

FERNANDO VIEIRA LAZZARIN

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NOTHING EVER ENDS

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Autor: Fernando Vieira Lazzarin
Orientador: Sandra Sirangelo Maggio

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“What is time but a variety of one thing?”
Austin Osman Spare,
The Focus of Life

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Dedico esse trabalho à minha amada, por me encorajar em momentos de dúvida.

À minha família, sempre presente.

À Sandra, por não desistir das minhas loucuras e pelo apoio incondicional.

Ao Universo, por me proporcionar a oportunidade de estar aqui e escrever estas linhas.

E a todos que cruzaram meu caminho.

RESUMO

Trata-se de uma leitura sobre representações do tempo na obra *Watchmen*, de Alan Moore e Dave Gibbons, à luz das ideias de Mircea Eliade sobre Eterno Retorno e da mitocrítica de Gilbert Durand, buscando uma maior compreensão sobre as funções da temática do tempo neste romance gráfico. O tópico será explorado em seus aspectos simbólicos e míticos. Discutiremos as apresentações díspares encontradas no esforço de Ozymandias para banir o Tempo e a História, que se opõe aos tempos simultâneos em que se movimenta o Dr. Manhattan. Identificarei como são apresentadas as narrativas múltiplas através de diferentes tipos de balões de fala e de painéis. O fio condutor será analisado através do filtro do narrador extradiegético que dá forma à narrativa e organiza seus capítulos e notas. As narrativas diegéticas e metadieéticas, a trama principal e os “*Contos do Cargueiro Negro*” serão considerados em função de como agregam à temática do tempo e quanto ao que significam para o desenvolvimento das personagens. O capítulo de análise se constrói sobre a leitura de duas personagens: Jon Osterman, também conhecido como Dr. Manhattan, e Adrian Veidt, cujo codinome é Ozymandias. A análise de algumas passagens será feita para explorar as representações psicológicas dessas personagens. No final, espera-se obter um painel das representações do tempo em *Watchmen* que decodifique a diversidade de camadas simbólicas que compõem a obra e que revele a complexidade dessa narrativa e da discussão que ela apresenta com respeito à temática da temporalidade.

Palavras-chave: 1 Alan Moore; 2 *Watchmen*; 3 Tempo; 4 Crítica Literária.

ABSTRACT

This monograph consists of a study of the representations of time in the graphic novel *Watchmen*, by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, in the light of Mircea Eliade's ideas about Eternal Return and Gilbert Durand's myth criticism. It aims at analyzing and discussing the theme of "time", as employed by the authors, in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of the novel. It aims also at exploring the theme in its symbolic and mythological significance. The effort of banishing Time and History, enacted by Ozymandias, in opposition to the apparent simultaneous time in which Dr. Manhattan exists is discussed. We identify the presence of multiple narratives superimposed by means of speech balloons and panels. The main narrative thread is presented through the filter of an extradiegetic narrator, who organizes the novel, its chapter, and notes. The diegetic and metadiegetic narratives, the main narrative and the "*Tales of the Black Freighter*", are analyzed in order to illustrate the theme of "time", and its significance to the development of the characters is discussed. The chapter of analysis centers on two characters: Jon Osterman, also known as Dr. Manhattan and Adrian Veidt, whose alias is Ozymandias. The analysis of certain passages is used to explore these representations on the psychological level of the characters. In the end, it is concluded that time is arranged and dealt with in a multitude of symbolic layers, and that it is used as both a means to convey a complex narrative and as a reflection on the nature of time itself.

Key-Words: 1 Alan Moore; 2 *Watchmen*; 3 Time; 4 Literary Criticism.

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INTRODUCTION

*Unfathomable Sea! whose waves are years,
Ocean of Time, whose waters of deep woe
Are brackish with the salt of human tears!
Thou shoreless flood, which in thy ebb and flow
Claspest the limits of mortality!*

*And sick of prey, yet howling on for more,
Vomitest thy wrecks on its inhospitable shore;
Treacherous in calm, and terrible in storm,
Who shall put forth on thee,
Unfathomable Sea?*

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Time*

The first time I had contact with Alan Moore and David Gibson's *Watchmen* was not through the graphic novel itself, but rather by watching the homonymous Hollywood film adaptation, directed by Zack Snyder. (2009) I went to the movie theater expecting a regular super-hero movie with a dark twist to its tone and ambience. However, after all the flash and thunder, due in part to the music video style so characteristic of the adaptation, I left the theater thinking that maybe this was the best super-hero movie I had ever watched –even though I was not sure if it deserved to be put in the same category as other films pertaining to the genre. It was more “mature” in many ways, darker in mood, with its references to both pop culture and literature, while still managing to tell a story of costumed “heroes”.

Some time passed by and I came upon an opportunity to write a short essay about Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem “*Ozymandias*”. (SHELLEY [1818]: 2000) I remembered the quotes from the poem used in the movie, associated with the character Ozymandias (whose civil name is Adrian Veidt), a direct reference to the poem and to the pharaoh Ramesses II. Even though I focused on analyzing the movie in conjunction with the poem, an inevitable sense of curiosity led me to go to the source of the adaptation, the graphic novel itself.

When I started reading the first of its twelve volumes, I began realizing what is perhaps so obvious to other, more seasoned, comic book readers: that what was in my hands was no ordinary comic book. I will not discuss the differences between the original graphic

novel and its Hollywood counterpart. Nevertheless, I was overwhelmed by the quality of the work so I decided that one day I should approach it more seriously.

Many things have drawn my attention in *Watchmen*. I liked the way it explores the common sense notion of super heroes; the way it twists and exploits the heroic ideal, the validity of seeking utopias and how they might in fact resemble a frightening dystopia. How it provokes the reader all the time, forcing a reassessment of his notions of good and evil, the dangers inherent in this search for a utopia, and most of all, how Time is on our side, as human beings, and how it is not. This is the main theme of this research: the representations of Time in *Watchmen*.

Watchmen plays with the idea of the hero, as Joseph Campbell defines it, and then it deconstructs this notion, in an unforgiving fashion, “destabilizing reader’s notions of heroism and the heroic archetype” (NESS: 2010, digital document). The reader is left on his own in order to stitch the pieces of this broken image back into a new shape, a highly personal reconstruction of what the word “hero” means. For in the end, it seems, all heroes in *Watchmen* are too human, with their complex balance of virtues and defects. What stands out most are the human traits in them, sometimes even more than their deeds. We see heroic characters playing the drama of the modern world, but none of them a proper hero. They are heroic characters, at best.

Moore’s works in general abound with “allusions to ancient mythology, mysticism, and magic” (NESS: 2010, digital document), and this is the reason I bring to use dictionaries of symbols such as Juan Eduardo Cirlot’s, Jean Chevalier’s and Gilbert Durand’s magnificent work *Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* (2012), to shed light on the discussion of the work and as an attempt to create a small and humble constellation of images that might align with the work of the authors. I also use Mircea Eliade’s concept of eternal return to analyze Adrian Veidt’s trajectory and motivations, since the great destruction he causes may be taken as a need to reenact and surpass the deeds of his spiritual archetype.

1 FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

1.1 GRAPHIC NOVELS

Comic books and graphic novels are a form of sequential art, such as literature or film. Scott McCloud (1994) identifies the term with a much older narrative tradition, which predates even the first written records of human history. The cave paintings by Neolithic human beings are one such example. The contemporary term “graphic novel”, as adopted by the comics industry and its audience, is a new term for a genre that has its roots sunk deep into the history of mankind. Of course, what readers buy at the newsstand as a bound book nowadays, this so-called graphic novel, does not immediately resemble objects such as the Bayeux tapestry or a painting on the walls of Lascaux cave. It shares, instead, similarities with both text novels and comic books at first sight.

Alan Moore’s and Dave Gibbon’s *Watchmen* is considered by many one of the finest examples of the genre in its modern acception. It figures, for instance, on *Time* magazine’s list of 100 best novels¹, and it won a Hugo Award in 1988 under the Other Forms category (HUGO) As an increasing number of adults who grew up reading comic books as children still consume their “adult counterpart” nowadays, graphic novels prove to be an established genre in the bookshelves of many readers. Other examples of famous graphic novels are Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* or Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns*, both published the same year *Watchmen* was released.

The modern usage of the term and its increasing popularity are usually attributed to Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God, and Other Tenement Stories*, published in 1978. It was not the first work to use the term “graphic novel”, but its popularity gave rise to a trend of graphic novels in which *Watchmen* may be included. Graphic novels are a relevant kind of comic

¹ Information granted at the cover of *Watchmen*. MOORE, Alan; GIBBONS, Dave. *Watchmen*. International Edition. New York: DC Comics, 2008.

book nowadays, and perhaps in due time, they may witness a potential “emancipation” from its progenitor genre, that is, the comic book.

