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Amanda Piazza

piazzaa2@student.lasalle.edu

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Recommended Citation

Piazza, Amanda, “Where is the Essence that was so Divine?”: The Nostalgia of Moore’s Minutemen” (2018). *Undergraduate Research*. 38.

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Amanda Piazza
ENG 444-01/ Dr.Franson
Undergraduate Research Project
14 December 2018

“Where is the Essence that was so Divine?”: The Nostalgia of Moore’s Minutemen

Aside from the *The Death of Superman*, *The Sandman*, and *Hellboy*, Alan Moore’s *Watchmen* is quite possibly one of the most influential graphic novels of all time. When *Watchmen* hit stands in 1986, the comic book world broke away from the shielding restrictions of the Comics Code¹ and started an era almost devoid of censorship. Graphic novels such as *Watchmen* and Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns* opened up opportunities for comics unheard of in the Silver Age.² Comic book creators were no longer held back by inflicted rules and were free to display the gritty and psychological depths of reality within the glossy pages. By now, almost everything has been said about *Watchmen* and its impact on the comic book genre, yet not many articles focus on the impact of nostalgia within the past-reliant work. Set in an alternate 1985 where superheroes wander the streets, the characters are faced with the promise of nuclear destruction, political unrest, and the knowledge of their own temporary existence. In a story reliant on complex origin stories and a blood-soaked aftermath, each character finds themselves in a constant conversation with the past to validate the present they stand in.

The characteristics of figures like Rorschach (Walter Kovacs) and The Comedian (Edward Blake) have been explored to the bone, but the lives of Laurie Juspecky and Adrian Veidt are seldom ever the topic of discussion. True, Rorschach is the emotionally scarred and endlessly intriguing narrator of the greater portion of the novel, and The Comedian’s

¹ According to “The American Comic Book: A Brief History,” the Comics Code “prohibited seductive clothing, profane dialogue, and negative portrayals of race, marriage, or established authority.”

² This was a period lasting from approximately 1955-1970. It featured reimagined characters of the Golden Age and spurred a demand in more developed storylines (Smith).

controversial life and heinous death touches the life of every character, but at this point, handling these men would be a hackneyed endeavor providing little to no academic breakthroughs in understanding. Instead, the actions of Laurie Juspezyk and Adrian Veidt will be examined in contrast to Dr. Manhattan, who stands as a figure rejecting the very idea these figures stand to signify. The lives of these characters have never been ideal. Laurie's father turns out to be the man who almost raped her mother, and Veidt was orphaned at seventeen. Despite these tragedies, Moore's Minutemen hold the past on a pedestal. To better understand the places of each character within the larger societal discourse, the theories of thinkers such as Judith Butler and John Stuart Mill will be applied in relation to Friedrich Schiller's teachings on nature. Writers who have since examined *Watchmen* have valued Moore's characters as literary apparatuses and powerhouses for philosophical ideas, but a rare few have considered these characters in relation to natural elements, more specifically, to time. Schiller's romantic assumptions on humans and nature come the closest in relating to Moore's handling of nostalgia, and serves as the philosophical basis for why people reminisce.

How Schiller solves Watchmen

In Friedrich Schiller's essay "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,"³ the Romantic theorist discusses the relationship of humans to the world around them. He believes the pleasure gained from nature is not from its beauty, but the moral essence exuded by the object. In other words, the object itself does not invoke pleasure, but the idea portrayed *by* the object, for, "We treasure the silent creativity of life in them, the fact that they act serenely on their own, being there according to their own laws; we cherish that inner necessity, that eternal oneness with

³ Information on Friedrich Schiller summarized from the *Naïve and Sentimental* section of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy by Lydia L. Moland.

themselves” (Schiller). Nature acts on its own accord, disregarding the outside laws created by the external world of humanity, and humans yearn for the freedom once gifted to them by nature. The pleasure obtained from nature’s undertones mixes with the melancholy of knowing, “they *are* what we *were*; they are what we *should become* once more” (Schiller). This results in a longing for the unity humans once had with nature as well as with a sense of pleasure for having an advantage over the natural object. Nature’s form is determined, providing humans with a sense of superiority over nature, and with the pleasure included in this advantage, since the fate of the individual is not yet determined but “self-determining.” There is comfort in the self-determined feature of nature and also a juxtaposing melancholy produced from the knowledge that this quality is now unavailable to humans. Baring this in mind, people still look to the state of nature for comfort and inspiration, wanting nothing more than to act as freely as nature does, knowing well they cannot regain what is lost today.

Schiller’s focus on the sublime feeling of pleasure and melancholy connects to the nostalgia of *Watchmen*. Each of the masked avengers refer to their pasts for different reasons. Nite Owl regards his as a childhood fantasy still thriving in the confines of his basement; Rorschach’s trauma over a gruesome kidnapping case rationalizes his present resort to unrelenting violence; and The Comedian’s escapades as an original Minutemen member and government agent paint the background for his cynical and vicious lifestyle. Like the human’s interaction with the natural object, the past itself is not what these characters want, since yesterday was full of problems of its own. The characters long for the ideas the past holds- a concept relaying that times left behind hold greatness inaccessible today. The time before now always seems more promising, since the transpiring’s of *then* are *today*’s memories and give these characters reason to act as they do in the present. However, the impressions of those “good

old days” are more lasting than the characters themselves initially realize, which may be why Laurie and Adrian both experience life from within their own little glass balls of somewhere else- a fabricated world constructed by perceptions of the past as *they* see it rather than how it ensued in actuality.

