In their articles on Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's ground-breaking graphic novel, both Brent Fishbaugh and Jamie A. Hughes indicate that *Watchmen* experiments with the ramifications of placing superheroes into a real world setting, making them face "scenarios that mirror the [world's] current political and social problems" (Hughes 547-8). In *Watchmen*, these problems are both personal and national — the mostly impotent superheroes that haunt the pages of this graphic novel struggle with their personal lives, while America faces the threat of nuclear war following a Russian invasion of Afghanistan. On both the personal and the national levels, *Watchmen* addresses real-world problems, and throughout the story it reveals how these problems affect the characters, many of which are traumatized by events in the story or in their personal histories. However, rather than merely telling a narrative of trauma, Moore and Gibbons illustrate it, portraying the symptoms of trauma through the formal techniques of the graphic novel and its images. In *Watchmen*, the medium provides the message of trauma. The authors utilize imagery to emphasize the theme: Woven together into a complex structure, illustrations of personal traumatic experiences and national traumatic events represent the growing fear, the helplessness, and the isolation that mankind can experience during and after a traumatic event, in this case, events connected to fears of the Atomic bomb and nuclear war.

In her critical work *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth explains trauma and its symptoms: "In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). The past century has witnessed numerous traumatic historical events as well as an increased understanding of trauma and its effects on individuals. Because of extensive research, psychologists now understand that traumatic experiences can range from large-scale events such as war, mass-murder, terrorist attacks, and long-term oppression, to individual experiences of rape, abuse, sudden accidents, and the death of loved ones, and they have a clearer idea of the ways these traumatic experiences can affect people. The importance of the research is clear: learning about trauma allows us to better understand and help its victims. In recent years, authors and literary critics have expanded the study of trauma to literature, which allows knowledge of trauma and its symptoms to reach a larger audience and gives authors an opportunity to illustrate how the human mind experiences and processes traumatic events.

Recent literary criticism has focused on the effects of trauma and how they can be realistically presented in literature. Simply discussing traumatic events or telling stories of them does not portray the impact of actual traumatic situations or the disturbing symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, so novelists and critics have attempted to recognize formal traits of literature that can. In *Trauma Fiction*, Anne Whitehead explains: "Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterized by repetition and indirection" (3). These formal qualities have been utilized in much postmodern literature with abundant critical acclamation. However, one type of literature, the graphic novel,
has an ideal form for representing trauma but has found little critical attention. [1] In their most
typical forms, graphic novels possess many formalistic features that could be used to express
trauma. According to Ann Whitehead, “there are … a number of key stylistic features which
tend to recur in [trauma] narratives. These include intertextuality, repetition and a dispersed or
fragmented narrative voice” (84). These stylistic features interrupt the text, acting as intrusions
on the story, which illustrate traumatic symptoms and experiences by “mirror[ing] at a formal
level the effects of trauma” — particularly its intrusive symptoms (Whitehead 84). Several
features of graphic novels enable them to replicate these symptoms. First, graphic novels, or
sequential art, are by definition fragmented narratives. As Scott McCloud explains in
Understanding Comics: “Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged,
staccato rhythm of unconnected moments” (67). Isolated pictures, divided by a gutter, tell a
fragmented story, and the audience has to put that story together and fill in the blanks.
Second, according to Judith Herman in her work Trauma and Recovery, "traumatic memories
lack verbal narrative and context; rather, they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and
images" (38). While purely verbal literature can present trauma, graphic novels can utilize
images to emphasize the “frozen and wordless quality of traumatic memories...” (Herman 37).
Emotional impact, repetition compulsion, states of helplessness, and other symptoms of
trauma can all be delivered through visual clues, such as color, panel size, and repetitive
imagery. The combination of words and images provide many opportunities for illustrating the
impact of traumatic experience.

