

THE POWER OF SUBTEXT AND THE POLITICS OF CLOSURE:
AN EXAMINATION OF SELF, REPRESENTATION, AND AUDIENCE IN 3
NARRATIVE FORMS

by

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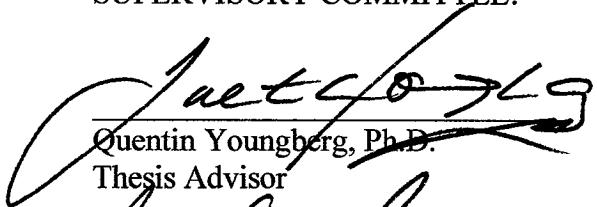
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Quentin Youngberg, Department of English, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

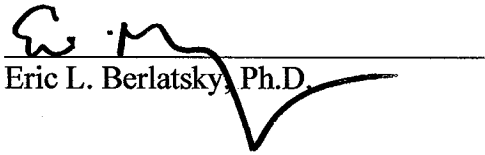
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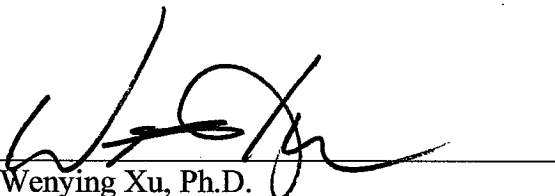
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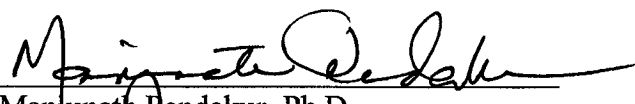
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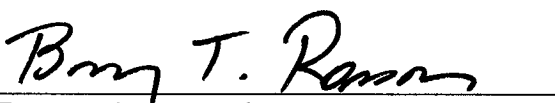
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the ways that certain artists—including Joseph Conrad, Alan Moore, Richard Attenborough, and Francis Ford Coppola—break from their inherited traditions in order to speak from an alternative perspective to western discourse. Conventional narrative formulas prescribe that meaning will be revealed in a definitive end, but all of the texts discussed reveal other avenues through which it is discerned. In *Heart of Darkness*, the tension between two divergent narratives enables Conrad to speak beyond his social context and imperialist limitations to demonstrate that identity is socially constructed. In *Watchmen*, Moore breaks from comic convention to illustrate ways meaning may be ascertained despite the lack of plot ends. The third chapter explores the ways that Attenborough and Coppola subvert technical and plot conventions to resist static constitutions of identity endemic to Hollywood film. The several texts discussed subvert the Self/Other duality by suggesting alternatives to the western narrative model.

For Grams

THE POWER OF SUBTEXT AND THE POLITICS OF CLOSURE: AN
EXAMINATION OF SELF, REPRESENTATION, AND AUDIENCE IN 3
NARRATIVE FORMS

I. THE POLITICS OF CLOSURE.....	1
II: SEEING AND SPEAKING THE OTHER: THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF <i>HEART OF DARKNESS</i>	12
III. WE ARE ALL WATCHMEN: FINDING TRUTH AND MEANING THROUGH BALANCE IN <i>WATCHMEN</i>	30
IV. RESOURCES BEYOND THE REAL: AUTHENTICITY, HISTORY, AND REPRESENTATION IN <i>GREY OWL</i> , <i>APOCALYPSE NOW</i> , AND <i>APOCALYPTO</i>	53
V. CONCLUSION: APOCALYPSE NEVER.....	76
NOTES	78
WORKS CITED	81

I. THE POLITICS OF CLOSURE

According to western telos, narratives have beginnings, middles, and ends, a model derived and observable in The New Testament, which opens with *Matthew* and closes with the *Book of Revelation*. The model provides western man with his origin, as well as with a purpose, one that will ostensibly be unveiled with the second coming. In contemporary times, this ethos persists as the logic dictates that the ends of things will marshal their conclusive resolutions. Though, the recent trend in narrative art, particularly literature and film, is to negate resolution and closure. In contemporary fiction, for instance, the model is problematic when artists broach issues and subjects in which readily definable closure is not ascertained so easily. Often, works intentionally subvert western ideology by interrogating the presuppositions and foundations upon which it relies, and the linear western model is one example. Therefore, the ends of such works may intentionally refuse the audience the closure it is accustomed to. I argue that artists deny their audiences closure to trivialize western formulas such as the Self/Other duality.¹

John Fowles' novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, questions closure by forcing readers to choose between different ends, thus reminding them of the subjective nature of their decision. Whether one accepts the more modern end in which protagonist Charles Smithson potentially reunites with his love interest Sarah Woodruff—shunning Victorian codes of civility—, or the bleaker result, in which it turns out that Sarah h

used Charles to attain social freedom, the text ensures that readers reflect on the outcome they choose. By foregrounding readers' expectation and participation the novel interrogates the dependence on closure. Furthermore, it is pertinent that the novel's examination of closure is linked to its broader concern with interrogating the codes and mores of its context, the Victorian era. Both of these themes are linked to choice, and just as both Charles and Sarah are limited in their choice, readers are intended to recognize that their own are constrained to the two polar ends. Because these two ends do not occur simultaneously in time and space, the logic of the western frame tells that the second end supercedes the one preceding it. In addition, like any written text, it must end because the author will eventually stop writing. Such issues bespeak the limits imposed on authors aiming to resist the conventions of narrative structure. Unless they are already wealthy, authors are also hampered by their publishers' demands. These are some of the economic and practical obstacles that like the biblical and historical models compel authors to exact closure on the fictional universes they have breathed life into. How do artists, including authors and directors, subvert the conventions of the western system even when they, themselves, derive their words, ideas, and fictional realities from the system? In short, how can artists speak the Other while they simultaneously speak the Self? This project suggests that artists approach this conundrum by writing, speaking, and filming on several levels. Negating closure may be impossible on the literal, or plot, level, yet I argue this may be circumvented by artists through the elements provided by their distinct mediums and forms.

In *Reading for Plot*, Peter Brooks explains the result of contemporary western culture's ambivalence towards neat and tidy closure:

Ends, it seems, have become difficult to achieve. In their absence, of their permanent deferral, one is condemned to playing: to concocting endgames, playing in anticipation of a terminal structuring moment of revelation that never comes, creating the space of an as-if, a fiction of reality. (313)

Similarly, In *A Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode explains that prophecies of apocalypse, in the biblical sense, have always failed, and that “Consequently the historical allegory is always having to be revised; time discredits it” (8).² Both scholars finalize their examination by pointing to modern literature of the second half of the twentieth century to show that closure has become an overt fascination in the plot.³ “[Plot] no longer wishes to be seen as end-determined”(Brooks 314). Authors, then, constrained by the western model, aim to undermine these structures by foregrounding closure in their plots. In *French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Charles is confronted by a fictionalized version of Fowles who materializes in order to remind both Charles and readers that closure is an artifice. Authors writing in similar contexts, ranging from Barth to Pynchon, when not toying with closure, abandon it entirely. For instance the final third of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is unreliable because the protagonist’s first-person narration is untrustworthy. As the exemplar of contemporary historical revisionism, such unreliability belies the conventional historical description of India’s independence and foregrounds the writing of history.

In the tension between the literal end and the less material instance of closure there emerges an open-endedness, or lack of closure that enables readers along with the text to glimpse beyond the western viewpoint. Western teleos colludes with reason, science, and identity, and is replaced by insecurity, self-reflection, unreliability, and

open-endedness; all liberating because they repudiate easy acceptance of ideology. In the case of *French Lieutenant's Woman*, by providing readers with two choices, a third end emerges, one through which the value of choice and freedom are emphasized. By forcing readers to engage with the text's fictional universe it demands they confront the roles they play in forming and facilitating ideology in their own world.

The lack of definitive closure corresponds with the emerging western suspicion in the latter half of the 20th century of so-called master narratives such as progress, reason, and science. Accompanying these trends, typically referred to as post-structuralism in the social sciences, is a distrust of religion, truth, and even language. Perhaps the most valuable area where such trivialities have emerged is in the realm of critical race studies, where the uprooting and interrogating of master narratives has led to a more enlightened, egalitarian sort of politics. Those outside of the hegemony may benefit when formulas traditionally viewed as essential are revealed to be context specific. These progressive politics leave western artists at a precarious, yet verdant space. As members of the hegemony, attempts to articulate the discourse of the Other—to question the core values and beliefs of western society—must be scrutinized and interrogated for their motivations and reasons.

The lack of closure trivializes the conception of Self in several ways, including: democratizing the reading and viewing processes by endowing the audience with the responsibility of meaning-making and resolution; engaging textual artifacts of the past to dispel view that history and aesthetic-literary history are complete and absolute; questioning the canon themselves to enable that marginalized texts and narratives are recognized alongside the dominant ones. All are geared towards bringing to the fore the

ways in which the western Self has emerged and defined it-Self at the expense of the Other. Before proceeding, it is necessary to explain the Self and one of the key ways it is examined and criticized by critical race studies.

The modern conception of Self and its relation to the Other is the subject of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. In his book, published in 1978, Said disrupts the western world's view of its Oriental counterpart. Said argues that the Occidental's conception of the Self cannot be adequately understood without exploring the influential role that its Other—the Orient—plays in its construction. Said contends, “the orient has helped to define Europe (or the world) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience,” and that for the West this Other has offered “privileged communal significance” (Leitch 1991). Said's exegesis crucially explains that the Self devises discourse of and about the Other that it relies upon for its own stability and reification. However, the “real” Oriental Other, in its heterogeneity, remains almost entirely beyond the scope of the system of representation, and “is not an inert fact of nature” (Leitch 1993). Said's goal is to place Orientalism—“a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience” (Leitch 1991)—as the key object towards understanding the systems of interdependence and discourse that have collaborated in forming the West's sense of Self.

Further than his description of the Self's dependence on the Other, Said's discussion is relevant to this project in that he deliberately confronts many of the scholars, philosophers, and seminal artists of the western tradition for fostering Orientalist beliefs and practices even when attempting to repudiate them. Said writes:

For if it be true that no production of knowledge in the human sciences

can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances, then it must also be true that for a European or American studying the Orient there can be no disclaiming the main circumstances of *his* actuality; that he comes up against the Orient as a European or American first, as an individual second. (1999)

Said's lesson illustrates that for discourse the political, social, and the economic, are always inseparable. Like closure, this inseparability requires artists to foreground their subject positions even as they interrogate these positions' vantage points.

Before proceeding, it is also necessary to touch on the link between the ethos of the West as it pertains to narrative structure and identity. This will show that the deconstruction of one binary—closure/non-closure—will equivalently attenuate the hierarchal Self/Other duality. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Val Plumwood explains that the nature/ reason duality, which has persisted since Plato's time and has galvanized in force since the Age of Reason, has provided a paradigmatic set of relations for a multitude of other dualities—including Self/Other—that has privileged one side of the binary while hindering the other side. In this paradigm, the gap between nature and reason has provided the rationale for a trajectory of uneven dualities that have served the interests of the (male dominated) hegemony of the west. Plumwood links the western Self to the side of the dualities that have benefited from the uneven duality. She writes:

The same basic structures of self which appear in the treatment of nature as lifeless instrument also underlie the rational egoism and instrumentalism of the market, the treatment of those supposedly less possessed of reason as inferior, and as instruments for their more civilized

western neighbors (as in slavery, colonialism and racism), and the treatment of women as inferior others whose norms of virtue embody a thinly disguised instrumentalism. The deep structures of mastery are lodged now especially in self/other dualism, which weaves a tangled web of exclusions and incorporations between self and other. (3)

The notion of the static, homogenous Self, then, is collusive with the set of practices that privilege reason over nature and extend to favor science, logic, and progress over nature, chaos, and the primitive. In the context of this project, progress is particularly germane because it is inherently linked to the distinct model from which the western narrative structure emerges. The conventional view is that progress is immanent for the human race as a whole, and that primitive societies—along with nature—are inferior because they have progressed less. One may see the connection between this model and western teleos, as witnessed in the Bible for instance, in which the further man and civilization evolve the closer they come to supremacy, perfection, and enlightenment. Thus, the texts discussed here trivialized the entire western model, including the reason/nature and Self/Other dualities, when they subvert the classic model. I argue that even though western narratives are constrained by their linearity, many of the artists and texts approached manage to (self-reflexively) engage with the traditions from which they emerge in helping to guide readers to more egalitarian spaces outside of the conventional model.

As Fowles' text shows, readers will expect and thus interpret meanings differently over the course of history depending on the subject position they occupy. Their positions may greatly diverge from the distinct historical context from that which a given work

emerges. My experience of Homer's *Odyssey*, for instance, will differ from that of Homer's contemporaries. While I will actually read the epic, likely from one anthology or another, Homer's contemporary probably heard the epic told by one of the era's great bards, or even from Homer himself. My experience can never fully emulate Homer's contemporary because the very hermeneutic tools I would use would themselves be significantly different from the ones he or she employed. The point is that the object may never change, but readers' and listeners' dispositions, prejudices, and values do. While I disapprove with Odysseus's decision to prematurely leave Penelope after she had waited 20 years for him to return, a contemporary of Homer probably lauded Odysseus's decision for the obligation to duty it expressed.

The idea that the tools of interpretation may differ between time and place is underscored by Frederic Jameson's momentous commandment, "Always Historicize," which begins his seminal piece on interpretation, "The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act." Jameson reminds us that "texts come before us already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented reading habits and categories developed by [...] interpretive traditions" (Leitch 1937). Jameson's idea precludes any chance that a work might transcend its own representational possibilities and bespeak a universal truth that maintains consistency through disparate time and place. Indeed, artists foreground the subjective nature of their work to transcend the limits of their own "traditions" and to see and speak beyond the limited contexts of their readers. By foregrounding the way truth is devised and how meaning is made, artists may construct hermeneutic frameworks to ensure that readers and viewers across time and space arrive at more subjective conclusions. Because language, in the form of signifiers and signs indelibly transforms,

and politics, both transform, artists employ both structure and theme in order to foreground the act of creating meaning. Therefore, the works discussed in this project communicate their messages by foregrounding the hermeneutic tools required for reading and viewing. As I show, the linear plot line is unavoidable, so artists will implant a sub-theme or plot that juxtaposes with the events that are explicit in the narratives to foreground the precariousness of the western system. As such, all of the works here contain multiple trajectories. Typically, the dominant trajectory materializes in the literal story or plot. These plots will usually pander to the norms and conventions of the western linear narrative. The secondary trajectory, however, will engage with the dominant one, often undermining in its juxtaposed tension, resistance, and conversation. The following works not only acknowledge the limits of western subjectivity, but also inform readers of their dispositions and prejudices as they simultaneously offer new insights and ways of reading texts and worlds. Most of the texts disrupt, or at least interrogate, western subjectivity by emphasizing the way Otherness and theoretical and real Others are co-opted by the Self as it constructs and reifies identity—as Said shows in the context of Orientalism.