It's a Trap!: How Laurie's Rejection of the Past makes her Part of it

Laurie Juspezyk is one of two characters whose superhero alias is taken from a former member of the Minutemen. Laurie is the daughter of the first Silk Spectre and has been training since birth to continue her mother's crime fighting legacy. Daniel Dreiberg is another caped defender with a borrowed name. In the years before the Keene Act eradicated masked vigilantism, he scoured the streets for scum along with his silent yet vicious pal Rorschach. Dreiberg willingly took on the mantle of Nite Owl from Hollis Mason, while Laurie's Silk Spectre title was thrust upon her through lineage. At every opportunity, Laurie vocalizes her animosity towards her masked adventuring past, seeing it as a choice determined for her by birth and shaping her identity.

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* deems the concept of identity as a force created by the interaction between body and soul through cultural means, which later become replicated and associated with gender. Due to the social determination of gender, composing a universal definition for feminism as it relates to the concept of gender is near impossible. The very notion of encapsulating “woman” under a single header excludes the subjects the definition seeks to include, for, “Gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (Butler 4). “Woman” connotes diverse associations within cultural spheres, so attempting to create a figure that envelopes those variances is impossible,

since they are not *shared* differences. Therefore, there cannot be a universal definition for feminism because there is no shared idea of a woman. Culture works as a determinant of gender through sex, as seen with Laurie and Sally Jupiter, since each of these figures embody varying sides of the American twentieth century idea of “woman.”

Laurie’s whole life revolved around adopting roles for the purpose of appeasing someone. As soon as she’s old enough to walk, her mother forces her to follow in her footsteps until the law prohibits her career. John recalls, “She [Laurie] herself has been forced to retire by the Keene Act, but having never really enjoyed the life, she doesn’t mind” (Moore 133). Laurie has always been held in comparison to her mother, leading her to resent never gaining control over her life. During her conversation with Jon on Mars, she reveals, “My mother, she eroded my adolescence, chipping me into the shape she’d have been if she hadn’t had me. She pushed me into adventuring, fussing over ‘my career,’ trying to live her life through me...” (Moore 294). Her identity is not an essence she crafted, but something assigned to her based on societal and cultural influences. By the time she is born, superheroes are adopted as an integral piece of American culture, and seeing as her mother was one of the most well-regarded female adventurers, Laurie’s identity is directly tied to this culture and thus determined by it. Laurie serves as the mirror image of her mother, and Gibbons subtly enforces the notion of her likeness by having Laurie stand as a reflection of her mother in the mirror (Moore 45). Blake even observes, “You ain’t got her hair. But otherwise, you’re like her.” (Moore 295). Yet as similar as they are, the two women represent the twentieth century American woman in conflicting ways. Sally grew up in an age where masked heroes first began to sweep into American culture. The majority of these “costumed adventurers” were men, with the exception of the Silk Spectre and Silhouette, so the crime fighting field was dominated by a prominently masculine influence.

Those like the Comedian and Nite Owl were praised for their work, whereas Sally was seen as mere eye candy. When Laurie stops by for a visit, Sally shows her some of the memorabilia from the old days, including a pornographic comic about her. Upon seeing the vulgar images of her mother, Laurie exclaims, “Oh, god! Mother, this is just gross! Somebody sent you this?” Sally responds, “Sure. Listen, those things are valuable, like antiques. Eighty bucks an’ up. I think it’s kinda flattering.” (Moore 46). Laurie, still paging through the dirty comic, is amazed at how her mother could view such dehumanizing images as flattering, but Sally states, “Being reminded that people used to slobber over me? Sure flattering why not?” (Moore 46). To Sally, these images are not degrading tokens of a hedonistic past, but symbols of empowerment. The thought of people worshipping her in any way, even for purely shallow reasons, gives Sally a sense of validation as a woman. Back in her day, the highest merit a woman could fit was being visually stimulating, so fitting these standards rejuvenates her. In context, Sally’s ability to entice men gives her power over the opposite sex. She decides what she wants to do with her body and controls how she flaunts it, and even though she uses her body for the sake of eroticism, her ability to do as she pleases with her femininity widens the definition of feminism. Sally defines herself, just as feminism defines and redefines itself through culture.

Laurie, on the other hand, is a product of a more modern idea where being outspoken and establishing oneself through action exudes femininity. When Laurie discovers Jon working while they were in bed together, Jon says, “Laurie, try to understand...” Standing her ground, Laurie shouts, “Understand nothing! Were you working in here at the same time as we were in bed?” (Moore 81). Laurie makes her anger known and leaves, not considering any excuse Jon might compose. Laurie represents a divergent side of femininity than her mother, for Laurie demands the same respect men receive, whereas her mother sought attention as a means for admiration. In

different ways, each of these ladies constitutes the American idea of “woman.” They are trapped by the standards of their time, which is why Sally excuses objectification and Laurie acts against it...or so she thinks. Inadvertently, Laurie succumbs to the cultural standards she means to defy through her involvement with Jon. Her job is to keep Jon happy, sexually and emotionally, so he can continue working as the government’s secret weapon, and as a result, she is shaped into an object necessary for the man’s pleasure. Laurie leaves behind the standards of her mother’s name, only to fall into another societal role fashioned to appease men. She leaves the alias of the Silk Spectre to avoid being further associated with her mother’s legacy, only to adopt the role of the H-Bomb’s mistress.

