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MEMORIA DE LICENCIATURA

**From Don Quixote to The Tick:
The Reflection of Sancho Panza in the Comic
Book Sidekick**

**De Don Quijote a The Tick:
El Reflejo de Sancho Panza en el *sidekick* del
Cómico**

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To comic book creators of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The comics medium is a very specialized area of the Arts, home to many rare and talented blooms and flowering imaginations and it breaks my heart to see so many of our best and brightest bowing down to the same market pressures which drive lowest-common-denominator blockbuster movies and television cop shows. Let's see if we can call time on this trend by demanding and creating big, wild comics which stretch our imaginations. Let's make living breathing, sprawling adventures filled with mind-blowing images of things unseen on Earth. Let's make artefacts that are not faux-games or movies but something other, something so rare and strange it might as well be a window into another universe because that's what it is. [Grant Morrison, "Grant Morrison: Master & Commander" (2004: 2)]

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INTRODUCTION

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Comic books have been an integral part of my life for as long as I can remember. Some of my earliest memories are tied to superhero comic books and funny comic strips. I vividly remember being a kid and getting my hands on a copy of *Batman* #446 (Apr. 1990). Even though I was too young to understand the intricate and obscure political background that constituted the plot of that particular issue, I was completely and immediately enthralled by its art, its dialogue, its colors and its action. Everything about it captivated me unlike anything else had done before. Since then, comic books have managed to enter every aspect of my life, from the video games I play to the movies I watch and to the books I read. And, of course, comic books have become my main interest in my academic life. When I started thinking about writing a dissertation at the end of my degree, focusing on comic books was the most logical and natural subject for me.

The question at that point was how to embed my study of comic books within the on-going research on Cervantes's *Don Quixote of the Mancha* conducted by several faculty members of the University of Oviedo, among which is Dr. Álvarez Faedo, my dissertation supervisor. The most obvious solution would have been to analyze adaptations of Cervantes's novel to comic book format, but I wanted to try a more original approach to the matter. I wanted to create something that could extend itself beyond *Don Quixote* and comic books and put them in the same literary continuum, not two different items linked arbitrarily for the sake of this dissertation. The problem solved itself serendipitously: while

brainstorming with my supervisor, we arrived at the idea of studying the relation between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza and then extrapolating it to comic book superheroes and their sidekicks. The analysis developed naturally and seamlessly from then onwards: the more I delved into these characters, the clearer it became that their relation was truly unique and that the seeds *Don Quixote* laid in the 16th century had sprung into the most diverse genres, including comic books. As the focus of my analysis was to be centered on something as popular and relatively recent (at least in the great scheme of the history of literature), I found myself in need of a critical apparatus that could answer to my needs. The New Historicism provided me with the perfect framework for my desired analysis, a way to link an established, canonical milestone in universal literature as *Don Quixote of the Mancha* and an originally American and popular form of literary and artistic expression as comic books. Under these New Historicist views, neither item is above or below the other, so I could work freely with them, understanding them as equally valid literary expressions of their respective moments of composition.

As a researcher who is just making his first steps into the academia, I could not be more thankful to live and develop my trade in the 21st century. Had I been born 25 years before, gathering the required bibliography for a research on comic books would have been an almost insurmountable task. That is, of course, assuming that said bibliography had already been written, which is probably not the case. It was in great part due to the often-overlooked commodity that is the Internet that I was able to amass a considerable amount of essays, articles, books on comic book criticism and even scans of old, out-of-print issues which would have been lost to the tides of time were it not for a dedicated group of comic book fans who devote their time to their digital preservation—all these sources have proved absolutely fundamental to the development of this dissertation. Online retailers like Amazon or The Book Depository have made available resources that would have

otherwise been nearly impossible to find, such as a 1973 edition of Les Paul's *Comix: A History of Comic Books in America*, undoubtedly one of the jewels of my collection. That being said, I could have never carried out this research without the library of the University of Oviedo, which not only for this study but also all throughout my formative years as a student of English Philology, has always been a source of unending knowledge.

The following eight chapters of this dissertation will constitute the bulk of my study. The first section will be devoted to briefly introducing the theoretical background of the New Historicism upon which my analysis is built. The second chapter will describe in general terms the roots, evolution and development of comic books as a medium, from the early 19th century to the beginning of the so-called Golden Age in the 1930s and 1940s. The fourth chapter will explore the nature of the superhero, the character archetype that has come to define comic books and which ties them to *Don Quixote of the Mancha*, taking Batman as the case example. The same historical background given to comic books will be provided for the figure of the sidekick in chapter four of this dissertation, from the earliest traces of the archetype in Sumerian literature to the more contemporary examples, including the teenage superhero sidekick that is found at the core of this study. After having established the parallelisms between the titular hero of the novel and the comic book superhero, a fifth chapter will deal with their respective sidekicks in particular, Sancho Panza and Robin: what roles they are assigned, how their respective authors use them as tools in a meta-textual level and what kind of evolution, if any, can be found in them as time goes by. The sixth chapter will focus on a truly defining period of comic book history: we will explore the persecution the medium suffered in the hands of the media and the political class of the time and the everlasting consequences it had on comic books in general and on the figure of the sidekick in particular. Lastly, a seventh and final chapter will try to offer a glimpse of how the superhero sidekick is treated by authors

nowadays, after half a century of existence. A two-part appendix will offer, on the one hand, visual material to better demonstrate and exemplify what has been proposed in this dissertation and, on the other hand, a short biographical section of all the superheroes mentioned throughout this analysis, so as to have a quick reference guide to help any possible reader who is not familiar with these characters.

CHAPTER I:
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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One of the most difficult tasks that comic books have had to face in their brief but hectic life is that of validating themselves as a valid and serious form of cultural expression. Their very humble origins as a mere form of entertainment have created the impression that comic books—and, by extension, cartoons, comic strips and animation—have no real artistic value. The detractors of comics have always claimed that they lack polish, that their stories are aimed at a very young audience that does not care about quality storytelling, and that their characters are absurd walking clichés without any kind of depth. In other words, comic books have been subjected to the same prejudices and bigotry that any other form of art has had to go through. Very few visionaries would have imagined, at the beginning of the 20th century, that the movie industry would reach as high as it has and that it would be considered one of the pillars of contemporary culture, and yet there it is, a multi-billion dollar industry that has created some of the most valuable pieces of culture of the 20th and 21st centuries. Music, literature, sculpture, architecture, comic books, movies, video games... they all have been at one point stigmatized and persecuted to some degree by the self-proclaimed defenders of art. It is today that comic books are still looking for their identity, despite the tremendous advances towards the stage of being considered “Art” that have been made in these last 70 years. Comic books are a medium torn apart by a basically commercial nature and the artistic aspirations of those involved in the process of literary and pictorial creation. There seem to be two levels to comic books: a mainstream, profit-driven layer that comprises the vast majority of comic books created,

and the underground, independent layer where authors and artists can tailor the stories they want, not what publishers demand. But in these last few decades, more and more mainstream publishers have been creating spaces where underground artists may showcase their work free of the shackles of editorial meddling, so it seems that not even this basic distinction is sound enough.

The aim of this dissertation is, by no means, to give a concrete, unmovable definition of what comic books are—that is, in my humble opinion, a futile job: comic books are as ample and vast as authors want them to be. Instead, my focus here is much more limited in scope: the superhero genre, especially the relation between superheroes and their sidekicks. My initial analysis led me to the realization that the primordial couple of hero and sidekick in comic books, Batman and Robin, shared almost all the features of one of the most famous and seminal pairings of literature: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. The fundamental problem at this point was obvious: conjugating one of the best and most celebrated novels of all time with two characters that, no matter how famous they are, are still comic-book characters, for better or worse is no easy task. However, I found that the critical apparatus provided by the New Historicism completely validates the foundation of my analysis.

The New Historicism is a school of literary theory and criticism that came to prominence during the 1980s and 1990s, with Stephen Greenblatt being its foremost thinker. Whereas Cultural Materialist and Marxist readings of culture deal with literary matters from a socio-economic perspective, New Historicists are more concerned with the way literature deals with strategies of power. However, they go a step further in their analysis, incorporating Feminism, Post-modernism and Post-structuralism—Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, among many other—to the mix in order to understand how power relations affect cultural

creation. They consider that every cultural product is directly linked to the social reality of the time it was conceived. The personal and ideological circumstances that led an author to create a certain piece of art are as important as the cultural, political, economic and social context in which that product is embedded. In other words, history is as literary as literature is historical: in words of Louis Montrose, one of the earliest supporters of the New Historicists approach, “the historicity of texts and the textuality of history” [Montrose 1989: 20] is vital, as there is a relation of interdependency between them that makes them completely devoid of any meaning if separated. “There are textual traces—a bewildering mass of them—but it is impossible to take the “text itself” as the perfect, unsubstitutable, freestanding container of all of its meanings” [Greenblatt 1988: 3]. Fashion trends and culinary taste may be as important to the understanding of a play as the literary influences of its author. The New Historicism also allows us to understand *Don Quixote of the Mancha* and superhero comic books not as two different entities, but as part of the same continuum. In contrast to what has been traditionally maintained about “high culture” and “popular culture,” both are equally valid instances of cultural expression. There is no inherent evolution to human culture: everything has to be taken in its context.

The role of the critic is also revised by New Historicists. They argue that the critic, in trying to recreate the circumstances for the production of a certain cultural item, is modifying it with their own cultural baggage. Thus begins Greenblatt’s seminal *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*:

I began with the desire to speak with the dead. This desire is a familiar, if unvoiced, motive in literary studies, a motive organized, professionalized, buried beneath thick layers of bureaucratic decorum: literature professors are salaried, middle-class shamans. If I never believed that the dead could hear me, and I knew that the dead could not speak, I was

nonetheless certain I could recreate a conversation with them. Even when I came to understand that in my most intense moments of straining to all I could hear was my own voice, even then I did not abandon my desire [Greenblatt 1988: 1]

Critics, willingly or not, “manipulate” the text when they study it; they focus more on certain aspects than on others, they contribute with their own interpretations of it. In the end, what is truly important is the need to understand that there are no objective and undisputable truths in literary criticism. The creation of a cultural item is in itself an extremely complex and involved process of which some aspects may be unknown to even the author and, at the same time, critics must be aware that the lens through which they try to understand that text and recreate its surrounding reality modifies how the critic understand that text.

Finally, there is also the idea posited by the New Historicism of the literary text as an exercise in subversion against the dominant discourse in which it is embedded and how it often uses the same tools it criticizes. This is a matter in which comic books have to begin to fit in the New Historicist approach until very recently. As a matter of fact, for most of their history, comic books have been thoroughly submissive to the dictates of social mores and market trends. It was not until the 1960s that comic books began to question the social injustices around them, and only in the last half of the 1980s did comic books start a meta-analysis of themselves as a medium. This facet of comics will be touched upon in the last section of this dissertation, where the contemporary attitudes towards the figure of the sidekick will be explored.

CHAPTER II:
THE NATURE OF COMIC BOOKS

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Don Quixote of La Mancha and American superhero comic books are two seemingly completely different and unrelated literary items. The former is one of (if not *the*) most celebrated novels of all time and a cornerstone in the development of European literature in general and Spanish literature in particular, written more than four hundred years ago by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and published in two parts in 1605 and 1615. The latter is a literary sub-genre born no sooner than 1938, genetically American, driven by commercial trends and the revenue generated by the sales of each issue, and, above all, a form of literature that had not been considered as such until very recently, to the point that still today many academics and laymen alike disregard it as “non-literature.” At first sight, the link between *Don Quixote* and the popular superheroes that fill the pages of American comic books seems to be tenuous at best, if it is actually there at all. How such a landmark in the literary canon could ever be related with this apparently minor form of literature? The costumed heroes of comic books seem too clownish and self-parodical, even by quixotic standards, to be of the same ilk as the chivalric protagonist of Cervantes’s novel. But upon closer inspection, the pieces begin to fall into place and patterns begin to emerge: the presence of Don Quixote among comic book heroes is much greater than what initially may be thought possible. The influence of the Cervantes’s characters Don Quixote of La Mancha and his squire, Sancho Panza, is at the very core of the creation and development of the superhero and, most importantly for this study, of the superhero’s sidekick. But to

understand the strong kinship between these two ostensibly distant forms of literature, it is necessary to review the origins and roots of the superhero comic book.

Scott McCloud, in his seminal *Understanding Comics*, argues that comics are not content in themselves, but rather a medium through which the author may express and expand “any number of ideas and images” [McCloud 1994: 6]. The unique feature that differentiates comic books from other forms of artistic expression is the close interdependency between the written word and graphics. In other words, comic books combine what is typically found in books (“text”) and what is natural to plastic arts (“drawings”) to create a mixed medium in which both elements are in a constant tension. As McCloud puts it, “a simple style does not necessitate a simple story” [McCloud 1994: 45]: the quality and complexity of the writing does not require an equally good and complex drawing, the same way as good art may not be accompanied by good writing. Take, for example, the works by Chris Ware, especially *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Boy on Earth* (2000), in which a simple and realistic story is greatly enhanced by the author’s minimalistic with extremely detailed art. On the other side of the spectrum, there are many comics whose plot has been poorly received by critics and fans alike, despite the quality of their artwork being on-par with any “industry standard” at the time of publication — such is the case, for example, of miniseries like Marvel Comics’ *Ultimatum* (2008) and *One More Day* (2007). American writer and comic book historian Les Daniels summarizes the history of the medium with just a single sentence in the opening lines for his 1973 *Comix: A History of Comic Books in America*: “Comic books were not created—they evolved” [Daniels 1973:1]. Thus, a sensible approach to the study of comic book history is to focus on these two convergent branches —writing and drawing— before undertaking the task of studying comics as a separate entity in itself.

The visual aspect of comic books was born alongside the development of the traditional plastic arts, particularly drawing and painting. These two disciplines have historically been used to represent particular and unique moments of a story: take, for example, the following anonymous engraving of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, from the 1648 Frankfurt edition of *Don Kichote de la Mantscha* in **[Image 1]**.¹ The scene depicts the titular hero fighting against the windmills he perceives as giants, with his sidekick Sancho Panza yelling to him in the background and his broken lance bouncing off one of the sails of the windmill, in one of the most popular and well-known episodes of Cervantes' novel. Anyone who is familiar with the novel will immediately be able to recognize the scene and put it in the proper context. Nevertheless, the engraving on its own is not enough to tell a story: it still needs to source material to feel "complete." McCloud works with a definition of "comics" first put forward by Will Eisner, one of the founding fathers of the medium: the essential difference between comic books and other forms of art is that they are sequential, that is to say, they juxtapose image after image to create a continued link between them where the plot resides—all of this regardless of the contents, style and genre of the plot and characters found within. English painter, engraver and satirist William Hogarth was one of the first "canonical" artists to take advantage of this format in his series of paintings and engravings, namely *A Harlot's Progress* (1731-1732), *Marriage à-la-mode* (1743-1745) and *A Rake's Progress* (1732-1735). Each series narrates a self-contained story from beginning to end, but lack any accompanying expository text. If we accept McCloud's definition of comic books, Hogarth's work is undoubtedly one of the genetic ancestors of the genre. Nevertheless, not everyone is content with this definition. Robert C. Harvey challenges the central importance McCloud gives to sequence in his article *How Comics Came to Be*:

¹ Henceforth, all images mentioned throughout the essay will be found in an Appendix section at the end of this dissertation.

It seems to me that the essential characteristic of “comics”—the thing that distinguishes it from the other kinds of pictorial narratives—is the incorporation of verbal content. I even go so far as to say that in the best examples of the art form, words and pictures blend to achieve a meaning that neither conveys alone without the other. To McCloud, “sequence” is at the heart of the functioning of comics; to me, “blending” verbal and visual content is. [Harvey 2009: 25]

The main aim behind Harvey’s definition of comic books is to include single-panel comical drawings with a brief text that explains or sets up the joke, and this desire is not merely out of whim. Humorous cartoons have been produced for centuries with two main subjects: pure situational humor (the so-called “gag cartoons”) and political satire. Examples of the latter have been found in places as far away in time as the ruins of the Roman villa of Pompeii, with caricatures of what are thought to be politicians of the time engraved in walls. The popularity of this format has ensured its enduring appearance in periodical publications in the English-speaking world for almost two hundred years, from *Punch*’s founding in 1841 to the famous (and sometimes difficult to understand) cartoons of *The New Yorker*. But in the end, what is truly important is that both McCloud’s and Harvey’s approaches complement each other and explain the natural evolution of the medium by the late 19th Century: the comic strip, which juxtaposes several panels with written dialogue to create a humorous short story. Early pioneers of the comic strip are the illustrations of Rodolphe Töpffer and Richard Outcault’s *The Yellow Kid*. One of the greatest advantages that the comic strip had over the single-panel cartoon is that the author was able to introduce a regular cast of well-defined characters upon which the stories of the comic strip could be focused. Many of these characters proved to be immensely popular and became cultural icons that linger still to our days. For example, in 1929 E. C.

Segar introduced a new character to his comic strip *Thimble Theater*, a sailor with just one eye and incredible strength. Although initially a secondary character meant to appear in just one arc² of the comic strip, he became an overnight sensation, so much so that he completely stole the spotlight from the original protagonist, Castor Oyl, and the strip was shortly after renamed after him: *Popeye the Sailor*. Nevertheless, it was not until 1933 when what we understand as a comic *book* first appeared: *Funnies on Parade*, the first collection of newspaper comic strips reprinted from newspapers. Just a few years later, in 1935, Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson founded the National Allied Publications — which, in time, would evolve into the modern-day DC Comics— and began publishing the first comic book composed entirely of all-new material, not reprints of previously-published comic strips. Shortly afterwards, hundreds of new comic book characters began to populate newsstands all over America, some of them selling hundreds of thousands of copies per issue. But the deepest and most important event in comic book history was still to come.

1938 was undisputedly a landmark year in the history of comic books, and the linking point of the medium with Cervantes’s novel. The United States of America was being slowly but steadily dragged into yet another European war after having barely endured a decade of economic collapse and natural catastrophes. The collective spirits of the nation were utterly devastated, but two young Jewish comic book creators —artist Joe Shuster and writer Jerry Siegel— decided to create a character unlike any other before, a character that could possess superhuman abilities and powers that would help him fight for truth and justice and bring hope to the masses. There already were characters whose strength

² In comic book terms, an “arc” designates a self-contained story that spans several installments of the series. Contemporary superhero comic books usually require several issues to complete each arc. In the case of Popeye, being a newspaper comic strip, the story in which the character was introduced took place throughout several weeks. In the Fantagraphics’s *Popeye vol. 1*, which reprints all *Thimble Theater* strips from 1928 to 1930, this particular arc is given the title of “Popeye the Sailor.”

surpassed that of a common human being (Popeye the Sailor, Hugo Hercules), characters who wielded magic (Mandrake the Magician, Zatara Zatanna) and character who were constantly jumping from one thrilling adventure to another (Doc Savage, Flash Gordon), but never all these traits had converged into a single character before as they did with Shuster's and Siegel's creation. Add to these powers a distinctive origin story and a bright red, blue and yellow costume and the result is that in issue #1 of *Action Comics* (Jun. 1938), Superman, the first superhero, is finally unveiled to the world. The character was an instant hit with the public and ushered a new era for comic books. The spotlight shifted from the usual humorous comic books and the down-to-earth and violent pulp comic books and shined brightly over Superman and the seemingly almost unlimited supply of similar characters that were created shortly after. Such is their enduring appeal that to this day it is the image of the superhero that most people, laymen and experts, generally associate with the idea of "comics." This is, however, a double-edged sword, as superhero are also responsible for the assumed "immature" nature of comic books and the subsequent downplay they have been subjected for most of their life. Be as it may, the fact that the introduction of Superman and the subsequent explosion of the superhero genre were vital catalysts for the proliferation of comic books is an undeniable fact.

