

Leonardo Pogia Vidal

THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL:
TRADITION AND MORPHOLOGY IN ALAN MOORE'S *SWAMP
THING*

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**THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL:
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SWAMP THING**

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RESUMO

Esta pesquisa estuda, através do escopo da Teoria Narrativa, a presença da tradição na re-criação do personagem Monstro do Pântano, da DC Comics, por Alan Moore. O objeto do trabalho é “The End”, última história do arco intitulado *American Gothic*, publicado entre junho de 1985, em *Swamp Thing* #37, até julho de 1986, em *Swamp Thing* #50. Esta tese é estruturada em cinco capítulos. O primeiro apresenta contextualização, lastro teórico e as escolhas realizadas. O segundo acompanha o desenvolvimento do personagem desde sua origem, em *House of Mystery* #92 (1971), até a última edição antes de *American Gothic*, *Swamp Thing* #36 (1985). No terceiro capítulo é realizada uma revisão do arco *American Gothic*, seguida de considerações sobre seus aspectos narrativos significativos. O quarto capítulo analisa a história “The End”, de acordo com os princípios compilados por Verman e Vervaeck no livro *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005). O texto é, então, analisado em termos de suas estruturas narrativas (*ações e eventos, actantes e personagens, cenário, tempo, narração e focalização*). Esta etapa traça paralelos entre elementos da história e da tradição, como os modelos estruturais de Vladimir Propp (1968), A. J. Greimas (1987), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963) e Joseph Campbell (2004). Outros aspectos da tradição presentes na história também são discutidos neste ponto. O capítulo cinco, prefaceado por rápidas considerações sobre a poética de Moore, foca em colocar os dados examinados a serviço de uma interpretação, com especial atenção para a maneira em que Moore, intencionalmente, emprega elementos da tradição para criar uma narrativa que frequentemente serve um propósito desconstrutivo, minando as próprias fundações que erigiu.

Palavras-chave: Quadrinhos e Graphic Novels; Literaturas de Língua Inglesa; Monstro do Pântano; Alan Moore; Teoria Narrativa.

ABSTRACT

This work aims at analyzing aspects pertaining to tradition in Alan Moore's re-creation of the DC Comics' character Swamp Thing through the scope of Narrative Theory. The object of this work is "The End", the last part of the story arc entitled *American Gothic*, published between June 1985, with *Swamp Thing* #37, and July 1986, with *Swamp Thing* #50. The dissertation is structured in five chapters: the first one explains what is to be done in the work, briefly presents the theoretical background and the choices involved; chapter two follows the development of the character, from its origin in *House of Mystery* #92 (1971) up to the last issue before *American Gothic* starts, *Swamp Thing* #36 (1985); chapter three focuses the *American Gothic* arc, presenting a brief analysis of the story in its significant narrative aspects; chapter four analyses the story "The End" through the scope of Narrative Theory, according to the principles compiled by Herman and Vervaeck in their book *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005). To that end, the text is decomposed into its narrative structures (namely, *actions and events*, *actants and characters*, *setting*, *time*, *narration* and *focalization*). During this step, parallels between the story's elements and established elements of tradition, such as deep structure models for the analysis of myths and the heroic journey, are made, notably Vladimir Propp (1968), A. J. Greimas (1987), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963) and Joseph Campbell (2004). Other aspects of the tradition appearing in the story, are also discussed at this point. Finally, chapter five, which is prefaced by a quick assessment of Moore's poetics, focuses in putting the data acquired to the service of an interpretation, with particular attention to the ways in which Moore knowledgeably employs traditional elements in order to create a narrative that consistently serves a deconstructive purpose, effectively working to undermine the foundations it is built upon.

Keywords: Comics and Graphic Novels; Literatures in English; Swamp Thing; Alan Moore; Narrative Theory.

No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell.

(Carl Gustav Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, 1959, p.43)

*Oh shame to men! Devil with devil damned
Firm concord holds; men only disagree
Of creatures rational, though under hope
Of heavenly grace, and, God proclaiming peace,
Yet live in hatred, enmity, and strife
Among themselves, and levy cruel wars
Wasting the earth, each other to destroy:
As if (which might induce us to accord)
Man had not hellish foes enough besides,
That day and night for his destruction wait!*

(John Milton, *Paradise Lost*: Book II, vs. 496-505)

*[...] What is Evil anyway?
Is there reason to the rhyme?
Without Evil there can be no Good,
So it must be good to be evil sometimes.*

(Trey Parker. "Up There". Soundtrack of *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut*, 1999)

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1 GERMINATION

It is a truth universally acknowledged that, the world being round and no significant deviation happening, every path taken should eventually lead back to the point of departure. That is not to say, however, that every path taken eventually leads back to the same initial point, for significant changes have occurred from departure to arrival: the traveler is changed – and so is the world, even though it may continue to be round.

Being at a time in my life where many cycles are coming to a close (hopefully with others on the way), I feel compelled to do what one usually does when at a crossroads and in need to choose a path: look back. See the road travelled. Consider its implications. In this work, I do precisely this.

I was thirteen years old when I first read “The End”. The story, written by Alan Moore, with artists Stephen Bissette, Rick Veitch and John Totleben, colors by Tatjana Wood and letters by John Costanza, is the final chapter of the story arc which became known as *American Gothic*, developed between *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #37*, published in June 1985, and *Swamp Thing #50* (the name of the title changed mid-arc), published in July 1986.

In it, a creature made of moss goes to Hell to stop Darkness, Evil incarnate, from destroying Heaven. The monster/hero has several companions in his enterprise: a superhero who is actually a wizard; a ghost in a circus outfit; a stranger in a cape and hat costume; a bright yellow demon in a red leotard, who speaks in rhymes; a giant pale man, scarcely clothed, in a hood. These heroes are aided by séance of magicians, who throughout the story try to help them remotely. Sometimes this is presented directly to the reader and other times they are presented through the perspective of the characters, such as Mento. As the battle goes on, something peculiar happens: one by one, the heroes are tested by Darkness – they have to answer a question about Evil. And, one by one, they fail. First the yellow demon, then the superhero/wizard, then the giant, who is supposed to be very powerful. When all seems lost, the hero/monster is tested as well. He answers that Evil is basically part of a cycle, that Good and Evil are interdependent concepts. Then Good personified shows up to fight against Evil personified – only they do not fight. They shake hands, and then it is over.

Now, my 13-year-old self was probably not a sophisticated reader – but even then I realized that something in that story sounded very familiar. I recognized the idea of the hero being tested with a question, or a riddle, or a fight. The structure reminded me of a fairy tale of sorts. And, a quarter of a century later, the potential of the story still seemed to be unveiled

to me. So, I decided to use that very story as my doctoral research: the first thing I read by Alan Moore¹. I wanted to really study it and understand how it worked, finally put to rest this strangeness – hopefully once and for all. Since the structure of the story was precisely what made it strange – simultaneously familiar and odd, reminiscent of old stories but with unusual twists, and in a different form – I decided to concentrate the analysis on how it related to different sorts of tradition, especially related to literature, the specific medium, and other art forms and to the title itself.

On that note, a few words must be said about the methodology and the goals of this research. In my M.A. thesis, *Quis Evaluates Ipsos Watchmen* (2014)², I had the opportunity to get acquainted with the wonders of Narrative Theory (or, in Mieke Bal's term, Narratology), I have done a somewhat extensive review of it and adapted it to work with comic books, proposing a few modifications, particularly in the structure of the narrator and advocating for a broader take on character analysis than those proposed by the authors reviewed. However, in doing so, it is my feeling that the analysis itself was considerably reduced and, though I have succeeded in making it interesting (I figure), I spent some time in the following years producing other articles and book chapters related to the book. Although it is not unusual for extensive works to be divided into relevant parts and published to make them more accessible, I realized that very little of my production was a repetition of my previous work. It was instead a complement to my M.A. thesis, where I managed to comment more freely and extensively on topics the constraints of time and space had not allowed at that time, such as establishing parallels between the story of heroes in the diegetic universe and the history of the medium and the editor, focusing on the art and the things communicated exclusively through visual means, trying to understand the generalities of Alan Moore's poetics through a broad scope on general tropes developed in his *oeuvre*, and so on. So, I thought it would be profitable for me, as a critic, to do the opposite way in this specific research, and concentrate on analysis and interpretation, taking advantage of the theoretic review already largely developed. That does not mean, of course, that there will be no theoretical background or that

¹ I understand that the statement raises a natural question: 'Why Alan Moore, with so many people involved in the making of the story?' And, though I plan to address it again later, I must explain that it is due to *consistency* and the *tradition of the medium*. Comics' creators have gradually become known by the public for their works, and the creations of artists working different titles varied widely in quality of storytelling, tropes developed, etc. (though they remained recognizable by the drawing or coloring style). Along with the more modern way of collecting several editions into complete story arcs, which tend to be developed by a single writer, the writer became known as the main voice in a given comic – though far from the only voice.

² The full text is available online and can be downloaded in .PDF at <<http://www.lume.ufrgs.br/handle/10183/103917>>, last accessed on 07/12/2018.

it will be merely referenced here; it means just that some of the structures and conclusions developed in detail in the previous work will be presented more succinctly, although properly referenced.

Moreover, one of the greatest features of Narrative Theory, in my opinion, is that it is not prescriptive in terms of interpretation – it provides the critic with a very detailed view of the text, the resources, structures and techniques deployed, without necessarily demanding a conclusion regarding meaning. This frees the critic to reach their own conclusion. Despite the responsibility that comes with any instance of freedom, it seems appropriate that, in a work signaling the end of a cycle of learning, I should be allowed to stretch my interpretive wings into the understanding of a text, and either make a horrible mess or prove myself capable of making an analysis. In that, I seek the liberating support of Terry Eagleton's notion of *rhetoric*, proposed in the last chapter of *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (1996), where he states that “what you choose and reject theoretically, then, depends upon what you are practically trying to do. This has always been the case with literary criticism: it is simply that it is often reluctant to realize the fact” (p.184). Or, in other words, use the theory as a tool to interpret, but don't let yourself be bound by it.

So, the method of choice for this research is a narrative analysis of the text in question, according to the principles provided by Jean Genette in *Narrative Discourse: An essay on method* (1983), by Rimmon Kennan in *Narrative Fiction* (1983) and by Mieke Bal in *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative* (1985). A comparison between these theories and their common points made by Herman and Vervaeck in *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005) will prove to be instrumental in this part of the research in order to refine the structures. The text will then be decomposed and commented on in regards to its narrative structure and the elements that compose it (in particular the narrative structures proposed by Herman & Vervaeck in the ‘Classical Narratology’ section of their book – that is, *actions and events, actants and characters, setting, time, narration and focalization*). Because of the specificities of the medium, the structure of the narrator will be divided into the *reciter* (responsible for the iconic part of the text), *monstrator* (responsible for the verbal part of the text) and *meganarrator* (the structure coordinating their interaction). These were taken from Thierry Groensteen's *Comics and Narration* (2013), and Ann Miller's *Reading Bande Dessinée* (2007). The structure of the *reciter* will also be studied in terms of style and techniques, and for that purpose the works of Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (1993) and *Making Comics* (2006) will be used, as well as Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art*

(1985), among others. This work intends to select from their production enough resources for a practical approach to the analysis of style in a comic book, adding to that pool and choosing other sources, as needed.

Due to the specificities of the medium, it is equally important for this study the problem posed by the narrative analysis of a comic book character: if, as we will see, the narrative take of characters is a set of recognizable traits developed by actants throughout their journeys — and therefore constantly developing structures, evolving along with their narratives — how does one approach narratives that span an unreasonable amount of time, for instance characters such as Batman and Superman, seeing monthly publication for decades? Are they approachable as characters by traditional means? Can an effective analysis of character development be made with such complex structures?

This work will, then, make a brief review of the entire publication history, from the first appearance in *House of Mystery* #92, published in July, 1971, to the subsequent beginning of monthly publication of *Swamp Thing* #1, in November of 1972, and then up to *Swamp Thing* #50, published in July, 1986 – publication which was interrupted from September, 1976, with the publication of *Swamp Thing* #24, to May, 1982, with a new edition of *Swamp Thing* #1 (the beginning of Vol.II). This is a work with about 10 years and a half of publication only – not one of the most extensive, but enough to provide the reader with an idea of some of the complexities offered by the analysis of comics, which are so frequently considered superficial in the Academy, and how they can enrich the literary studies. A comparison between older versions of the character will enable a deeper understanding of how the character, the title, and tropes developed changed in Moore's hands – and this is notably important considering the title was scheduled for cancellation in the beginning of Moore's run, in *Swamp Thing* #20, January of 1984, and was one of the editor's most popular titles when the author left, in *Swamp Thing* #64, September of 1987. Something significant happened, and this extensive analysis may help to understand what that was.