Females are often viewed as fine-tuned machines wired to nurture because of their intrinsic reproductive abilities. These views are hypothesized and explained in the writings of feminist theorist Monique Wittig, who suggests females live according to “the myth of woman,” which was created by the male oppressors of society and defines women based on the standards set by the male domineering society.⁴Based on this culturally enforced idea, William Moulton Marston, an American psychologist and creator of Wonder Woman, proposed what he believed to be the ideal role of women in relation to men. In Ben Saunders’s analytical novel, *Do the Gods Wear Capes?: Spirituality, Fantasy, and Superheroes* the comic and cartoon historian explores the purpose of superheroes in pop culture and the shared message of each comic book. Summarizing Marston’s general argument, Saunders states, “His [Marston] argument basically boils down to a fairly simple two-part manifesto: the world will become a better place when men learn to take pleasure in sexual submission, as most women learned to do; and the best teachers

⁴ In Monique Wittig’s “One is Not Born a Woman,” she claims the male oppressors of society assign *the mark* onto female bodies as a way of constituting the “myth of woman,” or the standard of qualities a woman should possess according to men (Wittig qtd. in Butler)

of men in this regard will be ‘actively developed,’ dominant-but-kind women who are willing to serve as their ‘Love Leaders’” (Saunders 51).⁵In this case, women should use their natural capabilities to keep men grounded, and men should embrace their submission through the dominance of women. To Marston, “The most ‘advanced’ women in society must become ‘Love Leaders,’ teaching both men and other women to take greater pleasure in submission through their ‘love supremacy’” (Saunders 50). As utopian as Marston’s proposal sounds, it further imposes roles on women by labeling them as vessels for males to project their desires onto. By women teaching other women the ways of ‘love supremacy,’ they encourage other women to base themselves off of the means of men; they fall into the trap of submitting to male needs rather than flourishing in an outlet for dominance.

Laurie’s escape from her lineage leads her to fall into the culturally enforced confine of the “Love Leader.” When the Keene Act is ratified in 1977, she finally packs away her Silk Spectre attire, free from having to live her mother’s life, but four years after, she moves in with Jon on a secret government base and is only allowed to stay by Jon’s request. Once he flees to Mars, she’s kicked out, since the government has no use for her without Jon. When Daniel suggests she call her mother, Laurie claims, “Nah, I’ll get by. It just burns my ass to be so damn disposable” (Moore 154). Laurie is only considered as a means of keeping Jon, America’s greatest weapon, content. Now that he is missing in action, Laurie’s service is no longer needed. Her value was solely based on her contribution to her male counterpart, once again trapping her within a system. When Laurie tries to convince Jon to save Earth, he tells her, “I said, often, that you were my only link, my only concern with the world. When you left me, I left Earth. Does

⁵ Refer to *The Emotions of Normal People* by William Moulton Marston for more on submission and dominance of the female.

that not say something? Now you have replaced me, and that link is shattered. Don't you see what that means? Don't you see the futility of asking me to save a world that I no longer have any stake in?"(Moore 288). Laurie's purpose is to "humanize" Jon, but now that she has moved onto Dreiberg, who she claims is more "receptive," Jon no longer submits to the means of humanity and stands as his own force of dominance, for Laurie was his only tie to the society he ceased to understand. In this case, Marston's idea places the blame of Jon's condition on Laurie. Since she did not properly teach him the ways of submission, he no longer sees the point in it. Laurie was first confined by the standards of her mother, and now finds herself imprisoned by her role as Jon's 'Love Leader.' Instead of establishing her own identity through her rejection of the past, she becomes a part of a societally established gender construct. No matter how hard she tries to escape these forces, she finds herself succumbing to these predetermined roles.

Despite all efforts of concealment, Laurie's consistent focus on her established past reveals her subtle longing to return. The novel constantly summons images of nostalgia, the most predominant being the Nostalgia perfume bottle. Even if the bottle is not physically present, the Nostalgia brand is manifested in some shape or form, being one of Veidt's larger campaigns. After her fight with Jon, Laurie is dropped off on the city streets where a Nostalgia perfume billboard looms above, sporting the allusive tagline, "Where is the essence that was so divine?" (Moore 83). The perfume's appearance could just be the result of great product placement on Veidt's part, but in the grand scheme of the novel, the object actually serves as a visual window into Laurie's mind. In Schiller's terms, the ubiquitous presence of the Nostalgia perfume symbolizes the looming nature of the *then*. Nature represents what humans were and are no more because of their ability to change, and this knowledge fills the human with a melancholic feeling. People *were* nature, but are now simple observers of nature and cannot return to being part of it.

Similarly, Laurie lived in the past, making her a part of it, but she cannot relive those days, and her buried awareness leaves her saddened.

