

FRAMING A FEARFUL SYMMETRY

- Narratological Aspects in Alan Moore's *Watchmen*

Mervi Miettinen
University of Tampere
School of Modern Languages
and Translation Studies
English Philology
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Pro gradu –tutkielmassani keskityn Alan Mooren ja Dave Gibbonsin sarjakuvaromaaniin *Watchmen*. Pyrin erittelemään ja analysoimaan sarjakuvan moninaisia kerronnallisia tasoja ja erityisesti sitä, miten ne toimivat ja miten ne vaikuttavat lukijan tulkintoihin. *Watchmen* on yleisesti nähty angloamerikkalaisen sarjakuvan merkkipaaluna, ja se taidokkaasti dekonstruoii supersankaruuden myyttiä kuvaamalla yhteiskuntaa, jossa supersankaruus on todellisuutta. Analyysini pohjautuu pitkälti narratologiaan ja erilaisiin visuaalisen ja verbaalisen kerronnan teorioihin, mutta pyrkii tulkitsemaan näitä teorioita nimenomaan sarjakuvan viitekehysessä.

Aloitin hahmottelemalla *Watchmen* –teoksen peruselementtejä, erityisesti kuvan ja tekstin suhdetta ja miten varsinkin näiden kahden monitasoisen jukstaposition kautta *Watchmen* luo merkitysrakenteita nimenomaan sarjakuvulle ainutlaatuisilla keinoilla. Sarjakuvan muoto, joka yhdistää kuvallisen ja tekstuaalisen kerronnan, mahdollistaa näiden kahden elementin välisen jännitteen - kuva voi joko tukea tai kiistää tekstin sisältämää informaatiota. Jukstaposition avulla toisiinsa liittymättömät kerronnalliset elementit luovat uusia, keinotekoisia kerronnallisia yksiköitä. Myös erilaiset toiston keinot, kuten saman sarjakuvaruuden toistaminen eri konteksteissa, luo uusia merkitysrakenteita.

Tämän alustavan rakenteellisen analyysin jälkeen siirryn tarkastelemaan miten tietyt kerronnan tutkimuksen olennaiset kysymykset näkyvät sarjakuvassa. Erittelen sekä kerronnan luotettavuutta ja hulluuden ilmenemistä visuaalisessa kerronnassa että ajan kokemisen ja esittämisen problematiikkaa sarjallisessa esityksessä. Kertojan luotettavuus kyseenalaistuu sarjakuvan kerronnassa nimenomaan visuaalisen kerronnan muodossa, fokalisaation eri muotojen ollessa avainasemassa. Ajan kuvaus sarjakuvassa mahdollistaa ajan kokemisen fragmentoitumisen, epäkronologisen jatkumon sarjallisen esittämisen muodossa, jolloin jokainen ruutu voi sijoittua eri kohtaa koetussa ajassa.

Loppupäätelmässäni kokoan yhteen näitä erilaisia tutkimiani kerronnallisia elementtejä, jotka paljastavat tarkkaan harkitun symmetrian niin visuaalisella, tekstuaalisella kuin temaattisellakin tasolla. Tematiikan kohdalla esiin nousi erityisesti supersankaruuden yhteys status quon ylläpitoon ja muutosvastarintaan, jota tekstin monitasoinen symmetria tukee. Pyrin hahmottelemaan tulevia tutkimuskysymyksiä nimenomaan tämän temaattisen symmetrian pohjalta, joka sitoisi tutkimuksen laajemmin kohdetekstin poliittiseen ja sosiaaliseen kontekstiin.

Asiasanat: *Watchmen*, sarjakuva, narratologia, visuaalisuus, kertojan luotettavuus, kerronta ja aika

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 On the Research Topic

In October 2005, *Time* Magazine listed its All-Time One Hundred Novels, chosen from all novels published in English after 1923. One novel to make the list was Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's twelve-part graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986), of which Lev Grossman, one of the two compilers of the list said: "*Watchmen* is told in fugal, overlapping plotlines and gorgeous panels rich with cinematic leitmotifs. A work of ruthless psychological realism, it's a landmark in the graphic novel medium." (Grossman, 2005, 66). *Watchmen* was also included in the Top Ten Graphic Novels list - the only graphic novel to make both lists. This is not, of course, the first or the last time Alan Moore will be hailed as one of the greatest writers in the medium of visual narratives. Still, it does not change the fact that Alan Moore is a widely respected writer in the field of comics today with a career that stretches back to the early 1980s. He has collaborated with many talented illustrators, including Eddie Campbell in *From Hell* (1989/1999) and David Lloyd in *V for Vendetta* (1988), and he is generally seen as the writer who crucially changed the essence of comics in the English-speaking world from mere entertainment to something altogether different.

Watchmen, published first serially by DC Comics between 1986 and 1987 and together in one volume in 1987, is a multilayered graphic novel depicting real-life superheroes in an alternative US of the 1980s. Certain visual motifs keep repeating and plotlines overlap again and again, creating a thrilling narrative structure, which will be the main interest of this study. As Matthew Wolf-Meyer points out in his article "The World Ozymandias Made: Utopias in the Superhero Comic, Subculture and the Conservation of Difference" (2003), the visual imagery of *Watchmen* owes a great debt to the original superhero comics it deconstructs in its portrayal of real-life superheroes, "cloning" the original Charlton Comics superheroes from the

1960s, who themselves were clones of other, previous superheroes (Nite Owl, for example, is a clone of the Blue Beetle, who himself was a clone of Batman). As Wolf-Meyer argues, this kind of process of cloning allows the authors to contribute to a particular aspect of the discourse of the superhero comics where they provide their readers with familiar iconography, yet failing to directly confront them with the truth behind the characters: “it may be comforting to know that Superman can never impose his utopian regime, however utopian it may seem, for if he can pose utopia, then he can surely impose dystopia, and it is only a matter of ideology that saves us from one or damns us to the other” (2003, 504-505). Apart from this significant contribution to the superhero discourse, the comic book is also striking in its multiplicity of narrative levels; often the text and the pictures tell completely separate stories, and still neither can definitely be read as being more dominant than the other. The unique form of the graphic novel that combines the textual and the visual narratives in a longer narrative piece poses interesting challenges when it comes to narratological study, for even the simplest questions of narration and focalization become complicated in the sense that the imagery always narrates ‘more’ than what the traditional view of the focalizer is capable of. Thus the layers of narration are significantly more complex, and the question of how to study these becomes crucial. Therefore, as Jeanne Ewert has pointed out, a narratological method suitable for the study of comics must take into account the both forms that define comics: both “the content and the artwork contained in the panels” (2004, 178). In addition to this, textual elements contained within the comic book need to be taken into account, as a part of a carefully constructed interplay between words and images.

Set in an alternative American history where Nixon is still president, superheroes are real and pirate comics have consequently substituted the superhero comics of our world, *Watchmen* shows us a dark and violent world on the brink of a nuclear war, each of the twelve chapters taking us metaphorically one minute closer to midnight - and doomsday. As in many

of the graphic novels of the late 1980s, the city of New York offers an urban setting, a place with little or no hope, a city where traditional authority figures are incapable of dealing with civic problems or criminal activity (Johnston, 1989, 43). The “watchmen”, though never explicitly named so, are the so-called superheroes, already outlawed in 1977 by the “Keene Act”, and are now either retired or choosing the life of outlaw vigilantes, still hiding their true identities behind masks. As one of their kin is brutally murdered, they slowly begin to discover a much larger plot, designed by Adrian Veidt (previously superhero Ozymandias) to unite mankind by very questionable methods. Apart from the powerful visual narration, *Watchmen* relies on many textual devices unusual to graphic novels to narrate the story, ranging from personal diaries to scientific articles and newspaper clippings, which all weave new layers and meanings to the already complex narration. Also, each of the twelve chapters ends with a short epigraph, a quotation ranging from rock lyrics to nineteenth-century poetry. Each epigraph underlines the theme of the chapter and can therefore be seen as affecting the cognitive schemas and interpretations the reader develops of given chapters.

1.2 Setting the study question

This thesis sets out to identify and analyze the various narrative structures and elements found in *Watchmen*, beginning with the textual and visual aspects. How do the narratological elements function in the text, how can they be identified, how should they be interpreted? As James Phelan points out in the editor’s column of *Narrative* 14.1 (2006), an emerging view in the field of narratology is that form has “not only political and ethical consequences but political and ethical dimensions”, connecting political and ethical views as essential in the study of narratology (2006, 2) . How does a form such as comics affect the narrative and the meanings within, both political and ethical? The text consists of several types of textual

narration, from the basic verbal narration in speech balloons to newspaper clippings and quotations from various fictitious literary sources, and all of these contribute to the narration of the graphic novel. The “superhero” characters in the comic are essential as well, both as focalizers and as means to deconstruct the traditional stereotype of a superhero as a “genetic representation of the übermensch” (Wolf-Meyer, 2003, 497). The various aspects of visual narration will be analyzed through theories from art history to basic comic book analysis of the single panel. This thesis will not set out to systematically cover the entire contents of *Watchmen*, for the graphic novel is extensively wide and could be studied from various other points of view, such as the political perspective it offers of the Cold War -era America, or the way it chooses to depict its female heroines in a genre that is overtly masculine.

In addition, this thesis will not take part in the debate on the academic credibility of studying comics. As Samuel R. Delaney points out in his book *Shorter Views. Queer Thoughts and The Politics of the Paraliterary* (1999), the academics entering the field of science fiction (and by implication, comics), have traditionally felt their major task was to legitimate their object of study to the larger academic situation (1999, 257). This approach has, according to Delaney, been unfruitful in the long run, and has focused on the definition rather than description of the genre (1999, 261-262). The need to “prove oneself” in the face of the academic world is still with us, especially in the paraliterary genres, but it is not the aim of this thesis to validate comics as “art” or anything related to that discussion. As far as I know there exists no previous academic research on *Watchmen*, and the studies on the narratological aspects of graphic novels published so far are quite limited.

This thesis will for the most part refer to Alan Moore as the single ‘author’ of *Watchmen*, and Dave Gibbons will be credited only when discussing the visual details and illustration. The reason for this is that like Neil Gaiman, the author of the award-winning graphic novel saga *The Sandman*, Alan Moore concentrates on writing scripts while various

talented artists illustrate his work in their own distinctive styles. This question of authorship related to graphic novels should not be overlooked as unproblematic; already in 1985 Will Eisner confronted this problem in his book *Comics and Sequential Art*: “Who is the ‘creator’ of a comic page which was written by one person, penciled by another and inked, lettered (and perhaps colored or backgrounded) by still others??” (1985, 123). One reason why this thesis chooses to represent Moore as ‘the author’ is because Moore is well-known for his scriptwriting, which involves extremely detailed information addressed to the illustrator concerning aspects such as panel division, overall mood and even the amount of words per panel. In a relatively recent interview with Daniel Whiston Alan Moore actually stated that “for average comics scriptwriters a page of comics is probably gonna [sic] be a page of manuscript, whereas for me it's at the very minimum a page of comics is two pages of manuscript, sometimes three.”¹ This is an essential dilemma when discussing the question of word and image – which of them is dominant? As Marie-Laure Ryan (2004, 11) among others has claimed, verbal language is “the native tongue of the narrative” and has to be regarded as such. Yet, as Ryan herself admits, there are meanings which are better expressed through non-verbal means, and these meanings “should not be declared a priori irrelevant to the narrative experience” (2004, 12). Will Eisner, too, insists that in order to stay fair to the art form of comics, one must always acknowledge the primacy of writing, even though the preferred way being that the writer is also the illustrator (1985, 126). This is a question that brings forth several more, as such divisions as author/reader and script/text are far from simple and unproblematic. Crucial here is to realize that whether a combination of text and image or script and illustration, the result is always a dynamic process between the two components. In this thesis, Alan Moore will be credited overall authorship for this detailed scriptwriting, but also for the sake of simplicity.

¹ Interview found at : <http://www.enginecomics.co.uk/interviews/jan05/alanmoore.htm> (Accessed 20.2.2006)

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a study of the narratological levels of *Watchmen*, this thesis is naturally located in the field of narratological studies and will attempt to mould a narratological method suitable for the study of graphic novels, to the study of word and image. As no such established method exists yet, this thesis shall begin by combining various theorists from the field of traditional narratology, such as Seymour Chatman and Gérard Genette, with various views on visual narration and the study of comics. A basic structural analysis of *Watchmen* is the initial goal, and later chapters will attempt at more detailed analysis of the various narratological aspects of the graphic novel. It is important to point out right at the beginning that in the context of this study, the general terms of traditional narratology are not directly applicable, but must be reconsidered and possibly redefined when applied. Therefore, terms such as *narrator* work poorly, as no single narrator can be extracted from the story appearing in a graphic novel, as the images are not “narrated” in the way traditional written novels are. It is more useful to borrow the term *narration* from the field of film studies, as Juha Herkman has done in his book *Sarjakuvan Kieli ja Mieli* (1998, 135). Still, in this thesis the terms from narratology will be applied from the point of view of comic book narration and its requirements.

As Herkman (2001, 101-104) points out, comics are formed from images, words and the union of the two, and it is impossible to find a single dominant narrative level typical to traditional narrative literature, which has traditionally been divided into retrospective first-person narrative, self-reflective narrative, objective third-person narrative, an omniscient narrative, focalized narrative or stream-of-consciousness -type of narrative. According to Herkman, these are not alone sufficient in a study of visual narration, which is usually divided between ‘narrator’, ‘narrative level’ and ‘point of view’ - but these terms are not used in the same way as they would be used in basic literary studies, for the narrator of the comic book

does not have to describe the characters or the settings around him, because they are immediately available to the reader in visual form. The setting of the comic is therefore important, the *mise-en-scène*: what is shown and how is it shown. The various narrative devices of the comic book can also enable to reader to identify to the characters in a new way by concretely positioning the reader inside the point of view of a certain character (Herkman, 2001, 101-104). In the following subchapters I will present some of the basic theoretical tools and concepts this thesis will rely on as well as some of the reasons for choosing these particular approaches. As the study of comics and the terms linked with it are not yet widely known, the basic concepts related to it will also be presented.

2.1 Traditional Narratological Aspects

As mentioned above, traditional narratology as such does not provide sufficient tools for comic book analysis, as the medium is visual in a way written literature is not and the written narrative is usually privileged above the visual, as already mentioned in the previous section. However, rather than creating a whole new method for the narratological analysis of comic books, this thesis will apply these traditional views as far as they can be useful, and continue to build new concepts with the help of other theorists when this approach fails. A transition in theoretical approach from classical to post-classical narratology will take place during this thesis, as traditional approaches will gradually be supplemented with views from cognitive sciences and later developments from the field of narratological studies.

For the basic narratological analysis, this thesis will begin by relying on some very fundamental narratological theorists, beginning with Seymour Chatman, the author of *Story and Discourse - Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978). Chatman suits the thesis as his theories include film studies, which overlap closely enough to the study of comics as to be of

use. Chatman has divided the narrative text to two essential components: *story* and *discourse*, in which story stands for “the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting); and a discourse...the expression, the means by which the content is communicated” (1978, 19). In short, the story tells us what happened, and the discourse shows us how it happens – a division widely accepted in the field of narratology. However, the term “discourse” is so heavily linked with foucauldian discourse analysis that the term in the sense Chatman uses will be replaced with the more appropriate term “narration”, taken from Gérard Genette (cf. Herkman, 1998, 115).

Gérard Genette will be another essential classical narratologist in this thesis, as the term *narration* itself comes from him, as well as the idea of a *focalizer*, both of which are essential to narratological study, and of great interest in the study of comic book narration, for focalization in comics has possibilities beyond traditional literature. In *Narrative Discourse* (1980, 114-116) Genette also refers to *frequency*, which he uses to describe the way certain elements are repeated in the story and how often the certain event is told. The event cannot be told exactly the same way each time, but it is always bound to different contexts and thus creates new meanings and is connected to new thematic ideas every time. According to Genette, a text can hold several abstract and thematically motivated events that are repeated in different parts of the narration. Considering the temporal structures in graphic novels, frequency is an important concept in this study since certain images appear repeatedly in *Watchmen*, each time in slightly different contexts, thus creating new meanings. Some events are also repeated from different perspectives, variations in point of view, which is a narrative device labeled by Genette as *repeating narrative* (1980, 114-116). This type of repeating can also involve only stylistic variations, but the changes in the point of view is the aspect of repeating narrative that will be applied in this thesis.

