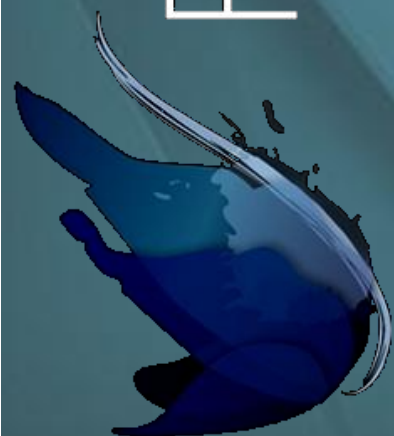РІВНЕНСЬКИЙ ДЕРЖАВНИЙ ГУМАНІТАРНИЙ УНІВЕРСИТЕТ
Факультет іноземної філології
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До 25-ї річниці факультету іноземної філології
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АКТУАЛЬНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ СУЧАСНОЇ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ ФІЛОЛОГІЇ

PHILOLOGY

Студентський науковий вісник

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Актуальні проблеми сучасної іноземної філології

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Рівне

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NARRATIVE LEVEL OF GRAPHIC NOVELS

Studying narrative levels of graphic novels, it is naturally to be located in the field of narrative studies and it will attempt to mould a narrative method suitable for studying of graphic novels, for studying of the world of image. As no such established method exists yet, this thesis we'll begin by combining various theoretical researches from the field of traditional narrative studies, such as Seymour Chatman and Gerard Genette, with various views on visual narration and researches of studying comics. A basic structural analysis of "Watchmen" (1986) by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons is the initial goal, and later chapters will offer the detailed analysis of various narrative aspects of a graphic novel. It is important to point out right at the beginning that in the context of this study, the general terms of traditional narrative study are not directly applicable, but must be reconsidered and possibly redefined when applied. Therefore, terms such as narrative studies poorly, as no single narrator can be extracted from the story appearing in a graphic novel, as the images are not "narrated" in a way traditional written novels are. It is more useful to borrow the term "narration" from the field of film studies. Still, in this thesis the terms from narrative studies will be applied from the point of view of comic book narration and its requirements.

As we know, comics are formed from images, words and the union of the two, and it is impossible to find a single dominant narrative level typical to traditional narrative literature, which has traditionally been divided into retrospective first-person narrative, self-reflective narrative, objective third-person narrative, an omniscient narrative, focalized narrative or stream-of-consciousness-type of narrative. These are not alone sufficient in a study of visual narration, which is usually divided between narrator, narrative level and so called "point of view", but these terms are not used in the same way as they would be used in basic literary studies, for the narrator of the comic book does not have to describe the characters or the settings around him, because they are immediately available to the reader in a visual form. The setting of the comic is therefore important, the events-on-scene are what it is shown and how it is shown. The various narrative devices of the comic book can also enable to reader to identify to the characters in a new way by concretely positioning the reader inside the point of view of a certain character. In the following subchapters, we'll present some of the basic theoretical tools and concepts this thesis will rely on as well as some of the reasons for choosing these particular approaches. As the study of comics and the terms linked with it are not yet widely known, the basic concepts related to it will also be presented.

The researcher Seymour Chatman divided the narrative text into two components, which will be referred to here as story (what happens?) and narrative (how it happens?). The story is further divided into events and existents, which are composed of subcategories such as actions, happenings, characters and setting [1, 19]. "Watchmen" also can be divided into story and narration, the story being the abstract plot of superheroes uncovering a plot to kill millions of people, and the narrative is the arrangement of the events of the plot in a given medium (here comics) that actualizes the story [1, 37]. The narrative structure in "Watchmen" plays with temporal levels and concepts, showing the reader events and actions from the past, present and sometimes even the future, many of them almost

simultaneously by the way of juxtaposing panels from separate temporal levels. A past act can be shown to the reader in connection to the present action, thus giving both events new contexts and new meanings by associating them with each other.

