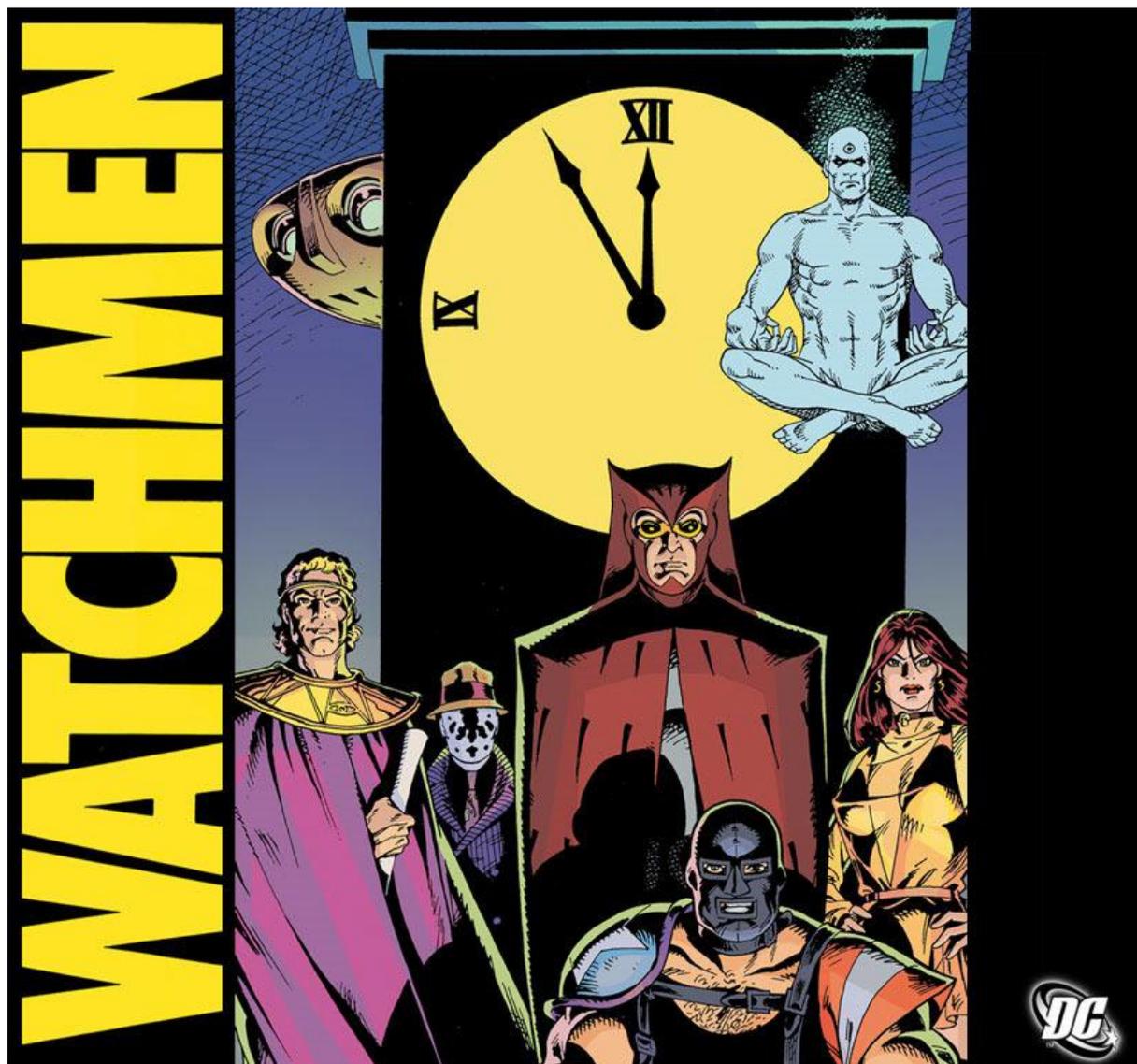


Emma Maes 3168581
Eisenhowerlaan 318
3527 HM Utrecht
Bachelor Thesis English Language and Culture, University Utrecht
British English
Roselinde Supheert
11 July, 2010
7877 words

Postmodernism in *Watchmen*



Contents

Introduction.....	p.3
Chapter 1, Postmodernism.....	p.7
Chapter 2, Postmodern devices in <i>Watchmen</i>	p.13
Chapter 3, Postmodern themes in <i>Watchmen</i>	p.22
Conclusion.....	p.25
Works Cited.....	p.27
Appendix.....	p.29

Introduction

To some, *Watchmen* (1986), created by writer Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons, may seem to be nothing more than just another superhero comic, an adventurous story with pictures. To others this book has more to offer and is considered a graphic novel. This term is used to imply the difference between the more humorous and childish word comic book and the word graphic novel. As it is, *Time* magazine placed *Watchmen* in its All Time 100 Novels List. However, before a book can be placed on this list, it must be considered as literature, which *Watchmen* actually is. Literature is seen as something that can be analysed, leaving the reader to find deeper meanings, themes, motives, complexities. This can be done with *Watchmen*. To be more specific, *Watchmen* can be seen as Postmodern literature.

Watchmen is set in America in the 1980s, with the Cold War looming over the American civilisation whom have grown tired of superheroes. In the novel, an Act was passed in the 1970's to abolish the masked crime-fighters. These were men and women who thought against crimes under pseudonyms, such as Silk Spectre and Rorschach. The story follows a group of six aging former superheroes, with the focus placed on each of their storylines separately though eventually they come together in the end. Though each character in the novel has his or her own problems to deal with, they are all a part of an even more significant problem: the murders of former masked heroes and villains. There are five main characters who come together due to the death of the Comedian, the sixth member of their former crime-fighting group The Minutemen. One of these is the melancholic Nite Owl. Then there is the only genuine superhero, the big blue Dr. Manhattan and his girlfriend the Silk Specter. There is also Ozymandias, once crime-fighter now businessman. Finally there is Rorschach, a psychopath who believes only in right and wrong, and the first to think that there is more to the Comedian's killing. Rorschach's thoughts are dark and morbid, presented in a film noir style, which becomes clear in the following monologue, presented in the novel after Rorschach hears about the Comedian's murder:

On Friday night a comedian died in New York. Someone threw him out of a window and when he hit the sidewalk his head was driven up into his stomach. Nobody cares.

Nobody cares but me. Are they right? Is it futile? 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 in this. But there are so many deserving of retribution...and there is so little time. (1.14)

At first the death of the Comedian seems nothing more than just another meaningless killing in the Big City, until the disturbing truth is revealed: the murder is linked to a conspiracy.

Ozymandias has gone power mad, and believes that the imminent threat of nuclear war between the countries of the world has gone too far. He decides to take matters in his own hands and feels that something must be done to bring the world back together. He plans to cause a disaster, thereby uniting mankind against other life forms. Ozymandias creates a huge dead alien which he teleports, a mode of instantaneous transportation, to New York city, killing millions of people on impact. The story contains a moral dilemma, with the main characters trying to deduce what is right and what is wrong, and if there even is such a thing as right and wrong.

When *Watchmen* came about in 1986, comic books were on the rise. Along with Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*, the love for an unpopular superhero was born again and stories like these fell into the typical *Zeitgeist* that was present at its time. *Watchmen* initially came out in single issues, chapter by chapter, and it was not until later that it appeared in a paperback version, with all 12 chapters together. *Watchmen* was one of the first comic books that received the term graphic novel, a long with Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. This term differentiated them from most comic books, and their popularity began to increase. In its time *Watchmen* received both praise and negative reactions. It received negative critique from people who discarded the possibility that it could be seen as literature, due to its comic book style and colour pictures. Another negative point of critique was the term graphic novel. Few feared that the line between literature and fiction would fade. "As it has come to be used, however, "graphic novel" places Alan Moore in direct competition with Toni

Morrison, and this does neither of them any favours” (Hallberg, 15). It was praised because it had been written in a completely new style for comic books, as it leans more towards literature than most comic books. It contains themes and deeper layers, something which was not often found in these types of books. However, even this was not always received as a positive thing. Several reviewers even say Moore has gone a bit overboard with all the intellectualities found in *Watchmen*, “[t]he last time I looked, the only ones reading *Ulysses* and quoting Nietzsche were teenagers. No adult has time for aesthetic ‘difficulty’ or ‘self-consciousness’ (Shone). Along with the writing of *Watchmen*, the artistic side of the graphic novel was praised as well. Gibbons’ created certain symbols, such as the bloodstained smiley, that reoccur throughout the novel and are linked to the novel forever. *Watchmen* would not be what it is today if it had not been for Gibbons and his artwork, as the artwork complements Moore’s writing. “There's little action in *Watchmen*, a story that runs more than 350 pages, so Gibbons uses cinematic tricks to keep our focus through pages upon pages of dialogue” (Goldstein). The artwork contains spectacular full cover pictures, containing the greatest detail. Moore and Gibbons really outdid themselves with the 5th chapter of *Watchmen*, “Fearful Symmetry”, as made the layout completely symmetrical.

