



**Negotiating Multimodality in Graphic Narratives – An Exploration of Stream of Consciousness Techniques in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell*.**

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**Declaration:**

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or any other person, for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification.

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## Thesis Abstract

This thesis will address the narratological strategies that the graphic novels *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* employ in order to document the manner in which a stream of consciousness can be conveyed in a multimodal medium. The argument will propose that navigating Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull's respective streams of consciousness becomes a journey that not only exposes the layers of psychological complexity that defines each novel's anti-hero, but it also brings to task the array of creative options available to the polysemiotic structure of the medium itself. In order to provide a framework for this multivalent analytical model, chapter one will break down the format of the medium on a componential basis in order to highlight the complicit role of the reader in bringing a sense of cohesion to each fragmented narrative. Chapter two will address panoptic reading vectors by applying a close reading to contextual examples taken from representations of each protagonist's stream of consciousness. Chapter three will address the privileged relationship that exists between thematically connected, yet spatially interspersed, panels that imbue each narrative with their respective protagonist's ubiquitous psychological resonance. Chapter four will attempt to contemporise a theorised connection between Freud's dream-work and the visualised realisation of each anti-hero's thoughts by focusing specifically on the relationship between psychoanalysis and the image as promoted in the field of visual methodology. Chapter five will outline a mythopoeic reading of Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull by addressing the powerful sense of self-achieved ascension and resolute conviction they attain. Chapter six concludes this mythopoeic reading and gauges the subsequent downfall of each anti-hero by ascribing the three distinct stages to each one. In this light Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull are examined in relation to their self-imposed detachment, their acceptance of death, and the dissemination of their legacy into the collective unconscious.

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## Chapter One:

### The Multimodal Mindset and the Establishment of Image-Text Fluency

#### 1.1 Introduction

Arguably the central issue in navigating the multimodal narrative structures that *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* exemplify is familiarising oneself with a visual lexicon. A lexical fluency in the various components that go into their makeup serves two ends. First of all, establishing a level of multimodal fluency attunes the reader's eye to the implicit tension that exists on the page between the illustrated visual and the printed word. Secondly, negotiating a sequential image/text dynamic leads to an acknowledgement of each novel's fragmented design. This allows a reader to identify how the layout and design can contribute on a diegetic level to the story-world, and in this case – to the portrayal of a protagonist's stream of consciousness. By extension, this chapter aims to highlight that these components of narrative structure play an important role in contributing to the psychological instability of each protagonist, thus blurring the division between narrative layout and diegesis. With this in mind, the first necessary step that this chapter must take is to acknowledge on a general level the sense of tension that exists in a polysemiotic medium that incorporates two disparate levels of relaying information, in other words, the image and the word. This will then establish the need for an investigation into how such tension may be processed in order to serve the purpose of presenting a unified narrative. The best way to accomplish this is to prepare an analysis of these novels by highlighting the primary tools of the trade that the medium employs in order to generate a fluid and cohesive narrative.

To serve the purpose of this analysis, the first component that will be highlighted will be what is referred to as the gutter in the field of comics theory. By clarifying the purpose that this tool serves the chapter will then incorporate the important cognitive role played by

the principle of closure with regards to reader reception. Such an approach will help identify the level of reader awareness or fluency necessary to glean meaning from such a visibly fragmented form of narrative by highlighting the cognitive alignment that takes place when meaning is established between two panels. This will set up the second approach in this chapter, one that will apply contextual relevance to the thesis overall as it prepares to engage with the specific layout of these graphic novels over the course of the following chapters. With that in mind the next aspect of graphic narrative that will be highlighted is the use of visual synecdoche and the contribution it makes to the economised dynamic of a panel-driven story-world. As well as analysing its ability to facilitate a reductive form of narrative its contextual and diegetic role will also be forwarded. This will be done by hypothesizing that synecdochic representation can be used to represent the broken language of the unconscious as manifested in the guise of the dreams, flashbacks, and visions that Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull respectively experience. In other words, this component will be posited as preparing the ideal atmosphere for a stream of consciousness to be visually conveyed in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell*.

What is being pursued here is an organic approach to the structural comprehension of sequential narrative as exemplified by these three graphic novels. It will be demonstrated that acquiring a sense of fluency with the underlying mechanics of such a multimodal medium will assist the reader with the necessary level of cognitive awareness to successfully probe the psychological depths of Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull's respective mindsets. Using this lexical launch pad as a catalyst will then permit this chapter to operate as an important structural and narratological reference point for the thesis at large. The terminology used in this chapter, directed towards the clarification of how a visual/sequential mode of narrative is structured, will feed into the structural, psychological and mythopoeic scope of the thesis overall. Taken as a whole this interdisciplinary approach will argue that

the multimodal and plurivectoral format of each novel is very suited to conveying the obsessive psyche of its respective anti-hero.

## **1.2 The Art of Tension: Becoming Familiar with the Building Blocks of Sequential Narrative**

It is not hard to guess where the first hurdle exists when dealing with a medium of such an interdisciplinary nature. The image/text premise of the graphic novel elicits an understandable level of tension within a reader's mind. Any union of image and text in a prolonged and sequential format is destined to bring with it an imbalance of cognitive reception. The reader will attempt to apply an understandable degree of prioritisation to either the written word or the illustrated image in an effort to make the story flow without obstruction. As such a sense of caution must accompany the analysis of any platform that brings together a multitude of disciplines. As Roland Barthes observed in *Image Music Text*:

Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security; it begins *effectively* when the solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down . . . in the interests of a new object and a new language (with) this unease in classification being precisely the point from which it is possible to diagnose a certain mutation (Barthes 1977, 155).

As this chapter gradually spreads out from an examination of particular components and attempts to outline the properties of specific sequences in each novel it will adopt a structural approach and argue that the layout of certain sequences complements the disturbed mindset of the protagonists they depict. So fittingly, it is beneficial to incorporate an element of structuralism into this issue of tension and in chapter two such a venture will be applied in detail. Nonetheless, at this early stage in the thesis it bears mentioning that Barthes addressed the dichotomous nature of an image/text medium and the signifying value of each mode of delivery when he began to ask:

What is the signifying structure of 'illustration'? Does the image duplicate certain of the informations given in the text by a phenomenon of redundancy or does the text add a fresh information to the image? . . . What are the functions of the linguistic message with regard to the (twofold) iconic message? (Barthes 1977, 38).

For the reader of a graphic novel questions like these can be used to address the need to negotiate multimodality and there is a danger that the effort needed to do so may detract from an engagement with the actual story-world. As comics scholar Joseph Witek points out:

...the anxiety raised in readers about the proper way to decipher the comics page can run counter to the narrative energy: readers who are trying to figure out the proper way to read the page are readers who are not immersed in the story (Heer and Worcester 2009, 154).

Indeed, this potentially prohibitive barrier to complete immersion in the story-world is exacerbated when dealing with the anti-heroes in these graphic novels as the reader is also tasked at points in novel to incorporate visually discordant thought patterns into the overall reading experience. A challenge, therefore, is laid down to the reader and how he or she decides to meet that challenge determines the level of tension that will be experienced in making all the pieces of this sequential puzzle fluidly interlock. Professor Charles Hatfield, a noted theorist within the medium of sequential narrative, notes that:

From a reader's viewpoint, comics would seem to be radically fragmented and unstable. I submit that this is their great strength: comic art is composed of several kinds of tension, in which various ways of reading – various interpretative options and potentialities – must be played against each other (Heer and Worcester 2009, 132).

By drawing attention to the challenge that a comic page represents to the human eye and by implying that there are a variety of interpretative potentialities with which to negotiate it Hatfield emphasizes the multimodal dynamic presented to the reader. For Barthes the problem with being presented with a variety of interpretative options and potentialities lay with the connotative potential of the image and the degree to which it can convey more than one meaning. Indeed, William Eisner, one of the medium's foremost pioneers and theorists

addressed this polysemic dynamic by suggesting a filtering process determined by a shared commonality of experience between the writer and his/her readership. He explained that:

Comprehension of an image requires a commonality of experience. This demands of the sequential artist an understanding of the readers' life experience if his message is to be understood. An interaction has to develop because the artist is evoking images stored in the minds of both parties. The success or failure of this method of communicating depends on the ease with which the reader recognises the meaning and emotional impact of the image (Eisner 2008, 7).

The success or failure approach to visual comprehension that Eisner forwards here would seem to be based on the assumption of an accessible and responsive readership. Not only that, his reference to a common store of images in the minds of both the artist and the reader can be used to outline the overall structure of this thesis as it is centrally focused on images that are stored within the minds of each novel's anti-hero. Barthes was concerned with the fact that, 'all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a "floating chain" of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others' (Barthes 1977, 39). However, in his efforts to address the polysemic nature of the image and filter its meaning-making potential he identified a component called anchorage. Anchorage refers to the attribution of text to an image, whereby, 'the text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance' (Barthes 1977, 40). With reference to the potential level of tension that the specific medium of sequential narrative represents, anchorage can be claimed as an important joint in the overall structure of narrative. Barthes viewed it as a form of control, 'bearing a responsibility – in the projective power of pictures – for the use of the message' (Barthes 1977, 40). While his approach primarily focused on the issue of attributing a caption to a single image or photograph in a magazine or newspaper he does at various points in his argument directly address the comic

book form. Proceeding from his establishment of anchorage to describe the reassuring, lock-down effect that an image/text relationship establishes in an attempt to attenuate as much as possible the polysemic potential of a stand-alone image, he then argues that this combinatory approach to delivering the desired message flows naturally into the message-conveying domain of ‘relay’, which, in his own words:

...can be seen particularly in cartoons and comic strips. Here text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis (which is ample confirmation that the diegesis must be treated as an autonomous system) (Barthes 1977, 41).

So for Barthes the unity of the message is achieved by incorporating image/text fragments into a general syntagm which can then convey the higher level meaning of the diegesis. Accordingly, this syntagmatic approach to the formation of narrative will be contextually applied in detail to each protagonist’s thought patterns in the following chapter. Channelling this premise into the discourse of comics theory overall, his emphasis on conveying the higher level meaning of diegesis may be viewed as an avenue towards ultimately selecting from the various interpretative options and potentialities that Hatfield referred to above. Arguably, the combination of image and text in sequential format does take on the properties of an autonomous utterance, each one complementing the other within a panel and locking in a sense of declarative anchorage from which to proceed onto the next panel. On a cognitive level, the sense of immersion that comes from negotiating this image/text challenge can yield a fluent reader with a sense of achievement gained from the successful alignment of two forms of reading, one visual, the other textual. This tension, then, is an inevitable component to the graphic novel’s representational nature. Indeed, Hatfield considers it to be, ‘fundamental to the art form’ and locates the dynamic right ‘at the heart of comics design’ (Heer and Worcester 2009, 133/140).

However, the argument can be made that in some cases one may not need the presence of text to elicit any sense of relay or anchorage at all. Panels often do not contain both elements, and are sometimes presented in image only or text only format. As will be seen over the course of the entire thesis, this statement relates directly to the visual representation of a stream of consciousness. In mimicking the sense of immediacy that arises from unexpectedly encountering an image that suddenly emerges from the depths of their subconscious it makes sense that these anti-heroes cannot immediately explain their relevance through text. So allowing such an image to stand alone speaks to an inherently visual aspect of the human mind. Given the psychoanalytic take on visual methodology that will be applied in chapter four it is worth pointing out here in advance that in *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud had also addressed this image/text relationship. As a preparatory measure towards filtering the sequences of images that pertain to each anti-hero's engagement with the dream-work in the chapters to follow it is significant to note that Freud had also conducted his own level of investigation into the same dynamic when he observed that:

Before painting became acquainted with the laws of expression by which it is governed, it made attempts to get over this handicap. In ancient paintings small labels were hung from the mouths of the persons represented, containing in written characters the speeches which the artist despaired of representing pictorially (Freud 2010, 329).

A precursor, indeed, for the anchoring presence of word balloons in modern day comics and graphic novels but even this argument hints at a presence of tension or discordance in relation to the acceptance of such interdisciplinary relay. For a connection point may be drawn from Freud's observations that, 'the art of painting eventually found a way of expressing, by means other than the floating labels, at least the intention of the words of the personages represented – affection, threats, warnings, and so on' (Freud 2010, 330). Even at this stage, although it related to painting, the anchoring function of text was being called into question. The

emerging field of dream-analysis was beginning to address the formation of strictly visual transference, where the image, or more so the combination of images, could convey information without the help of text. This is a central argument to a thesis attempting to outline the way in Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull's respective streams of consciousness are visually orchestrated. Indeed, Belgian comics theorist Thierry Groensteen directly challenged Barthes's emphasis on the role of textual anchorage in *The System of Comics* when he claimed that:

We can reproach this article (ie. *Image Music Text*) for not making a clear distinction between the isolated image (which consists of a comical drawing, or the advertisement for Panzini that Barthes analyzes) and the sequence of images (comics, photo-novel or cinema, of which Barthes tells us that the speech-relay is very important, since it "truly advances the action while laying out messages and meaning that are not found in the image"). Frequently dominant in the first case, the function of anchoring the text sees its own importance considerably contextualised in the second. In comics, the image does not often need a linguistic message to be anchored in a univocal signification. It is not true that, without a verbal "crutch", it will be condemned to polysemy. For what determines its signification, in the first instance, and permits a reading in accordance to the writer's program, is precisely – and we have seen a sufficient amount of examples – its inscription in an iconic sequence. The sequence itself exerts an anchoring function in relation to each of the images that compose it, which consequently discharges from the text this responsibility, which it assumes solely in the case of a unique image (Groensteen 2007, 130).

This effectively brings readers, and scholars, of the graphic novel into the state of contention that can hinder discourse on the medium as one ponders whether the dominant strand of narrative progression lies with the image or the word. However, Groensteen's reference here to the anchoring function that the sequence itself is capable of exerting will be fully exposed in the following chapter. Thus, when he asks 'Where must I direct my gaze next?' in relation to the negotiation of this image-text format he ultimately concludes that this question can only be satisfied on a contextual basis, in other words, on, 'Each unique strip or graphic novel' (Groensteen 2007, 34/146). Accordingly, although *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*,

*Watchmen*, and *From Hell* vary widely in relation to visual style, sequential exposition, and the kind of anti-hero they respectively depict, the question as to where the reader should direct his or her gaze and so begin his or her journey into their respective mindsets can be answered by addressing one of the most useful devices available to the medium.

### **1.3 The Semantics of Omission: Outlining the Significance of the Gutter and Promoting the Role Played by Closure in Establishing Narrative Cohesion**

Concurrent with the reader's need to negotiate the interplay of image and text within the graphic novel is the ability to cognitively unify a form of narrative that is ultimately conveyed in fragments – most commonly referred to as panels. To ameliorate this fragmented delivery theorists hypothesize that the bond developed between creator and reader acts as the catalyst to eliciting whole narratives from selected parts. This was pointed out by Dr. Randy Duncan and Dr. Matthew J. Smith in *The Power of Comics* when they noted how, 'The comic book reading experience is the result of the interaction between what is on the page and the life experience and even emotional state of each reader' (Duncan, Smith 2009, 153). Thus, the graphic novel represents a form of narrative which is staggered by a recurrent presence of omission or disruption between panels/images. Usefully, a consideration of the role played by such omission is not limited to the medium of sequential narrative alone. As mentioned above, the initial scope of this thesis aims to move from an analysis of individual components in the medium to their subsequent incorporation into complex sequences thus highlighting a link between layout and story-world; in other words, narrative and diegesis. This move will attempt to demonstrate in the next chapter how the analysis of particular sequences has much to gain from a comparison to the paradigmatic and syntagmatic structure of discourse in general. However, in relation to the visually emphasised iterative presence of omission/disruption in this particular narrative form a brief early excursion into the nature of syntagmatic structure pays valuable dividends. In *Semiotics: The Basics* Daniel Chandler

suggests that ‘Perhaps the most basic narrative syntagm is a linear temporal model composed of three phases – equilibrium – disruption – equilibrium (Chandler 2007, 114). Indeed, all forms of narrative, to varying degrees, are dependent on this semantic component. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* H. Porter Abbott notes how:

The reading of narrative is a fine tissue of insertions as we move from point to point . . . it also gives the experience of narrative much of its power. In other words, the energy narrative draws on is our own. Wolfgang Iser, who wrote at length about the gaps in narrative, put it this way: “it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism” (Abbott 2008, 91).

So the first thing that becomes evident when laying out a blueprint upon which to analyse this concept of omission is to establish to what extent a level of complicity between writer/creator and reader/viewer is satisfied. This process is summed up by comics theorist Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* when he points out that, ‘Every act committed to paper by the comics artist is aided and abetted by a silent accomplice. An equal partner in crime known as the reader’ (McCloud 1994, 68). This sense of partnership lies at the heart of sequential narrative, a medium reliant on the establishment of a ‘visual dialogue’ based on an element of ‘tacit cooperation’ and a common level of experience between artist and audience to fill in the blanks that ultimately bind the cognitive links of disclosure essential to the story (Eisner 2008, 41/42).

Taking Chandler’s three-phase model as an instructional template it can be applied to the dynamic that exists between two panels separated by the disruptive presence of what is referred to as the gutter - which is the term used to describe the semantic gap that exists between panels on the page of a comic or graphic novel. To employ Chandler’s model, one begins with the sense of orientation and equilibrium embodied by the first panel then must negotiate a disruption in narrative flow, located in the gutter, until returning to the sense of equilibrium that the following panel provides. An important observation is necessary at this

point - although the gutter *is* a visible site on the page in relation to the three graphic novels that this thesis addresses it is important to note that a *visible* gap between panels is not a mandatory condition to satisfy its presence. As Mario Saraceni points out in *The Language of Comics*, ‘Some authors of comics prefer to place panels attached to one another, without any space between them, but that doesn’t mean that the gutter is not there or that it is less important. The gutter is a conceptual gap, not necessarily a physical one’ (Saraceni 2003, 55). Groensteen follows suit when he explains that, ‘When there is no gutter, only a simple line to separate the two contiguous images . . . the semantic relations between the images are the same’ (Groensteen 2007, 112).

At any rate, the gutter localises each instance of aforementioned omission in the narrative. It represents a site of latency from within which this bond of complicity between author and reader is generated. Abbott addresses the significance of this dynamic across a variety of media, including the graphic novel, when he points out that, ‘If narrative comes alive as we fill in its gaps, it also gains life by leaving some of them unfulfilled’, and he concludes by proposing that, ‘In the art of narrative, less can be more’ (Abbott 2008, 92). The idea that one can cohesively apprehend narratives which omit certain aspects strikes at the heart of this thesis, given its focus on fragmented depictions of the anti-hero’s innermost thoughts. A panel represents a locatable and visual node or narratological reference point on the page. The gap/gutter between each one, be it a physical or conceptual one, serves the dual function of establishing each panel as an autonomous statement while also marking its difference from the panel before and after it. Dr. Julia Moskowitz explores this co-existing binary on the page between that which is represented and that which is withheld by forwarding the premise that, ‘the gutter signifies in spite of itself. Paradigmatically speaking, for example, it serves as evidence of what the panel is not, what the illustration is not and what the word is not . . . All this suggest that the gutter can operate as a material sign; it is

both index and point of difference' (Moskowitz 2010, 6). Furthermore, Johanna Drucker emphasizes this necessity for differentiation as one of the primary *navigational* components of the medium and claims that:

The gutter functions diegetically. It becomes part of the structure of the story line, it *is* the line of social tension in the narrative . . . Boxing elements off from each other within frames . . . may not carry an intrinsic narrative value, but the basic act of differentiation creates the field of *differance* within which narrative meaning can be construed. The graphical scaffolding creates the structures through which navigation and narration occur . . . They are the working of the stage for the action. And then, they articulate the actions through the distinctions and relations they support (Drucker 2008, 127/136).

A sense of structure may be elicited from this approach to narrative, one that emphasizes and relies on that which is not shown in order to valorise that which is. Enforcing the separative act through a process of iterative gaps has the effect of highlighting each narratological link on the page and inviting the reader to take time to examine it before moving along the visual sequence. Tracing a useful precedent to this sense of exposition, in *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean*, theorist Douglas Wolk cites Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's essay *Laocoon*, which addresses the limits of painting and poetry. Incorporating Lessing's argument into his own take on the medium of sequential narrative Wolk notes how:

Any particular panel of a comic book can encompass as much space as a person can see at once (projected onto a two-dimensional picture plane), although it usually trims most of that space off with its borders to focus on whatever's important to the narrative (Wolk, 2007, 128).

So while the borders surrounding a panel perform a trimming function the act of scanning from one panel to the next involves the cognitive acknowledgement of a narratological leap between each one, with the reader never losing sight of the fact that what is being negotiated is a fragmented form of narrative. Attention is being drawn so extensively to this concept of a fragmented form of narrative in this opening chapter to anticipate chapter

three's analysis of a braided narrative, a dynamic which epitomises the need to collate thematically consistent visual fragments whose arbitrary dispersal mirrors the discordant psychology of each novel's anti-hero. Wolk further incorporates Lessing's essay to validate his own approach to the implied causality of any one panel, which he likens to Lessing's concept of a 'pregnant moment.' It is worth quoting Lessing directly at this point, in particular, his statement in *Laocoon* that, 'Painting, in its coexistent compositions, can use but a single moment of an action, and must therefore choose the most pregnant one, the one most suggestive of what has gone before and what is to follow' (Lessing, 2005, 92). This concept crosses a very relevant interdisciplinary bridge into the field of comics theory when placed alongside Charles Hatfield's claim that, 'a single image within a cluster typically functions in two ways at once: as a "moment" in an imagined sequence of events, and as a graphic element in an atemporal design' (Hatfield 2005, 48). As a representative of a single narratological statement the 'kinetic potential' of a panel may be interpreted as a pregnant moment on the page that provokes progressive scansion to the next panel, and so on (Noth 2007, 174). Lessing's concept of a momentary, and at the same time visual, approach to conveying information acts as the ideal precursor for the individual panel in a graphic novel. The gutter, by extension, comes to represent the semantic demarcation point necessary to separate each of these pregnant moments. Indeed, Groensteen acknowledges the important role it plays in inciting tacit cooperation from the reader when he clarifies that:

Between the polysemic images, the polysyntactic gutter is the site of a reciprocal determination, and it is in this dialectic interaction that meaning is constructed, not without the active participation of the reader . . . We use it to designate "that-which-is-not-represented-but-which-the-reader-cannot-help-but-to-infer." . . . The gutter is simply the site of this absence. More than a zone on the paper, it is the interior screen on which every reader projects the missing image (or images) (Groensteen 2007, 113/115).

As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, this reference to an interior screen on which the reader projects missing images is also an ideal way to describe what is taking place in the minds of each novel's anti-hero as they struggle to come to terms with subliminal imagery that is projected from the depths of their subconscious. For the reader of such occurrences, if panels on a page represent the building blocks of narrative then the cement that binds them resides within his or her interpretive ability to unconsciously incorporate the iteration of omission between each one. In the words of Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, 'the fascination that comics can carry out on the reader, rests, among other elements, on its capacity to make us imagine everything other than what is actually shown to us: there is a rustling of voiceless signs behind these docile aligned frames' (Groensteen 2007, 11). This element of interdisciplinary scansion and the give-and-take between what is shown and what is withheld cannot be overemphasized as it is the strongest representation of a semantic reading pattern that a mode of narrative otherwise determined by fragmentation is dependent on. Essentially, absence in any narrative is a given, it provokes engagement as the reader forms a weave from the disparate narrative strands that the author presents. As an example of a highly representational mode of narrative the graphic novel happens to emphasize this weave because each strand is so visually locatable. And as Samuel R. Delaney points out in his commentary on sequential narrative, 'this relation between the expressed and the withheld must exist in any art hinging on representation – because one cannot, in any given art work, represent everything. Something has to be left implied' (Delaney 1999, 230).

Effectively, filling in the blanks is handed over to the reader in a process that can be likened to a gesture of good faith on the writer's part, one that a reader must be attuned to if the concept of a fragmented form of narrative is to develop a meaningful degree of cohesion. This cohesive and incorporative act of scanning a multitude of signs on a page is a recurring

point of contention in comics theory. Jan Baetens captures the explorative drive of the field in relation to this semantic process when he asks:

...what happens when one shifts from the static to the dynamic mode, ie. when one either inserts an image in a series or isolates it from the larger whole? . . . does the reader already have prior familiarity with the medium and is he or she able to retrieve that information in a useful way? What is his or her encyclopedia? . . . What is the impact of the reading mechanisms themselves? Is the collecting, organizing and interpreting of the signs being read successful, satisfying, painful, impossible, etc? (Baetens 2011, 105).

Arguably, one of the best ways for a reader to begin addressing questions like these is to refer to Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*. This text appeals to the same level of multimodality contained within the medium as it is laid out in the style of a comic and employs both text and sequential imagery to make its point. He explains that the ability to visually traverse the absences signified by the gutter in between panels without obstructing the reading process is achieved by way of what he refers to as 'closure' (McCloud 1993, 63). As a reader's ability to scan a single page or a double-page spread improves his or her ability to collect and interpret the signs being read begins to develop. Closure relies on the aforementioned cognitive act of complicity between author and reader whereby the reader fills in the blanks between panels. Now Groensteen's aforementioned 'interior screen' may be incorporated into a cohesive and meaningful narrative (Groensteen 2007, 113). The significance of this process was recognised as far back as 1845 by, 'the father of the comic strip', Rudolph Topffer, arguably the earliest proponent of the medium's potential, when he pointed out that:

For purposes of invention and composition you must . . . begin by shaking off as far as possible the yoke of reality, and the logical drag of some conventional succession of incidents, in order to charge once more into an area of livelier, quicker, and easier relationships, those that the mind grasps between pictures bound to an idea (Kunzle 2007, 99).

Fittingly, Mc Cloud visualises this dynamic when he claims that, ‘Several times on every page the reader is released – like a trapeze artist – into the open air of imagination then caught by the outstretched arms of the ever present next panel!’ (McCloud 1994, 90). He approaches the application of this concept to the medium by indicating that it is one that we employ regularly to the world around us on a daily basis when he observes that, ‘Our perception of “reality” is an act based on faith, based on mere fragments. . . . This phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole has a name. It’s called closure (McCloud 1994, 63). Furthermore, he points out that within sequential narrative, ‘...creators regularly make assumptions about their readers’ experiences’ (McCloud 1994, 85). This observation is echoed within the field of semiotics, where Daniel Chandler notes how:

Turning experience in to narratives seems to be a fundamental feature of the human drive to make meaning. We are ‘storytellers’ with ‘a readiness or predisposition to organize experience into a narrative form’ which is encouraged in our socialization as we learn to adopt our culture’s ways of telling (Chandler 2007, 115).

Thus, a privileged relationship is established which echoes Barthes’s conclusions that, ‘a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination’ (Barthes 1977, 148). This predisposition to convert all experience into a narrative form is a very helpful approach to take when analysing the psychological instability that Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs and William Gull experience. A developed fluency with how the medium operates can alert the reader’s eye to moments when the reading pattern is challenged or subverted in order to contribute to the story itself. The ideology behind the aforementioned commonality of experience that Eisner emphasized, and the predisposition to organize experience into a narrative form as noted here by Chandler, are incorporated into the field of comics theory by Jan Baetens when he points out that:

The impact of our sequential reading habits is so strongly narrative that those habits help us make narrative sense of panels and drawings that seem to defy any direct figuration. From

the very first moment that material forms are changing from one panel to another, we seem to be able to read these transformations in a narrative sense. Actually, our faculty to read in such a way is steered by our eagerness to do so: not only are we capable of reading non-figurative material in a narrative manner, we are also very keen to do so, since narrative is such an efficient and satisfying strategy for handling problems and difficulties in any material we may be reading (Baetens, 2011, 100/101).

Given this key component of narrative continuity it is thanks to the presence of the gutter that what could coalesce into a discordant mess of semantic clutter aligns itself into a cohesive narrative order. As Mc Cloud puts it, ‘By creating a sequence with two or more images, we are endowing them with a single overriding identity, and forcing the viewer to consider them as a whole . . . Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea’ (McCloud 1994, 66). As a location of cognitive drift, where an acquired sense of visual and sequential fluency allows the reader to form a connective link to each consecutive panel, the gutter allows the author, and reader, to focus on the storytelling nodal points that *can* be seen - the actual panels that acquire the right of entry onto the page. As Johanna Drucker notes:

Once called to attention, the graphic workings of these structures become conspicuous. We cannot read for seeing the activity of white space on a page, frame divisions, groupings, and visual rhymes and so forth. We start to see these as conventions . . . They delimit the ground on which the figure of narrative emerges (Drucker 2008, 136).

And Abbott fleshes this out from an overall take on narrative cohesion when he concludes that, ‘the promise of closure has great rhetorical power in narrative. Closure brings satisfaction to desire, relief to suspense, and clarity to confusion. It normalizes. It confirms the masterplot’ (Abbott 2008, 64).

In this spirit it is worth briefly previewing Freud’s thoughts on the structure of the dream-work (effectively a form of narrative consisting of images in sequence) which reaffirmed for him that whenever it shows us two elements close together, ‘this guarantees

that there is some specially intimate connection between what correspond(s) to them among the dream-thoughts' (Freud 2010, 330). By extension, much can be gleaned from Kaja Silverman's work on similarity and contiguity in the field of psychoanalysis. These two principles establish a level of connection between images in the dream-work that is similar to the semantic process of closure that takes place on the page of a graphic novel in that they are able to, 'treat affinity as the basis for an absolute identification' (Silverman 1983, 91). This brief aside with regards to a combinatory semiotic/psychoanalytic approach will be elaborated in detail in chapter four. For the launch pad that this chapter represents towards the upcoming analysis of each protagonist, it is enough to acknowledge Eisner's, Chandler's and Baetens's perspectives on shared human experience; a readiness to organize experience into narrative form; and the ability to form narratives from even the most abstract of elements. Additionally, Freud and Silverman's reference to a sense of implied affinity between elements in close proximity applies just as much to the graphic novel. Indeed, it is very much the basis for the semantic relationship that exists between panels on the page and the response they elicit in the reader. A 'transfer of psychic value from one term to another along a signifying chain' as Silverman puts it is ideally suited to the approach that some of the most prominent voices within the industry have adopted in their pursuit towards the clarification of closure (Silverman 1983, 97). The reader, in essence, employs a sense of deductive reasoning to effectively marry scenes and join the cohesive dots of narrative closure, thus ensuring that McCloud's trapeze artist is never allowed to fall. Thus, what begins to be revealed within a frame-work of narrative cohesion combining pictorial and textual strands is not a sense of tension but in actual fact an implicit sense of interdisciplinary amalgamation. From a potential chaos of signifiers, or what Mc Cloud refers to as 'limbo', comes economised order and design (McCloud 1994, 66).

#### **1.4 An Economised Story-World: Outlining the Need for Economic Design and Promoting the Use of Synecdoche to Anticipate Depictions of the Anti-Hero Mindset**

Part of the reason why sequential narrative asks so much from its readers on a cognitive level comes down to the necessity for a highly economic page layout. Eliminating the need to join the dots for a reader by depicting too many panels in a sequence would introduce such an element of redundancy into the act of reading that the enjoyment of a story would be severely dampened. Additionally, and from a pragmatic standpoint, overtly striving for clarity by inserting too many panels in a sequence would result in much larger (thus more expensive) graphic novels. As Baetens explains this model of narrativization requires cutting out, ‘superfluous elements without making the story too elliptical’ (Baetens 2011, 108). Thus, the need to pursue an economic approach to the narrative layout is part of the key to maintaining the dynamism of the story and holding a reader’s attention. Scott McCloud summarises this need when he points out that, ‘the art of comics is as subtractive an art as it is additive. And finding the balance between too much and too little is crucial to comics creators the world over’ (McCloud 1993, 85). Indeed finding such balance was identified from the earliest days of the medium when Topffer concluded that:

...there must be an economy of accessories and only a lively and selective choice of the most characteristic among them, always in order to render the idea only in terms that enhance clarity and emphasize the sense of the intention, adding nothing for the sake of [mere] description or completeness (Kunzle 2007, 98/99).

Adding contextual relevance to this dynamic as it pertains to this thesis it is worth acknowledging Alan Moore’s advice that:

...a writer thinks visually and takes advantage of how much information it is possible to casually convey within an image without overburdening either the picture with extraneous detail or the captions with lengthy descriptions (Moore 2012, 41).

Thierry Groensteen's analysis of the medium also validates this design feature as his own research identifies the significance of, 'the principle of economy, by virtue of the fact that the illustrator includes in his images only that which must be there', (Groensteen 2007, 119) and according to Will Eisner, 'comics should be the maximum amount of information told in as few images as possible' (Millar 2008, closing page.). Thus, by way of a measured approach to designing a visual narrative, where only the key nodal points are admitted, the semantics of closure are further emphasized as the importance of conveying a message through the delivery of space-saving and synecdochic markers comes to light.

In *The Pursuit of Signs* Jonathan Culler identifies synecdoche as, 'a totalizing figure, the common operation whereby a discourse infers qualities of the whole from the qualities of a part or extracts an essence from an example' (Culler 2001, 241). He points out that synecdoche is of a number of devices or modes of inference and interpretation which are often foreground in literature, adding that, 'we gain an enhanced sense of their power and importance when, having learned to discover them in literary works, we identify them as the constitutive structures of other discourses as well' (Culler 2001, 241/242). Such thinking implies a sense of compatibility between narrative components across a variety of media. In this spirit, it will be demonstrated that *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* each use make use of synecdoche to infer complex psychological profiles from a minimum amount of visual cues. In *The Power of Comics – History, Form & Culture*, Dr. Randy Duncan and Dr. Mathew J. Smith emphasise the role that synecdochic representation fulfils in the construction of a visual sequential mode of narrative when they point out that:

The most prevalent reductive device in comics is synecdoche, using a part to represent the whole or vice versa. For example, in the majority of panels, only a portion of the character's body is drawn to represent the reality of the entire body . . . In the static medium of comic books, the frozen moments of prime action stand for the entire action (Duncan and Smith, 2009, 133).

They refer here to the way frozen moments of prime action stand for an entire action. This thesis will adapt that observation to suit the representation of thoughts also. Indeed, a panel bestows referential permanence onto the diegetic brevity of a protagonist's thoughts and becomes a physical site in the overall text that can be assessed and re-assessed whenever the reader sees fit simply by flipping back to whichever page it is located on. This sense of placement within the overall text will be promoted as a vital component to the way a braided narrative is designed in chapter three. It will also be used to emphasise an important distinction between the graphic novel and the transient nature of filmic representation in chapter four due to the fact that it effectively establishes an archive of images that are more easily collated by the reader as he or she builds a comprehensive psychological profile of Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull. At this point it is also worth drawing attention to the tendency towards which analysis of this medium is approached from a primarily textual basis, an approach which can all too easily brush over the self-referential nature of the actual image when it comes to the production of meaning. To highlight the discursive potential of an image-based analysis one need only consult the sense of visual exposition that Will Eisner and Scott McCloud employ. In his chapter on frame composition in *Comics and Sequential Art*, for example, Will Eisner uses partial representations of the human body to highlight the efficiency of synecdochic representation by depicting three panels of identical content that decrease in size and, thus, depict less and less of the same character's body:



(Eisner 2008, 43).

Labelling the three panels (A), (B) and (C) respectively, with (A) depicting the entire human body, (B) cutting the body off from the waist down and (C) merely representing the character's face Eisner explains:

When the full figure is shown (A), no sophistication is required of the reader. The entire image is complete and intact. In panel (B) the reader is expected to understand that the figure shown has legs in proportion to the torso and that they are in a compatible position. In the close-up (C), the reader must supply the rest of the picture in conformity with what the physiology of the head suggests (Eisner 2008, 42).

At this point the connective markers between closure and economy present themselves and what Eisner regards as the suggested conformity of physiology in the previous example can be taken and expanded as a whole to represent the significance of synecdochic representation and its relationship to the semantic linkages that closure represents. McCloud focuses in on this specifically when he explains that, 'Closure can be a powerful force *within* panels as well as between them, when artists choose to show only a small piece of the picture', and then concludes that a combination of synecdochic representation and a high degree of closure allows a reader to take mere picture fragments and construct, 'an entire scene out of those fragments' (McCloud 1994, 86). Duncan and Smith verify such conclusions when they explain how:

...the comic book form cannot truly show the world of the story, but can only suggest it by employing the device of synecdoche, using a part of something to represent the whole thing . . . because panels occupy a finite and often small space, the images in them usually show only a portion of objects and beings. Readers use their background knowledge to understand what is not shown (Duncan and Smith 2009, 158).

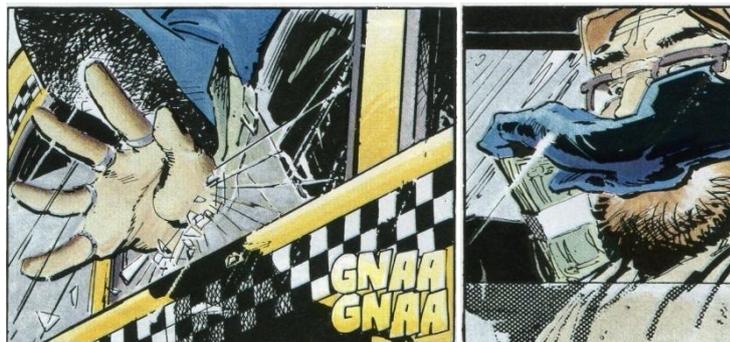
This, then, is the role of synecdoche as laid out by comics theorists. It will now serve the purpose of this chapter to apply this visual device to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell*. On a structural level of visual layout alone it will be seen how the use of synecdoche certainly does adhere to a principle of narrative economy. However, from the perspective of setting a scene and raising the curtain on the significance of each protagonist's introduction and interaction with his respective story world it will be argued that the role played by synecdoche operates on a *diegetic* level as well as a narrative one. For example, in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, the use of synecdoche plays a key role in announcing the return of the Dark Knight to the streets of Gotham City. The first visual indicator of Batman's reappearance is of a silhouetted hand punching through a pane of glass in order to intercept an attempted mugging and/or rape/murder:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 20).

One mysterious hand, shrouded in shadow, suppresses the mugger's attempt to stab his victim and two panels later another unidentified hand takes firm grip of the attacker's head and drags him back through the shattered pane of glass in the door behind him. The lead-in to this sequence of events comes from a weathercaster who phrases the approach of a powerful

storm front in biblical terms as he warns, ‘Like the wrath of God it’s headed for Gotham (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 19). The implication here is that the approaching storm and Batman’s imminent return both equate as potentially disastrous events for the citizens of Gotham. The sequence is then concluded with a loud crack of thunder and a luminous arc of lightning is depicted over the city, the lightning acting as a synecdochic omen of the storm to come. The mysterious assailant in this sequence is not identified but a page later a similar display of synecdochic scene-setting takes place. This scene is set in a taxi cab where an aggressive pimp is administering a vicious assault on one of the girls he employs (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 21). As the cab driver pockets a payoff to look the other way while the off-scene pimp attacks the prostitute something heavy lands on the cab roof. At this point the pimp has drawn a handgun which he aims out of the back window in order to deal with whoever is on the roof. All the reader has to go on in this sequence is the depiction of a blue boot driving the pimp’s hand down through the lowered back-seat window and then three panels later a blue glove reaches into the cab driver’s shirt pocket and tears up the money he received to look the other way:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 21).

Once again the sequence is concluded by a loud peal of thunder and a close-up of a page-spanning arc of white lightning. Miller uses synecdoche here to cinematic effect. Each partial appearance offers just a bit more information than the previous one; in the case of the pimp/taxi-driver incident the colour blue is added where in the previous sequence the violent

intervention is depicted in shadow. A pattern of partial representation is established and in the third and final example of its use before the identity of the vigilante is revealed a hand is once more cast in silhouette as it draws back and prepares to throw four projectiles at a gang member who is just about to attack two girls on their way home from school:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 23).

The storm once again acts as the backdrop to this incident, it has by now descended on the city and sheets of torrential rain are depicted in the background. This demonstrates how synecdoche can generate a sense of anticipation as the reader awaits the eventual reveal of the novel's protagonist. However, the focus of this thesis centres on the discordant and metonymic representation of the anti-hero's stream of consciousness. In this light, it will be demonstrated in chapter four how the use of synecdoche can also open up a visually arresting glimpse into the level of trauma Wayne experienced as a child by unlocking partial reveals of a mother whose face he cannot bring himself to fully visualise. Consequently, it will then explain how the technique is used to convey the level of displacement his unconscious attempts to enact in order to shield himself from the painful memory of his parents' murder by selecting a single pearl fragment from his mother's necklace as a storage site for such emotions as guilt, conviction, and ultimately, vengeance.

In the example taken from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* above, synecdoche is used to apply a sense of pace and anticipation to the gradual introduction of Batman to the

reader. In the case of the Rorschach character in *Watchmen*, however, synecdoche is not only used to introduce the character but it is also skilfully deployed throughout the novel to allow his alter-ego to hide in plain sight before the reader. Seeing that at the heart of *Watchmen* lies a murder mystery it makes sense to call on the partial-reveal properties that the visual use of synecdoche is capable of. At just about mid-point in the novel Rorschach's mask is removed, his face is revealed, and in the chapter that follows his prison psychologist notes his real name to be Walter Joseph Kovacs. However, this unmasking actually triggers a number of earlier memories for the reader. This is not the first time that Kovacs' face has been depicted. Through the skilful insertion of a variety of synecdochic glimpses Moore and Gibbons present Walter Kovacs to the reader before his significance as a key player in the novel is ever realised and the technique is highly effective. The second panel in the whole novel depicts a pair of shoes treading across a pool of blood. The next panel offers more information and the reader is presented with a seemingly nondescript figure carrying a sign with the apocalyptic message 'The End Is Nigh' on it (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 1). Three pages later in the bottom two right-hand panels this figure appears again, partially depicted this time, revealing a side profile of his face from behind and then a reverse angle from the front where we see his face almost in full profile:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 4).

His appearance in these two panels betrays an additional level of disclosure because he is walking right past two detectives who are alluding to the violent behaviour of a character they refer to as Rorschach. These two panels establish a dynamic which leads in to one of the most subtle depictions of synecdochic representation in the novel. Literally operating on a level of symmetry between day and night the angle and perspective captured in the second panel in the sequence above is reproduced in the first panel on the next page, only this time it is set at night, with a full moon in the sky and an almost blink-and-you-will-miss-it depiction of a man's hat in the lower right hand corner, the same location that the nondescript figure with the apocalyptic placard occupied in the previous panel:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 5).

Even the page layout here serves the interest of withholding or at the very least delaying the relay of important diegetic information. Had this sequence been located on the same page the placement of the third panel may have triggered a sense of narrative closure raising questions as to the significance of its connection to the previous two. However, by disrupting the sequential rhythm of this triptych and deploying this seemingly unobtrusive use of synecdoche in the first panel on a new page the act of closure is postponed, with the reader accepting this page break as an indication of a new arc in the story's narrative.

In comics theory the response that such a layout design elicits is what Thierry Groensteen refers to as 'retroactive determination' (Groensteen 2007, 110). This occurs when

the information relayed by one panel in a sequence directly influences, and alters, the first-level meaning that was taken from an earlier panel. Randy Duncan and Matthew Smith elaborate on this aspect of layout when they observe that, ‘The understanding of the next panel can also be influenced by a number of the panels yet to come because, as Groensteen points out, “the focal vision never ceases to be enriched by peripheral visions” (Duncan and Smith 2009, 141). However, once the Walter Kovacs revelation is made a second reading of the novel discloses further applications of synecdoche which dispel the ambiguity surrounding previously inconsequential details to the novel as a whole. One of the most relevant examples of this one can be found in the funeral of Edward Blake, also known as The Comedian, in chapter two. Rereading this chapter with the knowledge of Rorschach’s alternate identity clears away any mystery as to why the same vagrant with the apocalyptic placard from chapter one is seen before and after the ceremony. Indeed, the second panel of page two in this chapter shows two hands holding a wooden pole upright, a synecdochic precursor to the unexplainable presence of this character outside the cemetery:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. II, 2).

Two panels later the owner of these hands is revealed to be the same character who walked past the detectives on page four of chapter one, the chapter that opened up with the depiction of his two feet in a pool of blood. The funeral ceremony is then framed afterwards by a return

to this mysterious peripheral addition of two hands clutching a placard in a three-panel sequence that scans back in the third panel to reveal that the vagrant has stayed for the duration of the ceremony, purposely observing the final mourner leave the cemetery:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. II, 19).

Thus, playing on a skilful placement of synecdoche, in the three-panel example used above complete peripheral vision is withheld to serve an important point in the story world, the postponement of Rorschach's true identity. Fittingly, in a novel called *Watchmen*, what is disclosed here is that the novel's elusive anti-hero has been so successful in keeping his identity a secret that he can hide in plain sight, from both the reader through the incomplete nature of synecdochic representation, and from the characters in the story through the use of his nondescript civilian identity, and this allows him to get as close as he desires in order to watch those around him. Echoing the example taken from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, just as synecdoche is used to reveal Rorschach to the reader it is particularly employed to convey aspects of his stream of thought. For a character that comes to extrapolate so much of his worldview from the suggestive connotations of symmetrical ink-blot patterns a high degree of synecdochic representation applies and over the course of the following chapters it will be demonstrated how a number of patterns in particular unlock a milieu of disquieting memories and profound epiphanies for him.

The synecdochic ‘hand’ motif as seen in the previous two characters is used in *From Hell* also. The reader is introduced to the novel’s protagonist, William Gull, in the second chapter. Of the 248 panels that it contains just under half of them, 110 in all, are drawn from the point of view of Gull himself. The only visual marker the reader has in relation to a visual sense of orientation in these panels is the synecdochic depiction of Gull’s hands:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 7).

This perspective not only conforms to the space-saving necessity and economic layout that Eisner and McCloud identify but - just as in the case of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* above - it plays an important role in the story world too. All three anti-heroes take the extreme view that they can shape society around them through the use of force. An aging Batman returns to the streets of Gotham to continue his war on crime and Rorschach prowls the streets of New York with the chilling detachment of a sociopath and is prepared to murder in order to uphold his Manichaeian take on justice. According to his own take on moral values, William Gull re-invents himself as a dark saviour who will remove the cause of vice from Victorian society, which he lays at the feet of women in general but prostitutes in particular. Accordingly, Gull’s hands are the tools he will craft and hone in order to save society from itself. The psychological implications of this visual approach will be explored in chapter four, but from a perspectival layout alone synecdoche is used in this novel to draw attention to particular images that ultimately resonate with a secondary meaning when placed in the context of the overall story. In the sequence where a young William dissects a mouse

the close-up technique of synecdoche is used to capture the first time in his life when his hands are covered in blood:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 6).

This is a visual allusion not only to his later career as a surgeon but also a suggestive indication of the dark obsession that would occupy his mind in adult life. The visual deployment of synecdoche is employed later in the novel as a form of grim calling card for the doctor's obsessive quest. Both Annie Chapman and Liz Stride are enticed to offer their services to Gull with the offer of some laudanum-soaked grapes:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Seven, 20).

In both cases the depicted point of view is the same as the example mentioned earlier, all is seen through Gull's eye. All the reader is presented with is his outstretched, disembodied

hand, cut off by the panel frame, offering up the poisoned fruit like a sacramental offering before his personalised ritual of murder can commence.

Synecdochic representation also plays a key role in conveying the metonymic significance of Gull's ritualised mutilations as he focuses intently on particular body parts that he believes transcend their corporeal significance to bestow a sense of spiritual enlightenment upon him. Equally, synecdoche is also used to portray the partial glimpses that Gull is afforded of the twentieth century as well as the build-up to one of his final epiphanies in the novel. As he stares into a fire towards the end of the novel a private revelation is disclosed to him:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 28).

The depicted perspective captures a progressive magnification of his eyes which only serves to obfuscate the mysterious message that is bestowed on him. Campbell employs the diegetic potential of the frame to full extent here by denying the reader access to the cause of Gull's awe. This reductive narrative device is also used to capture the visual impact of Gull's disembodied consciousness as it is disseminated into the public psyche after his death. In fact, one of the most memorable instances of this occurrence adds a phantasmic slant to Eisner's above-noted suggested conformity of physiology as an apparition of Gull's disembodied head reappears years after his passing to inspire terror and awe in a new generation of susceptible psychotics (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Fourteen, 18).

Thus, synecdoche is not only called on to the effect highlighted by theorists in the field in relation to economy of form but the partial-reveal nature of it in these novels adds pace and atmosphere to the story and makes for an important contribution to the psychological makeup of each protagonist too. As will be seen as this thesis progresses, employing the use of synecdoche to depict a limited perspective in order to withhold information asks of the reader to consider both narrative temporality and stream of consciousness narration as one and the same thing. Notably, Professor Mark Currie argues that, ‘point of view in narrative distributes knowledge in a way that controls the proximity and the distance of a relationship between a reader and a narrative participant, specifically in the degree of access that a narrative grants to a reader of future events (Currie 2015, 14). In an observation that lends much currency to the intent of this thesis Groensteen offers a correlating train of thought to Currie’s take on the role played by point of view in narrative, one that could also be used to account for the degree of access that a reader is permitted into a protagonist’s thought process, when he explains that comics have:

...the unique capacity to be able to illustrate with the same force of conviction the “real”, the imagined, the thought, and the felt – and in the transition from one panel to the next it can glide smoothly from an objective to a subjective register. It is therefore very easy for it to offer equivalents for the free indirect style, to change the point of view and invade the consciousness of its paper denizens. Since storytelling is the natural inclination of the medium, any kind of inner expression (whether thought, reverie, fantasy, or reminiscence) is ipso facto narrativised. This applies even if this narration takes the form of chaos when the mental state of the character is troubled (Groensteen 2013, 131).

Thus, as a reader’s visual and sequential fluency develops he or she brings to the negotiation of such a polysemiotic narrative a skill set which includes an ability to identify and accept synecdochic markers as valuable windows into these often chaotic anti-heroes’ minds to the point where, ‘Every portion of the image isolated by a frame reaches, by that same fact, the status of a complete utterance’ (Groensteen 2007, 56). So on a surface level,

the reader reconstructs a complete body from a represented aspect of one; be it a hand, foot, or head etc. However, on a deeper psychological level, this process trains the reader's mind to hypothesize complete utterances based on partial visual cues that represent instances of trauma and/or psychosis. Given the arbitrary, fragmented, and very often symbolic state of each anti-hero's stream of consciousness, synecdochic representation comes across as a highly intuitive form of mimesis. By incorporating closure and synecdoche into the comprehension of panel construction the reader gradually hones a level of fluency that can then be applied to the complexity of an entire network of panels. As the following chapters will demonstrate, this level of comprehension is essential in order to process the unique bond shared between certain panels that are dispersed throughout each of these graphic novels. McCloud has stated that the medium is as subtractive as it is additive, but when a reader learns how to unite this sense of elision with the semantic bridgework of closure he or she can then attempt to hypothesize a complete psychological profile based on mere glimpses within the anti-hero's mind.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

The next level of investigation that this thesis will outline will see it move beyond the isolated analysis of individual components such as the gutter and synecdoche in an effort to present a globalised view of each graphic novel. This venture will be carried out over the course of chapters two and three and it will begin by analysing the layout of multi-panel sequences on a single page or a double page spread. The analysis of closure from the first level of investigation will act as an ideal lead-in here as the properties of closure are moved beyond a two-panel dynamic and applied to specific extended sequences that relate to each protagonist's stream of consciousness. The process of panel selection and alignment used to map the exposition of these sequences shall be aligned with perspectives adopted from the fields of semiotics and structuralism in relation to syntagmatic and paradigmatic

representation. This argument will position the semiotic theories of Daniel Chandler and Kaja Silverman alongside the semantics of visual and sequential comprehension as posited by comics theorists such as Thierry Groensteen and Neil Cohn.

Following on from this, chapter three will extend beyond the panoptic design of same-page sequences and highlight the overall significance of negotiating each graphic novel as a self-referential network - a network complex enough to elicit a non-linear approach to reading. This approach will contemporise the structuralist perspectives that Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette applied to narrative by weaving them into arguments developed by comics theorists that are of particular use to this thesis. As such it will be argued that Barthes's and Genette's referral to a global narrative is reflected on an interdisciplinary level by the concept of the braided narrative within the field of comics theory. Thus, over the course of the next two chapters, it will be argued that the structure and layout of the narrative strategies employed in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* can adopt a hermeneutic form of commentary on each protagonist's mindset and further locate the psychological instability they betray, thus contrasting the explicit and implicit layers of meaning that can be drawn from each anti-hero's struggle against their own private demons.

## Chapter Two:

### Sequential Psychosis: Exploring How a Combination of Horizontal and Vertical Reading Paths can be used to Complement the Anti-Hero's Discordant Mindset

#### 2.1 Introduction

It has been argued that a familiarity with the principles of closure and economy, as well as the semantic role played by the gutter, establishes a link between individual panels. On the other hand, an analysis of synecdoche demonstrates that it is just as important to analyse the elements that *are* presented as well as those signified by omission. In other words, even the components within a panel can call on the cognitive assumptions of closure. Developing fluency with these narrative devices allows the reader to address situations where they are incorporated into complex sequences. Sequences move beyond the one-to-one semantics of panel-to-panel transitions and as a whole their positional layout can often add important elements to the story world. Thus, sequence analysis is the logical progression point from which to move from a component-based analysis as the fluency developed from the ways in which selected sequences can be read will ultimately pave the way for the appreciation of these graphic novels as braided narratives. Sequences can also be used to call into question conventional left-to-right reading paths and often present situations where a non-linear reading can re-contextualise earlier panels, loading them with an additional retroactive meaning. In the case of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* this panoptic form of reading establishes a sense of vectoral fluency that can often unlock important aspects of character development.