Therefore, **the tasks** of our research are:

1. To analyze the narration of "Watchmen" and to show emphasis of textual device with the help of epigraphs.

2. To study psychological characteristics of narrative level of graphic novels.

3. To propose psycholinguistic aspects of narrative discourse.

Telling about psychological characteristics of narrative level of graphic novels, we have to admit that the kernel events are the major events which advance the plot "by raising and satisfying questions", whereas satellite events are minor plot events that are in no way crucial in the ability to follow the narrative text. The omission of a satellite text will only impoverish the text aesthetically, and its function is to elaborate the kernel events, to imply their existence. Seymour Chatman said that these written appendices' functions precisely were as these satellites, operating at a deep structural level and by the means of an independent medium [1, 54]. Problematic here is the fact that even though the appendices begin as material clearly in the public domain, such as published books and articles, they gradually transfer into showing the reader evidently private material not meant to be published. This creates a hierarchy of discourses, which provides the reader with knowledge no other character in the story has.

These fictive appendices were the first of their kind in comic books, and serve an important function in the reading of the entire novel. Moore has not merely created alternate superhero characters, he has also given them a concrete past, textual evidence of their existence in a society that has crucially affected the way these characters act now. The relationship between the appendices and the comic book narrative itself is a complex one, both affecting one another. The appendices give the reader clues to solve the mystery the superheroes are trying to solve, they create pasts for the characters, they explain their present. But the comic book also affects the way the appendices are read, so that when Dan Dreiberg writes in his article *Blood from the Shoulders of Pallas* in the appendix for chapter VII about "*visiting a sick acquaintance at a hospital in Maine*", he is referring to the Mothman, a fellow superhero gone insane – a fact revealed to the reader in Rorschach's narration in Chapter I, if one is alert enough a reader to spot such details.

Textual evidence is also offered to the reader of "Watchmen" in a much more subtler way than the appendices, by the way of detail texts. These detail texts are small textual details embedded in the visual world of the comic book, such as posters, signs, books or newspapers. Depending on the comic book in question, these detail texts may be crucial to the understanding and interpretation of the text, and create several narrative levels within the comic. "Watchmen", although already constructed at multiple levels of narration, does not ignore the opportunity to influence the reader via these detail texts. Newspaper headlines appear at various points in the comic, contextualizing the current political situation with headlines such as: "*French withdraw military commitment from Nato*" [4, 9], "*Keene Act passed: Vigilantes illegal*" [4, 15] or "*Reds cross Pakistan border*" [4, 44]. All these take place in different points in time in the alternate history of *Watchmen*, and they all help the reader to construct the political and historical context of this fictitious world. These headlines are deliberately written out, so it is likely that they are meant to be read, instead of being ignored. Other types of detail texts include advertisements and slogans that appear in the background, including a spray-painted "*Who watches the watchmen*?" that appears repeatedly. So, even though the title phrase of the "Watchmen" is not explicitly said at any point in the actual narrative, the theme it presents is kept alive throughout with the help of the detail texts, appointing the detail texts in a more crucial position than just background material.

The narration of "Watchmen" is affected by yet another textual device, in this case we mean the role of epigraphs. Every chapter ends with an epigraph that consists of a short quotation, varying from the song lyrics of Bob Dylan to the philosophical fragments of Friedrich Nietzsche. These inter-textual allusions all affect the way the reader interprets and analyzes the chapters; one could say that they cast a shadow over the chapter to which they are epigraphed, forcing the reader to reconsider what

he/she has just read. But as we may understand from the already highlighted points, the comic book quotation differs crucially from the traditional literary quotation due to its radically different format. We see the gaps between panels and gaps between the original text and the quotations as places where the reader steps in and "creates" the text being read, inserting his/her own interpretations of the relationship between the old and the new text, as with the images on a comic book page. However, as this in my view applies to other types of literature as well, Ali's argument is left rather weak. Chapter V, titled "Fearful Symmetry", ends with a quotation from William Blake's poem "The Tiger" (1794):

> *Tiger, Tiger burning bright,*
> *In the forests of the night,*
> *What immortal hand or eye*
> *Could frame thy fearful symmetry?* [4, 26]