Watchmen contains different elements of Postmodern literature. In order to set out and explore these elements, it is necessary to first of all establish what Postmodernism is, this can be done by giving certain examples of Postmodern devices. Secondly, it is important to link these devices to *Watchmen*, and finally it is important to look at the themes present in *Watchmen*, as they comply with themes that are typical for Postmodernism. Most of the devices in *Watchmen* are metafictional devices, devices which are often linked to Postmodernism, such as the framework narrative, intertextuality and fragmentation. Furthermore, it contains a certain narrative device, the unreliable narrator, which partly reveals *Watchmen*'s Postmodern nature. Besides this, Moore turned the “all American hero” into the “all American Anti-Hero”. The hero behind the mask was no longer the stereotypical American man, but had been replaced by a psychopathic freak. Besides these elements, *Watchmen* contains nihilistic themes which are often

found in Postmodernism. These themes become clear through the actions of the characters and the storylines, constantly reminding the readers of them.

Chapter 1, Postmodernism

Postmodernism can be determined by looking at the different devices it uses and the themes it contains. Postmodernism has evolved throughout the past decades. What supposedly started out as a response to Modernism, grew to be a cultural movement that would influence many. From literature to film, television, architecture, music, dance, theatre and art, Postmodernism can be found almost everywhere nowadays. However, to define Postmodernism is easier said than done. Both Eco and Burroughs are seen as two of the greatest Postmodernist writers of the 20th Century, though their works and styles are completely different. Although some might say that *Watchmen* is indeed a work of Postmodern fiction, others might reject this idea. The only way to discover if this is true is to analyse Postmodernism itself, as Fokkema claims:

There seems no other way than either to start out from a rather vague consensus about the nature of Postmodernism and thereupon to delimit a corpus of works that falls within its scope, or to begin with a consensus about texts that “evidently” belong to Postmodernism and then to proceed with establishing the distinguishing features of these texts. (5)

To find out what makes a work Postmodern, Postmodernism has to be determined, or recognised. The problem with Postmodernism is that it is difficult to define. The only thing that gives readers a grip on what they are reading is being able to construe their own interpretation of what they are reading. However, Postmodernism may not need interpretation. Bertens explains Sontag's discontent with interpretation in his article, “The Postmodern Weltanschauung”: Sontag claims that Modernism invented interpretation, and that Postmodernism needs experience. To understand a Postmodern work, whether it be art or literature, it needs to be experienced; “Postmodern art simply is and must be experienced. Modernist art refers to a meaning hidden behind its surface and must be *understood*. Postmodern art presents itself as surface. Modernist art claims depth behind that surface” (15). Postmodernism is often seen as a form that has mixed high art with popular culture, reality and fiction, exceeding all boundaries as Broden explains, “The critic Leslie Fiedler enthusiastically pointed to new authors inspired to 'cross the border, close the gap'

by transgressing and straddling Modernism's dichotomy between high and low culture, letting fresh breezes of popular culture into their work" (787).

Metafiction and the new novel are two genres which are often associated with Postmodernism. Both these terms cross borders and boundaries that have been set by Modernism, such as the ones set for narrative and visual devices. These devices are found in Postmodernism, though they are also found in Modernism, however both movements use these devices in different ways. According to the *Glossary of Literary Terms*, Postmodernism is linked to the word metafiction, "an overall term for the growing class of novels which depart from realism and foreground the roles of the author in inventing the fiction and of the reader in receiving the fiction" (203). This is backed up by Bertens in his essay, who discusses Postmodernism and also links Postmodern elements to metafiction (55-56). In this article he mentions that one of the metafictional strategies is the use of actual historical events, claiming that if genuine historical actions and people occur in the story, even though these events may be slightly altered, the reader breaks with the illusion of reality (56).

Some of the other devices of metafiction described by Bertens are; a work of fiction within fiction, a novel within a novel, a novel about a reader reading a novel, a non-linear and fragmented novel, narrative footnotes, and many more such devices (56). A framework narrative is an example of a work of fiction in a work of fiction, and is often found in postmodern novels. Framework narratives provide the reader with information which otherwise would remain undetected. A parallel story in a novel can provide greater insight into the characters and their developments. By creating an alternate story line in which the characters struggle with the same problems as in the main story, these problems become clearer. In some novels the metafictional aspect is obvious, especially in a novel in which the author is one of the characters, as in *Everything is Illuminated* by Foer. However, in some novels, the metafictional aspect is less obvious.

Bertens gives an example of metafiction in his essay, "[e]xamples of implicit metafictional strategies would be the appearance of one or more characters taken from an already

existing literary text or even the complete reworking of a text” (56) and continues by coining this as intertextuality. Intertextuality is found in many different guises, one clear example being Nabokov's *Lolita*, in which the main character's name, Humbert Humbert, is an allusion to E. A. Poe's short story “William Wilson”, and the novel contains more allusions to Poe's work.

According to *A Glossary of Literary Terms* intertextuality

is used to signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text is in fact made up of other texts [...] its repetitions and transformations of the formal and substantive features of earlier texts, or simply its unavoidable participation in the common stock of linguistic and literary conventions and procedures that are “always ready” in place and constitute the discourses into which we are born. (325)

This leads some to believe that everything is intertextual. As Redies states in her article, “[t]he idea of the author as original creator has long been challenged, and a number of theories regard all texts as intertextual, as they may all just be networks of quotations and incorporations of existing texts. Postmodern texts, however, often directly address this problem by referring, in one way or another, to specific texts or genres (11)”.

Postmodern authors refer to other work, in an attempt to mix high art with popular culture. Apart from using existing work, Postmodern authors also produce and use their own made up secondary sources. A great example of this is the book *House of Leaves* by Mark Danielewski. For this book, he wrote his own secondary sources, which do not exist outside his work and the world of his novel. These are academic texts, letters, appendices, exhibits, all written by Danielewski himself, but for the purpose of the novel they are put under different non-existing names and authors. These documents give the reader an insight into the characters, which otherwise would never have been realised.

Another narrative device is fragmentation. Fragmentation is often used in Postmodernism as well as in Modernism, along with non-linear narratives. Fragmentation breaks up the narrative, and leaves it in no particular order. In Modern texts, fragmentation is often symbolic,

representing the breaking and chaos of life itself. However, the author tries to rectify this chaos, and attempts to put everything back in perspective. In Postmodern literature, fragmentation is also a representation of the chaos of life itself, but the author has no intention of overcoming this, or bringing order to the chaos. Bertens explains this by saying that

[f]or postmodern writers nothing has the power to impose form on the endless complexity of the contemporary world. They strongly doubt that the world is coherent and in any meaningful way continuous and so refuse the suggestion that art ... may create order where such order seems fundamentally lacking. (54)

The Postmodernist author accepts the chaos, thus reinforcing the notion that in Modernism there is an urge for resolution, whereas in Postmodernism this is not the case. As Broden explains, the use of fragmentation gives reader an interactive part in the text, leaving them to work things out themselves, rather than just read a text (787). A fine example of fragmentation in Postmodern literature is the novel *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortázar. His novel contains 155 chapters which can be read in different orders. It also contains a table formed by the author himself to direct the reader through the book, leaving the reader stuck in a loop between the final two chapters. Postmodern literature is also known for its manipulation of chronology, leaving the reader confused. Flashbacks are often used to give inside information about the characters in a novel, information that might otherwise not be available to the reader.