## 2.2 Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Alignment: Using an X and Y axis to Map Sequential Layout in the Graphic Novel

As noted in the last chapter, and in reference to closure, comprehension of the medium relies on a dynamic of shared experience between author/illustrator and reader. Nonetheless there must be an authorial basis for the selection and placement of each panel. One way of analysing this process is to acknowledge a semantic and inter-dependent relationship between the vertical and horizontal axis on the page. In traditional attempts to apply structure to narrative theorists have hypothesised the intersection of these axes whereby the vertical is affiliated with the paradigmatic inter-changeability of terms and the horizontal deals with the syntagmatic alignment of each selected term. In other words, a relationship is established based on substitution and position. As Chandler points out in *Semiotics - the Basics*, ‘Saussure emphasized that meaning arises from the difference between signifiers; these differences are of two different kinds: syntagmatic (concerning positioning) and paradigmatic (concerning substitution)’ (Chandler 2007, 83). The significance of this positional dynamic in relation to the structure of language in general is noted in the field of semiotics by Silverman when she points out that, ‘A sign’s value is determined in part by the ways in which it deviates from the other members of the abstract groups to which it belongs – ie. by its place within the system’ (Silverman 1983, 103). The binary opposition between depiction and elision in a graphic novel, choosing which aspects of the narrative to portray and which ones to bypass, effectively conforms to this structural and semantic interdependence between substitution and position. Indeed Groensteen argues that comics and graphic novels are capable of demonstrating their own form of language based on their sense of plasticity, ‘which allows them to put in place messages of every order . . . which demonstrates that before being an art, comics are well and truly a language’ (Groensteen 2007, 19). If the medium is to be viewed as commanding its own form of language, as

Groensteen here suggests, then it could be argued that what Silverman refers to as a sign's value within a system may also be applied to the nature of a panel within a sequence. The system she relates to is just as applicable to the discursive nature of a visual sequence in a graphic novel, thus extending the premise that irrespective of the textual or pictorial constituent of a medium it will still be receptive to:

... the operations of selection and combination. Certain signifying elements must be chosen rather than others, and they must be linked together in some manner. A user of language, for instance, must first select a group of words from the manifold resources of the system, and then cluster them together to create a sentence. As Saussure was the first to observe, each word which is selected enjoys a relationship of similarity with numerous other words which are associated with it in some way, and a relationship of contiguity with those which surround it discursively . . . . This is another way of saying that paradigmatic relationships determine a signifying element's systemic value, while syntagmatic relationships determine the same element's discursive value (Silverman 1983, 104).

With respect to an analysis of the graphic novel, Silverman's user of language will be replaced here by the author(s) of sequential narrative. An approach based on selection and combination is still adhered to; the number of signifying elements has simply increased. From a narratological perspective, identifying the discursive value of narrative with respect to this paradigmatic/syntagmatic model is not a revelatory move in its own right. For example, in *Narrative Discourse* Gerard Genette explains that on first approaching the analysis of a text it is beneficial to identify its', 'skeleton and foundation' (Genette 1983, 137). The skeletal analogy is an interesting one to bring to a medium whose initial skeletal make-up is based on the alignment of panels on a page before each panel is fleshed out with contextual detail. Genette proceeds from this foundational analogy to clarify that:

The analysis of foundations discloses, beneath the smooth horizontality of successive syntagms, the uneven system of paradigmatic selections and relationships. If the object of analysis is indeed to illuminate the conditions of existence - of production - of the text, it is not done, as people often say, by reducing the complex to the simple, but on the contrary by

revealing the hidden complexities that are the secret of the simplicity (Genette 1983, 137/138).

In this regard it is useful to explore what is meant by the term “sequence” when it comes to the medium of sequential narrative and to examine how the hidden complexities of the sequence might benefit from a comparison to definitions of syntagm. Chandler identifies with Saussure’s conclusions on syntagm in that it represents, ‘an orderly combination of interacting signifiers which forms a meaningful whole within a text – sometimes, following Saussure, called a “chain”’ (Chandler 2007, 85). In relation to important character-developing sequences in these graphic novels special attention will be focused on the variety of linear and trans-linear ways in which the semantic links in these visual chains interact with each other. This interlocking motif can be traced back to semiotics as Chandler points out that, ‘The distinction (between paradigmatic and syntagmatic selection) is a key one in structuralist semiotic analysis in which these two structural axes (horizontal as syntagmatic and vertical as paradigmatic) are seen as applicable to all sign systems’ (Chandler 2007, 84). This conclusion highlights a valuable acknowledgement in semiotic discourse that syntagmatic structure is applicable or adaptable to a variety of media. Following on from Saussure’s aforementioned definition of a syntagm it is worth taking into account Chandler’s extended hypothesis that:

Syntagmatic analysis can be applied not only to verbal texts but also to audio-visual ones. In film and television, a syntagmatic analysis would involve an analysis of how each *frame*, *shot*, *scene* or *sequence* related to the others (these are the standard levels of analysis in film theory). . . . The linguistic model often leads semioticians to a search for units of analysis in audio-visual media which are analogous to those used in linguistics. In the semiotics of film, crude equivalents with written language are sometimes postulated, such as the frame as morpheme (or word), the shot as sentence, the scene as paragraph, and the sequence as chapter (suggested equivalences vary among commentators) (Chandler 2007, 119).

What Chandler describes here as the linguistic model can be interpreted as a cautionary guideline into explaining how the exposition of sequential meaning in a graphic novel also operates. Cautionary in that any redistribution of theory inevitably recalls Barthes aforementioned disclaimer that inter-disciplinarity is ‘not the calm of an easy security’ (Barthes 1977, 155). In other words, the framework used to analyse one medium may not be simply uprooted and then re-deposited into the parameters of another without a high degree of contextual integration. Yet, Chandler’s hypothesis is being used here because it suggests that when efforts are made to realign a theoretical framework from one medium to another the first port of call seems to be the need to establish corresponding units of discourse and in this case the primary unit is the sentence. This mindset finds further validation elsewhere in semiotics as Kaja Silverman similarly widens the interdisciplinary scope of syntagmatic relationships to include:

...relationships of similarity and contiguity in film, literature, music, painting, photography, and architecture as well as language . . . The term “syntagmatic” also proves adaptable to other discourses besides the linguistic . . . the spatial disposition of objects in a painting or photograph establishes a syntagmatic connection between them; and the unfolding of events in a novel depends upon numerous syntagmatic clusters – sentences, paragraphs, chapters, etc. (Silverman 1983, 106).

The expansion of syntagmatic analysis to such a widening variety of media and the argument that it can be adapted to discourses other than linguistic together set up an inviting opener to exploring how sequences in a graphic novel may be read. Indeed, in their efforts to outline a grammar of visual design Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen explain that:

There is a close similarity between sequential information structure in language and horizontal structure in visual composition, and this attests to the existence of deeper, more abstract coding variations which find their expression differently in different semiotic modes (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 181).

As will be demonstrated, this chapter will adapt their reference to deeper and more abstract coding variations to suit the visualised representation of each anti-hero's stream of consciousness – a complex process that will confirm their conclusion that, 'visual structures are never merely formal: they have a deeply important semantic dimension' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 47). Thus, given this proposed interdisciplinary manoeuvrability it is unsurprising to discover similar efforts to establish a sense of structural scaffolding in comics theory. Many theorists within the field highlight the relevance of such axes in their efforts to apply a workable template to the establishment of page structure. In *The Visual Language of Comics*, for example, Neil Cohn argues that on the two-dimensional space of the page these grouping rules, 'essentially concatenate elements along X and Y dimensions' (Cohn 2013, 102). Additionally, Duncan and Smith pay similar attention to the paradigmatic/syntagmatic model and note that at each panel there is the:

...vertical axis of the paradigmatic choice, the chosen images and all the images that could have made sense or communicated nearly the same meaning at the same point in the panel.', a vertical axis complemented by and utterly dependent on, 'images of syntagmatic choice ((which)) are arranged along the horizontal axis to form scenes and sequences of the overall story (Duncan and Smith 2009, 132-133).

Again, the notable link between these observations is the desire to find an interdisciplinary equivalent for a coherent arrangement of terms along a horizontal axis, in other words, sentence structure. Interestingly, Silverman applies the use of syntagm above to the spatial disposition of objects in either a painting or photograph. The concept of spatial disposition between panels on a page has already been adapted to the distinctive relationship each one shares with the next thanks to the separative function of the gutter and the process of closure that it subsequently initiates. However, when that relationship is repeated in a continuous chain one is presented with the manifestation of a visual sentence, with the notable absence of one crucial component - punctuation.

### **2.3 Sequential Autonomy: Parsing Discrete Sequences and Incorporating Panoptic Reading Patterns**

In his essay *Structural Analysis of Narratives*, which he applies to an ‘almost infinite diversity’, of narrative forms (including comic strips) Barthes defines a sequence as, ‘a logical succession of nuclei bound together by a relation of solidarity: the sequence opens when one of its terms has no solidary antecedent and closes when another of its terms has no consequent’ (Barthes 1977, 101). Notably, in comics theory, Groensteen refers to a sequence as, ‘a succession of images where the syntagmatic linking is determined by a narrative project’ (Groensteen 2007, 146). Barthes’s observation on how to recognise the beginning and end of a sequence resonates with Chandler and Silverman’s proposed prerequisite to locate an equivalent for the sentence when it comes to interdisciplinary analysis. It also helps to at least initiate a level of investigation into contemporary comics theory. The comic strips that Barthes was referring to in 1977 are far less complex than the graphic novels being addressed here, for if one was to apply his observations directly to those then it would stand to reason that they could all be simply defined as one long continuous sequence. After all, the only term or panel in a graphic novel that has no antecedent is the first one, and the only panel that has no consequent is the final one. Yet this is not a satisfactory conclusion for the graphic novels being analysed here as they are composed of a large number of anachronistic and incongruous sequences, to say nothing of the break in rhythm created by chapter division. To this end Silke Horstkotte and Nancy Pedri point out in their research that, ‘anachronies in graphic narrative can be difficult to pinpoint, as the visual track often offers no hard evidence of temporal relations such as grammatical pronouns (that enable a distinction between subjective and objective anachronies), verbal tense, or temporal adverbs’ (Horstkotte and Pedri 2011, 344).

However, Barthes's efforts to define and isolate a sense of sequential autonomy do correlate with work being carried out by theorists in the medium of sequential narrative to parse discrete and identifiable sequences within a story. Cohn argues that a constituent structure *is* possible for panels in a sequence but identifying it can be problematic. He raises questions such as, 'How do people know where the boundaries between constituents lie? . . . (and) . . . How might readers know the borders of these segments?' (Cohn 2013, 83/130). However, at the same time that he questions the nature of a visual language in which punctuation like periods or commas are not used to indicate boundaries he also offers a possible solution. He proposes that the 'arc' (Cohn 2013, 70) makes for an effective visual equivalent for the sentence; explaining that, 'Each arc can be considered as a "visual sentence," meaning that a longer comic book or graphic novel may contain many arcs throughout the whole story. But unlike sentences, arcs do not overtly mark their beginnings (such as with capital letters) or endings (such as with periods)' (Cohn 2013, 70). He proposes that one possible way of parsing distinct arcs relies on, 'major changes in characters, locations, or causation . . . Essentially, constituents end when a segment is no longer about particular characters, places, or actions, and thus major breaks in the narrative stream cue a reader that one constituent has ended and the next has begun' (Cohn 2013, 83). This train of thought is quite similar to Groensteen's proposal that:

...a change in place is effectively a monstration of a new decor, which the reader can, in principle, identify as such; furthermore, the passage from one scene to another is frequently highlighted by a modification of the dominant chromatic, the internal coherence of each scene being generally attested by a range of homogenous colours that contribute to its dramaturgical and emotional impact (Groensteen 2007, 132).

However, even when changes in characters, locations or causation are apparent there remains the additional factor of coordinating eye movement in such a way as to filter the simultaneous impact of a visually enticing and panoptic spread of panels on each page. Bearing this in

mind, the delayed comprehension of the selected sequences from these graphic novels that convey each protagonist's train of thought all relate to the concept of causality and tracking the path of the reader's eye. Silverman argues that, 'Syntagmatic relationships . . . are always based on the same principle: formal contiguity' (Silverman 1983, 105). Contiguity also played an important role in Barthes's thoughts on the relevance of sequentially navigating narrative as a weave of multiple codes when he proposed in *S/Z* that:

The text, while it is being produced, is like a piece of Valenciennes lace created before us under the lacemaker's fingers: each sequence undertaken hangs like the temporarily inactive bobbin waiting while its neighbour works; then, when its turn comes, the hand takes up the thread again, brings it back to the frame; and as the pattern is filled out, the progress of each thread is marked with a pin which holds it and is gradually moved forward: thus the terms of the sequence: they are positions held and then left behind in the course of a gradual invasion of meaning (Barthes 1990, 160).

Barthes's attentive approach towards the braided nature of the sequence as being temporarily inactive and waiting while its neighbour works evokes comics theorist Benoit Peeters's observation that, 'comics rest, in each instant, on a tension between the story and the picture. The story that, while including the image within a continuity, stretches to allow us to glide over it. And the isolated image that allows us to fix upon it' (Groensteen 2007, 86). At any stage in the reading, therefore, while semantically gathering up or intertwining the disparate threads that coalesce to create sequential narrative, it is the isolated image, or panel, that comes to represent what Barthes here refers to as a pin whose responsibility it is to mark the progress along each thread of narrative and to allow a 'gradual invasion of meaning' (Barthes 1977, 160). For example, when Groensteen addresses the dynamic of syntagmatic design he proposes that the most basic reading model that the medium operates on is made up of three contiguous panels which consist of:

...the triad composed of the panel that is currently being read, the panel that preceded it, and the panel that immediately follows it. At this level, my reading of the panel is already forcibly

different, informed before and after by other contents with which I construct (or verify) semantic relations, on the basis of a postulate of narrative coherence. Plainly, I am now involved in interpretation: at any moment of my reading I will privilege the relations of immediate proximity and I will reconstruct this triad, which is carried along with me (Groensteen 2007, 111).

Groensteen's triad can be seen as an attempt to apply a sense of order to sequential comprehension and has much in common with Barthes's theory on sequential progression. Effectively, the reader carries this model along in blocks of threes (past, present, future) prioritising anterior and posterior relations of immediate contiguity and proximity. He draws similar initial conclusions to Silverman's on the basis of syntagmatic structure noting that while the medium, 'is not only an art of fragments, of scattering, of distribution; it is also an art of conjunction, of repetition, of linking together . . . whereby narrative continuity is assured by the contiguity of images' (Groensteen 2007, 22/117).

Thus, the process of incorporation, and the flow of the narrative in the reader's imagination, is facilitated by repetition and change from panel to panel. Comics scholar Ann Miller echoes this line of thinking and argues that comic books are "an art of both iteration and transformation" in which the narrative is moved forward in consecutive panels by "the conservation of certain elements and the modification of others" (Duncan and Smith 2009, 164). However, Groensteen's triad is open to more than one navigational interpretation and may be read from left to right or right to left, to the effect that, 'the meaning of a panel can be informed and determined by the panel that preceded it much like the one that follows it' (Groensteen 2007, 110). This demonstrates how sequential narrative represents an important break away from the conventional way a text can be read and it is a crucial factor in visually processing the information portrayed in the sequences that are about to be analysed below. As noted above by Barthes, the gradual invasion of meaning in a text takes place only by moving

forward, whereby the terms in a sequence are at once held - and then left behind - as the narrative progresses in one direction.

However, in accordance with Groensteen's theory, when it comes to sequential narrative there exists the possibility that while a relationship of contiguity can certainly satisfy the formation of semantic meaning between panels it is not necessarily restricted to doing so in only one direction. In fact, in so far as the reading experience is concerned, the graphic novel's multidirectional dynamic exemplifies a notable departure from traditional text-based narratives and so becomes an important identifier of the medium. Gerard Genette breaks early theoretical ground in relation to this distinction in *Narrative Discourse*. He separates the causal relations that exist between the novel and other forms of narrative expression, including the comic strip. At first echoing the interdisciplinary comparisons between various media made by Chandler and Silverman above, Genette also points out an important distinction in the case of visual/sequential narratives. He identifies the interdisciplinary common ground between written literary narrative and oral or cinematic narrative based on the premise that they can only be consumed, and therefore actualized, in a time that is obviously reading time. He points out that in written narrative:

...even if the sequentiality of its components can be undermined by a capricious, repetitive, or selective reading, that undermining stops short of perfect analexia: one can run a film backwards, image by image, but one cannot read a text backwards, letter by letter, or even word by word, or even sentence by sentence, without its ceasing to be a text. Books are a little more constrained than people sometimes say they are by the celebrated linearity of the linguistic signifier (Genette 1980, 34).

He then pursues this distinction even further when he focuses solely on image-based, sequential narratives and points out that, 'while making up sequences of images and thus requiring a successive or diachronic reading, (they) also lend themselves to, and even invite, a kind of global and synchronic look – or at least a look whose direction is no longer

determined by the sequence of images' (Genette 1980, 34). In order to crystallise the interdisciplinary transition from Genette's traditional scope to the particularities of a contemporised visual medium an additional insight from Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design is welcome here. According to them:

Non-linear texts impose a paradigmatics. They select the elements that can be viewed and present them according to a certain paradigmatic logic but leave it to the reader to sequence and connect them. In the design of such texts there will be pressure to put more of the meaning in the individual elements of the composition, to use more highly coded images – symbolic and conceptual images, tightly written, self-contained items of information, drawings or highly structured images (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 208).

Accordingly, this line of thinking is echoed in comics theory by Jan Baetens when he points out that:

...the book itself induces an undeniable vectorization of discourse; the book consecrates a linear, or more exactly monovectorized, reading, that distinguishes (and sometimes discriminates) a start and an end, an incipit and an explicit, a first and a last of the cover. With respect to comics, this disposition finds itself constantly embattled, and in a certain measure neutralized, by the properties that we have seen in the panels. The network that they form is certainly an oriented network, since it is crossed by the instance of the story, but it also exists in a dechronologized mode, that of the collection, of the panoptical spread and of coexistence, considering the possibility of translinear relations and plurivectoral courses (Groensteen 2007, 147).

Thus, the implication is raised that certain forms of narrative have a capacity to disengage their arrangement from all dependence, even inverse dependence, on the chronological sequence of the stories they tell. Incorporating this conclusion into the interdisciplinary scope of this chapter overall, it can thus be argued that the revelatory aspect of these graphic novels comes from the potential meaning a panel, or an arrangement of panels, may share with any other on the same page. The aforementioned rigid constraint of linearity that Genette confers onto text-based narrative can, in this case, be side-stepped in favour of a form of polysemic expression that rewards reading in more than one direction. This can result in confusing a

narrative's syntagmatic order with the story's temporal order but Genette believes that the existence of such a dynamic serves a deliberate intention, whereby the author(s) has, 'the clearest of reasons for grouping together, in defiance of all chronology, events connected by spatial proximity' (Genette 1980, 85). For larger sequences this relationship can subvert relations of linear proximity and contiguity completely. Very often a distanced, staccato-type relationship between panels that abandons contiguity will play to the desire of an author to convey a frenetic pace or broken sense of rhythm. As Groensteen observes, when a layout is chaotic, the rhythm of the story becomes affected, anarchic, 'or even disappears within a phenomenon that accompanies the reading' (Groensteen 2007, 61). Ultimately, this can be a very effective method with which to characterise a conflicted protagonist's disjointed train of thought, which is precisely the function this chapter aims to highlight.

Keeping the idea of a chaotic or anarchic layout in mind, then, it is worth noting that in an interdisciplinary venture Barthes appropriates the medical term 'dystaxia' to describe what happens when the signs in a language become distorted and linear meaning is offset. In medical terminology dystaxia refers to a, 'lack of muscular coordination resulting in shaky limb movements and unsteady gait' (See reference in bibliography). Barthes, however, applies the concept to the study of narrative and explains that, 'Dystaxia occurs when the signs (of a message) are no longer simply juxtaposed . . . when the (logical) linearity is disturbed' (Barthes 1977, 118). His use of the term opens a practical level of inquiry into how we process information on a page, or how we might respond on a cognitive level to information that is presented in a non-linear fashion. Upon opening any of these graphic novels one is confronted, to varying degrees (not all pages will have the same arrangement or number of panels), with a simultaneous input of panels on either a single page or double-page spread. Essentially, a reader must negotiate a form of narrative whose units are compelled by, 'simultaneity and panopticism' (Groensteen 2007, 7). Thus, one is struck by the overall

layout and it can often be quite difficult not to let the eye wander and appreciate the full scope of a mosaic of visual fragments on a page before engaging with them proper and scanning them in succession. From a creative standpoint, as Will Eisner pointed out, ‘The most important obstacle to surmount is the tendency of the reader’s eye to wander. On any given page, for example, there is absolutely no way in which the artist can prevent the reading of the last panel before the first’ (Eisner 2008, 40). Consequently, as Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith note, ‘readers can, and usually do, scan an entire page as they turn to it’ (Duncan and Smith 2009, 140). In fact, when they elaborate further they explain that, ‘A reader actively engaged with the story incorporates each panel . . . into the narrative that has been encountered up to that point and into the narrative that has been anticipated based on a scanning or peripheral awareness of yet-to-be-read panels on the page or adjoining page’ (Duncan and Smith, 164).

This can be interpreted as a contemporary, and visual, take on Barthes’s concept of *dystaxia* as it incorporates a sense of duality to the act of reading. On one hand there is an approach to the act of reading that proceeds in a linear fashion by following the conventional z path of left-to-right and top-to-bottom along a sequence of panels. On the other hand there exists a peripheral scansion of the information surrounding that sequence. Groensteen compares the sense of cognitive dissonance created by such peripheral anticipation to an optical and mental leap. He highlights the input of visual simultaneity on a comics page when he points out that, ‘the focal vision never ceases to be enriched by peripheral visions’, and that, ‘in reading a comic I am here, then I am there . . . every comics reader knows from experience that, in practice, even when the gaze functions like an “irremovable beam”, the eye’s movements on the surface of the page are relatively erratic and do not respect any precise protocol’ (Groensteen 2007, 19/47/113). The initial disorientation caused by such an openly navigable form of reading is understandable. All at once the reader is confronted with

a ‘co-occurrence of panels . . . their simultaneous presence under the eye of the reader, and also the visibility of the intervals between these panels, that is to say, the locations where their symbolic articulation is carried out’ (Groensteen 2007, 105). Thus, on the basis of how the reader is visually processing information, this has the effect of further enhancing Barthes concept of dystaxia as it is arguably easier for the reader’s eye to disturb logical linearity when presented with a simultaneous layout of discrete visuals than it is for the eye to wander arbitrarily from word to word in a strictly textual medium. However, as the reader’s fluency with the medium develops and he/she learns to attenuate this panoptic and simultaneous visual influx it can be seen how the orchestration of narrative in this way primarily functions, ‘so that we are naturally inclined to credit narration to the sequence’ (Groensteen 2007, 105).

This erratic scatter-effect does not elicit the first instance in narrative discourse where conventional reading paths are questioned and issues of causality are raised. Barthes justifies his appropriation of the term dystaxia by explaining that the effect it has on narrative induces, ‘a sort of structural “limping”, an incessant play of potentials whose varying falls give the narrative its dynamism or energy’ (Barthes 1977, 122). For him, this element of dynamism means that, ‘to understand a narrative is not merely to follow the unfolding of the story it is also to recognise its construction in ‘storeys’, to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative on to an implicitly vertical axis’ (Barthes 1977, 87). Similarly, in *The Unexpected: Narrative Temporality and The Philosophy of Surprise* Professor Mark Currie observes a:

...”polyphonic harmony” in the interaction of the different strata of a literary work which is absolutely dependent on the arrangement of its consecutive phases, so that the concretisation of a work, in all its aspects, is functionally dependent on the double horizon of the already read and the still unknown’ (Currie 2015, 120).

It may be said that this polyphonic harmony, or construction of narrative in storeys, is uniquely exemplified by the graphic novel as the concept is quite visually pronounced. Each

horizontal strip, or storey, on the page takes up far more physical space than a line of text in a traditional novel thus emphasising the structural breaking or limping that Barthes attributes to the vertical integration of meaning into a narrative. Groensteen points out as much when he observes that:

One smoothly glides along the panels that, taking part in the strip, follow each other along the horizontal axis, while a leap is required in order to pass to the following strip. The linear course of the reading is briefly subjected to a breaking. This last is clearly more sensitive than the equivalent of the passage from line to line in the reading of the page of text. On the one hand, because the reader is returned farther behind, by the fact that the format of pages in a comic book is greater than that of an ordinary book; on the other hand, and especially; because of the height of the strip: vertically, the leap that is accomplished represents a quarter, a third, or even half of the page (Groensteen 2007, 60).

Thus, as Barthes notes, even though the search carried out over a horizontal set of narrative relations may well be as thorough as possible it must still, to be effective, also operate ‘vertically’ (Barthes 1977, 87). This transfer between horizontal and vertical readings on the page of a graphic novel can trace a precedent back to his conclusions on what he views as an important component of the structural foundation of all narrative. In his opinion:

...everything suggests that the mainspring of narrative is precisely the *confusion* (my italics) of consecution and consequence, what comes after being read in narrative as what is caused by; in which case narrative would be a systematic application of the fallacy denounced by Scholasticism in the formula *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*’ (after this, therefore because of this) (Barthes 1977, 94).

It is of valuable use to an analysis of sequences in these graphic novels to discover a theoretical challenge of this nature to the hierarchical structure of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. The emphasis above on the word confusion subscribes precisely to what Groensteen is trying to convey in his triad model when he says that, ‘at any moment of my reading I will privilege the relations of immediate proximity and I will reconstruct this triad, which is carried along with me’ (Groensteen 2007, 111). Barthes believes that the mainspring of narrative is the

confusion of consecution and consequence and Groensteen is proposing the existence of a narrative form whereby semantic meaning may be frequently realigned due to a reassembly of past, present, and future in an ongoing process. In a manner that is highly beneficial to the exposition of this complex temporal dynamic, regardless of the medium it is located in, Professor Mark Currie explains that:

...the cognition of the work of art during reading and the cognition of the work after reading are in a relation of temporal disjunction, and necessarily so, since their coincidence, the simultaneity of the perspective during reading and the recognition that invalidates it, would produce contradiction, but contradiction of a kind no more catastrophic than the ironic structures of narrative that permit us to live alongside a fictional character and, at the same time, know what is to come. It is, in other words, a kind of flight from simultaneity and contradiction that gives narrative its cognitive purchase (Currie 2015, 173).

The simultaneity of perspective that Currie refers to here is undertaken on a primarily visual basis when dealing with the way these anti-heroes' thought processes are mapped onto a page. Thus, literally (and often more important given the sense of immediacy inherent to the image - visually) thanks to the way in which sequences may communicate with one another on a vertical as well as horizontal path the idea that a reader can, 'live alongside a fictional character and, at the same time, know what is to come' is emphasized on a panoptic navigational basis (Currie 2015, 173).

The sense of simultaneity that this brings to the visualised depiction of a character's stream of consciousness represents a visual/sequential extension of the same temporal fluidity that Barthes and Genette brought to their analyses of narrative in general. Even moving backwards along a sequence of panels, or moving straight up or down along the vertical axis, from future to present to past, and reconstructing the chronological order of the narrative has an additional meaning or perspective to offer a reader who is fluent with the medium's reading strategies. It would seem, therefore, that incorporating an element of dystaxia into the

act of reading sequences on a page may ironically fly in the face of the literal connections the word has with a lack of coordination. In other words, it may be argued that uncoordinated scansion actually has an important role to play in processing the visual array of panels on the page and can be used to unlock cognitive relations that move beyond the basic side-by-side semantics of syntagmatic and sequential contiguity.

Indeed, Groensteen's theory progressively graduates to a branching out from his initial thoughts on this necessity for a bond of contiguity in order to make sense of the overall page. It also echoes Barthes's stance on the semantic benefits of challenging, or confusing, conventional approaches to the model of cause-and-effect. This is especially the case where the complexity of a narrative is, 'capable of integrating backwards and forwards movements; or integration in various forms which compensates for the seemingly unmasterable complexity of units on a particular level' (Barthes 1977, 122). To this end Groensteen settles on the premise that:

In a comic narrative *continuity* is assured by the *contiguity* of images, but this side-by-side is not necessarily an end-to-end of narrative instances structured according to a univocal and mechanical logic of repetition and difference. We must guard ourselves here against dogmatic conclusions. Comics admit all sorts of narrative strategies which are all equally modern and legitimate. Modern narratology develops a mode of structural analysis that tends to "dechronologize" the narrative contents in order to "resynchronize" them. It appears to me that the narrative organization belonging to comics, that is to say, the manner in which information is distributed over the duration, frequently overtakes the logic of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* to employ procedures that are themselves already structural (Groensteen 2017, 119).

This ultimately leaves the reader with a form of narrative capable of exploiting potential semantic relations that operate on the basis that there may not be a, 'unidirectional vectorization in the construction of meaning' (Groensteen 2007, 110). This is not such a distant remove from Barthes own conclusions that, 'meaning is not 'at the end' of the

narrative, it runs across it . . . it eludes all unilateral investigation (whereby) each part of the narrative radiates in several directions at once' (Barthes 1977, 87,118). Thus, the intersection of nodal points along vertical and horizontal axes elicits a plurivectoral sense of closure which invites the reader to look for semantic connections between all panels, no matter where they are located on the page. As Groensteen points out:

...the strip, the page, and the double page, are nested multiframe, systems of increasingly inclusive proliferation. They have an essential property in common: they allow a dialogue in praesentia, a direct exchange between images that are in a situation of co-presence under the gaze of the reader (Groensteen, 148).

Expanding on Scott McCloud's argument from the previous chapter, effectively the reader learns to endow two or more images with a single overriding identity, only in this case the physical location of these images/panels do not have to be side-by-side. This ultimately results in the reader viewing them as a whole in order to make efforts to, 'construct a continuous, unified reality' (McCloud 1994, 67).

#### **2.4 Visual Confirmation: Crystallising the Link between Panel Alignment and Stream of Consciousness Narration**

The intention of outlining in detail such a theoretical precedent for sequence structure in this chapter is to demonstrate how variations of it in these graphic novels can be used to emphasize psychological aspects of each anti-hero's train of thought. As a final anticipatory move towards negotiating this structural and psychological connection before applying it to key sequences from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* it pays dividends to align the concept of visual dystaxia with stream of consciousness techniques in narrative overall. In an argument that can be applied both to the multidirectional semantics of reading a page of discrete panels, and to the psychology of Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs and

William Gull, Robert Humphrey proposes in *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* that:

The psyche, which is almost continuously active, cannot be concentrated for very long in its processes, even when it is most strongly willed; when little effort is exerted to concentrate it, its focus remains on any one thing but momentarily. Yet the activity of consciousness must have content, and this is provided for by the power of one thing to suggest another through an association of qualities in common or in contrast, wholly or partially – even to the barest suggestion (Humphrey 1954, 43).

For these graphic novels the focus of each protagonist's troubled psyche correlates well with the erratic scansion of the reader's eye around the page. In return, the idea that narrative comprehension may require developing a fluency in acknowledging more than one reading path echoes Humphrey's notion of a momentarily focused and continuously active psyche. A form of interdisciplinary symmetry is established whereby narrative technique and character psychology become interwoven. He emphasizes a representation of the content of consciousness through an association (even to the barest suggestion) of qualities in common. Arguably, the structure of an associative layout determined by content plays a key role in the graphic novel, given the attention that has already been paid to the variety of directions in which meaning can emanate from an anachronistic reading of certain sequences. Fittingly, this is echoed in the field of comics theory by Neil Cohn's cognitive approach to the medium where he points out that, 'Narrative categories are influenced by an interaction between content and context, and have distributional tendencies in a sequence' (Cohn, 2013, 133). Additionally, in *Basic Elements of Narrative*, David Herman's take on comprehending the multimodality of the graphic novel acknowledges an approach where:

Both the design of individual panels and sequential links among panels thus align readers with particular vantage-points on the story world . . . (whereby) the verbal and visual details found in individual panels and panel sequences cue readers to attach local textual details to (an) emergent storyline, while that storyline in turn provides context for interpreting

the actions, postures, and speech productions of characters represented within a given panel or across panels (Herman 2009, 61).

Thus, to serve an exploration of how layout contributes to psychological development, it is worth aligning Cohn and Herman's thoughts on aspects of design with Humphrey's deference to the technical component of conveying a protagonist's state of mind. He points out that:

Stream of consciousness fiction is essentially a technical feat. Its successful working-out depended on technical resources exceeding those of any other type of fiction. Because this is so, any study of the genre must be essentially an examination of method. A study of devices and form becomes significant. Stream of consciousness is not technique for its own sake. It is based on a realization of the force of the drama that takes place in the minds of human beings (Humphrey 1954, 21).

Both this chapter and the one preceding it have focused on an interdisciplinary handover between text and image, representation and omission, and the linear and non-linear dynamics of the medium. It is now time to examine how a contextualised 'examination of method', as Humphrey phrases it, of key sequences from each graphic novel confirm his observation that the way in which each protagonist's thoughts are laid out is not simply technique for its own sake and that it can be used to enhance the link between narrative layout and character psychology.

In the first chapter (or Book as Miller calls them) of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Bruce Wayne is interviewed for a news channel in relation to the rehabilitation of former district attorney Harvey Dent. Dent, also known as the criminal 'Two-Face', is a character consumed by a warring psychological disparity between justice and violent retribution, a disparity that is visually emphasized by the disfigurement of one half of his face. Advocating, and indeed financially sponsoring, Dent's rehabilitation Wayne comments on how, 'We must believe that our private demons can be defeated . . .' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 9). Interestingly, Miller follows this comment with a three-panel sequential arc that

depicts the flight path of an enormous bat framed by a full moon, thus setting up a textual/visual payoff between the word demon and the image of a bat. This sets the tone for one of the most revealing sequences in the novel in relation to the internal psychological battle Wayne wages with himself. It also acts as an effective window into the mindset of the novel's anti-hero. In spite of the therapeutic and aesthetic (he receives plastic surgery to restore damaged facial tissue) efforts made to rehabilitate Dent he slips back into a life of crime. Wayne, as Batman, resignedly begins a manhunt for him, clinging to the hope that the masked man he is after may not be Dent and that Dent has finally conquered his demons, something he struggles to do himself. When he does eventually track him down the two of them address the futility of ever trying to suppress the darker side of the psyche with Dent referring to Wayne's efforts to rehabilitate him as a 'joke' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 47). However, it is in the design of the conversation that follows, consisting of a sequential arc of eight specifically aligned panels, where the translinear panopticism of the medium is called on and the semantic value of reading along both a horizontal and vertical axis is disclosed. As explored above through the theories of Chandler, Silverman, Barthes, Cohn, and Groensteen a cross-disciplinary approach between mediums benefits from identifying roughly equivalent units of discourse, and the transferable unit that was selected was the sequence, which was then argued to be an equivalent for the sentence. While parsing a sequence of images can be problematic and will depend on any number of variables depending on the sequence it is possible here to divide this eight panel sequence into two four panel ones:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 47).

The first arc consists of Harvey Dent's bitter acknowledgment of the fact that neither psychology nor surgery are capable of exorcising the demon that occupies his soul as he points out how ineffective such endeavours have been:

Got the whole world to smile at me ... got them all to keep their lunches down when they saw my ... my face ... saying I was cured ... saying I was fixed ... Take a look ... have your laugh. I'm fixed alright At least both sides match ... Have your laugh, Batman – Take a look!  
(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 47).

In each panel of this sequence Batman's internalised stream of consciousness is woven in to complement Dent's rage, 'The scars go deep, too deep ... I close my eyes and listen. Not fooled by sight, I see him ... as he is' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 47). Thus, one sequence is conveying two contrasting trains of thought. At no point in this confessional sequence is Dent's face ever fully revealed, it is always half shrouded in shadow. The four panel sequence beneath this depicts Batman as a private audience to a former friend who has completely succumbed to the dark side. Here, sequential progression from left to right is similarly complemented in each panel by a progressive expansion of shadow across Batman's

face, to the point where the final panel depicts him in complete darkness. This is a very fitting visual allusion to the sense of subconscious eclipse his dark side commands. The Dent sequence contains Batman's internal monologue as he closes his eyes and 'sees' Dent for who he really is. However, in the sequence below it he vocalises his conclusions, 'I see ... a reflection, Harvey. A reflection' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 47).

In this sequence Batman admits to himself that he is not fooled by sight. Similarly, from a narrative perspective, the reader is not restricted to only one viewpoint. In the third panel of the first sequence Batman's eyes are closed and he visualises the extent to which Dent has become corrupted. What Miller has done here is capture an aspect of stream of consciousness in visual form. Dent's plastic surgery has not suddenly relapsed. Rather this is a visual interpretation of what lies beneath it. This is an ideal example of how a vertical reading can bring added depth to the story world. In the panel directly beneath the visualisation of Dent's disfigured face Miller breaks the rhythm of the sequential representation of Batman's face with a seemingly incongruous close-up of the same bat/demon that repeatedly haunts his thoughts. This establishes a subconscious mirroring effect as the visual track vertically aligns each figure's monstrous duality. Dent's disfiguration is played off against Wayne's obsessive nature.

While this visual dynamic establishes an aspect of affinity or empathy that Wayne feels for Dent's condition the fourth panel in each sequence breaks this sense of empathic alignment, a point of conclusion that is again emphasized through a vertical reading. In the fourth panel in the Dent sequence his head is lowered, his eyes are closed and the balloon containing his words is dominated by empty space rather than words. This is a defeated acknowledgement of what he has become and, yet, this realisation may be the first step towards a sense of acceptance and peace of mind, if nothing else there is a sense of finality to it. However, in the fourth panel of Batman's sequence his completely shrouded face makes

for a stark contrast against the burning yellow eyes and flame-filled mouth of the bat in the preceding panel. Dent's tragic struggle is extinguished and his role in the story is over, his head bowed, his eyes closed. The fire that burns in the Dark Knight's eyes, however, shows no sign of flickering and the overall sequence of eight panels, as well as the chapter itself, ends with two piercing white eye slits gazing out from the page, beckoning the next campaign in his obsessive one-man war. This layering of sequences and accrual of visual and verbal cues puts a contemporary, and medium-specific, spin on Barthes's earlier reference to reading a story in storeys. It also echoes Herman's observations on the duality of narrative strategies that the graphic novel is capable of exploiting. He identifies a dynamic where the non-verbal elements can play a more prominent role, whereby:

...the arrangement of characters in represented scenes, the shapes of speech balloons, and the representations of the scenes in panels that form part of larger sequences of images and textual elements, can convey information about the story-world that would have to be transmitted by purely verbal means in a novel or short story without a comparable image-track (Herman 2009, 107).

This example from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* shows how inserting an incongruous panel into a sequence stretches the side-by-side logic of contiguous images to the diegetic advantage of opening a window into the anti-hero's disjointed train of thought.

Echoing Herman's observations, such juxtaposition reveals information about the anti-hero's mindset that would otherwise have to be transmitted by purely textual means in a traditional novel and the process transfers very effectively to Rorschach in *Watchmen* too. In fact, Moore himself referred to this dynamic in a treatise which outlined his approach to writing for comics when he pointed out that:

Information can be presented visually in an efficient and measured fashion concerning character and environment that would take a lot of bulky description and exposition to convey with words alone. Also, since our current society has a greater visual orientation than a

literary one, a visual flow of narrative gives a much more immediate and involving sensory impact to the work in hand (Moore 2012, 5).

Thus, putting theory into practice, Rorschach's identity is only revealed half-way through the novel at the end of chapter five when he is apprehended and then sent to prison where he undergoes psychological evaluation. This involves sessions with a psychoanalyst who, fittingly, (or perhaps irresponsibly) uses a variety of Rorschach cards as a strategy to probe his patient's subconscious. The first session makes full use of the variance in reading paths available to the nine-panel grid layout of *Watchmen*'s pages. There is a sense of vertical, as well as horizontal, alignment established which allows semantic meaning to disregard conventional reading paths. The first panel in this sequence depicts a close-up of the Rorschach card handed to Kovacs. After staring at it with notable intensity in the third panel the following panel depicts the seemingly incongruous image of a dog's head, split down the middle, before the visual track returns to Kovacs' face and his response to his psychoanalyst that he sees, 'a pretty butterfly' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 1):



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 1).

From the reader's perspective the visual disruption caused by the image of the dog's head is similar to the sequence from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. Once again stream of consciousness is briefly converted into image form for the duration of one panel in order to capture a reflection of psychic resonance that strikes at the heart of the anti-hero's dark outlook. Sequence disruption of this sort also highlights the elliptical nature of the aforementioned gutter in the previous chapter and emphasises the level of closure needed to identify stages in the narrative where a panel is framed as a literal window into the protagonist's psyche. Operating on the power of suggestion, the first panel, depicting a Rorschach card, finds its visual correlate in the panel directly below it. Thus, a form of visual symmetry is established between both axes on the page which implies that a panoptic reading strategy may reveal useful clues about the identity of the man being analysed in this scene. The second vertical arrangement in this grid discloses the impenetrable surface that even Kovacs' unmasked face has become. Even though the psychoanalyst in this scene claims that he could look at Kovacs' 'fascinatingly ugly' face for hours it is quickly established that such an endeavour would yield misleading results for his evaluation reports (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 1). Kovacs stares back in the panel below and coldly delivers a deliberate misreading of the Rorschach card in his hand. This effectively sets this sequential arc up for its conclusion in the sixth panel. At this point Dr. Long expresses a sense of unease at Kovacs' intensity. However, in the panel directly above it, the intensity he himself should be bringing to the session is completely sidelined in favour of a moment of internalised reflection and self-promotion as he concludes, 'I'm convinced I can help him. No problem is beyond the grasp of a good psychoanalyst, and they tell me I'm very good. Good with people' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 1). When read vertically the interplay between the textual and visual tracks in this panel and the one beneath it set Dr. Long up for the erroneous conclusions he draws in relation to Kovacs' response to the Rorschach test - 'His responses to

the Rorschach blot tests were surprisingly bright and positive and healthy. I really think he might be getting better' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 1). This sequence takes place on the first page of chapter six and by establishing a play-off between a visual indication of the violence that lies beneath Kovacs' cold expression and Dr. Long's initial disinterest the stage is set for the eventual revelation of this anti-hero's dark and turbulent mindset.

By the time that Kovacs returns to the same Rorschach card in his sessions with Dr. Long he has revealed a lot of information about the abuse he experienced as a child, his motivations for becoming a loner, and the level of violence he meted out in his self-appointed role as a vigilante. To this end Dr. Long re-introduces him to the Rorschach card from their first session and this time the results are quite different:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 17).

The contrast between these two sequences effectively conveys an intersection between two perspectives on the same narrative. On the one hand there is Dr. Long's perspective who is ignorant at first as to the kind of man he is dealing with in these sessions

and on the other hand there is Rorschach's stream of consciousness, which is conveyed to the reader in single panel snap-shots of an initially disorientating nature. By applying a vertical and horizontal sense of symmetry to the sequential expression of each perspective Moore and Gibbons pull back the curtain on the relevance of this panel and the connection it has to the brutal propensity for violence lying behind Kovacs' cold and apathetic visage. Just like the sequence taken from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, the panel capturing a snapshot of the anti-hero's mindset shares a directly vertical relationship with the depiction of his face. This dynamic is further emphasized by the semantic link elicited between the blood flowing from the dog's head in the top panel and the depiction of Kovacs' face in the panel below in red. The initial and deliberate misreading from the first session has been swept aside and the visceral nature of the mind under scrutiny is disclosed. Indeed, in a stroke of symmetry that reflects both the card being analysed and the mask of the individual analysing it there is an additional symmetrical aspect to the panels in these contrasting sequences, one that only an awareness of an integrated vertical and horizontal reading could reveal. Both figures are facing each other across a table. Yet the visual perspective that is used in the first session shows each one gazing out from the page in the second and fifth panel respectively. Thus, from a structural perspective a vertical link is established by way of panel alignment. However, in so far as the actual scene is perceived by the reader's eye, line of sight engagement between analyst and patient is not depicted. However, in the second sequence this dynamic is realigned along a horizontal axis rather than the earlier vertical one. Here, in the fifth and sixth panels, barring the separative function of the gutter, both figures are facing each other as the full relevance of Kovacs' response to the test is announced. From a narrative perspective this is a clever way of manipulating the interplay between the vertical and horizontal axes in order to serve the interest of an important turning point in the story. In other words, only when Dr. Long drops his self-congratulatory demeanour and actually starts

paying attention to his patient does the process yield results and he sees Kovacs for who he really is. Indeed, in an interview with comics scholar George Khoury Moore explained the attraction of layering certain sequences in *Watchmen* with more than one perspective or narrative at once when he said that:

We started to get clever with symmetrical stuff in the Rorschach story, gradually. It had to be seen all at once rather than in a strictly linear way . . . there are some sequences that you've got two or three separate narratives all going on in the same sequence and occasionally linking up with each other in ambiguous ways or non-ambiguous ways . . . I could see that there were some interesting possibilities in having one narrative embedded in another, so that you could strike interesting sparks between the two (Khoury 2008, 112/113).

As testament to the overpowering effect this delayed realisation has on the psychoanalyst he too begins to demonstrate a darker outlook on life. Both of these Rorschach sequences, and the sequence taken from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, exploit the relationship between the vertical and horizontal axis in order to capture the essence of the anti-hero's mindset. However, in the case of Dr. Long that sense of identification is reflected on a dangerous level. It is almost as if the cost of closely scrutinising the dark realm of the anti-hero's mind is to become ensnared by that same realm yourself. In an illuminating occurrence of interdisciplinary happenstance the extent of this multimodal analysis of Walter Kovacs' visually triggered stream of consciousness can be twinned with a fascinating insight from Barthes. By co-opting his insights to scrutinise the effect that being psychoanalysed has on this complex anti-hero it makes sense to accommodate for the fact that:

There is a plurality and a co-existence of lexicons in one and the same person, the number and identity of these lexicons forming in some sort a person's idiolect. The image, in its connotation, is thus constituted by an architecture of signs drawn from a variable depth of lexicons (of idiolects); each lexicon, no matter how 'deep', still being coded, if, as is thought today, the psyche itself is articulated like a language; indeed, the further one 'descends' into the psychic depths of an individual, the more rarified and the more classifiable the signs become – what could be more systematic than the readings of Rorschach tests? The variability of the readings, therefore, is no threat to the 'language' of the image if it be admitted that that language is composed of idiolects and, lexicons, and sub-codes. The image

is penetrated through and through by the system of meaning, in exactly the same way as man is articulated to the very depths of his being in distinct languages (Barthes 1977, 47).

Bearing this complex hypothesis in mind, as testament to the subliminal impact that these efforts to descend into the psychic depths of Walter Kovacs have on his analyst it can be seen that the more time he spends trying to analyse him the more his initial optimism begins to fade. Indeed, the process results in his own psyche being penetrated, and then rearticulated, to accommodate for the invasion of a much darker lexicon of subconscious imagery. Thus, the initially enthusiastic therapist who once believed, ‘A success here could make my reputation’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 1) has been replaced by a very sombre nihilist as the co-existence of lexicons in one simple Rorschach pattern shatters his fragile optimism. Fittingly, the chapter ends with a close-up of the same Rorschach pattern that it opened with:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 28).

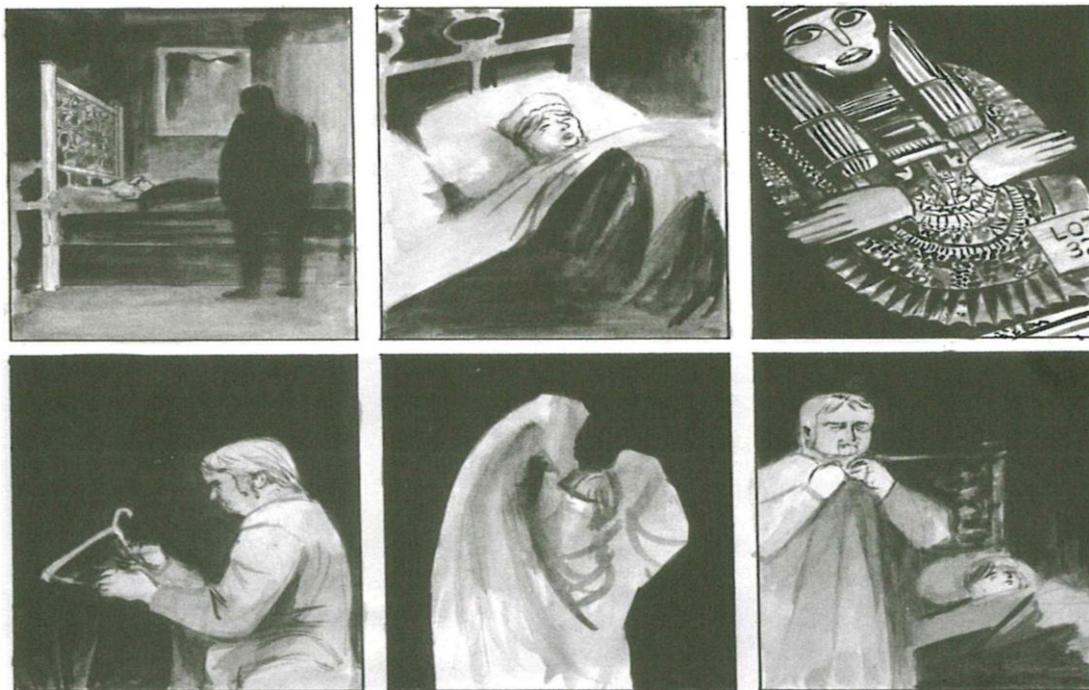
As the reader's attention moves across the horizontal axis the card is magnified. This is an ideal symbiosis of narratology and psychology as Groensteen's triad of panels consisting of past, present and future is imbued with a powerful psychoanalytic resonance. The proximity of this close-up technique is so immediate in the panels following this triptych that eventually all that can be seen is the blackness within the inkblot. In other words, a visual correlate is established to explain what has happened to the analyst who got drawn too deep into the mind

of his patient. Thus, unknowingly, Dr. Long's transformation begins with his career-motivated desire to help Kovacs. This transformation is then finally realised at the end of the chapter by engaging with the very same Rorschach card that revealed Kovacs chilling take on the meaning of life. The consequences of this process have a powerful effect on him, as seen in his final reflection:

I sat on the bed. I looked at the Rorschach blot. I tried to pretend it looked like a spreading tree, shadows pooled beneath it, but it didn't. It looked more like a dead cat I once found, the fat, glistening grubs writhing blindly, squirming over each other, frantically tunnelling away from the light. But even that is avoiding the real horror. The horror is this: in the end, it is simply a picture of empty meaningless blackness. We are alone. There is nothing else (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 28).

Barthes hypothesized that, 'The language of the image is not merely the totality of utterances emitted, it is also the totality of the utterances received: the language must include the "surprises" of meaning' (Barthes 1977, 47). By analysing the symmetrical, and semantic, connections between the vertical and horizontal axes in these scenes the kind of visual utterance being emitted by Rorschach's mind is gradually disclosed, but much to the horror of his analyst (yet much to the understanding of the fluent reader) so too is a multiplicity of visual utterances received. Fittingly, this sequence from *Watchmen* ends with a quote from Nietzsche, 'Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 28). For Bruce Wayne the reflective process that reveals a monster within is confirmed by talking to Harvey Dent. Walter Kovacs' acknowledgement of his monstrous self is triggered by a Rorschach blot and his discussions with an analyst. William Gull, however, embodies the anti-hero who does not just stare into this abyss but one who is swallowed by it completely as the process drives him insane.

Thus, the final example of employing a panoptic reading strategy between a horizontal and vertical axis in the interest of character development will be taken from Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell*. After the novel's protagonist experiences an aphasic and hallucinogenic stroke early on in the story he becomes increasingly susceptible to mythological symbolism and uses it to validate the dark task he takes on to eradicate five prostitutes from the streets of London who threaten to bring scandal onto the royal family. Directly after disembowelling Polly Nicholls, Gull announces that her body 'was full of light' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Five, 33). This is an early indication that he is prone to visions that no one else is aware of. However, for the reader, the earliest *visual* allusion to this blurring of reality and the realm of mythological symbolism occurs when he observes his wife in bed after returning home from this first murder:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Five, 39).

Once again a seemingly incongruous image/panel is located in a sequence which calls on further powers of deduction on the reader's part. There is no visual cue anywhere else on the page to explain the insertion of this Egyptian iconography (although a visually attuned reader

will recognise it from a visit Gull pays earlier in the chapter to an Egyptian mummy in Sotheby's Auction Room) (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Five, 18). Nonetheless, a discordant panel is slipped into the flow of the sequence to indicate the psychological divergence taking place within the anti-hero's stream of consciousness. According to Groensteen introducing incidents of difference like these into the dominant visual track, 'is generally motivated by a will to expand the expression of a key moment in the story; for example it will aim to make the reader feel something that shares the same sense of disequilibrium, dread, or exultation attributed to the characters' (Groensteen 2007, 48). Thus, when the sequential format is disrupted by the inclusion of such panels its structuring function begins to share a unique bond with its expressive function (Groensteen 2007, 48). In this case this technique helps to establish a connection to an alter-ego within Gull that exhibits increasing difficulty in telling the difference between reality and mythological symbolism and just like the previous two anti-heroes this process is located in the narratological/psychological intrusion of an incongruous image that challenges the semantic coherence of the sequence as a whole.

In the previous examples from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* a process of recognition or acknowledgement takes place in the anti-hero relating to a direct confrontation with a form of visual catalyst which triggers a psychological response. From a narrative perspective this awakening is emphasised along the vertical axis. Bruce Wayne's totemic bat is located directly beneath the depiction of Two-Face's disfigured face and the butchered dog that marked Walter Kovacs' transition to Rorschach is located beneath a panel containing a Rorschach card. Exemplifying his psychotic mindset, however, Gull's awakening is not triggered by a living catalyst, rather his form of projected identification is initiated through a silent union with the mutilated corpse of his final victim. In comics theory much work has been carried out in relation to the gutter with reference to the purpose it

serves on a horizontal level. However, in the respective layouts being discussed in these graphic novels one cannot ignore the fact that the cognitive relations of the gutter may also be applied to panels above and below each other. A form of fearful symmetry is enacted which configures the page as a blueprint for the dark minds being exposed therein. This strategy is employed in *From Hell* when a psychic confrontation with the full scope of Gull's insanity takes place:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 19).