Throughout this analysis and review, I intend to make approximations with different traditions, whenever relevant, and supported by theoretical features, before the given analysis. These approximations will be made *apropos* of the distinctive features to be considered, instead of dedicating a specific chapter for them. This chosen structure is here deemed appropriate for not hindering the reading of the work, obligating the reader to go back and forth between chapters to check the theory presented in a given section of the text. The objective, then, is to point out how the dialogue with other works, tropes and lores, as well as

the history of the publication of the same title, is performed in the text in question, in order to gather how significant a role they perform in its reading. Predictably, among those are different takes on heroic tropes and myths, such as the functions proposed by Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968, translated by Laurence Scott) and the monomythic structure proposed by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (2004), among others. I will also use different aspects of tradition, referencing the use of couplets *blanc verse* and poetic caesura in the pages of the comic, and I will also approximate the story's elements/characters to some of Carl Gustav Jung's archetypes, among other things, as demanded by the careful reading needed in narrative analysis. That done, hopefully, this work will finally arrive at an interpretation based on the text's features and the elements gathered.

Since the interpretation of a comic involves reading not only the text, but the images, and demonstrating the things cited, many images are referenced in this work. So, it is appropriate to mention some of the particularities and choices made when referencing images, pertaining particularly to the legal matter of copyright.

The images contained in this work, when not created by myself, are used as quotations, according to Brazilian legislation on authorial rights code, namely, law 9.610/98, article 46, paragraph III, which allows "quotations in books, newspapers, and magazines or any other means of communication, of sections of any work, for the purpose of studies, criticism or polemics, in the justifiable measure to attain it, indicating the name of the author and the origin of the work"; and paragraph VIII, which allows "partial or integral reproduction of pre-existing works, of any nature, when constituted of visual arts, whenever the reproduction in itself is not the main objective of the new work and do not hinder the normal profiteering of the reproduced work or cause unjustifiable loss to the legitimate interests of the authors"³.

This work, a literary criticism in nature, also conforms to the international doctrine of *fair use*, which estates that:

(...) the fair use of a copyrighted work, including such use by reproduction in copies or phonorecords or by any other means specified by that section, for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for

³ Law 9.610/98, ruling over authorial rights in Brazil. Available for the public (in Portuguese) at <http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/19610.htm>. Last accessed on 15/07/2019. Quotations in English presented of this law were translated by the author.

classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright. (TITLE 17 OF THE UNITED STATES CODE, COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1976⁴)

That said, the images presented do not amount to a large extent of the original text nor do they hinder the commercialization of the work – in fact, arguably, a passionate analysis of a 33-years-old work could encourage the purchase instead.

The form of image referencing, in my opinion being limited in its understanding as illustrative material in the guidelines of Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas (ABNT), was also emended to be equitable to that of textual citations, with the indication of author, year and page (with the panel added, when relevant, numbered according to the reading order of each page). Comics are here, then, treated as text in the full sense of the word, *i.e.*, anything carrying meaning, and referenced in the most complete way possible.

Since in this work a brief review of the entire publication history of the title in question is made, along with other works referenced in the story (comprising 75 issues of the title alone, along with other titles and miniseries mentioned), the sheer volume of issues would unduly inflate the references section of this work, “The Rich Soil”. To avoid this situation, the comics were referenced in each of the writers’ runs, the number of issues written and the volume (which changes whenever the title relaunched and the number is reset, as in the example with the “Swamp Thing”). That is largely because this is majorly the way the original stories are referenced in the market and by the aficionados, as “runs” of writers/artists teams, the writer appearing prominently because the art team sometimes lingered from one story arc to another, whereas the writer usually left the title when completing an arc. So, the difficulty is already solved by a market practice, yet to be assimilated by academic rules. Moreover, conventions tend to fail in works filled with titles which are also full volumes. In this work, I considered the title of the work as a whole, meaning the entire story arc, *American Gothic*, while the final story itself is referred to in quotation marks, as a chapter would, “The End”. Some of the quotations do not follow the same rule.

Since I am going about struggling with academic conventions, trying to fit the odd cuckoo of a medium into a recognizable frame, I ask for a moment to explain the structure of this work. As the reader may have noticed, the title of this chapter, where I present the work and what is to be done, is ‘Germination’, instead of the usual ‘Introduction’, announcing a trope that is going to be developed throughout the work. The change is minimal, though, for as always, there is an introduction, to present what is going to be done, chapters of

⁴ Available online in PDF at < <https://www.copyright.gov/title17/title17.pdf>>, last accessed on 07/15/2019.

development, and a conclusion, to summarize the work and highlight the relevant points, I simply decided to have a bit of fun with the chapter names, which are all related to vegetable life. So, Introduction, the first chapter, is named “Germination”. Chapter two is “A Moss-Covered Hamlet”, adapted from a quotation taken from Moore, and in it there is the review of the publication’s history, focused on the narrative aspects of the stories and the development of character and plots. This is followed by “American Growth”, the third chapter, which analyzes the story arc that concludes with “The End”. Since the arc is, predictably, very significant to the story, those issues are more thoroughly analyzed. And, finally, in chapter four, “The Root of All Evil”, the narrative analysis of the story “The End” is made, and the story’s elements decomposed in terms of *actions and events*, *actants and characters*, *setting*, *time*, *narration* and *focalization*. Significantly, as the main analysis, this chapter is by far the longest, and where most of the arguments and approximations are made. In many ways, the previous chapters, with the reviews of the works, are a preparation for this one, and crucial specifically when commenting Swamp Thing as a character. The fifth chapter is “A Few More Leaves”, a word play with the double meaning of ‘leaf’ – of grass and paper – at this point, also relying on the dwindling patience of the reader. The sixth concluding chapter, ‘The Rings in the Trunk’ summarizes the work and considers its achievements, shortcomings and possibilities (when you cut a tree, through the rings in the trunk, the entire history of the tree is visible to those able to read it, so I thought that was appropriate). And, finally, the References are “The Rich Soil” from which the work grew.

2. A MOSS-COVERED HAMLET

Something is rotten in the state of Louisiana. Precisely, in the swamps. While the gross suggestion of the main figure's potent smell lingers in the air, like a ghost in a Shakespearean play, it is important for us to seek a ghost of different make: to trace the formation of a fictional character.

Being tasked with understanding the development of the Swamp Thing, and which of the monster's characteristics in the story this study analyzes are Alan Moore's input (which I considered necessary to highlight Moore's treatment of the character and the plot, one of the focus points of this work), I felt the need to understand the creature's origin and trajectory until it got into Moore's hands, in order to have a term for comparison. That doubt sprouted due to the unusual nature of comics as a collaborative artistic effort commercially driven, in which creative teams succeed each other with their own ideas and different takes on characters or plotlines: the fastidious question of 'how much of the creature is Moore' presented itself regularly in my readings of the story arc *American Gothic*, which eventually leads to "The End". And, having already read the creature's adventures previous to Moore's treatment, I knew that many changes were made to the character, including a re-imagining of the character for serialization and a hiatus between the two existing (at the time) volumes of the book. I also had read different biographies of Moore, each with its own account and critical assessment of his work in *Swamp Thing*. I, however, had never gone through all of the editions considering character development, plotline and narrative elements – and if part of the critic's work is to read other critical assessments, there is also the need to confirm, agree, or disagree with an educated opinion. And this chapter is where this education takes place.

It is an effort to understand the character's trajectory and development through its publication history, and the narrative aspects of the treatment of the stories. Obviously, as summarized as I was able to make it, because it is quite an effort in itself. The best I can say for it is that it also was a lot of fun.

The reason I decided to include this effort in the study is that, besides giving the reader the possibility to follow my reasoning and disagree with me, it is also coherent with the idea of a dissertation in the first place: it is a narrative of a learning process, a critical assessment, and getting to a conclusion or proving/disproving a hypothesis. And the method used for understanding the work was, in the case in point, an important part of the process.

Therefore, the following pages will bring a character's biography of sorts, with a summarized view of the entire publication history leading to *American Gothic*. Along that summary (which is in itself an interpretation, I'm painfully aware of that fact) a summary of the relevant changes or shifts in narrative devices and character development will be assessed, to highlight their significance to the character's development. This includes *House of Mystery* #92 (1971), *Swamp Thing* #01 to #24 (1972 to 1976), comprising the Volume I of the title, and finally *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* #01 to #36 (Moore took over in issue #20 and the title changed to *Swamp Thing* again in issue #31). That opens doors for the reader to enter *American Gothic* after a first glimpse of a very American nightmare in the previous arc, *The Nukeface Papers*. *Swamp Thing*, by that point, is also dead (again), so the new story arc is a fresh beginning of sorts.

The work, however, will not be enacted in vain, since the section dedicated to the study of *Swamp Thing* as a character would demand some term of comparison, so it is work anticipated in order to frame the analysis in a more comprehensive way for the sake of the reading.

2.1 CONTEXT AND HOUSE OF SECRETS #92

1971 was an uncanny year in Comics for a monster to be born in. As Robert Petersen points out in his book about the history of the medium *Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels* (2011, p.163), the strict rules of the Comics Code Authority (CCA) were revised early in that year⁵, a measure which was probably triggered by the positive reaction to the anti-drug comic *The Amazing Spider-Man* #96, developed at the request of Nixon's Department of Health Education and Welfare. The comic, denied approval by the Authority, ran without its seal. After that repercussion, the Comics Magazine Association of America Inc., which had originally issued the code in 1954, felt the pressure to amend it. Even so, there were strict (and somewhat illogical) restrictions to horror titles:

No comics magazine shall use the word horror or terror in its title. The words may be used judiciously in the body of the magazine. [Footnote: The word horror or

⁵The following details are not present in Petersen, but can be checked in the article *Comics Code History: The Seal of Approval*, by Dr. Amy Kiste Nyberg, available online at Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF) website <<http://cblddf.org/comics-code-history-the-seal-of-approval/>>, last accessed on 12/08/2017.

terror in a story title in the body of the magazine has been ruled to be an injudicious use, and therefore is not permitted.]

- All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.
- All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.
- Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.
- Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, or torture, shall not be used. Vampires, ghouls and werewolves shall be permitted to be used when handled in the classic tradition such as Frankenstein, Dracula, and other high caliber literary works written by Edgar Allen Poe, Saki, Conan Doyle and other respected authors whose works are read in schools around the world. (CODE OF THE COMICS MAGAZINE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, INC., 1971)⁶

Which begs the conclusion that, on the one hand, the CCA (perhaps catching a whiff of obsolescence in its rules) sought to adapt to the times and allow more diversity of content in their associate comics; and that, on the other hand, the medium was still regarded as a potentially corrupting influence, and as an art form specifically devised for the aesthetic sensibilities of children. That attitude could easily be considered anachronistic during the *Silver Age* of Comics, but it isn't necessarily – merely the reflection of a context in which the artistic medium is evolving and fighting for its space, a dialectic struggle. As Douglas Wolk wrote:

If you try to draw a boundary between everything that counts as comics and excludes everything that doesn't, two things happen: first, the medium always wriggles across that boundary, and second, whatever politics are implicit in the definition always boomerang on the definer. (WOLK, 2007, p.17)

Of course, Wolk was justifying his evasion of a definition of Comics, but it makes sense in the context as well: art is plastic, it evolves with time and technological development; it appropriates the tradition and improves with it. Therefore, it makes sense that it cannot be contained by a definition (or a code). Eventually, the code became obsolete and the titles began running without its seal. But it was during this struggle that the Swamp Thing finally eclosed from the fetid waters to come out somehow smelling like flowers – a veritable success that soon got its own series, which, once again, points directly to the widening ditch between the CCA and the readers.

Even with the restrictions imposed by the code, DC Comics had two sister magazines with similar names, *House of Secrets* and *House of Mystery*. The titles usually presented one-off stories (that is, self-contained stories in which the characters not necessarily were part of a

⁶Available online at <<http://cblbf.org/comics-code-revision-of-1971/>>, last accessed on 15/08/2017.

specific series) dealing with horror and mysticism. Each magazine was ‘hosted’ (in *Tales of the Crypt* style, with a funereal character in an eerie scenery introducing the stories) by the keeper of the respective house. Cain was the keeper of the *House of Mysteries*, and Abel the keeper of the *House of Secrets*⁷. The cover of July 1971 of *House of Secrets*, issue #92, presented a woman combing her hair in front of a dresser, with a deformed creature creeping behind her. She has her eyes to the side, deviated from the mirror, which indicates she is aware of or suspects the presence of the creature:

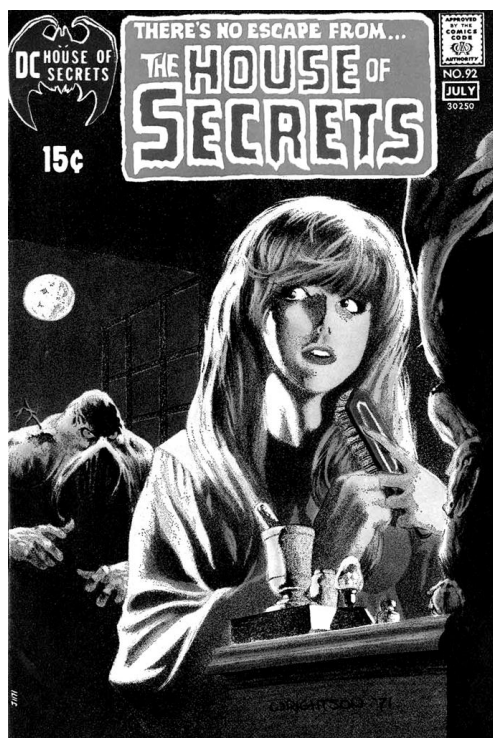


Figure 1 - *House of Secrets* #92. NY, DC Comics, 1971.

