

WATCHMEN: DO ENDS JUSTIFY MEANS?



How and Why

- **Primarily character-focused analysis**
 - **Focus on how the philosophy of characters and characters in general are presented**
 - **I will still explore other aspects of the text as necessary**
- **Easy to stop a character-focused examination at Ozymandias**
- **I want to extend this exploration beyond Ozymandias**

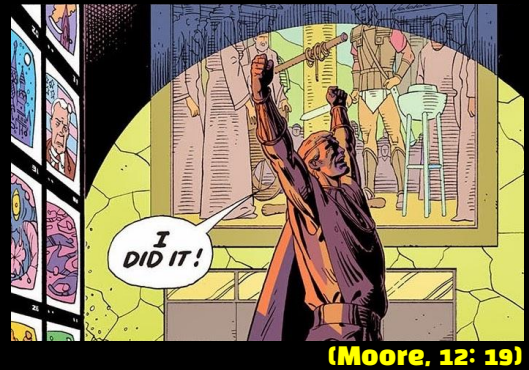
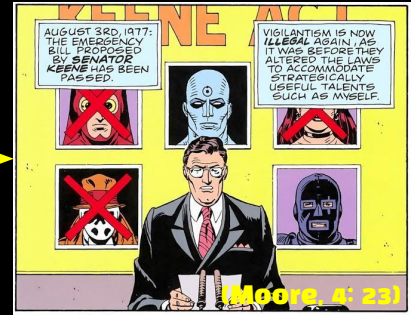
- I will always bring other aspects of the text back to the characters I'm discussing

Outline of Presentation

- **Ends justifying means isn't central theme**
- **However, it is the most developed theme**
- **Two cases to consider**
 - **Case 1: He's the Villain**
 - **Case 2: But Thematic Depth**
- **Which case is more convincing?**
- **Popular interpretations**

- Central theme is a critique of idolization of superheroes
- In the beginning, we see a superhero thrown out a window. At the end, we see Ozymandias doing terrible things in the name of saving the earth. From beginning to end, heroes are presented as far less than an idolized form.
- Critique of idolization theme isn't developed as much developed as it is consistent throughout the text.
- Ends justifying means theme is developed.
- Will talk about this throughout the presentation, but gradually more and more symbols come to represent ends justifying means.
- Developed in other ways as well like when we learn of Ozymandias's evil plan.

QUICK SYNOPSIS

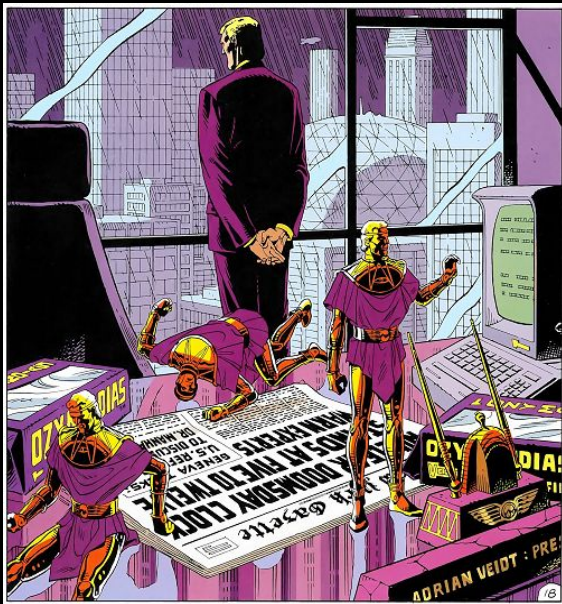


- Watchmen opens on the Comedian (a superhero back in the day) being killed
- Rorschach (another superhero from back in the day) takes on the hunt for the killer; this hunt takes him on a tour of all the other superheroes like Night Owl, Silk Spectre, Doctor Manhattan, and Ozymandias
- However, he has to do so in secrecy as superheroes have been outlawed by the Keene act
- In the end, we learn Ozymandias is the killer. He killed the Comedian as the Comedian learned of his evil plan. Ozymandias's evil plan being to drop a squid on earth to make them focus their missile a space rather than at each other. This novel takes place during the Cold War so the threat of mutually assured destruction is high.