After spending twenty years with Jon, she finally walks out, only for him to have little reaction because of his inability see the connection within things as Laurie does. As an all-knowing being, Jon does not view the past in the same ways humans do, he “looks at things, like he can’t remember what they are and doesn’t particularly care” (Moore 85). Laurie finally grows tired of Jon’s ways, so after their spat, she returns to a token of her past, or an “essence that was so divine,” for comfort: Dreiberg. Laurie and Dreiberg⁶ both show a longing for their costumed days, but through opposing behaviors. Daniel’s entire basement is filled with Nite Owl memorabilia, he is always inspecting Archie the owl ship, even though he has not ridden it in years, and he often visits Hollis Mason, the original Nite Owl, where they reminisce about their days as crime fighters. Laurie may have stashed away her old costume, but she still holds onto her days as the Silk Spectre as much as she seeks to disguise it. At her reunion dinner with Daniel, she thinks about what she’s done with her life, claiming, “I’ve spent eight years in semi-retirement, preceded by ten years running round in a stupid costume because my stupid mother wanted me to!” (Moore 33). Here, she yet again bashes her past as the Silk Spectre, but after this statement she brings up Captain Carnage, a wannabe supervillain each of the Minutemen faced. They share a laugh as the panels gradually zoom out on the characters, creating the distance that the memory exudes. Laurie is also the one who suggests they go out adventuring and they even sleep together in their costumes as a way to relive the times they once had. In the panels

⁶ Butler states, “As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an ‘act,’ as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamental phantasmatic status” (200). Dreiberg’s “man cave” of knick-knacks and self-centered memorabilia show the mask of masculinity, for Dreiberg’s dominance and charisma left as soon as he hung up his cape and cowl in the basement. Without masked adventuring, Dreiberg remains a passive figure devoid of an identity outside of his superhero alias.

following their late night adventure, Laurie lights a post-intercourse cigarette. Dan says, “I thought you’d quit, Laurie. Dangerous habits remember?” to which Laurie responds, “There’s no such thing as quitting. Just sometimes there’s a longer pause between relapses, right?” (240). On the surface, they are referring to her smoking habit, but their exchange applies more directly to their reprisal of the masked adventuring role. Laurie and Dan can never quit who they are and what they were, which is why they come out of retirement after the New York disaster. Laurie’s subtle recognition of her past habits as a part of her is what ultimately changes her way of looking at nostalgia during the climax.

On her trip to Mars, Laurie tells Jon of a time when she broke a snow globe. She says, “There was this toy, this snowstorm ball, with a tiny castle inside, except it was like a whole world, a world inside the ball... it was like a little glass bubble of somewhere else” (Moore 287). As she recounts this story and others, the Nostalgia perfume bottle spins in the air, slowly spilling its contents. This image is integrated as its own separate panel, and appears when Laurie mentions anything about “fragility (Moore 288),” “spilling” (Moore 292), “pouring (Moore 296),” and the like. With every memory she recounts, the nostalgia bottle panel appears, its contents pouring out.⁷ Each of these memories has to do with her mother and Edward Blake. She remembers her mother preventing her from reading Hollis’s book, her mother crying after an encounter with Blake at the Crimebusters meeting, and confronting Blake for herself at a party. When Laurie finally pieces these random memories together, a connection is made and the entire truth is revealed. Laurie is faced with the knowledge that Edward Blake, the man who attempted to rape her mother, is her father. When she finally pieces these memories together, she throws the very

⁷ In Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*, the perfume bottle’s journey through the panels would be considered a “moment-to-moment” transition, which follows the immediate progression of the depicted subject. The perfume bottle’s “moment-to-moment” transition is placed between a series of other panels to create the effect that the bottle is following Laurie’s train of thought as she “spills” her thoughts within the panels.

same Nostalgia bottle that had been flying through the pages prior, where it finally shatters. The snow globe Laurie had busted as a kid, the “little glass bubble of somewhere else” was her life. Her mother had shielded Laurie from the horrors of her lineage and distracted her from the truth by having Laurie focus on adventuring. Now that the truth is out, that glass world is broken and so is the nostalgia Laurie may have had for it. She now sees the past as a “gag” played on her by those who knew the truth. The past she secretly admired was built on a lie, and longing to return to something that never was is just as pointless as wanting something inaccessible, making her see life as some sort of a joke conducted at her expense. Right after her discovery, Jon teleports her to the scene of the New York massacre where she says to Jon, “Just take it away is all... Take it way” (Moore 390). Although she is referring to the terror she is witnessing at the moment, she is also referring to the ugly truth. Adrian’s display of utter carnage shows her the past and present contain horrors of their own, and as many times as Jon can teleport her, he cannot truly take her away from how things are.