Chapter 1, “Seeing and Speaking Truth: The Limits and Possibilities of *Heart of Darkness*,” is concerned with the limits of Joseph Conrad’s novella. The most resounding of these limits is the difficulty that Conrad faced in both seeing and speaking beyond the Self’s ‘imperial gaze,’ which as Chinua Achebe explains in his critique of the novella, typified the “English liberal tradition,”(7) to which Conrad belonged. A Polish born, trilingual British subject in fin de siècle 19th century, Conrad aims to provide a lens through which readers might view colonialism and its alternative. As such, this chapter rescues

Conrad from Achebe's condemnation by suggesting that *Heart of Darkness* is constructed from two opposing narratives that in their irreconcilability and tension, shows the contradictory and "hollow" nature of colonialist rhetoric. Writing of the opposing levels of plot and meaning in Conrad's novella, Brooks proposes that "[*HOD*] displays an acute self-consciousness about the agonizing features of traditional narrative, working with them still, but suspiciously, with constant reference to the inadequacy of the inherited orders of meaning"(238). By trivializing the narrative structure, language, space, even desire of western subjectivity, Conrad shows the way truth may be transmitted through the "unspeakable" Other.

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's classic graphic novel, *Watchmen*, is the focus of chapter 2, entitled, "We are all *Watchmen*: Finding Truth and Meaning through Balance in Alan Moore's *Watchmen*." The chapter argues Moore's work demonstrates that because closure is impossible, truth and morality must be devised and fostered by the collaborative process of reading integral to comic books. This process characterizes the entire medium, but in *Watchmen* it is foregrounded both in the theme and structure. Because this process is collaborative, the graphic novel ultimately shows the way disparate vantage points may combine to engender more subjective and contingent truths. In *Watchmen*, this truth manifests in an unconventional rendering of the Manichean binary—formerly integral to the ideology of comics—which posits former superhero Adrian Veidt as the potential villain. However, because of closure's absence in the novel, such steadfast categorizations remain impossible. By rejecting the notion of hero and villain, *Watchmen* ultimately rejects static identities that the western tradition has previously relied on in constructing Selfhood.

The third chapter explores how meaning, truth, and identity are foregrounded by the directors of three different films—*Grey Owl* (1998), *Apocalypto*, (2006) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979)—to explore issues of representation. The chapter shows that the different tools and resources endowed by the postmodernism, mass media landscape with its proliferation of information, enables directors to rewrite historical narratives that defy both mainstream film and the western perspective from which it derives. The chapter suggests that in some cases, like in *Grey Owl*, directors can harness the audience's pre-existing knowledge to construct meaning through unprecedented forms. In other cases, like Gibson's *Apocalypto*, directors co-opt stereotypes of marginalized groups to reify the Self and disavow their tenuous subjectivity. However, in such cases, the availability of information beyond the text reveals the directors' ideological intentions. Finally, in other instances, like *Apocalypse Now*, directors might engage intertextually with source material and the western aesthetic tradition to foster meaning and diverse perspectives. In all, the postmodern landscape and its emphasis on difference, intertextuality, and the proliferation of information and signs enables authors and directors to critically disengage from inherited traditions and to illuminate new identities and subjective positions that ultimately signify transformation and change, thus fostering utopias yet to be circumscribed by the hegemonic status quo.

II: SEEING AND SPEAKING THE OTHER: THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF *HEART OF DARKNESS*

In the arduous task of subverting the status quo in order to eliminate it writers often inhabit limited subjective positions. In *Heart of Darkness*,⁴ Joseph Conrad, from inside the Empire, aims to write beyond the limits of the imperial gaze in critiquing the western perspective which privileges the European, white, male over the purportedly less civilized, and thus less adequate, black, African male. A deconstruction of this hierarchy could feasibly undermine the theoretical underpinnings of the entire colonial system. Conrad, however, was a British subject, and member of the “European liberal tradition,” (Achebe 7) a class whose members, according to Chinua Achebe, in “An Image of Africa,” were able to sympathize with the plight of blacks in their being subjected to colonialism’s malice, but were unable to imagine an alternative to colonialism—a vision of the world not circumscribed by the imperialist gaze. Marlow, Conrad’s protagonist, recognizes that his European workers, “pilgrims,” are more tyrannical and have less “restraint” (one of the standard and most desirable European values in the novella) than the African workers. However, just as his criticism attenuates the idea of civilization, it employs “restraint,” a pillar of western civilization, to measure the nobility of the Africans’ behavior and the “pilgrim’s” lack. Beyond these trivial moments, *Heart of Darkness* strives to materialize a truth beyond the scope of ordinary language, which must always fall back on its routine and familiar signifiers. Because of the ways that

reason, language, and even narrative structure collude with colonial discourse, Conrad must utilize his distinct aesthetic to counter convention in unveiling truth and speaking the Other of this discourse.

Conrad's narrative strategy is composed of multiple, often-contradictory levels. Within each of level there are also beliefs and viewpoints that contradict one another. In his tale, Marlow repeatedly contrasts Europeans and Africans to deconstruct the binary, yet on the surface these moments are fleeting. For example, Marlow opens up his tale asserting that the Thames, the birthplace for "the dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires," has also been, as Africa is now, "one of the darkest places of the earth" (Conrad 39). This comparison locates Marlow and also the novella within a specific time and place, suggesting that perspective is contingent and varies with context. Showing the subjective nature of experience allows for the possibility that colonialism is one outcome of many, as "the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much"(Conrad 41). In another instance, Marlow relates the sound of "far off drums" in the wilderness with "the sound of bells in a "Christian country," (Conrad 56) overtly trivializing western orthodoxy and religion. Thus, Marlow is not beyond criticizing Europe and praising Africans, but his scope is limited, as is evinced by his use of Africa as a reference point to refer to the darkness that once characterized the Thames; and his offering that that which isn't pretty is redeemed by an "idea"(Conrad 41). Because Marlow represents the prototype of the European gentleman he must eventually stray from looking into it "too

much, “ expressing, “the essentials of this affair lay deep under the surface, beyond my reach, and beyond my power of meddling”(Conrad 79).

Conrad exhibits these limits in what Marlow can know and say, and in what he cannot know and is unable to express. Such limitations are poignant when Marlow must disrupt the linearity of his narrative to respond to his listeners’ sighs; they either do not believe, or do not consent to, Marlow’s claim that he felt truly despondent after his helmsman’s death. “I couldn’t have felt more of a lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed something of my destiny in life,” Marlow relates (Conrad 89). Then, in response to their sighs, he asks, “why do you sigh in this beastly way, somebody?”(Conrad 89). More than slyly downgrading his audience to “beasts,” a designation they would likely employ in referring to the natives, their response testifies to the limits Conrad faces in narrating the unspeakable to his four auditors emblemizing the pillars of colonialism: the Director of Companies, the pilot of the *Nellie* who represents the businessman; the lawyer, its legal sanctioner; and Marlow, the skilled rhetorician. Their censure of Marlow is echoed by his own self-censure when he chooses not to listen to the harlequin describe Kurtz’s “unspeakable rites,” relating, “I don’t want to know anything of the ceremonies used when approaching Kurtz”(Conrad 103). This self-reflexive moment, both in the diegetic world of Marlow’s tale and one tier beyond it in his world aboard the *Nellie* symbolizes Conrad boldly demonstrating what cannot be expressed directly.

Achebe’s acerbic condemnation of Conrad and his text helps explain the limits Conrad experienced as he belonged to “European liberal tradition,” which “touched all the best minds of the age in England, Europe, and America,” and “took different forms

in the minds of different people but almost always managed to sidestep the ultimate question between white people and black people” (Achebe 7,8). Although, Conrad is able to acknowledge the facts of the matter, the similarities between blacks and whites; and moreover, that whites are capable of tyranny, malice, and greed, yet his narrative indelibly leaves western subjectivity stable and intact. This stability is affected in Marlow’s ambivalence, through which he is able to contest colonial rhetoric, but is compelled to ultimately accept that an “idea” may redeem all of these perfidies.

Achebe contends that these politics implicate “Marlow/ Conrad” as racist and the novella, itself, as an exercise in colonialism (8). However, there are several other characters throughout the novella that should be equally recognized as mouthpieces for Conrad. Added to this, the multilayered structure prohibits readers from relying on one voice, and the indeterminacy of the frame narrator, who delivers the entire novella from an unknowable subject position, precludes reductive readings.

Rather than positioning Marlow as a direct, unmediated mouthpiece for Conrad, the novella substitutes higher, aesthetic principles and truths for Marlow’s individual perspective. In the novella, truth is not conveyed directly because language is inherently flawed and inextricable from society and discourse. Instead, the unnamed, frame narrator prescribes the way meaning should be gleaned in the novella:

The yarns of seaman have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be accepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of

those misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (Conrad 40)

As such, Conrad, through Marlow, is able to transcend the limits of the imperial gaze in disseminating truth through avenues other than direct, mediated language. Western civilization's typical association of light with progress, knowledge, and god, is inverted as the notion of what light represents is trivialized. This occurs literally when Marlow responds to his aunt's claim that he is "an emissary of light," by calling it "rot"(Conrad 48). Readers are tacitly reminded not to condone the easy association, like when Marlow admits, "I know that sunlight can be made to lie too" (Conrad 119). In fact, it is darkness to which the unnamed frame narrator's description points towards for finding meaning: in the "haze," and the "spectral illumination of moonshine," instead of sunlight.

Furthermore, the novella is contoured as a trek into the *heart of darkness*, where truth is most likely to be found. All of these tropes are metaphorical for the narrative murkiness in which Conrad locates truth in the unlikely and fortuitous instance that readers will stumble upon it.

There are two altering, contradictory trajectories in *Heart of Darkness*.⁵ The imperialist trajectory tells that despite its pitfalls colonialism is validated by what Marlow claims is its redeeming idea. This idea is cemented by Marlow's lie to the Intended, an instance of closure that suggests civilization is worth upholding, even when these foundations are constructed of lies and if preclude the spread of truth. The other trajectory, both more moral and truthful, defies the notion of closure and implies that because subjectivities are socially contingent a new way of viewing and categorizing the world must be devised—one that does not objectify and enslave. The way these two

contradictory and opposing viewpoints enable truth in *Heart of Darkness* is understood though D.A. Miller's conception of closure in the novel. In *Narrative and Its Discontents*, Miller explains that closure in the novel is often paradoxical. Writing of the "narratable," or the instance of disequilibrium, suspense, and general insufficiency from which a given narrative appears to arise"(ix), Miller poses that there is often discord between the Utopic endings of many works and the "narrative means used to reach it"(x). In short, because novelists rely on internal tension (dramatic incidents, antagonism, suspense, and dialogue are a few), the moment of closure is always dramatically irreconcilable with the "principles of production"(xi), which are these tense moments. The several diverse viewpoints held by Marlow and others tend to be "dramatically irreconcilable," and are consequently left out from Conrad's equation of truth. In this equation, the mere existence of these perspectives—their instability, inconsistency, and the inability of the centers to hold—proffer the truth of civilization and subjectivity, that their footholds can be reduced to the specific moment only. Miller concludes that narrative bodies are not "governed" by closure; almost as if closure in narratives is sloppily tagged onto the end because narratives have to end at some point. Closure's inadequacy here suggests that Conrad panders to the conventional formula of writing and storytelling only because there is no alternative. Although, to reflect on this position and the necessity it entails, Conrad provides two narrative trajectories: the one in which Marlow closes the book on colonialism, and the one where he must tell and re-tell his tale, itself a self-conscious reflection on the socially constructed nature of western subjectivity and its distinct teleology.

Miller's poetic is especially useful for interpreting the disjunction between Conrad's goal and the overt themes of Marlow's tale. In the latter, utopia is precluded by a lie, even though several other moments would suggest an alternate end. Though, all of these elements, including the framing narrative and the extra-texts, render a more utopic vision that is in accordance with Conrad's vision. This schematic suggests that the juxtaposition between dystopia and utopia, one ending with a lie and one in which truth is told indirectly, at best, is purposeful. This possibility is directly supported by the unnamed narrator's explanation of Marlow's storytelling.

Because of some of his inherent limitations, like reader expectation, conventional narrative structures, and even language, Conrad must sacrifice direct facts for a higher aesthetic imperative. Conrad was a Polish born, émigré, who became a British subject at the age of 29, and who wrote in his third language, English; Polish and French being his first two. In this the writer inhabited a liminal space between diverse, and often opposing, linguistic worlds. Both his liminality and hybridity permitted him an idiosyncratic style, in addition to an expansive vocabulary, both which enabled Conrad to see and write beyond the narrow scope of the imperial gaze. As Ian Watt shows, one of Conrad's preferred methods, "delayed decoding," enabled him to circumvent societal discourse by highlighting the disparity between unmediated experience and experience formatted in the language of the hegemony. In "delayed decoding," "physical impression must precede the understanding of the cause" (Watt 318). In this, Conrad employs style to supplant societal discourse with the individual, subjective viewpoint, which ostensibly represented truth more honestly. In this, readers must stumble through the "haze" of meaning as Marlow stumbles through his own experience. By defamiliarizing readers and

casting the narrative image in haze devoid of society's signifiers, Conrad is able to induce a more truthful experience.

An example of "delayed decoding" is situated in the episode where Marlow discovers that Kurtz, who earlier had been transported aboard Marlow's steamer to be shipped back to civilization, has disappeared. Marlow's reacts:

I think I would have raised an outcry if I had believed my eyes. But I didn't believe them at first—the thing seemed so impossible. The fact is I was completely unnerved by a sheer blank fright, pure abstract terror unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger. What made this emotion so overpowering was—how shall I define it?—the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly. This lasted of course the merest fraction of a second, and then the usual sense of commonplace, deadly danger, the possibility of a sudden onslaught and massacre, or something of a kind, which I saw was welcome and composing. It pacified me, in fact, so much that I did not raise an alarm.
(Conrad 110)

Conrad employs "delayed decoding" to divide Marlow's response into two categories. In his initial response, Marlow's sense impressions show his fear and apprehension towards confronting Kurtz on neutral territory, where Marlow will be without recourse to the "restraint" inscribed in his steamer, on which "only it seemed I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life"(Conrad 6). Marlow's first response demonstrates he is unable to relinquish his imperial gaze because his subjectivity is tied to the west's conception of

space. Literally, going “ashore” means risking becoming a decapitated head impaled on a post, yet Marlow’s true fear is engendered by his carnal knowledge that in confronting Kurtz his “restraint” will be tested because it means facing the darkness without a foothold. Civilization is an automatic defense against both of these risks, and Marlow’s boat is a metonym for civilization because it strictly accords with the sailor’s code of conduct, a faith in order and civility that provides a barrier to the chaos and disorder on the outside. Leaving this space implies that Marlow’s gentile English values and his subjectivity will be tested and inexorably attenuated, and yet to exhibit and explore this tension Conrad employs “delayed decoding.”