In Watchmen, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons utilize the graphic novel form to emphasize the
trauma of several characters — for example, showing how Laurie Juspeczyk contends
with the rape of her mother and how the murder of a young girl turns Walter Kovacs into
Rorschach. [2] However, one character's story ties personal trauma with one of the novel's
main themes — fear of nuclear devastation. That character is John Osterman, the man
who becomes Dr. Manhattan. After realizing the power of the Atomic Bomb and hearing of its
effects on Hiroshima, Jon's father, a watchmaker, pressures his son into a career as an atomic
physicist, and in a sudden, unexpected accident at work, Jon is vaporized in an experimental
intrinsic field chamber. However, Jon does not die in the experiment; he slowly reassembles
himself, using his new ability to "control atomic structure" (Moore 4: 13). Reformed into a
human-like being with blue skin and blank white eyes, Jon attempts to return to a normal life.
However, because of his appearance, his super-human powers, and the lasting emotional
ramifications of his accident, he cannot. His powers make him crucial to America's defense
strategy — the government even renames him Dr. Manhattan after the Manhattan Project so that he will inspire the same fear as the atomic bomb (Moore 4: 12) — but keep him from being able to relate to normal human beings, who look at him as if he is
Superman, a radioactive threat, or God. Physically and emotionally separated from the rest of
mankind because of his traumatic experience, Jon is no longer a part of normal society or even
of man.

John Osterman's vaporization and his experiences after that event are characteristic of trauma
and of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Even in the early days of trauma studies, psychologists
recognized sudden accidents, particularly "accidents involving a risk to life," (Freud 10) as a
cause of trauma, and Jon's accident certainly occurs suddenly, in the space of moments
— in less than two pages of text and only thirteen panels. His "risk to life" is reflected in
his terrified facial expression — a close-up of his face, wide-eyed, mouth agape, green
both with terror and a radioactive glow — and the way he desperately presses his hands
against the glass, trying to escape (Moore 4: 7). Helpless, Jon knows his fate before it
happens but can do nothing to stop it. When "the light [takes him] to pieces" within the next
few moments, the black on white image emphasizes the extent of his physical anguish; the brightness of the disintegrating light shines through his ribs, skull, pelvis, and other pieces of his skeleton as his body violently rips apart (Figure 1).

Alternative content
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Additionally, while most traumatic experiences do not alter the victims physically to the point that they are no longer members of the human race, they often cause detachment from society. Trauma victims may feel completely isolated from everyone else, as Judith Herman explains. "Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion" (Herman 52). The images of Jon Osterman in the story after he has rebuilt his body — his blueness, his blank eyes, and his nakedness — represent his difference from everyone around him, his alienation from society and his literal removal from humanity. Even the very first picture of his reconstituted body accentuates his separation (Figure 2).

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In this image, Jon, blue and perfectly formed, floats above the people at Gila Flats, all of whom stare at him with faces that mirror his earlier terror, including the green, radioactive glow. However, in this case the green glow is the reflection of the light emanating from Jon's body. This light encircles him, acting as a barrier that divides him from the "normal" and terrified people in the room (Moore 4: 10). Moore and Gibbons's decision to isolate him through physical representation, both in particular images and in his new physical characteristics, emphasizes his emotional state of separation. Jon feels divided from other people, and they cannot relate to him anymore because of his difference. Though Jon's traumatic symptoms are realistic, no real person is separated from humanity to the extent that he is. He even flees to Mars &ndash in numerous images, Gibbons sets his small blue form against the desolate pink landscape and the expansive, starry sky of Mars, emphasizing Jon's feelings of isolation. However, by being such an extreme example, Jon symbolizes the experience of trauma itself and its possible ramifications.