Film studies, a crossroads leading from verbal to visual studies, will undoubtedly be of

use in my thesis, and Edward Branigan's *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (1992) is what my analysis will rely on. Branigan introduces the term *narrative schema*, “an arrangement of knowledge *already possessed* by a perceiver”, which is used to evaluate and interpret new information (1992, 13). Through this idea of narrative schema, borrowed from cognitive psychology, Branigan has also further developed the idea of focalization, widening the term to include not only those aspects explicitly narrated by a character, but also those the character experiences internally, thus heightening the identification process of the reader and the active use of various schemas (101-102). These ideas borrowed from cognitive psychology into narratology by the way of cognitive narratology will be investigated further in relation to reliability of narration and focalization. One theorist to have explored this aspect fairly early on is Dorrit Cohn with her groundbreaking study *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (1978), in which she focuses in great detail on the various techniques novelists have to construct fictional minds.

2.2. How to Study Visual Narration

The study of visual narration has lately been of interest in the academic world, as the publication of Kai Mikkonen's *Kuva ja Sana - Kuvan ja Sanan Vuorovaikutus Kirjallisuudessa, Kuvataiteessa ja Ikonoteksteissä* (2005) shows. What makes the study of visual images challenging, according to Mikkonen, is the fact that the visual experience is described first and foremost with language; the visual meaning is verbalized and narrativized through language (2005, 17). One of the great early masters of comic books, Will Eisner was one of the first to demand comics the respect they deserve, both as an art form as well as an object worthy of serious academic study. His book, *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985), is despite its twenty years' age still a valid aid when analyzing the very basic elements of comics, such as imagery,

timing and framing, all of which are crucial in understanding and comprehending the building blocks of comics as a narrative medium:

When one examines a comic book feature as a whole, the deployment of its unique elements takes on the characteristic of a language. ... Comics communicate in a 'language' that relies on a visual experience common both to creator and audience.... The format of the comic book presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art (eg. perspective, symmetry, brush stroke) and the regimens of literature (eg. grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other. (Eisner, 1985, 7-8).

Despite the fact that Eisner stated it twenty years ago, this statement holds firm today. Comic book experts still continue to stress the unique nature of reading abilities comics require, and the union of word and image has become even more centralized in the modern study of comics. Comics are seen as a 'language', even though the grammar of this language is far from the completeness of the grammar rules of written language, as Pekka A. Manninen has pointed out (1995, 37.) According to Manninen, comic book narration includes aspects such as the composition of each page, which in turn affects the contents of that page. This creates an interplay between the content and the form, and the elements that are used to create comic book narration are so various that they do not create such limitations to the form as does the strictly written text (1995, 37). In the structural analysis of *Watchmen* and its narratological levels, this thesis will apply some of Eisner's observations on the 'grammar' of comics. It should also be pointed out that languages within this grammar alter greatly, and serve various different purposes – there exists no unified and single language within comics any more than in reality.

Another "structuralist" approach that continues Eisner's ideas on the study of comics is Scott McCloud's acclaimed *Understanding Comics - The Invisible Art* (1993), in which McCloud attempts to develop comprehensive tools for comic book analysis, discussing the various ways and multiple levels comics work at. McCloud's work, praised by Delaney as an "extraordinary paraliterary critique" (1999, 224) is quite unique, narrated completely in comic

book form, with McCloud's drawn alter ego illustrating the various problematic aspects related to comics with different visual examples. One that still works remarkably well is his demonstration of the power of the "gap" or the "gutter", the white line between the panels that requires active participation from the reader to construct the events taking place in the timelessness of the white void (1993, 66). *Watchmen* actually puns with the term gutter right at its beginning: "the gutters are full of blood" (1986, I; 1) writes the vigilante Rorschach in his diary, while blood is indeed washing into the street gutter in the accompanying panel - but the panel edges close off the blood from the white "gutter", in which the only blood is the one the reader's imagination puts into it. The gutter is the place where the real action happens, and the metaphorical blood will seep back into the panels throughout the story, shading the panels with bloody pink. As Samuel R. Delaney describes it, the gutter brings us the notion of closure, "the relation between the shown and the not shown, the stated and the implied, the articulated and the suggested" (1999, 229).

The single panel has traditionally been seen as the basic component of comic book narratives, and the action traditionally takes place from panel to panel. McCloud has divided these panel-to-panel transitions into six different categories, depending on the changes that take place between those two panels (1993, 70-74). These transitions can be *temporal*, which include a clear transition and usually very little closure; this is the most common one in comic book narration. The transition can also be spatial, which consists of *subject-to-subject* change, where the panel shifts from one subject to another while still remaining in the same scene or idea. McCloud stresses that at this point, a "degree of reader involvement [is] necessary to render these transitions meaningful" (1993, 71). This type of transition is often very powerful, as Juha Herkman points out, because it enables the writer/illustrator to deliberately leave out dramatic actions, thereby increasing the level of suspense (1998, 96). *Scene-to-scene* transitions, in which the change takes the reader across great distances, either in time or in

space, are ones that, according to McCloud, require “deductive reasoning”. Other transitions include shifts in aspects or transitions with no logical relationship whatsoever between the panels. This non-sequitur type of transition is very rare, as comic book narration is largely based precisely on sequential imagery of events and action in time and space, as Herkman has noticed (1998, 97). These transitions are the very building blocks of comic book narration, and will serve as a logical starting point in the analysis of the visual narration in *Watchmen*. McCloud also distinguishes various ways of combining words and images, from *word specific* (the pictures simply illustrate what the captions might say) to *interdependent* where only together do the words and pictures actually convey the message of a scene. Still, he admits that the possibilities are virtually unlimited (1993, 152-155).

Kai Mikkonen has resorted to a slightly different classification. Mikkonen refers to comics as iconotexts, by which he means the inseparable unity of word and image (2005, 8). Mikkonen has used Ferdinand deSaussure’s ideas on general thought in order to develop terms to describe the two ways in which words and images work dynamically in comics: syntagmatic and paradigmatic (2005, 299). In a syntagmatic relationship both word and image support and complete each other, and the rules of the discourse (narration) are clear to the reader. This syntagmatic relationship can exist even when two separate narrational chains are combined, as often happens in *Watchmen*. A paradigmatic relationship, then, requires co-operation of the word and image that highlights the system in which it appears; word and image are contrasted and through the associations linked to this union, they create a meaning independent from the narrational chronology; this means that a picture or a panel can act as a metaphorical substitute to the events taking place in the narrative (2005, 299).

Other important sources for the study of comics include the dissertation of Pekka A. Manninen called *Vastarinnan Välineistö - Sarjakuvaharrastuksen Merkityksiä* (1995), the first Finnish academic dissertation on comic books and their significance to the reader. Manninen

presents various types of comics, their history and present state, including superhero comics, the very thing *Watchmen* carefully deconstructs. *Watchmen* borrows its visual look from the most typical of all comic book genres, the superhero comic exemplified by Superman, the X-Men and the Fantastic Four. Manninen (1995, 90-91) has collected some of the most typical aspects of the genre, such as the handsome looks and the muscular body of the superhero, not to mention the brightly coloured outfits, which are usually very tight and include a mask. The look that receives acceptance in fictional superhero comics receives a new meaning once transferred into the mundane world of *Watchmen*, especially when discussing the objectifying element in the outfit of the female superhero. As Laurie (formerly known as Silk Spectre) well describes: “You remember that costume? With that stupid little short skirt and the neckline going down to my navel? God, that was so dreadful.” (I; 25). *Watchmen* extrapolates with the idea of real-life superheroes, revealing the ridiculousness behind the romanticized idea of crime fighters.

According to Manninen, the “super” in superhero has generally referred to the supernatural abilities of the superhero, such as the ability to fly or becoming invisible (1995, 90-91). It is noteworthy to point out that apart from one, the “superheroes” in *Watchmen* do not actually possess any supernatural abilities, but are in fact tragically human with very human problems. The “superheroes” are outsiders whom the American people neither trusts nor understands. This can be located in the wider context of the development the superhero comics as a genre went through in the 1980s, as Riku Perälä has pointed out in his article “Supersankareiden 80-luku : psykopaattien ja neurootikkojen vuosikymmen” (*Sarjainfo* 2/1990, 3-5). According to Perälä, the genre went through a transformation in which the clean-cut heroes of the past were replaced by a darker, more problematic and complex brand of superheroes. This transformation can be traced in the artful depiction of the real-life superheroes of *Watchmen*, who are carefully created in Moore’s writing, and highlighted in the

illustrations by Gibbons. In the following sections of this thesis, I will first investigate and analyze the basic narrative structures of both textual and visual narration with the combined aid of narratology and comic book analysis. Section four will focus more on the visual elements of narration in *Watchmen*, and also question the problematics of an omniscient narrator in the narrative form of a comic book. Section five will move beyond traditional structuralist approaches, and develop the question of madness and narration with the help of cognitive narratology and the idea of focalization in connection to visual narration. Finally, in section six I will focus on the question of temporality and narration, especially through the character of Dr. Manhattan.

3 NARRATIVE STRUCTURES – FROM TEXTUAL TO VISUAL

Seymour Chatman divided the narrative text into two components, which will be referred to here as story (*what* happens?) and narrative (*how* it happens?). The story is further divided into events and existents, which are composed of subcategories such as actions, happenings, characters and setting (1978, 19). *Watchmen* too can be divided into story and narration, the story being the abstract plot of superheroes uncovering a plot to kill millions of people, and the narrative is the arrangement of the events of the plot in a given medium (here comics) that actualizes the story (1978, 37). The narrative structure in *Watchmen* plays with temporal levels and concepts, showing the reader events and actions from the past, present and sometimes even the future, many of them almost simultaneously by the way of juxtaposing panels from separate temporal levels. A past act can be shown to the reader in connection to the present action, thus giving both events new contexts and new meanings by associating them with each other.

An important part of comic book narration is also the point of view: who is watching and what is the object of this gaze; if a character is looking at something and in the next panel we are shown this object of this gaze, the reader is positioned as this character (Chatman, 1978, 38-40). This type of positioning is essential in comic book narration, as it has the possibility of affecting the meanings linked with the reading of the comic. The power of the gaze is thus an important aspect, and well used in *Watchmen*: the entire novel begins with the murder of Edward Blake (aka the superhero Comedian), and what the reader sees is the entire act of the murder through the eyes of the murderer, the panels shaded with menacing pink. This application of focalization, seeing the murder through the eyes of the killer, typically requires that the reader identifies it with a certain character, that it defines and grounds the character that experiences this focalized event (Branigan, 1992, 102). But in this case, the reader is

deliberately left without this information and encouraged to create his/her own concepts of the murderer through the dialogue of the two detectives investigating the death, which alternates with the scene-to-scene panel transitions of the violent act that has taken place previously:

“Somebody really had it **in** for this guy. I mean, how did he go outta **window**?”

“Maybe he **tripped** against it.”

“Forget it. That’s **strong glass**, man. You **trip** against it, even a big guy like **that**, it don’t **break**. I think you’d have to be **thrown**.” (I; 3).

Of this dialogue, the first and last sentences are illustrated by the images of the murder, while others show the detectives on the scene afterwards; the reader will see that indeed, the other detective is right - the Comedian was a big man, and he was thrown. The bolded passages appear as such in the original text, and the use of such bolding of words is generally interpreted as an emphasis on those particular words, which intensifies their meaning. This type of visual emphasis is just one of the many ways comics can visually affect the meanings related to the text, and will be discussed in more detail in section 4.1 of this thesis.

The concept of ‘focalization’ was introduced to narratology by Gérard Genette. Focalization as a term is more abstract than point of view, involving not only the one who sees but also the one who speaks (1980, 189). However, as this division refers to traditional written literature, the word ‘see’ receives a whole new meaning in relation to comic book focalization, where the focalizer has no need to verbalize his surroundings or the atmosphere because they are immediately available to the reader in visual form. As Will Eisner points out, “in comics the imagining is done for the reader” (1985, 122). Therefore, the term focalization is not in itself sufficient in the study of comic book narration, and the further formulation of the concept by Edward Branigan introduced earlier will be used in this thesis instead, especially in the context of cognitive narratology and when discussing the reliability of the narrator. Juha Herkman has pointed out that comics as a medium do not directly convert to the idea of focalization, as in comics visuality plays a central role both in the story and in the reading (1998, 141). Herkman himself has divided focalization in comics into different subject-object -position categories that

participate in the narration of the comic book. The first two are the visual subject and the verbal subject: what is the reader shown and who is the verbal narrator? Often the character who speaks is also visually present, so the focalization is both visual and verbal. Herkman's third type of subject-position, (reminiscent of Branigan's experiencing focalizer, 1992, 101-103), is the psychological subject, the one who experiences and feels, the one that binds the visual and verbal narration to each other (1998, 144-5).

More often in *Watchmen*, though, the visual and verbal subjects are in a strong contrast, narrating separate stories which still seem to be commenting on each other. Herkman (1998, 56, 114) has analyzed *Watchmen*, which has many metanarratives, narratives that have no direct link to the main story. One example of this is a pirate comic, *The Black Freighter*, which is read by a black boy within the comic and which always appears in the comic in relation to the act of the boy's reading. The textual captions of the pirate comic are then combined with the visual narratives of the main story, and vice versa (1998, 56). According to Herkman, this creates a metanarrative that builds a new context to the events that take place and can thus affect the reader's interpretations of the actions in the main story as it is contrasted with the violent and cynical world of *Watchmen* (1998, 114). The black and yellow colouring of the fallout shelter signs predicting nuclear war and consequently death is juxtaposed against captions which come from the pirate comic: "I saw that hellbound ship's black sails against the yellow Indie's sky, and knew again the stench of powder, and men's brains, and war" (III;1). Nuclear threat and the fear of world war three are both connected with pirates, as the news vendor man simultaneously curses the dark looking future. Markku Soikkeli (1996, 134) has even gone so far as to suggest that the pirate comic in question can be read as an allegory of the type of human character the world of *Watchmen* admires – the survivors.

The separate textual narratives in *Watchmen* are often bound together by verbal allusions or the use of similar words in different contexts, very much in the same way as the

visual allusions are used in connection to verbal captions, such as the fallout shelter example above. Verbal and visual combine, somewhat ironically, in II; 2-3, when Laurie puts out her cigarette with the words: “Look, I’m putting it **out**, okay? It’s **dead. Extinguished.**”. This line is then followed by the general view of the Comedian’s funeral assembly, the pun of course being that the Comedian, too, is “extinguished”. This creates an ironical link between two separate scenes. Similar linkings take place throughout *Watchmen*, the word “madness” in one storyline juxtaposed with “insanity” in another (VIII; 3-4), “hell and damnation” with “Hades” (V; 19-20) and so forth. The continuous play between different levels of meanings connects the various plotlines and levels of narration by the power of juxtaposition, both in consecutive panels and in the single panels where the captions of one story level are presented in a panel from another level. This type of contrasting vs. supporting the visual narrative via the textual narrative is a central type of narration in *Watchmen*, and one that is essential to the interpretation of the narrative. It is important to notice that *Watchmen* has no written third-person omniscient narration, but that all captions come from within the story by its various characters or metanarratives. However, the visual narration of the graphic novel is something more than the focalizers and narrators are capable of, and concepts such as an “omniscient narrator” may acquire whole new dimensions in the context of the graphic novel. This question of the omniscient narrator will be dealt with more thoroughly in section 4.2.

In *Watchmen* the most commonly used type of textual narration is dialogue via speech balloons and separate captions in which various characters relate their thoughts by the way of written internal monologue. Sometimes dialogue is also expressed in captions, while the panels show something else so that the dialogue contrasts or supports the visual narrative. The dialogue in the captions is always in quotation marks, whereas the sign of internal monologue is the lack of quotation marks. In Chapter IX, much of the narrative focuses on Laurie’s painful memories of her past, which she retells to Jon/Dr. Manhattan on planet Mars. Her act of telling

is visualized by these past actions, and her spoken words appear in captions, complete with quotation marks that imply her act of telling of her past to Dr. Manhattan rather than just memorizing them internally, as Dr. Manhattan for example does to his past in Chapter IV. However, at the end of Chapter IX, Laurie's telling becomes infused with dialogue fragments of the scenes of the past, clearly no longer told by her but as if playing on repeat in her head (square brackets indicate captions here):

Dr. Manhattan: I think you're **avoiding** something.