In Adrian’s fortress, she along with the other Minutemen discover Adrian was the mastermind behind everything all along. This discovery not only reveals Veidt’s intentions, but allows Laurie to see the value in the past. After learning of Adrian’s plan she tells Dan, “All those people, they’re dead. They can’t disagree or eat Indian food, or love each other... Oh, it’s sweet. Being alive is so damn sweet” (Moore 404). Those killed in New York were deprived of their option to live in the now. Their deaths help Laurie see how temporary life is, and how important it is to seize the moment, since the past was once the now too, but it’s gone. Her hidden past and the cruelty of the present shows Laurie how bad everything was and will always be, so she needs to appreciate the good parts of the past, since the present is just as bad. In the beginning her mother told her, “Laurie, I’m 65. Every day the future looks a little bit darker. But

the past, even the grimy parts of it...well, it just keeps on getting brighter all the time” (Moore 46). The past is a reiterative force that produces similar horrors and gifts as time goes on. Laurie and her mother both have pasts stained by Edward Blake and were trapped by the standards of their time, but it is better to value the idea of what already was than face what might be. Laurie’s sugarcoated memories of her frivolous adventuring days are brighter in comparison to the bloody wake of the New York mass genocide, and Sally’s focus on the glory days as a pinup icon hold better than the reality that she was almost raped. The past itself is not what Laurie wants, but the simplicity and preferable consequences they hold compared to the bleak future. While Laurie spends the novel grappling with the truth of her past and the knowledge of temporality, Adrian composes a life-altering plan based on what he believes the past holds for those who now roam where others once stood.

Ozymandias: Holder of Yesterday’s Tomorrow

Adrian Veidt is perhaps one of the most profound figures in *Watchmen*, for his actions subvert yet enforce moral thought for the sake of creating a future. In regards to Schiller’s teachings, Veidt uses nature, or, the past rather, to justify his dream of surpassing the achievements of those within that past, while Laurie tries to escape her past at every chance until she realizes the value in it. Veidt’s plan of killing millions for the sake of billions is an act fitting for the theoretical moral premise of utilitarianism, but applying these principles in the real world leaves repercussions unforeseen in theory. John Stuart Mill, the father of utilitarian thought, establishes, “The utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being desirable as means to that end” (Mill 34). Utilitarianism is a moral philosophy proposing actions are completed with the purpose of obtaining happiness, which is held as the ultimate end, so, “the creed which accepts as the foundation of morals,

Utility, or the Great Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportions as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse happiness” (Mill 10). According to Mill, pleasure and freedom from pain are the two leading doctrines of happiness, and although these determine happiness, there are varying degrees of pleasure. Depending on the particular situation, “Some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others” (Mill 11). Therefore, the quantity of the given pleasure is held in high regard, for this feature will serve as a more efficient means towards happiness. In a given predicament, if one pleasure is longed for by the majority, than that is the chief pleasure acted upon.

In the case of *Watchmen*, the world is on the brink of nuclear destruction, so the chief pleasure sought by humanity is peace among nations. However, every step taken by the world’s leaders has resulted in more bloodshed and hope is fading. Adrian Veidt realizes the world is growing closer to destruction with each passing moment, leading him to make a fateful decision toward lasting peace. After the disastrous Crimebusters meeting of ’66, Adrian grapples with a horrid realization at the hands of The Comedian. Adrian initially tells The Comedian, “Given correct handling, none of the world’s problems are insurmountable” (Moore 53). Young Adrian realizes there are many issues gaining traction in the world, but with efforts by those who recognize the dilemma, these issues can be stopped. Adrian, however, voices this opinion before his eyes are opened by The Comedian, who retorts, “You people are a joke. You hear Moloch’s back in town, you think ‘Oh boy! Let’s gang up and bust him! You think that matters? You think that solves anything?’” (Moore 53). Though pessimistic, Blake’s statement points out how the focus on resolving street crime is nothing compared to humanity’s main source of discontent, which is imminent self-destruction. To emphasize his point, Blake sets Nelson’s display ablaze, saying, “It don’t matter squat because inside thirty years the nukes are gonna be flyin’ in like

maybugs... and then Ozzy here is gonna be the smartest man on the cinder” (Moore 53). Blake sees the Crimebusters’ pursuit as futile, since the main cause of the world’s discontent is not being handled. Only when Nelson cries out, “Somebody has to do it, don’t you see? Somebody has to save the world...” (Moore 53) does Veidt realize what he must do. In being the smartest man alive, the failure of this meeting has shown him he must act on the prominent source of suffering and seek to resolve it. Remembering the fateful meeting, he claims, “Brutally, I’d been brought nose to nose with mankind’s mortality; the dreadful irrefutable fact of it. For the first time, I genuinely understood that Earth might die. I recognized the fragility of our world in increasingly hazardous times” (Moore 369). To prevent the Earth from going up in a mushroom cloud, Adrian embarked on a quest to ensure global tranquility.

To Adrian, this quest has been a long time coming. When he invites his servants inside his vivarium for a drink, he says, “Today marks an event especially worthy of such attentions [celebration]. In many ways, it represents the culmination of a dream more than two thousand years old.” (Moore 355). Veidt’s lifelong inspiration was Alexander of Macedonia, “A young army commander, he’d swept along the coasts of Turkey and Phoenicia, subduing Egypt before turning his armies towards Persia...He died, aged thirty-three, ruling most of the civilized world” (Moore 356). Alexander was a trailblazer who inspired Adrian to use his heightened intelligence to surpass the feats of the very conqueror he admired. He recounts to his servants how he visited Turkey to literally follow in Alexander’s footsteps. At the end of his journey, Veidt experienced what he believed to be a drug-induced epiphany where he stood naked in the desert and succumbed to visions of grandeur.⁸ He states, “The ensuing vision transformed me. Wading