The story, written by Len Wein and drawn by Bernie Wrightson, begins with the swamp creature sneaking around the house where Damien Ridge and his wife, Linda Olsen Ridge, live together. The couple has been married for six months, but Linda seems distant and depressed. It turns out Linda cannot forget Alex Olsen, her former husband, who was a young scientist, and also Damien’s partner in a promising project. Damien suspects that Linda’s depression is due to her having found out his involvement with Alex’s death, of which he is guilty (he sabotaged Alex’s chemical experiment in order to cause an explosion and, succeeding and learning his rival survived, Damien buried him alive in the swamp, to eventually be reborn as the Swamp Thing, perhaps due to the chemicals, but that is not explicitly set in the narrative). When Damien decides to murder Linda as well, to cover his

⁷ CAIN AND ABEL entry in the *DC Comics Encyclopedia*. NY, DC Comics Ed., 2004, P.58.

previous murder, the Swamp Thing intervenes and kills Damien in front of Linda. She does not recognize her former husband in the grotesque form, and the creature returns to the swamp, feeling quite sorry for itself.

The murder of Alex Olsen is unveiled slowly, as the focalization is directed through the different characters, and the resolution of the plot is quite sudden. The whole story is only eight pages long, and the focus of the narrative does not allow for suspense, at least not related to the creature – the reader immediately sympathizes with the Swamp Thing. The horror element is reserved to Linda's internal view of the creature murdering her husband, which is explained through the composition of the scene, proximal to Linda's point of view, and the comments of an omniscient reciter⁸, all in a single panel (p.9, panel 01). Internal focalization is also employed to reveal the murderous intentions of Damien and the creature's sorrow. The characters' fashion style and the candlelight unsupported by any modern facilities suggest the 1900's as the probable setting of the story, all in a typical Gothic-style plot, in a house in the middle of an undefined swamp, with a damsel in distress and a cursed creature. The twist: the creature is actually the hero of the story. It is uncomplicated, it is straightforward in its morals, establishing (according to the Code) the guilt of the villain before his punishment, and therefore it is also simplistic in its Manichean view. The creature, however, was not necessarily so – a sensible being trapped in a grotesque body with big, expressive eyes, shunned by its true love, it had a tragic element to it.

It was a hit. According to Len Wein, in an introduction for a collected edition issued by DC Comics later in 1991⁹, the title was the most selling comic by DC Comics that month, and the editor was flooded with letters about the story. After some hesitation of the creators, who felt that the story was the strongest in its undiluted form, and so did not want to risk it by continuing the saga of the character, the monster started being published in its own title, *Swamp Thing #1*, in November of 1972. To keep the original story away from the apparently diluting effect of a monthly title, the character gained a new origin story, set in modern times.

2.2 SWAMP THING VOLUME I

⁸ That is, the verbal narrator. I'll comment further on that structure later on when I address the narratological elements of the text.

⁹ Of which I own only the Brazilian edition, so I mention the translation of the text by Edu Tanaka for WEIN, Len; WRIGHTSON, Bernie. *Clássicos DC – Monstro do Pântano: Raízes*. São Paulo: Panini Ed., 2016, p.6-7.

The second iteration of Swamp Thing has some fundamental differences from its predecessor. First and foremost, the plot was upgraded to a regular monthly series, and that meant the pacing of the story did not need to be so fast – there was more space to develop both characters and plot in the adventures of the character, since a normal story in a regular edition was about 23 pages long (the original story was only 8 pages in length). Another thing that a monthly series requires is a regular flow of adventures, preferably exotic enough to keep the interest of the readers. Finally, as a title character, Swamp Thing would need to be interesting and relatable, if not in an aspirational way (since the average reader might not want to pay the price of deformity and isolation for the powers of the creature), at least in recognizable emotions and drives – enough to trigger identification in the readership. So, strong emotional content was desired, but the dark streak of the horror comic should be avoided, particularly the motivation and the solution of the original story. A hero who kills would have been problematic enough even without the Code hanging over each edition as Damocle’s sword; not only that, but a romantic rival was probably too weak a villain for a regular series, murderous as poor Damien might have been in the previous incarnation of the series (once his true devious nature was revealed, he was little but a regular human facing an angry monster). Other villains would be needed – that or a different sort of conflict from which the story could derive interest. It is interesting to note how many changes were required by the mere adaptation of the short story into a continued series – and how many of the choices made can be accounted for due to this shift.



Figure 2 - *Swamp Thing* #1, 1972. NY, DC Comics, Nov. 1972.

The new monster was made slightly different. Perhaps the most prominent feature to change was the creature's appearance – while the old monster was misshapen, seemed to walk with extreme difficulty, curved and with his arms hanging down, with a hunchback and shadows hiding his features in most panels (the element of mystery entices the imagination and, in such a figure, the reader tends to assume the worst), the new version was more humanlike. Wide-chested, with hips (the first version appeared to have a bulgy heap of moss instead of a waist), a more proportioned (and larger) body was given to the creature, as well as an almost human face – which helped to convey facial expressions other than through the large eyes (not so prominent in the new iteration). Looking at the image below, one can see the strange stance of the monster (on the right), apparently with a clubbed foot (or two) and the lack of any recognizable neck – while the serialized version of the creature (on the left) presents more human features, including a human-shaped skull (allowing for a wider range of facial expressions).



Figure 3 - Body Type Comparison (*Swamp Thing* #01, 1972, p.16 panel 1; *House of Mystery* #92, 1971, p.7 panel 1)

Once Wein and Wrightson had space to widen the plot, some strange elements started to pop in. The second (and still ongoing) origin story started in a similar way, with the Swamp Thing walking around the house (actually a barn, furnished for scientific experiments, this time around), looking for the return of the people who killed him. And, similarly to the previous version, the reader learns what happened through *analepses* (GENETTE, 1980, p. 48), that is, the presentation of previous moments in the narrative. Perhaps there is a naturalization feature to that resource (once the reader is presented with the monster, the steps

to how it came to be seem a little more credible). This version of the character, though, is not merely feeling sorry for itself, but eager for revenge.

Alec and Linda Holland are scientists working for the United States of America (USA) government, subordinates to Lieutenant Matthew Cable (here mentioned because he is going to become a reoccurring character in the series), trying to produce a bio-restorative formula, something that is capable of making plants grow instantly – which they achieve soon after getting to the barn. But, as soon as this happens, they are contacted by an organization called the Conclave to sell their discovery. Alec and Linda refuse the offer, and are threatened. As they refuse to be intimidated, the strangers leave, but soon a mysterious dog shows up in the premises, and is adopted. The dog had surveillance equipment attached, and when the Conclave finds out the scientists had already completed the formula, they decide that, if they cannot have it, no one can. They blow up the laboratory with Alec inside, and he runs to the swamp ablaze, covered with the reminiscent of the formula. Linda is left alive, under the care of Lt. Cable, and tries to finish the experiment, unaware of the rebirth of her husband as the Swamp Thing. Soon after that the dog runs away and Lt. Cable goes after it – and is soon knocked unconscious by a thug from the Enclave, who had come to finish destroying the formula. The Swamp Thing also gets distracted saving the dog from quicksand, and in the meantime the Conclave murders Linda. The Swamp Thing is able to intercept the murderers (by destroying the car they are in standing in front of it and hammering his fists on the motorcase) and knock them out. Lt. Cable, arriving then, blames the creature for Linda's murder and swears to catch it. An unidentified person (soon to be known as Anton Arcane, the creature's nemesis) watches everything in a mirror and decides to catch the creature, and that is the end of the origin story.

One can see several aspects in which the second iteration differs significantly from the first. The more humanized approach to the anatomy, the diversification of the creature's feelings (instead of merely feeling sorry for itself, it now is able to hold a grudge and of fits of anger and despair), the insertion of seemingly random elements in the plot (such as the dog, an impractical vehicle for surveillance equipment), a murder plot (Cable goes after him untiringly after that), a modern setting and a mysterious mystic villain (who can watch events remotely in mirrors). The exaggerated action perhaps is more suited to a more lengthy plot, needing to keep the attention of reader through long runs, but it surely represents a shift from the tone of the original story, which focused mainly in re-telling the events and in the horror of the murderous moment – much more concise and not focusing on the action, but in the

building of the tone of the narrative. Maybe that is what the author was referring to when he mentioned diluting the story – and Wein probably had a point.

Knowing the origin of the monster, the reader should be acquainted with the basics of its trajectory. A simple table can convey the essential information of the rest of Volume I of *Swamp Thing*, which ran for more 23 editions, two years in total, before cancellation (after that, the interest was revived by a live-action movie, later in 1982). But one thing at a time. The following table presents a resume of the first run of the comic, with the presentation of the main characters and a very brief summary of the plots, as well as the and/or the relevance of the edition to the furthering of the plot, or the comic run as a whole. The objective is to get the reader acquainted with the general progression of the character in order to fully understand the changes enacted by Moore later on.

Issue/Title	Plot	Formal Aspects/Relevance
<i>Swamp Thing #01 – Dark Genesis</i>	Alec Holland is turned into Swamp Thing after a criminal explosion in his lab. He enacts revenge, but his wife, Linda, dies. Lt. Matthew Cable swears to avenge her.	Origin story. Introduction of the title character, of Lt. Matthew Cable and the Conclave (enemies).
<i>Swamp Thing #02 – The Man who Wanted Forever</i>	Swamp Thing (S.T.) is taken by the elder mage/scientist Anton Arcane, who wants the Swamp Thing's body and power. In turn, the S.T. would be returned to human form. Learning of Arcane's ill intentions, S.T. breaks the magical jar which sustains the exchange and fights Arcane's un-men (monsters). Fleeing the creature, Arcane falls down a precipice, and his monsters follow him. S.T. is left in Arcane's castle.	Introduction of Anton Arcane (nemesis), mage <i>and</i> scientist, and his un-men. Arcane will go through several bizarre transformations through the years (from elder man to un-man, insectoid un-man and finally demon). It is also established that S.T. can speak, though with difficulty.
<i>Swamp Thing #03 – The Patchwork Man</i>	Lt. Matthew Cable follows S.T. to Arcane's city, and meets Abigail (Abby) Arcane, his niece. S.T. is in Arcane's lab, and, as the place catches fire, is helped by a Frankenstein creature look-alike (actually Abby's father, who died in an accident but was saved by his brother through magic and science). As the creature is unleashed and goes to the village to try and find his daughter, S.T. has to intervene in order to save Abby, who recognizes her father instants before he dies to save her life. Cable is frustrated in his attempt to catch S.T. and boards a plane home, together with Abby. S.T. goes along, holding the plane's landing gear.	Introduction of Abby Arcane, who will in time become the love interest of S.T. – but not for a long time yet. The comic also establishes a connection between Frankenstein's monster and S. T. (arguably mainly the cinematic tradition of the creature, as some details indicate).
<i>Swamp Thing #04 - Monster on the Moors</i>	The plane carrying the trio falls into a Scottish moore, lured by a local family's (MacCobb's) fake landing signals. They were looking for strangers to make complete transfusion and thus cure their son of the werewolf curse. S.T. intervenes and the werewolf (Ian MacCobb) is killed when a silver chandelier falls over it.	Another connection, this time with the werewolf tradition. It is interesting to point out that the Scottish werewolf has a human nose, not a snout.
<i>Swamp Thing #05 – The Last of the</i>	S.T. is shipwrecked into a shore after trying to board a ship to get home, and meets a girl and her	The comic seems to be exploring well-known roads