CHAPTER III:
HEROES DEFINED

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Having reached this point, the most obvious question anyone would pose themselves is the same as that which started this study in the first place: what does *Don Quixote* have to do with superheroes? The first part of this analysis, retracing the steps of the evolution of comic books, is actually quite necessary to understand the nature of superheroes. They were born at a time when people needed guidance and hope in bleak and depressing times. The superhero came to embody everything that was essentially good and commendable about humankind, a beacon of light shining in the darkness of the late first half of the 20th century. It is worth mentioning that the archetype of the superhero has been challenged and contested in recent years, especially since the publication of ground-breaking graphic novels such as Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (1986-1987) and *V for Vendetta* (1982-1989) or Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), but for the sake of simplicity, this study will focus on the original conception of the superhero, mostly based on the material produced during the so-called Golden Age.³ Comic book author and critic Peter Coogan gives a precise, yet comprehensive, definition of what a superhero truly is, and which is a

³ Much like historians have done for universal history, comic book historians and critics have tried to establish a system to divide and classify the evolution of comics into segmented periods of time. Though there is no solid consensus of what these eras should be and how they should be delimited, most critics agree upon at least four basic stages: the **Golden Age** (starting with the publication of *Action Comics* #1 and ending by late 1950s), the **Silver Age** (starting with the publication of *Showcase* #4 in 1956, which introduced the revamped version of The Flash, and ending by the 1970s), the **Bronze Age** (marked by the return of socially-committed storylines during the 1970s) and the contemporary **Modern Age** (also known as the **Dark Age**, for its "dark and gritty" approach to story-telling and characters). Other critics, like Duncan and Smith (2009) have proposed different systems for periodical classification, not based on characters but on events and their respective "lasting effects." For the sake of clarity and consistency, this essay will use the first and most widespread system of classification.

fantastic jumping point to link this comic book sub-genre with Cervantes's *Don Quixote of La Mancha*:

Superhero. A heroic character with a selfless, pro-social mission; with superpowers — extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume, which typically express his biography, character, powers, and origin (transformation from ordinary person to superhero); and is generically distinct, i.e. can be distinguished from characters of related genres (fantasy, science fiction, detective, etc.) by a preponderance of generic conventions. Typically superheroes have dual identities, the ordinary one of which is usually a close guarded secret. [Coogan 2009: 77]

Coogan's definition is able to include most, if not all, of the superheroes created during the Golden Age, but at the same time, it evokes a series of traits and characteristics that can be found in more traditional heroic characters—including Cervantes's own knight-errant. The similarities between Don Quixote and the prototypical superhero are clear to see. Of course, this is not to say that Cervantes ever had in mind creating a *superhero*, but the resemblance between the two is too uncanny to be a coincidence. It would seem, then, that both Cervantes and the comic book creators of this period were constructing their characters using essential characteristics that transcend the particular genre and style in which the narrative takes place: heroes need certain ageless, basic characteristics in order to be heroes.

In order to explore the relation between Don Quixote and the superhero —and, eventually, that of Sancho Panza with the heroes' sidekicks— it is necessary to narrow down all the possible subjects for a case study out of the hundreds of superheroes that could serve to that purpose equally well. While Superman is universally considered as the most

representative and seminal superhero, another character, very close in time to Shuster's and Siegel creation, is a much better candidate. National Allied Publications wanted to capitalize on the massive success of Superman, so it ordered a new character that was distinctive enough from Superman, but who could also be recognized as the same "kind" of character as him. Batman was created by artist and writer Bob Kane (with the mostly-unaccredited collaboration of artist Bill Finger) and debuted in *Detective Comics* #27, in 1939. "The Dark Knight" is a great case example to work with under these premises, since not only does he share many similarities with Cervantes's Don Quixote, but it was also in *Detective Comics*—which by that point had become Batman's series in full right—where Robin, the first sidekick of comic books, debuted. The parallelisms between Batman, Robin, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are just too obvious to be ignored.

There are two fundamental aspects that can be seen in any character, and these two are no exception: what is outside, and what is inside. The form and the content, what is physical and what is psychological, what is seen and what is thought. Coogan's definition raises a series of points that can be applied to both Batman and Don Quixote and that, in the end, make up the core essence of both characters. His definition starts with the mention of a "selfless, pro-social mission": it is indeed true that a superhero has to be, first and foremost, good. A superhero should never seek personal gain by his actions, and this is a principle that almost every character follows to the letter, and Batman and Don Quixote are no exceptions to this. Batman's alter ego, Bruce Wayne, is a millionaire playboy and a philanthropist with a fortune inherited from his late parents. Alonso Quijano—Don Quixote's real name—is what Cervantes qualifies as "un hidalgo de los de lanza en astillero," that is to say, a member of the low nobility that populated the rural areas of the Spain of the 17th Century. While Don Quixote is nowhere near as rich as other noblemen of his time, but his position gives him enough money to maintain himself and his

household without having to work and, most importantly, to amass an impressive collection of knightly romances that would eventually trigger his madness. Both men could have lived completely carefree lives, and yet they decide to put themselves in danger every day to help those who cannot help themselves. There is a Faustian element in the self-imposed moral code that urges and compels these characters to throw themselves into the world and fight for what is good and just in a world in frank decadence. While Batman dedicates his life to train and become a superhero to avenge the death of his parents at the hands of a mugger by preventing any other potential innocent victim from suffering from the same fate, Don Quixote decides to become a knight-errant because he feels that there is the need for one in the first place; the world is an unfair and corrupt place and someone has to fix it. The main obstacle between him and his mission, however, is the world itself: Don Quixote's is a time that has moved on from the knightly code of honor and has rooted itself in a more pragmatic and least idealist reality. Batman has to carry the same burden as Don Quixote: Gotham, the city in which he operates, is a nest of corruption and never-ending violence that no matter what Batman does will continue in its path to self-destruction. And yet, these two characters never give up on their mission. Despite all the blows they may have to endure, despite the bruises and the cuts, despite the constant fatigue, heroes endure. Although the ultimate fates of these two characters are potentially different from each other, they convey the same message. On the one hand, Don Quixote returns home battered and broken, both physically and psychologically. He understands that the anachronism that he had been living was a lost cause from the start and, overtaken by sorrow, regains his sanity and prepares his will just before dying in his bed, fully renouncing from his knightly ideals despite Sancho's efforts to convince him of the contrary:

[...] Y, volviéndose a Sancho, le dijo:

—Perdóname, amigo, de la ocasión que te he dado de parecer loco como yo, haciéndote caer en el error en que yo he caído de que hubo y hay caballeros andantes en el mundo.

—¡Ay! —respondió Sancho llorando—. No se muera vuestra merced, señor mío, sino tome mi consejo y viva muchos años, porque la mayor locura que puede hacer un hombre en esta vida es dejarse morir sin más ni más, sin que nadie le mate ni otras manos le acaben que las de la melancolía. Mire no sea perezoso, sino levántese de esa cama y vámonos al campo vestidos de pastores, como tenemos concertado: quizá tras de alguna mata hallaremos a la señora doña Dulcinea desencantada, que no haya más que ver. Si es que se muere de pesar de verse vencido, écheme a mí la culpa, diciendo que por haber yo cinchado mal a Rocinante le derribaron; cuanto más que vuestra merced habrá visto en sus libros de caballerías ser una cosa ordinaria derribarse unos caballeros a otros y el que es vencido hoy ser vencedor mañana.

—Así es —dijo Sansón—, y el buen Sancho Panza está muy en la verdad en estos casos.

—Señores —dijo Don Quijote—, vámonos poco a poco, pues ya en los nidos de antaño no hay pájaros de hogaño. You fui loco y ya soy cuerdo; fui Don Quijote de la Mancha y soy ahora, como he dicho, Alonso Quijano el Bueno. Pueda con vuestras Mercedes mi arrepentimiento y mi verdad volverme a la estimación que de mí se tenía, y prosiga adelante el señor escribano.

[*Don Quijote de la Mancha*, Part II, Chapter LXXIV]

It would seem that, in the end, the reality of the world finally caught up with Don Quixote. But on a closer inspection it becomes apparent that Cervantes's decision to kill off Don Quixote (partly to finish the story, partly to prevent any further non-authorized sequels like Avellanada's) does not mean that he is killing off Don Quixote's ideals. His death only serves to reinforce those values, and the fact that in the 21st Century we are still talking about the character is an undeniable proof of the power of the symbol he represents.

Conversely, nothing can be etched in stone about Batman's death, as the very nature of comic book characters will always leave the door open for authors to annex, amend, retcon⁴ or reboot⁵ as they consider suitable. Many authors have dealt with the last days of Batman and what happens when the Caped Crusader has fought his last battle. Frank Miller, in the aforementioned classic graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns*, makes a 60-year-old Bruce Wayne come back from retirement for just one more battle in a Gotham where crime runs rampant; Dick Grayson, the first Robin who currently operates under the Nightwing alias, was promoted to Batman in Tony Daniel's 2009 *Battle for the Cowl*; Scottish writer Grant Morrison gave the mantle of the Bat to Damian Wayne, Bruce's son and fifth Robin, in the possible future of *Batman* #666 (2007) and artist and writer Paul Pope imagined a Gotham 100 years in the future where an unknown man recovers the long-lost identity of Batman in *Batman: Year 100* (2006). All these stories —just a few among countless other— greatly differ in tone, setting and even characters, but they all coincide in one essential component: legacy. Both Bruce Wayne and Alonso Quijano decide to masquerade with a constructed identity, what Coogan calls “a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume.” Chung-Hsiung Lai emphasizes the essential relation between saying and doing: “the world will not allow identity to be formed through

⁴ One of the inherent problems of long-running TV shows, movie series and comic books (among other forms of “popular” literature) is that each new piece of content, character or event added can potentially contradict, partially or totally, the established canon. Writers may retroactively alter the continuity of the story (hence, “retcon”) to fit new pieces of information without creating a conflict with what was already in place in the fictional universe of the work. Retcons in comic books are a double-edged sword, as they can be seen as just a cheap cop-out to bring a dead character back to life or solve a seemingly-impossible situation via a *deus ex machina*. Spider-Man has suffered many badly-received retcons, including the *Clone Saga* (Oct. 1994 – Dec. 1996), Norman Osborn surviving his apparently-fatal encounter with Spider-Man in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #122 (July 1973) or Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson-Parker making a deal with Mephisto (Marvel Comics's version of Satan) to save May Parker's life in exchange for their marriage.

⁵ A “reboot” could be considered as a retcon in a bigger scale. Instead of affecting an isolated portion of a character's history, a reboot affects large amounts, even sometimes the whole, of the history of the character and, in some cases, the whole fictional universe. Reboots are usually brought about by catastrophic events that alter the in-fiction reality of the universe, and are used by publishers as a way to provide new readers a “jumping point” to their series by simplifying and modernizing the otherwise convoluted continuity of their characters. DC Comics is infamously known for using (and sometimes, abusing) reboots every few years, in the form of their “Crises”: *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (1985), *Zero Hour* (1994), *Infinite Crisis* (2005-2006) and *Final Crisis* (2008).

language alone; action must follow from exhortation, as man must seek to join the signifier with its referent” [Lai 2006: 6]. The importance of gaining actancy through the use of a dual identity is paramount: the moment the characters put on their respective costumes, they cease to be “normal” human beings and come to embody a series of moral values that give purpose to their mission. Donning a costume and throwing oneself into the world is what validates the ideals behind the heroic identity constructed by these characters. In the case of Don Quixote, even if his armor and his weapons are old, rusty and barely function, they still represent all the ideas and values associated to the order of knights. His armor is a symbol that anyone would have been able to recognize immediately as a sign of honor and justice, had he lived in the right period. Batman has become more than just a mask and a suit that Bruce Wayne wears to fight crime —it has become a symbol for something greater than what a single man can ever be. It does not matter who is under the cowl, what counts is that he (or she) honors the ideals that come with the job... or as Spider-Man’s uncle Ben’s eternal words go, “with great power comes great responsibility.” In the end, what Don Quixote and Batman (and, truly, any superhero) stand for is bigger and more important than them as individuals. It transcends the human mortal coil and that is why, no matter what, it will live on past its knights. Some four hundred years after Cervantes had published *Don Quixote of the Mancha*, one of Alan Moore’s most celebrated creations, the terrorist only known as V, pronounced these now-famous words after being shot at point blank by detective Finch: “There. Did you think to kill me? There’s no flesh or blood within this cloak to kill. There’s only an idea. And ideas are bulletproof. Farewell.” [*V for Vendetta*, Volume IX, Chapter 7, 1989]

The other essential component of a superhero is exactly what makes it “super”: what Coogan defines as “superpowers —extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental or mystical skills” [Coogan 2009: 77]. Superman can fly, is

almost indestructible, has heat vision and frozen breath, among other powers; the Flash can run at the speed of light; Captain America has enhanced strength and stamina; Spider-Man the proportional strength and nimbleness of a spider and Sue Storm, the Invisible Woman, can turn invisible and project force fields with her mind. Despite being the second superhero ever created, Batman lacks any special power—at least not in the same terms as the all these other superheroes. His “superpower” is, in fact, his lack of superpowers, which, considering his roots, is not as far-fetched as it may initially seem.

According to researcher Peter Coogan, the earliest comic book superheroes were derived from three primary streams of adventure-narrative figures: the science-fiction superman, the pulp magazines *übermensch*, and the dual identity vigilante. [Duncan & Smith 2009: 222]

Duncan, Smith and Coogan argue that, while all the aforementioned characters are a mix of science fiction (Frankenstein, John Carter) and pulp (Tarzan, Doc Savage) tropes, Batman inherits traits from both the pulp *übermensch* and the dual-identity vigilante (The Shadow, Zorro) schools. Being a direct descendant of pulp vigilantes explains why Batman’s adventures take in place in such a down-to-earth, gritty and realistic environment, initially devoid of all the science fiction elements found in Superman. Even their origins are radically different: Superman is the last son of Krypton, but finds love and shelter with the Kents, a young couple from Smallville, Kansas, who adopt him and raise him like a child. Batman, on the other hand, lost his parents to a trigger-happy mugger when he was just a child. Like a modern Hamlet, tragedy is the catalyst that launches young Bruce Wayne into a life of vengeance: he devotes every waking hour to perfecting himself, physically and mentally, so as to be able to fight injustice, crime and corruption as a way to honor the memory of his parents and make sure that nobody ever has to go

through all that pain and suffering again. Batman is a modern Renaissance man: he is in peak physical and intellectual condition, he is a master fighter, an Olympian-level athlete, a strategist, a chemist, an inventor, a detective —everything he needs to be a crimefighter and deal with supervillains of the likes of Bane, The Joker or Mr. Freeze. Another major distinction with Superman is that Batman’s abilities are always within the realm of plausibility: Superman, in his first incarnation, for example, could not fly, but he could jump over a skyscraper without much effort. No human could ever accomplish that feat, but with the proper training, some of Batman’s abilities could be within the reach of a selected few. The superpower has become a defining trait of the superhero genre, but after Batman, there have been a handful of superheroes without any superhuman ability: apart from characters related to Batman (such as Nightwing, Robin or Batgirl), there are cases like Green Arrow and Hawkeye, who are both master archers; Iron Man (Tony Stark), who has used his genius-level intellect to create a high-tech armor; all incarnations of Blue Beetle; Wildcat, a Golden Age boxer, or Elektra, a master assassin.

Don Quixote is on the other side of the spectrum, a polar opposite to Batman’s perfect mental and physical abilities. The nature of Don Quixote’s “powers” is less based on actual abilities and more on his unique condition: his madness. Reading so many romances has made Don Quixote disconnect himself from the real world and create a new reality where he is the hero of the tale, destined to bring back the knightly code of honor of yore:

—Sancho amigo, has de saber que yo nací por querer del cielo en esta nuestra edad de hierro para resucitar en ella la de oro, o la dorada, como suele llamarse. Yo soy aquel para quien están guardados los peligros, las grandes hazañas, los valerosos hechos. Yo soy, digo otra vez, quien ha de resucitar los de la Tabla Redonda, los Doce de Francia y los Nueve de la Fama, y el que ha poner en olvido los Platires, los Tablantes, Olivantes y Tirantes, los Febos y

Belianises, con toda la caterva de los famosos caballeros andantes del pasado tiempo, hacienda en este en que me hallo tales grandezas, extrañezas y fechos de armas, que escurezcan las más claras que ellos hicieron. [*Don Quijote de la Mancha*, Part I, Chapter XX]

His distortion of reality is so strong that he is able to modify the environment around him. Windmills and fullers become giants and monsters, prisoners of the Inquisition are taken for captives who need to be liberated, a hostel is upgraded to a hold and a mere peasant is transformed into the embodiment of woman perfection. Although his adventures, more often than not, end with catastrophic results, Don Quixote's intentions can never be put in question. He believes that he is doing good by acting the way he acts, despite the constant opposition by Sancho. Don Quixote's faith in his mission is so strong that no beating nor defeat can persuade him from continuing pursuing it.

Almost everything that has been said about Batman and Don Quixote in this chapter can be extrapolated to the vast majority of superheroes. Comic book authors always sought to add a new quirk or gimmick to their characters that would make them distinctive enough from other heroes, but the essential components that make up the superhero were always there: the costume, the dual identity, the ideals of justice and freedom, the self-sacrifice for a higher cause. All these characteristic traits could be found in older characters, but seldom in the same arrange as in comic book superheroes. Don Quixote is an extremely interesting character to analyze in the light of the superhero, as he seems to meet these criteria despite predating these characters by almost 400 years. With this being said, *Don Quixote of la Mancha* also home to Sancho Panza, a character whose presence in the narrative is equally important to that of the titular character and whose pivotal role in the novel has left its imprint in the whole of universal literature. Comics are not the exception to this and traces of Sancho's influence can be found in a particular archetype of character born shortly after

the breakthrough of the superhero genre: the sidekick. The next chapters will be devoted to analyzing the parallelisms between Sancho and the superhero sidekick, much like this chapter was focused on the central figures of Don Quixote and Batman (and, by extension, all “major” superheroes).