Graphic novels are different in some respects from regular comic books, in which narratives usually span a series of comic books published monthly or weekly, for instance, and the characters and the universe they are set upon are considered a “work in progress”. Graphic novels usually have a beginning, middle and an end, and the characters and the universe they inhabit might have been created exclusively for that specific work, which is the case of *Watchmen*. There are no series of *Watchmen* comic books, consisting of weekly or monthly releases, the same way there are *Superman*, *Batman*, *Spider Man*, etc. comic books. *Watchmen*'s universe was created especially for that graphic novel, even though DC Comics (the publisher and copyright holder) might have published prequels to that original story later, they were not made in collaboration with Alan Moore. Those are the so called “spin-offs”, works derived from a parent work in order to extend the longevity of a franchise, not necessarily involving the collaboration of an original author.

The term “graphic novel” is regarded by some with derision, and even the very authors that helped establish this new genre have provided negative statements regarding its validity and necessity, such as Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman (BENDER: 1999, p.4)

Alan Moore, for instance, once said that selling graphic novels instead of comic books was only an excuse to sell “expensive comics” to people (KAVANAGH). This means that the often derogative term “comic book”, associated with children and teenagers, would no longer be used to market a product laden with the prejudices term ensues; this time it would be directed to adult, or mature, comic readers instead. The “expensive comics” were now to be seen as a new genre, fit for adults due to its mature themes and frequently innovative art designs. It implies seriousness and aims at “true” art status, in the sense of being opposed to mere entertainment, contrary to the way comic books are usually viewed. Nevertheless, much of what constitutes a graphic novel is intimately shared with what is called a comic book.

A comic book as it is understood nowadays has some elements and characteristics that entitle it as a comic book proper, such as panels, speech balloons, a conventional reading order (left to right, top to bottom), onomatopoeia, sequential images conveying a form of visual narrative, etc. Not all of them must be present at all times. Some comics deviate from the norm by introducing or omitting some elements, others by introducing themes alien to the genre, and others try to operate a structural revolution within the panels themselves.

Nonetheless, when a reader has a comic book in hands he expects some elements to be presented to him, since they are general conventions pertaining to the genre. And this is the case of *Watchmen*, which contains standard comic book elements but uses them in its own fashion, or even discards them, such as onomatopoeias, which never appear in the novel.

1.2 TIME IN COMIC BOOKS

Of all the elements necessary to make a comic book (or graphic novel), there is one of paramount importance, and that is the visual narrative, in the form of a sequence of images. Thus one cannot avoid dealing with time, or “the phenomenon of duration and its experience” (EISNER: 2006, p.25) since, without the experience of duration it cannot be called a sequential art form properly. Each panel, each page or speech balloon, has a certain implicit timing that is fully realized when a reader makes the effort of reading the comic book. It is so because the illusion of sequentiality is conveyed by the active reading of the comic book, and we “perceive it through the memory of experience” (EISNER: 2006, p.25)

This emphasis on time extends to the space that comics occupy (the page, panel, etc.), because when reading a page one perceives different “times” in the space of the page. The combination of illustrations and text provides comics a peculiar relation to time and space to the point that they are “one and the same” (McCLOUD: 1994, p.100). That is, there is correspondence between the space used by text and illustrations and the time they convey to the reader. There is also a perception implied in comics in general that “in comics, as in *film*, *television* and ‘*real life*’, it is always now.” (McCLOUD: 1994, p.104). On the other hand, different from these kinds of media, which create the illusion of sequentiality by relying on the audience’s memory, comics also point to the past and the future instantaneously, for these are the previous and the next panels in the sequence, which the reader is able to access at any moment. In a film, for instance, after a frame of the film is past it will not be projected again, the film keeps going on and it depends on the viewer’s memory to remember the sequence of images displayed. Comics are closer, in this sense, to reading a work of literature, with a stronger emphasis on the graphical content it displays to the reader, however, and the instantaneous nature of the illustration - it is not the sole domain of text.

Watchmen deals with different concepts of Time. It approaches time as a theme - on which it creates a frame to work its images and meanings; and it uses Time as a structural asset, which shapes the reading of its multiple narratives and defines page layouts, number of panels, symmetrical arrangements, superimposed textual narratives over visual ones and many more elements.

1.3 THE PLOT OF WATCHMEN

The cover of *Watchmen* (the international edition) tricks the first-time reader by suggesting it is a comic book (or graphic novel) about super heroes. After some chapters, the reader realizes the only character who has actual super powers is not exactly a hero, while the other characters who resemble traditional super heroes are actually costumed vigilantes. Most of its events are set in New York, the first panel showing the date of October 12th, 1985. But we soon learn that this universe exists in a different timeline than ours. In this universe, President Nixon never faced the accusations of the Watergate scandal, for instance, and he is still the president of the USA. The tension of the Cold War, however, remains a very strong influence on the lives of people, just like in our own world in the eighties'. Since looks are deceiving when reading *Watchmen*, its plot is a good example of how different points of view change perspective on a given subject.

There are many points of view to choose from when trying to summarize *Watchmen's* plot. It might be briefly summarized by saying that it is a mystery story in which a vigilante by the name of Rorschach undertakes an investigation to find out the murderer of his former colleague. In the end he finds out that this murderer is actually one of his colleagues, Adrian Veidt (Ozymandias). In addition, he discovers that the murderer has a plan to unify the divided world of the Cold War era, killing half the population of New York in the process. The killer also blames a creature from another dimension for the genocide. Rorschach, loyal to his ethics, decides not to compromise with the evil plan and sets out to reveal the truth. This decision causes his death, by the hands of Jon Osterman (Dr. Manhattan).

It could also be summed up as the dilemma faced by a godlike blue creature named Dr. Manhattan (formerly nuclear physicist Jon Osterman), confronted with the decision of

saving mankind from destruction or not. The problem is that this bluish Shiva-like character has the power to see into the future and past simultaneously, and yet, he cannot predict that crucial moment in his own future. In the end he decides to compromise with Veidt's plan, and leaves the Earth forever. The irony being that "Dr. Manhattan" could not save New York from destruction, and his departure pointing at the fact that he had never chosen the alias "Dr. Manhattan", a choice made by the "marketing" department.

Watchmen might be the story of a retired masked hero, Dan Dreiberger (Nite Owl), now in his late forties, and the consequences of embracing his nostalgic feelings for his Nite Owl costume. On his journey he finds unsuspected love from a former colleague, Laurie Juspecky (alias Silk Spectre) and finds himself responsible for the fate of mankind. Only this time he saves people by compromising his principles, by accepting to withhold the truth, and keeping silence about it.

This novel might be about how a not very bright office boy came upon a document that reveals the most shocking truth about humanity's long sought and now finally attained world peace. This might be the way this office boy reads Rorschach's journal, with possible omissions or parts skipped, that ultimately tell the reader of the novel a version of the investigation that Rorschach undertook. In order to read it this way, the reader must start reading the novel from the last page and then proceeding to the first page proper.

In short, the plot consists of an investigation undertaken by an outlawed masked hero, Rorschach, to solve the mystery of the Comedian's murder. As the narrative unfolds, the roles of heroic characters and villains are put on perspective, forcing the reader to reassess his concepts of hero and villain, in a grey and seemingly amoral world. The book is divided in 12 chapters and it juxtaposes multiple narratives in a way peculiar to the medium it is written on, that is, that of a comic book.

2 TIME AND WATCHMEN

To state that *Watchmen's* main theme is arguably Time might seem a bit too obvious, as the play of words (double entendre) its title suggests is clearly pointing at that. In addition, when reading it, the reader might notice the hints on illustrations and the puns dealing with the subject of Time throughout the narrative. And after all, one might say that Time is such an ordinary subject, something that permeates all human acts, that it would be pointless to analyze a work of fiction based on such an all-pervasive theme. At the same time, the importance of Time for humanity and the universe as we perceive it is such that it would be deceiving to try to escape the attempt of discussing this subject in a work such as *Watchmen*.

This graphic novel is undeniably devoted to the questioning of Time. The concepts presented in the work resonate with the cultural construct of at least two thousand years of speculation and discussion. Saint Augustine of Hippo, already in the 5th century A.D., questioned the nature of Time in a manner similar to the way perceived by Jon Osterman, for instance. Alan Moore quotes Stephen Hawking, contemporary physicist, when discussing his own ideas regarding the construction of the latter character. And even the ideas of Henri Bergson, a philosopher born in the 19th century A.D., could contribute to explaining Time in *Watchmen*. References to Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias" spread throughout the work hint at intertextual references to a poem which has as its main theme the ravages of Time and the fall of empires.

From the moment the reader lays his eyes on the cover, references to Time will sprout incessantly: the yellow clock at the beginning of each chapter, reminding us that the Doomsday Clock is almost pointing midnight; the twelve chapters, or issues, reminding us of the traditional 12 hour scale of analog clocks and the general division of time and cycles in 12; we are constantly reminded that the present narrative is composed of a larger whole, which includes actions done in the past, and those only disclosed to the superior mind of Jon Osterman; Rorschach holding a sign that reads "The end is nigh", with all its apocalyptic implications; ordinary people constantly worried about a potential nuclear war involving the two great potencies of the time, the Soviet Union and the United States; the strangeness of

reading a story set in a world so similar to the world of the reader, yet with a twist on certain events, so that it is an “alternate” timeline, and thus an “alternate” world, for time and space are always linked.