Of the three sequences discussed so far this one presents the toughest challenge to the causal relations of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. In the previous sequences a precedent for each visual catalyst exists earlier in the story. In the sequence taken from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* this is not the reader's first time encountering the close up of the bat's face that haunts Wayne's thoughts and, similarly, the reader is more than familiar with variations of Rorschach patterns due to the amount of times the motif appeared previously in any panel depicting the eponymous anti-hero's mask. However, in the sequence from *From Hell* a

process of identification is affiliated with an image that the reader has not yet encountered in the novel. Indeed, one may be forgiven for incorporating an element of dystaxia into the reading process here as the image literally stops one in his/her tracks. In this case a vertically oriented reading strategy is crucial as the only semantic connection that the third panel would seem to have with the sixth is the relative placement and posture of the figures in each one. In the line of explanatory cues the only sense of precedent the reader has for such incongruous imagery is a fleeting reference six chapters earlier to a ‘mother goddess’ named Tiamat (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 24). The anti-hero’s connection to myth will be explored in chapters five and six but it will suffice in this instance to briefly outline that in the Babylonian creation myth featuring Tiamat her innards are torn apart and her body is slashed in two by the male god Marduk. Gull precisely re-enacts this mutilation as he goes to work on Marie’s body. According to myth, from one half of her body Marduk, ‘made the vault of the heavens, from the other half, the floor of the ocean’ (Cotterel and Storm 2003, 326). In Gull’s case, following on from the onset of aphasia caused by a stroke, he transposes both himself and his victim Marie into this creation myth and psychically re-imagines himself as the manifestation of the god Marduk. This connection is further emphasized due to the absence of text in the fifth panel, the vision has literally stopped him in his tracks and he pauses in his mutilation of Marie’s corpse. This effectively captures the process of inward reflection Gull goes through before he, and in turn the reader, can only account for the figures in the third panel due to the anchoring presence of text as he connects the vision to, ‘The Myth of Tiamat and Marduk, the Enuma Elish . . . extraordinary. Absolutely extraordinary’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 19). Thus, just as Gull is visibly taken aback by his eventual identification with an image that has sifted up from the depths of his unconscious so too does the reader reassert control of the narrative by drawing conclusions based on his or her comprehension of the unique interdependence between every axis on the page.

## 2.5 Conclusion

There are clear echoes in each of these sequences of Humphrey's analysis of stream of consciousness techniques and they are visually emphasized through the interplay of both a horizontal and vertical method of reading. In each example the dominant visual track is briefly ruptured by the inclusion of a panel that travels inward into the unconscious of each protagonist. To this end it bears repeating that, 'stream of consciousness is not technique for its own sake. It is based on a realization of the force of the drama that takes place in the minds of human beings' and that is precisely what the inclusion of such panels achieves (Humphrey 1954, 21). Additionally, if a sequence/syntagm is determined by how its terms are selected and positioned, then forcing the reader to negotiate the purpose of panels that appear to fall out of sync with the dominant visual track will lead him or her to apply an additional level of deductive reasoning to the relevance of that panel. Indeed, it may even result in incorporating an element of dystaxia into the reading process as the reader randomly rescans the page in order to find a visual correlate for this seemingly out-of-place visual cue.

This brief structural breaking reminds one of Humphrey's argument that in conveying a protagonist's stream of consciousness in a narrative its emergence can operate on the barest suggestion of connections, with its focus remaining on any one thing but momentarily. Meanwhile the narrative consequences of disrupting the semantics of linear causality by inserting a seemingly incongruous panel into a sequence serve to amalgamate traditional literary theory with comics theory. Structural breaks initiated by the inclusion of such panels call to mind the incessant play of potentials Roland Barthes mentions, whose varying falls bring to each graphic novel a sense of dynamism and energy that tests the cognitive powers of its readers. Thus, as can be seen from the examples selected for analysis in this chapter, 'The horizontal vectorization that the strip promotes is confounded and dialectically balanced by small vertical syntagms which constitute local infractions to the supposed linearity of the

reading process' (Groensteen 2013, 46). Ultimately, by challenging traditional concepts of how the navigation and orientation of a page can be read, narrative strategies such as the ones seen in these three sequences conform to Terry Eagleton's conclusions on the mutable nature of all narrative. As multimodal fluency increases the reader of these graphic novels will bring an acquired skill-set to comprehending the variances between vertical and horizontal navigation. While coming to understand that there are no hard and fast rules as to how these two axes intersect it can only be of benefit to be mindful that at any stage one axis may share privileged relations with the other. The dynamism of each narrative is maintained by the versatile way each one employs a panoptic sense of exposition to portray the psychological intensity of their respective protagonists. Fittingly, as Eagleton pointed out:

In applying a code to the text, we may find that it undergoes revision and transformation in the reading process; continuing to read with this same code, we discover that it now 'produces' a different text, which in turn modifies the code by which we are reading it, and so on. This dialectical process is in principle infinite; and if this is so then it undermines any assumption that once we have identified the proper codes for the text our task is finished. Literary texts are 'code-productive' and 'code-transgressive' as well as 'code-confirming': they may teach us new ways of reading, not just reinforce the ones with which we come equipped (Eagleton 2008, 108/109).

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how an incorporative and unidirectional scansion of sequences on a same-page basis has the code-transgressing potential to reward an attuned reader with additional insights into the mindset of the anti-hero. It has been argued that this process teaches the reader how to engage with the polysemy of a sequential, yet panoptic, page structure. However, this process is taken a crucial step further when the global nature of each of these graphic novels is revealed. Therefore, in order to fully appreciate the relationship these novels depict between narrative technique and the ubiquitous psychological resonance of their respective anti-heroes then each one must be analysed as an intricately woven braid.

## Chapter Three:

### Fearful Symmetry: Navigating the Fabric of a Braided Narrative and Employing Plurivectoral Reading Strategies to Track the Anti-Hero's Stream of Consciousness

#### 3.1 Introduction

By addressing the variation in reading strategies that are capable of establishing trans-linear links between panels that are not just located side-by-side it was proposed that a relationship between the alignment of the panels on the page and the stream of consciousness of each graphic novel's anti-hero exists. This has been directed towards the establishment of a level of fluency with the medium that can train the reader's eye to identify aspects in each novel where the actual layout can contribute to the story world. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* focus on anti-heroes who are in a state of conflict with their own personal demons and it is to each novel's credit that such psychological discordance can be invoked by drawing on imaginative and highly mimetic reading strategies. To this effect, the final stage in highlighting the connection between narrative design and the anti-hero mindset is enacted by engaging with each graphic novel as an interdependent network, or what is referred to as a braided narrative. To this end this chapter will adopt the same strategy as chapter two. First a theoretical precedent attempting to explain the purpose of a braided narrative will be outlined. This premise will then be applied on a contextual level to the stream of consciousness techniques that are used to apply psychological depth to Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull. As with the previous chapter, all of this will be done in the interest of highlighting how narrative design and layout can be used to mirror the discordant psychology and stream of consciousness of each novel's anti-hero. In order to establish the theoretical framework that will permit such contextual analysis this chapter will look at a number of aspects of the braided narrative.

It will be explained that this term refers to an ability on the reader's part to perceive each narrative as a unified whole whereby panels separated by any distance across a story's duration have the potential to share a privileged and associative connection with one another. Although this bond relates specifically to the unique nature of the medium the initial outline of a literary and narratological precedent will again be drawn on here from the work of Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette. As such, it will be posited that their theories on narrative as a weave, or braid, is re-imagined and given a contemporary slant by scholars working in the field of comics theory. This section will be followed by a cautionary distinction between what will be referred to as the conventional monovectoral reading of a traditional novel in contrast to what Groensteen refers to as the plurivectoral reading that the graphic novel as a braided narrative evokes. This important distinction furthers the need for a sense of navigational fluency which is required on the reader's part when reading these graphic novels. Once again Barthes and Genette will be used to establish a narratological foundation for this distinction. Here Genette's referral to a narrative's omnitemporal potential and Barthes's concept of a univocal reading of a text will be contrasted with Thierry Groensteen's argument for an interpretative reading of graphic narrative. According to him, navigating the medium of sequential narrative in this way allows the image to exploit the full potential of its signification in a manner that can resonate throughout a novel. This navigational component will then be used to further the argument initiated in chapter two that narrative design and the portrayal of the anti-hero's stream of consciousness share a unique, medium-specific bond. The purpose of carrying this argument over from the previous chapter is to demonstrate that the navigational dynamic initiated on a page-based level can only be fully appreciated when applied to each graphic novel in its entirety.

The third and fourth sections of this theoretical outline will deal specifically with the operations of the braid. The third section will argue the relevance of applying Barthes enigma

stage to these graphic novels. Here it will be explained how the disruption caused by the unpredictable appearance of initially disorientating panels in these graphic novels is eventually allayed by the reader as he or she moves through the story. Each of these novels deploys visual/psychological revelatory flashpoints that lead to character development and it is not until they have reached their respective conclusions that the significance of certain panels, or the relationship between them, comes to light. This component of the medium will be dealt with in close connection to the fourth section of the chapter. Here the use of repetition will be explored. In the interest of navigating each one of these graphic novels as a braided narrative, it will be seen that the repetition of certain visual motifs throughout each one has the effect of thematically binding each narrative by enhancing the psychological ubiquity of its respective protagonist. Accordingly, use of what is known as the citation effect in the medium will be explained and the role it plays in enhancing an incorporative and trans-linear reading path will be emphasised. This use of repetition often calls on a visualised sense of retroactive determination whereby the meaning that lies behind recurring visual motifs can be re-contextualised depending on how often they are used and where they are located in the story-world. As will be demonstrated, this will involve a close reading for each novel's anti-hero that uses the braid to conclude the proposed connection between visual layout and character psychology.

### **3.2 Global Design: Establishing a Theoretical Precedent to Promote the Graphic Novel as an Inter-Dependent Network**

In the previous chapter it was proposed that the graphic novel is capable of conveying a trans-linear form of narrative owing to the visual and panoptic page format presented to the reader. It was argued that incorporating more than one reading path, in other words, moving beyond the conventional westernised 'Z' path of left to right and top to bottom, allowed the reader to unlock key points of psychological and diegetic resonance. This established a

dynamic whereby a discordant reading pattern could be employed to emphasize an unstable state of mind. All of this was used to outline the cognitive fluency required on the reader's part to be able to construct a unified narrative based on a variety of reading strategies. To this effect there is an important dynamic yet to be covered which is referred to as braiding (Groensteen 2007, 6). Only by drawing attention to the ways in which certain panels enjoy privileged relations with other panels that are interspersed throughout each novel can the ubiquitous impact of each anti-hero's stream of consciousness be adequately gauged. Thus, the final component that defines the symbiotic relationship in each graphic novel between structural design and the visualisation of thought is their ability to establish a semantic connection between distant panels and use that connection as the thread that binds each one together to form a cohesive psychological framework.

A lot of the groundwork in relation to the role a braided narrative plays has been laid down by Thierry Groensteen. For example, in *Comics and Narration* he points out that:

...comic art is not ontologically destined only to perpetuate a canonical model dominated by the categories of narration and legibility, but that its constituent features – the association of image and text, the spatio-topical apparatus for the display of images – lend themselves to the exploration of new forms, new configurations, new ambitions (Groensteen 2013, 31).

One of the key terms from this quote is Groensteen's referral to the idea of new configurations as it carries on from the argument proposed in the previous chapter that reading a graphic novel is very much a navigational experience unlike anything experienced in other media. Accordingly, it was hypothesised in the previous chapter that sequential comprehension involved navigating the page in a variety of directions in order to connect internalised, yet visually narrated, moments of psychological disruption within the anti-hero's mind. The concept of a braided narrative, then, is simply an expansion of this navigational

dynamic across the graphic novel as a whole. Silke Horstkotte and Nancy Pedri emphasise this incorporative dynamic when they note that:

A narratology geared towards graphic narrative necessarily has to account for a number of semiotic features (including) . . . . . the “braiding” (Groensteen 146) of graphic narrative that puts every panel in a potential, if not actual, relation with every other, leading to a densification of detail . . . Groensteen specifically develops the concept in order to integrate the two dimensions of graphic narrative’s spatial composition and the temporality of its reading (147), thus solidifying its place as an important building block in the cognitive model of comics narratology (Horstkotte, Pedri 2011, 336).

The temporality of a graphic narrative’s reading that Horstkotte refers to here is a temporality that moves forwards — in keeping with conventional narrative progression — but also backwards, as the reader responds to cognitive points of visual resonance that trigger memories from earlier panels in the story. Thus, the multidirectional reading dynamic employed by these graphic novels contemporaneously adapts Gerard Genette’s hypothesis that stories which employ a recurring use of temporal discordance (in this case panels of a psychological and anachronistic nature) demonstrate, ‘narrative’s capacity for temporal autonomy,’ as it expresses its ability, ‘to disengage its arrangement from all dependence, even inverse dependence, on the chronological sequence of the story it tells’ (Genette 1980, 84). The work undertaken by Mark Currie in his analysis of the relationship between narrative chronology and teleology, ‘first within the arrangement of the “whole” (holos) and, second, within the disarrangements open to “plot” (mythos)’, offers a useful insight into this global dynamic. He maintains that there are:

...two different kinds of question about the relation between forwards and backwards in narrative, the first of which is concerned with the work as a whole, and the second with the order in which events are arranged and therefore experienced by a readership or an audience (Currie 2015, 38/39).

The interplay between past, present, and future that ensues as a result of this temporal dynamic, one that may often require a reader to flip back and forth through these novels, is often referred to as a global reading — a reading that calls on a level of fluency capable of recalling connections between story fragments that are dispersed across its entire network. Thus, in a medium-specific take on Genette’s concept of temporal autonomy Groensteen clarifies that in comics:

...braiding deploys itself simultaneously in two dimensions, requiring them to collaborate with each other: synchronically, that of the co-presence of panels on the surface of the same page; and diachronically, that of the reading, which recognises in each new term of a series a recollection or an echo of an anterior term. A tension can be established between these two logics, but far from ending in conflict, it resolves itself here in a semantic enrichment and a densification of the “text” of the comic. (The term *braiding* is inscribed in the topos that habitually associates notions of tissue or threads with the text) (Groensteen 2007, 147).

For the reader of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *From Hell*, and *Watchmen* specifically, this diachronic reading is an important factor to negotiate with regards to how dispersed information is processed and assembled on a cognitive level. As Groensteen explains, ‘the braiding effect that operates between spatially distant images can . . . assume as much importance as the friction between adjacent images orchestrated by breakdown’ (Groensteen 2007, 35). The form of diachronic reading that he posits here is one that involves identifying the connection between autonomous panels and sequences that are arbitrarily interspersed throughout the network. Effectively, the existence of a temporal discordance or autonomous instance, in the form of what initially appears to be an incongruent panel, is an effective bridging point between narrative technique and a psychologically disturbed state of mind. Therefore, discordances in temporal narrative design of this type are capable of pinpointing important moments of psychological disparity. This subsequently reflects on a diegetic level the portrayal of an aspect of stream of consciousness which is capable at any

moment of falling out of sync with rational thought - which is precisely what Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull experience on a recurring level.

Indeed, in promoting the scope of fluency required to incorporate a global reading of these graphic novels it is worth recalling how it was demonstrated in the previous chapter that some of the earliest forms of speculative commentary on comic strips could be found in the work of literary theorists Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette. In fact, in *Narrative Discourse*, Genette proposed that the comic strip lends itself to, and even invites, ‘a kind of global and synchronic look – or at least a look whose direction is no longer determined by the sequence of images’ (Genette 1980, 34). Once again an element of interdisciplinary caution is necessary here as the as the medium has developed considerably from the period in which Barthes and Genette made their observations on it. Nevertheless, this global model is appropriated by Groensteen when he outlines a need for, ‘a global comprehension of the comics system’, and it is then reinforced when he identifies page layout as the first stage, ‘in the service of a global artistic project’ (Groensteen 2007, 92,103). Consequently, in *The Visual Language of Comics* Neil Cohn explains, again echoing Genette’s rationale, that, ‘our understanding comes entirely from the global sequence. In order to make connections in a braided narrative we must have a system that extends beyond linear connections between panels’ (Cohn 2013, 67). This very much goes back to the point made in the first chapter that a high level of reader complicity is necessary in order to cognitively align the discrete components that go into the production of a graphic novel. Indeed, it is especially relevant to a study of the medium’s ability to convey a stream of consciousness as individual panels which act as important windows into the psyche of their respective protagonists may be glossed over on first encountering them due to the incongruous impact they have within a sequence. Therefore, only a multimodal degree of fluency with the narrative role of the braid attenuates reader reception to the point where he or she can signpost recurring psychological

threads within the overall weave of each story. Investment of this sort into the complexity of a braided narrative in many ways echoes Robert Humphrey's observations from the previous chapter that a protagonist's psyche may focus, 'on any one thing but momentarily . . . (and) is provided for by the power of one thing to suggest another through an association of qualities in common or in contrast, wholly or partially – even to the barest suggestion' (Humphrey 1954, 43). In the interest of applying a global reading strategy to the stream of consciousness techniques applied to the anti-heroes in these graphic novels, the momentary manner in which each protagonist's psyche is represented inevitably calls on reading skills that require one to acknowledge and collate the significance of key panels. From either perspective, (in other words, the visualised portrayal of a character's mindset or the challenge laid down to the reader to make sense of it on a narrative scale) the appearance of such panels is sudden, largely unannounced, and often captures a visualised moment of introspection without any accompanying text. Subsequently, these moments are often only valued on a retrospective level when their reappearance takes place further on in the story and they are woven into the narrative fabric as a whole. This dynamic can then be used to convey a sense of psychological resonance that, although unpredictable in appearance, gradually establishes a consistent, even ubiquitous, tone. In comics theory, Groensteen attempted to convey this level of investment in the totality of a virtual world when he proposed that:

The crossing of frames becomes a largely unconscious and mechanical operation, masked by an investment (absorption) in the virtual world postulated by the story. The diegesis, this fantastic virtual image, which comprises all of the panels, transcends them, and is where the reader can reside . . . the multiplicity and spread of these images, the ubiquity of the characters, makes comics truly open to a consistent world (Groensteen 2007, 11).

Much like Humphrey's referral to the barest suggestion, Groensteen claims that the largely unconscious and mechanical operation of moving from one panel to another induces a sense of absorption in the virtual story world. One of the potential functions of such

absorption in this case is to bestow a dark and pervading mood onto the characters that reside within it. This element of cognitive investment, as Groensteen calls it, enables the reader to apprehend the graphic novel ‘as a networked mode that allows each panel to hold privileged relations with any others and at any distance’ (Groensteen 2007, 126). This resonates on an interdisciplinary level with Roland Barthes’s claim that, ‘the metaphor of the Text is that of the network; if the Text extends itself, it is as a result of a combinatory systematic’ (Barthes 1977, 161). For the graphic novel this openly navigable kind of networked modality visually emphasises the encompassing command of the braid and as such speaks directly to the semantic enrichment of the overall reading experience by permitting every panel to exist, potentially if not actually, in relation with each of the others.

### **3.3 A Plural Way of Reading: A Cautionary Note on the Importance of Distinguishing between a Monovectoral and a Plurivectoral Reading of the Graphic Novel as a Braided Narrative**

According to Belgian theorist Jan Baetens, ‘the book induces an undeniable *vectorization* of discourse; consecrating a linear, or more exactly monovectorized, reading, that distinguishes (and sometimes discriminates) a start and an end, an *incipit* and an *explicit*, a first and a last of the cover’ (Groensteen 2007, 147). For the reader, there is a potential problem with relying on a monovectoral approach to perceive a plurivectoral network of spatially interspersed, panels. Returning to the point raised in chapters one and two, this problem relates once again to the level of fluency a reader has with the medium. Thus, in applying the braid dynamic to these graphic novels, fluency in this case concerns the participatory role that he or she must play in semantically collating panels that depict any instantiation of conscious or subconscious thought. As Baetens asks in relation to the complexity of such an incorporative and navigational approach to the medium, ‘Is the reader

reading or (locally or globally) rereading? Is the collecting, organizing and interpreting of the signs that are being read successful, satisfying, painful, impossible etc?’ (Baetens 2011, 105).

In other words, there is a further element of perception necessary in order for the reader to be aware of the semantic links that exist between specific panels that are not located on the same page. The purpose of analysing the braid is to explore how it may serve the anachronistic portrayal of the anti-hero’s stream of consciousness. Any panel that unveils an aspect of psychological insight into the anti-hero’s mindset reinforces one kind of recurring thread within each novel’s overall weave. Establishing this kind of common ground with respect to such a multimodal medium is important because it attenuates the scope of research to a particular theme and once a theoretical justification for the function of a braided narrative has been established this theme can then be explored in detail. So from the outset it is important to note that there exists the possibility that the reader may let slip unnoticed specific visual cues which highlight the telescopic relationship that exists between these distanced panels. This is where the linear, or monovectorized, reading evoked by the bookish form can fall short of preparing one for the sense of privileged connection shared by certain panels within a graphic novel. Therefore, in navigating the plurivectoral and psychological reading strategies that *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* employ it is useful to first point out a cautionary precedent set in literary theory which addresses the limitations that a conventionally linear reading, or analysis, can impose on a text.

In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette argues that a writer is able to perceive, ‘the unifying significance of his story’, whereby:

...he never ceases to hold all of its threads simultaneously, to apprehend simultaneously all of its places and all of its moments, to be capable of establishing a multitude of “telescopic” relationships amongst them: a ubiquity that is spatial but also temporal, an “omnitemporality” (Genette 1980, 78).

In applying a narratological observation like this to these graphic novels one needs to ask to what extent this omnitemporal ubiquity is made apparent to the reader. Effectively, a successful reading of a braided narrative is one that allows the reader a similar ability to perceive that same unifying significance that Genette refers to. In other words, to locate the reader in such a way as to unlock the same sense of simultaneous apprehension described by him as he or she identifies each narrative's relevant psychological threads.

However, Genette draws attention to the level of awareness necessary in navigating the spatio-temporal aspect of a narrative and he expresses a sense of caution when he points out that a narrating situation is:

...a complex whole within which analysis, or simply description, cannot differentiate except by ripping apart a tight web of connections among the narrating act, its protagonists, its spatio-temporal determinations, its relationship to the other narrating situations involved in the same narrative etc (Genette 1980, 215).

There would seem to be an implication here that the consequences of isolating, by analysing, individual events within the overall weave of a narrative may result in one losing sight of how such events are ultimately integrated as contributing strands to a tight web of connections. In other words, the kind of reading where narration and navigation (on a plurivectoral scale and across the novel as a whole) enjoy a sense of privileged interdependence. Indeed, with regard to the sense of awareness necessary to map the complexity of an omni-directional narrative Roland Barthes applied a similar degree of caution as Genette to what he refers to as a univocal reading of a text, a term which will be adapted here to read as a precedent for Jan Baeten's contemporary use of the aforementioned term monovectorized in relation to reading a comic. Notably, Barthes used a braid analogy to emphasize the grouping of multiple codes which come together to form a narrative and he

highlighted the limitations of negotiating such an entity from only one perspective when he pointed out that:

The grouping of codes, as they enter into the work, into the movement of the reading, constitute a braid (text, fabric, braid: the same thing); each thread, each code, is a voice: these braided – or braiding – voices form the writing . . . The text, in short, is a fetish; and to reduce it to the unity of meaning, by a deceptively univocal reading, is to cut the braid (Barthes 1990, 160).

There are important similarities here between Genette's and Barthes's theories and it will be demonstrated that their application to the narrative strategies being analysed in these graphic novels is a valid one. They both emphasize the potential frailty that a braided narrative embodies, whereby a monovectoral reading can have the affect of attenuating a story's openly navigable and interdependent structure, much to its detriment. Much like analysing a spider's web one strand at a time until one is left with little concept of what the original structure looked like. Thus, in the interdisciplinary spirit of this thesis both theorists' arguments bear relevance because contemporary analysis of braided narratives in comics theory also highlights a similar note of caution. In this spirit, Groensteen exposes the inadequacy of what he refers to as:

...standard readings, which privilege, in each image, the enunciable quality, (and) flatten the semantic richness of the image to profit from its immediate narrative functions . . . (whereby) only an interpretative reading allows the image to deploy all of its significations and resonances (Groensteen 2007, 127).

In order to tap the potential of such an interdisciplinary premise it is important to ask what the consequences of cutting the braid by allying oneself to a singular reading path means to an analysis of the stream of consciousness techniques deployed in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *From Hell*, and *Watchmen*. Thus, a univocal reading may prove to be inadequate if one is to try to piece together the disparate and unpredictable nature of panels that represent psychological flashpoints. Given the paced infusion of psychological resonance

that each braided narrative commands, if the reader is to attempt to negotiate each novel's diachronic layout, locate the necessary thread(s) of consciousness, and form a comprehensive profile of each protagonist, then he or she must be attuned to the interpretative reading that Groensteen describes above. Thus, for *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *From Hell*, and *Watchmen* the first step in undertaking a reading that allows the image 'to deploy all of its significations and resonances' involves pinpointing where the relevant psychological threads in each braided narrative begin (Groensteen 2007, 127).

### **3.4 Visual Warning Signs: Using Anachrony to Instantiate Episodes of Psychological Disruption in the Anti-Hero Mindset**

In *Narrative Discourse* Genette reserves the general term 'anachrony' to designate, 'all forms of discordance between the two temporal orders of story and narrative' and he explains that, 'it can reach into the past or the future either more or less far from the "present" moment (that is, from the moment in the story when the narrative was interrupted to make room for the anachrony)' (Genette 1980, 48). He then designates the temporal distance that the anachrony travels into either the past or the future of the story world as its 'reach' (Genette 1980, 48). This is an attempt to quantify narrative's ability to stage a shift in focus, and for Genette, that shift is determined on a temporal level. By adapting Genette's description of anachrony to serve an analysis of braided narratives, what is being argued here in relation to thematically navigating these graphic novels is that an anachrony's reach can also be used to visually relay arbitrary points of unexpected psychological disruption within the overall network of the story. To clarify, Genette claims that an anachrony is capable of reaching into the past or the future. The argument being proposed here is that it can also be used to visualise arresting glimpses into a protagonist's mind. As comics theorist Peter R. Sattler points out, 'comics . . . exist on a fluid experiential boundary between insides and outsides, between the experience of imagining a world and the experience of seeing it', so

effectively, the medium is capable of calling up a character's dreams, memories, or premonitions but doing so in a way that makes those experiences visible (Ball and Kuhlman 2010, 213). Thus, pinpointing visual anachronies that attempt to document the unpredictable immediacy of an internalised stream of thought becomes a kind of memory game which, 'depends on the persistence of the memory of pages already turned, . . . (whereby) the reader conserves all this useful information for the intelligibility of the narrative situation without the successive images needing to repeat (Groensteen 2007, 35/19). For the reader, encountering anachronies of a visual nature and conserving them for the intelligibility of a psychological analysis can have a disorientating effect, all the more so if they are depicted in panels that do not contain the anchoring presence of text. Arguably, then, the most disorientating aspect of mapping such anachronisms begins with the first time the reader is faced with one.

The introductions to the respective anti-heroes in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *From Hell*, and *Watchmen* are conveyed by way of a first person stream of consciousness narration, for which there is no build up or indication of what is about to be disclosed. For example, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* opens with an ambiguous voice-over that corresponds to a sequence of panels conveying a race car tournament on the verge of disaster. The as yet unidentified driver notes how:

I've got the home stretch to myself when the readings stop making sense. I switch to manual . . . but the computer crosses its own circuits and refuses to let go. I coax it. It shoves hot needles in my face and tries to make me blind. I'm in charge now and I like it. Then the front end lurches, all wrong. I know what's coming. I've got just under two seconds to shut this mess down and forfeit the race. The engine, angry, argues the point with me. The finish line is close, it roars. Too close. The left front tire decides to turn all on its own. I laugh at it and jerk the wheel to the right. The nose digs up a chunk of macadam. I look at it . . . then straight into the eyes of the sun (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 2).

The focus of the narrative track accompanying this sequence is on one driver in particular as he accepts the inevitability of his impending demise. Early in the sequence a voice communicates with the driver over the radio and addresses him as Bruce. This disorientating, fast-paced sequence takes place on the first page of the graphic novel and apart from the fact that the reader has opened a Batman graphic novel there is no immediate sense of location in relation to the story-world. All there is to go on is the depiction of a race tournament on the verge of disaster in which the visibly aged driver, presumably Bruce Wayne, is about to meet an imminent and fiery death. In the interest of analysing his stream of consciousness and its portrayal in a braided narrative, what is of most significance in this sequence is his reaction to the danger he is in and the impression that he seems to be at a point in his life where he has made peace with the concept of his own death as he concludes that:



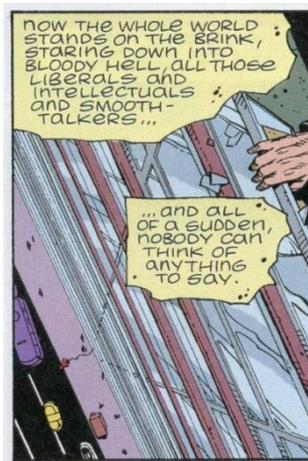
(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 1).

How exactly Bruce Wayne has reached this point of view is yet to be revealed, yet as opening statements go, it will have lasting consequences on the remainder of the novel. Indeed, the introduction to *Watchmen* is no less ambiguous. Once again the first page opens with an internal monologue, this time taken from the pages of a journal belonging to a character named Rorschach. Fragments of this journal entry are used as the narrative track which accompanies a seemingly unrelated sequence of panels that use an omniscient birds-eye view

of a busy metropolitan city sidewalk and street. The entries are depicted in what appear to be a torn fragment style, almost as if they had been ripped from the pages of the journal itself and the tone conveyed within them reinforces this violent motif:

Dog carcass in alley this morning, tire tread on burst stomach. This city is afraid of me. I have seen its true face. The streets are extended gutters and the gutters are full of blood and when the drains finally scab over, all the vermin will drown. The accumulated filth of all their sex and murder will foam up about their waists and all the whores and politicians will look up and shout “save us!” . . . and I’ll look down and whisper “no” (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 1).

The short, staccato rhythm of these sentences displays a similarly detached regard for death, only in Rorschach’s case it is more the death of others he is relating to and not his own. Nevertheless, the final fragment from this opening experience with his inner thoughts establishes the same mood as Bruce Wayne’s thoughts on his own demise with the final journal entry on the page revealing that:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 1).

As was the case with *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* there is a considerable amount of information the reader does not have at his or her disposal at this point. The apocalyptic vision in these journal entries will eventually become *Watchmen*'s dominant theme but at this early stage in the narrative there is no indication as to why the city is afraid of this character,

how he will end up in a position to save these ‘whores and politicians’, and why the world stands on the brink of bloody hell. In *From Hell* rather than depicting the introduction to William Gull with direct reference to stream of consciousness narration it is instead portrayed with a series of important character defining episodes, or memories, from his past. Indeed, the chapter that introduces Gull opens with a sequence of eight panels all of which are blacked out. The text accompanying each of these panels depicts partial dialogue fragments that are taken from varying points in the narrative that is about to unfold and there is no direct correlation between any of them (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 1). Although the full meaning of this page will only be revealed in retrospect, it epitomises a kind of index of the braided design of *From Hell* as it arbitrarily locates on one page so many moments from the overall story to come. Upon first encountering this page it is impossible for the reader to place it in context. However, the following page depicts William Gull as a child, working on a river barge with his father. It becomes apparent from the language he uses that young William is older than his years. Discussing his future with his father he expresses a desire, ‘to work on water’, when he is grown, or, if this may not come to pass that he would, ‘like to work with something of a kind to it . . . something that flows like the ocean . . . Something salt, and old’, (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 3). At this early stage in the narrative it is not possible to ascertain the full meaning of this desire, or establish that the viscous conduit he is referring to is blood, yet the detached air of the child expressing it establishes an ominous tone. This cold atmosphere is reinforced as the memory fragment draws to a close with William declaring that, ‘Though I should have a task most difficult, most necessary, and most severe, I should not care if none save I did hear of my achievement’ and that:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 3).

As with the previous two novels important information is withheld at this opening point in the story. To reiterate Groensteen's earlier observation all the reader can do at this point is conserve this information for the intelligibility of the narrative situation to follow.

Initiating a narrative in a disorientating manner such as this correlates with what Barthes's referred to as the 'unformulated enigma' (Barthes 1974, 107). According to him, the enigma stage in a narrative embodies a situation where, 'for the moment there is neither snare nor question but merely the emphasis of a subject, affirmed before the enigma has been proposed or formulated' (Barthes 1974, 107). In other words, the reader is presented with a purposely enigmatic introduction to a story-world that he or she must assume will gradually make sense. By applying this precursory design feature directly to the mindset of a narrative's main protagonist each of these anti-hero's are introduced in a paradoxical manner. On the one hand this dynamic mimics the intense proximity of knowing their inner thoughts and on the other a distancing effect is created by immersing the reader into the stream of consciousness of a protagonist that he or she has not been adequately prepared for. Thus, since the graphic novel is capable of setting up this enigmatic dynamic with words as well as pictures it is in a position to reinforce a protagonist's point of view and according to literary theorist Mark Currie this is:

...the defining feature for the relationship between a reader and what has traditionally been called a protagonist or any other participant in the action of a written narrative. We know that point of view in narrative distributes knowledge in a way that controls the proximity and the distance of this relationship between a reader and a narrative participant, specifically in the degree of access that a narrative grants to a reader of future events (Currie 2015, 13).

With regard to the mindset that each of these novels introduces us to, the subject being emphasized is death, and in the overall weave of each braided narrative it will prove to be the most consistent thematic and psychological thread. Effectively, the reader is thrust right from the beginning into the point in each novel at which the enigma is being staged. However, that thread must be followed through from beginning to end in order for the reader to retrospectively come to such a conclusion. There is no explicit statement or declaration of intent on the part of these protagonists at this early stage, only the preliminary establishment of a dark worldview within each of them. As Barthes explains, 'the enigma never will be proposed' (Barthes 1990, 107). In other words, any form of engaging narrative will not show its hand too early, rather it will spark just enough interest in the reader to ensure committed investment in the story to follow. Consequently, as has been demonstrated from the cryptic introductions to these protagonists, 'the enigma will be subject only to snares, equivocations' until it reaches the point of full disclosure (Barthes 1990, 107). To clarify, when the reader encounters an enigma he or she can make no initial assumptions as to its significance. At the point of first contact it does no more than register in the reader's mind and he or she is not in a position as yet to assume that it represents the beginning of a narrative thread, it simply exists as enigma. Genette phrased it another way, one that resonates when applied to a narrative form that can use synecdochic imagery to probe the depths of a protagonist's unconscious. He argued that enigmatic openings into the diegesis, such as the ones seen here for example, are like seeds whose importance, 'will not be recognized until later, and

retrospectively' and he follows this with the important reminder that their contribution to the story-world is dependent on:

...the possible (or rather the variable) narrative competence of the reader, arising from practice, which enables him both to decipher more and more quickly the narrative code in general or the code appropriate to a particular genre or a particular work, and also to identifying the "seeds" when they appear (Genette 1980, 76).

Based on the need for narrative closure that these enigmatic references to death mandate, the reader is enticed into the multimodal and psychological labyrinth that these graphic novels represent in order to apply some measure of context to these introductions. As Barthes points out, 'to propose a subject, to thematize, to emphasize . . . is to introduce the question of its predicate, the uncertainty of its complement' (Barthes 1990, 108). In narrative theory catalysts of this sort are not uncommon, for example, in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* H. Porter Abbott refers to Anton Chekhov's advice that, 'If in the first chapter you say that a gun hung on the wall, in the second, or third chapter it must without fail be discharged' (Abbott 2008, 60). So in these graphic novels, when the protagonists are affiliated with death from their earliest introductions, it is understandable that the reader will expect to see more references to it. According to Genette, 'the role these advance notices play in the organization, and what Barthes calls the "weaving", of the narrative is fairly obvious, through the expectation that they create in the reader's mind' (Genette 1980, 73/74).

### **3.5 Mnemonic Navigation: Explaining the Relationship between Visual Repetition and the Creation of Theme**

When dealing with a form of narrative that can draw on the connotative potential of the image this enigmatic dynamic is enhanced. The early deployment of this enigma stage, which highlights each anti-hero's preoccupation with death, can be thought of as the beginning of a thematic thread that will unwind in the reader's mind as he or she proceeds

further into each novel, and by extension, delves deeper into the psyche of each anti-hero. This thread is reactivated each time a similar instance of anachrony to the initial one is encountered and the repetition of this dynamic gradually establishes a dark psychological undercurrent that weaves its way through the network that each of these graphic novels represent. Thus, repetition establishes pattern and pattern creates mood. As Currie theorises, narrative, 'has a special power to join the uncertainty of prospect to the certainty of retrospect' (Currie 2015, 103). Accordingly, it is important to emphasize the diegetic significance that telescopically inter-related panels in a braided narrative exhibit and how such relations are capable of imbuing these graphic novels with a ubiquitous psychological resonance. Earlier in this chapter a quote from Groensteen was used which mentioned the effect that investing in the virtual totality of a comic or graphic novel has on the reader. He referred to this effect in terms of its ubiquity, in that engaging with a visual narrative and piecing together panels of a similar visual or thematic nature is capable of bestowing a sense of ubiquity on to the characters within it (Groensteen 2007, 11). This sense of ubiquity requires clarification as it is an important dynamic to familiarise oneself with when analysing the psychological resonance that is layered throughout *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell*. Arguing for the ubiquitous presence of these novels' protagonists does not mean that they are depicted in every panel. Rather, a powerful thread of subconscious resonance is reinforced by specific panels that are arbitrarily dispersed throughout each novel.

It is beneficial to establish a helpful interdisciplinary foundation to explain this complex dynamic. From a traditionally structural point of view Barthes's theories on the use of such cues (or in his words 'catalysts') within a narrative point out that they have a unifying effect on it that serve to bind it with a sense of semantic tension. He argues that, 'Since what is noted always appears as being notable, the catalyser ceaselessly revives the semantic

tension of the discourse, says ceaselessly that there has been, that there is going to be, meaning' (Barthes 1977, 94). This notability is very applicable to the disorientating effect that the above-mentioned introductions to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* have. Additionally, the idea of a ceaselessly reviving catalyst capable of innervating an entire narrative can be adapted and put to highly effective use if the narrative happens to be conveyed in a multimodal medium where imagery can depict just as much information about the story-world as text. The previous section identified the significance of the reader's first contact with visual anachrony and emphasised the enigmatic effect it initiates within him or her. Therefore, the consequent step in successfully navigating these novels as visually braided narratives involves the reader's ability to recognise all aspects of repetition, thus providing him or her with a gradually emerging pattern capable of highlighting the psychological depth of each protagonist.

Thus, by calling on a foundation established in structural theory, Barthes's efforts can be put to contextual use here. According to him, 'it follows that the meaning of a text lies not in this or that interpretation but in the diagrammatic totality of its readings' thus confirming for him that a text's 'lines of destination are multiple' (Barthes 1990, 120/131). He later expanded on this concept with the observation that:

The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric) (Barthes 1977, 159).

There are some noteworthy seeds embedded in this line of thinking which have blossomed in the field of comics studies and can be used in the interests of this thesis to form a link between the use of repetition and the portrayal of a protagonist's thought patterns. As such,

the stereographic plurality that Barthes attributes to a text finds itself adapted to serve the exposition of graphic narrative in Silke Horstkotte's observation that:

Braiding accounts for the medium specific nature of part-whole interaction in graphic narrative by highlighting the plurivectoriality of work-internal iconic references. These references lead to both a densification of detail and the multidirectionality of graphic narrative's reception (to the effect that) with every repetition, the relation of complementarity between the sequences is further extended (Horstkotte 2011, 336/344).

Thus, Barthes and Horstkotte seem to be implying that a narrative is capable of taking a message and imbuing it with a proliferating resonance that is felt throughout the work as a whole. Earlier a cautionary distinction between a monovectoral and plurivectoral reading was pointed out and the analogy of a spider web was used. Returning to that structural analogy briefly, it can be used to visualise both the dissemination that Barthes refers to and the multidirectionality that Horstkotte refers to if one compares any panel that depicts an internalised stream of thought - or visually cues an aspect of a protagonist's psyche - to the joints in a web from which multiple strands emanate in a variety of directions. To borrow a term from psychoanalysis such panels effectively become nodal points capable of resonating in multiple directions throughout the narrative. The relations of complementarity that Horstkotte refers to as being induced by this concept are complex and so it is important that the reader develop a sense of fluency that allows him or her to trace the links between them. This multidirectional fluency then becomes the most effective way that the reader will be able to resolve a graphic novel's dominant theme. As Horstkotte points out, 'Braiding poses a challenge for readers wishing to determine not only what in the sequence is a significant repetition and what is a significant variation but also why these significant repetitions and variations are meaningful within a given multi-panel sequence as well as in the overall narrative' (Horstkotte 2011, 344). Groensteen echoes this obstacle by pointing out that:

Braiding over-determines the panel by equipping coordinates that we can qualify as hyper-topical, indicating their belonging to one or several notable series, and the place that it occupies. As it is articulated to several of its likenesses by a relation that comes under the jurisdiction of braiding, the panel is enriched with resonances that have an effect of transcending the functionality of the site that it occupies, to confer the quality of the place. What is a place other than a habituated space that we can cross, visit, invest in, a space where relations are made and unmade? A place is therefore an activated and over-determined site, a site where a series crosses (or is superimposed on) a sequence (Groensteen 2007, 147/148).

This echoes Barthes's earlier statement that at the heart of a text's plurality there exists a sense of passage, or overcrossing, between its weave of signifiers. In the case of the graphic novel, this introduces a physical component to the navigational act as the reader turns each page and scans the text, thus crossing, visiting, and investing, in sites that are dispersed (like random thoughts) throughout. Notably, however, as Groensteen points out, we must take account of the fact:

...that no panel can be integrally repeated without modification. The reprise of the same panel at two locations in a comic, contiguous or distant, does not constitute a perfect duplication. The second occurrence of the panel is already different from the first by the sole fact of the citation effect that is attached. The repetition raises the memory of the first occurrence (Groensteen 2007, 148).

The citation effect that he refers to here evokes the same spirit of Genette's observation that, 'symmetrically, a narrative statement is not only produced, it can be produced again, can be repeated one or more times in the same text' (Genette 1980, 114). Accordingly, this is a fitting embarkation point from which to explore how *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* manifest this effect and make full use of the aforementioned plurality that is endemic to the braided narrative.

### 3.6.1 From Theory to Practice: Reading *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* as a Braided Narrative

Thus, proceeding with the hypothesis that repetition in a braided narrative serves to imbue it with a unifying and thematic thread, tracing this thread through *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* involves identifying the recurring visual motifs that frame Wayne's reflections on the finality of his last campaign as Batman. His thoughts are dominated by a sense of self-loathing because of his age and they also betray a relentless drive to return to his own private war before his life is extinguished. The enigmatic beginning of this thread has already been highlighted, with a near fatal car crash causing him to reflect on how it almost brought about a, 'good death . . . but not good enough' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 2). The tone initiated by this incident gradually imbues a ubiquitous resonance into the novel and it is enforced on two levels. The first level relates to Wayne's reflections on his old age and a recurring sense of ambivalence in relation to his inevitable death. This is then complemented on a visual level by the manner in which he is haunted by his own personal harbinger of death and the memory of his parents' murder.

As Wayne reflects on his life in the opening stages of the narrative he morbidly concludes that he is 'ten years dead' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 4). This is a reference to the span of time that has elapsed since he retired from his life as Batman. He follows this thought by reflecting on the fact that, 'Batman was a young man. If it was revenge he was after, he's taken it. It's been forty years since he was born . . .' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 5). His morose temperament in relation to a chapter in his life that he is struggling to bring closure to briefly dissipates when he eventually makes the decision to reincarnate his alternate identity. Donning the Batman costume reanimates his passionate conviction and he cannot help but admit that the experience makes him feel like he is, 'born again' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 26). However, such euphoria is short lived and as a testament to interpreting the novel as a

braided narrative the original pattern of morose self-reflection is re-established with renewed intensity. At one point he realises that he is, 'Old enough to need my legs to climb a rope', and at a later stage confesses, 'I wish I could say it's the suit . . . that slows me down' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 31/Bk. Three, 3). From here a predominantly derisive form of introspection is established. He grudgingly acknowledges that he can no longer afford to think and fight, 'like a young man' (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 44) and he repeatedly refers to himself as a, 'lucky old man' every time he has a near death experience, heightening the tension for the reader by setting the scene for the point at which his luck will run out (Miller 1986, Bk. Three, 6). Indeed, after narrowly avoiding a hail of gunfire at one point it begins to dawn on him how, 'All it will take is one bullet', as he finally begins to wonder, 'How much longer have I got . . .' (Miller 1986 Bk. Three, 30/33). He also needs the help of stimulants, or some form of medication, to allow him to keep up with the physical demands of his self-appointed crusade, pausing momentarily in the heat of battle to swallow, 'something . . . to keep an old man awake' (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 4). By this stage, in accordance with the unrealistically high standards he holds himself to, he regards himself as nothing more than a, 'Clumsy . . . stupid . . . senile . . . doddering . . . helpless .. lucky old man' (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 6). Wayne's tormenting inner voice never relents as the novel progresses and to reinforce this subconscious march towards death Miller constructs a narrative whereby the supporting cast also validates his line of thinking. At one point after Wayne resumes his Dark Knight persona, he and Commissioner Gordon address the escaped Harvey Dent's state of mind and Batman concludes that, 'He's possessed, Jim. Out of control. I think he wants to die' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 38). Gordon replies to this with the rhetorical observation, 'We are talking about Harvey Dent ...' implying that Batman's referral to Dent's death wish applies just as much to him (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 38). Subsequently, as Gordon contemplates his own approaching retirement from the Gotham Police Department he realises that Batman's time is

similarly over and that there is no way he can maintain his one-man war on crime in light of the growing political and judicial opposition his increasingly violent brand of vigilantism brings about. Similarly, as Clark Kent tries to point out, ‘You’re not a young man anymore, Bruce . . . Maybe if you’d learned to slow down . . . Find your niche . . . But times have changed, and you . . . Well it’s just not healthy. You’ll burn yourself up’ (Miller 1986, Bk. Three, 14).

Additionally, on a narrative level that challenges the reader’s response to the use of repetition, Wayne is haunted by recurring manifestations of an ominous bat and jarring, visual flashbacks of his parents’ murder. In each case their appearance is never coincidental and is further testament to his persistent obsession with death. The bat makes its first appearance in a dream Bruce Wayne has recounting an episode in his youth. It later reappears in the same chapter in a conversation Batman has with former district-attorney-turned-criminal Harvey Dent. As seen in chapter two of this thesis the obtrusive appearance of this creature in the interaction between the two men has a profound psychological impact which effectively blurs the division between the criminal mindset and that of the novel’s anti-hero. The next time the reader encounters this recurring bat motif is when Wayne withdraws into the darkness and sanctuary of the cave beneath his mansion after being almost beaten to death by an enemy:



(Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 31/32).

Significantly, he removes his Batman costume in this scene as he makes ready to face his own private herald of death. This perfectly highlights the narrative's ability to convey his stream of consciousness as the paraphernalia of his Batman persona is cast aside and the source of the Dark Knight's will to survive is as exposed as his broken body. Indeed, as this scene concludes it seems to be the case that the only thing keeping him alive is a sense of determination which is projected through the fierce visage of this particular bat, almost as if the bat itself will not let him die and accordingly grants him enough life to complete one final task. The next visual assemblage also depicts this bat's face which at this point in the narrative begins to resonate in the visual memory of the reader as his or her familiarity with the ubiquitous tone emitting from Wayne's stream of consciousness develops. This visual citation effect is implied in this case through the use of a close-up of the Joker's face before he dies as a string of maniacal laughter emanates from his mouth thus echoing the scorn that Wayne's inner demon heaps upon him. Indeed, the Joker, in his final death rattle, mocks Batman for not having the conviction to kill him, and takes his own life instead. This comparison bears weight because the final depiction of the Joker's face, a few pages into the next chapter, shows it consumed by fire, with the mouth open wide just like the mouth of the bat that Batman internalises:

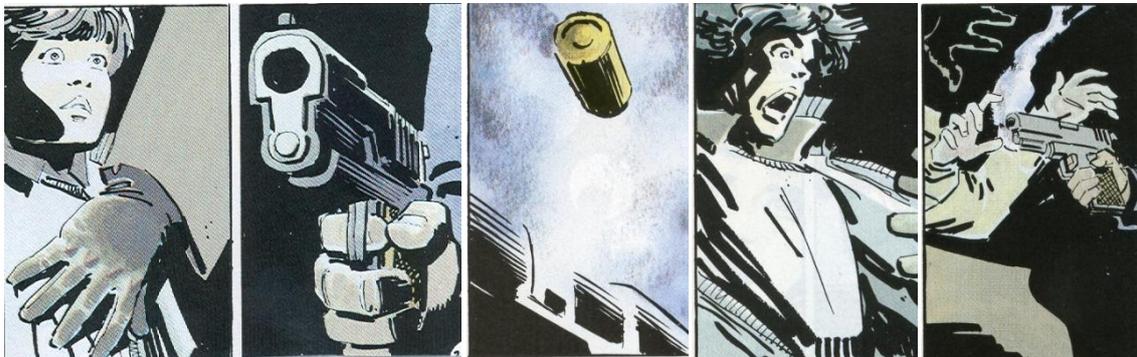


(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 47/Bk. Three, 47/Bk. Four, 4).

It is important to point out that these images are not located on the same page but are dispersed throughout the novel as a whole. However, they are being displayed here to emphasize a pivotal link between narrative design and character psychology. In other words, they invoke the citation effect that Groensteen maintains is such an integral component of a braided narrative. Consequently, this recurring motif comes across as an insistent psychological precursor to the Dark Knight's inevitable death, almost as if he was beginning to see patterns in the waking world that were confirming his deepest anxieties. As pointed out in chapter two, and extending the premise here in relation to an analysis of the novel as a braided narrative, the recurring use of this perspective, where a close-up of a character's face gazes out from the page, establishes an important level of consistency in the novel by transforming it into a network of visually inter-related nodal points that emanate from Wayne's subconscious. Indeed, a pattern is established which gradually intertwines all the players in Batman's life and this is important because the pattern itself is leading towards a sense of closure within his troubled psyche as each facial manifestation is ultimately understood to be a reflection of Batman himself.

Importantly, towards the end of the novel the final appearance of this bat will be purposely aligned by Miller alongside the second recurring visual motif in the novel, this being the flashback of Wayne's parents' murder. The first reference to this brutal act takes place as Bruce Wayne walks the streets of Gotham City and eventually reaches the street where his parents were gunned down. His stream of thought is paced in tandem with the visual structure of this sequence and when he reaches this location its residual psycho-geographic resonance quickly evokes the painful clarity of reflection as he notes how, 'it could have happened yesterday. It could be happening right now. They could be lying at your feet. Twitching, bleeding . . .' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 5). The next time the reader encounters

this incident it is laid out with intense detail as panel after panel synecdochically isolates intense fragments of Wayne's traumatic memory of the shooting:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 14/15).

The onset of this flashback is triggered by an announcement on his television that the movie “The Mark of Zorro” is about to begin, the same movie his parents brought him to the night they were killed (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 14). This sends Wayne back into a spiral of self-loathing as he begins to speak through the voice of the bat that dwells in his subconscious in order to transform the memory of his last moments with his parents into an opportunity to mock his inability at the time to prevent their murder. Thus, seeing the movie reappear in adult life on his television screen he taunts himself about the way he, ‘jumped and danced like a fool’ on that fateful night, demanding that he, ‘remember . . . you remember that night . . .’ (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 14).

After this, the incident appears in a very unpredictable manner, disrupting the dominant visual track of sequences in a manner similar to the use of dystaxia on a same-page basis that was explored in chapter two. Again, a similar effect is produced, disrupting the dominant visual track with discordant imagery in order to convey moments of trauma and/or surprise, all to the effect of attempting to mirror the erratic stream of consciousness of the novel's protagonist. These incidents signify the tightening grip that the proximity of death has over his every thought and they predominantly manifest themselves any time he narrowly

avoids it. Ultimately, in spite of their arbitrary appearance they maintain the consistency of a fatalistic tone throughout the course of the novel and one is reminded of the sense of ubiquity that Groensteen argues is an endemic feature to any braided narrative. If, as noted by Barthes earlier, ‘what is noted always appears to be notable’, then the reader cannot ignore the notable build-up of tension that these flashbacks create, with each one bringing Batman a step closer to his own demise (Barthes 1977, 94). This recurring flashback makes for a powerful visual accompaniment to Wayne’s previously noted sombre yearning for a purposeful death. For example, at one stage the pace of the narrative quickens considerably as Batman is pursued through the streets of Gotham by the police yet even at this heightened state of alert there is room in his stream of thought for a jarring (and perpetually futile) three-panel flashback of his father’s murder:



(Miller 1986, Bk. Three, 28).

The impact of this flashback on Batman’s psyche is reinforced by Miller’s use of short-burst sentence fragments that sound off like a salvo of rapid fire so quick that no matter how many times Batman experiences this memory, he will never be quite prepared for the emotional charge it commands. Two pages after this flashback it reappears again but in an abbreviated single-panel manifestation. As the gravity of the situation they find themselves in finally begins to hit home for Robin her loss of innocence is captured in a panel where she realises that the Joker’s next potential targets will include many of her friends. The look on her face

reminds Batman of the moment in his own youth when all meaning was violently removed from it and once again Miller uses the same visual motif, this time devoid of text, to capture the mood:



(Miller 1986, Bk. Three, 32).

As mentioned, the final appearance of this flashback ties in with the reappearance of the bat, cleverly weaving both streams of consciousness together into the braid of a single sequence. This structural weaving process signifies an awareness in Wayne's mind that a measure of closure has been achieved as an acknowledgement of his impending fate begins to dawn on him. Thus, in a manner which only the medium of sequential narrative can orchestrate, the traumatic impact of his past is brought into sequential alignment with a projected manifestation of his sense of failure in the present. Both strands of narrative become intertwined on a visual and deeply psychological level as their combination maps the inward journey of the anti-hero's mindset from a tortured reminiscence of the past to an acceptance of events that are about to transpire. From the reader's perspective, apprehending the weaving together of disparate narrative strands like this has the effect of concluding the novel with an affecting sense of symmetry as the comprehensive design of this braided narrative is neatly tied off:



(Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 35).

Indeed, this sense of symmetry is emphasized on a binary level by Wayne himself. He expresses dissatisfaction in the opening pages that he has not yet found a fitting death but concludes in the final page that he has instead found a new reason for living, admitting to himself that his new role in Gotham, ‘will be a good life . . . Good enough’ thus opening and closing the novel on the binary opposition between life and death (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 47). Furthermore, as far as navigating the novel as a braided narrative is concerned, the implicit symmetry that lies behind the portrayal of Wayne’s subconscious is actually hinted at by the novel’s own psychotherapist, Dr. Wolper. He compares Batman’s impact on society to ‘a psychosocial infection’ and proposes that his ‘psychotic sublimative behaviour pattern is like a net’ that draws others ‘into corresponding intersticing patterns’ (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 39). He later elaborates on his line of thinking when he states that a whole new generation, ‘will be bent to the matrix of Batman’s pathological self-delusion’ (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 10). For the reader, terms like net, matrix, and intersticing patterns resonate beyond the fictional world of the characters and call up theories of narrative design as he or she traces every relevant psychological thread and semantically navigates Bruce Wayne’s traumatised stream of consciousness.

