

Palgrave Studies in Comics and Graphic Novels

Series editor
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This series concerns Comics Studies—with a capital “c” and a capital “s.” It feels good to write it that way. From emerging as a fringe interest within Literature and Media/Cultural Studies departments, to becoming a minor field, to maturing into the fastest growing field in the Humanities, to becoming a nascent *discipline*, the journey has been a hard but spectacular one. Those capital letters have been earned.

Palgrave Studies in Comics and Graphic Novels covers all aspects of the comic strip, comic book, and graphic novel, explored through clear and informative texts offering expansive coverage and theoretical sophistication. It is international in scope and provides a space in which scholars from all backgrounds can present new thinking about politics, history, aesthetics, production, distribution, and reception as well as the digital realm. Books appear in one of two forms: traditional monographs of 60,000 to 90,000 words and shorter works (Palgrave Pivots) of 20,000 to 50,000 words. All are rigorously peer-reviewed. Palgrave Pivots include new takes on theory, concise histories, and—not least—considered provocations. After all, Comics Studies may have come a long way, but it can’t progress without a little prodding.

Series Editor Roger Sabin is Professor of Popular Culture at the University of the Arts London, UK. His books include *Adult Comics: An Introduction and Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels*, and his recent research into nineteenth-century comics is award-winning. He serves on the boards of the main academic journals in the field and reviews graphic novels for the international media.

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Revision and the Superhero Genre

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To Kimberlie and Jasmine, who put up with so much and continued to love, support, and understand me throughout the writing of this book.

PREFACE

Ever since I taught my first writing class, I have been fascinated by the resistance so many students express toward the process of revision. If I try and summarize these reactions, they basically come down to two questions: why does my writing need fixing; and if it doesn't, what am I revising for? For my students, revision was and is perceived as medicinal, a form of triage to be applied only to the broken and sick text. If their words were healthy already, why submit them to the intrusive allopathic cures of revision? The fact that they are acutely aware of their own lack of training in such surgical application of sutures and splints only makes the task more alienating and less attainable. Practical classroom exercises and approaches, no matter how much I tinkered with them, could not overcome this powerful obstacle. Desire is impossible to mandate, and without desire, how could I expect my students to practice revision without grimaces foreboding painful expectations?

I slowly formed a strange hypothesis: perhaps the trouble had to do with a misguided belief that the purpose of revision was to *improve* a text. Improvement seems so self-evident a revising goal as to be outside the range of legitimate questioning. Yet, the pressure to *make it better* permeates so much of student writing that it can inhibit the generation of more writing, and thus short-circuit its own imperative. If you cannot create new versions, you certainly cannot create improved ones.

What was needed was a different way of looking at revision. So I eagerly sought answers in the field of composition, and was excited to find in the process writing movement an extensive group of scholars

who espoused in various ways the idea that revision was an inventive practice of discovery and creativity. But this excitement faded as I realized that the field was engaged in a deep and ongoing critique of process theory, and had exposed limitations in its unquestioned faith in individual voice and the writer's subjectivity. But these post-process challenges often ignored the practical implications of rejecting process paradigms regarding social constructs such as education and identity. When revision was emphasized at all, it was often through a continuation of process classroom activities cut off from the underlying positions in which they developed, or worse, by regressing back to the pre-process days of rote error correction and mechanical propriety.

This book posits that new directions in revision are to be found by examining its practice in narrative genres, especially that of superhero fiction. Due to a combination of factors, the superhero resembles a petri dish within which revisionary strategies emerge rapidly. While many of these strive, or at least claim, to be improvements over their source texts, they are more concerned with creating alternatives than with establishing orthodox versions of narratives. Some of the more innovative superhero texts not only inscribe these types of unorthodox revision tactics; they also provide diegetic meta-commentaries on the nature and history of superhero revision.

What follows is an attempt to begin a conversation about revision between these two discourses, with small doses of narrative theory and textual studies joining in occasionally. Although the conversation is academic in its approach, the issues raised go beyond the concerns of disciplinary Glass Bead Games or specializations. Revision can be a powerful means of exerting control through the imposition of orthodoxies that limit creativity and expression. It can also provide ways to resist this control. Improvement, like all ideological goals, is adept at hiding its ideological nature; as a result, revision appears neutral and innocent. It can be both, but it is just as capable of being a reactionary or radical practice. It is my hope that this book can contribute to the cultural task of reminding us that revision always involves us in ethical decisions, which can and must be made with imagination and creativity.

Bronx, USA

David Hyman

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