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**PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSES OF THE NOVEL
«WATCHMEN» BY ALAN MOORE AND DAVE GIBBONS**

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У статті зроблено психолінгвістичний аналіз графічного роману Алана Мура та Дейва Гіббонса «Нічні охоронці». Проаналізовано психолінгвістичні та авторські аспекти побудови композиції твору.

Запропоновано та обґрунтовано концепт «фокалізація». Показано, що комічне не завжди відповідає ідеї фокалізації, тому що в комічному візуальне завжди відіграє провідну роль. Зокрема, ми розрізняємо фокалізацію в комічному з огляду на різні суб'єкт-об'єктні категорії, які впливають на сприйняття комічного. Ці категорії є так званими візуально-вербальними суб'єктами. Постає запитання: що саме читач демонструє і хто є вербальним автором? Досить часто той, хто розповідає, є візуально присутнім, тому й фокалізація є одночасно візуальною та вербальною. Мету статті – окреслити художні засоби, які використано Аланом Муром та Дейвом Гіббонсом в романі «Нічні охоронці» – було досягнуто.

***Ключові слова:** графічний роман, психолінгвістичні аспекти побудови композиції твору, авторські аспекти побудови композиції твору, композиція.*

В статье проанализирован графический роман Алана Мура и Дейва Гиббонса «Ночные охранники» с точки зрения психолингвистики. Описаны психолингвистические и авторские аспекты построения композиции произведения.

Предложен и обоснован концепт «фокализация». Показано, что комическое не всегда отвечает идее фокализации, потому что в комическом визуальное всегда играет главную роль. Таким образом, мы различаем фокализацию в комическом с учётом разных субъект-объектных категорий, которые влияют на восприятие комического. Эти категории являются так называемыми визуально-вербальными субъектами. Возникает вопрос: что именно демонстрирует читатель и кто является вербальным автором? Достаточно часто тот, кто рассказывает, визуально присутствует, поэтому фокализация является одновременно визуальной и вербальной. Цель данной статьи – описать художественные средства, которые использованы Аланом Муром и Дейвом Гиббонсом в романе «Ночные охранники» – было достигнуто.

Ключевые слова: *графический роман, психолингвистические аспекты построения композиции произведения, авторские аспекты построения композиции произведения, композиция.*

In this article the graphic novel Watchmen by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons as a piece of literature was presented. Psycho-linguistic and narratological aspects of various levels presented in the body of the composition were analyzed.

It was proposed and explained in details the concept 'focalization'. Comics as a medium do not directly convert to the idea of focalization, as in comics visuality plays a central role both in the story and in the reading. We have divided focalization in comics into different subject-object-position categories that participate in the narration of the comic book. The first two are the visual subject and the verbal subject: what is the reader shown and who is the verbal narrator? Often the character who speaks is also visually present, so the focalization is both visual and verbal. The aim of this research paper is to define the main narratological devices and inventions made by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons and represented in the novel, Watchmen.

Key words: *graphic novel, psycho-linguistic aspects of the novel, narratological aspects of the novel, composition.*

Introduction. The actuality of the problem. In October 2005, *Time Magazine* listed its All-Time One Hundred Novels, chosen from all novels published in English after 1923. One novel to make the list was Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's twelve-part graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986), of which Lev Grossman, one of

the two the compilers of the list said: «*Watchmen* is told in fugal, overlapping plotlines and gorgeous panels rich with cinematic leitmotifs. A work of ruthless psychological realism, it's a landmark in the graphic novel medium» [3; 66]. *Watchmen* was also included in the Top Ten Graphic Novels list – the only graphic novel to make both lists. This is not, of course, the first or the last time Alan Moore will be hailed as one of the greatest writers in the medium of visual narratives. Still, it does not change the fact that Alan Moore is a widely respected writer in the field of comics today with a career that stretches back to the early 1980s. He has collaborated with many talented illustrators, including Eddie Cambell in *From Hell* (1989/1999) and David Lloyd in *V for Vendetta* (1988), and he is generally seen as the writer who crucially changed the essence of comics in the world (English-speaking world mostly) from mere entertainment to something altogether different. *Watchmen*, published first serially by DC Comics between 1986 and 1987 and together in one volume in 1987, is a multilayered graphic novel depicting real-life superheroes in an alternative US of the 1980s.

