universität wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„Multilayered Narrative Construction and Comic Book Continuity in Geoff Johns´ and Gary Frank´s *Doomsday Clock*"

verfasst von / submitted by

Alexander Halamek, BA

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2022 / Vienna, 2022

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt / degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:	UA 066 844
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt / degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet:	Masterstudium Anglophone Literatures and Cultures
Betreut von / Supervisor:	Dr. Tatiana Konrad, MA

Table of Contents

Abstract

Graphic novels and comics have seen a sharp rise in popularity over the last two decades, not only in the mainstream media, but also as an area worthy of academic investigation. Scholars have conducted meticulous examinations of this highly serialized form of graphic storytelling. This area of research still offers a wide range of topics to explore and is missing a more general description of the inner workings of narrative brand continuity, as well as the intradiegetic and extradiegetic factors that influence it.

This thesis aims to explore the multi-layered narrative construction of DC Comics canonical continuity and how it leads to the publication of *Doomsday Clock* by Geoff Johns and Gary Frank in 2016. This text manages to achieve narrative cohesion within over 80 years of stories set in DC´s fictional universe. As *Doomsday Clock* is a continuation of *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, the striking visual and narrative similarities produce an effect of narrative braiding. The focus lies on the character legacies of Superman, Green Lantern and The Flash, and how these legacies inform the canon through a narratological approach. Additionally, I propose that comic book brand continuity cannot exist without these legacies that are the foundation of DC´s narrative continuity.

Abstrakt

Graphic Novels und Comics haben in den letzten zwei Dekaden stark an Popularität hinzugewonnen, nicht nur im Mainstream, sondern auch auf dem Gebiet der akademischen

Forschung. Forscher haben sorgfältige Untersuchungen dieser höchst serialisierten Form des grafischen Storytellings unternommen. Dieses Gebiet der Forschung bietet eine breite Auswahl an Themen, die es zu untersuchen gilt und dennoch fehlt eine generelle Theorie über die Funktionsweise von narrativer Kontinuität eines Brandes, sowie die intradiegetischen und extradiegetischen Faktoren, die sie beeinflussen.

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist die vielschichtige narrative Konstruktion des Kanons von DC Comics zu untersuchen und wie dieser zu der Publikation von *Doomsday Clock* von Geoff Johns und Gary Frank im Jahr 2016 geführt hat. Dieser Text schaffts es narrative Kohäsion innerhalb der über 80 Jahre existierenden Story Welt von DC´s fiktionalem Universum herzustellen. Da *Doomsday Clock* eine Fortsetzung von Alan Moore und Dave Gibbons *Watchmen* ist, wird durch die stilistischen und narrativen Ähnlichkeiten ein Effekt von narrativer Einflechtung produziert. Der Fokus liegt hier auf einer narratologischen Untersuchung der Vermächtnisse der Charaktere Superman, Green Lantern und The Flash und wie diese Vermächtnisse den Kanon beeinflussen. Zusätzlich stelle ich die These auf, dass die Kontinuität des Kanons eines Comic Verlags nicht ohne diese Charakter Vermächtnisse existieren kann, da diese das Fundament der narrativen Kontinuität bilden.

1. INTRODUCTION

I have been reading comic books for over 30 years. As a kid, I would devour anything from *Mickey Mouse* to the *X-Men* and get lost in these fantastic story worlds. The first time I realized that there was an overarching storyline connecting individual titles was when I was going through a stack of *X-Men* comics. In one issue, the X-Men were battling Magneto on his asteroid in space. In the next issue, the X-Men were battling dinosaurs in the "Savage Land", Magneto and his asteroid nowhere to be seen. Looking closely at the covers confirmed that both titles were *X-Men* books, yet one was called *Uncanny X-Men* while the other one was simply *X-Men*. At that moment, I perceived the serial nature of narrative continuity in comics and felt an incredible urge to know all of the X-Men´s continuity. The idea that a narrative could be told through multiple issues over separate individual titles fascinated me. This was also before one could look up issues pertaining to continuity online and my only repository for knowledge was a comics store in downtown Vienna. In an attempt to reconstruct continuity for myself I would spend hours hunched over the bargain boxes that were filled with old issues of my favorite characters.

Throughout the years, I would often lose interest in the titles published by DC and Marvel as they were getting either too repetitive or too confusing. Yet when I saw the first ads for Geoff Johns´ and Gary Frank´s *Doomsday Clock*, I was immediately intrigued by its resemblance to *Watchmen*. *Watchmen* had always been a favorite of mine and I was in total agreement with the rest of my peers that it was nearly perfect and did not need any additions. When the first rumors started circulating that Johns was going to bring Dr. Manhattan into the DC universe for a massive crossover event that would work as a sequel to *Watchmen*, I was very skeptical. Alan Moore´s and Dave Gibbon´s groundbreaking work was seen as holy in the comics community and any attempts to improve on it or add to it were seen as blasphemous. After Zack Snyder´s unfaithful film adaption and DC´s uninspired *Before Watchmen* series, fans had grown weary of writers muddling up the legacy of *Watchmen* with subpar adaptions and additions.

However, with *Doomsday Clock*, Johns and Frank managed to produce a worthy sequel to one of the most popular comic book stories ever published and managed to bring order to the confusing mess that was DC´s canon at the time. This feat is accomplished through the use of Dr. Manhattan who is made responsible for the changes to DC´s continuity that have plagued DC´s canon for the better part of the last two decades.

This thesis aims to highlight the importance but also the function of narrative continuity in DC´s canon of superhero comics. The genre´s highly serialized format of storytelling and publication

demands a coherent continuity as a foundation for its narratives. This foundation is represented by the character of Superman, who was the first superhero within DC´s pantheon. Over the past two decades, this foundation, which is held up by the canon´s legacy characters, has been eroded by a multitude of reboots and retroactive changes. I will show that the legacy of Superman serves as a foundational building block for DC´s canon while the legacies of The Flash and Green Lantern serve as narrative anchors within DC´s continuity, producing a coherent whole. Additionally, I will demonstrate how the adherence to Dave Gibbon´s original art style and nine-panel page layout in *Doomsday Clock* produces an effect of "narrative braiding" that incorporates the Watchmen universe into DC´s canon. Yet, the most important aspect of *Doomsday Clock* is that it also reconnects and braids together previously discarded continuities and so creates narrative cohesion within DC´s canon.

This paper is separated into three chapters, starting with the history of comic book continuity and an extensive literature review regarding the importance of narrative continuity as well as the intradiegetic and extradiegetic factors that influence it. The next chapter discusses important aspects of narratology that are employed in the analysis, focusing on the sequential ordering, the narrative rhythm, and the role of Dr. Manhattan as an actorialized narrator. The analysis part dives deep into the character legacies of Superman, The Flash and Green Lantern to emphasize their influence on the canon and gives a brief history of crises events in the DC universe. The last part of the analysis is a narratological investigation into key scenes from *Doomsday Clock* that establish narrative cohesion within DC´s canon, before concluding my findings.

2. THEORY

2.1. List of comics

DiDio, Dan. *Crisis on Infinite Earths: The Compendium*. New York: DC Comics, 2005.

Fox, Gardner. Hibbard, Everett E. *The First Meeting of the Justice Society of America. All-Star Comics*, no. 3. DC Comics, 1940.

Fox, Gardner. Infantino, Carmine. *The Flash of Two Worlds. The Flash*, no. 123. DC Comics, 1963.

Johns, Geoff et al. *Infinite Crisis*. Edited by Jeanine Schaefer, Eddie Berganza. DC Comics, 2006.

Finger, Bill. Nodell, Martin. *The Origin of Green Lantern. All-American Comics*, no. 16. DC Comics, 1940.

Fox, Gardner. Sekowsky, Mike. *Justice League of America: Starro the Conqueror. The Brave and the Bold*, no. 28. DC Comics, 1960.

Johns, Geoff. Frank, Gary. Anderson, Brad. *Doomsday Clock*. Edited by Jeb Woodward, Robin Wildman. DC Comics, 2020.

Johns, Geoff et al. *DC Rebirth*. Edited by Andrew Marino, Eddie Berganza. DC Comics, 2016.

Johns, Geoff. Kubert, Andy. *Flashpoint*. Edited by Eddie Berganza. DC Comics, 2011.

Morrison, Grant et al. *Final Crisis*. Edited by Eddie Berganza, Adam Schlagman. DC Comics, 2009.

2. 2. List of characters

Dr. Manhattan (Jon Ostermann): A main character from the original *Watchmen* graphic novel who was accidentally locked in an intrinsic field generator chamber and disintegrated on the atomic level. He reconstitutes later as a blue-glowing god-like being with the power to manipulate matter at the atomic level as well as a non-linear perception of time that allows him to see and experience the past, present, and future simultaneously. At the end of the original *Watchmen* story, he leaves that fictional universe for "one less complicated" and arrives in the fictional DC universe where he begins an experiment.

Superman (Kal-El / Clark Kent): The lone survivor of the planet Krypton arrives on Earth as a baby and is adopted by the Kent family who raise him on a farm in Smallville, Kansas. He is the embodiment of hope and the ideal that all other superheroes in DC´s fictional universe strive towards. Being the first of DC´s superheroes, he also represents the foundation of DC´s canon.

Ozymandias (Adrian Veidt): Also a main character from the original *Watchmen* graphic novel, that world´s self-proclaimed smartest man. He attempted to unite Earth under the common threat of an alien invasion. His plan fails and he follows Dr. Manhattan into the DC universe to try and convince him to return and save their universe from nuclear annihilation.

Mime & Marionette (Erika Manson & Marcos Maez): Two new characters created by Johns, yet belonging to the *Watchmen* universe, they are recruited by Ozymandias to appeal to what´s left of Dr. Manhattan´s humanity, as he once spared the pregnant Marionette.

Rorschach II (Reggie Long): Another new character who takes over the mantle of Walter Kovac, the Rorschach from the original *Watchmen* story and is determined to take revenge on Ozymandias for his involvement in the alien invasion that killed Reggie´s parents. He is manipulated by Ozymandias to join him on his quest to find Dr. Manhattan.

Green Lantern (Alan Scott): An engineer who holds onto a mysterious green glowing lantern during a train crash and survives unscathed. He would go on to inaugurate the Justice Society of America in 1940, DC´s first superhero team, becoming an integral part to DC´s canon. By moving the lantern six inches out of Scott´s reach, Dr. Manhattan erases the legacy of Green Lantern and the JSA.

The Flash (Barry Allen / Wally West): The fastest man alive and the first character in DC´s history to travel to an alternate Earth and meet an alternative version of himself (Jay Garrick) thereby establishing the existence of a multiverse. His protégé, Wally West, is trapped in an interdimensional prison by Dr. Manhattan, but manages to escape and warn the heroes of the DC universe.

Firestorm (Ronny Raymond / Prof. Martin Stein): Two characters that were fused together during a nuclear reactor explosion and possessing the power of elemental transmutation, Firestorm is at the center of "The Supermen Theory" conspiracy.

Lex Luthor: Superman´s archnemesis and DC´s self-proclaimed smartest man.

Johnny Thunders & Saturn Girl (Imra Ardeen): Thunders is a 102-year-old man who was a member of the JSA where he commanded the "Thunderbolt", a fifth-dimensional genie, while Saturn Girl is a telepath from the thirtieth century and a member of the Legion of Superheroes. These two characters represent the furthest reaches of DC´s canon, from the past to the future.

Carver Coleman / Nathaniel Dusk: A struggling actor in 1940s Hollywood who becomes a temporal anchor for Dr. Manhattan when he first arrives in the DC universe.

This chapter introduces the most important frameworks and theories of narrative continuity in superhero comics and examines the significance of this form of serialized storytelling. I will start with a brief overview of the development of narrative continuity in superhero comics and show that Superman is the foundation of DC´s canon, before turning to Reynolds and Brooker who have both suggested frameworks explaining continuity. The concept of superhero narratives as modern mythology will illuminate the importance of legacy as a part of narrative continuity. Additionally, I will explain the purpose of *Doomsday Clock,* narrative cohesion, as

well as the extradiegetic and intradiegetic factors that have brought about the necessity for a book that would result in a newly formed status quo.

Superhero comics employ a serialized form of narrative continuity that is reminiscent of telenovela-soaps, stretching storylines over years and demanding a level of attention from its audience that is equally ambitious as it is satisfying (Reynolds 38). The first to put forward a definition of continuity in comic books was comics historian Don Markstein in 1970. He postulated that if two characters met, they were part of the same fictional universe and if one of them met a third character, they would transitively also exist in the same universe (Markstein 1). At the time of his publication though, DC´s canon had not yet become as overly expanded and therefore, this simple definition of continuity only fits its era. Nowadays, continuity is required to encompass every alternative version of those characters, may they be from parallel universes, alternative dimensions, or possible future timelines. Their narratives need to establish connections between them to be perceived as belonging to the DC universe. Anthony M. Smith has proposed to broadly define continuity in superhero comics as "an explicit and consistent memory within fictional universes" which seems fitting to capture the multiplicity of superhero comics (55). I will demonstrate how continuity is employed as a narrative technique that links previously discarded narratives back together, how it restricts certain narrative choices and how it provides an overarching framework that aims for coherence.

Innovations in printing and production methods, as well as the establishment of a direct market for consumers, in the form of specialty shops, lead to a steady growth of the two big publishing houses, DC and Marvel. When mature graphic novels started vindicating the medium of the comic book in the late 1980s, elevating it to the status of a literary product, the comic industry started booming with success. The overwhelmingly positive reception of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons´ *Watchmen* (1986) lead to a tonal shift in DC comics, emphasizing more gritty and realistic elements in favor of the more fantastical science fiction tropes that were prevalent during the seventies. This shift also precipitated a need to streamline the various strands of narrative continuity that were coexisting in DC´s fictional multiverse at the time, leading to a complete reboot at the end of Marv Wolfman and George Perez´ *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (1986).

In 2016, Geoff Johns presented a radical idea to achieve complete narrative cohesion for the whole of DC´s canon, by canonizing all continuities of previous publishing initiatives. A daunting feat, which is realized through the introduction of a non-canonical character, Dr. Manhattan of *Watchmen,* who is made responsible for DC´s changes in continuity. As a result,

Johns successfully connects almost 85 years of narrative continuity in a meaningful way, without foregoing the legacies of characters that have played a crucial role in the establishment of DC´s canon. I want to trace these legacies and the importance of their removals to answer the following questions:

- How does the legacy of characters inform the canon of its brand continuity?
- How does the legacy of *Watchmen* inform *Doomsday Clock*?
- Can the canon exist without the narrative building blocks that inform those legacies?

2.3. Research Aim

My aim is to show that canonical comic continuity cannot exist without the legacies of its most popular characters. They not only serve as a red thread along DC´s timeline, but their heroic actions also set examples for future generations of superheroes which will continue those legacies. This will be shown by a detailed case study into the narrative construction of *Doomsday Clock*, which portrays the DC universe devoid of its fundamental building blocks. By removing specific characters at the pivotal moments that make up important parts of their backstory, Dr. Manhattan corrupts an integral part of the DC universe which leads to a cataclysmic showdown between Superman and Dr. Manhattan. The central conflict between Superman and Dr. Manhattan is framed like a philosophical argument between hope and despair and will be analyzed as such. This culminates in a rebirth of the whole DC universe in which every character, and every story is canonized, achieving narrative cohesion of the canon.

For the analysis I will briefly examine the legacies of the Flash, Green Lantern and Superman. The Flash was the first character to establish the idea of a multiverse while Green Lantern, was a founding member of the JSA which was DC´s first superhero team and an attempt at a shared narrative. Superman represents the embodiment of hope and foundational building block of DC´s canon. They will be analyzed on the levels of their structural, serial, and hierarchical continuity, as defined by Reynolds, in combination with Brooker´s paradigmatic approach. Here, on the structural level, the whole canon and previous continuities are taken into consideration, while serial continuity regards the causal chain of events depicted in current publishing initiatives. Hierarchical continuity deals with the hierarchy of power within DC´s shared fictional universe, while Brooker´s paradigmatic approach also addresses the overall brand continuity of a publisher.

To achieve this, it is crucial to look back at the preceding “crises” that have affected continuity and brought about reboots, as well as the significant changes to the legacies of Superman, The

Flash and Green Lantern. In fact, these characters themselves have brought about major changes to the canon, for example, expanding the DC universe to a multiverse and sacrificing their lives to save and preserve it. A narratological approach regarding the temporal structure of Superman´s origin and Dr. Manhattan´s far reaching manipulation thereof will reveal the gravity of Superman´s legacy to DC´s fictional narrative universe and why it cannot exist without him or DC´s other legacy characters. The major event series in which these characters fight for the survival of their universe and overcome the greatest odds define their legacies. *Doomsday Clock* then aims to define the whole of DC´s legacy.

2.4. Achieving Narrative Cohesion

Readers of superhero comics keep an internal record on what is canon and what is not, even though the sheer volume of available texts makes this an almost Sisyphean task of constantly trying to catch up. To give some context here, according to DC´s website, they published a little over 1100 comics in weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly installments in 2019. Considering all these stories are set within one fictional universe should offer a glimpse at the volume of narrative continuity that makes up the fictional DC universe. Therefore, the contemporary comic book industry has to rely on a range of narrative techniques to service a loyal and dedicated readership while also addressing a potential wider audience (Smith 53).

What has been missing so far is a definitive text that acknowledges the constant changes to continuity on an intradiegetic level, which is exactly what *Doomsday Clock* accomplishes. Declaring an official status quo and defining which specific causal chain of events to recognize as the official canon had previously posed a major problem for DC. The ingenuity and courage of Geoff Johns lead to a solution that was equally as revolutionary as it was simple. On the one hand, the conclusion of *Doomsday Clock* canonizes all previous continuities, characters, and crisis events. On the other hand, Johns transferred the responsibility for the changes to continuity to a force outside of the canon, Dr. Manhattan who had left the fictional universe of *Watchmen* behind to quench his scientific curiosity in the multiverse of DC. In that sense, *Doomsday Clock* serves not only as a sequel to *Watchmen* but also concludes DC´s latest publishing initiative “Rebirth” which was started in 2016. It also attempts to unify over 80 years of continuity into one coherent narrative by rebooting the fictional universe of DC anew. This is achieved through a paradigmatic crisis that presents a central conflict between hope and despair.

In short, the tone of DC comics had taken on a darker and grittier note, after ten years of narrative continuity had been erased as a part of Dr. Manhattan´s experiment. The loss of this

period coupled with the disappearance of legacy characters from the canon had also lead to a gradual dismissal of hope within the overarching storyworld, caused by a compressed timeline and reworked origin stories. *Doomsday Clock* then depicts this manipulation of DC´s timeline, the consequences that stem from it and how the heroes of the DC universe overcome them. The series is meant to emphasize the importance of a continuous legacy of its most prominent characters and to show what happens if these foundational building blocks of DC´s canon are no longer present.

The main character is Dr. Manhattan who is employed as a cold logical antithesis to Superman´s embodiment of hope. Alan Scott, the first Green Lantern and founder of the Justice Society of America, DC´s first superhero team, serves as an example of a legacy lost. In contrast, the two versions of the Flash, Barry Allen, and Wally West, exemplify a character legacy so vital it cannot be expunged from the canon. Johns also utilizes the character of Johnny Thunder, a 102-year-old man and only remnant of the JSA, as a temporal anchor to DC´s past. Additionally, Imra Ardeen, or Saturn Girl, a telepath from the thirtieth century and member of the Legion of Superheroes represents the future of DC´s canon. By including these two characters in the narrative, Johns establishes a distinct temporal link between the furthest shores of DC´s continuity. *Doomsday Clock* also introduces more characters from the *Watchmen* universe that hold important roles within the story, Ozymandias, the self-proclaimed smartest man on his earth and a new version of Rorschach. Together with two completely new characters, Mime and Marionette, they are trying to convince Dr. Manhattan to return to their native universe and save it from nuclear annihilation.

Dr. Manhattan´s scientific curiosity leads him to explore the past and future of Superman and thereby DC´s canon as a whole. It is significant to note that Dr. Manhattan is not officially part of the DC universe which allows him to observe and make detailed changes to Superman´s continuity, and thereby to the whole canon. His role as an actorialized narrator, defined by Groensteen (2013) as “an instance constructed by the text” and in this case, an explicit actor, gives the audience an unprecedented insight into the inner workings of the structural continuity of DC´s canon (79). With such a sheer volume of material being canonized, another question that arises is how the narrative construction can still work in a meaningful way, even though the majority of stories contradict each other?

A fitting example here would be the origin story of Superman, canonically set in 1938 but continually pushed forward in time to give the character a more contemporary feel. During *The New 52* publishing initiative, which took place prior to the release of *Doomsday Clock*, he

appears to the world in 2011 as a 22-year-old version of Superman. This leaves out a crucial part in the development of the character, his time as Superboy. In previous continuities, Superman is inspired by the JSA to become Superboy, which was a major aspect of the character´s development. In turn, he has served as an inspiration to the Legion of Superheroes, a group of young heroes from the thirtieth century and a cornerstone of DC´s future. *In The New 52* era, continuity implies that Superboy and the Legion are both absent, presenting a version of Superman that is wholly unfamiliar to long time audiences as the legacy of the character has been altered so drastically.

Doomsday Clock serves as a prime example to illustrate the difficulties of keeping up with current continuity. When the first issue was released in November 2017, it was already set one year in the future, in 2019. The consecutive issues were meant to be released monthly, over the span of a year. By issue #12 the rest of DC´s continuity should have caught up. However, the series suffered from severe delays and was ultimately released as a quarterly title, almost doubling its publication schedule. This caused all kinds of editorial problems, one of them being the fact that Alfred Pennyworth, butler, and father figure to Batman was still alive and well in the pages of *Doomsday Clock*. Meanwhile, on the main *Batman* title, writer Tom King had decided to kill off Alfred, and Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo´s *Dark Nights: Metal* was already kicking off DC´s next companywide crossover. During that event series, Batman has died (again), making his and Alfred´s appearance in *Doomsday Clock* very much questionable on the level of serial and hierarchical continuity, as both event series were being published at the same time.

Dr. Manhattan also serves as the answer to this question, identifying the prime earth of DC´s multiverse as a “Metaverse” from which all other stories flow out of, partially explaining why both event-series were taking place simultaneously. He also traces the generational shifts and reboots of DC´s continuity back to Superman, who does not only serve as symbol of hope but also represents the foundation of all of DC´s canon. The methodology chapter will present a narratological inquiry into the narrative construction of *Doomsday Clock* and subsequently, DC´s canon.

3. Literature Review: Narratology & Continuity in Superhero Comics

As the genre of superhero comics has gained a certain mass appeal through its proliferation across a wide range of different media outlets, comics have become equally important objects of study for scholars from various academic disciplines. Still, comics had had a long and harsh path towards recognition during the latter half of the twentieth century, constantly competing

with the assumption that they did not qualify as real art. It is probably safe to say that the introduction of the term "graphic novel" in the late 1970s to mid-1980s accompanied by the release of several groundbreaking works, laid the debate to rest. Mahmutovic (2018) points out that, "[t]his work has not only had a significant impact on readers of comics, but readers of prose fiction in general. It challenged many preconceived ideas about the medium of comics and, together with the likes of Gaiman and Art Spiegelman, gave rise to the era of graphic novels" (2).

These included Will Eisner´s *A Contract with God* (1978), Art Spiegelman´s *Maus. A Survivor´s tale* (1986), and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon´s *Watchmen* (1986). While all of these examples differ greatly in style, content, and form, they still exemplify Scott McCloud´s very broad definition of comics: "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9). In my mind, this definition is sufficient to subsume all instantiations of the medium, as it does not lay emphasis on the distinction between words and images, but rather its deliberate combination. While the medium of comics itself encompasses a multitude of different genres, from abstraction to autobiographical work, this thesis focuses on American superhero comics.

The field of comics studies offers many different avenues of investigation, applying approaches from popular culture studies, narratology, semiotics, or intersectionality. Concurrently, the distinction between comics and graphic novels, which for the most part comes down to serialization, is discussed at large by Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey (2014). Although they exclude superhero comics from their analysis and rather focus on the other genres of the medium, with Baetens focusing on abstraction in comics (2011) and characterization (2013) as well as story worlds (2020). Also favored topics are the representations of hypermasculinity in male characters as shown by Jeffrey Brown (2001) who has also explored the modern superhero in film and television (2016) and the multiple identities of Batman (2019). There are also intersectional discussions dealing with queer characters or characters of color, like Adilifu Nama´s *Super Black: American Pop Culture and Black Superheroes* (2011) or historical explorations of the genre like Peter Coogan´s *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (2006). Hillary Chute (2008) has asked the question if comics are to be considered literature, in addition to also decoding them (2006) and reading them as graphic narratives (2006). Mila Bongco (2000) has also contributed a monograph on the language, culture, and concept of the superhero.

Scholarly investigations usually make one character the central focus of their analysis, for example, Philip Bevin (2019) has studied the extensive history of Superman as a character and

a brand while Regalado (2015) takes a close look at the inherent modernity of the character. Additionally, Jennings (2009) focuses on the synthesis of scholarship and an emerging criticism regarding Superman. Still, the objects of interest are usually situated within the larger context of their fictional universe and publisher. It is therefore necessary to take into consideration the many different and continuous iterations of characters through the various "Ages" of comics. These represent historical periods and their respective places within the narrative continuity of a publisher, also called the brand´s canon. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the prevalent theoretical frameworks regarding comic book continuity.

Continuity in superhero comic books denotes the multi-faceted web of interconnected texts and backstories that make up a publisher´s canon. Considering the serialized publishing format of superhero comics, a strict causal link between these stories is often hard to construe, when the individual titles are released on the same day. As a result, the narratives unfold rather next to each other instead of having a fixed order. While Smith (2015) has proposed that continuity develops along a syntagmatic and paradigmatic axis yet is only ever implied and not explicitly spelled out, others have recommended more differentiated approaches (59). Philip Bevin has traced Superman´s continuity through the ages, while Will Brooker has done the equivalent for Batman´s canon (2012) and the many different iterations of the character (2015). Paul Levitz (2011) has managed to compile his encyclopedic knowledge of DC comics into a comprehensive form, detailing 75 years of publishing comics. The semiotic approach to sequential art of Thierry Groensteen (2007) who has written two detailed books on the theoretical workings of comics needs to be taken into consideration just like Richard Reynolds´ (1992) exploration of the modern mythology of superheroes. What is lacking here though is a closer look at the evolution of the canon as well as the intradiegetic and extradiegetic factors that influence it. Especially, regarding the overarching storyworld narrative that holds together all the various individual titles and team books in one web of interconnected texts. Therefore, *Doomsday Clock* by writer Geoff Johns and artist Gary Frank is a fascinating examination of this intertwined network of relations among the texts that make up the canon, as it makes a definitive statement about the status quo of the DC universe.

3.1. The Origin of Comic Book Continuity

The importance of continuity in superhero comics stems from its long running, serialized publishing format, which breaks down the long form narrative into weekly or monthly installments. Considering that DC has been publishing superhero comics this way for almost

85 years, the continuous narrative cohesion of its intellectual property has become the company´s most valued aspect.

Philip Bevin traces the development of Superman from an above average strongman to a cultural icon in his book *Superman and Comic Book Brand Continuity*. By detailing the various phases of development that the character went through in order to reach mass appeal, the author also gives insight into the inner working of DC´s early brand continuity as well as the internal and external factors that shaped it. With World War II sweeping across Europe, comic book superheroes made for perfect propaganda figures, furthering the war effort, and pushing comic books sales (Bevin 16). Marvel´s Captain America is a striking example of such use for a comic book character, where the geopolitical conflicts of the real world shaped and informed the stories that were published in early superhero comics. The fact that comics were even following a somewhat coherent narrative had been born out of sheer necessity. In this sense, Chute (2008) remarks that "In particular, graphic narrative offers compelling, diverse examples that engage with different styles, methods, and modes to consider the problem of historical representation" (457). It can be argued that the effectiveness of the portrayed propaganda constituted a need to further explore these popular war time stories, evident by the many titles that featured costumed heroes taking part in the war effort. Even though the historical representation of these events, does not correspond with events in the real world, they are integral building blocks to the foundation of DC´s brand continuity.

As Paul Levitz, an editor at DC for 38 years, describes it, at the time when the publisher, then still called National Allied Publications, released *New Fun* No.1 in 1935, it was the first book that had all-new and original material. This was in stark contrast to other companies publishing comic books that merely reprinted old material and served as "repositories for the castoffs of the news-paper strips" (2011, i). With the aims of a publishing company being to release new material, an ever-present need for new characters and story material arises. The majority of superhero characters that are among the most popular today, all have their origins during the so called "Golden Age" of Comics (2011, i). This was a time "when readers were searching for methods of escape from a failing economy and the dangers of war", according to Hughes (2006 546). In his book *75 years of DC comics: The Art of Modern Myth Making*, Levitz postulates that the history of DC comics went through these stages of development, or "Ages":

- The Stone Age: Prehistory – 1938
- The Golden Age: 1938 – 1956

- The Silver Age: 1956 – 1970
- The Bronze Age: 1970 – 1984
- The Dark Age: 1984 – 1998
- The Modern Age: 1998 – 2010 (Levitz 5)

There exists no definitive term for the current period of comic publication, however, Levitz has suggested the term "Digital Age", marking the advent of digital comics production and its distribution. The first two periods were the most creative and productive eras in terms of stories and character creations while in the Bronze Age the sheer volume of published material was already causing problems within continuity. Having survived through these ages not only speaks to the popularity and longevity of characters like the Flash and Green Lantern, but also to their positions as building blocks of their respective brand continuity. Still, there are two important external factors that played a significant part in the establishment of a shared narrative continuity, as pointed out by Anthony M. Smith regarding the "Golden Age" of comics:

> children/adolescents represented the primary target audience in this period, the market experienced a general customer turnover every three years. This constant change of readership provided little incentive for editors to ensure narrative connections to prior storylines with which its fast-changing audience would likely be unfamiliar. In addition, due to the perception of comic books as disposable entertainment, there was an absence of back issues within reading cultures, meaning there was also little available prior narrative within circulation to which readers might refer. (55)

This meant that, going forward, DC would have to look to its largest rival, Marvel, and try to emulate their attempts at world building to keep readers interested in new, connected material. Smith also observed that,

> to appeal to the segment of the readership that had begun to accumulate and revisit its own collection of comic book experiences, publishers – particularly Marvel, but to a lesser extent DC also – began to forge an explicit and consistent memory within fictional universes during this period. Narratives began to regularly and explicitly reference events in other series and from earlier storylines, suggesting that a publisher's collection of superhero titles operated as a single, coherent storyworld. (55)

The notion of a shared narrative was furthered by the idea of a "team-book" i.e., a book in which the different characters from their individual titles met other characters that were also

part of their brand continuity. (Reynolds 37). Reynolds acknowledges the commercial reasons that lead to crossovers between individual titles and team-ups of a revolving cast of characters, as extra characters mixed with popular or new ones were sure to increase sales (37). A book like *The Brave and the Bold* regularly featured stories of Batman working with less esteemed characters, beginning in 1966 (37). However, there are far reaching consequences regarding brand continuity as characters establish close links between each other as well as sperate teams of superheroes (Reynolds 37). In this regard, Friedenthal (2019) points out that "[s]ignificant changes or occurrences in any single book that takes place within the DC Universe are, by the strictures of this continuity, reflected in every other DC Universe title" (6).