A conventional form of narration is the third person point of view, an all knowing narrator whose thoughts and actions are believed to be authoritative and true. Postmodern writers often use the first person point of view, leading to the unreliable narrator. An unreliable narrator is a narrator whose thoughts and actions are the only ones read by the reader, lacking any external influences, and usually these thoughts are not true. This often leads to structural irony. An author who uses structural irony gives his character a different set of morals and values, which may not find acceptable. By maintaining this throughout the story, structural irony is induced. Bertens adds to this that the use of irony in Postmodern literature also adds to the Postmodern author's view on the world, that "Postmodern writers are deeply skeptical of ideas of ultimate order and

equally so of those luminous moments that bring understanding and significance ... If epiphanies occur at all, they are framed in irony so that their status remains undecidable” (54). Morals and values are also used to create anti-heroes. Postmodern literature often contains one or more anti-heroes. In conventional literature, the protagonist is a hero or heroine, a person who has the power to change the world or at least the problems given in the novel. In Postmodern literature, however, this is not the case. One of the reasons may have to do with the time in which Postmodernism came to exist, just after WWII, when the world was still in shock due to what had happened. These anti-heroes live life in a world which is more perceivable to the reader than any other perfect world inhabited with perfect people where the all time hero saves the day. Many great Postmodern novels contain anti-heroes, such as Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, Beckett's *Murphy*, Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, Danielewski's *House of Leaves* and Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*.

Themes found in Postmodernism are especially related to the time Postmodernism first came about. Most of the Postmodern works are works that were written after WWII. After this war, morale was very low and new artists were trying to break away from conventions. Modernism had become conventional and predictable, whereas life in this period was unconventional and uncertain. The effects of WWII, and later the Cold War, lead to major existential themes in Postmodern literature, for example, the significance of life and living in general and the threat of war. In Postmodern literature, authors tend to accept these themes, whereas in Modern literature, the author is constantly trying to find a solution to these problems. Bertens explains this in his essay “Postmodern American Literature” saying that, “[f]rom the postmodern perspective it makes a good deal more sense to assume that there is no ultimate goal and that there is no underlying structure that determines the future or in unseen ways controls our lives” (57).

As time goes by, so do cultural movements. Postmodernism tries to exceed Modernism by taking what has already been done and bringing it to another level. There are certain key elements associated with Postmodernism, such as metafiction, framework narrative,

intertextuality, fragmentation, the unreliable narrator and the anti-hero and themes relating to the significance of life. These elements are found in many Postmodern works, though the use of these devices is what makes works containing these elements truly Postmodern.

Chapter 2, Postmodern devices in *Watchmen*

Moore's *Watchmen* contains many literary devices, thereby distinguishing itself from other comic books and graphic novels alike. The term graphic novel is used to describe comic books that are more than just children's superhero-stories, due to the slightly childish connotation of the word, comic. Not every graphic novel that is written is about a hero saving the world. Though *Watchmen* is not the only graphic novel containing such elements, Moore created a novel that goes far beyond the limits of comic book writing, and surpasses it into literature. In *Watchmen*, themes, motives, deeper layers, narrative and visual devices are evident, as they are in literature. The narrative devices Moore uses in *Watchmen* are characteristic devices for Postmodern literature, such as the framework narrative, an intertextuality, intertextuality, fragmentation and the unreliable narrator.

The framework narrative in *Watchmen* is an interesting one, as it is introduced by a character who appears to be less interesting to the story at first. In *Watchmen* a boy called Bernie and a news vendor called Bernard talk about the Cold War, and the threat it has become. While conversing, the boy is reading the comic book "The Black Frater", a horror story about a pirate, which is a parallel to the story of *Watchmen* and some of its characters. The story from "The Black Frater" and *Watchmen* complement each other, and as the story of *Watchmen* continues, frames of *Watchmen* and "The Black Frater" alter and the two storylines become intertwined, this suggests a parallel between "The Black Frater" and *Watchmen*. The story of "The Black Frater" is that of a Sea Captain, who after losing his ship and crew to the bloodthirsty pirates of the Black Frater, is on his way home to save his wife and children from the same pirates who are now on their way to his home town. He floats around the sea, on what little is left of his ship, anxious to get home, slowly but surely becoming delirious, thereby losing himself and the goals he set for himself. He eventually kills his wife in one of his deliriums, thereby scarring his children for life, as he can no longer see what is right and what is wrong in his battle to save his family. After realising what he has done, he leaves his home to join the crew of the Black Frater.

the The story of “The Black Frater” is shown in its own frames, though after a few frames of “The Black Frater”, the story switches back to the newsvendor. The text from “The Black Frater” however continues into the next frame in frayed-edge style boxes, usually followed by text in speech bubbles from the newsvendor himself, which has the same underlying message (Appendix #1). Black Frater, because he has become a killing monster just like them. Though both stories are complete stories on their own, the combination of the two reveals a parallel. Whenever something important is about to happen in *Watchmen*, the story quickly switches back to “The Black Frater”. Because “The Black Frater is found in fragments throughout *Watchmen*, the outcome develops at the same pace. The parallel between *Watchmen* and “The Black Fater” is also found in the storyline. Whilst the problems of the Sea Captain become clearer towards the end of “The Black Frater”, the problems of other major characters in *Watchmen* itself become more evident. Just as the Sea Captain is losing himself in the fight between what is right and wrong, two of the main characters in *Watchmen*, Rorschach and Ozymandias are experiencing similar problems. Throughout the novel, Rorschach is portrayed as a prosaic bounder, though all he wants is to save the world from Evil. He is alone, has a freakish appearance, has no mercy, and lets nothing stand in the way of his fight against evil. Similar to the Sea Captain in “The Black Frater”, he hurts people to get what he wants, almost losing sight of his objective. The same applies to Adrian Veidt, who used the name Ozymandias when he was still a masked hero. After his days of crime fighting Veidt has become a self-made enterprise on a mission to save the world and is known to everyone as kind and gracious. Nevertheless, Veidt sees killing half of New York as a small price to pay for world peace, thereby becoming a monster himself. This framework narrative is not the only instrument used to provide the reader with more insight into the story and its characters.

Another efficient metafictional device is intertextuality, something which is especially present in *Watchmen*. Moore uses different references to other works in his work, including quotes from Blake, Shelley, Einstein, Freud, Jung, Dylan and even the Bible. These references

are all placed at the beginning of each chapter, and are also the titles of each chapter (Appendix 2 and 3). However, at the end of each chapter the quote is repeated, but nearly always in their full context and with the author's name below it. This also gives the reader who is unfamiliar with these quotations, a chance to understand them. There are different types of quotations in *Watchmen*, some more profound than others. Some references only emphasise what is being said and believed in *Watchmen*, such as the quote taken from Dylan's songs. One of the chapters is titled "Two riders were approaching...", at the end of the chapter the quotation is completed and a Dylan song is revealed: "Outside in the distance a wild cat did growl, two riders were approaching and the wind began to howl" (11. 28). In this chapter, Rorschach and Nite Owl go to Ozymandias' fortress which is in Antarctica. As the chapter ends you see Nite Owl and Rorschach riding through the snow, the wind blowing around them, while Ozymandias is watching them on television screens, whilst petting large wild cat. There are more of these quotes which are other quotes of greater intensity and more penetrating levels, such as quotes referring to Blake, Nietzsche, Jung, Einstein and Shelley. Perhaps the quote referring to Shelley's work is one of the most important ones, as it refers to both a character and theme in the novel. Ozymandias, Adrian Veidt, is the only character in the novel to have publicly announced his true identity. Veidt has a weakness for power, something which becomes clear throughout the novel. He admires Alexander the Great, and his Georgian Knot, and many other ancient heroes, naming his companies after them. One of his lock companies is ironically called the Georgian Knot Lock Company, and their motto is "They'll never undo this sucker"(3.7). Ozymandias is the Greek name given to Ramses II, the ancient Egyptian pharaoh. However, Ozymandias also refers to the poem by Shelley, which concerns a traveller who tells the narrator of the poem about a statue he has seen of King Ozymandias. However, this statue lies amongst his ruins, though Ozymandias himself obviously never dreamed that that would happen:

And on the pedestal, these words appear:

My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings,

Look on my Works, ye Mighty and despair!