<p><i>Ravewind Witches</i></p>	<p>young simpleton brother, both of whom are being chased by their village under the accusation of witchcraft. S.T. attempts to help them, but falls down a precipice and the villagers manage to capture the siblings. S.T then proceeds to free them, first the brother from the prison and then the sister, who has been judged a witch and is going to be burned. S.T. helps her, but in the final confrontation with the villagers it turns out that the simpleton brother is the witch, and the sister is the familiar. They turn the villagers into flowers.</p>	<p>of folklore and culture, this time with witchcraft and the Salem trials. S.T. is shown to be able to regenerate missing body parts (he regenerates his arm in the comic). This is attributed to the regenerative formula in his body.</p>
<p><i>Swamp Thing #06 – A Clockwork Horror</i></p>	<p>S.T. falls off a vegetable truck (seriously) and is greeted by Linda Holland. Soon he meets himself. It turns out there is a city (Burgess Town) of unregistered clockwork people whose appearances and histories are based on newspaper obituaries. Matt Cable and Abby Arcane are also called to investigate this city. It turns out the mayor, Hans Klochmann, carpenter and watchmaker, built the city and its inhabitants. The Conclave sends in an armed team (lead by a giant fighter robot) in a helicopter to capture Klochmann and, as a bonus, Matt and Abby. S.T. fights and defeats the robot, but the mayor intervenes and the Conclave men end up shooting him. The clockwork men then kill the Conclave members, not before they are able to take Matt and Abby to their base. S.T. (and the dog, who sporadically appears in the adventures) then vows to rescue them.</p>	<p>The Conclave is still monitoring the activities of Matt Cable and still interested in S.T. The mixing of clockwork technology, carpentry and robotics seems very awkward and strange in this edition.</p>
<p><i>Swamp Thing #07 – Night of the Bat</i></p>	<p>S.T. is in Gotham City, home of the Batman, with the dog, trying to find Matt Cable and Abby Arcane. He ends up getting the local police's attention (and Batman's, by proxy). However, he manages to find the Conclave's location and free Matt and Abby. The dog runs s acting strange and leads S.T. to a confrontation with Batman, which he wins, and goes on to find the Conclave's boss. Batman instead follows the dog, who finally finds its master (unmasking the Conclave leader – Nathan Ellery, a Bruce Wayne's associate attending a charity party). Ellery then shoots the dog and ends up falling down a porch.</p>	<p>S.T. strikes back against the Conclave, the organization responsible for his and his wife's murder. He also refuses to kill the leader, which begs the inference that his previous killing of a Conclave member was either attributable to his confusion or his highly emotional state of mind.</p>
<p><i>Swamp Thing #08 – The Lurker in Tunnel 13</i></p>	<p>S.T., having eloped Gotham in a truck, which he left at a truckstop, fights a bear in a cave he sought for shelter in order to save an old man who was inside. He kills the bear, but the man tells him a story about a cursed mineshaft and dies. S.T. then carries the body to the village to be interred, and the villagers seem to welcome him. Soon after he joins a party do seek a lost boy and ends up in tunnel 13, where he confronts the creature inside, an amorphous blob (M'Nagalah) consuming living matter and aspiring to divinity, with claims to have bestowed many gifts upon mankind (including seeding life into our planet, granting man the natural disposition for violence and inspiring writers such as Poe, Lovecraft and Bierce) before being summoned there. S.T. is the final element to its plan, who will provide it with the mass needed to transcend, the planets and stars being aligned in</p>	<p>The story harbors not only citations of different writers of horror stories, such as Poe, Lovecraft and Bierce, but also bears strong resemblance with some of Lovecraft elements (the creature looks like a Shoggot, and having been summoned here from outer places is something that also links to lovecraftian <i>mythos</i> – not to mention the title, which closely resembles Lovecraft's story <i>The Lurker at the Treshold</i>).</p>

	the correct disposition. S.T. throws a post at it, and the fury of the creature helps to collapse the weakened structure of the mineshaft, killing it. S.T. then continues his journey.	
<i>Swamp Thing #09 – The Stalker from Beyond</i>	S.T. falls from a train in which he was hiding and walks the rest of the way home, to the barn in the swamp where he was killed and reborn. He intended to find remains of his experiment and maybe regains his humanity. All that only to find out the barn was being used for a stranded alien to fix his spaceship in order to go home. Frustrated, S.T. fights the alien and loses, being thrown into the swamp. The alien then has to face a group of men who was after the UFO, and surrenders after killing one of them. S.T. finds the group as one of the men was about to kill the creature, and intervenes, helping the creature escape. Before leaving in the ship, the creature admonishes men and thing for their violence, and leaves, only to crash the ship and die.	Not only another common lore of <i>sci-fi</i> is employed here, but also a relativistic view of characters usually presented as unidimensional in fiction and cinematic tradition – the alien is well-intentioned and misunderstood, much like the S.T.
<i>Swamp Thing #10 – The Man who Would Not Die</i>	S.T. saves an old black woman from a wounded escaped convict. She then tells him a story about a slave who stood up for his lover and was tortured to death, enacting his revenge after death. Soon after S.T. is attracted to a graveyard by deformed creatures, and there he confronts Anton Arcane, turned into a deformed un-men by his servants after their last encounter. They want S.T. body, but Arcane talks about enslaving mankind, and the ghosts of the slaves in the graveyard rise to help S.T. Eventually the reader finds out that the elderly woman S.T. found before was also a ghost. Arcane is left under a tombstone in the graveyard.	Introduction of the ghosts lore into the narrative of the adventures of the S.T. Also, the theme of the slave narrative will be developed again by Alan Moore, in the future. First of the strange transformations Anton Arcane will go through. The artist Bernie Wrightson leaves the title after this edition.
<i>Swamp Thing #11 – The Conqueror Worms!</i>	Matt Cable and Abby Arcane, walking through the swamp, find themselves in a conflict against a mutated alligator. S.T. appears to help, and soon has to fight also some strange giant mutated worms, with telepathic abilities. The worms take Matt and Abby to a city immersed in the middle of the swamp, led by a villain from another comic, Prof. Zachary Nail, who created an atomic city (which polluted the waters) in order to restart society. Matt and Abby are made prisoners together with other captured people – Prof. Nail still wants to restart society. As S.T. finds them and tries to release the captives, the worms reveal their true intention: they want to use humans as food. Prof. Nail then destroys the city. Matt and Abby are able to escape, with most of the captives and S.T., who strands from the group, touches a mysterious gem with a seven-pointed star incrusted in it, and soon after finds himself facing a dinosaur in the last panel.	The title is a reference to Poe’s poem. There is also a connection between the universe of the S.T. and other DC Comics (specifically Prof. Zachary Nail, a villain defeated by the parapsychological investigator Dr. Terry Thirteen in the comic <i>Ghost Stranger #14</i> , in the story entitled <i>Specter of the Stalking Swamp</i>). The artist Nestor Redondo takes over the title.
<i>Swamp Thing #12 – The Eternity Man</i>	S.T. travels through time and space in leaps, first in pre-historical times (in which anachronically cavemen coexisted with dinosaurs), then in Rome, at about 100 A.D., then Germany in middle 14 th Century, during the black plague, and then in his swamp, in the middle of the American Civil War – after that he is returned to the swamp in the current diegetic time. Each time he finds the same man,	Despite the title, which is a clear reference to Jonathan Mill’s chamber opera about the life of Arthur Stace, there is no connection between Stace and the story. The immortal man, Milo Mobius (his only known <i>alias</i>) is also

	apparently reincarnated, only to see him die in front of him. The man's destiny is apparently connected to the gem, for his eyes shine with its image just before his death, and he is always close to it. First as a caveman, then as a gladiator, then as a nobleman (Milo Mobius), as a Union soldier and finally as a modern man. S.T. buries the man with the gem in the swamp. Throughout the story, small sections depict the actions of Matt Cable and Abby Arcane, who invite Bolt (one of Prof. Nail's captives) into their team to locate S.T.	not part of the DC Comics'
<i>Swamp Thing #13</i>	S.T. is investigating the mutated creatures in the swamp, and is captured by Matt, Abby and Bolt. Taken to a laboratory in Washington, the creature is kept and studied until it manages to confess to Matt who he is (Alec Holland). Matt then helps S.T. to escape under the cadaver of a scientist killed by a guard during S.T. first attempted escape. In the end, S.T. refuses to join Matt, Abby and Bolt and accepts the swamp as his home.	Last edition with scripts by Len Wein. The last panel is practically the same as the last panel of the monster's first story: the creature ambles about in the swamp, with the saying "and if tears could come... they would." (WEIN, 1971, p. 09, panel 6 and 1986, p.20, panel 7)
<i>Swamp Thing #14 – The Tomorrow Children</i>	S.T. helps a deformed child who was running from some townsfolk. When going to investigate the source of the mutations and deformities, he is captured by giant ants and taken to the deformed children's home. It turns out the chemical imbalance in the swamp is due to a toxic substance poured into the waters, and affected animal life and these children, who developed telepathy, telekinesis and the power to control plants. The townsfolk blame them for a bout of sickness and the mutations, so they plan to burn them in their treehouse, together with the mutated animals which they control. A friend of theirs goes to warn them of the danger, but ends up locked in the burning structure, and it takes both S.T. and the elder deformed girl to save him – she sacrifices herself, what convinces the townsfolk of her good qualities. Even so, they are reluctant to accept the children. Disgusted, S.T. goes back to the swamp.	David Michelinie takes over the script of the creature. The change in the script is visible: melding panels, inset text (that is, text treated as part of the scenery), elusion of borders to indicate analepsis and the composition signal towards a more mature narrative structure, though the complicated plot and change of direction in S.T.'s origin (from regenerative formula to chemical imbalance in the swamp) seem tightly jammed into the comic.
<i>Swamp Thing #15 – The Soul-spell of Father Bliss</i>	S.T. is struck by lightning and helped by Father Bliss, who takes him to his church, where he harbors Nebiros, a demon he summoned through magic, and who wants S.T.'s body. Father Bliss believes that helping the demon to bring forth Armageddon is to bring God closer to mankind. Matt, Abby and Bolt are in the vicinity, but Bolt leaves the group and is taken by the Enclave. Matt and Abby get to the church soon after Nebiros takes over S.T.'s body, and are taken hostage, with their guide. The demon then rips the guide's soul from his body to study it, and the vision causes Father Bliss to change his heart. He tries to send the demon back, but Nebiros stops them. Matt then breaks the sphere which held the enchantment, and the demon materialized physically. S.T. then fights the demon, who enters Father Bliss' body and, as the body was weak, disintegrates.	The plot is once again crowded with information hastily given, and the resolution makes no sense. That the demon would materialize for S.T. to have something to do and the father disintegrate are a little too convenient and fall oddly into the story. Same with Bolt's capture, in which he is taken hanging from a hook in a helicopter, in the end of the edition.
<i>Swamp Thing #16 – Night of the</i>	S.T. is in a plane with Abby and Matt, going to free Bolt, who is prisoner of the Enclave and is being	The leader of the Enclave is still alive and seeks

<i>Warring-Dead</i>	tortured for information. But the plane is hijacked and S.T. has to act to stop the murder of a stewardess. He falls from the plane and ends up in an island which is currently undergoing a revolution. He is found by the rebels, led by high-priestess Lagana and the American mercenary Adam Rook. Rook tells his story of disillusionment with America and S.T. is soon captured by the government. Meanwhile, Matt and Abby decide to continue searching for Bolt. S.T. wakes up in the middle of the struggle, and finds out Lagana raised the dead to fight the soldiers. He cannot agree to that, and breaks the amulet, turning the army of the dead into dust. Lagana and Rook are killed, and S.T. evades the scenery. In the end, it is revealed that the leader of the Enclave (Nathan Ellery, believed to be dead after falling through a window in the end of issue #7) is still alive, paraplegic and wearing a medical suit of some sort.	vengeance. S.T.'s adventure in this issue is unrelated to the main plot and only delays the main course of events. It touches relevant issues of politics and morals, but looks strongly like a filler chapter or issue – that is, a chapter or issue in which a parallel action happens, used in long series to provide the audience a ‘breath’ between long story arcs (or to allow the artistic team to pick up the pace, sometimes), except for the fact that it is in the middle of a story arc and the art is the same, so it doesn't feel like it is justified.
<i>Swamp Thing #17 – The Destiny Machine</i>	S.T. and Abby and Matt approach the headquarters of the Enclave. Warned of their presence by sensors, Ellery is able to capture Matt and Abby (again) by sending troops to their location, and soon they learn about his plan to become the leader of the world by incapacitating every other person with capacity for leadership. The S.T., coming from another side, proves a harder target. A cat and mouse game ensues, with S.T. having to fight a mechanical octopus, a flying magnifying glass and a pack of robot wolves, before he endeavors to get to the Enclave's location. When he does so, he throws Ellery's chair into the machinery, eventually electrocuting him. The group evades in a helicopter, having rescued Bolt, but the aircraft malfunctions.	This second confrontation with Ellery is filled with adventure and fulfills the objective of demonstrating the immense strength and sagacity of S.T. – as a superhero comic should. It is also filled with nonsensical elements and plot holes (the usefulness of a flying magnifying glass or a video transmitter in the middle of a field, not to mention Ellery's final plan).
<i>Swamp Thing #18 – Village of the Doomed</i>	Walking about after the crash, the group find Serenity Village, seemingly an amusement park filled with elderly people. S.T. stays behind as Matt and Abby seek help for the injured Bolt. They are soon introduced to Audrey Trask, the village leader. And, to add some variety to the stories, captured. Meanwhile, S.T. finds some monsters in the swamp and saves a man who is being attacked. The man runs to the village and is also captured, being placed with Matt, Abby and Bolt. This man is Nicholas Trask, son of Audrey – it turns out the village was a retirement center, but Audrey found a way of leeching youth from other people through magic, and started capturing people to extend the villager's lives (the surrounding creatures are their pawns). S.T. intervenes and is able to burn Audrey's book, the source of his powers, and things go back to normal. S.T., once again disappointed with mankind, ambles away.	Again, relevant aspects of everyday life are dealt with (in this case, aging) in a somewhat Manichean way, in which the father would not hesitate to kill his son for his youth. The manner in which the group seems to repeatedly find exotic and mystical situations, and manage to always get captured is quite repetitive, what damages the believability of the story. The contract with the reader, after all, only goes so far, and if it begins breaking its own stipulated rules, it becomes harder to enforce.
<i>Swamp Thing #19 – A Second Time to Die</i>	The arm S.T. lost in <i>Swamp Thing #5</i> has grown into another S.T., without the benefit of Alec Holland's mind. A native American, Ho'tah Makanaw finds the creature and helps it. Meanwhile, Matt, Abby and Bolt appear in the nearby city (Gatorberg, Florida) looking for S.T. Asking at the local bar, they are led by the patron's	First of a two-parts story written by Gerry Conway (Nestor Redondo is still the artist). The story endeavors to touch the racial tension between native Americans and the colonizers, through

