batman and Superman, considering them as defining moments that are also open to modification. We’ll use the origin tales as a background to the first book in The Dark Knight Returns. Look for two examples in Miller’s work of any of the observations that McCloud discusses.

- Under D2L’s “Analysis of Comics” find “UnderstandingComics 2” and consider the points that Scott McCloud proposes as the distinguishing features of the graphic narrative.
- Under D2L’s “Graphic Texts” find three files: “SupermanOriginalTale,” “BatmanOriginTale” and “BatmanBatlesVampires”
- Read Book One, “The Dark Knight Returns” by Frank Miller (w), Klaus Janson, Lynn Varley (a).

Week Two

1/26. We’ll bring up focus on the issue of vigilantism while we continue examining Miller’s breakthrough text. Look at the first of the Central Issues listed in the syllabus, and consider how some of the problems in the first of these, those defining “social justice,” are now in play halfway through the publication. We’ll also ponder the history of women crimefighters as costumed heroes, and we’ll compare how Wonder Woman was presented in two early stories that were published during World War II, both of which seem to limit the woman’s role dramatically.

- Under D2L’s “Vigilantism Research” read the brief encyclopedia entry “Vigilantism, Facts, Information, Figures” that gives an overview of vigilante action in America.
Under D2L’s “Graphic Texts: find two files: “WonWomanMilkThieves,” “WonWomanRubberThieves” 
Read Book Two, “The Dark Knight Triumphant.”

1/28. We’ll wind up work on this text by Miller, though we’ll examine another next week. Here we can bring 
together a more sophisticated view of vigilantism (from the perspective of philosophy) along with an essay 
that comments on the revisionary narrative in Miller (and Moore) while we continue reading Miller’s 
brackthrough text.

- Under D2L’s “Vigilantism Research” read only pp. 48-57, Part One of Travis Dumsday’s piece filed 
- Under D2L’s “Analysis of Comics” read “Batman and the Problem with Vigilante Justice — A LoveStory”
- Under D2L’s “Analysis of Comics” read Tony Spanakos’s “Governing Gotham”
- Read Books Three and Four, “Hunt the Dark Knight” and “The Dark Knight Falls”

Week Three

2/2. As a follow-up to Miller’s work, we’ll look at a series he developed after a dispute with DC Comics, the 
publisher of his earlier work. Sin City proceeds free of any editorial interference as a product he both wrote 
and drew and published on his own terms. We’ll finish the Dumsday piece on vigilantism from a 
philosophical perspective. We should ask whether Sin City identifies itself as a product of Miller’s hand. 
What does it share with Dark Knight, and how does it differ? Here we begin the first of our student 
presentations

- Student presentation 1 Under D2L’s “Vigilantism Research,” finish reading Dumsday’s piece filed 
  under “BronsonVigilantism”
- Under D2L’s “Graphics Text” examine Sin City: The Big Fat Kill filed under “Sin City 03”

2/4. There is no specific reading assignment for this meeting. We’ll screen a showing of the movie 
adaptation of “The Big Fat Kill.” Director Richard Rodríguez aimed for an accurate transfer from the page to 
the screen, and he testified to Miller’s influence by sharing his director’s credit with him (a controversial 
decision not appreciated by Hollywood). (Quentin Tarantino directed one of the segments we’ll see here.) Is 
there material on the page that encourages such fidelity?

- Alan Moore’s Watchmen is a demanding text that tells a series of overlapping stories with a 
  remarkable attention to visual detail. Take advantage of the no-need-to-prep opportunity by 
  starting with the first four chapters which we’ll discussion on February 9. They can be found on 
  D2L at “Graphic Texts” under Watchmen
- You might note there is a small industry of fans who annotate Watchmen (and other Moore titles), 
  and some of their work can be found under D2L’s “Analysis of Comics” under “Watchmen 
  Annotated”

Week Four:

2/9. Here we begin Alan Moore’s elaborately produced Watchmen. We should pause for a moment to 
consider some articles in which Miller and Moore are contrasted, though we haven’t yet read all of Moore’s 
book.