Marlow’s fear demonstrates that western subjectivity is subjective and contingent, and it is also an expression for Conrad’s aim to show that he is torn between his western subjectivity and his desire to show its artificiality. This tension also manifests in Marlow’s need to speak with Kurtz, who personifies western civilization’s Other. “For me it [his steamboat] traveled towards Kurtz—exclusively” (Conrad 75). On the one level, Kurtz ideally embodies western civilization in his adeptness at ascending the corporate ladder. Marlow is told that one day Kurtz will be promoted to manager, and the current manager residing at the Central Station views Kurtz as a rival to be defeated. Although, Kurtz’s ascendance is ultimately ironic because the very skills that enable him to advance professionally eventually lead to both his literal demise, or death, and his ontological transformation, which in the novella’s overt logic means *going native*. In this, Kurtz epitomizes those traits that western industrialism and mercantilism deem admirable taken to their extreme. By showing that within Kurtz’s corporate ascendance there is not only a moral decline but also a literal and figurative inversion, the novella questions the

highest level of Self that might be obtained through virtue, industry, and oratory. Despite representing “all of Europe,” Kurtz inexorably embodies all that Europe must repress.

This is salient in that quality, Kurtz’s loquacity, through which Marlow most connects with the Kurtz he has yet to encounter. Presumably, Kurtz, as a “voice,” will disseminate the most moral and humane prescription for dealing with the natives. This is evident in Kurtz’s document, “Suppression of Savage Customs,” in which language and meaning arrive at their own extremes when Kurtz finalizes his pamphlet by demanding, “Exterminate all the Brutes.” In this manner, the Kurtz that Marlow finds at the end of the river is not an exemplar of European etiquette and manners but the inverse, or Other, of this, as his words and actions continually resist meaning and in them rational, reason, and logic become grotesque. Such trivialities deconstruct etiquette and other European qualities by showing that like language they are veneers that hold weakly in praxis. However, despite his pretenses about listening to Kurtz’s “discourse,” when Marlow finally encounters Kurtz in the jungle he threatens him to gain back control. “I had some vague notion of falling upon him and giving him a drubbing” (Conrad 110). In Marlow’s ambivalence, the tension between his desire and his disavowal, Conrad shows that the emptiness and hollowness of colonial rhetoric.

This dynamic is effected because in the logic of the novella Kurtz, who is no longer the “original Kurtz” made by all of Europe, becomes the Other of western civilization, a “hollow man” (Conrad 103). Because he is the Other, Marlow will try to both identify with him and try to master him. The former is evinced in the several instances where Marlow aligns himself with Kurtz against the “pilgrims” and the other Company workers, his “choice of nightmares”(Conrad 107). There is consistent tension

in this purported connection. Marlow claims to be buried “in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets,” (122) like Kurtz, but he denies the “harlequin’s” attempts to inform him the very nature of these, claiming, “I don’t want to know.” Marlow’s relation with knowledge echoes his connection with Kurtz. Despite his purported connection, Marlow eventually admits, “I did not go with him,”(124) which shows that the two are separated by a precipice, as Marlow tells, “Kurtz has “stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot”(Conrad 117).

Marlow’s purported link with Kurtz can be read through the lens of Lacan’s concept of ego formation. According to Lacan’s model, the Self, or Ego, is formed when the infant first looks in the mirror and views an idealized image of itself unhampered by its own lack of motor skills. From this moment, the infant identifies its own lack with the mother and wholeness with the mirror image.⁶ The experience fosters a life-long ambivalence towards the Other because it signifies both lack and the desire for wholeness. In the novella, Conrad implicitly touches on this ambivalence to show Marlow’s association with Kurtz. When Marlow enters the jungle to retrieve Kurtz he “confounds” the sound of the “dream-beat” of Kurtz’s followers with the beat of his own heart.

Kurtz’s role as the Other, rather than the African natives, who are mere “set pieces” has two functions. While Conrad’s readership would probably have not accepted an explicit demonstration of a European man becoming an actual savage, Kurtz’s transformation into the Other serves the definitive purpose of exploring the Otherness of the Self, questions crucial to the progressive views on race and identity the novella implicitly strives towards. In short, in revealing the Other’s dependency on the Self, the

latter is trivialized and shown to be little more than a social artifice. Though, the instant he confronts Kurtz Marlow is convinced, “his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad. I had—for my sins, I suppose—to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself”(Conrad 112). Rather than look into his own “Self” at this definitive moment, Marlow feigns to look into Kurtz,” effectively, reestablishing the divide between Self and Other.

There are two levels to the way Conrad interrogates space in order to undermine the Self/Other binary. The logic underlying Marlow’s realization that he will have to “go ashore” is that his ship is a literal and figurative cordon sanitaire that protects him from physical and psychological (or ontological and epistemological danger). This notion is also salient in Marlow’s comparison of the Roman “commander,” for whom there was “no going ashore,” with the “decent young citizen in the toga,” forced to “live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable,” and finally begotten by the fascination of the abomination”(Conrad 41). The pointed message is that “going ashore” is not wise because that is where the European traveler succumbs to “the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate”(Conrad 41). This ideology underpinning this view is literalized in Fresleven, Marlow’s Danish successor who was murdered when he went ashore to settle a dispute over some trivial issue. Although, on another level the dualities embedded in the boat/wilderness dichotomy is trivialized. For instance, the boundary of the ship is disintegrated when the helmsman is struck by an errant spear. The fact that, as Marlow learns, Kurtz’s followers had flung the

spears out of fear (that their deity would be taken from them), rather than malice, further attenuates western logic in its chaos.⁷

Plumwood's explanation of the ways that the Self/Other duality is couched in terms of reason and nature helps to show several of the dualities foregrounded in the novella. The western ethos routinely locates subjectivity in spatial terms, so Conrad trivializes identity through space. Marlow believes that traveling into "prehistoric" Africa will enable him to glimpse truths that are unmediated by social code.⁸ Like Conrad, who dreamed of traveling to far away places as a youth, Marlow also refers to his childhood fantasies, when he would lose himself in thoughts of exploring the "blank spaces" on the map. Marlow, in typical modernist fashion, equates knowledge with power and subjectivity. Plumwood explains how nature, as an Other, along with other Others, is instrumentalised, entirely amenable to be treated as a means to an end for the Self because it is silent and silenced. Because the "spaces" are blank, they are ripe to be explored and colonized. In *Postmodern Fiction*, Brian McHale explains that the map for Marlow "stands at the center of a typical modernist structure. That of illusion and disillusionment" (54). However. The novella shows that such visions are ultimately products of fantasy. Not only are these spaces populated, but anthropomorphically, the wilderness, with its "stillness [...] an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention"(Conrad 74) has its own form of agency, and able to pose its own resistance to these fantasies of knowledge. This is literalized in the disappearance of the Eldorado Expedition, led by the Manager's Uncle, which went into the patient wilderness, that closed upon it as a sea closes over a diver"(Conrad 73).

Marlow learns that the wilderness, a spatial Other, follows its own rules. His childhood fantasies are contradicted in the jungle's refusal to serve as an unwilling and passive recipient of western knowledge awaiting colonization. Despite the preconceptions, the jungle is not a silent Other awaiting domination by Europe, but an entity signifying the "real" enigmatic Others interminable elusiveness. In his description, Marlow, rather, treats the "god forsaken" jungle anthropomorphically, with its "smiling, fawning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage and always mute with an air of whispering"(Conrad 48). In fact, because it is "mute" and as such directly opposed to the empty and vainly depicted discourse of colonialism, we are meant to favor the jungle over its new inhabitants. After all Kurtz, the epitome of voice, sound, and discourse, is empty, vacant, and tells Marlow and the readers as much by what he is not—and doesn't say—than what he does. One of the poignant ironies in Marlow's wish to speak with Kurtz is that Kurtz say's very little directly, and what he does say is ultimately mad, incoherent, and intangible.

Like Kurtz, the mysterious jungle is also an Other that is both luring and elusive. Marlow explains, "the silence of the land went home to one's very heart—its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life"(Conrad 63). Also like Kurtz, Marlow will seek to repudiate the jungle and its answers for the more mundane tasks associated with his ship and thus civilization. This tension, between enlightenment and duty, persists, as through Marlow Conrad teeters on the edge of enlightenment and re-establishment of the status quo. For Conrad, this tension has a dual function of making the truth accessible, and self-censure, ensuring that he does not offend the noble, "high minded" sensibilities of readers unable to palate what his message implies Marlow's own

ambivalence, between grasping and making his readers see, and his dependence on western moorings is exhibited in his habitual reference to the “idea.” It is also explicit when explains, “When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality—I tell you, fades. The inner truth is hidden—luckily, luckily”(Conrad 74). Though such notions of “restraint” and “efficiency,” that is “something you can setup, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to”(Conrad 41), are trivialized by Marlow, himself, when he observes the “restrain” in the natives aboard his boat who do not resort to cannibalism despite the fact their hippo meat has gone rotten. “Restraint!” Marlow exclaims, What possible restraint”(Conrad 83).

Marlow’s reliance on the western moorings entwined in his responsibilities also explains his elation in finding Towson’s book, which he eventually learned belonged to the harlequin that he will meet soon meet downriver. Marlow considers his connection to the book an “old friend and solid friendship,” that “with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungles and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real”(Conrad 78-9). Marlow’s use of “real” to describe his feelings harkens back to the western view of the universe, one marked by order, rational, and coherent language and subjectivity. More than simply reuniting Marlow with the familiar contours of western gentility and seamanship, the book provides a tether to those feelings associated with the West and civilization that must feel so foreign to him at this point in the journey, The opposite of this is found in the harsh realities of the jungle which denies simple narration and explanation, and also de-values western rhetoric on morality.

Indeed, this dichotomy, between civilization and the wilderness, is also salient in the way the wilderness keeps Marlow away from the “truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion,”(Conrad 40), and the river, or surf, which connotes, a “positive pleasure like the speech of a brother”[...] something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning”(Conrad 9). In their contradictory nature, this tension indicates the constructedness of identity. This is a different reality in which voice is vilified because it is tied to rhetoric, which means that silence is actually superior. This inverts the western hierarchy that both praises and relies on discourse to promulgate its ideas. It also suggests that readers should be conscious about the politicized nature of discourse.

The contradictions in *Heart of Darkness* are overt, forcing readers to confront the contradictory nature of the western system. Language is both the object and vehicle for truth. On the surface, Marlow criticizes the language of colonial discourse. He does not accept the labels used by the “pilgrims” in referring to the African workers. “There has been enemies, criminals, workers”(Conrad 103), he exhorts. Marlow also doubts the so-called benevolence of the colonizers with their “noble cause,” (Conrad 44) and “high and just proceedings”(Conrad 52), and even disputes his aunt’s claim. For Marlow colonialism is epitomized in the purposeless “boiler” in the grass”(Conrad 51), and the holes in the ground devoid of any ostensible reason, which are amplified in their futility by the fact that “no change appeared on the face of the rock”(Conrad 50).

However, despite the overwhelming futility and vanity of the enterprise Marlow chooses to uphold it with his lie to Kurtz’s Intended. In the novella, and particularly for Marlow, women embody that which is worth saving and defending, as “they—the

women I mean—are out of it—should be out of it. We must help them stay in that beautiful world of their own, les ours gets worse”(Conrad 90). Marlow lies to Kurtz’s Intended—who in her picture painted by Kurtz is “draped” and blindfolded, suggesting the blind innocence of civilization, and carrying a lit torch, the light of progress, while all else is shrouded in blackness—because the truth will likely destroy her, along with the civilization she personifies. Despite all his talk of truth and justice, which are emblemized in Kurtz’s final double utterance about “The Horror,” Marlow explains to The Intended that “The last word he [Kurtz] pronounced was—your name,” precluding the possibility for truth and “justice”(Conrad 124), for “the salvation of another soul”(Conrad 120). However, readers are meant to be suspicious about the tension between Marlow’s lie and all of the purported claims and striving for truth as well as his earlier screed against lies, which he claims to detest, "You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie (Conrad 77). Marlow may be locked within his subjectivity, but readers are forced to consider and question Marlow’s narratorial perspective in the conflict between his claim to detest lies and his final lie.

Marlow conceals Kurtz’s final proclamation because it is a testament to civilization’s dependence on meaning and resolution. In it he witnesses a “veil [that] had been rent,”(Conrad 120), which opposes western civilization’s dependence on closure. As the pivotal instance of the novella, Kurtz’s final legacy, which the Intended is never privy to but that presents a hermeneutic puzzle that harangues expectant readers and confronts them with their own dependence on, desire for, and inclination towards closure. The circularity of this linguistic and referential puzzle juxtaposes with Marlow’s singular trek and return. The resistance to interpretation counters the linear, phallogocentric view of

history that underpins colonial discourse. Marlow has only one opportunity to endow Kurtz lover with his legacy, a chance he spoils. Though this moment ends unfortunately for her, readers are not the Intended and they have infinite chances to discern truth in the novella. Located outside of Marlow's world and even beyond the unnamed narrator's frame, readers are privy to a host of competing and conflicting tales and discursive positions in Marlow's direct tale, and in the unnamed narrator's frame.⁹

Further contradiction is also poignant in Kurtz's pamphlet and its final command. Both malicious and entirely outside the paradigm of understanding, readers must abandon any previously held stations in order to digest it in the least. Even though Marlow, himself, is indebted to society and cannot breach its accepted conduct and knowledge, there ultimately remains tension between his dependence on the western modes of interpretation and its signifiers and his desire to escape from the limits of this construct. His final lie curtails to the western reliance on definitive closure. However, Marlow's tale is constantly belied by his own contradictions, as well as the circular narrative, which the unnamed narrator finalizes with an invocation to open-endedness, "the offing was barred by a black bang of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness"(Conrad 120). In *Heart of Darkness*, there are two rivers: one which transports Marlow, and readers through him, back to the "lie" of civilization; and the other, which leads readers into the "heart of immense darkness," which is not Africa, but truth unbounded by the *light* of discourse and politics.