While Jon Osterman's experiences and physical form symbolize trauma and its resulting isolation, the presentation of Jon in the graphic novel emphasizes his post-traumatic symptoms through two formal, stylistic features: fragmented narrative chronology and repetition of imagery. A fragmented narrative effectively represents trauma symptoms because traumatic events can disrupt chronological time. The impact of the event causes a break in time in which the event intrusively returns to the victim, forcing him or her to re-experience it. As Dori Laub explains in Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History:

The traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after … Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. (Laub 69)

In Watchmen, Jon Osterman experiences time in this exact way &ndash past, present, and future cannot be clearly differentiated. After his traumatic accident, Jon undergoes extreme disruptions in time. He no longer experiences time moment by moment. Though Jon's story is essentially presented in a chronological manner, he does not experience those events separately or in order. Instead, every moment of his life occurs simultaneously: "Saturday the 19th now. My hands encircle Laurie's face … In 1966, the costumed people are arguing. In 1959, I am telling Janey I shall always want her" (Moore 4: 25). Moore focuses on John's trauma and his "timelessness" (Laub 69) throughout chapter four of Watchmen, and within this single chapter, Jon exists in numerous moments of time throughout his own life &ndash the day he learned that the atomic bomb destroyed Hiroshima when he was sixteen; the day Kennedy was shot; the days he met, slept with, argued with, and broke up with Janey Slater and Laurie Juspeczyk; the day he went to Mars; and the day of his accident. Jon revisits these moments multiple times throughout the chapter, sometimes on the same page.

The graphic novel format reiterates Jon's traumatic detachment from time. First, because of their sequential organization, graphic novels automatically emphasize disruptions in normal chronology. Panels appear side-by-side, each indicating a moment (or a short space of) time. However, as Scott McCloud points out in Understanding Comics, while each panel represents now:

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! Wherever
In addition, McCloud indicates that, while traditionally American graphic novels are read from left to right like purely verbal literature, the audience can disrupt the chronological order of the story by looking around the page (McCloud 104). It is hard to avoid seeing what comes next or what happened a moment before. Jon Osterman's timelessness reflects this format. On the first page of Jon's chapter, the audience can simultaneously see images of Jon holding a picture, the picture lying in the sand, Jon sitting on Mars, Jon standing in Gila Flats, and the picture falling from Jon's hand. The audience experiences each of these moments at the same time by looking at the page as a whole. However, Jon is also experiencing these moments simultaneously. "In twelve seconds time, I drop the photograph to the sand at my feet, walking away. It's already lying there twelve seconds into the future. Ten seconds now. The photograph is in my hand. I found it in a derelict bar at the Gila Flats test base twenty-seven hours ago. It's still there, twenty-seven hours into the past, in its frame, in the darkened bar. I'm still there looking at it" (Moore 4: 1). Jon's trauma symptom, his disruption in time, mirrors the format of the graphic novel page, and for a moment, the audience may feel the same confusing lack of sequence that Jon goes through, viewing numerous moments of time at once.

In Jon's chapter, the simultaneous presentation of time does not always occur during a sequence of images. Multiple moments can occur within a single frame, which corresponds to another convention of graphic novels. A single image or frame can focus on a single instant, but as Scott McCloud illustrates, a single image generally takes more than a moment of time to look at or, when words are present, to read: "words introduce time by representing that which can only exist in time &dash sound" (McCloud 95). Therefore, a single image can represent multiple seconds of time rather than a single instant. While this is a common fact of graphic novel structure, Jon's chapter of *Watchmen* alters the convention: the moments of time within a single panel are not always sequential. In one frame, showing the photo of Jon and Janey in the sand on Mars, three text boxes indicate the moments of time upon which Jon focuses. "It's 1963. [Janey and I are] making love after an argument, our tenderness in direct proportion to its violence ... It's 1966, and she's packing: tearful, careless with anger ... The photograph lies in the sand at my feet" (Moore 4: 5). In some instances, as with this one, the amount of time squeezed into the panel feels very disruptive, as if the panel will burst with the amount of time it holds. Sometimes, however, the image connects all of the moments of time in the frame. "It's October, 1985. I'm on Mars. It's July, 1959. I'm in New Jersey at the Palisades Amusement Park" (Moore 4: 1). In this image, Jon stands on Mars but examines the photo of him and Janey at the park, the two moments condensed and symbolized in one picture. In other frames, a unique effect occurs, and multiple images can be pictured at the same times. For example: "It's 1959. Janey is handing me the glass. It's 1966, and she's packing: tearful; careless with anger ... The photograph lies in the sand at my feet" (Moore 4: 18). In this frame, the image shows the middle event of Janey packing. However, the other two events, Janey handing Jon the glass and the photograph in the sand, have been shown multiple times in separate frames throughout the chapter. Because they have appeared so many times, the audience can easily picture them and even imagine all three pictures at once.