Considering the fact that Chapter V deals with the pursuit and capture of Rorschach, this leads to the interpretation that the Tiger referred to Rorschach, beyond all description and understanding, beyond capture mentally and spiritually: no hand or eye can ever truly capture him, neither his therapist nor his enemies in prison. The original poem by Blake ends with the same stanza, except that "could" is replaced by "dare", which makes the task of framing the mind of Rorschach an even more daunting a task. The connection between Rorschach and the idea of a bleak "tiger" instead of "tiger" is made even more apparent by the two police officers entering the building where he is. The other jokingly warns his friend with the phrase "*Here be tigers*" [4, 26], which is an allusion to the phrase "here be dragons", used on medieval maps to denote dangerous or unexplored territories. Tigers infiltrate the entire chapter, as the meta-narrative of the pirate comic, too deals with "*a pale and mottled yellow*" giant shark, a beast tangled in ropes, unable to escape [4, 20]. The metaphors and allusions are heavy with meanings, as even the dominant color scheme of Chapter V with its fiery yellow tints brings to mind a yellow tiger. Another striking piece of carefully woven inter-textual allusions is on the final page of Chapter XI, which ends with the soundless depiction of people's reactions as Adrian Veidt's plan is carried out and 3 million New Yorkers are killed in a fake alien invasion. Next to the panels of horrified faces and the blank last panel Moore has added this epigraph:

> *My name is Ozymandias,*
> *King of Kings:*
> *Look on my works,*
> *ye mighty, and despair!* [4, 48]

This quotation is from Percy Bysshe Shelley's famous poem "Ozymandias" (1817), which is also Adrian Veidt's superhero alter ego. Ozymandias, of course, refers to the Egyptian king Rameses, whose colossus bears a similar inscription. At this point in the narrative Veidt has succeeded in his plan of killing millions of people, and Rorschach and Nite Owl, who have come to stop him, have nothing left to do but stand and despair. However, the quotation can also be read in an ironical light if one is familiar with the entire poem by Shelley, which ends:

> "*Nothing beside remains. Round the decay/ Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare /The lone and level sands stretch far away*" [2, 33].

The tyrant triumphantly declares *"Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"* – and yet, in the end nothing remains of Ozymandias himself but a "colossal wreck". His victory, utopia achieved, is short-lived, as the ambiguous ending of *Watchmen* also implies.

These types of quotations are explicit intertextuality, by which I mean the kind of allusion that binds the text to another text, a subtext, a previous literary text. Through this type of reference the graphic novel attempts to bind its meanings to a certain kind of subtext and the meanings therein. It should be noted, however, that the level in which the reader understands the intended message of the subtext depends on whether or not the reader is acquainted with the subtext. Literary parallels such as these function in a text by adding pleasure and resonance to the reading of those who recognize them. But neither consciously or unconsciously do they lend, in themselves, power, authority, persuasive force or greatness. The understanding and enjoyment of the basic narrative is not diminished by not being familiar with the texts referred to. These epigraphs can support the narrative or they can attempt to deny it, depending on how they are read. Both of the examples above are ones

which can be read as either supporting or denying the narrative, depending on the reader's previous knowledge of the topic.

The entire graphic novel ends with the epigraph "*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*", with the translation "Who watches the watchmen?", quoted from the epigraph of the Tower Commission Report from 1987. A simple argument is that this is what the entire graphic novel is about: the question of political power, the question of the misuse of power, which leaves its shadow over the whole work, making the reader question the justifications and motives of all the characters in the novel. In this light the entire publication of the graphic novel could then be read as critique of the political situation of the mid-1980s, tying the work closely to a wider context. The decision to put the epigraphs at the end of the chapters instead of the beginnings is somewhat peculiar, for it affects the interpretation of the text once the chapter has already been read. What ensues is a sort of hermeneutic circle, in which the interpretation of the text influences the way we read the epigraphs, which in turn affect the way we read the text itself.