III. WE ARE ALL WATCHMEN: FINDING TRUTH AND MEANING THROUGH BALANCE IN *WATCHMEN*

For nearly 20 years since it was first issued in 1986, writer Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons's graphic novel *Watchmen*¹¹ was labeled a classic by comic book readers. In 2008, director Zack Snyder brought the storyline to a mainstream audience with a *Watchmen* film. A whopping 162 minutes, Snyder's rendition is a testament of his devotion towards bringing Moore's work to the silver-screen. This is achieved in all but the climax, which diverges considerably from the graphic novel's end, in which billionaire entrepreneur Adrian Veidt¹² teleports a gigantic, artificial squid into New York City that obliterates half of the population with a psychic shockwave. Formerly known as the crime fighting superhero Ozymandias, Veidt is an unconventional villain who commits his crime to save the world, rather than to destroy it. His goal is to foster a "united world" (11.8) by "frightening it towards salvation with history's greatest practical joke" (11.24). Using the squid, Veidt tricks people into believing earth is being attacked by aliens from another dimension, which temporarily ends the standoff between the U.S. and U.S.S.R.¹³ In the film, the squid and the subplot hinting of its elaborate construction—Veidt's kidnapping and subsequent murder of several well-known artists, including a painter, comic book writer, sculptor, and the brain of a dead telepath—are absent. In exchange, the film version of Veidt ensures that Dr. Manhattan, who he has

duped into lending Veidt his powers under the pretense of using them to create an alternative fuel source, is blamed. The terror of nuclear threat that resounds in the graphic novel is replaced in the film by fear of dwindling energy sources, an anxiety specific to Snyder's 21st century and not Moore's late 20th.

Watchmen's superheroes are normal people with flaws and limitations, and Moore's story portrays how the "real" world might respond socially and politically to the existence of über-men and women. While the general public, after a short love-affair, rejects the intrusion of these masked heroes and vigilantism into their lives, the U.S. government views Manhattan and The Comedian as valuable weapons and incorporates them into their arsenal. Local heroes are forced into retirement by the Keene Act, which outlaws masked vigilantism, while the mercenary Rorschach defies the Keene Act and continues to dish out his own brand of cold justice. The implication is that people will indelibly detest vigilantism because it negates the status quo of the rigid, law-based system of society. Beyond the social and political implications of the presence of superheroes, Moore's work also explores issues of morality and epistemology that comics have previously taken for granted.

Watchmen engages with these conventions by showing that signifiers 'hero' and 'villain,' or more broadly, the Manichean binary, conventionally assumed in comics, are outmoded in the morally dense and murky postmodern world. Because the binary, formerly essential to the worldview underpinning the comic book archetype, is inadequate to describe the Cold War scenario, new methods of understanding and categorizing the world must be devised. In *Apocalyptic Transformation*, Elizabeth Rosen explains, "Moore is thus poised to reinterpret the apocalyptic myth in distinctly post-

modern ways, experimenting with notions of the apocalyptic ‘world,’ challenging strictly dualistic notions of morality, and incorporating the multiplicity and indeterminacy that postmodernism endorses” (2). Yet, the apocalyptic moment, itself, is what is principally elided in Moore’s apocalypse. Veidt’s plan ultimately fails, precluding notions of revelation and enlightenment—Manhattan informs, “Nothing ever ends,” (12.27)—so characters, along with readers, must fashion alternate ways of solving problems and finding meaning. This chapter argues that in the absence of revelation and closure—in-between an unfulfilled apocalypse and an obsolete moral prescription—characters may discern and foster truth only by collaborating with one another. The graphic novel’s structure, which is echoed by its theme, shows how various forms of discourse may participate in constructing a uniform truth. It is telling that the final panel of the plot reads, “I leave it entirely in your hands”(12. 32). Literally uttered by the editor of *The New Frontiersman* to his employee Seymour, and giving the later freedom to decide the story, these words also refer—metafictionally—to readers in constructing their own outcome after the graphic novel’s end.

This chapter highlights some of the key moments in which the value of balancing disparate discourse is stressed, a lack of balance that inhibits objective resolution—through closure—but enables a reading experience that advocates choice and responsibility on the part of readers, who ultimately might see themselves in contravention to Veidt, who fails in his responsibility. In Moore’s version, the balanced consensus of varied perspective manifests in the Manichean binary’s ambiguity. But even this particular ambiguity, an important prerequisite for balance, is countered by the protagonist Rorschach’s conservative “black white no gray” creed, which renders it

tedious and unreliable to privilege liberal readings of the text. Snyder's film, however, lacks this ambiguity and, consequently, balance, because the nature/science duality stands in for the Manichean one. This lack is salient when Manhattan, the epitome of both the positives and negatives of science, is exiled from earth for the second time.¹⁴ When Veidt tells reporters, "Our Cold War with the Russians isn't ideological; it's based upon fear...fear of not having enough. If we make resources infinite we make war obsolete," the audience witnesses the film's negative treatment of technology. In Moore's work, technology is equally dubious, but only in the context of the graphic novel's more extensive concern with ideology. It is no accident that in the film Manhattan, and not the aesthetically brilliant creation of the squid, is set up by Veidt to serve as the sacrificial lamb. In a post-9.11 world, this anti-science perspective, only one step away from Gore-an global warming politics, is more resonant than Moore's aesthetic focus could have been. Moreover, the literary self-conscious reverberating loudly throughout the graphic novel was translatable into the film which lacks these specific concerns. While Moore's work has drastically altered the trajectory of comic books, Snyder's work is split between his allegiance towards its source and the studio issues that mired it prior to and during production; issues which surpassed Snyder's creative autonomy.¹⁵ When asked of his decision to alter Moore's end, Snyder claimed he wanted his version to be more accessible to mainstream viewers, but as any fan loyal to Moore's *Watchmen* fan should know, most of Moore's subtext, like his self-consciousness toward comic books and their history, were beyond the medium's capacity. In Moore, these tropes help articulate the role of balance in fostering both meaning and alternative moral prescriptions. Even though the graphic novel is the primary focus of this chapter, its divergence from the film

is an apt starting point for showcasing the relations between balance, plot, and visual narrative in Moore's *Watchmen*. Therefore, the following analysis abandons the film to concentrate on the poetic of meaning that emerges exclusively from Moore's text.

Moore's text begins with Rorschach searching for a killer, "Waiting for a flash of enlightenment in all this blood and thunder" (5.6). Unbeknownst to Rorschach, Veidt murdered The Comedian to prevent him from disclosing the truth about his plot to characters and readers. Veidt eventually confesses, but only when his plan has been set in motion. "I'm not a republic serial villain. Do you seriously think I'd explain my master-stroke if there remained the slightest chance of you affecting the outcome," Veidt asks Dreiberg (11.27). After his "master-stroke" is carried out, allowing humanity to learn the truth would only render all the deaths in vain, so the others agree to keep it secret. Rorschach believes, "Evil must be punished. Even in the face of Armageddon" (1.24), however, and views concealing the truth as a compromise to his "black and white no grey" creed. Therefore, Manhattan is forced to murder Rorschach before he returns and tells about Veidt's plot. Although, before departing with Dreiberg for Karnac, Veidt's arctic base, Rorschach mails his journal recounting his investigation to the right-wing newspaper, *The New Frontiersman*, where it is discovered in the mail by Seymour. The journal correctly predicts that behind The Comedian's death there is a labyrinthine conspiracy to kill off masks, if not even something more complex. In his last entry, Rorschach presciently speaks to his readers with a foot already in the grave: "if reading this now, whether I am alive or dead; you will know truth: whatever precise nature of this conspiracy, Adrian Veidt is responsible" (9.22). It is possible that sometime after the story ends, Seymour will publish Rorschach's story, consequently upending Veidt's plan

and restoring the world back to the brink of Armageddon, reflecting Manhattan's assertion that "nothing ever ends" (12.20). Although, Manhattan's prescience is limited to his own subjective perspective, and he could just as easily mean that the Cold War will not end, or to an infinite number of other possibilities. Just as likely, Seymour will not choose to publish or even believe Rorschach's story. Also, who is to say that even if the story is published it will even be believed, as *The New Frontiersman* is less than a fully reputable source in Moore's fictionalized reality? Just as the editor's revelatory words explain, it remains entirely up to the reader whether not they will accept that *Watchmen* is a metafictional text that reflects one accessible to readers in their diagetive world. The fact remains that Moore's story ends and any construing following the close of the story is strictly ideological on the part of imaginative readers.

By denying readers closure, *Watchmen* also refuses them resolution, meaning, and any one ideological standpoint. Through this the text critically engages conventional comic book formulas. Rorschach is not proffered a hero's death because his heroism is in question. Readers are equally uncertain about the role of Veidt's plot in the destruction of the world. In the midst of this equivocaility, the graphic novel demands readers to also construct the events that occur after its own literal end. Thus, there is a constant symmetry between readers' roles and the limits that will be found upon each reading of the text, in which new light will be cast as new elements and clues are discerned.

As the story advances, Veidt's plot and his culpability for various events become explicit, and for acute readers this truth is accessible before Veidt confesses, and even before Rorschach's learns, "Veidt's behind everything"(10.22). The writing of

Rorschach's journal is marked in boxes, and the combination of his inkblot mask, brown fedora, trench coat, and "horrible monotone voice" (1.23) links Rorschach to detective-heroes of the noir tradition. The storyline revolves around Rorschach's investigation, and following along readers also play the part of sleuth as they piece together the clues contained in both the plot and the visual narrative. In discussing the symmetrical design of chapter 5, in "Paneling Parallax: The Fearful Symmetry of Alan Moore and William Blake," Roger Whitson argues the chapter's "balance of the structure (the first panel mirrors the last; the second, the second to last; and so on) might lend a momentary euphoric feeling, a revelatory moment that would seem to make all the elements of the issue come into a clearer focus" (16). Whitson believes the Blakean harmony (between visuals and visuals and word and visual) discloses for perceptive readers an absolute truth about 'good' and 'evil' through "balance" and "meaning." In the storyline, this effect is underscored by Veidt's image, which encompasses—pagination-wise—the chapter's exact middle point. Whitson's reading not only shows that Veidt is at the center of all of the action—the unrelated events like Moloch's execution, the death of Hollis Mason (the original Night Owl), and the assassination of Veidt's secretary—but also provides sufficient evidence and moral grounds to indict Veidt who occupies the center of the puzzle frustrating readers and Rorschach.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the internal characters do not share readers' purview. Therefore, more than Veidt's condemnation, his placement in chapter 5 confronts readers with the limits of their perception in their own worlds.

These clues may be inaccessible for Rorschach who inhabits the graphic novel's diageitic world, but for readers, who inhabit an exterior one and are thus privy to a more circumspect purview, they are observable in the visual narrative, especially for readers

familiar with the idiosyncratic reading strategies comics demand. Unlike traditional literary forms, where readers need only observe the words on the page, in comics words are inextricable from the other visual elements.¹⁷ One way in which *Watchmen* operates self-reflexively is by foregrounding its own reading process, and this is evinced in the depiction of Seymour. Working for the editor of *The New Frontiersmen*, Seymour wears a shirt embossed with the same yellow smiley face that is The Comedian's pin, an emblem that has become synonymous with *Watchmen*'s cover (The final panel shows the smiley face covered with Ketchup from Seymour's hamburger—the actual cover of the book). The pudgy, red-haired Seymour physically fills the comic reader stereotype, and through him the character-esque role played by readers is dramatized. When Veidt's plan creates a lull in attractive news stories, the editor exclaims, "Two more pages to fill before you eat, thanks to this goddamned ass-kissing accord" (12.32), Seymour is told to look through the "crank piles" where he discovers Rorschach's journal. His discovery foreshadows the journal will be printed, but only after Seymour sifts through it and constructs his own version of the story from the clues Rorschach provides.

As this premise unfolds, Seymour possibly gleans the truth when he assays Rorschach's experiential narrative and fills in other ideas and forms of discourse wherever gaps exist. This filler is culled mostly from the disparate paratexts¹⁹ at the beginning and ends of each chapter. Ostensibly, most of these are unrelated, but combined with one another and also the primary narrative, assist in forming and confirming the truth about Veidt's plot. Thus, the composite graphic novel may be formed from the confluence of Seymour's preconceptions, representing in part those of stereotypical comic readers, Rorschach's narrative, and the linguistic and visual

narratives. In his influential book, *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud describes the way comic writers convey meaning with and through the assistance of readers. McCloud stresses the importance of “gutters,” or the space between panels, in affecting “closure,” “the phenomenon of observing parts but perceiving the whole”(63). In McCloud’s view, writers provide readers with basic directions, while readers bring their own impressions and experiences to the table. McCloud maintains that “Gutters” are important to comics, a “medium where the audience is a willing and conscious collaborator and closure is the agent of change, time and motion” (65).¹⁹ Between the panels—in the “gutters”—readers are granted a measure of freedom and imagination, while artists can ensure that all readers will share the general, overall narrative: “Closure in comics fosters an intimacy surpassed only by the written word, a silent secret contract between creator and audience” (McCloud 69). This is a contract where readers, writers, and the position or context from which each “write,” are involved in equal partnership. Viewed this way, *Watchmen* can be construed as a visual narrative constructed from disparate pieces of information pieced together by Seymour and the reader in continuing Rorschach’s quest for truth and justice.

In order to discern the truth it is paramount that Rorschach’s subjective narrative is measured, weighed, and balanced, with the other narratives that assist in forming *Watchmen*. The graphic novel stresses that these types of balanced conversations potentially foster or deliver truth. Unfortunately, though, Veidt is isolated and his egotism precludes him from wondering what others might say. Readers are left wondering why Veidt refuses to consult with omniscient Manhattan in formulating his plot. Though Veidt resists conferring with any one else about his plan, and even murders The Comedian precisely because he accidentally finds out about the plot. This is ironic considering The

Comedian's claim years earlier that Veidt was the "smartest man on cinders (11.19) partially provided the impetus for Veidt to plan an act of heroism that would transcend the typical preservation of the status-quo. "He [Comedian] discussed Nuclear War's inevitability; described my future role as 'smartest man on cinder...and opened my eyes, only the best comedians accomplish that'" (11.19). Simply, Veidt predicts his strategy will elevate him to a level of greatness, albeit a behind-the-scenes one, that complicity might diminish. Although, we are keen to observe that such solipsism is dangerous.

The problematic nature of isolation and its deleterious effects are overt in *The Tale of the Black Freighter*, a comic within a comic, read by Bernard, an example of what Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction* calls "constructions *en abyme*," which "reflect on a miniature scale the structure of the texts in which they appear" (53). Beyond simply providing plausible thematic and moral maps for the graphic novel's primary story, the panels composing the sub-story are regularly spliced in among the panels from the primary one, and the language contained in the storyline of *The Tale* often accords with the action in the primary narrative. *The Tale*'s protagonist is an unnamed sea captain who is stranded alone on an island when his ship is destroyed and the rest of his mates are massacred by Blackbeard and the ruthless crew of his demon ship. The sub-story depicts the captain's frenzied attempt to return to Davidstown to save his wife and children from Blackbeard, a feat he eventually manages by attaching wood to the bloated carcasses of his fallen shipmates. The captain returns to Davidstown mired in rage and insanity, to rescue his family, but mistakenly believes it is too late and they have already been massacred, and in turn he blindly murders several townspeople. He soon realizes that one of these people was his wife, that, "There'd been no plan to capture Davidstown. What

could a mortal township offer those who'd reaped the wealth of the Sargasso?"(11.13).

