

Who Watches the Watchmen: The Revaluation of the Superhero in the Nihilistic World of Alan Moore's Watchmen.

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Abstract

Alan Moore's comic book series *Watchmen* is unique in comic book history in that it possesses a multi-layered, multi-interpretive structure and complex philosophically driven narrative. One of the novel approaches of *Watchmen* is Moore's treatment of superheroes, revealing in their realistic psychological portrayals the inherent pathologies present in a person who presumes to act on behalf of a society, even if their justification is one of benevolence. In a postmodern world where God is absent and humans are left to construct their own belief systems independent of a creator, the superheroes of *Watchmen* are more often than not just as morally troubling as the villains of the comic. It is Moore's reevaluation of the superhero, by placing the superhero archetype in a largely nihilistic alternate universe that brings into relief the problematic existence of such super-powered beings, and questions their authority and justification to act on behalf of the world. Moore ultimately asks readers to make qualitative distinctions between the moral approaches his superheroes apply, generally reevaluate the morality and ideals superheroes represent, and last, but not least, use their own critical reasoning to take responsibility for their lives and their own moral systems. Moore, in effect, asks readers to apply the kind of heroism his superheroes fail to exemplify: hopefully, a heroism validated by their own authentic search for truth.

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[British and Irish literature; Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm;](#)

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