- Student Presentation 2 Under D2L’s “Analysis of Comics” read Geoffrey Klock’s Introduction to 
  the Miller and Moore pieces filed under “KlockRevisionaryBatmanWatchman” (the emphasis here 
  should fall on Miller as we haven’t yet turned to Moore, so not all the essay applies)
- Student Presentation 3 Under D2L’s “Analysis of Comics” read Aeon Skobles’s introduction to 
  Miller and Moore as revisionary writers, found under “SkobleRevisionSuerhero”
- Remember “Watchmen Annotated” under D2L’s “Analysis of Comics” if you are interested in an in-
  depth reading
- Finish reading “Watchmen 1 through 4” on D2L, if you haven’t already

2/11. We continue the second third of Watchmen, with emphasis on “Tales of the Black Freighter,” an 
innovative insertion within the ongoing narrative that functions like the cinematic mise-en-abyme (a term
from heraldry in which a miniature scene that represents the essence of the family is placed at the center). How is this, then, a commentary on what serialized comic narratives are able to deliver, and who they effect, and what good or bad they produce? In addition to this examples of postmodern meta-commentary (where the producer alludes knowingly to what has become a convention) consider the way the secret identity, which played a part in Dark Knight but not a crucial one, is here under discussion as an important aspect of one’s identity

- **Student Presentation 4** Under D2L's “Analysis of Comics” read Jamie Hughes’s “Who Watches the Watchmen?,” an early commentary on Moore’s work filed as “Who Watches”
- **Student Presentation 5** Under D2L's “Analysis of Comics” read Tom Morris’s “What’s Secret about Secret Identities?” filed under “MorrisWhatsSecret”
- Read the fifth through the eighth chapters of Watchmen on “Graphic Texts”

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**Week Five**

Note: Remember that the first paper is due on February 23, a week from this Tuesday

2/16. This will wrap up our examination of the print culture Watchman. We now can consider the overall text, as well the distinctive scenarios that unfold in the last three issues, as Moore sets out to tie up all the strings.

- **Student Presentation 6** There are numerous fine essays on Watchmen and at least one superb book-length analysis. This is a tightly focused essay by Mary Borselinno on Watchman's use of music filed in “Analysis of Comics” as “BorselinnoMusicWatchman”
- **Student Presentation 7** This essay by Brandy Ball Bake examines trauma in Watchman and in a sense carries on from Dark Knight. It is from ImageText, which is dedicated to comics scholarship, but its images won’t transfer on a pdf file, so I’ll provide the URL here: [http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v5_1/blake/](http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v5_1/blake/)
- **Student Presentation 8** Stuart Moulthrop’s essay explores the numerous detailed alliances between the print culture version and other media in the “Analysis of Comics” section of D2L under the file “MoulthropWatchmanStrings”
- Finish reading Moore’s Watchmen, chapters 9 through 12 in “Graphic Texts”

2/18. To give you some extra time to think about your forthcoming paper, we’ll consider some scenes from Zack Snyder’s 2009 film that has been admired for its allegiance to many, though by no means all, of Moore’s feature (Moore himself refused to have any association with the film). The two pieces useful for the screening are valuable, one addressing problems in Watchmen, the other speaking generally.

- In D2L's “Analysis of Comics,” consider Elisavet Iannou’s “Adapting Superhero Comics to the Big Screen” under the same title.
- This essay from ImageText is listed by its URL for you to download so the images can remain with it: [http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v5_4/manivannan/](http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v5_4/manivannan/). Its title is “Interplay among the Strangeness and the Charm” and it contrasts Snyder’s film with the text by Moore and Gibbons

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**Week Six**

2/23. The first paper is due today – a comparison-and-contrast of how justice is handled in two works, one by Miller, one by Moore. It should be about 4 to 5 pages, and it would benefit from noting passages from the scholars we’ve been reading who talk about comics in general or either one of the texts. Its min emphasis, however, is on considering how the concept of justice is on display in texts that include numerous vigilante actions. We'll talk about what we've done in our various submissions.