	son to Ho'tah's shed, but he denies seeing the creature. The <i>real</i> S.T., who is walking about, feels attracted by a mysterious force and ends up disturbing the workers in a governmental excavation while <i>en route</i> . The townsfolk seem to be prejudiced against Ho'tah, who is harboring the other monster. As Ho'tah and the boy go to a place called 'grotto of eternal youth', S.T. is ambling through the swamp.	the person of Ho'tah, who seems to be older than he looks. The story was intended to be published whole, but was divided into two parts.
<i>Swamp Thing #20 – The Mirror Monster</i>	Ho'tah shows the boy and the fake S.T. the grotto, and explains it has mystical properties that kept him alive for 180 years. S.T. continues to advance towards his mirror self, and in the way confronts a biker gang from the city. Matt Cable talks to the workers of the excavation, who are using explosives. One of the explosions causes an avalanche in the mountain, burying the grotto accidentally. That upsets Ho'tah, and he and the fake S.T. go on rampage towards the city. S.T. faces his <i>double</i> and they fight, while Ho'tah confronts the people in the city and ends up getting killed. S.T.'s double sees that and goes towards his fallen friend, but one of the government's engineers throws an explosive at him, destroying the creature and Ho'tah's body. As it is already a trope by now, a disillusioned S.T. walks to the swamp, tired of humanity's violence.	Last part of the story. Again, a lot packed into little space. Some of the plot seems rushed, and there are so many parallel things happening that until the end adventure, when things coalesce, it is hard to say if they are connected at all. Differently from other writers to employ synchronicity as a trope, though, not everything falls into place in the end, but several small things happen, which weakens the desired effect a little.
<i>Swamp Thing #21 – Requiem</i>	The S.T. is abducted by Solus, an alien usurper condemned by his people to travel the void for eternity, not able to land in any planet for being set to self-destroy at the mere touch of planetary soil. As a means of distraction, then, he collects freaks and curiosities, such as S.T. himself. As his slave/lover helps the slaves in an attempted escape, he forces her to dance to death, and immediately regrets it. The slaves then rebel, and Solus is unable to control them, and ends up almost falling from the spaceship (gravity apparently is a problem in deep space). S.T. tries to help, and is betrayed by Solus – but it turns out that S.T. is made of planetary soil, and so Solus self-destructs. S.T. is teleported to Earth again.	The pertinence of this story to the adventures of S.T. is very hard to determine. It seems not only irrelevant to the plot of the series, but also a deviance from the path the adventures of the creature had taken up to that point, trying to maintain at least an illusion of feasibility.
<i>Swamp Thing #22 – The Solomon Plague</i>	While walking through a desert, S.T. is captured and taken to an underground facility where several other deformed people are kept. It turns out that during the test of a bomb, a city was contaminated and the people changed as they got contaminated, and began to spawn a deadly virus. They are kept locked in order to contain the disease, even if there is a group wanting to evade to tell the world of their story (John, the contaminated son of the head scientist, is their leader). They simply thought S.T. was another one of the deformed citizens. The rebels attempt an escape, and father must kill son to prevent the plague. Finally, the head scientist commits suicide with his wife, Kate. S.T. walks away once again, this time reaching a house with 'Holland' in the mailbox.	Introduction of atomic-age concerns in the title, with a very dramatic tint. The clear mention of the Manhattan Project and the moral relevancy and dangers of nuclear tests in the desert are dealt with. Daniel J. Solomon, the head scientist, is a typical Manhattan Project scientist, many of whom later manifested varied degrees of regret and heavy conscience.
<i>Swamp Thing #23 – Rebirth and</i>	S.T. seeks the help of this brother, the biochemist Edward Holland. With his M.A.'s student, Ruth	The series appears to turn towards a radically different

<i>Nightmare</i>	Monroe (who lives with him for some reason) they re-create the explosion that originated S.T. and as he dips into a chemical bath, a villain appears. It is John Zero, ex-Conclave bureaucrat, ruined when S.T. escaped. With a sword in place of a hand and a supervillain showy custom, Zero is now employed by the Colossus organization, and attacks S.T. as he is weak from the chemical bath and turning into Alec Holland once again. S.T. manages to knock the villain unconscious, just before turning human.	path – that of the superhero. With very strange and colorful characters (such as Zero, or ‘Sabre’ and Thrudvang, the superstrong mutant) and perhaps a love interest in the person of Ruth Monroe, a liberated woman.
<i>Swamp Thing #24 – The Earth Below</i>	Back to Alec Holland’s form, S.T. tries to adapt to his newly found humanity, as the Colossus’ leader frees Sabre from custody. The Colossus wants S.T. in order to create an army of swamp creatures. There is a display of Thrudvang’s powers (superstrength and capacity to control earth) and a hint that Alec Holland is still harboring some problems. Thrudvang ambushes Alec and Ruth, and Alec is barely able to escape and save her (Thrudvang falls from a rope bridge).	The approach to superhero tropes seems stronger in this issue. Alec Holland misses the power of S.T. and is still suffering from S.T. related side effects. With the supervillains and a Hawkman crossover, it seems that S.T. was due to become a Hulk-like hero, changing shape as need be. The title was cancelled.

Table 1 - Swamp Thing Vol. I Summary

As it may have become clear, the problem with long series, in which a sequence of writers and artists work, is that the diverse approaches do not necessarily fall organically unto each other, and a radical change in direction may affect profoundly a title’s significance or relevance. All that not to mention editorial decisions, usually taken with an eye on the title’s sales – part of the editor’s job. *Swamp Thing* started with what seemed like almost a roll call of popular horror creatures and monsters, but in the end showed a distinct tendency to go the superhero way. The most popular stories were by far the ones in the beginning of the series, but there are good things to be said to the last editions as well – the approach to down-to-earth themes, the attempt to introduce multidimensional plots (though they might have seemed cramped in the small space available) and the art, which is more realistic and detailed.

Even though there are different approaches to the stories, some things can be said about the character, generally. It is a hulking creature, made largely of vegetable matter, with extraordinary regenerative capabilities and having its strength as its most distinguishable feature. Its method of transportation is catching rides in trains, trucks, cars (even in the cargo space or the exterior of planes) or, when everything else fails, walking. Usually, during its travels (which may be voluntary or involuntary, when it is taken against his will) S.T. stumbles on extraordinary events and creatures with staggering consistency – which contributes to make these situations and creatures a lot less extraordinary than they were supposed to be. The main objective of the creature seems to be regaining the lost humanity,

even if in latter editions the creatures seems to have reached a degree of acceptance regarding its condition.

2.3 THE SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING VOLUME II - #01 TO #19

The series entered a hiatus that would only be broken five years and a half later, by the sudden popularity brought forth by Wes Craven’s film, *Swamp Thing* (1982)¹⁰. The comic would sprout another live-action movie, *The Return of Swamp Thing* (1989)¹¹, an animation with five episodes, *Swamp Thing* (1991)¹² and a live-action TV series, lasting three seasons, with 72 episodes in total, *Swamp Thing: The Series* (1991-1993)¹³. The second iteration of the comic, Volume 2, as it is called, with new edition numbers, began being published in May, 1982, with the title *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*. The title doubled with short, 6-8 pages stories with another DC character, *Phantom Stranger*, a sort of supernatural detective with a Christian background that usually helped people to deal with their problems, always with a supernatural tint. This is the run that saw the arrival of Alan Moore as the writer, in issue #20 (January, 1984). Follows another table, containing a summary of these issues that predate the involvement of Alan Moore in the title:

Issue/Title	Plot	Formal Aspects/Relevance
<i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #01 – What Piece There May Be in Silence</i>	S.T. emerges from the swamp and, after remembering his origin (for the sake of the new readers) and saving a she-bear and some hunters from each other (losing a hand in the process, which strangely doesn’t grow back), ambles to the city of Limbo and saves a mute girl (Casey) who’s about to be killed by her father. Then he tries to take the child to the city, but is run over by a car (stopping it cold and sending the driver through the windshield). The city folk thinks he is a devilish creature the girl summoned (she apparently is considered a witch), and turns against the couple. A mysterious person is investigating S.T., aiming to capture him. This person analyzes the missing hand and gets to the conclusion that S.T. is dying.	The comic is written by Martin Pakso and drawn by Tom Yates, but edited by S.T.’s creator, Len Wein. It does not link with the continuity – S.T. had regained his humanity in the end of the previous iteration. Yet, some similarities with his origin are established, for he apparently is again being chased by a mysterious organization due to the bio-restorative formula in his body. Introduction of a book, <i>Swamp Man: Myth or Fact?</i> By Lizabeth (Liz) Tremayne – both book and author appear in several subsequent editions.

¹⁰ Information available at <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0084745/>>, last accessed on 09/12/2017.

¹¹ Information available at <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098193/>>, last accessed on 09/12/2017.

¹² Information available at <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0408427/>>, last accessed on 09/12/2017.

¹³ Information available at <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098919/>>, last accessed on 09/12/2017.

<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #02 – Something to Live For</i></p>	<p>S.T. saves Casey from the city folk, but the girl is taken by the mysterious man (Dr. Harry Kay). He lures S.T. to a field where he is captured (with defoliant). The intention of the kidnappers (employees of the Sunderland Corporation, or Sundercorp) is to attain S.T.’s biorestorative formula in order to stimulate human regeneration, among other things. Casey and S.T. manage to escape (Casey displays unnatural power) and start a fire in their keep (which burns Dr. Kay). In the end, S.T. and Casey evade in a train after being chased by an employee (which has a mechanical hand) with a rifle, and Dr. Kay shows supernatural regenerative powers.</p>	<p>Not only the reader becomes partisan of aspects of the story that S.T. is not privy to (which was already the case), but the aspects become more significant (Casey’s power) – Interludes are used to introduce new elements for future editions.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #03 – A Town has Turned to Blood</i></p>	<p>S.T. and Casey, in the train, are attacked by youngsters – vampires. They prevail, but S.T. falls from the train in the city of Rosewood, leaving Casey. S.T. explores the town and finds out it is taken over by vampires, aligning himself with the last remaining citizens. As he tries to rescue a boy’s mother and son, some allies blow up the city dam, and the running water kills everyone but S.T. and the boy (the vampires melt when the running water touches them – which is strange, because the superstition is that vampires cannot <i>cross</i> running water, not that it is lethal to them). S.T. then leaves the boy to go look for Casey</p>	<p>There is an interesting analogy developed in the edition that goes beyond the obvious (and correct) link between the vampire lore and the S.T., but also with the <i>punk</i> movement, youth in general, and the shift in generations and societal power (the vampires are youths). Moore would explore these themes further later on.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #04 – In the White Room</i></p>	<p>Liz Tremayne is reporting a recently caught serial killer, murderer of 12 children. S.T. (again falling from a food truck) arrives searching for Casey, who is being held in a facility, but uses her powers to escape. The killer (Barnard Stryker, a kids’ TV show host) is actually possessed by a demon, which kills its host and goes on to kill again. Possessing Tremayne’s colleague, the demon abducts Casey and is confronted by S.T. Unable to stop the demon, S.T. offers his body in turn of Casey’s life. Only S.T. is held in a slaughterhouse hook in the moment, and the demon is trapped in a cold storage facility, where apparently the cold kills it – a <i>deus ex machina</i> ending which will remain unexplained. S.T. is captured by the Sunderland Corporation.</p>	<p>Lizabeth Tremayne appears in the story. Once again, Casey’s power (apparently telekinesis of some sort, though the demon told her that they weren’t too different, which allows for the interpretation that her powers derive from a mystical source).</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #05 – The Screams of Hungry Flesh</i></p>	<p>Captured by Sunderland Corporation, S.T. is treated by Dr. Dennis Barclay, a psychic whose touch seems to heal. S.T. then tells Barclay of his previous encounters with Sundercorp and Harry Kay. Liz Tremayne arrives at the facility to investigate both S.T. and Sundercorp. S.T. escapes and finds out that the ‘psychic healing’ is just a cover to the power of artificial beings, empaths, who can absorb other people’s injuries (in turn, they suffer). Barclay and Tremayne find him, and they plot to free the creatures, which they eventually do, having to confront a renewed Dr. Harry Kay. The empaths get their revenge on the staff, but Kay escapes in a helicopter, and goes on to chase S.T., Tremayne and Barclay, who evaded in a car.</p>	<p>The elements of the plot vary wildly from one edition to the other. The supernatural seems to be the prevailing theme of the second run of the series, but is conflated with ill-thought science, mixed with parapsychological elements (the artificially created empaths). At the same time, the supernatural elements are not clearly explained (cold kills demon).</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #06</i></p>	<p>Dr. Barclay visits the hospital and talks o Casey’s mother, who survived the bullet – she tells him to</p>	<p>Some plot points seem ill-considered. The reason</p>