According to Ferber, “time is itself often symbolized, like dawn, death, and the seasons” (1999, p.218), and it is under these guises and many more that *Watchmen* unfolds its main theme. We are constantly reminded of the plausible possibility of the death of the characters, and even of the whole humanity.

The main theme may appear in the constant threat of a “mutually assured” nuclear annihilation –a living ghost from the Cold War era- or even as Veidt’s conspiracy, a plan that should bring an end to the tension between the potencies at the cost of half of New York’s population. Death is threatening the masked heroes and the population, even if they, as characters, are not aware of it, we, as readers are not spared of the anxiety of such a fatal outcome. By the end of the novel Veidt carries out his plan, and many auxiliary but emotionally relevant characters are killed in the process.

However, after this terrible outcome, a strong note of hope shows up in the end, reminding us that Veidt’s lies might come to light one day, and just as Jon puts it, “nothing ever ends” (MOORE: 2008, p.27). Rorschach’s journal is the dim light of hope in the novel, a reminder that even in a dark and seemingly hopeless world such as the one depicted in *Watchmen*, Time might be on the side of truth, for “he heals wounds, and truth is his daughter – he can ‘unmask falsehood and bring truth to light’” (Ferber, p.218). This, however, might spark a new Cold War, fueled by Rorschach’s revelations.

The thought of Time might bring feelings of fear and restlessness in its wake, because Time changes us, and it also changes the universe around us. And it will change all until all is no more, or until it becomes something totally different from what it was in the beginning. It is the movement that brings restlessness to the soul. This movement, might bring final destruction, but it might also bring forth the opportunity of renewal. The passing of Time reminds us of death and the end of things. It is Saturn with its sickle, always ready to reap what it has sown. This restlessness in the face of destruction is a driving force in *Watchmen*. It is Shelley’s “Unfathomable Sea” which is “Treacherous in calm, and terrible in storm”, a reminder that existence is on the brink of this abyssal entity, this devouring Time.

2.1 TIME AS SATURN

The Roman god Saturn is a very important symbol of time. Despite controversies regarding this deity as being confused with or being itself a merging of two different entities from Greek mythology, the titan Kronos and Khronos, Father Time, I believe the syncretic approach will serve the present analysis better. According to Cirlot, he “symbolizes time, which with its ravenous appetite for life, devours all its creations, whether they are being, things, ideas or sentiments.” (CIRLOT: 1971, p.278) On the other hand, he is also symbolic of a mythical Golden Age, in which humanity lived in joy and knew not what suffering and toil meant. This is an image that fits well within *Watchmen*'s narrative.

Saturn is related to Veidt's ambition, that of a golden age with limitless possibilities, “a whole new universe of sensations and pleasures that is just within reach” (MOORE: 2008, p.31). But Time sets boundaries to possibilities so, in fact, Veidt actually wants to put mankind in a state of timeless joy. In a sense, he acts as if he wanted to impersonate Saturn himself, leading mankind to this new era he envisions. The perfume his corporation sells is called “Nostalgia”, and its slogan is “Oh, how the ghost of you clings” (MOORE: 2008, p.31). This face of Saturn, which Veidt insists on imposing on mankind is balanced by the character's very nature, that of Shelley's “Ozymandias”, the pharaoh who despite his great achievements is powerless against the ravages of time. Regardless of Veidt's efforts to achieve peace and to become as mighty and immortal as his spiritual predecessors, there is a very tangible chance that his work might be undone by things which no human being can fully control: the outcome of Rorschach's journal being revealed to the public, and Time itself, which is the father of Truth (FERBER: 1999, p.218).

Veidt observes the world and his surroundings through “multi-screen viewing” (MOORE: 2008, p.2), and he is the only character who really knows how Time is working against the others. He is an ever-present hidden enemy, a treacherous aspect of Time: “To Baudelaire, time was ‘the watchful deadly foe, the enemy who gnaws at our hearts.’” (CHEVALIER: 1996, p.1009)

When Rorschach and Nite Owl discover that the murderer they are after is Veidt, and that he actually has an even more evil agenda, they are in front of Veidt's yellow clocks. The feeling of desolation and powerlessness seen on Nite Owl is unmistakable, as he faces once

more the enemy he ultimately cannot win. First he sees this aspect of Time as the deadly foe who takes away his days of crime-fighting and wrapped him up in nostalgia (both the idea and the perfume made by Veidt's industries, which carry the same name). By that time he did not know Veidt was that hidden "watchful" foe, which was carefully observing and manipulating all other characters. This time he faces Veidt, tries to confront him, and the inevitability of Dan's defeat reveals Veidt as the destructive face of Time. It is evident that Veidt, just as Saturn, is simply reaping what he has been sowing for a long time, and that all this is unavoidable.

Watchmen, however, hints at the positive aspect of Time; it is not only limited to its destructive face. It points a way towards healing of wounds, towards Truth, its daughter, with every secret it reveals. It is the note of hope that might go unnoticed when reading the novel for the first time, but nonetheless obvious when we see Rorschach's journal in the hands of Seymour, Hector Godfrey's assistant.

2.2 THE CLOCK

There are many objects and structures that serve as motifs symbolizing Time in *Watchmen*. The depiction of the yellow clock throughout the book resembles the wheel, with its circular shape. The book is divided in twelve chapters, the same number as the signs of the zodiac, which describe "the circle of life as they move round" (CHEVALIER: 1996, p.1008). There are many watches and clocks depicted throughout the novel. This is evidence that *Watchmen* is full of motifs pointing towards its central theme.

When looking at the clocks placed in the beginning of each chapter and the ones at the end of the chapters, it is possible to notice some differences between them. The first come in a variety of colors, from yellow to purple, and the hours are not inscribed on their faces. The latter are placed on the bottom of the page, cut in half, with a white face, and the hours are written in roman numerals, decorated with a red rim. At the end of each chapter the blood oozing from the top of the black pages gets closer to the clock which, in turn, is ticking its way to midnight.

But why do the chapters begin under the aegis of a full round clock and they end with “half a clock”? The answer may be in the different conceptions of time portrayed in the novel, that is, linear time and circular time, time and eternity, and so on.

The hint that the clock motif points at might be that its center is “the motionless aspect of existence”, or eternity, and the circle would represent the “motion of existence”, time. Around its center, which is immovable, all existence revolves. A character that fits the role of “pivot” would be Jon Osterman, and the moving hands of the bloody clock would be Adrian Veidt. The former experiences time as an eternal present, very much alike St. Augustine’s conception of time. The latter is obsessed with the passing of time and its ravages, believing himself as some sort of savior of mankind from its temporal flaws, desperately trying to abolish Time and History.

Both characters seek to escape from time, each their own way. Jon’s perception of time and reality renders him unable to cope with humanity’s limited scope on the events, and Veidt wants to set humanity in the course of a glorious future of limitless possibilities, a Golden Age. Jon seems to escape, due to his very nature, from the cosmic order as perceived by humanity, thus he manipulates reality with godlike proficiency. Alas, he is not yet a creator of another order, one different from the universe he is inserted. He is powerful enough, though, to create and destroy life, spinning the wheel of death and birth, while remaining perpetual himself.

Veidt, on the other hand, aims at the future, perpetuating, or even culminating, a heritage of great deeds, such as the ones of his spiritual predecessors, the pharaoh Ramesses II and Alexander the Great. By doing so, he wishes to inscribe himself in the line of History, like an arrow striking the heart of the future. He is conscious his own self is finite and limited, as all men are, but his deeds must outlive him, in the manner of great historical characters.

The clock reminds us also that it is a material, objective representation of an abstract phenomenon. The field of action that sees both Jon and Veidt struggling for worldly deeds is still the realm of temporality, and not yet Eternity itself. Jon, even though living in the “hyper moment” as Moore intended, is still bound to time. He is not omnipotent or omniscient, and his status, from the reader’s perspective, is “godlike” at most. Of course, the reader’s perspective on time is privileged (just as Jon’s is), and perhaps this is one of the ways the novel plays with its symbols. Jon is a great symbol of time, and also a symbol pointing towards the graphic novel reader, who is able to see a whole page at a time, instead of

separate and minute panels; someone who can go back and forth inside the narrative; a being who is able to perceive Time and space simultaneously. Perhaps the reader is more akin to Jon in his capabilities of perceiving time in a simultaneous way, and Jon is the ultimate “cosmic reader” of the graphic novel that is the universe itself.

2.3 WATCHMEN’S NARRATIVE AND TIME STRUCTURE

Watchmen’s narrative structure is complex and intricate, and it was intended this way by the authors. Alan Moore described its structure as a “massively complex, simultaneous event with connections made of coincidence and synchronicity” (NESS: 2010, digital document)

For instance, the succession of chapters does not correspond strictly to the succession of chronological events, and the connections between those events point to all tenses, creating, thus, this feeling of a “simultaneous event”. The authors are able to manipulate narrative time at will, by juxtaposing images and text from different points in the chronological chain of events.