The analyses of latest researchers and issues. *Watchmen* as sociocultural phenomenon has been studied in the courses of history, economy, politics and sociology, while there have been no linguistic study on the novel. Originally we planned to make an extended research on the linguistic peculiarities of *Watchmen*, but the composition proved to be so complex and multilayered, that in the very process of writing the thesis we decided to focus mostly on the narratological aspects of the novel. Still, the research has completely no analogues in our country, and probably a few in the world due to the complexity of the topic.

Certain visual motifs keep repeating and plotlines overlap again and again, creating a thrilling narrative structure, which will be the main interest of this study. As Matthew Wolf-Meyer points out in his article «The World Ozymandias Made: Utopias in the Superhero Comic, Subculture and the Conservation of Difference» (2003), the visual imagery of *Watchmen* owes a great debt to the original superhero comics it deconstructs in its portrayal of real-life superheroes, «cloning» the original Charlton Comics superheroes from the 1960s, who themselves were clones of other, previous superheroes (Nite Owl, for example, is a clone of the Blue Beetle, who himself was a clone of Batman). As Wolf-Meyer argues, this kind of process

of cloning allows the authors to contribute to a particular aspect of the discourse of the superhero comics where they provide their readers with familiar iconography, yet failing to directly confront them with the truth behind the characters: «it may be comforting to know that Superman can never impose his utopian regime, however utopian it may seem, for if he can pose utopia, then he can surely impose dystopia, and it is only a matter of ideology that saves us from one or damns us to the other» [McCloud 1993: 114-115].

Actual importance of the thesis is proved by the constantly growing role of popular culture in general and comics media in particular. The profound study of *Watchmen* can represent this new to our mentality media as one of the most promising from the academic point of view. The *object* of the presented thesis is the graphic novel *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons as a piece of literature. The *subject* of the research are the narratological aspects of various levels presented in the body of the composition.

The purpose and the tasks of the article. According to these, the *aim* of this research paper is to define the main narratological devices and inventions made by Alan Moore and represented in his milestone novel, *Watchmen*. As a study of the narratological levels of *Watchmen*, this thesis is naturally located in the field of narratological studies and will attempt to mould a narratological method suitable for the study of graphic novels, to the study of word and image. As no such established method exists yet, this thesis shall begin by combining various theorists from the field of traditional narratology, such as Seymour Chatman and Gerard Genette, with various views on visual narration and the study of comics. A basic structural analysis of *Watchmen* is the initial goal, and later chapters will attempt at more detailed analysis of the various narratological aspects of the graphic novel. It is important to point out right at the beginning that in the context of this study, the general terms of traditional narratology are not directly applicable, but must be reconsidered and possibly redefined when applied. Therefore, terms such as *narrator* work poorly, as no single narrator can be extracted from the story appearing in a graphic novel, as the images are not «narrated» in the 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 narratology will be applied from the point of view of comic book narration and its requirements.

Methods of the research. This article is theoretical, that's why the main method used in the article is the method of theoretical analyses of scientific literature.

Theoretical study of the problem. 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 [Chatman 1978: 19]. *Watchmen* too 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 [Chatman 1978: 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.

An important part of comic book narration is also the point of view: who is watching and what is the object of this gaze; if a character is looking at something and in the next panel we are shown this object of this gaze, the reader is positioned as this character. This type of positioning is essential in comic book narration, as it has the possibility of affecting the meanings linked with the reading of the comic. The power of the gaze is thus an important aspect, and well used in *Watchmen*: the entire novel begins with the murder of Edward Blake (as known as the superhero Comedian), and what the reader sees is the entire act of the murder through the eyes of the murderer, the panels shaded with menacing pink. This application of focalization, seeing the murder through the eyes of the killer, typically requires that the reader identifies it with a certain character, that it defines and grounds the character that experiences this focalized event. But in this case, the reader is deliberately left without this information and encouraged to create his/her own concepts of the murderer through the dialogue of the two detectives investigating the death, which alternates with the scene-to-scene panel transitions of the violent act that has taken place previously:

«Somebody really had it in for this guy. I mean, how did he go outta **window**?» «Maybe he **tripped** against it.»

«Forget it. That's **strong glass**, man. You **trip** against it, even a big guy like **that**, it **don't break**. I think you'd have to be **thrown**» [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 3].

Of this dialogue, the first and last sentences are illustrated by the images of the murder, while others show the detectives on the scene afterwards; the reader will see that indeed, the other detective is right – the Comedian was a big man, and he was thrown. The bolded passages appear as such in the original text, and the use of such bolding of words is generally interpreted as an emphasis on those particular words, which intensifies their meaning. This type of visual emphasis is just one of the many ways comics can visually affect the meanings related to the text.