Laurie: Don't be **stupid**. There's n-nothing to **avoid**...

["...his, y'know, his old friends daughter? What do you think I **am**?"]

Laurie: I-I've **never** had any occasion to avoid the truth...

["Only once." "What do you think I **am**?" "...old friend's daughter?" "What do you think..." "...his, y'know, his..."]

["What do you think I **am**?" "...friend's daughter?"]

Laurie: I-I mean **look, here, my life, my mom's life**, there's nothing there **worth** a voiding, it's all just meaningless...

["...his y'know his..." "Only once." "...y'know, his old friend's dau..."]

Laurie: No.

[Laurie's inner speech: No. No not him not... No.]

(IX; 23-24)

(See Appendix 1.)

This rather long scene takes place in four consecutive panels, and they mark a shift in which the increasingly fragmented captions are repeated until a moment of self-realization takes place in the sudden shift in the captions from Laurie's speech to her thoughts as she realizes the man she hates is in fact her father. The panels alter between Laurie's present and images from her past, shown to the reader earlier in the chapter, so the fragments of the past infiltrate her present both textually and visually. This type of verbal transition to inner speech is a rare occasion in the narrative structure of *Watchmen*, which uses visual shifts in focalization far more than verbal, and testifies the enormous abilities comics have in narrative potential.

The textual narration in comics can take place in various forms: it can appear in speech balloons, on separate captions on the edge of a panel, or even completely outside the panel.

However, the text can be also read as image, when lettering is treated “graphically”, thus providing effects like mood or implication of sound (Eisner, 1985, 10). One typical example of this in *Watchmen* is the bolding of certain words in order to increase their impact, indicating both stress in speech as well as underlining the importance of the words in the narrative. This type of graphic text clearly demonstrates how fragile and unsustainable the division between textual and visual narration is when discussing graphic novels. As *Watchmen* includes a significant amount of clearly textual material in the form of the appendices, it serves a purpose to devote a separate section to the analysis of textual narration, even though the visual aspects of the analysis cannot be completely dismissed. The comic book narration also occasionally tips the balance between visual and verbal narration by privileging one over the other, as happens for example in Chapter VIII, as pages 1-2 depict a telephone conversation between Hollis Mason and Sally Jupiter. The distribution of knowledge happens prominently through the dialogue, and the characters speaking are not fully shown even once, only parts of them, thus heightening the importance of the dialogue. The reader is shown glimpses of both parties and their homes as they speak, thus acquiring more information than either of the characters since Hollis and Sally cannot see each other (Branigan, 1992, 70-71). Still, even if the dialogue is more prominent than the visual narrative during this scene, the images nevertheless produce a narrative of their own, conveying information more “subtly to the reader that would otherwise require writing out descriptive details” (Ewert, 2004, 182-183). Hollis is watching the news on the Afghanistan invasion while Sally’s television shows a generic soap opera; Hollis’s table holds a beer can and cigarettes while Sally’s is filled with various vitamin products. All of these little visual clues subtly contain information that would require several pages of written narrative, whereas images produce these meanings almost instantly.

As mentioned above, one of the most common types of textual narration in traditional literature is that of internal written monologue. In *Watchmen*, this internal monologue is often

expressed by some written medium, as for example in the form of a diary, “a close relative – and an important ancestor - of the autonomous monologue”, as Dorrit Cohn points out (1978, 208). According to Cohn, diarists write, like monologists speak, only for themselves, which means that they have no need for overt exposition, as the fiction of privacy is destroyed the moment a diarist begins to explain his/her existential circumstances in the manner of an autobiographer addressing possible readers (1978, 208). This is also why a diarist’s past usually emerges in the order it presents to his memory, “fragmented and allusive rather than continuous and explicit” (1978, 208-209). In a graphic novel, however, the diarist’s inner monologue is complimented by a visual narrative, which reveals details the diarist does not tell, or illustrates at length things he/she only briefly mentions without destroying the illusion of privacy. In a purely written narrative form of a diary, the diarist has to tell his “inner and outer condition anew” every time he picks up his pen, whereas a combination of visual and textual narrative erases some of the need for explicit description of outer conditions. This takes place, too, in Dr. Malcolm Long’s notes in Chapter VI: the caption “Dinner didn’t go very well” is the only thing he writes about dinner, but the consecutive panels depict the dinner scene, showing what happened to make Dr. Long write that in his diary.

The main diary in *Watchmen* is still that of Rorschach, captions of which begin the graphic novel and which as a concrete object plays a crucial role later in the narration. The narrative focus of the textual narration may shift from one character’s speech or writing to another’s during chapters, but the narrator is always easily distinguished by different visual looks and varying uses of language. Rorschach’s mode of expression is one of short sentences and incorrect grammar (“tireder”), giving clues and hints about his character and background:

Rorschach's journal. October 21st, 1985: Woken at eleven by shouting outside.
Disturbed to find I had fallen asleep without removing the skin from my head. Tireder than I thought. Should be more careful.
(V; 11)

These entries are reminiscent of pieces of paper torn from somewhere, and the font used imitates handwriting to some extent. Rorschach's diary-narration comprises precisely of these short sentences ("Tired than I thought. Should be more careful."), his film-noir detective-style observations about the world around him, often combined with visual focalization where the reader sees the world from his perspective or him writing in the journal. Rorschach's writing has none of the bolded words to indicate stress that mark the other character's speech and writing, and even after he loses his "face", his speech remains completely stress-free, creating the effect of a monotonous voice completely void of any emotions. As all the other characters' voices have these stresses, it becomes clear that the difference is intended precisely for this effect.

3.1 Under the Hood – Producing Textual Evidence

The aspect that most clearly sets *Watchmen* apart from other graphic novels are the written appendices after eleven chapters (the final chapter is without one). These fictitious articles, interviews, psychological reports and other textual evidence bring new depths into the narration in ways that may not immediately be clear to the reader and are by no means essential to the understanding of the story and enjoyment of the basic narrative. To create the illusion that they have been collected as in the form of a scrap book, almost all appendices have a drawn note attached, complete with a drawn paperclip, explaining their origin: "We present here excerpts from Hollis Mason's autobiography, *Under The Hood* --- Reprinted with permission of the author" (I; 27). One appendix depicting an unfinished draft of a newspaper cover goes as far as to show a pencil 'forgotten' at the edge of the page (VIII; 32). In order to comprehend these fragmental paratexts the reader has to actively construct various turning points in several different spaces in time in the fictitious universe of *Watchmen* (Mikkonen, 2005, 304). These

paratexts seem to act as textual evidence of the reality of the universe in which the Watchmen exist, and are a vital part in the narrative schema of the reader and of the previous information the reader possesses. The texts acting as appendices occasionally appear also in the comic book narrative, as we are shown for example Hollis Mason's bookshelf with his autobiography or the newspaper draft being constructed in VIII ;10. Branigan's concept of the narrative schema functions to complete the narration, it works as a model of the combination of texts, images and iconic signs so that the result is a continuous, flexible movement both in time, space and narration (Mäkinen, 1998, 100). The main narrative of the graphic novel interacts with the appendices, and the information contained in them complete and deny each other in the dynamic process which creates the narrative.

The first three appendices consist of excerpts from *Under the Hood*, an autobiography by Hollis Mason, the second superhero to make himself known in the US under the alias Nite Owl during the 1940s. Here the narration style is one of familiar retrospective first-person narrative, and it provides a context for the alternative US of *Watchmen*, where Mason describes the first impulses he had to follow his "vocation" during the late 1930s (I; 32). This narrative provides the reader with the exact point where the world of the reader and the world of the comic book were torn apart, and the universe of real-life superheroes became the reality. Mason's narrative also reveals that the superheroes are far from being the heroes of their communities - in fact they are faced with constant distrust, speculation and ridicule in a society where homosexuality is seen as more acceptable than dressing up in a mask and tights, which comes through well in Mason's somewhat self-ironic writing:

I've heard all the psychologists' theories, and I've heard all the jokes and the rumors and the innuendo, but what it comes down to for me is that I dressed up as like an owl and fought crime because it was fun and because it needed doing and because I goddamn felt like it. Okay. There it is. I've said it. I dressed up. As an owl. And fought crime.

(I; 31)

Mason's expression is clearly one of justifying to the public what he did ("because I goddamn

felt like it”), almost as if he was ‘coming out of the closet’ by repeating his words, relieved to have had the courage to say it out loud. A parallel is drawn between being gay and being a superhero by the use of similar terminology concerning the ‘true nature’ of people. It also becomes clear from Mason’s text that the reason superhero comics never became successful in the world of *Watchmen* was precisely the appearance of these ‘real’ crime-fighters (I; 32). The following two appendices continue to give the reader excerpts from *Under The Hood*, and these pieces narrate us in detail of the history of the first superheroes, called the “Minutemen” and what became of them: all this additional information brings new events and existents that deepen the narration and explain some of the actions and motives of the characters in the main story – in short, they become a part of the narrative schema the reader constructs.

These appendices even at one point manage to pastiche the original comic book conventions of our universe: Adrian Veidt, the superhero Ozymandias, advertises what he calls “Veidt Method”: a self-improvement course, which includes:

[S]eries of physical and intellectual exercise systems which, if followed correctly, can turn YOU into a superhuman, fully in charge of your own destiny. All that is required is the desire for perfection and the will to achieve it.
(X; 32)

As Matthew Wolf-Meyer has noticed, this advertisement is a direct pastiche of the Charles Atlas’ advertisements that ran in the comic books in the 1950s, urging “90 pound weaklings” that got picked on at the beach by the bigger boys to send money to Atlas for a “subscription to his life changing self-improvement course” (2003, 498). Other appendices include a scientific article on the only truly superhuman superhero Dr. Manhattan, declaring that “God exists and he’s American” (IV; 31), as well as an outtake on the scrap book of Sally Jupiter (formerly known as Silk Spectre), complete with personal letters and an interview, revealing the unglamorous business side of the superhero profession. All these additions increase the reader’s understanding of the universe in which the comic book is located. Seymour Chatman (1978, 53-54) has developed a hierarchical division between story events: kernels and satellites.

The kernel events are the major events which advance the plot “by raising and satisfying questions”, whereas satellite events are minor plot events that are in no way crucial in the ability to follow the narrative text. The omission of a satellite text will only impoverish the text aesthetically, and its function is to elaborate the kernel events, to imply their existence. One could say that these written appendices function precisely as these satellites, operating at a deep structural level and by the means of an independent medium (1978, 54). Problematic here is the fact that even though the appendices begin as material clearly in the public domain, such as published books and articles, they gradually transfer into showing the reader evidently private material not meant to be published. This creates a hierarchy of discourses (cf. Branigan, 1992, 74) which provides the reader with knowledge no other character in the story has.

These fictive appendices were the first of their kind in comic books, and serve an important function in the reading of the entire novel. Moore has not merely created alternate superhero characters, he has also given them a concrete past, textual evidence of their existence in a society that has crucially affected the way these characters act now. The relationship between the appendices and the comic book narrative itself is a complex one, both affecting one another. The appendices give the reader clues to solve the mystery the superheroes are trying to solve, they create pasts for the characters, they explain their present. But the comic book also affects the way the appendices are read, so that when Dan Dreiberg writes in his article “Blood from the Shoulders of Pallas” in the appendix for chapter VII about “visiting a sick acquaintance at a hospital in Maine”, he is referring to the Mothman, a fellow superhero gone insane – a fact revealed to the reader in Rorschach’s narration in Chapter I, if one is alert enough a reader to spot such details.

Textual evidence is also offered to the reader of *Watchmen* in a much more subtler way than the appendices, by the way of *detail texts*. These detail texts are small textual details embedded in the visual world of the comic book, such as posters, signs, books or newspapers

(Herkman, 1996, 43). Depending on the comic book in question, these detail texts may be crucial to the understanding and interpretation of the text, and create several narrative levels within the comic. *Watchmen*, although already constructed at multiple levels of narration, does not ignore the opportunity to influence the reader via these detail texts. Newspaper headlines appear at various points in the comic, contextualizing the current political situation with headlines such as: “French withdraw military commitment from Nato” (II; 9), “Keene Act passed: Vigilantes illegal” (VI; 15) or “Reds cross Pakistan border” (VIII; 4). All these take place in different points in time in the alternate history of *Watchmen*, and they all help the reader to construct the political and historical context of this fictitious world. These headlines are deliberately written out, so it is likely that they are meant to be read, instead of being ignored. Other types of detail texts include advertisements and slogans that appear in the background, including a spray-painted “Who watches the watchmen?” that appears repeatedly. So, even though the title phrase of the “Watchmen” is not explicitly said at any point in the actual narrative, the theme it presents is kept alive throughout with the help of the detail texts, appointing the detail texts in a more crucial position than just background material.

3.2 “Who Watches the Watchmen?” - The Power of Epigraphs

The narration of *Watchmen* is affected by yet another textual device: that of epigraphs. Every chapter ends with an epigraph that consists of a short quotation, varying from the song lyrics of Bob Dylan to the philosophical fragments of Friedrich Nietzsche. These intertextual allusions all affect the way the reader interprets and analyzes the chapters; one could say that they cast a shadow over the chapter to which they are epigraphed, forcing the reader to reconsider what he/she has just read. But as Barish Ali has noticed in his article “The Violence of Criticism: The Mutilation and Exhibition of History in *From Hell*” (2005, 605-631), the comic book quotation

differs crucially from the traditional literary quotation due to its radically different format (2005, 612). Ali sees the gaps between panels and gaps between the original text and the quotations as places where the reader steps in and ‘creates’ the text being read, inserting his/her own interpretations of the relationship between the old and the new text, as with the images on a comic book page (2005, 611). However, as this in my view applies to other types of literature as well, Ali’s argument is left rather weak.

Chapter V, titled “Fearful Symmetry”, ends with a quotation from William Blake’s poem “The Tyger” (1794):

Tyger, Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

Considering the fact that Chapter V deals with the pursuit and capture of Rorschach, this leads to the interpretation that the Tyger referred to *is* Rorschach, beyond all description and understanding, beyond capture mentally and spiritually: no hand or eye can ever truly capture him, neither his therapist nor his enemies in prison. The original poem by Blake ends with the same stanza, except that “could” is replaced by “dare”, which makes the task of framing the mind of Rorschach an even more daunting a task (*The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 2001, 1359-1360). The connection between Rorschach and the idea of a Blakean “tyger” instead of “tiger” is made even more apparent by the two police officers entering the building where he is. The other jokingly warns his friend with the phrase “Here be tygers” (V; 26), which is an allusion to the phrase “here be dragons”, used on medieval maps to denote dangerous or unexplored territories. Tigers infiltrate the entire chapter, as the metanarrative of the pirate comic, too deals with “a pale and mottled yellow” giant shark, a beast tangled in ropes, unable to escape (V; 20). The metaphors and allusions are heavy with meanings, as even the dominant color scheme of Chapter V with its fiery yellow tints brings to mind a yellow

tiger.

Another striking piece of carefully woven intertextual allusions is on the final page of Chapter XI, which ends with the soundless depiction of people's reactions as Adrian Veidt's plan is carried out and 3 million New Yorkers are killed in a fake alien invasion. Next to the panels of horrified faces and the blank last panel Moore has added this epigraph:

My name is Ozymandias,
King of Kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty,
and despair!

This quotation is from Percy Bysshe Shelley's famous poem "Ozymandias" (1817), which is also Adrian Veidt's superhero alter ego. Ozymandias, of course, refers to the Egyptian king Rameses, whose colossus bears a similar inscription. At this point in the narrative Veidt has succeeded in his plan of killing millions of people, and Rorschach and Nite Owl, who have come to stop him, have nothing left to do but stand and despair. However, the quotation can also be read in an ironical light if one is familiar with the entire poem by Shelley, which ends: "Nothing beside remains. Round the decay/ Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare /The lone and level sands stretch far away" (*The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 2001, 1719-1720). The tyrant triumphantly declares "Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!" – and yet, in the end nothing remains of Ozymandias himself but a "colossal wreck". His victory, utopia achieved, is short-lived, as the ambiguous ending of *Watchmen* also implies.