Since time is linked to space, the authors deliberately mix speech balloons from *Tales of the Black Freighter* (a comic book within *Watchmen*) with the panels belonging to the main narrative, by means of juxtaposition and superimposition. It is important to remind that the world of *Watchmen* is set in an alternative version of the reader’s world, and that the *Tales of the Black Freighter* is a comic book inside *Watchmen*. Rorschach’s journal is also a book inside *Watchmen’s* universe, just as *Under the Hood* (Hollis Mason’s autobiography) and the many documents attached to the end of each chapter, including Dr. Malcolm Long’s notes on Rorschach. This creates a multilayered narrative, in which the reader is constantly reminded of the repercussion of all events in different timelines, and thus, different worlds that adhere to those timelines.

This process adds to the uncanny feeling of reading a novel based on a sometimes quite plausible alternative version of our own world, in which we never really know who the narrator is. The same thing could be said about our own reality, since we are immersed in the narrative of our own universe, we tend to sometimes perceive ourselves as this hidden

narrator and, sometimes, as just another character in a multilayered narrative we cannot figure out the direction it is heading to.

However, just as in reality we are not completely clueless about the direction Time is going and the space we occupy in the universe, *Watchmen* has its ways of measuring itself. One such way is, for instance, the pattern of panels employed by Gibbons. As Ness states in her book *Watchmen as Literature*, most pages in *Watchmen* are made of a “three-by-three grid pattern”. (NESS: 2010, digital document) This pattern of nine panels “tick by” like a clock on its way towards midnight. The dominant pattern is found throughout the book, present in most of its pages.

The grid structure adds to the intricately rigid aesthetic employed in the work. It is linked to its main theme, that of Time, and the common sense perception of Time, that it is something fixed like clockwork. There is no concession to fantasy, there are no super-humans (despite Jon), the world is harsh and grim, the masked vigilantes don’t look like supersized weightlifters, and there are no superpowers besides science itself (except for Jon, for he has both superpowers and science). The psychology of the protagonists is exposed mercilessly under a cold white light, all characters seem “too human”, and Veidt’s plan is executed with clockwork precision.

By the moment the reader discovers the plan is already in motion, that it is too late for any of the characters to oppose it, this framework helps build momentum towards this climax. Throughout chapter XI the three-by-three grid is used to convey the arrival of Rorschach and Nite Owl at Veidt’s secret headquarters in Antarctica. It is used to show Veidt telling the story of his life while he poisons his staff. On the next page it cuts Veidt’s monologue and goes to New York, showing the ordinary struggles of side characters the reader is now used to. This time the characters are portrayed under a pale light, showing their mean side. The last panel shows us Bernie, reading the *Tales of the Black Freighter* with its balloons superimposed asking “How have I reached this appalling position, with love, only love, as my guide?” (MOORE: 2008, p.9), which fits well as an ironic commentary to both Veidt’s plan and the couple arguing on the upper panels. On the next three pages the nine-panel grid gives way to a seven panels pattern, with a big panel in the middle used to illustrate the moment of the sad realization that Veidt killed his interlocutors while speaking to himself. Page 12 is silent, no speech balloons, as snow is now covering the biosphere and the dead staff, conveying a feeling of “slow time”. The next page the nine-panel grid returns, alternating between the

Black Freighter's panels and New York, and time is ticking again. The following pages switch between the seven-panel and nine-panel patterns, until the moment of great revelation, when Veidt discloses his morally grey plan to Rorschach and Nite Owl. On page 27 there are only three big panels, each occupying one third of the page, horizontally. The first panel focuses on Veidt and his speech balloons, conveying the message that it is “too late”. The second shows an awestruck Nite Owl and Rorschach in front of the yellow clock motif. The third shows New York, the street of Bernie’s newsstand and the ongoing argument with the side characters that is now reaching a violent point and involving even the people passing by. The next and final page shows a vertically tighter panel grid, gradually enveloping these characters in a blinding white light. It used twelve panels on top and a thirteenth panel on the bottom, completely white, preceding Percy Bysshe Shelley’s quote “My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair! (MOORE: 2008, p.27)

Gibbons deviates from this structure he adhered to in the final moments. Page 27, with its three big panels, conveys a sense of suspension, as if time halted in the face of such an important event. But the kind of time that halts is the internal, subjective, time of the reader, and not objective time. It is a lengthening of our apparently linear time using the space of the page to achieve this effect, added to the emotional impact of the revelation.

2.4 DR. MANHATTAN AND TIME

2.4.1 The Broken Watch in *Watchmen*

The moment Jon’s father throws away his broken watch, the message is clear: there is no way one can control time in this atomic century. As his father assumes the role of castrating his early adulthood ambitions, this action is mirrored in Jon neglecting his father the knowledge that he was still alive, after his accident in the laboratory. His father renounced the continuity and the boundaries of time, and Jon in his turn, rejected the hereditary lineage of time, breaking free from its cause and neglecting its effects, or consequences. As Cirlot puts it, “the clock is related to the notions of ‘perpetual motion’, automata, mechanism and to the magical creation of beings that pursue their own autonomous existence”. (CIRLOT: 1971, p.50) This is how his father interrupted the career Jon was beginning to pursue, by literally throwing away his son’s clock, interrupting his timeline.

This image of the broken clock is recurrent. When Jon assumes the responsibility of fixing his girlfriend's wristwatch, it seems he is trying to make atonement with his past, potential life of watchmaker. But he is also starting his own life as an "autonomous existence", now more radically separated from his father's plan. Inside the intrinsic field chamber in which he is disintegrated, the last object he holds is this fixed wristwatch. And the same way he fixed this wristwatch he manages to achieve rebirth later, for "it's just a question of reassembling the components in the correct sequence" (MOORE: 2008, p.9). After this event, he becomes Dr. Manhattan. Later on, after Veidt's plan is unleashed, and the Doomsday Clock strikes midnight, Jon leaves Earth and our galaxy to "perhaps create some [life]" (MOORE: 2008, p.27). This way we see each transformation of Jon related to the symbol of the clock.

2.4.2 The Gigantic Hyper Moment

Jon Osterman is the character that best illustrates Alan Moore's statement on "the limitations of Western thought". This godly, big, blue, Shiva-like character, made not of ordinary human flesh and bones but, instead, of some kind of energy that allows him to be physically present at more than one place at a time. He is not yet not a god, but "merely" godlike. Despite his super powers what is most intriguing about him is his perception of time. He is not limited to the modern western common sense concept that Time is a composite phenomenon made of three aspects, past, present and future, but he perceives it in a way similar to what Saint Augustine of Hippo conjectures: "There be three times; a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future." (2014, p.115)

As Jon guides us through his peculiar perception of time, it is by means of this "gigantic hyper moment" concept which Moore mentions:

Watchmen's fundamental construction exposes what Moore refers to as "an example of the limitations of Western thought." He explains: Whereas once there was this great eternal present [for earlier or more primitive cultures], we ... as a species, adopted this different notion of time, [a] rather simplistic and fatalistic idea of past, present, and future.... [Stephen Hawking suggests] that there is this gigantic hyper moment in which everything is occurring. That would mean that it is only our conscious minds that were ordering things into past, present, and future ... we believe we understand the entire Cosmos, but

actually we understand the insides of our heads” (NESS: 2010, digital document)

Moore was inspired by the earliest cultures and the languages of the aboriginal people, which have only one tense while at the same time he criticizes the contemporary western common sense that time is divided into past, present and future. (NESS: 2010, digital document) In this sense, both the novel itself and *Jon* serve as a critique to our way of perceiving the universe, which he sees as fatalistic and simplistic. This being made possible by highly advanced science, Dr. Manhattan, would see the universe in a way akin to the primitive peoples so despised by the culture of progress and scientific knowledge he is also responsible for. The author himself says the models of time proposed by physicist Stephen Hawking are closer to the idea of time that the primitives held. (NESS, 2010, digital document) Between the beginning of the universe, the Big Bang, and the end of the universe, the Big Crunch, the total universe exists the whole time as a whole thing.

St. Augustine conjectured that the protraction of time might be the protraction of the mind itself (2014, p.117). When *Jon* is on Mars, in chapter IV, his remembrance of past events seems to adhere to a similar model. As his mind reaches for past memories, such as his arrival at Gila Flats, and shortly after skips to the present; as the photograph is falling from his hands, he is illustrating the concept proposed by Augustine. At least in the realm of memory, for *Jon*'s narrative still maintains consistence with his point of view as an observer in the present. He narrates past memories in the present tense, while looking at the Martian night sky. But his mind expands and dives into his memories, creating a space of constant present in which all events are linked to this moment when he is recalling those memories.

By the end of the chapter he asks himself, while erecting his monumental clock-castle: “who makes the world?” (MOORE: 2008, p.27) And shortly after hypothesizes that “perhaps the world is not made... perhaps it simply is, has been, will always be there... a clock without a craftsman” (MOORE: 2008, p.28). So *Jon* would assume at this point that the inextricable relation between space (the world) and time (his own mind) is a structure of constant shape, that of an eternal present. The possibility of going back and forward, past and future, would be a characteristic of perception, which focuses on a different facet of the structure at a given moment. The whole of the time-space continuum would effectively remain constant independent of the observer, and depending on the viewer's perception it would assume the

forms of past, present and future. This is the “gigantic hyper moment in which everything is occurring” (NESS: 2010, digital document) that Moore briefly discusses. Jon, even though gifted with such extraordinary perception of time and space, cannot apprehend the mystery of the universe, but only “the insides of his head”, as Moore would put it.