The first of these superhero teams was the "Justice Society of America," introduced in *All Star Comics* issue #3 in 1940. A team of costumed heroes, inspired by Superman, who fought on behalf of the United States during World War II. Interestingly, the JSA did not feature Superman as a member. The popularity of the JSA waned rather quickly and they would not be seen again until the beginning of the Silver Age. This was also the time when the process of "world-building" was taken more seriously by the editorial staff of DC, as Friedenthal (2012) points out:

> the "world-building" aspects of the publisher's output were somewhat haphazard at first, but by the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, DC (in part copying the intentional world-building continuity of rival Marvel Comics) was working deliberately to create a cohesive story world spanning a multiverse full of different Earths. (4)

The more meetings that take place between other costumed characters, or versions of them from different earths in the DC multiverse, the more entrenched their connections and relationships become on an intertextual level (Reynolds 38). As a result the multiverse grows but these connections inform and also put restrictions on overall continuity. If the Flash and Green Lantern meet in the pages of *All Star Comics* as part of the JSA, they also need to be familiar with each other within their respective individual titles. In this regard, Mikkonen (2017) points out a convention that is usually adhered to by the readers of a narrative in which they "establish the chronology of their events, identify the characters, construe their personalities and relationships, and make note of the significance of the milieu and the circumstances (34).

There are many competing definitions of comic book continuity floating around and Friedenthal attempts to define it this way: "Continuity in a comic book superhero universe is the meta-narrative created out of the sum total of meetings, relationships, battles, births, deaths, and other twists of plot and characterization that have taken place within that universe" (6). Fans then aim to accumulate as much knowledge on the continuity of their favorite characters and discuss it

online and offline. Matthew J. Pustz (1999) notes the centrality of narrative continuity in terms of engagement between the audience and superhero comic books: "Information based on continuity becomes the source of discussion, jokes and arguments, making it the raw material for the interactive glue that holds comic-book culture together" (56). This core group of fandom regards continuity as the highest good and defends it vigorously.

To Reynolds, continuity "forms the most crucial aspect of enjoyment for the committed fans" and he compares it to long running television formats:

> Continuity is a familiar idea for all followers of soap opera, but as practiced by the two major superhero publishers, continuity is of an order of complexity beyond anything to which the television audience has become accustomed. An appreciation of the importance of continuity is an essential prerequisite to a fully-engaged reading of superhero comics, especially those published post Silver Age. (38)

This prerequisite is now missing as the multiverse that made up the Silver Age of DC comics, together with its previously established brand continuity, was officially struck from the canon. This happened following the conclusion of DC´s first ever company-wide reboot in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* in 1986. After this restarting of DC´s brand continuity, key titles like *Superman* and *The Flash* even changed their numbering and started over with a brand-new issues no.1. Certainly, this marketing ruse was intended to draw in new readers who had previously been put off by the sheer volume of stories already available. It is hard to imagine that a casual reader would choose to start reading Batman with issue 478, as this entails 477 issues of unfamiliar material that needs to be read as well. Therefore, issues with a low number count were expected to bring in a new readership. Examining Batman´s long running continuity, Smith remarks that,

> the increased pressure on publishers to attract a wider audience while also retaining the core readership has required rethinking continuity: writers still reference the Caped Crusader's complex and extended backstory but use techniques far subtler than those deployed prior to the emphasis on new readers. By implying Batman continuity as opposed to explicitly flagging it up, writers appease a core following of dedicated readers while not confusing and/or irritating a broader audience unfamiliar with the minutiae of Batman's biography. (53)

However, this "implied continuity – that is, writers' referencing of an overarching storyworld in ways that satisfy dedicated readers without baffling new and/or casual readers ignorant of prior events", ignores the official canonical status of a story (Smith 54). Long time readers of DC comics though, are never content with reboots as their collections of back issues are no longer considered canon and they have to get used to a new numbering system and status quo.

The main result of *Crisis on Infinite Earths* was a downsizing from a multiverse of infinite earths and infinite variations of characters to one single, coherent, and unified universe. Friedenthal points out the initial reason for having coherent and cohesive continuity:

> What began as a bit of a slapdash connection between alternate versions of popular characters from different eras was refined, redefined, and retconned continually over time such that ultimately readers could chart and follow a unified cosmology of fictional parallel worlds composing the entirety of creation (including our own "real" world, or at least a fictionalized version thereof). (4)

Over the last three decades there have been multiple companywide reboots that have affected the numbering system of titles to such a degree that nowadays, it has become impossible to follow continuity solely based on consecutive issues. Nowadays, when talking about a specific title, it is common to refer to it by its creators, i.e. *Batman* by Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo, Volume 1.

3.2. Superman: The Foundation of DC´s Continuity

The overall importance of Superman to the canon of DC comics, which is twofold, cannot be stressed enough. Superman was the first character introduced within the fictional universe that comprises all of the stories of DC comics and so, all subsequent stories and characters that were introduced after him draw inspiration from him. This means that characters are modeled, to a degree, on the same belief system that Superman holds true, and they aspire to reach his level of greatness. Therefore, his legacy serves as a template for other characters in terms of popularity and longevity. One notable example here is Superman´s strict "no killing" rule which is universally adapted by all other superhero characters within DC´s fictional universe. This rule stems from Superman´s believe that as a superhero and a symbol of hope, he must always take the moral high road and find creative ways of defeating his opponents, because killing them would make Superman just another villain. Richard Reynolds has described this character trait as "the extra effort" that superheroes utilize to overcome the greatest odds (41).

As Superman is also considered the most powerful character within DC´s fictional universe, the titles that he stars in also represent the top tier in terms of hierarchical continuity. This means that the stories published in *Superman*, *Action Comics* and *Man of Steel*, have precedence over titles of less popular characters in the case of narrative contradictions. The kind of threats that are unleashed on his fictional universe always need to be on par with the character´s power levels, otherwise there would be no reason for him to intervene. It follows then that the narrative

construction of DC Comics revolves around Superman and spins out from there to include the multitude of other characters that are present within DC´s brand continuity. This is of course also true for *Doomsday Clock* in which Superman, the symbol of hope and inspiration is pit against *Watchmen´s* Dr. Manhattan, the cold, logical antithesis to Superman.

Yet, this thesis is not an exploration of Superman´s continuity, as Bevin, Levitz, and Morrison (2011) have already fulfilled this task with great care and precision. Instead, it targets the inner workings and rules that govern DC´s canon of stories and how these in turn are influenced by longstanding characters. As Superman is the central character to the narrative construction of DC´s fictional universe, most scholars focus on him. This can be perceived from the existing scholarship on Superman, including works by such authors as Larry Tye and Andrew J. Friedenthal. A logical development within the field of studies concerning DC comics, as Superman stories, and those told in adjacent titles like *Action Comics* and *The Man of Steel* not only influence the whole of DC´s narrative continuity but also acts as its center. These stories deal with grand themes and motives, such as hope, responsibility, power and belonging. A recurrent plot point is the "othering" of Superman, pointing out his alien origin and the ingenious and inspiring ways he overcomes this fear of him. The character also reached a high point in popularity with the release of Richard Donner´s *Superman* movie in 1979 which really made people believe a man could fly. Still, Superman is not without failure and the biggest burden he has to carry is the fact that he is the sole survivor of his home planet of Krypton. Although he may not have been directly involved in the demise of his home world, his mission is to ensure Earth does not suffer the same fate as Krypton. This elevates the status of Superman and places him next to the heroes of classical mythology.

3.3. Superhero Narratives as Modern Mythology

In his article *The Myth of Superman*, Umberto Eco compares the character of Superman to that of other heroic male characters from ancient mythological tales in order to describe the lore of Superman. This is a rather fitting comparison, as Superman himself is an ancient being from a long-lost civilization, millions of light-years away. However, there is a fundamental difference between contemporary superhero stories and that of classical or Nordic mythology in the way the myths are articulated over time (15). The traditional figure of myth is defined by a religious or divine origin, featuring "immutable characteristics and an irreversible destiny", thereby giving the story a predetermined, unchangeable outcome (15). As an example, the author points to the story of Hercules:

> The story has taken place and can no longer be denied. Hercules has been made real through a development of temporal events. But once development ended, his image symbolized, along with the character, the story of his development, and it became the substance of the definitive record and judgements about him. (15)

In contrast to this, the kind of myth that is communicated through the characters of superhero comics works through different temporal mechanisms, as the story of Hercules does not continue on. The origin of Superman and his defining traits are probably as commonly known as the heroic feats performed by Hercules. Yet, there are still volumes of stories to be told about Kal-El and other fantastic characters like him. In Eco´s view, modern novels offer "a story in which the reader´s main interest is transferred to the unpredictable nature of what will happen and therefore, to the plot invention which now holds our attention" (15). The defining mythological event has not taken place before the story, but rather unfolds within it, as it is being told. There is a peculiar detail about the way superhero stories are told, which Eco points out: "The very structure of time falls apart, not in the temporal sphere about which it is told, but rather in the time in which it is told" (17). If one were to pick up and read an issue of *Superman* this week and then skip the next two issues, the plot might have moved on, but time seems to have been standing still and the story seems to just fill in gaps in an overarching narrative. In that sense, the events that have come before and those that are about to happen are always cloudy, lacking a certain causality (17).

I can only partially agree with Eco´s critique here as he does not take the serialized format of the comic book into consideration. Currently, single issues of comic books feature between 25 to 30 pages in which either a whole story or part of a longer storyline is printed, restricting plot development to a certain degree. Writers and artists collaborate to produce a coherent piece of art that fits into an overarching narrative construction that happens in "Hypertime". This is a concept that was first postulated by Grant Morrison during his tenure as a writer on *Justice League of America* and aims to explain the relatively unequal flow of time within DC´s fictional universe. According to the DC Database, it is an "overarching and interconnected web of timelines and realities" that all flow together to create the canon of DC comics. At its center is a central timeline, representative of current continuity, with all other alternative timelines diverging from it, whether they are in continuity or not. It is also noteworthy that "Hypertime" itself is considered to exist outside of DC´s fictional universe and its official status as an element of the canon is unclear. That itself speaks to the fluidity and flexibility of comic book continuity and the narrative constructions it employs. By situating Hypertime outside of, yet around DC´s

multiverse it becomes as malleable as DC´s canon itself. After discussing the origin, the foundation, and ambiguous temporality of DC´s continuity it is now time to look at established definitions of superhero comic book continuity.

3.4. Will Brooker: Principles of Comic Book Continuity

In his book *Hunting the Dark Knight*, Will Brooker has proposed some general principles that govern the narrative continuity of superhero comics, calling them a "rulebook" that dictates "what counts and what happened, what is "true" and what isn´t, in the mainstream Batman comic book universe" (154). What might sound like a stern structuralist approach at first turns out to be a simple application of logic in most cases. The narrative situation of Batman comics is determined by various factors stemming from current continuity. Consider Batman´s sidekick, Robin for a moment. There have been four distinct iterations of the character so far; starting with Dick Grayson in the Golden and Silver Age, Jason Todd and Tim Drake in the Bronze and Dark Ages and continuing currently with Damien Wayne, Batman´s son. According to Brooker´s rulebook, any story featuring the Dick Grayson version of Robin would have to be set in the past and could not feature any of the other Robins, as they had not been introduced yet. As Batman is another leading character within DC´s narrative continuity, the mainstream comic book universe of his brand is an extension of DC´s canon and therefore governed by the same rules as Superman's. This is made evident by Batman adhering to Superman´s "no killing" rule, yet for his own different reasons. Even though, Batman and Superman represent cornerstones of DC´s brand, their contemporary popularity is always pronounced by their readership.

Brooker also takes note of an interesting extradiegetic factor, fandom, and assigns to it the role of an authoritative figure that "polices" continuity (154). In this role, fans conduct meticulous research into the backstories of their favorite characters which they document in detail as well as share it on websites like Wikipedia and the DC Database. There also exists a multitude of online forums to discuss all superhero related content. In some cases, users moderate these message boards as "CP", continuity police, answering user questions regarding the canonical status of characters and story arcs. Their aim is to spot errors in continuity as minute as unexplained changes to a characters' costume as well as unfamiliar character traits. It is hard to say whether these considerable efforts in research are due to the readers' desire to find and identify with the definitive version of their favorite character or to fully grasp their brand continuity. As Brooker points out, this thorough attempt by the independent audience to give

the canon a coherent and cohesive structure is in direct contrast to Umberto Eco´s declaration that only the story being currently read holds importance (Booker 155).

3.4.1. The Three Paradigms of Continuity

Situated within the same fictional universe of DC comics, the canons of Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman are also governed by DC´s brand continuity which superimposes certain editorial rules on them. Brooker identifies three distinct paradigms that dictate and guide the way that Batman´s continuity has evolved since DC´s first reboot in 1985´s *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (152). This event series by Marv Wolfman and George Perez was the result of the accumulation of almost 50 years of stories that had caused DC´s fictional universe to become overcrowded with characters and their own contradictory continuities. According to Friedenthal,

> [b]y the mid-1980's, the "obsessed," fan-driven demand for cohesive continuity within comic book universes, combined with the creator-driven desire to constantly devise new scenarios and alternative narratives, had led to a cluttered, confusing mess in the DC Universe. (6)

Crisis on Infinite Earths erased many characters, killed off even more as heroic sacrifices and destroyed countless parallel universes within its narrative multiverse. This was an effort carried out to streamline and adapt the most popular characters and give them a more contemporary image, while also deepening and strengthening DC´s own mythology. A process that DC would refine over the years and use to reinvigorate its publishing schedule whenever they felt the need for a new creative direction. One major goal that publishers also strive for in this context is the continuation of their most popular character legacies that have taken on mythical proportions.

Myth

The first one of these paradigms, is the "myth" of a character, their metatext which Brooker sees as belonging "to everyone; to the public, to popular memory, to a modern folk culture" (152). Nonetheless, the mythology of superheroes has grown so much it cannot exist without a proper structure. Reynolds explains that this "metatextual structural continuity" works as a "strategy through which superhero texts most clearly operate as myths" and notes the importance of continuity as providing a means for interaction with the audience, as this is a central characteristic of "mythological discourse" (45). Although, as Brooker puts it, "it is this sense of Batman as myth that comprises all his contradictory variants but is loose and flexible enough for the contradictions not to matter" (153). This continuous mythological discourse, in

which the audience is free to choose which version or iteration of a character they favor, or even which specific Age can only function properly if it is grounded within a continuous narrative. This means that an archetype is expressed here, that all individual stories and iterations of characters follow as a part of a whole, with each new story contributing to it and building on what has come before (Brooker 153). Still, the audience of superhero comics seems compelled to situate their favorite characters and stories within brand continuity, even if it is only to make sure that they are officially canonized. If there was no overarching continuous assessment of characters and story developments that runs in line with all the published titles, the canon would overflow with stories contradicting each other and therefore negate its initial purpose. Here, attention needs to be drawn again to a peculiar feature that is part of DC´s overall mythology; the no-killing rule that is almost universally adhered to by all of DC´s superheroes. This rule, while morally hard to object to, leads to an overpopulation of characters which in turn floods the canon with stories, making it even harder to determine which texts are canon.

Matrix / Brand

The second paradigm that Brooker has identified is the "matrix", which has so far been referred to as the "brand". It can be seen as "a smaller, more contained and
more controlled network of texts, defined by their current status as Warner Bros. Batman products" which in turn belong to the DC comics universe. Additionally, they are "expressions of the contemporary corporate template, rather than a broader, folk identity" (Brooker 154). This corporate template is also used to synchronize the various other mediums, like movies, tv-shows and video games with the rest of its brand continuity. Although, this attempt to create synergy between the different iterations of a character only goes so far as to make a character resemble their comic book counterpart enough to satisfy loyal fans. For the most part, only the character´s core values and points of identification are retained, while the main goal is to streamline and adapt them for the masses and broaden their appeal. In a sense, the matrix of a character represents the most current version that agrees with contemporary continuity and the canon. Depending on writers and artists though, this matrix may change periodically and incorporate previous versions of a character. The matrix then also enacts a degree of influence on the rules of continuity.

The Rulebook

According to Brooker, the third paradigm of comic continuity is the most rigid one, which he refers to as "the rulebook of continuity canon", a draconian sensibility of which stories "count"

in the sense that they have happened within continuity therefore determining what is "true" and what is not (154). *Crisis on Infinite Earths* is a drastic example of how this last paradigm is applied in practice and while it might be seen as acts of control and censorship, this strict approach is editorial in nature. It includes "revising, writing over, deleting and replacing" with the aim of erasing large swathes of comic book history that no longer fits within the matrix or the overall myth of DC´s brand (Brooker 157). This in turn reveals that continuity is not permanent but rather develops fluidly around its constant changes. However, *Crisis on Infinite Earths* definitively separated DC´s brand continuity into a pre-*Crisis* and a post-*Crisis* era. By definition then, the post-*Crisis* era is no longer considered to be in continuity. This does not mean that the pre-*Crisis* continuity is completely erased but that it cannot be referenced explicitly anymore, it can only be implied. Anthony M. Smith defines implied continuity as the following:

> implied continuity addresses new and/or casual readers' desire for coherent narratives not dependent upon any prior knowledge while also catering for dedicated readers' preferences for a complex narrative continuity that references the wider storyworld. Both new/casual readers and dedicated readers must still purchase all the instalments of a particular story arc, either individually or together as part of a collected edition, but while the former can delight in the serial pleasures of that arc's narrative enigma and resolution, the latter can also relish the arc's implied connections to the broader fictional universe with which they are familiar. (57)

Implied continuity then falls outside of the rulebook as it does not make definitive statements about the currently valid causal chain of events that forms a character´s serial continuity. However, it is a resourceful mechanism to appeal to loyal long-time audiences that put emphasis on narrative continuity while also providing comprehensible narratives for new readers.

Reynolds, Brooker, and Smith have proposed different but valuable frameworks to describe narrative continuity in superhero comics, focusing on the seriality of the medium as well as the structure that makes up this highly sensible web of interconnected texts. However, these not only have to withstand intradiegetic crises but also extradiegetic scrutiny, such as retroactive changes.

As already mentioned, the narrative continuity of DC´s brand constitutes its own canon, which Brooker calls "the formal calendar of official continuity and canon" (149). This framework can be viewed as a map that writers and readers employ to orient themselves within the overabundance of content published by DC comics since the 1940s. Of course, some characters

like Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman who have already had a long and successful publishing history will be represented in the canon to a larger degree, having accumulated decades worth of backstories. These characters have their own canons, full of contradicting narrative threads and retroactive changes to their continuity, so called "retcons". These retroactive changes can have wide reaching effects on a character´s previous or current continuity or be as insignificant as the explanation for a new hairstyle or costume. Almost anything can be changed retroactively, from a completely revamped origin story, in the case of Wonder Woman for instance, to a complete change in a character's power set. Another great example here is Alan Scott´s sexuality, which is retroactively changed in the conclusion of *Doomsday Clock*, when he officially comes out as gay to his children. This makes him the oldest and first ever gay character in the whole of DC´s canon.

Retroactive changes are an aspect of brand continuity that makes it especially hard for dedicated fans to keep track of developments in continuity without losing themselves in obsessive behavior, as Wandtke (2012) puts it:

> Obsessed with superhero continuity, the superhero aficionado known as the fanboy may try to identify various strands of superhero revisions as canonical and non-canonical. However, the fanboy fights a losing battle in superhero worlds filled with imaginary cities (with an ever-changing landscape), informed by conceits of the medium (in which heroes almost never age), and redeveloped by regularly changing writers and illustrators (in ways that are sometimes slight and sometimes dramatic). In addition, when suggestions from letter pages, innovations of television incarnations, and wild tangents of fanfiction at least partially reshape the current story arc of the comic book source material, the idea of origin and canon becomes nebulous at best. (7)

There needs to be a distinction here though, between perceived errors within the causal representation of events in continuity, their temporal order, and questions regarding the canonical status of these events. Both issues are points of contention among superhero aficionados, critics, scholars, and writers themselves. Where Brooker sees continuity as a sort of template that can be applied and adjusted according to the rulebook and matrix of a character, Reynolds defines continuity as distinct, interconnecting levels.

3.5. Richard Reynolds: Levels of Continuity

In his book, *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology*, Richard Reynolds establishes alternative parameters to describe continuity, pointing out that many readers "conflate several different

types of intertextuality when using the word continuity" (39). The author then distinguishes three distinctive levels of continuity within superhero comics: serial, hierarchical and structural continuity.

Serial Continuity

On this level of continuity, causality holds the most weight, as serial continuity determines what has come before, all the previously published issues of a title and a character´s origin story. This always needs to be in line with current and planned issues as the narrative develops to ensure a level of cohesion within the canon. Authors are advised to tread with great care if they want to write stories that are set in the future, as these stories readily cause contradictions within current continuity. Reynolds offers up a great example when he discusses the controversy regarding the canonical status of *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller published in 1986 and considered one of the best graphic novels of all time (38). Miller´s gritty and dark approach towards the character of Batman was already a big departure from the characterization that fans had grown familiar with during Denny O´Neill´s long running tenure as a writer on *Batman*. *The Dark Knight Returns* is set in the near future and depicts an old, broken-down Batman who comes out of retirement once more to fight crime in his sixties. One thing that a lot of readers debated heavily was the canonical status of this story, as it implied that the current *Batman* title would develop towards that particular future. This in turn would regulate and restrict any other future versions of Batman that had previously been published and believed to be in canon. Still, continuity cannot be grasped completely by a linear chain of causal events or consecutively numbered issues as not all titles operate on the same level of hierarchy.

Hierarchical Continuity

This aspect of continuity is largely built upon the intertextual links between different titles that create a certain hierarchy of power, with a character like Superman on top and a non-powered character like Batman near the bottom (Reynolds 39). This order of power is a crucial part of crossovers and other storylines in which characters from individual titles team up, as it determines which characters will most likely be grouped together. While Batman might not possess super strength or flight, he is still considered the "world´s greatest detective" giving him a key role as a strategist leading other characters. Still, he would not be paired up with Green Lantern to fight space aliens on far away worlds, as his power set and that of Green Lantern are not on the same level of hierarchy. Still, the protagonists of superhero comics are not just defined by their level of power but as Reynolds puts it, "the negotiation of a character´s

heroism (or villainy) is fleshed out, as in all narrative, by the examination of moral choices made under pressure" (41). Even more so, the pressure of combat is what brings out a quality that is inherent to the superhero´s moral nature: "the extra effort" (Reynolds 41).

This facet of superhero comics is a necessary mechanism within the narrative construction employed by the genre. It would make for very one-sided narratives if the Flash simply hit every villain with a super-sonic punch or if Superman pulverized every opponent with his heat vision. What makes superhero narratives fascinating to the majority of readers is the clever application of a character's powers, their extra effort, which enable them to overcome the greatest odds. According to Reynolds, this is a key feature of superhero narratives:

> The moment of the extra effort, and the soul searching that is conducted to make it possible, are the key moments of most superhero narratives, and far more significant in terms of character development than all the acrobatic and artistic slugging and atomic, psychic, or electromagnetic zapping that comprises the progress of the fights themselves. (41)

In short, a character who is positioned rather low on the hierarchical power scale can still overcome a character more powerful than them by making an "extra effort", using their limited power set in a creative way. Therefore, writers constantly need to be aware of the development of characters and their specific abilities in order to pair them up with fitting opponents and bring about conflicts that require the extra effort. The levels of seriality and hierarchy come together to form a continuous structure.

Structural Continuity

In contrast to serial continuity, which is diachronic and develops over a period of time, hierarchical continuity only offers up the state of affairs in a given moment, making it synchronic (Reynolds 41). Although, put together, serial, and hierarchical continuity combine to form structural continuity, encompassing the entire catalog of a publisher, in this case DC (41). Yet this does not mean that structural continuity is only concerned with the total sum of stories and canonical interactions between individual characters as Reynolds clarifies:

> Structural continuity also embraces those elements of the real world which are contained within the fictional universe of the superheroes, and (for the truly committed) actions which are not recorded in any specific text, but inescapably implied by continuity. (41)

To illustrate this, consider any superhero narrative that deals with time travel or is set in an unspecified future. According to the rules of structural continuity, it is implied that the narrative will develop towards said future, even if it only represents one possible outcome in an infinite

multiverse of stories. A common narrative technique employed in this case is the envisioning of an alternate future to drive character development in a specific direction, usually opposed to the alternate future. Structural continuity can also be seen as the scaffolding that provides the narrative situation, the overarching storyworld, from which the big universe threatening crises emerge.

3.6. Extradiegetic and Intradiegetic Factors

The incorporation of a non-canonized character, in this case, Dr. Manhattan, aims to address extradiegetic, as well as intradiegetic problems of DC´s narrative continuity. The extradiegetic circumstances that have an effect on continuity are numerous, like delays in the publishing schedule, yet reactions from the audience and consequently, sales, weigh the heaviest. The reciprocal exchange between readers and creators of superhero comics has gone through a big change in the last two decades. In DC´s books, the last few pages are usually reserved for letters, or rather e-mails nowadays, from fans in which they express their thoughts and opinions on the current storylines and also voice their criticism. This criticism is frequently aimed at perceived errors in a characters' continuity or their development as a superhero. Usually, on one or two pages one could find reprinted fan letters and responses from the writers, artists, or editors. They most commonly featured letters asking questions about obscure characters, abandoned story lines, or pointed out perceived errors in continuity to writers. In those cases, writers could use the opportunity of the response to correct narrative missteps or fill plot holes effectively and retroactively. Still, it also gave creators valuable feedback on what readers liked about their stories and more specifically, what they could do without.

Oftentimes, DC´s multiverse would offer up easy explanations to the most rigid questions from readers, as Friedenthal notes: "the multiverse frequently provides an easy out for creators to fix up continuity problems, relegating those contradictory stories to different universes" (9). In fact, finding irregularities related to continuity became so prominent among comic readers that writers would give out prizes to those that found or spotted the most blatant inaccuracy in a story. Probably best known was Stan Lee´s famous "No-Prize", which would be awarded to loyal readers for pointing out major issues with continuity but also giving a valid explanation for them. The "No-Prize" was simply an empty envelope that said, "Congratulations this envelope contains a genuine Marvel Comics No-Prize" (Duncan et al. 320).

As mentioned earlier, the greatest joy for readers of superhero comics comes from exactly this practice and the total engrossment with a certain title or creator´s work. These reader-

researchers even take on some of the writer´s research workload, going through mountains of back issues to back up their claims. It might be something as minor as unexplained costume changes and as major as dead characters suddenly being alive again. For example, if in one issue, Superman reveals his secret identity to his long-time love interest, Lois Lane, the following issues need to acknowledge this change in the relationship between the two characters. Authors and editors are often forced to come up with explanations for their perceived inconsistencies which they would print as responses to the letters. Of course, writers are always free to choose which letters to publish at the end of the book and which to engage with. These responses can range from short apologies to long tirades as to why the writers flunking of established continuity must not be seen as such.

With the advent of the Digital Age of comics however, this mutual exchange of opinions between readers and writers has gained a new dimension. The internet has created an environment where creators of superhero comics and their readership are connected at all times. Prior to that, weeks and months would pass between the release of an issue, meaning that feedback from the audience regarding that issue, would not be addressed in print until the release of the next issue. Today, most people read comics online on designated websites, like Comixology, that also feature forums and message boards to discuss current developments. A relatively new feature is a comments section directly below an issue that offer readers the option to voice their opinions immediately after reading and so far, readers have taken full advantage of it. Although, it needs to be acknowledged that the safety of anonymity on these websites tends to bring out the most extreme opinions and harshest of criticisms in its users. Therefore, the majority of this feedback that is directed at the authors is hardly ever objective in any way.

Additionally, social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram have also become a place for fans to interact directly with their favorite writers and artists. As already mentioned, the anonymity of the internet tends to bring out the worst in people and much of the criticism posted online is more reminiscent of hate speech. This has even lead to writers and artist leaving the titles they were working on midway through because of the insurmountable negative feedback form the online community. A bitter side effect of this phenomenon is the fact that many new titles get cancelled before they manage to conclude their first big story arc, due to pessimistic and cynical comments on social media. Perhaps, Tom King´s tenure as the writer on *Batman* from 2016 to 2019 serves as a good example of this phenomenon. King had been following an exceptionally ambitious plan to write a bi-monthly Batman story that would run through 100 consecutive issues. In the end though, he received such outrageous criticism online for the

direction he was taking the character in that he left the title after 85 issues and three annuals. Here, a quick explainer on the nomenclature of comic books seems in order. A popular title like *The Flash* or *Batman* is commonly published every month, resulting in 12 issues a year, plus an additional "Annual", an oversized issue that bookends the year. These issues then are collected as a volume and published as a trade paperback.

There is another famous example to this sort of direct response between writers and readers which can effectively change the outcome of a story drastically, like the Batman event *A Death in the Family* by Jim Starlin and Jim Aparo. In this story, published in *Batman* #426-#429 in 1988, the Joker kidnaps and tortures Jason Todd, who at the time served as the second Robin to Bruce Wayne´s Batman. Todd was not at all well-liked by the audience and DC editorial ultimately decided to let the readers decide, whether Todd should survive his confrontation with the Joker or not. And so, an ad was placed in several books that were published under the *Batman* banner asking readers to call a number and vote on the outcome of *A Death in the Family*. Originally, Todd was supposed to survive but readers wanted him killed off and so the second Robin´s crimefighting career ended abruptly by the hands of the Joker and his crowbar. This example perfectly shows how vital the relationship between publisher, artist and readership is to the unfolding of the narrative and how it can influence continuity. However, this is a rare example of a character dying and staying dead for an extended period of time, and the audience bringing about a change in the status quo.