These types of quotations are explicit intertextuality, by which Herkman means the kind of allusion that binds the text to another text, a *subtext*, a previous literary text (Herkman, 1998, 189.) Through this type of reference the graphic novel attempts to bind its meanings to a certain kind of subtext and the meanings therein. It should be noted, however, that the level in which the reader understands the intended message of the subtext depends on whether or not the reader is acquainted with the subtext (Herkman, 198). As Samuel R. Delaney has noticed, literary parallels such as these function in a text by "adding pleasure and resonance to the

reading of those who recognize them. But neither [consciously or unconsciously] do they lend, in themselves, *power, authority, persuasive force or greatness*" (1999, 227). The understanding and enjoyment of the basic narrative is not diminished by not being familiar with the texts referred to. These epigraphs can support the narrative or they can attempt to deny it, depending on how they are read. Both of the examples above are ones which can be read as either supporting or denying the narrative, depending on the reader's previous knowledge of the topic.

The entire graphic novel ends with the epigraph "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes", with the translation "Who watches the watchmen?", quoted from the epigraph of the Tower Commission Report from 1987². A simple argument is that this is what the entire graphic novel is about: the question of political power, the question of the misuse of power, which leaves its shadow over the whole work, making the reader question the justifications and motives of all the characters in the novel. In this light the entire publication of the graphic novel could then be read as critique of the political situation of the mid-1980s, tying the work closely to a wider context. The decision to put the epigraphs at the end of the chapters instead of the beginnings is somewhat peculiar, for it affects the interpretation of the text once the chapter has already been read. What ensues is a sort of hermeneutic circle, in which the interpretation of the text influences the way we read the epigraphs, which in turn affect the way we read the text itself.

² The report relates to the Iran-Contra scandal, in which the US government was suspected of misuse of power.

4 FEARFUL SYMMETRY - VISUAL NARRATION AND BEYOND

The separation of visual and textual narration when studying comics may seem arbitrary and somewhat pointless, as one could argue that comics are an entirely visual medium and that letters as such are visual signs, too. There are some aspects of comics that are more visual than others, such as the panel division, the point of view of the panel imagery and the use of colours, for example - and yet the question of the speech balloon may rise, as it is clearly a visual icon typical of comics, but nevertheless contains textual, written information. The visual narrative of *Watchmen* seems to search for a perfect symmetry through repetition and rhythm, reproducing various visual icons at certain intervals and juxtapositioning various separate storylines, producing effects dependent upon the context in which they appear. Shifts from separate storylines are highlighted by verbal and visual allusions, such as the disturbingly similar images of the narrator of the pirate comic eating a raw seagull and Dan Dreiberg biting into a piece of chicken leg (V; 9-10). This symmetry is predicted even at the final pages of the graphic novel, as the diary of Rorschach, which begins the entire graphic novel, enters the hands of the yellow press, hinting at the return of the old status quo as the truth of Veidt's plan is revealed, restoring symmetry. As Wolf-Meyer points out, preserving the status quo actually is the predicament of superhero comics themselves:

[U]topia achieved would be a radical narrative, whereas utopia attempted and failed retains the conservative status quo while appeasing the proposed conservative ideology of readers. Hence, in reading *Watchmen*, readers identify with Rorschach and his conservative ideology rather than Ozymandias and his radical act of achieving utopia. (2003, 511)

The status quo of the world of *Watchmen* is preserved as the truth is revealed, and the visual narrative supports this interpretation by showing the reader again the image of the smiley face with the red stain that began the entire novel.

These recurring images, such as the smiley face ("Have a Nice Day!"), a

black-and-white silhouette of a couple embracing, not to mention the numerous triangles, all appear repeatedly. Through this repetition the images become symbols, which means that they begin to represent something else through a rule or a shared agreement (Mikkonen, 2005, 31). These symbols become narrativized, and act as parts of the narrative by the way of integrating the symbolic meanings linked to them to new contexts. The symbols can even turn into metaphors, as for example the recurring image of the Comedian being flung through the window, which Markku Soikkeli has interpreted as speaking of the violence hidden in all of us (1998, 137-138.). The reoccurrence of these images that turn into symbols can also be interpreted through what Genette refers to as *narrative frequency*, repetition in narrative (1980, 113-116). As already mentioned, in *Watchmen* certain images and panels are repeated in different contexts, sometimes even with an alternate point of view, thus adding new dimensions to the narrative. One example of this frequency, this repetition is the image of the Comedian being thrown out of the window in Chapter I (I; 3) (See Appendix 2.). This image is repeated in other contexts: in Chapter II, Rorschach narrates an anecdote about the depressed clown Pagliacci, while the narrative shows again the murder of the Comedian (II; 27); the black humor of the anecdote and the images is that of a depressed clown, which is what the Comedian appears to have been before he died. The punchline "...I am Pagliacci" is contrasted with the by now iconic image of the man thrown through a window. This image finally returns in Chapter XI, shown again but now both through the eyes of the killer as well as the victim, finally revealing the reader the face of the killer, just before flinging the Comedian through the window (XI; 24-26).

As mentioned in previous chapters, the panel division in *Watchmen* is often one where parallel storylines, two separate narratives alter from panel to panel and thus are placed in relation to one another, commenting on the other, yet neither can definitely be said to be more dominant than the other. The panel transition is from scene-to-scene, and as McCloud has

stressed, it requires active deductive reasoning on the part of the reader to construct meanings between transitions such as these (1993, 70-74). Also, when these parallel storylines take place in *Watchmen*, the captions of one narrative appear often in connection with the panel image of the other narrative. This combination of separate narratives of word and image can be read in various ways: as an example of what McCloud refers to as interdependent, where “words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone” (1993, 155). On the other hand, Kai Mikkonen refers to this type of relationship between the image and text as “syntagmatic”, binding two separate narratives into one, and where both word and image support and complete each other (2005, 299). Branigan writes of temporal and spatial order, and how events that have no causal connection are yet presented “*as if* they were causally connected” (1992, 39). Branigan stresses the reader’s importance in evaluating these temporal relationships and juxtapositions of spatial fragments, the cognitive schemas that the reader constructs (1992, 39-40). So, as can be gathered, the same type of union of word and image can be interpreted through various different paradigms, which all aid the reader to understand the complexity and diversity of even the simplest of unions between words and images. The role of the reader and his/her abilities are of vital importance in understanding comics, as interpretations are made instantly.

These interdependent syntagmatic juxtapositions of no immediate causal connection are a standard pattern in *Watchmen*, which has a bound panel division (Manninen, 1995, 34). This means that it is regularly divided into nine panels per page, three in a row, so that during these juxtapositional storylines, every other image narrates one story, while every other narrates another one, and the captions containing dialogue often appear in the other story, commenting it in an almost fearful symmetry (cf. II; 2-3, III; 9-16). *Watchmen* uses the so-called ‘splash panels’³ very rarely, thus heightening their effect. The long piece in Chapter

³ A panel that breaks the normal division by being larger or significantly different, “splashed” across the page.

III is an example of the two narratives commenting on each other, as Dr. Manhattan is interviewed on television while Laurie and Dan are confronted by a gang of thugs in a back alley: the question put to Dr. Manhattan relating to Afghanistan ends with the words “...will **you** be prepared to enter **hostilities**?”, while the panel shows Laurie and Dan threatened by the gang, exchanging meaningful looks - they indeed are prepared for hostilities, both being ex-superheroes (III; 12) (See Appendix 3.). The later comments of the interviewer are combined with the scenes of fighting and violence, producing a sense of connection though there is none - the text of the other narrative seems to comment on the images, conveying a larger meaning than it would be possible by traditional comic book narrative of word-specific, illustrative function. This effect of apparent causality caused by the juxtaposition of separate storylines questions somewhat the construction of the narrative schemas and the illusion of coherence they produce, for the connection is created by deliberate positioning, and the effects of coherence and causality are mere illusions – is the ideological coherence of the text also illusionary, even false?

Another such an example of the way this type of narration widens the storytelling is the panel showing Dr. Manhattan (III; 9): the dialogue between Laurie and Dan comes from the other narrative, the image shows Dr Manhattan dressing himself telekinetically, by the power of his mind. The caption says “...and he does not care how people dress”, the original context being that of describing Hollis Mason and how it does not matter which clothes one wears when visiting him. However, combined with the image of Dr. Manhattan dressing himself in a manner unlike anyone else on the planet, the “how” in the captions acquires a whole new meaning - the complete message of the union more than either would be if narrated separately. Most of these cases of internarrational commenting in *Watchmen* produce an effect of irony, even though often very dark irony, such as the clumsy lovemaking attempt between Dan and Laurie in Chapter VII (14-15), which is accompanied by a praising television commentary of

Ozymandias' skillful gymnastic performance.

These parallel narratives mostly take place simultaneously in two different places at the same time, but occasionally the time frame alters so as to show a recurring narrative from the past events, giving meaning to the current narrative. This is the case for example in Chapter VII, where Dan's motives for suddenly being scared about Laurie's life are motivated by a simultaneous recount of a previous visit from Rorschach, warning that someone might be killing masked heroes (VII; 3). As Gérard Genette has pointed out, these "retroactive returns" confer on the past episode a meaning that it did *not yet have* in its own time. Past actions are modified in their meanings, their interpretations changed after an occurrence in a new context (1980, 56). This new context is in its turn also affected by the narrative schemas related to the past event which is now recurring. This is apparent throughout Chapter II, "Absent Friends", in which various characters appear to be remembering the deceased Comedian during his funeral, and the visual narrative activates certain past events to the present narrative for the reader to see. These memories are conveyed in the visual narrative by changes in time and space in which the character "remembering" it stays in the same posture while the temporal and spatial elements around him alter (cf. II; 9 and 12). The type of transformation is familiar from film studies, and as Edward Branigan has noticed, it is a clearly visual way of narrating the past private experiences of the character through external focalization, showing what the character has experienced in the past but from outside the character (1992, 103). Jeanne Ewert, too, has noticed how the use of visual elements to provide smooth transitional moments in space and time is a practical advantage of a rich visual style that "exceeds the content of the speech balloons" (2004, 185). Juha Herkman has claimed that this playing with temporal levels and transitional moments in time and space is in fact an essential quality of the narrative of *Watchmen*, leading to the interpretation that alongside power, time is one of the crucial overall themes of the graphic novel (1998, 121-122). I will return to the concept of time and narration

in *Watchmen* in greater depth in section six of this thesis.

4.1 Extranormal operatives - Sound and colour

One of the most typical and widely-used means comics have is the use of the ‘word balloon’. It is the icon of the comic book form, to which Will Eisner refers as a “desperation device” (1985, 26) due to its impossible mission: the attempt to visually communicate sound. Scott McCloud (1993, 134-135) has illustrated the onomatopoeic possibilities of the word balloon; according to him, both the shape of the balloons and the lettering styles inside them “speak of an ongoing struggle to capture the very essence of sound” (1993, 134). Some of the characters in the comic book have a special lettering style and a specific kind of word balloon, in which the visual and verbal expression combine together in order to create onomatopoeic signs, in which the graphic layout complements the meaning of the words (Herkman, 1998, 50). As already briefly mentioned in section three of this thesis, the bolding of specific words acts as a way of bringing emphasis to these words, stressing their importance: Eisner has even gone so far as to suggest that the reader “should be able to get the thrust or sense of the dialogue out of the bold-face letters alone” (1985, 152). In *Watchmen*, the speech balloons are standard, round and smooth, with the exceptions of Rorschach and his wavy lines and Dr. Manhattan, whose intense blueness reaches even his speech balloons. Dr. Manhattan’s gradual withdrawal from the world of human beings is stressed also in his speech balloons, which have double lines whereas others have single lines - a unique way of hinting at his increasing detachment and separation.

Rorschach, as mentioned, has a distinctly unique word balloon style: his speech balloons have wavy, almost slurry edges, which create a somewhat moist and muffled idea of speech as opposed to the usual straight and clear lines of normal speech balloons. His voice, described as horrible and “monotone” by Laurie (I; 23), lacks all the bold-face words, creating

indeed the feeling of a monotonous speech without any stresses. It is noteworthy to mention that once he is captured and his mask has been taken off, his speech balloons alter to look like everyone else's, that is the 'normal' speech balloon, although still without any stresses. The effect of the mask he wears on his speech is clear, as the quality of his voice alters depending on whether the mask is on or not. However, a more careful inspection of Rorschach's speech balloons reveal that his speech balloons were "normal", round and smooth and with bolded words in his past even with his mask on, as a past scene located in 1966 demonstrates (II; 10-11). It is therefore to be assumed that his speech did not acquire the "Rorschach-quality" of wavy edges and zero stress until 1975, as he himself recounts his traumatic "birth" as Rorschach to Dr. Long in Chapter VI. His speech echoes, among all other things, also the shift in his mental state, the movement "over the edge" that took place, causing him to become what he is. This type of visual information concerning speech is unique to the medium of comics, and serves many purposes from recognition to onomatopoeia.

An important aspect to notice concerning sound in *Watchmen* is the complete lack of sound effects. This lack of effects is noteworthy, for the general opinion among comics researchers is that sound effects are one of the essential qualities of comics (cf. Herkman, 1998, 43-5; Manninen, 1995, 37-8). Graphic sound effects ("Pow!" "Ka-Boom!" etc.) have become almost a trademark of superhero comics, even though their use increases the feeling of detachment on the part of the reader. This detachment may arise from the "double effect" of both seeing the action itself as well as the seeing the "sound" it causes – just seeing the action can alone create the sound images in the readers mind. Just like spoken language is not seen in real life, neither are the sound effects of violent action. Thus, by avoiding the use of sound effects and leaving the sounds to the imagination of the reader, *Watchmen* manages to bring the reader closer to the action, more intertwined with the narration, become a part of it, an active participant in the creation of a narrative from sequential images.

The contradictory element here is, of course, the unavoidable existence of speech balloons, which convey the dialogue to the reader in written form, which could hardly be described as “realistic”. However, comic book speech acts do not generally have the same visual effect as violent action, as the movement caused by speech is hardly visible – the aforementioned “double effect” is absent from the dialogues, thus eradicating the problem of both seeing the action and seeing the sound. The use of “motion lines” indicating movement is also very limited, which results in the fact that the imagery is one of photorealism, of completely ‘still’ images that create sequential motion. Dave Gibbons has discarded all of these traditional elements of comic book action, which actually produces a stronger image of reality, for sounds are not ‘seen’ in real life; *Watchmen* also rejects the use of thought balloons, probably for the same effect of realism.

As the second of this chapter’s “extranormal operatives”, the colouring of the graphic novel is a factor not to be overlooked. As Scott McCloud points out, black and white –comics have a tendency to transfer the ideas *behind* the art, meaning transcending form, whereas in colour comics the colours themselves take on more significance (1993, 192). Unfortunately, this often implies that the more “serious” work is done in black and white, while the coloured comics have the status of entertainment. *Watchmen*, however, challenges this stereotypical assumption. Dave Gibbons has used very bright colours, the trademark of American superhero comics, which according to Scott McCloud originated from the competition to stand out from the normal black-and-white look of the newspapers: “...costumed heroes were clad in bright, primary colors and fought in a bright primary world!” (1993, 188). Because the colours of superheroes’ costumes remained the same from panel to panel, the colours they wore came to symbolize the characters in the mind of the reader (1993, 188). Thus Dr. Manhattan’s bright blue colouring begins to symbolize him in *Watchmen*, and dominates his narration, his captions and his world to the point that when the colour appears, the narrative schema concerning him

will automatically activate. The panels with the red shade create an immediate feeling of threat, as it has been associated with a brutal murder scene during the initial pages of the graphic novel. Colouring plays a crucial role in the “modern mythology” of the superhero, as symbols are a part of the “stuff of which Gods are made” (McCloud, 1993, 188).