The concept of 'focalization' was introduced to narratology by Gerard Genette. Focalization as a term is more abstract than point of view, involving not only the one who sees but also the one who speaks [Genette 1980: 116]. However, as this division refers to traditional written literature, the word «see» receives a whole new meaning in relation to comic book focalization, where the focalizer has no need to verbalize his surroundings or the atmosphere because they are immediately available to the reader in visual form. As Scott McCloud points out, «in comics the imagining is done for the reader» [McCloud 1993: 122]. Therefore, the term focalization is not in itself sufficient in the study of comic book narration, and the further formulation of the concept by myself, done after the thorough analysis of presented sources combined with my personal experience as a writer and a scriptwriter, will be used in this thesis instead, especially in the context of cognitive narratology and when discussing the reliability of the narrator.

Comics as a medium do not directly convert to the idea of focalization, as in comics visuality plays a central role both in the story and in the reading. Chatman himself has divided focalization in comics into different subject-object-position categories that participate in the narration of the comic book. The first two are the visual subject and the verbal subject: what is the reader shown and who is the verbal narrator? Often the character who speaks is also visually present, so the focalization is both visual and verbal. Chatman's third type of subject-position is the psychological subject, the one who experiences

and feels, the one that binds the visual and verbal narration to each other [Chatman 1978: 144-145].

More often in *Watchmen*, though, the visual and verbal subjects are in a strong contrast, narrating separate stories which still seem to be commenting on each other. While getting down to work on the thesis, I have analyzed *Watchmen*, which has many metanarratives, narratives that have no direct link to the main story. One example of this is a pirate comic, *The Tales of the Black Freighter*, which is read by a black boy Bernie within the comic in Chapters III, V, VIII, X and XI, and which always appears in the comic in relation to the act of the boy's reading. The textual captions of the pirate comic are then combined with the visual narratives of the main story, and vice versa. This parallel in-box plotline, «a story within a story» creates a metanarrative that builds a new context to the events that take place and can thus affect the reader's interpretations of the actions in the main story as it is contrasted with the violent and cynical world of *Watchmen*. The black and yellow colouring of the fallout shelter signs predicting nuclear war and consequently death is juxtaposed against captions which come from the pirate comic:

«I saw that hellbound ship s black sails against the yellow Indie s sky, and knew again the stench of powder, and men's brains, and war» [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 1].

The separate textual narratives in *Watchmen* are often bound together by verbal allusions or the use of similar words in different contexts, very much in the same way as the visual allusions are used in connection to verbal captions, such as the fallout shelter example above. Verbal and visual combine, somewhat ironically, in II; 2-3, when Laurie puts out her cigarette with the words:

«Look, I m putting it out, okay? It's dead. Extinguished.»

This line is then followed by the general view of the Comedian's funeral assembly, the pun of course being that the Comedian, too, is «extinguished». This creates an ironical link between two separate scenes. Similar linkings take place throughout *Watchmen*, the word «madness» in one storyline juxtaposed with «insanity» in another [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 3-4], «hell and damnation» with «Hades» [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 19-20] and so forth.

The main diary in *Watchmen* is still that of Rorschach, captions of which begin the graphic novel and which as a concrete object plays a crucial role later in the narration. The narrative focus

of the textual narration may shift from one character's speech or writing to another's during chapters, but the narrator is always easily distinguished by different visual looks and varying uses of language. Rorschach's mode of expression is one of short sentence, periodically omitting personal pronoun «I», and incorrect grammar («tireder»), giving clues and hints about his character and background:

Rorschach's journal. October 21st, 1985: Woken at eleven by shouting outside. Disturbed to find I had fallen asleep without removing the skin from my head. Tireder than I thought. Should be more careful [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 11].

These entries are reminiscent of pieces of paper torn from somewhere, and the font used imitates handwriting to some extent. Rorschach's diary-narration comprises precisely of these short sentences («*Tireder than I thought. Should be more careful*»), his film-noir detective-style observations about the world around him, often combined with visual focalization where the reader sees the world from his perspective or him writing in the journal. Rorschach's writing has none of the bolded words to indicate stress that mark the other character's speech and writing, and even after he loses his «face», his speech remains completely stress-free, creating the effect of a monotonous voice completely void of any emotions. As all the other characters' voices have these stresses, it becomes clear that the difference is intended precisely for this effect.