3.7. The Importance of the Status Quo

To long time readers, it might seem that the DC universe is in constant peril of being destroyed, rewritten, or taken over by evil forces. The continuous growth of the canon allows for new connections to be made between texts to further cohesion and integrate new characters and storylines into overall continuity. The downside of this is a never-ending need for bigger threats to the whole of the DC universe, culminating in an escalating cycle of crises and reboots. These tend to include as many characters as artists can fit on a page and present a great opportunity to show the creativity and diversity of its representative universe as well as boost sales. Usually, after the crisis has been overcome, the status quo is slightly adjusted for whatever continuity changes and repercussions may have arisen. Additionally, the crisis event is canonized in a grand line of universe threatening affairs and relegated to the realm of implied continuity. However, the perpetual practice of rebooting continuity through such crisis events, which has been the case through much of the last decade, has caused deterioration of the cohesion and coherence of the canon. Friedenthal has observed this circumstance as well and pointed out that,

> ironically, it is that same urge to clear up continuity via the multiverse that often leads to even further contradictions, requiring bigger, more complex stories to tie up loose ends and "fix" the multiverse. The history of the DC Multiverse is one of confusion, clutter, and giant, eschatological "events" that every so often recreate and rewrite the multiverse entirely. (9)

The impact of these multiverse-rewriting crisis events will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Before doing so, I want to draw attention to another extradiegetic fact that has a tremendous influence on brand continuity: the publishing schedule.

There is one extradiegetic factor that has an unmistakable effect on brand continuity, which is time. *Doomsday Clock* was originally supposed to be released over a one-year period in 12 monthly installments which would lead directly into the next big event series *Dark Nights: Metal* by Scott Snyder and Greg Capullo. That event was meant to seamlessly connect to *Doomsday Clock* and explore DC´s now unified narrative continuity. However, *Doomsday Clock*, which was released in a prestige format featuring extra pages and special heavy paper, suffered tremendously from delays in its publishing schedule. It was eventually released between November 2017 and December 2019 almost doubling its schedule. This also meant that some issues were released with several months between them, stretching the story and the audience´s attention to its limits. In turn, this put a strain on the rest of DC´s publishing schedule and the editorial choices that resulted from them were less than optimal. *Dark Nights: Metal*, which, canonically, was supposed to take place after *Doomsday Clock*, was launched ahead of schedule and left readers wondering what was going on in the DC universe. When *Doomsday Clock´*s final issue was released, its conclusion pointed to an exciting new era for DC, but the backed-up publishing schedule did not leave much room for the story to really have an effect on the DC universe.

At the end of this chapter, I also need to acknowledge that the narrative continuity of comic book publishers, their brand, is not limited to printed comic books but rather branches out into other genres as well. For the last ten years, comic book movie adaptions have filled theater seats in the millions, and the superhero dramas on the CW have even created their own "Arrowverse" of interconnected storylines running through several different shows. Even video games adapt popular comic book lore, as evident by the success of the *Arkham* series. However, none of these are officially considered to be canon, even though they have to adhere to the rules of the brand matrix, as not to disturb brand synergy.

Continuity in comic books is defined by various terms and parameters or can be grouped under several aspects, deeming it either canonical or non-canonical. Charting the official continuity of an entire publishing house requires specific attention to detail and vast knowledge of the canon. The biggest problem that arises with continuity is the causality between the interconnected texts that form and give meaning to the canon. By rebooting their continuity one too many times, by removing fan favorite titles from their publishing line and by changing the origins of their most popular characters, DC has caused its canon to decay, and its in-story narrative is nearing collapse. Looking at the cover of *Doomsday Clock* #1, which shows an angry protester holding up a sign that says, "THE END IS HERE", there is no denying it. Nonetheless, *Doomsday Clock* also sets up DC´s biggest rebirth yet.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Aspects of Narratology in Graphic Narratives

In this chapter, I will present key aspects of narratology that will be employed in the analysis of *Doomsday Clock*. The main aspects to consider here are the various layers of narration that make up the story and the plot as well as the sequential ordering of events. Superhero narratives also employ a mode of narrativity that Ryan (1992) has described as "braided narrativity" in which several parallel subplots develop along with the narrative (1). Within a sequence, continuity is used in the form of a narrative mechanism that establishes serial and hierarchical links across DC´s canon through narrative saliency. This is achieved through the use of an actorialized narrator and constant shifts in perspective and focalization. The genre of the superhero comic employs a continuous narrative that leads to a highly serialized form of the medium, and a great number of individual titles that form an interconnected web of metatexts. Within this web, a connection between *Watchmen* and *Doomsday Clock* is also established through an adherence to the iconic nine-panel grid structure and the narrative breakdown of the page leading to narrative braiding. The aim of *Doomsday Clock´s* plot is to establish a comprehensive and coherent structure within this network of metatexts, while the story invokes and reconnects previously discarded continuities to form a cohesive canon.

Looking at *Doomsday Clock* as a graphic narrative requires adjustments to the established conventions of classical literary narratology. One point of contention is the perceived issue of *showing* which Mikkonen describes as "a problematic notion of mimetic presentation that equates some techniques of narration with life-likeness" (75). Therefore, a distinction between the two modes of *showing* and *telling* has often been dismissed in favor of a gradient scale that orders the degree of narrative mediation and its resulting narratorial intrusion according to the

mode of presentation (Mikkonen 75). In comics though, showing can be employed in a more literal sense and understood in the sense of witnessing an event that is unfolding in front of the reader without the need for narration (Mikkonen 75). *Doomsday Clock* also adopts the same layout and panel grid that was made iconic by *Watchmen*, in addition to invoking elements of its narrative, creating a thematic parallelism. This is underscored by utilizing the same graphic style as Gibbons, generating a continuous rhythm between *Watchmen* and *Doomsday Clock* that furthers narrative cohesion.

4.2. Narrative Breakdown and Panel Composition

Panel composition, page layout and narrative breakdown of the page are also aspects that further narrativity and need to be taken into consideration. In *The System of Comics*, Groensteen (2007) defines the spatio-topical parameters that make up a page of a comic as a "multiframe" that encloses all its elements, from the panels to the gutter, as well as the reduction of the images within this frame and its delimiting features. Furthermore,

> the linear organization of the panels is governed by the idea of narrative breakdown, that is, the process of dividing the narrative into images (in a strip or a larger zone of composition, such as the page), and "most often subordinated to the narrative ends", whereas braiding involves a more elaborate integration between narrative progression and the spatio-topical form of comics. (22)

The thematic parallelism between *Doomsday Clock* and *Watchmen* coupled with Gary Frank´s adoption of Dave Gibbon´s graphic style and panel composition make for an interesting case of narrative braiding. This becomes evident when comparing the covers of the two series.

Fig. 1. Covers. Frank, Gary. *Doomsday Clock* no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019)/Gibbons, Dave. *Watchmen* no. 1 (New York: DC Comics, 1986).

Invoking the early beginnings of the genre, Mikkonen addresses the importance of the composition of comic strips and its sequential form as a sort of reading protocol, allowing the audience to follow the particular order of a series of images (249). Superhero comics have gone through a long evolutional process, both in style and substance, adopting more complex plots as well as visual modes of representing these. One aspect of narrative organization that runs through all of *Doomsday Clock* is that of juxtaposition, as Geoff Johns apposes, not only the plot of *Watchmen*, but also its iconic visual composition of layout and panel design.

Mikkonen highlights the importance of this principle as it "can provoke meanings through contrast, association, extension, similarity, difference, reversal, and antithesis, among other things" (252). This provocation of antithesis is one of the most salient features of *Doomsday Clock* as it positions *Watchmen´*s Dr. Manhattan as the antithesis to Superman. This aspect already divides the narrative of *Doomsday Clock* into two distinct layers, one that focuses on a metaphysical struggle between hope and despair, the other one mirroring the plot and story of

Watchmen. Thematically and structurally, *Doomsday Clock* is split in the middle, with the first five issues focusing on the *Watchmen* characters, while the later issues deal with DC characters.

By adhering to *Watchmen´s* nine-panel grid the narrative breakdown of the page is also restricted in what it can actually show and what it must tell. The structure of *Doomsday Clock* is highly fractured leading to a prismatic effect that presents a broad view of DC´s previous continuities and emphasizes the connections between them through showing and telling. Johns chose to depict this connective tissue in the form of DC´s legacy characters Green Lantern, the Flash and most importantly Superman. The frequent shifts in perspective and focalization result in a dynamic switch between the multiple layers of narration and fast paced plot development that stresses the urgency and gravitas of the narrative situation. Furthermore, it accentuates the most salient parts of DC´s canon and as a result its most prominent character legacies. The notion of narrative salience is picked up by Mikkonen as it is helpful in conceiving a character's function: "Narrative salience refers to the importance of how something is shown, and how certain elements, in particular relating to characters and their actions, are significant for an understanding of the narrative as a coherent whole" (25).

The significance of legacy characters stems from their function as temporal anchors that provide fixed reference points within continuity that help readers situate themselves and comprehend DC´s canon as a coherent whole. The inclusion of Dr. Manhattan as an actorialized narrator puts even more emphasis on these legacies as they are observed by an outside force as the building blocks of DC´s canon.

The contemporary western tradition of storytelling, be it in plays, prose or novels is built upon the principles laid out by Aristotle in *Poetics*, such as the unity of action. Altman (2008) remarks that "the notion of unity of action involves the need to build a play around a single unbroken plot thread, eschewing competing story lines, unnecessary characters, and unrelated episodes" (3). If applied to DC´s current in-story continuity, it would seem that the publisher is hard at work to ignore this ancient principle in favor of its complete opposite. It is up for debate whether or not the principle of unity of action also applies to a whole canon of superhero narratives. In the case of DC comics though, the whole canon has developed from the Superman stories told in the pages of *Action Comics*. Therefore, his primary function to the canon is to provide the ground for this unity of action in terms of continuity. Still, Superman´s contemporary continuity is by no means coherent, featuring an origin story in constant flux and a plethora of iterations of the same character.

For instance, in the lead up to *Doomsday Clock*, there are two versions of Superman present in the overarching in-story narrative, with one hailing from the pre-*Flashpoint* continuity and the other one from the *New 52* era. While casual readers might regard this as an irrelevant oversight, long-time readers will immediately question the canonical status of both characters and in turn that of the narrative. This leads to canonical ambiguity regarding the characterization of Superman and stalls his development as a character. Such issues are representative of the editorial problems that have plagued DC comics for the better part of the last decade and have led to a wave of reboots and different continuities. With every new publishing initiative, DC tried to establish a single, unbroken plot thread that would run through all of its canonical continuity and eschew contradictory parts of it. In the process though, the interconnected web of metatexts that has formed the scaffolding of DC´s canon was picked apart until it was barely recognizable to a long-time audience. As a result, the narrative that arose from these continuous changes reads incomplete and features ageless characters with compressed origin stories, robbed of their greatest heroic deeds and in turn, their legacies. The importance of these legacies remains crucial as they serve as fundamental building blocks of DC´s canon with all subsequent stories building on them.

As previously mentioned, Superman is not only the first of DC´s superheroes, but he also represents the values on which DC´s entire canon is built upon. Therefore, this legacy character not only defines DC´s complete publishing line, to a degree, but also informs current continuity. In *Doomsday Clock* #10, Dr. Manhattan realizes that the main earth of the DC multiverse is a "metaverse" from which all stories flow out and influence the other universes. Even more fascinating is the proposed idea that the metaverse itself possess a degree of agency and attempts to alert its heroes to Dr. Manhattan´s experimentation. This is accomplished via the presence of scattered photographs of Dr. Manhattan, on a date with his first wife, still in his human form. According to Mikkonen, embedded photographs in a panel sequence are a device to for "multiplying perspective" as it "draws attention to the choice of perspective, and the use of juxtaposed perspectives, by multiplying points of view" (161). This idea that the metaverse fights back against Dr. Manhattan´s manipulations is a very interesting method to highlight the importance of the metaverse as the center of DC´s narrative multiverse. Furthermore, this is an instance of narrative agency which Mikkonen defines as:

> […]the conceptualization of a kind of global frame of narration that enables the reader to estimate the meaning and importance of the various visual and verbal or visual-verbal

elements, their relations, and their alternating perspectives at the micro-level of the story. (26)

In the context of *Doomsday Clock*, this framing of the metaverse at the center is utilized to communicate to readers that this level of narration is the most important one and that consequences stemming from there will be the heaviest. In terms of Brooker´s hierarchical continuity, it is possible to say that things that happen in the metaverse outrank other events taking place in other parts of the multiverse.

There are various factors to consider when approaching comics as narratives that differentiate them from other examples within the genre of narrative fiction. The historically specific details of "the genre, the publication format, the significance of paratexts, the evolving intermedial relationships, as well as what the cartoonists and the readers expect of stories in this medium", need to be acknowledged, as pointed out by Mikkonen (245). Although these matters might not fall into the field of narratology proper, expressing the means and techniques of narration, they become highly relevant when narratology is employed to engage and interpret individual works (Mikkonen 245). There exists a direct correlation between the publishing format of comics and its respective audience, may it be a comedic strip in a newspaper or in trade paperbacks and graphic novels. Readers of the genre have developed specific expectations about the story contents, the characters, and settings which ultimately stem from the form of publication and the restrictions it entails. In contrast to novels, comics employ different methods to build up suspense through the visual composition of the narrative as well as the amount of complexity in characterization that shines through (Mikkonen 246). This complexity can only be kept up through continuous and coherent characterization within a continuous narrative. Furthermore, the arrangement of panels on a page and its subsequent relation to other panels can serve as a basis for a narratological investigation of a narrative. As *Doomsday Clock* copies *Watchmen´s* iconic layout, as well as it emulates the story, the two texts are "braided" together on a visual and a narrative level.

4.3. Sequential Ordering of Plot and Story

Narratology does not offer clear cut modes of analysis but rather tools that can be applied. As comics and graphic novels possess a special degree of narrativity due to their hybrid construction of image and text, these tools need to be configured to fit the text under investigation. Mikkonen refers to a few basic properties in the narratological investigation of narratives and includes "the temporal sequencing and the causal connection between the narrated events", but is quick to point out that, "a chronology of events, a chronicle, does not

in itself constitute a narrative, or it makes only a poor story" (16). However, DC´s current continuity that is represented through the overarching in-story narrative is lacking this chronology of events. Instead, it is repeatedly constituted anew following an all-encompassing crisis event, without acknowledging the preceding crisis that has brought about the current status quo of continuity.

Classical narratology, as proposed by Shlovsky, Petrovsky and other proponents of Russian formalism in the beginning of the twentieth century is not properly equipped to engage with sequential art. This is due to the fact that their theories rely heavily on the distinction between *fabula* and *sujet*, which is not a suitable approach to graphic narratives. Instead, the use of their English translations, plot, and story(line) which are not as heavily connotated, should suffice. The special narrativity that arises from graphic narratives is more complex and constituted through a variety of features. I understand the plot of *Doomsday Clock* and its story as separate layers of the text´s narrative construction. Furthermore, the plot of *Doomsday Clock* reaches far beyond the text and attempts to connect the various discarded continuities of the past to the current continuity of DC´s canon in order to achieve narrative cohesion. The story told in *Doomsday Clock* mirrors the story told in *Watchmen* on a thematic level, as in both texts, humanity has lost hope in its heroes and their respective fictional universes are on the brink of collapse.

Both books also feature a classical literary element, the play within a play, which in the case of *Watchmen* is presented as a comic within a comic, *Tales of the Black Freighter*. In *Doomsday Clock*, Geoff Johns adds another layer of narration with the story of fictional Hollywood star Carver Coleman and the mysterious circumstances of his death, which are mirrored in and explored through his movies. However, the sequential ordering of these various layers of narration is by no means straight forward but rather fragmented and disconnected. This is due to the fact that Dr. Manhattan´s perception of time is non-linear, causing him to experience the past, present, and future simultaneously. He also serves as an actorialized narrator for parts of *Doomsday Clock* in which his perception is illustrated in a manner that the reader can fathom his omniscience. Even though, he does not step into this role of actorialized narrator until halfway through *Doomsday Clock*, Dr. Manhattan´s meddling and his presence reverberate through the narrative. In order to fully make sense of *Doomsday Clock´s* plot, it is important to analyze the sequential ordering of these separate narrative layers and how they are presented in the story and on the page. This will also emphasize the importance of DC´s legacy characters as connective tissues between various continuities. The story of Carver Coleman works as an

interlude and breaks the narrative tension that has built up over the previous issues while also utilizing the character of Coleman as a temporal anchor for Dr. Manhattan. One major aspect of *Doomsday Clock´*s plot is Dr. Manhattan´s attempt to transform Superman and in conjunction, the whole of the DC universe, into something that more resembles himself and his original universe. As narratology is chiefly concerned with "transformations" or "happenings" which move the action forward and create continuity, Schmid also takes the difference between historical narratives and fictional narratives into consideration, explaining that,

> [j]ust as the historian writes his own story about particular happenings by bringing together individual elements of an extract from continuous reality under a general term ("Seven Years' War"), so does the narrator create his own, individual story under one title, out of the happenings to be narrated. (196)

It is plausible to argue that fictional works do not contain any real happenings, as they are simply fictitious, but this has caused a debate around a missing "reference level" in fiction, as postulated by Crohn (Schmid 196). This level of reference is deemed to only exist for historical narratives as these reference "happenings" that have actually taken place in real life. I disagree strongly with this notion and claim that a distinctive reference level exists in superhero comics in the form of previous continuities that serve as reference. They can also be described as preceding publishing initiatives that follow an overarching plot encompassing all of the titles released by DC culminating in a history of DC comics. Consequently, they adhere to prescribed editorial decisions that dictate setting, character development and the status quo of the whole fictional universe. Past continuities inform and shape all the continuities that follow and serve as a rich deposit for reference to writers to orient themselves within DC´s canon. This repository of reference can be drawn upon as a narrative device to connect the various Ages of the DC universe that are not deemed contemporary. By establishing the principle that the underlying plot of DC´s publishing initiatives culminate in a crisis-level event followed by a reboot of continuity, the canon becomes subject to segmentation. Contrary to classical literary canons, readers of superhero comics only regard books and titles that are currently in publication as in canon. This ambiguity regarding the official status of characters and storylines stems from the serialized nature of the medium. Events and storylines that have previously been published are regarded as part of the canon of DC comics but as their diverging continuities do not link up, they are simultaneously not in canon. It is therefore also necessary to compare previous continuities with the current one to highlight the significant changes from one iteration to the

next. This will provide the opportunity to emphasize the enduring character legacies of Superman, The Flash and Green Lantern as building blocks of DC´s canon.

4.4. The Actorialized Narrator

A central aspect of narratological investigation is the question of the narrator, whether they be implicit or explicit, abstract, or unreliable, the role of the narrator can take many forms, yet is always distant from the author of a text. Groensteen acknowledges this in *Comics and Narration*:

> It is well-known that the narrator—the teller of the story, the source responsible for the enunciation of the narrative discourse—is a key concept in literary narratology, which takes great care to distinguish it from the real-life author. The narrator is an instance constructed by the text. (79)

In the instance of *Doomsday Clock*, it is important to examine the role of Dr. Manhattan as an "actorialized narrator", one who "monopolizes the recitatives, within which s/he says "I,"" and "on the grounds that s/he appears in the story of which s/he is (or pretends to be) the enunciator" (Groensteen 97). Dr. Manhattan is the driving force behind the plot of *Doomsday Clock*, implicitly and explicitly. Implicitly, because he transplants the dystopian setting of *Watchmen* onto *Doomsday Clock*, explicitly as the audience bears witness to his manipulations. As his universe of origin, the diegesis of *Watchmen*, is not considered to be part of the official canon of DC comics, it is debatable whether *Doomsday Clock* is a product of Dr. Manhattan, or the other way around. He is an extradiegetic factor, influencing the diegesis of DC´s canon.

Another intriguing aspect in the narratological examination of superhero comics narratives are modalization strategies as postulated by Groensteen in *Comics and Narration*. In a very broad sense, he defines modality as "that which colors, qualifies, and particularizes the discourse of the narrator (whether fundamental or delegated), determining how we gain access to the story, how we perceive its content, and how it produces certain effects on us" (108).

As previously mentioned, Dr. Manhattan possesses an unspecified degree of omnipotence and omniscience causing him to perceive time and events in a non-linear fashion. This is reflected in his dialogue and narration, evident by the peculiar choice of present tense verbs in flashbacks and flashforwards. For instance, *Doomsday Clock* #8 starts out with narration by Dr. Manhattan, indicated through the light blue of his caption boxes, as he traces the origins of Alan Scott´s powerful green lantern, explaining:

It´s July 16th, 1940. A young engineer named Alan Scott is riding a train over a bridge when it collapses. I move the lantern six inches out of his reach. Alan Scott dies when the bridge falls. (*Doomsday Clock* #8, 1)

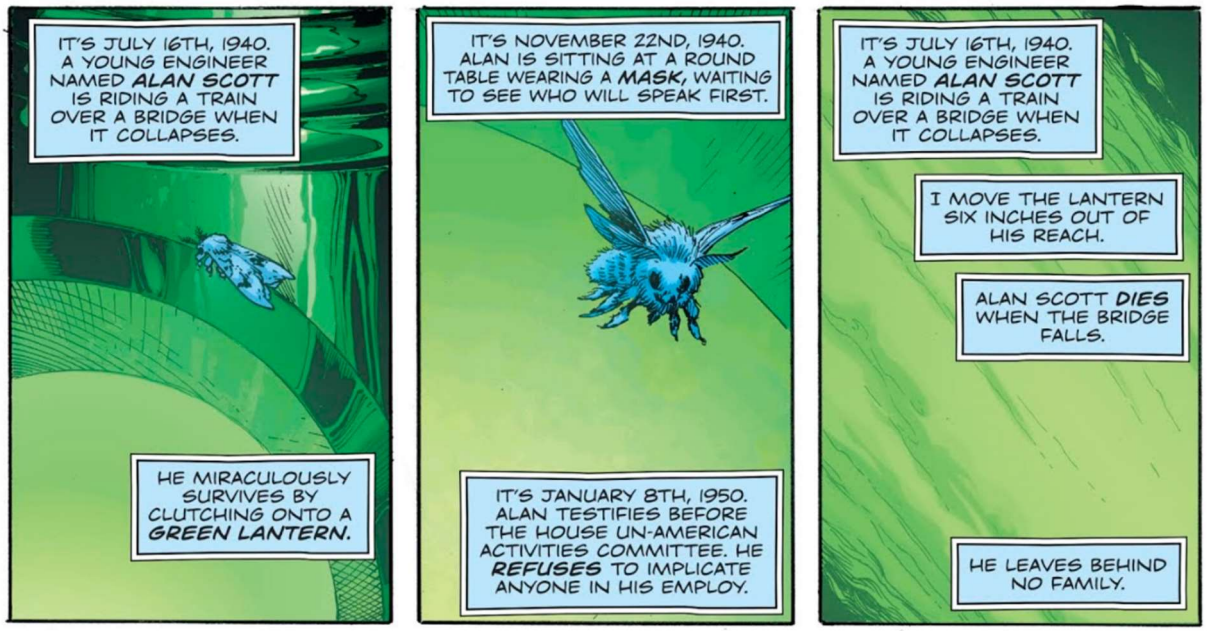

Fig. 1.1. Dr. Manhattan kills Alan Scott. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 8 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p.1.

In the next panel, a bright green star is making its decent towards earth and Dr. Manhattan´s narration continues: "It´s July in the year 960. The Song dynasty is born. In October, a green star falls out of the sky" (*Doomsday Clock* #8, 1). The use of present tense verbs in both instances is indicative of Dr. Manhattan´s non-linear perception of time and his ability to exist in several places at the same time. Yet it also emphasizes the longevity and relevance of the Green Lantern myth, and subsequently, that of Alan Scott as the first Green Lantern. Here, Johns traces the origin of this mystical artifact back hundreds of years, yet Dr. Manhattan´s lives through both moments simultaneously. Only once Alan Scott takes possession of it, is it the moment that Dr. Manhattan actually interferes and ends the legacy of Green Lantern before it can even begin. Looking at the composition of panels above, the green lantern takes up the entire background, while Dr. Manhattan is depicted only as a tiny moth, moving the lantern six inches. There is an interesting juxtaposition to discover here, between Dr. Manhattan´s vast powers and the moth, usually seen as insignificant. However, this miniscule act will reverberate through all of DC´s canon.

Fig. 1.2. Dr. Manhattan´s narration. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 8 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 1.

A characteristic of comics narratives is an inherent fluctuation in temporality, as the narration tends to be set in the past while being juxtaposed with images that are presented to the reader in the present (Groensteen 108). What this means is that the events recited have already taken place while the text and images, from the perspective of the reader, are situated in the present moment of reading. While there exists an equilibrium between text and image in this way, it can be offset by the use of verb tenses employed by the narrator (Groensteen 108). In most cases, the narration is presented through caption boxes and in present tense creating a narrative situation that positions the reader in the moment. The past tense is used to recite events that have taken place in the recent past and to provide exposition. The identity of the narrator is not always immediately discernable from studying the panels alone, leading to an ambiguous temporality of the narrative situation. Oftentimes, only through the sequential ordering of the panels the position of the narrator can be determined. However, if this position is assumed by an actorialized narrator, he is positioned more explicitly in relation to the events that are recounted through the narration, making it possible for the audience to know "from whence" the narrator speaks (Groensteen 108). In the case of Dr. Manhattan, this "whence" is always presented as an unspecified now which accentuates the moments he observes, and which are shown to the reader, as most salient. Johns also applies Dr. Manhattan as an actorialized narrator to explore the previous Ages of DC´s canon.

Looking closely at *Doomsday Clock*, the reader will come across several panels that point to Dr. Manhattan being present in several of the same moments at different times, obscuring his

actual whence. There is a degree of unreliability inherent to Dr. Manhattan´s role as the actorialized narrator, as his omniscience does not cover the entirety of *Doomsday Clock´s* narrative construction. His vision is obscured at a certain point in the timeline, just before his confrontation with Superman, everything goes dark. Dr. Manhattan then asks himself whether Superman will destroy him or if he will destroy the whole of the DC universe, reflecting the central conflict of *Doomsday Clock*, a struggle between hope and despair.

Doomsday Clock features several layers of narration that aim to restore elements to the canon that have been lost in previous reboots and continuity shifts. These have caused damage, not only to the legacies of DC´s most important characters but also to its overarching in-story narrative. This damage is exemplified by the compressed origin stories of *The New 52* publishing initiative that erased ten years of character development from the canon. As a reaction, Johns utilizes *Doomsday Clock* to retroactively undo this damage. This is a necessary process to achieve narrative cohesion between the various Ages that make up DC´s canon and establish an unbroken timeline of events. In this book, all the changes to continuity brought upon by crisis-level events are acknowledged for the first time and Dr Manhattan, as the actorialized narrator, is identified as the culprit of the aforementioned changes leading to a confrontation that determines the future of the DC universe.

In the following chapter, I will undergo a close narratological exploration of key scenes from *Doomsday Clock*, incorporating the narrative breakdown of the page, the narrative rhythm, and the braiding together of continuities into the analysis. Looking at Dr. Manhattan´s role as the actorialized narrator will highlight the importance of character legacies and the central conflict between him and Superman will prove that the legacy of Superman is central to DC´s canon.

5. ANALYSIS

This chapter´s aim is to analyze the complex narrative construction of *Doomsday Clock* and highlight the narrative techniques employed to connect it back to previous continuities of DC´s canon. This will also demonstrate the importance of legacy within DC´s canon and how the legacy of Superman has shaped DC´s continuity so far, by exploring the central conflict of *Doomsday Clock*. At its core, the book revolves around the philosophical concepts of hope and despair, exemplified by Superman and Dr. Manhattan. Before addressing the main focus of *Doomsday Clock*, the achievement of narrative cohesion within the canon of DC comics, I will give a brief overview of the preceding “Crises” and reboots that have brought upon the need for such coherence.

First, I want to define the importance of the concept of "Legacy" within the genre of superhero comics and highlight the legacies of the Flash, Green Lantern and Superman, as all three of these characters share one trait in common. They are all part of a longstanding legacy that goes back to the Golden Age, and they have inspired other characters to take over their mantles. Moreover, these characters possess a high degree of narrative saliency as they have previously been instrumental during DC´s big crisis events. Giving a brief summary of the biggest crisis-level events in DC´s history will shed light on the persistent use of reboots as a narratological device and the consequential fracturing of the overarching narrative. The long-lasting impact and legacy of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons´ groundbreaking graphic novel *Watchmen* will be discussed as well. The goal here is to show how character legacies influence and inform the canon of DC comics. After this survey, I will turn to Superman, the Flash and Green Lantern.

5.1. Multiplicity and Legacy

A cornerstone of DC´s fictional universe and its more than 80 years of continuity are its legacy characters. Subsumed under this term are characters that have been in publication continuously throughout the various ages that designate the decades of comic book publishing of the last century. There exists no definitive term for the current period of comic publication, however, Levitz (2017) has suggested the term "Digital Age", marking the advent of digital comic production and its distribution (5). The first two periods, the so-called Golden and Silver Ages, were probably the most creative yet uncoordinated eras in terms of stories and character creations, while in the Bronze Age the sheer volume of published material was already causing problems. Friedenthal identifies DC´s attempts to mimic the success of its rival, Marvel, as a driving force behind its attempt at cohesive world-building:

> Certainly, the "world-building" aspects of the publisher's output were somewhat haphazard at first, but by the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, DC (in part copying the intentional world-building continuity of rival Marvel Comics) was working deliberately to create a cohesive story world spanning a multiverse full of different Earths. (4)

Many of the most famous characters had already lived through a lifetime of battles and heroic deeds and required updates to bring them closer to the unfolding modernity of the times. The suspension of disbelief is a pillar of the genre of superhero comics. However, it becomes harder to uphold when characters who are supposed to be in their seventies, are still fighting the same villains they were fighting in their forties. Therefore, their legacies and heroic responsibilities had to be passed on to other characters giving writers a chance to modernize them, according

to the societal changes that were taking place during the Cold War era. These legacy characters create focal points within the narrative that remain constant for decades while also serving as inspiration for new stories that triumph their previous heroic feats. They also function as narrative anchors that give readers orientation in the vast timeline of the DC universe.