While fragmented chronology is one way to present Jon's very serious traumatic symptoms, the repetition of images is another. According to Judith Herman, "long after the danger is past, traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present ... The traumatic moment becomes encoded in an abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashbacks during waking states and as traumatic
nightmares during sleep" (86). Because trauma survivors often experience repetitive intrusions of imagery related to the trauma, authors of trauma narratives, as explained by Anne Whitehead, often utilize a form of repetition to illustrate this characteristic. "One of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act at the levels of language, imagery or plot. Repetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression" (Whitehead 86).

In graphic novels, images can repeat in multiple panels, as the focus of the frame or in the background. They can appear unexpectedly, intruding upon the moment, or they can be subtly hidden, giving an association that is not obvious.

Numerous images repeat throughout Jon's chapter. The repetitive pictures include: the photograph of Jon and Janey (falling from Jon's hand or lying in the sand), the cogs of the watch (falling or laid out upon the table), the image of a broken watch, and the image of Jon and Janey's hands touching across a beer. Each of these images has significant connections to Jon's personal trauma. The cogs, for example, allude to the fact that Jon's father pressured him to become a nuclear physicist rather than a watchmaker. When Mr. Osterman reads about the destruction of Hiroshima in the paper, he pours the watch cogs out the window, believing that his occupation is obsolete in a world with atomic power. "They dropped the Atomic Bomb on Japan! A whole city gone! Ach! These are no times for a repairer of watches ... This changes everything! There will be more bombs. They are the future ... This Atomic science ... This is what the world will need! Not pocket-watches!" (Moore 4: 3). Moore and Gibbons emphasize this moment with a sequence of three images (figure 3).

Alternative content

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In the first, Jon and his father stand on the balcony as Mr. Osterman shakes the cogs from the velvet sheet they laid upon. In the second image, from the story's future, Jon stands on his balcony on Mars, watching meteors fall, while the third image shows a close-up of the falling cogs, black against the yellow light (Moore 4: 3). The repetition of the falling cogs marks their importance but also emphasizes the sense that Jon's fate is inevitable, preordained. Unfortunately, following his father's advice and leaving this "obsolete" life of a watchmaker leads to his accident, his trauma, and his transformation into an Atomic man, and the image of the cogs indicates the beginning of this path, one that he cannot change — one that will eventually lead to his isolation on Mars and the moment that he watches the falling meteors. At the very end of the chapter, the image of the cogs appears again, representing Jon's
helplessness due to his inability to avoid the accident that altered him forever: "I am standing on a fire escape in 1945, reaching out to stop my father, take the cogs and flywheels from him, piece them all together again ... But it's too late, always has been, always will be too late" (Moore 4: 28). This feeling of inevitability, "of being pursued by a malignant fate" as Freud notes in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, emphasizes Jon's trauma (23). He wishes he could stop the cogs from falling, stop the events in his past from occurring, but he is helplessly caught up in the chain of events, unable to alter them even as he relives them. The repetition of the image of falling cogs is instead an intrusive reminder of his helplessness and his fate. However, they also have another association with his trauma. Another image of the cogs, lying on a velvet sheet to be reassembled, appears in the chapter when Jon thinks about his job, about objects falling into place, and about reassembling component parts, including his own body. These associations illustrate Jon's new, detached state of mind, his tendency to think about pieces instead of people.