CHAPTER IV:
ENTER THE SIDEKICK

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If survey is conducted on the street and people are asked whether they know any of the following characters (both real and fictional), chances are a good majority of them will be known by most interviewees. Don Quixote, Sherlock Holmes, The Green Hornet, The Lone Ranger, Captain Kirk, Fred Flinstone, Han Solo (from *Star Wars*), Harry Potter, Frodo Baggins (from *The Lord of the Rings*), William Abbot, Dean Martin, Shrek, Simba (from *The Lion King*), Michael Knight, Sonic the Hedgehog, Mario (from the *Mario Bros.* series of video games), Astérix... It could be almost impossible to create a more heterogeneous cast of characters, hailing from TV series, fantasy literature, movies, radio shows, comic books and even real-life comedy acts. But despite the enormous differences in origin, style and genre, there is a common denominator that links all these characters — and one that will probably be immediately called upon by anyone reading this list— is that none of them feel “complete” without other character: their respective sidekicks. Sherlock Holmes needs his Dr. John Watson; The Green Hornet and The Lone Ranger have Kato and Tonto, respectively; in space, we have Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock, and Han Solo and Chewbacca; Timon and Pumba taught Simba how to live by their motto, “hakuna matata”; Frodo could not have succeeded in his quest to destroy the ring without his friend Samwise Gamgee, just like Harry Potter could not have vanquished Lord Voldemort without Hermione and Ron; Mario and Luigi and Sonic and Tails share the privilege of being some of the most recognizable video game characters; Dean Martin started his career with his friend Jerry Lewis, and Abbot and Costello changed the way comedy was made in the

1940s; Shrek shares his adventures with Donkey and Puss in Boots, and *Knight Rider* would not have been the same if Michael Knight did not have KITT to move him around. All these pairings prove that if the presence of a protagonist is essential to the development of a plot, then that of a sidekick can be as equally as important—and in some cases, even more.

Understanding *Don Quixote of La Mancha* without taking into account the pivotal role of Sancho Panza is an impossible task. Sancho has been a defining character in universal literature and his influence has permeated throughout all genres and styles, and even media. Just as Don Quixote makes his presence known in the world of comic books by laying out the bases that the superheroes will build upon several centuries later, Sancho's shadow is as long and as important for comics. But despite this, Sancho was not, by any means, the first sidekick. The whole of *Don Quixote* is constructed by taking already-existing tropes and character archetypes and retooling them under the light of the genius of the author, and Sancho is no exception. His character is obviously based on that of the squires of the knightly romances that *Don Quixote* parodies, but his lineage as a sidekick goes far back in history. One of the oldest pieces of literature that humankind has been able to recover, the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (dated between 2250-2200 BC) narrates the story of Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, and oppressor to his people. The gods answer the pleas for help of the people of Uruk and create a man-beast named Enkidu to distract Gilgamesh and prevent him from further causing pain in his kingdom. The two characters set out to destroy Humbaba, a gigantic monster, and become friends as they proceed in their quest. Their bond is so strong by the end of the first part of the romance that Gilgamesh is devastated when the same gods that created Enkidu in the first place end his life as a way to punish the king for his intromission in the affairs of the deities. Since then, the figure of the sidekick to a man in power became a staple of literature. In the Greek

works set in the Trojan War by Homer, Achilles, protagonist of the *Illiad*, is accompanied by his cousin (and arguably lover) Patroclus. The two Acheans share a strong friendship, and the death of his companion once again marks a point of inflexion in the development of the hero. Patroclus's death at the hands of Hector is what forces Achilles into battle and, subsequently, seals his destiny: death by an arrow cast by Paris, Hector's younger brother, told in several versions outside the *Illiad*. Some time later, in the 15th Century, the traditional Chinese novel *Journey to the West* features a monk, Xuanzang, who is accompanied by four supernatural beings who act as his disciples in the titular journey to India. Xuanzang is tasked taking the "sutras" of the Buddha to India, a land filled with corruption, greed and sin. These three companions—Sun Wukong, Zhu Bajie, Sha Wujing and one of the sons of Ao Run, the King Dragon of the West Sea, in the body of a horse—prove to be invaluable for Xuanzang, since his condition as a monk and a pacifist means he lacks any fighting skills. The four disciples protect their master all throughout the journey and allow him to finally reach India, go back to China and be rewarded for their efforts. Around the same time *Journey to the West* was being published, another very popular story based on the relation of a main character and a companion was beginning to take form in Europe. The mystery surrounding the life of Johann Faust, a German occultist, laid the basis for several fictional adaptations, including Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (c. 1604) and, later on, greatly expanded in Goethe's *Faust* (1806-1832). Though the interpretation of the character varied with the time—from Christian heretic to embodiment of the zeitgeist of the Renaissance—the core aspect of the "deal with the devil" is always present in the story. The contract between Faust and the devil stipulates that Mephistopheles, a demon, will have to accompany the scholar and obey him for duration of the pact in return for his soul. This way, Mephistopheles effectively becomes Faust's companion, providing him with the knowledge and powers he

had craved for so long, and propitiating the situations that form the plot. The relation between Faust and Mephistopheles is radically different from the one established between protagonists and sidekicks in the previous examples—it is, at best, tense. In Marlowe’s version of the Faustian myth, the limitations and shortcomings of Faust’s pact with Mephistopheles immediately come up, and the scholar realizes that what at first seemed like a bargain is not so.

Although it is plain to see that this archetype of character has been around for as long as literature has existed, the history of the term “sidekick” is much more recent and obscure. According to Douglas Harper’s *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the word “sidekick” did not enter the English language until 1906, with the meaning of “companion or close associate.” The term itself is a clipping of “side-kicker,” first recorded in 1903 and, while there are some earlier related terms like “side-pal” or “side-partner,” the exact origin of the word is shrouded in mystery. Though it may seem trivial at first, the definition, meaning and use of the concept “sidekick” is of vital importance to the further analysis of these characters. The definition provided by Harper is a good starting point for the study of the sidekick in general terms, but it falls short on capturing all the shades of meaning present in these characters, especially if we delve deeper in the sub-category of comic book sidekicks. The problem extends even further in Spanish, where there is no direct translation of the word “sidekick,” but rather a series of unique words that convey the diverse roles and aspects of the sidekick. I have defended the use of “sidekick” in Spanish as a way to group all this information in a single word, even if that means using an Anglicism and adapting its pronunciation to the Spanish one.

CHAPTER V:
DARK KNIGHTS OF SAD COUNTENANCES

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The creation of Sancho Panza marked a turning point in the history and evolution of the sidekick, as Cervantes was able to go far beyond what had been done until then with this kind of characters. The amount of unique facets, roles and functions that Cervantes granted his character made him a referent for the way future authors will approach the figure of the sidekick—including, of course, comic book writers. Exploring the role of Sancho in *Don Quixote* is a necessary step to understand his importance as the most complete and well-rounded sidekick to date and, by extension, his influence in the superhero sidekick—the case example of which will be Robin, the Boy Wonder, to continue with the analysis of Batman and his world as prime examples of Quixotic influence in comic books.

The origins of Robin—and by extension, those of the kid sidekick in superhero comic books—are to be found in the early years of the 1940s. Superman and Batman had established the superhero genre as the driving force behind the popularity of comic books in the United States in mere matter of years, and similar characters had begun to appear almost immediately. Between 1938 and 1941, hundreds of new superheroes began to populate American newsstands. Many of them faded into Oblivion: Mr. Scarlet (Dec. 1940), Green Lama (Apr. 1940), Green Mask (Aug. 1939), Blue Tracer (Aug. 1941) or Stardust the Super Wizard (Dec. 1939), to name a few. But this period also gave the world some of the most well-known and beloved superheroes: apart from Superman (Jun. 1938) and Batman (May 1939), National Allied Publications created Wonder Woman (Dec.

1941), the original Flash (Jan. 1940) and Green Lantern (Jul. 1940) and Hawkman (Jan. 1940), while Timely Comics⁶ put out characters like the original Human Torch (Oct. 1939), Namor the Sub-Mariner (Apr. 1939) and Captain America (Mar. 1941) and Fawcett Comics, Captain Marvel (1939). But among the myriad of Superman clones, gimmick-based superheroes and jingoistic super-soldiers (as WWII draw near), there also began what Duncan and Smith deem “the illogical tradition of adult superheroes taking on teenage sidekicks, often with no power, in the dangerous fight against the very powerful forces of evil” [Duncan & Smith, 2009: 228]. Though it is true that the idea of bringing a child or teenager to a fight is certainly ludicrous—even more so if there are superpowers involved—, bearing in mind what has been established about the influence of *Don Quixote* in the superhero genre, then the figure of the sidekick is not as illogical as Duncan and Smith may argue. After all, all of the functions assigned to Sancho Panza in Cervantes’s novel are also to be found in the superhero sidekick. The first of the many young sidekicks to grace comic books was Richard “Dick” Grayson, better known as Robin, the Boy Wonder. He made his first appearance in issue #38 of *Detective Comics* (Apr. 1940), less than a year after Batman had been first published. Along with his parents Mary and John Grayson, Dick is part of the “Flying Graysons” trapeze act in Haly’s Circus. Unbeknown to everyone, Haly is being sabotaged by Tony Zucco, a local mobster: Zucco demands payment from Haly, but the owner of the circus refuses. On the same fateful night that Bruce Wayne attends a performance of the Flying Graysons, Zucco sabotages their act, cutting their ropes and making John and Mary fall to their deaths. Bruce Wayne is witness to the exact same tragedy that marked his life so many years ago: a young boy who loses his parents to crime. He decides to take Dick under his wing, help him hone his already-outstanding skills as an acrobat and train him in the ways of justice, so he can avenge his

⁶ The precursor of modern-day Marvel Comics.

parents and help Bruce in his crusade against crime. The relationship between Bruce and Dick goes beyond that of tutor and ward: Bruce becomes Dick's father figure, a mentor and a moral guideline all throughout his career as masked vigilante, first as Robin, then as Nightwing—and for some time, as Batman. In a more general (and generic) way, Robin set the basic characteristics that almost all comic book sidekicks created during this period shared. They were all young (most of them teens or pre-teens), they “matched” the sex of their mentor (male sidekicks were not usually paired with female heroes, and vice versa), they were orphans or their parents were absent (which allowed sidekicks to move with the hero) and they usually followed the same theme that characterized the grown-up hero. This last characteristic, nevertheless, is not found in Robin, who clearly contrasts with Batman's dark appearance, but this is in fact the reason why Robin was created in the first place. Despite Batman's massive popularity with audiences of all ages, there was a question that greatly distressed parents all across America: Batman employed physical violence against his enemies, many of which would end up dying as a result, direct or indirect, of their fight against the vigilante. True to his pulp origins, he originally carried two guns, despite the solemn vow of never using firearms of modern interpretation of the character, since they were the tool used to kill his parents. The editors at National Allied Publications feared a possible backlash against the character, so they tasked Bob Kane with the creation of a character that could balance Batman's gritty persona, and thus Robin was born. His introduction to the Batman comic book line brought about immensely deep changes to it and to the world of comic books in general terms, but his role as a sidekick will be further analyzed later on in this chapter. For the moment, it suffices to say that shortly after Robin's debut, most superheroes were getting a sidekick. In the very same issue Captain America was introduced to the world (*Captain America Comics* #1, Mar. 1941), his sidekick James “Bucky” Barnes also made his first appearance. Bucky is, like Robin, an

orphan taken under the protection of the superhero. But unlike Batman and Robin, the adventures of Captain America and Bucky take place in the European front of the 2nd World War, an scenario even more dangerous for a teenager than the streets of Gotham. Another character that helped the Allies fight the Axis during WWII, The Human Torch (who was actually an android, not a human), had Toro as his sidekick in *Human Torch Comics* #2 (Fall 1940): Thomas Raymond, an orphan and lab assistant to Phineas Horton, the creator of the Human Torch, who acquires the power to combust into flames after an experiment goes wrong. In the National Allied Publications side, the Sandman (Wesley Dodds) found his sidekick in Sanderson “Sandy” Hawkins (*Adventure Comics* #1, Dec. 1949). The Seven Soldiers of Victory (which was formed in *Leading Comics* #1, 1941) included Speedy (*More Fun Comics* #73, Nov. 1941), sidekick to Green Arrow, and Stripesy (*Action Comics* #40, Dec. 1941), sidekick to the Star-Spangled Kid. These two last characters were an exception to the rule, as they turned upside down the established conventions: the Star-Spangled Kid (Sylvester Pemberton, a teenager) was the main hero, while his sidekick Stripesy (Pat Dugan) was a grown-up. Independent comic book publishers also rode the sidekick train: Kato is introduced to the world of the Green Hornet in *Green Hornet Comics* #1 (Dec. 1940) and Will Eisner’s The Spirit met Ebony White in *The Spirit* comic strip of June 2, 1940. Even non-superhero characters like Hergé’s Tintin and Archie Andrews found sidekicks in Captain Haddock (*The Crab with the Golden Claws*, 1941) and Jughead Jones (*Pep Comics* #22, Dec. 1941) respectively.

Having established the bases for the superhero sidekick, it is now a good time to turn back the page to the world of *Don Quixote of la Mancha* and see how they related to each other. The first mention of Sancho Panza in *Don Quixote* takes place in Chapter VII of the First Part:

En este tiempo solicitó don Quijote a un Labrador vecino suyo, hombre de bien –si es que ese título puede dar al que es pobre–, pero de muy poca sal en la mollera. En resolución, tanto le dijo, tanto le persuadió y prometió, que el pobre villano⁷ se determine de salirse con él y servirle como escudero. Decíale entre otras cosas don Quijote que se dispusiese a ir con él de Buena gana, porque tal vez le podía suceder alguna aventura que ganese, en quítame allá esas pajas, alguna insula, y le dejase a él por gobernador de ella. Con estas promesas y otras tales, Sancho Panza, que así se llamaba el Labrador, dejó su mujer y hijos y asentó por escudero de su vecino. [*Don Quixote of the Mancha*, Part I, Chapter VII]

This first description of Sancho gives the reader a handful of basic pieces of information about the character: he is a poor, uneducated farmer, not very clever, but a good man nonetheless, and he joins Don Quixote purely out of economic pursuit. His job is described as a “squire” (“escudero” in Spanish), which situates him in a long tradition of characters in the knightly romance: every knight had a squire who accompanied him in his journeys and performed certain functions, such as carrying the knight’s weapons, tending his wounds and making sure that there is always something to eat at hand. Sancho, true to Cervantes’s intentions, is a peculiar squire, since he is a fully grown up man, with wife and daughter, while the vast majority of squires that entered the service of a knight did not exceed the age of 14 years old. With all these remarkable attributes, it should become clear by now that Sancho’s functions go beyond those of a mere attendant. These extended roles can be divided into two categories I have called “intra-textual” and “meta-textual” functions: the former refer to the roles adopted by Robin and Sancho *as characters* in the story, while the latter focuses on their use as *tools* that serve to the construction of the plot. This distinction, however, does not imply an insurmountable breach between each set of

⁷ In this context, “villain” is used in the etymological meaning of “from a town.” In Spanish, just like in English, the term suffered a process of pejoration that added the moral commentary of “evil-doer” to a word that originally only designated the place where a person lived.

functions—on the contrary, they often intertwine and directly affect one another. Authors in general—Cervantes and Bob Kane in this particular case—construct their characters in the way they needed to unfold the plot the way they wanted. There is nothing new in this, but the fact is that Sancho and Robin, as it has already been established, are two uniquely innovative characters in their respective genres and times.

As far as intra-textual functions go, the most basic one shared by these two characters is, as discussed, that of the helper, the provider. Batman, unlike Don Quixote, does not need Robin to carry around his equipment and gadgets, which gives the sidekick a lot more of room to move freely. Batman usually employed Robin's aide in field investigations, while he remained at the Bat-cave—their headquarters under Wayne Manor. Putting a kid in such a risk may have not been the most sensible decision a grown up could have made, but it made sense in that context: it was easier for him, being a kid, to infiltrate the enemy strongholds, and if he was caught, he could have been dismissed as being just a kid poking around where he should be. For example, in "The Cat," one of the four individual stories included in *Batman #1* (Spring 1940), Robin goes undercover as a steward in a ship in order to investigate a possible robbery by a mysterious villain known only as "the Cat."⁸ While Sancho is completely dependent on Don Quixote's orders for most of the novel, he is granted some degree of freedom from time to time, such as when he is sent back from Sierra Morena to their hometown in Chapter XXV of the First Part, to deliver a letter from his master to Dulcinea del Toboso. Another role these two characters frequently adopted is that of the age-old trope of the "damsel in distress"—although, as it is plain to see, neither of them was a damsel. Although it has been established that superhero sidekicks generally "matched" the sex of their adult mentors, some superheroes took up sidekicks of the

⁸ In the end Robin is able to prevent the criminals from robbing the passengers of the ship. It turns out that the Cat was masquerading as an elderly woman all the time. This character would prove to be very popular and would return in successive issues. In time, she will become known as Catwoman, one of Batman's most recognizable characters from his ample gallery of villains.

opposite sex. This mainly applied to men, since the figure of the leading *superheroine* was far too uncommon at the time. The male-centric mentality of the USA in the mid-1940s was reflected even in the way female sidekicks were named. Some heroes like Bulletman (*Nickel Comics* #1, 1940) and Hawkman (*Flash Comics* #1, 1940) had female sidekicks of their same age to which they were married. But despite what logic may dictate, as Duncan & Smith point out, “the superheroine’s name ended in *-girl*” [Duncan & Smith, 2009: 228]: Hawkman was accompanied by Hawkgirl, while Bulletman was paired with Bulletgirl. With the advent of the female leading superheroine with characters like Wonder Woman (*All-Star Comics* #8, Dec. 1941), Phantom Lady (*Police Comics* #1, Aug. 1941) and Mary Marvel (*Captain Marvel Adventures*, Dec. 1942), among others, female characters began to be given a more considerable role and their names changed accordingly. Hawkgirl became Hawkwoman for some time, although her and Hawkman’s canonical story is extremely murky and plagued by a myriad of contradictory retcons—so much so that, eventually, Hawkgirl and Hawkwoman became to separate characters. The original Bulletgirl faded into oblivion along with Bulletman, but the concept of the character was revived by Grant Morrison in his “meta-series” *Seven Soldiers* (2005-2006). She is renamed as “Bulleter” and given superhuman strength and near invulnerability after she is coated with a metallic “smartskin” that also kills her husband. No matter the sex of the sidekick, it was a commonplace practice to create situations where the heroes could showcase their skill and fearlessness by rescuing them from the clutches of evil-doers. As early as in his second appearance in *Batman* #1 (Spring 1940), Robin is captured by the Joker, who is making his ground-breaking debut in this issue. Batman arrives in the nick of time, save his young ward and the two of them manage to overpower the Joker. Good triumphant over evil was the most common resolution to all the battles superheroes and sidekicks faced during the Golden Age, even if, in the end, villains escaped only to

return a few issues later. On the other hand, as it is customary in *Don Quixote of the Mancha*, things do not usually go as planned for the two protagonists. While stopping in an inn early in Cervantes's novel, in Chapter XVII of the First Part, Sancho is tossed up in the air on a blanket by a group of angry mob because Don Quixote refused them payment. The would-be knight tries to stop Sancho's punishment, but he himself is so beaten up that he only manages to wait until the people calm down and let his squire go.