One popular topic among readers of superhero comics is the question of their favorite character and especially why. In most cases, the answer would likely include a character from DC´s "trinity" of Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, who are the publisher´s biggest sales hits. As they represent heroic archetypes, their legacies reverberate through the different ages of DC´s publishing line, having produced a multiplicity of iterations of themselves in various parallel dimensions and alternate earths.

5.2. Multiplicity of Characters

The multiverse that is portrayed in DC comics is characterized by a multiplicity of different versions of the same characters with minor alterations and additions to them. This has previously afforded writers the opportunity to tell stories that are set outside of continuity and have no lasting effects on their original counterparts and their legacies. Friedenthal points out an important aspect of multiplicity in superhero comics when he says that,

> perhaps the most obvious lesson of the DC Multiverse is that readers and audiences do not have a problem encountering multiple versions of the same character. They can differentiate between the young, single Superman of Earth-One and the older, married Superman of Earth Two, and appreciate the differences between the two versions of the character and the kinds of stories that creators can tell with them. (101)

As a general rule, the stories of Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman are set on Earth One, the main Earth of DC´s multiverse which also produces contemporary continuity. In order to preserve a degree of coherence within serial continuity, the characters of Earth One need to adhere to previously established story settings and character traits. At the same time, authors are always free to create stories set on alternate earths with relatively little restrictions. However, in case they are aiming for canonization, they need to find a way to connect their stories with current continuity. When reviewing DC´s continuity, it is not enough to explore the publication history, the history of DC´s multiverse needs be considered as well (Friedenthal 99). DC´s multiverse uses the earliest published superhero stories of the "Golden Age" as its foundation, adding the heroic return of characters like the JSA in the "Silver Age" and the more

politicized and mature reimaginations of characters that proliferated into the 1990ies (101). To sum up,

> throughout that entire history, the multiverse is constantly "bringing back" something that has been lost or forgotten in DC Comics, whether that is the reappearance of the Justice Society in the 1960s or the resurgence of specific parallel worlds at the end of 52. (Friedenthal 100)

While the concept of the Multiverse, a universe of infinite numbers of parallel worlds, might lead to an infinite number of possible variations of a character, the legacy of that character always serves as the foundational building block of that specific iteration. And so, "the DC Multiverse has helped to solidify the sense of legacy that lies at the heart of the DC Comics imaginary world", as specified by Friedenthal (101). In a next step, I will discuss Superman, the Flash and Green Lantern in detail.

5.3. Superman

Fig. 2. Superman. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 26.

Superman is the first superhero within DC´s fictional universe of shared characters. As Philip Bevin has already expertly charted Superman´s history I will not go into too much detail here and rather pick up distinctive points in his continuity that are prevalent during *Doomsday Clock*. These will include his origin, the death of his parents and his adventures as Superboy, which represent foundational elements of the character´s legacy.

Superman´s tragic origin story has been retold in any medium imaginable, from tv and radio serials to animated cartoons and even blockbuster Hollywood movies, making it almost universally known. On the eve of the destruction of his home planet Krypton, Superman´s parents, Jor-El and Lara Lor-Van, put the infant Kal-El into a rocket ship and send him to Earth,

as the radiation of its yellow sun will give him god-like abilities. The rocket crashes outside of fictional Smallville, Kansas where it is found by John and Martha Kent who take in the boy and name him Clark. As an adult, Clark moves to Metropolis to become a reporter for the Daily Planet and adopts the identity of Superman to stop crime and protect the innocent.

When this origin story was first published in *Action Comics* #1 in 1938, Superman´s powers were nowhere near as great as they are today, lacking flight and x-ray vision and being only as fast as a speeding bullet. Over the decades to come, Superman would grow increasingly more powerful, and his origin would be continuously updated for new audiences. Especially the precise moment of his arrival on Earth is perpetually pushed forward in time to always give the character a contemporary feel. Dr. Manhattan observes how Superman´s origin constantly shifts, while the rest of the DC universe reacts to these shifts, as illustrated in *Doomsday Clock* #10.

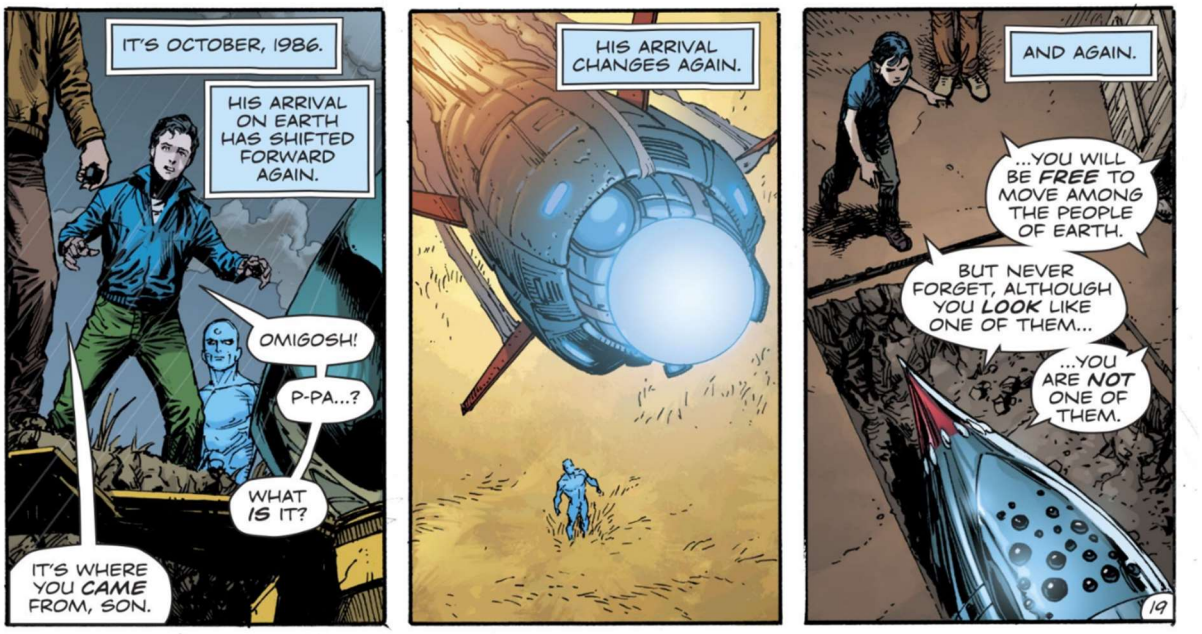

Fig. 2.1 Dr. Manhattan observes Superman´s arrival on Earth in different periods. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 19.

Shifting Superman´s arrival on Earth forward also serves as a narrative device that keeps continuity intact and provides authors with more freedom in writing the character, as the fictional world he occupies also needs to shift with him. Superman´s ambiguous age can easily be explained by his alien heritage, however the duration of his presence on Earth produces many problematic questions.

As the continuity of DC´s fictional universe uses real life events as its template, Superman´s involvement in geopolitical affairs becomes an issue. If Superman arrived in 1938, why did he not stop Word War II? Why did he not prevent the Vietnam War? Did he save the Apollo 13 mission? Interestingly, it is not only Superman´s continuity that is affected by these shifts, as his supporting cast of characters, especially Lois Lane, also shifts with him together. It can be rather confusing to think about Superman´s place within DC´s continuity as he is not only the initial spark that birthed this fictional universe but also its very center. In short, DC´s hierarchical continuity dictates that developments in Superman´s continuity have precedence over the continuity of other characters, resulting in a constant need to keep individual titles up to date.

There is an intriguing reciprocal relationship between Superman and the Justice Society of America, DC´s wartime heroes of the 1940s, that pertains to their legacy status. At first, the JSA banded together after being inspired by Superman but in *Doomsday Clock* #12, Dr. Manhattan observes a conversation between a teenage Clark and his adoptive Father Jonathan: "When I was a boy, my father told me stories of the Justice Society of America. Wartime heroes who made us feel safer and inspired us to do our part" (26). This leads to Clark preventing a deadly car crash and saving the life of his parents, dressed as Superboy, a teenage version of Superman. The inspiration thereof stems directly from Jonathan Kent´s anecdote about the Justice Society of America. How then, can the JSA be inspired by Superman, if Superman is first inspired to become Superboy by the JSA? Furthermore, the appearance of Superboy ultimately inspires the formation of the Legion of Superheroes in the thirtieth century, but if Superboy appeared before Superman, when exactly does he perform the iconic car lifting scene, depicted on the cover of *Action Comics* #38? Answering these questions thoroughly would definitely burst the scope of this thesis. However, what can be grasped from this is a reciprocal influencing of the canon, guided by a need to keep continuity flowing in all directions.

5.4. The Flash and the Discovery of the Multiverse

Fig. 2.2. Barry Allen and Jay Garrick meet for the first time. Carmine Infantino (penciler) and Carl Gafford (colorist). "The Flash Of Two Worlds". *The Flash*, no. 123. (New York: DC Comics, 1961), P.1.

There is one story that can be said to have kicked off DC´s exploration of a multiverse in Gardner Fox and Carmine Infantino's "Flash of Two Worlds" story in *The Flash* #123, published in 1961. In this issue, the original Flash, Jay Garrick, had already been replaced with the more modern and science-oriented version of Barry Allen. While Jay Garrick had been a college student who gained his super speed through the accidental inhalation of "heavy water vapors", as told in *Flash Comics* #1 (1940), Barry Allen is a forensic scientist who is hit by lightning in his laboratory while handling experimental chemicals in *Showcase* #4 (1956). Here, the most salient parts of the Flash´s origin story are retained with minor changes. As a sort of in-joke between writers and editors at DC, Jay Garrick´s heroic deeds were portrayed in the form of comic books stories that Barry Allen was reading and ultimately inspired him to take up the mantle of the Flash.

In "The Flash of Two Worlds", Barry Allen runs so fast he breaks the vibrational barrier between their respective worlds and ends up in Jay Garrick´s universe, where the latter had

already retired. When the two Flashes run into each other, they are both surprised to see different versions of themselves, and they postulate the existence of a multiverse. At the end of the issue, Barry Allen returns to Earth One and Jay Garrick has been inspired by his younger counterpart to come out of retirement on Earth Two. What can be observed here is a complementary connection between two individual characters that influences their shared legacy as the Flash. However, "The Flash of Two Worlds" is only the starting point of a legacy that will span centuries and a family of other speedsters, inspired by Barry Allen.

A few years before Barry Allen meets his Earth Two counterpart, the same accident that gave him his speed powers, occurs again, this time transforming his teenage nephew Wally West into Kid Flash in John Broome and Carmine Infantino´s *The Flash* #110. Wally would go on to serve as a sidekick and protégé to Barry for years until the original Flash sacrificed himself to save the whole DC universe from the evil Monitor in *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. Wally dons Barry´s old costume and fully embraces his role as the fastest man alive for almost 30 years until he is written out of continuity at the dawn of DC´s publishing initiative *The New 52* in 2011. Around the same time, *The Flash: Rebirth*, also written by Geoff Johns, was published which saw Barry Allen return from the "Speed Force". An interdimensional realm which serves not only as the source of the Flash´s power but also as a wayward point between life and death for speedsters. Between Wally´s disappearance and Barry´s reemergence, Barry´s time travelling nephew from the 30th century, Bart Allen takes over the mantle of the Flash for a very brief period of time.

It must be acknowledged here, that Jay Garrick, Barry Allen, and Wally West are by far not the only characters who have held the title of fastest man alive. There exists a whole family of Flash characters stretching from the Golden Age all the way to the far future of the DC universe, set in the thirtieth century. A major part of the stories featuring the Flash revolve around his ability to time travel, which usually causes a mess within serial continuity. What is important here are the connections that the Flash manages to establish between certain periods of DC´s canon and his function as an anchor point within continuity. Still, the example of the Flash shows the multiplicity of character legacies and how the passing of a mantle to the younger generation does not necessarily have to mean the end of the character. There is always a possibility for renewal and revitalization, depending on the needs of the story and continuity overall. This makes character legacies a crucial part of the narrative construction of DC´s shared fictional universe. In a next step, the legacy of Alan Scott´s Green Lantern and subsequently, the role of the Justice Society of America as a template for superhero-team books will be discussed.

5.5. Green Lantern

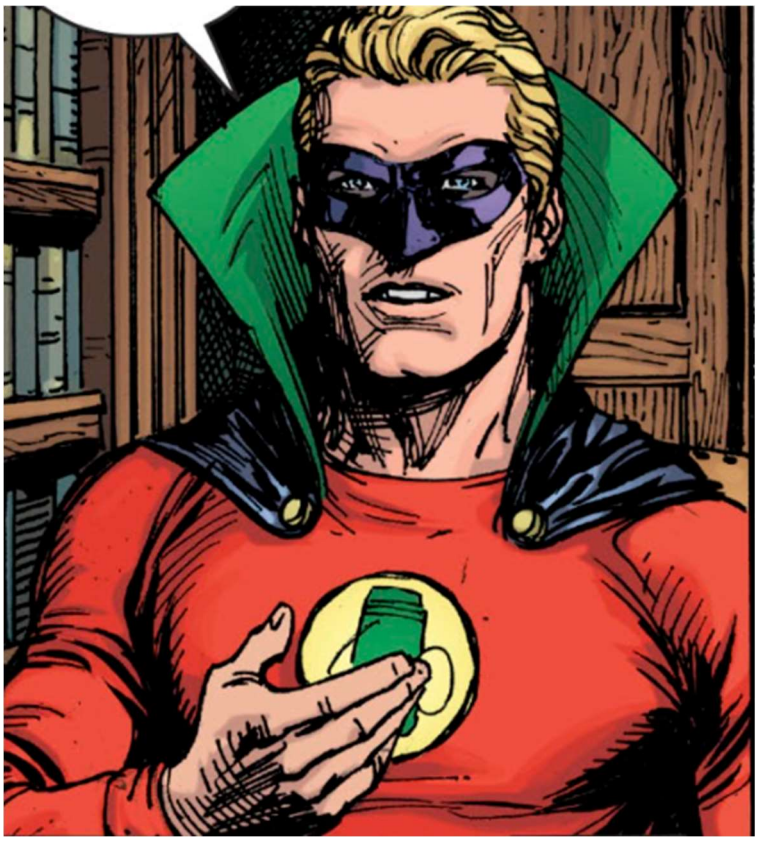

Fig. 2.3. Green Lantern (Alan Scott). Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 17.

Martin Nodell and Bill Finger created Alan Scott and he first appeared in *All-American Comics* #16 in April 1940. An engineer who survived a train crash by grabbing hold of a mysteriously green glowing lantern, he is then transformed into the Green Lantern. Wielding a green power ring that is only limited by the imagination of its bearer, it operates solely on willpower. This makes Green Lantern one of the most powerful characters in the whole DC universe. Possessing flight, invulnerability, and the ability to create hard light objects from his imagination, his only weakness is wood which he is unable to manipulate. One of the most salient features of the character though, is the fact that he was a founding member of the Justice Society of America, DC´s first superhero team introduced in *All-Star Comics* #3 in the winter of 1940.

During this period in American history, comics and especially superhero comics were an essential part of the war effort. For example, in *10 Cent War: Comic Books, Propaganda, and World War II* (2018), Goodwin discusses Superman´s intervention in the war between two fictional nations that is reminiscent of the conflict unfolding in Europe at the time in *Action Comics* #22-23 (1940). Additionally, Mark Fertig has compiled a comprehensive anthology on comics published during WWII, featuring over 500 classic covers from the Golden Age in *Take*

That, Adolf!: The Fighting Comic Books of the Second World War (2017). The JSA was portrayed as a team of masked crimefighters that aided the United States in winning World War II and consisted of: Doctor Fate, Hourman, The Spectre, Sandman, Atom, The Flash, Hawkman and Green Lantern. The JSA would also go on to serve as a template for the superhero team book, bringing together characters from various titles to take on threats that were too dangerous for one hero alone. In this sense, Writer Gardner Fox and editor Sheldon Mayer conceived the concept of a fully connected comic book universe, by combining the company´s most popular characters in one team book (Friedenthal 21). Moreover, Levitz contends that "in 1941, the idea of mixing separate properties together was radical…and an enduring enough hit that *Justice Society of America (JSA)* ran to the end of the Golden Age" (56). Although the main focus was to further the connections between individual titles, Friedenthal adds that, "[t]hese early Justice Society stories were very light on continuity, but they did reflect changes in costume and concept from the characters' own books, giving birth to the idea that these stories all took place in the same world" (21).

Subsequently, the founding of all other major superhero teams in DC´s canon can be traced back to the JSA, whether it be the Justice League of America, the Teen Titans, or the Legion of Superheroes. Early on in its publishing career, DC was already taking the first steps that would lead to the establishment of an enormous single, shared universe of characters.

After the end of World War II, the popularity of the Green Lantern character waned and after several years without a solo title, DC decided to pass the mantle to a younger character. They introduced Hal Jordan as the new Green Lantern in 1959. Later on, both characters existed at the same time, with Hal Jordan residing on Earth One and Alan Scott on the parallel Earth Two. Jordan would go on to become the most popular iteration of the character, joining the Justice League of America and even founding his own Green Lantern Corps. To the dismay of many fans, he was turned into the villain Parallax and decimated the fictional Coast City during the Zero Hour crossover event in 1994. He ended up saving the DC universe and sacrificing himself by reigniting the sun. Hal Jordan remained absent from DC´s canon for almost ten years until his return in *Green Lantern: Rebirth* in 2004, which was also written by Geoff Johns. In the meantime, his ring and title were passed on to Kyle Rayner, a comic book artist in his mid-twenties, who became the Green Lantern of the new millennium.

Talking to the website comic book resources, Johns explains why he included Alan Scott in *Doomsday Clock*:

> He’s the spark, the light. To me, Alan Scott is the big gun of the JSA, he's the powerhouse, and a lot of that I take as a nod to James Robinson's work in *The Golden Age* where he was that; it just felt right to me, […] And writing that character, I love Alan Scott, I love the elder statesmen of the JSA, and he also comes from different places of overcoming fear and that's evolved over the years. But Alan Scott just felt like the right character, he was the spark, the light that Doctor Manhattan was drawn to, and Alan Scott felt like the lynchpin, to me, of the JSA. (Geoff Johns, cbr.com, 22/08/21)

Just like there exists a “Flash Family” there is a whole Green Lantern Corps of characters wielding magic power rings and patrolling the galaxy by sheer willpower. The legacy of Green Lantern is extensive, just like the accompanying backstory and mythological lore that further the textual interconnectivity of DC´s canon.

I am aware that this is not a fully comprehensive character history of the Flash and Green Lantern as the 150+ years of continuity between the two characters would go beyond the scope of this thesis. However, what this example shows is the structure of character legacies and how these are perpetuated throughout the various ages of comic book publishing. Passing the mantle of a character to a new one has a long and rather convoluted history within the DC universe that can take on any imaginable scenario. One thing that all of them have in common is the fact that the need to further a character’s legacy and pass the mantle usually stems from a lack of popularity among readers. This might simply be because kids and teenagers are not interested in reading stories about World War II veterans as they do not offer points of identification to their young audience. Whether you look at Wally West replacing Barry Allen as the fastest man alive or Kyle Rayner becoming the Green Lantern, both of these characters are updated, younger versions of their mentors. They represent a generational step in their character legacies.

From a creative standpoint, this gives authors a fresh template to work with and explore what makes that character worthy to carry on said legacy. This reimagining of popular characters is meant to attract new readerships that will identify with the younger heroes yet also aim to give the story of these characters a fresh start. Oftentimes, characters from the Golden or Silver Age suffer from perplexing back stories in the canon of the DC universe that make it nearly impossible to continue their stories. For the most part, this is due to a lack of editorial oversight between writers and artists who were producing these books at astonishing rates, yet without much thorough coordination. As a result, stories would contradict each other on a weekly basis and at worst, simply abandon plot lines midway through an issue.

During the Silver Age, the narrative focus started to shift more towards psychedelic and high science fiction adventures while also turning towards social issues. The most pertinent work of that rea is undoubtedly Denny O´Neil and Neal Adams´ *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* series that dealt with mental health issues, drug abuse among the youth and other societal concerns of the time. Probably most well-known is the 1971 two-part story "Snowbirds don´t fly", published in *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* issues #85 - 86, which depicts Green Arrow´s ward Roy Harper as a heroin addict and his subsequent recovery.

Of course, the looming threat of the Cold War was also a theme that was reproduced and mirrored in comics leading to a tonal shift towards more mature and realistic content. All these developments not only culminated in the creation and release of *Watchmen* in 1986, its unparalleled popularity and success nudged DC towards its first official reboot at the conclusion of *Crisis on Infinite* Earths by Marv Wolfman ad George Perez. I will now turn to the legacy and importance of *Watchmen*.

5.6. The Legacy of *Watchmen*

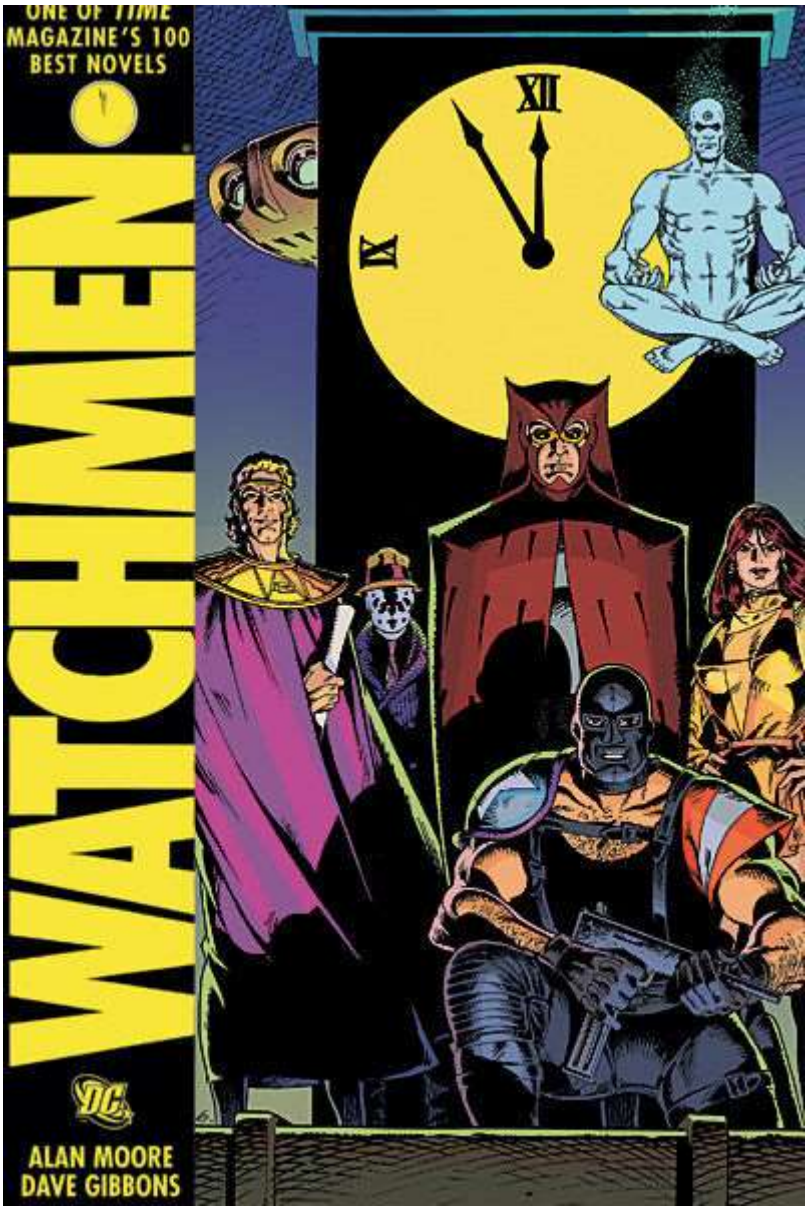

Fig. 2.4. Cover to the collected edition. Dave Gibbons (artist). *Watchmen*, vol 1. (New York: DC Comics, 1986).

The setting of *Watchmen*, written by Allan Moore and illustrated by Dave Gibbons, is an absolutely dystopian vision of the United States in the mid-1980s and according to Brand (2014), "explores both the political anxieties of the decade, and the history and function of superhero comics" (19). It depicts an alternative world in which some things are the same as in our own and some things are vastly different. An amended constitution by President Nixon has allowed him to stay in power for five consecutive terms, electric cars are the norm, and the history of crime-fighting costumed vigilantes is well known and discussed in the media. Additionally, the tension between the world´s superpowers is comparable to the height of the

Cold War, yet with one important difference that upsets the geopolitical balance, in the form of the "American detergent" Dr. Manhattan.

While the history of costumed vigilantes in the world of *Watchmen* goes back to World War I, none of these heroes actually possesses "metahuman" powers, until a young watchmaker is caught up in a terrible accident. Jon Osterman is present during an experiment with an intrinsic field generator and accidentally leaves behind his girlfriend's watch in the experimentation chamber. When he rushes back in to retrieve it, the doors close behind him, and he is atomized down to the molecular level. He later reappears as a tall blue man, giving off a radiating glow and to the shock of most bystanders, is completely naked. Because of his new uncanny appearance, he receives a new name, Dr. Manhattan, symbolized by the atomic structure of a hydrogen atom that adorns his forehead. At first, Dr. Manhattan is confused about his new state of being, which can be described as near god-like. He is having trouble situating himself within the timeline of *Watchmen*, as the accident has changed his perception of time and his physical structure on the atomic level. This not only gives him the ability to manipulate matter on a molecular level, but it also changes his perception of time to a nonlinear, nearly omniscient state in which he experiences past, present, and future simultaneously. Unfortunately, Dr. Manhattan is not able to change any of the things that happen to him which leads to him growing distant and detaching himself from humanity. The last part is crucial to the plot of *Doomsday Clock* and will be picked up again at a later point.

This peculiar feature of Dr. Manhattan, his nonlinear perception of the world around him is exemplified through his narration as Jim Zittlaw (2014) points out:

> In the chapter "Watchmaker," writer Alan Moore's style choices—the use of verbs, phrases, sentence structure, and formatting in Manhattan's first-person narrating voice—reflect Manhattan's specific worldview. This literary style gives the reader access to the story's high ambitions. To describe the situations he finds himself in, Dr. Manhattan utilizes many present-tense linking verbs. These are words such as is, am, and are, and their purpose is to equivocate the subject, Manhattan, with the predicate (Manhattan's presence in some time or place). Examples include sentences such as "I am sixteen years old" and "I am on Mars". (1)

Eventually, Dr. Manhattan loses interest in the struggles of humanity and leaves Earth for Mars, which accelerates the arms race among the superpowers. After President Nixon had deployed Dr. Manhattan to Vietnam, and thereby swiftly won the war, the USSR had been threatening to

launch a preemptive nuclear strike against the United States, fearing the "American detergent" might be sent to the Soviet Union next. After Dr. Manhattan leaves Earth, the tension between the superpowers comes to a pique and total planetary annihilation is imminent. And so, the self-proclaimed "smartest man in the world", Adrian Veidt, orchestrates a fake alien attack assuming that such a catastrophe would unite humanity. Ozymandias appeals to his humanity but is unable to convince Dr. Manhattan to return to Earth and save humanity from itself. The god-like figure refuses Veidt and tells him that he will leave this universe for one less complicated and that he might try to create live himself.

DC published *Watchmen*, under its Vertigo imprint, from October 1986 to September 1987. The 12 issues were released only two years prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. They have been collected as a trade paperback, which is "probably the best way to approach the text of *Watchmen* – as the graphic novel format strongly emphasizes the structured and unified character of the whole", according to Reynolds (105). The result is a story that looked wholly unfamiliar next to the majority of other mainstream comic books published at the time. Even featuring a note on the cover that suggested the book was "for mature readers only" most likely to escape the strict censorship of the Comics Code Authority. In addition to their gritty and dark realism, Moore and Gibbons manage to collect the most common characters, tropes and plots of the whole genre and distill it down into a mediation of the genre itself. Richard Reynolds, in his book *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology*, describes it best:

> One of the many remarkable aspects of *Watchmen* is the deft way in which Moore and Gibbons deploy multi-layered intertextual themes from the entire canon of superhero comics. A full engaged reading of *Watchmen* demands a broad familiarity with the overall preoccupations of the genre throughout its history. (34)

While *Watchmen* might be demanding, it is also highly satisfying to read a superhero story that concludes with a definite ending and allows the reader a kind of closure. In contrast, mainstream superhero comics always defer this kind of closure to the next issue, due to their serial nature. Although it is full of intertextual references, *Watchmen* is still a self-contained story within its own narrative universe. Everything the reader needs to know about it is delivered over its 12 issues. Therefore, the story does not require extensive background knowledge of its readers the way the majority of superhero comics does. Reynolds agrees on this point and also sees *Watchmen* as a critical response to the accumulation of superhero stories over the last decades (34). Regarding the direction the genre was going at the time, Paul Levitz remarks that,

> as with *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Watchmen* set off a chain reaction of rethinking the nature of superheroes and heroism itself, and pushed the genre darker for more than a decade. The series won acclaim, including becoming the first comic to win science fiction´s prestigious Hugo Award, and would continue to be regarded as one of the most important literary works the field ever produced. (563)

This might give an insight to the text´s popularity and longevity as in 2009, TIME magazine even placed *Watchmen* on their list of 100 top novels. It is not surprising then that DC would try to emulate the success of *Watchmen* throughout their publishing line, although without the expected results. Often hailed as dark, gritty, and realistic the story of *Watchmen* constructed a referential framework that publishers were eager to exploit for themselves yet failing to grasp its inherent postmodern deconstruction of the genre. *Watchmen* deconstructs the superhero myth by stripping away over 50 years of accumulated continuity thereby creating a new way to read superhero comics. Reynolds puts it this way:

> Watchmen´s so-called "postmodernism" largely comprises this process of stripping away the accumulation of 50 years of continuity. In so doing, Moore and Gibbons have produced a text which transcends the accumulated myths through which superhero texts are read - they have, so to speak, stretched the boundaries of the genre. (117)

But the text does not simply aim to point out how the majority of superhero stories are mostly identical variations of each other, differing only in miniscule details. Rather, it examines them with great precision. *Watchmen* features side characters that are so obviously rip-offs of other characters, even their names cannot help it: Nite-Owl as a version of Batman and The Comedian as a version of the Joker. According to Reynolds,

> the extent of the text´s ironic self-awareness of the genre´s history, and the technique by which stock superhero types such as Nite Owl and The Comedian are interrogated to the point where their mythology collapses into new levels of literal meaning, all mark out *Watchmen* either as the last key superhero text, or the first in a new maturity of the genre. (117)

This perceived maturity created a momentum within the comics industry to adopt a more realistic and in turn darker approach to their books as well, given the unmatched success of *Watchmen*. This lead to a wave of mature and realistic titles like Frank Miller´s *The Dark Knight Returns* and *The Killing Joke*, also written by Allan Moore and published in 1988. Ultimately, *Watchmen* transplanted the superhero genre onto the real-life settings of the contemporary

novel, crafting a text that not only deconstructed the whole genre but also revitalized it with a newfound sense of seriousness.