The Tale further foregrounds the way comics are read, and reiterates the connection between isolation and myopia, as the captain muses, "In the terrible silence I understood the true breadth of the word 'isolation'"(3.18). In the end, he realizes, "the world I'd tried to save was lost beyond recall. I was a horror. Amongst horrors must I dwell" (11.23), because of his own actions. The panels depicting his lament are issued precisely when Veidt reveals his plot, suggesting that Veidt and the captain both cause the world to be "lost beyond recall" (11.23).

The paratexts and *en abyme* present the multiple, diverse perspectives that contribute to and facilitate the formation of truth, or one possible version. As the story progresses, the paratexts become increasingly focused on Veidt, and the commencement of his plot coincides with the striking of midnight of the doomsday clock found at the beginning of each chapter. As Veidt hides the truth, Rorschach sets out to uncover it, and these two characters embody the graphic novel's moral ambiguity. In the 40's and 50's—their Golden Age—comics were overtly ideological, with superhero archetypes like Captain America combating straw-men villains that represented whatever and whoever America opposed at the time; basically serving as fodder for patriotism and other dogma. In its dialogue with this integral yet checkered past, *Watchmen* disrupts these stultified constructs. Super-villains such as Moloch mature from clichés into legitimate businessmen and productive members of society, eventually dying from cancer rather than by a brush with heroism. Meanwhile, the brutal slaying of Hollis Mason by the gang of Knot-Tops is charged by neither politics nor ideology, but rather by a fear and distrust of masks. Finally, Veidt imagines his plan will engender utopia, and his shortcomings are

epistemological and not inherently evil. In this dense postmodern world, villainy is a result of human fallibility, or the inability to see beyond a limited scope.

Like the unnamed captain in *The Tale*, Veidt's myopia is caused in part by his isolation, which inhibits his from viewing all variables circumspectly, leading him to incorrectly predict the outcome of his plot. His egotism is also inhibiting, and this is apparent when, upon hearing of his plot's initial success, he exclaims, "I did it" (12.19). Even Veidt's ironic choice of superhero moniker shows his paucity of sight. Ozymandias was another name for the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses, and the name's modern recrudescence can be attributed to Percy Bryce Shelley, whose sonnet, "Ozymandias," expresses the vanity and myopia of its own titular subject. The sonnet's premise is that power and wealth are ephemeral in comparison to nature's unyielding might. The epigraph of chapter 11 of *Watchmen* recites the lines, "My name is / Ozymandias, / king of kings: / Look on my works, / ye mighty / and despair!"(11.28). Like the Blakean chapter 5 and the *en abyme* of *Black Freighter*, Moore's invocation of Shelley hints to Veidt's literal and moral villainy. Much like the figure whose name he appropriates, Veidt thirsts for immortality through his "works," but in the end he is not the "king of kings," rather a paltry and forgotten figure whose fame and wealth survive only within a sonnet about the frailty of human existence.

In the modern sense, Veidt is only a "king of kings" in that he is able to manipulate and control global forces, Manhattan, and even President Richard Nixon (powerful enough to be elected to a fifth presidential term). From Karnac, Veidt receives information filtered from around the entire world through his giant wall of TV monitors,

“multi-screen” viewing that enables him see below the surface to the “subtext,” as “the planet is currently swarming with events. In such times, none of them are insignificant” (9.7). Veidt uses these images to inform his social, political, and economic predictions. Unlike Manhattan who is able to see events directly in real-time, Veidt constructs his view from the technologically mediated images, and readers never see him turn to others for advice or alternative perspectives.²⁰ The extent of his isolation is apparent in the way he treats those he is closest to. He murders his trusty Vietnamese servants after he divulges his secrets to them, and he also murders his secretary simply to misdirect Rorschach. Moreover, Veidt admits that his parents died when he was young, and that forced to make a tough decision: “My intellect set me apart. Faced with difficult choices, I knew nobody whose advice might prove useful. Nobody living. The only human being with whom I felt any kinship died three hundred years before the birth of Christ”(11.8). Veidt’s sole companion is the lynx, Bubastis, a creature he genetically engineers and eventually sacrifices too in attempting to stop Manhattan’s interference. Manhattan is the one who questions why he should save a world he has no stake in, as he laments to Laurie, “ don’t you see the futility of asking me to save a world that I no longer have any stake in?”(9.8). Yet, it is Veidt that lacks any stake, aside from the personal glory he thinks he will attain by untying a Gordian Knot like his hero Alexander the Great did centuries before. For Veidt, untying the Knot means putting an end to the Cold War, as he explains, “I wanted to match his accomplishment, bringing an age of illumination to a benighted world,” and “I wanted to have something to say to him should we meet in the hall of legends” (11.8). However, his ideal of heroism is unreasonable in the postmodern world, and his goal is rooted more in a nostalgic ideal of the past than in any tangible

reality. Trapped, though, in his technologically mediated experience of the external world, Veidt is unable to discern this.

Though the possibility that Veidt has blundered, the graphic novel reinforces the danger of appropriating the past to deal with the present. In *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau writes of the “breakage” between the present and the past, “the postulate of interpretation (which is constructed as of the present time) and its object” (4). In de Certeau’s view, the arbitrary distinctions between epochs, or “periods,” are necessary to the self, even “self-motivated,” because a certain version or image of the past is necessary in order for the present, as the Self, to uphold. “In the past from which it is distinguished, it promotes a selection between what can be *understood* and what must be *forgotten* in order to obtain the representation of present intelligibility”(de Certeau 4). Meaning, that the recitation of history and the contemporary status quo are dependent on this version and must construct the past. *Watchmen* must borrow from the past of comics even as it uses it to inform its critique and divergence from it. Unfortunately for Veidt, that which is left aside “comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies,” to “perturb the pretty order of a line of ‘progress’ or a system of interpretation (de Certeau 4). Veidt is haunted and inhibited by Rorschach, who operates and collects trinkets of the past precisely on these edges; or metextually in the paratexts and various other elements. The Other, which for Veidt is his own imagined history, always returns: “a return of the repressed, that is, a return of what, at a given moment, has *become* unthinkable [failure] in order for a new identity [or Self] to *become* thinkable” (de Certeau 4).

This parallels the graphic novel's overt disengagement from the static identities and binaries of comic books in the past. Though there is no literal Other in *Watchmen*, Veidt actually co-opts the past as a silent Other, and this more than anything indicts him as the most likely villain. Veidt's distorted image of the past can be read as a symptom of a postmodern present in which, as Frederic Jameson explains, nothing new occurs:

This very triviality of everyday life in late capitalism is itself the desperate against which all the formal solutions, the strategies and subterfuges, of high culture as well as of mass culture, emerge: how to project the illusion that things still happen, that events still exist, that there are still stories to tell, in a situation in which the uniqueness and the irrevocability of private destinies and of individuality itself seem to have evaporated? (*Signatures* 87)

Undeniably, Jameson's reading of the postmodern is more ominous than Rosen's, but it also shows what is perceived to be lost when, "what was good was never in the slightest doubt, and where what was evil inevitably suffered some fitting punishment" ("UTH" 5).²¹ In the graphic novel's dense, complex landscape, Veidt, without recourse to love and compassion, must (re)turn to a falsified reality where values were clearly defined and truths were decided by those in power. Unfortunately for him, such a reality no longer exists, or maybe never did. The individual, or "individualism" embedded in the notion of great heroes like Alexander is a 'thing of the past' (Leitch 1964), writes Jameson. Significant in Veidt's case is that he can recognize the potency of nostalgia, yet is ironically doomed to perpetuate it. Veidt actually labels one of the fragrances sold by his

company “Nostalgia,” and in a letter to one of his executives, writes:

In the soft focus imagery and romantic atmosphere, the advertisements an idyllic picture of times past. It seems to me that the success of the campaign is directly linked to the state of global uncertainty that has endured for the past forty years or more. In an era of stress and anxiety, when the present seems unstable and the future unlikely, the natural response is to retreat and withdraw from reality, taking recourse either in fantasies of the future or in modified versions of a half-imagined past.

(*Watchmen* Chapter 10)

However, Veidt fails to recognize that his memory of Alexander’s “half-imagined past” is itself, nostalgic.²³ Through Veidt and his symptoms, *Watchmen* shows us the deleterious effects of seeing history and reality through the rose-colored lens of nostalgia, which proffers a fantasy in its neglect of the disparate forms of discourse that comprise historical moments. It also highlights the problematic that arise when the Self co-opts a history rendered silent by space and time. Through Veidt’s case, the graphic novel’s subtext compels readers to construct truths from more than simply “fantasies” or “half-imagined” past. It is not that Alexander did not achieve great things; rather, it is that Veidt’s myopia inhibits him from seeing these images of the past through the lens of the present, too.

Veidt’s nostalgic idealization of Alexander’s exploits may prevent him from fully seeing the present and making the best decision regarding the future, however, he is not the only one inhibited by a nostalgized image of the past. Laurie Juspezyk, a.k.a. Silk

Specter II, is also stymied by a falsified, idealized version of an experience from her childhood. As a child, Laurie accidentally discovered The Comedian is her father, but replaced her memory with one of the snow-globe she held in her hand during her discovery. Laurie tells, “There was this toy, this snowstorm ball, with a tiny castle inside, except it was like a whole world, a world inside the ball” (9.24). The snow-globe is a “half-remembered,” nostalgic version of the past that hides a truth made painful by the rumors that The Comedian raped her mother. From atop his floating palace on Mars, Manhattan, formerly Laurie’s lover, implores her to abandon the “world inside the ball” in order to recover her painful memory. “I think you’re avoiding something,” he imparts to her (9.24). During their conversation, Laurie holds in her hand a bottle of Veidt’s “Nostalgia,” but when she submits to Manhattan’s request and permits him to show her what really happened the bottle falls from her hands and shatters. This sequence is visually relayed through a sequence of panels inter-spliced with scenes depicting the snow globe shattering in her youth upon overhearing the truth. The symbolism is clear; Laurie is able to find peace of mind when she dispenses with nostalgia and regards her past from Manhattan’s perspective. Unlike Veidt’s, Laurie’s image of the past becomes more honest because it is composed of more than one form of knowledge and discourse.

Manhattan’s conversation with Laurie also helps him rediscover the extant humanity he thought was destroyed when he transformed into Manhattan. In seeing Laurie cry tears of joy, Manhattan realizes:

Thermo-dynamic miracles...events with odds against so astronomical they're effectively impossible, like oxygen spontaneously becoming gold.

I long to observe such a thing. And yet, in each human coupling, a thousand million sperm vie for a single egg. Multiply those odds by countless generations against the odds of your ancestors being alive; meaning, siring this precise son; that exact daughter; until your mother loves a man she has every reason to hate, and of that union, of the thousand millions children competing for fertilization, it was you, only you, that emerged. (4.26-27)

Following Laurie's personal revelation, Manhattan discovers in the spawning of human life there are forces, "thermo-dynamic miracles," that are just as interesting to ones found elsewhere in the non-human cosmos. Previously, Manhattan was convinced human life and endeavors were vain and insignificant compared to the vastness and intricacies of the non-human, material universe (he tells, "I read atoms, Laurie. I see the ancient struggle that birthed the rubble. Beside this, human life is brief and mundane" (9.17)), but he discovers the value of the ineffable through his experience with Laurie. 'Love' and 'hate,' much like good and evil, (or any of the several other polarities previously discussed) are not static, following an ordered pattern, but dynamic feelings that acquire their force and meaning, often indeterminately, through human relations. Although, by this point Manhattan has become too un-tethered from his former emotions and must still read and describe these "miracles" through the language of science. However, Laurie's memories convince Manhattan that humans are worth saving; such "miracles" are unique and cannot be duplicated nor created even by Manhattan, the expert watchmaker.

Because Manhattan realizes that neither rational science, nor reason, nor order

should be privileged over human life, chaos, or the irrational, he agrees to rescue humanity. As such, he is the most apparent answer to the question from which the title of Moore's work derives, "Who watches the Watchmen?" However, watching is a motif present in many facets in *Watchmen*, and Dreiberg's exegesis on observing owls, "Blood on The Shoulder of Pallas," a paratext found in chapter 7, proffers a lesson on the optimal way to watch in the postmodern world. In his essay, Dreiberg explains how he comes to realize the pitfalls of objective, empirical observation that is devoid of subjective experience. Dreiberg's methods of observing were imbalanced before he underwent an "apocalypse" in thought which triggered the sudden, screeching cry of an owl. Dreiberg explains, "Some facet of the experience had struck a chord in me, forged a connection between my dulled and jaded adult self and the child who sprawled in faint starlight while the great night hunters staged dramas full of hunger and death in the opaque jet air above me" ("BFTSOP"). This experience rekindles in Dreiberg "an urge to experience rather than merely record," and also leads importantly to "the self evaluation that has led to this current article" ("BFTSOP"). The dichotomy, between viewing and immersing, that Dreiberg uncovers also applies to the gap between Rorschach and Veidt.

While Veidt's contact with the world is limited to his view from Karnac, Rorschach prefers to be immersed within the center of it all. Sitting at the window of the Gunga Diner, he narrates, "I sat watching the trashcan, and New York opened its heart to me"(5.11), and he grows anxious when his connection with this world is too severed, as he complains to Dreiberg, "Cowering down here in the sludge and pollution, conjuring names on screens, learning nothing. That is unnecessary. Give me [sic] smallest finger on a man's hand ill [sic] produce information. Computer unnecessary "(10.9). Rorschach

prefers to retrieve his information direct, unmediated, and he even thrives best among the dregs of society, whether behind jail bars or in the underground bars which cater to society's pariahs. It is no coincidence that he rejects the very technological apparatuses Veidt relies on.

Rorschach's methods ultimately enable him to circumvent Veidt, and they are also motivated by his paranoid conspiracy theory that "somebody knows" who killed The Comedian. Paranoia in *Watchmen* makes possible the emergence of a liberating counter narrative to the powerful, dominant one promulgated by the hegemony, embodied by Veidt. Behind Rorschach's swirling ink-blot mask is Walter Kovacs, a mysterious figure who carries around the sign that claims, "The end is nigh." Rorschach encounters skepticism when he tries to convince Manhattan, Laurie, and Dreiberg that The Comedian's death is part of a conspiracy to kill off "masks" (1.12), but his paranoia indelibly proves a boon as it prevents him from accepting the conventional logic. Jameson reads paranoia as a way of "mapping" the world, a "[poor person's cognitive mapping] in the postmodern age. It is a "form of pop sociology cobbled together on the fly as people try to gain a handle on the social and economic causation in an era of rapid globalization" (Jameson 8). Of course, most of the sociological and economic events are traceable to Veidt who stands at the summit of power. Rorschach, though, refuses to accept his role as a chess-piece in Veidt's game, and his paranoid, "pop sociology" gives him something else to pursue and discover. It is no surprise that Rorschach is a regular reader of *The New Frontiersman*, which specializes in disseminating "pop sociology." Several of their articles relate conspiracy theories, and the newspaper provides a platform from which Rorschach can tell his story.