Nothing besides remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare

The lone and level sands stretch far away. (9-14)

In *Watchmen*, Moore only uses lines 10 and 11, in the last frame of chapter 11, and the title of this chapter is “Look on my Works, ye Mighty” (qtd. in *Watchmen* 11.1). In this chapter, Veidt’s plan is revealed, he plans to destroy half of New York to unite the world. It is typical that Moore only uses lines 10 and 11 of the poem, as they are the strongest lines in the poem. These lines show how the great Ozymandias once thought how his legacy would go on, and so along with that, everything he built. However, these lines are followed by “Nothing besides remains” (12). If the reader is not familiar with Shelley's poem, the quote from Shelley will only make Veidt appear stronger and fiercer, though a reader who knows this poem will also understand the implied irony. It is peculiar that Veidt would choose such a name for himself, of all the ancient kings he could have named his vigilante alter ego after, he chose the name of a king whose works no longer remain. Moore must be telling the reader that this will happen to Veidt, that his work will not be remembered.

Watchmen contains other intertextualities, such as the Nietzsche quote “Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gaze also into you” (qtd. in *Watchmen* 6.28). This quote indicates the moral dilemma that surrounds Rorschach, a man who kills for sake of Good, and adds to his nihilistic views that life is subjective. Besides using intertextual references to other works, Moore also refers to his own created work, just as Danielewski does in his novel *House of Leaves*. *Watchmen* contains several fake secondary sources created by Moore for the purpose of the story, which can be found between each chapter. The first one the reader comes across is an excerpt of *Under the Hood*, a book written by the first Nite Owl, Hollis Mason. In this book, events of the past become clear, thereby giving insight into the characters, such as the Comedian and the first Silk Spectre. The Comedian dies before the novel even starts, and therefore he is merely cited in the story by means of flashbacks and whilst

being discussed by the other characters. *Under the Hood* also provides background information for the story itself, as it reveals historic events which happened in the world of *Watchmen*, but are not truly historic facts and therefore unknown to the reader. Another secondary source is a file on Rorschach made up by his psychologist Malcolm Long, all these files are under Rorschach's real name, Walter Kovacs. The file includes an arrest report which reveals charges alleged against Rorschach. This arrest report is followed by a history of Rorschach's childhood written by someone from the New York State Psychiatric Hospital, to which Rorschach is admitted after he gets arrested in the novel. This report reveals even more than the previous police report. It shows that Rorschach had a troublesome childhood, and that he was declared mentally unstable. The file also contains a story about his parents which Rorschach wrote when he was little, again showing his troubled childhood. Other secondary sources in the novel are articles written by main characters, or interviews with characters such as Ozymandias and the first Silk Spectre. All these sources give insight into the world of *Watchmen*.

Another postmodern metafictional element in *Watchmen* is fragmentation. Fragmentation happens frequently in *Watchmen*, as storylines run parallel to each other. *Watchmen* is divided into twelve chapters, and the chapters alter between stories, showing how while one storyline is followed, another story occurs at the same time in a different place. Nevertheless, the storylines are sometimes intertwined, leaving out important information. The best example of this is in the second to last chapter, chapter 11. In this chapter the puzzle pieces fall into place as the storylines finally come together. The reader follows two storylines, one taking place in New York City and the other in Veidt's fortress in Antarctica. In New York the reader follows people on the street, including Bernard and Bernie, though it is not yet clear to the reader why these people are so important. Meanwhile, Rorschach and Nite Owl are in Antarctica to confront Veidt they now know that he is up to something. As Veidt explains his course of action for world peace, the reader is confronted with the fact that Moore is playing a game with his reader, by confusing the reader's perception of time. Veidt explains to Nite Owl and Rorschach the essence of his plan; Veidt plans to teleport a gigantic monster to New York. On arrival the monster will explode, thereby

destroying half of New York. As the only known person able to teleport is Dr. Manhattan, therefore Veidt is certain that Dr. Manhattan will be blamed for his actions. Dr. Manhattan was involved in a horrible accident in which he was locked in radioactive testing room, which gave him his powers. When Veidt finishes explaining, Nite Owl asks him, "I mean, when was this hopeless black fantasy supposed to happen? When were you planning to do it?" (11.26), to which Veidt responds: "Do it? Dan, I'm not a republic serial villain. Do you seriously think I'd explain my masterstroke if there remained the slightest chance of you affecting its outcome? I did it thirty-five minutes ago" (11.27) (Appendix #4 and #5). This is followed by a frame of Nite Owl and Rorschach, then back to a frame of New York, showing the explosion Veidt was talking about frame by frame. This leaves the reader in great confusion, as the reader did not see this one coming due to the confusing time perception. The reader was misled to think that the actions in the New York scenes were taking place at the same time as the actions in Antarctica, as conventional parallel stories usually do.

Another great example of fragmentation is the character of Dr. Manhattan himself. Dr. Manhattan is the only person in the novel to actually have super powers, and one of them includes his perception of time. Dr. Manhattan is able to see into his own future, and experiences his own present, past and future at the same time. This leads to complicated situations, especially in the chapter which is narrated by Dr. Manhattan. In this chapter Dr. Manhattan constantly shifts between events in his life in the past, present and future, mixing up the reader's perception of time, leaving out relevant information about his life, and leaving the reader puzzled,

The photograph is in my hand. It is the photograph of a man and a woman. They are at an amusement park, in 1959. In twelve seconds time, I drop the photograph to the sand at my feet, walking away. It's already lying there, twelve seconds into the future. Ten seconds now. The photograph is in my hand. I found it in a derelict bar at the Gila Flats test

base twenty-seven hours ago. It's still there, twenty-seven hours into the past, in its frame, in the darkened bar. I'm still there, looking at it. (4.1) (Appendix #6)

However, Moore has no intention of bringing order to the chaos he creates in *Watchmen*, leaving it up to the readers themselves to experience the novel, using their own frame of reference.

It may be difficult for readers to read the novel objectively, as the story is mostly narrated by an unreliable narrator, something often found in Postmodern literature. *Watchmen* has three narrators: Rorschach, Dr. Manhattan and Dr. Malcolm Long. They narrate in this order, though the narration turns back to Rorschach after Dr. Long's narration. Some chapters have no narrator, and are just scenes following each other. *Watchmen* starts out with Rorschach, and his narratives are in the form of diary entries. "Rorschach's journal. October 13th, 1985. Slept all day. Awoken at 4:37. Landlady complaining about smell. She has five children by five different fathers. I am sure she cheats on welfare" (1.14). Rorschach's entries are gloomy and concise, though they influence the reader's way of thinking. As the story continues, the reader starts to understand the character of Rorschach more, eventually creating a certain empathy towards him. The reader will find himself thinking that what Rorschach says and does is right, and what the rest of the world is doing is wrong, even though the reader knows very well that Rorschach is a bit of a psychopath. This makes Rorschach an unreliable narrator, and the novel filled with structural irony. An example of this is the last chapter. When Rorschach is eventually killed by Dr. Manhattan, the reader actually feels compassion towards Rorschach, though Dr. Manhattan acts righteously.

After three chapters, the narration shifts to Dr. Manhattan, who is also an unreliable narrator. Dr. Manhattan's narration is mainly about his own life, and how he became Dr. Manhattan. He tells his life story in flashbacks, though as he is talking about his past he talks about it as though it is the present, as he lives in his past, present and future simultaneously. Dr. Manhattan is a super-human with super-powers who has no empathy for human life. His ways of thinking do not comply with those of people who are not in his position, like the reader, as Dr. Manhattan no longer understands human life and its meaning in this universe, "I am tired of this world-, these people. I am tired of being caught in the tangle of their lives" (4.25) . After this chapter, the narration shifts back to Rorschach, and stays with him until he is arrested by the police, and put into jail. Because he is in jail, Rorschach can no longer write in his journal,

resulting in another narration shift. This time the narration shifts to Rorschach's psychologist, Dr. Long. Dr. Long's narrative is mainly an observation of Rorschach, though Dr. Long has no idea what is going on in Rorschach's mind. Ironically, the reader does, because in between Dr. Long's narration, flashbacks of Rorschach's past are seen. Dr. Long's narration continues for a while, and gives the reader an awareness of his existence. Though at first it is unclear why the reader is following his storyline, it all becomes clear in chapter 11. In this chapter, Dr. Long is in the New York street scene when Veidt's monster appears, killing him and all others present. When the reader becomes attached to him, he gets killed. In the chapter after Long's narration, Rorschach escapes from prison with the help of Nite Owl and Silk Spectre, and is again able to write in his journal until chapter 11, when he deposits his journal at a newspaper office, hoping someone will publish it, thus revealing the truth about Veidt. Rorschach and Dr. Manhattan are typical anti-heroes, and the same applies to Dan Dreiberg, Nite Owl, and Laurie Juspecky, Silk Spectre. Rorschach can be seen as the protagonist, as the reader experiences the story mostly through his words and actions. However, he is not a typical protagonist, especially for a comic book. Moore did something to the all American hero comic book that had never quite been done before. The men and women behind the masks in *Watchmen* were no longer the typical heroes found in other comic books. Some of these masked heroes are people with serious psychological problems. Most protagonists in comic books are heroes; good-looking and with great personality. However, just as in most Postmodern works Rorschach is not. Rorschach is ugly and a murderer; killing off whores, pimps, rapists and paedophiles. Rorschach believes in right and wrong, and nothing in between. He even threatens Moloch, an ex-villain, saying that he will hand him over to the police because he is using illegal drugs to fight his cancer. The rest of the characters are no better, another example being Dr. Manhattan, the only real super-hero. Dr. Manhattan is the only one who can save the world, though feels nothing for mankind. His struggle with the meaning of human life becomes apparent throughout the novel, making him an anti-hero, while the reader expects him to be the one to save the world.