The aspect that most clearly sets *Watchmen* apart from other graphic novels are the written non-fictional appendices after eleven chapters (the final chapter is without one). These fictitious articles, interviews, psychological reports and other textual evidence bring new depths into the narration in ways that may not immediately be clear to the reader and are by no means essential to the understanding of the story and enjoyment of the basic narrative. To create the illusion that they have been collected as in the form of a scrap book, almost all appendices have a drawn note attached, complete with a drawn paperclip, explaining their origin: «*We present here excerpts from Hollis Mason's autobiography, Under The Hood – Reprinted with permission of the author*» [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 27]. One appendix depicting an unfinished draft of a newspaper cover goes as far as to show a pencil «forgotten» at the edge of the page [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 32]. In order to comprehend these fragmental paratexts the reader has to actively construct various turning points in several

different spaces in time in the fictitious universe of *Watchmen*. These paratexts seem to act as textual evidence of the reality of the universe in which the Watchmen exist, and are a vital part in the narrative schema of the reader and of the previous information the reader possesses. The main narrative of the graphic novel interacts with the appendices, and the information contained in them completes and denies each other in the dynamic process which creates the narrative.

The first three appendices consist of excerpts from *Under the Hood*, an autobiography of the supporting character of Hollis Mason, the second superhero to make himself known in the US under the alias Nite Owl during the 1940s. Here the narration style is one of familiar retrospective first-person narrative, and it provides a context for the alternative US of *Watchmen*, where Mason describes the first impulses he had to follow his «vocation» during the late 1930s [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 32].

This narrative provides the reader with the exact point where the world of the reader and the world of the comic book were torn apart, and the universe of real-life superheroes became the reality. Mason's narrative also reveals that the superheroes are far from being the heroes of their communities – in fact they are faced with constant distrust, speculation and ridicule in a society where homosexuality is seen as more acceptable than dressing up in a mask and tights, which comes through well in Mason's somewhat self-ironic writing:

I've heard all the psychologists't heories, and I've heard all the jokes and the rumors and the innuendo, but what it comes down to for me is that I dressed up as like an owl and fought crime because it was fun and because it needed doing and because I goddamn felt like it. Okay. There it is. I've said it. I dressed up. As an owl. And fought crime [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 31].

Mason's expression is clearly one of justifying to the public what he did («*because I goddamn felt like it*»), almost as if he was «coming out of the closet» by repeating his words, relieved to have had the courage to say it out loud. A parallel is drawn between being gay and being a superhero by the use of similar terminology concerning the true nature of people. It also becomes clear from Mason's text that the reason superhero comics never became successful in the world of *Watchmen* was precisely the appearance of these «real» crime-fighters [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 32]. The following two appendices continue to give the reader excerpts from *Under The*

Hood, and these pieces narrate us in detail of the history of the first superheroes, called the «Minutemen» and what became of them: all this additional information brings new events and existents that deepen the narration and explain some of the actions and motives of the characters in the main story, in short, they become a part of the narrative schema the reader constructs. These appendices even at one point manage to pastiche the original comic book conventions of our universe: Adrian Veidt, the superhero Ozymandias, advertises what he calls «Veidt Method»: *a self-improvement course, which includes: [S]eries of physical and intellectual exercise systems which, if followed correctly, can turn YOU into a superhuman, fully in charge of your own destiny. All that is required is the desire for perfection and the will to achieve it* [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 32]. This advertisement is a direct pastiche of the Charles Atlas' advertisements that ran in the comic books in the 1950s, urging «90 pound weaklings» that got picked on at the beach by the bigger boys to send money to Atlas for a subscription to his life changing self-improvement course. Other appendices include a scientific article on the only truly superhuman superhero Dr. Manhattan, declaring that «*God exists and he's American*» [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 31], as well as an outtake on the scrap book of Sally Jupiter (formerly known as Silk Spectre), complete with personal letters and an interview, revealing the unglamorous business side of the superhero profession. All these additions increase the reader's understanding of the universe in which the comic book is located. Seymour Chatman [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 53–54] has developed a hierarchical division between story events: kernels and satellites.

Conclusions and perspectives of future researchers. So, 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. One could say that these written appendices function precisely as these satellites, operating at a deep structural level and by the means of an independent medium [Moore, Gibbons 1987: 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.

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.

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