CASE 1:

HE'S THE VILLAIN





(Moore, 1: 18)



(Moore, 10: 8)

Introduction to Ozymandias

- Idolized
 - Has his own toy line, a cologne named after him, and various other branding deals
 - Watchmen is a rejection of idolization so this casts negative connotations on Ozymandias
- Has incredible mental abilities (see him watching multiple TVs at once)
- Also intense physical abilities
- However, no actual super powers (he's still human)
- Surprise villain



(Moore, 11: 28)



(Moore, 11: 28)



(Moore, 12: 1)



(Moore, 12: 2)



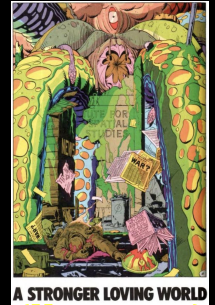
(Moore, 12: 3)



(Moore, 12: 4)

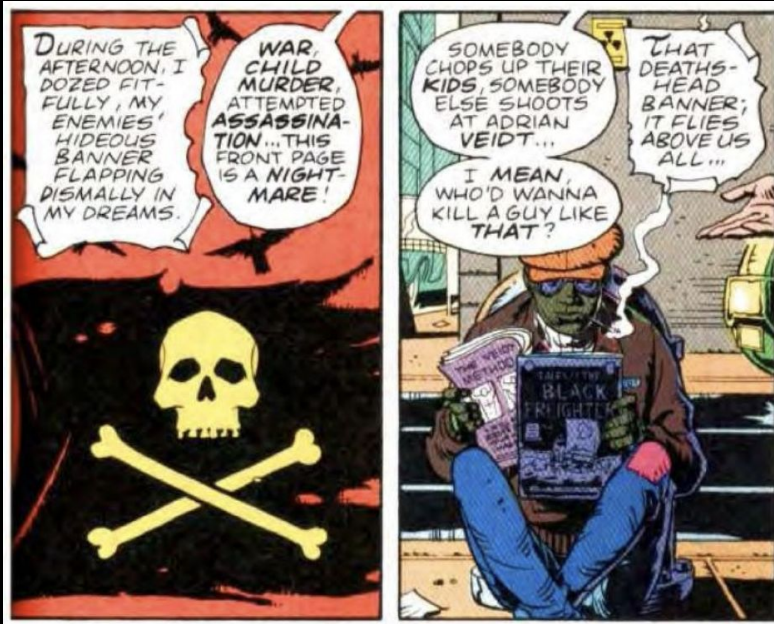


(Moore, 12: 5)



(Moore, 12: 6)

- Moore puts a lot of emphasis on Ozymandias's evil plan
- Time in comics is a mix of panel size and number of panels; larger panels is longer time; more panels is longer time
- Moore uses both these techniques to show the gravity of the horrendous nature of the squid attack and the fear leading up to it
- From these panels, the message is clear, ends don't justify means as the means are this bad (Note that we never actually see the fantastic ends Ozymandias speaks of; that peace after the squid is never shown)



(Moore, 5: 17)

Non-Sequitur Transitions:

No relationship between the panels. Meaning created by the reader.

Parallel Word-Picture Combinations:

Words and images do not directly relate, but tell parallel stories.

(Barnes, 53)

Black Freighter

- In-universe comic book series
- Told through kid reading comic on a street corner
- Black Freighter is a phantom ship that collects evil souls
- The issue from series we read focuses on the lone survivor of shipwreck caused by the Black Freighter
- Fearing the Black Freighter will kill his family, the survivor makes a boat out of his dead crewmates and sails home
- Thinking the Black Freighter has beat him home, he kills people to steal their horse so he can get home quickly
- When he gets home, he thinks the people in his house are from the Black Freighter and kills them. Actually kills his family
- The story's form uses a mixture of non-sequitur transitions and parallel word-picture combinations (Barnes, 53) (from his article "Time in the Gutter: Temporal Structures in Watchmen")
- The story is meant to parallel Ozymandias's story
- Ozymandias even says "I dream, about swimming towards a hideous..."; a reference to swimming towards the Black Freighter and becoming the enemy
- This story supports the idea that means can't be justified by ends as in the end you become the enemy
- Combined with its parallels to Ozymandias, it's a hard case against ends justifying means

Case 1

- **Ozymandias is an idolized, human hero**
 - **Watchmen is rejection of idolization and Ozymandias**
- **His plan's means are given more emphasis than the ends**
- **Black Freighter story mirrors Ozymandias's**
 - **Bad means makes you the enemy**
- **Ends don't justify means**

CASE 2: BUT THEMATIC DEPTH



This case is a little ambiguous as much of Alan Moore's theming is; it doesn't fully support ends justifying means or ends not justifying means