6. A Brief History of DC´s Crises

In this next part, I will give a brief overview of the previous crises that have impacted DC´s continuity in the last three decades, including *Infinite Crisis* (2005-2006), *Final Crisis* (2008-2009), *Flashpoint* (2011), and the resulting publishing initiative *The New 52* (2011). In a sense, the legacy of DC´s Crisis reboots is a result of its ever-growing canon that demands a coherent internal structure for the narrative of its storyworld to unfold.

As previously mentioned, the DC universe underwent its first big continuity reboot in the 12 issue limited event series *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. Former co-publisher of DC comics, Dan Didio goes into detail as to why such a radical step was necessary, stating:

> By the mid-1980's, the "obsessed," fan-driven demand for cohesive continuity within comic book universes, combined with the creator-driven desire to constantly devise new scenarios and alternative narratives, had led to a cluttered, confusing mess in the DC Universe, as writer/editor Marv Wolfman saw it. Crisis was Wolfman's brainchild, and he wrote the entire twelve-issue miniseries, which would be illustrated by detail-oriented penciller George Perez. (5)

Ever since the release of “The Flash of Two Worlds” in 1961, which expanded DC´s fictional universe to a fictional multiverse of infinite variations, continuity had branched out into almost infinite storylines. Wolfman acknowledged this fact and outlined the problems of DC´s continuity in the letters page of the second issue of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*:

> Writers like to complicate matters, and what began as a dream of a story—'Flash of Two Worlds'—had turned into a nightmare. DC continuity was so confusing, no new reader could easily understand it, while older readers had to keep miles-long lists to set things straight. And the writers … well, we were always stumbling over each other trying to figure out simple answers to difficult questions. (Didio 5)

The infamous slogan that accompanied the event, “Worlds Will Live, Worlds Will Die” held true and decimated the DC multiverse, leaving only one universe intact and killing off hundreds of characters. Most notably were the deaths of Supergirl and the Barry Allen version of the Flash who sacrificed himself at the climax of the story. Levitz adds that,

> Supergirl´s death provided evidence of the grave threat posed by Crisis´s villain, the Anti-Monitor. It also demonstrated to readers that DC´s crossover event would have lasting consequences. The demise of Supergirl, coupled with the death of Barry Allen, the second Flash, symbolically closed the door on the Silver Age and invited darker tales to come. (560)

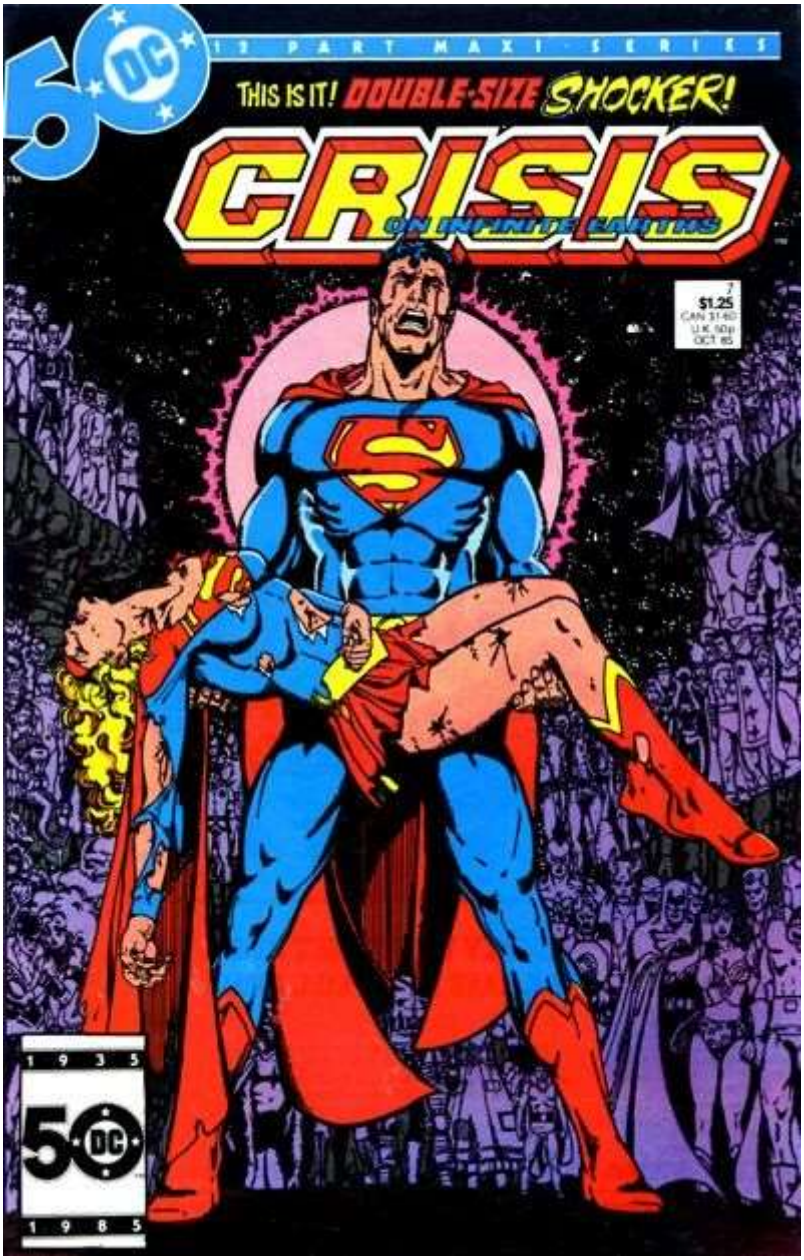

Fig. 2.5. Superman mourns the death of Supergirl. George Perez (Artist). *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, no. 7. (New York: DC Comics, 1985).

Additionally, DC´s continuity going forward was split into two distinctive parts on the level of seriality: the pre-*Crisis* continuity and the post-*Crisis* continuity, which immediately lead to new problems for DC editorial. Since they were still publishing individual titles featuring

characters from pre-*Crisis* continuity mixed with characters from updated post-*Crisis* continuity, it was confusing to follow for both writers and readers.

This unintentional problem with continuity was addressed in 1994 by the limited five issue event series *Zero Hour: Crisis in Time!* Written by Dan Jurgens and Jerry Ordway it served as a sequel to *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and addressed continuity problems. It was followed by a "Zero Month" in which DC introduced the characters of the updated post-*Crisis* continuity proper by restarting all their individual tiles with a new issue #0. It also featured a fold-out timeline on which fans could chart various events and key story elements, like the introduction of the Justice Society of America in 1940. However, Superman´s origin was portrayed as having happened during the previous decade, to keep the character and his age more contemporary.

Crisis on Infinite Earths set the stakes for all preceding crisis events for the next three decades, unfortunately leading to an oversaturation of the big crossover event concept. This is evident by the many crises that have befallen the DC universe ever since. Levitz clarifies that this was also partly due to the fact that Dan Didio was now approaching their publishing line from the view of a television producer. This meant that big crossover events were planned as the central pieces of seasons or years with a sharp focus on connecting these to the rest of DC´s publishing line along one creative vision (641). Still, for the most part of the 1990s and into the new millennium, DC´s continuity remained relatively stable until the release of *Infinite Crisis* in 2005.

Infinite Crisis was written by Geoff Johns, who had taken on an editorial position at DC at the time, and illustrated by Phil Jimenez, George Perez, Ivan Reis, and Jerry Ordway. It was released as a seven issue limited series from 2005 to 2006. The plot mostly revolves around characters from the pre-*Crisis* continuity, among them Kal-L (the Superman of pre-*Crisis* Earth-Two), Superboy of Earth-Prime, Alexander Luthor Jr. of pre-*Crisis* Earth-Three and Lois Lane Kent of pre-*Crisis* Earth-Two. Superboy and Alexander Luthor Jr. attempt to create a perfect world that is more resembling of the pre-*Crisis* continuity. This expands the DC universe again, including an unpopulated version of Earth-Two. Levitz mentions that the event "reached back 20 years to Crisis on Infinite Earths and reexamined the survivors in light of the changes in the DC universe" (643).

Ultimately, Superboy Prime is revealed as the villain of the story as he tries to destroy the current iteration of the DC universe. A form of retribution for losing his home universe, Earth-Prime, during *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. He is defeated and imprisoned by the combined efforts

of Superman and his pre-*Crisis* counterpart, yet not before killing several heroes. The aftermath of the event left the whole DC universe fragmented and in a state of uncertainty regarding continuity. The crisis also had a lasting effect on the canon, again changing the origin of Superman and his first sighting in Metropolis. In order not to have to address the ensuing continuity changes directly, DC decided to jump forward one year in its continuity. They revealed the "One Year Later" initiative which detailed in flashbacks what had happened to the characters in the intervening year following *Infinite Crisis*. The format that DC had employed in its "One Year Later" publishing initiative proved successful and was soon expanded in 2007 with a year-long series called *Countdown to Final Crisis*. This was meant to lay the groundwork for DC´s last entry in its trilogy of crises, appropriately named *Final Crisis*.

Final Crisis is a seven issue limited series written by Grant Morrison and illustrated by J.G. Jones, Carlos Pacheco, Marco Rudy, and Doug Mahnke, released between 2008 and 2009. According to Levitz, it was intended to bring back the multiverse that had been condensed in 1985 and allow for different versions of DC characters to coexist (643). At its center, the series features the villain Darkseid who is plotting to overthrow reality and enslave all living beings through his "Anti-Life Equation". A form of mind control, which makes everyone affected by it a servant of Darkseid. This company wide crossover included an overabundance of tie-in issues and adjacent titles. The most notable aspects of are the deaths of Martian Manhunter at the hands of Libra, and Batman, who is killed by Darkseid. The impact of Batman´s death is further portrayed in the main *Batman* title during the storyline "Batman R.I.P" (2008) which ran through issues #676 to 681. It is later revealed that Batman survived, with the help of complicated time travel mechanics, but is stuck in prehistoric times. His journey back to the present is depicted in the six-issue miniseries Batman: *The Return of Bruce Wayne* (2010) written by Grant Morrison.

Final Crisis positions the villain Darkseid as the most powerful and dangerous threat to the DC universe and also completes the *Crisis* trilogy. This event also marks the end of a particular part of continuity, spanning the aforementioned crises and ending with the DC universe having gone through multiple iterations of being a multiverse, a single universe and everything in between. However, the biggest change to the status quo of DC´s canonical continuity would soon follow and came in the form of another crossover event, *Flashpoint* (2011).

Flashpoint is a crossover story arc, written by Geoff Johns and illustrated by Andy Kubert, spanning more than 60 issues with various tie-ins and adjacent miniseries. Leading up to the event, the original Silver Age Flash, Barry Allen, travels back in time to thwart the murder of

his mother at the hands of his archnemesis, the Reverse-Flash (Eobard Thawne). However, the murder of his mother is the defining element of the Flash´s origin story and by preventing it, Barry Allen forfeits his legacy as a superhero and shatters the timeline of DC´s current continuity. When he awakes in the new *Flashpoint* reality, his mother is alive, but he is powerless, Superman does not seem to exist and the Justice League of America, successors to the Justice Society of America, has never been formed. Allen realizes that the death of his mother must occur for him to become the Flash and so he travels back in time, bids his mother farewell, and restores continuity to its previous state. While he is in the timestream, the Flash observes the universe splitting into several new ones before recombining. He then wakes up in a similar fashion to the beginning of *Flashpoint*, in a newly formed DC universe which is missing the preceding ten years of continuity. Although Barry Allen is the only one who remembers the previous universe and its continuity. This marks the beginning of DC´s new continuity and its publishing initiative *The New 52* (2011).

The New 52 functioned as a complete remodeling of DC´s entire publishing line and its continuity, cancelling all ongoing titles and debuting 52 new ongoing series. This was meant to emphasize the new DC multiverse which now consisted of 52 Earths. In this new continuity, all the characters were de-aged by approximately ten years and their origin stories were retold, sometimes with only slight changes yet in some cases with major adjustments. The main argument for rebooting the DC universe was to attract new readers and to once again clean up the convoluted continuity that had been accumulating since *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. This meant that there was again a separation between pre-*New 52* continuity and *New 52* continuity. Perhaps the most pertinent change to continuity included the revised origin of the Justice League of America, which was now positioned as DC´s first superhero team, as the Justice Society and its subsequent inspiration was completely absent from *The New 52*.

Originally, the Justice League of America debuted in *The Brave and the Bold* #28 (1960) created by Sheldon Mayer and Gardner Fox as a revival of the cancelled Justice Society of America. It featured Green Lantern (Hal Jordan), the Flash (Barry Allen), Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman (Diana Prince), Aquaman (Arthur Curry) and Martian Manhunter (J´onn J´onzz). The Justice League first gets together to battle Starro the conqueror, an alien in the form of a starfish possessing formidable mind control powers. This notion, that a team of heroes needs to be assembled to save the world from an overwhelming (alien) threat became so ingrained in DC´s canon that all subsequent iterations of the Justice League followed it. It also

became the template for the reimagined version of the JLA featured in this new publishing initiative.

However, during *The New 52*, the Justice League first bands together to stop Darkseid´s invasion of Earth, which is notably different from the League´s Silver Age origin. This change to continuity left audiences perplexed as Darkseid had just served as the main antagonist during *Final Crisis* only two years prior, attempting the same scheme. While this rebooted version of continuity only lasted until the crossover event *Convergence* (2015) and was surpassed by the *Rebirth* initiative, DC still managed to publish an impressive volume of stories during *The New 52*. The initial bank slate that was the starting point for this reintroduction of DC´s fictional universe might have been more of a hurdle to creators, as Scott Snyder, the writer on the main *Batman* title, told the website polgygon.com in an interview:

> That sort of fluidity, that lack of rules, of blueprints, led to issues, because between different groups there were different ideas of what was DC history. So you'd do something and then you'd hear from a different group that one of the characters you mentioned [being] in the past wasn't in the past anymore, because they had a new origin. Again, everyone was working out of love of story, trying to tell the best tales in their area. It was just difficult without more set rules. (Scott Snyder, polygon.com, 23.12.2021)

Many of the new stories were repetitive and drew heavily from the pre-*New 52* continuity, in some instances blatantly reusing previous story arcs. This is probably most evident in the storyline "The Darkseid War" which ran through *Justice League* issues #40 – 50 and saw the Justice League battle Darkseid once again, in a manner akin to *Final Crisis*. The story is also one of the last published in the *New 52* continuity and the events lead directly into DC´s next relaunch, *DC Rebirth* (2016).

This next reboot of continuity, helmed by Geoff Johns, was meant to give birth to a new DC universe and a continuity that included elements of the pre-*Flashpoint* continuity while keeping many aspects of the *New 52* continuity as well. However, it lacked an overall structure and overarching narrative to tie everything together, as Scott Snyder remarks:

> Honestly, if you want to know what I think the big problem with it was, from a structural standpoint, the biggest problem I had with it architecturally as an initiative was that it didn't really have rules about the way continuity was going to work. Ultimately, we didn't have an uber-story fully worked out. There were sort of hints of one with Pandora

> and Flashpoint, there were good ideas there, but there wasn't a big narrative. (Scott Snyder, polygon.com, 23.12.2021)

A new direction for DC´s publishing line was a necessary conclusion to the negative reception of *The New 52*, which was perceived by many readers as being incomplete, convoluted, and missing a clear direction. This is evident by the fact that 27 of the 52 new titles were cancelled within the first two years, due to declining sales. Snyder sees the initial success in sales at the start of *The New 52* as a major issue:

> I think what led to more and more and more problematic aspects as we went was that it became a victim of its own success. It was doing so well initially that there wasn't a desire to rein it in and put rules on how things worked. Books were doing things differently, and so some books had different histories than others, and different rules on how things worked, so I think it became about those things existing next to each other, and that just created a mounting sense of frustration and confusion. Eventually, we needed something like Rebirth to come in and set rules, rebuild an uber-story. (Scott Snyder, polygon.com, 23.12.2021)

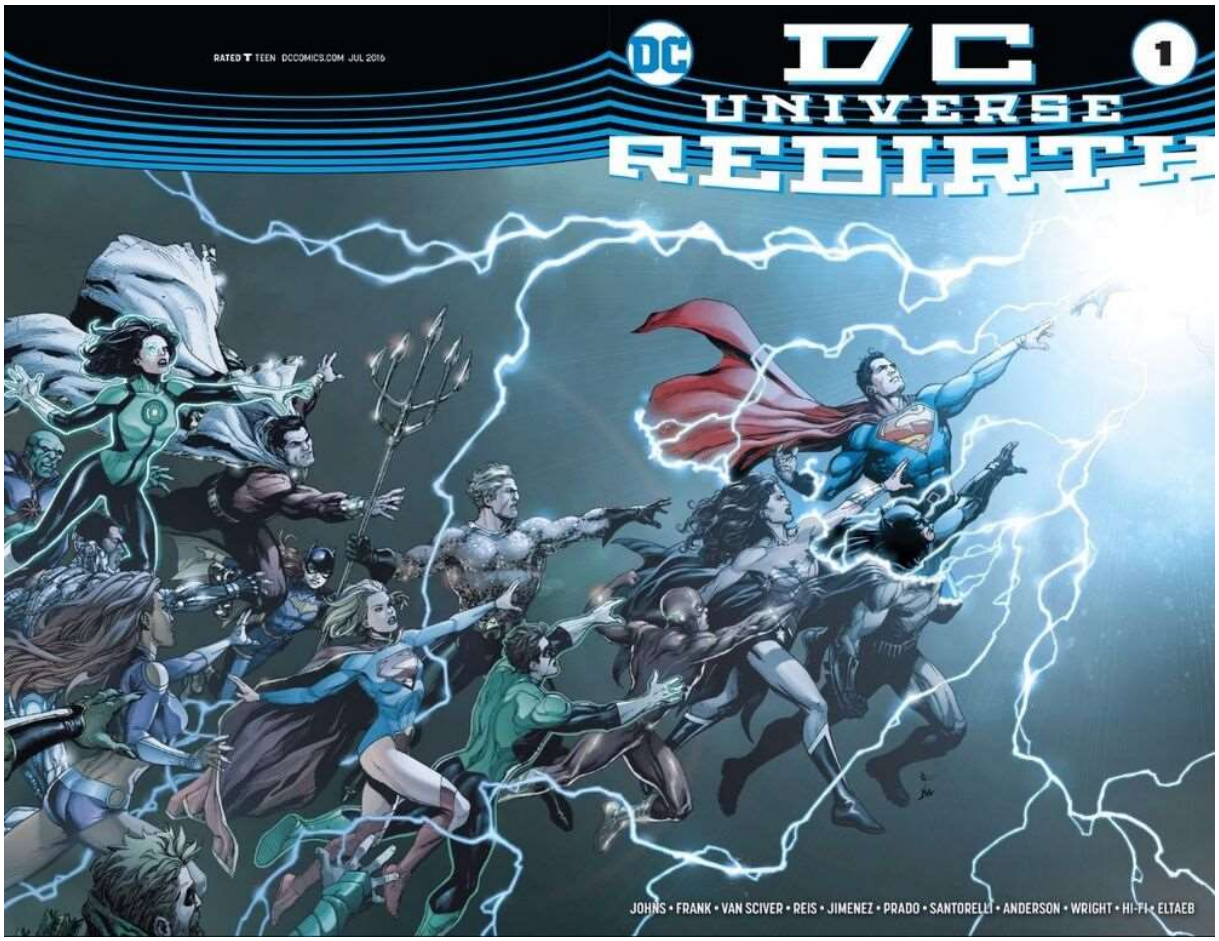

Fig. 2.6. Cover. Gary Frank (penciler), Ethan van Sciver (inker) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *DC Universe: Rebirth*, vol.1, no.1 (New York: DC Comics, 2016).

The rebirth of DC´s fictional universe started with the oversized *DC Universe: Rebirth* (2016) special, written by Geoff Johns and illustrated by Ivan Reis, Phil Jimenez, Ethan Van Sciver and Gary Frank.

The cover depicts members of the Justice League reaching out towards a blue hand, that of Dr. Manhattan, amidst a storm of blue lightning. The story of *Rebirth* is told through the perspective of a young Wally West, the third iteration of the Flash, who is trying to return to the main DC Earth after having been stuck in the Speed Force dimension for years. The Wally West version of the Flash had notably been absent from *The New 52*, replaced with a different character of the same name but of African American descent. After visiting friends and team members, none of which remember the former Flash, West seeks out his mentor Allen. He finally remembers Wally and enables him to take corporeal form in the DC universe proper. This moment of remembrance highlights the importance of the Flash´s legacy with Barry being the only one with the capacity to remember his former protégé and help him return to the DC universe proper. West then warns Allen of a mysterious force that had manipulated the timeline and stolen ten years of their lives. In the epilogue to the story, Batman discovers the iconic bloodied smiley face button, worn by the Comedian during *Watchmen*, hinting at Dr. Manhattan´s involvement.

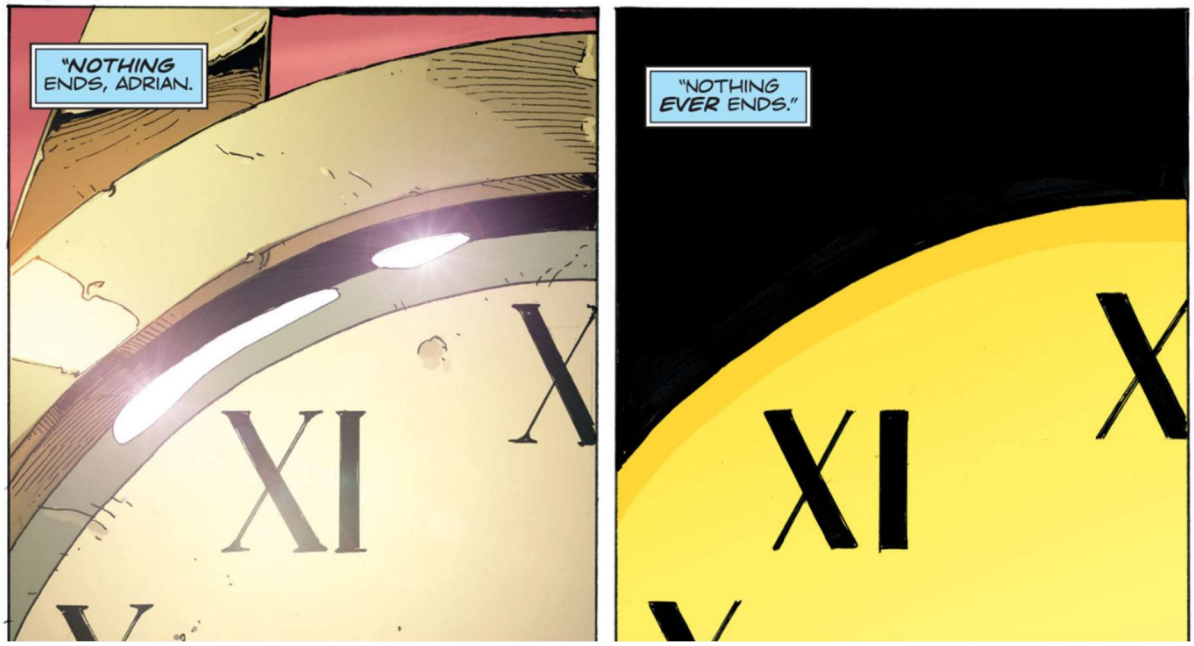

Fig. 2.7. Nothing ends. Gary Frank (penciler), Ethan van Sciver (inker) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *DC Universe: Rebirth*, vol.1, no.1 (New York: DC Comics, 2016), p. 48.

The last page of the special is made up of four panels, depicting the surface of Mars and zooming in on a watch. It is accompanied by boxes of narration that retell a conversation between Ozymandias and Dr. Manhattan. While none of these characters from the *Watchmen*

universe are actually shown on the page, their presence is indicated through their character dialogue and through the distinctive blue background and white framing of Dr. Manhattan´s text box. In the final panel, his dialogue is an ominous response to Veidt´s question if everything had worked out in the end, responding "nothing ever ends" (DC Universe: Rebirth, 80) as the clockface of the watch turns into the iconic yellow and black doomsday clock (see Fig. 2.7.).

The first issue of *Doomsday Clock* was released to much anticipation in November 2017 and finally confirmed, after almost a year of speculation, that Dr. Manhattan was indeed responsible for stealing ten years of continuity from the DC universe. Subsequently, it is revealed that when Barry Allen travelled back in time during *Flashpoint*, he opened up an interdimensional rift that allowed Dr. Manhattan to cross into the DC universe where his scientific curiosity leads him to conduct an experiment. After DC had gone through a multitude of unpopular changes regarding continuity, most of them can be attributed to instances of misguided editorial oversight. Passing the responsibility to a non-canonized character in the form of Dr. Manhattan is an ingenious remedy.

7. The Multilayered Narrative Construction of *Doomsday Clock*

While the primary focus of *Doomsday Clock* lies in fixing the continuity problems caused by *The New 52*, and connecting it back to the pre-*Flashpoint* continuity, it also includes many narrative threads that pick up the mood and themes of the original *Watchmen* graphic novel. This chapter will explore the complex narrative construction of *Doomsday Clock* and lay out the single threads that constitute it while also taking a closer look at the reoccurring themes and motives.

In order not to get lost in a plot summary of *Doomsday Clock*, I will give a brief overview of the most significant plot points:

- Ozymandias tries to find Dr. Manhattan and return him to their home universe to prevent nuclear annihilation once again.
- "The Supermen Theory" has caused a metahuman arms race between the US and the rest of the world as it asks a profoundly puzzling question: why are the majority of superheroes American?
- Dr. Manhattan´s manipulation of the timeline of DC´s canon and the removal of the JSA´s legacy.

- Dr. Manhattan is unable to see past a certain point in his future, a confrontation with Superman and wonders if he will destroy him, or if he himself will destroy the DC universe.

The plot of *Doomsday Clock* can be split up into two overarching narrative threads from which the story branches out and the plot is driven forward. The first one follows Ozymandias and a group of surviving characters from the original *Watchmen* universe travel to the DC universe in search of Dr. Manhattan, hoping to convince him to return to their home universe with them and save humanity. The second thread deals with the heroes of the DC universe reacting to "The Supermen Theory" and the ensuing global arms race and unrest. Furthermore, the conflict between Superman and Dr. Manhattan is framed as a battle between hope and despair.

These distinct layers of narration not only constitute the story of *Doomsday Clock*, they also specifically refer and link back to a large part of continuity that had been absent during *The New 52*, through the actions of Dr. Manhattan. The plot of *Doomsday Clock* then, is to connect old and new continuity and produce a fully coherent canon of DC´s fictional universe that can be grasped by readers and authors alike. A special feature of comics in general is the hybrid format of text and image, both of which combine to form a unit of meaning. However, even in this format, both parts need to adhere to continuity, meaning that, for example, characters also need to have a familiar look.

> Comics contain "double vision" in their structural hybridity, their double (but nonsynthesized) narratives of words and images. In one frame of comics, the images and the words may mean differently, and thus the work sends out double-coded narratives or semantics. (Chute 459)

Even though Chute is discussing the validity of graphic narratives as a representation of historical occurrences, this idea of a "double vision" applies well to superhero comics. Depending on the artist, superhero characters might look different from issue to issue, yet they still retain their narrative and cultural encoding. A panel depicting a character in a prominent pose can be read as an homage to a previous story and appeal to its themes and motives. The layout of *Doomsday Clock* itself serves as a nice example here, at the same time invoking the original story through its graphic presentation and iconic nine panel grid. Gary Frank´s drawing style and Brand Anderson´s coloring is as close to Moore and Gibbon´s original as possible and offers a double reading that invites readers to draw their own parallels. Geoff Johns also

prominently named his story after a recurring object that signified the impending destruction of the *Watchmen* universe.

7.1. The Symbolic Importance of The Doomsday Clock

Probably the most prevalent theme detectable within the story of *Doomsday Clock* can be found in the name of the event series, doom. The cover to the complete collection of *Doomsday Clock* features a publisher´s note on the inside of the cover, detailing the inception of the real-life doomsday clock:

> The doomsday clock is a symbol created in 1947 by the Science and Security Board of the academic journal Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, in response to the world´s growing geopolitical insecurities and rising fear of nuclear war. The time on the clock – the proximity to midnight – indicates the view of the Science and Security Board regarding the likelihood of a global catastrophe. (Johns i)

The symbol of the doomsday clock plays a large role in Moore and Gibbon´s original *Watchmen* graphic novel, highlighted by Jon Osterman´s obsession with time before his tragic transformation into Dr. Manhattan. After his father, a watchmaker, witnesses the U.S. dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and their unprecedented potential for destruction, he declares his profession irrelevant and outdated and forces his son into studying physics. It is then almost poetic that a misplaced watch that Jon was repairing for his girlfriend, Janey Slater, causes him to enter the intrinsic field generator chamber to retrieve it. Even more so, Osterman is transformed into a "nuclear detergent" whose perception of time has been radically altered to a non-linear state in which he perceives time simultaneously. During the original publication of *Watchmen* in the middle of the 1980s, the doomsday clock sat at three minutes to midnight as a result of the failure of another round of SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) negotiations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The urgency that is represented by the doomsday clock can be felt throughout *Watchmen* as the cold war is at its height and the threat of nuclear annihilation is imminent. In *Doomsday Clock*, "The Supermen Theory" provides thematic allegory here, recreating the hostilities of that era. Even the iconic smiley face logo with the blood spatter in the upper left-hand corner is meant to signify the impending doom of the clock reaching midnight.