Part Two

We begin the second segment of the course in mid-week, examining a number of publications that follow after the breakthrough Moore and Miller. With what Moore and Miller have set forward, do these texts advance the discussion and depiction of narratives about vigilante justice that consider the issue in subtle ways? We’ll consider three works by important creators. We follow the next steps in the development of the form with examples from Mark Millar, Neil Gaiman, and Alan Moore.
After the spring break, we’ll spend a final week considering an archetypal figure whose definitions have been continually undergoing development almost since his appearance in 1940 – the Green Lantern. Since we’ve done considerable background work on comics theory in the first one-third of the course, we’ll limit our attention to scholarship by others and focus on how we can improve our own responses to these texts.

2/25. We’ll open this four-week segment by reading Mark Millar’s *Red Son* (2004), a three-issue speculative tale from the franchise that DC entitled “Esleworlds.” These alternate-reality environments that are in play in Elseworlds are derived from *Watchmen* and *Dark Knight* and they are pressed hard in this variant on the Superman narrative (with important roles played by Batman). If Millar asks: Superman had landed in the Soviet Union rather than America, how would the familiar story be unfamiliar?

- In The “Graphic Texts” section of D2L, choose “Red Son”
- Read the thoughtful and detailed essay by Karin Kukkonen on the cognitive adjustments that readers of graphic novels make when they handle the interesting problems associated with alternate reality narratives. See “KukkonenInfiniteEarths” in “Analysis of Comics”

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**Week Seven**

3/1. One of the oldest of the titles we examine here also seems one of the freshest. Neil Gaiman’s *Black Orchid*, following close on his acclaimed series *Sandman* and working with the artist who had designed that feature’s striking covers, encouraged a collaboration that extends the boundaries of the image as it delivers a story that subverts fundamental aspects of the superhero narrative.

- As an artwork designed for display in print culture, *Black Orchid* is best viewed in book form, though it is also available digitally from Comixology.

3/3. Freed from his dependence on commercial publishers, Alan Moore in the late 1990s embarked on a series of innovative titles whose first issues we should all examine and plan to discuss in detail. In each case, though, please look at the opening of the second issue and indicate what details in it either encouraged you to read further or halt. The same approach will govern in the titles in the following week. Read issue number one, examine the second issue, and evaluate whether or not you are drawn toward reading more (you do not need to read any more than the first issue and the opening of the second issue, but you do need to decide on the appeal or lack of appeal in the second issue).

- Choose from "Graphic Texts," the file named “TopTen” with the first six issues of *Top Ten* (1999), a police procedural in an alternate reality where everyone is born with unusual powers and capabilities, though some are more effective than others (though as always, the extent of one’s power depends on how it is used). Into this setting enters a rookie cop, Robyn Slinger, whose power is her ability to control a group of small toys that can serve as her scouts (her nickname in school was “Toybox”)

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**Week Eight**

3/8. The second of three examples of Alan Moore in the 1990s is *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman* (1999), set in 1898, in which a group of superheroes are assembled to combat evil. Here the alternate reality is a version of the “steampunk” sci-fi that imagines a different set of inventions emerging in Victorian times. The figures assembled to form the superhero group, moreover, are all drawn from the popular literature of the Victorian era, such as Alan Quatermain (the explorer from H. Rider Haggard’s *She* and *King Solomon’s Gold Mines*), Mina Harker Murray (targeted by Dracula in the novel of the same name), with aid from H. G. Wells’s *Invisible Man*, Jules Verne’s Captain Nemo and (most disconcertingly) Robert Louis Stevenson’s Jekyll-and-Hyde split personality. What is more, even minor characters with walk-on parts represent literary figures. I Moore able to balance all these divergent types in one harmonious blend? That problem is central to the book and it depends on Mina Harker to find a balance among them. Moore will continue the adventures of this superhero group as they move through time without ageing, and the feature is now collected in several volumes.
3/10. The final of the three examples of Moore’s late 1990s creativity is Promethea (1999), lavishly illustrated by J. H. Williams, in which every page carries its own distinctive design. The narrative follows the various avatars of a powerful female presence that represents the powers of the imagination through history. Various women of all kinds are chosen in different centuries to carry forward the power of Promethea, a task that involves confrontation the opposition that occurs in numerous forms to block the imagination.