As if to emphasize Jon's current difficulties connecting to people, much of the other repetitious images focus on his failed relationship with Janey Slater, intrusive reminders of a relationship that failed because of his accident. These images all originate before his accident, when both he and his relationship were normal. On the day he met Janey, she buys him a beer, and their fingers touch. On the day of their first date, the day when they also first sleep together, they have their picture taken, and later, Janey's watch breaks. These three images, their hands touching over the dripping beer glass, the photograph of Jon and Janey happy together at the fair, and the watch with the broken face, focus on important memories of this relationship, and all three are also relevant to Jon's accident. Jon gets locked in the intrinsic field chamber when he realizes he left Janey's (now repaired) watch within it. As the intrinsic field begins to vaporize his body with heat and light, Jon wishes "for a beautiful woman to hand [him] a glass of very cold beer" (Moore 4: 8). When the accident occurs, the audience sees panel by panel the (repaired) watch, the hands touching across the beer, the light of the intrinsic field vaporizing Jon, and the photograph being hung upon the wall. The remainder of the chapter explains Jon's inability to connect with Janey and later with Laurie Juspeczyk. The repetitive imagery that keeps intruding upon Jon, particularly the glass and the broken watch, reminds him that he has lost the normal relationship he had with Janey &ndash and his ability to have normal relationships since the accident. Though Jon could fix the watch and even fix his own broken body, he cannot fix his relationships, cannot connect with another person in the way that he had with Janey, as represented by their touching hands. In Trauma and Recovery, Judith Herman discusses the ways in which traumatic events can interrupt connections between people: "Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience" (Herman 51). Jon's trauma has separated him from his society and from other "normal" people, even those that he loves. While the repetitive imagery in his chapter shows that he regrets this separation, the repetitive picture of Jon dropping the photo, like the image of the falling cogs, illustrates that there is nothing he can do to regain his connection.

Both the repetition of images and the disruptions in chronology are intrusive symptoms of trauma that indicate the traumatic event is "continually recurring in the present" (Herman 37). The connection between these two symptoms is emphasized when the imagery also indicates disruptions of time. While Jon's story is essentially in chronological order, several images revisit the past and foreshadow future moments, altering the sequence of events. The photograph, for example, is shown in the sand before Jon drops it in the story. The watch
cogs, which fell when Jon was sixteen, are reminiscent of "present" moments &ndash the falling stars Jon sees from Mars and the image of the Martian sand slipping through Jon's fingers. As a timepiece, the repeating image of the watch-face, sometimes broken and sometimes repaired, also emphasizes Jon's broken chronology. It illustrates the "hands frozen" on the beer when he meets Janey Slater, the cause of Jon's accident, and ... Hiroshima (Moore 4: 24). Late in the chapter, the audience sees an image of *Time Magazine*: "On the cover there is a damaged pocket-watch, stopped at the instant of the blast, face cracked ..." (Moore 4: 24). This repeating image of a watch, along with the cogs dropped by his father because of the bombing, connect Jon's personal trauma (as well as the sense of inevitability that accompanies it) to a traumatic event from the past &ndash Hiroshima &ndash and to the resulting fear of the atomic bomb. Jon's isolation comes from his disconnection from others yet simultaneously from their fear of him. After all, the fear of Dr. Manhattan, the nuclear man, parallels the country's fear of the growing atomic threat. Jon's trauma, and even his presence in the story, acts as a reminder of the destructive nature of atomic power and of man's helplessness against it.