⁸ The panel depicting Veidt’s desert dream on page 358 mirrors the panel on page 111 of Jon standing naked on Mars, his back turned to the audience looking to the stars. In Annalisa di Liddo’s *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel* she discusses how Moore often mirrors particular events, phrases, and images to

through powdered history, I heard dead kings walking underground; heard fanfares sound through human skulls. Alexander had merely resurrected an age of pharaohs. Their wisdom, truly immortal now inspired me” (Moore 358). Some would have regarded his encounter as nothing more than a hallucination brought on by a drug high, but Adrian saw the dream as a sign. His hallucination allowed him to dig deeper into the past and draw an even larger inspiration. Adrian believed Alexander was only continuing what those before him had started, specifically the Egyptian pharaohs, and no king was more impactful than Ramses II, or Ozymandias, who became Adrian’s superhero namesake. Like Laurie, Adrian adopts the alias of someone before him, yet Laurie’s was born from blood lineage, and Veidt’s was a product of idolization. Veidt seeks to adopt the legacy associated with his chosen name, whereas Laurie yearns to break from the connotations of her borrowed identity.

These past kings and conquerors show Veidt he can change tomorrow as they have before him, but to succeed, he must do something these fallen heroes could never accomplish. Like Alexander, Veidt strived to create a united world, for, “[Alexander] Ruling without barbarism! At Alexandria, he instituted the Ancient world’s greatest seat of learning. True, people died... perhaps unnecessarily, though who can judge such things? Yet how nearly he approached his vision of a united world!” (Moore 356). Alexander’s untimely death prevented him from accomplishing his quest of complete cultural unity, but Veidt saw this failure as a chance to complete what his idol started. He adopted Ramses II’s Greek name of Ozymandias, who is often regarded as Egypt’s most powerful king, for he reigned longer than any other pharaoh (66 years), erected a myriad of monuments, and won the Battle of Kadesh, which spurred the creation of the

create a unity within the work. The mirroring of Jon and Adrian alludes to their eye opening experiences- Jon accepts the reality of time, and Adrian finds his purpose by *looking* to time.

world's earliest known peace treaty.⁹ The Ancient Greek teachings of philosophy, culture, and language influenced Alexander the Great, who studied with Aristotle; he used his Greek background to conquer the places he invaded, but never forced the Greek ideals onto the inhabitants, only introducing the concepts.¹⁰ Ozymandias is the Greek translation of the Egyptian phrase "Userma'atre'setepenre", which according to the Ancient History Encyclopedia, translates into, "Keeper of Harmony and Balance, Strong in Right, Elect of Ra." By adopting the Greek name of the Egyptian king, Veidt enforces Alexander's idea of subtly introducing ancient philosophies into other cultures, but simultaneously refers to the peace and prosperity associated with Ramses II by using his name. To conclude his speech, Adrian claims, "Adopting Rameses the second's Greek name and Alexander's free-booting style, I resolved to apply antiquity's teachings to today's world. Thus began my path to conquest...conquest not of men but the evils that beset them" (Moore 359). War and destruction were prevalent players in the ancient world and Ramses II and Alexander did their best to unite the regions they dominated, but the past tends to replicate itself. As Adrian said, Alexander "resurrected an age of pharaohs" and now Adrian is doing the same thing but applying their teachings to the modern world. Alexander sacrificed lives, but to Adrian, he did what was necessary to create a united world, and now Adrian will sacrifice the lives of three million people to accomplish the goals set by men he never knew, their goal being one world order. He tells Jon, "I know people think me callous, but I've made myself feel every death. By day I imagine endless faces. By night...well, I dream about swimming towards a hideous...no. Nevermind. It isn't significant" (Moore 409). For Veidt to have accomplished his goal, he, in turn, had to sacrifice his individual happiness for the sake of others. He now suffers from constant nightmares as well as the knowledge of how many

⁹ "Ramesses II" section in the New World Encyclopedia

¹⁰ "Alexander the Great" section in the Ancient History Encyclopedia

lives he's taken. Mill believes, "It is noble to be capable of resigning entirely one's own portion of happiness, or chances of it: but after all, this self-sacrifice must be for some end; it is not its own end; and if we are told that its end is not happiness, but virtue, which is better than happiness" (Mill 17). Vedit knew his plan would come at a price, leaving countless dead in exchange for peace. He explains to Dr. Manhattan, "I know I've struggled across the backs of murdered innocents to save humanity...but someone had to take the weight of that awful, necessary crime" (Moore 409). Although Adrian must live with the blood of his victims on his hands, he sees his fate, along with the fate of those who died, as a necessary evil, for with it includes the reward of knowing he produced something widely beneficial and virtuous. He accepts this because the kings who inspired him faced the same predicaments in the name of success.

Sacrificing one's own happiness for the sake of others, as Adrian has, stresses the utilitarian principle of acting based on the greater good, but doing so does not always qualify the sacrifice itself as "good." The thought of completing the action may be honorable, but the result may not actually provide increased happiness. According to Jamie A. Hughes's "'Who Watches the Watchmen?': Ideology and 'Real World' Superheroes," "His wealth, intelligence, and concentration on past societies have already well removed him from the ideological trappings of the world and into one based on his own system of belief, and with each step back in perspective, Ozymandias is still further removed" (553). Veidt's plan was enacted through violence and conducted outside of governmental jurisdiction as a way of obtaining the peace so longed for by the struggling society as he sees it. With the thought of alien invaders, the class struggles present before the massacre will be extinguished, but only for a little while. Hughes establishes:

The change in mindset from “Us versus Them” to “One World, One Accord,” which is posted on walls across New York after the “attack,” can only be temporary. Ozymandias’ empire of peace, like those created by Alexander and Ramses II, is destined to crumble if the truth becomes known because “the State apparatus...may survive political events which affect the possession of State power (Althusser 94). Simply put, no matter how elaborate or cunning Ozymandias’ plan may be, he can do nothing to change humanity (or ideology) (Hughes 554).