<p>– <i>Sins on the Water</i></p>	<p>kill the daughter, and gives him an amulet to find her. Joining Tremayne and S.T. in his car, they are chased by Sundercorp (Kay and a psychic man in a helicopter), who manages to capture Tremayne. S.T. and Barclay then follow them into a cruise ship, the S.S. Haven, where Barclay is able to find and free Tremayne (who was being controlled through drugs). The Sundercorp Psychic finds Casey, who is hiding away in a cave, but her powers seem to have strengthened. S.T., who went aboard in the cargo ship, gets out of hiding, only to fight tentacle monsters. Tremayne and Barclay attend a masquerade ball in disguise, in order to gather information, but the moment of unmasking reveals many people are not human (Cyclops with a big red eye in the middle of the forehead).</p>	<p>Barclay visits the hospital is not clear in the plot – he did not know Casey’s mother was alive. Also, not clear is the Sundercorp chairman’s reason to board a cruise ship, and at the same time leave the captive Tremayne drugged but unchecked, free to walk about.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #07 - I Have Seen the Splintered Timbers of a Hundred Shattered Hulls</i></p>	<p>The inhuman creatures unmasked contaminate the crew and passengers, turning them into one-eyed tentacle monsters. Tremayne and Barclay’s identity is also revealed, and they are again caught by Sundercorp, but this time Dr. Harry Kay gives them his gun and lets them go free. S.T. finds the source of the infection and confronts the giant monster in the ship’s pool – alien microorganisms mixed with a strain of herpes virus, which is sinking ships in order to fix its fallen spaceship and go home. S.T., Barclay and Tremayne build a bomb to kill the creature, and S.T. dives to deliver it, but gets caught. The explosion sends him stranded into a shore with what appears to be a(nother) dinosaur.</p>	<p>The plot elements are confusing in themselves, but mixed with the strain of coincidences that furthered the title’s action it becomes even less feasible. The change of heart in Dr. Harry Kay inserts yet another complication in the storyline.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #08 – The Island of Broken Dreams</i></p>	<p>S.T., Tremayne and Barclay wake up in a strange shore – and not only a shore. In actuality, they are taken from one classic film scenario to the other, confused with what is happening. The dinosaurs (some of which look like giant lizards, or alligators with spikes on their backs) relate to <i>King Kong</i>, who appears later. Barclay witnesses the death in the beginning of <i>Citizen Kane</i>. When they gather together and enter Rick’s Café Américain (from <i>Casablanca</i>) Barclay is able to put all the pieces together and guess they are all related to a troop carrier ship, the New Hampshire, having sank in the immediacies after the Vietnam War. It turns out the staff of the bar is actually what remains from the New Hampshire’s crew, who due to chemical changes in their brains are able to shape reality, and so created all the elements of the films they enjoyed together. The island, natives, dinosaurs, are just creations. S.T., Tremayne and Barclay are able to evade in a helicopter created by the last member of the New Hampshire’s crew, which accompanies them. Meanwhile, we learn that Casey, the mute girl, is growing strong and evil, evading the control of Sundercorp.</p>	<p>The story makes a lot of effort to approach filmic language, including presenting ‘the players’ and the place in a map (as if there’s an overlaying narration), captions made to look like film rolls, captions guiding the reader from scene to scene, an intermission and, in the end of the story, extra panels depicting a movie poster and people happily leaving a cinema after the movie ends (with the helicopter going away in the distance while the traumatized crew of the New Hampshire drowns in the first plane). The comic bends strongly towards a fantasy atmosphere, instead of horror.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #09 – Prelude to Holocaust</i></p>	<p>This issue focuses on developing Casey’s (who starts going by her <i>real</i> name, Karen Clancy) and Harry Kay’s storyline. S.T., Tremayne and Barclay arrive at civilization and discuss Casey’s story. Harry Kay and other Sundercorp affiliates are trying to capture Casey (Karen), but she burns one</p>	<p>Casey’s development into a villainous woman helps to gather together the stray pieces that seem to form the central plot of the comic, but it also renders most of the</p>

	<p>of them alive, and is able to absorb the power of a psychic to develop physically into a young woman, kidnapping another psychic to develop her powers further. Kay then goes to Washington, showing himself to be a double agent in Sundercorp organization. As S.T., Tremayne and Barclay investigate and find out Kay is not the true identity of the man (they find a picture of him in a file which suggests his real name is Helmut Krippman, a Nazi genetic scientist brought to America). In the end, Kay and his affiliates (including a psychic with powers) confront the trio. S.T. is subdued and his vines used to strangle Tremayne and Barclay. This is done in order to force S.T. to <i>help</i> Kay with Casey (Karen) The issue ends in a cliffhanger.</p>	<p>adventures of the last issues useless (except for Harry Kay's shift, which in any case was only developed in this issue anyway). Nazi Kay seems to be a double agent involved with US Government (through Gen. Sunderland) and, strangely, a Jewish organization (the clothes of his operatives, with kippah and a star of David hanging from the neck).</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #10 – Number of the Beast</i></p>	<p>The issue starts with Kay (née Krippman) explaining the situation to T.S. and his allies: Karen Clancy is a mutant with unlimited power who is seeking a magic amulet to bring forth the Holocaust. He and his team sided with Sundercorp to kill the girl and stop the prophesized tragedy. They agree to help and travel to camp Dachau, in Germany, where the amulet is buried. Karen is absorbing the power of the kidnapped psychic and faces the group. She brings the horrors of the Nazi camp back to life in the minds of the group, and distracts them. She summons a ghost who tells her of the location of the amulet. She escapes, and in the end Krippman reveals he was in Dachau as a prisoner. Sundercorp is still looking for S.T., now also seeking revenge from Kay's betrayal. Gen. Sunderland and the employee with the mechanical hand plot their revenge. Barclay developed (apparently platonic) feelings towards Tremayne.</p>	<p>The plot twists further, and the reader cannot stop thinking it will break at any point. The complications build up as Casey is Karen (and not an innocent mute girl, but a powerful mutant), Kay is Krippman (and not a Nazi, but leader of a Jewish organization that has their own psychic mutants). The awkward mix of science (mutations), psychic phenomena and mysticism (amulets and pendulums) is also incongruent.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #11 – Heart of Stone, Feet of Clay</i></p>	<p>The issue begins with S.T.'s recollections – a summary of S.T.'s origin <i>and</i> the Casey/Karen storyline. Meanwhile, Karen recovers the amulet. A psychic from Krippman's crew explains to S.T. that Karen is a mutant, a telepath, psychokinetic and pyrokinetic. Barclay and Krippman fight and Krippman reveals he was a kapo in the camp, but now fights to save millions and redeem himself. Then the <i>same</i> psychic explains that Karen is a 'herald of the Beast', who came to pave the way to the end of the world. The reason she travelled with S.T. is that she thought he could be her psychic catalyst, erroneously. Karen then builds a demonic fortress psychically, and the Jewish members of the crew build a golem to kill her. Barclay finds out that S.T.'s sick from an artificial bacterial infection and gets to the conclusion that someone is trying to kill him. The golem and the group find Karen at a ski station, and she destroys the golem. S.T. then fights her as the crew puts the golem back together, the golem then attacks S.T. because of the locket he's been using, which is connected somehow to Karen.</p>	<p>The story is difficult to sum up because so many elements are inserted in it – to the point of a character having been brought forth to explain things. Even so, he explains the pseudoscientific (psychic) part of the plot separated from the mystic part (prophecies and the beast coming forth) – which seems to show a recognition by the authors that these variations do not mingle well. The parallel plots (the Sundercorp, S.T.'s disease, the attraction between Barclay and Tremayne) come and go inconsistently.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #12 – And Yet it Lives</i></p>	<p>S.T. fights the golem and manages to erase the inscription in its forehead, killing it. Karen then defies them for a confrontation in front of a</p>	<p>Once again, the way the author presents a summary of the story so far, this time</p>

	<p>synagogue, and they prepare. Barclay and Tremayne are still flirty, but stop to subdue a Sundercorp assassin (codename Grasp, the same with a mechanical hand), and then go meet the rest of the group. Arriving at the Synagogue, they manage to kill Karen, but her spirit enters Tremayne's body, possessing her, and then the S.T. – who is able to cast her out. The spirit then takes Tremayne again and (just as Grasp tried to kill them from a distance with a sniper laser rifle) teleports the entire group to the fortress Karen had prepared (taking Grasp along), and tells them they'll meet her master, the Beast (of which Hitler was the last iteration on Earth).</p>	<p>(after the fight between S.T. and the golem) only the part related to Karen. This time Karen is presented with supernatural tones, with little mention of her psionic powers. Grasp presents a problem – it is a reappearing character, the same who chase S.T. in issue #2.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #13 – Lambs to the Slaughter</i></p>	<p>Inside the fortress, they have to face Grasp and his rifle, but Karen hits him with her power by accident and he apparently gets killed. Karen's spirit then tries to kill the group with several traps, and the golem (it had been ambling since Karen's death) arrives to kill her, in Tremayne's body. S.T. saves her, after listening to the plans for the Holocaust (which are very similar to the biblical version). Suddenly, S.T. develops psychic powers and kills the golem, and proceeds to face Karen's spirit and the Antichrist (Grasp, who hadn't been killed). S.T. is able to destroy Karen and Kriptom kills Grasp, finding out that everything, even the fortress, were illusions. The group then goes back to the swamp, which presents a possible healing to the ailment of S.T.</p>	<p>The end of the Casey/Karen saga. It was original in some aspects, such as the Jewish Cabala making a golem (linking it to the golem legendary and cinematic tradition), but mostly confusing, with S.T. developing powers just because he touched the amulet and even so being able to overpower Karen's spirit. Grasp, as a character who'd been beaten again and again, was a remarkably weak villain.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #14 -</i></p>	<p>Nathaniel (Nat) Broder, millionaire and inventor, owner of Broder Electronics, suffers an accident while experimenting with a new way of producing silicon crystals. His body is not found. His wife, Sally, is stopped intervening by the Phantom Stranger, sparing her of the same fate. The remains of the experiment are illegally dropped into the swamp, where S.T. lives. He soon finds out a trail of desert sand in the swamp, with animals turned into crystal, and meets a crystal monster, being chased away. Sally Broder and a group go to the swamp to clean up and try to find Nat's body, stumble upon S.T. (and shoot him). S.T. then finds Nat while he is able to regain his consciousness, but realizes he's turned evil and power hungry. Nat then turns S.T. into crystal and finds Sally. Phantom Stranger tries to warn her of the danger, but he is also turned into crystal by Nat.</p>	<p>The issue was written by Dan Mishkin and Drawn by Bo and Scott Hampton, guests to the title. They also author the subsequent issue. The lack of the usual profusion of characters and long-lasting plots make the story much more organic, and easy to follow. S.T. has uglier features in this style, with a hunchback and more prominent vines – it suits him nicely.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #15 – Empires Made of Sand</i></p>	<p>At Broder Electronics, Nat starts enacting a plan to become an unstoppable force in the world of information, since his metamorphosis turned him into a living computer, with a brain full of micro circuitry. S.T. goes back to normal due to the biorestorative formula and tries to exit, but stumbles on Nat trying to murder an employee (Peter) who learned of his intentions and is not prone to cooperate, and has to fight him again. Sally is warned of her husband's disposition by Peter, and is reluctant to believe it – until Nat arrives, smashes another crystal employee and uses</p>	<p>Last issue with Dan Mishkin and Bo and Scott Hampton. The action is direct, and the presence of the Phantom Stranger, who appears again and again (despite being turned into crystal last issue) is not far a take from the normal <i>modus operandi</i> of the character, who usually works as a moral compass in the adventures, and only</p>