To Jon Osterman, events appear simultaneously; no matter if they have already passed or if they are yet to come. His perception of past and future is always accessible to him, time can be perceived as an ever-present continuum, even though when he discusses things past or events from the future, he adapts his language to his interlocutor, using the proper tense in his speech when conveying events. But even when making these concessions, his statements on future events always cause a feeling of uneasiness in his interlocutor. Most of the time characters fail to grasp the whole meaning of Jon’s revelations.

Jon is disturbed by revelations from his past, which means he is not fully aware, or even omniscient of the whole span of cause and consequence. His ex-wife having cancer, allegedly because of her prolonged contact with him, is one example. He seems to be aware of, or concerned with, mostly himself. This ambiguity is exploited in later chapters, in which he goes to the planet Mars to evade the recent charges made against him and also to reflect on his former life.

But besides Jon, the novel itself serves as the framework through which this “hyper moment” is conveyed to the reader. This theme is something that permeates all the multiple narratives of *Watchmen*, for every now and then the reader is reminded that events that happened in the past have echoes in the present and that events from the *Tales of The Black Freighter* (another universe, or reality, so to say) overlap the “main narrative”.

As the mind of the narrator focuses on different events, and as the mind of the reader in its turn focus on the different panels and elements within the page, so this feeling of simultaneity of Time is conveyed: “Whence it appeared to me that time is nothing else than protraction; but of what I know not. It is wonderful to me, if it be not of the mind itself.” (AUGUSTINE: 2014, p.117)

When Jon says something in the present tense, it relates to his continuous perception of time as a constant present. Wherever he sets his mind to, this is where he goes. Jon is able to extend his perception of time and space but he is limited to his own experience. Jon

Osterman lives on the brink of eternity; his mind almost reaches the limitless perception of Time as an ever-present event. But Veidt is still able to trick the godlike being.

2.4.3 Jon's Forehead

Dr. Manhattan's symbol on his forehead resembles an open eye. When Shiva opens his eye, the universe is destroyed. Is Dr. Manhattan at the same time the prelude of great technological progress and the trigger for the end of the world? Is this why the world of *Watchmen* lives under the threat of imminent and utter destruction? Jon assumes a role of provider, or creator, to mankind, but he is also a destroyer, a walking nuclear deterrent during the Cold War.

The relation between Dr. Manhattan's hero name, the sun's ongoing nuclear fusion process and the hydrogen atom representation on his forehead, linked to the zodiacal sign of the Sun gives the reader a clue as to his central role in the novel. He has atomic power just as the Sun does; he is the small ruler of the novel's time. Because of his character, perhaps, the novel was structured around playfulness with the theme of Time so explicitly. The Sun is physically far from the Earth, but its presence or absence is felt everywhere. And the same way our night and day cycle happens only because the Earth orbits the Sun, we, as regular human beings, perceive only one facet of this cycle at a time. The notion of time as understood by Jon is radically different, for he sees both, just as the sun knows only its self-irradiating daylight.

Jon tries to explain to Laurie his different take on time: "Time is simultaneous, an intricately structured jewel that humans insist on viewing one edge at a time, when the whole design is visible in every facet." (MOORE, 2008, p.6) And this different point of view, added to his "atomic" powers grants him a different status among ordinary human beings. Some citizens regard him as a godlike creature; the government says he is the American superman.

Regarding Jon's strong impression on normal people, Sara Ness states: "As he levitates above the heads of terrified onlookers, his form is reminiscent of many artistic renditions of the Resurrection of Christ" (2010, digital document)

This idea of godhood renders him in the fashion of “Christ as the Lord of Time, the Chronocrator who was coupled with the Cosmocrator, the Lord of the Universe and of its harmonies.” (CHEVALIER; GHEERBRANT: 1996, p.1009). The same way as Christ is misunderstood, it seems Jon cannot be fully apprehended by regular human beings. His appearances are prone to controversy and he instills terror in the heart of some and admiration in others. Characters who get used to him tend to address him more directly, but there’s always a moment when the utter strangeness of spontaneous teleportation, bilocation or even multilocation causes a shock or great uneasiness among present people.

Jon represents a great threat to mankind (especially for the Soviet Union, afraid of his powers) because he is not a being bound by the rules of time. He is, in a sense, akin to Death, this immortal entity that reaps the final moment of every man’s life.

Durand (2012: p.82) describes how the horns of the bovines are a symbol of the crescent moon and the sickle of Chronos. Dan Dreiberg’s utility belt has a golden waning crescent moon. He is a character who feels the passage of time very intensely; he becomes himself a herald of Time in its destructive phase, he is a victim of the symbol he carries under his protruding belly. He feels the weight of the passing of time; he is burdened by the threat of the sickle, emotionally mutilated and sexually impotent. His affair with Laurie is colored by nostalgia and all the memories of their bygone years as vigilantes. At the same time she is Jon’s girlfriend. After sleeping with her, without actually having been able to have sex, due to Dan’s sexual dysfunction, he has a visionary dream (MOORE, 2008, p.17). In this dream Laurie and Dan tear apart their clothes and their skins until they reveal their vigilante costumes, the inner layer of their sexual projection. In the end they are disintegrated by a nuclear explosion. After that, Dan wakes up frightened. His dream reveals Time as Death, as if his puerile nostalgia was soon to be annihilated by Jon’s sudden power, showing Dan what he needed to do in order to give birth to his sexual drive again. Jon’s symbol on his forehead, which is both the hydrogen atom and a reminder of the zodiacal Sun, is indeed a herald of Time in its many manifestations.

Both Jon and Veidt have their imagination bent toward the diurnal order, in the sense they do not completely trust the “feminine seductions” (DURAND: 2012, p.121) When Jon’s role is turning towards the euphemized Nocturnal Order, that is, he is not seen any more as a hero only, his position as a benefactor of mankind is questioned; he rejects both feminine presences from his life. He tries to escape both from Laurie and from Jane, his ex-girlfriend,

who accuses him of giving her cancer. In Mars, he ascends Olympus Mons, the great volcano, while attempting to recover a lost sense of power. (DURAND: 2012, p.145) Veidt, on the other hand, does not have a companion, besides his genetically engineered lynx Bubastis.

2.4.4 Jon, Ouroboros, Hydrogen: Examining some Excerpts

Watchmen's structure is like an ouroboros. It begins and ends at the same point: Rorschach's journal. It also begins with the blood-splattered yellow smiley button on the first page, and in the end we see the same smiley on the last panel. This time it is a t-shirt stamp, and instead of blood, it is stained with ketchup. The first speech balloon is extracted from this journal.

At the climax of the story, when Veidt's plan is done, and Jon is about to leave our galaxy, Veidt asks: "Jon wait, before you *leave*... I did the right thing, didn't I? It all worked out in the end" (MOORE: 2008, p.27) to which Jon replies, while ethereally standing at the point where the sun stands in the solar system globe, "in the end'? Nothing ends, Adrian. Nothing ever ends." (MOORE: 2008, p.27) After that, Jon vanishes, leaving Veidt dumbfounded with his reply. He vanishes and leaves a trail of smoke behind, which resembles an atomic cloud, precisely on top of the sun of the globe. Of course the relation between Dr. Manhattan's hero name, the sun's ongoing nuclear fusion process and the hydrogen electron configuration representation on his forehead, linked to the zodiacal sign of the sun invite to a multitude of interpretations regarding his symbolic role in the novel.

On the last panel of chapter XII, p.27, it is possible to see Veidt facing his own shadow, cast by the solar system globe behind him. He does not look merry, or satisfied with what he sees. As Karlsson (2012: p.50) states "evil can function as a dark mirror of mankind" and perhaps at this point Veidt considers glimpsing on this dark mirror and the burden of his actions. By the look on his face one may think he is sad, because Jon did not confirm his expectation of "doing the right thing" (Veidt should have asked Rorschach instead), or even betrayed by the Sun, the solar image he held as his guiding myth. Misquoting Nietzsche's famous line "if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee" (NIETZSCHE: 2011, p.51) as "the sun gazes also" would be a possible closing line for the scene. After all, gazing at the sun for too long will make anyone blind. And Veidt is

meditating on top of a pyramid-like seat, with ankh symbols underneath. He surely longs for eternity. However, his previous actions create a great contrast with this transcendent posture. The reader is able to remember very clearly the violence of his final plan. Veidt's reputation towards the reader seems to begin its slow decline, in case it has not been going downhill already. His self-assurance is put in check and he now seems to belong to "this grey evil surrounding us in our world is mainly committed by frustrated and confused individuals, power-mad politicians or criminals unable to control petty desires." (KARLSSON: 2012, p.17)

His actions are reflected also by the symmetry between pages 26 and 27: The last panels of each page are linked by their exact same size and their slight shift of perspective when viewing the same scene, which results in different emotional responses. For instance, on page 26 Veidt is in meditative pose, his hands clasped in a mudra (a yogic gesture used for closing an energy circuit), facing a translucent globe inside of which there is a miniature of the solar system. In the center, a miniature sun shines brightly, illuminating the whole room. The planet Saturn is on the right. He is surrounded by basic geometric figures, such as cubes and cones, but the center of the panel is dominated by this translucent sphere. The sphere looks like the sun's zodiac sign also, a point in the middle of a circle. Veidt looks well and confident, showing a "bright" semblance. But on the next page, this panel is contrasted by its gloomy figure, the opposite of what he looked like before. The miniature sun is not depicted anymore, but Saturn is shown to the left, while the dark shadow of Saturn is projected on the verge of the panel, together with Veidt's own towering shadow.