The young age at which sidekicks started their adventures propitiates the rise of a father/son and mentor/pupil relation between them and the heroes they accompany. The superhero trains and tutors the young sidekick in the art of fighting while he teaches him the set of moral values that define their mission. Shortly after Dick Grayson is taken to the Bat-cave, Batman makes him swear an oath that unites them in a common crusade against evil: “-and swear that we two will fight together against crime and corruption and never to swerve from the path of righteousness!” [“Robin, the Boy Wonder,” *Detective Comics* #38, Apr. 1938]. In the next three panels immediately after the oath is sworn, the issue shows in an extremely condensed manner how Bruce Wayne trains Dick Grayson in “boxing” and “jiu jitsu,” and by the last panel of the page, Dick Grayson has already been transformed into Robin, the Boy Wonder. The fact that Sancho is an adult answers to Cervantes's parodical intention with *Don Quixote*, but this does not stop the old knight from lecturing his squire whenever he gets the chance. All throughout the novel Don Quixote tries to educate Sancho in the ways of the knights of yore; on how unfair is the world and how it is their duty to set it straight. Two whole chapters of the Second Part—XLII and XLIII—are fully devoted to the different pieces of advice that Don Quixote gives Sancho before the squire becomes governor of his island, the “insula Barataria.” The knowledge imparted by Don Quixote includes how a ruler should dress (“Tu vestido será calza entera, ropilla larga, herreruelo un poco más largo; greguescos, ni por pienso, que no

les están bien ni a los caballeros ni a los gobernadores” [*Don Quixote of the Mancha*, Part II, Chapter XLIII]), not to use the popular sayings Sancho is so fond of and even not to burp in public. Though the whole situation is a ploy schemed by two Dukes to play a trick on Sancho, and in spite of the terrible advice Don Quixote gives him, Sancho proves to be a good ruler through his common sense and the lack of the formal education that “corrupted” the Dukes and Don Quixote. In the end, and despite their essential differences, their time with their respective mentors proves to be a decisive step in the education of Sancho and Robin. The training that squires had to go through as they accompanied a knight-errant on adventures was aimed at preparing the young man to, eventually, take up the arms of the knight and become a hero on his own. Sancho, as previously mentioned, ends the novel imbued with Don Quixote’s idealism and he begins to see the world as place that needs to be changed for the better; Robin, for his part, is eventually able to step out Batman’s long shadow and forges a new persona for himself. He becomes Nightwing, one of the most trusted superheroes in the DC Universe, partially thanks to the moral values passed on by Batman, and also partially to his rejection of the isolationism and general distrust of others that characterize his mentor. This “graduation” usually takes place under two scenarios: the first, like in Robin’s case, when the sidekick is old enough to fly solo; the second, when the hero is killed in action and the sidekick is forced to become his replacement. In the case of Dick Grayson, he has had to take the mantle of the Bat, to date, at least twice—in both occasions, Bruce Wayne was temporarily incapacitated. This role of “inheritor” or “successor” will be further analyzed in the next chapters.

Meta-textual functions are more rooted in literary criticism and theory, as they deal with how characters are used by authors as “tools” to construct the desired mood within the narrative and to create certain expectations in the reader of how it will unfold. In the case

of these two sidekicks, the meta-textual functions are basically centered on establishing a contrast between them and the heroes they accompany—they are what literary criticism has come to call “foil” characters. According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the first attested use of the term “foil” in the English language dates back to the early 14th century, derived from the Latin word “folia,” and with the meaning of “thin sheet of metal.” The sense of “one who enhances another by contrast,” dating from the 1580s, was given by the common use of metallic sheets put behind precious gems to make them shine brighter. Through analogy with this material use, “foil” entered the literary language to define characters that, by constructing their own personality, establish a stark contrast with another one, mainly the protagonist. The foil does not need to be a sidekick—they do not even need to be on the same side as the protagonist, for that matter—and the contrast established between them can operate at several levels: morality, superpowers, goals, attire, relationships, etc. Many of the heroes and sidekicks mentioned at the beginning of last chapter base their relations in terms of contrast, and it is not uncommon to find the foil of a hero in the villains they face. Take, for example, Mufasa and Simba from Disney’s 1994 *The Lion King*. Their main enemy throughout the movie is Scar, brother of the first and uncle of the second, who is binary opposed to them even in the color of his fur—while father and son sport a golden fur and reddish mane, Scar’s fur is dark brown and his mane completely black. These color schemes are completely deliberate on Disney’s part: darker hues are usually associated with evil characters, while good characters usually wear shining, bright colors. Even a child—the target audience of the movie—will recognize who is the hero and who is the villain at first sight, solely based on the physical appearance of the characters.

In their roles as foils, Robin and Sancho present several facets that respond to different aspects of their characterization. Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are the first couple to

embody almost all of these facets at the same time, and as such they have become a sort of default referent with which to measure the interaction between a hero and their foil, especially if the foil is a sidekick. The first and most obvious aspect of the foil is created by the physical differences between the heroes and their respective sidekicks. Don Quixote is described throughout the novel as an elderly man by the standards of the time: “Frisaba la edad de nuestro hidalgo los cincuenta años.” [*Don Quixote of the Mancha*, Part I, Chapter I]. His fragile, extremely thin figure under the moonlight moves Sancho to give him the pseudonym of the “Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance” (“caballero de la triste figura” [*Don Quixote of the Mancha*, Part I, Chapter XIX]), emulating the style of pseudonyms adopted by the knights Don Quixote read about in so many romances. Even his attire and his weapons are a mockery of the proper equipment fit for a knight: armor and weapons moldy and rusty after decades forgotten, they are a family heirloom that belonged to Don Quixote’s great-grandfathers, and he even has to use his ingenuity to come up with a makeshift helmet to cover his face. And as for his steed, Rocinante, it is a horse as old and fragile as his master that can barely carry his own weight, let alone Don Quixote and his armor. Still, be as it may, in the end Don Quixote manages to dress vaguely similar to the knights whose steps he intends to follow, and that is good enough for him. Anyone who sees Don Quixote arriving, dressed like that and carrying around a shield, a sword and a lance will immediately recognize him as a knight, though the most logical follow up would be questioning his sanity. Sancho is placed by Cervantes on the spectrum, a polar opposite to Don Quixote. Sancho is a humble shepherd who dresses for the job he has, with raggedy and worn out clothes. In contrast to Don Quixote’s slenderness, Sancho is usually described as short and stocky, with a sizeable belly and not much care for his personal hygiene and manners. And much like Rocinante reflects the appearance of its master, Sancho rides a mule that reflects his. All these features produce a

very clear visual contrast between the two characters, so much so that the figure of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza has become an icon recognized worldwide. One of the most comedy acts of all time, Laurel and Hardy, capitalized in this difference of size and based their slapstick comedy around it. The contrast between these two characters does not limit itself solely to the physical realm: the way they are characterized psychologically and emotionally also contributes to the opposition between them. Don Quixote and Sancho represent two diametrically opposed views on life—Don Quixote embodies the idealization of a Golden Age long gone (or, to be more precise, never actually existed) and the constant rejection of the rotten values that rule the world he lives in; Sancho is a very basic man with a very basic education—he is virtually illiterate, only knowing how to scribble and read some words and make his signature—who gets most of his knowledge from popular aphorisms. In a few words, it is a textbook case of idealism against realism. Cervantes's goal is twofold: on the one hand, he is poking fun of the values represented by both Don Quixote and the decadence of his contemporaries, while at the same time reaching a balance between, as evidenced by the ending of the novel. Don Quixote recovers his senses as he is drawing his last breaths and apologizes to Sancho and everyone present for his irrational behavior, but Sancho has already been turned over by Don Quixote's code of knighthood, if at least partially. He may throw himself to another adventure on his own after Don Quixote passes away, but it is an undeniable fact that Sancho had seen the good intentions embedded in Don Quixote's actions.

The contraposition between Batman and Robin follows a similar pattern to that of Cervantes's heroes, both in terms of physical appearance and psychological profiles. It has already been established that the introduction of Robin in the world of Batman was a direct consequence of the increasing dissatisfaction parents were feeling towards the violent adventures of the superhero. The lighthearted Robin was created to bring some light into

Batman's world, making his adventures more palatable for parents and, at the same time, creating a figure with which kids could more easily identify. Even if Batman was a hero kids could look up to, Robin allowed them to imagine themselves inside the story, fighting alongside the Dark Knight himself. But to achieve this, Robin had to be more than a younger version than Batman, unlike many sidekicks who came after him, who limited themselves to recreate the theme of the grown up hero, such as Bucky and Captain America or Speedy and Green Arrow. Robin was conceived from the start as the exact opposite of Batman, as a way to both distinguish him from the hero and to further reinforce Batman's distinctive features. Batman disguises himself as giant bat to instill the purest fear in the hearts of his enemies. As explained in *Batman #1*, the inspiration from his disguise came one night, while pondering how he would approach his mission after so many years of training:

-Dad's estate left me wealthy. I am ready... but first I must have a disguise. Criminals are a superstitious cowardly lot, so my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts. I must become a creature of the night. Black, terrible... a... a...

As if in answer, a huge bat flies in the open window!

-A bat! It's an omen... I shall become a bat!

[“The Legend of the Batman—Who he is and how he came to be!” *Batman #1*, Spring 1940]

By disguising a bat, Bruce Wayne effectively becomes a creature of the night, if not the night itself. Batman is cold and calculated, he leaves no place for error, has a contingency plan for everything and builds an impenetrable wall between himself and the rest of the world—any positive emotion is a sign of weakness that will detract from his efficiency in

battle. In a retelling of the last days of Bruce's training published in 2012 in the context of DC Comics's "Zero Month,"⁹ Tony S. Daniel shows how Shihan Matsuda, the last of his masters, encouraged him to take on this attitude:

-This *tonglen* heart-practice can be very dangerous. You must see all the suffering of the world as black smoke, and you must take it in and absorb it. All the world's hatred, fear, rage... breathe it in. It is yours now. And breathe out white light. Rid yourself of your own love, compassion and joy. Give it to the world. It is honor. It is sacrifice. You must take in the darkness who are incapable of protecting themselves from it. But. If you are not ready, this will corrupt your soul and body.

-Why must I send away from myself all that is light?

-Light is not for you to have, Bruce-kun. It is for you to guard in others.

-Shouldn't I hold some within myself to share with others?

-No. You must be better than others. Intimacy is a weakness. It is mortal, and to be mortal is to die. Love will erode your discipline. It will blind you. Guard yourself. Let no one in. Distrust everything and everyone. Only then will you become a true warrior. ["The Final Lesson," *Detective Comics* #0, Nov. 2012]

Whereas Batman fully embraces this philosophy, Robin outwardly rejects it. First and foremost, even if the circumstances that surrounded the deaths of their respective parents

⁹ DC Comics underwent massive changes in its lineup in 2011. The company decided to cancel all its "DC Universe" titles—including some like *Superman*, *Action Comics*, *Batman* and *Detective Comics*, which had been running continuously for more than 70 years—after the *Flashpoint* miniseries had ended. DC Comics then proceeded to launch 52 new series, all of them starting with a brand new #1, though most of them were actually new volumes of recently-canceled series. This new status quo was branded as "The New 52" and the conclusion of *Flashpoint* brought about total and partial reboots to the continuity of all of DC Comics's characters. In October 2012, just after The New 52 had reach its first year of life, DC Comics decided to move the publication of all the #13 issues to November and dedicate the month in-between to "zero issues": #0s that are placed chronologically before their respective #1s and further expand on the retooled origins and backgrounds of the protagonists of the series. As it is customary in the industry, these issues have their cover date a few months in advance—in this case, November 2012.

are extremely similar, the fact is that Dick Grayson had the advantage of having Bruce Wayne mentoring him as he grew up. Alfred Pennyworth, the Wayne's loyal butler, became young Bruce's legal tutor after the death of his parents, and while it is undeniable that Alfred became an irreplaceable part of the back-bone that supports Batman, Bruce was a very difficult child to deal with. And, on top of everything, once he became old enough, he went away and spent years training with the best masters all around the globe—Alfred could not be sure if he was even alive. The experience of going through all of this all by himself made Bruce the man he is, but it also saved Dick from having to go through it himself. Bruce knew how to mold this young trapeze artist into something that could quench his thirst for justice, but without imposing on him such a deep sacrifice as he had to do years ago—in other words, Bruce gave up part of what makes him human so that Dick could retain his, just as Tony S. Daniel puts in the words of Shihan Matsuda. Robin's attire is a mix of the costume he used when he performed with the Flying Graysons and the color scheme of the American Robin. The result is a garish green, yellow and red costume that immediately contrast with Batman's black and grey uniform. The effect of Robin's presence could be felt immediately, even in Batman's appearance: colorists usually used the color blue to show movement in otherwise completely black objects, like Batman's cowl. Gradually, his uniform became completely blue, with black lines where his cape folded and moved. Batman began to appear more and more during daylight, and he even dared, sporadically, to smile **[Image 2]**. Such was the power of Robin's cheerfulness: a happy-go-lucky young boy who was constantly cracking jokes while taking down some of the most ruthless criminals Gotham City had to offer. This process of transformation from dark and brooding vigilante to lighthearted superhero reached its highest point in the 1960s TV adaptation of the character, starring Adam West as Batman and Burt Ward as Robin—a constant parade of puns, camp humor, illogical plots and onomatopoeic visual effects

that had little to nothing to do with the origins of the character. As time went by and after several successive revisions of the character, Batman went back to his dark roots, but Robin continued evolving and maturing into his own persona. He distanced himself from Batman and began leading the Teen Titans and, eventually, became abandoned the Robin persona and became Nightwing. The following chapters will be devoted to the development of the character after the Golden Age.

Last but not least, a different kind of meta-textual role can be seen in the figure of the sidekick. As with the function of the foil, this role arises from the interaction of the two characters that form the pair, but it involves the reader in a much more direct manner. The sidekick becomes a reader surrogate, a character within the narrative who takes onto themselves the task of filling the place that the reader would occupy were they there. In other words, readers naturally comes up with a series of questions, observations and remarks as they progress through the narrative, but literature is, for the most part, a one-way method of communication. No matter how much the reader wants it, the novel will never provide more information than what the writer originally included in it, nor will any question be answered unless characters inside the narrative ask it themselves—or, at most, not if the writer did not leave the necessary clues for the reader to infer the answer. Neither Batman nor Don Quixote would feel the need to verbalize the mental processes that lead them to act the way they do were it not for their sidekicks being there, needing an explanation. The exposition flows a lot more naturally if a character raises the question instead of having the hero explaining it without rhyme or reason, or an omniscient narrator gives it to the reader “pre-digested.” Otherwise, we—the reader—would have never been able to know why Don Quixote decides to charge against the windmills or why Batman decided that a certain character was the murderer and not another one. The figure of the reader surrogate has been thoroughly used in literature since Cervantes’s days, especially

in detective fiction. One of the most famous sidekicks of literature, Dr. John Watson, plays this role to the letter. Poor Dr. Watson looks like a fool whenever Sherlock Holmes is around and always needs an explanation for Holmes's course of action. Thankfully for us, Dr. Watson is always present and ready to ask Holmes to decipher his intricate logic to the reader.

This chapter has, hopefully, established the bases that link Sancho Panza with the origin of the superhero sidekick during the 1940s. Although Sancho is by no means the first sidekick ever, he is truly unique character that has marked a milestone in the development of this type of character, and by whom all subsequent sidekicks have been influenced in one way or another. The rise of the teenage sidekick in the superhero comic books spread like wildfire during the decade of the 1940s and early 1950s, but today, such type of character is seldom found in the genre. And if sidekicks are found, it is obvious that there has been a change in the perception of these characters since those early days. The following chapters will be devoted to finding an answer to why sidekicks left the spotlight when the Golden Age was coming to an end, and how these characters survive nowadays.

CHAPTER VI:
UNDER SCRUTINY

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New Historicism, as I understand it, does not posit historical processes as unalterable and inexorable, but it does tend to discover limits or constraints upon individual intervention. Actions that appear to be single are disclosed as multiple; the apparently isolated power of the individual genius turns out to be bound up with collective, social energy: a gesture of dissent may be an element in a larger legitimization process, while an attempt to stabilize the order of things may turn out to subvert it. [Greenblatt 1990: 164-165]

By now, it should be no mystery to anyone that I firmly believe that one of the best methods to understand the mindset of a time is to analyze popular culture. Unlike what has been traditionally considered “high art” (classic music, drama, poetry, etc.), popular cultural expressions show an unfiltered, raw *zeitgeist*—they are the only way the masses of “common” people have to express themselves artistically and, as such, the best display of what was going through their mind at the time. Comic books, as anyone may imagine, are not an exception. This chapter will be focused on a period of clash between the comic book industry and American society, the first true showing of the subversion Greenblatt talks about in this previous quote. This is the time were we can first see a comic book creator face direct and open criticism and how his rebuttal changed the face of the industry forever.

The years following World War II brought about radical changes to the world of comic books, both from the inside and from the outside. There was a confluence of reasons behind the instability of the medium at the time: they took the form of sales figures, institutional criticism, character evolution and, in general, a massive shift in the opinion towards comic books in American society. Very few new sidekicks were introduced during this period of comic book history and analyzing the multiple causes that led to the twilight of the Golden Age of American comic books is a necessity if we ever hope to explain the evolution and change in the figure of the sidekick, as well as its current state.