### 3.6.2: Reading *Watchmen* as a Braided Narrative

Reading Rorschach as the novel's most complex analysis of the anti-hero mindset, *Watchmen* also weaves a consistently foreboding thread through its entire narrative. Indeed, the portrayal of his stream of consciousness manifests itself on a highly suggestive level by way of its deployment of braiding techniques throughout the narrative. The overlaying of fragmented diary entries in caption form on the opening page over images that are depicted from the perspective of someone looking down from a high vantage point quickly establishes the presence of an omniscient narrator, all the more so as the owner of this voice remains unseen. It was argued that this is *Watchmen's* submission to the enigma stage of a narrative as the delayed revelation of his identity owes a lot to the way a braided narrative can control the distribution of information. Effectively the reader is thrust into a running monologue with no orientation as to who is speaking or what they are referring to. Subsequently, this omniscient presence appears again and again in the form of additional diary entries each of which grants the reader intimate access to this anti-hero's stream of thought. This has the effect of overlaying the corresponding visual track with a resonating psychological thread that is highlighted any time that a manifestation of a Rorschach pattern is encountered by the reader.

As in the analysis of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* above, the point will be emphasized here that none of the details in this braid are accidental. Indeed, the proliferation of this simple plot device invites a kind of reading that is perfectly suited to identifying the disparate visual manifestations of Rorschach's seemingly ubiquitous stream of consciousness and tying them all together. Therefore, using the portrayal of his stream of consciousness as a thematic carrier, the sense of visual navigation that the novel mandates is initiated by the way in which a particular shadow motif is woven through it. It is then up to the fluent reader to first locate this shadow and then ascertain the psychological implications it has for Rorschach

himself. Accordingly, early notes and drawings taken from a foster home he was remanded to indicate that at one point in his childhood witnessing his mother having sex with a stranger had a permanent and damaging effect on him. To that effect he draws a picture of his impression of the incident which appears in the novel in the case notes of his prison psychologist Dr. Malcolm Long:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 32).

Even from the perspective of early childhood, many years before he would become a violent sociopath, there is a disturbingly familiar symmetry to the image, not unlike that seen on a typical Rorschach card. He later adorns his face with a mask that is capable of manifesting variations of this symmetrical pattern, bringing him to literally wear his own neurosis on his face. However, this pattern really only begins to trigger the dynamic inherent to a braided narrative when it begins to reappear at arbitrary locations throughout the rest of the novel. Such repetition not only represents a consistent thread that can be used to evoke echoes of Rorschach's state of mind but it also manages to imprint a psycho-geographic resonance onto the very walls and alleyways of the city he prowls, almost as if the hunting ground becomes a dark reflection of the hunter within it.

For example, upon leaving his apartment at one stage he passes a building that has been defaced with graffiti. This street-art is affecting enough to warrant an entry in his journal as he notes:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 11).

Seven pages later the narrative returns to Rorschach's patrol of the city. Although he is now in a different location a variation of this shadow-motif can be seen in the background, almost as if it is pre-empting, or indeed following, his every move. Significantly, in this case the shadow motif visually forewarns an attempted mugging/rape seven panels later on the same page:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 18).

Thus, there is the emerging establishment of a pattern whereby this apparently ubiquitous shadow motif becomes intertwined with connotations of violence and illicit sexual behaviour. Moore and Gibbons later connect the two dynamics when Rorschach experiences a flashback of his abusive childhood that is framed on either end by a Rorschach card containing a pattern

that is suggestive of two figures about to embrace. This is directly followed by a panel depicting a silhouette of his mother having sex:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 3).

The flashback closes with a silhouette of his mother physically abusing him which is then visually capped in the next panel through a return to the same Rorschach card that initiated the episode to begin with:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 4).

Thus, the act of remembrance for him owes a significant psychological debt to the use of repetition and even moments of trauma are layered beneath the perfect sheen of symmetrical representation. Accordingly, the next time this shadow couple is observed it is not from Rorschach's perspective but his psychotherapist's, indicating that his exposure to Rorschach's mind has induced a contagious element of subconscious parity within him.

Indeed, this is not unlike the subliminal behavioural mannerisms that Batman's presence triggers in the psyche of Gotham's citizens. However, where Rorschach associates the image with shame, vice and the corrupt nature of society, Dr. Long imbues it with an apocalyptic tone, as it evokes for him memories of, 'people disintegrated at Hiroshima, leaving only their indelible shadows':



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 16).

He notes the increasing hold this pattern has over him later on after continued exposure to the darkness within Rorschach's mind and his apocalyptic interpretation of the image is notably heightened after he reads an article in the newspaper outlining the procedure for the correct disposal of the bodies of family members in the event of a nuclear war:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 27).

Consequently, and almost like a subliminal chain reaction, the repetition of this shadow motif, and the apocalyptic undercurrent it conveys, is visually captured by Gibbons in a later sequence in which Dan Dreiberg has a nightmare depicting a couple being incinerated in a nuclear explosion:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VII, 17).

Again, by skilfully exploiting the potential of a braided narrative Moore and Gibbons take a single motif, the shadow that occupies the darkest recesses of Rorschach's mind, and transform it into an avatar of contagious mass hysteria and apocalyptic symbolism which appears with increasing frequency as the novel progresses. Thus, a pattern begins to emerge whereby a reader who is visually attuned to the structure of a braided narrative is not only encountering this recurring motif on the walls of the city but in the minds of other characters within the story too. Such a reading is lent further currency in the following chapter, when a newsstand vendor (who Moore and Gibbons cleverly use as a point of confluence that covertly binds separate strands within the narrative together) comments that peoples' old nightmares have the potential to come back and haunt them:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VIII, 3).

What is important about this statement is that it is captured in a panel whose background depicts the same shadow-couple motif that is so implicitly woven into the fabric of Rorschach's nightmares. The caption beneath the shadow-couple, overlaid from a separate narrative-within-the-narrative, further enhances the connotative potential of the overall panel. Visually the text is located on a piece of torn parchment which is very reminiscent of Rorschach's torn journal fragments. The description within it, which compares 'darkest imaginings' (in other words nightmares) to a kind of irremovable black ink that spills forth from one's brain acts as a covert reference to the viscous black fluid that defines the features of Rorschach's mask (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VIII, 3). Thus, even within the confines of a panel that does not even feature him, his presence is still felt. This is a very effective use of braiding to trigger memories of other locations within the story-world that are connected by subtle variations on the same visual motif. Ultimately, given the symmetrical connotations of his name and mask, and in deference to the residual ubiquity connected to this particular motif, it is not surprising to discover that his departure from the city is peripherally observed by the same shadow-couple, almost as if they are seeing him off:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. X, 32).

By the time the novel realises its apocalyptic climax Dr Long's Hiroshima Lovers are still trying inadequately to console each other, surrounded by the corpses of the novel's supporting cast. This is a powerful testament to *Watchmen's* ability to weave a symmetrical braid that incorporates the many echoes of Rorschach's stream of thought. The opening page of the first chapter documented the apparent ravings of a man named Rorschach who predicted that the world stood on the brink of hell and that even the streets would become extended gutters full of blood. Here, in the opening pages of the final chapter that prediction has been realised and the only echo of the man who predicted it all stands in silent observation as a stain on the wall:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. XII, 5).

These can all be read as manifestations of Rorschach's proliferating presence, imbuing the novel with a dark, psychological resonance. However, just as the comments of secondary characters in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* helped to perpetuate his ubiquitous presence so too is this dynamic threaded through the design of *Watchmen*. In many ways the aforementioned news vendor in the novel acts much like the chorus in a Shakespearean play, often commenting on events as they happen or in some cases intimating what might come to pass in the narrative that follows. For example, in chapter five he peruses the day's newspaper and comments on how the world seems destined for another world war when he asks, 'Don't people see the signs? Don't they know where this is headed?' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 12). This seemingly mundane observation is quite literally, and visually, located directly above the same sandwich board man who has appeared at various points earlier in the narrative. As the reader discovers in the following chapter this scene holds a significantly renewed value after it is later revealed that this unidentified vagrant is actually Rorschach, a revelation that then triggers a backwards flow in the entire weave of the narrative up to this point as the reader is inspired to return to any instance where this initially

nondescript figure appeared in the story. A few pages later in the same chapter there is another veiled intimation towards the subtle disclosure of hidden strands within the narrative that are related to Rorschach. This time the news vendor points out that, ‘All we see is what’s on the surface. I bet there’s all kinda stuff we never notice . . .’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 17). In the far left of the background of the panel in which he makes this comment, Walter Kovacs can be seen rifling through a rubbish bin with his back turned away, his familiar sandwich board propped against it. This demonstrates once again that peripheral scansion, be it within a single panel, across a full page, or throughout the entire weave of the narrative, is an essential component to identifying Rorschach’s presence, and that applies whether it is realised in a purely visual form or it is subtly rendered on a deeper, psychological level. Ultimately, visual allusions, and textual references, to his state of mind are not automatically collated within the reader’s mind. Sometimes this is due to the way in which the narrative withholds the disclosure of certain relevant information and other times it is because its placement can be quite covert, mandating a second or third reading before actualising in the reader’s mind. As Geoff Klock points out:

Throughout *Watchmen* it can be seen that meaning is elsewhere, deferred, and very often unaware of its relevancy. Within the text this takes the form of spatial juxtaposition . . . It is entirely appropriate in this context that Rorschach’s psychological report shows that he has witnessed at a young age his mother engaging in a sexual act; only later could he understand what it was he was seeing. This structure of deferred action, as it is known in psychoanalysis, powerfully informs the reader’s understanding of *Watchmen* (Klock 2006, 67).

To paraphrase one of Rorschach’s own observations in order to explain this aspect of the braided narrative that he is such a pivotal component of, we are only able to discern the entire pattern after staring at it long enough – only then can we extract a sense of meaning from the dispersed fragments of his conflicted psyche.

Fittingly, bookending the novel with representations of Rorschach's journal weaves a final thread of symmetrical design into the novel's complex braid. The final panel depicts a worker in a publishing firm trying to decide which piece to run in an upcoming edition as he reaches, we assume, towards the same journal that Rorschach mailed before meeting his end. As he does so his impatient editor declares, 'I leave it entirely in your hands' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. XII, 32). While the comment is directed towards his employee it also reads as an invite to the reader to reengage all over again with *Watchmen* itself. From a narratological perspective this journal is effectively a retelling of the narrative as seen through Rorschach's eyes and represents a return to the opening caption in chapter one thus establishing a perpetual circularity to the reading experience where the ending incites a return to the beginning and the beginning can be interpreted as an engagement with the ending. As Klock highlights:

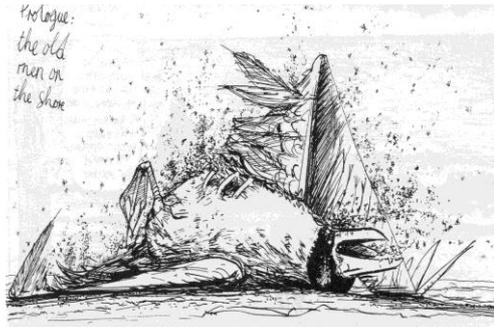
An entry from Rorschach's journal makes up the opening lines of *Watchmen*, and the journal is thus a synecdoche for it; the journal is ultimately delivered to the New Frontiersman, "delivered at last into the hands of a higher judgement." As an example of textual juxtaposition . . . this line is intended to refer back to Rorschach's journal as an emblem of *Watchmen*, and to its judgement by the reader (Klock 2006, 75).

Groensteen argues that this circular dynamic makes intense use of all the procedures of braiding as it deploys, 'a recurrent geometric motif that lends itself to plastic rhymes', which evoke connotations of, 'perfection, eternal recommencement, etc' (Groensteen 2007, 155). In this way, he argues, 'The authors have contrived to put in place two narrative loops, the first circumscribed by the inaugural chapter, the second extending to the dimension of the entire work' (Groensteen 2007, 155). Thus, a symmetrical interdependence between beginning and ending is established and the story-world folds in on itself, evoking a sense of braided design that needs to be looked at more than once in order to glean full meaning from it - not unlike the design of a Rorschach pattern.

### 3.6.3: Reading *From Hell* as a Braided Narrative

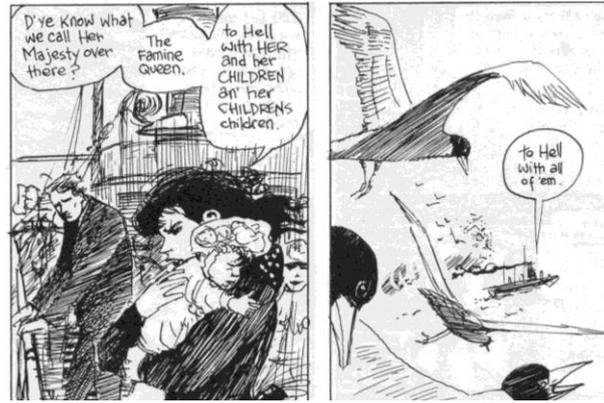
Of the three anti-heroes that this thesis explores *From Hell*'s William Gull not only exemplifies the darkest mind but he is also located in the most complex form of braided narrative. The portrayal of his stream of consciousness is realised in such a way as to genuinely challenge the reader's fluency with the medium and the narrative employs a wide variety of strategies to convey its protagonist's chilling mindset. As with the previous two anti-heroes death is a central preoccupation for William Gull but in his case it relates as much to the murderous acts that represent for him essential conduits to a higher state of consciousness as it does to the belief that his own death may be a doorway to a plane of existence on a par with the gods themselves (Campbell and Moore 2013, 265). Reading *From Hell* in this way it becomes apparent that the repetition of certain visual motifs, and the recurring use of certain words, phrases, and conversations, constructs the novel in such a way as to intertwine complex temporal and psychological threads, all of which emanate from Gull's domineering psyche.

The first of these motifs plays on his surname for at points in the narrative a panel depicting a seagull is encountered. Indeed, the novel is capped on either end by panels of this nature. The first image the reader encounters in the prologue is the rotting corpse of a seagull surrounded by a cloud of flies. The final image in the overall book (it is located outside the story proper and appears at the end of Appendix II) depicts a seagull in an empty white panel flying away into the distance:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Prologue, 1/Appendix II, 24).

Thus, the narrative is initiated with an image connoting death and it culminates with a depiction of life. There is a notable hermeneutic purpose to these bookend panels in that neither of them have frames. This calls up memories of a design feature cited in chapter one called a bleed. As Scott McCloud pointed out, by allowing an image to extend all the way to the edge of the page, 'Time is no longer contained by the familiar icon of the closed panel, but instead haemorrhages and escapes into timeless space' (McCloud 1994, 103). This bears repeating here because Campbell and Moore lean so heavily on the idea that William Gull represents an avatar of sorts for a kind of ageless stream of consciousness - a complex dynamic that *From Hell's* braided narrative is capable of endowing with a multi-layered resonance. Beginning and ending the novel with panels of such a similar nature further emphasises *From Hell's* symmetrical construction, a purposeful design feature that also plays a role in mapping the psyche of the novel's anti-hero and this visual citation effect is reactivated with each successive appearance of this seagull motif. Thus, in chapter one, Walter Sickert, Annie Crook, and Marie Kelly are shown on board a ship bound for France. When their conversation turns to Queen Victoria Marie makes her opinion on the topic quite clear when she says, 'To Hell with HER and her CHILDREN an' her CHILDREN'S children. To Hell with all of 'em':



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. One, 7).

In this panel she is seen holding Annie's daughter close to her body in a protective and maternal embrace. This is directly followed by a panel that literally depicts a bird's eye view as a flock of seagulls gaze down at the ship far below. In a manner befitting the symmetrical nature of braided narratives the significance of this initially nondescript sequence only comes to light when the reader encounters a very similar manifestation of it at the end of the novel. In chapter fourteen Gull's disembodied consciousness takes flight from his corporeal form and begins to drift through time itself on two levels. On one level his consciousness begins to drift through time as it relates to the scope of all that has come to pass in the novel thus far. Thus, his transcendent journey is portrayed as a retrospective amalgamation of key events in the narrative. However, on a second level, it also moves beyond events as laid out in the story-world revealing to the reader glimpses of a future that Gull the man could not possibly have experienced in his own lifetime. This bears a striking resemblance to Carl Jung's description of the ability of the shaman in certain primitive cultures:

...to leave his body and fly about the universe as a bird. In this case the bird is the most fitting symbol of transcendence. It represents the peculiar nature of intuition working through a "medium," that is, an individual who is capable of obtaining knowledge of distant events – or facts of which he consciously knows nothing – by going into a trancelike state (Jung 1968, 147).

One of the most significant incidents in relation to this second transcendent flight depicts a much older Marie Kelly in Ireland who not only becomes aware of this disembodied presence but seems to recognise who it represents. As with the earlier incident she is depicted in a maternal posture, drawing her children close to her as she faces this presence with a look of protective ferocity in her eyes and warns this spirit/presence to, ‘Clear off back to hell and leave us be!’:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Fourteen, 23).

Consequently, this is the final thing Gull’s dissociated consciousness encounters before his life is finally extinguished. Upon initial publication the significance of this second warning was open to interpretation as the identity of the woman is not disclosed. In fact, in the first appendix to the novel Moore points out that, ‘These final pages are invented, and the cryptic scene upon page 23 must go without an explanation for the moment. Work it out for yourself’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Appendix I, 42). However, in 2013, fourteen years after the novel’s first publication, *The From Hell Companion* was released and in that the woman’s identity in this sequence was confirmed. Indeed, Moore explains in his script notes for the chapter that this woman is, ‘Mary Kelly, on the brink of forty years old but still recognizable’ (Campbell and Moore 2013, 276).

As valuable as this eventual point of clarification was it can be argued that the information as presented in the novel itself is enough to cause the reader to reflect on the use of this gull motif and deduce that it may represent something of significance to the story, seemingly representing the consciousness of William Gull himself. Armed with this knowledge the reader can now bring added context to a point in the story where the use of the gull image seems to be out of sync with the rest of the sequence it is located in. Chapter two provides the reader with summarised episodes from Gull's life that document such incidents as the death of his father, his rise in prominence as a skilled surgeon, and his initiation into the Freemasons. This initiation ritual is laid out over two pages with the final panel depicting the same decomposed corpse of a seagull that was seen at the opening of the novel:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 9).

In light of the knowledge the reader attains pertaining to the gull imagery by the time he or she reaches the end of the novel it becomes possible, in an act of retroactive clarification, to bring meaning to this panel also. Even within the boundaries of the story proper, excluding the appendices, there is a progressive temporal rhythm connected to the depiction of the seagull's corpse. The first time the reader encounters it can be seen that the sea's tide has not yet reached it. When encountered later on, as this concluding panel to Gull's Masonic initiation shows, the sea has moved that bit closer to the gull's corpse. In the final panel of the

story the tide has progressed much further and the gull's corpse is now immersed in the sea which can be interpreted as a visual allusion to the inevitability of time:

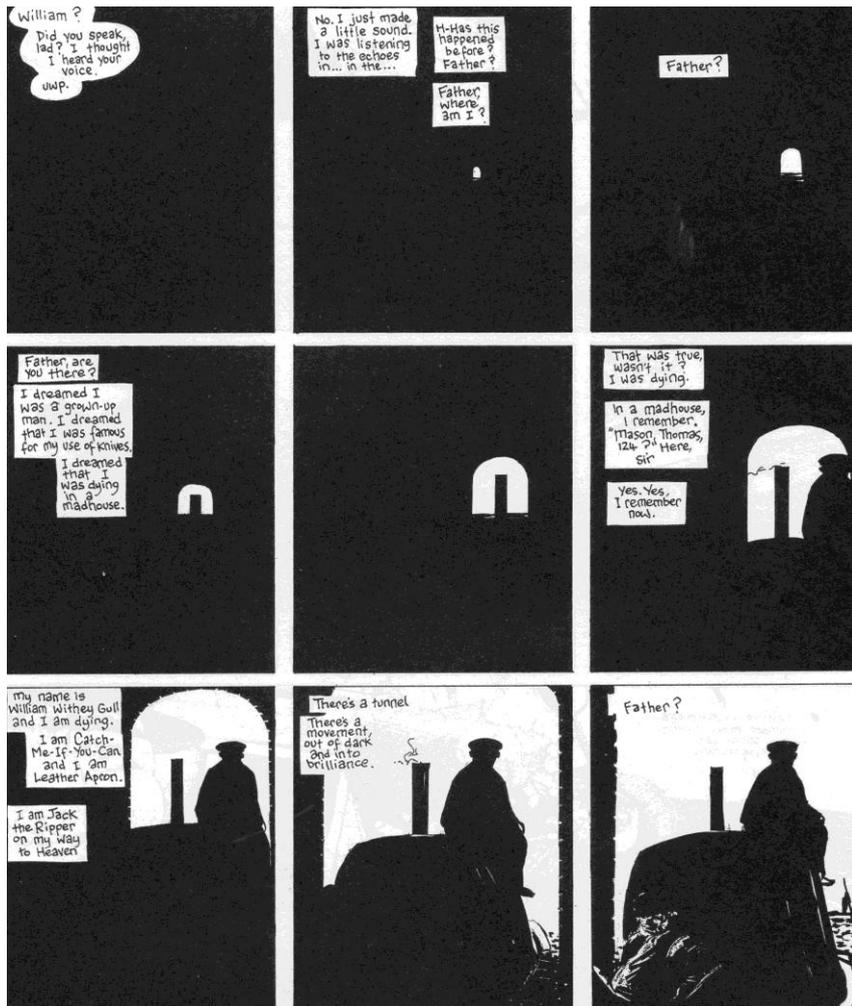


(Moore and Campbell 2013, Epilogue, 10).

Thus, even though William Gull's stream of consciousness briefly experiences a release from the conventional flow of time in the final chapter there is the implication in the panel that depicts his initiation into the Freemasons that the events of his life have been nonetheless preordained to subscribe to an inevitable sequence of events. Gull passionately believes that he has been privileged with an arcane knowledge that will guide him towards a spiritual apotheosis, lift him up to the level of the gods themselves and grant him immortality. In reality, the flow of time, in spite of the anachronistic departures he experiences by way of hallucinatory projection, moves in one direction only and the deployment of specific panels in the overall braid of the narrative as well as the aforementioned visual progress of the sea concludes that for all his grand designs his fate is as predestined as the tide itself.

The second recurring motif that alludes to Gull's stream of consciousness is the depiction of a dark tunnel. It is first used as a way to introduce the reader to William Gull as a young boy and there are connotations of birth behind the way in which he is depicted as moving from the darkness of a barge tunnel into the light of daybreak. Introducing the novel's anti-hero through the use of silhouette establishes a sense of mystery about him that is then heightened by the dark thoughts that occupy his mind. Thus, the portrayal of his

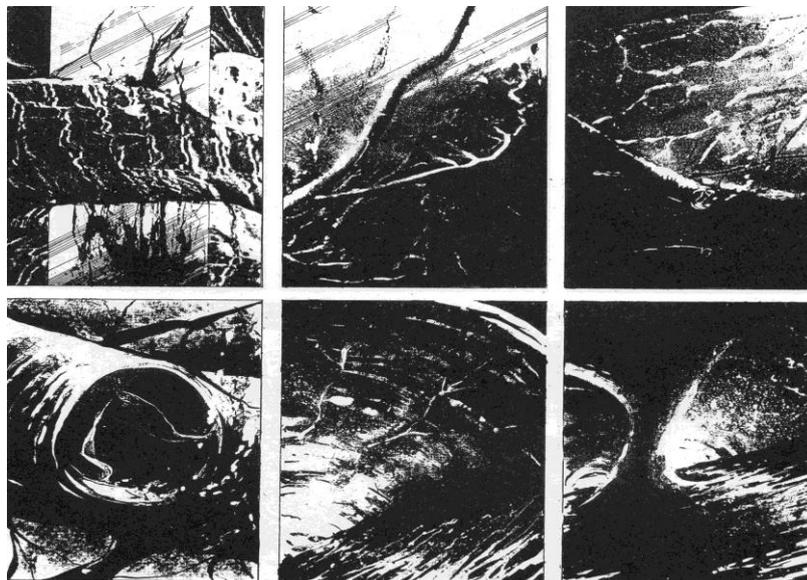
stream of consciousness literally coincides with the momentum of a flowing body of water. Reflecting the symmetrical nature of a braided narrative this tunnel motif later serves as the anti-hero's exit point from the story-world in the penultimate chapter whereby it is used to signal Gull's subconscious departure from his bodily form. However, when the reader encounters this tunnel sequence this time around it is accompanied by a level of introspection on Gull's part that emphasises the temporal complexities of the overall narrative. The visual perspective in this second tunnel sequence does not vary extensively from the first: William Gull as a boy is still depicted from behind, sitting on a barge that is moving through a dark tunnel into light. However, while the accompanying text depicts a character who seems to echo the words spoken by the boy that the reader met in the first sequence in chapter two he now appears to be remembering events that, for him (in other words Gull as a child), have yet to take place. However, for the reader, the events being referenced by Gull in this second appearance of the tunnel sequence are now located in the past as relates to the actual reading of the novel:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Fourteen, 5).

This highly complex temporal pattern masterfully demonstrates how a visually braided narrative can be used to mimic the psychological instability of the novel's anti-hero as this kind of sequential manipulation entirely disrupts the unidirectional flow of the reading experience. By using the same visual sequence to carry two different threads of text, the story asks of the reader to be alert for additional uses of this pattern elsewhere in the novel. Just as Gull's perception of time and reality begins to slip so too is an aspect of *déjà-vu* triggered in the reader which mandates a backwards motion in the reading process. Re-appraising the first instance of a repeating sequence brings an added context to it and the emergence of a visual theme is gradually revealed by substituting a plurivectoral reading for a monovectoral one.

Consequently, there is a third use of a tunnel motif that magnifies the reader's exposure to William Gull's mindset, and this tunnel is located within the body of his final victim. Even more important to him than the task he has been appointed to remove, 'certain wretched women', who threaten the crown is the dawning realisation that their disposal brings with it a sense of epiphany or enlightenment for him (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 6). Gull views the ritual of murder as a rite-of-passage that, properly attended to, will bring about his ascension to godhood. To this end, by the time he locates his final victim, Marie Kelly, this enlightened state is reached through the medium of flesh and the capillary vein tunnels within the human body are re-imagined as conduits to a higher plane of existence. The manner in which Campbell chooses to depict this awakening is accomplished through the use of intensely magnified depictions of the journey Gull's blade takes through Marie's corpse:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 12).

This wordless sequence is initially confusing as the depicted proximity of the blade entering this 'landscape of flesh' is too fragmented to allow the reader to orient him or herself

(Campbell and Moore 2013, 218). As Moore outlines to Campbell in his script notes for this sequence:

We are now moving down the tunnel of the vein. We continue along the vein as if we were whitewater rafting . . . or red plasma rafting in this instance . . . Up ahead, down the tilting bore of the tunnel we can see a complex junction approaching, where the tunnel seems to widen out into an as-yet unglimped chamber. We surge forward, the world about us getting bigger all the time (Campbell and Moore 2013, 219).

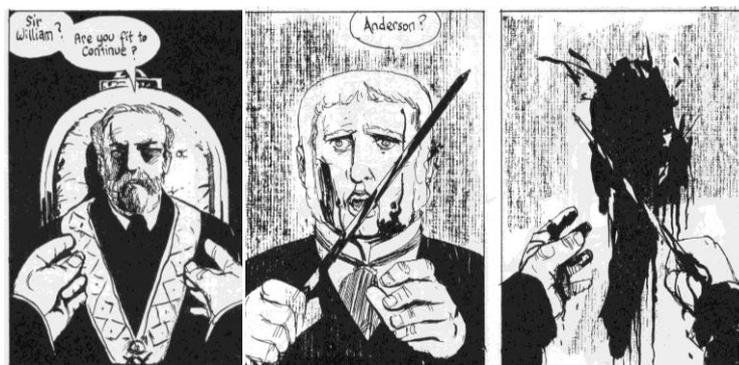
In the interest of clarification a brief recap is useful here in order to draw a connection between the distant threads of narrative that weave both a physical and psychological interpretation of this tunnel motif together. In the barge tunnel sequence, Gull intimates his desire for a higher purpose in life from a very early age. In this analogous placement of capillary veins and dissected flesh to represent an altogether different kind of tunnel he draws ever closer to realising this purpose as both his blade and his mind probe the sanctity of the human form in search of a non-existent holy grail.

An important additional strand in the narrative that is used to portray Gull's stream of consciousness is the use of premonitions and flashbacks. This addition enhances the concept observed in the use of the tunnel sequences that Gull feels himself to be somehow removed on a subconscious level from the lived-in present to experience a simultaneous sense of either the past and/or future, thus seemingly placing him in command of more than one perspective on the same moment in narrative time. Although the novel contains many incidents of this nature — where temporal and subconscious threads intertwine in an attempt to establish a pattern to Gull's mindset — it is enough to explore the repetition of two important conversations in order to emphasise the psychological resonance that weaves its way through *From Hell's* overall braided design. In chapter two Gull and his close acquaintance James Hinton discuss the nature of time and history with Hinton suggesting that, 'Time is a human illusion (and) that all times co-exist in the stupendous whole of eternity' (Moore and

Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 15). He makes an effort to clarify this statement by proposing that, ‘Fourth dimensional patterns within eternity’s monolith would ... seem merely random events to third-dimensional percipients’, and he argues that this would result in, ‘events rising towards inevitable convergence like an archway’s lines’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 14/15). Clearly taken by the theory Gull reacts by rhetorically asking, ‘Can history then be said to have an architecture, Hinton? The notion is most glorious and most horrible’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 15). Indeed, the final chapter challenges the reader to ask if *From Hell* itself has its own kind of architecture as there is a point in it where Gull’s disembodied unconscious revisits this same conversation. This inexplicable return is depicted from a high vantage point (that of a seagull’s perhaps) where, in defiance of temporal logic, Gull’s seemingly omniscient spirit begins to descend from the sky and move in closer to better familiarise itself with the two men on the steps below as both he and the reader revisit a conversation from their respective pasts. If it is to be argued that a braided narrative is capable of conveying a stream of consciousness then this dynamic is strengthened by subsequent readings of the novel which imbue Gull and Hinton’s first conversation in chapter two with an added context and resonance as the reader takes note of the fact that within the proposed temporal simultaneity that Gull’s subconscious eventually experiences the reader is not the only one observing this conversation. Thus, Gull’s timeline is viewed from the simultaneous perspectives of past and future, and narrative time as experienced by the reader becomes a coalescence of skilfully woven threads based on multiple readings of the same text. Thus, by way of repetition, the reader gradually unveils a pattern in the narrative that traverses moments of premonition and recollection, often resulting in an amalgamation of both within the same panel. The required context for these incidents is only disclosed in the final chapter, where Gull’s dissociated subconscious drifts arbitrarily from present to past to future time. As Moore explains, ‘Gull becomes a kind of black ripple pulsing out through the

time stream’, and at any moment his subconscious is capable of occupying, ‘a place where past, present, and future co-exist’ (Campbell and Moore 2013, 265). Thus, in a manner befitting the interdependent structure of a braided narrative they conclude the novel with, ‘a collage of Gull’s impressions of the past and the future assembled into a frighteningly suggestive pattern’ (Campbell and Moore 2013, 265).

Gradually even seemingly innocuous conversations are seen to resonate with a similar aspect of temporal duality that reinforces this suggestive pattern by exposing Gull’s tenuous grip on reality. Often, the subtle design of the narrative discloses important nodal points on a very implicit level that challenges the reader’s navigational fluency as instances of repetition begin to play a more significant role in portraying the frayed strands of his declining mind. Thus, when such instances of repetition or *déjà vu* play a more significant role, Moore and Campbell introduce a subtle degree of sequential manipulation into the weave of the narrative to betray Gull’s downward spiral into madness. Chapter ten as a whole is established as a visually disturbing journey through Gull’s mind and in one sequence he has a premonition of a confrontation with a council of his Masonic peers that will not actually take place until chapter twelve. In his premonition Campbell lays out the sequence in a particular order:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 24).

However, when the actual confrontation takes place two chapters later events are rearranged in a slightly different order:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Twelve, 22).

Thus, the same images are used but they appear in a different configuration. This establishes a dual dynamic between repetition and difference that can be read as a mirror of Gull's fluctuating thought process. In the first sequence a premonition of events to come stops Gull in his tracks and it takes the sight of the blood on the wall before him to bring him back to his senses. In the second sequence the memory of this blood stain unexpectedly interrupts his discourse with his peers, causes him to briefly relive the horror of his previous actions, and effectively destabilises his grip on time and place. To verify this, the third panel demonstrates that he is no longer certain that the man in front of him is actually there or not. This interchange of temporal perspectives is made manifest by the subtle way the second sequence differs from the first. Thus, reassembling one sequence of panels/events into another order acts as a hermeneutic signal that his thought process has lost the power to differentiate between past and present and the visual immediacy of a panel-based narrative perfectly discloses the jarring nature of the man's psychological collapse.

As with the previous two anti-heroes, William Gull is also depicted in a novel where the supporting cast bring additional context to the proliferating resonance of its anti-hero's subconscious and the way in which it seems to be implicitly woven into the overall braid of the novel's structure. In fact, one observation in particular exemplifies this ubiquitous undertone. As noted earlier, after listening to Hinton's theory that events in time can be

traced along, ‘an invisible curve, rising through the centuries’, Gull begins to ponder the notion that history might have ‘an architecture’ of its own (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 15). This assumption leads masterfully to the novel’s own architecture, one that firmly locates it on a foundation of psychic resonance. Indeed, Moore’s approach to *From Hell*’s narrative structure is sometimes referred to as ‘architectonic’ by commentators (Campbell and Moore 2013, 8). One of the most significant characters to inadvertently address this concept of an implicitly layered resonance that weaves its way through the narrative is Marie Kelly. In the chapter preceding the final murder she has a conversation with Maria Harvey in which she expresses a fear that something bad is about to happen, a sensation that reminds her of her first husband’s death:

Marie: Maria? D’ye ever have a feelin’ somethin’s goin’ t’ happen?

Maria Harvey: Well, I know we’ll trip in the dark and kill ourselves if you don’t buy a new candle.

Marie: Oh aye. I will. No, I mean proper feelin’s. It’s like when me first husband died, in that pit-accident. All that week, things had a feelin’ to them. D’ye know what I mean?

Maria Harvey: I can’t say I do. Look, shall we buy that candle or what!

Marie: Alright, I’m comin’. It was like things had a pattern I couldn’t quite see. It’s like there was a kind of lace tyin’ things together. A kind of lace over everything.

Maria Harvey: Lace? What do you mean? God you have some bloody funny ideas sometimes Marie Kelly (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Nine, 47).

In chapter two of this thesis, the properties of sequential narrative on a page-based nature were tied in with Barthes’s lace analogy and the connection returns with fitting relevance here as Marie’s comparison is applied to the novel as a whole. Notably, in the foreword to *The From Hell Companion* Craig Fisher and Charles Hatfield point out that:

In *From Hell*’s chapter nine, shortly before William Gull’s final ritualistic murder, Mary Kelly describes the pervasive sense of predestination she felt immediately before the death of

her first husband (and) Our job as readers is to search for the hidden strands of lace – the symbols, the motifs, the repetitions – that knot the narrative together . . . Moore and Campbell sew many of these strands into early chapters of the book, so that they can reappear and take on new meanings in new contexts, across the length of *From Hell* (Campbell and Moore 2013, 5).

Indeed Campbell himself refers to each of these hidden strands of lace as an ‘echo’ which is an interesting way of interpreting the effect that repetition within this braided narrative has on the reader’s visual memory (Campbell and Moore 2013, 148).

As has already been argued, navigating these graphic novels as braided narratives gradually reveals their symmetrical design. Bruce Wayne undergoes a transition which sees him progress from a subconscious obsession with death towards an eventual anticipation for a new life. *Watchmen* becomes a perpetual temporal loop that exchanges beginnings for endings and vice versa thanks to opening and closing panels that depict the only remaining source of Rorschach’s inner thoughts, in other words his diary. Gull becomes aware of a symmetry to his actions that aligns events from a past before he was alive with future events that will take place long after he has expired. Such temporal manipulation is skilfully conveyed by exploiting the full potential of a braided narrative and it exemplifies a mimetic portrayal of a stream of consciousness by demonstrating that the linear constraints of narrative time are completely sidestepped in deference to the ubiquitous resonance of each protagonist’s recurring submission to an acute state of subconscious coercion.

### **3.7 Conclusion: Retroactive Determination – The Narrative Impact of Emerging from the Braid**

For a comprehensive analysis of Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull’s respective streams of consciousness an initial lack of orientation is only dispersed gradually through the repetition of particular visual motifs that are often implicitly woven into the

overall narrative and require a committed sense of plurivectoral scansion in order to contextualise. The significance of these visual cues may often be bypassed on a first reading. Therefore, identifying the respective portrayals of their streams of consciousness is as much an act of physical navigation back and forth through the text as it is a challenge to the reader's cognitive prowess. Bringing an aspect of symmetry to this physical performance it is useful to make note of Genette's approach to this kind of gradual disclosure in a narrative when he observes that, 'episodes which were lost to insignificance because of their dispersion are now suddenly reassembled, now made significant by being bound all together' (Genette 1983, 56). Notably, Genette's observation correlates with contemporary analyses of deferred significance in comics theory with Groensteen echoing a dynamic whereby, 'images that the breakdown holds at a distance, physically and contextually independent, are suddenly revealed as communicating closely, in debt to one another' (Groensteen 2007, 158). Similarly, Horstkotte notes that braiding charges overall layout with meaning, often, 'forcing readers to re-evaluate previous certainties' (Horstkotte 2011, 336). Arguably, this places the highest level of faith in the aforementioned participatory role of the reader. By drawing on the kind of 'associative logic' that exists between spatially interspersed nodal points in the overall text he or she enacts an indispensable strategy for negotiating their complex designs (Groensteen 2007, 158). As Currie concludes, the ability to cognitively traverse, 'the peculiar crossings between events and parts, the peculiar recollective-perceptive attitude of perspective, and the combination of during and after – form a useful summary of the phenomenological legacy for a narratological approach to temporality' (Currie 2015, 123). This traversal ideally summarises what the reader of these graphic novels undertakes as he or she familiarises him or herself with their respective structural designs and uses them as scaffolding to rebuild the discordant profiles of the dark anti-heroes they house. Consequently, where Currie argues that the process summarises a phenomenological legacy

for a narratological approach to temporality this chapter, and indeed thesis, proposes that the process is also capable of outlining a narratological template for the visualised portrayal of subconscious thought in graphic narrative.

Chapter four will initiate a shift in focus in this thesis. The previous chapters outlined the reading strategies necessary in order to fluently navigate *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell*. The argument being proposed was that each novel is structured or designed with a psychology of its own, a psychology determined by a combined panoptic and plurivectoral scansion which speaks directly to the erratic mindset of each protagonist. Thus, this chapter rounds off the close reading and level of fluency required to navigate each of these graphic novels as braided narratives. The next chapter will focus more on the anti-heroes themselves, and attempt to psychoanalyse their dreams, nightmares, and visions. Having displayed each novel as an intricately woven braid it is now time to follow the strands to their locus point, the dark mind of the anti-hero himself.

## Chapter Four:

### Anti-Hero Psychology: Exploring the Link between Psychoanalysis and the Visual Design of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell*

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will be structured with the intent of accomplishing two tasks. The first will be to convey the relevance of placing Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs and William Gull under a psychoanalytical lens. To this end it will attempt to locate each character's mindset by pinpointing two key incidents in their lives that would shape them into the dark figures they would eventually become. This is a necessary precursor to exposing the psychology of the anti-hero as it helps to identify commonalities in their psychological make-up. The first incident will be an analysis of a key childhood experience as related by each respective narrative. The second incident will concern itself with a respective dream, flashback, or vision that they experience as adults with the purpose of highlighting the sense of awakening these episodes induce within them. In other words, first locating the psychological seeds that would help to define these characters, and then identifying a traumatic catalyst in their adult lives strong enough to justify their obsessive natures. This is an attempt to probe the depths of their engagement, in other words, with their own subconscious in an effort to identify a unifying pattern that might help to explain their motivations and actions.

After identifying these catalysts, this chapter will then explore the psychological impact they have on each respective anti-hero. To this end, the analysis section of this chapter will enact a three-stage plan. The first stage will draw on Freud's dream-work as identified by him in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and efforts will be made to apply it to the way each protagonist engages with his own subconscious, regardless of whether that engagement is manifested through a dream, premonition, or flashback. Doing so will examine how the

previously explored property of omission helps the reader to process the turmoil within these characters minds. Freud coins the term ‘nodal points’ in relation to the images that are prioritized by the dream-work and this term will be incorporated here to describe similarly prioritised panels that relay key signals from each character’s subconscious. The second stage will explore the relationship that psychoanalysis has with the image and the act of looking. The graphic novel represents a predominantly visual medium and the combination of psychoanalysis and visual methodology effectively sets the scene for the ways in which characters within them are portrayed. Thus, the incorporation of visual methodology will serve as an important contemporaneous update on the use of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The third stage will expand on an argument from film theory to further promote the relevance of placing these novels and their respective anti-heroes under a psychoanalytical lens. This interdisciplinary cohesion will be closely monitored due to the risk of allowing film theory to speak for a wholly separate medium. To that end, relevant points from an essay by Jean-Louis Baudry entitled ‘The Apparatus’ will be adopted as it argues that the medium of film is an ideal conduit for the conveyance of psychoanalytical terminology.

In light of the context established by this analysis, the stage is then set for a close psychoanalytical reading of Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs and William Gull. This reading will demonstrate the applicability of two important terms within psychoanalytical discourse to the way these figures react to the traumatic visual language of their own subconscious. The work of semiotician Kaja Silverman will play a significant role here and the key terms that will be applied are metonym and displacement. The sequences these terms will be applied to will shed light on the role such terms can play in extracting a sense of visualised psychology from the blended narrative of text and image. By applying a psychoanalytical lens to the subconscious experiences of these protagonists it will be demonstrated that the medium they exist in has the potential to act as a visual aid to the psychology used to define them. Thus,

this chapter will initiate a shift in the focus of the thesis overall away from the narrative structure of the novels themselves to a more character-centred breakdown of each protagonist's stream of thought in an effort to source the root of the anti-hero mindset.

#### **4.2 Character Location – Preparing Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs and William Gull for Visual and Psychoanalytical Analysis**

In Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Wayne's transformation from boyhood to an existence based on perpetual guilt and a rigid code of justice is captured with a powerful sense of visual resonance. Bruce Wayne is a man in his mid-to-late fifties, burnt out and numbed into a state of apathy who recklessly engages with a dangerous lifestyle with little or no regard for the consequences it engenders. In fact, he seems quite ready to confront the finality of these consequences head on. As noted in the previous chapter the narrative engages straight away with his participation in a car race that almost ends with his death as his car bursts into a ball of flame. As he stares into the inferno closing in on him he indifferently concludes that, 'This would be a good death ... but not good enough.' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 2) Two pages on, in a reunion with a visibly aged Commissioner Gordon, himself only four weeks away from retirement, Gordon notes that Wayne has, 'certainly learned to drink' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 4). Similarly, Alfred, Wayne's aged butler, drily conveys his hopes, 'that the next generation of the Wayne family shan't face an empty wine cellar' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 13). This then is the Bruce Wayne with whom Miller opens his novel, a brooding veteran from a private war whose life revolves around a morbid death-wish. Even though Miller's interpretation of the Dark Knight was a significant remove from the Batman readers were familiar with the novel still managed to re-cast him in a way that stayed true to his defining characteristics. As Alan Moore points out in his introduction to the novel, 'Everything is exactly the same, except for the fact that it's all totally different' (Miller 1986, Introduction). For the purpose of the psychoanalytic approach this chapter will pursue

this is relevant because Miller has opened his novel on the very first page with a deeply troubled and complex character. Consequently, this approach unsettles a readership that is even only casually aware of the Batman character and leaves them unsure as to what they can expect from him in the story to follow. Thus, in his efforts to re-imagine a well-known character, this opening level of discordant characterisation, coupled with a sense of expectation and uncertainty on the reader's part, plays perfectly into Miller's next move. Having introduced the reader to a barely recognizable Bruce Wayne he is able to re-present the psychological turmoil that defines him with a level of intensity not seen before.

As noted in the introduction the two-step progression into the psychological location of each character begins with an incident in their early childhood. For the case of Bruce Wayne in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* the first move is to re-imagine two of the most significant events in the young Bruce Wayne's life. The first event can be seen as the formative seed that is planted in all three protagonists' respective childhoods. The first port-of-call for the young Bruce Wayne is his initial encounter with the bat-cave and, in Miller's hands, the demonic guardian that dwells within it. The confrontation with this totemic entity is delivered in the form of a dream/nightmare as experienced by a now long-retired Batman in his mid-fifties and is established by means of a visual reconstruction of an early childhood experience. In a sequence consisting of twenty two consecutive panels Miller depicts a young Bruce Wayne chasing after a rabbit and falling through a hole on the Wayne manor estate grounds:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 10).

The dream sequence then depicts Wayne descending head-first into a dark abyss straight into a cacophony of startled bat shrieks that fill the bottom half of a deliberately narrow, vertical, page-long panel:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 10).

As he attempts to get his bearings he becomes aware of the fact that he is not alone in this subterranean lair. Introduced simply by two red eyes and two flaring nostrils at first, in a panel where everything else is consumed in blackness, the terrified Wayne pulls back from what Miller presents as a demonic manifestation of the bat that resides over this tomb-like setting:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 11).

The full body of this ancient guardian is never depicted, stylistically severed by the surrounding frame of each consecutive panel. This way neither Wayne nor the reader is allowed the closure of applying a sense of complete scale to the creature, effectively capturing the sense of anxiety Wayne feels while at the same time conferring a ubiquitous resonance onto the bat that is capable of permeating not just the cave in which it dwells but the entire narrative that it presides over. Partial representation of a claw or a wing adds stylistic emphasis to this dynamic while at the same time solidifying the psychic imprint it will have on Wayne's adult life. As the sequence draws to a close this hellish watcher opens its mouth and the dream adopts an Inferno-like resonance as the open jaws are depicted as being entirely full of fire – an element that will be used to explain the anti-hero's complex relationship with myth in the following chapter. Upon awakening from this dream Wayne sombrely reflects how, 'I was only six years old when that happened. When I first saw the

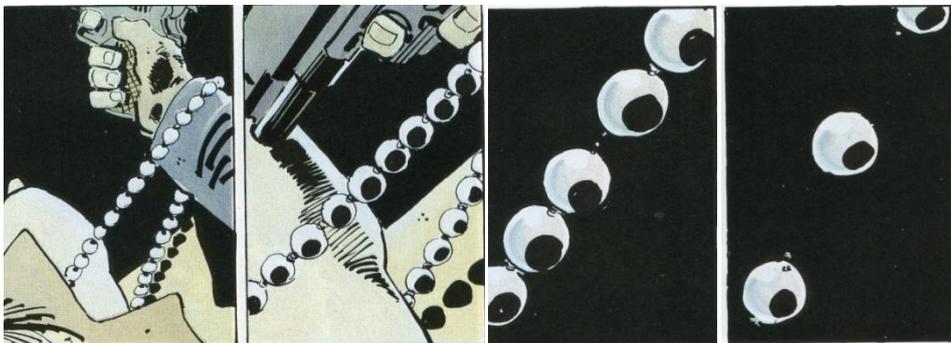
cave ... huge, empty, silent as a church, waiting, as the Bat was waiting.’ (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 11).

The next stage in outlining the psychoanalytical parameters with which to connect these protagonists is to identify a moment in their lives where they experience an epiphany that acts like a guiding light in their self-appointed quests. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* the second aspect of the Batman mythos that Miller applies his own stylistic spin to relates to this essential visual psychological trigger. All three of these protagonists have this in common. Consequently, how they respond to entrenched visual triggers in their subconscious displays a sense of psychological instability which they attempt to assuage with violent and sociopathic behaviour. Two pages after this dream/flashback of his first encounter with the Bat Miller depicts Wayne channel-surfing at home, complete with wine glass in hand. When it is announced that the movie about to be shown is *The Mark of Zorro*, the same movie that his parents took him to the night they were gunned down in an alley, it triggers a second jarring flashback in Wayne’s mind as he considers, ‘Zorro. I should have checked the listings. I should turn it off . . . Right this second . . . Just a movie. That’s all it is. No harm in watching a movie’ (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 14). Indeed, for Wayne this moment is indeed quite harmful and induces a sense of reflective paralysis in him. In the panel directly preceding the flashback sequence to come Wayne’s face is depicted in a retreating posture, attempting to draw his head back from the screen before him:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 14).

As the episode draws to a close in his mind's eye, he is depicted twice more in a near identical posture, implying that he has been frozen into place by the severity of this resurfaced trauma. However, the memory contains a sense of prescience that is too painful to allow retreat, and the following sequence commences regardless. The sequence itself consists of twenty seven panels which are all the more notable due to the lack of accompanying text in any of them. Wayne is forced to watch his parents being gunned down once more. Just like the earlier sequence, where Wayne first encountered the Bat that would become his totemic guide, this rerun of his parents' murder is delivered through intense proximity and partial representation. The visual perspective used varies discordantly from close ups of the young Bruce's face, to snapshots of the gunman's finger on the trigger, to shell casings suspended mid-air, to the ruptured fragments of his mother's pearl necklace:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 16).

Indeed, the optimum level of psychic resonance seems to be applied by Wayne to these disconnected pearls as they seem to hover in his mind even after the flashback has run its course. In an effort to escape the effect they have on him he even attempts physically running away from the television that initiated this flashback, blindly crashing into a statue in the mansion as he does so. These, then are the two key sequential triggers from which to generate a psychoanalytical reading of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and as will be demonstrated through the combined application of Freudian dream analysis and visual methodology they exemplify the novel's ability to convey a stream of consciousness.

Tracing progression across a spectrum of characteristically violent behaviour and an extreme worldview, as demonstrated by all three of these anti-heroes, is a pivotal component to isolating the common denominator between them. In spite of their methods, at their core these characters share a consuming conviction to see their own personal quests in life fulfilled, that is their strongest defining link. Batman is arguably the most famous vigilante in comics, but he has sworn to never take a life. Rorschach is a different breed, he graduates from administering brutal beatings to committing murder, allowing Moore to take the concept of the anti-hero as vigilante and push it, 'several stages further' (Khoury 2008, 109). To the extent, in fact, that killing actually makes him feel 'cleansed' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 26). This mindset, then, is the next variation on the dark anti-hero motif that this chapter will place under psychoanalytic scrutiny and just as in the previous case, where one incident was recounted from Bruce Wayne's youth and another from his adult life the same template will be applied to Walter Kovacs/Rorschach.

Applying a psychoanalytical reading to *Watchmen's* Walter Kovacs is an easy fit for a character whose mask is a canvass of constantly shifting Rorschach patterns. Fittingly, it is only in the presence of Dr. Malcolm Long, the novel's psychoanalyst, that efforts are made to peel away the abrasive psychological barrier he takes refuge behind. In the example taken

from *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* above, the first seed of psychological turmoil was seen to take root in an early childhood experience. Similarly, for Walter Kovacs, the root of his aberrant behaviour can also be traced back to an instant of childhood trauma. Both of the aspects of his life that will be held up to psychoanalytical reading here are triggered by his exposure to one of Dr. Long's Rorschach cards. As pointed out in the previous chapter from the perspective of the novel's narrative design and use of braiding Dave Gibbons designs the first card that Rorschach examines as a suggestive ink-blot pattern that resembles two people facing each other:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 3).

The sense of visual fluidity this permits between consecutive panels underlines the significance it bears on a particularly traumatic incident in the young Walter Kovacs' life. In a sequence that takes up two pages — and is symmetrically framed on either side by the same Rorschach ink-blot — Moore and Gibbons depict a flashback to an incident in Kovacs' life where he fearfully walks in on his mother, who has descended into a life of prostitution, having sex with a customer. It is a fearful experience for him because he has no idea what is happening and naively believes his mother is being hurt. Chapter three of this thesis highlighted the valuable role played by braiding in imbuing, and then arbitrarily sustaining, a disturbing psychological resonance to Kovacs' presence throughout the novel, documenting his graduation from abuse victim to sociopath. It initiated this dynamic by reaching into the

archive of his unconscious and revealed his first efforts to convey his emotions visually and the result is worthy of displaying once again:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 32).

Significantly, a transcript of the young Kovacs describing this incident accompanies this drawing and it is relayed in nightmarish form as he explains how:

I was walking down this sort of hallway, and it was dark and I saw what looked like my mom and this guy dancing, old fashioned dancing at the other end of the room, and they didn't have any clothes on . . . When they got nearer, I saw they weren't dancing at all, they were squashed together like Siamese twins, joined at the face and chest and stomach. They didn't have any face, you could only see their ears, two on either side of the head facing each other. Their hands were growing into each other as well, but they had all four legs free and they were sort of dancing sideways towards me down the dark hall like a crab . . . They were coming towards me, and then I woke up. . . The dream it sort of upset me, physically (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 32).

In the novel's flashback of this incident, upon Walter's entrance into the bedroom the customer gets irate and callously throws a five dollar bill onto the bed before leaving. It is Walter, however, who feels the full brunt of his mother's rage. The tirade of abuse she levels at her young son is portrayed as having a permanent effect on him. Turning to face him she addresses him thus, 'You little shit! You know what you cost me, you ugly little bastard? I shoulda listened to everybody else! I shoulda had the abortion!' (Moore and Gibbons 2007,

Ch. VI, 4). Her aggressive reaction and abusive language implant a traumatic seed so powerful in the young Walter's life that all he can do in later adulthood is attempt to cloak this trauma behind the anonymity of a mask. Bruce Wayne witnessed his parents being gunned down before him, thus setting up the motif of absent parents and the role it would have to play in his development as an adult. Rorschach, however, never knew his father, is admitted into care in a foster home at a young age and seems to express satisfaction when he is told that his mother is dead. This is a much darker take on the absent parent motif and the earliest indication of a figure for whom murder represents an acceptable solution to life's problems. As comics scholar Gene Phillips notes, 'Walter Kovacs' very life is an injustice, starting from conception' (Bensam 2010, 69). For the kind of psychological profile that this chapter is attempting to establish this represents an emerging philosophy in the anti-hero's mindset that regards the loss of life as a passable consequence that carries no emotional weight, in other words, the anti-hero for whom empathy is an alien concept.