All the devices Moore uses in *Watchmen* are typical devices for Postmodern literature, yet

many critics cannot see past the pictures in the novel. However, when analysing *Watchmen*, Postmodern devices come to the surface, showing that it is indeed a Postmodern novel.

Chapter 3, Postmodern themes in *Watchmen*

Times were difficult while Postmodernism was on the rise. After WWII, people felt that things could only get worse, and the threat of the Cold War and fear of annihilation by nuclear warfare greatly affected people's morale. The meaning of life and hopelessness became recurrent themes in Postmodern literature, as it did in Modernism. In *Watchmen*, incoherence and the meaning of life are apparent themes that are important for the Postmodern genre. Throughout the novel, these themes are applied and show that *Watchmen* is indeed a Postmodern text. Besides the fact that *Watchmen* contains Postmodern themes, the fact that a comic book has themes, sets *Watchmen* apart from any other comic books and adds it to the list of graphic novels.

According to the *Glossary of Literary Terms*, Postmodern writing wants to “subvert the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience so as to reveal the meaninglessness of existence and underlying the 'abyss' or 'void', or 'nothingness' on which any supposed security is conceived to be precariously suspended” (176). This is demonstrated in Moore's *Watchmen*. The main themes in *Watchmen* are the threat of nuclear war and the meaning of life. As the threat of nuclear war was real during the years Moore wrote *Watchmen*, it is not strange that this is one of themes in the novel, as it was in many Postmodern works of that time. In the novel, America is coming closer to nuclear war with the Soviet Union, something which is interpreted in the Doomsday Clock. This is a clock ticking towards midnight, and the closer it gets to midnight, the closer America grows towards catastrophe, now in the guise of nuclear war. This clock is found everywhere in the book, and in the novel newspapers are not afraid to scare people with the fact that war is coming. Each chapter ends with a picture of the Doomsday Clock, and as it approaches nearer to midnight in every chapter, eventually reaching midnight in chapter 12, the reader is reminded of the threat of nuclear war. Besides the Doomsday Clock, the threat of nuclear war is constantly mentioned in the novel by the characters as well. Dr. Manhattan, whose real name is Jon, is seen as America's Ultimate Weapon against this nuclear war, and when he disappears half way through the novel, the threat becomes even bigger. Eventually, *Watchmen*

ends with a moral dilemma, when one of the main characters, Adrian Veidt, turns out to have teleported a monster to New York city, which will explode on its arrival, killing half of New York. He did this so that it would seem as if New York is under alien attack, thereby uniting all the countries of the world against whatever other attack may come from another world. Eventually, Veidt gets what he wants, world peace. The watchmen decide to keep quiet about Veidt's actions, as telling the truth would only bring the world back to war. The final chapter of *Watchmen* reveals its plot, Veidt wants world peace, something which is not possible if nuclear war is imminent. The reader is constantly reminded of nuclear war throughout the novel, for example when Jon refers to the bombing of Hiroshima as he thinks about the future of the world. The novel is also brimming with pictures of silhouettes of people disintegrating in a nuclear explosion, and Jon sees this in one of his premonitions. He has the power to see into his own future, but somehow he cannot see what is going to happen to Earth in relation to Nuclear War.

In the face of nuclear war, the question of the meaning of life becomes an important one. Nearly all the characters struggle with this in *Watchmen*. Existential nihilistic perspectives such as the subjectivity of life are present in *Watchmen*. Jon becomes alienated from human life after becoming Dr. Manhattan. He feels distance between himself and other beings, because his radioactive accident causes him not to age, while others do. He is able to shift through time and can see the complex nuclear structure of everything. These complicated things make him forget that less complicated things are important as well. He is no longer in touch with human life, as to him Earth is only a tiny speck in the Universe. This becomes clear in the discussion he has with Laurie, the Silk Spectre, on Mars, where Jon goes for peace and quiet, after they end their romantic relationship, and in doing so, breaking Jon's link to the world, and therefore his involvement with it. When she says to him "don't be ridiculous! Earth's too important to hinge on one relationship!" (9. 9) Jon replies "[n]ot to me, my red world here means more to me than your blue one. I will show you around if you wish" (9. 9) (Appendix #7). He treats the fact that they are on Mars as a minor thing, asking if he should show her around like someone shows around their house. To an average person it would probably be quite an tremendous experience, and this

demonstrates how he feels towards human life. Later in the novel, Jon realises that human life does have meaning as he is reminded of the complexity of Earth, and the complexity of human life, referring to the existence of human life as a miracle, “But the world is so full of people, so crowded with these miracles that they become commonplace and we forget, *I forget*” (9. 27). He is reminded of the complexity of life when he and Laurie are on Mars, and Laurie has problems understanding of the meaning of life, mainly because she has her own personal problems, like not knowing who her father is. This reminds Jon how complicated human life is, thereby making it vital to him. Jon's feelings towards human life are constantly discussed by the characters in the novel. For example when Laurie leaves Jon, she turns towards one of her fellow ex-vigilantes, Nite Owl, telling him the reason she left Jon was that Jon is becoming estranged from Earth and human life, as it is meaningless to him. This becomes apparent to the other characters during the story, thereby reminding the reader of the meaning of life. Different quotes, such as the one from Nietzsche, “Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also intoBA you” (qtd. in *Watchmen* 6. 28) also remind the reader of the nihilist views often found in Postmodernism.

Conclusion

Moore did something with the graphic novel that had not been done in such a manner before. He took a medium that many saw as an uneducated form of writing and showed that graphic novels too can be literature. While most people saw the graphic novel as just another childish comic book, Moore proved that with the right devices, this form of writing can too be transformed into Postmodern literature. In a time when Modernism had become too conventional, Postmodernists crossed the boundaries that had been set by these Modernist writers, transgressing into Postmodernism. When people no longer wished to read about heroes who saved America, Moore provided an alternative, *Watchmen*. *Watchmen* is an example of what the Postmodern *Zeitgeist* entails, and the use of literary quotations from philosophers such as Einstein and Nietzsche illustrate the nihilistic tenor found in *Watchmen*. Moore's *Watchmen* is a complicated work of literature, containing several Postmodern elements such as the fragmented and framework narrative, the unreliable narrator, intertextuality and mixed up chronology. The themes present in *Watchmen* are themes found in most Postmodern works, such as the nature of life and reality itself and the threat of (nuclear) war, or oppression. Though all these elements are elements of Modernist writing as well, Postmodern authors use these devices in a completely different way. Whilst Modern authors tried to find a reason and solution for the problems of their time, Postmodernists accepted the situation they were in, and this was reflected in their works.