	<p>his power to turn Peter into crystal as well, all in front of her. S.T. catches up to them and helps Sally escape, and Phantom Stranger appears to convince Sally to use her synthesizer's vibrations to smash her husband's crystal body – which she does, while S.T. fights him. Sally takes S.T. back to the swamp.</p>	<p>steps in to help the resolution of the plot, unflinching with a lesson to the reader in the end.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #16 – Stopover in a Place of Secret Truths</i></p>	<p>After a re-telling of the character's origin, S.T. digs up his former wife's (Linda Holland's) body, Heathcliff-style, but finds her grave empty. He is back with Tremayne, Barclay and Kripptman, and they decide to take on Sundercorp, in order to be able to live normal lives (impossible with the corporation on their heels). S.T. goes out of the car and scares a local woman at a roadside motel, and has to run away. After a while, he saves a boy from a car falling into a precipice, and the boy's neighbor invites him to their boarding house. Nobody in the city seems to notice S.T.'s appearance, and his host (Cyrus Harmon) offers him a mask for the soul – a mask that reveals a person's soul and hides the appearance. S.T. then looks like Alec Holland again, and he develops a romance with the Harmons' daughter, Mallory. Meanwhile, Tremayne, Barclay and Kripptman are at the motel (where they are waited upon by Abigail Arcane, apparently, but that is not mentioned) waiting for S.T. And, at Sundercorp, Gen. Sunderland still will not give up killing S.T. At the mysterious city, S.T. has a rival for Mallory's love, Frank, and decided to leave rather than living a lie. But as he approaches Frank, S.T. finds out he is a monster. They fight, and, despite Mallory tries to intervene, S.T. has to kill Frank to protect her. The rest of the city appear to invite him to stay, and it turns out everyone has a similar mask, and everyone is deformed in some way. Mallory refuses to take of her mask. S.T. thinks about staying, but desists thinking that he would not want Mallory's pity – and at the end she takes off her mask to reveal a normal face. S.T. goes back to the motel.</p>	<p>Martin Pasko comes back to writing the title, this time with art by Stephen Bissette and John Totleben (with the art that will continue through to the first editions of Moore's work). S.T. develops spinal bumps in his back, and more widespread vines through most of his body, and also looks taller (smaller head and longer limbs). The art is full of hatches and exaggerated expressions and features, making the comic feel more intense and emotional, not aesthetically pleasing – which is fit for a horror comic. The insertion of the previous run's characters again places a strain in the narrative, which has to follow several parallel plots. Neither the monsters nor the masks are explained – what can be considered an improvement given the previously offered explanations.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #17 - ...and Things that Bump in the Night</i></p>	<p>Arriving, S.T. meets Abby Arcane, and learns she is Abby Cable now, having married Lt. Matt Cable, his old friend. S.T., Tremayne and Barclay go to Abby's house, but are attacked by a monster with the intent of killing Barclay. S.T. faces the monster, who goes away. Apparently, Abby and Matt have been seeing these apparitions frequently. Soon the visitors learn that Matt Cable became a shadow of his former self, an alcoholic with deep mental problems, who at first refuses to believe S.T. is there (seeing that the last time Matt saw S.T. was when his mirror was blown up, and believed him dead). Then S.T. recalls his history with Matt, and we learn he and Abby may also be targets or Sundercorp. Matt recognizes Barclay – who gave him electroshock therapy under Sundercorp instructions, leaving him in his current state. Abby is attacked by a giant centipede who proceeds to attack Matt, but S.T. intervenes. Soon Matt has an episode of <i>delirium tremens</i> (which is weird</p>	<p>Though the number of characters is practically doubled, the story is presented in a less confusing way, perhaps because the author has restrained himself to two different parallel sets of actions through most of the book. The return of Matt, Abby and Arcane is a dive into the previous iteration of S.T.'s lore, and also a development of the fictional universe of the second volume, since all of these characters were absent. Again, no explanation is offered to the monsters (though the episode with Matt and the floating</p>

	because he's been drinking the whole time, and episodes are reserved for the detoxing alcoholics), and all of them are attacked by strange creatures and floating eyeballs. Meanwhile, through the edition, Dr. Krippman falls into a trap in the woods and is approached by a strange dragonfly-looking helicopter, ending up kidnapped by S.T.'s antagonist Anton Arcane, in a bizarre insectoid body, and his un-men.	eyeballs suggests they may be connected). Matt also reveals that Linda Holland's body was taken by Sundercorp, for an autopsy, which revealed something.
<i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #18 – The Man Who Would Not Die</i>	As S.T., Tremayne, Barclay, Abby and Matt are attacked by the flying monsters, Krippman meets Arcane, with an insectoid lesser half, who tells him the story of his last encounter with S.T. What follows is, staggeringly, the almost full reprint of <i>Swamp Thing Vol. I, #10</i> (June 1974), except for the worms in the last panel, preceded by two pages and one panel drawn by Bisette and Totleben and followed by one panel and a page. The rest of the edition is a reprint of the original art. Arcane is preparing Krippman for a metamorphosis, supposedly unto a un-man.	The tradition of reprints is established in the series – Moore would improve on that later on, bringing the monster's tradition to a full circle by incorporating the original 1972 story into the second volume of the creature's lore. Other than that, the issue does not further the plot at all.
<i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #19 - ...And the Meek Shall Inherit...</i>	The monsters disappear and Matt, seemingly capable to conjure one from scratch to help save Abby from a fire started by their attack, concludes he is the one creating them with a power due to the effect of his electroshock therapy. Barclay and Tremayne are stranded in the woods and end up hooking up. Meanwhile, Arcane starts to convert Krippman into a un-man, after explaining him how he got the grotesque body he wears (in a way that conflicts with the previous issue). They then proceed to capture S.T., Matt and Abby. Arcane's plan is still taking possession of S.T.'s body and convert Abby into a un-man (or un-woman, that is not established). But Krippman is able to reverse the energy of the transformation, short-circuiting his connection with Arcane and killing the villain. Seriously. S.T. and Abby jump from the dragonfly-helicopter and land in the swamp. S.T. then goes to check if Arcane is really dead.	The <i>deus ex machina</i> way in which the adventure is solved is highly artificial – and the mix of science and mysticism is made yet more prominent by a discussion between Krippman and Arcane (Krippman, funnily thinks Arcane's idea of science is ridiculous). After this issue, Alan Moore takes over the role of writer of the title.

Table 2 - Swamp Thing, Vol. II: The Saga of the Swamp Thing #01-#19

In what appears to be an editorial decision motivated by the low sales, seeing as both iterations of the title shifted radically their plot styles previously to a cancellation – and the title was due for cancellation soon when Moore took over (selling 17.000 copies, according to PARKIN, 2013, p.145), the plot seems to change towards the characters and conflicts of the previous volume of the series, with the introduction of several characters that were long absent and even the reprint of a full issue. The character's evolution seems somewhat stunted, as if Swamp Thing is trapped into his own cycle, incapable of change: eventually, he'll get back to the swamp, disillusioned by mankind and, coherently, at the same time searching a way to become human again. Always facing a company of some sort and meddling with every sort of alien invasion, demonic possession, psychic phenomena or advanced-science-mutant-

insect-hybrid-wizard-villain. The appearance of the creature and general art shifted to something more exaggerated, dark and unnerving, with a style that prominently featured deformed expressions and a wild imagination for monsters (some of which had the mandibles stuck to the torso), though the general tone of the series remained largely a mixture of superhero and campy horror styles.

2.4 SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING #20 TO #36

In issue #20, Moore takes over the series, wildly re-imagining the character. The following table will summarize the title run up to that point, which is the beginning of the story arc *American Gothic*, that finishes in *Swamp Thing* #50 (July, 1986) with the story (very aptly) entitled “The End”, the main object of this study. So, in this section, Moore’s take on the character is the main focus – of course, without understanding the character and how the previous creators dealt with him, it would be difficult to establish a term of comparison that allowed the reader to perceive clearly these distinctions. So, hopefully, just as the metaphorical rocky road of the title finds a smoother ground with Moore’s writing, the reader will also be able to understand the difference in treatment. That is a necessary step to determine what Moore did differently from his predecessors – and will be the grounds, along with the analysis of the narratological structure of the text, to a conclusion on the role of tradition in the work, and how Moore employs it to his service in the title.

Following the table with the summary, a brief analysis of the main differences perceived in the character’s treatment will be done, and further developed later in the narratological decomposition of the story elements.

Issue/Title	Plot	Formal Aspects/Relevance
<i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing</i> #20 – <i>Loose Ends</i>	S.T. goes to the crash site to check if Arcane is really dead, and finds out Kay is dead as well. In the meantime, General Sunderland (retired), head of Sundercorp, decides to order a hit on everyone in the team, because they are the only ones who know the connection between the corporation and the D.D.I. (a branch of the CIA). Lizbeth and Barclay, stranded in the road, find a hotel, not before having a fight (Barclay held romantic feelings towards Liz, but she didn’t feel the same). Abby and Matt are in their shack, and also a little stranded. Matt is now able to control his powers, able to create things from thin air, but does not tell Abby this. Then	Wild as the idea of a Swamp Thing may be, the fact that Sundercorp’s men are the antagonists, and not led by a mutant, robot or otherwise superpowered being is oddly believable. The pages are framed by decorations and symmetric elements, reminiscent of tryptics – generally, they develop an ‘artsy’ look by using elements commonly found in Art history. S.T. launches a long comparison between he and the soldiers and

	<p>the Sundercorp teams strike. They blow up Liz and Barclay's room in a roadside hotel (they escape, traumatized – Barclay starts hallucinating with Vietnam and Liz is unresponsive), and Abby and Matt's shack (they weren't inside, and also escape). S.T. finds himself surrounded and is attacked by multiple soldiers, explosions and fire, and finally falls down, apparently dead.</p>	<p>a beetle being assaulted by an army of ants. This simile is also unusual in its length and apparent irrelevancy – until it finds the precise spot in the narrative to represent the soldiers and Swamp Thing. There is a more cohesive feeling to the story.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #21 – The Anatomy Lesson</i></p>	<p>Jason Woodrue (a.k.a. the Floronic Man, a villain, plant-human hybrid from the DC Comics universe) is wondering if Sunderland fell into his trap and remembers the last days, in which he was called to Washington to perform the autopsy of S.T.'s cold body. He did what he was asked, and found out the organs of S.T. were not functional, only looked like vegetable versions of human organs. That confused him, until he developed a theory: like planarian worms, which can learn their way through a labyrinth by eating another worm who knows the way, S.T. was a plant that had absorbed Alec Holland's consciousness. Sunderland is not happy, and threatens Woodrue. Woodrue then uses the computers to trap Sunderland into the building and leaves S.T. to defrost – a bullet cannot kill a plant. S.T., waking up, reads the reports and realizes his situation. During a mental breakdown, S.T. murders Sunderland and then escapes.</p>	<p>The story begins <i>in media res</i>, and is told by recollections (analepsis). The conscience (or lack thereof) of Woodrue is the voice filtering the narrative, and so the reader can understand his puzzlement (along with his despise for Sunderland, and how offended he feels in being treated like a servant – and also his curiosity and wonder at studying S.T.). The important revelation that S.T. was never Alec Holland is made. Also, the dark task of the autopsy is very meticulously presented. Once again the title gains a horror atmosphere, distancing itself from superhero tropes.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #22 – Swamped</i></p>	<p>Abby and Matt find S.T.'s body rooted in the swamp. Close by is Jason Woodrue, who explains to them what happened to S.T. and that the character has been lying there for three weeks due to a psychological breakdown. Woodrue, meanwhile, has been studying the creature. S.T. is having a highly allegorical dream which is a re-telling of his origin and symbolic of his coming to terms with the new information he has about himself. In the dream, which is full of wordplay, he is marrying Linda amidst his friends and she dies, he then dresses in a mud suit (S.T.'s form) to get her back, but disappears inside it. He then carries Linda to a group of planarian worms eating Alec Holland's body, and they leave him only his humanity (represented by the skeleton). S.T. has to leave Linda to carry it, but all his enemies appear and want a piece of it, tearing it apart. S.T. manages to run, but gets tired and lies down, absorbing the remains of his humanity. Meanwhile, Jason Woodrue, who has been experimenting with and even eating pieces of S.T.'s body, finds a way to connect with the plant realm, touching every plant on the planet with his mind. Abby talks to his body and tries to bring him back, and is also very concerned with Matt, who is behaving in a way that terrifies her.</p>	<p>The dream sequence is not only filled with wordplay, but also verbal cues that S.T. is conscious of what is happening (dislocated words, mainly references to vegetables and plants and other elements of the plot, unusually placed – acting like Freudian slips). In a way, what it is doing is re-interpreting the entire S.T.'s run in order to place the new information, and turning the history of the character into a journey in which he gradually loses everything that is important to him, up to losing his humanity. Besides the allegorical nature of the dream, there are also significant focalization shifts in the narrative, from Woodrue (his experiments) to S.T. (the dream) to Abby (her concerns and attempts to wake S.T.). Bearing in mind that this is something that was not usual in the title until the beginning of Moore's run.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #23</i></p>	<p>The action begins with S.T. feels Woodrue's presence in the Green, but is unmoved.</p>	<p>Again, despite the omniscient narrator, who frames most of the</p>