To continue with the pattern of connecting a psychological trigger from childhood with a catalyst or moment of epiphany in adulthood the next step in *Watchmen* is to identify the aspect of Rorschach's adult life that corresponds to this pattern. As seen in the analysis of Bruce Wayne it does not take much of a catalyst to unlock a powerful surge of psychological turmoil, a simple reminder of the movie he went to see on the fateful night his parents were gunned down was enough to trigger his extreme response. For Rorschach the catalyst is a two-step affair. The first step addresses why Rorschach was driven to create a new face for himself. In a sequence again influenced by a suggestive ink-blot, Kovacs explains to Dr. Long how the rape, torture, and death of a young girl named Kitty Genovese exacerbated his complete detachment from society. His connection to this girl and the fate she suffers is tenuous but nevertheless significant. In his job subsequent to his release from foster care, as a manual worker in the garment industry, he is commissioned to make a dress composed of

viscous fluids compressed between two layers of heat and pressure sensitive latex for a young girl (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 10). He cannot remember her name at the time but his memory is refreshed when he sees it two years later on the cover of *The New York Gazette* in connection with her murder. Indeed, the fact that this crime was watched by a group of neighbours who did nothing to prevent it has a profound impact on him:



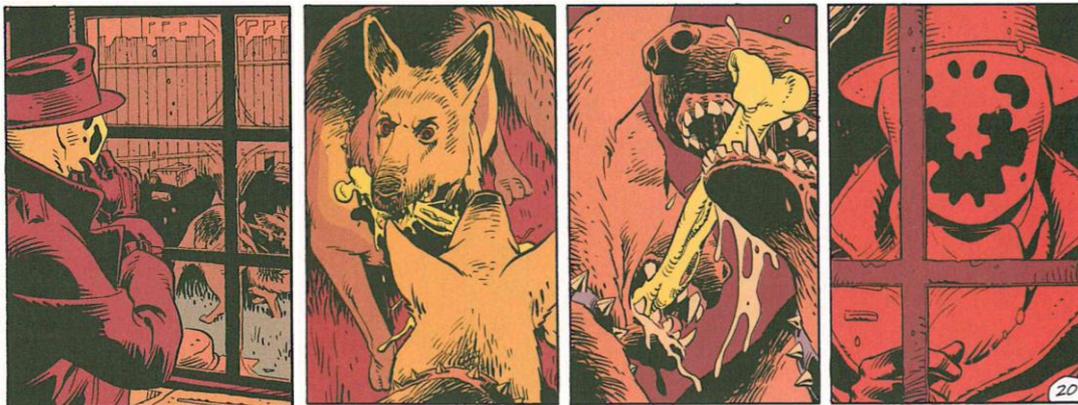
(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 10).

The second trigger that initiates an explanation of Rorschach's awakening is again a result of his engagement with his psychoanalyst's Rorschach cards. Dr. Long's sessions with the captured vigilante fascinate the analyst, but he is convinced that there is a deeper layer to Rorschach capable of explaining how he has become the apparent monster he appears to be as he makes note of the fact that:

...he never says what it is that compels him. It's not his childhood, his mother or Kitty Genovese. Those things just made him over-react to the injustice in the world. They're not what sent him over its edge. They're not what turned him into Rorschach (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 16).

The trigger that pushes Bruce Wayne over the edge and causes him to resume the mantle of the bat is a flashback to the most traumatic moment in his life, the death of his parents. The trigger that pushes Rorschach over the edge also revolves around death, but in

this case it is a death for which he is responsible. The second component that fully completes Rorschach's awakening consists of a formidable sixty three panel sequence, thirty six of which, not unlike Wayne's traumatic flashbacks, are explicated without any accompanying text. It is as though the primacy of the image alone, unhindered by text, represents the most effective conduit to convey the intensity of reflection, thus suggesting that consciousness itself is primarily an imagistic experience for him. This unlocked memory shows Rorschach searching the home of a suspected child abductor, seemingly reaching a chilling conclusion as to the fate of the missing child as he observes two guard dogs fighting over a distinctly familiar bone fragment:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 20).

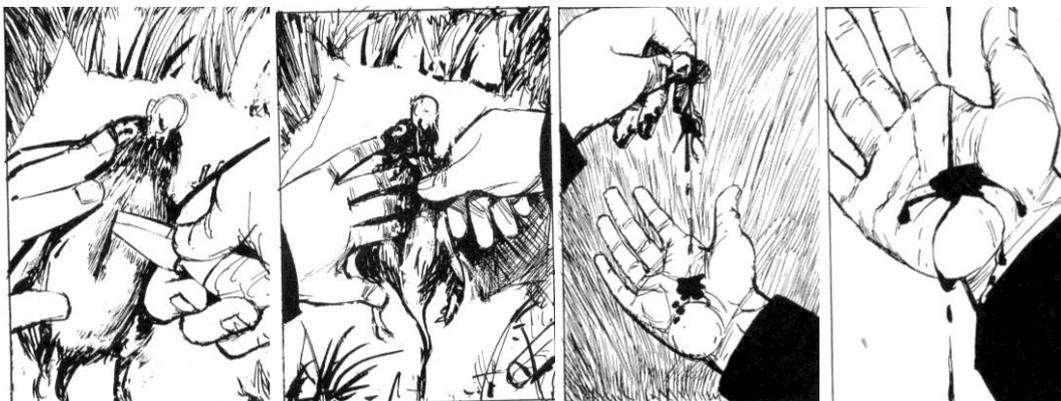
The remainder of the flashback shows Rorschach waiting for the killer to return home at which point he steps into the role of judge, jury, and executioner. As he watches the killer's house burn to the ground, with the killer handcuffed to the boiler in its cellar, whatever was left of Walter Kovacs disappears and is replaced by detached manifestation of vengeance he chooses to call Rorschach.

The relevance of selecting *From Hell's* William Gull for this analysis is justified by the degree to which his maniacal conviction can be attributed to the anti-hero's characteristic trait of pursuing a self-appointed crusade, no matter how dark that crusade may be. In his case, however, the concept is taken to its extreme as for him murder *is* the essential

component to that sense of completion. For him, the act of taking a life, and the subsequent ritualised mutilation which follows, becomes a conduit to a hypothesized higher plane of spiritual existence. Pointedly, all three protagonists believe that the path they are on serves the greater good. Thus, the argument being made in Gull's case is that even psychopathic behaviour can be located within the anti-hero mindset, especially given that his psychological development as portrayed in the novel corresponds to a similar pattern to the figures seen already. A seed is planted in early childhood to strongly imply that his destiny is going to be chartered down a very dark path. Again we encounter the loss of a parent, and again, most significantly, there is the psychic confrontation in adult life with a catalytic/epiphanic event that concretises his sense of conviction. Thus, Gull represents the dark apotheosis of the quest motif, and he exemplifies just how inter-related the psychopathic and the anti-heroic mindset can be.

As explored in the previous chapter the early glimpses of the young William Gull reveal a child that speaks with a very detached air, almost like someone who is already wise beyond his years. On one level this notably clinical mannerism can be seen as a fitting precursory stage to his later career as a surgeon, but it also subtly intimates a much darker aspect of his psyche. Speaking to his father in relation to what he would like to do with his life he reveals how, 'I should like to work with something . . . something that flows like the ocean . . . something salt, and old' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 2). Indeed, in a conclusion that would imply that his young mind is already made up he expresses his anticipation for a task most difficult, necessary, and severe and disregards in advance the reactions of others to his appointed course in life (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two. 3). Thus, before any traumatic or life-changing event has taken place Gull displays a cryptic sense of steely determination as a child. As with the other two protagonists he also loses a parent at a young age, however, in his case the presumably traumatic impact of such an

occurrence seems lost on him. In fact, in the scene where a doctor pronounces his father's cause of death as cholera the incident seems significant only in that it provides young William with a source of amusement as he pops open one of his father's eyelids with his fingers and laughs (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 4). The morbid irreverence that Gull displays here towards his father's corpse can be read as the first sign in the novel of his impending fascination with the manipulation of dead bodies. In the last sequence devoted to his childhood this fascination is fleshed out even more, this time replacing irreverence for reverence, as he dissects the body of a dead field mouse. Moore emphasises the sense of admiration in this episode when he explains that, 'The rat just rests there in William's powerful young hands, an object of awe and reverence where seconds before it had been only the merest carrion' (Campbell and Moore 2013, 46). In a sequence which is an early precursor to the climactic, and most disturbing, mutilation in the novel a young William produces a pocket knife and calmly begins dissecting the mouse:



Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 5/6).

Notably, the calculated precision with which he conducts this dissection will be applied in later life to his human subjects. In this scene, he pauses, almost longingly, only when the act is carried out and the warm blood of the mouse flows over his hand. This is the first incident in the novel where his desire to work with something 'that flows like the ocean . . . something salt and old' is realised (Moore and Campbell, 2013, Ch. Two, 2). Pointedly, Moore notes

that, ‘The moment is timeless and glassy . . . holy and mysterious. A personal grail revealed’ (Campbell and Moore 2013, 48/49). The pursuance of a violent grail-like quest is a pivotal linkage point between all three protagonists but in Gull’s case the quest motif takes as dark a turn as possible. In his review of *From Hell* for *The Comics Journal*, Rich Kreiner adds to this establishment of a dark psychological impulse, or ‘seed’, which will later manifest itself in the guise of human mutilation. He notes, ‘that as the child Gull splits open a dead field mouse, he, in our company, was divining an oracle. We, as he, read the entrails and clearly see the future: there’s blood on his hands’ (Campbell and Moore 2013, 47). Thus, this signals the initiation stage of a journey within that will ultimately yield the most chilling form of subconscious apotheosis.

There is a very gradual build up to William Gull’s point of awakening. This pace is perhaps understandable for a character who has declared a desire for a task most difficult from such an early stage in life. For all the honours he is awarded in the field of medicine and in spite of his continued rise through the ranks of the Freemasons he still feels that his life lacks true meaning as he muses, ‘I am fifty, my own purpose unrevealed’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 15). Even though he regards his achievements up to this point as meaningless laurels his ascension through the ranks of the Freemasons does grant him access to the identity of the deity the Freemasons worship:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 17).

Unbeknownst to him at the time, this disclosure has a profound impact on his psyche and it is only many years afterwards that its significance is revealed. As he takes a walk through the Scottish highlands he encounters a series of ghostly figures from his past which he first attributes to hallucinatory formations in the surrounding fog (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 25). The first one he encounters is Nicholas Hawksmoor, the Masonic architect whose teachings introduced Gull to the idea, 'that certain symbols might subtly affect men's minds' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 13). The next figure he speaks to is his dead father, to whom he expresses his shame at still having found no purpose in life, 'Father I am almost seventy, and the lord has found me no special task' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 25). Finally, he is urged to the top of the hill he is climbing by the spirit of his dead friend James Hinton. Campbell and Moore's syntagmatic structuring of one figure from beyond the grave after another bestows a sense of anticipatory set design onto the way in which the narrative is presented to the reader. Before Gull reaches the top of the hill that Hinton is pointing at the reader must turn the page and experience the visual impact of an image deemed so significant to the conveyance of Gull's first hallucinatory breakdown that it takes up the entire page:



From Hell, Chapter Two, Page 26

(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 26).

Within the medium of sequential narrative a page that is devoted to one image like this is known as a splash page and according to Will Eisner, when the reader encounters a page like this a pause occurs which, ‘permits a change of time, a shift of scene, (and) an opportunity to control the reader’s focus’ (Eisner 2008, 65). Indeed, the reader’s focus is entirely dedicated to an overpowering visitation from William Gull’s new god, the Masonic deity Jah-Bul-On that he was introduced to earlier. In Gull’s case what is being exposed here is an accelerated descent into madness. However, this subconscious call-to-arms by an imagined entity, just like the initiatory moments of awakening experienced by the protagonists in the other novels, falls in line with Freud’s conclusions on the revelatory momentum of the dream-work. He argued that, ‘the first thing we see is the perceptual content that has been constructed by the

dream-work and immediately afterwards we see the perceptual content that is offered to us from outside ourselves' (Freud 2010, 575). The perceptual content that Gull sees outside himself could not be clearer, the novel contains only two splash pages and one of them is devoted to the towering status his new god is imbued with, depicted by Campbell as dwarfing Gull to the extent that the reader barely notices him at the bottom of the page. As he later explains to his coachman, 'Netley I saw God. I knelt before him . . . and he told me what to do' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 22). Thus, Gull finally finds his purpose in life. However, it is a private revelation between him and his totemic guide and at this point in the narrative the chilling nature of task he has been appointed remains hidden from the reader.

#### **4.3 The Dream-Work Analogy: Reading Panels as Nodal Points and Applying the Concept of Condensation to the Visual Representation of the Anti-Hero's Stream of Consciousness**

Before gauging the psychological impact of each protagonist's dreams the proposal of a theorised similarity between the structure of the dream-work and the nature of graphic narrative will further concretise the intention of this thesis to argue each novel's ability to effectively convey a stream of consciousness. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Sigmund Freud repeatedly posits the idea that a dream, 'is expressed as it were in a pictographic script' (Freud 2010, 296). He expands on this analogy to clarify that the dream-work, 'is obliged to paint what it has to say pictorially, and (that) . . . it makes full and powerful use of the pictorial form' (Freud 2010, 110). Given the medium's visually fragmented nature, one can identify theoretical correlations between Freud's analogy and the visual and sequential portrayal of each protagonist's subconscious thoughts. Notably, Christopher Booker proposes an interdisciplinary link between dreams and stories in *The Seven Basic Plots* and initiates his efforts by proposing that, 'the sequences of imagery which make up our dreams are shaped and presented to our conscious awareness (even though we are asleep) by another part of the

brain of which we are wholly unconscious' (Booker 2010, 543). The validity of that statement becomes apparent in the case of these graphic novels by applying a psychoanalytic reading to the way their respective protagonists' dreams are depicted. The underlying intention being to show how aspects of Freud's approach to the dream-work can be appropriated to map the turbulent mindset of anti-heroes who are unexpectedly confronted by visual warning signs that emerge from the depths of their minds. Notably, within the structure of the dream-work Freud refers to a prioritisation of key moments, or nodal points, within the work that enjoy the strongest element of support. He argues that, 'the most intense elements are also the most important ones – those which form the center-point of the dream-thoughts' (Freud 2010, 345). Each one represents an important link in the chain of what is eventually visualised, whereby:

A dream is constructed, rather, by the whole mass of dream-thoughts being submitted to a sort of manipulative process in which those elements which have the most numerous and strongest supports acquire the right of entry into the dream-content (Freud 2010, 302).

Sequential art operates on no less significant a process of manipulation and pictorial prioritization. In the case of each of these graphic novels – specifically in relation to the representation of dreams, flashbacks and visions -the writers and illustrators prioritize only those components that will allow successful transition from panel-to-panel in order to convey a sense of seamless continuity. Thus, a proposed similarity in construction between the dream-work and sequential narrative bears significant weight. In fact, according to Booker it is a connection that has been awaiting discussion for quite some time. Referring to Freud and Jung's lifelong devotion to the ability of the unconscious to transmit messages to our consciousness he points out that:

...it is curious how much of the pioneering work of these two psychoanalysts in opening up our understanding of the unconscious was centred on their study of dreams, without

their recognising just how much more systematic a picture of its workings can be derived from analysing the process whereby we imagine stories (Booker 2010, 553).

However, the graphic novel is an ideal location for such an interdisciplinary exchange process to take place. As such it is not entirely unsurprising to find that some of Freud's earliest queries on the nature of dreams, including questions like, 'Are all the dream-thoughts present alongside one another? Or do they occur in sequence? (and) what are the conditions that determine their selection?' (Freud 2010, 298) are echoed by similar queries in the field of comics theory by theorists like Thierry Groensteen who probed the narratological validity of:

Immobile images separated by gutters: how do we tell a story with these things? Is the narration in the images? Is it dispersed between each image, or does it emerge from being arranged end to end? (Groensteen 2007, 103/104).

Such levels of inquiry reflect the vibrancy of a medium built on selection and rejection, on as much of a reliance on what is hidden as what is ultimately revealed. Freud proposed that the sense of cohesion which can unify dream imagery into a semblance of narrative expression is determined by the principle of condensation. Usefully, David Macey defines condensation as a process whereby, 'A single idea or image in a dream may represent the nodal point at which a number of chains or of associations or ideas intersect' (Macey 2001, 71). Thus, Freud concludes that the key element to condensation, 'is brought about by omission: that is, that the dream is not a faithful translation or a point-for-point projection of the dream-thoughts, but a highly incomplete and fragmentary version of them' (Freud 2010, 299). This ties in well with a form of narrative that sees omission as one of the most important components in establishing a complicit relationship with the imagination of its readers, especially when it requires them to follow a character's stream of consciousness based on arbitrary and/or erratic visual cues. Therefore, Freud's nodal point may be appropriated in this context to read as any panel that carries an important visual cue relating to the way Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull's thoughts patterns are

visualised. However, it is vital that the reader can draw a semantic connection between such panels without too much obstruction, there is no narrative otherwise, or a frustratingly stunted one at best. This is a return to the concept of closure that was raised in chapter one right through to the dynamics of the braided narrative that was analysed in chapter three - where a consistent level of reader complicity is called on in order to bring cohesion to the narrative and fill in the blanks. Freud also addressed the significance of omission in the dream-work, referring to it as a semantic linkage point capable of representing:

...foreground and background, digressions and illustrations, conditions, chains of evidence and counter arguments. When the whole mass of these dream-thoughts is brought under the pressure of the dream-work, and its elements are turned about, broken into fragments and jammed together – almost like pack-ice – the question arises of what happens to the logical connections which have hitherto formed its framework’(Freud 2010, 328).

What the concept of condensation reveals here can be re-channelled into the way a stream of thought is mapped out in sequential narrative, a medium quite suited to Freud’s pack-ice analogy. Given the limit of panels that any one page can incorporate the question raised above by Freud in relation to the formation of logical connection points is just as relevant when applied to a fragmented narrative. Nevertheless, the pack-ice analogy makes for an interesting way of thinking about how visualised thought patterns may be grouped together on a page. Notably, Freud believed that:

Imagination in dreams is without the power of conceptual speech. It is obliged to paint what it has to say pictorially, and, since there are no concepts to exercise an attenuating influence, it makes full and powerful use of the pictorial form (Freud 2010, 110).

From the perspective of how the dreams/flashbacks/visions that these anti-heroes experience are designed, this reference to an attenuating influence can be read as the physicality of the page and the limited amount of panels that it can contain without sacrificing the cohesion of the narrative. Subsequently, any sequence that successfully engages with an internal stream

of consciousness absolutely makes full and powerful use of the pictorial form. This echoes the previous chapter which spoke of the suggestive potential of braided narratives, whereby if the visual is suitably deployed it can even resonate long after the page it is presented on has been turned.

#### **4.4 Contemporising the Dream-Work: An Experiment in Form - Incorporating the Use of Visual Methodology to Focus the Application of Psychoanalysis on *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell***

The previous section proposed a theoretical similarity between Freud's structure of the dream-work and the portrayal of a stream of consciousness in a graphic novel. In particular the idea of reading a panel as a visual analogue of a nodal point and then applying the principle of condensation to account for the final selection of a sequence of panels on a page was proposed. However, basing such interdisciplinary cohesion on the transfer of terminology like nodal points must take into account the potentially tenuous integrity of the link due to the fact that *The Interpretation of Dreams* was published in 1898 and the field of comics studies is relatively new by comparison. Bearing in mind Barthes's caution in chapter one, that interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security, care must be taken when removing terminology from one discipline, located in the past, and realigning it to suit a discipline for which it was not conceived. Therefore, in order to reinforce the proposed advantage of a link between psychoanalytic theory and sequential narrative it becomes necessary to amplify the contemporaneous role psychoanalysis can play when it comes to analysing images.

This is where visual methodology comes in and it will be put to two uses. Firstly, incorporating elements from this discipline will strengthen the aforementioned theorised link between Freud's dream-work and the layout of a stream of thought in graphic narrative by

examining the relationship psychoanalysis has with the act of looking. Secondly, incorporating elements from visual methodology will grant this argument access to a very relevant link between psychoanalysis and film theory. It will need to do this in order to engage with an essay entitled ‘The Apparatus’ by French film theorist Jean-Louis Baudry. Baudry’s essay is being included due to the direct connection it has with Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* and for the way semiotician Kaja Silverman adapts it to psychoanalyse the medium of film. Baudry’s argument proposes that the medium of film is the ideal platform for the visual adaptation of psychoanalytic terminology and it establishes, ‘numerous points of similarity not only between dreams and films but between the psychic topography outlined in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the cinematic apparatus’ (Silverman 1983, 107). Key points in Baudry’s argument will be engaged with in order to justify the proposal that the graphic novel is a natural successor to the qualities he attributes to film. The aim of such interdisciplinary practice is to exemplify these graphic novels as highly absorbent agents for psychoanalytic discourse – thus representing a crucial landmark in the overall topography of a thesis attempting to map the anti-hero mindset.

As noted above, in the field of visual methodology a foundation exists in relation to the practice of screening visual narratives through the lens of psychoanalysis. Gillian Rose notes that, ‘the visual is actually very important to psychoanalysis,’ and makes the distinction that:

...the psychoanalytic skills brought to bear on the analysis of an individual are not those used in relation to visual culture. . . . Those writers using psychoanalysis, like so many others currently addressing issues of visual culture, are not interested in the producer of images as an individual. Instead, psychoanalytic concepts are used to interpret aspects of visual images and, in particular, their effects on spectators (Rose 2012, 150).

Of key relevance in this outline is Rose’s use of psychoanalysis to interpret aspects of visual images. Indeed, she expands on this by offering that psychoanalysis is not only used to, ‘pay

careful attention to images themselves, especially their *compositional modality*' but that it can also be used to process, 'the co-constitution of images' (Rose 2012, 151) (Rose's emphasis). In other words, the discipline can be used to analyse a single image or it can address the semantic potential unlocked by grouping multiple images together. This dynamic is a familiar one within the field of comics theory and it suitably summarises the narratological approach undertaken in chapters two and three of this thesis. Thus, by analysing the above-noted dream sequences experienced by these anti-heroes on a compositional basis an inter-disciplinary union between visual methodology and comics theory will be forwarded. Taken in the order in which they have been presented at the beginning of this chapter, a single experiment based on the significance of compositional modality will now be applied to the same sequences that featured earlier in this chapter.

In Bruce Wayne's case the dream he has of falling into what will consequently become the bat cave and his first encounter with its totemic Bat guardian offers up a sequence where a design feature known as a bleed is deployed. Comics theorist Scott McCloud explains that when a panel on a page of a comic or graphic novel has its frame or border removed it can take on a timeless quality. The panel's sense of duration is deconstructed and, 'because of its unresolved nature, such a panel may linger in the reader's mind' (McCloud 1994, 102). He continues that in the case where a panel is allowed to actually run off the page this effect is compounded and a situation arises whereby, 'Time is no longer contained by the familiar icon of the panel, but instead haemorrhages and escapes into timeless space' (McCloud 1994, 103). This is a component of sequential narrative that Miller skilfully applies to Bruce Wayne's nightmare and is used in two key panels within the dream-work. Within the actual dream/nightmare the opening panel on the left-hand side of a two-page sequence is signposted with the use of a bleed and relates to the young Bruce Wayne's fall into the swallowing darkness of the bat cave. In this case, the effect of the bleed activates a

connotative implication that strips his traumatic descent of a time span. In the spirit of a good nightmare it establishes an atmosphere of unquantifiable terror. However, the use of the bleed technique truly comes into its own at the bottom right-hand corner of the same page where the metonymic depiction of two eyes and two nostrils aglow with flame in an otherwise black panel that runs off the page stylistically portrays the inescapable nature of the brooding creature that has been waiting for Bruce Wayne to fall into its lair.

For Rorschach the establishment of a sense of compositional modality makes its first stop with the metronomic cadence of rhythm created by the symmetrical layout of each panel on the page. As noted earlier from the work carried out in the field of visual methodology by Gillian Rose, the visual is actually very important to psychoanalysis. This observation is so relevant here because this particular experiment in relation to the compositional analysis of a sequence is being carried out on one devoid of text, so the visual is everything. The predominantly nine-panel, three-by-three, grid-like nature of *Watchmen*'s pages adds a visually structured rhythm to the scene where the protagonist, just like the reader, is afforded one clue, or visual cue, with each new panel as to fate of the missing child that he is searching for. Eventual revelation is reached one step, in other words one panel, at a time. This in its own right is a skilful meta-textual nod to the rigid sense of order Rorschach imposes on his own life. Consequently, it is through the use of primary colours that Gibbons and Moore deliver the conclusive blow to this sequence. In a move that combines the properties of synecdochic representation with contiguity Rorschach observes two dogs fighting over what appears to be a human bone - a grim take on the use of synecdoche. But the full impact of what this scene must inevitably mean in relation to his own investigation is decisively delivered through the use of the colour red in the next panel which depicts his 'face'. Comics theorist Neil Cohn argues that, 'Panels act as a "window" on a visual scene, and thus serve as "attention units" to highlight parts of a scene in different ways' (Cohn 2013,

56). The way Dave Gibbons focuses these panels as attention units is a nod to the deft touch he brings to the novel overall. First of all he delivers a sense of revelation to this scene without using any text. On top of that, he is tasked with depicting an expression of horror on a mask, effectively a face that has no features. He is successful on both levels by contrasting a sense of almost yin-yang symmetry to the two panels. In the panel depicting the dogs fighting the human bone acts as a diagonal divider, and the snouts of the dogs occupy an equal space with one facing inwards from the lower-left hand side of the panel and the other face inwards from the upper right-hand side. In the following panel, where Rorschach realises the significance of this bone, the ink blot pattern on his mask, as is befitting his name, depicts an equally symmetrical pattern. So, what is seen here is a symmetrical panel structure, or form of narrative, which uses visual symmetry within the story world to deliver the conclusion that the protagonist reaches and which subsequently crystallises his severe outlook.

The third, and final, manifestation of the dream-work to be submitted for componential analysis here is the epiphany William Gull experiences in *From Hell*. As noted above, when out on the Scottish Highlands early in the novel Gull is confronted with a series of illusionary figures, all deceased in reality, which he first attributes to formations in the surrounding fog. Campbell and Moore's seemingly discontinuous syntagmatic alignment of one figure from beyond the grave after another corresponds with Freud's take on the arbitrary sense of sequential causality within the dream-work itself when he observes that, 'Dreams are disconnected, they accept the most violent contradictions without the least objection, they admit impossibilities, they disregard knowledge which carries great weight with us in the day-time' (Freud 2010, 83). With this in mind this visual reconstruction creates the perfect sense of anticipatory set design that the medium is so comfortable with. As mentioned earlier, as Gull reaches the top of the hill that the illusory James Hinton has been pointing at the

reader must turn the page and encounter the full force denouement of one of the novels only splash pages. According to Eisner, when this technique is properly deployed, ‘it seizes the reader’s attention and prepares his attitude for events to follow. It sets a “climate” (Eisner 2008, 64). In this case the climate being set is one of sublime terror and overpowering awe. As a component within the medium capable of seizing a reader’s attention, a splash page is very often located on the left hand side of a double-page spread. The sequential arc building up to it will naturally be located on the previous page so the act of turning it becomes the primer for the full page confrontation that follows. This is a very effective way of introducing an element of shock to the narrative and acts as a fitting visual correlate to the Freudian observation that dreams admit all manner of impossibilities. In this particular case the shock is the sky-spanning revelation of Gull’s personalised Messiah.

Arguably, one of the most visually arresting aspects of the composition of these three incidents is the amount of complete, or partial, repetition of panels that takes place. Notably, Groensteen proposed that, ‘comics are founded on a dialectic of repetition and difference, each image linked to the preceding one by a partial repetition of its contents’ (Groensteen 2007,115). Usefully, this dialectic is also relatable to Freud’s theory on the nature of memory and the link has been enacted in comics theory by Georgiana Banita who applied it to panels that are almost identical, thus:

...reinforcing the idea of a past that recurs with obsessive persistence. The constant replay of memories, often encapsulated in iconographic detail, epitomizes the concept of difference through repetition by drawing on Freud’s claims that with repetition comes not only difference – understood within the repetitive pattern in which it is concealed – but also remembrance (Ball and Kuhlman (eds.) 2010, 182).

Thus, the re-emergence of specific images that relate to each protagonist’s past serves to reinforce them as defining nodes in their collective minds and thanks to the panoptic medium

that such memories are located in the past does indeed come across as an effectively repetitive and persistent agent.

#### **4.5 Tracking Causality: How the Graphic Novel Supersedes Filmic Representation in Relation to the Portrayal of a Stream of Consciousness**

This, then, is emblematic of a sample visual methodological analysis of some of the components from the skill-set of the medium that these graphic novels use to convey their respective protagonists' mindsets. In each case what arises is the establishment of a psychologically complex character as the narratological resonance of these visual cues embellishes the overall reading experience. Such multimodality opens an avenue into an additional strain of visual and psychoanalytical discourse by granting access to elements of film theory. Referencing French film theorist Jean-Louis Baudry's essay *Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus* in her book, *The Subject of Semiotics* Kaja Silverman proposes that 'films share with dreams a "capacity for figuration (and a) translation of thoughts into images"' and she notes that, 'Baudry attributes to films the same sensory and affective intensity which characterizes dreams' (Silverman 1983, 107). Thus, Baudry's perspective on the medium of film demonstrates that a precedent exists for the application of psychoanalysis to an inherently visual and sequential medium. It also serves to hone the focus of this thesis, as the primary source of psychoanalytic discourse that Baudry is concerned with is *The Interpretation of Dreams*, just as it is a central reference point in this chapter.

To sustain the impetus of this contemporised approach and demonstrate how it can be applied to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* it pays dividends to note Baudry's observations on the establishment of narrative continuity between individual frames in a film. He observes that:

The meaning effect produced (through the relation between individual frames and the projection) does not depend only on the content of the images but also on the material procedures by which an illusion of continuity, dependent on the persistence of vision, is restored from discontinuous elements. These separate frames have between them differences that are indispensable for the creation of illusion of continuity, of a continuous passage (movement, time). But only on one condition can these differences create this illusion: they must be effaced as differences (Baudry 1974, 42).

Baudry refers to discontinuous elements that are different enough to create an illusion of narrative flow. This process is carried out much quicker than the human eye can track due to the rate at which consecutive film frames are projected. However, a viewer is still effectively speed-reading a durative sequence of images. Significantly, in his efforts to establish a grammar of visual language which can be applied to comics, theorist Neil Cohn also comments on this shared property of film and comics, noting that:

...the filming and editing process often begins with “storyboarding,” where shots are drawn out in a form similar to the visual language used in comics. In other words, film uses the same narrative grammar, except the units are not static panels, but moving segments of film. The result is a hybrid: the narrative grammar organizes captured perceptual events in shots. Because film uses motion, this temporality can “gloss over” what in the static form would be individuated narrative units (Cohn 2013, 88).

Arguably, engaging with the individuated narrative units, or panels, in these graphic novels elicits a more observable condition of difference between its components due to the fact that the pace of the reading act can be arbitrarily slowed down and stopped wherever a reader likes. Engaging with this argument Groensteen picks up the film theory thread and weaves it into a discourse focused on the role played by discrete elements when it comes to creating the illusion of seamless continuity. He notes that:

When watching a film, “the cinema spectator does not experience . . . the sensation of being placed in front of a multitude of narrative utterances of the first order that accumulate piece by piece to give birth to the second order narrative utterance, the entirety of the filmic story.”

The comics reader, on the contrary, experiences precisely a sensation of this type (Groensteen 2007, 26).

By addressing a multitude of narrative utterances that accumulate piece by piece Groensteen's efforts can be used to address the element of difference that Baudry identifies as the primary carrier of meaning in a visual narrative. However, the graphic novel's level of fragmentation is far more emphasised and the semantic union of these fragments elicits a higher degree of closure from its audience than frames in a film do. Baudry identifies film as the ideal medium of transference for psychoanalytic analysis by mimicking:

...the "language" of the unconscious, as it is found in dreams, slips of the tongue, or hysterical symptoms, manifests itself as continuity destroyed, broken, and as the unexpected surging forth of a marked difference. Couldn't we thus say that cinema reconstructs and forms the mechanical model of a system of writing? (Baudry 1974, 42).

However, if his basis for a connection between psychoanalysis, cinema, and a system of writing is dependent on an emphasis on discontinuity and the surging forth of a marked difference then it stands to good reason that a medium capable of markedly emphasising such discontinuity and difference is more suitably located to absorb this broken language of the unconscious. Voices from the field of comics theory would certainly seem to feel this is the case with Groensteen arguing that:

The co-occurrence of panels within the multiframe, their simultaneous presence under the eye of the reader, and also the visibility of the intervals between these panels, that is to say, the locations where their symbolic articulation is carried out, function so that we are naturally inclined to credit narration to the sequence (Groensteen 2007, 105).

However, it suits the purpose of this chapter to posit that in this particular case – isolating Baudry's referral to a shared sensory and affective intensity between film and dream - that the medium of sequential narrative offers a more congruent source of absorption for Freud's theories. Baudry identifies the ability of film to translate thoughts into images. However, it becomes possible to posit the privileged position the graphic novel enjoys in this regard based

on the permanent state of existence that each panel enjoys. Referring to Groensteen once more, he points out that:

...barring the use of a video or DVD, the vision of the film is, by definition, monovectorized and irreversible; the filmic images are fugitive, and the echo of an image already passed is without another reality, no verification is possible, other than that of memory (Groensteen 2007, 155).

However, unlike the movie frame a panel on a page does not present itself for a fraction of a second and then disappear before our eyes. Both dreams and films suffer from the inconstancy of a transient sense of representation that can only be semantically related to for as long as it is either visible to the eye or available to memory. In other words, once one image is superseded by the next (whether on a screen or in the mind) then the previous one loses its status of priority (no longer being available to us) to the next and so it goes, in one direction. Thus, any panel in these graphic novels that visualises a character's thoughts can potentially contribute to a dynamic of panoptic simultaneity and permanency which allows for a far more encapsulating approach to the sensory and affective intensity Baudry attributes to film. To come full circle and return to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud also addressed the sequential causality of dream images when he emphasized that, 'the existence of a causal relation is only to be taken seriously if the transformation actually occurs before our eyes and not if we merely notice that one thing has appeared in the place of another' (Freud 2010, 332). By simply scanning the selected sequences that have been used in this thesis overall the act of transformation that Freud refers to is precisely the kind that takes place before the readers' eyes in each one, with the physicality of each panel on the page documenting an accountability to each anti-hero for the state of anxiety their minds entertain.

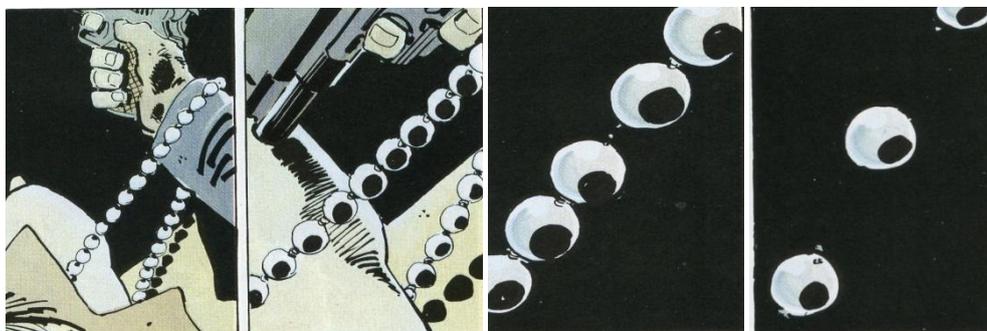
#### **4.6 Psychologising the Sequence – Conducting a Metonymic Analysis of Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull’s Dreams, Nightmares, and Visions**

Thus, by combining aspects of visual methodology with an appropriation of the points highlighted in Baudry’s essay a level of engagement is now available which can psychoanalyse important components in each of these sequences. To this end, in a move that will directly lead in from the work carried out with regards to Baudry’s essay, the final step in this approach will draw from the precedent set by Silverman in her application of particular psychoanalytic terminology to film. Her approach in *The Subject of Semiotics* effectively demonstrates the plasticity of a psychoanalytic reading by the way in which she applies it to a variety of media. In this spirit, two terms that will bear relevance to the furtherance of the psychoanalytic reading of these anti-heroes are metonym and displacement. Notably, Gillian Rose points out that, ‘many psychoanalytic critics often work with just one or two psychoanalytic concepts, exploring their articulation – or re-articulation – through a particular image’ (Rose 2012, 150). This suitably describes the following experiment, where not only single images but specific sequences of images that articulate each protagonist’s discordant streams of thought will be viewed in terms of the way they visually relate to metonymic representation – thus brokering further links between each novel’s design and the complex mindset of its anti-hero.

Thus, the above-noted approach will begin by returning to the sequence that portrays the most traumatic incident in Bruce Wayne’s psychological development. In a display of the semantic components unique to the medium Miller constructs a sequence of jarring snapshots which perfectly reconstruct the fractious nature of the medium itself while losing none of the brutality and anxiety of the moment they seek to depict. The main body of the sequence is devoid of text. A young Bruce Wayne, initially full of enthusiasm after seeing Zorro in action on the big screen, is briefly distracted by the appearance of large bat. This all occurs in a

single panel which comes to represent a symbolic drawing in of breath before the fragmented chaos of the sequence to follow. Indeed, it is within this sequence that Miller's command of the medium is demonstrated. Will Eisner's observations on the use of perspective within sequential narrative is worth mentioning here, noting its ability, 'to manipulate and produce various emotional states in the reader' (Eisner 2008, 92). This corresponds to Rose's visual approach to psychoanalysis too when she notes that, 'psychoanalysis often focuses on the emotional effects of visual images' (Rose 2012, 153). The reader's perspective throughout this sequence is from below, evoking 'a sense of smallness, which simulates a sensation of fear' which is a fitting way of aligning the reader with Wayne's point of view (Eisner 2008, 92). However, his most telling visual recollection of the incident relates to the pearls in his mother's necklace, a necklace which is subsequently ripped apart as the sequence draws to a close. This ideally captures his state of rupture from any further semblance of a normal life. The properties of metonymic substitution and displacement are used here to dissect the complexity of Miller's chosen method of expression for this recurring nightmare-as-flashback.

Wayne's subconscious attempts to pull back from the inevitability of a murder that is relived as a waking dream within his mind over and over again by emphasizing peripheral details:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 16).

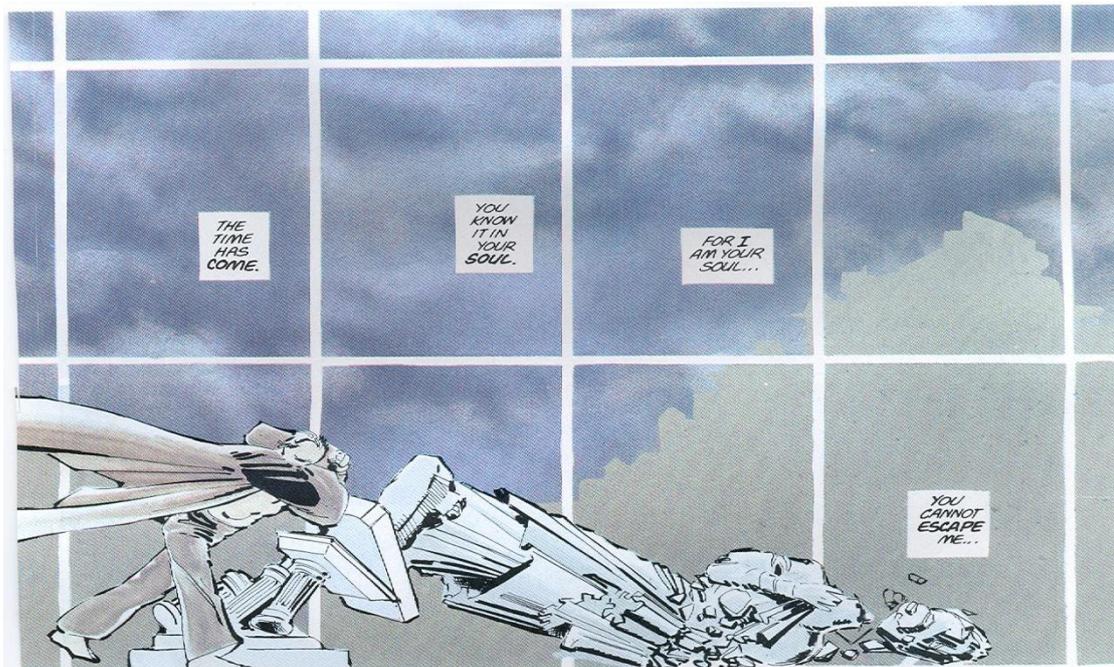
Yet, the sense of privilege he attributes to each pearl within his mother's necklace betrays an act of displacement that symbolises the metonymic shards of his own psyche, which vainly tries to restore a lost childhood that is naturally beyond recovery. In fact, by focusing on the componential minutiae of individual pearls Wayne reverts into a state of psychic relapse that Silverman attributes to the dream-work's inherent tendency to stage a:

...shift in emphasis away from those elements of the dream-thoughts that are most central to those that are most peripheral (ie. from those in which there has been the most psychic investment to those in which there has been the least) . . . (thus) taking things out of one context (ie. out of the linguistic, relational and temporal organisation of the preconscious) and putting them into an altogether different one (ie. a context in which the criterion of representability figures centrally, and in which difference – relational, temporal – no longer obtains) (Silverman 1983, 96).

Thus, intensive focus on those elements most peripheral, in other words the pearl fragments, operate on a dual level perfectly suited to the semantic scope of sequential narrative. By opting for a pearl fragment as a metonymic representation of a traumatic instance that can never be truly confronted Miller presents the reader with the tormented psychological state of the novel's protagonist. The reader's eye cannot help but be aware of the visual repetition of so many pearl fragments frozen in time and space, a semantic dynamic which is comparable to, 'a whole chain of tiny causalities strung close together, like beads sliding on an apparently smooth thread' (Barthes 1990, 197). It is important to consider this concept of frozen moments in time and space as regards the medium's unique perspective on the depiction of the dream-work. A mounting sense of pressure begins to build up in Wayne's mind based on the fundamental drive of the dream-work to utterly disregard any interest:

...in indicating or even maintaining relationships between different elements. It seeks to collapse distinctions – to achieve an absolute identification between repressed materials and those which substitute for them in the dream, as well as between the various dream-thoughts (Silverman 2008, 98).

This sense of compressive tension is captured visually as the mind of Wayne begins to revert back to reality and he tries in vain to hurriedly flick through channels on his television in an effort to screen out the traumatic impact of his recent flashback. However, the diminished size of the panels in which he attempts this stands as testament to a metonymic representation of acute anxiety and panic. Groensteen explains how, ‘panels can be assimilated to metonymic fragments’, and, quite fittingly, the sense of anxiety in this sequence is persistently goaded by the refusal of the individual pearl fragments to stay locked within the dream-work (Groensteen, 119). Disturbingly, they begin to show up in his waking thoughts also. Indeed, in a masterful nod to the effect that such a sense of collapse, as Silverman describes it, has not only on the mind of Bruce Wayne and on the process of cognitive perception within the reader of sequential narrative, the composition of panel arrangement and frame boundaries do indeed begin to destabilise before the eyes of the reader. The language used to construct the narrative begins to participate with the story-world to convey the degree to which Wayne’s subconscious attempts to manifest itself. Such a sense of pressure, notes Silverman, ‘breaks down syntagmatic clusters and chronological divisions. Displacement in dreams would thus seem to occur from one signifying chain to another, and not along individual chains in the majority of cases’ (Silverman 1983, 98/99). This ultimate sense of collapse, therefore, is allegorically portrayed by Wayne knocking over a towering statue in his futile efforts to run from the shadowy figure that haunts him:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 17).

The consequent destruction of this statue collapses the distinction between narrative design and the story-world as it takes eight panels to convey the dramatic impact of the incident. This is a skilful allusion to a narrative technique called metalepsis. Professor H. Porter Abbott explains in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* that this occurs when narrative technique and the story-world and are conflated. Interestingly, given the multimodal format of the graphic novel, he points out that the term has been related to patterns of, ‘frame-breaking in static arts like painting’ (Abbott 2012, 171). In this sequence in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* the panels also double as window frames in Wayne’s mansion. Narrative and diegesis blend into one, thus adapting, to use Silverman’s phrase, the ‘syntagmatic clusters’ of sequential narrative to suit a dual purpose while at the same time exposing the palpable sense of psychological turmoil that wracks Bruce Wayne’s mind (Silverman 1983, 98/99).

Silverman selects Raoul Walsh's film *Pursued* to demonstrate how displacement and metonym can be adapted to analyse the medium of film. As she explains, in it a character played by Robert Mitchum:

...suffers from hysterical amnesia about the early years of his life. His lapse of memory is triggered by the death of his father during a shootout with a sexual rival. The young boy hides during the fight in a kind of shelf below the trapdoor. All that he can see and hear is the movement of his father's spurs on the floor as he struggles with the other men. After those men leave, the boy lifts up the door and see's his father's corpse (Silverman 1983, 114).

The spurs in Walsh's film, as Silverman explains, 'are metonymically related to the father, and represent him in his protracted absence. They inspire both in his son and the viewer the desire for that missing figure' (Silverman 1983, 114). Similarly, the pearl fragments in Wayne's flashback metonymically relate to a mother figure who quickly becomes absent from the subsequent continuation of the dream-work. In this case, the censoring process of displacement attempts to distance Wayne from the proximity of a destabilising sense of psychic overload. In fact, in a proposed venture of interdisciplinary alignment whereby Silverman's process of analysis is being applied here to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* it is helpful to incorporate her close reading of the scene in *Pursued* because she proposes that the metonymic substitution that takes place in it, 'involves the displacement of affect from the unconscious memory of the father's death to the conscious (but not voluntary) memory of his spurs' (Silverman 1983, 114). Thus, the fact that Bruce Wayne's mother dominates this waking dream in spite of her largely predominant absence (in a sequence comprising thirty three panels she is only present in seven, in some cases represented to the limits of synecdochic depiction through frantic close-ups of her neck) suggest that metaphor and metonymy can be skilfully employed to open the wounds of absence that the loss of his parents' initiated in childhood.

Meanwhile, displacement's focus on the attribution of psychic intensity from one element to another, based on both contiguity and emotional intensity has already been initiated, and in order to explain this transference, Silverman identifies a, 'privileged concept' and a 'metaphoric one' (Silverman 1983, 113). She then explains that, 'the two concepts are never simultaneously manifest; rather, there is an oscillation, in which the presence of one militates against the presence of the other' (Ibid., 113). The level of adaption and reapplication of such comparative conclusions transfer effectively onto the anxiety fuelled flashbacks of a man oscillating at the high end of psychological disparity. Effectively, Wayne's mother's pearl necklace becomes the metaphoric concept with the privileged one being the absent mother herself. The sense of psychological retreat so emblematic of the displacement process leads to a militant sense of suppression which results in him erasing any trace of his mother's face from the flashback. This conveys the stunted psyche of an anti-hero who is permanently bound by the metonymic stranglehold of a chain of fragile pearls that forbid a normalised progression into adulthood.

In David Macey's *Dictionary of Critical Theory* he defines metonymy as being closely related to synecdoche, where an attribute of a thing stands for the thing itself. Using this description as a psychoanalytical doorway into the mind of Walter Kovacs it can be argued that of all three anti-heroes he is the one most adaptable to the dynamics of metonymic representation. Emotionally hardened by what he perceives to be the apathetic and callous nature of humanity (as explained above in his reaction to the circumstances surrounding the rape and murder of Kitty Genovese) he creates a new face that will allow him to cope with society. This face — a featureless mask defined by constantly shifting, yet perfectly symmetrical, ink patterns — becomes a barrier behind which he can retreat and apply his own sense of order to a society he perceives to be sinking into moral lapse. But over time, this act of displacement, whereby a paranoid mindset attempts to draw solace from the

fetishistic comfort of a mask, backfires. Silverman argues that, 'metonymy exploits relationships of contiguity between things, not words: between a thing and its attributes, its environment and its adjuncts' (Silverman 1983, 111). This idea of a relationship between a thing and its attributes would seem to classify Rorschach's metonymic relationship with his mask. In a situation that could be classed as metonymic overload the part, in other words the mask, consumes his sense of self completely and *becomes* the whole. This is seen on a number of occasions. In relation to the aforementioned rape and murder of Kitty Genovese he proceeds to make, 'a face that I could bear to look at in the mirror' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 10). At a point in the novel where he seeks to become anonymous, or to take it one step further, where he needs to blend into a crowd and become one who is devoid of identity, he 'peels off' his face (ie. his mask) because, 'without my face, nobody knows. Nobody knows who I am' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 11). So when he is apprehended by the police half-way through the novel and they remove his mask he frantically exclaims, 'No! My face! Give it back!' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 28). In her psychoanalytic reading of metonym Silverman explains that the principle of absence is central to the formulation of what she refers to as, 'the "classic" metonymic situation, in which one term stands in for another to which it is in some way contiguous' (Silverman 1983, 112). Crucially for Walter Kovacs the concept of absence relates, in this context, to his actual face. Walter Kovacs must be erased in order to formulate the identity of Rorschach.

However, there is another reason why Rorschach's mask makes for such an intriguing source of metonymic discourse. There are four moments in the novel where the immiscible fluidity that defines his mask coalesces into a recurring and identifiable pattern in response to (or perhaps to signify) Rorschach experiencing shock and/or horror. Additionally, these incidents all relate to the disclosure of important information in the story. The four moments being referred to are; his discovery in the first chapter of a hidden compartment in Eddie

Blake's wardrobe, which reveals him to be The Comedian, his reaction in the second chapter after hearing Moloch's story regarding Blake's midnight visit to his home just days before his murder, his shock when he pays a return visit to Moloch's home in chapter five to discover that Moloch has been murdered, and the moment of visual deduction which is conveyed in the flashback of his search for a missing girl as he suddenly realises what has happened to her. Each of these incidents is presented in the order listed below:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 8/Ch. II, 24/Ch. V 24/Ch. VI, 20).

As mentioned earlier in section 4.4, Gibbons is tasked with having to depict expression on a mask devoid of facial features. This is made all the more difficult given its impermanent composition which consists of a viscous fluid between two layers of heat and pressure sensitive latex. So while he effectively conveys the inconstant nature of the mask as a whole by depicting it with a different pattern every time it is seen it is significant (and arguably beyond coincidental in a narrative that uses the technique of braiding so skilfully) that one pattern in particular is chosen to signify moments of realisation in Rorschach's stream of consciousness. Keeping in mind the brief aside mentioned earlier in relation to the formation of a visual lexicon it is indeed as though Gibbons is attempting here to recreate the visual equivalent of a metonymic allusion to the expression of emotion. This is a masterstroke of compositional modality and a visualised form of metonymic discourse which, in the spirit of

all great stories, establishes an inconclusive outcome leaving the reader to make the final call. Barthes once argued that metonymy furnishes the image with its most connotative potential and in so far as the exploration of this anti-hero's thoughts are concerned, Rorschach's very mask acts as a metonymic representative of graphic narrative at its most allusive - and elusive (Barthes 1977, 50).

A final observation that bears mentioning in Rorschach's case is a possible visual allusion to suppressed desire. According to Silverman, 'metaphor and metonymy can be used to increase the value of a given term by suppressing it', adding that, 'desire is created by absence – not only by the signifiers which “name” a missing signified, but by the other signifiers which replace those signifiers in the event of an additional metaphoric or metonymic elaboration' (Silverman 1983, 114). If desire is created by absence then the question arises as to what might be missing from his life. Answering this requires returning to the visual recollection of the first time he saw two people having sex. The image depicts a figure of enmeshed limbs and flesh, with four arms, four legs, two heads, a shared mouth containing sharp teeth and a conjoined union of genitalia which are on full display. This plays an important role in explaining the psychological barriers Kovacs puts up around his adult life as this sexualised monster is adopted as a kind of metonymic warning against the prospect of human intimacy. Thus, a visual precedent is imprinted on his psyche by this dream-image which is based on a suppression of desire that from a visual standpoint bears a resemblance to the symmetrical layout of a Rorschach card. Consequently, any time anything even loosely similar to this visual pattern shows up the adult Kovacs/Rorschach reacts negatively. Thus, the metonymic/visual implication would seem to be that any form of visual cue that signifies an act of human intimacy will elicit an adverse, negative response. This is where the application of metonym can prove to be instructive. If the sense of symmetry elicited by both the monstrous recollection of his mother's sex life and the design of his mask

can be seen as an invitation to explore suppressed desire then it can be argued that Rorschach's mask unlocks a hidden epiphany in the novel. This relates to him possibly finding a sense of closure and peace of mind just before he dies by combining the hypothesised narrative potential embedded in the symmetrical framework of the novel with the metonymic resonance of the mask he wears. In the previous example of metonym any allusion to human intimacy or union is rejected by Rorschach. However, everyone in the novel is forced to reassess the seismic impact that the story's apocalyptic conclusion has on their lives, and Rorschach is no different. A most significant case in point occurs when Dan and Laurie embrace in the aftermath of the disaster that befalls New York and, not unlike the aforementioned Hiroshima lovers, they cast a shadow on the wall behind them. However, this silhouette is one of a unified couple that have found some measure of solace in each other. This important alteration to the more dominant silhouette of a couple who have been , 'trying inadequately to console one another', is directly followed by a panel containing a close-up depiction of a pattern on Rorschach's mask that could be interpreted as an echo of Dan and Laurie's embrace (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 27):



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VII, 22/23).

Since so much of Rorschach's stream of consciousness has been hypothesized from manifestations of this pattern up to this point, then the implicit symmetry in the visual alignment of these two panels, and the alteration from a separated to a unified couple, can arguably be read as a visual analogue for his dawning sense of acceptance of humanity's

interdependent nature. Significantly, no text accompanies this stylistic allusion. If there is indeed an act of displacement being carried out here it is within Rorschach's mind, the mask can only offer a tantalising visual clue. But it is significant that in the next page, now resigned to his ultimate fate, Rorschach removes his face, in other words his mask, for the final time and confronts the world as Walter Kovacs, not Rorschach. In chapter six Walter closed his eyes and reopened them as Rorschach. What is being proposed here on the basis of visual and metonymic representation is that, given *Watchmen's* symmetrical design, this conclusive pattern implies that Rorschach's eyes are finally closed so that Kovacs can at last reopen his. Thus, fully aware at this point that he is about to die he discards his mask and for the first time in the novel displays emotion that is not based on anger or the expression of violence. The transient figures on his mask finally find solace in each other and by extension Walter Kovacs is finally able to express genuine emotion by crying for possibly the first time in his adult life as he commands Dr Manhattan to kill him so that he can finally step into the shadows without complaint. Metonymic representation deals with situations where an attribute of a thing stands for the thing itself, but in this case attributes, fragments and clues are all the reader has to work with. The real conclusion that Walter Kovacs/Rorschach reaches in this moment follows him to the grave.