Autobiography, as we all know, is a verbal interpretation – not simply recollection, not simply construction – of a life. So is postmodernism a collective interpretation of an age. More than an artistic style or historical trend, more than a personal sensibility or *Zeitgeist*, postmodernism is a hermeneutic device, a habit of interpretation, a way of reading all our signs under the mandate of misprision. (Hassan 4)

Watchmen is an interesting Postmodern text, as it provides the reader with complex themes and deeper layers, which appear throughout the novel. Everything being taken into account, Moore created a work of literature that revolutionised the foundations of literary writing, adding a new dimension to Postmodern literature.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, eds. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. London: Thomson Learning, 2005. Print.
- Bertens, Hans. "Postmodern American Literature." *A Company to Twentieth-Century United States Fiction*. Ed. David Seed. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2010. 48 - 59. Print.
- Bertens, Hans. "The Postmodern Weltanschauung and its Relation to Modernism: An Introductory Survey." *Appropriating Postmodernism*. Eds. Douwe Fokkema and Hans Bertens. Amsterdam; Benjamin, 1986. 9-51. Print.
- Broden, T. F. "Postmodernism." *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics Second Edition*. Ed. Keith Brown. Place: Elsevier Ltd, 2005. 785 – 794. Web. 14 Apr. 2010.
- Fokkema, Douwe. "Preliminary Remarks." *Appropriating Postmodernism*. Eds. Douwe Fokkema and Hans Bertens. Amsterdam; Benjamin, 1986. 9-51. Print.
- Goldstein, Hilary. "Absolute Watchmen Review." Rev. of *Watchmen – Absolute Watchmen* edition, by author Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons. *IGN* 5 Mar. 2009. Web.
- Hallberg, Garth R. "'Watchmen': The Curious Case of a Graphic Novel." *More Intelligent Life*. The Economist Newspaper Limited, 15 Apr. 2009. Web. May 29.
- Hassan, Ihab. "Beyond Postmodernism." *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 8.1 (2003): 3-11. Web. 3 Jun. 2010.
- Moore, Alan. "Alan Moore: The Wonderful Wizard of... Northampton". Interview by Susanna Clarke. *The Telegraph.co.uk*. The Telegraph, 2007. Web. 23 May. 2010.
- Moore, Alan and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York, NY: DC Comics, 2005. Print.
- Redies, Sunje. "Return with New Complexities: Robert Coover's Briar Rose." *Marvels & Tales* 18.1 (2004): 9-27. Web. 12 May. 2010.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "Ozymandias." *The Norton Anthology*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. London: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd, 2005. 768. Print.

Shone, Tom. "The World's First Anti-Heroic Comic Book is Underwhelming." Rev. of *Watchmen*,

by author Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons. *Slate* 5 Mar. 2009. Web.

"Zeitgeist". Oxford Dictionaries. Oxford University Press, 2010. Web. 23 Jun. 2010.

Appendix
Graphics



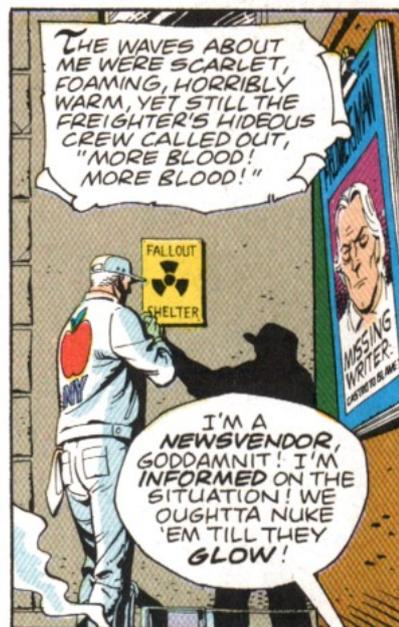
DELIRIOUS, I SAW THAT HELL-BOUND SHIP'S BLACK SAILS AGAINST THE YELLOW INDIES SKY, AND KNEW AGAIN THE STENCH OF POWDER, AND MEN'S BRAINS, AND WAR.

WE OUGHTTA NUKE RUSSIA, AND LET GOD SORT IT OUT.



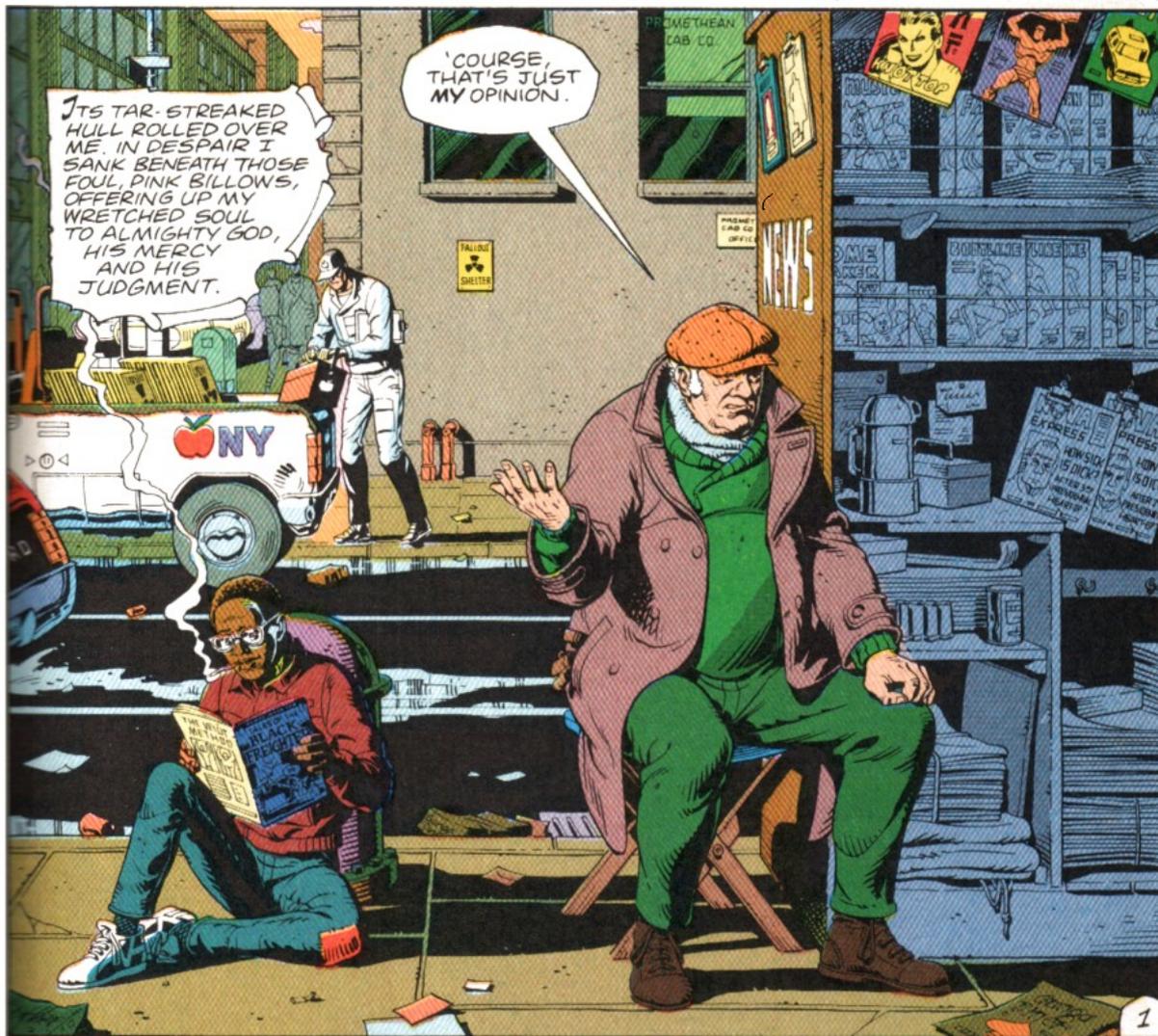
I MEAN, I SEE THE SIGNS, READ THE HEADLINES, LOOK THINGS INNA FACE, Y'KNOW?

THE HEADS NAILED TO ITS PROW LOOKED DOWN, THOSE WITH EYES; GULL-EATEN; SALT-CAKED; LIPLESSLY MOUTHING, "NO USE! ALL'S LOST!"



THE WAVES ABOUT ME WERE SCARLET, FOAMING, HORRIBLY WARM, YET STILL THE FREIGHTER'S HIDEOUS CREW CALLED OUT, "MORE BLOOD! MORE BLOOD!"

I'M A NEWSVENDOR, GODDAMNIT! I'M INFORMED ON THE SITUATION! WE OUGHTTA NUKE 'EM TILL THEY GLOW!