The cover for the complete collection of *Doomsday Clock* takes this imagery even further and juxtaposes it with Superman´s instantly recognizable S-symbol by placing a small blood spatter in the exact same location as the hands on the doomsday clock and the splatter on the smiley

face button. This artistic choice foreshadows the inevitable confrontation between Superman and Dr. Manhattan which is the central conflict of *Doomsday Clock*. Additionally, the cover to the complete collection also features a smaller yellow clock face, set at 12 minutes to midnight which is represented by Superman´s logo. This serves as an indication that it will take the full 12 issues of Doomsday Clock´s initial publication until the two powerful protagonists clash.

7.2. The Central Conflict: Superman vs. Dr. Manhattan

The unavoidable confrontation between Superman and Dr. Manhattan represents not only a clash of polar opposites but also that of opposing philosophies. Superman is often portrayed as a humanist who is looking for the best in people, which grounds him on Earth as an alien outsider. Journalist and Superman scholar Larry Tye (2012) set out to answer the question of how this character has managed to thrive for nearly eight decades and sees the intrinsic simplicity of his story as an orphan as driving factor for Superman´s popularity (xiii). Additionally, Tye also remarks that,

> Superpowers are just half the equation. More essential is knowing what to do with them, and nobody has a more instinctual sense than Superman of right and wrong. He is an archetype of mankind at its pinnacle. Like John Wayne, he sweeps in to solve our problems. No thank-you needed. Like Jesus Christ, he descended from the heavens to help us discover our humanity. He is neither cynical, like Batman, nor fraught, like Spider-Man. For the religious, he can reinforce whatever faith they profess; for nonbelievers, he is a secular messiah. (xiv)

This, however, does not mean that Superman is a static character. After having started out as a strong man in the 1930s, taking on Al Capone and other robber gangs, Superman supported the war effort and protected the home front in the 1940s and stood behind his adopted country during the Cold War (Tye xiv). In each era, he tackled the world´s biggest threats to humanity giving each generation the Superman they needed and deserved, becoming a steady beacon of light (Tye xiv). While the threats Superman was facing over the course of the last century had been tangible and one-dimensional, like super villains and costumed criminals. In the new millennium he was often pitted against adversaries that challenged not only his physical strength but also his incredible resolve and humanist philosophy. During *Doomsday Clock*, Superman not only faces a god-like being possessing abilities that surpass even his own, but his fundamental beliefs are also shaken to their core when Dr. Manhattan reveals that he is responsible for the death of his parents in issue #10. Still, this is not the only adversary

Superman has to overcome, as his status as an American citizen is called into question as part of the "Supermen Theory".

7.3. The Invocation of Cold War Paranoia: The Supermen Theory

This narrative thread is a crucial part of the overall story of *Doomsday Clock*, as it leads to a superhuman arms race, akin to the height of the Cold War and threatens to destroy Earth. It also asks a rather obvious question that scholars have not yet paid attention to: why are so many superheroes American? The backmatter for issue #5 of *Doomsday Clock* features a special report on "the metahuman menace" from a fictional magazine titled *Trouble Alert*.

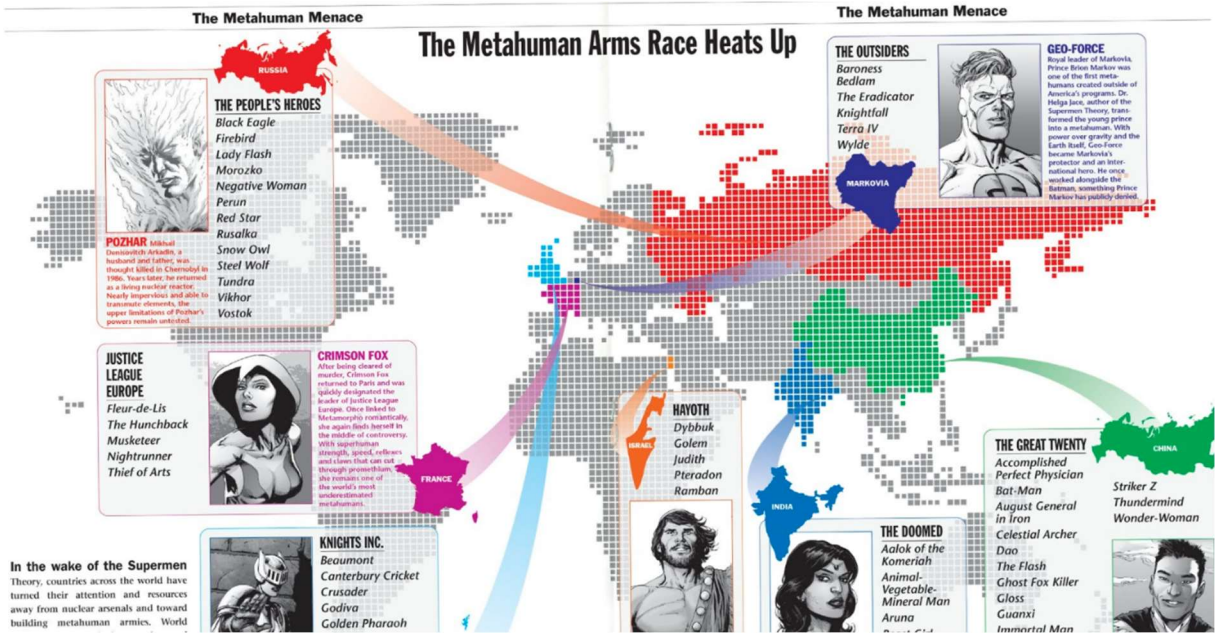

Fig. 2.8. The Metahuman Arms Race. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 5 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 49.

It states that more than 97% of the world´s metahumans are American and that the United States government is responsible, having run a decade-long program to create their own superhuman soldiers. As a result, governments around the globe turn their attention away from their nuclear arsenals and instead focus on the creation of their own metahuman agents, leading to a superpowered arms race. This invokes, and at the same time, inverts the setting of the original *Watchmen* story, where only Dr. Manhattan actually possesses metahuman abilities. In *Doomsday Clock*, the fear represented by the United States´ metahuman superiority, thanks to emergence of Superman in Kansas, causes other nations to defend themselves in a matter equally as powerful. Dr. Manhattan´s powers stem from an accident involving nuclear science and he is dubbed the "American Detergent" by President Nixon during the original *Watchmen* graphic novel. In response, the world´s nuclear arsenal is expanded greatly. In both cases, these

arms races turn into global conflicts that threaten to destroy both fictional universes. The revelation that the U.S. government has been lying to the public also connects back to the original *Watchmen* story in which the alien invasion, orchestrated by Ozymandias in hopes of uniting a divided world, is revealed to be a lie. Just as with "The Supermen Theory", this discovery leads to total societal collapse.

Even though, superheroes save cities, countries, planets, galaxies and whole universes from destruction, there is one area where they do not intervene: politics. When reading a superhero comic, one might wonder about the legal aspects of costumed vigilantism on a geopolitical scale. The fictional universe of DC comics houses all of the real world´s political bodies that operate on a global scale, like the United Nations and the WHO. In general, writers tend to stay away from involving real life geopolitical crises in their stories, as these would prompt some uneasy questions. Why have Superman and the rest of the Justice League, so far, not intervened in war torn countries or acted on behalf of the United States in such manners? The answer is twofold. On the one hand, the vast majority of superhero characters published by DC are American and are therefore meant to only operate within the U.S., except of course space-based characters. On the other hand, intervention in another country is seen as a form of American imperialism, evident by the story of *Watchmen* in which Dr. Manhattan single handedly ends the Vietnam war in a matter of days, on behalf of President Nixon. The lesson here is simple: solving geopolitical conflicts with superpowers leads to even more super powered conflicts that in turn threaten the whole planet that the heroes are sworn to protect.

This moral conflict often plays out in Superman stories, where Clark Kent´s secret identity as an American journalist and his origin as an alien immigrant on Earth clash. While he will surely defend "Truth, Justice and the American Way", as is his often-quoted motto, Superman sees himself firstly as a protector to the whole planet and to all of humanity. He believes that the people of Earth must be allowed to forge their own destiny and not have it forged for them. In a sense, Superman sees himself always one heroic deed away from becoming a global dictator, as detailed in Tom Taylor´s *Injustice* series. There exists a sharp contrast here between the two major publishers of superhero comics, DC, and Marvel, where the latter´s flagship property, Captain America, was actively involved in fighting Nazi Germany. The consequences of superpowered interventions become tragically clear in issue #8 of *Doomsday Clock* when one of the main characters involved in "The Supermen Theory", Firestorm, accidentally turns hundreds of people into glass in Moscow´s Red Square. When Superman comes to his aid, the

situation escalates and Russia all but declares war on the United States, if Superman does not turn himself in.

"The Superman Theory" is later debunked by Lex Luthor, except for the creation of Firestorm, which was indeed part of a government program, run by Dr. Martin Stein. While "The Supermen Theory" invokes the paranoia of the Cold War era, it can also be read as a critique on American politics in general, similar to the way that *Watchmen* chastises the United States´ military interventions in the latter part of the twentieth century.

One common complaint that was articulated by DC´s readership during the 2000s was a complete lack of diversity and representation in the comics that were published as Cocca (2020) points out:

> People of color, people with disabilities, people who are LGBTQ+, women—most of the people in the world—are dramatically underrepresented on superhero comics pages and onscreen, as they are in positions of power in all of our institutions. When almost all of the stories out there exclude that majority or repeatedly show them as stereotypes, it becomes more difficult to imagine them as heroes and leaders and more difficult for others to see them that way. (7)

Around that time, the majority of titles featured American male, white protagonists and the few books that did have female leads presented them as hypersexualized counterparts of male characters. To contrast this, Cocca provides us with the statistical relevancy of female characters and creators, specifying that, "[f]emale characters star in about 15% of superhero comics in 2020, with about the same percentage being written or drawn by a female creator. In 2015 it was about 12%, in 2010 about 6%, and in 2000 about 5%" (6).

With the advent of *The New 52* publishing initiative, which was meant to draw in new readers, DC also focused on more inclusivity and more diverse characters, although with limited success. They introduced an African American version of the third Flash, Wally West, and draped a few characters in ambiguity regarding their sexual orientation. Most importantly though, it was acknowledged that there were characters with metahuman powers all over the globe, like China´s "The Great Twenty" featuring Kong Kenan, the Chinese Super-Man. Additionally, there are India´s "The Doomed" and Israel´s "Hayoth" among others. Unfortunately, most of these characters do not appear in their own titles but are rather relegated to the background of other characters´ stories. For instance, "The New Super-Man" which

featured Kong Kenan only ran for 19 issues before it was cancelled and subsequent appearances by the character have been rare.

The purpose of "The Supermen Theory" is to put Superman in a position in which his fundamental beliefs are challenged to such a degree that even to him, the situation appears hopeless. The world´s metahuman powers are directed against him after losing faith in their adopted protector. Devoid of his defining character trait, Superman must then exert "the extra effort" it takes superheroes to overcome their greatest odds and surprisingly, it does not come in the form of brute force or violence, but as a passionate appeal to Dr. Manhattan.

7.4. The Philosophical Conflict: Hope vs. Despair

One of the reasons why the original *Watchmen* graphic novel stands out among other graphic novels is its tragic ending. Superhero stories tend not to have a definitive ending, only briefly lasting victories over the villain of the story, resulting from its serialization. In the case of *Watchmen* though, the villain succeeds in actualizing his evil plan, without being foiled by the heroes of the story. Ironically, Ozymandias´ plan to unite the world in the wake of an alien invasion does not have the desired outcome and instead plunges the world into even deeper chaos and there remain no heroes to save it. The only clue to Ozymandias being responsible for the attack is a journal, kept by the masked vigilante Rorschach, which eventually finds its way into the offices of a newspaper. Still, it won´t be revealed to the public until the beginning of *Doomsday Clock.* After being manipulated at the hands of Ozymandias, Dr. Manhattan decides to leave the universe of *Watchmen* for another one to satisfy his scientific curiosity, having shed whatever remained of his humanity. To him, there is no hope in saving his world.

At first, Dr. Manhattan is confused by this new universe and his non-linear perception of time is having trouble adjusting itself, as a result of the convoluted and confusing timeline of the DC universe. In a way, Johns is using the character of Dr. Manhattan as a metaphorical representation of the reader here, acknowledging how hard it can be for readers unfamiliar with DC´s continuity to start reading DC comics. This becomes even more obvious, considering that Dr. Manhattan has a degree of omniscience, unparalleled by any other character in the DC universe. Once he finds a temporal anchor in Hollywood actor Carver Coleman, his vision clears. Dr. Manhattan is fascinated to find out that he has travelled to a universe where he is not the only one with god-like powers, but just one of many. Although, there is a certain point in the future that Dr. Manhattan cannot see beyond, and all he perceives is darkness. That moment is a confrontation with Superman in which he is charging towards him glowing red eyes, full

of rage and leading to question of whether Superman destroys Dr. Manhattan, or if Dr. Manhattan destroys the DC universe.

Fig. 2.9. Superman is about to attack Dr. Manhattan. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 17.

The first person he meets is an aspiring actor named Carver Coleman who becomes a temporal anchor for Dr. Manhattan in 1948. In this part of DC´s Silver Age continuity, Superman had debuted in the 1950s and Coleman had never heard of him before. Dr. Manhattan then proceeds to observe the ever-fluctuating timeline of the DC universe and begins his experiment: is the DC universe stronger than his home universe and can it save itself from destruction? It must be noted here that, even though Dr. Manhattan might appear omniscient due to his experience of the timeline as simultaneous, he is still not able to change his own actions. He goes on to manipulate the timeline of the DC universe, especially that of Superman, to find out if this beacon of hope will be able to overcome his cold logic. That includes removing or changing crucial details of Superman´s life that are foundational building blocks of the character and in turn, of the DC universe, which sets up the central philosophical conflict of *Doomsday Clock*: hope vs. despair.

Dr. Manhattan´s first manipulation is the removal of a green glowing lantern that would save engineer Alan Scott´s life during a train crash in 1940 and produces a ripple effect that reverberates throughout continuity. The lantern is moved six inches to the left, Alan Scott dies in the train crash, and he never becomes the first Green Lantern. He also never becomes a founding member of the Justice Society of America in the 1940s. As a result, Jonathan Kent

never tells a young Clark of the inspiration the JSA provided during the war time and Clark is never inspired to reveal himself to the world early as Superboy, failing to prevent the car crash that kills his parents. In the thirtieth century, the Legion of Superheroes is never inspired by Superboy and therefore never forms. With one single act, Dr. Manhattan has caused a domino effect that has fundamentally changed Superman and subsequently the whole DC universe, erasing legacies and robbing it of hope.

Dr. Manhattan´s experimentation with the DC universe stem from a scientific curiosity that is driven by his failure to save his own universe from destruction during the story of *Watchmen*. His peculiar experience of time also allows him to exist in multiple moments at the same time, which leads to him neglecting his personal connections in favor of scientific discovery. His wife at the time, Janey Slater, is the first one to appeal to what is left of Jon Osterman, yet without success. She later dies of cancer, and it is implied that Dr. Manhattan´s new physical form is the cause of her illness while others also come forward suggesting he gave them cancer as well. This leads to Dr. Manhattan isolating himself on Mars in order to continue his experiments to construct a machine capable of producing unlimited amounts of clean energy, without hurting anyone around him. Although, a twist in the story reveals that Dr. Manhattan did not actually cause his wife´s cancer, rather it was a ploy by Ozymandias to get Dr. Manhattan to leave Earth, so his plans could unfold uninterrupted. A gambit that is employed again during *Doomsday Clock* issue #1, when Ozymandias deceives Rorschach II, pretending to be suffering from a brain tumor.

At the core of the conflict between Superman and Dr. Manhattan lies a question that has been debated for centuries, which is stronger: nature, or nurture? Can Superman´s hopeful nature overcome Dr. Manhattan´s manipulations of the DC universe, which nurture it to become more like the *Watchmen* universe? This is the basis for Dr. Manhattan´s interest in the DC universe and his attempt to shape it into a version of his home universe. As he himself, a being of god-like proportions was not able to inspire humanity not to destroy itself, he wants to see if the DC universe, populated by hundreds of metahumans with incredible powers, might choose another course of action when faced with the threat of annihilation. This threat becomes very real during the first meeting of Superman and Dr. Manhattan in issue #10 when the former is attacked by an army of metahumans demanding he take responsibility for the “Moscow Massacre” that occurred in issue #5. When Superman asks Dr. Manhattan for help, he simply replies: “I don´t help you”, followed by the revelation that he is the one responsible for the changes in his life, the loss of mentors he has never known and friends that he has forgotten. Yet, Dr. Manhattan´s

final piece of dialogue is what truly enrages Superman when he tells him: “more specifically, I´m responsible for the deaths of your parents. I changed your life, Superman, out of cold curiosity…will you destroy me for it? Or will I defend myself despite my sins?” (#12, 16).

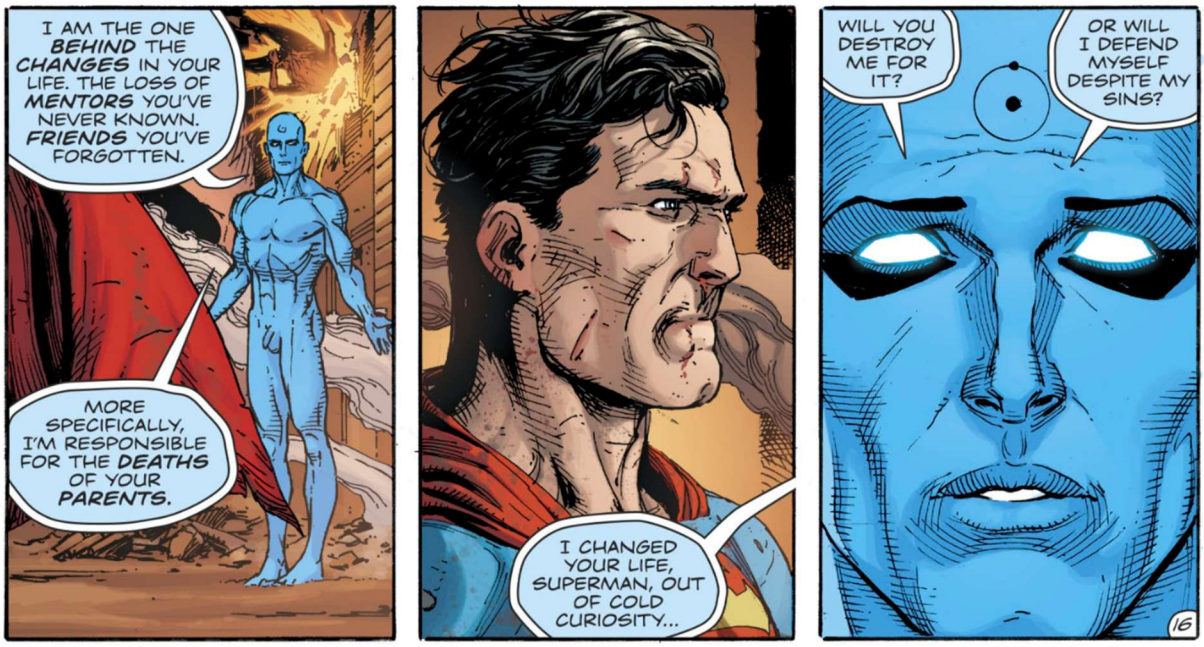

Fig. 2.10. Who will destroy the DC universe? Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 16.

This leads to the moment that Dr. Manhattan has foreseen and cannot look past in his future, when a rage filled Superman charges at him, ready to strike a blow. This sequence also breaks up the established nine panel grid on the page, in favor of three wide panels. The top panel shows Superman at a short distance, in front of a destroyed building, ready to charge and eyes full of red-glowing rage (see fig. 2.9.). The middle panel is a close up of Dr. Manhattan´s face, eyes closed with billowing smoke and fire in the background. The bottom panel then is a close up of Superman´s fist, ready to hit, and his face full of anger and despair. This departure from the established panel layout heightens the built-up suspense even more. To Dr. Manhattan´s surprise, Superman´s fist does not hit him, but a Russian character named Pozhar, who is about to attack Dr. Manhattan from behind, to which he replies: “Why would you defend me…?”. This also causes him some confusion as the darkness Dr. Manhattan has envisaged is still coming. Superman does not know what to make of the whole situation when his attention is drawn to an old, wrinkled photograph lying next to Dr. Manhattan. It shows him still as Jon Osterman together with his wife Janey, and he produces the pictures with every step he takes. Superman assumes that at one time, she was important to Dr. Manhattan to which he replies that she was. This is also one of the few instances in which Dr. Manhattan uses a past tense

verb, in sharp contrast to his usual speech patterns which are normally in the present tense to reflect his omniscience.

What follows is an inspirational speech from Superman that convinces Dr. Manhattan to make a choice:

> Right now you have a choice to make. You talk about me destroying you or you destroying me because all you see beyond this is nothing? But maybe there´s a third choice. Maybe the darkness you see…Maybe it takes everything you have to save this world. Maybe you make that choice. (#12, 19)

In the ensuing chaos of the battle, Dr. Manhattan comes to the realization that everything ends and that he himself is responsible for the darkness he has seen in the future. The next page depicts the main characters of the story in individual panels, drenched in a blue light and slowly fading to black. Considering the narrative breakdown of the page, the narrative saliency here lies on Superman. The page is divided in three horizontal tiers with six panels per tier, breaking away from the established convention of the nine-panel layout to signal the creation of something new. In the first tier, the perspective shifts rapidly between characters, zooming in on their reactions. The last thing the reader sees is Superman´s emblem glowing bright blue in front of a dark background before it fades into nothingness with the last panel of the page completely black.

Fig. 2.11. Superman fading. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 21.

The prominence given to Superman in the second tier of the page, all six panels portraying him slowly fading away, is meant to highlight his importance and his long-lasting legacy as the building block of the DC universe. Even though, Dr. Manhattan is characterized as wielding god-like power, erasing Superman takes up a considerable amount of his power. More specifically, Superman´s emblem, the symbol of hope is the last visible image on the second tier. The third tier consist of only one rectangular panel that is kept completely black, visualizing the end of the entire DC universe. On the following double page spread there is a full black page and the nine black panels next to it that carry over onto the next page. Together, these 12 black panels force a complete break in the narrative rhythm which had been building up with intensity. The intensity of the following release is exemplified by a single black page devoid of panels, encapsulating the enormity of Dr Manhattan´s action. The adjacent page is also composed on nine completely blacked out panels, leading to an interesting instance of narrative braiding. By keeping in line with the panel layout, this break in the narrative signposts that the subsequent narrative will still connect to the previous one on the spatio-topical level. On the next page, a glimpse of green light is depicted on the bottom right-hand corner of the page which gradually develops into an explosion, portraying the destruction of Superman´s home planet of Krypton and the rocket in which Kal-El escapes it.

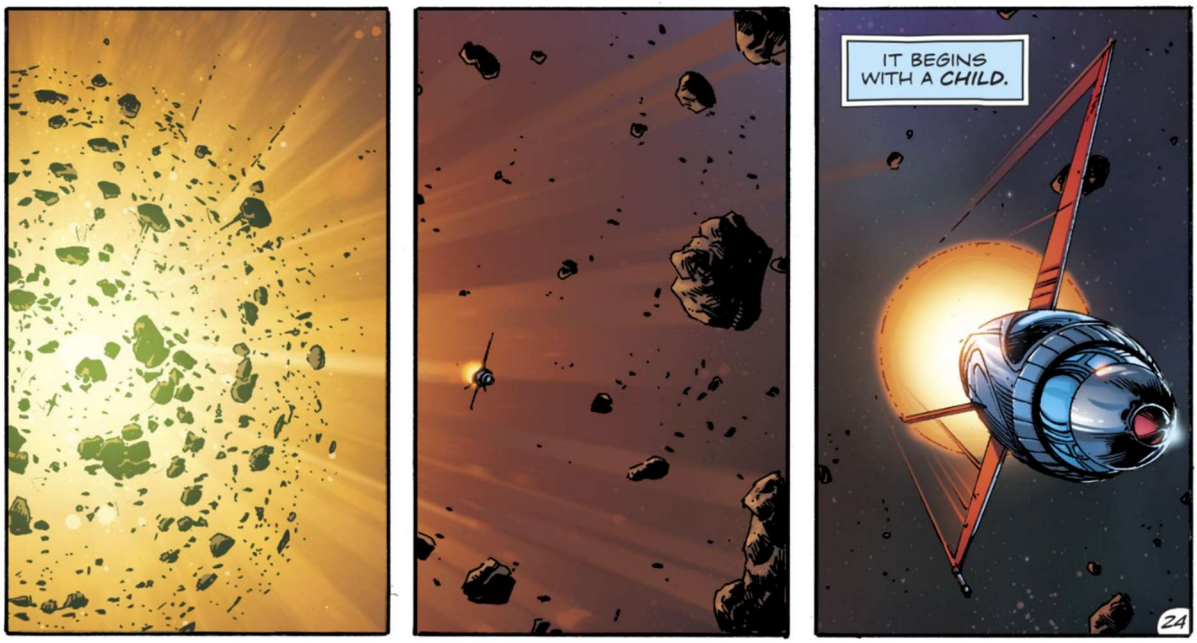

Fig. 2.12. The DC universe begins anew Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 24.

The monumentality of this event is underscored by Dr. Manhattan´s narration: “It begins with a child. The metaverse forms around this one and only son.” Here, Johns and Frank actively

braid together the universe of *Watchman* and that of *Doomsday Clock* into one new coherent narrative. This is accomplished on the visual level by the continuation of the nine-panel layout and the faithfulness to an art style the invokes *Watchmen*. On the level of the narrative, Superman´s origin being recounted by Dr. Manhattan firmly places both of these characters in the same fictional universe and in relation with each other. The way these sequences are ordered make it clear that the DC universe cannot exist without its narrative building blocks, especially Superman. What follows is a compilation of Superman´s rocket landing on Earth in various time periods before it is discovered by the Kent family in a field in Kansas at the beginning of the twentieth century. With Dr. Manhattan´s manipulations undone, the DC metaverse reforms, continuity is set right, and the timeline adjusts itself. The story then continues where it left of and Superman, with the help of the reintroduced Legion of Superheroes and the Justice Society of America, is able to end the battle swiftly.

8. Temporal Structures

The temporal structures in *Doomsday Clock* are in no way linear, rather they are purposefully tangled and juxtaposed with each other. They form connections that overcome the restrictions imposed on the story by current continuity. In turn, the various discarded continuities of previous publishing initiatives and the subsequently removed characters are linked back up again and reintegrated into DC´s canon. For the most part, this is achieved through a consecutive switch in perspective and focalization during the narrative. This highlights the importance of DC´s legacy characters such as the Justice Society of America and the Legion of Superheroes through narrative saliency on the page. Still, the parts of *Doomsday Clock* where the focus lies on Dr. Manhattan´s narration give a clear insight into his manipulations of DC´s timeline, providing readers with the knowledge of how the overarching plot ties everything together. I will now give a precise overview of the connections between the depicted timelines and previous continuities that make up the distinctive layers of narration.

8.1. 1st Timeline: November 1992

The first issue of *Doomsday Clock* is set in the original *Watchmen* universe, seven years after Dr. Manhattan has left for the DC universe. Adrian Veidt´s involvement in the "New York Massacre", which occurs at the end of *Watchmen* and kills millions, is finally revealed to the world and it spirals out of control. Nuclear disarmament has stalled, the Soviet Union has invaded Poland and the U.S. is preparing a nuclear strike in response which leads to mutually assured destruction of both nations. Veidt has realized that the world cannot be saved any longer now that his actions have become public. So, he formulates a plan to bring back Dr. Manhattan

and convince him to intervene. The public outrage that follows the revelations that the "New York Massacre" had been a hoax mirror the societal unrest in the wake of "The Supermen Theory". Veidt manages to escape nuclear annihilation together with Rorschach II, Mime, Marionette, and a clone of his caracal Bubastis. It can detect the electrons leaking from Dr. Manhattan´s body and follow them like a trail into the DC universe. There, they arrive in current DC continuity which is set one year in the future.

This first issue serves to establish the connection between *Watchmen* and *Doomsday Clock* and makes a definitive statement, positioning the latter as a continuation of the former. It should be noted here that Rorschach II, Mime and Marionette are completely new characters that do not appear in the original *Watchmen* graphic novel. By creating these new characters but placing their origin in the *Watchmen* universe, their subsequent transplantation into the DC universe strengthens the newly established connections between the two fictional universes. What is more important is the fact that these characters, by appearing in this publication, have officially been canonized into the DC universe and their continuities linked up. Veidt´s plan of uniting the world in the original *Watchmen* continuity has led to worldwide societal collapse and foreshadows the state of the DC universe in *Doomsday Clock*.

It also provides a reason for Veidt´s need to bring Dr. Manhattan back and present himself as the world´s savior once again. The issue also establishes the narrative setting and tone of the whole miniseries, invoking the gritty and realistic setting of *Watchmen*. Right at the beginning of the narrative, Johns and Frank already prearrange it to be braided into the canon of DC comics. As a vehicle, they employ narration from Rorschach´s journal to introduce the narrative setting.