2.4.4.1 Eternal Return

Eliade's version of the concept of eternal return is used to analyze a seemingly non-religious or mythological text. Even though religiosity is not a theme regarded as central to the novel, it is hinted, very subtly on many occasions. In addition, it is part of the imaginary of the West. Take Rorschach's billboard, for instance, with its reminder that "the end is nigh". Another example is the scientist talking on a TV show about Dr. Manhattan, stating that he now believes he is the closest thing to god he knows. Ordinary citizens committing suicide and taking with them their family because they believe doomsday is coming, even though it is in the form of a nuclear clash between the USA and the USSR. Veidt, for instance, aiming at

godhood, trying to surpass the deeds of the god-pharaoh Ramesses II is a very interesting object to be analyzed.

The eternal return, as proposed by Mircea Eliade, is a concept that posits the dichotomy between sacred, or mythical, time and profane, or historical, time. Archaic societies would relive this sacred time in order to abolish profane time and to reestablish their connection with the Cosmos and the cosmic rhythms. This means the mythical, original actions, served as archetypes through which archaic man gave meaning to his historical existence: “by virtue of these paradigmatic models revealed to men in mythical times, the Cosmos and society are periodically regenerated.” (ELIADE: 2012, p.xxvii). According to Eliade, the man of modern societies has a strong influence of Judeo-Christianity and sees himself as connected to History only. The man in archaic and traditional societies, on the other hand, “feels himself indissolubly connected with the Cosmos and the cosmic rhythms” (2012, p.xxvii). This model fits Moore’s vision regarding the “limitations of Western thought” mentioned earlier.

We must add also Nietzsche’s concept of the Eternal Return, or Recurrence as well. According to him, if time is infinite but there is a finite number of events, then these events will recur an infinite number of times. This kind of Eternal Return is suggested in the circular motifs spread throughout the novel and the structure of the novel itself. As Nietzsche says:

And this slow spider which creepeth in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and thou and I in this gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things— must we not all have already existed? —And must we not return and run in that other lane out before us, that long weird lane— must we not eternally return?"— (NIETZSCHE: 2012, p.156)

Adrian Veidt, whose alias is Ozymandias, is the ambivalent character that best illustrates both a wish for regenerating his existence and mankind’s existence. He does so by committing himself to follow in the footsteps of his self-imposed archetypes, the pharaoh Ramesses II and Alexander the Great. By acting in the same grandiose manner they did, he wants to bring mankind back to a Golden Age, abolishing the degeneration imposed by linear time and History. He, however, seems to be acutely conscious of the History he tries to abolish, he is by no means an archaic or primitive character. On the contrary, he is the

epitome of the modern, self-made man, exceedingly intelligent, athletic and entrepreneurial. It seems he believes his actions are inserted in the linearity of Time, but the actions themselves mirror an underlying archaic pattern as exemplified by Eliade:

Such a re-valuing of history as an “epiphany,” as an irreversible, linear process, carries with it a temptation, that rather than a recollection there will be a forgetfulness of the divine; that rather than a myth of the future abolition of time, there will be a myth of an extended future of unlimited progress undertaken by autonomous individuals; that “becoming” will be taken for “being” as the locus of meaning—a temptation he dates as beginning with seventeenth-century European thought (p.145) and culminating in nineteenth- and early twentieth century “historicistic philosophies” (p.149– 50)— which results in “modern man’s” anxiety and “despair” in the face of the “terror of history.” The man who has left the horizon of archetypes and repetition can no longer defend himself against that terror except through the idea of God” (p.161– 62). (ELIADE: 2012, p.xix)

This fear of Time, or God; this ambition to become godlike, and even the consequences of being immortal and beyond Time as mortals know it; all these issues are to be found within *Watchmen*. Veidt is involved in his own Titanomachy, trying to overthrow Jon. Veidt, in this case, would be the equivalent of the Greek god Zeus, and Jon would be Cronus, or Saturn.

Jon might be seen as an equivalent of a being living in sacred time, and his appearance causes distress in the heart of the people. He is the character who experiences Nietzsche’s Eternal Return more properly. Veidt might be seen as the effort of banishing time and history. On the other hand, it is important to note that banishing history through reenactment was an attitude associated with the so called primitive societies. What Veidt does is trying to enact the actions from a sacred time, and temporarily reaching eternity in profane time. Jon, however, is the embodiment of sacred time encapsulated in profane time, and he does not care much about banishing history. At first he is inclined to banish life itself, because from a historical point of view, it represents a small speck in the timespan of the universe. But when Laurie shows him the miracle that life is, he changes his mind.

2.5 THE DESTRUCTIVE FACE OF TIME

Watchmen seems to convey a transition from the Diurnal Order to the Nocturnal Order. First we are anxious with the passing of time and its dark aspect, the impending doom upon our heads, the doomsday clock is a reminder of this fact. It reminds us that, as Rorschach would put it, the end is nigh.

The reader is reminded of the possibility of cyclical return of things, and thus is relieved that what has come to an end might come back to life. For instance, in the beginning of the novel, when reading the first line of Rorschach's journal, the tone of the novel is set. It is bound with antithesis, contrasts between light and dark. The panels illustrate the height of the building and the great fall the Comedian suffered at the time of his murder. We are constantly reminded of Veidt's plan for transcending his condition, and how the world is on the verge of utter, radical destruction.

When reaching the end of the novel, and noticing that Rorschach's journal is found (by accident) by Seymour, the Nocturnal Order is more clearly present. It reveals the antidote for time, and the reader finds relief from acknowledging the constant rhythm that hides all phenomena and the accidents, as Durand (2012: p.194) puts it. The destructive face of Time, so eloquently displayed in the preceding pages gives way to the euphemistic Night (the end of the book itself, the clock pointing midnight) which promises exorcism from Veidt's questionable moral choices. The key Nocturnal representation unfolds at ease by the end of the book, that is, the diachronic representation, linking contradictions by the factor of time, and causality is euphemistically suggested (DURAND: 2012, p.443). This is the note of hope in the end of the book, reminding us once again of Jon's lines: "Nothing **ever** ends." (MOORE: 2008, p.27).

The book is presented in 12 chapters, but the order of events in the story is not linear. As the reader begins reading the book, he is already glimpsing at the outcome of events, without acknowledging it at first. As one advances through the next chapters, the plot is constantly interrupted and superimposed with events from the past, or even from "alternate realities" and inset narratives, such as the *Tales of the Black Freighter*. As the reader reaches the end, he is invited to read anew.

In the cyclical structure of the book one might lose oneself in the intricacies and new meanings found upon each rereading of *Watchmen*. According to Ness, “The work’s structure is reflexive and self-referential.” (NESS: 2010, digital document) The linear, chronological progression of events is only apparent, and upon closer inspection, one notices that the flow of events is not limited from past to future, but they are mixed, be it in the narratives themselves or in the relation between text and images. What happens in the present has echoes in the past and future, and *Watchmen* exploits this connection in many ways. It apparently has a beginning, but after reaching the end of the book, one is impelled to recognize that elements presented in the beginning were actually related to the end of the book and its final chapters.

2.5.1 The Mythical and Historical Ozymandias

Ozymandias is the transliteration into Greek of the name of the third Egyptian Pharaoh of the New Kingdom, Ramesses II. His life is depicted in the many temples and statues he built, a great number of which survives to this day. For this reason he was indeed a historical ruler of Ancient Egypt, his life and deeds attested and recorded. Thus, he was not a proper myth in the popular sense of the word, since this word implies, for instance, the category of gods and legendary heroes. He is rather an archetype for Adrian Veidt.

In order to understand Ramesses II as a myth rather than simply a historical personage with delusions of grandeur (the way a modern reader might be inclined to do), we must view him in the context of the archaic civilization in which he was inscribed. It is necessary to view Ramesses II not only in a historical timeline, being the son of Seti I, predecessor of Merneptah, and so on. Mircea Eliade (2012) says that the perception of time is different for *historical civilizations* and *archaic* ones, and Egypt, despite being already part of recorded history, still retained most of its archaic mindset by the time of Ozymandias’ reign. Archaic civilizations, such as Ancient Egypt, regarded time as being sacred – the mythical time, in which archetypal actions are performed, the time of ritual - and profane time, the ordinary and meaningless time of historical events. It is important to note that the term *archetype* is used in

the sense of “a synonym for ‘exemplary model’ or ‘paradigm’”(ELIADE: Kindle Locations 334-335).