Therefore, while Jon's story illustrates personal trauma and simultaneously emphasizes mankind's fear and awe of the Atomic Bomb, the overlying plot of *Watchmen* focuses on a traumatic situation related to nuclear warfare &ndash the intense terror of a seemingly inevitable nuclear war. The relationship between trauma and prolonged terror is less clear than the direct connections between traumatic symptoms and a definitive traumatic event. After all, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, by definition, occurs after a traumatic event. However, some correlation has been found between traumatic symptoms and long-term feelings of fear. In *National Trauma and Collective Memory*, Arthur G. Neal examines numerous tragic moments in America, but he also focuses on prolonged collective trauma. "The crises precipitating a national trauma are of two types ... The second type of crisis is chronic, enduring, and long-lasting. A chronic crisis lacks the dramatic beginning of an acute crisis, but builds in intensity with the passing of time" (Neal 7-8). In this type of crisis, "the central hopes and aspirations of personal lives are temporarily put on hold, replaced by the darkest of fears and anxieties. Symbolically, ordinary time has stopped ... " (Neal 5). As an example, Neal discusses the days surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis, when Americans were sure that nuclear war was inevitable. This is the atmosphere within *Watchmen*, and the people within the story feel the same oppressive fear and helplessness that occurred in 1962. Throughout the novel, the residents of New York repeatedly return to a newsstand, desperate for updates on the nation's status. Here, Bernard, the newsvendor, constantly expounds upon the possible eruption of World War III with the members of the community: a newspaper delivery man, a lesbian cab driver named Joey, a group of punk druggies, a therapist named Malcolm Long, and anyone else who will stop to listen to him for a moment. Bernard and his customers represent the populace of New York, relating their fears that the nuclear disaster that may be upon them &ndash "People know something's coming. Ask me it's Doomsday, like in the Book O'Revolutions" (Moore 10: 13) &ndash and their concern for their own safety &ndash "I mean, there's gotta be somebody lookin' out for us, right?" (Moore 10: 23). Their constant commentary and repeated visits to the newsstand emphasize the descending disaster and the effects of fear, horror, and helplessness.

Intrusive repetitive imagery appears throughout *Watchmen* to illustrate the trauma caused by this escalating sense of fear and helplessness, beginning on the front cover of the first volume &ndash the image of a smiley face splattered with blood. When the image first appears, the audience is struck by its disturbing qualities &ndash particularly the metaphorical contrast implicit in a smiley face within a pool of blood &ndash but cannot yet know the significance
the story continues. At first, it represents the death of the Comedian, an event that does not, in itself, signify a particularly traumatic moment. However, as the story continues, the bloody smiley face repeats and becomes more iconic, appearing in various forms as a circle with an arrow within it: a poster of the sun, splattered with blood; a yellow flower, splattered with blood; a smudge on a pair of goggles; a smudge on a dirty, round glass window; a smudge on a foggy window, set against the full moon; pumpkin juice on a Jack-O-Lantern; a radar monitoring air space; and even a speech bubble in a circle of light. [4]

As this image frequently reappears, the story's focus shifts to the impending global threat. After Dr. Manhattan leaves for Mars, the Russians make a major offensive move, invading Afghanistan. World War III looms. As Douglas Wolk explains: "The overarching metaphor of Watchmen ... is nuclear eschatology: a blinding and unstoppable disaster that's perpetually descending, a clock perched at a few minutes to midnight" (Wolk 244). This image of the Doomsday clock, starting as the iconic bloody smiley face, repeats so often and in so many forms that it is barely noticeable at first, but by the end of Watchmen, the image has become another illustration of the repetitive symptoms of trauma— in this case, the trauma of living under the threat of nuclear war. Numerous clocks, with hands often pointing near midnight, take on a new meaning, and even the concept of a clock appears again, as Douglas Wolk points out in Reading Comics, in "a sort of 'tick-tock' effect, like the scenes in chapter 5 in which a neon sign blinks on and off outside a bedroom, alternately lighting everything in red and casting it in darkness" (239). At the end of each chapter, Moore and Gibbons provide a full-page image of a clock against a black background. As the chapters progress, the clock gets closer to midnight, and blood, dripping from the top of the page, gets closer to the clock. The build-up of this imagery shows the trauma of normal American people, trying to go about their daily business in Watchmen as their fear and helplessness take control of their lives. Unable to escape, they begin to lose hope— and to disconnect.

Another repeated image also emphasizes the terror of nuclear war and the isolation it causes. In chapter V, graffiti artists paint the silhouette of two lovers holding each other onto a New York City wall (figure 4).