The separation of visual and textual narration when studying comics may seem arbitrary and somewhat pointless, as one could argue that comics are an entirely visual medium and that letters as such are visual signs, too. There are some aspects of comics that are more visual than others, such as the panel division, the point of view of the panel imagery and the use of colors, for example – and yet the question of the speech balloon may rise, as it is clearly a visual icon typical of comics, but nevertheless contains textual, written information. The visual narrative of "Watchmen" seems to search for a perfect symmetry through repetition and rhythm, reproducing various visual icons at certain intervals and positioning various separate storylines, producing effects dependent upon the context in which they appear. Shifts from separate storylines are highlighted by verbal and visual allusions, such as the disturbingly similar images of the narrator of the pirate comic eating a raw seagull and Dan Dreiberg biting into a piece of chicken leg [4, 9–10]. This symmetry is predicted even at the final pages of the graphic novel, as the diary of Rorschach, which begins the entire graphic novel, enters the hands of the yellow press, hinting at the return of the old status quo as the truth of Veidt's plan is revealed, restoring symmetry. As Wolf-Meyer points out, preserving the status quo actually is the predicament of superhero comics themselves:

[U]topia achieved would be a radical narrative, whereas utopia attempted and failed retains the conservative status quo while appeasing the proposed conservative ideology of readers. Hence, in reading Watchmen*, readers identify with Rorschach and his conservative ideology rather than Ozymandias and his radical act of achieving utopia* [3, 51].

The status quo of the world of "Watchmen" is preserved as the truth is revealed, and the visual narrative supports this interpretation by showing the reader again the image of the smiley face with the red stain that began the entire novel.

These recurring images, such as the smiley face ("Have a Nice Day!"), a black-and-white silhouette of a couple embracing, not to mention the numerous triangles and circles, all appear repeatedly. Through this repetition the visual images become symbols, which mean that they begin to represent something else through a rule or a shared agreement. These symbols become narrative, and act as parts of the narrative by the way of integrating the symbolic meanings linked to them to new contexts. The symbols can even turn into metaphors, as for example the recurring image of the Comedian being flung through the window, which may be interpreted as speaking of the violence hidden in all of us. The reoccurrence of these images that turn into symbols can also be interpreted through what G.Genette refers to as narrative frequency, repetition in narrative [2, 113–116]. As already mentioned, in "Watchmen" certain images and panels are repeated in different contexts, sometimes even with an alternate point of view, thus adding new dimensions to the narrative. One example of this frequency, this repetition is the image of the Comedian being thrown out of the window in Chapter I [4, 3]. This image is repeated in other contexts: in Chapter II, Rorschach narrates an anecdote about the depressed clown Pagliacci, while the narrative shows again the murder of the Comedian [4, 27]; the black humor of the anecdote and the images is that of a depressed clown, which is what the Comedian appears to have been before he died. The punchline "...*I am Pagliacci*" is contrasted with the by now iconic image of the man thrown through a window. This image finally

returns in Chapter XI, shown again but now both through the eyes of the killer as well as the victim, finally revealing the reader the face of the killer, just before flinging the Comedian through the window [4, 24–26].

As mentioned in previous chapters, the panel division in "Watchmen" is often one where parallel storylines, two separate narratives alter from panel to panel and thus are placed in relation to one another, commenting on the other, yet neither can definitely be said to be more dominant than the other. The panel transition is from scene-to-scene, and as S.McCloud has stressed, it requires active deductive reasoning on the part of the reader to construct meanings between transitions such as these [4, 70–74]. Also, when these parallel storylines take place in "Watchmen", the captions of one narrative appear often in connection with the panel image of the other narrative. This combination of separate narratives of word and image can be read in various ways: as an example of what S.McCloud refers to as interdependent, where "words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone" [3, 155]. On the other hand, I support the idea that we should refer to this type of relationship between the image and text as "syntagmatic", binding two separate narratives into one, and where both word and image support and complete each other. So, S.Chatman writes of temporal and spatial order, and how events that have no causal connection are yet presented "as if they were causally connected" [1, p. 39]. Also S.Chatman stresses the reader's importance in evaluating these temporal relationships and juxtapositions of spatial fragments, the cognitive schemas that the reader constructs [1, 39–40]. So, as can be gathered, the same type of union of word and image can be interpreted through various different paradigms, which all aid the reader to understand the complexity and diversity of even the simplest of unions between words and images. The role of the reader and his/her abilities are of vital importance in understanding comics, as interpretations are made instantly.