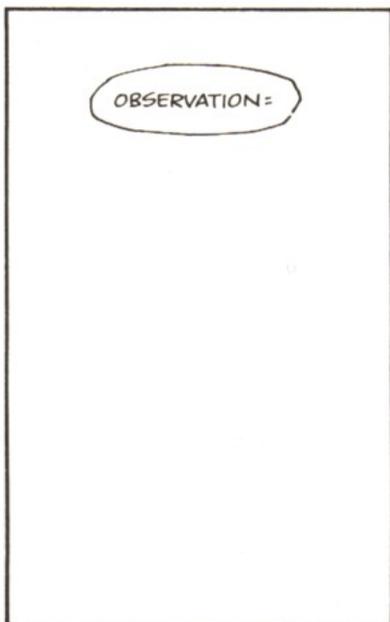


ITS TAR-STREAKED HULL ROLLED OVER ME. IN DESPAIR I SANK BENEATH THOSE FOUL, PINK BILLOWS, OFFERING UP MY WRETCHED SOUL TO ALMIGHTY GOD, HIS MERCY AND HIS JUDGMENT.

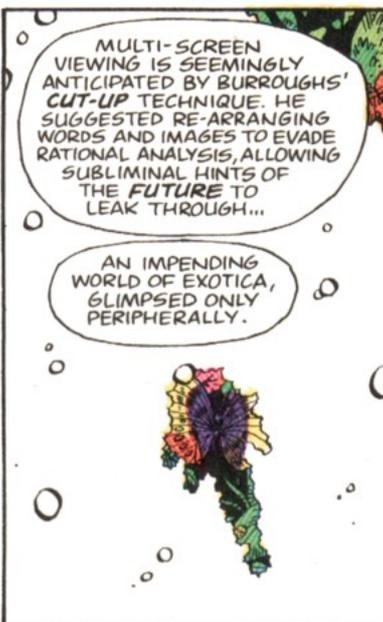
'COURSE, THAT'S JUST MY OPINION.

THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH

#1

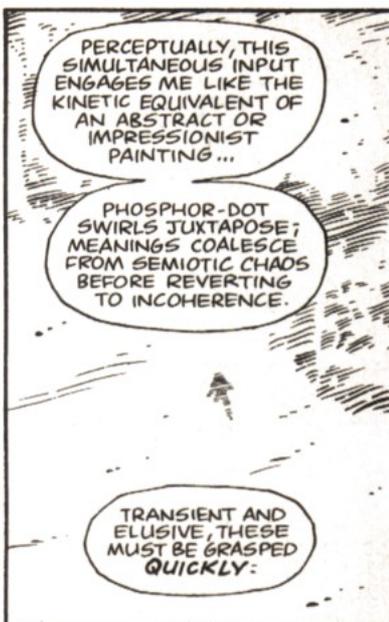


OBSERVATION:



MULTI-SCREEN VIEWING IS SEEMINGLY ANTICIPATED BY BURROUGHS' CUT-UP TECHNIQUE. HE SUGGESTED RE-ARRANGING WORDS AND IMAGES TO EVADE RATIONAL ANALYSIS, ALLOWING SUBLIMINAL HINTS OF THE FUTURE TO LEAK THROUGH...

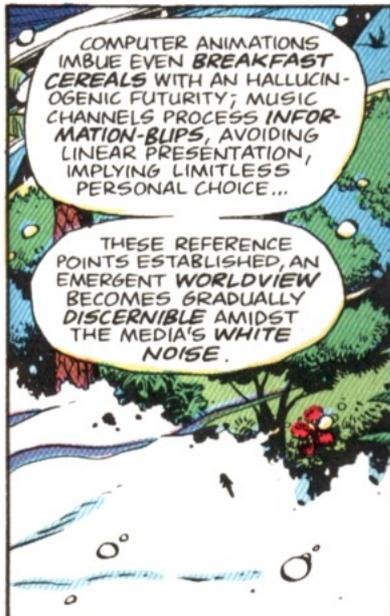
AN IMPENDING WORLD OF EXOTICA, GLIMPSED ONLY PERIPHERALLY.



PERCEPTUALLY, THIS SIMULTANEOUS INPUT ENGAGES ME LIKE THE KINETIC EQUIVALENT OF AN ABSTRACT OR IMPRESSIONIST PAINTING ...

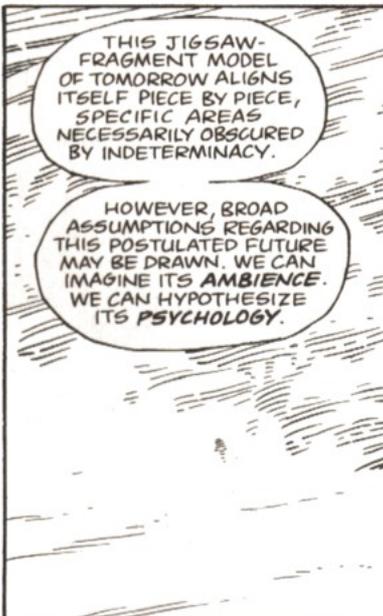
PHOSPHOR-DOT SWIRLS JUXTAPOSE; MEANINGS COALESCE FROM SEMIOTIC CHAOS BEFORE REVERTING TO INCOHERENCE.

TRANSIENT AND ELUSIVE, THESE MUST BE GRASPED QUICKLY:



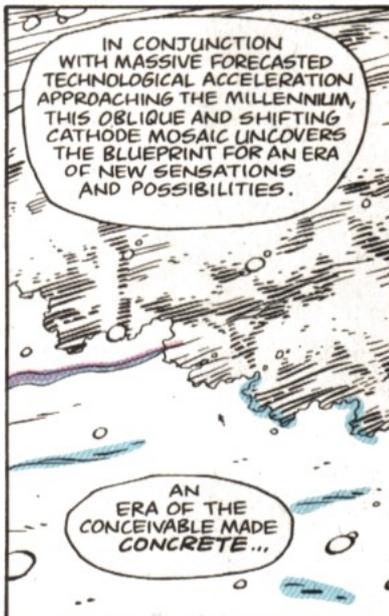
COMPUTER ANIMATIONS IMBUE EVEN BREAKFAST CEREALS WITH AN HALLUCINOGENIC FUTURITY; MUSIC CHANNELS PROCESS INFORMATION-BLIPS, AVOIDING LINEAR PRESENTATION, IMPLYING LIMITLESS PERSONAL CHOICE...

THESE REFERENCE POINTS ESTABLISHED, AN EMERGENT WORLDVIEW BECOMES GRADUALLY DISCERNIBLE AMIDST THE MEDIA'S WHITE NOISE.



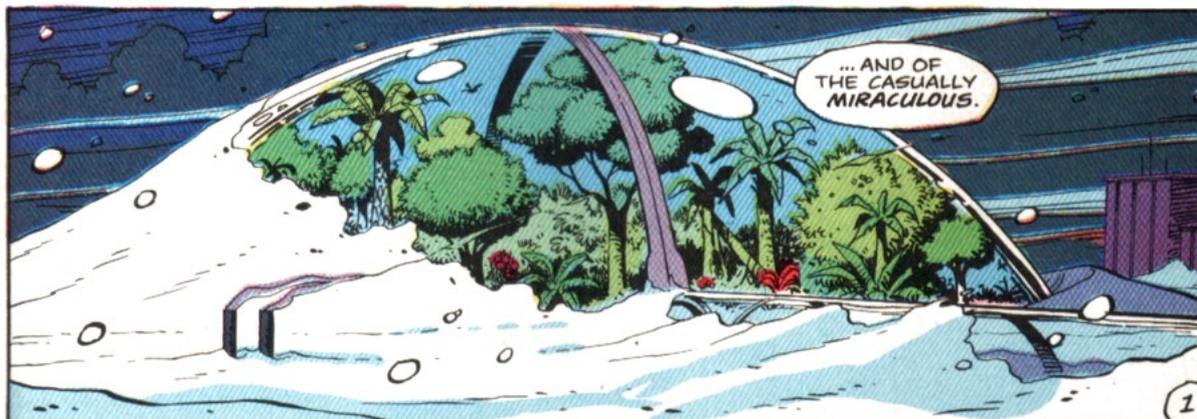
THIS JIGSAW-FRAGMENT MODEL OF TOMORROW ALIGNS ITSELF PIECE BY PIECE, SPECIFIC AREAS NECESSARILY OBSCURED BY INDETERMINACY.

HOWEVER, BROAD ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING THIS POSTULATED FUTURE MAY BE DRAWN. WE CAN IMAGINE ITS AMBIENCE. WE CAN HYPOTHEZIZE ITS PSYCHOLOGY.