3/22. In both the segments for this week, the class will be listening and responding to examples from the complex and twisted history of Green Lantern, prepared by the instructor and the interns. Why is it that this superhero has had so many avatars? What does it say about his adaptability? We’ll be primarily offering material for your consideration, but we do have an important excerpt from the 1970s that is a turning point in the development of the superhero narrative. In a year-long series of issues written by Dennis O’Neil and illustrated by Neal Adams, Green Lantern and his companion Green Arrow (with an intermittent sidekick Black Canary) went on a road trip in search of America at a time when the Vietnam War had left a country that was deeply divided.

3/24. We’ll continue presenting examples of Green Lantern to the class, wrapping up this second part of the course.

The third part of this course examines where the superhero narrative is at the moment. Almost all this material is so recent that there are no commentators or evaluations to direct our reading, so we will need to build on what we know about the superhero, about vigilantism, and about predecessor texts by Miller, Moore, Gaiman, Millar and the various avatars of Green Lantern. The procedure here is necessarily inventive. For the next four weeks, the whole class will read four different recently-published collections; however, each week one group of class members will also read an additional text, a text that is indirectly related to the main text that everyone reads, and on the Thursday of each week, that group will present information about their additional text to the class, bringing new approaches to the class. These additional texts are easily available locally, in the nearby comics store or the franchise bookstore, or they can be ordered from Amazon or acquired on Comixology, but they are not required reading. (The only text that a class member may need to acquire is the text that is in play when that class member is serving as a member of a group commenting on a particular week.) I’ll do all I can to make copies of these additional texts available for each group’s use. My aim here as elsewhere is to keep expenses as low as possible. Finally, in the last two weeks before the semester ends, the groups return on a daily basis to present their detailed conception of a proposed superhero publication.

As always, the emphasis in our discussion will fall on the individual page design and its text, the overall justification developed for vigilante action and its relation to justice; the commentary on
costumes (or masks or secret identities); and the awareness that is given (or withheld) from issues of gender, sexual identity or male-female tension. It will also be important to note the extent to which the work your group is presenting comes up against what we’ve been calling “commercial pressure” (that is, the need to remain within or close to a formulaic narrative or work with material inherited from the past) and how the work solves that problem.

Note: The order of the groups is significant: group one will be first present in the last two weeks of class, and group four will be last.

3/29. Here the main text that we’ll all read is The Guardians of the Galaxy: Cosmic Avengers (2013), Brian Michael Bendis (w), Steve McNiven, Sara Pichelli (a). The Guardians is a motley group of diverse beings – arguably, the most diverse of all the superhero groups so far – who face distinctive problems to overcome if they are to operate as a team. We should include the film adaptation and consider excerpts from the 2014 film directed by James Gunn.

3/31. Group One will attend to the main text but place it alongside Birds of Prey: Sensei and Student (issues 62-68, originally published in 2004), Gail Simone (w), Ed Benes, Alex Lei and others (a). The title refers to a number of women superheroes in the DC universe of characters, including Gotham Police Commissioner Gordon’s disabled niece (and adopted daughter) Barbara, Black Canary (long-time friend of Green Arrow and others), and Huntress (whose extreme crimefighting methods place her alongside Batman), and others as well.