The colours can also express mood, become more subjective and thus affect narration (1993, 190). As mentioned, in *Watchmen* the dominant colour in certain scenes is that of crimson, almost dark pinkish red – the same far too bright colour is also used for blood in the comic. This red tint shades the Comedian’s death scene right in the beginning, and later when the images of the scene reoccur, they are continuously red, creating an atmosphere of threat and anxiety. There is a visible change in colouring between the main story of *Watchmen* and the *Black Freighter* -comic read inside it, and the doubly-fictional pirate comic has a distinguished colour pattern of cruder and cheaper appearing colour division than *Watchmen*, implying its ‘superhero comic –nature’ in the fictional universe of *Watchmen*. The pirate comic with its bright green and yellow is the cheap entertainment that superhero comics have been labelled as in our world, and they are made with low costs for the buying masses. The appendix of Chapter V consists of a praising article on the “creators” of the *Black Freighter* –pirate comic, ironically mocking the similar praises done on Moore and Gibbons. As letterer, Gibbons even goes out of his way to draw different styles of speech balloons and captions based on the pirate comic character and the time period.

The colouring serves also as a timing device, as Gibbons uses the blinking streetlight outside Moloch's apartment (II; 22-23) to serve as a visual reminder of the parallel storylines of *Watchmen*, even though this time the narrative is single, and no parallel shift appears. This also works as a way for the reader to follow the time frame: every other panel is a gloomy yellow, while other is dark, thus pacing the action in a more uncommon way. The temporality of the narration can also be created through colouring in the sense that a past storyline can be

juxtaposed with a present one, and the distinction between past and present is created through shading the past storyline with a single colour, thus immediately separating all the images belonging to that particular time level as their own distinct whole. One such instance is the murder scene of the Comedian right at the start of the graphic novel. The colouring serves various functions in the narrative structures of *Watchmen*, it symbolizes, it gives the narrative rhythm, it creates the mood.

4.2 “Deus Ex Machina” - The Omniscient Narrator?

Comics do not have an omniscient narrator in the same way that traditional literature does, no all-knowing all-seeing power behind the action. As discussed in previous chapters, comics do use focalizers and narrators and point-of-view shots, which are an integral part of the narration of the graphic novel. One could argue that the omniscience of narration takes place in the visual depiction of the narrative when no focalization takes place and the images merely illustrate the actions from a clearly outside point of view. Herkman (1998, 111) has resorted to film studies and calls this type of storytelling “Hollywood aesthetics”, where the narration becomes ‘invisible’ and the focus is on the events instead of the narration. According to Herkman, the reader is ‘pulled in’ to the story, and only after a visible break in the narrative structure does the reader once again become aware of the narrative structure and the discourse it applies and consequently use different interpretational tools. The question is not this simple, however. According to John Morreall, an omniscient narrator is one who knows about “events occurring at any time or place, in complete detail, and not just about public events but also about the private thoughts and feelings of the characters” (1994, 430). This statement does not hold when discussing the narration in *Watchmen*, as for example the traditional thought balloons depicting private thoughts are not shown at all to the reader.

The argument is that every story has a point of view, so there must be someone telling the story from that point of view (Morreall, 1994, 431). *Watchmen* creates an interesting dilemma here, for who is the person behind the collection of appendices? Who is the mysterious “we” that presents the excerpts from the various sources, some of them clearly of very private nature? The events are “filtered through” by a consciousness, which according to Morreall makes the idea of “omniscience” impossible, as an omniscient narrator knows everything, past, present and future – with no need to have a point of view or a presentation of the events in a chronological order (1994, 432). Edward Branigan borrows Colin McCabe’s ideas on a “hierarchy of discourses” that reveal and conceal the amount of knowledge available to the reader by presenting the events of the story through “less knowledgeable” agencies such as various characters (1992, 74). Thus, we do not know any more about the plot by Adrian Veidt than Rorschach and Nite Owl investigating it, as the events have been filtered through their experiences; at least that would be the case had we not the appendices with their information. As the readers are equipped with the appendices, the readers are in possession of more knowledge than the characters, which positions the reader in an interesting position in the hierarchy of discourses in *Watchmen*. The fact that these hierarchies exist mean that choices are being made for the reader of the comic, events are presented in one way rather than another, which according to Branigan, is the essence of narration itself (1992, 81-82). Every panel is a deliberate scene shown to us for a purpose of the narrative, the gutter closing every panel. So who shows us the scenes, gives out the small clues to solve the mystery, who allows us a sudden access to the memories of the characters? Are these questions even relevant when discussing a medium so visual as comics? Morreall’s answer to the problematics of an omniscient narrator is to appeal to the author and his/her creative control, transferring the omnipotence to the author (1994, 434). Branigan, on the other hand, transfers this process to the reader, who creates and controls the narrative via acquiring knowledge divided by the text

(1992, 76).

Jonathan D. Culler has discussed the problem of omniscience in his relatively recent article “Omniscience” (*Narrative*, 12:1, 2004). In this article, Culler problematizes the religious undertones linked with the term, as the usual analogy is that made between the author/narrator and God, and the basis for the idea is what Culler refers to as “Perfect Being Theory” (2004, 23). The main problem in theology is the question of the compatibility of omniscience and free will, both which Culler claims are taken for granted as necessary and desirable (2004, 23). The idea of a “perfect being” is literally put to test in *Watchmen*, for the character of Dr. Manhattan IS as close to God as a character can be: he is “omniscient” in a sense, for he knows all events past, present and future, and omnipotent as he potentially has the power to destroy the world (or save it). But, as Culler points out, omniscient characters and narrators differ greatly in their “readiness to share their unlimited knowledge with the reader” (2004, 24). Dr. Manhattan does have access to Laurie’s thoughts, as shown to us in the dialogue between him and Laurie in Chapter VIII:

“**Jon?** Oh Jesus, I... I, I mean they said you’d **gone**. They said you were on **Mars...**”
 “I **am** on Mars. Now, I believe we have a **conversation** scheduled. You want to **talk** to me.”
 “God, **yes**. Yes, I was just thinking... But Jon, how did you **know?** I need to **see** you, you **appear** ... I mean, it’s all so **deus ex machina...**”
 (VIII; 23)

As Culler points out, omniscience is not a quantitative but a qualitative attribute: thus, if Jon/Dr. Manhattan has the ability to know the thoughts of one character, he “must by definition be treated as knowing those of others” (2004, 24). This claim is based on the assumption that the only alternative to a human’s partial knowledge must be an omniscient God. However, as Culler writes, we can imagine various versions of superior knowingness which are not limited to complete omniscience or human knowledge (2004, 26).

The implicit omniscience of Dr. Manhattan is also doubtful, for even though he has the

access to other people's thoughts and an omnitemporal view of the past, present and future, the future is not as simple as it sounds. In Chapter IX, Dr. Manhattan talks of his future in very vague terms: "I return to Earth at some point in my future. There are streets full of corpses. The details are vague." (IX; 17). The narrative also suggests at one point that Dr. Manhattan knew that President Kennedy would be assassinated, but yet he was seemingly powerless to prevent it, because to him, "the future is already happening" (IV; 16). Everything is preordained, yet as an omnipotent character he could change the course of history. The character of Dr. Manhattan dramatizes well the untenability of an "omniscient" narrator, and forces to look for other ways to analyze his existence. One solution, presented by Nicholas Royle in his book *The Uncanny* (2003), is to replace the heavily religious term "omniscience" with the idea of clairvoyance, more precisely telepathy (2003, 259). Royle strongly criticizes the religious undertones that plague the term omniscience, and suggests that telepathy "opens up possibilities of a humbler, more precise, less religiously freighted conceptuality than does omniscience for thinking about the uncanniness of what is going on in narrative fiction" (2003, 261). Telepathy is, according to Royle, both thematically and structurally at work in the narratives of modern fiction, and calls for a very different kind of storytelling than "that promoted by the religious, panoptical delusion of omniscience" (2003, 261). This, as Culler later has noticed, helps us understand that when characters' thoughts are reported, we are not dealing with a narrator who knows everything at once, but rather we should talk about "narrative instances" that report on one consciousness at a time, often transposing or translating the thoughts into the intermediate discourse (2004, 29).

The idea of telepathy instead of omniscience brings into discussion other elements as well, creating an effect of cognitive estrangement in the narrative as telepathy is linked with paranormal activities whereas the religious undertones of omniscience are more familiar with any reader born and raised in a western culture. So is Dr. Manhattan an omniscient God-like

creature or a super-human with the super-human ability of telepathy? At one point he expresses his visions as follows: “There’s some sort of static obscuring the future, preventing any clear impression. The electromagnetic pulse of a mass warhead detonation might conceivably cause that...” (IX; 17). His knowledge appears to be more telepathy-like than omniscient, and as the later development in the novel shows, this “static” is actually caused by Adrian Veidt to prevent him from discovering his plot too soon (X; 11). However, Dr. Manhattan’s character does retain some aspects which link him to the concept of God, as he playfully suggests he will go and “create some“ human life in another galaxy after leaving earth for good (XII; 27). The questions of creation and free will arise repeatedly in Dr. Manhattan’s narration, as he questions his actions:

A world grows up around me. Am I shaping it, or do its predetermined contours guide my hand? ... Without me, things would have been different. If the fat man hadn’t crushed the watch, if I hadn’t left it in the test chamber... Am I to blame, then? Or the fat man? Or my father, for choosing my career? Which of us is responsible? Who makes the world?
(IV; 27)

This question of making the world is a central theme in narratology, as the debate on “who makes the world?” is ever present. Is it the author, the narrator, the reader? The theme of power and responsibility entwines with the question of omnipotence. The question of symmetry and preservation of status quo are given new dimensions through the worldview of Dr. Manhattan, seeing the world acting as in clockwork, everything taking place as preordained. Dr. Manhattan’s inability to relate to human life and continuing resignation from the sphere of humanity place him in an interesting debate concerning God and whether or not God actually cares at all. Through Dr. Manhattan, *Watchmen* develops and discusses the idea of omniscience and all that is linked to it, including the dramatic change that follows from the appearance of something truly omnipotent and God-like, for as Jonathan Culler has noticed, the idea of divine omniscience is not really a model that helps us fathom the way authors and narrators work on

literary fiction. Instead, the analogy seems to work the other way:

[T]he example of the novelist, who creates his world, peopling it with creatures who come to seem to us autonomous and who have interesting adventures, helps us to imagine the possibility of a creator, a god, a sentient being, as undetectable to us as the novelist would be to the characters who exist in the universe of the text this god created.”
(2004, 23).

This idea is not new in the field of literature, but has been repeatedly explored by authors such as James Joyce. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) Joyce uses the internal monologue of Stephen Dedalus to discuss the role of the artist in connection to his work, an idea familiar from various other literary sources: “The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails” (1916/1996, 244-245). The vision of the indifferent, detached God “paring his fingernails” comes close to Dr. Manhattan’s impartiality in the face of humanity. The omnipotent characters work like omnipotent authors, drawing up analogies to help us explain things we cannot explain.

5 METHOD AND MADNESS - THE RELIABILITY OF THE NARRATOR

The reliability of the narrator has been one of the fundamental questions of traditional narratology ever since Wayne C. Booth first introduced the concept of unreliable narration in 1961 in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. The reliability of a narrator may be put to doubt in several ways, and the truthfulness of any fictive narration as such has also been questioned. Unreliable narration is often linked with mental illness and instability, the voice of a broken mind. Heidi Laine states in a recent article “Hulluja puhuvat. Näkökulmia kertojan mieleisairauteen” (*Nuori Voima*, 2-3/2006, 6-9) that the so-called “mad” characters in literature have traditionally represented silenced views, they have been objects of ridicule or protagonists for cruel and unexplainable actions. However, as Laine herself points out, this characterization of an insane literary narrator lacks much in definition, and instead one should focus on the question of how and with what kind of narrative structures mental instabilities are inscribed in fictive texts.

In *Watchmen*, one of the key characters and narrators, the vigilante Rorschach, is represented as an ambiguous character in connection to his mental health, and it is stated on several occasions by the other characters that he is not mentally reliable. The concept of unreliable narration must be redefined when discussing a visual narrative such as a graphic novel, as the imagery linked to narration and focalization of a potentially unreliable narrator transfers the discussion to a completely different level. How reliable are the images and visual storylines shown to the reader through Rorschach’s inner focalization? Is it possible to determine the state of his mind from his narration? Shoshana Felman has analyzed various types of literary madness in her book *Writing and Madness* (1985), connecting literary analysis with psychoanalysis. As a part of this discussion, the rise of cognitive narratology has also greatly contributed to the study of the depiction of the human mind and human consciousness

in literary works, providing the reader with an insight into the interaction with the literary text (Zunshine, 2003, 271).

This section of the thesis will discuss the questions of reliable/unreliable narration through the character of Rorschach, a character who is repeatedly given a narrative position in *Watchmen*, an authoritative position through which he is able to affect the narrative schemas created by the readers. This creates an ambiguous element in the narration, as his sanity is repeatedly questioned by the other characters, and yet, according to Matthew Wolf-Meyer (2003, 508), he is one of the most popular characters of the graphic novel and one the readers identify with. Apparently, the key to his success is simply the fact that he is “a misanthropic, has poor social skills, and is ostracized by his peers and society”. This creates an interesting dilemma concerning the formal elements of narrative and their ethical consequences, a question raised by James Phelan (2006, 2). The ethical and political consequences of identification with a sociopath are manyfold, and could in a detailed analysis reveal something about the hidden politics of the narrative that is *Watchmen*. This relates to the question of the comic book audience, which according to Wolf-Meyer, is either the stereotypical “adolescent male” (2003, 508), or alternately, consists largely of men (513), which means that his argument on supposed reader identification must be read with reservations. In this section I will examine how the varieties of focalization borrowed from traditional narratology will function in the context of a visual narrative of a graphic novel. The concept of focalization that has been developed further by the way of cognitive narratology, which focuses on the perception of the reader and how it effects the way the text is read and interpreted, will be taken into consideration in this section of the thesis. In addition, the thematic structure upholding symmetry will be discussed in connection to Rorschach and his character, as his mask already manifests concretely the thematic symmetry in the manner of Rorschach inkblots.

5.1 “The belief in truth is precisely madness” - Questions of Sanity and Insanity

As a key character in *Watchmen*, Rorschach (aka Walter Kovacs) is repeatedly described by various other characters and sources as an unstable person, and his mental health is often put to doubt. Even his actions suggest it, as he evokes fear in everyone and commits acts of brutal violence without hesitation (cf. I; 16, VI; 24-5, X; 14-5). The appendix of Chapter VI includes a report on him by the New York State Psychiatric Hospital as well as reports from his childhood dreams, contextualising his character further and providing clues and motifs as to how he has become the “madman” he is today. The appendix is clearly a part of the “Kovacs –file” Dr. Long uses in the main narrative, and a handwritten note by Dr. Long actually proposes to “identify a new syndrome that will help us to understand those other people who have in the past shared Kovacs masked vigilante activities” (VII; 32). The superhero activity is viewed as a psychological anomaly, suggesting that in fact all the heroes of *Watchmen* are nothing more than madmen. The chapter also makes an allusion to Friedrich Nietzsche through the epigraph of Chapter VI, titled “The Abyss Gazes Also”. The epigraph provides also the title of the chapter, becoming the key motif of the chapter:

Battle not
with monsters,
lest ye become
a monster,

and if you gaze
into the abyss
the abyss gazes
also into you.

This quotation comes from Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), and it creates several parallels and interpretative possibilities in the narrative context of *Watchmen*. One obvious link is naturally the relationship between Rorschach and Dr. Long, as Dr. Long “battles” with Rorschach during their psychotherapy sessions, ultimately losing the battle and discovering the

abyss gazing back at him: “The horror is this: In the end, it is simply a picture of empty meaningless blackness. We are alone. There is nothing else.” (VI; 28). Staring at a Rorschach ink blot in the increasing darkness of the panels, Dr. Long has lost the battle, and wades into the abyss.

The relevance of the quote is more subtle than this, however. Shoshana Felman has discussed the relationship between madness, philosophy and literature in connection to Nietzsche’s writing. Felman (1985, 35-6) characterizes madness in terms of “blindness”, of being blind to oneself to the point of entailing an illusion of reason. Felman links reason with madness, a conflict of thoughts, and claims that the question of madness is the question of thought itself. Madness is thus a “major philosophical preoccupation” (1985, 37), which can be discussed through such literary figures as Nietzsche, and, I shall claim, by such fictional characters as Rorschach. Rorschach’s moral conviction is infallible and uncompromising to the point of illusionary reason, as his narrative monologue reveals:

Soon there will be war. Millions will burn. Millions will perish in sickness and misery. Why does one death matter against so many? Because there is good and there is evil, and evil must be punished. Even in the face of Armageddon I shall not compromise this. But there are so many deserving retribution... and so little time.
(I;24).