IN CONJUNCTION WITH MASSIVE FORECASTED TECHNOLOGICAL ACCELERATION APPROACHING THE MILLENNIUM, THIS OBLIQUE AND SHIFTING CATHODE MOSAIC UNCOVERS THE BLUEPRINT FOR AN ERA OF NEW SENSATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES.

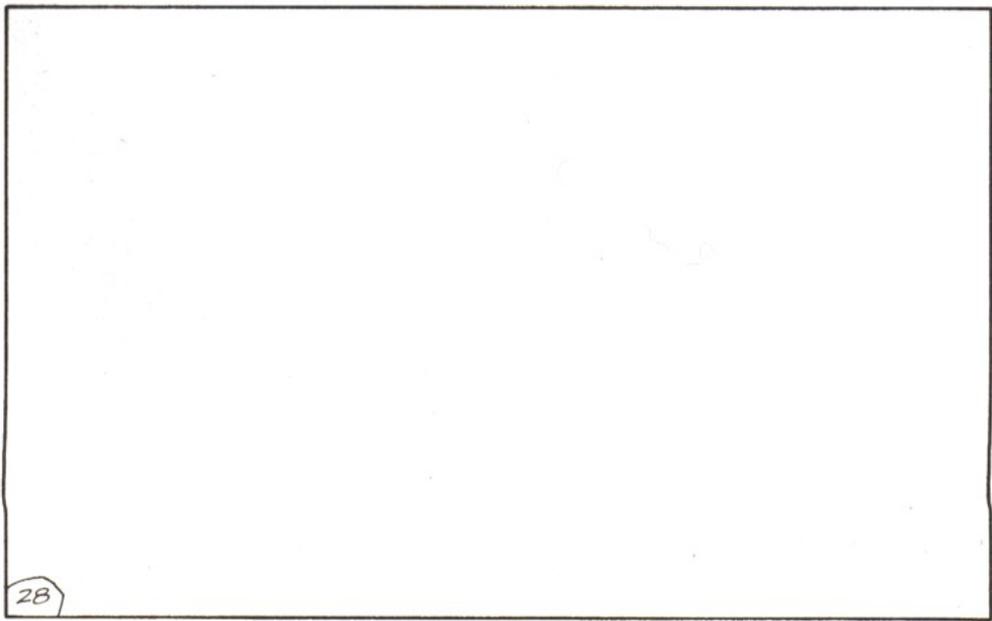
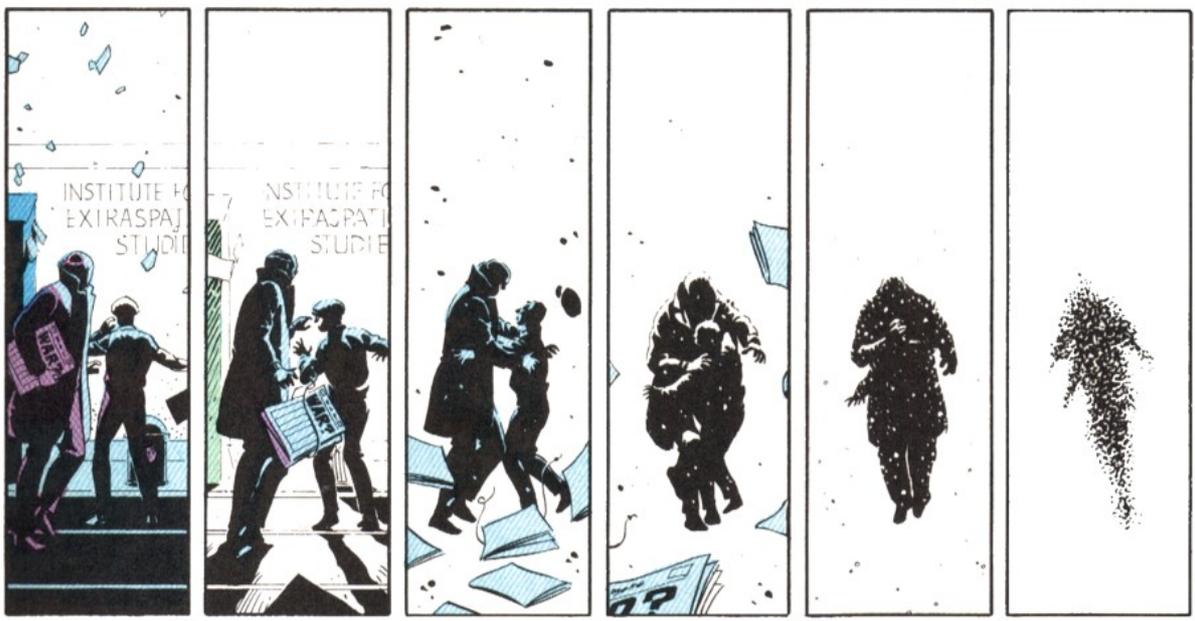
AN ERA OF THE CONCEIVABLE MADE CONCRETE ...



... AND OF THE CASUALLY MIRACULOUS.

1

LOOK ON MY WORKS, YE MIGHTY...



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

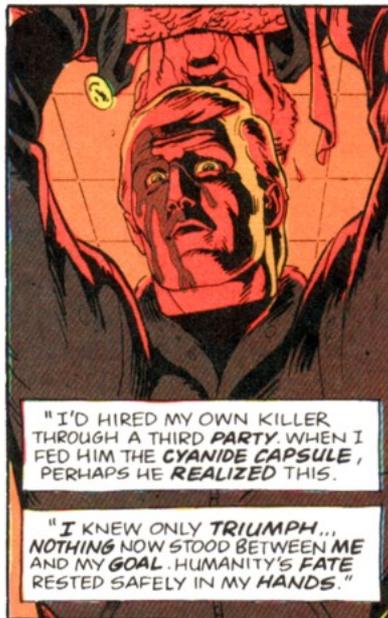
—Ozymandias
Percy
Bysshe
Shelley





AFTER **BLAKE**, I NEUTRALIZED **JON**. STOLEN **PSYCHIATRIC** REPORTS INDICATED HIS MENTAL **WITHDRAWAL**. THE **CANCER** ALLEGATIONS MADE IT **PHYSICAL**.

BY THEN, **RORSCHACH'S** **MASK KILLER** HUNT NEEDED STOPPING. MY OWN "ASSASSINATION", CONFIRMING HIS ERRONEOUS THEORY, PLACED ME BEYOND **SUSPICION**.



"I'D HIRED MY OWN KILLER THROUGH A **THIRD PARTY**. WHEN I FED HIM THE **CYANIDE CAPSULE**, PERHAPS HE **REALIZED** THIS.

"I KNEW ONLY **TRIUMPH**... **NOTHING** NOW STOOD BETWEEN ME AND MY **GOAL**. **HUMANITY'S FATE** RESTED SAFELY IN MY **HANDS**."



ADRIAN, THIS IS **CRAZY**. WHO'D BELIEVE AN **ALIEN** **INVASION**?

HITLER SAID PEOPLE SWALLOW LIES **EASILY**, PROVIDED THEY'RE **BIG** ENOUGH. I PLANNED TO BUILD MY **MONSTER**, TELEPORT IT TO A CERTAIN **DESTINATION**...

SAID TELEPORTATION **UNWORKABLE**.



"IT WORKS **FINE**, ASSUMING YOU WANT THINGS TO **EXPLODE** ON **ARRIVAL**."

"TELEPORTED TO **NEW YORK**, MY **CREATURE'S** **DEATH** WOULD TRIGGER MECHANISMS WITHIN ITS **MASSIVE** **BRAIN**, CLONED FROM A **HUMAN SENSITIVE**..."

"...THE **RESULTANT** **PSYCHIC** **SHOCKWAVE** **KILLING** **HALF** THE **CITY**."



ADRIAN, I'M **SORRY**... YOU NEED **HELP**. I KNOW THIS "**HALF** **NEW YORK**" STUFF IS **BULLSHIT**, BUT I'M **STILL** **GLAD** WE GOT HERE BEFORE YOU GOT **DEEPER** INTO THIS **MESS**.

CHRIST, YOU **SERIOUSLY** **PLANNED** ALL THIS **MAD** **SCIENTIST** STUFF?



"I MEAN, WHEN WAS THIS **HOPELESS** **BLACK** **FANTASY** SUPPOSED TO **HAPPEN**?"

"WHEN WERE YOU **PLANNING** TO **DO** IT?"