Paranoia and conspiracy theories provide alternative epistemological vantage points in *Watchmen*, and indeed, both were prevalent in the 1960's, 70's, and 80's, as the public's distrust of government waxed in response to events like Watergate, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War. *Watchmen* exhibits the result when the dominant system collides with the paranoid, conspiratorial perspective, as The Comedian and Night Owl II hose down a group of protestors demanding the Keene Act because they believe masked heroes, in their resistance to the public gaze, have grown too powerful and have negated the need for regular law enforcement. Essentially, the heroes are convenient, symbolic scapegoats for the public's anger and distrust towards a government that rules invisibly through the tentacles of discourse. One example is Manhattan's visual presence in Vietnam during the war, and panels show him zapping enemy soldiers and literally ending the war. Although, following his return home Manhattan becomes an obvious target for the public's ill sentiment towards a variety of issues. In order to control the disorder, which is a direct result of their presence, the masked heroes are forced to turn on those they set out to protect.²² Veidt's plan is the extreme form of this paradox, which further testifies to the difficulty in assigning blame in Moore's work, and also highlights the chasm between the protected and the protector integral to conspiracy.

Just like the characters benefit from each other, paranoia and conspiracy valuably counterbalance the official narrative purveyed by the hegemony. These forms are important because they incite the dominant groups into to behave more faithfully. Evidence of the progressive potential of conspiracy and paranoia is observable in the Watergate Scandal, which continually enacted federal investigations into self-regulation. Though limited, these counter-narratives may be the best form of checks and balances in

that by their very nature they resist censure and disarticulation. As the most paranoid character, Rorschach is the only one that still wears a mask because of his social marginalization and his resistance to standard laws, whereas most of the others have resigned their costumes in choosing to assimilate. Rorschach's persistence reminds us that legislation like the Keene act is really tautological, in outlawing vigilante justice. Only paranoia, in Rorschach's case, is able to resist such discourse both literally and linguistically.

Similar to Moore, several 20th century writers, including Thomas Pynchon (*V*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *The Crying of Lot 49*), Don DeLillo (*White Noise*, *Mao II* and *Underworld*) and William S. Burroughs (*Naked Lunch*) are intrigued by paranoia and write tangled webs of conspiracy into their fictions. Moore's other major work, *V For Vendetta*, also emphasizes this concern, and in *Watchmen* paranoia and conspiracy are less than subtle themes and tropes that foreground the precariousness in official versions of history. For example, it is suggested that The Comedian was the second gunman in the JFK assassination, and there are also clues that he murdered the parties responsible for uncovering Nixon's role in Watergate. Much like Dreiberger learns by studying owls, and also what Manhattan sees through Laurie, irrational beliefs like those underpinning paranoia may counterbalance dominant narratives. Moore's revised history, then, shows the limited, subjective nature of written history, itself. Such revised, conspiratorial narratives bespeak of the problem of writing history as outlined by historiography, as Fran Mason suggests:

In their insistence that everything is connected, conspiracy theories

provide rough-and-ready narratives that bring together past, present, and future into a coherent whole. In effect, they offer substitute meta-narratives for the ones whose loss has so often been identified with the crisis of postmodern knowledge and politics. (Knight 9)

Rorschach's journal is one such "rough-and-ready narrative," and his and Veidt's antagonism represents the epistemological dichotomy of the postmodern conception of self and other, or center and margin. As a child, Kovacs inhabited the fringes of the system as the son of a physically and emotionally abusive mother, who earned an income as a prostitute. Therefore, it is unsurprising that as an adult he would prescribe to a fatalistic view of humankind and distrust a system that had failed him repeatedly. But through his paranoia, Rorschach deconstructs boundaries of power and agency separating him and Veidt.

Paranoia may be imprecise and unpredictable, but in Moore's work it enables Rorschach to expose the foundations Veidt's plot and power rest on. In this, *Watchmen* shows various forms of agency that may facilitate the uncovering, fostering, and conveying of truth and meaning. In *Watchmen*'s postmodern landscape, the conventional ways of understanding, describing, or even "mapping" the world no longer apply, so readers and characters must heed what Rorschach compels, "to scrawl own design on this morally blank world"(6.26), but only after considering others are equally compelled to do the same, and that their designs are equally valuable, even necessary, for creating a balanced version of the truth.

IV. RESOURCES BEYOND THE REAL: AUTHENTICITY, HISTORY, AND REPRESENTATION IN *GREY OWL*, *APOCALYPSE NOW*, AND *APOCALYPTO*

A crucial dilemma arises when mainstream films attempt to transcend their own ideological and subject positions to portray marginalized Others fairly and inadequately. Because of film's mass appeal and proliferation, such portrayals can be damaging because they project stultifying and homogenous images of Otherness. These images may indelibly inhibit agency and autonomy if they are promulgated broadly, creating cultural consensus among the hegemony about how to identify and construe the Other. Though, more recently, the symptoms of deleterious representation have not only been evident in film, but issues foregrounded by directors as they strive for mimesis, authenticity, and critical engagement with film practices past and present. Laura Mulvey explains some of film's inherent limitations in her seminal text "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In outlining the way viewers are orientated toward film, Mulvey argues that mainstream cinema seeks to erase its own processes of production and also viewers' roles as voyeurs—a term denoted "scopophilia"—to create a diageitic world in which viewers can identify with films' male protagonists.

The function of film is to reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception. Camera technology (as exemplified by deep focus in particular) and camera movements (determined by the action of the protagonist) combined with invisible

editing (demanded by realism), all tend to blur the limits of screen space.

The male protagonist is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action. (Mulvey 367-8)

Using Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, Mulvey suggests that male protagonists represent the imaginary, perfected ego. This identification between viewer and protagonist is necessary because women in film, serving as merely catalysts for the exploit and adventures of them, signify castration anxiety, a reminder that is disavowed in a variety of ways; including fetishism, sadism, and the linear, heroic tale. However, Mulvey locates a form of resistance in alternative cinema, which foregrounds viewers' identification with the protagonist. Mulvey uses Alfred Hitchcock's films as an example, in which the process of production is woven into the theme and structure.

Even though Mulvey is a feminist and is interested in divesting film from the patriarchal 'male gaze,' her connecting of the eye of the camera with the passive viewer, active only through the male protagonist, also helps to explain the role of Others in mainstream film. Mulvey's description of film politics' directly equates with Said's exegesis on the role that the Orient plays for the Occident in Orientalism. In both, the Self's use of the Other must be systemically erased in order for seamless identification to occur. This identification is necessary for the Self to maintain its completeness. Though most mainstream film tends to follow the formula Mulvey prescribes, I suggest that the increased proliferation of mainstream film and the vast compendium of resources, both tangential and adjacent to films, and the inescapability of the camera's lens for actors

even in their personal lives, has contributed to a blurring of the seamless connection between viewer and actor, or director.

In keeping with “scopophilia,” the movie industry has re-devised ways to reaffirm the seamless connection between viewer and films’ diegetic worlds. Now that it is virtually impossible to retreat from the eye of the camera (especially the case for celebrities), it is much more difficult for the audience to identify with mainstream actors, especially those that have become synonymous with a genre or sub-genre. Consequently, no longer are viewers permitted to temporarily, wholeheartedly buy into the necessary illusion that the world on screen is sealed. The nascent popularizing of viral web videos is a testament to this. Likewise, the recent re-popularization of 3-d glasses is due in part to companies and viewers’ desire to reconnect the breach in identification resulting from this. Furthermore, gone are the days when viewers can watch a movie with little knowledge about what they are viewing besides what the movie posters offer. Now, the typical viewer is constantly bombarded with information pertaining to the film through the Internet²³ and television.²⁴ Moreover, with Hollywood’s tendency to re-cycle films, partially attributable to what Frederic Jameson would label postmodern, or mass-media society, viewers gain an automatic reference and point of comparison between one film and another. The availability of paratexts, which include all of the extraneous material and sources of information linked to films, has rendered it virtually impossible for an actor to become synonymous with his roles. Acknowledging this nascent trait, directors now employ and integrate culturally wide resonant signs into their films as tropes to foreground notions of identity and representation. At the same, time, it has become impossible for directors to conceal the ideological positions from which their ideas and

films manifest. Directors demonstrate that their approach towards writing, film, and casting their works is both consciences of the final product, as it exists autonomously, independent of an audience, and the preexisting expectations, prejudices, and knowledges of their audience.

Issues of representation have always been foregrounded in film both thematically and structurally, especially those concerned with Native Americans. Since its inception, Hollywood has constructed its own representation of Native Americans, or Indians, as either the violent Other—an obstacle to Manifest Destiny—or as the stoically passive victim ready to relinquish space and even identity in the name of ‘progress.’

Additionally, found under this same ideology is the White Man who somehow finds himself on a reservation ready and able to supplant the natives and to transform into an even better native than native: see Kevin Costner in *Dances With Wolves* (1990).

Recently, however, the civil rights movement and the academy’s *tilt to the left* has diverted Hollywood towards a new representational mode where it seeks to unearth and reveal the “real,” or authentic Indian that it has formerly misrepresented. This search for the “real” Native is set against, and parallel to the broader movement that is taking place throughout the various socio-culture disciplines.

Casting is a crucial device that enables directors to simultaneously toy with notions of authenticity and self-consciously express the difficulty of mimetically representing the past and identity. In his 2006 sophomore, directorial effort, *Apocalypto*, Mel Gibson employs an all native cast to endow his film with historical authenticity. Gibson’s ostensible aim is to project onto screen the palimpsestic account of the final moments of the once ascendant Mayan culture, an instance in space and time that

Hollywood had yet to tackle on such a grand and spectacular level. It is well known that Gibson utilized an array of scholars and experts, including linguists, historians, and weapons experts, to help him authenticate his rendition of Mayan history. *Apocalypto* depicts the heroism of protagonist, Jaguar Paw, (Rudy Youngblood), who is kidnapped by slave-traders from his rural, idyllic village and brought to the decadent, Mayan city to be ritually decapitated as sacrifice to the gods. While he lies upside down awaiting his death, Jaguar Paw is conveniently rescued by a solar eclipse, and his subsequent escape comprises the crux of the film and its dramatic sequences.

Gibson's striving for authenticity is salient in the elaborate construction of the city, along with the use of the Yucatec Mayan language with subtitles to immerse viewers in Jaguar Paw's reality.²⁶ However, the film fails to exhibit the awareness and focus on identity that *Grey Owl* displays. Rather, it employs its experts, mostly Native cast, and hyper visual elements to exploit Mayan identity and history, or its interpretation of each. The true aim, though, is to reify western identity, and to bolster Gibson's own political agenda. The film's title shows how this agenda is a guiding subtext, self-licensed by Gibson when he erroneously suggested to Diane Sawyer, "they [Mayans] aren't around anymore" (Spence 495).

Viewers are immediately ensconced within Jaguar Paw's world as the film opens with camera's lens breezing over the jungle greenery, a shot that gives viewers the feeling they are entering a remote and forgotten space and time. As the diegesis unfolds, viewers are introduced to Mayan identity through Jaguar Paw's hyper-visceral and hyper-visual experience, which is predictably violent, dangerous, and eroticized, as evinced in this opening sequence in which Jaguar Paw and his fellow clansmen hunt a wild tapir for

food. Upon catching their prey, the characters mull over their reward playing with its entrails. To further foreshadow destruction and violence, Jaguar Paw and his clansmen encounter another exiles from another village that has apparently fleeing from an unknown evil. Jaguar Paw and his clansmen permit the exiles to pass through, but the image of the sickly and emaciated Mayan group is a harbinger of things to come for Jaguar Paw and his village. Though, even before these violent and gory sequences, the film is framed by an Epigraph from Will Durant, informing viewers, "A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within." Combined with the vividly detailed violence of the initial images, viewers are led to perceive the Mayans as violent intruders of the landscape and its animals—the outward destruction of the landscape is metaphorically internalized in the film's political logic.

Viewers are momentarily distracted, yet reminded of this inherent self-destructiveness by the image of Jaguar Paw's idyllic, primitive village. After Jaguar Paw and his fellow hunters return, viewers see Jaguar Paw's tranquil, primitivized village, the embodiment of remote passivity. Although from the onset, the notion of self-destruction is encoded in the virulent strain of infertility hidden within the travails of the aptly yet unoriginally named Blunted (Jonathan Brewer), relegated as the brunt of practical jokes and comic relief for his unsuccessful attempt to impregnate his wife. Aside from the undercurrent of infertility, the sequence depicting the daily life of Jaguar Paw's peaceful, isolated village is rounded out with a storytelling sequence in which self-destruction and internal fissure is further foreshadowed in a fable told by the village elders about man's insatiable desire; again, projecting Mayans as self-destructively lusty and burdened by insatiable desire. This also foreshadows the arrival of the Spanish, who in their

transcendence of the primitive will likely be able to offer the Mayans a more advanced reality.

That night, Jaguar Paw's village is marauded and pillaged by a band of slave-traders, and from this point on viewers are subjected to the decadent inner and outer state of Mayan civilization through the trader's behavior and in the elaborate debased visuals of the Mayan city. The sight of severed heads rolling down the temple stairs is the most viscerally objectionable image intended as commentary on the Mayan's brutal self-destructive practices. Eventually, Jaguar Paw, with miraculous luck, some guile, escapes his captors to return to his village and to rescue his wife, son, and newborn child, incidentally the only remaining survivors of the village. Though, not before he leads his captors, including the dreaded Flint Sky, (Morris Birdyellowhead) the leader of the captors, angered doubly when Jaguar Paw kills his son, on a wild chase. The scenes depicting the chase provide Gibson with the opportunity to display his own, directorial prowess. He adeptly immerses viewers into the Mayan world, and this augments the feeling of authenticity, which elides the fact that Gibson wields an imperial gaze as he appropriates Mayan history and subjectivity for profit and politics.

Gibson's incessant need to amplify the film's political logic is also evinced in the prophetic young girl standing by the roadside as Jaguar Paw and his fellow captives are strung along. Likely afflicted with smallpox, the sickly girl is an augur and a ghost that stands outside of the film's linearity, (evinced directly in Jaguar Paw's trek towards the central city), and reminds viewers about the Mayan's self-destruction, while equally disavowing the role played by Europeans, who arrive in the final moments of the film. Forget the fact that several of the diseases afflicting Mayans at the time were brought to

the Americas by the imperial Spaniards, the girl's prophetic warning metaphorically, blames Jaguar Paw for Mayan destruction:

You fear me? So you should. All you who are vile. Would you like to know how you will die? The sacred time is near. Beware the blackness of day. Beware the man who brings the jaguar. Behold him reborn from mud and earth. For the one he takes you to will cancel the sky, and scratch out the earth. Scratch you out. And end your world. He's with us now. Day will be like night. And the man jaguar will lead you to your end.