Ramesses II wanted to be known as the greatest of all pharaohs of Egypt, and his reign lasted for 67 years, “He desired to be known to posterity as the greatest Pharaoh who ever sat upon the throne of Egypt” (MACKENZIE: 2008, p 347). During his life he aimed at being godlike, dedicating temples to Amon and to himself. (Idem) The carvings on the walls of the Ramesseum, a temple dedicated to the deified pharaoh, depict him as a giant, titanic figure, of legendary size and power, “Ramesses is depicted like a giant bending his bow as he drives in his chariot, scattering before him into the River Orontes hordes of Lilliputian Hittites.” (MACKENZIE: 2008, p.348)

On the other hand, when viewed through a more historical prism, he was not exactly the greatest pharaoh of all times. As later historical research eventually revealed “we know now that there were greater Pharaohs than he, and, in fact, that he was a man of average ability” (MACKENZIE: 2008, p.348). To think of Ozymandias’ ambitions this way is to depose him from his mythical throne and to strip him of his pharaonic divinity, something probably not within the scope of ancient Egyptians.

This historical perspective is, according to Mircea Eliade (2012), insufficient or even erroneous when analyzing archaic societies and rulers. Ramesses II was not simply boasting his deeds and using propaganda when fighting the Hittites or demolishing his predecessor’s temples and replacing them with his own temples, because “Where tradition is still more or less a living thing, great monarchs consider themselves imitators of the primordial hero” (ELIADE, Kindle Locations 843-844). This primordial hero that Ramesses II relates to is the god Ra, “a major solar deity of the ancient Egyptians” for he was also the “Living King.”

The kings became the physical sons of the deity, a concept that would remain constant throughout Egyptian history. Even Alexander III The Great after he conquered Egypt with his Greek armies journeyed to the oasis of Siwa in the Libyan Desert to be adopted as a son of the god Ra and be given the powers of the true kings of the Nile. During the New Kingdom the god AMUN was united to Ra to become the most powerful deity in Egypt. (BUNSON: 2002, p.340)

His very name, Ramesses, is translated as “Ra Fashioned Him,” (BUNSON: 2002, p.334) which means he is somehow an embodiment of a god, and not merely human. During the New Kingdom, at least, the pharaohs were indeed sons of gods. Thus, Ramesses II’s military campaigns and wars, which expanded the borders of Egypt, and the restoration programs he undertook were intrinsically related to his role as a son of Ra, for Ra’s cult was concerned, among other things, with the destiny of the nation (BUNSON: 2002, p.340). Ozymandias’ actions were to be regarded as living myth par excellence, not simply the acts of a mortal man, either when marrying the princess of the vanquished kingdom or when supervising the building of temples: “not only do rituals have their mythical model but any human act whatever acquires effectiveness to the extent to which it exactly repeats an act performed at the beginning of time by a god, a hero, or an ancestor.”(ELIADE: Kindle Locations 624-626)

The Pharaoh’s adversaries were considered “sons of ruin, wolves, dogs,” and so forth. When the pharaoh conquered the Hittites, for instance, he was at the same time repeating archetypal actions, regenerating time and driving profane time away. “Thus the gods did; thus men do” (ELIADE: Kindle Locations 614-615) and so did Ramesses II during his long reign. This is how he is remembered: “In the Book of Apophis the enemies whom the Pharaoh fights are identified with the dragon Apophis, while the Pharaoh himself is assimilated with the god Ra, conqueror of the dragon.” (ELIADE: Kindle Locations 847-849)

By repeating the actions of gods and by using them as a role model for his deeds as a pharaoh it is necessary to view Ozymandias, or Ramesses II, as a mythical character rather than simply the third pharaoh of the New Kingdom. This is how he inspired Alexander III and Adrian Veidt in “following in the footsteps” of heroes of *illo tempore* (“in those days”), the time of archetypal actions. In the context of archaic societies, Veidt would be, maybe, far more real, or legitimate, than most men.

2.5.2 Different Readings to a Same Chapter

Summarizing *Watchmen*’s plot and some of the multiple narratives that support it does not do justice to the intricacies found when reading and rereading the novel itself. All

those possible points of view are presented both in linear and cyclical time perspectives, and also through out-of-order presentation. *Watchmen* comprises at least three intradiegetic narratives that blend seamlessly during its 12 chapters: those of the masked heroes exploits, in “current” graphic novel time, which begins in the end of 1985; the narrative of the *Black Freighter* comic book; the excerpts from Hollis Mason’s biography, together with relevant documents attached to the end of each chapter, revealing details about the character’s past lives. When trying to choose a central point of view, a narrative frame, the reader is able to choose from more than one character to rely on, or even choose which of the narratives he wishes to be central. This is so because of the way the novel is structured, as a “fragmented continuum”. It opens cracks in the linear interpretation of the narrative, because the superimposition of illustrations, text and narratives inside narratives create a sense of simultaneity of narrative time.

The narratives are not simply superimposed, they are also synchronized. This device may be extended to the concept of synchronicity. Veidt talks about it in the end of chapter XI, which is a chapter that explores puns on the word “time”.

2.5.2.1 Readings Regarding Time Linearity

There are at least three ways of reading page 20 and 21 in chapter III. One might follow the conventional order of panels, top left to bottom right. This would show events in the following order: Jon Osterman approaching the ghost army base of Gila Flats; entering the ruined bar; picking up an old photograph of his former, human self, together with his healthy ex-wife, who nowadays has cancer; Jon looking sadly at the photograph then leaving the bar; Jon outside, now looking up to the night sky, now looking to Mars, smiling; Jon vanishing in an orb of white light, leaving a trail of smoke in his wake; the narrator of the *Black Freighter* superimposed to the smoke and Mars.

But if the reader instead decides to read the two pages as one large page, while still using the same panel order convention of top left to bottom right, the sequence would be like this: Jon approaches the ghost army base of Gila Flats and passes by it; he does not enter the bar; he looks up to Mars and smiles; now he enters the ruined bar; finds an old photo of him

and his ex-wife; Jon is engulfed in a ball of white light; Jon is looking sadly at the photo, he leaves the ruined bar, and there is only a trail of faint smoke in his wake.

Also, one might choose to adhere to conventional panel reading order, considering the two pages as one big page, and reading from left to right the top six panels, then proceeding to the fourth panel on page 21, now reading from right to left the three central panels on page 20, then left to right up to the end of page 21.

But what is the point of deviating from the conventional way of reading if it depicts events in a linear fashion, similar to the way we organize Time in our minds? Reading the panels in a different order confuses the linearity of time, bringing the reader closer to the “hyper moment” experience Jon Osterman relates to. Reading the two pages out of the conventional way creates an experience similar to remembering something in the past, while still feeling the presence of being in present time all the while predicting what the consequences of those events will be in the future.

A chapter that illustrates the clever use of time relations and causality in *Watchmen* is chapter IX. It is at this point that Jon teleports Laurie to Mars and they have a long conversation that determines the involvement of Jon in the following events. It is here that they “debate Earth’s destiny” (MOORE: 2008, p.5)

Right from the start we see the Nostalgia bottle flying, spreading its perfume as it rotates, a motif in this chapter. Just as Time, it is spherical, circular. It is also transitory, constantly reminding us of its trajectory in space. It reminds us of “fast time”, the time of things present, in opposition to Laurie’s “slow time”, the time of her memories, and the snowflakes inside her snow globe. The title of the chapter “The Darkness of Mere Being” is also related to Saturn, whose color is black.

On page 4 we see the great clock-shaped castle built by Jon, with its mixture of gears and clock hands. It is a great symmetrical construction made of crystal, the work of a divine watchmaker, in this case, Jon himself. This is once more a reminder that Jon’s father threw away his broken watch out of the window. Now Jon has the power not only to repair watches, but to build them out of the blue, manipulating matter as he wills. He went beyond the possibilities of a mere physicist, analyzing and dissolving atoms in his laboratory. Now he is able to create and destroy matter according to his will. The clock-hand pointing upwards has the shape of a spear, reminding us of the ancient clash between earth and sky, or between Jon

and Earth's population. They are a reminder of verticality and ascension, transcendence, thus, of the Diurnal Order. This crystal clock contrasts triumphantly against the dark background of the night sky, reflecting the golden light of the Martian sunset. Its crystalline structure shines like the stars behind it, reflecting their light. In each sunlight reflection, we see a gleam similar to the stars in space.

On page 5, Jon declares Earth's destiny, that is, its future, must be decided on the red planet, the planet of the god of war, Mars. What follows is a revision of past events towards the shadow of the unconscious, revealing and bringing to light events forgotten in Laurie's subconscious mind. She, who so far has been a secondary character in the narrative, blossoms as the one responsible for the destiny of mankind. Her past, her memories, her individual life become the key to the destiny of humanity. Her microcosm is being reflected onto the macrocosm, what is within her is reflected outside, and the identity between both realities is revealed to the reader, the link between her inner universe and the outer universe is understood, and the tension grows up to a breaking point. Jon reveals his divine nature is not equivalent to the power of God, an absolute God. He sees himself as just another puppet, like all human beings. He however is a puppet who can see the strings, a privileged observer, as he says.