(Moore, 6: 16)



(Moore, 12: 5)



(Moore, 12: 5)

Shadows of Suffering

- The shadows start as a symbol of imminent doom from nuclear apocalypse and are compared to those from past nuclear explosions
- By the end, when the squid has been dropped, they've transformed to be a symbol from the catastrophe that was the squid dropping



(Moore, 12: 22)

Night Owl and Silk Spectre kissing after the squid is dropped

- Shadows of Suffering are now a symbol for the peace after the squid is dropped
- Shadows of Suffering say ends justify means as after the means we have this
- Night Owl and Silk Spectre are the most human characters in the text

Other Transforming Symbols

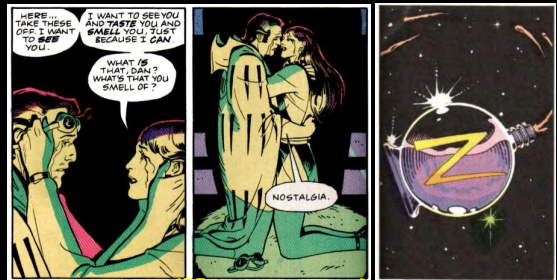
- **Blood on a smiley face**

- **Begins as a symbol for The Comedian**
- **Ends as a representation of blood shed for happiness**



- **Nostalgia (Veidt's Cologne)**

- **The appeal of the past changes significantly**



(Moore, 12: 22) (Moore, 9: 3)

Blood on a smiley face

- Blood on a smiley face starts as the Comedian's symbol; he will commit violent things, get blood on himself, and laugh through it
- End as a symbol for ends justifying means; blood (means) on a happy face (ends)
- Symbol still keeps the negative connotations of the Comedian associated with it at the beginning
- Overall, symbol is not in support of ends justifying means

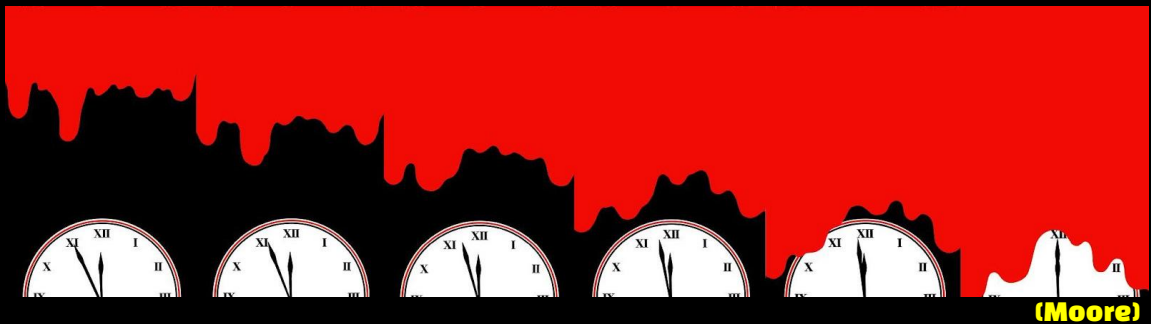
Nostalgia

- Appeal of the past changes from hope for a pre-Cold War past to hope for a pre-squid past
- Silk Spectre asking Night Owl what she smells and his saving nostalgia enforces the idea that Veidt brought them together
- Symbol supports ends justifying means as it about how Veidt's means can bring together people

Other Transforming Symbols

- **Clocks**

- **Start as foreshadowing for an imminent end (Cold War)**
- **End as symbol for Manhattan's control and Veidt's end**



- Each chapter ends with a clock getting closer and closer to midnight and more and more blood filling up the page
- Now, I'll move on to discussing Manhattan's control



(Moore, 4: 2)



(Moore, 4: 2)

“Dr. Manhattan’s storyline is a combination of two familiar chronotopes from two different genres, superhero narrative and historiography — that is, a combination of timelessness and linear historical time” (Mahmutović 259)