Alternative content

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This image, as it is repeated, becomes associated with Hiroshima and nuclear disaster. When the Atomic Bomb went off, the heat rays caused shadows of objects to be imprinted onto the landscape. According to The Manhattan Project: An Interactive History: "The white light acted
as a giant flashbulb, burning the dark patterns of clothing onto skin ... and the shadows of bodies onto walls" (Atomic Bombing). One character in *Watchmen*, Dr. Malcolm Long, twice buys a newspaper from Bernard, and as he reads about Russia's offensive actions, he stares at the shadows: "Russian tanks have entered Pakistan. On Seventh Avenue, someone had sprayed silhouette figures onto the wall. It reminded me of the people disintegrated at Hiroshima, leaving only their indelible shadows" (Moore 6: 16). The images, both close-up shots of the shadows on a city wall, project the idea of love and comfort, as the shadows of the lovers seem to be holding each other, their faces pressed together. However, in both instances, they only remind Dr. Long of the approaching nuclear disaster &ndash of Hiroshima in the first instance and of death in the second: "[The newspaper] says that any dead family members should be wrapped in plastic garbage sacks and placed outside for collection. On 7th Avenue, the Hiroshima lovers were still trying inadequately to console one another" (Moore 6: 27). Though the image seems to be comforting, it merely represent past disaster and man's inability to feel connected to others in the present traumatizing circumstances.

Trauma, then, whether personal or national, isolates the characters of *Watchmen*, yet as the nuclear disaster becomes inevitable, both Jon and Bernard attempt to connect to those around them &ndash though unsuccessfully. Jon, with prompting from Laurie, rediscovers his interest in and link to mankind by perceiving the miracle inherent in human life (Moore 6: 27-8). He agrees to return to Earth to help save the world, showing that he has breached the disconnection caused by his trauma, but arrives too late &ndash after the disaster has already occurred. Bernard, the newsvendor, realizes that, though numerous people repeatedly come by his newsstand, he knows none of them; all of them, instead, are caught up in their own fears and problems. Bernard recognizes that the fear of war has caused isolation and attempts to overcome that isolation by connecting to another human being &ndash young Bernie, the kid who has been reading comics at his newsstand since the beginning of the novel and with whom he has barely spoken: "See, people don't reach out and make contact ... That's why there's this commotion all the time, this conflict. People don't connect with each other. It's like, you been coming here weeks, readin' that junk over an' over, an' yet we ain't exactly close ..." (Moore 9: 23). Unfortunately, just as Bernard decides to break the isolation, the awaited explosion occurs (figure 5).

**Alternative content**

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In a set of six side-by-side panels, Bernard and Bernie reach out to comfort each other, their bodies, black in shadow, mimicking the physical connection of the Hiroshima lovers and their inability to console each other in the face of destruction (Moore 9: 28). The two Bernies, likewise, cannot find consolation. Like Jon's attempt to reconnect to mankind, Bernard's attempt at connection comes too late, their isolation shown to be too great of a hurdle to overcome. Bernard and Bernie die, along with the rest of the newsstand customers, and Jon decides to leave Earth forever. However, the six images of this attempted connection also echo Jon's accident, linking the national and personal traumas of the story. As Bernard and Bernie reach for each other, their black forms are set against blinding white light of the explosion. Distinct in the first image, their bodies become more indefinite from panel to panel as the light seems to disintegrate them, shining through their bodies as it kills them &ndash as it shone through Jon's. The repetition of this image acts as a reminder of Jon's fate &ndash his helplessness in the intrinsic field chamber and his inability to stop his inevitable fate. In fact, because of its connection to the image of Jon's accident, the sense of inevitability inherent in Jon's fate is applied to this moment &ndash from the beginning of the book, as the repetitive imagery has shown the audience, this moment, this explosion, has been inevitable. The repetitious imagery confirms it.