The flaw in Adrian’s plan is thinking its enactment will provide permanence, but in reality, the results are temporary. He is not finishing what Ramses II and Alexander have started, but repeating what they have endured. They each wanted to change the world, and they did, but only until someone with the same idea came along to replicate it. The happiness Veidt sacrifices to provide for the world will be a short-lived process subject to fall apart on the backs of repetitive and conflicting human ideologies.

Adrian intended to establish unbreakable unity,¹¹ but left a world tasked with moving on from the New York holocaust and also created another bigger issue in the wake of this situation. After disposing of Rorschach, Dr. Manhattan visits a meditating Adrian, who asks, “I did the right thing didn’t I? It all worked out in the end” (Moore 409). By even asking this question, Adrian reveals how even he is unsure if his plan, which seemed good on paper, will actually produce the consistent unity he sought for. Before disappearing, Dr. Manhattan delivers the cryptic line, “‘In the end?’ Nothing ends, Adrian. Nothing ever ends” (Moore 409). Dr.

¹¹ Ties to Sigmund Freud’s idea in *Civilization and its Discontents*: “Civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then faces, people and nations, into one great unity of mankind” (111).

Manhattan knows the inevitable truth of Adrian's involvement will one day come to light, since nothing ever stays secret forever.¹² For example, Laurie lived her whole life without knowing Edward Blake was her father, because of her mother's efforts, but eventually the painful truth was revealed, leaving Laurie screaming and broken on Mars. Aside from alluding to truth, Dr. Manhattan's cryptic line applies to time. Although two thousand years have passed since Ramses II's reign, wars still flourished and people still died. Veidt's plan only has a temporary hold on this time in history, like the actions of rulers passed. People and society are who they always were, and nothing can change that permanently. Veidt's "One World" order can hold up for the time being, but eventually another man with a dream will seek to enforce his beliefs upon the world too.

The fact Adrian was born after the times he's nostalgic for feeds into the grand nature the past holds. He only knows what history books document and refers to his desert epiphany, but he was never a figure in the distant past, so for him to base his actions off of a time so far from his own shows the ubiquitous nature of the past. Adrian is inspired by the grand possibility of transmutation, but he is actually acting based on what's always been. So, Dr. Manhattan is correct: nothing ever ends, because the past, present, and future will remain what they are, even in the face of so-called "change."

What's with the Blue Guy?: Dr. Manhattan vs. Nostalgia

When Jon Osterman entered the Intrinsic Field Center's test chamber on that fateful day in August 1959, he was a man, but exited as Dr. Manhattan, a blue entity defying the concepts of

¹² In Peter Paik's *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe* his chapter "Utopia Achieved" suggests the permanent success of Veidt's plan relies on people's readiness to eschew the past and adopt falsehood for the sake of peace.

nature, human life, and time.¹³ After the accident, Dr. Manhattan grows less in touch with the humanity he once had and embraces life as he now knows it. When Laurie visits Dreiberg, she explains how the world works according to Jon, saying, “This world, the real world, to him it’s like walking through mist, and all the people are like shadows...just shadows in the fog” (Moore 85).¹⁴ In the same section, Dr. Manhattan sits on his bed looking at Laurie’s bra as if he has no idea what the item is, furthering Laurie’s claims of detachment. The “real world” Laurie refers to is the world as she and other humans see it, but now that Jon is something more than human, this “real world” is not reality to him at all. The accident left him with the ability to experience and, even become, a figure of time. To humans like Laurie, time is seen as a linear unit, with one event leading to another event and so forth. In “The Myth of Superman,” Umberto Eco explains time as, “*Before* casually determines *after*, and the series of these determinations cannot be traced back, at least in our universe (according to the epistemological model that explains the world in which we live), but is irreversible” (16). The view goes along with the teachings of Sartre who believes, “the past is the ever-growing totality of the in-itself which we are” (Sartre qtd. in Eco). The past determines the future, and the past cannot be re-experienced but only re-evaluated to determine future actions.

To Jon, time is not linear or dependent on the events of before, but is a force occurring simultaneously. For example, on Mars he recounts a series of moments, stating, “It’s 1959. A pulse flutters in her [Janey] belly, beneath my cheek. It’s 1966. The suitcase won’t shut and she’s

¹³ Hughes suggests in “Who Watches the Watchmen”: Ideology and “Real World” Superheroes’ that Jon is a force created by the ideology he frees himself from. He is initially used to assert the ideology of the United States, but he breaks from the control of the state and becomes a force outside of manmade ideology.