Through these ceaseless reminders, Gibson disavows the European's role in the Mayan destruction through the stereotypical notion that connects prophecy and warning to Native, specifically Mayan, culture. It also plays with the familiar, pop-culture notion that the Mayan calendar predicts the end of the known world in 2012, a theme underscored in the film's title. Thus, the film co-opts the typical viewers awareness of these signs that are culturally resonant in the west.

In the director's commentary, which accompanies the DVD version, Gibson and Farhad Safinia attribute the girl's illness to pollution and deforestation, negating the likelihood that her lesions would have been likely caused by epidemic diseases like smallpox, typhus, measles, or even syphilis, transported to the Americas by Europeans. The girl's proximity to the "putrid" Mayan implies, rather, that her sickness is a physical manifestation of the Mayan's destruction of the landscape.²⁷ Moreover, in this sequence the viewer begins to see the toll that Mayan civilization has taken on their physical landscape, as the fauna begins to become increasingly sparse.³⁰ Ironically, the little girl

warns, “Beware the man who brings the Jaguar,” which applies to Gibson, who ‘delivers’ Jaguar Paw to the Spanish, and to his western audience.

In this final scene, Jaguar Paw, having managed to kill most of his captors Rambo-like, including Flint Sky, who he baits as he would an animal into the tapir trap, eludes the remaining two chasers up until the beach. Suddenly, arriving in the Americas is the image of Spanish galleons in the background with separate, individual boats being paddled by conquistadors and ushering Spanish missionaries who brandish their crosses. In juxtaposition with the two previous hours, when viewers are fully immersed within Jaguar Paw’s exotic and alien world, the arrival of the Spaniards and their Christian ideals proffers welcome relief from the savagery and barbarism. This revelatory moment subscribes to the typical notion purveyed by Hollywood that Natives must indelibly be rescued by Whites, and like Jaguar Paw and his family, the film and viewers through it are rescued by the arrival of the familiar western victors of the Spanish and Christianity. While his antagonists fall to their knees in disbelief and supplication, Jaguar Paw is wise enough to know to retreat back into history’s forgotten annals, symbolized in the jungle’s periphery, while he still has a chance. His final words testify, perhaps most truthfully, to the state of Mayans, both in “real” history and the film’s diegetic one, as he tells his wife, “We should go to the forest. To seek a new beginning.”

The arrival of the Spanish to rescue Jaguar Paw and viewers as well is a literal and figurative *dues ex machina* that suggests virtually the entire narrative prior to the final sequence is a set for the miraculous arrival of the Spanish, who, in their symbolizing juxtaposition with the previous two hours, represent progress and goodness, and whatever else antithesizes the self-destroying Mayans. In this dynamic, Gibson indulges his own

Christian 'heroism,' as he momentarily rescues Jaguar Paw and Mayan history from the forgotten annals of history symbolized in the periphery of the jungle to which Jaguar Paw and his family march in the film's final image.

Gibson, then, draws the audience into his contrived world to establish authenticity, only to reify the official, western version of history by mirroring viewers within an ideological trap. The authenticity striving merely serves the purpose of establishing a context and rationale for imperialism. According to Gibson's own words, "I think hearing a different language allows the audience to completely suspend their own reality and get drawn into the world of the film" (Wildaboutmovies.com). This authenticity striving bolsters the conventional notion that the world in the film is insular, enabling viewers to first identify with Jaguar Paw, in his linear, heroic tale, and then with the Spanish Conquistadors, who along with Gibson, are elevated to the status of the real heroes. Indelibly, this dynamic reifies the western dialect of progress that posits civilization as a desirable alternative to savagery and barbarism. Further, in the film's appropriation of Native identity, bodies, and history, it relies on and reaffirms the stereotypical view of the Native Other as helpless and highly eroticized, which is pointed in the sequence in which Seven (Dahlia Hernandez), Jaguar Paw's wife, births her child while virtually underwater.

Gibson's use of native characters, then, unlike *Grey Owl's*, does not foreground identity, but appropriates static conceptions of identity for political and religious aims; and also co-opts apocalyptic rhetoric, particularly from popular culture, in order to reaffirm Christianity and, by proxy, Gibson's own personal dogma.

Despite the purported authenticity, this agenda is poignant in the director's commentary, a feature on the DVD, in which Gibson admits his project was engendered by his desire to reenact the standard, though stereotypical narrative of America's discovery. The exchange between Gibson and Safinia unfolds as follows:

Safinia: This is where the story started, really isn't it?

Gibson: This is the first thing I thought of.

Safinia: What if there was a guy being chased by ten really bad guys and he comes out onto this beach he collapses, he's exhausted, he looks up?

Gibson: It's the end of the story and Columbus is just arriving

In addition to revealing the impetus behind the film, the director and writer's dialogue reveals the fundamental importance of the film's structure, which has all of the Mayan moments merely a set-up for a narrative retelling of European imperialism. Though, this ideology is unveiled because the nature of mass-market and western culture's desire for tell-all experiences offers Gibson a platform, on the DVD, to explain the filmmaking process. This telling fundamentally alters the viewing experience. A second viewing, for instance, will allow viewers to see all the foreshadowing and the allusions to self-destruction in alternate viewpoints. For instance, even though the film takes place almost entirely within the jungle, aside from the end-scene, earlier in the film when Jaguar Paw and his tribesmen return from their hunt the camera momentarily pans to a present a view of the ocean, one which echoes the penultimate scene in which the camera steadily focuses on the presence of the Spanish galleons. This foreshadowing, though, only makes sense in light of the final scene, and even more sense in the context of Gibson and

Safinia's views. Such moments indicate the way the entire film is structured around the Spanish arrival, and this highlights the degree to which Gibson blatantly traffics in the palimpsestic history of the Other for personal ends.

Beyond the impetus for its creation, the film is underpinned by Gibson's strong bias towards U.S. politics, which Safinia shows in telling ABC, "faced by the Maya are extraordinarily similar to those faced today by our own civilization [...] especially when it comes to widespread environmental degradation, excessive consumption and political corruption." Gibson supports this view in his comment, "there are monsters in every culture" (Wildaboutmovies.com).

In her essay, "Is *Apocalypto* Pornography?" Traci Ardren writes disapprovingly of Gibson's allegory:

it has become fashionable to use the so-called Maya collapse as a metaphor for Western society's environmental and political excesses. Setting aside the fact that the Maya lived for more than a thousand years in a fragile tropical environment before their cities were abandoned, while here in the U.S, we have polluted our urban environments in less than 200, I anticipated a heavy-handed cautionary tale wrapped up in Native American costume. [...]What I saw was much worse than this.

Rather than strive for authenticity with an attention to identity, *Apocalypto* relegates to Gibson's use of Mayans and their history purely as a platform for his own political agenda, which are his critical view of U.S politics, and his simultaneous reifying as Catholicism as the antithetical guiding light for such decadence. *Apocalypto*, then, because it is really a tale about Christianity, in which Christianity is the hero, should be

considered a sequel to Gibson's directorial debut, *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), an equally controversial film that must similarly be read, and viewed, among the context of the oblique and extraneous paratexts surrounding it.

Another film that employs casting to critically disengage from the inherited tradition is *Grey Owl* (1999). In the film, Director Richard Attenborough negotiates questions of authenticity and historical representation within the context of the native experience. The film has been labeled "visually spectacular" in its presentation of a wilderness not yet (but close) touched by business and the market. *Grey Owl* is recognized as the true story of Archie Grey Owl, played by Irish born Pierce Brosnan, a Brit who actually lived in the 1930's that fooled many people into thinking he was actually Indian. The film attempts to negotiate identity formation, as viewers learn at the end that Grey Owl is not racially Indian at all. Ostensibly, this quest for identity—both Archie's and the film's—relies on the stereotype that Indians are closer to nature, as well as the aforementioned one that narrates the easy transition from white to Indian.

Thematically, however, *Grey Owl*, through trivializing these stereotypical identities, a process aided by its very smart casting, is able to subvert the same stereotypes it establishes. This is evinced by the role-reversal, typified in such scenes where Grey owl teaches Pony, a "real" native, played by Annie Galipeau (Maniwaki), how to be in touch with her Indian-ness. Throughout the film viewers are always equivocal about Owl's true identity, "my mother was Irish" Grey Owl admits unconvincingly. However, the courageous and audacious casting of Brosnan, a notable and familiar figure in Hollywood, to play the role of a purported Indian leaves viewers questioning notions of identity. I suggest that viewers are never actually meant to be

convinced of Grey Owl's authenticity, and in questioning this conception viewers are also better able to conceive that the romanticized notion that Indians are one-with-nature is an ill-conceived illusion.

In the opening scene, for example, a man intending to expose this authenticity for financial gains suggests to a Journalist, "Imagine hearing a real Indian's story." The absurdity of this is emphasized by the other man's surprise that Grey Owl can write, but this only appears ironic to the viewer that should be well aware that no one expects Pierce Brosnan to represent a "real" Indian. Here, then, the film leaves the viewer at a precarious junction, questioning the reality and history of the "real" Grey Owl, the fictional one unfolded as the first-level diegesis, and the authentic Grey Owl that exists in the historical account of the fictionalized Grey Owl. Furthermore, there is another Grey Owl; a personified stereotype of the Indian which the viewer should realistically not be able to negate until the film's end, but I argue that the casting as well as the thematic foregrounding of the "real"—ontologically motivated—serve to resist the typical Hollywood construction. The viewer then, along with the fictional characters, experience parallel confusions about the real character. These contradictory, overdetermined positions leave viewers bereft of any "real" concept of the character, and also self-reflexively resist Hollywood's usual practice of positing stereotypically rigid, and stultifying Native Americans identities. The narrative frame; a story (3rd level), within a film (second level), that is supposedly mimetic, serves to defy the traditional constructions that Hollywood has made in the past. One might present the possibility that *Grey Owl* and the character have nothing do with Indians at all, but the presence of the second and third levels actually allude to an entire compendium of Native American

films that undeniably resonate with mainstream viewers. Thus, viewers are compelled to continually negotiate these similarities while maintaining their awareness of the film's narrative structure. These characteristic Hollywood symbols are so pronounced as to continually confront viewers with the contradictory nature of stereotypical representations: the primary contradiction being Brosnan's casting. And, in this preoccupation with identity, Brosnan, as the prototype British actor, is the perfect choice because like all of the film's characters, and the theme, viewers continually question the validity of the fictional Owl's, and Brosnan's, *Indianness*.²⁵ This is evidenced by film's cover, which shows a superimposed Brosnan wearing a headband with two teepees set against the background, along with an Indian on a horse. In this context, what might seem audacious, casting the quintessential Brit Brosnan as Brit-playing-Indian, brings to the fore the tenuousness of the representations of the past.

Another fictional instance where identity becomes a stark contradiction occurs in the scene where Grey Owl is first introduced to Pony's father Jim Bernard. Here, too the casting of Graham Greene (Oneida), a notable Native actor is significant within the structure and the theme. Structurally, the actor Greene, who has appeared in over 10 films, is almost synonymous with current films that involve Indians. Owl's and Bernard's dress in the scene further add to the foregrounding of Identity, where Bernard wears a business suit, while Owl wears Hollywood's formulaically prescribed Indian garb. Furthermore, traditional notions of constructed identity are foregrounded when Bernard tells Owl, summarily, that his daughter should efface her Indian identity in the name of progress. The film foregrounds identity by appealing to the likelihood that viewers will know the bare minimum about each actor.

The concern with progress is another overt theme. The “real” Grey Owl is most recognized in the annals of history for his contributions to conservationism, and in the film this is emphasized by his love affair with Pony which, more significantly, leads to a number of wilderness protection laws being enacted in response to the ‘real’ Owl’s activism. This focus on conservation in the film resonates, and actually relies upon, the fictional Grey Owl’s impersonation. Here, we see Hollywood’s passive, one-with-nature, view of the Indian, in full force. However, the actual closing of this stereotype never reaches fruition because of the previously aforementioned contradictions and resistances inhering in the casting and thematic ultimately equate to a film about a white man, dressed as an Indian, saving the environment. The viewer, unlike Grey Owl’s fictional viewers and audience, never completely buy the illusion. Chief Pete Misebi, played by Jimmy Herman, chief of Grey Owl’s adopted tribe, tells Pony that Owl’s Indian name, when translated into English means, *One Who Roams*, and this is fitting, because Owl manages to pass between different identities and to even transcend the traditional Hollywood construction of the Native American.

Another film in which casting is self-consciousness and has the effect of foregrounding, rather than underscoring stereotypical notions of identity is Frances Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. This film is valuable to understanding the role of the Other precisely because it manages to diverge from Hollywood stereotype even when its representation of Others is tendentious. In fact, there are few depictions of Natives in the film; and even in the few that are proffered—like the Natives that abound Kurtz’s camp, or the ones lining the shore—are less than salutary. Despite these shortcomings, the film is able to resist reifying Self/Other by engaging other stereotypes and conventions.

Coppola's film indirectly reinterprets Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* through the context of one soldier's experience on the Vietnam War. Rather than represent experience mimetically, Coppola recreates the war's psychological effect on the western man's mind through his adept filmmaking. Notably absent from the film are the standard action sequences which characterize the majority of war movies, like Stephen Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). Instead, Coppola's film is heavily character driven and relies on the protagonist Willard's (Martin Sheen) voice-over and strong visual elements. In one famous scene, Willard's Patrol Boat is transported by helicopter, via the air cavalry of Lt. Bill Kilgore (Robert Duvall) to the mouth of the river, while speakers attached to the helicopter's blare Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries." The few scenes involving guns and shooting, like the Sampan and Dung Lo Bridge scenes, effectively focus on violence's absurdity and its traumatic impact on the human mind. When characters are killed, it is always because of human error and chaos, like friendly fire or an errant spear flung by scared Vietnamese villagers lining the shore. As such, Coppola's film intentionally disappoints viewers expecting to see mindless and merciless killing devoid of lasting ramifications. And indeed, by the time Willard and his remaining crewmembers arrive at the end of the river, the psychologically debilitating effects of death and chaos have taken their innocence, sanity, and even the purity of their souls.