Mainstream comic books have always been, and always will be, an industry driven by profit: the better a title sells, the better chances it has of not being cancelled. Superheroes had been the most important source of revenue for publishers since 1938—*Captain Marvel Adventures* managed to sell the outstanding sum of 14 million copies of an individual issue in 1944,¹⁰ for example [Duncan & Smith, 2009: 36]. However, the popularity of the superhero genre began to dwindle after the Allied victory in 1945 and by the end of the decade its sales had been already surpassed by those of those of comedy, romance, westerns, crime and horror comic books—comic books had entered what Duncan & Smith call the “Era of Diversification” [Duncan & Smith, 2009: 36]. The massive exposure superheroes had had during WWII had left the public tired of their adventures and, at the same time, these other genres offered fresher and newer stories to read—a combination that logically tipped the scales in favor of the novelty. Although there is no clear-cut date or event that marks the end of the Golden Age of American comic books, it is generally agreed that by the early 1950s a new cycle was beginning. New trends, new characters and

¹⁰ The comic book industry nowadays is not as massive as it may appear to be at first glance. To put these numbers in perspective, according to Newsarama, the 20 top selling comic books of January 2012 gave a grand total of 1,154,110 combined issues sold. This includes the most popular series of the moment, like *Batman*, *Justice League*, *X-Men* and *Avengers*, which currently have a substantial presence in movies, television and video games.

new readers for a new era. One particular publisher rose and became one of the leading companies for this new wave of comic books. It was EC Comics and his “New Direction.” This publisher rose to popularity for its series of comic books based around gruesome, graphic violence, crime and horror, including *Tales from the Crypt* (Oct./Nov. 1950 - Feb./Mar. 1955), *The Haunt of Fear* (May/Jun. 1950 - Nov./Dec. 1954), *The Vault of Horror* (Apr./May 1950 - Dec./Jan. 1955), *Weird Science* (May/Jun. 1950 – Nov./Dec. 1953), *Weird Fantasy* (May/Jun. 1950 – Nov./Dec. 1953) and *Crime SuspenStories* (Oct./Nov. 1950 - Feb./Mar. 1955), to name a few. None of these series featured a superhero, but proved to be extremely popular among older readers (teenagers and young adults) thanks to their masterfully drawn and well-written stories **[Image 3]**, even if they more often than not revolved around murder, monsters and horror. American society had been taking notice of these kinds of comic books for some years now, and EC’s irruption into the market only helped to make problems brew faster. For some time already, juvenile delinquency had been rising steadily among the youth of America, and its detractors did not waste much time linking it to the widespread consumption of violent comic books. The population began to openly oppose the comic books of EC and the likes, organizing public pyres to burn them, and journalists like made sure Paul Coates that evils of comic books were exposed for everyone to see. The following years saw the public opinion engaged in a crusade against comic books with a very clear message: they are harmful to children. In 1954, the Senate organized a “Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency in the United States.” Several figures linked to the industry were called to the stand, including William Gaines, owner and director of EC Comics, who adamantly defended his publications. His voluntary involvement in the Senate hearings turn Gaines into the visible face of the comic book defense, spearheading a counter-campaign against Wertham’s and the Senate’s accusations **[Image 4]**. It was the first time in history that a comic book

creator not only took pride in his work, but also risked losing all of his potential customers, even his job, in order to defend his trade. There was an obvious clash between the ideal of artistic integrity and the ever-present dominant discourse trying to force and enforce what is taken as normatively acceptable.

Even though EC Comic's series are now considered classic, cornerstone items of comic book history, the resolution of the Committee at that time was not a surprise: comic books had to be regulated, children had to be protected and Gaines and his followers be put in place. The direct result of these hearings was the creation of the Comics Code Authority, a self-regulated censorship body that filtered any material that could be considered harmful to children, very similar to its contemporary analogue in the movie industry, the Hays Code. The CCA's extremely strict code of conduct prohibited the mention of the undead and monstrous creatures¹¹, explicit violence, the use and mention of drugs, the use of profanity and "bad language" and sexual content (especially if it referred to homosexuality). The introduction of the CCA was a devastating blow to Gaines's EC Comics, which continued to publish without its approval for a time. Newsstands and retailers plainly refused to carry and sell comic books that did not have the CCA sign on their cover, and returned the issues to the publisher. Without being able to sell his publications, Gaines finally conceded defeat, toned down the stories featured in his magazines and, eventually, managed to convince the CCA to approve their distribution. By 1955, Gaines was exhausted of constantly battling against Judge Charles Murphy—first administrator of the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers and principal enforcer of the Code. The last straw came in the form of a short story titled "Judgment Day" that was

¹¹ In what can only be considered an irony generated by the system itself, American comic book writer Marv Wolfman was initially banned in 1970 from publishing a story because the lack of capitalization in the lettering meant that his surname—included in the story as its in-fiction source—could not be distinguished from the word "wolfman," a werewolf. After DC Comics appealed the decision arguing that Wolfman was, in fact, his surname, the story was given a pass and published in *House of Secrets* #83 (1970).

to be published in *Incredible Science Fiction* #33 (Feb. 1956), though the story itself had originally been published in *Weird Fantasy* #18 (Apr. 1953). The story revolved around a space traveler who visits a planet that is being considered as a potential new member for the Galactic Republic. The planet, Cybrinia, is inhabited by robots of two colors—blue and yellow—which are kept apart from one another by a series of Apartheid-like rules. At the end of the story, the astronaut concludes that this particular society is not yet ready to enter the alliance, since bigotry and racism are still deeply rooted in it. The twist ending is what prompted Murphy's utter denial to publish the story:

The ship roared up into the night sky. It roared into the infinite void of space... Into the endless cosmic vacuum! It roared towards glorious Earth... And inside the ship, the man removed his space helmet and shook his head, and the instrument lights made the beads of perspiration on his dark skin twinkle like distant stars... ["Judgment Day", *Weird Fantasy* #18, Apr. 1953] **[Image 5]**

The astronaut was black and, suddenly, the whole story acquired a new, terrifying meaning. Throughout the whole story the reader would have felt safe and sound, knowing they were above the conflicts that plagued that robot society. But in the very last panel, they are forced to confront the ugly truth: there was no need to go to faraway planets to witness racism in its purest, cruelest form. American society was as guilty of it as the yellow robots. "Judgment Day" was a posed a clear, direct and provocative challenge to the status quo Murphy was trying to preserve. The CCA did not make any mention of race or skin color as a bannable offense, but "Judgment Day" heralded some very dangerous ideas. A choleric Gaines called Murphy and demanded that his story was allowed to be published under the CCA, or else he would make Murphy's decision public. Murphy finally gave Gaines what he wanted and "Judgment Day." Ironically, it would also be the

last story an exhausted Gaines ever published in the series of horror and suspense comic books that had made him popular in the first place. EC Comics continued to publish another iconic magazine that vastly differed in tone from all those spooky, bloody stories: MAD Magazine (Oct./Nov. 1952), which continues to satirize American society and culture to this day.

Though the main threat against the clean and safe American morality had been finally vanquished, the CCA continued to be used by the industry until very recently, although both Marvel Comics and DC Comics had taken defiant stances during the Silver Age. Marvel Comics tried to publish *The Amazing Spider-Man* #96 (May 1971), which contained a story titled “The Last Fatal Trip.” The story had been commissioned by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare as a way to show children and teenagers the potentially fatal consequences of drug use, but the CCA did not approve of it. Marvel Comics decided to publish the issue anyway, forcing the CCA to change its rules to allow publishers to include drugs in their storylines, as long as its use was depicted as harmful. The same year, DC Comics published the two-part story “Snowbirds Don’t Fly” in *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #85-#86 (Sept.-Oct. 1971). This arc is famous for featuring one of the first stories about explicit, frontal drug use published with the approval of the CCA. And, to further aggravate the issue, the drug user is not a random citizen who has made a bad choice for his life or an amoral villain who enjoys the rush, but Green Arrow’s very own sidekick, Roy Harper, better known as Speedy. **[Image 6]**

There was still another open front against comic books in the late 1940s and early 1950s, especially keen on attacking the superhero genre. Unlike the decline of popularity of this genre and the subsequent backlash against violent comic books, this third enemy of comic books had a name and surname: Dr. Frederic Wertham, a distinguished and respectable German-American psychiatrist. Wertham had been campaigning against comic book for

some years when he published in 1954 one of the most pernicious books ever to grace American shelves, *The Seduction of the Innocent: The Influence of Comic Books on Today's Youth*. Apart from indulging in an ample description on why Superman is a fascist and Wonder Woman a sexual deviant (since she frequently uses her Lasso of Truth to tie up criminals, and in turn is depowered when she is tied up), among many other points of criticism with varying degrees of justification, Wertham made sure to uncover the supposed truth behind the relationship between Batman and his sidekick Robin.

In the Batman type of comic book such a relationship is depicted to children before they can even read. Batman and Robin, the "dynamic duo," also known as the "daring duo," go into action in their special uniforms. They constantly rescue each other from violent attacks by an unending number of enemies. The feeling is conveyed that we men must stick together because there are so many villainous creatures who have to be exterminated. They lurk not only under every bed but also behind every star in the sky. Either Batman or his young boy friend or both are captured, threatened with every imaginable weapon, almost blown to bits, almost crushed to death, almost annihilated. Sometimes Batman ends up in bed injured and young Robin is shown sitting next to him. At home they lead an idyllic life. They are Bruce Wayne and "Dick" Gray-son. Bruce Wayne is described as a "socialite" and the official relationship is that Dick is Bruce's ward. They live in sumptuous quarters, with beautiful flowers in large vases, and have a butler, Alfred. Batman is sometimes shown in a dressing gown. As they sit by the fireplace the young boy sometimes worries about his partner: "Something's wrong with Bruce. He hasn't been himself these past few days." It is like a wish dream of two homosexuals living together. Sometimes they are shown on a couch, Bruce reclining and Dick sitting next to him, jacket off, collar open, and his hand on his friend's arm. Like the girls in other stories, Robin is sometimes held captive by the villains and Batman has to give in or "Robin gets killed."

Robin is a handsome ephebic boy, usually shown in his uniform with bare legs. He is buoyant with energy and devoted to nothing on earth or in interplanetary space as much as to Bruce

Wayne. He often stands with his legs spread, the genital region discreetly evident. [Wertham, 1954]

Wertham's accusation spread like wildfire. Although it was never the intention of Bob Kane, Bill Finger nor that of any of the artists that contributed in the formative years of the character, Wertham's interpretation of Batman as a homosexual idealization was partially justified. The images and dialogues were there and anyone with even the slightest intention of doing harm could twist them to support their claims. Later in his life, Dr. Wertham reconsidered his view on comic books, mainly of fanzines, which he considered a good exercise in creative writing. But be as it may, the poisonous darts he threw in *The Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) had reached their target and their effects were to be felt for many decades to come.

The combined efforts of Dr. Wertham and the CCA had left teenage sidekicks in a very delicate position. Their once-trustworthy mentors could now be seen as sexual predators. DC Comics knew the risk they were taking if they did not do something to combat Wertham's accusation of homosexuality, so they decided to put some distance between Batman and Robin and introduce new characters that could balance out the possible homosexual overtones. The Dynamic Duo continued their adventures together, but now they had the help of Kathy Kane, first introduced in *Detective Comics* #233 (Jul. 1956): a wealthy Gotham socialite who, inspired by Batman, creates the superhero persona of Batwoman. He is a clear and forced romantic interest for the hero, and Robin gets his own pairing when Bette Kane, Kathy's niece, is introduced as Bat-Girl in *Batman* #139 (Apr. 1961) [Image 7]. The issue had been settled for the time being, though these two characters would not last for very long in the Batman-related titles—Batwoman would be erased from continuity in the conclusion of the limited series *Crisis in the Infinite Earths*,

while Bette would eventually evolve into her own persona unrelated to Batman, Flamebird, and the Batgirl moniker would be used by Barbara Gordon, the best-known incarnation of the character.

Of course, not every single sidekick was in a position to easily “escape” from scrutiny with the introduction of a love interest that drew away the attention from the issues at hand, so other methods to unlink them to their mentors had to be found. In the thick of the Silver Age, three sidekicks joined forces to stop the evil Mister Twister in *The Brave and the Bold* #54 (Jul. 1964): Robin, Aqualad and Kid Flash, sidekicks to Batman, Aquaman and the Flash, respectively. Wonder Girl (Donna Troy, Wonder Woman’s sidekick and younger sister)¹² joined the team in *The Brave and the Bold* #60 (Jul. 1965) and with her, the Teen Titans were officially formed. The team proved to be extremely popular and shortly afterwards they were given their own title in Feb. 1966. In *Teen Titans* #19, Speedy (Roy Harper, Green Arrow’s sidekick) became the fifth stable member of the team. The Teen Titans provided a place where sidekicks could stop being sidekicks for a while and, instead, focusing on solving problems by themselves. The series was used as a venue to showcase teenage characters in a “safe” environment, such as Beast Boy (Gar Logan, from the Doom Patrol), Hawk and Dove (brothers and avatars of War and Peace) or Bumblebee (Karen Beecher, one of the first African-American superheroes). It is worth noticing that many of these characters were not sidekicks, but actual, proper superheroes who solely depended on themselves. The appearance of teenage superheroes owes a great deal to Marvel Comics’ approach to the genre during the Silver Age. Stan Lee had been working in Marvel Comics for years, but he had grown tired of rehashing the same type of superhero stories time and time again. He decided to follow his literary sensibilities and went on to create some of the most iconic Marvel characters in existence: the Fantastic Four (known

¹² Donna Troy’s story is full of contradictory retcons and reboots. For the sake of simplicity, this chapter will reference the original incarnation of the character from 1965.

as “comic books’ first family,” *The Fantastic Four* #1, Nov. 1961), the Mighty Thor (*Journey into Mystery* #83, Aug. 1962) and the Incredible Hulk (*The Incredible Hulk* #1, May 1962). In 1962, alongside artist Steve Ditko, Lee pitched the idea of a leading teenage superhero, but Marvel Comics was not as sure of the potential of the character as his creators. They were given the chance to put their story in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (Aug. 1962) and the rest is history: dorky, geeky high-school student Peter Parker is on a field trip when, suddenly, a radioactive spider bites him, granting him the reflexes and proportional strength of an arachnid. Peter employs his genius-level intellect into creating two web-shooters to move around, swinging from building to building, and comes up with a bright red and blue suit to combat crime in New York City—Spider-Man is born, proving that age is not a requirement to become a superhero. The character is an instant hit with the public, especially with teenagers who see themselves reflected in Peter: he has the same problems the average American teenager has. He is not popular in school and often bullied by the jocks; he has troubles finding a girlfriend and has to cope with the death of his uncle and surrogate father Ben Parker, of which he is partially responsible. Lee and Ditko created a new brand of superhero, a flawed character that struggled with the responsibility inherently attached to the power bestowed upon them. Stan Lee would repeat this formula, this time with Jack Kirby, when he creates the X-Men (*The X-Men* #1, Sept. 1963), a group of young mutants who seek refuge from the bigotry and prejudices of society in Charles Xavier’s School for Gifted Youngsters. Cyclops (Scott Summers), Iceman (Bobby Drake), The Angel (Warren Worthington III), The Beast (Hank McCoy) and Wonder Girl (Jean Grey) are outcasts, rejected and feared by common people due to their strange abilities, but who never the less put their powers to use to protect humankind. It is no wonder, then, that Stan Lee based the character of wheelchair-bound telepath Charles Xavier on Reverend Martin Luther King, and used the struggle of mutant kind to

symbolize that of black people and the fight for civil rights in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s.

Marvel's approach revolutionized the way teenage characters could be created. No longer did they need to be relegated to a secondary role, subdued to the figure of a grown up superhero. But as good a solution that may have been, it could not be applied to already-existing characters like Robin, Speedy or Kid Flash. As hinted in previous chapters, sidekicks did not remain sidekicks for ever—they grew up, they matured, they “graduated” from “sidekickhood.” The vast majority of them either created new superhero personas when they became independent, or succeeded their mentors when they died or retired. Donna Troy, after taking up the moniker of Troia, becomes Wonder Woman for some time during the *One Year Later* event (2006), but has since gone back to her own superhero identity. Bucky Barnes, sidekick to Captain America, assumed the latter's role in 2008, when Steve Rogers was thought dead after the conclusion of *Civil War* (Jul. 2006-Jan. 2007). Wally West, originally Kid Flash, became the Flash when Barry Allen (the first modern version of the character) died during the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (Apr. 1985-Mar. 1986). But it is Robin who once again proves to be a textbook example of comic book sidekick, both on the path of emancipation and the path of succession at different stages of his crime-fighting career. Splitting his hours between the Teen Titans and attending college left Dick Grayson, now a young adult, very little time to patrol Gotham City with Batman. The tension between him and his mentor grew steadily issue by issue, until in *Tales of the Teen Titans* #84 (Jul. 1984), he retired the identity of Robin and debuted that of Nightwing. He went on to have a successful career flying solo and became one of the most respected members of the superhero community in the DC Universe. Throughout his fictional history, Nightwing has been “promoted” to Batman at least twice so far. The first time Dick Grayson had to take the mantle of the Bat was during the “Prodigal” arc running

through most of the Batman-related titles in 1994 and 1995 (*Batman* #512-513, *Shadow of the Bat* #32-34, *Detective Comics* #679-701 and *Robin* #11-13, Nov. 1994-January 1995), when he became Batman's temporary replacement while Bruce Wayne traveled the world on a spiritual journey after recovering from a broken back. The second time Dick had to assume the role of Batman was after his apparent death at the hands of Darkseid in *Final Crisis* #6 (Feb. 2009). Unbeknown to everyone, Batman was not truly dead, but in the meantime Dick assumed his identity to keep the world from knowing about his demise. The Robin identity was picked up by Jason Todd, a petty thief Batman rescues from the streets and trains as his new sidekick, shortly after Dick Grayson moved on. In *Batman* #426, Todd discovers some clues that may point at his mother being alive. He embarks on a journey to meet all the women who can potentially be her, but his rash nature took him directly into a trap laid by the Joker. In one of the most infamous moves in comic book history, DC Comics allowed readers to vote by phone whether Jason Todd should be left alive or killed by the Joker. In the end, the audience sentenced Todd (who had never been fully accepted as the new Robin to begin with) and he became the first Robin to fall in combat. Jason Todd's death was a huge blow to Batman's confidence, since, after all, it had been him who put a teenager in danger in the first place. He became even more brooding and violent than before, almost killing some of the enemies he faced. High-school student Timothy Drake deduced that Nightwing was the former Robin, that the ex-sidekick was Dick Grayson (because a very young Tim had been witness of the death of the Graysons in Haly's Circus) and through that, that Bruce Wayne was Batman and his behavior answered to the death of Jason Todd. Tim Drake made Batman realize what we readers have known from the start: Batman needs a Robin who balances his darker side, the same way Robin needs a Batman for mentoring and guidance. Batman reluctantly accepts Tim as his new sidekick, and he becomes the third Robin. Currently, Tim Drake

has also stepped out of Batman's shadow and now operates as Red Robin, leading his own incarnation of the Teen Titans. The mantle of Robin is now worn by Damian Wayne (*Batman and Robin* #1, 2010), Bruce's son from Talia Al Ghul, daughter of Ra's Al Ghul, one of his greatest enemies. Robin's legacy is in capable hands, for the time being.

CHAPTER VII:
EVOLVE OR DIE

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Throughout this study I have been using the word “evolution” time and time again in different contexts related to the figure of the sidekick. As a blank term to describe “change”, the word is fine, but I have to admit now that “evolution” may not have been the best term to use upon closer inspection, as it inherently carries the connotation of “melioration”: evolution is triggered by the necessity to adapt to a new reality, to make oneself better. But, as it should be clear by now, adaptation does not necessarily carry melioration. The case made by Wertham and the American Senate against William Gaines, EC Comics and violent comic books in general forced the industry to evolve into something new, but it is debatable whether this change was for better or worse.