On page 6, when they reach the top of the stairs, high up in the tower, the conversation starts properly. When they are on top they transcend towards the beyond, they understand what they themselves cease to be. In fact, the conversation Jon alludes to does not start at this point, in the time of narrative or the internal time of the reader, but only two pages later, on page 8, when Laurie suggests she is sleeping with Dreiberg.

On page 10, when the castle starts flying, they make time "fly" as well. On this page miracles happen. They remember all the generations past, time as causality, and nocturnal imagery constantly surfaces. To Jon's question "What did they ever achieve?" (MOORE: 2008, p.10) the answer is, at least, Jon's very existence, otherwise impossible had he not been disintegrated in his lab. Jon owes his first birth, his existence, his rebirth, both to his human origin and to a human tool, which allowed him to be reborn in this blue form, beyond the limitations of his previous form. The result of the effort of all those generations is this divine blue being, indifferent to life, an ungrateful son turned into a god.

On page 12, the miserable figure of Byron shows up, completely lost in time. "High time" says Hollis, the first Nite Owl (MOORE: 2008, p.12). Laurie asks her mother about her

future, she is disgusted with the sight of Byron, a former masked hero, now deranged and lunatic. Jon asks Laurie if she has been listening to him, but as the last two pages show the reader, she was absorbed in her own memories, even though she was supposed to be discussing Earth's destiny in this most unreal scenery. The space occupied by eighteen panels is equivalent to Laurie's flashback. These panels seem to last longer, because they are slow time, time of memory and the time inside Laurie's snow globe. But in the main narrative this time was simply the transition from one panel to the next.

On page 17 we are reminded that human life is brief and mundane. Is Jon really in another time, that is, in eternity? Certainly not. He is merely a privileged observer of what we call linear time, the experience of time-space bound by duration. He has the advantage, however, of a very privileged point of view. Nonetheless he does not exist in the atemporal reality, in eternity. Jon says something clouds his vision of the future. Therefore, he is not eternal, he lives in the temporal universe, but his perception is not limited to the linear succession of events, he may perceive and wander freely along his timeline, up to the point of melting past, present and future into unity. At least in his consciousness, his mind, he is able to do so. Nonetheless, he is not yet eternal. He does not have the power to alter events inside the chain of cause and effect. If the Soviet Union knew about this, his status of a walking nuclear deterrent would be questioned, since part of the marketing on Dr. Manhattan, made by the US, is that he is omnipotent.

On page 19, Jon and Laurie reach Vales Marineris, a place where "one end knows day, while the other endures night" (MOORE: 2008, p.19). An inanimate object is elevated to the category of a sentient being by Jon. He says this valley is more similar to him in so many ways, since it has the simultaneous experience of two distinct phenomena separated by time. Jon is just like that, he sees the past and the future simultaneously. He states that the cosmic dance, as seen from his point of view, means more to the universe than the brief event represented by life. The vast movements of the universe over a much longer timespan are much more valuable than the brief spectacle of life.

On page 22, night starts taking over the scene. On page 23, each succeeding panel alternates between present and past (Laurie's memories). Just as times merge and confuse Laurie, her emotions and memories fuse and melt. She finally gains access to her repressed memories and reaches the knowledge that the Comedian is her biological father. The technique is very interesting: panels alternate between past and present, reality and memory,

an emotional crescendo reaching its climax when the speech balloons from earlier panels are brought back to dominate the two last panels.

On page 24, slow time prevails. We finally see Laurie with the Nostalgia bottle in her hands. This means that the previous panels were actually showing the future trajectory of the bottle, since Laurie had not thrown the flask until now. The superimposed speech balloons could be, then, not only speeches in the present, making reference to the image of the bottle in the past, but speeches pointing towards the future bottle (its future image) carrying within itself and in its wake all the emotional associations now awake in Laurie. The thrown and shattered bottle points not only to the great clock that shatters, but also to the destruction of the illusions that held Laurie inside an ignorant existence, without knowledge of her true past, her biological origins. It represents a second birth as well, part of the Nocturnal imagery so characteristic of this chapter.

Independently of the result of the conversation, the bottle would be shattered anyway, as Jon insists, and all events happen in a pre-determined way, the way they should be. The speech balloon on the first page refers to Dreiberg, the moment he calls “Laurie?”; and now it is Jon who calls “Laurie?” The superimposition, however, of different moments in time brings forth new meanings. Both called for her because they did not understand what was happening with Laurie at different moments. First Dreiberg, shocked with Jon’s presence in the room, then Jon, not knowing what Laurie was about to do. Both male characters were oblivious to her memories, her slow time. Laurie is perhaps the object of the unuttered questions, inferred from the look on the face of the characters: “why are you leaving me Laurie?” or even “why does the fate of the world depend on you, Laurie?”

In six panels and one page, the chapter is bound. Laurie went up the tower to gaze deep down into her own self. At the time she went down the tower, already on the ground, she threw the Nostalgia bottle with all her might against the great clock. This gesture destroys also her own tower. She destroys both Time and the narrative of her previous life, which now must be reassessed. The happening shakes off Jon’s temporary alienation, and he now starts realizing the value of the phenomenon, the miracle, of life. Life is now seen as a holder of intrinsic value, not just as a means, an arrow towards the progress of the cosmic dance, or an accident of its rhythm. The climax started on page 22 is reached in the great panel on the center of the page, after Laurie’s memories’ text is mixed with her own internal dialogue. The

revelation is too strong and the violence of the explosion of repressed emotions translates, externally, in the destruction of the great clock.

On page 25 we see the great structure crumbling down, and no sound is represented, no onomatopoeia, only the silence of the images narrates Laurie's emotional drama. In the meantime the castle and its tower fall down. The chapter ends with a quote by Jung: "As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being" (JUNG: 1995, p.326) which might be a key to interpreting the last panels of the chapter. The camera zooms out, away from their location, up to the point where the sun turns into just another tiny star in the vastness of space. It contrasts with the great panel showing the clock-castle for the first time on previous pages. The utter darkness of space is the backdrop against which the sun is now only a tiny point of light among others, representing the act of kindling in the quote. Just as the sun is a tiny light in the darkness that surround it from a distance, the happenings that took place on Mars, the knowledge Laurie and Jon achieved, are also a kindled light inside the darkness of their unconscious, of their mere being.

CONCLUSION

“Nothing ends, Adrian. Nothing ever ends.”

Alan Moore

Trying to add a voice to the chorus of voices that have already delved into the “intricately structured jewel” that is *Watchmen* is a Promethean task. One is sure to be punished by the gods, because how can one steal the fire from this novel an escape unharmed? Every time I tried to define, analyze or categorize the minute details or the broader structure presented, so many more things started showing up on my mind, like a fractal iterating itself in my mind’s eye.

It was possible to have a glimpse at the irrationally complex structure devised by Moore and Gibbons and the effects they might have on the reader. Their mastery of the medium is without a doubt a matter of revolution in the comics’ language. Adding to this such a complex theme as Time, revolving and playing around meaning, structure, concepts, etc. also proved this novel is an inexhaustible object for research.

Durand’s concepts of Diurnal and Nocturnal Order of images became clearer to me as I tried to identify and apply them to the novel. There is, of course, so much more still untouched in this monograph regarding this myth criticism approach. But I believe the idea proposed in the beginning –that *Watchmen* conveys a transition from the Diurnal to the Nocturnal Order of images– is actually a rather complex mosaic, that perhaps this straightforward transition is also scattered in the circular structure of the novel. It is not straightforward in the sense that it is presented linearly, at least. It seems the prevalence of one structure of imagination over the other is not an effect of a linear reading of the novel, but, instead, lies in the aftereffect of reaching the end of the novel, when looked from afar. However, in its body, the work concentrates a myriad of Nocturnal imagery, since so many archetypal attributes are related to past and future.

The idea of Eternal Return, as exemplified by Eliade, proved prolific when analyzing the character of Jon Osterman. His obsession with his archetypes and the long term planning of his utopia (or should we say dystopia?) point at an archaic behavior surviving in the mindset of an otherwise apparently contemporary character. Veidt's adherence to act in the manner of his predecessors is more inspirational than concrete, however. In the beginning he literally followed their footsteps, trying to become real and meaningful, to connect his existence to that of the cosmos. In the end his actions mirror his archetypes in the sense they too require grandeur, power, the attributes they shared.

Having been forced by Time itself to finish my monograph here I long for more time and an opportunity to dive again in this bottomless ocean of symbols that is *Watchmen*. I believe this is a feeling I share with the many fans of the novel who passionately argue about it almost thirty years after its release. My humble sense of accomplishment at a task so interesting, yet probably never-ending, is rewarded with the feeling that I surely have not wasted my Time in the end. And now I know for sure that "nothing ever ends".

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