It is not surprising that William Gull's life eventually becomes one defined by a sense of psychic over-investment in the properties of metonym and displacement due to the fact that he goes insane. Reference to a connection point between dementia and the dream-work can be found early on in *The Interpretation of Dreams* when Freud identifies the dream as, 'the first member of a class of abnormal psychological phenomena of which further members, such as hysterical phobia, obsessions and delusions,' are also counted (Freud 2010, xxiii). With regards to the above noted catalyst that initiated Gull's descent into madness he himself explains to his coachman Netley that, 'Quite recently I had a heart-stroke . . . It caused

aphasia: a fluxion of the brains right side that yields hallucinations’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 22). Notably, David Macey points out that an onset of aphasia impairs, ‘the ability to use metaphor and metonymy respectively’ (Macey 2000, 18). Not only does the formation of hallucination in William Gull’s life lead him to believe that he sees God in the form of the Masonic deity known as Jah-Bul-On but it also corresponds to his very unorthodox interpretation of metonymic representation. In locating this character at the start of this chapter he is introduced as someone who fervently desires a purpose in life. As he continues into adulthood he begins to exhibit a heightened level of sensitivity to signs and symbols all around him and ultimately decrees that, ‘consciousness itself is naught but symbols, metaphors which build upon themselves and thus extend their metaphysical domain’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 24).

Thus, a close psychoanalytic reading of Gull’s apotheosis in *From Hell* will lay bare the significance of metonym and displacement to a protagonist who is slipping further and further away from the realm of sanity. In the novel Gull experiences with increasing intensity visions of an age to come which are initiated through their association with light, a light that only he can see when he commits the act of murder. This allows him, according to comics scholar Annalisa Di Liddo, to acquire, ‘some mysterious visionary power that enables him to open up gashes into the future, especially during the ritual moment of murder’ (Di Liddo 2009, 79). A brief reminder of the conditional nature of displacement is now required before observing how both it and metonym factor into Gull’s life. Macey explains that, ‘The mechanism of displacement detaches the effect of emotional charge of an unconscious idea and transfers it to a less intense idea which is linked to the first by a chain of associations’ (Macey 2000, 101). Gull knows that, ‘he is at least touched by insanity and it doesn’t bother him even slightly’, so the concepts of emotional charge and intensity that he feels are not the same as those a sane person would feel, in many respects they are either nullified or inverted

(Campbell and Moore 2013, 84). This can be seen most clearly in the professional approach he takes to mutilating the corpse of Marie Kelly, an exploded reminder of his dissection of a field mouse as a child. While the death-stroke itself is mercifully swift, owing to Gull's extensive medical expertise and consisting of one powerful slash across Marie's throat, it is the subsequent, and in Gull's mind highly symbolic, mutilation that follows it which establishes a chain of associations, or a network of signification, through a medium of blood and dismembered flesh. However, as he literally deconstructs her corporeal form an aphasic act of displacement is established as the body-as-signifier metonym leads him to the threshold of a hallucinatory form of transcendence. The dynamics of metonym and displacement are manipulated here to elicit the dreamlike state of existence that Gull's psychosis exemplifies.

This allows Moore and Campbell to put into play the novels' most disturbing and visceral *denouement*. In a prolonged, and silent sequence due to the lack of text that consists of over seventy individual panels Gull's blade carves its way through the corpse of Marie, dissecting organs, muscles, and fascia that Gull isolates with a twisted sense of intimacy as having a metonymic otherworldly value. In fact, Moore speculates that, 'Gull, it seemed, believed the human body to be the supreme creation in a cosmos filled with beautiful creations. In its inner workings, Gull perceived a divine hand at work, the glory of its machinations often overwhelming to him' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Appendix I, 35). Following on from the precedent set by Kaja Silverman in *The Subject of Semiotics*, where she applies a psychoanalytic reading to a variety of media one can begin to identify that for William Gull the 'minor displacements' that each severed organ initially represents:

...are to be distinguished from the major one which accompanies the actual substitution of one object for another, in which the former assumes the position of the privileged term in a series of new signifying transactions (Silverman, 1983, 120).

Thus, the eventual dehumanising shift of Gull's attention from Marie to each severed muscle, ligament and tendon that compose her corporeal form does not in any way diminish his desire for her. On the contrary, and to appropriate further psychoanalytic phraseology from Silverman, these displacements increase Marie's appeal to Gull by way of extending her, 'signifying network' (Silverman 1983, 120). In fact, as one processes this brutal sequence of images this concept of positioning a privileged term begins to ring true when one witnesses the reverence with which Gull treats Marie's removed heart. In an act of displacement embodied through the medium of mutilated flesh, therefore, Gull valorises the human heart as a metonymic talisman to guide his way to a kind of transcendence. Indeed, the macabre gifts that Gull bestows on the now unrecognisable Marie only serve to further elaborate this network as he slices off one of her breasts and places it under her head, tenderly commenting, 'A pillow. ... pillow for you ...' as he does so:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 8).

Her own purpose in life fulfilled by advancing Gull a step closer to enlightenment, his fragmented psyche presents her with a pillow so she can rest as he continues with his gruesome task. Indeed, this delusional manifestation of metonymic projection is perpetuated by the reverence with which he later treats the ashes of her cremated heart as he casts them into the night sky with the fanatical sense of purpose of a religious acolyte who is seeking to curry the favour of a bloodthirsty god.

Consequently, it is his metonymic adaptation of the human body as a conduit to higher plane of spiritual and intellectual awareness which ties the scene in with efforts Freud has made towards extrapolating meaning from the dream-work. Given his increasingly tremulous grip on reality one can be forgiven for extending the latter part of Gull's life, through the decline into madness, as a metaphoric, dream-like, state of being, and it is the dream, as Freud posits, which appears:

...to engage in making symbolic representations of the body, (whereby) we now know that those representations are the product of certain unconscious phantasies (deriving, probably, from sexual impulses) which find expression not only in dreams but also in hysterical phobias and other symptoms . . . rendered by obscure forces from the depths of the mind (Freud 2010, 608).

Campbell's precise and magnified adherence to every incision in Marie's body is delivered by way of the intense close-ups within each panel thus reversing that sense of enthusiastic magic of closure that Mc Cloud refers to. This creates a vital sense of proximity that prepares the reader for the heightened elevation of psychic intensity necessary to initiate the dream-state of Gull's induced vision. The sense of voyeuristic confrontation that is thrust upon the reader by the power of visual sequence is quite visceral — a dynamic that is exacerbated by the void of anchorage that the complete lack of text creates. The reader is brought in too close to the murder and a desire for the distancing properties usually endemic to the medium through the skilful application of absence, or negation, is withheld. Sequential narrative, therefore, now freed from the restrictive concepts of economy and condensation, is here permitted to flex its creative muscles in the most visceral of fashions, offering a rare glimpse into the profound sense of diegetic power it contains and it is not for the faint of heart; as comics scholar Annalisa Di Liddo notes:

The first temporal entity to be manipulated, then, is that of the reader, who is compelled to closely watch the tortures Marie's body is undergoing as they are represented in every detail;

panel breakdown slows down, and the slaughtering lasts much longer in comparison with the previous murders. The reader is turned into an obscene voyeur and is invited to attend the scene in real time (Di Liddo 2009, 80).

This suturing of imagery through sequence is a clever allusion to William Gull's skill with a blade and at the same time operates as a metonymic slash-mark of narrative expression which cleverly opens up the doorways into the fractious psyche of its fiercely determined protagonist.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter a sense of psychological foundation has been laid down for Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs and William Gull. It has been argued that their gradual maturation and sense of identity has been determined by the significance of an event in childhood coupled later on with a form of profound revelation in adult life. Identifying a psychological link between these characters will act as a precursor to the efforts made in the following two chapters to outline the anti-hero's subversive engagement with the formation of myth. All three protagonists introduced a deeper level of psychological complexity to the graphic novel and even though their methods range from violent to psychotic what emerges is a sense of fierce resolve and conviction to see their self-appointed purpose in life through to the end, no matter how dark or fatal that end might prove to be.

Secondary to the analysis and comparison of each protagonist this chapter has also attempted to further locate the medium they are depicted in by way of a psychoanalytical sign-off. Efforts have been made to draw comparisons between Freud's early work on the nature of dream-work and comics theorist's work on the selection process endemic to the medium of sequential narrative. Freud's pack-ice analogy in relation to condensation and the manifestation of nodal points within dreams resonates with the nature of panel construction and the reliance on closure in the medium. This visual and sequential confluence between

psychoanalysis and the graphic novel was then used as a lead-in for the introduction of visual methodology. The relevance of adopting this approach comes down to both its contemporary significance for a multimodal medium as well as the value that psychoanalysis brings to the image and the act of looking. An additional strain of psychoanalytic comparison was then applied by incorporating an aspect of film theory to further promote the causal relationship between images in succession. It was shown how an essay by film theorist Jean-Louis Baudry drew influence from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* in order to explore the significance of images in sequence that attain their status due to the differences between them. It was then argued that this dynamic is susceptible to a more detailed level of compositional analysis when applied to the graphic novel due to the tactile permanence of a panel on a page versus the transient nature of the frame in film. The interdisciplinary step of incorporating Baudry's theories acted as a lead-in for the final level of analysis in this chapter. Kaja Silverman's semiotic and psychoanalytic breakdown of film by way of incorporating metonym and displacement as instructive tools heavily influenced the psychoanalytic dissection of each anti-hero's engagement with the dream-work.

In conclusion, this chapter's main focus was to reveal to a shared level of psychological complexity between each anti-hero. It then attempted to demonstrate the level of influence that the dream-work has on determining the path they would follow in life, a path involving violence, self-imposed isolation, distrust of others and a dark, complicit engagement with voices or images that only they can see. This path, or sense of calling, is signposted by important visual cues from each character's past or subconscious. Terrifying watchers, totemic animal guides, epiphanies in fire, and a resolute, Promethean conviction to a self-appointed cause that they truly believe will benefit mankind. In this spirit the final framework that will be applied to the portrayal of their streams of consciousness will involve outlining a generic template for the anti-heroic mindset by cataloguing characteristic traits or

behavioural aspects that can be classified as identifiable tropes. By way of adapting this mythopoeic template to Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull their hubristic rise to power will be traced. Consequently, this stage of ascension will then be balanced against the inevitable fall from grace that such hubris elicits, thus ascribing a mythopoeic reading to the complexity of the anti-heroic mindset on display in these novels.

## Chapter Five:

### **Hearts of Darkness: Applying a Mythopoeic Reading to the Anti-Heroic Mindset as Exemplified by Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull**

#### **5.1: Introduction - The Language of Myth**

Thus far this thesis has attempted to explain how the structural design of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell*, plays an integral role in conveying their respective protagonists' streams of consciousness. Upon outlining an interdisciplinary foundation for the respective strategies that made this possible each chapter then applied them to specific depictions of Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull's dreams, flashbacks, and premonitions — in other words, the areas where their respective streams of thought play their most powerful roles in each narrative. Chapter four was then used as a staging site for a necessary shift in focus in the overall momentum of this thesis. The interdisciplinary transition that took place in this chapter employed psychoanalytic theory to round off the structural analysis addressed by the previous chapters and then it channelled its focus solely on psychoanalysing the anti-heroes themselves. This realignment attempted to reveal a common psychological template between each protagonist by highlighting incidents of psychological import in their respective childhoods and emphasizing the subsequent formative role these incidents played in their development as adults. The end goal of such an incorporative approach is to highlight every strand of narrative construction that goes into the successful portrayal of each protagonist's thoughts. In this spirit, the aim of this penultimate chapter is to identify common tropes that relate to the anti-hero mindset as manifested by Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull. Importantly, it will be argued that similarities between these dark figures can be extracted from mythological tropes pertaining to the traditional hero and then adapted to suit the mindset of protagonists that consistently blur the division between good and evil. Outlining, or categorising, a behavioural foundation

for the anti-heroic mindset in this way will not only allow this thesis to closely scrutinise the motivation behind each protagonist's stream of consciousness but it will also crystallise the similarities that can exist between these diverse and complex anti-heroes.

Before applying a mythopoeic reading to these anti-heroes a final semiotic perspective must be acknowledged in order to justify the argument that the image/panel based nature of these novels constitutes just as valid an inclusion into the exploration of mythological tropes as a text-based narrative does. Chapter two adapted Barthes's appropriation of dystaxia to propose the potential advantage gained by allowing the human eye to navigate and process a multimodal page format which is designed to take unique advantage of a vertical and a horizontal axis. Chapter three drew from Barthes's analogy of the text as a braid to help explain how the plurivectoral scansion of these graphic novels allows the reader to piece together the dispersed fragments of each protagonist's psyche irrespective of their overall location in the novel. In this spirit a theoretical precedent will again be drawn from the work of Barthes in order to round-off the shift in focus from structural design to the character analysis that was initiated in chapter four. Addressing the malleability of mythological speech in his essay 'Myth Today' Barthes proposes that myth functions as a system of communication and that its message can be conveyed as effectively through the use of imagery as it can through text. According to him:

...it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness that one can reason about them while discounting their substance. This substance is not important: pictures, to be sure, are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analyzing or diluting it (Barthes 2013, 218).

Accordingly, in the case of each of these anti-heroes it will be demonstrated how the contextual application of mythic elements inarguably presupposes a complex signifying consciousness, albeit a very dark and troubled one. However, it is just as relevant to bear in

mind the level of consciousness that needs to be maintained by the reader in order to be able to identify these traits. As Barthes points out above, there is an imperative factor to processing an image, seeing as how it can impose meaning at one stroke. Therefore, being familiar in advance with some of the traditional message carriers from the world of myth enriches the reading of these graphic novels and permits a deeper understanding of each anti-hero. Similarly, the imperative quality that Barthes attributes to the image is especially relevant when exploring the portrayal of a stream-of-consciousness in a comic or a graphic novel as it can be manifested by a single discordant panel in a sequence without warning or explanation – a dynamic by now familiar from earlier chapters. Being armed, therefore, with a working knowledge of the relevance of the symbolism of myth minimises the disruptive impact of this visual shock tactic by locating an established tradition for it. This, he argues:

...is why the semiologist is entitled to treat in the same way writing and pictures: what he retains from them is the fact that they both are signs, that they both reach the threshold of myth endowed with the same signifying function, that they constitute, one just as much as the other, a language object (Barthes 2013, 224).

Establishing this chapters' theoretical foundation in this way also correlates with the efforts made in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* to identify common tropes which are exhibited by the hero figures across an array of the world's myths. Even though this thesis deals with the anti-hero, a figure more susceptible to darkness than the traditional hero, with due consideration Campbell's work can also be used to illuminate this chapter's intentions. Indeed, much in the same way that Barthes attributes an imperative impact to pictorial representations of myth so too Campbell opens his own investigation of the concept by claiming that the symbols of mythology, 'are spontaneous productions of the psyche' (Campbell 1993, 4). For Campbell images and symbols are capable of conveying such a profound sense of mythological resonance that they disclose a language of their own and the crux of his argument lies with the claim that through myth, 'symbolic expression is given to

the unconscious desires, fears, and tensions that underlie the conscious patterns of human behaviour' (Campbell 1993, 256). Taken as an important connection point to the previous chapter's exploration of each anti-hero's dreams, Campbell maintains that the figures of mythology originate from the same sources, those being 'the unconscious wells of fantasy' (Campbell 1993, 4). Furthermore he proposes that their grammar is the same as that perceived in dreams, whose understood function, 'is to serve as a powerful picture language', — a description that resonates distinctly with Freud's reference to a pictographic script in the previous chapter (Campbell 1993, 256). Therefore, just as Barthes maintains that the semiologist is entitled to treat writing and pictures in the same way due to the fact that they can both serve the interest of myth so Campbell proposes that:

It is not difficult for the modern intellectual to concede that the symbolism of mythology has a psychological significance . . . there can be little doubt, either that myths are of the nature of dream, or that dreams are symptomatic of the dynamics of the psyche . . . With their discovery that the patterns and logic of fairy tale and myth correspond to those of dream, the long discredited chimeras of archaic man have returned dramatically to the foreground of modern consciousness (Campbell 1993, 255).

Accordingly, the following chapter will be divided into three sections that will deal respectively with the adoption of a tutelary guide to strengthen each anti-hero's resolve, the role played by the use of fire to unlock the epiphanies they experience, and the inevitable cycle of events that is activated when a protagonist entertains a highly disproportionate level of hubris and eventually begins to find pleasure in inflicting pain on those weaker than him.

## **5.2 Threshold Guardians: Using Totemic Guides to Crystallise the Anti-Hero's Sense of Purpose**

Fittingly, Campbell's reference to chimeras will be used to initiate this mythopoeic reading. Accordingly, this first section will look at how each of these anti-heroes manifests his own tutelary guide to aid him in his private quest and subsequently bolster his ego at

points on his journey when it needs external reinforcement. In the course of highlighting the narrative techniques used by these graphic novels to convey their respective protagonist's streams of consciousness, certain figures were singled out from their thoughts as having a powerful sense of influence over them. In *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, Bruce Wayne's thoughts are haunted by the magnified visage of a gargoyle-like bat whose open mouth is full of fire:



(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 11).

Alan Moore pre-empts the importance of this figure in the novel's introduction when he points out that:

The importance of myth and legend as a subtext to Dark Knight can't really be overstated, shining as it does from every page. The familiar Batman origin sequence with the tiny bat fluttering in through an open window to inspire a musing Bruce Wayne becomes something far more religious and apocalyptic under Miller's handling; the bat itself transformed into a gigantic and ominous chimera straight out of the darkest European fables (Miller 1986, Introduction).

In *Watchmen*, on the other hand, Walter Kovacs is held in thrall to two threshold guardians. One of them stems from his childhood and has been analysed extensively in previous chapters but it is enough to summarise here that it inspires his deep-rooted aversion to the concept of intimacy and signifies a period in his life when he perceived himself to be weak and powerless. The other is represented by the same dog's head that was analysed in chapter two and its symbolic function is to remind him of the precise moment when he forcibly took

control of his life. Notably, both figures coalesce from Rorschach patterns that manifest themselves to him arbitrarily throughout the novel:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 32/Ch. VI, 17).

The primary role of this bestial signifier is to remind him of the night he slaughtered this dog, a symbolic act that subsequently gave birth to the purest manifestation of his Rorschach alter-ego. This moment, and the animal associated with it, subsequently colours his interpretation of everything he encounters. From making comparisons between the city and a fierce animal that is dying of rabies to the justification of his violent behaviour by attributing animal urges to it (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 16). From reading signs of an impending apocalypse in reports of the birth of a two-headed cat to the way he refers to people in the city as parasites or flecks of foam that drip from the mouth of a diseased animal (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. III, 3). For William Gull in *From Hell* animal references similarly abound. In a previous chapter it was proposed that the image of a seagull is used as a braiding trigger to evoke resonant traces of his dissociated stream of consciousness. Additional use of animal totems includes an episode from his youth that was noted in the previous chapter where he dissects the corpse of a field mouse. This act pre-empts the dark crusade he would undertake as an adult and Moore proposes that in this reverent and symbolic moment Gull's 'personal grail' is revealed (Campbell and Moore 2013, 49). Indeed, even his human victims are perceived as mythical creatures of a kind, with Marie Kelly being likened by Moore to, 'some kind of odd

mythical creature or chimera; the body of a beautiful live woman, the head of a flayed corpse' (Campbell and Moore 2013, 216). However, the animal-based image that affects him most and the one that triggers his awakening is that of the Masonic deity known as Jahbulon, the same ancient and obscure goat-headed god whose psychological impact was analysed in the previous chapter:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 26).

Solely occupying each anti-hero's private thoughts, these figures establish themselves in a sense as agents of subconscious fortification, bestowing onto each protagonist the conviction they subsequently display in pursuing their respective self-appointed tasks. Effectively, they instil purpose where none previously existed. According to Joseph Campbell's extensive analysis of hero myths in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

The herald or announcer of the adventure (often dark, loathly, or terrifying) . . . is a beast, representative of the repressed instinctual fecundity within ourselves, and yet, the hero and his ultimate god – are understood as the outside and the inside of a single, self-mirrored mystery (Campbell 1993, 40/53).

Campbell's research compares and contrasts hero myths from around the world in order to outline common features between them. Notably, the protagonists in these three graphic novels come under the classification of the anti-hero in comparison to Campbell's traditional hero and as this chapter progresses it will become clear that this figure is more difficult to

locate given the ease with which he consistently blurs the distinction between good and evil. Notably, two critics from the field of comics studies have proposed a definition of the anti-hero that ideally frames the three protagonists addressed in this thesis. According to Michael Spivey and Steven Knowlton:

...the anti-hero concept is flexible enough to accommodate some rather intriguing variations on a theme. By having the moral ambiguity to commit acts that require anything from intimidation to mass murder as the means to an end, anti-heroes blaze trails in the uncharted territory between the categories of obvious goodness and unmitigated evil . . . However, what all anti-heroes have in common is that they capture our imagination by attempting to balance their evil methods with their good intentions. Sometimes the results are purely gratifying; sometimes purely horrifying . . . . . We see our flawed selves in anti-heroes, and this allows us to understand their humanity, even when their deeds are unquestionably evil (Rosenberg 2008, 61).

Thus, sourcing a generic ideology for the anti-hero can be a difficult task. However, there is a strong enough foundation in Campbell's analysis of the traditional hero that with considered application it can be used to launch an exploration of the anti-heroic mindset too. Ultimately both figures are driven by the conviction that their chosen path in life is incontrovertibly the right one. Subsequently, given that the anti-hero may be prone to acts of undeniable violence and malevolence so the potential exists for the role of their tutelary guides to be subverted and used as catalysts for destruction. Thus, while the relationships between these anti-heroes and their subconscious heralds initially prove to be a source of great power they also contain the seeds of their own downfall.

To help understand how this is possible and better put in context how this bond specifically relates to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* an observation taken from Carl Jung's analysis of symbolism in myth will be used. In *Man and His Symbols* Jung argues that at that stage in a story where the hero has yet to find his calling:

...the early weakness of the hero is balanced by the appearance of strong “tutelary” figures – or guardians – who enable him to perform the tasks that he cannot accomplish unaided. . . . These godlike figures are in fact symbolic representatives of the whole psyche, the larger and more comprehensive identity that supplies the strength that the personal ego lacks. They bring into the field of consciousness a special chthonic (underworld) message and their special role suggests that the essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individual’s ego-consciousness – his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses – in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him (Jung 1968, 101/153).

Each of the anti-heroes in these novels experiences a moment of existential crisis or psychological turmoil in their lives so powerful that it signals an imminent visitation by a tutelary figure/totemic guide. These figures imbue them with the resolve they need to accept a newfound sense of direction in their lives, even if that direction steers them down a very dark path. However, in deference to the focus this thesis has on the portrayal of the anti-hero’s stream of thought one needs to be mindful that the guardians these protagonists encounter are generated from within their own subconscious. For example, in the case of Bruce Wayne the story picks up at a point in his life where he has successfully silenced the voice of his inner demon for over twenty years by retiring his Batman persona. However, as events unfold and he finds himself suffering an anxiety attack this voice rises to the forefront of his thoughts and quickly points out just how weak he is without its support when it reminds him that, ‘You are puny, you are small . . . You are nothing . . . A hollow shell, a rusty trap that cannot hold me . . . You try to drown me out . . . but your voice is weak’ (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 17/18). In fact, even after relenting and allowing the animal demon within him to once again take over, it is clear that Wayne cannot function without the continued support of this subconsciously manifested guardian. This can be seen at stages in his obsessive crusade where he is on the verge of defeat or death. In these moments the demonic bat reappears to heap fresh scorn on him, a tactic that conversely has the effect of replenishing his passionate conviction and setting him back on course to continue waging his

private war. Rorschach expresses a similar sense of despondency in relation to the life he led up to the point of awakening triggered by his own bestial guide. There is little doubt that this perspective stems from the abuse he endures at the hands of a mother who tells him as a child that she should have aborted him. Indeed, he speaks of his past life - before he truly became Rorschach - in terms of how weak he was and is disgusted by his former lack of conviction to kill if a situation required it. Accordingly he judges himself to have been too, 'Soft on scum. Too young to know any better. Molly-coddled them. Let them live' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 14). However, even after his moment of epiphany it is only in those moments when he is wearing his mask - thus assuming the identity bestowed on him by his interaction with a totemic beast - that he removes all remaining traces of weakness from his life. William Gull similarly views his life as purposeless in spite of the impressive credentials and laurels that are heaped upon him as he rises in stature and esteem through both the medical profession and the ranks of the Freemasons. Indeed, his desire in childhood that he might find a task most difficult, necessary and severe goes unsatisfied for almost the full duration of his adult life when he frustratingly admits, 'I am fifty, my own purpose unrevealed despite meaningless laurels' and he later confesses to the spirit of his dead father, 'I am almost seventy, and the Lord has found for me no special task (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 25).

Thus, for each protagonist it is only when they are violently confronted with a subconsciously generated totemic figure that the aimless momentum of their lives is replaced by a kind of possessive urge to master their own fates. Jung emphasises this dynamic in relation to hero myths in general when he points out that:

...the need for hero symbols arises when the ego needs strengthening – when, that is to say, the conscious mind needs assistance in some task that it cannot accomplish unaided or

without drawing on the sources of strength that lie in the unconscious mind (Jung 1968, 114).

Adding to this statement Jung argues that the hero must understand that he can draw strength from this tutelary guide (Jung 1968, 112). The same guideline applies to these anti-heroes and the arbitrary reappearance of panels depicting these tutelary guides throughout each narrative confirms that they are never far from each protagonist's thoughts. However, seeing as how these guardians are constructs of the mind the danger is magnified that the dark influence they exude could wholly assimilate the anti-hero's entire identity. Campbell explores this self-destructive potential when he notes that:

The unconscious sends all sorts of vapors, odd beings, terrors, and deluding images up into the mind . . . These are dangerous . . . but they are fiendishly fascinating too (representing the Destruction of the world that we have built and in which we live, and of ourselves within it (Campbell 1993, 8).

This echoes the implication made earlier that aside from satisfying a tutelary role they are also potential agents of destruction. Jung also considered this possibility and cautioned that:

. . . men must realize the violence of their instinctual drives and their powerlessness in face of the autonomous emotions erupting from the unconscious . . . The animal demon is a highly expressive symbol for such an impulse. The vividness and concreteness of the image enables man to establish a relationship with it as a representative of the overwhelming power in himself. He fears it and seeks to propitiate it by sacrifice and ritual . . . (Thus) Man is the only creature with the power to control instinct by his own will, but he is also able to suppress, distort, and wound it – and an animal, to speak metaphorically, is never so wild and dangerous as when it is wounded. Suppressed instincts can gain control of a man: they can even destroy him. The familiar dream in which the dreamer is pursued by an animal nearly always indicates that an instinct has been split off from the consciousness and ought to be (or is trying to be) readmitted and integrated into life. The more dangerous the behaviour of the animal in the dream, the more unconscious is the primitive and instinctual soul of the dreamer, and the more imperative is its integration into his life if some irreparable evil is to be forestalled (Jung 1968, 264-266).

Each of these anti-heroes adopts a life of sacrifice, propitiating their inner animal by obsessively committing themselves to the pursuit of one objective. Such reasoning can be used to put in context the powerlessness Bruce Wayne exhibits whenever his tutelary guide admonishes him. He struggles to resist its dominant commands and the implication is made that in the battle of wills between him and his demon (which is really a battle between two competing voices within the same mind) he will inevitably lose. This creature tells him what he needs, fills his sleep, tricks him and all the while struggles relentlessly and hatefully to be free yet is never quite finished tormenting him. It represents his repressed Dark Knight persona and as comics scholar Geoff Klock points out, 'In a psychomachia, the retired "Batman" taunts the aging Wayne' (Klock 2006, 50).

Jung's observation can also be applied to the way Rorschach's observations are so proliferate with bestial language and it can also be used to explain the connection he draws between his birth as an anti-hero and his acknowledgement of an impending apocalypse for all humanity as both moments are symbolised for him with dog imagery. Jung describes this entity as an overwhelming power and in Rorschach's case, given his susceptibility to visual patterns, this is very much the case – he 'sees' projected variations of this animal all around him. To the effect that he is not just pursued by it in his dreams, his subconscious projects it into the waking world too. This is why the Egyptian iconography and statuary in Adrian Veidt's office resonates so deeply with him, especially one statue in particular, as he notes, 'Recognise dog-headed bust. Anubis, watcher over dead. Whole culture death-fixated . . . Disturbing dead our job . . . If that offends Anubis, too bad. Handled watchdogs before' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. X, 20). Thus, the personality known as Rorschach has been sired by his very own Anubis - a deity with the head of a dog who symbolises death. Just as the Egyptian god was the keeper of the dead so does his own tutelary guide reside in the silent abyss of his subconscious as the instigator of his own demise.

Gull, on the other hand, comes across as being honoured by the emergence of a tutelary guide in his life and is proud of the influence it has on him. He commits himself completely to the power of myth arguing that it represents a world of celestial visions and whispering muses, a world which he refers to as a, ‘drowned realm of the mind’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 11/19). So when one god in particular appears before him he has no problem incorporating it into his life and following the path to enlightenment it offers him. Indeed, as he warns Netley, ‘Scorn not the gods: Despite their non-existence in material terms, they’re no less potent no less terrible. The one place Gods inarguably exist is in our minds where they are real beyond refute, in all their grandeur and monstrosity’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 18). Accordingly, in one revelatory moment/panel in his mind’s eye he draws an affinity between himself and the chief of the ancient Babylonian gods, Marduk. This subconscious projection sanctions the terrifying acts he commits. As an integral figure in an ancient creation myth Marduk slew the monstrous female dragon Tiamat, representing the universal primeval mother, and then split her carcass in two to create heaven and earth (Cotterell and Storm 2003, 253/326). So too does Gull believe he is ushering in a new age for mankind by an equally symbolic form of mutilation.

Christopher Booker maintains that these tutelary guides represent human imperfection, symbolising a ‘magnified personification of the human capacity for egotism’, and warns that they are ‘immensely powerful and concerned solely with pursuing their own interest, at the expense of everyone else in the world’ (Booker 2010, 219/555). Given the recurring necessity to channel all aspects of this thesis back into the dynamics of how the anti-hero’s stream of consciousness is conveyed in these graphic novels it is hard to deny the psychoanalytical undertone of this mythological allusion as it resonates quite distinctly with Lacan’s observations about, ‘the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes . . . the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the

subject's entire mental development' (Rice and Waugh 2001, 190.192). As will be seen, the transformative, and ultimately destructive, consequences of assuming the guidance of these tutelary guardians is reinforced by each anti-hero's correlating obsession with fire.

### **5.3 The Burning Abyss: Reading Fire as a Symbol for Subconscious Epiphany**

In tandem with the subliminal coercion effected by these tutelary guardians the use of fire as a source of epiphany cannot be overstated as it too is deeply woven into each protagonist's stream of thought. Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull are either haunted by the spectre of unceasing flame or interpret signs in fire that speak uniquely to them alone. As will be demonstrated in the final section of this chapter the hubris demonstrated by these protagonists owes a debt to the precedent set in myth by the defiant titan Prometheus. The purpose of attributing a mythological antecedent to the way these figures think is to show that these anti-heroes conform to a pattern of identifiable tropes to satisfy an end-goal achieved by way of self-styled justice and the domination of others. In this vein, the formation point of their respective worldviews is powerfully reinforced by promoting Prometheus's gift to mankind as a psychological catalyst leading to a moment of epiphany for each of them. Notably, in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, the imprisoned titan points out that, 'fire has proved for men a teacher in every art, their grand resource' (Aeschylus 1961, 24). Additionally, Gaston Bachelard proposes in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* that, 'fire gives to the man concerned with inner depths the lesson of an inner essence which is in a process of development' (Bachelard 1968, 56) and Northrop Frye cautions that, 'the Promethean fire will burn the "opaque" world to ashes in the final consummation' (Frye 1990, 137). So the aspect to consider, and the one being emphasized here in relation to the role it plays in the portrayal of a stream of consciousness, is that fire can be read as a symbol of enlightenment. It is the ultimate grand leveller, capable of burning away all doubt and indecision and thus can unveil a profound message for the man who submits to instruction

from his own subconscious. In other words, it can open his eyes and replace lack of purpose with distinct vision. Thus, just as each of these anti-heroes receives a sense of subliminal guidance from an adopted tutelary guide so too does this incendiary element expose a similar degree of susceptibility to psychological triggering. The effect is predominantly symbolic, with the subconscious being plumbed deep enough to unearth enough of a spark of enlightenment to direct the anti-hero to his destined journey. Booker addresses the underlying connotative potential that is activated by employing the use of fire symbolism when he points out that:

When Prometheus steals 'fire' from the gods, what he is really stealing is that divine spark of consciousness which distinguishes humanity from all those other forms of life which live in unconscious thrall to instinct. Yet for all the new freedom this gives, there is a terrible price to be paid . . . It is the state of perpetual nagging discontent which must follow from that most crucial of all the new faculties that ego-consciousness brings with it: the ability to imagine that things might be different from what they are (Booker 2010, 548).

The key phrase in this observation is his reference to the cost that is incurred by allowing oneself to become overly susceptible to such symbolic influence, in other words the terrible price that is to be paid from unveiling enough of a spark of consciousness to allow the discoverer to believe that they may possess the power to change the world around them. This precipitates the discussion in the next chapter about the inevitability of each protagonist's demise but for now it is enough to contemplate the generation of an inextinguishable spark of power in the anti-hero's mind that is fanned into a consuming ideology if it is fostered by the right kind of appetite. Importantly, there is a distinct sense of immediacy to this epiphanic dynamic as each protagonist is psychically wrenched from a seemingly aimless existence and placed in sudden awareness of the role he must fulfil. Bachelard speaks to the psychological import of such immediacy when he posits how, 'all that changes quickly is explained by fire (and thus) fire is for the man who is contemplating it an example of a sudden change or

development and an example of a circumstantial development' (Bachelard 1968, 7/16). According to him a transfixion with fire elicits, 'the inner and almost invincible strength of the man who is living that decisive moment when the fire is about to shine forth and his desires to be fulfilled' (Bachelard 1968, 33). Each of these protagonists experiences this decisive moment as an epiphany that validates their role as judge, jury (and if circumstances call for it - executioner) of those deemed unworthy and this revelation has a powerfully liberating effect on them. Booker also addresses this developmental stage in hero narratives by identifying it as a point in the story when the protagonist, 'has found that the walls of his consciousness have suddenly fallen away, allowing him to glimpse something (he believes to be) immeasurably more real' (Booker 2010, 700). Notably, the sense of purpose instigated by such channelled conviction is a concept that Nietzsche also conveyed with the aid of a fire analogy and he used it to address figures whose 'supreme moments' laid upon them 'the most enduring obligation' whereby, a:

...great liberation comes for those who are thus fettered suddenly, like the shock of an earthquake: the . . . soul is all at once convulsed, torn loose, torn away – it itself does not know what is happening. A drive and impulse rules and masters it like a command; a will and desire awakens to go off, anywhere, at any cost; a vehement dangerous curiosity for an undiscovered world flames and flickers in all its senses (Kolocotroni, Goldman, Taxidou (Eds.) 2004, 18).

The use of the word liberation is being emphasized here as it will reappear in a second observation from Nietzsche in reference to the liberation experienced at that point where each anti-hero finally acts on his violent urges and finds that they draw intense pleasure from the experience. In other words, the point in their lives where they cross a threshold from which there is no return. Effectively, the sense of knowing invoked by their obsession with fire awakens in each of them the dominant drive and impulse that Nietzsche refers to here. Additionally, it also initiates a conscious separation within their minds from the rest of

society, which they gradually come to regard as being beneath them. As will be demonstrated later on, such hubristic isolation represents the first step on the path to annihilation. In this light, the psychological import of fire, and the sense of initial liberation it triggers will now be applied to each protagonist.

*Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* abounds with fire imagery. As discussed in chapter three, the novel opens with the near-death of its anti-hero on the first page when the car he is driving almost becomes, in the words of a television newscaster, 'a flaming coffin for Bruce Wayne' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 2). This establishes the role that fire will play throughout the novel as a signal of its protagonist's inevitable demise and as such fire is present at each stage of the Dark Knight's final crusade. His resurrection as Batman is presaged by panels depicting a powerful thunderstorm which is described in the novel as 'the wrath of God' as thick bolts of lightning overwhelm the Gotham skyline (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 19). Indeed, the powerful visuals used in these panels evoke Prometheus's command that, 'scorching flames be flung from heaven' as an act of supreme defiance (Aeschylus 1961, 50). As indicated in previous chapters, fire manifests itself in Wayne's flashbacks and dreams. This is first conveyed in his youth in the form of a visual initiation rite as he falls under the spell of the perpetual fire that burns inside the mouth of his threshold guardian. Accordingly, this same fire later signifies the resumption of the Dark Knight's personal quest, becoming a talisman of sacrifice and penitence for his inability to prevent his parent's murder. The same image is used to convey both moments because in spite of the passing of years the persecution and guilt burning inside Wayne's mind has been fanned to a disproportionate extent. This is precisely why the bat speaks to him with such conviction when it points out the burden it imposes on him, 'Smoldering, I burn you . . . Burning you, I flare, hot and bright and fierce and beautiful . . . You cannot stop me . . . You try to drown me out . . . but your voice is weak' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 17/18). Indeed, this is also a moment of epiphany,

burning away the turmoil in Wayne's mind with the declaration, 'The time has come. You know it in your soul. For I am your soul' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 17). Campbell discusses this degree of introspective insight in relation to the challenge all heroes must undergo in order to truly know themselves, a process whereby, 'instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again' (Campbell 1993, 91). This observation can be directly adapted to Wayne's train of thought as, fittingly, he succumbs to this subconscious herald and by way of what could be interpreted as a form of psychic immolation indeed refers to himself as, 'born again' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 26). Comics scholar Geoff Klock points out that, 'Miller's innovation in *The Dark Knight Returns* is to allow reflection to result in character development' and this is never seen so clearly as in the confessional soliloquies that are elicited by the visual echoes of fire (Klock 2006, 46).

Eventually, the introspective hold that this fire has over him is projected onto the burning skull of his arch-nemesis, the Joker. As his body burns beyond recognition this demonic harlequin disturbingly parodies the bat that haunts his subconscious, deliriously anticipating the Dark Knight's arrival in hell:



(Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 4).

This confirms that Batman has begun to project his deepest fears onto the outside world, seeing in all manifestations of fire the inevitable call of the funeral pyre. Unsurprisingly then,

his final epiphany is also triggered by a resurgence of this same immolating presence and it grants him a measure of closure, preparing him for the liberation of death as he comes to the understanding that:

When you came for me . . . in the cave . . . I was just six years old . . . you were ancient . . . nothing could kill you . . . but the war . . . it did not begin then . . . No . . . it was . . . two years later . . . when her necklace caught on his wrist . . . when he shoved his pistol to her jaw and pulled the trigger . . . and everything my mother **was** struck the pavement as a bloody wad . . . that night . . . began thirty years of hunting thieves and murderers . . . is that what you intended? . . . (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 35).

As mentioned earlier, Alan Moore proposes a reading of Batman in this graphic novel that evokes the power of myth, shaping Miller's Dark Knight into, 'a true legend' (Miller 1986, Introduction). In this light both the synonymous bat and the Joker's burning skull come across as visual analogues for two of literatures most notable depictions of hell. In *Paradise Lost* Milton compares the gates of hell to a 'furnace mouth' which casts forth 'redounding smoke and ruddy flame' (Fowler 2007, 153). Similarly, Goethe describes 'vast streams of fire' that flow 'In fury' from 'the fearsome jaws of hell' (Williams 2007, 359). If *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* does indeed attempt to invoke the power of myth, as Moore claims, then these visual analogues of a hell-mouth owe a literary debt to such poetic imagery, while at the same time offering up a valuable instance of psychoanalytical introspection whenever either image is woven into the Dark Knight's stream of consciousness. Fittingly, all material traces of Bruce Wayne's life are consumed by, 'a pillar of flame' and (to the understanding of Gotham's citizens at least) the capstone on the life of the enigmatic anti-hero known as Batman is finally fitted (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 44). Thus, just as he is announced in the beginning of the novel with reference to a flaming coffin so the story concludes with the depiction of an anti-hero who has come to terms with his past and prepares to rise, phoenix-

like, from the, 'burnt remains of a crimefighter who's time has passed' (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 47).

Fire plays no less of a pivotal role in *Watchmen*, in fact one fire in particular signals the epicentre of Walter Kovacs' transformation into Rorschach. However, before this takes place he is shown to be susceptible to a level of cryptic introspection, at one point claiming that he is, 'Waiting for a flash of enlightenment in all this blood and thunder' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 6) and at a later stage he concedes that, 'Being Rorschach takes a certain kind of insight' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 14). Introspection of this nature points to a character going through a phase of transition, a man living with an elusive assurance that enlightenment is imminent but not yet sure idea how it will manifest itself. Interestingly, the insight that he refers to is reminiscent of Bachelard's argument in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* that only, 'individuals subjected to the instincts of an intellectual formation can force the door of the furnace and enter into the mystery of the fire' (Bachelard 1968, 18). As is revealed in his epiphany, Rorschach's intellectual formation culminates with the belief that he has solved the meaning of life – by concluding that it has no meaning – a development that owes its formation to the direct influence of fire.

Thus, by way of a twenty five panel flashback devoid of text the reader gets to see the memory that he verbally relays to his psychoanalyst in which he uses a razor sharp cleaver to dispatch two guard dogs that he finds fighting over the bones of an abducted child. Importantly, he compares the ensuing bloodletting to a, 'Jet of warmth splattered on chest, like hot faucet' and in a comment that echoes Nietzsche's aforementioned observation he emphasizes the liberating consequences of the slaughter by pointing out how, 'It was Kovacs who said "mother" then, muffled under latex. It was Kovacs who closed his eyes. It was Rorschach who opened them again' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 21). His vivid recollection of how warm the blood was evokes considerations of a kind of baptism,

especially in light of the fact that the ferocious release the incident grants him expunges a lifetime's worth of impotent rage towards his abusive mother by erasing one identity and replacing it with a new one. However, the fact that such a transformation could be brought about by a baptism in hot blood is only a precursor to the scope of the larger epiphany that is unlocked when he burns the actual kidnapper to death. Indeed, this moment has been branded so permanently into his subconscious that he is able to comprehensively recall his stream of thought at the time many years later as he recounts for his prison psychologist that he:

Stood in street. Watched it burn. Imagined limbless felt torsos inside; breasts blackening; bellies smoldering; bursting into flame one by one. Watched for an hour. Nobody got out. Stood in firelight, sweltering. Bloodstain on chest like map of violent, new continent. Felt cleansed. Looked at sky through smoke heavy with human fat and God was not there. The cold, suffocating dark goes on forever, and we are alone. Live our lives, lacking anything better to do. Devise reason later. Born from oblivion; bear children, hellbound as ourselves; go into oblivion. There is nothing else. Existence is random. Has no pattern save what we imagine after staring at it for too long. No meaning save what we choose to impose. This rudderless world is not shaped by vague metaphysical forces. It is not God who kills the children. Not fate that butchers them or destiny that feeds them to the dogs. It's us. Only us. Streets stank of fire. The void breathed hard on my heart, turning its illusions to ice, shattering them. Was reborn then, free to scrawl own design on this morally blank world. Was Rorschach (Ch. VI, 25, 26).

Carl Jung proposed that one of the roles undertaken by the use of symbols in hero myths is to place an emphasis on the argument that, 'Some men need to be aroused, and experience their initiation in the violence of a Dionysiac "thunder rite"' (Jung 1968, 146). This is unquestionably Walter Kovacs' violent thunder rite, capturing the incendiary birthing stage of a new level of consciousness and it must be emphasized that the visual track accompanying the text depicts rising flames, melting mannequins, and plumes of black smoke rising into the night sky:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 26).

Notably, there is also a confessional air of absolution detected as a result of his engagement with this inferno. He refers again to the bloodstain on his chest in baptismal terms and he experiences renewed vigour and conviction as his senses are assaulted by the stink of burning human fat. Thus, as epiphanies go, Rorschach's is very much one of negative transcendence, confirming an utterly bleak perspective on the futility of existence (Klock 2006, 73). Importantly, this epiphany is ideally suited to the mythic tropes being applied to the anti-hero in this chapter and it is also a powerful reminder of just how effective the portrayal of a stream of consciousness in a graphic novel can be. In *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Bachelard suggests that the 'hypnotised form of observation that is involved in gazing into a fire . . . this hypnotised condition that is surprisingly constant in all fire watchers, is highly conducive to psychoanalytical investigation' (Bachelard 1968, 3). This is exactly what Kovacs has become, a fire watcher, or to coin the eponymous title of the novel - a watchman, and the psychological import of this flashpoint is not lost on him:

Once a man has seen, he can never turn his back on it. Never pretend it doesn't exist. No matter who orders him to look the other way. We do not do this thing because it is permitted. We do it because we have to. We do it because we are compelled (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 15).

In other words now that he has forced open the door of the furnace he cannot un-see what he discovered inside. As testament to the masterful sense of symmetry that defines the novel as a

whole this is precisely why the chapter in which Rorschach experiences this epiphany - and is thus borne into the world – is concluded with Nietzsche’s caution that, ‘if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 28). This is what each of these anti-heroes do, they mine the depths of a subconscious abyss and what they find there grants them the moral autonomy to act in any way they see fit. However, Rorschach’s abyss, just like Bruce Wayne’s and (as will be demonstrated) William Gull’s, is not shrouded in impenetrable darkness, it is illuminated by perpetual fire.

Of the three protagonists William Gull is arguably the one whose obsession with fire has the most catastrophic effect on his mind. Before his madness truly takes effect he makes reference to, ‘the purifying spirit of fire’ in a conversation about ascension and the prospect that base matter might possess the ability to be refined into pure spirit (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 10). As testament to the well-designed braid of *From Hell*’s overall narrative the appearance of this phrase is no coincidence as the perspective it elicits subsequently proves to be his undoing. However, it is not until he takes a blade to his first victim that this stream of thought is manifested by way of a subconscious obsession with light. As he removes his hands from inside Polly Nichol’s mutilated corpse he is shocked to discover a kind of light emanating from within her body. It is a light that only he can see but this does not stop him from elatedly trying to draw Netley’s attention to it, ‘Look at it, Netley. Can you see? Can you see it, Netley? . . . Light, Netley. Did you see? She was full of light’, (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Five, 33). Of course this light is just another symptom of his spiralling descent into madness but it resurfaces as a consistent waypoint throughout his gruesome crusade. In fact, his growing obsession with it, and subsequently with a kind of fire ‘wherein (the) unconscious (is) chained’ culminates with what can only be described as a process of sublimation from corporeal form into pure thought, where he ultimately identifies

himself as the embodiment of fire itself (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 37). As Eddie Campbell points out:

With Gull there is an escalation in his “aura phase hallucinations”, evolving from the simple but magical light emanating from the innards of Polly Nichols after the first of the murders, through the walk-in fantasia of Gull’s Miller’s Court vision all the way to his ascension to a kind of godhood in Chapter 14 (Campbell and Moore 2013, 127).

An aspect of Bachelard’s insights in relation to his psychoanalysis of fire can be put to good use here. According to him:

This inner, masculine fire, the objective of the meditation of the lonely man, is naturally considered to be the most powerful fire. In particular it is the fire which can “open bodies.” . . . “Art, in imitation of Nature, opens a body by means of fire, but uses a much stronger fire than the Fire that is produced by the fire of confined flames.” The super-fire prefigures the superman. Conversely, the superman, in his irrational form, conceived of in order to claim a uniquely subjective power, is scarcely more than a superfire. This “opening” of bodies, this possession of bodies from within, this total possession, is sometimes an obvious sexual act (Bachelard 1968, 53).

Applied with context to the psychological transformation taking place inside Gull’s mind this poetic reference to a much stronger fire than the one produced by flames can be read as a symbol of both his awakening and his towering conviction. Fittingly, Bachelard proposes that, ‘light is the purest form of fire (and that) whatever secretes fire truly bears the seeds of life’ (Bachelard 1968, 61/73). If such an observation can be co-opted to outline the kind of epiphany that will overwhelm Gull’s mind then it makes a macabre kind of sense that with each subsequent body that Gull opens he is granted more illumination, or brought further along the path to revelation. Thus, Gull’s epiphany is enacted on two levels and the first stage is triggered by this opening of bodies, a fact that he is barely cognisant of in the heat of the moment as he notes, ‘It’s almost as if . . . As if the act itself . . . The act of violence . . . Some trigger in the brain, as if . . . As if it were . . . Oh dear God’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 20). At this point his mind is transported forward in time into an office work

environment in the late twentieth century. Yet for all that this strange environment is completely alien to him he delivers his epiphany to the shades around him with unswerving conviction and ‘eyes filled with a zealot fire’ (Campbell and Moore 2013, 223) as he proclaims:

Dear God, what is this Aethyr I am come upon? What spirits are these, labouring in what heavenly light? It would seem we are to suffer an apocalypse of cockatoos . . . Morose, barbaric children playing joylessly with their unfathomable toys. Where comes this dullness in your eyes? How has your century numbed you so? Shall man be given marvels only when he is beyond all wonder? Your days were born in blood and fires, whereof in you I may not see the meanest spark! Your past is pain and iron! Know yourselves! With all your shimmering numbers and your lights, think not to be inured to history. Its black root succours you. It is inside you. Are you asleep to it, that cannot feel its breath upon your neck, nor see what soaks its cuffs? See me! Wake up and look upon me! I am come amongst you, I am with you always! You are the sum of all preceding you, yet seem indifferent to yourselves. A culture grown disinterested, even in its own abysmal wounds. Your women all but show their sexes, and yet this display elicits not a flicker of response. Your own flesh is made meaningless to you. How would I seem to you? Some antique fiend or penny dreadful horror, yet you frighten me! You have not souls. With you I am alone. Alone in an Olympus. Though accomplished in the sciences, your slightest mechanisms are beyond my grasp. They humble me, yet touch you not at all. This disaffection. This is Armageddon. (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 21/22).

It is with this epiphany that Gull comes closest to embodying the characteristics of the anti-hero. In other words, in spite of the horrifying act he has just committed he is at his most rational (and arguably relatable) as he delivers his astute commentary on the twentieth century environment he suddenly finds himself thrust into. It is worth repeating aspects of the aforementioned observation by Spivey and Knowlton here to justify this claim when they argue that:

By having the moral ambiguity to commit acts that require anything from intimidation to mass murder as the means to an end, anti-heroes blaze trails in the uncharted territory between the categories of obvious goodness and unmitigated evil (but) what they all

have in common is that they capture our imagination by attempting to balance their evil methods with their good intentions . . . We see our flawed selves in anti-heroes, and this allows us to understand their humanity, even when their deeds are unquestionably evil (Rosenberg 2008, 61).

Offered a brief glimpse of a future that terrifies him Gull's concept of good intention is his attempt to prevent society from regressing into a mindless and disaffected herd that will become inured to its own history and gradually numbed into a state of joyless apathy. Horrified by this possible future he genuinely believes he has rescued each of his victims from it by making them, 'safe from time' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 23). As Eddie Campbell remarks, 'We might find ourselves agreeing with Gull's profound soliloquy and then abruptly pull ourselves up and remember . . . that it's a Grand Guignol theatre of horrors we're attending' (Campbell and Moore 2013, 221). Thus, Gull exemplifies the concept of the anti-hero as both madman and visionary, misguidedly re-imagining himself as a defender of the spirit of a declining age against an impending Armageddon of apathy and disaffection. Notably, according to Northrop Frye:

Imaginative vision has something diabolic attached to it, and ... the visionary is not only doomed to be an outcast and an exile, but ... even crime may well be an inseparable part of a genius above the law, as illustrated in a murder which was the product of an intellectual awakening (Frye 1990, 199).

This perfectly captures the effect that Gull's crimes have on his mind. By way of luminous epiphany they elicit a profound intellectual awakening in him.

However, as mentioned, the overall scope of his epiphany is enacted on two levels and the second stage is wholly based on the undisclosed imagery exposed to him as he sets Mary Kelly's heart alight. As is now apparent from his reverence for the purifying spirit of fire, and the light he perceives that emanates from his victims' bodies, fire in itself holds its own fascination for Gull and setting the hearth alight becomes as much part of a symbolic

ritual as a practical aid to his dark work. So when he places the organ in the flames, and heart and hearth, unite in Gull's eyes a kind of alchemical sublimation takes place that completely paralyses him. As Eddie Campbell clarifies:

Realizing that the heart will need to be burned to fulfil the ritual, Gull stokes up the fire in the room by burning some old clothing that he has found in one corner . . . . . He removes the woman's heart and burns it in the raging fire . . . Angels are singing somewhere high above him. He licks his lips and tastes the holy blood of saints, which by now he is covered with. The heart, being muscle, does not burn easily, but eventually it is ash. Gull takes the pulverized remains of it to the front door and scatters them upon the night wind in accordance with the ritual. This is the perfect sublime moment, frozen in the amber of eternity (Campbell and Moore 2013, 226).

Attributes of the myth of Prometheus have been applied to the visual transcendence each of these anti-heroes undergoes — and to echo Booker's aforementioned analogy — the fire that each of them discovers represents that spark of ego-consciousness which distinguishes them from their fellow man. In this spirit perhaps the most fitting connection of all can be seen by locating Gull's ritualistic practices, and the arcane reverence he has for Mary's heart, to the same kind of premonitory foresight that Prometheus had access to when he stated that he knew:

How to interpret signs in sacrifice,

Smoothness of heart and lights, what colours please the gods

In each, the mottled shapeliness of liver-lobes.

The thigh bones wrapped in fat, and the long chine, I burnt,

Leading men on the highway of an occult art; And signs from flames, obscure before, I now made plain (Vellacott 1961, 35).

Fittingly, the panel layout in the scene depicting this visual epiphany zooms closer and closer towards Gull's eyes and when the scale can get no closer the signs from flames that are made plain to him are obscured from the reader's view as the concluding panel moves outside the

room itself to depict powerful shards of light emitting from the window and door, light that no mere fire could produce:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 28).

Bachelard claims that, 'Imagination works at the summit of the mind like a flame', and this scene pays visual deference to his observation as Gulls' (and the readers') imagination is left to contemplate the mystery of the flame that engulfs his mind (Bachelard 1968, 110). Ultimately, whatever was revealed to him in that fire initiates a state of transcendence and apotheosis and in his dying moments he regards himself as the energy, the meaning, and the fire that lies beneath 'the skin of history' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Fourteen, 10).