One of the chief detours Coppola takes in the creative process is his use of Marlon Brando, a larger-than-life celebrity, with both vocal and visual presence, to play the enigmatic and powerful Colonel Walter E. Kurtz. In Conrad's novella (as Chapter 1 shows), Kurtz is merely a voice, and is ultimately portrayed as a sad and paltry figure that

is merely promised as a voice but is described by Marlow as a “shadow,” as an “animated image of death carved out of old ivory”(Conrad 104-5). Brando, despite his small frame, is a resounding stage presence who dominated Hollywood in his hey day, an Academy Award nominee and eventual winner, most famous, perhaps, for refusing to accept the Oscar.²⁸ Beyond his celebrity presence, through Willard viewers are introduced to Kurtz, and Brando’s character is permitted to develop visually and physically more than Conrad’s Kurtz, who is doubly removed from readers access as he is mediated twice-over, first through Marlow and then through the unnamed, frame narrator. For the film, it is paramount that viewers are entitled to experience Kurtz through Willard and directly. When Willard first encounters Kurtz he is shrouded in darkness, with barely a sliver of light eclipsing from his tremendous and fantastic baldhead. The film is conspicuously depleted of Native depictions, and as such the burden of Otherness rests on Brando’s Kurtz. In this initial meeting however, it is made clear by Willard’s positioning and later by Kurtz’s ideas that enlightenment and truth, symbolized by light, is beyond grasp. Rather than face Kurtz, Willard faces a mysterious, light filled doorway that neither he nor viewers ever pass through. This symbolism suggests that enlightenment, the underlying fascination of Conrad’s novella, will not be found in a Hollywood film or through its characters and personas. What is attainable though is freedom from ideology and discourse, but only by abandoning the safety and security of societal discourse.

This tension created by these self-conscious moments is further highlighted in Kurtz’s ideas and within the great works of western literature and the ones Willard views on Kurtz’s desk, which includes, James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*. Frazer’s work deals with the mythical tale of *The Fisher King*: the tale of a king’s murderer that becomes a

king. This legend provides a frame for Willard's murder of Kurtz, but rather than curtail to the legendary western archetype, Willard subverts western epistemology when he refuses to accept the role of King offered to him by Kurtz's followers who supplicate to Willard after he murders their king. By disavowing power, Willard shows that he has at least learned from Kurtz that western notions of identity, epitomized by the Army command's condemnation of Kurtz heard during Willard's debriefing, is insufficient and artificial. The irony is that the Army, taking a cue from Conrad's novella, claims that Kurtz has lost "restraint" and gone native, but the reality that the notion of restraint is equally artificial and "hollow." The film then, engages both western discourse, embodied in the Army's view, and the western aesthetic tradition by directly engaging its source material, Conrad's novella. This distances the film from its source material and sparks a critical commentary.

Willard's choice to abandon these systems, and through him the film, is made possible by Kurtz's words which negate the entire western belief system by foregrounding the artificial nature of judgment. Unlike Marlow, whose ability to hear Kurtz discourse is limited, Willard is privy to Kurtz's loquaciousness and esoteric soliloquies. He designs to educate Willard about the true nature of man, asking him if he has ever experienced "real" freedom from opinion and from judgment, both from others and from his own self-judgment. His words inform viewers that judgment is a matter of subjectivity and social perspective; a lesson that juxtaposes with the Army's accusation that he is a murderer. As opposed to these social systems and conventions, Kurtz advocates a brutal efficiency that is non-ideological. Of choice, Kurtz suggests the "right to kill but no right to judge." Willard is able to accept Kurtz's wisdom when he follows

through with his orders, not because he sanctions the army's indictment of Kurtz, but because he understands what the outcome of Kurtz's rhetoric will entail, a rhetoric that views cutting off the arms of inoculated children as merely a means to a brutal ends. Marlow's choice, however, is to vanquish evil and to erect a world where the ends have not yet been decided. This explains why he repudiates the power intertwined with becoming Kurtz's successor, gathers up Lance, his one crew member still alive, and gets on the boat, to either return home, or to go elsewhere. His repudiation of this power, as well as the western system, is evinced in his refusal to acknowledge the army's radio request for the coordinates of Kurtz's base. In addition to not having the bombed dropped on Kurtz's base, rejecting "Almighty" the Army's call sign, as well as Kurtz's final request to drop the bomb; Marlow also rejects western teleology in refusing closure.

In rejecting "almighty," Willard also rejects the foreshadowed images of the bombs being dropped in the opening scenes. This sequence begin with Jim Morrison singing the apocalyptic-themed song, "The End," while a blurred image of Willard's face occupies the screen. The first image viewers witness, though, is one of the helicopter engaging an air strike, intended as the one Willard has already seen but viewers will not be told about until later. Though, by the end of the film, Willard is no longer "in their goddamn army," so the air strike does not occur. There are numerous elements that lead us to believe that, like Marlow's tale, the film is told retrospectively; maybe from the future, or possibly from an entirely alternate plane of existence altogether. In this opening scene, Willard is upside down, and this is mirrored in a latter scene, occurring at Kurtz's base, where Marlow is turned upside down by Kurtz's followers. Although neither the fan, nor the helicopter is present, the camera does the spinning. This suggests that Willard

has undergone an apocalyptic enlightenment that mirrors or resembles Kurtz's transformation. By rejecting this end, though, Marlow enables his tale, and the film, to become a confession that alters the future rather than re-inscribing it in a repetitive vision of the past. Coppola turns to the crux of Conrad's novella, Kurtz's final proclamation of "The Horror. The Horror," as an instance of self-referentiality that shows that the history is not a series of imperial re-telling and recycling of imperialist discourse, but a conversation that acknowledges those inconsistencies and tries to make amends for them through confession and narratives. For, as Kurtz himself self-reflexively, explains in the film, "It's impossible for words to describe what is necessary to those who do not know what the horror means"

In *The Apocalypse Now Book*, Peter Cowie details the several options that Coppola considered for endings before finally settling on the one now extant in the film. One of these consisted of Willard, working as a bodyguard for a wealthy businessman, re-telling his tale years later from aboard a cruiser to a woman. This scene concludes with a reiteration of Conrad's end in which Willard visits Kurtz's wife and delivers a carbon copy of Marlow's lie. Though, Coppola's decision to diverge from this end, which closely resembles Conrad's end, shows the way artists use and resist their source material in order to focus particular meaning in their work. Coppola's decision to reject this end, which definitely inscribes more closure, echoes Willard's decision not to adopt Kurtz's role as king. What Coppola achieves, conversely, is a final moment that recites the definitive moment of Conrad's text, which is most valuable for subversion for its ability to foreground language's inadequacy and social dependency in Kurtz's final words, "The Horror. The Horror." These are the words that Marlow elides in his lie to the

Intended, and thus reading intertextually viewers are left without the recourse to civilization and the status quo that was overt in the novella. Coppola's decision is a self-consciously meta-moment echoed earlier when Coppola actually plays the role of the director exhorting Willard and his men not to look at the camera. Such instances disrupt the cohesive unity of the diegetic world and as such demonstrate the tenuous nature of identity and authenticity in film.²⁹

In film, truth and representation is accessed through self-referentiality and intertextuality, which permit directors to transcend the scopophilia inherent in film and other ideological and conceptual limitations. The same tools and resources that may indelibly prove limiting to directors looking to recreate history and experience are the very tools through which they are most likely to expose truth, or its impossibility. More than fiction, perhaps, film, as the most accessible and popular medium, is able to engage and converse intertextually by appealing to its viewers' sense of context and familiarity. In his influential book, *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan distinguishes between different forms of media as "hot" and "cool," a dichotomy that describes the degrees to which viewers, readers, and listeners, are able to participate and share the experience of meaning making in diverse art forms. McLuhan contends that unlike books, which are "hot," because readers engage more thoroughly in creating and forming meaning through their participation and hermeneutic practices, film is "cold" because of the level of freedom and participation granted to viewers in constructing meaning. McLuhan explains, "The media are either 'hot' (with much detail—or 'definition'—being supplied by the transmitter, leaving the receptor little to add from his own experiences or knowledge) or 'cool' (with little detail, but requiring much contribution, or

‘involvement,’ from the receptor)”(Crosby 7). However, written in 1964, McLuhan’s book must be revised to account for the changing climate from which film’s emerge, where viewers are now able to affect changes in film through the various technological devices, and which directors are compelled to cater to the vast spectrum of knowledge and engagement that viewers may now access in interpreting and understanding their product.

V. CONCLUSION: APOCALYPSE NEVER

This project has shown the ways that artists working in several mediums have attempted to engage some tropes and forms of the western aesthetic tradition by resisting closure, which it has been shown is often a political. By altering closure and providing meaning in alternative fashions and forms, such texts show that meaning, truth, and resolution are not *always* political; that is rooted in the western Self's interminable and inscrutable desire, aim, or intention to appropriate the Other in order to reify the Self. Most of the aforementioned texts are at least self-conscious enough to wove into their own fabric the political nature of closure if not by warding off closure altogether, then by reducing it to a feeble plot point that is tacked on or possibly just ridiculous. The next step in understanding the Western conception of it-Self would be an examination of the new forms of media that have been made accessible by the nascent inventiveness of artists whom, in realizing the bleak future of old-fashioned forms of publishing, and also realizing the Internet generation's demand for interactive and participatory reading experiences, have sought to create fictions and worlds that further resist closure by permitting the audience to actually participate in creating worlds, characters, and stories. One such democratic venture is *The Mongoliad*. Co-authored by Neal Stephenson, Greg Bear, Nicole Galland, along with several others, the serialized story will be available to readers online and has been called an "experiment in 'post-book storytelling'" (Io9.com).

Created as a potential outlet to mediate the changing nature of print-media and publication, *The Mongoliad* will consist of “nontextual, para-narrative, and extra-narrative stuff” that will enable users to collaborate in fostering the fictional world and story. This potential project blends the democratization of the literary process, emphasizes readers’ role in creating meaning, and also inhibits closure due to its ongoing nature. Such projects signal the future of literature in which blurring the hierarchal distinction between Self/Other will be further attenuated to account for the diverse, heterogeneous viewpoints of the emerging cosmopolitan world.

NOTES

¹ In contemporary, popular culture, the difficult nature of biblical ends—Christ’s return and the subsequent rapture—is evinced in the popular *Left Behind* series created by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Began in 1993 with *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days*, the authors’ series depicts the struggle between those left on earth following the rapture, and the anti-Christ, a man Nicolae Carpathia. The sheer length of the series (16 books) attests the arduous task of writing the after, or the Other. It took 11 years for the authors to devise an ending, and though the last book is titled, *Kingdom Come: The Final Victory*, it is perhaps more telling that the front flap reads this, “Not all is well in utopia.” The authors implicitly acknowledge the hardships faced in articulating Utopia.

² Brooks observes the distinction between mainstream, popular literature, which still employs the classic model with definitive endings and resolutions, and experimental literature that defies this model.

³ Brookes notes the advent of Modernism as the site of divergence. He contends, “With the advent of Modernism came an era of suspicion toward plot, engendered perhaps by an overelaboration of and overdependence on plots in the nineteenth century. If we cannot do without plots, we nonetheless feel uneasy about them, and feel obliged to show up their arbitrariness, to parody their mechanisms while admitting our dependence on them” (Brooks 7).

⁴ I use the Barnes & Nobles Classics, trade paper version. The original was published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1898. It was collected in volume form in 1902.

⁵ See Edward Said’s analysis in *Culture and Imperialism*, “Two Visions in Heart of Darkness,” for an analogous treatment of the two alternate readings.

⁶ For a more thorough explanation of Jacques Lacan’s model of the psyche, see the third chapter of *Ecrits*.

⁷ Watt focuses on this scene in particular in developing “delayed decoding.”

⁸ In “Conrad’s Impressionism and Watt’s ‘Delayed Decoding,’” Bruce Johnson, arguing more cogently than Watt for Conrad’s status as a literary impressionist, suggests that for Conrad truth is most likely to be found in the primeval. This viewpoint typifies the modernist assumption, found especially in Picasso’s masks, that primitive societies were closer to the truth because of their distance from the decadence typically associated with

technological modernization. This viewpoint is salient in Conrad's model of Marlow's expedition.

⁹ Said contends that time is another factor that critically distances readers from the colonial moment circumscribing Conrad/Marlow. See "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*."

¹⁰ There are literally two rivers. The Thames is named and is implicated in the colonial venture, The other, the Congo, is not named, and thus represents the truth that exists beyond the scope of western language and discourse

¹¹ *Watchmen* was originally published in 12 parts in single-issue form between 1986 and 87' by DC Comics, and the version I use is a compilation of all 12 published by DC.

¹² Veidt, whose fate is sealed from the outset, rhymes with fate.

¹³ As it is still called in the graphic novel's dystopian, 1985 setting

¹⁴ The first time he leaves after Veidt tricks him into believing he has caused cancer in several of the people closest to him.

¹⁵ See Fox Vs. Warner Bros. for a more in-depth discussion of the battle over the *Watchmen* film's contractual rights.

¹⁶ In this dynamic, "meaning," like it is for Conrad's Marlow, isn't found in a "kernel" for either Rorschach, Moore, or readers, but is emitted from the surrounding haze, which in the sense of Moore are the various forms in confluence with the words.

¹⁷ This further links comics to postmodern or experimental fiction, which tends to focus on the presence of elements other than words to foreground discourse.

¹⁸ These will be referred to as such because "paratext" optimally describes the role that these texts play in fostering meaning in the narrative as they provide exterior context not found in the primary narrative, or text.

¹⁹ McCloud's analysis is rather tendentious at times, as he is overly invested in creating a comic book poetic in order to canonize the medium. Indeed, one could suggest that "gutters" are even more integral to conventional prose where authors usually do not have the benefit of providing readers with visual cues.

²⁰ One might justifiably say the same is true for Moore's knowledge and experience of America. Only having visited a couple of times for comic book conventions, it is possible Moore assembles his vision of a 1980's America from mediated, pop culture images.

²¹ The graphic novel's world is littered with advertisements for Veidt's scent, enough so that Snyder's film version begins with The Comedian watching a commercial for Veidt's product just before he is murdered by the latter.

²² Similar to how many Vietnam films, like *Deer Hunter* and *Born on the 4th of July*, depict soldiers' return home.

²³ The review sites *IMDB.com* and *Rottentomatoes.com* testify of this.

²⁴ In commercial advertisements most forcibly.

²⁵ Brosnan's eventual casting as James Bond proves this point.

²⁶ Even Richard Hansen, the resident Maya expert on Gibson's production crew, authenticates *Apocalypto*, calling the film "by far the best treatment—the first treatment really—of the Maya any film has ever done" (Time 2).

²⁷ Interestingly, one of the scenes edited out of the final cut depicted a sick deer, but as Gibson explains, was cut because of its associations with Bambi, which would surely upset a western audience.

²⁸ In this infamous Hollywood scenario, Brando, an American Indian Rights activist, boycotted his award and the ceremony, sending another American Indian Rights activist, Sacheen Littlefeather, in full Native garb, in his stead. Brando did so because he disagreed with Hollywood's depiction of Natives.

²⁹ This intertextuality is extended further in Coppola's 2001 release of a *Redux* version of his film. For a detailed comparison and examination of the relationship between the original film, *Redux*, and the Conrad's novella, see Pamela Demory's essay, "*Apocalypse Now Redux. Heart of Darkness Moves into New Territory.*" Demory's analysis further demonstrates the way director's utilize self-consciousness and intertextuality to interrogate conceptions of identity.

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