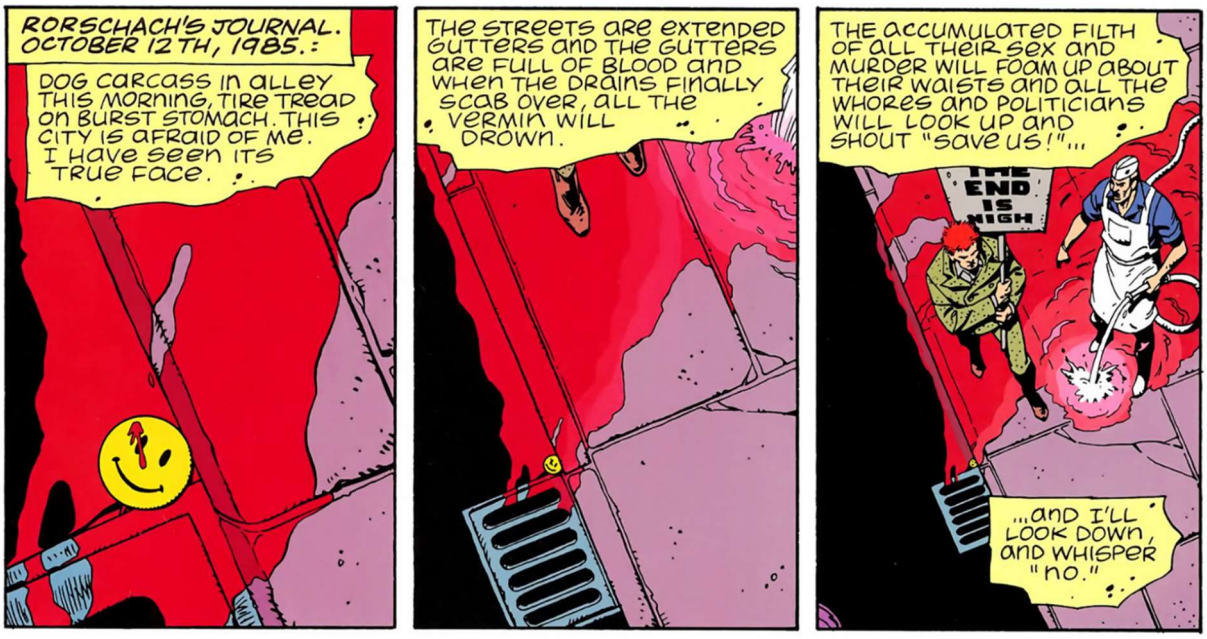

Fig. 2.13. Rorschach´s Journal. Dave Gibbons (artist). *Watchmen,* no. 1 (New York: DC Comics, 1986), p.1.

This process is implemented during this first issue through a multiframe that almost plagiarizes the work of Dave Gibbons. Compare the extract above from issue #1 of *Watchmen* and then the extract from issue #1 of *Doomsday Clock* below.

Fig. 2.14. Rorschach´s Narration. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 1 (New York: DC Comics, 2017), p. 1.

The first thing to notice here is the same use of perspective, a view from above that focuses on a specific object before zooming out. Interestingly, the first panel of the first page reproduces the cover of the issue, immediately capturing the reader and producing a narrative rhythm. This holds true for all issues of both *Doomsday Clock* and *Watchmen*, spanning a connection between the two narratives on the spatio-topical level. This method also highlights the most salient element of the narrative in that particular issue. When comparing the first issues of *Watchmen* and *Doomsday Clock* they can be seen as distinctively belonging to the same series.

The cover to the first issue of *Watchmen* features a close up of the Comedian´s signature smiley-face button swimming in blood, foreshadowing the Comedian´s death during that issue. A mob of angry protesters and a sign declaring "THE END IS HERE" are portrayed on the cover for the first issue of *Doomsday Clock*. Not only does it visually complement Dave Gibbons´ original work, but it also adopts this narrative mechanism of foreshadowing events on the cover. In this case, the complete annihilation of the original *Watchmen* universe. Furthermore, the way in which Rorschach´s narration is almost identical in both issues, seamlessly continues his

characterization, even though they are two different characters. In this way, Johns gives prominence to the legacy of Rorschach, who is killed by Dr. Manhattan during the original *Watchmen* storyline, by passing the mantle to a new character.

Fig. 2.15. Covers. Frank, Gary. *Doomsday Clock,* no. 1 (New York: DC Comics, 2017)/Gibbons, Dave. *Watchmen,* no. 1 (New York: DC Comics, 1986).

After clearly establishing a link between Watchmen and Doomsday Clock on the visual level, I want to draw attention to the thematic parallelism between these two first issues. While *Watchmen* follows Rorschach as he investigates the murder of the Comedian, *Doomsday Clock* begins with the mystery of a new Rorschach. In both narratives, these mysteries drive the plot forward and also hint at the larger mystery of Dr. Manhattan´s interference in the DC universe.

8.2. 2nd Timeline: November 2018, *Doomsday Clock*

This timeline represents current DC continuity, set one year in the future. Originally, *Doomsday Clock* was supposed to be released in 12 monthly installments, over the span of a year. Meaning that its ending would catch up with the timeline and continuity of the current publishing initiative. Editorial choices had led to this decision, as not to clash with titles that were actively being published at the time, in terms of continuity. As it is set one year in the future, there is no definitive way to connect its story back to a specific point in continuity during the *Rebirth*

publishing initiative, providing the story with a degree of narrative freedom. What can be grasped though is that the world is in an uproar, ever since "The Supermen Theory" has been made public and several metahumans have come forward to confirm their involvement. This leads to a growing anti-metahuman sentiment among the population and the demand that all superheroes reveal their secret identities. Here, Johns invokes a theme that has also played a big part during the original *Watchmen*, the public´s distrust of masked vigilantism. This is made evident by the inclusion of online articles that capture the mood surrounding this unfolding conspiracy. In a way, this timeline mimics the setting of the original *Watchmen* story in which masked crime fighters had been outlawed by the government furthering the thematic parallelism between the two event-series.

Fig. 2.16. Outrage over "The Supermen Theory". Frank, Gary. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 2 (New York: DC Comics, 2017), p. 31.

There is an interesting juxtaposition here between "The Supermen Theory" and the banning of masked vigilantism. In the world of *Watchmen*, there were no superheroes with actual metahuman powers while in DC continuity, there are way too many. For unexplained reasons

though, the majority is American. This unexplained discrepancy then provides the perfect ground for the confrontation between Superman and Dr. Manhattan as it calls into question the formers unshakeable faith in the superhero community. Including news reports from online sources to insert this conspiracy into the narrative makes it feel very contemporary and gives the topic a certain narrative saliency. By attaching these articles to the end of the issue they complement the narrative with relevant contextual background information. In addition, the timeline introduced here also serves as an overarching frame for the story to develop and the plot to move forward.

8.3. 3rd Timeline: November 1985, *Watchmen*

The 12-issue structure of Doomsday Clock allows for the narrative to shift focus between the single installments and emphasize the importance of different characters within the story. Issues #1, #2 and #6 provide the backstory for Mime and Marionette, two characters who share strong similarities with the Joker and Harley Quinn. The focus here lies on their criminal activity and consequential apprehension by Dr. Manhattan during a bank robbery. Just before Mime is about to atomized by Dr. Manhattan, Marionette throws herself in front of her partner, pleading for his life and demanding he kill her as well. This gives the blue god-like figure a moment of pause as he looks into the pairs future and realizes that Marionette is pregnant and spares their lives.

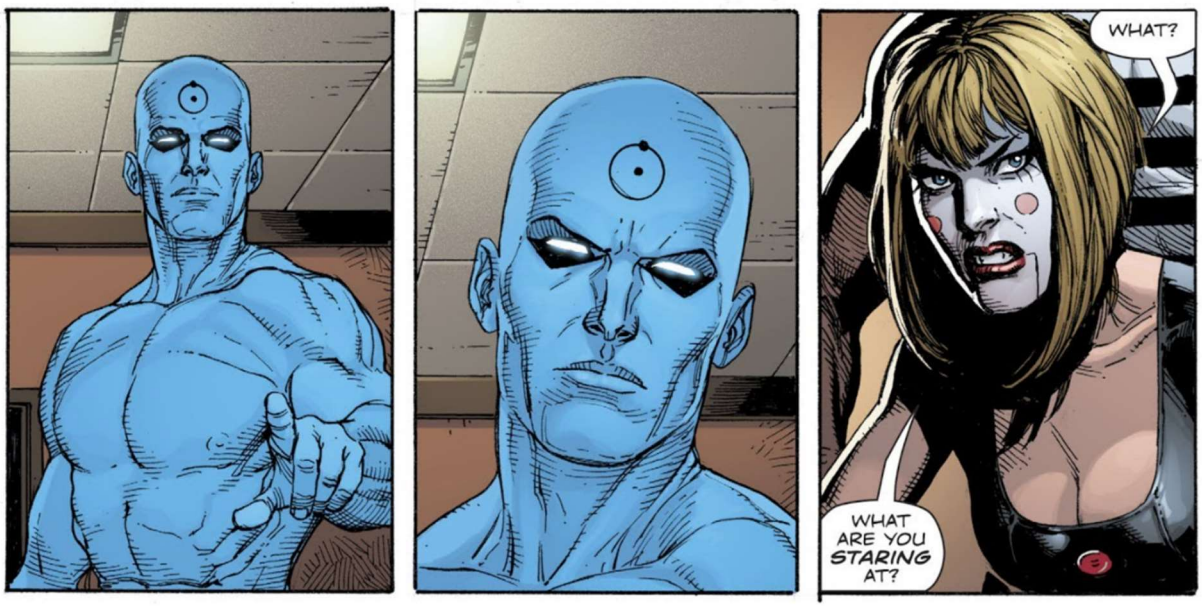

Fig. 2.17. Dr. Manhattan spares Marionette. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 2 (New York: DC Comics, 2017), p. 9.

This is a crucial detail regarding the characterization of Dr. Manhattan as it calls into question his total detachment from his humanity. While during the original *Watchmen* story, Dr. Manhattan does not interfere when the Comedian brutally murders a pregnant woman, this time

he chooses to preserve the unborn life. More importantly, this episode provides the reasoning as to why Ozymandias brings along Mime and Marionette to the DC universe, hoping to be able to appeal to what is left of Dr. Manhattan´s humanity. Surprisingly, it is revealed at the end of issue #12 that he did not spare the pair´s life simply because Marionette was pregnant. Rather, in the future, her son would bring great joy to his ex-partner, Sally Jupiter. The sequential ordering of these sequences puts emphasis on Dr. Manhattan´s characterization as near omniscient, being able to immediately perceive the consequences of his own actions. It also foreshadows the importance of Mime and Marionette´s child at the conclusion of *Doomsday Clock*.

This timeline provides background information on the newly introduced characters and gives insight as to how Ozymandias plans to persuade Dr. Manhattan to return to their home universe. Mime and Marionette play a significant role in this plan as Ozymandias believes that the previous encounter between the pair and Dr. Manhattan can be exploited for his own agenda.

8.4. 4th Timeline: Dr. Manhattan´s Narration

As previously mentioned, Dr. Manhattan perceives time simultaneously, but this experience is rather difficult to reproduce within the pages of a comic book. Without a clear chain of causality it would make little sense to the reader. Consider this sequence from the beginning of issue #7 where Dr. Manhattan narrates the history of the Green Lantern.

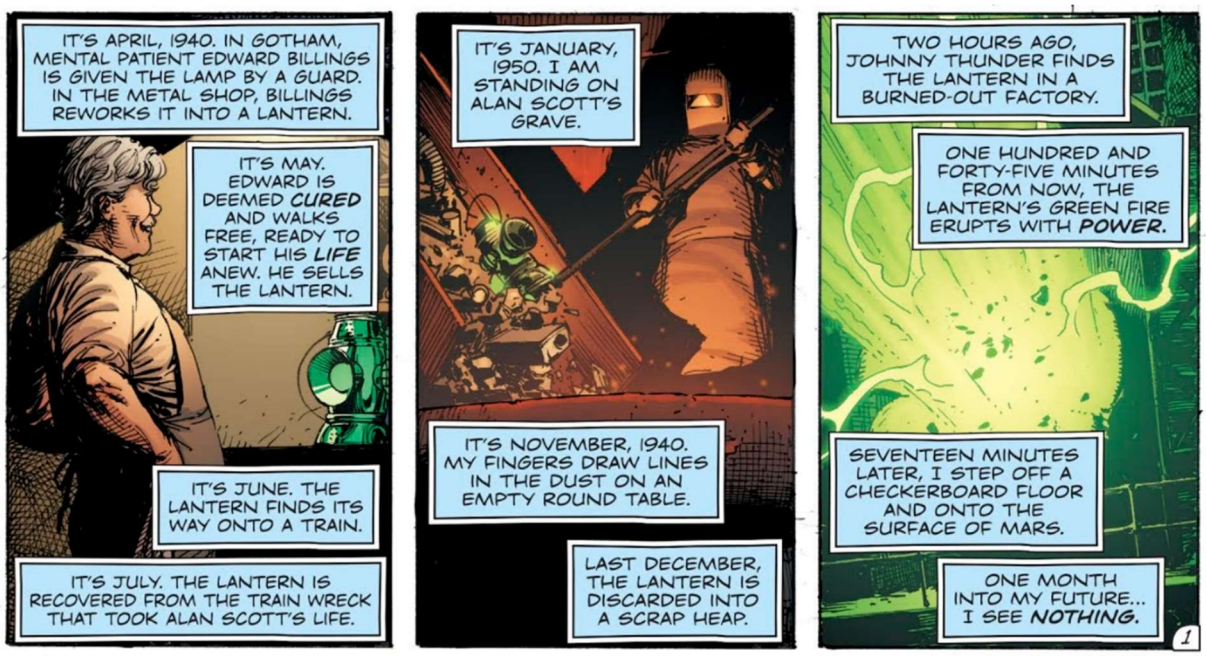

Fig. 2.18. Dr. Manhattan narrates the history of the Green Lantern. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 7 (New York: DC Comics, 2018), p. 1.

In the first panel on the left, the narration is kept in present tense while continuously jumping forward in time. His narration boxes take up the majority of space available per panel, giving more prominence to him as a narrator than to the events narrated. The middle panel then obfuscates Dr. Manhattan´s actual whence, by leaping from January 1950 to November 1940 before mentioning an unspecified "last December" (#7,1). It should also be noted here that Dr. Manhattan is examining the timeline following his manipulations, as he mentions the grave of Alan Scott and the empty round table of the Justice Society of America. The temporality of the narration becomes even less clear in the third panel of the sequence. Dr. Manhattan describes the fact that Johnny Thunders has found the lantern two hours ago in present tense, making it seem like the event is simultaneously happening now and has already happened two hours ago. The unspecified whence that Dr. Manhattan is narrating from is obscured even more as the narration first moves from "one hundred and forty-five minutes from now" to "seventeen minutes later" (#7,1). However, his omniscience does not cover the complete timeline of the DC universe as he reveals that, "one month into my future…I see nothing". Restricting his vison to a definitive point in the future aims to set up the confrontation with Superman later in the story and underlines the uncertainty of the outcome (#7,1). Even though Dr. Manhattan is not actually depicted on the page, his role as an actorialized narrator is accentuated through this form of narration in which the simultaneity of his perception makes it seem like he is always present in the moment. This is reiterated through the technique of panel repetition in conjunction with the distinctive present tense narration, that Dave Gibbons already employed during the original *Watchmen* story. As an example, take a look at this sequence from issue #10 in which Dr. Manhattan recalls his arrival in the DC universe.

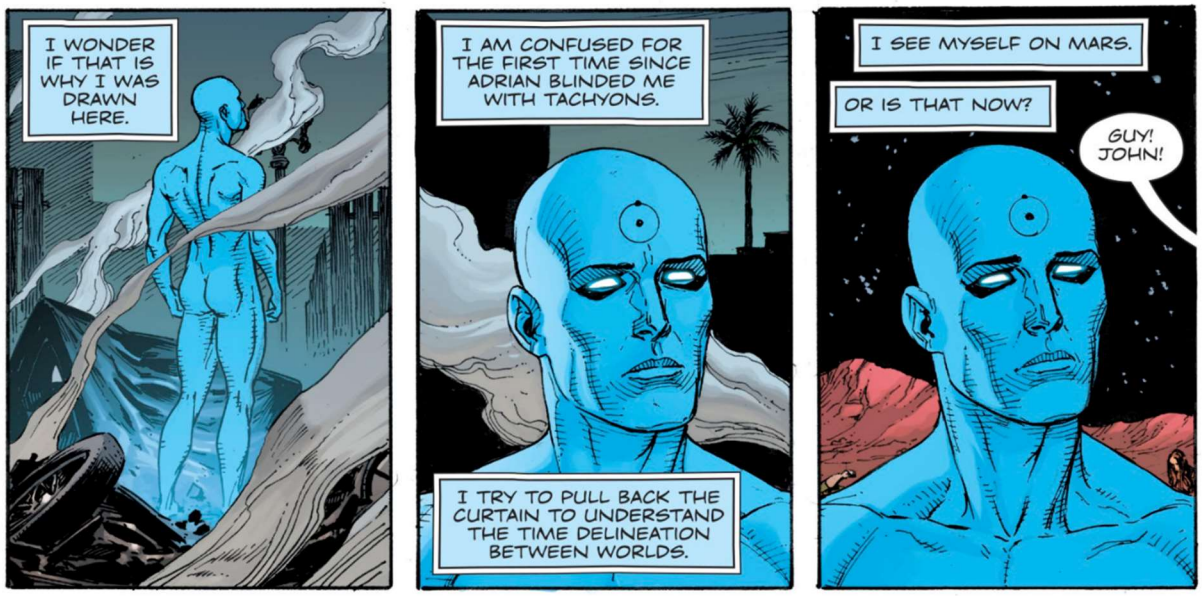

Fig. 2.19. Dr. Manhattan arrives. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 8.

In this sequence of panels. Dr. Manhattan appears motionless, the perspective shifting from behind to a close up of his face. The second and third panel repeat this perspective, only changing the background to show him in a different moment. According to Rantala (2016), panel repetition is used "to simulate four-dimensional simultaneity and detachment of time and space" (24). The narration boxes adhere to the established convention of Dr. Manhattan´s first person, present tense narration and give readers a glimpse into his perception of reality. The simultaneity is amplified by his narration when he asks himself: "or is that now?" (#10, 8).

Still, *Doomsday Clock* makes much greater use of this aspect of Dr. Manhattan and also uses him in the form of an actorialized narrator. This way, the narrative not only depicts his manipulations of the DC timeline, but also its consequences. The most striking observation that Dr. Manhattan undertakes in the role of the narrator is the fact that the DC universe of main continuity is actually a "Metaverse", centered around Superman, as discovered in issue #10.

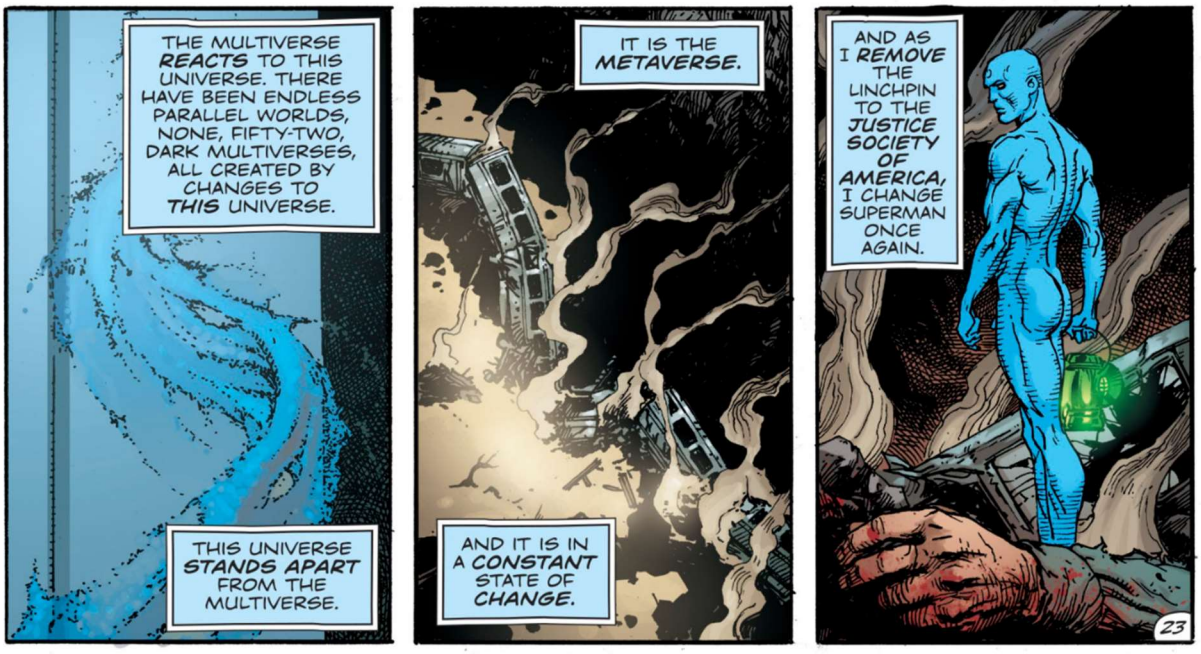

Fig. 2.20. Dr. Manhattan discovers the Metaverse. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 23.

The last panel in this sequence is a good example of Dr. Manhattan as an actorialized narrator as it shows him holding the green lantern amidst the rubble of the train crash that kills Alan Scott. His lifeless hand is featured prominently in the bottom of the panel and Dr. Manhattan acknowledges that he has removed "the linchpin to the Justice Society of America. As a consequence, Superman´s legacy is changed. This discovery also highlights the centrality of

the Superman character to the canon of DC Comics, as the metaverse, the center of the DC universe, forms around him.

Since Dr. Manhattan is a scientist he applies his knowledge of physics to his new discovery, explaining that:

> A theoretical physicist named Bryce DeWitt hypothesized that the universe was constantly splitting into alternative timelines. The many worlds interpretation. It theorized that parallel worlds were endlessly created, flowing out like the branches of a tree. The heroes on this Earth call it the multiverse. And this world was its center. (#10, 14)

The date of Dr. Manhattan´s arrival in the DC universe, April 18th, 1938, coincides not only with the real-life publication date of Action Comics#1 but also with the canonical first sighting of Superman. The reference made to the many worlds interpretation can be read as a metaphor for the many different alternative universes and characters that populate the DC universe. After having identified Superman´s point of origin within the timeline of this unfamiliar universe, Dr. Manhattan realizes that Superman was only the first of many other costumed heroes. His view then drifts forward in time to 1940 to witness the origins of the members of the Justice Society of America, with prominent emphasis on Alan Scott´s Green Lantern. Also featured are Jay Garrick (the first Flash), Carter Hall (Hawkman), Al Pratt (the Atom), Kent Nelson (Dr. Fate), Wesley Dodds (the Sandman), Jim Corrigan (the Spectre) and Rex Tyler (Hourman) as they attend their first team meeting, waiting for Superman. The panels depicting the members of the JSA are in line with their Golden Age origin, firmly establishing them as part of current continuity. The perspective then switches to the same meeting in November 1940, although this time no one has ever heard of Superman, and again, showing Dr. Manhattan standing next to an empty roundtable. The members of the JSA are absent, never having been inspired by Superman, as per Dr. Manhattans manipulation.

The next page shows Dr. Manhattan observing the landing of Superman´s rocket in a field in Kansas, although this time it is 1931and Superman is first seen in Metropolis in 1956 leading him to conclude that an outside force has shifted Superman´s arrival forward in time. The date is no coincidence but rather another reference to DC´s Silver Age continuity and the first appearance of the Barry Allen version of the Flash in *Showcase* #4, published in October 1956. In all these sequences, Dr. Manhattan is employed as an actorialized narrator, displayed in the panels as observing the action. This observation marks a specific point in DC´s publishing

history delineating the transition from the Golden Age to the Silver Age and DC´s first excursions into the multiverse. As a result, the reverberations of this change affect not only this world, but every world in the multiverse.

Dr. Manhattan then goes on to witness how Superman´s origin continuously shifts forward in time, from 1938 to 1956 to 1986, as a result of external forces and crises that affect continuity. Thinking he has misinterpreted what the DC universe actually is, Dr. Manhattan looks to the future and follows Superman´s trail of influence into the future and asks himself how one man can affect so much: "Even one thousand years from now…his hope is alive." (#10, 21)

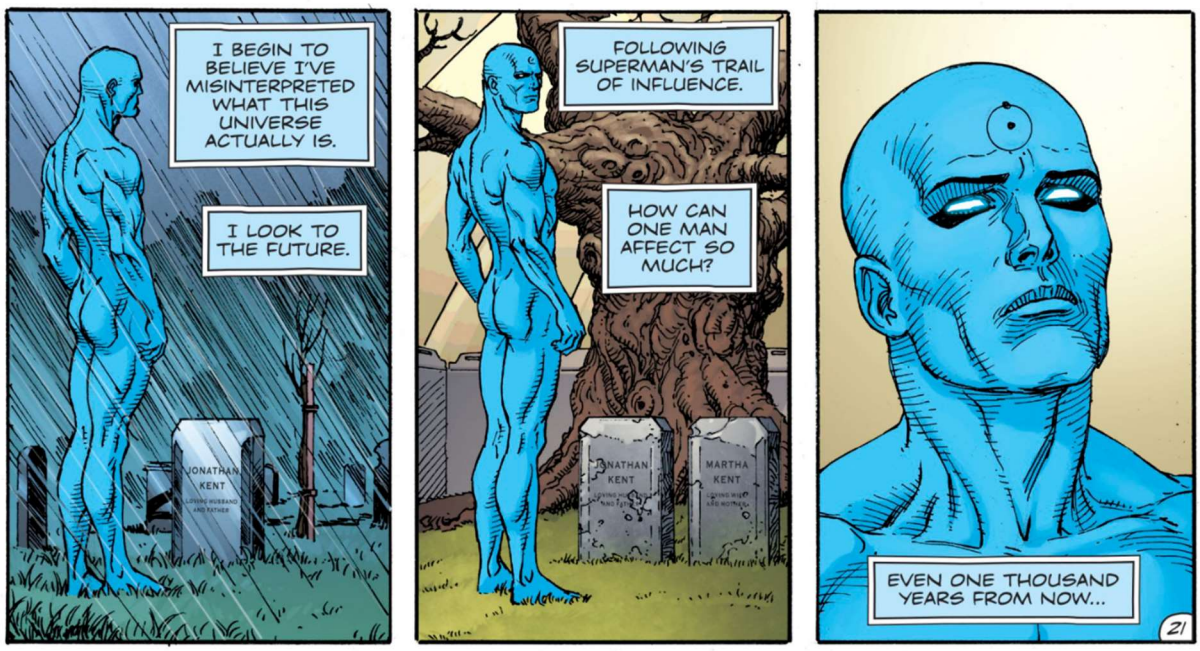

Fig. 2.21. Dr. Manhattan follows Superman´s trail of influence into the future. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 21.

The following page breaks with the established nine-panel layout in favor of a large panel that takes up two thirds of the page, showing a young Superboy in the thirtieth century, meeting the Legion of Superheroes for the first time. The scene is given prominence through the large panel, yet the narrative saliency lies on this important meeting and the fact that Superman´s legacy still serves as an inspiration a thousand years in the future. Just like Superman´s original appearance in 1938 inspired the Justice Society of America in the 1940s, he also inspired the Legion of Superheroes over a thousand years later. The Legion of Superheroes had been notably absent during *The New 52* and their prominent inclusion in Doomsday Clock firmly reintegrates them into continuity.

Dr. Manhattan´s curiosity is piqued, and he wants to discover why Superman is the center of the universe, he explains:

> Forces such as the Anti-Monitor and Extant have been responsible for the shifts in Superman´s timeline. Dark directions seem to constantly target the hope he embodies in an effort to redefine him. I grow curious. As others have done, I move to reshape this universe so that I might see how it forms around Superman. (#10, 21)

There is a certain significance in the fact that Dr. Manhattan mentions the Anti-Monitor, the villain responsible for *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and Extant, a major character during the *Zero Hour* miniseries. Both of these characters belong to previous continuities, the pre-*Crisis* continuity, and the post-*Crisis* continuity, respectfully. Having Dr. Manhattan observe them, and their actions clearly generates a connection to current continuity. This is a fitting example of how Dr. Manhattans exploration and manipulation of DC´s timeline is employed to reintroduce even the most minute details of past continuities.

As the issue moves on, Dr. Manhattan stresses that he changes the past to challenge the future, accompanied by a panel depicting the train crash that kills Alan Scott and the legacy of Green Lantern. As a result, reality comes crashing down and Dr. Manhattan realizes that this universe is not just a part of the multiverse, as others believe, and he exclaims: "The multiverse reacts to this universe. There have been endless parallel worlds, none, fifty-two, dark multiverses, all created by changes to this universe. This universe stands apart from the multiverse. It is the metaverse. And it is in a constant state of change" (#10, 23).

Even though Dr. Manhattan remains vague in his anatomy of the DC universe, his remarks have far-reaching implications as they serve to highlight previous continuities an reintegrate them into the canon. Here, he acknowledges the existence of pre-*Crisis* and post-*Crisis* continuity, as well as the events of *The New 52*. Especially surprising is that Dr. Manhattan mentions "Dark Multiverses," which is a direct reference to *Dark Nights: Metal*, the publishing initiative that follows the *Rebirth* era. It introduces the idea of dark and twisted multiverses that exists in parallel to the DC universe. *Dark Nights: Metal* started in the summer of 2017 and was supposed to be the point in continuity that *Doomsday Clock* catches up to. Unfortunately, delays in publishing lead to a situation where *Dark Nights: Metal* had already concluded before *Doomsday Clock*, calling into question the canonical status of both events and their place in continuity. Still, having Dr. Manhattan recognize the dark multiverses as part of the metaverse provides the possibility for both narratives to exist as part of a shared continuity. The constant

state of change that Dr. Manhattan refers to is a comment on the heavily fluctuating timeline of DC comics that began with *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

Having realized the previous changes to DC´s continuity, Dr. Manhattan moves forward with his own changes. He kills Alan Scott and removes the lynchpin to the Justice Society of America, thereby changing Superman again. This time though, the changes to continuity are more severe than before, removing several aspects of Superman´s legacy. His rocket still arrives on Earth when he is a baby and is found by the Kents, but his origin is now decades removed from his original introduction in 1938. The story of Superman now begins in the mid-1980s, and he does not revel himself to the world until 2011. Without the inspiration of the JSA, Superman never becomes Superboy and in return is unable to prevent the car crash that kills his parents. This leads to a noticeably darker characterization of the Man of Steel. Furthermore, he never travels to the future to meet the Legion of Superheroes, who were originally inspired by a young Superboy revealing himself to the world and saving his parents.