His belief in good and evil knows no shades of grey, and his conviction for truth at all costs acts as an indicator of his madness, his unwillingness to compromise moving to the point of illusionary reason - at least according to Nietzsche, who states that “The belief in truth is precisely madness” (*Philosophy and Truth : Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, 1990). This rhetoric echoes the image already familiar from Shakespeare’s era of madmen being the only ones being able to see the truth. Rorschach believes in the absolute value of truth, and his position as a madman enables him to see the “truth”. One must also remember that the morality of a narrator does not determine his/her reliability; we do not, for example, question Dr. Manhattan’s narrative on Chapter IV, although he himself admits that “The

morality of my actions escape me” (IV; 14). As Seymour Chatman among others has pointed out, unreliability is a question of discourse, the view of what happens and what the existents are like, not a question of the personality of the narrator (1978, 234). An “unsavory” narrator, like Humbert Humbert on Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955), can tell a story completely reliably, which means that Rorschach’s narrative account and its reliability cannot be judged by his moral views.

The name “Rorschach” that Walter Kovacs has given his “unhealthy fantasy personality” (VI; 8) as Dr. Long calls it, is familiar from the field of psychology, where the so-called Rorschach inkblot tests are used in psychiatric evaluation. The Rorschach Inkblot Test was introduced to psychology in 1921 by Hermann Rorschach, and it is a projective personality test in which the unconscious level of the mind determines the way one perceives the inkblots, which in and of themselves are “nothing” (Bruno, 1986, 202-203). Today the test is held somewhat unreliable, and is used only when it forms a part of a larger battery of tests (1986, 203). These today controversial symmetrical inkblots appear in the narrative as well as in the mask Rorschach wears, which is made of a special fabric which has viscous fluids between two layers of latex and which is heat and pressure sensitive, thus being in constant motion, creating continuous “inkblots” on the surface of Rorschach’s “face”. As mentioned above, the meanings of the inkblots are projected on them by viewers unconscious, as they are in themselves meaningless. Rorschach’s face is a continuous flow of varying inkblot images, constantly shifting and changing, even at times creating visual continuums in the narrative, as in Chapter XII, where the shadow of Dan and Laurie embracing on the bottom of page 22 is followed by an inkblot image of Rorschach’s face with a similar pattern – and yet, the inkblot only shows the reader a projection, an interpretation. The visual narrative leads the reader, encourages him/her to make certain interpretative decisions concerning the narrative. Rorschach’s face is “empty” in a way, he is a blank canvas on which to project emotions. As

Shoshana Felman writes:

[T]he madman is not, strictly speaking, a person: he is *no one*, a blank, an empty speech receptacle. And it is insofar as he is “no one,” a nul set or an empty square, that he makes the system function.
(1985, 110).

Rorschach’s mask could be read as a mirror, representing the world around him, the constant change, “a possibility of permutation of signifiers” (1985, 110). He is no one, a mirror for his world – but as Darko Suvin writes of the mirroring function of science fiction, the mirror not only reflects, it transforms, it becomes a crucible (1979, 5). Rorschach transforms himself, the city in which he lives in, becomes a vigilante. The symmetry provided by the mask of Rorschach is filled with projections of the readers, transformed from a mere black-and-white image into a metaphor.

The question of the reliable and unreliable narrator has been viewed in traditional narratology a case of “an ironic form,” a conflict between the story and the narrative in which the story undermines the discourse (Chatman, 1978, 233). “Irony” as such is a tricky term as it firmly resists definition, and is not without difficulties. According to Chatman, the ironic form of writing establishes a secret communication between the implied author and the implied reader, which gives forth the unreliability of the narrator. Greta Olson writes in her article “Reconsidering Unreliability. Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators” (*Narrative*, 11:1, 2003) that detecting irony requires an interpretative strategy that involves “reading against the grain” of the text and assuming that one grasps the unwritten message behind the literal one (2003, 94). These types of ironic forms through conflicts between the story and the narrative do appear in Rorschach’s narrative sections. For example, in Chapter I Rorschach writes in his diary, asking the rhetorical question: “Why are there so few of us left active, healthy and without personality disorders?” (I:19). This contemplation on the sad state of the former superheroes is cast in an ironic light as the previous narrative has already shown that Rorschach himself is far from

being a sane and “healthy” individual. Dorrit Cohn, too, agrees that the essence of irony arises from casting “a language of a subjective mind into the grammar of objective narration”, in which every “false note” struck by a fictive mind is thrown into ironic relief (1978, 117). So, when we read Rorschach’s diary entry in Chapter V, as he describes his gloves as “spotless” (V; 18) while the image shows that being far from the case, his observations of the world around him are cast in a doubtful light. Shoshana Felman, on the other hand, connects madness as an integral part of irony; irony is, in its extreme, madness, and the madman is not only the *instrument* of ironic knowledge, but in fact “he incarnates as well the imminence of the *peril* that threatens reflexive consciousness, always endangered by its own integral split, by the very tension that grounds it in its own contradiction” (1985, 114). Madness exists in the gap between the implied author and the implied reader, perilous in the gray area that contains the ironic message between the lines.

However, this view of irony and unreliability in narration is based on a communication between an implied author and an implied reader, yet *Watchmen* lacks a clear “author” who makes himself known to the reader. There is no authorial commentary behind the story, no outside commentary in the captions. It could be claimed that the basic story comes from the unfocalized visual and verbal narrative and the discourse of a written monologue by one character in the discourse which then becomes undermined by the story level. This “secret communion” (1961, 300) between author and reader, as Wayne C. Booth calls it, could be seen as taking place in the form of the appendices, which are chosen by someone, possibly the ‘narrator’. These appendices deliver information the characters do not possess, thus creating a line between reader and author that leaves the characters that narrate the story in the dark. It should be noted, though, that Booth’s postulation relies heavily on the implied assumption that both the reader and the implied author belong to a same “in- group” that shares values, meanings and judgments, and to which the unreliable narrator is excluded (Olson, 2003, 94).

Does Rorschach's apparent insanity affect his credibility as a narrator? Should the subtle marks of irony detected in the story be interpreted as a sign of his unreliability? As mentioned above, his moral views do not compromise the truthfulness of his words, and if this be madness, there is yet a method in it, a certain logic that allows the reader to give credit to his narration. Because after all, the line between madness and sanity is a fragile one, and at the end of *Watchmen*, the reader is faced with a question: which of them is in fact "mad", Rorschach or Ozymandias? As Shoshana Felman (1985, 111) asks:

Where then can we draw the line between the demented and the "reasonable", the delirious and the sensible behavior? Where does reason end and madness begin?

The illusion of reason can in itself be madness, the illusion of superiority a sign of insanity.

Rorschach is the product of the alternate history of *Watchmen*, the crooked Western culture that has for decades lived on the edge of nuclear war and has had to accept the fact that the arrival of Jon as the omnipotent Dr. Manhattan in 1959 has irreversibly altered the course of history and the development of technology. To reflect on Rorschach's madness is to open up and question the entire history of Western culture, both in fiction and in reality (Felman, 1985, 37).

5.2 The Abyss Gazes Also - Aspects of Focalization

As already briefly discussed in section three of this thesis, the term focalization can be developed to new directions when it comes to visual narratives represented by graphic novels. Gérard Genette has seen focalization as either nonfocalized, internal or external, where internal is via internal monologue while external could be internal by a character observing a scene (1972, 189-191). This type of division of focalization is not in itself sufficient in the study of visual narratives, as Edward Branigan has noted. To Branigan, focalization involves a character "*experiencing* something through seeing or hearing it" (1992, 101). Thus internal focalization in visual narratives results in the reader actually witnessing the character's

conscious memories, while other characters in the diegetic world of the story do not see them. External focalization can also transfer the private experiences of a character by the way of a point-of-view shot, which the reader must infer as being what the character would have seen from that particular position - but shifts between these two are possible, as this thesis will show. Focalization is involved also when a character becomes a narrator inside a narrative: when a character tells a story in the story world, he has a “new and different function in the text at another level, no longer as an actor who defines, and is defined by, a causal chain, but as a diegetic narrator...who is recounting a story within the story” (Branigan, 1992, 101). In *Watchmen*, this telling of a story within a story is accompanied with an internal focalization of the events being recounted. The reader does not merely listen/read, he IS there, seeing it.

However, as Branigan (1992, 102) too points out, focalization cannot be equated with narration since inadequate character perception is attributed to the character, not the narrator:

[F]ocalization represents the fact of character perception, even if we may discover later that the character misperceived and even if our misperception about the character turns out to have other consequences in our ongoing experience of the story. (1992, 102-3).

Thus, focalization is only reliable to a certain level, and can mislead the reader and his/her narrative schemas. A good example of this is Rorschach, whose real face is revealed to the reader only at the end of Chapter V once he is captured. If visual markers do not assist in recognizing him, the appendix of Chapter VI, including the psychiatric report of Rorschach, hints at the assumption that he is in fact the “prophet-of-doom sandwich-board man”, who makes repeated appearances in *Watchmen*, starting at Chapter I, page 1. This new information causes a disruption in the narrative (Branigan, 1992, 16) because it forces the reader to reassess all the previous chapters, reconstructing the narrative schema to fit this new, rather startling information. For example, the last panels on page 4 (Ch.I) receive a whole new context, as the two detectives discuss Rorschach, calling him “crazier than a snake’s armpit”. As the

prophet-of-doom man passes them (now identified as Rorschach himself by the reader), the other detective shudders - the irony of them passing the very man they want to catch impeccable in the light of this new information. These reassessments of narrative schemas are relatively easy due to the unique format of comics, which enables the reader to move forward and backward in the story with relative ease.

These types of reassessments can create unreliability within the narration, forcing the reader to question other aspects of the narrative. For example, whenever the events in Chapters I to V are focalized from the point-of-view of Rorschach without his mask, we are deliberately not shown his face. And when he acts as a narrator through the monologue in his diary, there is seemingly no connection to him when he is appearing in the background in his mask-less attire, while it is obvious they are connected when the panel shows him in the mask in the act of writing (I; 14). As Chapter I begins with captions from Rorschach's journal, the panels show him as the prophet-of-doom with his "The End Is Nigh" -sign walking over the blood flowing to the gutter. Yet nothing leads to the reader to connect this character to the one writing the diary, but instead the reader is lead to believe that a part of the narrative (the visual panel or the textual captions) has been substituted with something else to highlight a shared quality, thus creating a metaphor of the union between the two (Branigan, 1992, 49).

Edward Branigan approaches narration using a "fundamental cognitive psychological distinction", by which he divides the reader's perception into two kinds of processes: *bottom-up* and *top-down* (1992, 37). Bottom-up perception involves the organization of such elements as colour, depth and motion, and usually this takes place automatically with very little awareness; this is what happens in reading comic books, as the entire page is immediately perceived, and initial assumptions are made based on the visual information on the pages. Top-down processing, on the other hand, is based on knowledge and various narrative schemas, constantly reframing data as new information is acquired. Both of these processes operate

simultaneously on the data delivered by the narrative, which creates representations with different degrees of compatibility (1992, 37). Thus, the comic book reader perceives each page instantly, and then redefines this perception after reading the page, if need be. Top-down processes are not restricted to the particular moment of action, but are able to move forward and backward through data, continuously creating various spatial, temporal and causal hypotheses – “narrative”, according to Branigan, is the overall process of searching among various hypotheses (1992, 37-39). The focus is more on the reader and his/her processes during the reading than the structure of the story itself. These processes involve a continuous creative movement during which the reader constructs the narrative through the main narrative, the appendices and the epigraphs; the fact that a large portion of the narrative information in this process is visual makes this creation process even more fascinating, especially when considering the fact that the juxtapositional narrative structure of *Watchmen* can actually deceive the reader by creating a sense of connection where in fact none exists.

As Lisa Zunshine (2003, 270-291) explains in her article “Theory of Mind and Experimental Representations of Fictional Consciousness”, cognitive research shows how we “explain behavior in terms of the underlying states of mind” by using what is referred to as our “mind-reading ability”. Combining this research with literary studies, one can explore the specific aspect of the role such mind-reading plays in fictional representations of consciousness (2003, 271). This seemingly effortless mind-reading is of course not problematic, as the risk of misinterpretations are ever-present, such as mistaking tears of grief as tears of joy - this is effortless from the point of cognitive psychology, according to Zunshine, but the intuitive interpretation we make is still based on our personal experiences and beliefs, and could prove to be false (2003, 275-276). As Greta Olson points out in her article “Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators” (2003), readers bring implicit theories of personality and scripts for how narrators behave into every text they read;

reader responses vary, as do their attempts at analyzing character motivations, which leads to different assessments when it comes to unreliable narrators (2003, 99). Olson also differentiates between fallible and untrustworthy narrators, casting biased or misinformed narrators as fallible and dispositionally unreliable (unreliability a characteristic) narrators as untrustworthy (101-102). Fallible narrators are more likely to be excused of their failures than those deemed untrustworthy, and the readers are usually required to do some “detective work” to determine the reliability of a narrator (Olson, 2003, 104). Zunshine continues by asking whether literary narratives could actually train our capacities for this mind-reading, and if they even were capable of testing and bending the limits of our abilities to interpret the mental states behind various actions (2003, 277-278).

In Chapter VI these mind-reading abilities are tested. The captions are mostly from the notes of Dr. Malcolm Long, Rorschach’s therapist, and the panel-to-panel transition highlights the situation where the patient (Rorschach) and doctor are sitting face-to-face by alternating 180 degrees between what both men see, which is of course each other. The break happens when the reader suddenly sees through Rorschach’s ‘inner eyes’ when he is asked what he sees in a Rorschach -inkblot: the panel shows a dog with its head split in half with the speech balloon “What can you see?”, while the next panel shows him, deadpan, replying “A pretty butterfly” (V; 1) (See Appendix 4.) .This shift from external to internal focalization is so sudden it comes as a total surprise, as the previous dialogue has already established a narrative of external focalization. The focalizing verbal narrator is Dr. Long, but the focalization takes a sudden shift into the private and subjective world of Rorschach which no other character in the story can witness (Branigan, 101-103). The detective work required to judge Rorschach’s reliability can also be tested here. According to Greta Olson, fallible narrators are not reliable because they are “mistaken about their judgments or perceptions or are biased” (2003, 101). This type of fallibility is typical of mystery and detective novels, in which the narrator reports

on the informational puzzle he/she is working on, but cannot provide the reader with vital pieces of information until the end (101). Fallibility is therefore “situationally motivated”, not an inherent characteristic (102). So far this type of description would fit Rorschach, whose character appears to be an extreme variation of the film-noir type of detective, and whose visual look, too, seems to be borrowed from the same genre. However, Rorschach is also mentally unstable, which is an inherent trait Olson subscribes to untrustworthy narrators (102). Rorschach acts as borderline case between fallible and untrustworthy, an intersection which resists definition and judgment alike. Reader response requires a move “beyond literal reading”, a constant re-evaluation of the text (Olson, 2003, 104).

The chapter also shows the reader major events of Rorschach’s traumatic past through internal focalization, including a two-page recollection of his mother having sex, after which Rorschach’s reply on what he sees is “Some nice flowers” (VI; 5). What the character experiences and how he verbalizes his experiences seem to be strikingly in conflict. Rorschach himself also verbally narrates his life at times, retaining the verbal style of his diary, while the panels are what McCloud refers to as ‘word specific’, where pictures illustrate what the text says (1993, 153). When he finally decides to fully reveal his inner thoughts and visions to Dr. Long and consequently the reader via internal focalization, the narrative takes a more visual tone, discarding the verbal narration (although one undoubtedly exists in the story world, which is the one Dr. Long hears). The inner focalization without textual commentary works infinitely more intensely than it had if Rorschach had revealed everything at the beginning, or if the visual narrative had been accompanied with the verbal all the way through. These transitions from external to internal focalization often happen in visual form, from an ink-blot to a similar black shadow, creating immediate visual continuity through bottom-up processing, whereas the shift in time and story space is constructed via top-down processing, combining previous knowledge of the characters and actions into the new data. The appendix of this

chapter actually acts as a verifying element, supporting the reader into believing that the internal focalizations of Rorschach's past are genuine and not the delusions of a sick mind.