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Week Eleven

4/5. In this week the main text we’ll all read is Ms. Marvel: No Normal (2014), G. Willow Wilson (w), Adrian Alphona (a). Like the Green Lantern and like Promethea, the superhero known as “Ms. Marvel” is endowed with powers as a result of a decision made outside her control. To be recognized as a superhero and given powers accordingly is, in this scenario, always a source of problems, and that plot is compounded here when the latest chosen to be Ms. Marvel is a sixteen year old from Jersey City who comes from a Muslim family.

4/7. Group Two will attend to the main text but place it alongside Nimona (2015), Noelle Stevenson (w, a), a text first devised for circulating on the internet. Nimona is a young girl with shape-shifting powers that she wants to develop as ambitiously as possible, and though she persuades a supervillain to accept her as a sidekick, her transformative effect breaks down the black-white distinction between good and evil.

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Week Twelve

4/12. In this week and next, we revisit familiar texts from the opening of the class. The main texts are taken from the series known as “Beyond Watchmen,” DC Comics’s attempt to profit from the characters developed by Moore in Watchmen. Though Moore has refused to support any effort at commercializing, DC has persisted in commissioning artists and writers to invent prequels to Watchmen, and this week we’ll consider Before Watchmen: Minutemen (2012), Darwyn Cooke (w, a), a narrative that details the gritty and scandalous events surrounding the rise and fall of the group formed prior to Watchmen.

4/14. Group Three will attend to the main text but place it alongside Alias (issues 1-9, 2004), Brian Michael Bendis (3), Michel Gaydes (a). Bendis’s depiction of Jessica Jones, a onetime costumed superhero who withdrew from group activity to face what might be called her inferiority complex by self-medicating with alcohol stands out for portraying the stresses of vigilantism as unflinchingly as possible.

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Week Thirteen

4/19. We continue with a main text that is part of the “Beyond Watchman” series, this one centering on the teen-age exploits of Laurie Juspyczek, escaping her mother’s influence in sixties-era San Francisco. Beyond Watchman: Silk Spectre (20012), Darwyn Cooke (w), Amanda Conner (w) features appearances by other figures from Moore’s original as well as Hollywood celebrities.
4/21. **Group Four** will attend to the main text but place it alongside the two volumes of *Flutter* (2013), Jennie Wood (w), Jeff McCosmey (a). Like Nimora, Lily is a shape-shifter, the product of a set of experiments, and traveling from town with her father as both escape from the government eager to find them. Lily has super-powers (she heals if cut, has super-strength) but they complicate her life, and her inclination toward same-sex relations is complicated when she shape-shifts into a boy to attract a girl – a transgender moment that the text develops and sustains.

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**Week Fourteen**

A note on these presentations: They will almost certainly vary considerably. Superhero discourse is, in one form or another, an effort to think about a possible future, but not every group will imagine an extensive alternate reality. Some groups will need to go into detail and describe how the world has changed; for others the world may not change much at all. Some groups may want to distribute illustrations and biographies of the characters that they envision as necessary for the future; others may want to add some stories. It would be useful for everyone to attempt an origin story, as well as a second-issue story in which some narrative is described. There could also be prequel tales, as well as product spinoffs; which characters would make a good “action hero doll”? How would the creators of this superhero group like to be interviewed? Is there a videogame to be developed and what would it be?

Above all, though, the superheroes should be tied firmly to issues that would be recognized as important, that would engage with the problem of justice as it needs to be solved in the future, so that these exist in relation to a serious enterprise. The entertainment of the future isn’t just entertaining – it succeeds most, it seems, when it bears thoughtfully on issues that people may need to be aware of, that people want to be aware, but don’t know how to be aware of.

Final, I'd like the class members listening to these presentations each to write down two questions for the group presenting. I’d like to limit the time of the presentations to 45-50 minutes, after which we'll take up those questions in the remainder of the class.


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**Week Fifteen**


5/5. Group Four presents.

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The final, a response paper that will answer a simple prompt and will be no longer than 2 or 3 pages, will be due at the end of Finals Week.