¹⁴ In this panel, as Laurie speaks, the smoke from the boiling kettle covers her face. McCloud would deem this panel “duo-specific” because the words and pictures in the panel send the same message (153). The panel is trying to convey Laurie’s point that people to Jon are, “Just shadows in the fog.”

crying. It's 1985. In one hundred minutes, the meteorite shower begins¹⁵ (Moore 116). As the moment shows, Jon knows what will happen, what is happening, and what has happened. On Mars with Laurie, he describes the limitations of his abilities when she asks him how their conversation will end, "It ends with you in tears...I return to Earth at some point in my future. There are streets full of corpses. The details are vague" (Moore 297). Although not every detail is presented, Jon has a general grasp on what the future holds, for although humans are unaware of what will happen, Jon sees what *is* happening as he speaks to Laurie, since he can virtually see everything at once.

Jon's perception separates him from the society he was once part of. He does not understand humans, since their problems have no effect on the universe. When Laurie tries to make him understand how his return can save the fate of humanity, she exclaims, "Everyone will die..." to which he responds, "...and the universe will not even notice" (Moore 298). To Jon, things are what they are and what they have always been. When he's first introduced as Dr. Manhattan on the news, his then girlfriend Janey tells him he's arrived, spurring him to ask, "Have I? Sometimes I feel as if I've been here all the time" (Moore 123). Jon's response asserts the idea of time, as humans regard it, as false, since he sees himself as a force that always was. In perhaps the most famous exchange of the novel, Jon tells Laurie, "Everything is preordained. Even my responses." Laurie, confused and heated by Jon's propositions retorts, "And you just go through the motions, acting them out? Is that what you are? The most powerful thing in the universe and you're just a puppet following a script?" Jon then explains, "We're all puppets,

¹⁵ According to McCloud, "In comics as in film, television and 'real life,' it is always now. This panel and this panel alone represents the present. Any panel before this... represents the past. Likewise, all panels still to come... represent the future. But unlike other media, in comics the past is more than just memories for the audience and the future is more than just possibilities! Both past and future are real and visible and all around us!" (104). Comics are able to show all facets of time at once, within a single panel or even within an entire page.

Laurie. I'm just a puppet who can see the strings" (Moore 285). The events that *will* occur, *are* occurring, and *have* occurred are all predetermined. No matter what people do to try and change events, situations will be what they are and always were. Jon cannot even influence time, but his abilities allow him insight into how time works, which detaches him from people who live their lives believing they can influence what occurs in time.

Jon's comprehension of time separates him from people, and being an outsider who views actions as preset, he no longer holds humanity as important. When Blake guns down the pregnant woman in Vietnam, he criticizes Blake for killing her, but Blake notes, "You watched me. You coulda changed the gun into steam or the bullets into mercury or the bottle into snowflakes! You coulda teleported either of us to goddamn Australia...but you didn't lift a finger! You don't really give a damn about human beings" (Moore 57). Jon could have prevented the murder, but he did not, since he's no longer capable of sympathy and, to boot, she would have died anyway, no matter his interference. Yet, as unconcerned as he is with the general happenings of humans, he still holds onto Laurie. When he finds out Laurie is sleeping with Dreiberg, he is already aware of the reveal in the future, but in the present he is still shocked, since what was going to happen is technically happening at this moment. Finding out about Laurie's affair crushes what little humanity was stored within him. In a way, Laurie was a figure representing the grandeur of the past. She reminded him he was once human too, and without her, he has no humanity left and nothing to look back on. She is a token from the past and *of* the past, and since to him there is no such thing as a "past," he must let Laurie go.

Seeing as everything is always occurring, Jon does not experience nostalgia as humans do. To experience nostalgia, one would have to recognize the past as having happened, but Jon cannot reminisce on imminent events. As a result, Jon stands as a rejection of nostalgia and time

as humans see it. He is an entity who works apart from Adrian's idealist notions and signifies a force above temporality. So, when the figure in blue gives Adrian the cryptic message of "Nothing ever ends," (Moore 409) he lets the dreamer know that his efforts will not stop what is to be. Looking to the past does nothing to change the future, and knowing the future will not change the present. Everything transpires and will continue to do so, making nostalgia an almost pointless emotion. Yet, the characters of *Watchmen* still hold onto the past, not because they want it back, but because times passed is all they know. With a future plagued with the possibility of nuclear destruction, the times without such high stakes are better to grasp because they have already been handled.

Still, the future is no different from the past and present, seeing as they are all continuous entities. Laurie's masked adventuring days and feminine roles mirror those of her mother before her and Veidt's visions for the future replicate the aspirations of the pharaohs of yesterday. Dr. Manhattan's presence subverts the thoughts and actions of Laurie and Adrian, since if their lives truly are meaningless in the grand scheme of the universe, their choices mean nothing; but if they were to attempt living their lives based on what Dr. Manhattan represents, they would still fall into the trap of succumbing to the workings of time. Dr. Manhattan can see the inner machineries of time, but he is incapable of controlling the parts, for he too is a slave to it. Nostalgia is an unnecessary concept for Dr. Manhattan, seeing as he knows the truth of the past, present, and future. He embodies the concept instead of challenging a force even he does not completely comprehend. Embracing nostalgia is all mortals know and all they can wish to understand, for seeking to fathom Dr. Manhattan's perspective would have no influence on the time or on their fates. The characters of *Watchmen* can reminisce all they want, but at the end of the day, three

million people died in New York and the universe did not hear as much as a bang, and no one—not even time’s blue assistant— knows why.

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