With that he ascends, 'Up. Up out of the lunar and unconscious sphere where are both masterpiece and murder. Up towards a higher light' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Fourteen, 19).

Thus, in the same way that Prometheus is able to claim, 'I knew the appointed course of things to come' they are each empowered with a privileged sense of knowing due to their subconscious affinity with fire (Vellacott 1961, 27). Fire symbolises each anti-hero's obsessive nature but it also represents enlightenment, very much in accord with Bachelard's argument that, 'The fascinated individual hears the call of the funeral pyre. For him destruction is more than a change, it is a renewal (and as such) the fire which was consuming us suddenly enlightens us' - even if the sense of enlightenment these men discover ultimately elicits a very dark outlook on the meaning of their lives (Bachelard 1968, 16/101). Accordingly, this is the fire that helps guide Bruce Wayne to a sense of closure in relation to the purpose that was served by the murder of his parents as he comes to understand that their deaths may even have been a preordained condition in order for him to become Gotham's terrifying Dark Knight. In Rorschach's case fire purges of him of all weakness, burns away his past and moulds for him a new purified and incorruptible self. On the other hand, Gull is seen to take great pride in his incendiary epiphanies and in the knowledge they grant him, a clear example of which is displayed towards the end of the novel when he confronts the psychic, Robert Lees, and asks him, 'have you ever truly had a vision? A REAL vision? . . . No? I didn't think so . . . but I have' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Twelve, 13).

#### **5.4 The Beginning of the End: Establishing Pride and Pleasure as Precursors to the Anti-Hero's Downfall**

Thus, for these anti-heroes the most apparent consequence of subscribing to the influence of threshold guardians and the symbolism of fire is a growing sense of purpose - or

to give it a name more ascribable to the language of myth - hubris. The psychological hold that fire has over them can be used to explain the self-appointed election to saviourhood they adopt. In his preface to Bachelard's *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* Northrop Frye argues that, 'fire worship is defiance' and Bachelard concurs by pointing out that fire is often associated with acts of violence, symbolising, 'the objective phenomenon of an inner rage, of a hand that has become irritable' (Bachelard 1968, viii/36). Furthermore, he cautions that, 'the thought of fire, more than the thought of any other principle, follows the inclination to dream of a concentrated power (and) to think of a power means not only to use it, but above all to abuse it' (Bachelard 1968, 50/78). Notably, a hubristic undercurrent that leads to intimidation and the abuse of power is a common trait shared by these anti-heroes and not unlike the Nietzschean admonition regarding the danger of staring too hard into the abyss, Bachelard's observation can be similarly applied to these anti-heroes who stare too long into the fire. The most useful resource to help explore the mythological origins of such a mindset is Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*. The precedent set by the fate of the eponymous titan offers a valuable window into the mindset of protagonists that regard obdurate defiance as an issue on which there can be no compromise.

In fact, Booker argues that the purpose of using Prometheus as a mythological trope, 'is to personify ego-consciousness; that inventive capacity of the human brain which has given Homo Sapiens astonishing power to transform the earth to his own material advantage on an unprecedented scale' (Booker 2010, 648). Given the efforts of this thesis thus far to map the stream of consciousness of each of these anti-heroes, having such an identifiable personification of ego-consciousness and a literary exemplar for a state of resolute pride bodes well for any effort to probe the hubris demonstrated by Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull. All three entertain the belief that they are beyond the law and judgement of their fellow man. This is why incorporating Aeschylus's Prometheus is so helpful. In

*Prometheus Bound* the titan's act of defiance casts him into a state of torturous exile and yet it is a place that he chooses to remain rather than yield to Zeus's demands for obeisance. It is as if the ability to freely speak his mind, in spite of the continued pain it will incur, is preferable to a life of acquiescence to a higher authority. This is noted by the chorus when they point out to him that, 'You are too defiant, Prometheus, and your spirit, In spite of all your pain, yields not an inch' (Vellacott 1961, 26). Subsequently, Oceanus, the god of the sea, admonishes him for his 'too proud-speaking tongue' as well as his refusal to compromise, 'You still will not be humble, will not yield to pain' (Vellacott 1961, 30). Indeed, when it is put to Prometheus that he was wrong to turn his back on his fellow gods and bestow onto man the gift of fire his sense of conviction and this refusal to yield is clearly conveyed when he declares, 'Wrong? I accept the word. I willed, willed to be wrong! . . . Do you think I quake before these upstart gods? Not much, nor little – not one slightest thought!' (Vellacott 1961, 29/49). At the play's end Hermes makes the observation that Prometheus is like an unbroken colt that tries its strength, takes the bit between its teeth, and fights obstinately against the reins (Vellacott 1961, 50). Acting as Zeus's messenger he makes a final effort to convince Prometheus to submit to the authority of Zeus but the fallen Olympian remains steadfast, 'I am one whom he cannot kill' (Vellacott 1961, 51).

Just like Prometheus each of the anti-heroes in these graphic novels face a form of trial from a higher power for their actions, and just like him their defiant opposition to such judgment is resolute and steadfast. In Batman's case once he firmly re-establishes his return as the Dark Knight the sense of defiant pride it instils in him is powerfully conveyed in the aftermath of one of the novel's most important battles as he gazes into the night sky from his mansion and confidently observes how, 'The wind rises, tearing dead leaves free. Frogs croak like a cartoon car alarm. Crickets pick up the chorus. A wolf howls. I know how he feels' (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 47). Notably, the panel in which he compares himself to a wolf

depicts Wayne's domineering, even slightly menacing, smile – he is now master and commander of his world. Such pride is quite reminiscent of Ulysses' cautionary observation in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* when he points out that, 'Everything includes itself in power,/Power into will, will into appetite,/And appetite, an universal wolf . . . Must make perforce an universal prey,/And last eat up himself' (Booker 2010, 637). Thus, this powerful moment of introspection ideally captures a moment in which the anti-hero is defined by his defiant worldview as he finds a fleeting instance of existential fulfilment through having exercised his dominance over others. However, it also elicits an air of challenge, calling on forces as yet unseen to test this indomitable mindset and just as Prometheus is eventually called to answer for his actions by a higher power so too is the Dark Knight made to answer for his violent crusade by the government, who use Superman as their envoy (Miller 1986,, Bk. Two, 28). As his actions attract growing media attention those in power begin to get increasingly uncomfortable with what he represents and the impact he has on the public psyche. Interestingly, just as Aeschylus's Hermes compares the defiant Prometheus to an unbroken colt so too does Miller's Ronald Reagan apply the comparison to Gotham's anarchic Dark Knight when he explains to Superman that:

...it's all well and good ... on a ranch, I mean ... For the horses to be all different colours and sizes ... Long as they stay inside the fence ... It's even okay to have a crazy bronco now and then ... But if that bronco up and kicks the fence out and gets the other horses crazy ... Well it's bad for business . . . Now, son, I'm not asking you to drag him kicking and screaming into the stable. Just settle him down ... Ride him around the yard a few times if you have to (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 28).

Taking these instructions to heart Superman tracks Batman down and tries to rein him in by appealing to his sense of reason. Citing an incident that occurs outside the novel itself Superman reflects on the wider implications that Batman's hubristic tendencies elicited before he retired, reminding him that:

You were the one they used against us, Bruce. The one who played it rough. When the noise started from the parents' groups and the sub-committee called us in for questioning . . . you were the one who laughed . . . that scary laugh of yours . . . "Sure we're criminals", you said. "We've always been criminals." "We have to be criminals" (Miller 1986, Bk. Three, 31).

There are clear evocations here of Prometheus's, 'Wrong? I accept the word. I willed, willed to be wrong!' in Batman's defiant laughter and the ease in which he is willing to accept being labelled a criminal. Indeed, this stance echoes Rosenberg's earlier claim that the anti-hero is frequently placed in the position of choosing among several evils (Rosenberg 2008, 54). In the novel Batman uses methods that put him in direct contravention with the law, enacting a systematic life of defiance in the face of what society defines as tolerable behaviour. However, the fear of the powers-that-be in the story is that there may be no limits to which this unregulated vigilante is bound. Thus, referring to Wayne's resurrection of his Dark Knight persona Superman poses the question:

Do you remember why you retired, Bruce? No ... Just look at you . . . You'd do it again . . . and like a murderer, you'd cover it up again. Nothing matters to you . . . except your Holy War . . . But now the storm is growing again . . . They'll hunt us down again . . . Because of you (Miller 1986, Bk. Three, 35).

In spite of this criticism Batman maintains his defiant stance. In fact, in a statement that further clarifies the hubristic anti-hero mindset he accuses Superman of giving them, 'the power that should have been ours' (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 40). The troubling aspect of this statement is the distinction he makes between 'them', meaning legitimate agencies of law enforcement and government, and 'ours', meaning those like himself who he views to be located beyond the legal jurisdiction that the rest of society is held accountable to. In other words, he betrays in this comment a state of defiance which holds at its source a sense of superiority, and possibly even contempt, for anyone who does not subscribe to his methods.

Just like Batman, and testament to the black and white mask he wears, there are no shades of ambiguity in relation to the defiance that Rorschach demonstrates either. In fact, his Manichean outlook makes it entirely plausible that he is willing to die for his beliefs – thus satisfying a Promethean sense of defiance-at-all-costs. This is evident early in the novel when he notes in his private journal that, ‘there is good and there is evil, and evil must be punished. Even in the face of Armageddon I shall not compromise in this’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 24). Rorschach embodies the anti-hero whose sense of defiance is instinctually driven. This perspective is evident in a journal entry in which he contemplates the anti-hero mindset by asking whether or not it may be defined by, ‘Something in our personalities, perhaps? Some animal urge to fight and struggle, making us what we are?’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. II, 26). Most disturbingly, the panel that captures these thoughts depicts another of the novel’s anti-heroes, Eddie Blake, pinning the female crime-fighter, the Silk Spectre, to the ground as he rapes her:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. II, 26).

Thus, the visual brutally magnifies the argument being proposed in the accompanying text. It is important to note that even though this panel is overlaid by Rorschach’s stream of consciousness the scene depicted is not taken from his memory as it occurs before his inception in the story’s timeline. Therefore, it can be argued that the unsettling take on the

anti-hero being framed here by Moore and Gibbons — that even the most abhorrent of acts can be written off when attributed to an instinctual drive — acts as a form of commentary on the ultimately destructive consequences of the anti-hero's apathetic mindset.

In any case Rorschach is also called to account for his actions and his defiant nature is put to the test. This first occurs when the government takes a stance on the existence of figures in society who take on crime in their own way and it passes an act clarifying that vigilantism is illegal. In quick response Rorschach, 'expresses his feelings toward compulsory retirement in a note left outside police headquarters along with a dead multiple-rapist' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. IV, 23). This exemplifies the anti-hero as a figure located in a permanent state of defiant opposition to any regulatory body or higher authority. What is so interesting about this dynamic in Rorschach's case is that even when the old world order is dramatically reorganised through the success of Ozymandias's master plan and effectively a new world order is ushered in for humanity Rorschach still maintains an oppositional stance and refuses to compromise his ideals (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. XII, 19/20). In a nice bit of narrative symmetry that maintains his consistent and defiant stream of consciousness he now vocalises what he had earlier committed to his journal when Dan Dreiberg pleads with him to keep an open mind and compromise and he responds, 'No. Not even in the face of Armageddon. Never compromise' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. XII, 20). Thus, for most of the novel Rorschach is society's radicalised outsider, occupying an oppositional stance that permits him the freedom to act as judge, jury, and executioner as he sees fit. By the story's end a position of imposed complicity is thrust upon him as he is asked to cover up the dubious origins of an emerging new world order. Effectively, his position in society moves from one of liminality in an old world order to one of coerced centrality in a new one and his defiant refusal to accept this imposed transition is too dangerous a concept for his fellow co-conspirators to allow and they decide to kill him. Thus, just as Prometheus

does not yield to the impositions of Zeus so too must Rorschach test his conviction against the novel's own omnipotent being, Dr Manhattan. Fittingly, as a final testament to his defiant nature and his refusal to compromise even in the face of Armageddon he removes his mask just before the novel's god obliterates him.

After William Gull sees the Masonic deity Jahbulon in an aphasic hallucination, a sense of manic defiance begins to manifest in his personality. An early indicator of this trait can be seen when he and Netley mark key points of interest on a map of London city. As Netley pulls back in fear from the emerging pattern of a pentagram a sense of irreverent defiance is depicted in Gull's expression and he visibly revels in the fact that the god that will aid him in his impending task is not the Christian god that his coachman is familiar with. As Moore points out, by now Gull knows, 'that he is at least touched by insanity and it doesn't bother him even slightly' (Campbell and Moore 2013, 84). Thus, although Gull represents an anti-hero whose crusade for enlightenment quickly spirals into madness and murder it is this defiant confidence that helps him pave over the immorality of his chosen methods. However, since this stance is rooted in madness, any sense of perceived triumph that it elicits must be a fleeting one as his crusade, and the motivations that inspire it, are drawn from a source of fantasy that cannot be indefinitely sustained. This is precisely what happens after he experiences his most profound hallucination in the novel and steps out of Marie Kelly's room with the ashes of her incinerated heart in his hand. In a wordless sequence Gull raises his hand into the air and watches the ashes rise up into the night sky. Eddie Campbell refers to the way he drew Gull in this scene as, 'a statuary personification of victory, a David with the head of Goliath' (Campbell and Moore 2013, 225). Notably this moment also signals the beginning of Gull's fall as he has now reached the point from which any sense of victory begins to ring hollow. However, it is in defeat that his most articulate demonstration of defiance occurs. In a confrontation quite reminiscent of the interrogation faced by

Aeschylus's Prometheus, Gull is put on trial by a council of his peers and yet for all of the authority that they lay claim to it is his triumphant voice that dominates proceedings. By the time this secret trial takes place in the novel Gull's dark crusade is over, ultimately yielding only disillusionment and a further descent into debilitating madness for him. Yet, even though the cost of the epiphanic visions he experiences is the gradual erosion of his sanity he is still capable of momentarily displaying the sense of glory and power they have endowed him with. Thus, when he is called to account for his actions, by his own reckoning he is on the cusp of godhood and just like Prometheus this sense of knowing places him beyond the judgement of his tormenters. This vantage point is effectively conveyed when he is summonsed to defend his actions before a Freemason council. When Dr. Robert Anderson, the chairman of this clandestine hearing, proposes that he stands accused before his peers, 'of mayhems that have placed our brotherhood in jeopardy' Gull calmly and resolutely replies:

I have no peers here present . . . There is no man amongst you fit to judge the mighty art that I have wrought. Your rituals are empty oaths you neither understand nor live by. You cite the Great Architect yet would befoul yourselves should he address you. But he does NOT address you . . . And yet he speaks to ME. He is the balance where my deeds are weighed and judged. Not you (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Twelve, 21).

This declaration bears all the hallmarks of the anti-hero's defiant nature. It is also highly relatable to the message conveyed in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* that an anti-hero's actions can resonate to such an extent that he polarises society and potentially calls into question the authoritative structure of the regime he opposes no matter how brutal his methods are. Gull speaks from such a sense of self-assuredness here that he easily dismisses the judgemental tone of proceedings and instead responds with accusations of his own. Following Gull's declaration all that the council can weakly respond with is, 'I fear that you are suffering from delusions' (Ch. Twelve, 21). In no way dissuaded by this Gull maintains his fiercely defiant tone and with a knowing smile replies:

Indeed? Fear, rather, that I'm NOT. Fear rather it is you that misconstrues our human moment, its significance. Fear rather that in me there is an older truth made finally explicit. Our Dionysiac forbears sought to become instruments of God, a natural force and thus immortal (Ch. Twelve, 21).

As Moore points out, 'In Gull's mind, he has reached an invulnerable place where it no longer matters if anyone knows what he did or not . . . He is a god now. Nothing can hurt him' (Campbell and Moore 2013, 255). Indeed, the air of grandeur fuelling this oration is shown to be affecting enough to create a very unsettling reaction in the some of the members of the panel he faces, even reducing one of them to feeling physically ill. Campbell emphasises the power of the moment when he notes that, 'this is why Gull comes across so chillingly in this page. He has us believing that he KNOWS something' (Campbell and Moore 2013, 259). Moore confirms as much in his script notes for the scene when he outlines that at this point Gull, 'is somewhere far above the petty affairs of this court, in a cold high place where only he has access. There is something powerful and terrifying in his absolute conviction' (Campbell and Moore 2013, 259/260). Notably, this moment of hubristic triumph is the last occasion where he comes across as an articulate force to be reckoned with and in the following panel he experiences another aphasic hallucination from which he never regains his mental faculties. Thus, while this instance of exultant pride epitomises the anti-hero's sense of himself as a superior being (on par with the gods no less) it also marks the precipice of his ignominious descent into madness and, ultimately, death.

Before concluding the promotion of pride as a defining trope for each anti-hero the sense of pleasure it elicits must also be addressed as an influential contributor to their overall psychological make-up. To be precise, demonstrations of defiant pride elicit feelings of intense pleasure for each protagonist. This is significant because it helps to clarify the division between hero and anti-hero as the pleasure that each of these protagonists experiences in relation to both the anticipation of inflicting pain, and the satisfaction they

derive from exacting it, stands as a defining characteristic of the anti-heroic mind. As such it must be inducted into the analytical scope of a thesis that seeks to map the anti-hero's stream of consciousness. In his analysis of the anti-hero mindset, Chuck Tate, assistant professor of psychology at California State University, forwards the premise that:

Hostile aggression is characterised, psychologically, as actions or intentions to harm someone for the sake of deriving some pleasure from inflicting that harm. In other words, hostile aggression is committed for its own ends; it is not a means to another end. Thus, individuals engaged in hostile aggression are mildly or strongly sadistic, or, at the very least, derive momentary satisfaction from aggressing (Rosenberg 2008, 136).

Thus, it will be demonstrated that Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull exemplify Tate's definition of hostile aggression being conducive to feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. Additionally, in an effort to fully probe what is arguably the darkest layer of the anti-hero mind an observation from Nietzsche's Preface to *Human, All Too Human* will be woven in to the argument in order to better contextualise this pleasure dynamic. In it he proposes that exercising power over others represents:

...a sickness that can destroy the man who has it, this first outbreak of strength and will to self-determination, to evaluating on one's own account, this will to *free* will; and how much sickness is expressed in the wild experiments and singularities through which the liberated prisoner now seeks to demonstrate his mastery over things! He prowls cruelly around with an unslaked lasciviousness; what he captures has to expiate the perilous tension of his pride; what excites him he tears apart. . . . . It is an act of wilfulness, and pleasure in wilfulness (Kolocotroni 2004, 19).

His referral to a liberated prisoner is being taken in the context of this thesis to describe each of the anti-heroes in these graphic novels who, having now experienced the combined influence of threshold guardians and fire as a symbol of awakening, are invigorated by a new lease of life. Nietzsche's observation describes a figure confident in the knowledge that he is answerable to no higher power, and whose will to free will can inspire ecstatic pleasure from acts of mastery and destruction. The anti-heroes in these graphic novels easily satisfy this

hubristic and self-satisfied dynamic. Put in practice, when Bruce Wayne pays a visit to the street where his parents were murdered in the opening scenes of the novel he is approached by two assailants carrying knives. In his mind's eye he re-imagines one of them as a modern incarnation of his parents' killer and his train of thought betrays a very dark appetite when he admits that, 'we know so many ways to hurt him . . . So many lovely ways to punish him . . .'

(Miller 1986, Bk. One, 5). However, he breaks off this dark reverie before enacting any of these ways he refers to. Instead he falls to his knees, incapacitated not only by a reminder of Gotham City's societal decline, but by the momentary flickering of a dark desire within him to inflict pain on others. So when he does inevitably resurrect his Dark Knight persona, thus affecting the first outbreak of strength that Nietzsche refers to, there are moments when he embodies a primal entity that relishes the terror its appearance inspires. This is evident in a scene where he closes in on a group of fleeing bank robbers as he indulgently admits, 'I smell their fear . . . and it is sweet' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 27). Notably, just before dispatching them he announces his presence with the introduction, 'Welcome to hell' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 30). Indeed, this dark sense of pleasure even overrides sensations of extreme physical pain after a crushing defeat at the hands of a powerful opponent. Suddenly oblivious to the broken state of his body he is reminded of his singular purpose in life in the subterranean depths beneath his mansion and the reminder triggers a chilling smile:



(Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 32).

Thus, he is convincingly portrayed as an almost masochistic crusader who experiences genuine pleasure in a world of pain, even when he is on the receiving end of it. He is also the hunter who draws immense satisfaction from the thrill of the hunt. This was indicated earlier by way of the comparison he makes between himself and a howling wolf as he gazes from his mansion with a look of menacing satisfaction after brutally despatching one of his foes:



(Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 47).

Additionally, in a very revealing panel that speaks directly to the pleasure he takes in such activities he admits with a distinct air of satisfaction that, ‘There’s nothing better’ as he secures a set of knuckle-dusters around his closed fist:



(Miller 1986, Bk. Three, 17).

Affirmations like these confirm Chuck Tate's conclusions that, 'he derives pleasure from the activity of scaring and hurting criminals' (Rosenberg 2008, 140). Nothing confirms this more than the way he fantasizes about killing his nemesis, the Joker, as he admits that he has, 'lain awake nights ... endless nights ... considering every possible method ... treasuring each imaginary moment ... From the beginning I knew ... that there's nothing wrong with you ... that I can't fix ... with my hands' (Miller 1986, Bk. Three, 38). His admission of treasuring anticipated moments of pain so vivid that they deny him sleep is as clear a validation as any that pleasure and pain are as one in his mind. Indeed, there is a very notable manifestation of this dark appetite in the novel's closing stages. When a woman recounts for a news reporter how she narrowly avoided a brutal sexual assault she begins to describe a seemingly demonic rescuer that laughs as it tears its prey apart. In her report she explains:

The creep's pulling out his weapon when there's this shriek. Straight out of hell there's this shriek ... it turns into a growl ... flapping of wings ... big wings ... something wet happens to the creep ... a side of beef slams into the lamppost ... a switchblade snaps open ... Bones start popping inside the creep ... He's screaming and begging ... what grabbed him is laughing and so am I . . . (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 8/9).

This depiction of a man who lies awake in bed fantasizing about the many ways he could destroy his enemies as well as the description of a creature that is driven to laughter by its victims' agonised pleas for mercy effectively confirm both Tate's thoughts on the anti-hero's sadistic appetite and also validate the aforementioned Nietzschean desire to tear apart that which excites the man who has submitted to an ideology based on strength, self-determination, and the will to free will. As Tate concludes, 'it becomes difficult to argue any position other than that the Batman is motivated by some very selfish drive from which he derives immense pleasure . . . a pleasure revealed each time he grins as he delivers a ferocious blow to a criminal's body' (Rosenberg 2008, 143/144).

Ascribing feelings of pleasure to Rorschach needs to be done with due consideration for his nihilistic worldview. With this in mind instances of his derivation of more than just satisfaction from acts of intimidation and violence are evident. Deadpan humour colours many of his comments to others and appears regularly in his journal entries. Notably, his involvement in the story is initiated when a sadistic vigilante named The Comedian is thrown from of his high-rise apartment and hits the sidewalk far below, an incident that Rorschach refers to with a sense of irreverent wit: ‘Guy went sidewalk diving, Friday night. I don’t think he was alone when it happened’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 15). This element of dark humour is furthered by the way Rorschach finds occasion to laugh at the most inappropriate things. For example, when he shows a blood-stained smiley badge that he removed from the Comedian’s body to Dan Dreiberg, who mistakes the stain for bean juice, Rorschach responds by quipping, ‘That’s right. Human bean juice. Ha Ha’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 11). Indeed, comments and reactions like these cause others in the novel to refer to him as ‘sick. Sick inside his mind’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 4/23). For Rorschach demonstrations of mastery over others are pleasure-infused and the symptoms of his mental sickness are manifested in the thrill he feels just prior to inflicting pain. His night-time reconnaissance into a world of vice is likened to a form of recreational activity that he thoroughly enjoys. He regards the dusk that ‘reeks of fornication and consciences’ as an atmosphere highly conducive to demonstrations of violent cathartic release, an activity he clearly anticipates with pleasure when he muses, ‘I believe I shall take my exercise’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 14). In other words, immersing himself in an environment that satisfies his appetite for violence is his way of having fun. For example, during one such excursion he encounters a sexual assault in progress and describes the scene as follows:

Away down alley, heard woman scream, first bubbling note of city’s evening chorus. Approached disturbance. An attempted rape/mugging/both. Cleared throat. The man turned

and there was something rewarding in his eyes. Sometimes, the night is generous to me (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 18).

For an anti-hero who gleans pleasure from anticipated aggression there is a twisted sense of intimacy about a moment in which he finds reward in the eyes of a man he is about to brutally dispatch. Additionally, just like Miller's Dark Knight, he instigates a sense of intimidating foreplay to his aggression, further proof that the cat-and-mouse dynamic of hunter and prey is a source of inventive sport in the anti-hero's world. He satisfies this urge at one point in the novel when he breaks into the home of a possible suspect named Edgar Jacobi. Conscious of the presence of an intruder Jacobi nervously searches every room until he finds a note inside his refrigerator with the words 'Behind you' written on it (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 3). This diversionary tactic allows Rorschach to silently observe (and arguably savour) Jacobi's growing anxiety, culminating with the climactic realisation that he is not alone in his kitchen. He then delivers his punch-line to the sequence by pointing out, 'you're sweating. Looks unpleasant. Should cool down', before shoving Jacobi into the empty refrigerator and slamming its door shut (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 5).

This effectively validates the aforementioned Nietzschean admonition about the level of sickness that is expressed in the wild experiments through which the liberated prisoner now seeks to demonstrate his mastery over things. Effectively, the attribution of humorous one-liners to acts of aggression becomes a signatory pattern for Rorschach. As Dan Dreiberg, the closest thing he has to a friend, notes, 'Over the years that mask's eaten his brains' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VII, 9). In other words, Rorschach's interpretation of humour is not only amoral it is abnormal. No one in their right mind would find pleasure in such acts but this does speak to an important aspect of the anti-hero mindset in general, one that is applicable to all three protagonists. By citing humour in relation to observations or acts that are anything but humorous Rorschach speaks to the anti-hero's dangerous lack of empathy.

To this effect when he marks The Comedians death in his journal he drops the definite article and instead writes, ‘a comedian died’, almost as if Eddie Blake is just one of many comedians playing out their roles in an ultimately meaningless drama (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 14). Indeed, as testament to the subversion of humour that colours his perceptions, as he walks away from Blake’s grave he is reminded of a joke that can only evoke a sense of pathos:

Man goes to doctor. Says he’s depressed. Says life seems harsh and cruel. Says he feels all alone in a threatening world where what lies ahead is vague and uncertain. Doctor says “treatment is simple. Great clown Pagliacci is in town tonight. Go and see him. That should pick you up.” Man bursts into tears. Says “But doctor . . . I am Pagliacci” (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. II, 27).

In keeping with the connection between violence, death, and humour that is being proposed here as a formative aspect of the anti-hero mindset it is telling that the visual track accompanying this joke recounts scenes of Blake’s brutal murder overlaid with snippets of Rorschach’s journal entries that sombrely conclude. ‘Good joke. Everybody laugh. Roll on snare drum. Curtains’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. II, 28). Thus, the function of the joke is inverted, eliciting a tragic response, not a humorous one. This is fitting for a protagonist who in turn derives pleasure from committing acts that would horrify anyone else. Additionally, by demonstrating a clinical control of any instance that may elicit a humorous response he confirms indications of the kind of sociopathic detachment that lies beneath the surface of all anti-heroes - a factor that will be argued as an accelerant to his downfall in the final chapter. Fittingly, Kovacs’ only depicted smile in the whole novel is false. When his psychoanalyst mistakenly reads signs of improvement in his responses to the Rorschach test he expresses feelings of hope, confident that his sessions will have a positive effect on him. However, the panel following the doctor’s hopes for a positive outcome depicts Kovacs’ ineffectual attempt

to smile, an effort that perturbs Dr. Long and effectively dismisses his previously positive diagnosis:



(Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 5).

At this point the reader is the only one who knows that this smile is nothing more than a disingenuous effort to placate a man who has yet to experience the darkness that resides inside his patients' mind – just another mask in this anti-hero's wardrobe. In the end, Rorschach's journal is relegated to the crank file of a highly polemical publication called *The New Frontiersman* and he has the last ironic (and posthumous) laugh in the novel. By being the only one willing to expose a truth so seismic it could topple a new world order it is safer to relegate him to the realm of farce.

Nietzsche's proposal of a seemingly cathartic sense of liberation-by-way-of-destruction perfectly describes the release that Gull finds in madness, and the concept of a 'liberated prisoner' prowling his domain like a creature of the night with an unslakeable appetite for cruelty is validated each time he stalks his intended target. Thus, with Gull, as with the previous two anti-heroes, it is quite evident that for the anti-hero there is much pleasure to be gleaned from the hunt. An early pronouncement of such pleasure is disclosed when he surveys the prospective killing ground, in other words, London city. Gull begins the

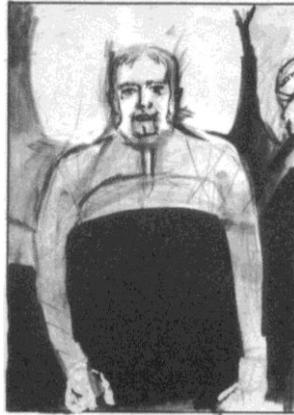
expedition in the best of spirits, laughing cruelly at Netley's mannerisms and lack of social standing while outlining a historical/mythological premise for the heinous task he is about to commit himself to (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 4). Cheerfully comparing himself and his coachman at one point to, 'royal hunting beasts' he quotes a line from Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* in anticipation of the terror he will soon bring to his victims, "Enslaved, the daughters of Albion weep; a trembling lamentation" . . . Ha ha ha' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 10/30). Indeed, the journey is such a source of maniacal delight for him that at times the pair come across as a kind of twisted comedy duo (unwittingly in Netley's case) with Gull continually playing his superior intellect against Netley's hopeless efforts to comprehend his deeper meaning. Indeed, this dynamic only serves to bring additional pleasure to Gull's quest as he playfully discloses to his confused coachman, 'You realize that I only share these private thoughts in recognition of your lack of cognizance? Why . . . thank you, sir. I can't say what that means to me. Ha ha ha! Of course you can't. That is precisely why I trust you' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 33). As with the previous two protagonists, attention must also be directed to the visual representation of Gull's facial expressions, as the image can often deliver a sense of immediacy capable of speaking directly to a character's innermost thoughts. For example, when he refers to women as 'half this planet's population' that lives in subjugation to the authority of male power his smile is quite evident and his gaze is somewhat distant, as though the observation has induced a kind of private reverie for him (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 23). This is very fitting for a man who will later experience brief flashes of ecstatic pleasure from eliminating five women. Notably, as they survey a map of the city it emerges that the configuration of the sites they visited forms a pentagram. This is significant because the revelation elicits intense pleasure for Gull as he declares to his now terrified coachman, 'You can't outrun it, Netley. It surrounds us . . . This pentacle of Sun Gods, obelisks and rational male fire, wherein

unconsciousness, the moon and womanhood are chained' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 36/37). Moore emphasizes Gull's predatory inclinations in this scene when he mentions how:

His eyes glitter and as he smiles at Netley his smile is predatory and dangerous. I want Gull to be an increasingly unsettling and powerful figure as this book unfolds . . . The mist and shadows seem to shudder and move behind him as he smiles disarmingly at us, eyes twinkling with a secret fire, a secret amusement (Campbell and Moore 2013, 65).

Consequently, once Gull has convinced himself that the violent acts he is about to perpetrate are justified on a symbolic level then everything that follows is carried out with a ceremonial, yet pleasurable, intent. So when his first intended victim humorously compares solicitation for sex to the act of marriage Gull finds cause for great delight in the comparison and responds, 'Ha ha ha. – Ha ha! Why not, a ceremony then' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Five, 27). However, the ceremony he has in mind is much darker than the physical interaction to which Polly alludes.

As much as the anticipation of violence is relished his sense of pleasure is even more palpable when he takes action. After taking Polly's life, the ritualised mutilation of her body is enacted in order for Gull to proffer an offering to his God in the correct manner. Netley is keen to flee the scene of the crime and when he asks if they are soon to be away Gull gleefully responds, 'Ha, ha! With the job half done? I think not' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Five, 31). With this he sets about his gruesome work and the episode has such a lasting effect on him that he is depicted lying in his bed afterwards with a smile of complete contentment on his face:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Five, 40).

With each subsequent murder/mutilation this sense of climactic euphoria increases and when he mistakenly believes his task is complete it is with a disturbing air of regret that what he refers to as his ‘adventures’ are over (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Eight, 41). Indeed, when his quest reaches its actual conclusion two chapters later and he comes as close as he ever will to satisfying his longed-for-purpose there is an expression one can only describe as resembling a kind of reverential thanksgiving on his face as he holds Marie Kelly’s heart in his hands like an offering to a God that clearly only he can see:



(Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 26).

Indeed, Moore emphasized the sense of diabolic gratification Gull experiences when he pointed out that:

When Gull smiles he looks quite satanic, knowing and sardonic with a fierce intelligence that glitters wickedly within his ancient eyes . . . his is a mind that can consider centuries of blood and war and slaughter with full knowledge of their implications, yet remain amused. (Campbell and Moore 2013, 71).

Thus, Gull, like the previous two protagonists effectively satisfies the Nietzschean description of a man consumed by a dominating urge to tear apart whatever excites him.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull each take counsel from their own self-styled threshold guardians to better set them on the path to power. Closely aligned with this is an interpretation of continued guidance from epiphanies borne by fire. Thus, resolute in their chosen course of action they each fall prey to an exaggerated state of proud defiance – to the point where elicitation of pleasure manifest themselves any time they exercise their power over others. However, this is a sense of pleasure only made possible by a complete disconnect from any sense of empathy, an adherence to a very narrow kind of stream of consciousness, a subscription to what Booker will identify in the following chapter as an inherently masculine ego-consciousness and a clear removal from moral responsibility. This train of thought forewarns the complete sense of detachment endemic to the anti-heroic mindset, where consequences are irrelevant and conviction alone is enough to conquer any challenge. However, this state of hubris cannot be sustained indefinitely. Indeed, as just another stage in a cycle of rise and fall this unchecked pride and appetite for destruction presages the ultimate fall for each of them – in other words, death. As Carl Jung warned, ‘The human ego can be exalted to experience godlike attributes, but only at the cost of over-reaching itself and falling to disaster’ (Jung, 112). Thus, in the final chapter it will be shown how adamantly subscribing to this exalted ego-state leads each one of them to the grave – and beyond.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **The Contagious Unconscious: From Detachment to Death. How the Anti-Heroic Mindset is Disseminated into the Collective Unconscious**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter will conclude the previous chapter's efforts to apply a template or set of tropes to the anti-hero mindset as exemplified by Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull. In that chapter a sense of self-ascribed ascendancy was attributed to each protagonist by highlighting the level of hubris they demonstrate. However, this pattern of ascent has an inevitable counterpart and there comes a point when they must answer for their actions. Thus, where the previous chapter addressed the indomitable spirit of the anti-hero this chapter will deal with his corresponding fall and demise. The first indicator of an impending fall from grace is the detachment that is a by-product of that same sense of pride which allows them to believe they are beyond the judgement of their fellow man. This is then followed by a theme without which no myth is complete, namely death. Finally, corresponding to the mythic cycle being applied to these figures it will then be explored how even death is but one stage in the overall cycle of the anti-hero and that through their departure they may possibly manifest a level of influence far more proliferate than anything they could have accomplished while alive.

#### **6.2 The Detached Nature of the Anti-Heroic Mindset**

If the proposed connection between fire and epiphany in the previous chapter evoked considerations of Promethean man so the sense of detachment these anti-heroes exhibit speaks to a literary tradition of dark protagonists. Each of these figures exemplifies the characteristics of the introspective outsider who has become convinced by way of subliminal/psychological persuasion of his superior standing and as such has no issue with

employing brute force in order to satisfy his goals. In order to justify this statement and affiliate this mindset with the anti-heroes in these graphic novels it is useful to consult Joseph Campbell's research. According to him, when the hero disregards the moral implications of his behaviour and justifies any act as being conducive to the completion of a destined task he is gradually desensitised to even the most abhorrent of consequences. As Campbell points out:

The inflated ego of the tyrant is a curse to himself and his world – no matter how his affairs may seem to prosper. Self-terrorized, fear-haunted, alert at every hand to meet and battle back the anticipated aggressions of his environment, which are primarily the reflections of the uncontrollable impulses to acquisition within himself, the giant of self-achieved independence is the world's messenger of disaster, even though, in his mind, he may entertain himself with humane intentions (Campbell 1993, 15).

It is worth examining this observation closely in order to justify affiliating the protagonists of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* with the term tyrant. Taking the definition of a tyrant as, 'a person exercising power or control in a cruel and arbitrary way' (Soanes and Stevenson (Ed.) 2008, 1561) each one of these anti-heroes are suitable candidates. This is furthered by the disregard they have for official channels of law enforcement — preferring to administer judgement according to their own personal mandate. Campbell characterises such figures in general as self-terrorized, fear-haunted, and alert at every hand to meet and battle back the anticipated aggressions of their environment. Examples of such anticipated resistance have been covered extensively for each of these anti-heroes in previous chapters. Bruce Wayne generates a private demon to haunt his every waking move, confirming Campbell's point that protagonists like this exist in a self-terrorized state of existence. Subsequently, the novel demonstrates that his singular efforts to battle back the anticipated aggressions of a society made impotent by a liberal approach to crime easily confirms him as a de-facto messenger of disaster as his influence is cited as the

indirect cause of the deaths of a number of copy-cat vigilantes (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 33/34). Rorschach, on the other hand, has let his mind slip into such a pliable state of impression that he gathers personal messages from the graffiti and shadows that occupy the walls and doorways of the city he patrols like a hunter. The fact that his mask also evokes imagistic echoes of these shadows confirms Campbell's reference to reflections within the self-made-tyrant of uncontrollable 'impulses to acquisition' within himself as he attempts to apply an ink-blot layer of meaning to his world (Campbell 1993, 15). His surroundings become an extended mirror of the mask he wears — visually presaging the self-terrorized subconscious of an anti-hero controlled by his own neuroses. His role as messenger of disaster, meanwhile, is literally documented from the novel's opening page. The journal that he keeps outlives him, and there are strong implications in the novel's closing panels that its publication is imminent. In William Gull's case it is not as initially evident that he suffers from the same sense of being self-terrorized or fear-haunted as the previous two anti-heroes because his sense of conviction seems so consistently resolute from such an early age. However, when he eventually experiences the brief flashes of epiphany brought on by the ritualistic mutilation of his victims his fearful reaction to the visions that follow is evident in his facial expressions. He satisfies Campbell's reference to an impulse to combat the anticipated aggressions of his environment through his fanatical efforts to prevent society from slipping into matriarchal control. Subscribing to the fiercely misogynistic belief that the influence of women represents a threat to the stability of society, Gull sees it as his special task to make sure such influence is (literally) cut off at its source before it can properly manifest itself. Consequently, he believes that the ferocity of the actions he takes to thwart such advancements will ensure the stability of patriarchal order, as well as safeguard the authority of the monarchy. However, his fanatic drive causes him to entertain delusions that seem to promise him an equal standing

with the Masonic god he worships - even if the path to such glory must be paved with blood - thus satisfying Campbell's messenger-of-disaster motif.

Effectively, the potential for these anti-heroes to be consumed by their own dark appetites is unlocked by the same single-mindedness that inspires them to take action in the first place, rather like a domino effect that can only end with their inevitable downfall. If it can be argued that they exist in this state of self-terrorization, as Campbell calls it, then it stands to reason that they will do whatever it takes to eliminate the cause of such terror. This involves adopting a state of complete emotional detachment from society around them in order to submit to their darkest impulses. This concept of an isolated figure that becomes consumed by an obsessive self-justified crusade has a strong literary and cinematic foundation. In traditional literature it can be seen in a wide variety of anti-heroic figures ranging from Milton's Lucifer to Shakespeare's Shylock to Shelley's Creature in *Frankenstein*. In cinema it is evident in Martin Scorsese's Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*, Francis Ford Coppola's Colonel Walter E. Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*, and Ridley Scott's Roy Batty in *Bladerunner*, to name but a few. In comics and graphic novels a multitude of such figures exist, including Garth Ennis's interpretation of Frank Castle in *The Punisher*, Jamie De Lano's John Constantine in *Hellblazer*, Ed Brubaker's Nicolas Lash in *Fatale*, Brian Azzarello's Agent Graves in *100 Bullets*, and Kazuo Koike's Ogami Itto in *Lone Wolf and Cub*. In Fred Parker's commentary on this anti-heroic archetype in *The Devil as Muse* he argues that what they all have in common is the fact that they are:

...charismatic yet profoundly isolated figures, exiles or outlaws from conventional society, alienated by a combination of their superior nobility of mind and some obscure act of crime or transgression in their past. Their consciousness is withdrawn, inflamed, and brooding; the pain they carry within is never fully communicated, but expressed in part by the attitude of disdain, severe and superb, which they show to human weakness in others as in themselves, and also to the littleness of life itself, its weakness to sustain their desires. They are *fallen*

beings – or so at least they experience their existence – but tremendous in their fallenness: they can neither altogether regret what they have become, because of the dark knowledge which they now possess, nor reconcile themselves to their condition, but vibrate between the poles of grim acquiescence and unappeasable rebellion. It often seems to be the intensity of this consciousness itself that constitutes their alienated self: consciousness not only *of* but also *as* alienation (Parker 2011, 113/114).

This ideally describes the protagonists of *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* as they each subscribe to the withdrawn and brooding state of consciousness that Parker identifies and position themselves as exiled, or fallen, beings. Understandably, many commentators have identified this intense state of mind as a portent of downfall. Jung, for example, observed that:

The dark side of the Self is the most dangerous thing of all, precisely because the Self is the greatest power in the psyche. It can cause people to “spin” megalomaniac or other delusory fantasies that catch them up and “possess” them. A person in this state . . . loses all touch with human reality (Jung 1968, 234).

By way of combining a structural analysis of the design features specific to each novel in conjunction with a measure of psychoanalytic profiling it has been documented up to this point how each of these anti-heroes spin delusory fantasies that allow them to step beyond moral restraint or consequence. Adding to this dynamic of the dark Self, in his extensive study of literary archetypes, Christopher Booker focuses considerable attention on tragic, or fallen, heroes who exist in a delusory state and his observations do much to explain why the protagonists in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* behave the way they do. Booker notes that tragic or flawed heroes, who become ‘heartless and blinded by the force of their egocentric obsession’ all essentially display the same psychological characteristics (Booker 2010, 225). According to him the first concern of stories that centre round a dark figure is to show us the danger of this power of egocentricity and he maintains that:

...since it is heartlessly self-seeking, it isolates the egotist from everyone around him . . . But equally significantly, we see how an inevitable consequence of egocentricity is that it limits and distorts perception. Someone seeing the world through the ego cannot by definition see objectively. He or she becomes cut off from reality. Seeing only what the ego wishes to see, they fall into a state of delusion. But because such a fantasy-state cannot achieve resolution with reality, this creates an unconscious tendency for the ego to step up its demands, taking on a self-destructive pattern. The egotist is driven even further into unreality . . . this puts him increasingly at odds with the world around him, until eventually he is likely to collide with reality in a way which is potentially fatal. The ego thus becomes identified with what stories portray to us as ‘masculine’ characteristics, most obviously representing a self-centred urge for power and control (Booker 2010, 556).

Booker’s line of thought makes for an ideal follow-up to the point made earlier about the hubristic nature of these anti-heroes and it also strengthens the argument that they are unknowingly orchestrating their own downfall. The reader picks up this sense of detachment/isolation so evidently in these graphic novels because the primary instigators of such an existence, the masculine urges for power and control that Booker refers to, are characteristics that Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull have in abundance. Notably, according to Booker, power or strength:

...may be presented primarily as a matter of physical potency and presence . . . it may be presented as the holding of great position (or) it may be portrayed simply as a strength of will, personality or character which enables its possessor to exercise dominance: either over others, or over himself. And in this respect, which derives ultimately from a physical power, the masculine is something which gives mastery and independence (Booker 2010, 261).

Thus, the physical potency and presence that Miller’s Batman conveys sends shockwaves throughout the collective psyche of Gotham’s citizens, but is perhaps best captured in an observation made by Robin towards the end of the novel as she watches the aged vigilante rally an undisciplined mob into action. As she observes him with a look of reverence on her face her accompanying internal monologue conveys the power of the moment as she compares his voice to the onset of an approaching storm, with the observation

repeating almost mantra-like in her head, ‘It’s just his voice . . . Just his voice. Just him’ (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 21/22). In Rorschach’s case, he epitomises Booker’s interpretation of power and strength to mean the ability of their possessor to exercise dominance over others and themselves. This is firstly illustrated by the terrified expressions on the faces of the various criminals that he interrogates and/or tortures throughout the novel. However, he takes Booker’s condition of self-dominance to a deeply psychological level of projected dependency (or displacement), whereby only by subscribing to the perfectly symmetrical patterns on his mask can he subsequently find a measure of order and control in an environment that he perceives to be beyond salvation. In *From Hell*, on the other hand, Booker’s manifestation of power or strength being represented by holding a great position in society is satisfied by Gull’s rise in both the field of medicine and the ranks of the Freemasons. His medical career is briefly recapped by a colleague who pays compliment to the fact that Gull, ‘won every prize available, graduating with honours in surgery and comparative anatomy’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 7) and he is later appointed Royal Physician in Extraordinary by Queen Victoria. With regard to his ascendancy through the ranks of the Freemasons one of his Masonic peers notes how:

...your rise in Masonry parallels your ascent in medicine. It seems so long ago you reached the third degree, manfully suffering the ordeal required to become Master Mason . . . Later, reaching thirteenth degree, you were exalted to the Royal Arch, learning its innermost secret . . . You’ve since advanced two degrees, becoming knight of the sword. We are impressed (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 16/17).

Thus, by following Booker’s rationale of the hero as a kind of delusional egotist to its conclusion it is important to highlight any indication of the dangerous level of detachment that resides within the minds of these protagonists. Booker traces this masculine aspiration for power to a dynamic of separation and division, in other words:

...the sense of power which enables one person or part to dominate over another; the sense of order which is rooted in the need to discriminate and to establish differences between one thing and another. In both these respects the masculine is potentially hard and inflexible. And when we see a character possessed by the 'dark masculine', we see him in the grip of either or both of these things, in a way which is egocentric and life-denying . . . In other words, while the masculine stands for the two great principles of power and order, if these are dark and one-sided they can only be turned to deadening and divisive purpose. The power can be used ultimately only to crush and to destroy (Booker 2010, 261).

Importantly, each of these anti-heroes exhibit early warning signs of this detached state of mind — this principle of separation and division that Booker identifies — in childhood. For example, in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, the genesis of the rigid code of justice that Bruce Wayne gradually fashions into a way of life is recounted by his butler and parental guardian Alfred. In the closing moments of the narrative he is reminded of a formative moment in the young Bruce Wayne's life whilst reading to him in bed:

Master Bruce was but nine years old, and restless, as he always was, at night . . . Still he sat, politely enough, on his bed, as Alfred read to him. "The Purloined Letter", "Yes, that was the story . . . he listened in silence, as, finishing the tale, Alfred explained the importance of Mr. Poe's contribution to detective fiction. Then, with a voice like steel . . . so frightfully formal, his dark eyes flashing . . . Master Bruce asked - - no, demanded . . . "The killer was caught. And punished." Alfred assured him that the villain had met justice. Bruce slept. Like a boy (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 177).

This brief anecdote of a noticeably clinical child retroactively lays the foundation for Wayne's disturbing referral to himself as a 'zombie' or a 'dead man' in his mid-fifties (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 4). This is further explored in his responses to a number of interactions that take place after he resurrects his Dark Knight persona for the final time. For example, his search for the whereabouts of Harvey Dent leads him to one of Dent's former associates and the shock of seeing Batman step from the shadows results in the criminal falling through a glass window in his efforts to escape, resulting in a deep laceration in his arm. Batman follows the injured man through the shattered window frame and calmly observes how,

‘Right now you’ve got a piece of glass shoved into a major artery in your arm. Right now you’re bleeding to death. Right now I’m the only one in the world who can get you to a hospital in time’ (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 37). Eventually his hunt for Dent ends with him extracting the criminal from a helicopter that subsequently lights up the night sky as it explodes over the city. Four of Dent’s accomplices are killed in the explosion, an inconsequential detail for the Dark Knight who dismisses the incident by concluding that, ‘Leaving the world no poorer . . . Four men die’ (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 46). This emotionless response to death is exemplified however when the topic is discussed on a more personal level. At one point in Batman’s obsessive crusade Alfred attempts to open his eyes to the danger of taking on a young apprentice, in other words a new Robin, by reminding him of Jason Todd, a previous Robin that was brutally murdered at the hands of the Joker years before. Even on this intimate level Batman maintains his detached stance and with the air of a military commander responds by saying, ‘I will never forget Jason. He was a good soldier. He honoured me. But the war goes on’ (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 37). Indeed, the tactics of warfare he employs further crystallize his complete lack of empathy, at times signalling a borderline sociopathic disregard for the level of pain he is capable of administering to those who stand in his way. For example, when he confronts the leader of a vicious gang called The Mutants he tailors his combative methods to accommodate for his younger opponent’s speed and endurance by relying on a sense of primal, yet calculated, ferocity. He initiates this duel with the precision of a surgeon and begins by limiting his opponent’s vision by giving him:

...just the right kind of cut above the eyes. The kind that bleeds . . . Right on schedule the blood hits his eyes . . . He charges blind . . . a quick one to the nerve cluster in his deltoid. It doesn’t hurt him . . . But no force on earth could help him move his left arm now’ (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 44).

Thus, he shuts his opponent down one muscle group at a time and as the duel approaches its climax he even applies a disturbing note of commentary to the pain he is casually

administering when he finally brings him to the ground and points out to him, ‘You don’t . . . Get it, boy . . . This isn’t a mudhole . . . it’s an operating table. And I’m the surgeon’ (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 45). Notably, directly after this declaration of power, whilst applying increasing pressure to a joint in his opponents leg, he casually dismisses the damage he is about to inflict, ‘Something tells me to stop with the leg. I don’t listen to it’ (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 45). Indeed, this cryptic reference to a ‘something’ opens a useful doorway into the mind of this novel’s anti-hero. Not only does he maintain a sense of detachment from those he preys upon but he tries to adhere to a conscious separation of one identity from another within his own mind. In other words, he relies on a sense of detachment between two personalities to sanction any action that speaks to his darkest impulses. As comics scholar David M. Hart points out:

...many writers have opted to push batman’s single-minded dedication to such an extreme that the character often comes across as borderline psychopathic, driven not by an altruistic intention to create a better world, but rather by an irresistible compulsion induced by childhood trauma (White 2008, 213).

This accounts for the way he addresses his bestial nature as a creature that resides in his gut which, ‘writhes and snarls and tells me what I need’, or why he sometimes refers to himself with the plural ‘we’ (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 4/5). It is unsurprising therefore, when he does confront Two-Face, a career criminal who has been diagnosed as suffering from acute split-personality disorder, that he acknowledges that he is looking at; ‘a reflection’ (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 47). Thus, he exemplifies the anti-hero whose sense of detachment feeds inwards, surviving on a tension between two-opposing identities that are as distinct as night and day, yet no less reliant on each other in order to stabilise his tenuous concept of a unified whole.

Walter Kovacs also satisfies this characteristic anti-heroic trait by exhibiting detachment from his emotions at an early age. In his case it is symptomatic of the abuse he

experienced at the hands of his mother whilst growing up. The end product of this systematic neglect can be taken from his reaction in later life to the news of his mother's brutal murder. As his prison psychologist notes, Kovacs' only verbal response to the news when it was broken to him was 'good' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 8). Indeed, it is through Dr. Long's observations that we are able to explore the extent of Kovacs' detached frame of mind. For example, he notes at one point in his analysis of the captured anti-hero that he is, 'very withdrawn, with no expression in either face or voice' and later concludes that he has, 'never met anyone quite so alienated' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 1/2). Notably, comics theorist Geoff Klock singles out his, 'obsessive-loner personality' as one of his strongest traits (Klock 2006, 66). Thus, he epitomises the anti-hero who operates on the fringes of society, a place where communion with others is kept to a bare minimum or avoided altogether. This permits him to dehumanise others and refer to them as 'cockroaches' or 'parasites' that infect the city he prowls (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 16/Ch. V, 11). He admits that putting on a mask frees him; 'from fear or weakness or lust', presumably detaching him from any responsibility for the actions he takes while wearing it also (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 18). In fact, at one point in the narrative he even disturbingly refers to rape as a 'moral lapse' when it is committed by a fellow crime-fighter in the novel whose ideals he admires (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 21).

As a result, when it comes to the administration of violence, or even death, it is carried out with a disturbing sense of detachment, becoming merely a channel through which to extract information or inspire fear. At one point in the narrative he comments to his colleague Dan Dreiberg with the air of an accomplished interrogator, 'Give me smallest finger on man's hand. I'll produce information' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. X, 9). Consequently, this methodology is applied when he begins his investigation of Eddie Blake's murder. His first stop is a bar frequented by known criminals and his opening line of enquiry

sees him grab one customer's hand and calmly break one of his fingers, an act followed by the curt announcement, 'I've just broken this gentleman's littler finger. Who killed Edward Blake?' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 16). He relies on this level of brutality to inspire fear in the other patrons of the bar, one bone at a time if necessary, dispassionately snapping a second finger on the man's hand while continuing with his monotone commentary, '... and his index finger. Who killed Edward Blake?' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 16). Receiving no satisfaction from this form of interrogation he later documents in his journal simply that the venture leaves him feeling 'slightly depressed' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 16). Notably, his victim does not even warrant comment in the entry. Additionally, when he eventually engages with his prison psychoanalyst, he refers to an earlier investigation involving a search for a child kidnapper and his approach to information gathering in that case reads as identical as he reflects on how he, 'Visited underworld bars and began hurting people. Put fourteen in hospital needlessly' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 18). Indeed, this pattern is concluded towards the end of the novel with a final excursion into the criminal underworld whereby he introduces himself thusly, 'Visited two bars before this. You may have heard ambulances . . . Need information . . . Won't insult legendary underworld solidarity by suggesting you surrender name without torture' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. X, 14).