These interdependent syntagmatic juxtapositions of no immediate causal connection are a standard pattern in "Watchmen", which has a bound panel division. This means that it is regularly divided into nine panels per page, three in a row, so that during these positional storylines, every other image narrates one story, while every other narrates another one, and the captions containing dialogue often appear in the other story, commenting it in an almost fearful symmetry [4, 2–3, 9–16]. "Watchmen" uses the so-called very rarely, thus heightening their effect. The long piece in Chapter III is an example of the two narratives commenting on each other, as Dr. Manhattan is interviewed on television while Laurie and Dan are confronted by a gang of thugs in a back alley: the question put to Dr. Manhattan relating to Afghanistan ends with the words *"...will **you** be prepared to enter hostilities*?", while the panel shows Laurie and Dan threatened by the gang, exchanging meaningful looks – they indeed are prepared for hostilities, both being ex-superheroes [4, 12]. The later comments of the interviewer are combined with the scenes of fighting and violence, producing a sense of connection though there is none – the text of the other narrative seems to comment on the images, conveying a larger meaning than it would be possible by traditional comic book narrative of word-specific, illustrative function. This effect of apparent causality caused by the juxtaposition of separate storylines questions somewhat the construction of the narrative schemas and the illusion of coherence they produce, for the connection is created by deliberate positioning, and the effects of coherence and causality are mere illusions – is the ideological coherence of the text also illusionary, even false?

Another such an example of the way this type of narration widens the storytelling is the panel showing Dr. Manhattan [4, 9]: the dialogue between Laurie and Dan comes from the other narrative, the image shows Dr Manhattan dressing himself telekinetically, by the power of his mind. The caption says "*...and he does not care how people dress*", the original context being that of describing Hollis Mason and how it does not matter which clothes one wears when visiting him. However, combined with the image of Dr. Manhattan dressing himself in a manner unlike anyone else on the planet, the "how" in the captions acquires a whole new meaning – the complete message of the union more that either would be if narrated separately. Most of these cases of inter-narrative commenting in "Watchmen" produce an effect of irony, even though often very dark irony, such as the clumsy lovemaking attempt between Dan and Laurie in Chapter VII [4, 64–65], which is accompanied by a praising television commentary of Ozymandias' skillful gymnastic performance.

These parallel narratives mostly take place simultaneously in two different places at the same time, but occasionally the time frame alters so as to show a recurring narrative from the past events, giving meaning to the current narrative. This is the case for example in Chapter VII, where Dan s motives for suddenly being scared about Laurie's life are motivated by a simultaneous recount of a previous visit from Rorschach, warning that someone might be killing masked heroes [4, 3].

As Gerard Genette has pointed out, these "retroactive returns" confer on the past episode a meaning that it did not yet have in its own time. Past actions are modified in their meanings, their interpretations changed after an occurrence in a new context [2, 56]. This new context is in its turn also affected by the narrative schemas related to the past event which is now recurring. This is apparent throughout Chapter II, "Absent Friends", in which various characters appear to be remembering the deceased Comedian during his funeral, and the visual narrative activates certain past events to the present narrative for the reader to see. These memories are conveyed in the visual narrative by changes in time and space in which the character "remembering" it stays in the same posture while the temporal and spatial elements around him alter [2, 9, 12]. The type of transformation of visual information is familiar from film studies, and it is a clearly visual way of narrating the past private experiences of the character through external focalization, showing what the character has experienced in the past but from outside the character. Still, while reading the novel it is easy to notice how the use of visual elements to provide smooth transitional moments in space and time is a practical advantage of a rich visual style that exceeds the content of the speech balloons. This playing with temporal levels and transitional moments in time and space is in fact an essential quality of the narrative of "Watchmen", leading to the interpretation that alongside power, time is one of the crucial overall themes of the graphic novel.

So, analyzing "Watchmen" and describing psychological characteristics of narrative level of graphic novels we can propose such ***psycholinguistic aspects of narrative discourse***:
-        visual emphasis;
-        focalization of information;
-        epigraphs' emphasis;
-        meta-narrative presentation of the text;
-        contrasting visual linkings;
-        actualization of narrative potential.

Also "Watchmen" as the socio-cultural phenomenon has been studied in the courses of history, economy, politics and sociology, while there have been no psycho-linguistic study on the novel. In other our articles we'll decide to focus mostly on the culturelogical aspects of the novel, and the results of these researches will be discussed and completely described.

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