There exists yet one more aspect in Rorschach which is of interest when discussing his mental abilities: his use of language. Rorschach's short sentences do not only echo film-noir detective monologues, but may actually be a symptom of something else. Rorschach's language resembles that of "verbal thought", a far more idiosyncratic language what is normally used in communication. Dorrit Cohn has analyzed this stylistic tendency in the works of James Joyce, who developed the technique of individualized monologic language (1978, 93). Its principal tendencies are, according to Cohn, syntactical abbreviation and lexical opaqueness, a language "freed from syntactical completeness, a language that suppresses elements that are customary, and often indispensable, in language aimed at communicating meaning" (1978, 94). Most typical eliminations are those of articles, subject pronouns, prepositions and copulas (94). Whereas Cohn mentions that this type of reduction may be typical of diaries, she connects this type of "castrated grammar" with children's "egocentric speech", the thinking aloud children do until age six (1978, 94-95). By the age of six, this egocentric speech becomes thought, and a new social speech skill develops as the child matures. The interior speech (thought) comprises mainly of predicative or nominal statements, concentrating on the new moments that come to mind. This impoverished syntax of the egocentric speech is, however, counteracted with the semantic enrichment of each individual word (1978, 96). Rorschach's speech is highly reminiscent of this type of egocentric speech, but unlike Joycean monologists, Rorschach uses his partially castrated grammar to communicate:

Gun. No license. I cheked. Very bad.(V; 4) (Dialogue)

Stood in firelight, sweltering. Blood stain on chest like map of violent new continent. Felt cleansed. Felt dark planet turn under my feet and knew what cats know that makes them scream like babies in night. (VI; 26) (Monologue, spoken)

Out in street, inspected defaced building: silhouette picture in doorway, man and woman, possibly indulging in sexual foreplay. Didn't like it. Makes doorway look

haunted. (V; 11) (Diary)

“If reading this now, whether I am alive or dead, you will know truth: whatever precise nature of this conspiracy, Adrian Veidt responsible. Have done best to make this legible. Believe it paints disturbing picture.” (X; 22) (Diary; written to a future reader)

These examples above demonstrate well the type of communication Rorschach resorts to, both in speech as well as writing. His speech misses many articles and copulas, but still manages often to paint disturbing images through the enrichment of words. This aspect of Rorschach’s communicative skills creates yet another dimension from which one can assess his reliability, as the use of egocentric speech in spoken language is connected with children; this could act as an indicator of his mental abilities. Rorschach is a conservative, an outsider, disturbingly violent and yet, he is the most popular character of the graphic novel.

6 WATCHMAKERS – OF NARRATION AND TIME

”Professor Einstein says that time differs from place to place.
 Can you imagine that?
 If time is not true, what purpose have watchmakers?”
 (*Watchmen*, IV; 3)

The quotation above is spoken in 1945 by Dr. Manhattan’s father, a watchmaker disillusioned about his profession after discovering Einstein’s theories on the relativity of time. As a central theme in the alternate world of *Watchmen*, time is heavily infiltrated in to the very structures of the graphic novel. Our perception of time comes from our ability to remember things past, access the present and foresee the future. Events follow one another, they become sequential.

Comics as a medium does this literally, as Will Eisner points out: “time is not absolute but relative to the position of the observer.... In essence the panel...makes that postulate a reality for the comic book reader.” (1985, 28). Also, unlike other media, the past and future are constantly real and visible to the reader, who can compare previous panels with the ones to follow instantly and with ease. The panels are essential for the depiction of time in comics, as they convey timing and rhythm: “The act of framing separates the scenes and acts as a punctuator. Once established and set in sequence the box or panel becomes the criterion by which to judge the illusion of time.” (Eisner, 1985, 28). Time is relative and needs to be established in each and every narrative, and modern literature has tried to capture the different ways we perceive and experience time and existence in it, from textual experiments to science fiction and its alternate worlds that question the way we read history. *Watchmen* approaches this theme primarily through the character of Dr. Manhattan, who, as a result of a tragic accident now, among his other god-like abilities, experiences the past, present and future as simultaneous. The existence of Dr. Manhattan acts as a way of producing what Darko Suvin refers to as cognitive estrangement, of showing us a world we recognize yet find strangely unfamiliar due to the arrival of a new variant in an otherwise familiar world (1979, 6). The

graphic novel uses various ways to depict this aspect of his existence: both textual and visual tools are applied to problematize the western view of time as linear and chronological, and rhythmic devices are applied to create and “manipulate” the elements of time to achieve “a specific message or emotion” (Eisner, 1985, 26). Repetition is used to create meanings, as each time an image is repeated, the meanings linked to it are altered by the previous appearance; symmetry through repetition involves a temporal discontinuum, a fragmented projection of time. Through the questioning of time as linear, the dystopia presented by *Watchmen* questions the role of the individual in society and in history.

Past and present intertwine in the narrative structures of *Watchmen*, as memories are presented through inner focalization, parallel storylines of separate temporal levels are presented and, most prominently, during the monologues of Dr. Manhattan in Chapter IV, called “Watchmaker”. Visual images of the past are repeatedly linked with the verbal narration of the present, and present images appear with past dialogue. As Erin McGlothlin has observed in her article “No Time Like the Present: Narrative and Time in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*” (2003, 178), the comic book format has the ability to easily differentiate depictions of two separate temporal levels and two physical manifestations of the same character in a much more visceral way than traditional written narration. However, as McGlothlin observes in her analysis of *Maus* (which I see fit to apply to here), *Watchmen*, too, problematizes this seemingly simple distinction, as past and present cannot be separated, but are “intimately interconnected”, for the past is constitutive of the present, and the present “makes demands on the ways in which the past is represented” (2003, 178). Temporal transitions in comic book narration often take place through visual analogues, where the postures of the characters remain the same but the setting alters. In *Maus*, as McGlothlin has noticed, “the past is an integral element of the present, and the present becomes the key for representing this past” (2003, 179). This can be compared to *Watchmen*, where Dr. Manhattan recounts the narrative of his past through his internal

monologue on planet Mars, and as in genuine interior monologues, “the temporal sequence of past events yields to the temporal sequence of present remembrance, and the past is thereby radically dechronologized” (Cohn, 1978, 182). However, it can be argued that in comic book narration the textual dechronologization can be challenged by the visual narrative, as the images contained in the panels can create a chronological structure independent from the textual narrative.

6.1 Comics and time

Timing in comics relies heavily on the panels. Panel division, sizes and shapes all affect the reading experience, and the various types of temporal and spatial panel-to-panel transitions exemplified by McCloud (1993, 70-74) that require active reader participation to make them meaningful are used to create narrative and structural effects. The experience of duration in comics is created by the combination of space and sound, actions, motions and movement are all measured by our perception of their relationship to each other (Eisner, 1985, 25). Speech balloons and their relation to each other help to measure time, as one large speech balloon in a single panel means a longer period of time than several small ones (1985, 28). Colouring, too, can help the reader to assess the duration of events, as has already been mentioned in this thesis under the section relating to colour (4.1). A blinking streetlight outside Moloch’s apartment shows every other panel as shaded with orange, which creates a steady rhythm for the action; panels of a past storyline in juxtaposition with a present one can be distinguished by a different colouring, as the crimson-shaded images of the Comedian’s murder in the beginning of *Watchmen*.

Rhythmic changes in comic book narration are easily distinguished when the “beat” of the narrative is fairly steady, as in *Watchmen*, which follows a steady pace of three panel per

row, three rows per page. Occasional larger panels appear, and the effect they have in the narrative structure is one of slowing down the narration, whereas the appearance of narrower panels creates what Eisner refers to as “a sense of suspense and threat” (1985, 30). Narrower panels are said to speed up the narration, creating a more “staccato” rhythm (Eisner, 1985, 31-37). However, the opposite effect is what appears to take place in *Watchmen*, which breaks the steady 3x3 panel division to use tighter, narrow panels at least twice, once in Chapter VII; 16 and again in Chapter XI; 28. The first occasion is a soundless dream sequence, and the effect is indeed of suspense and anxiety, and supports the idea of increased speed in narration. The second occasion is the very end of Chapter XI, and this time the effect is quite the opposite, slowing the narration down to slow-motion, as the characters stand in awe and fear, seeking refuge from each other, their actions painfully slow. The final panel is wide, and completely white, yet able to convey a moment when time seems to stand still, an eternity in a white void.

As noted above, the panels that constitute the visual narration of comics make the idea of a temporal arrangement of events a reality to the reader. According to Genette, the narrative discourse of a narrative is created by the order of events and temporal segments, so that the “story order is explicitly indicated by the narrative itself or inferable from one or another direct clue” (1980, 35). The discordance between story and narrative is what Genette refers to as anachronies, and these anachronies can reach either the past or the future of the narrative “present”; these analepses (past actions) and prolepses (future action) can exist either outside the main narrative, that is reach to a point in time before/after the main narrative begins/ends, or inside the main narrative, as internal to it (1980, 48-49). The visual form of *Watchmen* makes it relatively easy for the reader to locate these discordances in the narrative, such as Rorschach’s memories narrated from his childhood, or Laurie’s memories that have taken place before the “now” of the main narrative in which the plot by Veidt takes place. These analepses are mostly completely external, and do not interfere with the first main narrative, and

their function is simply to provide the reader with some information crucial to the understanding of the current actions (1980, 49-50). This takes place in *Watchmen* on several levels, from the visual memories of the characters brought to the reader via inner focalization to the appendices, which are not a vital part of the main narrative, but provide background material. Sometimes, however, past actions can infiltrate the present, such as when dialogue from Laurie's memories blends with the images of her present on planet Mars (IX; 23-24). This blurring of the visual and verbal narrative by the way of juxtaposition is what Genette refers to as narrative metalepses, transgressions that

by the intensity of their effects, demonstrate the importance of the boundary they tax their ingenuity to overstep, in defiance of verisimilitude – a boundary that is precisely the narrating (or the performance) itself: a shifting but sacred frontier between two worlds, the world which one tells, the world of which one tells. (1980, 236).

A concurrent phenomenon, like a leaky faucet, can “time” the action and its duration, as the reader will be able to evaluate the time it takes a single drop of water to fall (Eisner, 1985, 29). In Chapter IX, a recurring image appears throughout the chapter (a panel on pages 1, 3, 8, 12, 16, 21) of a falling perfume bottle, each panel showing it revolve a bit more until it finally takes place in the main narrative when Laurie actually throws it on page 24. This is an example of completing internal prolepsis (Genette, 1980, 70-71), as the act of throwing does not take place until at the end, but the image of the falling bottle interrupts the narrative repeatedly. Time stands almost still, as the perfume bottle falls and falls forever, until it finally meets the point where the throwing itself takes place. The slow falling movement of the bottle in the panels creates a time outside time, “slow time” where Laurie and Jon discuss the fate of the world.

The panel arrangement can deceive the reader, too. As Edward Branigan has noticed, various types of temporal situations that bear on “our judgments of causality may be created through the juxtaposition of spatial fragments from different shots” (1992, 40). In several

storylines within *Watchmen*, two parallel narratives are presented to the reader in juxtaposition, happening simultaneously, so that a parallel is drawn between them like in many other instances in the comic. However, the device is applied in Chapter XI only to fool the reader into believing that there is still time: as Adrian Veidt tells of his terrifying plan to Rorschach and Nite Owl, the narrative is juxtaposed with narrative segments from the sidewalks of New York, of people fighting, and the textual and visual narratives intertwined act as previously, commenting each other. At the end, however, Veidt reveals that his devious plan was executed thirty-five minutes ago, thus revealing that the juxtaposition of the two storylines was not of simultaneous storylines, which forces the reader to reassess all that he/she has read before. The two storylines did not take place simultaneously, but in fact one took place over half an hour before the other in the story time of *Watchmen*.

6.2 “The darkness of mere being“ – Dr.Manhattan and the Super-Present

The question of time becomes most evident in the character of Dr. Manhattan, discussed already in section 4.2 in connection with omniscient narration. As already mentioned, Dr. Manhattan is not only omnipotent and omniscient (perhaps), but also omnitemporal, for his perception of time is simultaneous: past and present exist continuously to him. This is most evident in Chapter IV, which is narrated by his interior monologue in the blue captions, which occasionally makes way to brief scenes from his past which have dialogue, a division Genette (1980, 95; 109) has labeled as a division between summary and scene. The captions have brief descriptions of various points in time:

It's 1945. I sit in a Brooklyn kitchen, fascinated by an arrangement of cogs on black velvet. I am sixteen years old. It is 1985. I am on Mars. I am fifty-six years old. The photograph lies at my feet, falls from my fingers, is in my hand.
(IV; 2)

Periods are summed up in a few sentences, and the next page moves from the summary to show

a brief scene between Dr. Manhattan and his father, then moving on back to the summary. According to Genette, these scenes become more intensified by the contrast to the summary (1980, 109-110), the alteration between dramatic and nondramatic narrative. However, the division between dramatic and nondramatic fails here, for Dr. Manhattan's narrative in the summaries takes advantage of a very powerful discursive tool: the narrative (dramatic) present.

The use of the dramatic present tense while speaking of his past is the only way Dr. Manhattan, experiencing no real difference between past and present, can express himself, using indicators such as "later" or "soon" incoincidentally, as if by an old habit. As the quotation of his monologue above shows, everything happens in the *now*: "The photograph lies at my feet, falls from my fingers, is in my hand." Dorrit Cohn refers to this type of first-person present tense narration as the "evocative" present, which does not refer to the "true" present of the speaker's present, but "evokes the past as though it were present" (1978, 198, 157). The use of this type of evocation of the past action as present is commonly used only briefly, to illustrate the "as-if-ness" of the past (Cohn, 1978, 198). However, when the dramatic present is used in lengthier narrative pieces and when the speaker's past thoughts intermingle with his past experiences, the text becomes "temporally and generically ambiguous" (Cohn, 1978, 199). The dramatic evocative present tense creates a dramatic presence in the first-person narrative, the scenes of the past become alive, the speaker "relives" the experience once more (Piikkilä, 2006, unpublished). Dorrit Cohn later developed the idea of the evocative present further in her book *The Distinction of Fiction* (1998), problematizing the traditional view held by narratology that "narrative is past, always past" (1998, 96), according to which the narrator/speaker is seen as referring always to a time understood as "anterior" to the present moment (1998, 98). Cohn presents as an alternative what she calls "the alternate interior monologue resolution", through which the reader attempts to understand the present tense of a

passage as “the normal tense of silently expressive self-communion, a language that emerges in a fictional mind without aiming at communicative narration or narrative communication” (1998, 103). Cohn also stresses that the pace of this type of discourse is not continuously synchronized with the events it conveys, but occasionally compresses long stretches of time in summary sentences (104). The difference between the narrating self and the experiencing self is obliterated in Dr. Manhattan’s narration, and the moment of narration is in fact the moment of experience, the use of the present tense presenting “seamless continuity” (1998, 107).

Whereas in traditional literature this is done mostly for dramatic effect, in *Watchmen* the use of the dramatic present tense appears to be the only way Dr. Manhattan CAN express himself. The dates and years that repeatedly position his memories seem to be there so that Dr. Manhattan himself is able to put them on a traditional timeline, rather than for the reader to construct his past through this montage of temporal events. Time is not absolute, but relative. It is a culturally defined phenomenon, and it shows in the monologue of Dr. Manhattan, who uses dates and deictic expressions as social rules expect him to. Humans define time through contracts, which does not satisfy his experience of time as a multifaceted jewel (IX; 6); therefore he feels the need to go to Mars, of all places, a “place without clocks, without seasons, without hourglasses to trap the shifting pink sand” (IV; 26). The fact that Dr. Manhattan marks his narrative with dates and years also makes his narrative anything but timeless; there can be no anachrony or indetermination of temporality as everything he narrates can be positioned temporally on a timeline (Genette, 1980, 83-84).