Sancho’s “evolution” in *Don Quixote of the Mancha* is one of these dubious cases I am talking about. He starts the novel as the voice of reason that counteracts Don Quixote’s madness, but as time goes by, Sancho is “perverted” by Don Quixote, while his master is “cured” by Sancho. Or, at least, this is what it may seem at first. It is undoubtedly true that Sancho begins to undergo the same process that had Don Quixote take up arms in the first place just by being so much time with him. The barriers that separated madness from sanity begin to crumble as the novel’s ending draws near until, as we have seen, Sancho finds himself begging Don Quixote to not give up his knighthood. His main motivation for putting up with Don Quixote eccentricities from the start was to, eventually, be given an isle for himself as the reward—a reward that leaves a bad taste in Sancho’s mouth after he

finally gets it. But even so, the ten days that Sancho ruled over the Barataria island and all the mockery he was subjected to throughout that episode can only be explained by accepting that Sancho is now beginning to see the world as his master does. Two adventures show this shift of perspectives among the two main characters: the adventure at the cave of Montesinos in chapter and the fight against the giant Malambruno on Clavileño's back in Chapters XL and XLI. We can see how Don Quixote is doubtful of those adventures having actually taken place, at least not in the way they are presented to him. Sancho, on the other hand, is fully convinced on the veracity of these adventures, and that Malambruno's defeat will both secure his position as governor of Barataria and serve to liberate Dulcinea from her enchantment. Can Sancho's change be considered an "evolution" or a "devolution"? Or is it Don Quixote partially regaining his sense what constitutes the evolution throughout the second part of Cervantes's novel? In a sense, all these possibilities are true at the same time. Ten years separate the first and the second part of *Don Quixote of the Mancha*. Ten years during which the novel became famous all around Europe. Ten years during which Cervantes's contemporaries praised and criticized his work. It is futile to expect the exact same characters, with the exact same flaws and virtues, that had started the journey ten years prior. As it posited by the golden rule of New Historicism, *Don Quixote* had impacted the world around it and the world had impacted the world inside *Don Quixote*. The characters inside the novel are aware of Cervantes's novelization of their adventures as the first part of *Don Quixote*, and even know that there was an authorized sequel by Avellaneda that is inconsistent with what they see are their reality. This "quixotic" version of Sancho was turned into the narrator of Will Eisner's introductory adaptation of Cervantes's novel, titled *The Last Knight* (2000). An elderly Sancho recalls the times he spent with Don Quixote, whom he believes to be a true knight.

Eisner, honoring his status as quintessential figure in comic books, perfectly captures the very essence of Sancho's relation with a fading Don Quixote in his deathbed:

- Sancho... I **never** was Don Quixote... Alas, I die Alonzo the old fool.

- No, no, no... Master, you are what you believed! ... You gave us a dream! You enriched us by your valor! ... **We saw real chivalry.**

- Ah, Sancho, my nest of dreams is now empty... [Eisner 2000: 30]

In the last panel of this page, Eisner introduces a mix of *deus ex machina* that emulates the meta-textual relation of Cervantes with his novel:

- No! The birds may have flown but the dream remains!!

- Who are you_

- I'm **Miguel de Cervantes**, the author. I have written a book of your adventures... It will be read far and wide... Your deeds will show people the value of dreams **and dreamers!** And it will be known forever that a certain Alonzo lived a dream.

- Ahhh, Cervantes believes in me!

- And from this dream was born a great **knight**... **He** to live it... and **me** to write about it. Therefore, **I dub thee Don Quixote de la Mancha** forever!! A knight who truly believes in helping the helpless and long after knighthood passed into history he became the last knight.

The ideals embodied by Don Quixote and, in part, by Sancho have reached our days and are still as valid today as they were back then. This inescapable interdependency between text and context is what makes literature “work” and “cross barriers” [Greenblatt 2012], what makes Don Quixote’s adventures resonate with audiences as different as those that have read the novel these past 400 years.

The figure of the sidekick has undergone a similar “d/evolution” propitiated by the very hostile environment in which it had to grow, and though it has had its ups and downs, it has never fully disappeared from the superhero genre. It changed and turned something more important than a mere helper throughout the Silver Age, but at the same time it has been tainted by the poignant criticism it was subject to during the 1950s. In this chapter we will briefly explore what has been happening to sidekicks and teenage heroes from the beginning of the Bronze Age of Comic Books to our days. One defining characteristic of the industry from the mid-1970s onwards is that mainstream comic books became “serious”: both the message and the medium itself became important. Long gone were the days of black and white morality when heroes and villains stood in a binary opposition. Modern comic books reflect the social issues of their time, such as the use of drugs, racial segregation, sexual identity, gender roles and political ideology. In this context we have landmark works like the aforementioned “Snowbirds Don’t Fly” (*Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #85-#86, Sept.-Oct. 1971), Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God* (1978) Alan’s Moore *V for Vendetta* (1982-1989) and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1980-1991). It is also necessary to underline the importance that self-aware, meta-textual reading from within comic books have acquired in this period: the medium has become as important as the message it conveys. In the superhero genre, some of the best examples of this self-scrutiny are Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns* (Feb.-Jun. 1986), in which the author explores a world that forces a fifty years old Bruce Wayne to come out from retirement, and Alan Moore’s

Watchmen (Sept. 1986-Oct. 1987), a visceral vision of the essence of the superhero in a fictionalized 1980s United States. As one can imagine, these new ways of understanding comic books not only affected superheroes, but also their sidekicks. The figure of the sidekick had become an undoubtedly evolved since its inception, but it was never able to completely shake off the stigma associated with it that had been building up around it since the early days of the 1940s to Wertham's homophobic crusade in the 1950s.

From the late 1970s onwards, very few sidekicks have been created, and most of them have a much higher degree of freedom than the original batch of sidekicks. Many have their own titles and regularly team-up with other heroes, some of them banding together under a common stable team. Apart from the already mentioned Jason Todd, Tim Drake and Damian Wayne, there have been two female Robins so far. The first one is Carrie Kelly, who makes a non-canonical appearance in Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (Feb.-Jun. 1986). The second one is Stephanie Brown, daughter of the Cluemaster, who first operated as Spoiler before becoming Robin. She is seemingly killed at the conclusion of *War Games* (Oct. 2004 – Jan. 2005), but is later found to be alive in *Robin* #172 (May 2008). She later took over the mantle of Batgirl in *Batgirl* #1 (2009), and, to date, has not appeared in the rebooted DC New Universe. In 1994, DC Comics introduced Bart Allen as Impulse (*The Flash* #92, Jun. 1994), who later becomes the second Kid Flash (*Teen Titans* #4, Dec. 2003) and, for a brief time, the Flash (*Infinite Crisis* #, Apr. 2005). Two years later, in 1996, a new Wonder Girl, Cassandra Sandsmark, debuted in *Wonder Woman* #105 (Jan. 1996), and in 1999, Cassandra Cain becomes the third Batgirl in *Legends of the Dark Knight* #120 (Aug. 1999). Mia Dearden, a character introduced in *Green Arrow* #3 (May 2001), becomes the second Speedy in *Green Arrow* #44 (Jan. 2005) and one of the first HIV-positive heroes in history. Marvel Comics, as expected, introduced almost none teenage sidekicks in this period—at most, some characters like Iron Man and Wolverine

became partners with rookie heroes like War Machine (Jim Rhodes, an African-American adult; *Iron Man* #118, Jan. 1979) and Jubilee (Jubilation Lee, a Chinese-American teenager; *Uncanny X-Men* #244, May 1989), respectively.

While the two most prominent mainstream comic book publishers, DC Comics and Marvel Comics, tended to play it safe with their depiction of the relation between heroes and their sidekicks, lesser and independent publishers seem to have fully embraced the inherent contradictions and criticism of the figure of the sidekick, mostly through various degrees of parody. The Tick (*The Tick* #1, Jun. 1988) was conceived by Ben Edlund as a satirical take on the Superman-like superhero archetype. The couple is the most direct inheritor of the dichotomies established by Don Quixote and Sancho Panza since Batman and Robin. The Tick is an irreverent hero whose past is a mystery before arriving at The City, his base of operations, though it is very clear from the first moment that his is totally insane. Arthur, his sidekick, is a shy accountant-turned-superhero who acts as the voice of the reason in the pair and who first appeared in *The Tick* #4 (Apr. 1989). Even their physical appearance is diametrically opposed: the Tick is a massive blue hulk with superhuman strength, while Arthur is a weak, fat, near-sighted, middle-aged man who dresses in a white, winged moth suit—though he is usually confused with an oversized bunny. Their dynamic is very much like that of Don Quixote and Sancho, even more than that of Batman and Robin due to the parodical context in which the Tick's adventures take place.

However, not every parody is as affectionate and harmless as Arthur's, though. Some authors have taken their interpretation of the figure of the sidekick to much darker levels. The pedophilia and homosexuality associated with Batman and Robin in the 1950s are some of the more common themes exploited in these stories. In *Bratpack* (Aug. 1990-May 1991), Rick Veitch explores these tropes through the point of view of a group of teenagers who are recruited by an ersatz analogue of the Justice League: the homosexual Midnight

Mink (Batman), the fascist Judge Jury (Superman), the female supremacist Moon Mistress (Wonder Woman) and the drug addict King Rad (Green Arrow). The story contrasts the initial excitement and naiveté of these teenagers with their cynic and corrupted attitude by the end of the novel, after they have been abused—physically and psychologically—by their supposed mentors. The world of superheroes portrayed by Veitch is completely devoid of any of the usual redeeming features of mainstream comic books, and instead is filled with drugs, rape, murder and abortion. Scottish writer Garth Ennis takes a similar approach in several issues of his superhero parody *The Boys* (Oct. 2006-Oct.2012). In issue #3, he introduces Starlight (Annie January), a member of the Young Americans, a Teen Titan-like team of Catholic teenage superheroes. She is recruited by The Seven, another Justice League analogue, as a replacement of the Lamplighter, but she is forced to perform oral on the Homelander—the leader of the Seven—, A-Train and Black Noir. She is verbally abused by the whole team and her costume is redesigned to show a larger cleavage to make her figure more sexually appealing. This first arc also deals with the confrontation of the titular Boys—a government-sanctioned group tasked with keeping the superheroes in check—against Teenage Kix, another group of teenage heroes who constantly engage in sexual debauchery and drug abuse. The following arc, “Get Some” (*The Boys* #07-10, Jun.-Sept 2010) pits the team against Tek-Knight—a Batman like vigilante—as they try to uncover the murder of a gay man. The Tek-Knight is a deeply conflicted closeted homosexual who tries to resist his lust for his sidekick, Swingwing, who in the end turns out to be the real killer.

The common denominator in most of these negative interpretations appears to be rooted in the seemingly inherent pedophilia of the superhero/sidekick relation. In his original accusations, Dr. Wertham did not have as much problem with Batman and Robin being a man and a kid as with them being two *males*. The changes in the perception of sexuality

and age of consent have undoubtedly alter the standard of what can be considered as a healthy and acceptable relationship between two people. While it is true that still today there is a deep hatred towards homosexuality in many parts of the world, even in countries that spearhead the defense of Human Rights (such as the United States or the members of the European Union), it is also true that the public opinion on it is by no means as negative as it used to be in the 1950s. The vast majority of Western countries have been depenalizing homosexuality from the late 1960s onwards and was removed from the DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) in 1973. Pedophilia, on the other hand, is today regarded as one of the worst sexual crimes, especially when it is committed by adults trusted by the children, such as their parents, teachers or, in this case, superhero mentors. The attraction towards young males has been present in Western society since antiquity—Wertham actually uses the term “hephebic” to describe Robin, a word related to the common practice of sexual intercourse with adolescents and young men in Ancient Greece. But with the advent of children’s rights embedded in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and subsequent legislation on the matter, public views swayed towards the protection of childhood as a vital period in the development of the person that had to be protected from any possible harmful environment. Unlike homosexuality, pedophilia is still classified as a paraphilia and a mental disorder in the DSM. The much-publicized cases of pedophilia among the clergy that came into light during the late 1990s and early 2000s have only served to fuel the rallies against sexual abuse of children around the world. In many countries, such as the United States, an adult having sexual relations with a minor constitutes statutory rape, even if the minor consents to it. In today’s society, attacking a comic book character because he or she is homosexual would be as equally frowned upon as criticizing another for being Jewish or black. This does not mean, of course, that homosexual characters have become fully accepted by everyone: in 2005’s 52

#7, Kate Kane is introduced as the new Batwoman. Conservative media was in an uproar when it transpired that Kane was a lesbian, seeing it as a corruptive influence in a product mainly aimed at young readers.

These are just a few examples of how both positive and perverted views on the figure the sidekick co-exist nowadays. There is no doubt that sidekicks have had their defenders and detractors in the comic book industry, but their mark on its history is undeniable, and their relevance today is as important as it was when the first few characters began to appear.

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

By now, I hope my study has shed some light on the nature and development of the sidekick in comic books and how much it owes to characters like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. In attempting to establish the bases of this relation, I had to engage in a sort of literary archeology, trying to follow back the chain that ties the superhero genre with old and remote epic poems. From this analysis, a few main ideas can be extracted. First of all, the history and development of comic books is much more complex than what it may initially seem. There is no proper “birth” of comic books, but rather a slow process of coordinated evolution from the plastic arts and literature. The introduction of the first superhero, Superman, in *Action Comics* #1 (Jun. 1938) was the catalyst that propelled the industry to then-unimaginable levels of popularity. Secondly, the fact that superheroes are not as original as they seem. The superhero is just another link in the long chain of heroes that started when literature was first recorded. What makes them so unique is a series of traits that had not been seen together before, with possibly the sole exception of Don Quixote in his own context. Thirdly, the realization that sidekicks have been present in literature for as long as literature has been literature. Not only that, but they have also consistently taken up roles of vital importance in the development of the narrative in which they appear, putting themselves at the same level of the heroes they accompany, sometimes even above them. The teenage sidekick of superhero comic books is direct descendant and a modernization of the squire that accompanied the knight-errant in medieval and early Renaissance romances. Fourth, the relationship between Don Quixote

and Sancho Panza is based on a series of physical and psychology binary oppositions, as well as certain literary roles that the author assigns to them. These features have become tropes in literature and directly contribute to the foundations of the superhero/sidekick team. Fifth, the symbiotic relation of the comic book industry with the *mores* of the audience that consumes its products. Without readers there is no literature and without literature there are no readers: the comic book industry has always been at odds with itself to try and retain its reader. It has needed to adapt to the demands of an ever-changing society and this has had immediate consequences in the type of comic books it produced. The sidekick has come into scrutiny several times throughout the 20th century, and though it has mostly managed to escape condemnation, it has been forced to slowly fade away in favor of more acceptable types of characters. Today, the sidekick is equally criticized as it is honored by authors and, contrary to what may seem logical, these opposing views are not mutually exclusive. Most of the charges against sidekicks can be found to be true in certain circumstances: it is true that superheroes often put kids and teenagers in extremely dangerous situations, and that there are homosexual undertones, whether intentional or not, that can be found if one is looking for them. At the same time, it is also true that sidekicks have been one of the pillars upon which the superhero genre has been built and that they have contributed massively to its popularity. The journey of maturation that sidekicks undergo parallels that of the readers that grow up reading their adventures, who see themselves reflected in the characters. The introduction of Robin in 1940 ushered a new era for comic books and created a type of character that would prove extremely profitable in the future. Sidekicks and teenage heroes will undoubtedly continue to evolve and change hand-in-hand with the audiences that read them.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX: IMAGES

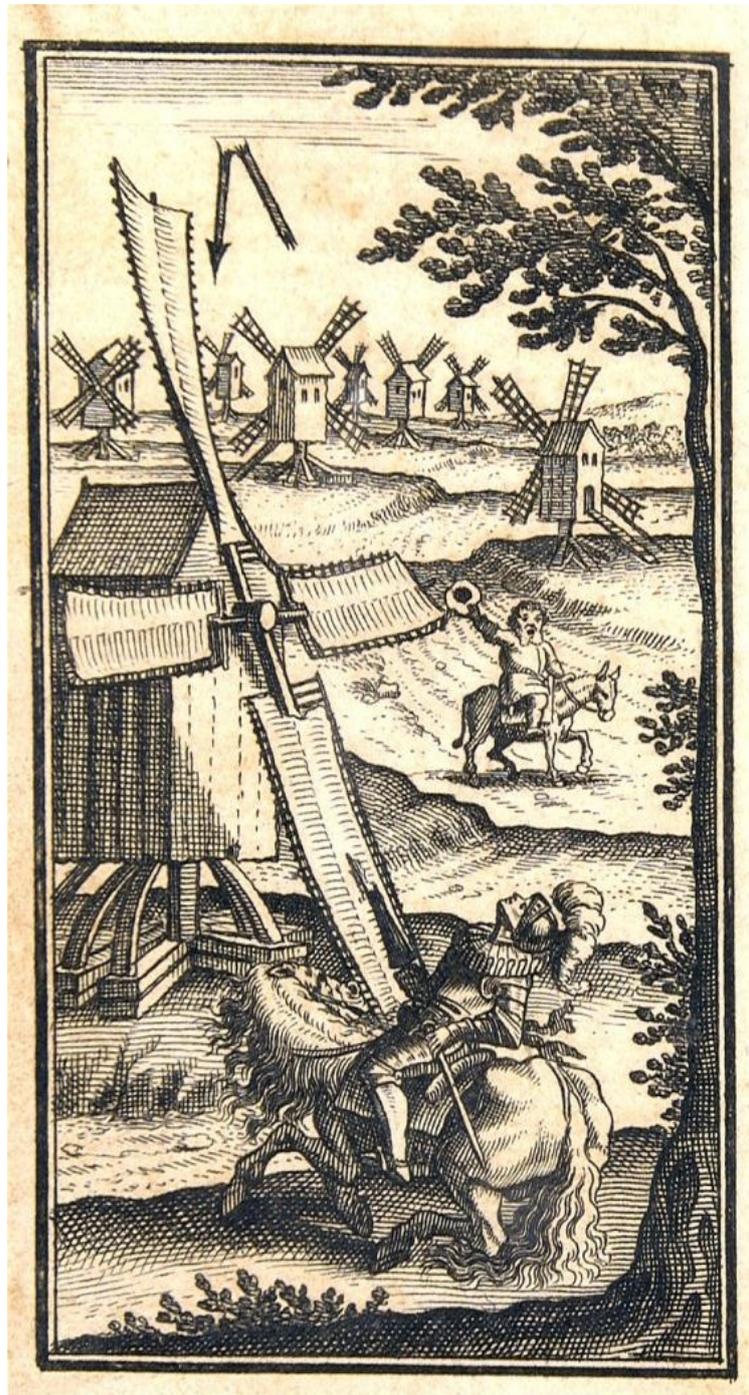


Image 1: In one of the most iconic images of the novel, Don Quixote fights against a windmill, while Sancho advises him against it in the background. Anonymous engraving from *Don Kichote de la Mantscha*, Frankfurt 1648.