Ironically, the main traumatic event of *Watchmen* is not nuclear war. Through the deaths of three million Americans, one of the superheroes, Adrian Veidt, stops World War III by convincing the world that aliens exist and that one destroyed much of New York City. Moore and Gibbons present the aftermath of this event through six full-page pictures of bloody, dead bodies. Scott McCloud indicates that panel shape can alter our perception of time &ndash bigger or longer panels appear to take up more time (101). Therefore, the use of full page images emphasizes the tragic moment, increasing the emotional impact by making the viewing of those pages seem to last longer, although the blood-soaked clock above the scene of destruction is frozen at midnight. Moreover, the audience recognizes numerous characters we have come to know throughout the story within the piles of bodies: Bernie, Bernard, Joey, Dr. Long, the punk drug addicts, and numerous others. In addition to the bodies, we clearly see the Hiroshima shadow in the background, as well as numerous newspapers, the front page of which boldly states: "WAR?" War has been averted. However, while Adrian Veidt celebrates his success, the audience understands the cost. We've seen the destruction and felt its impact. We visually experienced the trauma of Veidt's attack on New York and saw the last moments of its peoples lives as they desperately attempt to help one another, and with the repetitive image of the Doomsday Clock appearing on the final page of the story, we know that it was for nothing &ndash that even though the trauma of this event may have brought the world together, the threat of nuclear war will return and with it the terror.

While it has multiple strengths, *Watchmen* is unique and powerful in its presentation of trauma. Numerous critical studies show that trauma is a difficult subject to portray, particularly since the traumatic experience, as Anne Whitehead explains, "overwhelms the individual and resists language or representation ..." (3). However, by using conventions inherent in and unique to graphic novels, *Watchmen* illustrates the intrusive symptoms of trauma through the combination of word and image, surpassing the need for language alone. In addition, *Watchmen* successfully overwhelms the reader, using the graphic novel format to focus on the intense impact that trauma can have and to force the audience to feel the effects &ndash the sense of helplessness, the isolation, and the fear &ndash just as the characters do. Finally, the combination of nuclear eschatology with trauma shows the complexity and depth that graphic novels can reach. They have the capability to be sophisticated, groundbreaking, and relevant and, in the realm of trauma studies, to represent trauma in a hauntingly accurate
Notes

[1] The exception to this rule is, of course, Art Spiegelman's Maus, which tells the story of Spiegelman's father, Vladek, and his experiences during the Holocaust. Maus has received much critical attention, including a Pulitzer Prize Special Award.

[2] While a full description of Laurie Juspeczyk's and Walter Kovacs's (Rorschach) trauma symptoms and the formal methods used to portray these symptoms lies outside of the scope of this paper, Moore and Gibbons use similar methods with these two characters as they do with Jon Osterman.


[4] These images appear on the following pages: the poster of the sun, splattered with blood (V.7); the yellow flower, splattered with blood (V. 15); the smudge on a pair of goggles (VII. 4); the smudge on a dirty, round glass window (VII. 5); the smudge of a foggy window, set against the full moon (VII. 18); the pumpkin juice on a Jack-O-Lantern (VIII. 12); the radar monitoring air space (X. 1); and the speech bubble in a circle of light (XI. 4). There are also numerous other examples, in the foreground and background of numerous panels.

References


Watching the Watchmen book. Read 73 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Enjoy the ultimate companion to a comics masterpiece, as awar... Considered by some as the watershed graphic novel of the late twentieth-century, my best comparison of Moore and Gibbons’ epic comic-book series – for you neophytes out there -- is to Orson Welles’ Citizen Kane. How, you ask? Well, think of the recursive nature of the narrative, as well as the adage that absolute power corrupts absolutely. That and the fact that the ubiquitous smiley face is akin to Kane’s Rosebud in its symbolic power.
world of the city and the world my grandfather had presented to me as right and good became too wide and depressing to tolerate, I'd turn to my other great love, which was pulp adventure fiction. Despite the fact that Hollis Mason Senior would have had nothing but scorn and loathing for all of those violent and garish magazines, there was a sort of prevailing morality in them that I'm sure he would have responded to. From the graphic novel "Watchmen" by Alan Moore.

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