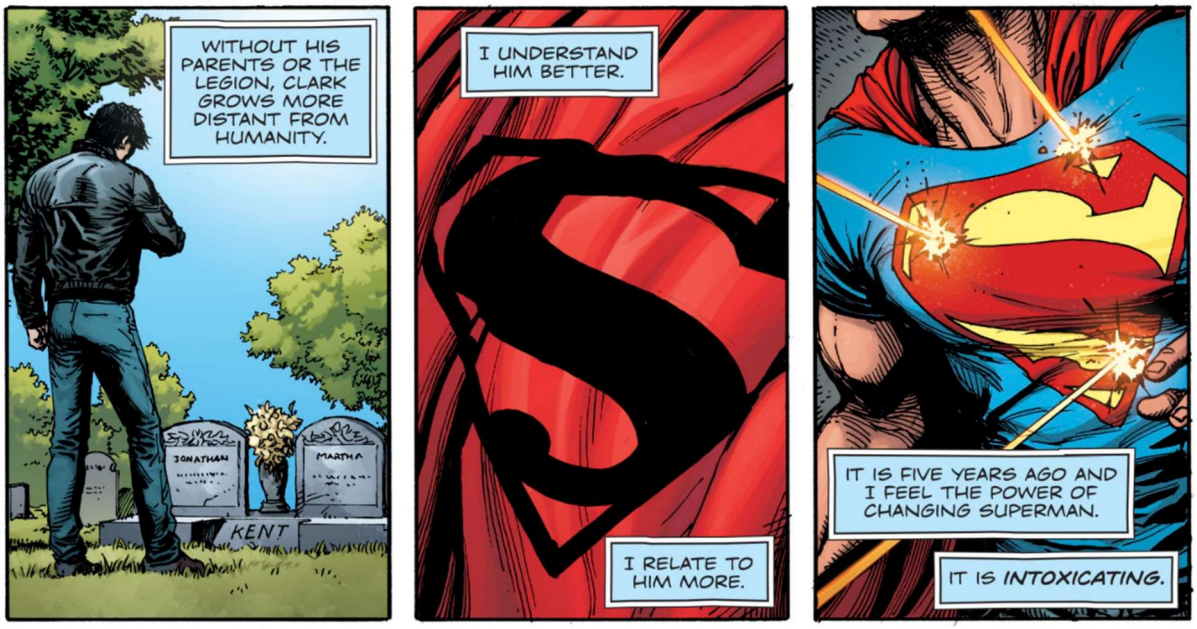

Fig. 2.22. Superman grows more distant from his humanity Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 25.

Removing these pillars of Superman´s legacy cause him to grow more distant from humanity, giving Dr. Manhattan the opportunity to understand him better and to relate to him more. This distance to humanity is exemplified by two adjacent panels on page 25 that show Superman at the grave of his parents his flowing red cape and his stylized S-emblem colored black. In his usual color scheme, the emblem on his cape is yellow, signifying the sun, while on his chest it is red with a yellow background, a symbol of hope on Krypton. The combination of black on

red recalls the “Death of Superman” storyline by Dan Jurgens published by DC between 1992 and 1993. In this crossover event Superman dies at the hands of the monster Doomsday and the whole DC universe mourns their symbol of hope. Characters appearing during the story sported black and red armbands featuring Superman´s emblem and as a gimmick, DC even sold such armbands with copies of Superman #75.

Slowly, Dr. Manhattan becomes intoxicated with the power of changing Superman causing him to become reckless in his attempt to model the DC universe after his home universe. His adjustments to Superman´s timeline have altered the metaverse and in turn, the multiverse. A decisive moment in the plot of *Doomsday Clock* occurs then when Dr. Manhattan explains that the metaverse has become aware of his hubris. This awareness comes in the form of Wally West, the third iteration of the Flash character, who has prominently been absent from DC´s publishing line following *Flashpoint*. To many readers who were children or teens when Wally West took over the mantel of his predecessor after perishing at the end of *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, he was a fan-favorite and an enjoyed continuous success throughout the 1990s. This generational adornment forms an intricate part of the character´s legacy whose story is proliferated from the Golden Age to today.

Fig. 2.23. Wally West confronts Dr. Manhattan. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 25.

Appearing to Dr. Manhattan from beyond the Speed Force, wearing his original Kid Flash outfit, he confronts him with a warning: “I know what you did! Whatever you did, they´ll stop you!” (#10, 25). Showing Wally West in his Silver Age costume again serves to link up past

continuities, especially acknowledging the time West spent as a sidekick to Allen´s Flash, which is an integral part of the Flash legacy. This intrusion into his experiment causes Dr. Manhattan to reevaluate his object of study, realizing that the metaverse is not passive, he concludes: "Like an organism fighting to survive, there are aspects of it I have underestimated. An innate hope that fights back to the surface." (#10, 25) The innate hope that Dr. Manhattan mentions here refers back to Superman´s initial role as the embodiment of hope within the DC universe, or even the personification of Reynolds´ concept of "the extra effort."

Having discovered the agency of the metaverse, Dr. Manhattan assumes that his confrontation with Superman is a result of the metaverse having turned against him. This leads him to first ponder the question of whether Superman destroys him or if he will destroy the metaverse. After having studied Superman´s timeline in great detail, Dr. Manhattan revisits what he deems to be the defining moments of his existence: "It´s May, 1971. I have ended the war in Vietnam. I watch Blake shoot a woman with child and do nothing" (#10, 28). Both of these episodes demonstrate how far-removed Dr. Manhattan is from his former humanity and how different he is from Superman. Especially his actions during the war in Vietnam which are detailed in the original *Watchmen* story, can only be described as horrific. Dr. Manhattan´s narration then continues and invokes the ending of *Watchmen*: "It´s November 1st, 1985. Adrian kills millions to unite the world. On November 2nd, I allow Adrian to walk free. I am a being of inaction. On a collision course with a man of action. To this universe of hope…I have become the villain" (#10, 28).

Fig. 2.24. Dr. Manhattan realizes he has become the villain. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 28.

The quick switches in perspective here, alternating between close ups of Dr. Manhattan and Superman, bring the narrative focus towards their upcoming confrontation and directly positions Dr. Manhattan as the opposite of hope. This can even be grasped from the facial

expressions of the two characters. While Dr. Manhattan´s face expresses a cold demeanor, in line with his characterization as logical and calculated, Superman´s eyes are wide open, and his face looks shocked. It can be read as Superman´s reaction to the same realization that Dr. Manhattan has come to. While the first shows true human emotion, the second can only portray his lack thereof.

8.5. 5th Timeline: DC Continuity Reborn

After destroying the DC universe of *Doomsday Clock* and reforming it, Dr. Manhattan bears witness to the formation of a new DC universe in which all previous continuities have been canonized. This is exemplified by a huge panel on page 31 of issue #12 which depicts Superman united with the Justice Society of America and the Legion of Superheroes, representing a direct connection between DC´s past and future.

Fig. 2.25. Superman with the Legion of Superheroes and the Justice Society of America. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 31.

It is underscored by Dr. Manhattan´s narration: " I see tomorrow. The man of tomorrow. And for the first time…I am inspired" (#12, 33). He then observes a history of the DC universe that starts with Superman´s original first appearance in 1938, then moving through the Golden and Silver Age on to *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and all the subsequent *Crisis* events. He watches reality divide and contract producing and destroying a multiverse full of alternate Earths, before realizing:

> And now I understand why these Earths exist. Every time there is a change in the metaverse, the multiverse grows. To preserve every era of Superman. More are created over the years. Including one because of my interference…after the Flashpoint…and this Rebirth. (#12, 33)

Dr. Manhattan then provides the audience with a glimpse into a (possible) future for the DC universe, referencing coming crises and watching Superman´s origin shift forward in time again, from 2038 to 2965, symbolizing his never-ending legacy.

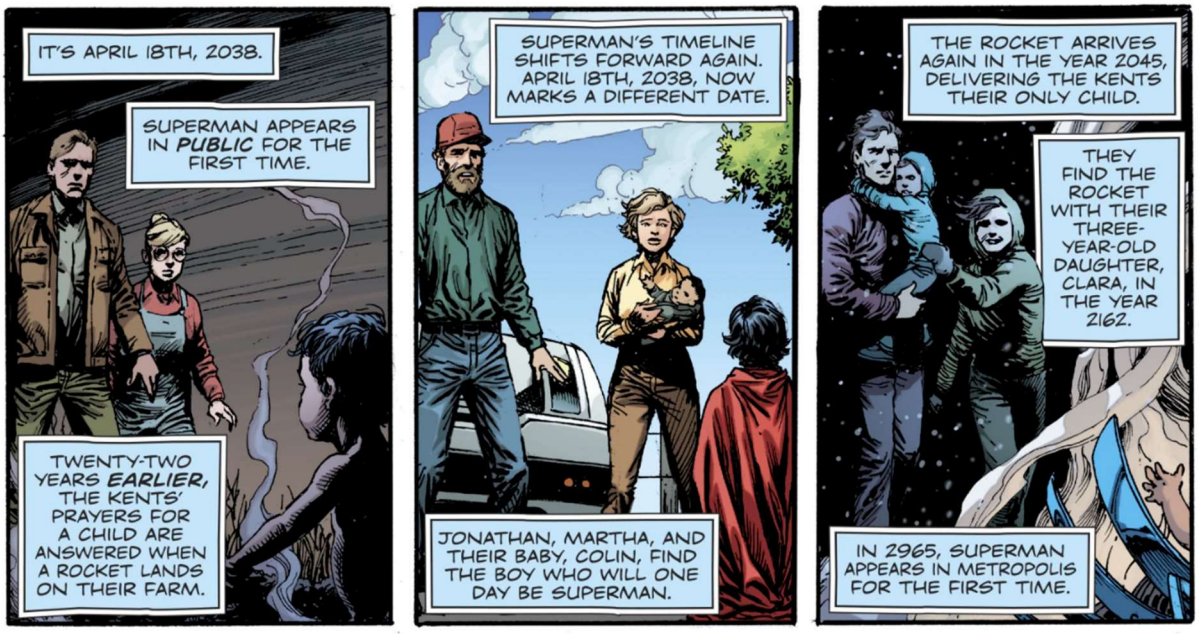

Fig. 2.26. Superman´s legacy continues into the future. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 35.

This prompts another realization from Dr. Manhattan: "No matter how many times Superman´s existence is attacked, he will survive. Even if change is a constant. Because hope is the north star of the metaverse" (#12, 33). In all the different iterations of Superman´s origin throughout the centuries, Dr. Manhattan discovers this constant: "The rocket arrives. A child is loved. Superman is made" (#12, 34).

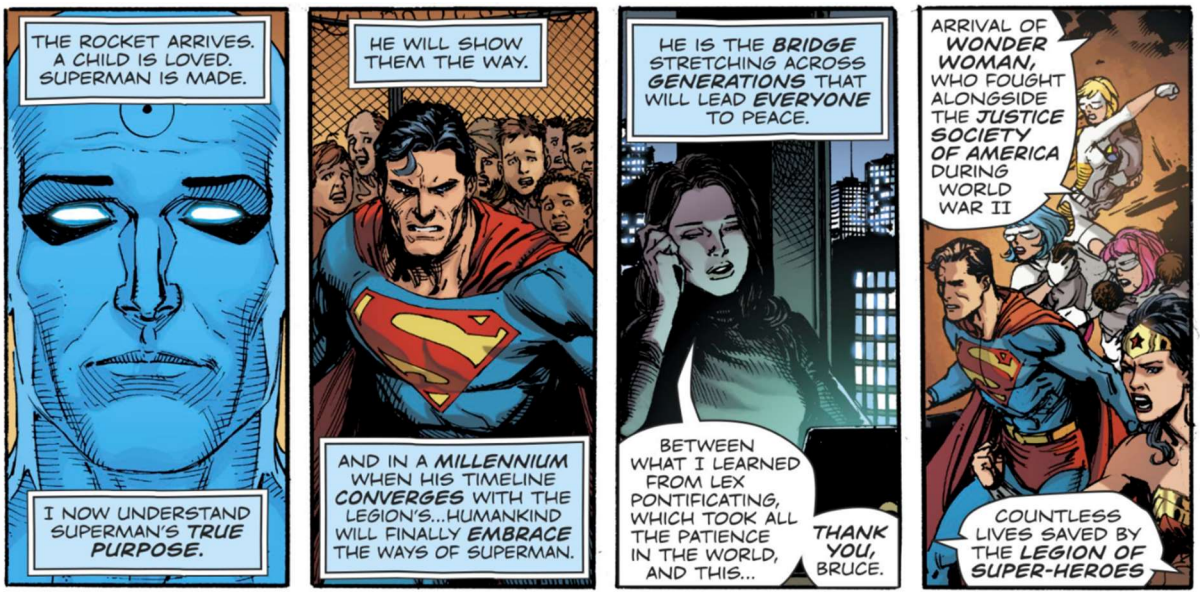

Fig. 2.27. True purpose. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), Doomsday Clock, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 35.

This leads him to understand Superman´s true purpose: “He will show them the way. And in a millennium when his timeline converges with the legion´s…humankind will finally embrace the ways of Superman. He is the bridge stretching across generations that will lead everyone to peace” (#12, 34). This inspiring revelation causes Dr. Manhattan to not only reassess his own place in the metaverse but also his relationship with humanity. After he has affected Superman´s world, Superman will now affect his world, as Dr. Manhattan travels back to his original universe.

There, he only finds the remnants of a destroyed world, the ash still warm under his feet. Dr. Manhattan then uses his powers to reverse the destructive effects of the nuclear Armageddon that has taken place, while also removing all nuclear warheads from the planet in the past. A sequence of four panels then depicts him cradling the infant son of Mime and Marionette, next to a panel of his father, throwing away his watchmaking tools.

Fig. 2.28. Dr. Manhattan becomes a father to Mime & Marionette´s child. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), Doomsday Clock, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 44.

This is accompanied by an inner monologue: “It is 1946. 1947. 1948. My father is more worried about my future than my present. I inherit that” (#12, 44). The two adjacent panels first show Jonathan Kent and Superman as a young boy, observing the stars of the night sky, next to Dr. Manhattan holding a young boy´s hand on Mars, seeing a falling star. This is also precisely the moment when the blue god-like figure realizes why he has not been able to save his universe so far: “I can never be the hero this world needs, because I didn´t have what Superman did” (#12, 44). The reference here is meant to emphasize the importance of a loving family, something that Dr. Manhattan was not able to receive when he was growing up, in contrast to Superman. Here, Dr. Manhattan identifies a cornerstone of Superman´s legacy, his upbringing by the Kent family.

Before he dissolves his body, Dr. Manhattan experiences a daydream in which his life plays out without the accident, where him and Janey fall in love and have a family of their own, and he comments: “It is a nice daydream to live in. A final thought as I give the last of my power to this world and this child. So that this planet has a protector who will receive love. And return it” (#12, 44). The book ends with a young boy arriving at the Jupiter household and young Sally opening the door, introduces herself and asks for the boy´s name. In a last, oversized panel, the boy is shown having the same logo on his forehead as Dr. Manhattan, the atomic symbol for helium, and he answers. “Jon calls me Clark” (#12, 46).

Fig. 2.29. Dr. Manhattan´s legacy. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), Doomsday Clock, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 46.

By granting his powers to the child of Mime and Marionette and providing him with a loving environment to grow up in, Dr. Manhattan has carried on the legacy of Superman, even across DC´s metaverse and beyond.

9. CONCLUSION

At the end of *Doomsday Clock*, the DC universe is not only restored but its scope is expanded even further, at the center, a metaverse from which all other stories flow out. All the previous continuities of DC´s bygone Ages have officially been canonized and a plethora of fan favorite characters returned to their rightful places within DC´s pantheon of superheroes. The timeline has been restored, now again beginning with Superman´s first appearance in 1938 and spanning all the way to the Legion of Superheroes in the thirtieth century.

I have shown that the legacy of Superman, foremost, constitutes the center of DC´s canon of superhero narratives and that there exists a reciprocal connection between the character of Superman and those that have followed him. Additionally, the legacy of Alan Scott´s Green Lantern and his subsequent role as a founding member of the Justice Society of America emphasizes the fact that DC´s whole canon is constructed upon these character legacies. *Doomsday Clock* is an exploration of the whole of DC´s publishing history and it provides proof of the crucial influence of these legacy characters as narrative building blocks of DC´s canon. As a continuation of *Watchmen*, the text not only mirrors the original´s storyline, but it also invokes the same themes and motives. The two stories differ most in regard to their relationship to vigilantes. While Alan Moore´s original is fueled by a deep-rooted mistrust of crimefighting men and women in colorful costumes, the DC universe is full of hope and admiration for its superpowered characters. Only when the people lose trust in their heroes, the two universes start to look more alike. *Doomsday Clock* aims to present the DC universe in the dystopic tone of *Watchmen*, by erasing the perennial legacies of its Golden and Silver Age characters, leading to a world that has lost hope in its heroes. As a result, the canon of DC comics had undergone a process of erosion that could only be reversed through the reintegration of its most important character legacies, stabilizing the fluctuating canon, and achieving narrative cohesion.

10. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Altman, Rick. *A Theory of Narrative*. Columbia University Press, 2008.

Baetens, Jan, and Frey, Hugo. *The Graphic Novel*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Baetens, Jan. "Abstraction in Comics." *SubStance*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2011, pp. 94–113.

Baetens, Jan. "Comics and Characterization: the Case of Fritz Haber (David Vandermeulen)." *Journal of Graphic Novels & Comics*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2013, pp. 84–91.

Baetens, Jan. *Rebuilding Story Worlds*. Rutgers University Press, 2020.

Bevin, Phillip. *Superman and Comic Book Brand Continuity*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2019.

Bongco, Mila. *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books*. Garland Publishing, 2000.

Brooker, Will, et al. *Many More Lives of the Batman*. Palgrave on Behalf of the British Film Institute, 2015.

Brooker, Will. *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman*. I.B. Tauris; Distributed in the United States by Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

Brown, Jeffrey A. *Batman and the Multiplicity of Identity*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2019.

Brown, Jeffrey A. *The Modern Superhero in Film and Television*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2016.

Brown, Jeffrey. "Comic Book Masculinity" *The Superhero Reader*. University Press of Mississippi, 2013, pp. 269-279.

Chute, Hillary L, and DeKoven, Marianne. "Introduction: Graphic Narrative". *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2006, pp. 767–782.

Chute, Hillary L. "Decoding Comics". *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2006, pp. 1014–1027.

Chute, Hillary. "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative". *PMLA*: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, vol. 123, no. 2, 2008, pp. 452–465.

Chute, Hillary. *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*. Columbia University Press, 2010.

Cocca, Carolyn. *Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel in Comics and Film: Militarism, Feminism, and Diversity in the Superhero Genre*. Routledge, 2020.

Coogan, Peter M. "The Secret Origin of the Superhero: The Origin and Evolution of the Superhero Genre in America". *American Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2003, p. 801.

Duncan, Randy, et al. *The Power of Comics : History, Form and Culture*. 2. ed., 1. publ. ed., Bloomsbury, 2015.

Eco, Umberto. "The Myth of Superman." *Communications (Paris)*, vol. 24, 1976, pp. 24–40.

Fertig, Mark. *Take That, Adolf!:The Fighting Comic Books of the Second World War*. Fantagraphics Books, 2017.

Friedenthal, Andrew J. "Monitoring the Past: DC Comics' Crisis on Infinite Earths and the Narrativization of Comic Book History". *Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 6.2 (2012), Dept of English, University of Florida, 2018.

Friedenthal, Andrew J. *The World of DC Comics*. Routledge, 2019.

Goodnow, Trisha and Kimble, J. James. *10 Cent War: Comic Books, Propaganda, and World War II.* reprinted ed., University Press of Mississippi, 2018.

Groensteen, Thierry, and Miller, Ann. *Comics and Narration*. University Press of Mississippi, 2013.

Groensteen, Thierry, et al. *The System of Comics*. University Press of Mississippi, 2007.

Grossman, Lev. "Watchmen". *TIME*. <https://entertainment.time.com/2009/03/06/top-10-graphic-novels/slide/watchmen/> 31. Jan. 2022.

Hughes, Jamie A. ""Who Watches the Watchmen?": Ideology and "Real World" Superheroes". *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 39, no. 4, Blackwell Publishing Inc, 2006, pp. 546–57.

"Hypertime" *DC Database*. <https://dc.fandom.com/wiki/Hypertime> 31. Jan. 2022.

Jennings, Jackson S. *Understanding Superheroes: Scholarship, Superman, and the Synthesis of an Emerging Criticism*, University of Arkansas, 2009.

Johns, Geoff. "Doomsday Clock: Why Green Lantern is the Key to the DC Universe". *Comic Book Resources.* <https://www.cbr.com/doomsday-clock-why-green-lantern-key-dc-universe/> 22 Aug. 2021.

Levitz, Paul. *75 Years of DC Comics: the Art of Modern Mythmaking*. Taschen, 2011.

Markstein, Don. "The Merchant of Venice Meets the Shiek of Arabia". *Toonopedia.* https://archive.ph/20190531164542/http://toonopedia.com/universe.htm#selection-15.7-15.33 25.01.22

Mahmutovic, Adnan. "Chronotope in Moore and Gibbons' Watchmen." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2018.

Mikkonen, Kai. *The Narratology of Comic Art*. 1st ed., vol. 1, Routledge, 2017.

Morgan, Harry. "Graphic Shorthand." *European Comic Art*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2009, pp. 21–39.

Morrison, Grant. *Supergods*. Spiegel & Grau, 2011.

Nama, Adilifu. *Super Black*. University of Texas Press, 2011.

Ndalianis, Angela. "Enter the Aleph: Superhero Worlds and Hypertime Realities." In *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero*, edited by Angela Ndalianis. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Ndalianis, Angela. *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero*. Routledge, 2009.

Oskari, Rantala. "Superhuman Cognitions, Fourth Dimension and Speculative Comics Narrative: Panel Repetition in Watchmen and From Hell." *Fafnir*, vol. 3, no. 4, Finnish Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy Research, 2016, pp. 24–40.

McMillan, Graeme. "'I wish there was a plan': The inside story of DC's infamous New 52 reboot". *Polygon.* <https://www.polygon.com/comics/22679756/dc-comics-reboot-new-52-writers-oral-history> 27.01.22

Pustz, Matthew J. *Comic Book Culture*: *Fanboys and True Believers*. University of Mississippi Press, 1999.

Regalado, Aldo J. *Bending Steel*: *Modernity and the American Superhero*. University Press of Mississippi, 2015.

Reynolds, Richard. *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology*. University Press of Mississippi, 1992.

Ryan, Marie-Laurie. "The Modes of Narrativity and Their Visual Metaphors." *Style,* vol. 3, no. 26, 1992, pp. 368-87.

Schmid, Wolf. *Narratology*. 1. ed., Walter De Gruyter GmbH Co.KG, 2010.

Scott Brand. “A Gordian Knot: Classical Elements in Watchmen.” *Foundation (Dagenham)*, vol. 43, no. 118, 2014, p. 19.

Smith, Anthony M. “History Left Unsaid. Implied continuity in Batman´s contemporary comic book narratives.” *Many More Lives of the Batman*. Ed. Roberta Pearson, William Uricchio, Will Brooker. London, 2015, pp. 53-66.

Wandtke, Terrence R. *The Meaning of Superhero Comics*. McFarland & Company, Inc, 2014.

Zittlaw, Jim. “Dr. Manhattan's Voice.” *MacEwan University Student eJournal*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014.

10.1. Comics:

Broome, John. Infantino, Carmine. *The Challenge of the Weather Wizard*. *The Flash*, no. 110. DC Comics, 1960.

DiDio, Dan. *Crisis on Infinite Earths: The Compendium*. New York: DC Comics, 2005.

Dini, Paul et al. *Countdown to Final Crisis*. Edited by Mike Carlin. DC Comics, 2008.

Eisner, Will. *The Contract with God Trilogy: Life on Dropsie Avenue*. 1. ed., Norton, 2006.

Finger, Bill. Nodell, Martin. *The Origin of Green Lantern. All-American Comics*, no. 16. DC Comics, 1940.

Fox, Gardner. Lampert, Harry. *The Flash: Origin of the Flash. Flash Comics*, no. 1. DC Comics, 1940.

Fox, Gardner. Hibbard, Everett E. *The First Meeting of the Justice Society of America. All-Star Comics*, no. 3. DC comics, 1940.

Fox, Gardner. Infantino, Carmine. *The Flash of Two Worlds. The Flash*, no. 123. DC Comics, 1961.

Fox, Gardner. Sekowsky, Mike. *Justice League of America: Starro the Conqueror. The Brave and the Bold*, no. 28. DC comics, 1960.

Johns, Geoff. Frank, Gary. *Doomsday Clock: The Complete collection*. Burbank. DC Comics, 2020.

Johns, Geoff et al. *DC Rebirth*. Edited by Andrew Marino, Eddie Berganza. DC Comics, 2016.

Johns, Geoff et al. *Infinite Crisis*. Edited by Jeanine Schaefer, Eddie Berganza. DC Comics, 2006.

Johns, Geoff et al. *Superman: Up, Up and Away!*. Edited by Nachie Castro, Matt Idelson. DC Comics, 2006.

Johns, Geoff. Frank, Gary. Anderson, Brad. *Doomsday Clock*. Edited by Jeb Woodward, Robin Wildman. DC Comics, 2020.

Johns, Geoff. Kubert, Andy. *Flashpoint*. Edited by Eddie Berganza. DC Comics, 2011.

Johns, Geoff. Van Sciver, Ethan. *The Flash: Rebirth*. Edited by Joey Cavalieri, Chris Conroy. DC Comics, 2009.

Johns, Geoff. Van Sciver, Ethan. *Green Lantern: Rebirth*. Edited by Peter Tomasi, Stephen Wacker. DC Comics, 2005.

Jurgens, Dan et al. *Convergence*. Edited by Dan Didio. DC Comics, 2015.

Jurgens, Dan et al. *Zero Hour: Crisis in Time*. Edited by Neal Pozner, Mike McAvennie, K.C. Carlson. DC Comics, 1994.

Jurgens, Dan. Breeding, Brett. *Doomsday. Superman*, no. 75. DC Comics, 1993.

Kanigher, Robert. Infantino, Carmine. *Mystery of the Human Thunderbolt. Showcase*, no. 4. DC Comics, 1956.

Moore, Alan. Bolland, Brian. Batman: The Killing Joke. Edited by Dennis O´Neill, Dan Raspler. DC Comics, 1988.

Moore, Alan, et al. *Watchmen*. DC Comics, 2005.

Morrison, Grant et al. *Batman R.I.P*. Edited by Jeanine Schaefer, Mike Marts, Janelle Asselin. DC Comics, 2009.

Morrison, Grant et al. *Batman: The Return of Bruce Wayne*. Edited by Janelle Asselin, Mike Marts. DC Comics, 2011.

Morrison, Grant et al. *Final Crisis*. Edited by Eddie Berganza, Adam Schlagman. DC Comics, 2009.

O´Neill, Dennis. Adams, Neal. *Snowbirds Don´t Fly. Green Lantern*, no. 85. DC Comics, 1971.

Siegel, Jerry. Schuster, Joe. *Superman, Champion of the Oppressed. Action Comics*, no.1. DC Comics, 1938.

Siegel, Jerry. Schuster, Joe. *Superman: Europe At War (Part1). Action Comics*, no. 22. DC Comics, 1940.

Siegel, Jerry. Schuster, Joe. *Superman: Europe At War (Part2). Action Comics*, no. 23. DC Comics, 1940.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: a Survivor's Tale*. Penguin Books, 2003.

Taylor, Tom et al. *Injustice: Gods Among Us*. Edited by Jim Chadwick, Sarah Litt, Aniz Ansari. DC Comics, 2016.

Waid, Mark. “1 & 2 = Crisis.” In *Crisis on Multiple Earths*, edited by Nick J. Napolitano, Julius Schwartz. DC Comics, 2002.

10.2. Table of Figures

Fig. 2.9. Superman is about to attack Dr. Manhattan. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 17, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-12?id=164993. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.10. Who will destroy the DC universe? Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 16, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-12?id=164993. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.11. Superman fading. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 21, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-12?id=164993. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.12. The DC universe begins anew Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 24, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-12?id=164993. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.13. Rorschach´s Journal. Dave Gibbons (artist). *Watchmen,* no. 1 (New York: DC Comics, 1986), p.1, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Watchmen/Issue-1?id=14876. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.14. Rorschach´s Narration. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 1 (New York: DC Comics, 2017), p. 1, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-1?id=125607. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.15. Covers. Frank, Gary. *Doomsday Clock* no. 1 (New York: DC Comics, 2017)/Gibbons, Dave. *Watchmen* no. 1 (New York: DC Comics, 1986), *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-1?id=125607. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.16. Outrage over "The Supermen Theory". Frank, Gary. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 2 (New York: DC Comics, 2017), p. 31, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-2?id=127529. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.17. Dr. Manhattan spares Marionette. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 2 (New York: DC Comics, 2017), p. 9, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-2?id=127529. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.18. Dr. Manhattan narrates the history of the Green Lantern. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 7 (New York: DC Comics, 2018), p. 1, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-7?id=140266. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.19. Dr. Manhattan arrives. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 8, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-10?id=156067. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.20. Dr. Manhattan discovers the Metaverse. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 23, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-10?id=156067. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.21. Dr. Manhattan follows Superman´s trail of influence into the future. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 21, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-10?id=156067. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.22. Superman grows more distant from his humanity Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 25, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-10?id=156067. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.23. Wally West confronts Dr. Manhattan. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 25, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-10?id=156067. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.24. Dr. Manhattan realizes he has become the villain. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 10 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 28, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-10?id=156067. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.25. Superman with the Legion of Superheroes and the Justice Society of America. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 31, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-12?id=164993. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.26. Superman´s legacy continues into the future. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), *Doomsday Clock*, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 35, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-12?id=164993. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.27. True purpose. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), Doomsday Clock, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 35, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-12?id=164993. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.28. Dr. Manhattan becomes a father to Mime & Marionette´s child. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), Doomsday Clock, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 44, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-12?id=164993. Accessed 05.04.22.

Fig. 2.29. Dr. Manhattan´s legacy. Gary Frank (illustrator) and Brad Anderson (colorist), Doomsday Clock, no. 12 (New York: DC Comics, 2019), p. 46, *Read Comic Online*, https://readcomiconline.li/Comic/Doomsday-Clock/Issue-12?id=164993. Accessed 05.04.22.

37175 words.