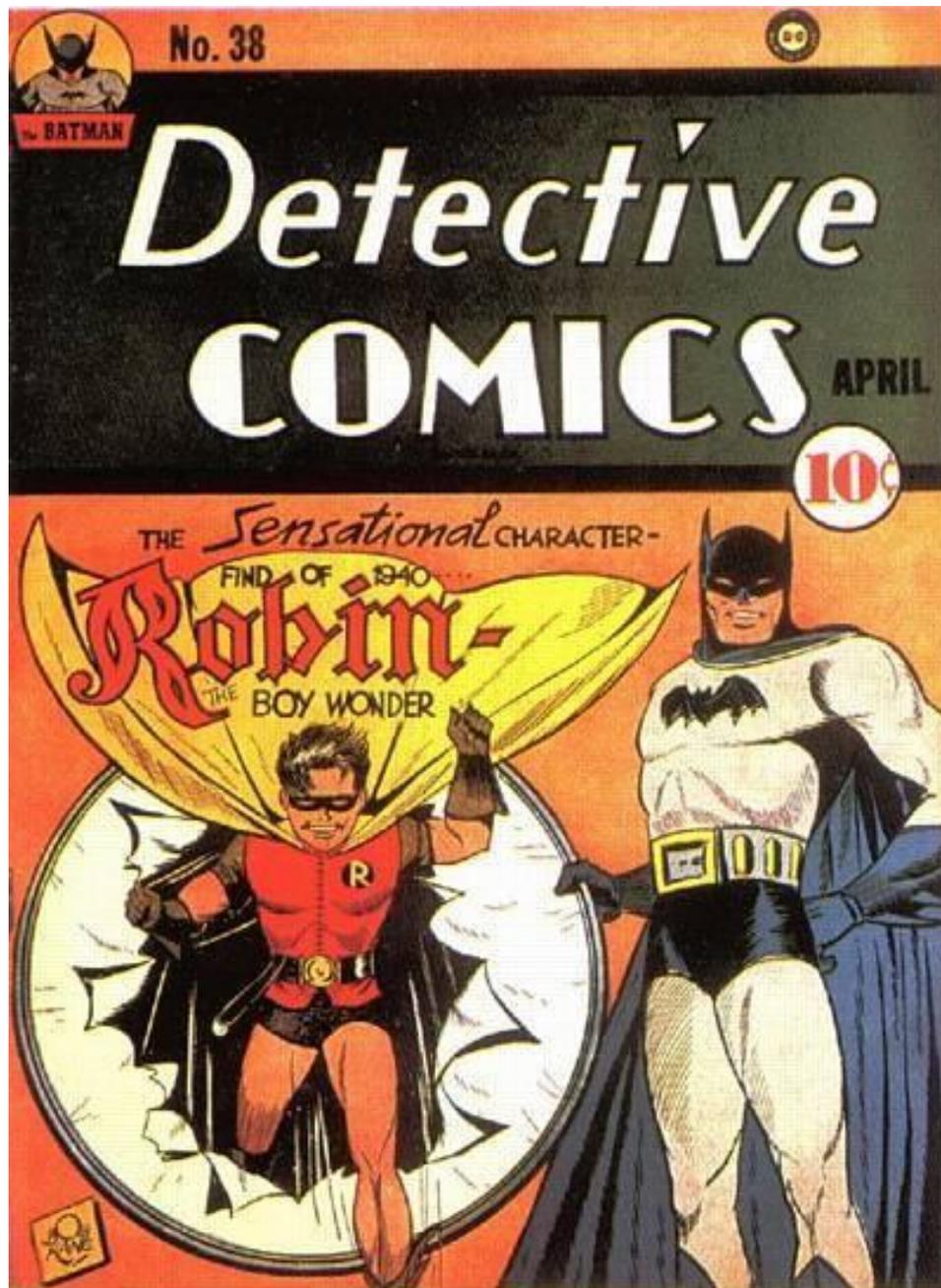


Image 2: Cover to *Detective Comics* #38 (April, 1940), issue in which Robin I (Dick Grayson) made his debut. Notice the bright colors of Batman's suit and his unusual smile as his young sidekick literally breaks through the page.

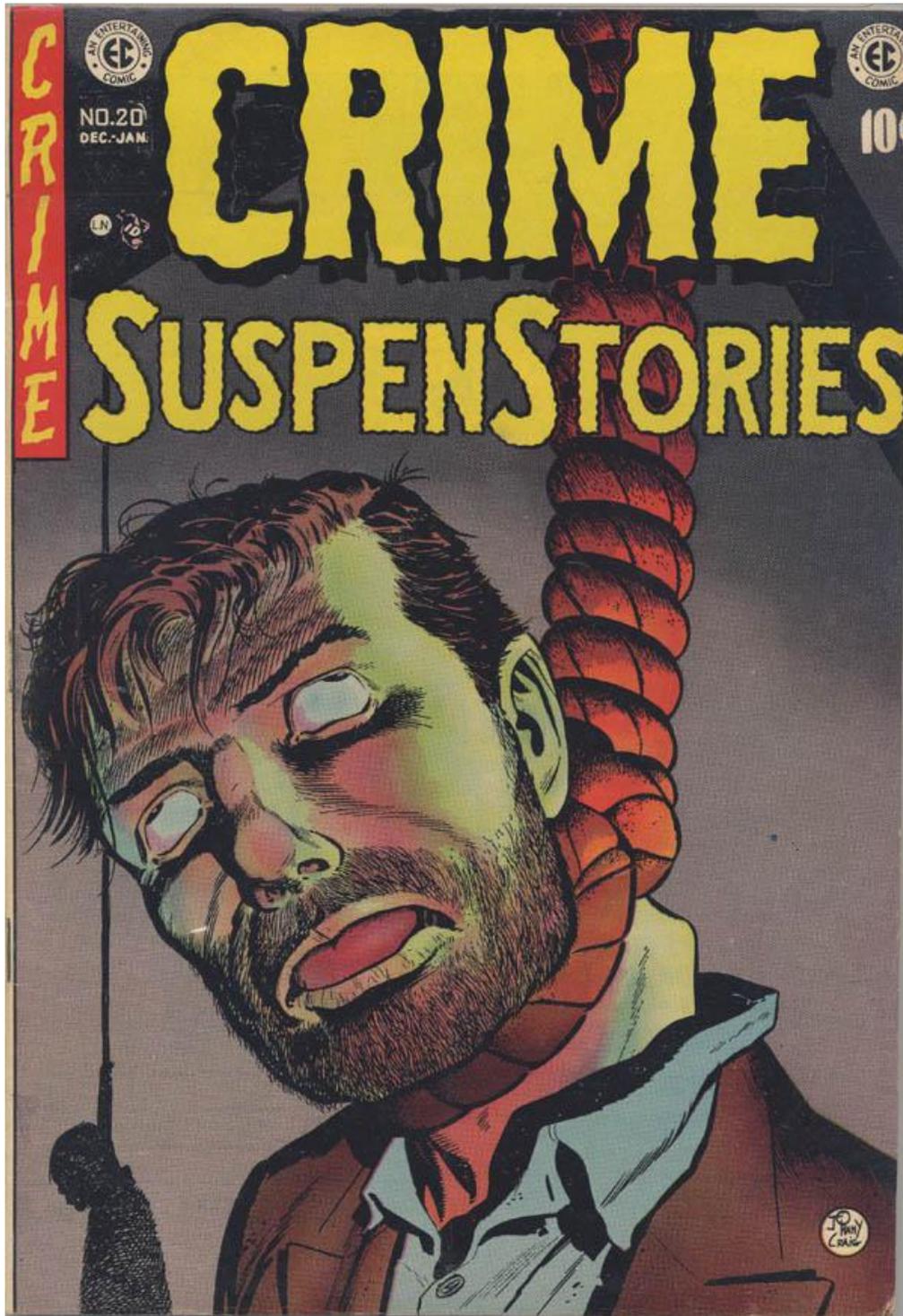


Image 3: Despite the extremely frontal and graphic nature of the violence presented in EC Comics's horror series, their artistic quality cannot be put into question. Above, the cover of *Crime Suspense Stories* #20 (Dec.-Jan. 1953).

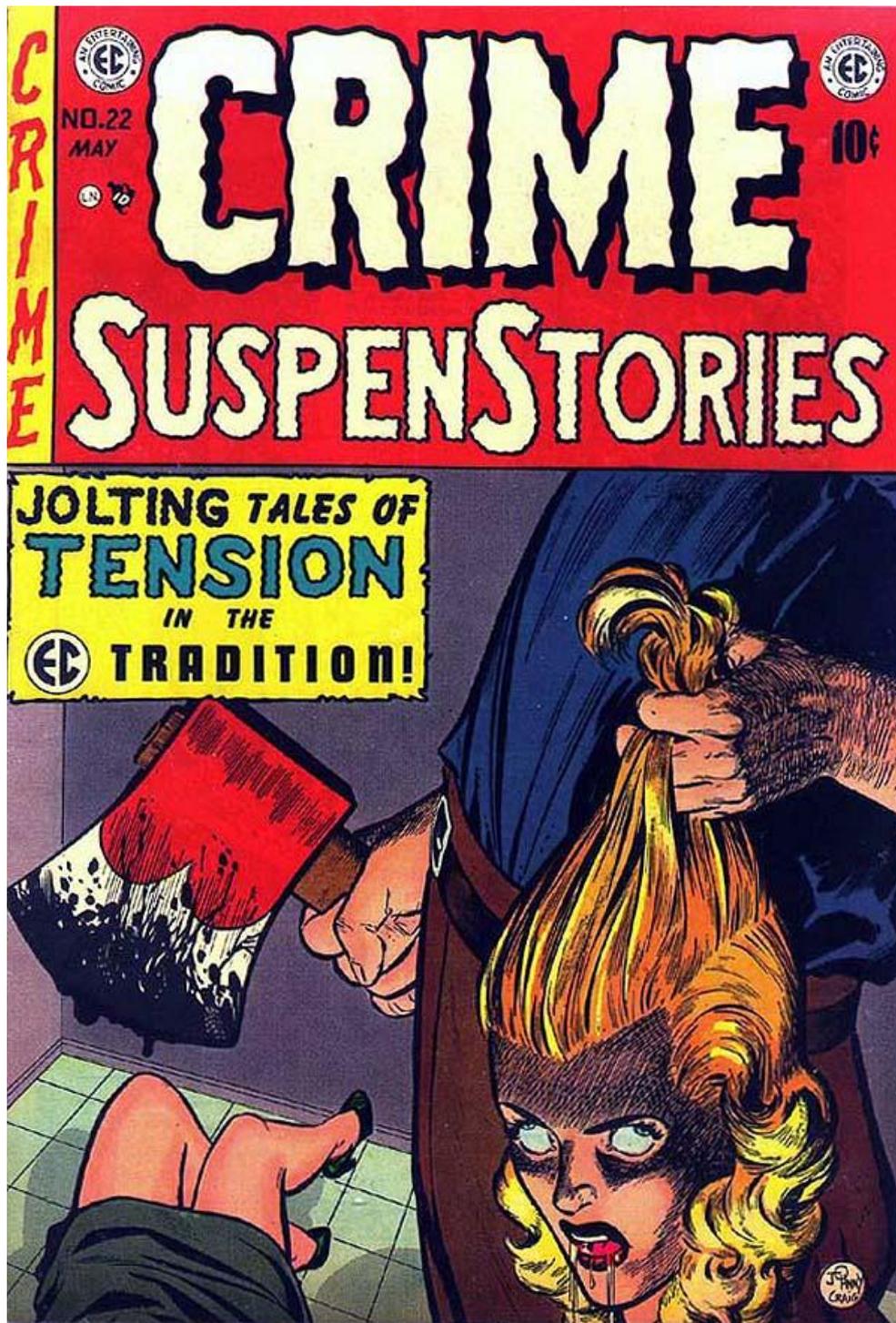


Image 4: The infamous cover of *Crime SuspenStories* #22 (May 1954) that caused an uproar during the Senate hearings. When asked if he considered it to be of bad taste, William Gaines replied that it was not, since it showed no blood dripping from the axe or the head.



Image 5: Last page of "Judgment Day", *Weird Fantasy* #18 (Apr. 1953), with the controversial last panel depicting a black astronaut.



Image 6: The famous cover Green Lantern/Green Arrow #83 (Aug. 1973), depicting Speedy (Roy Harper) using heroin and the heroes reaction to the shocking discovery.

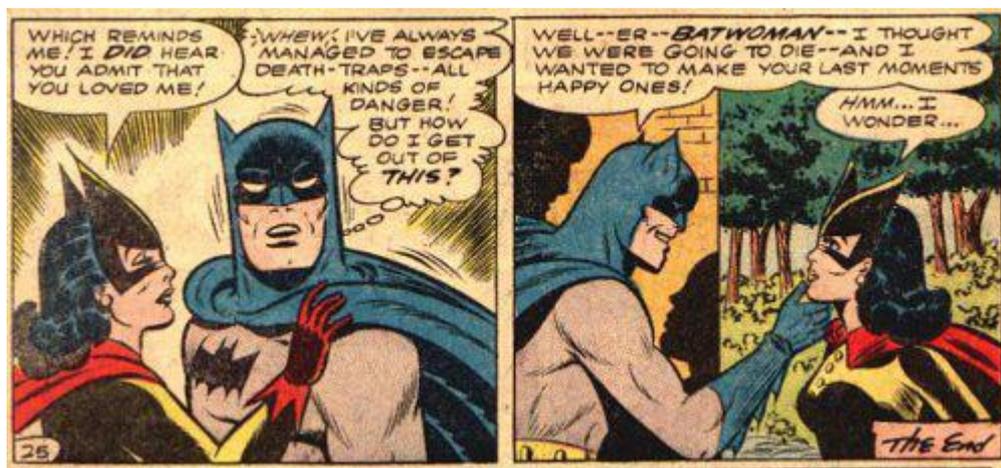


Image 7: With the introduction of Batwoman in *Detective Comics* #223 (Jul. 1956) as a measure to soften the accusations of homosexuality in Batman's series, the character was ushered into a campy, cheese period that had little to do with his origins as a dark vigilante.

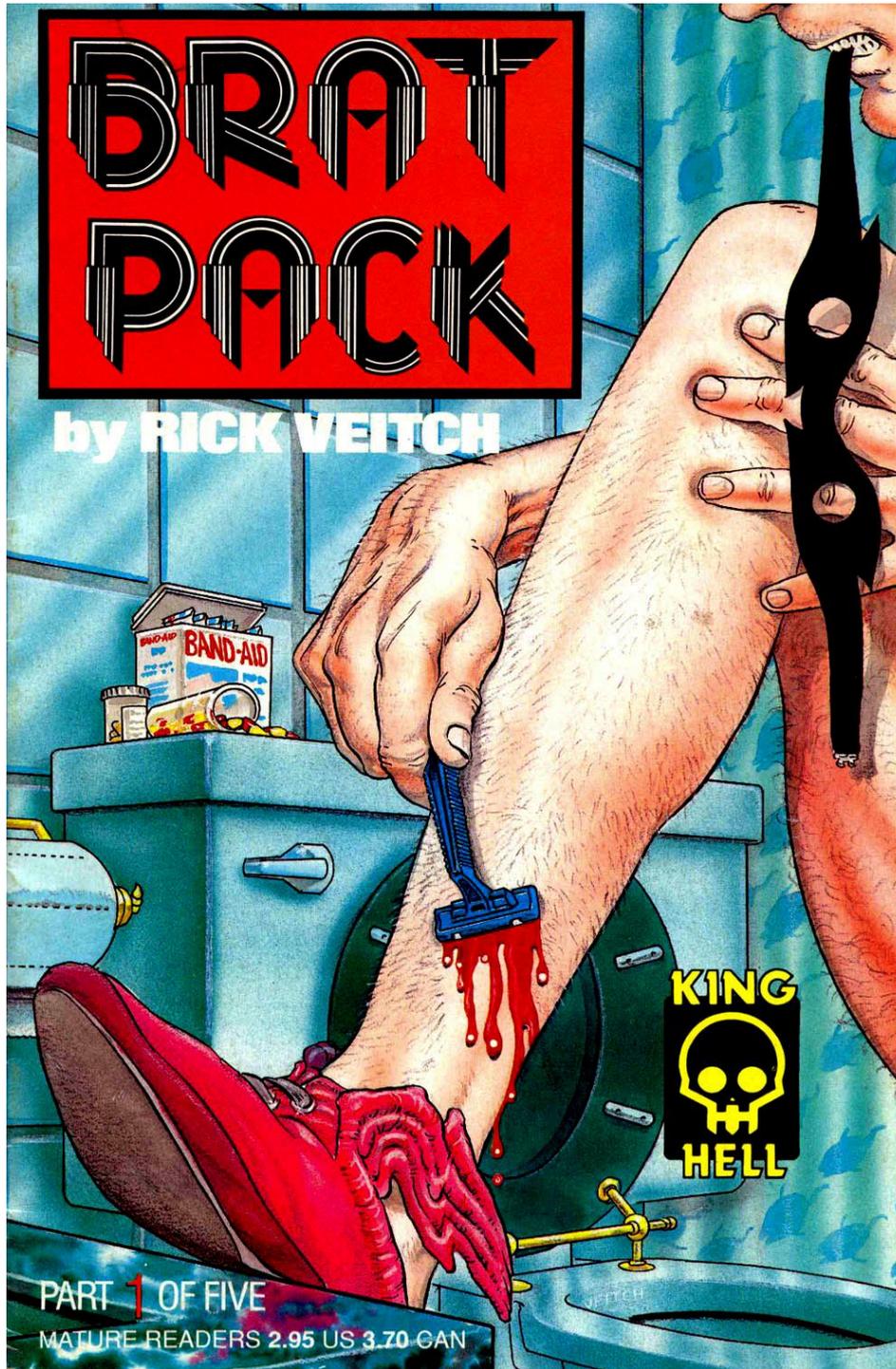


Image 8: Rick Veitch's *Bratpack* (1990) explores the most cruel and perverse aspect of the superhero/sidekick relation in a world deeply submerged in violence, drug addiction and sexual abuses.

APPENDIX: CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

DC Comics

Aquaman (Orin/Arthur Curry): Created by Mort Weisinger and Paul Norris (*More Fun Comics* #73, Sep. 1941). A half-human/half-Atlantean, Aquaman has the power to command sea creatures by telepathy, as well as underwater breathing, superhuman strength and enhanced endurance. Aquaman is a character torn between his role as king of Atlantis and superhero in the surface world, though he is often dismissed as a “useless” superhero by fans because of his water-dependent powers.

Aqualad (Garth): Created by Robert Bernstein and Ramona Fradon (*Adventure Comics* #269, Feb.1960). Garth’s powers as **Aquaman**’s sidekick differ very little from those of his mentor. Aqualad was a founding member of the original Teen Titans and later took up the codename of Tempest. He was killed during the *Blackest Night* event in 2009-2010.