The question of anachrony also presents itself here, as Dr. Manhattan’s monologue is filled with prolepses, predications of the future he is unable (unwilling?) to change:

Saturday the 19th now. My hands encircle Laurie’s face... In 1966, the costumed people are arguing. In 1959, I am telling Janey I shall always want her. It’s later. Laurie is walking out on me. On a rooftop in the past, I pull her sixteen-year-old body to me, breathing her perfume, never wanting to lose her, knowing I shall.
(IV; 25)

Not only is he unconcerned with interfering with tragic events (he won't prevent a murder in Chapter II; 14-15), he goes through reactions like a puppet: in Chapter IX he tells Laurie she will soon "surprise him with the information that [she] and Dreiberg have been sleeping together" (IX; 6), and when Laurie comments on Dan's skills as a lover on page 8, Jon goes through the motion of asking "does that mean that you're sleeping with Dreiberg?", as if surprised by that knowledge. The binary division of *then* and *now* is not enough to describe the inner temporality of Jon's experience, as then and now do not exist to him – he uses such expressions only by convention and because he knows the people around him experience time as a linear continuum of then and now (McGlothlin, 192-193). Dr. Manhattan's predictions of things that are about to happen disrupt the normal temporal sequence of narrative events, they "resist conventional narrative frameworks" (McGlothlin, 193) that both the reader and the other characters of *Watchmen* are accustomed to.

David Herman has discussed the problematics of what he refers to as polychronic narration in his book *Story Logic. Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (2002); according to Herman, polychronic narration can entail modes of narration in which "alternate or multiple ways of sequencing events are entertained", thus making events unplaceable and temporally indefinite (2002, 213). Dr. Manhattan's narrative is a case of complex anachrony, which can produce "the" narrative itself by exploiting a level of narrative indefiniteness to pluralize and delinearize the narrative (2002, 219). Herman claims that polychronic narration can be used to "suggest that situations, entities, and events are anchored, in the storyworld itself, in more than one place in time...[it] requires modeling a storyworld whose very history is polychronic; in that world, time does not unfold linearly" (2002, 220). Polychronic narration forces the reader to reinterpret his/her ideas and views on time and its capacities, to question the entire notion of time as linear. The entire storyworld of *Watchmen* may not be polychronic, but the world as Dr. Manhattan experiences it is close. However, as Erin McGlothlin (2003, 193) has noticed,

indeterminacy is an essential aspect of polychronic narration, and *Watchmen* does not fulfill this requirement; in fact, the opposite is what takes place in the monologue of Dr. Manhattan. The temporal aspects of Dr. Manhattan's monologue appear to be overdetermined, as he continuously names the exact time frame of each event he describes. Time in this kind of narrative mode does "not so much refuse to be ordered into a linear chronology as exempt itself from the notion of moving and developing temporality altogether" (McGlothlin, 2003, 193).

The dates and years given by Dr. Manhattan situate the events of the past such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963 within a recognizable timeframe, thus pulling the experiences out of an achronological and ahistorical past, placing them in the 'real' events of the present (McGlothlin, 2002, 189). Dr. Manhattan's narrative monologue does this repeatedly:

It's September, 1961. John Kennedy is shaking my hand, asking what it's like to be a superhero. I tell him he should know and he nods, laughing... Two years later, in Dallas, his head snaps forward and then back. Two shots... (IV; 14)

Dallas is still eighteen months away... (IV;15)

As McGlothlin argues, the events of a narrative may be seemingly arbitrarily arranged, yet they can be carefully juxtaposed to evoke "the enormous impact of the past on the present" (2002, 189). Everything happening in the past is still happening in the super-present of Dr. Manhattan, everything still has impact on the present. The "super-present", a concept developed by Art Spiegelman, the creator of *Maus*, is a static space apart from the temporal logic of the rest of *Watchmen*, "one that occupies a metaposition with regard to the conventional temporal flow of the present" (McGlothlin, 2002, 185-186). As McGlothlin quotes *The Oxford Dictionary*, the prefix *super-* designates something that is "above, beyond, or over in place or time or conceptually" (2003, 186); this description fits surprisingly well when discussing the character of Dr. Manhattan and his existence, as he himself describes it as follows: "It's February, 1960, and everything is frozen. I am starting to accept that I shall never feel cold or warm again." (IV;

12). He is standing still, outside time, not aging in the super-present of his existence. But whereas to Spiegelman the super-present represents a suffocating stasis where nothing unfolds or develops, to Dr. Manhattan the super-present is lucid and clear. The feelings of being “stuck and unhinged” (2003, 189) do not apply to him, for he is outside time, and the traditional linear chronological view of time is not one to govern his existence. McGlothlin describes the super-present as a temporal space in the level of narrating a time “in which nothing exactly happens, but in which the complexities and contradictions that relate to the other narrative levels are exposed” (2003, 186). As Dr. Manhattan is on planet Mars, he exists in a place of solitude and nothing does really happen, but his “a-chronological time montage” (Cohn, 1978, 229) that juxtaposes and reveals various points in his past do expose other narrative levels and force the reader to rethink his/her views on time and experience.

The concept of the super-present also puts more doubt into the assumed polychrony of Dr. Manhattan’s monologue, as the super-present relates to the problem of determinacy, not indeterminacy (McGlothlin, 2003, 192). According to McGlothlin (2003, 193), the super-present deals with a temporality that is adeterminate, overdetermined and clearly determined, of which adeterminacy is a “defining quality” of the super-present, a temporal plane outside the experience of time in the timeless static of memory. However, even if the super-present is a state of suspension above the past and the present, it is temporally overdeterminate instead of indeterminate, with Dr. Manhattan naming exact time frames for all his past actions relived through his narration (2003, 193). The temporal aspects of Dr. Manhattan’s narration are overdetermined, and the analysis McGlothlin delivers of *Maus* and its protagonists is easily applied here to suit Dr. Manhattan’s experience:

the litany of dates and traumatic experiences ...testify to the power that time and its markers have over [him]. The timeless, adeterminate quality of the time structure of the super-present does not mean that time is somehow unimportant to [him]; rather, in these images he is hyper-invested in the issue of temporality, experiencing thereby painful effects of a fractured chronology.
(McGlothlin, 2003, 193).

Even though the quote above describes the protagonists of *Maus*, they tell something of the temporality experienced by Dr. Manhattan, too. The “hyper-investment” to time and the resulting effects of “fractured chronology” describe his character and his unique relation to time and narrative, too. Dr. Manhattan may have distanced himself from the human experience and society, but his own perception of time is no less important to him than it is to everyone else; like he says himself: “We’re all puppets, Laurie. I’m just a puppet who can see the strings.” (IX; 5).

7 CONCLUSION : TOWARDS QUESTIONS OF POLITICS AND POWER

According to Samuel R. Delaney (1999), comic books belong to the field of the paraliterary genres, those genres traditionally excluded from the “value-bound” meaning of ‘literature’ and ‘literary’ (1999, 236). Therefore comics, as do other paraliterary genres such as science fiction, still lack some of the prestige so freely assigned to the literary genres, such as poetry. The lack of academic rigor in the area of the paraliterary has resulted in very little pressure to develop a criticism of it’s own, and in terms of terminology paraliterary criticism has gone on using a borrowed terminology instead of creating its own (1999, 240). This has to some extent plagued this thesis as well, as the theoretical approaches used are applied from the field of the literary, beginning with basic structuralistic approaches and gradually replacing them with more post-classical views on narratology. But as Delaney has insisted, instead of trying to *define* what comics are and how they work with the help of this borrowed terminology, this thesis aims at presenting a careful and detailed *description* of the various ways in which *Watchmen* works and what is so “vital, newly noticed, and wondrous” about it (Delaney, 1999, 245).

The initial goal of this thesis was to identify and analyze the various narratological aspects and elements at work in the complex composition that is *Watchmen*, and to reveal how these narratological aspects should be interpreted - what do they reveal, how do they function, what are the underlying motives and meanings written into the narrative? The question of the ongoing “battle” between word and image will still be unresolved, even though it has been repeatedly claimed that verbal language will always be the “native tongue of narrative, it’s proper semiotic support” (Ryan, 2004, 11-12). The initial structural analysis already revealed a complicated structure of various symmetries, beginning from the obvious symmetry of the strict 3x3 panel division and leading on to the more complex symmetrical devices of repeated images and words, which in juxtaposition to each other and then repeated in different contexts produced a host of new meanings and interpretations. A single image can present a myriad of

different meanings and interpretations, and the choice of colouring and uses of sound in comic book narration also contribute significantly to the interpretation of the narrative. Colours become symbols, and the lack of sound effects produces a more intimate and involving reading. The “fearful” symmetry found in *Watchmen* reached even the thematic structure of the graphic novel itself, as the preservation of the status quo, the state in which the world was in the beginning of the narrative, was hinted at in the final pages. This restoration of the status quo that acts as a thematical symmetry actually echoes the conservatism of superhero comics, as realized by both Matthew Wolf-Meyer (2003) and Umberto Eco (1972).

In his famous article “The Myth of Superman” (1972), Umberto Eco examined the structure of the comic book through structuralist and semiotic approaches, interested in seeing how the comic book supported the “civic consciousness” of its audience. As Eco noticed, Superman’s civic consciousness is completely split from his political consciousness, resulting in him carrying on his activities only on a small community scale even though he could in seconds bring about “the most bewildering political, economic, and technological upheavals in the world” (1972, 343). In other words, Superman could create utopia. Yet his plots remain static, and on a small and limited scale. As Matthew Wolf-Meyer argues, traditional science fiction is interested in the effects of utopia and unconcerned with the process of achieving it, whereas superhero comics “eschew the after-effort narrative in exchange for a narrative that reveals the inability to achieve utopia” (2003, 501). The superheroes are bent on preserving the status quo, and to the superhero comic a “dis-allowed narrative” is one where utopia IS achieved, for then they are, quite simply, useless. The narrative structure and elements discussed in sections three and four in this thesis reveal a multilayered effect of symmetry, resulting in the final image of the smiley face that begun the graphic novel, along with the implication that the truth will be revealed and the utopia achieved by Ozymandias (the only superhero with a political consciousness) will not last. The status quo of the beginning will be

reinstated once more.

Other sections of the thesis, namely five and six, probed and tested various questions and problems familiar from literary studies, such as the question of the omniscient narrator, the reliability of the narrator and the temporality of narration. Each time the visual nature of comics had to be taken into account, and the theoretical aspects and terminology proved lacking in the face of the needs of comic book narration. What became evident is that comic book narration has unique and highly efficient ways of expressing many of the above mentioned issues, and for example the question of madness, narration and focalization in the narration of Rorschach showed that Genette's external and internal focalization receive new meanings when they are brought to discuss visual narratives, where the view from the "inner eyes" of a character can concretely be shown to the reader instead of a verbal act of describing and telling. Time and the temporality of narration, discussed in section six, showed that time in itself is major theme in *Watchmen*, as Dr. Manhattan and his narrative monologue can be interpreted as a miniature of the entire thematic structure of *Watchmen*. The textual dechronologization is challenged by the visual narrative, and vice versa, creating unique temporal discontinuities that produce a montage of various points in time. As questions of politics, power and time all evolve during Dr. Manhattan's monologue in Chapter IV, the thematic undertones of the graphic novel begin to emerge. The juxtaposition of various points in textual and visual time, problematize the entire notion of time as strictly linear and testify to the enormous power of time.

The thematical issues that rise through the careful symmetry presented in *Watchmen* through the juxtapositions of various storylines and images bring forth the underlying questions of power and politics that *Watchmen* covertly addresses. The social, political and economical context of the publication of *Watchmen*, the themes addressed in the graphic novel, and the choice of the graphic novel form over other forms of art all create interesting questions for

further study. The impact of the easy victory in Vietnam with the help of Dr. Manhattan has created a completely different American consciousness from the one we know today, revealing the political and ethical dimensions and questions of superheroism and terrorism. In terms of narratology, as Alan Palmer argues, the study of narratology should be more concerned with the role of the context, of the “real-world, sociocultural contexts in which narratives are produced”. (2002, 29). What is the society that produces these superhero narratives, and how do they affect the world that reads them? In terms of comic book studies, I firmly agree with Delaney, who insists that what is needed now is “a clear, constant, and demystifying critique of what the actual politics of the situation are”. The politics of the form and the politics of the content and their consequences are what need to be studied next.

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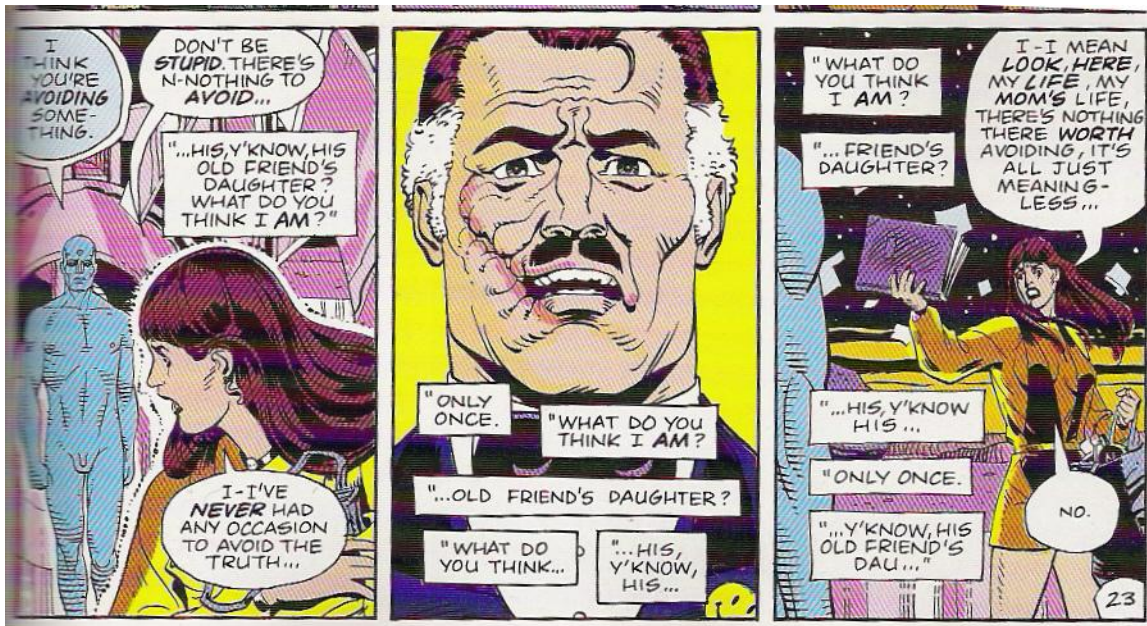
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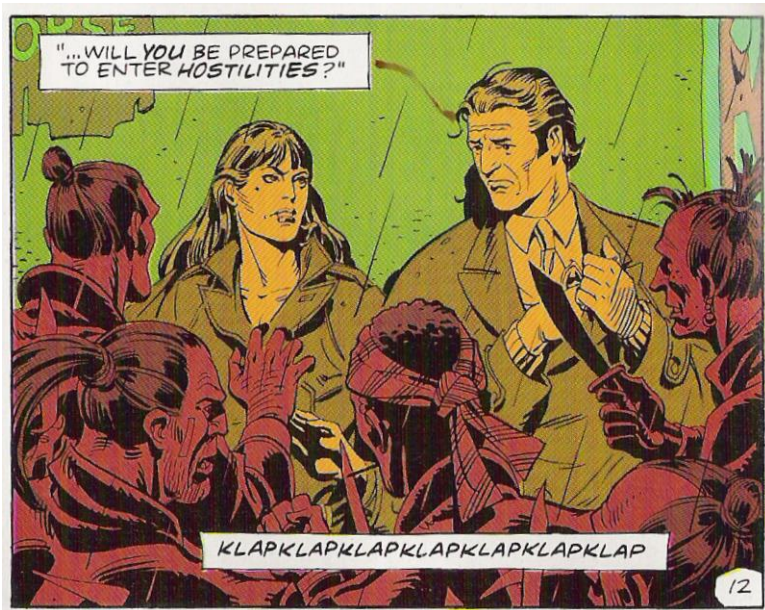
APPENDIX 1.



APPENDIX 2.



APPENDIX 3.



APPENDIX 4.