- After being exposed to nuclear radiation, he developed infinite powers (most importantly for this analysis, immortality); named Manhattan to cast fear into others. Atomic bomb allegory: we’re supposed to fear him.
- Casting his father as watchmaker gives him god status as clocks are continually reinforced to be symbols for unavoidable situations
- Deconstruction of objects imagery is repeated frequently. Not only with the clocks in the panels shown, but whenever Manhattan is working on something, he is often taking it apart.
 - Aligns him even more with atomic bomb (which was thought of as a complex invention that was only made because it was able to be broken down into tons of small parts)
- Doesn’t help his case that he is only one with actual superpowers (superpowers come with negative connotations as the book is rejection of idolization)
- He is superhero and historical figure which is represented by how his story represents time
- Quote is by Adnan Mahmutovic from the article “Chronotope in Moore and Gibbons's Watchmen”
- This combination of timelessness and linear historical time is expressed in the origin story’s form through non-sequitur transitions and parallel word-picture combinations which are the same transitions present in the Black Freighter story (Barnes, 53)
 - Implies his philosophy is similar to Ozymandias and casts negative connotations on him for it

- His philosophy as explained in the text is: "Nothing ever ends"
 - Nothing ever ends so why try and control thing. Manhattan puts focus on the future and the endlessness of it all
- Since he is immortal, this philosophy is validated; however, it is also condemned through parallels like the Black Freighter parallel
- As humans, we're mortal, so we can't hold this philosophy of "nothing ever ends" (things do end for us)
- Moore wants you care about the whether or not ends justify means
 - Manhattan's character doesn't give us a direct answer on the ends justifying means issue, but rather critiques not caring whether or not ends justify means

More Convincing Case?

Case 1 (Ends don't justify means)

- **Ozymandias is villain**
- **Ozymandias is idolized (a concept Moore hates)**
- **Killings emphasized**
- **Black Freighter mirrors these points**

Case 2 (Ends justify means)

- **Shadows of suffering**
- **Nostalgia**
- **Blood on a smiley face**
- **Clocks and Manhattan**
- **Nothing ever ends**
- **Black Freighter mirrors Manhattan's story**

- I label case 2 as in support of ends justifying means as this is where I feel the evidence as a whole points
- For me, case 2 is most convincing as the shadows of suffering and nostalgia are used to show how humans can be brought together through

POPULAR INTERPRETATIONS





SNYDER'S WATCHMEN

(Watchmen 2:22:18 - 2:23:13)

SAME SPEAKER NOTES AS NEXT SLIDE

Differences between comic and movie

- Never see Ozymandias's means (i.e. never see the squid)
- Manhattan is glorified as a super being and Ozymandias is presented as weak
 - Since Watchmen is a rejection of idolization, this casts negative connotations on him
- Manhattan kills Rorschach with NIGHT OWL WATCHING
 - Night Owl never saw this in the comic; in fact during this time, he was kissing Silk Spectre in the comic
 - Showing Night Owl's reaction amps up the sadness of Rorschach's final moment
- Focus is on how bad Manhattan
- Removed a lot of the points made in case 1 (also no Black Freighter in the movie) so the case that ends don't justify means is absent
- Removed the shadows of suffering and the scene where Silk Spectre and Night Owl kiss so case that ends do justify means is also absent
- What we're left with is seeing Manhattan as an unstoppable and evil force
 - So it's a critique of the "nothing ever ends" philosophy
 - The movie wants you to take a side on whether or not ends justify means, but doesn't tell you what side you should side with



SNYDER'S WATCHMEN

(Watchmen 2:27:30 - 2:28:10)

SAME SPEAKER NOTES AS PREVIOUS SLIDE

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HBO'S WATCHMEN

("See How They Fly" 58:00: - 58:54)

SAME SPEAKER NOTES AS NEXT SLIDE

- Takes post-cold war ideals to cast Ozymandias as big villain
 - World didn't end after cold war so we never needed to go to such jurassic lengths to try and save it; this show gets to be very retrospective
- Rejects Ozymandias's explanation in favor of believing the world will never end
- Ozymandias's demise is laughable; the music swells and then he's hit on the head with comedic line
- One of the main villains in show is a descendent of Ozymandias
- Ozymandias gets a Black Freighter synonym and is put in the situation of the stranded sailor
- Complete vilification of Ozymandias and amplification of every element of case 1 creates the messaging that ends don't justify means



HBO'S WATCHMEN

("She Was Killed by Space Junk" 36:05)

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Works Cited

Barnes, David. "Time in the Gutter: Temporal Structures in Watchmen." *KronoScope*, vol. 9, no. 1/2, May 2009, pp. 51–60. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1163/156771509X12638154745427.

Mahmutovic, Adnan. "Chronotope in Moore and Gibbons's Watchmen." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 50, no. 2, NORTH TEXAS STAT UNIV, 2018, pp. 255–76, doi:10.1353/sdn.2018.0014.

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