Batman (Bruce Wayne): Created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger (*Detective Comics* #27, May 1939). World’s greatest detective, master martial artist and expert tactician, young Bruce Wayne vows to dedicate his life to fighting crime after his parents are brutally murdered by a mugger. He uses his fortune to train himself and build an arsenal of gadgets and vehicles to patrol the streets of Gotham City as the Batman.

Batgirl I (Bette Kane): Created by Bill Finger and Sheldon Moldoff (*Batman* #139, Apr. 1961). Much like her aunt **Kathy Kane** was for Batman, Bette was created as a romantic

interest for Robin. She became the first Bat-Girl inspired by her aunt and later moved on to her own superhero identity, Flamebird. The modernized and revamped version of the character is now featured alongside her cousin **Batwoman II (Kate Kane)** in the hero's monthly series.

- **Batgirl II (Barbara Gordon)**: Created by Gardner Fox and Carmine Infantino (*Detective Comics* #359, Jan. 1967). The second Batgirl is the daughter of Gotham City Police Commissioner James Gordon, Barbara Gordon. A skilled acrobat and fighter with eidetic memory, Barbara is inspired by **Batman** and creates the Batgirl persona to help him in his crusade against crime. In Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* (Mar. 1988), she is shot and crippled by the Joker. She then created the Oracle persona after her recovery, assuming a more behind-the-scenes role as information broker and tactician. After DC Comics's 2011 relaunch, she has regained full mobility and has gone back to operating as **Batgirl**.

Batwoman I (Kathy Kane): Created by Edmond Hamilton and Sheldon Moldoff (*Detective Comics* #233, Jul. 1956). Batwoman was initially introduced as a romantic interest for **Batman** to combat the accusations of homosexuality put forward by Dr. Frederic Wertham. Kathy Kane is a wealthy heiress who becomes a costumed vigilante inspired by **Batman**. She was killed in "The Vengeance Vow!" *Detective Comics* #485 (Sep. 1979), but later revamped by Grant Morrison in *Batman* #678 (Aug. 2008).

- **Batwoman II (Kate Kane)**: Created by Greg Rucka, Geoff Johns, Grant Morrison, Mark Waid and Ken Lashley (*52* #7, Jun. 2006). A reinterpretation of the original character, Kate Kane is a young lesbian Gotham socialite of Jewish ascendancy who takes up the mantle of **Batwoman** to combat crime in

Gotham City during the events of 52. She is also the former lover of Renée Montoya, an ex-Gotham police officer currently operating as the faceless vigilante The Question.

Bulletman (James Barr) (Fawcett Comics): Created by Bill Parker and Jon Smalle (*Nickel Comics* #1, May 1940). Ballistics officer James Barr creates a helmet that grants him flying and invulnerability from bullets and a chemical concoction that enhances his strength and mental capacities. He fights crime as Bulletman, and soon enough, the Nazi menace in Europe during WWII.

Bulletgirl (Susan Kent) (Fawcett Comics): Created by Bill Parker and Jon Smalle (*Master Comics* #13, April 1941). **James Barr's** girlfriend, Susan Kent fights crime under the Bulletgirl moniker. A bullet-shaped helmet created by her boyfriend grants her the same abilities he has.

Bulleter (Alix Harrower): Created by Grant Morrison and Yanick Paquette (*Seven Soldiers: Bulleter* #1, Nov. 2005). Alix's boyfriend tried to satiate his superhero aspirations using a metallic "smartskin." The product completely covered his whole body, including his mouth and nostrils, and asphyxiated him to death. Alix was rushed to the hospital, where the doctors were able to save her life through the space where her wedding ring was on her finger. The smartskin was forever bonded to her, granting her near invulnerability and enhanced strength.

The Flash I (Jay Garrick): Created by Gardner Fox and Harry Lampert (*Flash Comics* #1, Jan. 1940). The original Flash, Jay Garrick, acquired his superspeed powers from a lab accident. His costume is rather simple by superhero standards, consisting only of a blue pair of jeans, a red long-sleeved T-shirt and a metal helmet with two golden wings at the sides, imitating that of Mercury from Greek mythology.

- **The Flash II (Barry Allen):** Created by Carmine Infantino, Robert Kanigher and John Broome (*Showcase #4*, Oct. 1956). Often cited as the very first superhero of the Silver Age, the second **Flash**, Barry Allen, was conceived as a then-modern revamp of the original Flash for new audiences. His origin and powers are similar to **Jay Garrick**'s—a lab accident and super speed—but his abilities extend beyond running extremely fast. He can alter his molecular frequency to phase through solid objects, generate whirlwinds by moving at high speeds and travel in time with the help of the Cosmic Treadmill. Barry Allen famously died to save the multiverse in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (1985). 23 years later, he was brought back to life in Grant Morrison's *Final Crisis* (2008).
- **The Flash III (Wally West):** Created by Carmine Infantino and John Broome (*The Flash #110*, Dec. 1959). The original **Kid Flash** was “upgraded” to full-fledged **Flash** when his mentor died during the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (1985).
- **The Flash IV (Bart Allen):** Created by Mark Waid and Mike Wieringo (*The Flash #92*, June 1994). Originally Impulse and later the second **Kid Flash**, Bart Allen took over the mantle of the Flash when **Wally West** moved to an alternate, safer reality with his family after the conclusion of *Infinite Crisis* (2005-2006).

Green Arrow I (Oliver Queen): Created by Mort Weisinger and George Papp (*More Fun Comics #73*, Sep. 1941). Oliver Queen is a rich heir who is left stranded on a faraway island. In order to survive, he begins practicing with a makeshift set of bow and arrows. His natural abilities are greatly enhanced by his forced training and upon his return to Star City, he decides to start a crime-fighting career as Green Arrow. The character is known for his concern with social issues and outspoken left-wing ideas, which have put him at odds with his friend Hal Jordan (the first modern Green Lantern) several times.

- **Green Arrow II (Connor Hawke)**: Created by Kelley Puckett and Jim Aparo (*Green Arrow* #0, 1994). Hawke is the long-lost son of **Green Arrow I (Oliver Queen)** and possesses a similar proficiency with the bow and arrow to his father's. He began operating as **Green Arrow** when **Queen** was killed off in 1995 and continued to use the moniker after his return.

Kid Flash I (Wally West): Created by Carmine Infantino and John Broome (*The Flash* #110, Dec. 1959). Wally West acquired his super speed powers in a similar accident to that which had turned his uncle **Barry Allen** into the Flash some time before. As **Kid Flash**, Wally has a similar array of powers to those of his mentor, although initially not as developed as his. Wally was one of the three founding members of the original Teen Titans, along with **Aqualad (Garth)** and **Robin I (Dick Grayson)**.

- **Kid Flash II (Bart Allen)**: Created by Mark Waid and Mike Wieringo (*The Flash* #92, June 1994). Bart Allen is the future nephew of **Barry Allen**, the first modern Flash, who was sent back in time to learn how to control his super speed, which was causing him to age rapidly. He first took the name Impulse, but later on became the second Kid Flash and a founding member of **Robin III (Tim Drake)**'s incarnation of the Teen Titans, and often acted as **Wally West**'s sidekick.

Robin I (Dick Grayson): Natural-born acrobat, trained in various forms of martial arts and criminal investigation by **Batman (Bruce Wayne)**. Founding member of the Teen Titans, later became Nightwing. He briefly took the mantle of the Bat during the time **Batman** was presumed dead (though he was actually trapped in the time stream) in *Batman and Robin* #1 (Aug. 2009).

- **Robin II (Jason Todd)**: Created by Gerry Conway and Don Newton (*Batman* #375, Mar. 1983). A street child taken under **Bruce Wayne**'s wing, Jason Todd began his career as the second Robin after **Dick Grayson** moved on to become Nightwing. His tenure was short, as he was infamously killed by the Joker in *Batman* #428 (Dec. 1928). He has since been revived during *Infinite Crisis* (2005-2006) and has currently adopted the antihero persona of Red Hood.
- **Robin III (Tim Drake)**: Created by Marv Wolfman and Pat Broderick (*Batman* #436, Aug. 1989). Tim was introduced as the third Robin after Jason Todd's death. He convinced **Batman (Bruce Wayne)** that Batman need a Robin after witnessing how cruel and emotionally detached he had become. Tim Drake is by far the most intellectual of all the Robins and what he may lack in terms of dexterity and fighting prowess (especially when compared to **Robin I (Dick Grayson)** and **Robin V (Damian Wayne)**), he makes up for it in detective skills and leadership.
- **Robin IV (Carrie Kelly)**: Created by Frank Miller (*The Dark Knight Returns* #1, Feb. 1986). The fourth **Robin** made a non-canonical appearance in Frank Miller's classic *The Dark Knight Returns*. Carrie Kelly is a young girl who, upon witnessing Batman's return, decides to dedicate her life to fighting crime in a dystopian Gotham City. The character is exclusive to the graphic novel and has not crossed over to the mainstream DC Universe.
- **Robin V (Stephanie Brown)**: Created by Chuck Dixon and Tom Lyle (*Detective Comics* #647, Aug. 1992). Daughter of the villain known as Cluemaster, Stephanie Brown began her career as masked vigilante Spoiler before being recruited by **Batman** as the fifth **Robin**. Her tenure was short, as she was apparently killed during the *War Games* event (*Batman* #633, Dec. 2004).

- **Robin VI (Damian Wayne)**: Created by Grant Morrison and Tony S. Daniel (*Batman* #655, Sep. 2006). The genetically-engineered son of **Batman (Bruce Wayne)** and Talia Al Ghul, Damian has been trained from the womb to be the most lethal and cunning assassin in history, with hopes of one day inheriting both the legacy of his father as well as that of his grandfather's, criminal mastermind Ra's Al Ghul. He became the sixth and current **Robin** during the year **Bruce Wayne** was presumed dead (*Batman and Robin* #1, Aug. 2009) and acted as the reluctant sidekick of **Dick Grayson**, who was then filling in the role of his mentor.

Speedy I (Roy Harper): Created by Mort Weisinger and Paul Norris (*More Fun Comics* #73, Nov. 1941). The original **Speedy** was an orphan raised by a Native American chieftain, Brave Bow, who trained him in the art of the bow and arrow. In an archery competition, he impressed **Green Arrow** with his skills and became **Oliver Queen**'s ward and sidekick. Roy was the last addition to the founding members of the Teen Titans, along with **Robin I (Dick Grayson)**, **Aqualad (Garth)**, **Wonder Girl (Donna Troy)** and **Kid Flash (Wally West)**.

- **Speedy II (Mia Dearden)**: Created by Kevin Smith and Phil Hester (*Green Arrow* #2, May 2001). Mia is a child prostitute rescued by **Oliver Queen** shortly after his return from the dead. She came under his tutelage and, eventually, managed to convince **Queen** to train her as the second **Speedy**. She is notable for being the first HIV-positive superhero, and one of the very few characters in comic books that have to live with the disease.

Star-Spangled Kid I (Sylvester Pemberton): Created by Jerry Siegel and Hal Sherman (*Action Comics* #40, Sep. 1941). Sylvester Pemberton became the first **Star-Spangled Kid** to help fighting the Nazi menace. He did not possess any special power besides being a

very talented acrobat. The **Star-Spangled Kid** was a unique character, since he was the first teenage hero to be the leader of the pair, while his **Stripesy**, the adult, was the sidekick.

- **Star-Spangled Kid II (Courtney Whitmore)**: Created by Geoff Johns (*Stars and S.T.R.I.P.E.* #0, Jul. 1999). The second **Star-Spangled Kid** (later renamed simply Stargirl) is the heir of both the Starman and Star-Spangled legacies. Courtney carries the magical Cosmic Staff, given to her by Jack Knight, the son of the original Starman.

Stripesy (Pat Dugan): Created by Jerry Siegel and Hal Sherman (*Action Comics* #40, Sep. 1941). Originally the adult sidekick of the first **Star-Spangled Kid (Sylvester Pemberton)**, Pat Dugan currently acts as the occasional helper and mentor of his step-daughter, **Courtney Whitmore**. When he is needed in battle, he employs a robotic armor of his own creation, the S.T.R.I.P.E. (Special Tactics Robotic Integrated Power Enhancer).

Superman (Clark Kent/Kal-El): Created by Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel (*Action Comics* #1, 1938). The first and most popular superhero ever, Superman is the last son of Krypton. The radiation of Earth's yellow sun granted his alien physiology with superhuman intelligence, strength, speed, resistance and endurance, as well as X-ray and heat vision and extended longevity.

Wonder Woman (Diana of Themyscira/Diana Prince): Created by William Moulton Marston (*All-Star Comics* #8, Dec. 1941). Originally an Amazon, now a Demigod after the DC Comics 2011 relaunch, Princess Diana of Themyscira is one of the first female lead superheroes and a feminist and cultural icon. Her powers and abilities rival those of Superman and she employs her indestructible bracelets, tiara and Lasso of Truth to fight for love and equality in the world of man.

Wonder Girl I (Diana of Themyscira/Diana Prince): Created by Robert Kanigher (*Wonder Woman* #105, Apr. 1958). The first Wonder Girl is actually **Wonder Woman** in her younger years. The character was created as a revised origin for **Wonder Woman** at the beginning of the Silver Age.

- **Wonder Girl II (Donna Troy):** Created by Bob Haney and Bruno Premiani (*The Brave and the Bold* #60, Jul. 1965). The second Wonder Girl, and first to officially use the name, was **Diana's** younger sister, whose abilities mimicked those of **Wonder Woman**. Donna Troy was conceived as Wonder Woman's answer to **Batman's Robin**, a younger sidekick that could add more dynamism to the stories and, unlike the Boy Wonder, to help deflect the accusations of lesbianism made by Dr. Frederic Wertham. Donna Troy is infamously known for having a very complex and contradictory history, with several different origin stories and retconned deaths and rebirths.
- **Wonder Girl III (Cassandra Sandsmark):** Created by John Byrne (*Wonder Woman* #105, Jan. 1996). The latest incarnation of Wonder Girl is Cassie Sandsmark, the daughter of Zeus with a mortal woman. Her powers are similar to Wonder Woman's and were granted to her as a gift given by her father.

Marvel Comics

The Angel (Warren Worthington III): Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (*X-Men* #1, Sep. 1963). A founding member of the X-Men, the Angel, as his name suggests, sports a large pair of wings that enable him to fly at extremely fast speeds. He was later turned into one of the Four Horsemen by Apocalypse, an ancient and powerful evil mutant, which

turned his skin blue and coated his wings in metal. He has since gone back to the X-Men, but is still able to turn his wings into metal if the situation demands it.

Beast (Hank McCoy): Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (*X-Men* #1, Sep. 1963). Despite what one may infer by his name and looks, Hank McCoy is by far the most cultivated and intellectual of the founding members of the X-Men. Though initially his condition only extended granted him enhanced his reflexes and nimbleness in exchange for an apish body, he later suffered from further mutations that covered his whole body in a blue fur and gave him a feline appearance.

Bucky (James Buchanan Barnes): Created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby (*Captain America Comics* #1, Mar. 1941). Bucky is an orphan soldier who is adopted as the camp's "mascot." He becomes **Captain America**'s sidekick after watching **Steve Rogers** change clothes into his superhero identity. Unlike **Rogers**, Bucky had no especial powers or abilities beyond his basic military training.

Captain America I (Steve Rogers): Created by. After being rejected by the US Army for unfit physical condition, Steve Rogers volunteers for an experimental program that turns weaklings like him into super-soldiers. As **Captain America**, Steve Rogers possesses superhuman strength, reflexes and endurance, as well as a shield made from the indestructible metal known as vibranium. He was a major player during the WWII years, but as his popularity faded away after the war, Marvel Comics decided to retire the character by making his plane explode. In the same explosion, Bucky was thought to have lost his life. Captain America was later reintroduced into the Marvel universe in the 1960s after he is found frozen solid in an iceberg.

- **Captain America II (James Buchanan Barnes):** During the time **Steve Rogers** was presumed dead after the conclusion of *Civil War* (2008), James Barnes took upon himself to continue the legacy of **Captain America**.

Cyclops (Scott Summers): Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (*X-Men* #1, Sep. 1963). One of the five founding members of the X-Men and *de facto* field leader, Cyclops mutant ability lets him to project powerful optic blasts. His condition requires the constant use of a visor that filters out light and allows Cyclops to regulate the intensity of his eye beams.

Iceman (Bobby Drake): Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (*X-Men* #1, Sep. 1963). The youngest founding member of the X-Men, Iceman has the ability to manipulate ice at will. He can cover his whole body in a protective ice armor and freeze water particles in suspension to create projectiles.

Marvel Girl (Jean Grey): Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (*X-Men* #1, Sep. 1963). The fifth and last addition to the founding members of the X-Men, Jean Grey is one of the most powerful telepath mutants on Earth. She is famous for being the long-time host of the Phoenix Force, a cosmic entity with enough power to destroy galaxies with ease. Her frequent deaths and resurrections are also infamous among comic book fandom.

Namor the Sub-Mariner (Namor McKenzie): Created by Bill Everett (*Motion Picture Funnies Weekly* #1, Apr. 1939 [Unpublished]; *Marvel Comics* #1, Oct. 1939). Namor the Sub-Mariner is a half-Atlantean/half-human mutant with superhuman strength and endurance, the ability to fly with two wing-like appendages in each of his ankles and slow aging. He is often credited as Marvel's "first mutant", since he was the first character to be defined at such, at least in chronological terms (there were other mutants before him in the in-universe continuity, but were created many years after Namor had already debuted).

The Human Torch I (Jim Hammond): Created by Carl Burgos (*Marvel Comics* #1, Oct. 1939). The first Human Torch was actually an android created by Phineas Horton with the pyrokinetic powers and the ability to fly. He fought the Axis during WWII as part of the Invaders, alongside his sidekick **Toro (Thomas Raymond)**, **Captain America (Steve Rogers)**, **Bucky (James Buchanan Barnes)** and **Namor the Sub-Mariner (Namor McKenzie)**.

- **The Human Torch II (Johnny Storm):** Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (*Fantastic Four* #1, Nov. 1961). Much like his predecessor, the second and most famous **Human Torch** can fly and manipulate fire at will. Johnny Storm's powers are the result of a space traveling accident: he and the other three members of the Fantastic Four were bathed in "cosmic rays" that mutated them to various degrees.

Spider-Man (Peter Parker): Created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko (*Amazing Fantasy* #15, Aug. 1962). High school student Peter Parker is given the proportional strength of an arachnid, as well as its reflexes and nimbleness, when he is bitten by a radioactive spider during a field trip. He creates a system of portable web shooters that emulates the webbing fluid secreted by spiders and which he uses to swing around New York City for greater mobility and as part of his combat arsenal.

Toro (Thomas Raymond): Created by Carl Burgos (*Human Torch Comics* #2, Fall 1940). Thomas was the orphaned son of Fred and Norman Raymond, lab assistants to Dr. Phineas Horton, creator of the first **Human Torch**. Toro is a mutant with a pyrokinesis and immunity to fire similar to that of both **Human Torch I (Jim Hammond)** and **Human Torch II (Johnny Storm)**.

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