Rorschach then, is an anti-hero whose sense of detachment equates him with a ruthless interrogator, information needs to be extracted and broken bodies are a causative by-product of his desire to obtain it. As Adrian Veidt comments in the novel's penultimate chapter he, 'seems to see the world in very black and white, Manichean terms' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. XI, 32). In other words, the moral detachment he establishes between his actions and his results is premised on the simple reasoning that the end is always justified by the means - with no apparent clash of values whatsoever. Importantly, he also subscribes to

the same kind of internalised detachment between two distinct personalities that was identified in Miller's Batman. He gradually reveals to his analyst that his Rorschach persona was conceived in an epiphany of blood and fire and that it represents his true self. Indeed, he only ever refers to his mask as his 'face', without which nobody knows who he is (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. V, 11). Effectively, when he takes it off he ceases to be. Indeed, the fact that the black and white patterns on the mask continually change shape but never blend speaks to the reassurance he takes from being able to establish two identities that have nothing in common. Accordingly, the binary opposition of black and white that adorns his face complements the mechanical sense of reason that drives the man wearing it. Moore himself echoes the fictional Veidt's observations and concedes that, 'Rorschach's world is seen in fiercely moral black and white terms' (Khoury 2008, 113). Thus, while his civilian persona is a consistent target for self-loathing because it experiences fear, weakness, and lust his constructed alter-ego grants him complete detachment from such failings, allowing him to act as the singular force for vengeance that is the anti-hero's most identifiable and problematic trait.

As with the previous two anti-heroes the signs of William Gull's detached mannerisms are noticeable at an early age. Like them, he also graduates to the same dark traits identified with protagonists whose egotism justifies acts of violence in the belief that they are acting for a greater good. However, where both Wayne and Kovacs exhibit occasional gradations of sociopathic behaviour Gull is in complete thrall to sociopathic urges that never conflict with the belief that he is performing an important duty. Thus, while Wayne and Kovacs colour the anti-hero classification with a sociopathic shade Gull darkens the label completely. He is an embodiment of the anti-hero as psychopath and an important example of how the figure can easily be conceived of as a monstrous one. Firstly, the detachment that seems to be synonymous with the anti-hero's make-up is revealed early on when he voices

his aspirations for a sense of purpose ‘most necessary and severe’ and asks his father if it is, ‘vanity to hope the Lord may choose for me a task most difficult?’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 3). However, the methodical way that he dissects a field mouse in a later incident in his youth speaks to something darker than detachment alone. Accordingly, confident affirmations from Gull in his adult life such as, ‘Putting matters to rights is my profession’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Two, 29), or ‘Four women threaten the crown. I am to deal with them’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Five, 14) all convey something of his sociopathic resolve and lack of empathy as he sets to eliminating five women who threaten to disclose a secret that could bring great shame on the royal family.

Indeed, such cold detachment is forewarned by the disconnected manner in which he speaks to his first victim just moments before her imminent demise. As they converse in his coach his sense of purpose gets the better of him as he declares, ‘What a life you have endured, awaiting nothing but deliverance . . . The fates have brought us both towards the place, at the appointed time . . . Whence our names shall go forth into history’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Five, 27). As chilling as the complete lack of empathy conveyed in this scene is it is a precursor to the sequence of images that follow. Just prior to instructing his coachman on how to properly cut Polly Nicholl’s throat Gull proceeds to give him a brief history of the Liston Knife that will be used to make the incision. He then observes Netley’s efforts with the air of an anatomist supervising a student and when his coachman botches his attempt he simply notes with a sense of mild disappointment, ‘Oh Netley I fear that you will never be a surgeon, See ... the blade’s glanced right off the collar-bone. Ah, well, then. Give it here. Give me the knife (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Five, 31). Notably, Moore compares the unflinching barbarism he demonstrates in these incidents with, ‘the air of an artist stepping back from his canvas for a moment to judge as to what further strokes are necessary’ (Campbell and Moore 2013, 220). This desensitised approach to murder is

revisited when he converses with his second victim-to-be in the same vacant tone and his increasing detachment from reality becomes quite evident as he muses, ‘Oh yes, you’re all my brides. Each one of you’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Seven, 22). It is with this same air of cold, reasoning (complemented by an expression that is described as ‘featureless and mask-like’) that he eventually signs off on his gruesome labours as he despatches his fifth and final victim (Campbell and Moore 2013, 214). Indeed, in the first appendix to the novel Moore specifically highlights Gull’s, ‘Utter detachment and disassociation from the human reality of his victims’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Appendix I, 34). Consequently, the successful completion of this task results in a gross misappropriation of the victorious hero motif as he declares, ‘I have saved you. Do you understand that? I have made you safe from time, and we are wed in legend, inextricable within eternity’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 23). Fittingly, this act inverts the concept proposed earlier of the anti-hero as a modern day Prometheus. Prometheus symbolises the protective father figure who bestows the gift of fire onto mortal man, an act of de-facto self-sacrifice that in the titan’s words means, ‘I have saved the human race from being ground / To dust, from total death’ (Vellacott 1961, 27). However, Gull, with a similar (yet entirely misguided) protective air believes that he has made his victims safe from time by bestowing on them the gift of death.

Additionally, just like the previous two anti-heroes the detachment that Gull regards the rest of the world with is internalised, causing a fissure within his own mind. He alludes to this divisive mindset when he explains to his coachman that the task appointed to him by the queen, ‘is but the fraction of my work that’s visible above the waterline. The greater part’s an iceberg of significance that lurks below’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 33). There is the implication with this metaphor that the schizophrenic mind frame he operates with is far from balanced and that his hidden, darker self has the controlling say in his life. This is very reminiscent of Jung’s earlier reference to that ability of the dark side of the Self to spin

megalomaniac fantasies capable of possessing the man who experiences them. Significantly, the effect of madness on Gull's mind causes him to lose any sense of the boundaries that the other two anti-heroes adhere to. Bruce Wayne at least tries to regard himself as a separate entity from his Dark Knight persona and Rorschach bestows a whole other self into the suggestive power of a mask. However, that delineation collapses for William Gull as his awakened self fully reconstitutes his purpose in life. This psychological conflation of two previously detached identities is brought on by his belief that he has seen the face of God, creating the paradox for him whereby he notes how, 'Gull the doctor says "Why, to converse with Gods is madness."' And Gull the man replies, "Then who'd be sane?"' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 22). The consequences of this psychic delineation are evident after he kills Kate Eddowes. Like a man coming out of a trance he notices the bloodstains all over his clothes and asks, 'How did I get this shirt in such a mess?' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Eight, 41). Thus, these anti-heroes make for a fitting inclusion to Campbell's dynamic of the fallen hero as self-made tyrant. By making reference to, 'that curiously disinterested, almost diabolic human phenomenon, beyond the normal bounds of social judgement, dedicated to the morals not of his time but of his art' (Campbell 1993, 24) it becomes easier to understand a Batman who thinks like an experienced surgeon as he brutally deconstructs his opponents bodies, or Rorschach as a ruthless interrogator who views manipulation of the human body as a conduit towards truth, or even William Gull as the diabolic artist who carves his legacy in the flesh of all those unfortunate enough to fall before his blade.

### **6.3 Death as a Necessary Qualifier to the Realm of Myth: Exploring the Anti-Hero's Reconciliation with the Grave**

Therefore it can be argued that Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull become so detached from the moral implications of their behaviour that not even the fear of death holds any power over them. Indeed, they accept it, or at the very least display an air of

ambivalence to its inevitability. This satisfies one of Campbell's conclusions on the nature of myth that, 'the hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror; the first condition is reconciliation with the grave' (Campbell 1993, 356). Thus, their respective mindsets are very conducive to a mythopoeic reading as they each exemplify a state of hubris so precarious that it cannot be indefinitely sustained without incurring a very high price. Of notable interest here, given each protagonist's close psychological relationship with fire, is Bachelard's observation in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* that, 'the call of the funeral pyre remains a fundamental poetic theme' (Bachelard 1968, 20). Additionally, Jung maintained that, 'we see the theme of sacrifice or death as a necessary cure for hybris, the pride that has over-reached itself' (Jung 1968, 106). Thus, when it comes to myth this reconciliatory attitude to death must be perceived as no more or no less significant than any other stage in a familiar cycle of death and rebirth. In some cases a rebirth will refer to the hero's return from the dead and in others the retelling of the story itself is enough to act as a rebirth of sorts, bestowing onto a new audience/generation the lesson to be learned from it. Hence, the cyclical nature of myth requires that the hero dies, literally or figuratively, upon completing his arduous task. As Jung explains, 'typical hero figures exhaust their efforts in achieving the goal of their ambitions; in short, they become successful even if immediately afterward they are punished or killed for their *hybris*' (Jung 1968, 124). In the case of these atypical anti-heroes, however, this dynamic is more complex. When traditional tropes such as death and rebirth are applied to these problematic figures the first thing that must be established is the manner in which they respond to them. Just as importantly — given the overall focus of this thesis on the portrayal of the anti-hero's stream of consciousness — is the psychological impact their response to such factors has on the collective unconscious of the society they leave behind. This initiates a centrifugal expansion outwards from an analysis of a singular stream of consciousness to a group-focused dynamic. Thus, the final component in analysing the

portrayal of each protagonist's stream of consciousness in these graphic novels is to explore how it affects those around them and is disseminated into a wider sphere of influence. To accomplish this, the chapter will conclude by analysing the death of each of these anti-heroes and then discuss the kind of afterlife which is embodied by the dissemination of their respective legacies into a collective mindset.

In Moore's introduction to *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, he highlights just how dominant this call of the funeral pyre is for Miller's Dark Knight. Notably, he argues that by introducing a sense of finality to a figure synonymous with the serialisation and perpetual youth that surrounds comic book heroes in general Miller manages:

...to shape the Batman into a true legend by introducing that element without which all true legends are incomplete . . . All our best and oldest legends recognise that time passes and that people grow old and die . . . With Dark Knight, time has come to the Batman and the capstone that makes legends what they are has finally been fitted (Miller 1986, Introduction).

Previous chapters have demonstrated how the medium-specific techniques employed by this novel emphasize a ubiquitous morbidity to Wayne's thoughts and the finality that Moore refers to here is never more than a panel or sequence away from resurfacing on any given page. In fact, the novel is framed by two interpretations of death. The first is manifested by the kind of living death that Wayne endures as a result of having retired his Dark Knight alter-ego for over twenty years. Correspondingly, the story concludes with Batman's second death, again orchestrated by Wayne, but this time in order for him to bury his Batman persona for good and dispel the amount of obstructive media attention it has attracted. Additionally, many instances of reflection or commentary on death punctuate the span between both events. One of the most telling is an observation made by Carrie Kelley in the novel's concluding chapter. As Gotham City descends into a state of chaos Batman assumes a more visible presence to re-establish some sense of societal order. After issuing a string of

commands to a group of freshly recruited followers he momentarily collapses from exhaustion. As Kelley observes, 'It's only once . . . in the whole night . . . that it shows . . . he just sags in his saddle like an old man . . . Then he straightens up and grins at me like it's funny. He can't die . . . ' (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 31). In spite of her defiant sign-off it is clear to the reader at this stage - having by now been inundated with Wayne's own reflections on the inevitability of death – what the anti-hero's fate will be. Indeed, a blunt validation of this outcome comes from Oliver Queen when he points out to Wayne how, 'You've always had it wrong, Bruce . . . Giving them such a big target. Sure, you play it mysterious - - But it's a loud kind of mysterious, man. Especially lately . . . you Bruce . . . man, they have to kill you' (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 34). Wayne is no stranger to such sentiment, the novel is woven with reflection that at times betrays a longing for the release of death, and to that end he sets about orchestrating it, to the extent of even appointing a time for it, 'in one hour . . . at midnight . . . a grand death' (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 35). The accumulation of these references builds towards the novel's dramatic showdown between Batman, the violent epitome of self-styled justice, and Superman, the God-like political puppet, who represents the militant arm of legislative power. It is a confrontation with only one possible outcome, something that Wayne seems to take effortlessly in stride as he points out, 'You're beginning to get the idea, Clarke . . . this . . . is the end . . . for both of us . . . ' (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 42). Indeed, it is during the battle which follows that his heart gives out and he dies in his opponents arms. Fittingly, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, Wayne's end occurs in tandem with the destruction of both his home and his lair as both Wayne Manor and the cave beneath it are consumed in fire.

In *Watchmen*, Walter Kovacs is driven by a seemingly instinctual compulsion to impose order on the world around him through the application of brutal violence. Notably, this unyielding drive is not compromised by thoughts of his demise and he too represents an

anti-hero who has come to terms with the dark path he has set himself on. This is seen towards the end of the novel just prior to the revelation that Adrian Veidt/Ozymandias has been the one orchestrating the mysterious murders that have taken place. As mentioned in the previous chapter Rorschach's attention is held by the Egyptian decor in Veidt's office when he recognises:

Anubis, watcher over dead. Whole culture death-fixated . . . Disturbing dead our job . . . If that offends Anubis, too bad. Handled watchdogs before. Need answers quickly. World on verge of apocalypse. Death and war already here. Other horsemen can't be far behind (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. X, 20).

Although this observation was used in the previous chapter to explain an affinity between him and his tutelary guide it also crystallises Rorschach's indifference to death. His glib reference to the watchdogs whose slaughter engendered his Rorschach persona further reinforces this mindset. He embodies the single-minded focus of the anti-hero here. With the world on the verge of apocalypse not even death can be afforded due consideration lest it obstruct him from achieving his goal. Indeed, he acknowledges that his imminent showdown with the novel's mastermind will most likely be his last act in a dispassionate final entry in his journal:

Offices below, headstones marking daily graves of thousands. Inside, across clock faces, as observed as those of celebrities, hands commence final laps. Oblivion gallops closer, favouring the spur, sparing the rein. I think we will be gone soon. Veidt is faster than Dreiberg. Perhaps faster than me. Return from mission seems unlikely. This last entry. Will shortly mail journal to only people can trust . . . If reading this now, whether I am alive or dead, you will know truth . . . Have done best to make this legible. Believe it paints disturbing picture . . . For my own part regret nothing. Have lived life, free from compromise . . . . . and step into the shadow now without complaint (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. X, 22).

We see here a clear rendition of Campbell's point, touched on earlier that, 'the hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror' (Campbell 1993, 356). So it is with Rorschach, he

has lived a life of no regrets and no complaints and has made his peace with the inevitability of his own demise, thus satisfying Campbell's condition that the mythic hero must experience a state of reconciliation with the grave. Additionally, as further testament to the novel as a braided and symmetrical narrative this important sign-off, located on the page's last two panels, is directly mirrored in the final two panels of the opposing page. The same sense of fatalism Rorschach expresses in his journal is echoed by the protagonist of *The Black Freighter*, the comic-within-the-comic whose protagonist's gradual submission to the hands of fate echoes Rorschach's fatalistic conclusions as he relates how, 'I spurred the horses on, whinnying, unnerved by death's scent, towards that inevitable confrontation: Dear God, let me have vengeance, then die swiftly . . . Delivered at last into the hands of a higher judgement' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. X, 23).

In the case of William Gull the approach to death is less one of reconciliation with the grave and more a desire for it - a longing for the release (and to his mind, the further possibilities) that death can provide him with. He expresses this desire to his coachman Netley with a sense of melancholy in the afterglow of the final murder/mutilation he commits when he admits that:

I'm finished. I have been climbing, Netley, all my life, toward a single peak. Now I have reached it. I have stood and felt the wind. I have seen all the world beneath me. Now there is only descent. Only the valley. Would that I had died there, Netley, in that light above the cloud line (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 33).

In Moore's notes in *The From Hell Companion* regarding this moment he clarifies that with this admission:

Gull is seized by the horrifying conviction that his work is over now. His pinnacle has been reached and now is past. He feels that it would have been better if he had died there in that room, united with Mary Kelly in her death, their glorious moment together, sustained for all time (Campbell and Moore 2013, 227).

Fittingly, four chapters after this defeated confession Gull finds the release he desires but in a very ignominious manner, dying on the filthy floor of madhouse cell under a false name. However, this outwardly degrading end signals the novel's lengthiest and most powerful portrayal of Gull's stream of consciousness. As Moore explains in his notes on the significance of this episode:

We cut between brief glimpses of the external reality of the cell with Gull twitching and convulsing on the floor and much longer sections in which we show what is going on inside Gull's extraordinary mind as he dies. Basically, what we witness is Gull's apotheosis. He becomes a god. At the point of death and liberation from mortal laws and perceptions (Campbell and Moore 2013, 265).

At this point the novel proceeds with a sequence of disjointed images, some easily identifiable, others more esoteric in nature, each one aligned with the intent of conveying the ubiquitous sense of temporal freedom Gull's disjointed stream of consciousness enjoys after he passes away. The narrative significance of this technique has been covered in previous chapters but what is of interest here, and applicable to all three anti-heroes, is the sense of liberation that comes with death, which is a very relatable dynamic to the idea of myth. For Miller's *Dark Knight*, for example, the staged death of his Batman persona at the end of the novel is a prerequisite condition for the freedom that Wayne needs to continue his war on crime, albeit in a much more clandestine manner as he casts off, 'the burnt remains of a crimefighter who's time has passed' (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 47). In the moments prior to Walter Kovacs' death in *Watchmen* tears are depicted streaming down his unmasked face and one cannot help but surmise that they represent a long-overdue cathartic release of pent-up frustration and rage at the horrendous childhood he experienced. Effectively his refusal to compromise his ideals bring him to a standoff with Dr Manhattan which is tantamount to suicide. It is a face-off he has no hope of walking away from and he demands that Manhattan despatch him, thus putting an end to his pained existence and granting him the release of

death. *From Hell* is peppered with accounts of William Gull's desire for a worthy task and after finding it events gradually move towards the inevitable outcome that taking on such a task elicits. Yet, as ignominious as the circumstances of his final moments may be, he perceives his death in celebratory terms as he sees himself as 'free of life' and 'free of time' signing off his existence with a proud air of determination and challenge as he asks, 'how then shall I be shackled? . . . how then shall History be my cage?' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Fourteen, 17).

By highlighting the inevitability/necessity of death for these anti-heroes a dominant mythological and literary trope is activated. In *The Seven Basic Plots* Christopher Booker makes the point that, 'if an author sets out to tell his story round a dark, egocentric hero, there is no way the plot can unfold to a fully-resolved happy ending' (Booker 2010, 352). This would indicate that any story centred on a protagonist that allows his dark side to consume him can achieve full resolution from only one of two outcomes. He must either acknowledge the error of his ways and redeem himself or accept that if he stays on the same course he will/must perish. For these anti-heroes, for whom, notably, fire plays such a significant psychological role, such self-destructive consequences are part of a natural order of things. This is what Bachelard suggests in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* when he states that, 'The lesson taught by fire is clear: "After having gained all through skill or through violence you must give up all, you must annihilate yourself"' (Bachelard 1968, 17).

#### **6.4 The Perpetual Anti-Hero: The Establishment of Legacy and the Dissemination of the Anti-Heroic Mindset into the Collective Unconscious**

In his analysis of literature's seven basic plots Booker identifies the powerful impact that a dark figure can have on the psyche of those around him by referring to:

...the contagious effect of egotism on a whole group or community of people. Because one dominant figure in particular ... is in the grip of egotism, this casts a distorting shadow over everyone around them . . . Everyone is thus set at odds, in one way or another dominated by the influence of that dark power (Booker 2010, 567).

The contagious dissemination of a dark and powerful ego which originates in the mind of a dominant figure can be clearly seen for each of these anti-heroes. In fact, the argument can be made that even after their passing a centrifugal dissemination of influence is upheld, to the point where it adopts mythopoeic properties as it becomes thoroughly embedded in a collective mindset. Thus, it will be argued that death is presented more as a stage of transition rather than a point of conclusion for these anti-heroes. Their respective journeys, either literally or figuratively, do not conclude with their passing. Campbell proposes an interesting foundation for this potentially perpetual dynamic when he points out that one of the chief responsibilities of any hero is, 'to return to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed' (Campbell 1993, 20). The argument being proposed here is that the transfigured return that Campbell mentions remains a pertinent concept even if the hero dies, in other words, that the psychological imprint he leaves behind after his passing holds fast. This idea, that the hero has a lesson to teach even after his primary quest is complete is echoed by Jung who regarded the "victorious hero" as a symbol of consciousness. He proposes that even the death of such a figure symbolises a phenomenon which, 'appears in a social context as the submergence of the individual in the mass', as the hero's identity is, 'dismembered or dissolved in the collective unconscious' (Jung 1964, 123/314).

As pointed out briefly above, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* bears witness to two deaths of the Batman persona. The first manifestation of it is the forced retirement of the Batman alter-ego by Wayne that takes place before events in the novel and the other is a staged death for the sake of public perception at the novel's conclusion. These instances offer valuable material for exploring how the perceived death of the anti-hero is disseminated into

a wider sphere. When Wayne submits to the subconscious coercion of his tutelary guide and decides to resurrect his Batman persona the effect is quickly manifested in the psyche of Gotham City's populace. The first mention of Batman himself comes in the form of a news report which notes that it has been ten years since, 'the last recorded sighting of the Batman. Dead or retired, his fate remains unknown' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 3). Interestingly the reporter follows this by pointing out the likelihood that, 'Our younger viewers will not remember the Batman. A recent survey shows that most high schoolers consider him a myth' (Ibid.). This effectively opens the novel with an already-established mythic aura around the novel's anti-hero, demonstrating how he has passed from one generation to the next, from reality into a kind of collective rumour. Geoff Klock points out that, 'the intention of the Batman persona is the edge provided by terror' (Klock 2006, 36) and Spivey and Knowlton concur that his, 'reputation as an anti-hero comes almost solely from his preference for striking from the shadows, using fear as a weapon' (Rosenberg 2008, 55). Thus, his eventual reappearance in Gotham City is accompanied by the conflicting first impressions of some of the civilians who catch a fleeting glimpse of him. It is interesting to note that even after seeing him - an act that should curtail fanciful exaggeration and move toward dispelling any mythic status - his impact on the public psyche is magnified even further. Some media sound-bites from various eye-witnesses compare him to a monster that has stepped right out of the darker pages of a fable. He is assigned bestial traits akin to a, 'wild animal. Growls. Snarls. Werewolf. Surely' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 26). A second witness adds to this by confirming, in her mind, that this Batman must be a, 'monster! Like with fangs and wings and it can fly . . .' (Ibid.). Even the calmest recording of his re-emergence is influenced by exaggeration as Carrie Fisher, a witness who will play a key role in the narrative to follow, calmly recounts to the reporter that, 'He's a man . . . about . . . twelve feet tall . . .' (Ibid.). This over-awed and exaggerated state of reaction is summed up later in the story by Lana Lang

who sees in Batman's return nothing less than, 'a symbolic resurgence of the common man's will to resist' (Miller 1986, Bk. One, 33). As Geoffrey Klock explains:

...at least part of his power comes from his status in Gotham City as a kind of urban legend that the criminal underworld fears is real. Batman comes out only at night and might be some inhuman demon or vampire (Klock 2006, 45).

For Wayne he is simply returning to what he does best, he is born again, there is a job to do and he has little regard for public response one way or another. However, impact of Batman's return on both the media and public awareness in general is deeply ingrained. As Moore indicates in his introduction, media portrayals of the Batman range from near-fascist and dangerous fanatic to concerned do-gooder and revenge-driven psychopath (Miller 1986, Introduction). Accordingly, the second book in the novel opens with a news presenter recounting how the 'council of mothers' has petitioned Gotham's mayor to issue a warrant for Batman's arrest on the grounds that he is, 'a harmful influence on the children of Gotham' (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 3). In direct contrast to this another petition arrives on the mayor's desk from the 'victim's rights task force' who demand, 'an official sanction of the vigilante's activities' (Ibid.). As the narrative progresses, further incidents depicting Batman's violent crack-down crime are punctuated by media samplings which gauge the varying reactions of Gotham's citizens to the Dark Knight's return. Talk show interviewee's responses vary from hard-line descriptions of Batman as a 'ruthless, monstrous vigilante' to those who argue that, 'He's only taking back what's ours' (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 9). Indeed, at one point he is even classed as 'a defacto murderer' (Miller 1986, Bk. Three, 36). Notably, the show's presenter states that these, and many others, 'are the reactions to a phenomenon that has struck a nerve center in our society', and that the show itself has been set up, 'to examine his impact on our consciousness' (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 9/Bk. Three, 36).

Of key relevance to an analysis of how the anti-hero impacts on a larger collective unconscious are incidents where people even begin to incorporate aspects of him into their own lives, to the extent of assuming his identity in order to act out their own revenge fantasies. Thus, a dynamic arises whereby the existence of such a figure radicalises the more impressionable members of society. As testament to this level of influence, the presenter from the aforementioned talk show concludes the piece by reporting that, ‘incidents of violence to criminals continue to abound in Gotham. We cannot be sure which are the work of the Batman . . . and which he has inspired’ (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 3). Two incidents briefly sample this adopted-persona dynamic and demonstrate how susceptible certain individuals are to becoming the anti-hero in their own lives simply by association with one whose seemingly ubiquitous presence is woven into the collective mindset by way of irresponsible media saturation. In the first incident a highly disturbed man suffering from schizophrenic delusions who believes that an authoritative inner-voice is directing him to punish sinners walks into a pornographic movie theatre with a gun and the outcome is succinctly captured in a news update, ‘Three slain in Batman inspired porn theater shoot-out. Details to follow ...’ (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 33). The second incident depicts a washed up wrestler-turned-leg-breaker for a debt-collector reading a copy of *Time* magazine. The cover depicts the iconic bat symbol with which Batman is associated and the by-line reads ‘The Batman Controversy’ (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 34). Frustrated by the termination of his wrestling career and his current occupation he flicks through the magazine, ‘and realizes he’s reading about a man. A man who dresses up like a monster and makes things right’ (Ibid.). This consequently inspires him to purchase a Batman costume and try to forcibly change the circumstances of his own life by killing his corrupt employer. Once again the outcome is briefly depicted by the media as a news caster announces, ‘Crazed would-be killer dresses as Batman’ (Ibid.). Accordingly, his influence on Gotham’s disenchanting youth has the effect of

galvanising many of them into a brutal vigilante death-squad called The Sons of the Batman. Although the novel's psychologist, Dr. Wolper, is predominantly used by Miller as a conduit for jargonised media sound-bites, elements of useful information can be gleaned from his take on this kind of collective influence. By perceiving the public psyche as, a 'membrane' Wolper argues that Batman's re-emergence has struck this membrane, 'a vicious blow and it has recoiled' (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 9). Furthermore, he argues that the effects of this blow are magnified by:

...irresponsible media input. Given this, the presence of such an aberrant, violent force in the media can only lead to anti-social programming . . . so a whole new generation, confused and angry . . will be bent to the matrix of Batman's pathological self-delusion. Batman is, in this context . . and pardon the term . . a social disease (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 10).

Thanks to such a wide variety of reactions and commentaries on Batman's impact on the society he inhabits the reader is presented with a highly divisive anti-hero and the more he is discussed the deeper he is embedded into that culture's collective consciousness. The long-term consequences of this dynamic are exemplified by the retiring commissioner Gordon through the use of a war-time anecdote. When Ellen Yindel, the incoming commissioner, asks him how he could possibly support the actions of a vigilante Gordon refers to President Roosevelt's ability to galvanise national spirit after the invasion of Pearl Harbour. However, he adds that:

A few years back, I was reading a news magazine . . a lot of people with a lot of evidence said that Roosevelt knew Pearl was going to be attacked . . and that he let it happen. Wasn't proven. Things like that never are. I couldn't stop thinking how horrible that would be . . . and how Pearl was what got us off our duffs in time to stop the Axis. But a lot of innocent men died. But we won the war. It bounced back and forth in my head until I realized I couldn't judge it. It was too big. *He* was too big (Miller 1986, Bk. Two, 40).

Additionally, he concludes his retirement speech later in the novel with the cryptic observation that the next police commissioner will have to face, 'a man who is the living

spirit of . . . something we need' (Miller 1986, Bk. Three, 12). Amplifying the Dark Knight's mythopoeic status, at the end of the novel Yindel is presented with an ideal opportunity to apprehend Batman but she stands down, suddenly conscious of the same perspective Gordon hinted at, as she similarly concludes that 'He's . . . too big' to stop (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 24). She has reached the same conclusion as Gordon that in a city/society teetering on the brink of chaos even a violent anti-hero who operates outside the law can occupy a necessary position of power. Fittingly, this takes place as the Dark Knight himself addresses an unruly mob of escaped prisoners in a commanding effort to appeal to their 'community spirit' which evokes the same sentiment Gordon implies in his retirement speech (Ibid.).

Indeed, the authoritative voice that Batman commands as he addresses this wayward army-in-the-making acts as a conclusive testament to the way in which the influence of a dark protagonist, possessed of sufficiently powerful (or obsessive) conviction, is disseminated into a group dynamic. Robin's observations effectively gauge the contagious impact the Dark Knight has on the collective psyche as she reacts in awe to the power of Batman's voice. As he rallies Gotham city's warring gangs behind a common goal Robin notes the complete attention Batman commands and she compares the power in his voice to that of an approaching storm (Miller 1986, Bk. Four, 21). Effectively, Batman's influence comes across as timeless, spanning the generation gap between him and the new disciples he has recruited to his holy war. In the wake of his words, an undisciplined mob starts operating like a focused group with an identifiable leader. Miller is directly contributing to a strong pattern of modern-day mythmaking here as the way in which Batman galvanises these youths into a purposeful unit mirrors Gordon's earlier war-time analogy about Roosevelt's voice on the radio, strong and sure, capable of taking fear and turning it into a fighting spirit. Just as Roosevelt's voice was able to fashion an army overnight, so too does the Dark Knight's voice achieve the same outcome for his own war.

Thus, Miller's decision to infuse the novel with prominent identifiable tropes anticipated the induction of his anti-hero into the realm of myth. Accordingly, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (to echo Moore's observation in the novel's introduction) became 'the capstone that secured Batman's passage into legend' (Miller 1986, Introduction). However, death in the world of comics and death in the world of myth are transient concepts and as a final brushstroke to the crafting of a mythic anti-hero Miller stages Bruce Wayne's reincarnation not long after Batman's death. Thus, for the second time in the novel he is born again and free to disseminate his influence to a whole new generation of acolytes - and readers. Comics scholar Geoffrey Klock sums up the deference Miller pays to this dissemination/mythmaking process when he points out that in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*:

Batman's metatextual act of knowledge is of himself and his tradition, of his razing or preceding visions of the Batman: "Here, in the endless cave, far past the burnt remains of a crimefighter whose time has passed . . . Miller's is the Batman who, in his strength, burns his predecessors "whose time has past" ((including his own Batman persona within *The Dark Knight Returns*, literally burned in the destruction of Wayne Manor)), but who also understands that the Batcave, and the Batman comic book, is "endless", that is, serially published. However strong a reading Miller might perform, "it begins here" rather than ends . . . The feeling of finality in the last moment of *The Dark Knight Returns* is juxtaposed with a statement of beginning. Just after calling for a lamp to illuminate the darkness of the cave – a new fire, a new Batman past the burnt out remains of the old – he informs his students that "we haven't got all night," but thinks to himself, "that's not true . . . we have years – as many as we need" (Klock 2006, 47).

In *Watchmen* the dissemination of Walter Kovacs' influence on a wider collective consciousness, both while he is alive and posthumously can be observed on two levels. On one level, just like in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, the effect he has can be gleaned from the comments and reactions from the variety of characters that his life intertwines with. On a deeper level, a level that is testament to the structural precision of the novel's circular

and braided narrative, the proliferate dissemination of Kovacs' implied presence is activated in the reader's mind through the simple act of rereading the novel. On a visual/textual level that suitably plays into the ubiquitous influence of novel's anti-hero the first time that Kovacs' Rorschach persona is mentioned is in a panel containing no one, a panel, rather, depicting a top-down view of a city street from a very high vantage point as an off-panel police detective points out that, 'Rorschach's still out there somewhere' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 4). Thus, Rorschach's presence is felt but not seen, implied but not yet made manifest. This is a very clever way of introducing a character that is all at once everywhere, given the amount of speculation and hearsay that surrounds him, and nowhere, given his masked identity — which translates as no identity at all.

As with the previous analysis of Batman's dissemination into a collective consciousness Christopher Booker's emphasis on the powerful and contagious effect that a dark figure can have on the psyche of those around him is just as applicable to Rorschach. Indeed, Booker's comparison of this psychological dynamic to the spread of a 'distorting shadow' holds a special meaning in the case of Rorschach as so much of his identity is infused with the recurring shadow motif that follows him throughout the novel (Booker 2010, 567). Fittingly, Rorschach is the one who spreads the 'Mask Killer' idea, a speculation that gradually seeps into the minds of his closest allies, infusing them with a sense of the paranoid worldview that Kovacs subscribes to (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VII, 4). The first instance of reflection on Rorschach's psychological impact comes from Laurie Juspezyk who vocalises this sense of subconscious contagion when she pointedly states that she does not like Rorschach, believing him to be, 'sick. Sick inside his mind' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. I, 23). Furthermore she compares him to a 'maggot' (Ibid.) - a creature synonymously associated with the spread of decay - as well as a, 'homicidal maniac' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VIII, 4).

Shared stories and personal recollections of Rorschach by the novel's other characters depict him as an uncompromising and vengeful sociopath. Yet, he is remembered, and spoken about; and for all that he remains unseen for much of the beginning of the story these references and recollections prove that his aura permeates the collective consciousness of those whose lives he has touched. Thus, as stories such as these are disseminated into the collective his urban legend status is magnified and its effects can be seen quite clearly when he is apprehended and sent to prison. The reaction of the prisoners to Rorschach's incarceration is a good indicator of how deeply entrenched in their psyche he has become. As he is walked to his cell a clamour of violent and sexual threats are hurled at him yet his facial expression belongs to a man who is completely unperturbed by the hell he has been consigned to. Indeed, given his subscription to the belief that all mankind has been sentenced for its sins, 'to this pandemonium we call the world', and that, 'Truly, life is hell and death's rough hand our only deliverance', his reaction here is not so surprising (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VIII, 25). Ironically, it is the mob that is agitated and frantic, not their intended target, almost as if Rorschach is precisely where he wants to be, occupying the very heart of darkness that his own myth has formed around him. As they ineffectually attempt to induce the same level of fear in him that he has successfully imposed into all of them Rorschach eventually, and chillingly, clarifies for them that, 'I'm not locked up in here with you. You're locked up in here with me' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 13). Here is an anti-hero who is fully aware of the grip he has over the collective psychology of those he preys upon.

Indeed, this subconscious stranglehold is not only restricted to the criminal underworld. It was demonstrated in chapter two how sequential rearrangement of key panels can be used as a way of visually imposing a certain train of thought into a character's mind and the technique was applied to Rorschach's psychoanalyst. Just like the prisoners he is placed in close proximity to Rorschach and gradually succumbs to his intense psychological

influence. The first indication of this occurs when he unconsciously reverts to calling Kovacs 'Rorschach' in his reports and pointedly, as his analysis progresses, he speculates that, 'It's as if continual contact with society's grim elements has shaped him into, something even worse' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VI, 16). However, it takes some time for him to realise that continual contact with Rorschach is shaping him into something much grimmer too, someone who has risked staring too long into the dark abyss that is Rorschach's mind only for it to reach out and engulf him. Echoing Booker's point once more, the powerful and contagious effect that a dark figure can have on the psyche of those around him is made powerfully manifest in Rorschach's case. The distorting effect of the mutable black pattern that he wears on his face seeps into the observer's unconscious like a corrosive agent and colours the perspective of anyone who stares at it too long. Just as the shadow that haunts Rorschach can be found lurking around any and every dark street corner so is the unsettling influence of Rorschach himself to be found residing in the minds of all those unfortunate enough to cross his path.

Given the multimedia influences of the graphic novel it is also worth noting the role the media plays as an agent that perpetuates the myth of the anti-hero and just as is the case in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* media output in *Watchmen* is represented as a very active channel of distribution. Similar to the public response that Miller's Dark Knight attracts, *Watchmen* uses portions of television reports to garner the public reaction to Rorschach and his crusade of violence. After Rorschach's identity is revealed and he is sent to prison one news report uses slanderous comments from his former landlady that he is a, 'Nazi pervert' who 'frequently propositioned her sexually' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VII, 11). Directly countering the tone set by her opinion the next person to be interviewed is Hector Godfrey, editor of the staunchly right-wing paper *New Frontiersman*, who proposes that Rorschach be reassessed, 'as a patriot and an American' (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VII, 12). Indeed, at

one point in the novel an editorial piece from this highly polemical newspaper is made available to the reader and in it Godfrey argues the necessity for masked vigilantes in a society beset with evil, claiming that they are, ‘the legends that urge our people onward even in times of deepest crisis’ (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. VIII, 29). Thus, one person’s Nazi pervert is another’s paragon of virtue, effectively summing-up the psychological schism that the anti-hero instigates within the public sphere.

The most fascinating aspect of *Watchmen* in relation to the dissemination of its dark avenger’s mindset into a public arena is based on its precipitous cliff-hanger ending and the state of temporal discord that this ending establishes between the initial reading and any subsequent re-readings. At one point in the story, Rorschach’s journal, an item capable of exposing the novel’s most explosive secret, is almost selected for publication. In fact, Godfrey’s assistant in the New Frontiersman office begins to read from the journal and by doing so repeats the opening lines of *Watchmen* itself. However, the editor dismisses it as the ravings of a madman and the journal is cast aside onto a heap of ‘crank’ files (Moore and Gibbons 2007, Ch. X, 24). This is a dress rehearsal for what happens at the end of the novel as the same assistant reaches once more for Rorschach’s journal - only this time there is a strong implication that it will be published. A strong implication, but not a guarantee, as the outcome of the novel, the true nature of *Watchmen*’s hidden plot, and the fate of Rorschach’s legacy, is left suspended in the open-ended final panel as well as in the perpetually unresolved minds of the novel’s readers. As well as this open-ended climax, which hovers on the brink of disseminating Rorschach’s innermost thoughts to an unprecedented amount of readers within *Watchmen*’s fictional story-world, there exists for the returning reader a second layer of retroactive dissemination. Indeed, so strongly does the novel invite subsequent re-readings given its symmetrical design that Rorschach’s presence comes across as even more proliferate each time the narrative is navigated by the reader’s eye. As

mentioned in relation to the design of a braided narrative, as the reader re-engages with *Watchmen*'s layout a process of retroactive determination (or in this case retroactive dissemination) takes place as he or she unveils instances of Rorschach's presence where in an initial reading they would be either glossed over or ignored. Indeed, thanks to his journal, the memory of this intriguing anti-hero is delivered into a cycle of, 'eternal recommencement' and the resulting impact of his presence is magnified in the collective consciousness of the novel's readers as they re-engage with the narrative by way of training them to become watchmen (or women) of their own for signs of an anti-hero who is hiding in plain sight (Groensteen 2007, 155).

*From Hell* offers an ideal manifestation of Booker's single dominant figure that is able to cast a fearful shadow over everyone around him. In fact, the shadow that William Gull casts over his world when he is alive pales in comparison to the magnitude of the myth that survives him, a myth that expands with each new enquiry and speculation that it generates. He exemplifies the darkest possible take on the anti-hero motif, a figure who believes that his nightmarish message can only be received if he cuts all ties with moral limitation. This line of thinking can be located in a comment he makes to his impending second victim, Annie Chapman, when he muses on how, 'Our moral envelopes are painful and encumbering things: Shackling us to here and now; denying us eternity. How may our message be received 'till they are opened?' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Seven, 21). On one level this comment firmly locates Gull's mindset — in order to spread his message he must step outside the parameters of moral restraint and be willing to commune with the darkest side of himself. Indeed, he is in such complete thrall to this introspective train of thought that he believes he is inspired by 'a pantheon of Gods' that reside in a 'drowned realm' in his mind (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Four, 18/19). As such he feels privileged to be the one who can then return to society and spread the message he has learned from his unconscious endeavours.

Just as disturbing, however, is the comparison he makes to an envelope that needs to be opened in order for the message within to be received. He is now of a frame of mind where he views each of his intended victims as symbolic message-bearers of his great awakening who must quite literally (and brutally) be opened in order for him to glean the precious arcane knowledge that their bodies (their mortal envelopes) contain.

The role played by the media is just as prominent in disseminating Gull's mythic status as it is with the case of Miller's Dark Knight and *Watchmen's* sociopathic detective. Indeed, if anything the representation of media involvement in *From Hell* comes across as more ruthless than either of the previous novels in spite of the technological constraints of the period. With the earlier two novels media involvement was shown to display a broad spectrum of people's reactions to the activities of a violent and aberrant agent in their midst. In other words, there was a measure of balance in the depicted reactions of the populace. In *From Hell*, however, irresponsible media fabrication is shown to incite a reaction akin to mass hysteria. As the atrocities in Whitechapel become public knowledge, a journalist (who is only referred to in the novel as 'Mr. Best') views the furore surrounding them as an ideal climate in which to sell more newspapers, with or without any credible evidence to back him up (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Seven, 11). In fact, he is not even particularly interested in the identity of the perpetrator of these acts so long as he is terrifying enough to be remembered. This is evident from the way he discusses the issue with another colleague when he admits, 'Personally, Mr. Gibbs, I couldn't give a monkey's fuck who did it. It's what we can make of it. That's the thing, 'ennit? What we can make of it' (Ibid., Ch. Seven, 11). Indeed, with the identity of the murderer not forthcoming, and fearing that the mass hysteria caused by his actions may subside, Best proposes to his colleague that, 'We need a villain . . . And if we can't find one, well . . . We shall just have to conjure one up, shan't we!' (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Seven, 37). Thus, in a move that pre-emptes the most irresponsible

kind of sensationalistic journalism he plays a huge role in disseminating the presence of this mysterious dark figure into the minds of his readership, adding that this is, ‘a whole new kind of journalism . . . and we’re inventin’ it right ‘ere in Wapping’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Seven, 38). Indeed, the contagious effect of this reckless move spreads like wildfire through the imaginations of the London populace and soon results in a copycat epidemic of confessional letters from people of all ages and backgrounds. Their motivations range from those who regard the exercise as a simple prank to those who experience sexual gratification by writing anonymously about slaughtering women (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Nine, 36). In the process the emerging mythic entity that is Jack the Ripper is made manifest and as one new strand of narrative after another is woven into his inception he can no longer be adequately defined within the collective consciousness, just like the dark protagonists of the previous two novels. Moore refers to this collective dynamic as a form of mass-induced ‘total identification’, where the grip that a dark figure has over the minds of a collective is so powerful that it inspires fantasies of identity projection, a true sign that the anti-hero’s impact has taken root in the minds of others (Moore and Campbell 2013, Appendix I, 32). As Moore adds in the novel’s appendix, ‘The fact that one man was actually killing and disembowelling prostitutes at this time almost pales into significance beside the fact that lots of ostensibly normal men throughout the country were fantasizing about doing the very same thing’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Appendix I, 32).

However, this mass-induced effort to claim Gull’s legacy does not sit well with the man himself and he comes to the realisation that if his dark crusade is going to be exploited for the gratification of others then he must make an effort to preserve its integrity. Thus, with a notable air of indignation he points out to Netley that they must confront their persecutors, these:

...newsmen (who) mock us with their “Jack the Ripper” jibes. Let us mock newsmen in return! Let us reclaim from them the myth they sought to shape for profit. Let us give them truer legends, grand enough to slake their morbid thirsts. Let us acquaint these fabricators with reality (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Nine, 32).

To this end he dictates a letter through Netley which not only contains information that would only be privy to the perpetrator but which is also accompanied by the missing kidney of one of his victims. Thus, even though Gull exemplifies the anti-hero motif when it pushed to the darkest limits of excess there is still much to be gleaned from his ascendance into myth. By the time he has completed his task he fervently believes that he has ushered in a new age for mankind, sweeping aside outdated ways of thinking and preparing society at large for the dawn of a new century, a century that would bear witness to a whole new array of war and atrocity. Aside from his own determined efforts to achieve a state of apotheosis and ascend to godhood this is the secondary purpose of his efforts, to illuminate the dawn of a new age for society. He confirms as much after his final mutilation when he confides to Netley that, ‘For better or worse, the twentieth century. I have delivered it’ (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Ten, 33). Indeed, in a chillingly unconventional manner there may be something to this claim. At a stage in the narrative after the completion of Gull’s task an informal gathering in Oscar Wilde’s house is depicted. When discussion turns to the Whitechapel murders one of the guests argues that the amount of attention they brought to London’s East End had the knock-on effect of forcing the city’s planners to seriously address the level of poverty in the area. Thus, a much needed element of social reform is delivered onto the East End as an inadvertent consequence of Gull’s actions.

The residual effect of Gull’s psychological impact on society is only fully exposed, however, after he dies as his disembodied spirit takes account of his past-life experiences and formulates its own theories on the nature of consciousness and the legacy of his own mythic

status. By means of a complex representation of stream of consciousness techniques Gull acknowledges that he has become:

...wholly concept now. Without the flesh to contradict, I truly AM as I'm perceived, in all the myriad ways. All things to all men, I ascend . . . I am escaped from space into the sphere of mind and myth and angels . . . I am set free from flesh and time. I am become a symbol in the human soul; a fearful star in mankind's inner firmament. And still I rise. Eternity itself shall not contain me. I am not man so much as syndrome; as a voice that bellows in the human heart. I am a rain. I cannot be contained . . . I am a wave, an influence (Moore and Campbell 2013, Ch. Fourteen, 10/15/17).

Of key significance in the way this wandering stream of thought is gradually disseminated is the diegetic sense of liberation that the technique bestows on the transient concept of death. The arbitrary nature of the images that document his wandering spirit skilfully mimics the concept that for this chilling anti-hero death is merely the launch point for an indomitable idea — a most applicable dynamic to the perpetual nature of myth itself. Thus, the conclusions that Gull reaches here offer up a rich source of material that can be used to tap into the effect that each of these anti-heroes have on their respective worlds. By becoming all things to all men, Gull is signalling the same divisive impact that Batman and Rorschach initiated. Miller's Dark Knight is reacted to as anything ranging from a near-fascist and revenge driven psychopath to a concerned do-gooder and an autonomous agent for justice. Similarly, public perception of Rorschach varies from terms like homicidal maniac and Nazi pervert to patriot and inspirational figure of legend. So too is opinion divided in the case of Gull from that of monstrous butcher to the most radical kind of social reformer. Either way, for all of these protagonists, they become symbols for something bigger than themselves in the collective consciousness of the societies they occupy. To echo Gull, they become a syndrome that is perpetuated each time they are referenced or spoken of, thereby attaining the sense of immortality that is synonymous to myth. As illuminating as this portrayal of a disseminated consciousness is it is matched in kind by Moore's closing thoughts in the

novel's second appendix. In it he outlines the perpetual nature of myth and the elusive search for the truth behind the figures that inspire it. Ultimately, he concludes that when a dark figure graduates to the realm of legend and myth the resulting narrative is more about the people that tell it than the figures it contains. As commentary, speculation, and judgement accumulates in each of these anti-hero's passing their dissemination into a collective mindset demonstrates that they are ultimately public property. Thus, to echo Rosenberg's definition for a final time, 'We see our flawed selves in anti-heroes, and this allows us to understand their humanity, even when their deeds are unquestionably evil' (Rosenberg 2008, 61). As Moore succinctly puts it, such figures are, 'about us. About our minds and how they dance. They mirror our hysterias and become receptacles for each new social panic. The complex phantom we project. That alone, we know is real (Moore and Campbell 2013, Appendix II, 23).

## **6.5 Conclusion**

In the previous chapter the stages that facilitated the anti-hero's rise to power were identified and then contextually applied to Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull. Importantly, their submission to a tutelary guide, their obsessive relationship with fire, and their resulting demonstrations of pride all speak to defining moments in the portrayal of their respective streams of consciousness. Accordingly, this chapter has documented the debt that they incur for choosing such dark paths in life. The hubris they each exhibit fosters the seeds of separation from their fellow man as they consciously choose to regard all others as beneath them. This divisive line of thinking is crystallised by the eventual sense of sociopathic detachment that each of them become so comfortable with. Thus, a momentum builds, with separation leading to detachment and detachment setting them up for the ultimate inevitable climax, in other words — death. However, as testament to the dissemination of each protagonist's mythopoeic influence, death manifests itself in *Batman: The Dark Knight*

*Returns, Watchmen, and From Hell* as just another stage in story-worlds that are perpetuated in the innumerable streams of consciousness of all those whose lives they touch, fictional or otherwise.

## General Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate how the medium of sequential narrative is able to convey a protagonist's stream of consciousness and it centred its focus on the anti-heroes in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* to accomplish this task. This process required weaving two perspectives into one correlating thread. The first perspective outlined the narrative structure of each graphic novel and the second perspective addressed the mindset of each anti-hero. The structural analysis began with chapter one identifying the essential building blocks that combine to allow narrative cohesion between panels. It then concluded with a demonstration of synecdochic representation in order to visually prepare the reader's eyes for an analysis of the fragmented portrayal of Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull's respective streams of consciousness. Chapter two attempted to expose the variable dynamics open to each of these graphic novels in relation to page-based scansion. By establishing an interdisciplinary link to a precedent set in structuralism and semiotic discourse, this chapter appropriated the semantics of paradigmatic and syntagmatic logic to explore the narrative potential embedded in page structures which encourage the reader to follow more than one reading vector. The purpose of this was to emphasize the unique diegetic role that these variable reading strategies play in depicting the arbitrary manner in which each anti-hero's stream of consciousness imposes itself into the story-world. Chapter three detailed a theoretical framework for the most complex dynamic employed by these graphic novels, the technique known as braiding. It then used this theoretical framework to conduct a close reading of how braiding facilitates the dispersal of each protagonist's thoughts. By way of framing each graphic novel as a network of privileged relations between panels that are spread across the story-world it was argued that a ubiquitous

undertone of psychological resonance permeates each narrative through the use of repetition and retroactive determination.

Chapter four acted as a transition point in the thesis whereby the structural template outlined up to this point was enhanced by incorporating an element of psychoanalytical theory. This involved appropriating terminology from Freud's analysis of the dream-work to explain the way each anti-hero's dreams, flashbacks, and/or visions were displayed. The momentum of this approach was then given a contemporary thrust by incorporating visual methodology and addressing the relationship that psychoanalysis has with the image. It then concluded with the proposal that the medium of sequential narrative is more adaptable to the dynamics of sequential causality, and as such represents a more absorbent field of reference for the psychoanalytical terms metonym and displacement, than the medium of film by way of drawing contextual examples from each novel's visual manipulation of its protagonist's thoughts. This put in place a structural and psychoanalytical foundation that could suitably accommodate the variety of ways that each graphic novel could facilitate the portrayal its respective protagonist's stream of consciousness. The penultimate chapter furthered the character-driven orientation that was initiated in chapter four by applying a mythopoeic reading to the thoughts and mannerisms of each anti-hero and putting in place a set of tropes with which to further document the way they think. It was argued that the guidance, or coercion, they receive from subconsciously manifested threshold guardians and the symbolism of fire justified the exaggerated state of hubris that each protagonist ascends to. Acting as a counterbalance to this self-justified dominance, the final chapter documented the level of detachment that their obsessive pride elicited and staged it as a precursor to their inevitable downfall. Enhancing the drive of this mythopoeic reading overall, this chapter then concluded its analysis of the anti-hero's singular stream of consciousness by taking account of its ubiquitous spread into a collective stream of consciousness. To do this it examined the

impact of each anti-hero's death - and the subsequent dissemination of their respective legacies - on the collective mindset of the story-worlds they left behind, thus satisfying their induction into the circular and perpetual dynamism of myth.

To sum up, at the heart of this thesis has been the issue of fluency. It highlighted the need for a sense of multimodal awareness from the outset in order to provide the reader with the means to visually and semantically apprehend the variety of reading strategies that *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* employ to convey their respective protagonists' streams of consciousness. As well as visualising each protagonist's conscious and subconscious thoughts these graphic novels also offer another kind of fluency by standing as defining examples of the psychological complexity (and variability) of the anti-heroic mind. These exemplars of the medium demonstrate that the graphic novel represents a platform of experimental exposition that has the freedom to deploy, withhold, or isolate both image and/or text fragments in order to facilitate a multimodal sense of immersion into a story-world. In closing, this is why the question of fluency reappears, as these graphic novels have subsequently been digitised and this technology introduces an additional form of tactile interaction that brings with it a new array of semantic and cognitive challenges for the reader's eye. By providing an ability to scan/read these graphic novels on an incremental panel-by-panel basis this platform has an inevitable effect on the dynamics that this thesis discussed. If, for example, the reader engages with these graphic novels in this manner then the semantic handover between the vertical and horizontal axis on the page that was discussed in chapter two is destabilised - possibly even neglected. As each panel succeeds the next 'it also replaces and effaces it (thus) the images are deterritorialized, and all the linking threads woven across the surface of the page are masked or destroyed' (Groensteen 2013, 67). So too are the properties of the braid as analysed in chapter three altered in that the reader is no longer in possession of a physical artefact that allows him or

her to flip back and forth through the entire work in order for the process of retroactive determination to take place. Scanning back through a succession of pages on a tablet may prove to be too unwieldy and pedantic to encourage cognitive investment in the braided design of works that were intended to be negotiated in paper form. Speaking specifically to some of the narrative techniques analysed in these graphic novels, the question is raised as to the impact a digital platform may have on the residual psychological resonance created by the disruptive intrusion of singular pearl fragments in Bruce Wayne's mind in *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. Similarly, one must consider whether the transfer to an electronic reader will accentuate or de-emphasize the citation effect incited by the arbitrary reappearance of Rorschach patterns in *Watchmen*. One can only hypothesize the effect such technology will have on the already highly complex command of narrative time as demonstrated by the movement of William Gull's disembodied consciousness through *From Hell*.

Chapter one contained an observation/caution from Joseph Witek that, 'readers who are trying to figure out the proper way to read the page are readers who are not immersed in the story' (Heer and Worchester 2009, 154). Such apprehension is an inevitable by-product of the inception of new media, a classification that initially pertained to the graphic novel in paper form when it first appeared. However, the field of narratology continues to advance, an argument that this thesis has attempted to justify by highlighting how conducive *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen*, and *From Hell* are to the portrayal of stream of consciousness techniques. As initially disorientating as the panoptic navigation of Bruce Wayne, Walter Kovacs, and William Gull's respective psyches is, developing a sense of fluency with the process speaks to an explorative impulse that advances the field of comics studies as a whole. Thus, mapping the creative ways that each protagonist's thoughts are conveyed and tracking the innovative potential of this medium, no matter what platform it

takes advantage of, visually showcases the mind's continued fascination with conflicted anti-heroes, and new ways of telling stories.

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