<p>– <i>Another Green World</i></p>	<p>Woodrue, having gained control over plant life, kills some teenagers in a car, and goes on to the city of Lacroix. Abby finds the corpses and is attacked by plants. Woodrue first destroys the public buildings of Lacroix, demands a witness to film his <i>ultimatum</i> to the world, then kills most of its citizens, on camera, by locking them up in their homes, stimulating the production of oxygen in the domestic plant life and waiting for a spark. Abby, being attacked by vines, reaches S.T., still rooted, and he awakens in time to help her (despite telling her that he wasn't Alec, as she thought), and goes after Woodrue in order to stop him. Woodrue's message reaches a neighboring city and (despite the content is unknown to the reader) the man who saw it, after calling Washington (forwarded to the Justice League), goes to his house and kills all the plants. S.T. finds Woodrue in the final page, demanding him to stop.</p>	<p>action through the third-person narration of several characters' viewpoints, the first-person narration of S.T. is added to bring the character's feelings about his past and current situation into the foreground. The peculiar recordatories associated with the protagonist, filled with suspension points and segmented speech, sometimes dripping, which will become a trade mark of the comic, start in this edition. Two other noticeable devices are used to deepen the characters' backgrounds: small details about random characters' lives and the alternation between scenes, adding the impression of synchronicity to the narration.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #24</i> – <i>Roots</i></p>	<p>The issue begins with the Justice League receiving and watching Woodrue's <i>ultimatum</i>: end Mankind in order to leave the world to the Green. The superheroes are unsure on how to react (S.T. is already there, though, confronting Woodrue). At first, Woodrue thinks S.T. is there as his ally, and even offers him sacrifice. S.T. attacks him, but Woodrue, controlling plant life, is too powerful and S.T. is buried under a collapsing building. The Justice League cannot think a way to stop him (stop all the plant life in the planet), and nor can Abby and the citizens. Woodrue is about to kill Abby with a chainsaw when S.T. saves her again, breaking Woodrue's arm. When asked for the reason, S.T. tells Woodrue it is because he is hurting the Green – infecting plant life with his madness. Realizing the truth, Woodrue loses his connection with the Green, and goes insane in the process, running to his hideout just as the Justice League arrives. He tries to disguise himself as human in a hurry, but is horribly disfigured and out of his mind, so they take him to Arkham Asylum. Abby gets to know the new S.T., who is happy to be alive, and himself. The issue ends with S.T. raising his arms to the sky, a Christ-like figure, looking peaceful.</p>	<p>The story arc of the last three issues comes to an end, but, atypically, not through conflict – it is the realization that Woodrue was actually not an avatar of the Green (an archetypal planetary conscience, made out of the entire network of plant life), but an intrusive presence that would end up unbalancing the ecosystem. There is no hate in S.T.'s expression during their fight. Also, the first person narration by Woodrue as the Green abandons him and he goes insane (which is emotional and impressive and confuse) shifts to S.T.'s 1st person narration as he comes into terms with his new, vegetable self as part of the swamp (and maybe the contrast between the madness of animal life and serenity of plants) is significant, making it look like the greatest struggles in the issue were internal.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #25</i> – <i>The Sleep of Reason</i></p>	<p>A mysterious stranger (Jason Blood) arrives in Baton Rouge and makes a couple of bizarre predictions, buys a print of a Goya's painting and checks in at a hotel. Abby tells S.T. that she's beginning a new job in the local center for autistic children, and tells him of Paul, a child obsessed with spelling and afraid of an imaginary creature named the 'Monkey King'. Progressively, as the action moves forward through scene shifts between S.T.'s thoughts walking in the swamp, Abby and Matt, Paul's memories and Jason Blood's actions (plus</p>	<p>The story is held together by the Goya's painting <i>A Sueño de la Razon Produce Monstruos</i> (A Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters) <i>motif</i>, presented in the beginning and linked to the resolution of the mystery, where the monster (the Monkey King) is released by Paul's sleep and feeds off the other children's fear. There is also connection between different scenes through</p>

	<p>unrelated scenes of Baton Rouge citizens at a sales event), the reader notes that Abby's marriage is not going well, and that Matt is hiding bizarre powers from her. S.T. is uneasy about something he cannot properly define, but links to the coming of the Autumn. Also, through Paul's memories and Jason Blood's investigation, the origin of the Monkey King is revealed: it was summoned by Paul's parents (killing them subsequently) through a Ouija board, and linked itself to the boy. It turns out the auction is actually of Paul's parents' possessions, and the predictions of Jason Blood (that Harry Price, the salesman, was going to be impaled by a swordfish, Mr. Corelli is going to jail for manslaughter and his wife Selena wasn't buying the lawn chairs) come to fruition at the end, when Jason Blood and Abby meet.</p>	<p>synchronical text that establishes a relation between different scenes. Synchronicity is also present in a different way: the stranger (Jason Blood) arriving at the city, Abby's new job, S. T.'s unrest about the Autumn, Paul and the different people of the city seem to be unrelated, until they all get together in the end, after we learn of the summoning of the Monkey King through Jason's investigation, in the accident with the swordfish, predicted in the beginning and which connects Abby and Blood (and later S.T.), presumably to fight the monster.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #26 – ...A Time for Running...</i></p>	<p>S.T. and Abby run towards the center for autistic children in order to save them, and Abby's recollections show how she was warned about the danger by Jason Blood and didn't believe him at first, but as the center was in distress and all the children had drawn monstrous white monkeys, she is convinced. Abby seeks Matt for support. Matt, who is drunk and resented with Abby's lack of attention to their marriage, didn't want to get involved, so Abby goes to seek S.T., who was already on the case, having felt the disturbance through the behavior of Nature about him, and that takes the plot back to the beginning of the story. When S.T. and Abby get to the center, the Monkey King is already in action, shape-shifting into each child's deepest fear in order to drink their horror. As they get in, Etrigan, the demon, arrives (Etrigan and Jason Blood share the same body – the DC Comics' character has a complicated origin in which Merlin bonds the demon to Blood) to help. Matt decides to help Abby, after all, but, being drunk, drives the car into a tree in the end of the issue.</p>	<p>The story begins <i>in media res</i>, with the characters running towards the source of the evil and the story of how they got there is told through analepsis (so, in a way, there is also a feeling of a prophecy being fulfilled, like last edition). The plot dives into psychological horror as the fears of the children find links in their lives' experience and trauma, rather than being merely monsters. The arrival of Etrigan lends a different rhythm to the story, not only because the he speaks in rhymes, but also because the focus of his elucubrations is the evil in each human, so he's a living counterpoint to the innocent/guilty narrative. S.T. is also able to 'feel' the evil, a power that he had not displayed since.</p>
<p><i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #27 – ...By Demons Driven!</i></p>	<p>Etrigan rips through the ceiling to confront the Monkey King along with S.T. During the usual physical fight (which proves difficult, since the Monkey is a shape-shifter), Abby grabs Paul and takes to the swamp, leaving the fight to the monsters. Meanwhile, Matt is dying in his wrecked car but receives the visit of a monstrous (and talkative) insect. Etrigan chases Abby, with the intent to kill Paul in order to sever the Monkey's connection to Earth, but is stopped by Abby and S.T. (who went after him). Abby again runs with Paul leaving S.T. and Etrigan fighting, but the Monkey finds them. Matt allows the insect into his body in exchange for his life (a demonic possession of sorts). The Monkey attacks Abby, but is stopped by Paul, who is able to break the creature's influence by refusing to be afraid any longer, and Etrigan</p>	<p>This is another issue in which the physical confrontation does not solve the conflict of the plot, but it is rather a change in the resolution of one character that brings the story to fruition. This is going to become a trope with the following issues, with the title slowly shifting into psychological horror. Both Matt's accident and Etrigan's warning (with the reader already knowing that something is very wrong with the end of the story) are an example of a clever use of focalization, employing the omniscient narrator in order to give the reader knowledge that</p>

	arrives just in time to swallow the shrunken foe. Etrigan then leaves, warning Abby of another demonic presence, and S.T. and Paul return to the Elysium Lawns school, talking about how they both were afraid (an endearing moment in which S.T. shows vulnerability). By the end of the issue, Abby is walking down the road and Matt picks her up in his car, as if nothing had happened to him.	the other characters don't have to increase narrative suspense and end the edition in a cliffhanger. Etrigan/Blood's predictions help bring the plot together and provide the reader with a clue of what's coming next – more demons. Or next to next, to be precise.
<i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #28 – The Burial</i>	S.T. is digging a hole in the wet ground, and remembers a conversation with Abby, where they talk about the arrival of the Autumn and how Abby and Matt seem to be patching up their marriage when S.T. sees a ghostly version of Alec Holland – and follows it. This ghost leads S.T. to the barn where his (Alec's) story began. S.T. remembers his (that is, Alec's) intimacy with Linda Holland and Alec's death. The story is narrated by the digging monster, with flashbacks (analepsis) to Alec's story in several moments. S.T. sees a ghostly Alec drown in flames, and a ghostly copy of himself point in a direction, where in investigation S.T. finds Alec's bones. S.T. then buries Alec Holland's bones (hence the digging in the beginning).	This is a <i>filler</i> issue, meaning there is another artist (Shawn McManus) with a cartoonish style that does not match the dramaticity of the plot (an issue that Moore would fix through his script in later filler stories). That also means the plot does not advance significantly, but is rather a retelling of S.T.'s origin and his coming to terms with the idea that he is not Alec Holland, only has his memories. S.T. seems to be more connected with Nature and Abby and Matt's marriage seems to have changed.
<i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #29 – Love and Death</i>	Abby is shown crawled into fetal position, clearly traumatized, after bathing and scrubbing herself bloody to get rid of 'the smell'. She remembers a dialogue with S.T. (where he says he got into terms with being called Alec) and Matt buying a house and getting a job at a firm called 'Blackriver Recorporations'. Matt took Abby to the firm and introduced her to the staff, comprised of four more people, including Sally Parks, a woman with a distinctive spot on her face. Abby has a glimpse of the staff as corpses but it fades. Her and Matt go home and make love, and she dreams of S.T. finding a bird moving and a smell. She then goes to the library for a book about autism (for her work in Elysium Lawns) and finds a book about Sally Parks, a homicidal maniac shot by the police two decades earlier. Then she begins to understand Matt's strange behavior and Etrigan's warning, in a sequence in which the pages go increasingly filled with insects and larvae, as the reading proceeds. Realizing Matt was not her husband (after making love several times) she bathes and burns her clothes and tries to get out of the house, but Matt arrives with the staff from Blackriver, and is revealed to be Arcane, Abby's uncle. They capture Abby as S.T. finds a bird moving in the ground and reaches for it, only to discover that it was full of maggots (which makes him realize Abby was in danger).	The story is told (again) by recollections, this time framed by Abby's viewpoint, which gives the reader insight into the character's uneasiness. Insects are a trope that represents both S.T.'s antagonist, Arcane, and Death in the issue. The wordplay between the anagrams 'insect' and 'incest' is also present throughout. There is (again) the idea of dream and waking up to reality to create narrative tension, as glimpses of the nightmarish reality insinuate in Abby's dream life, and the multiple references to smell bringing a whiff of synesthesia. The issue is filled with flashes to real life, innuendos and wordplay about death and decomposition that only can be fully understood in the end. The conflict between the inner world of the character and reality (and which is which) dive into psychological horror once again. And, once again, the link between Swamp Thing and Nature is introduced as a visual metaphor related to the swamp ecosystem.
<i>The Saga of the Swamp Thing #30</i>	The issue begins with waves of evil energy spreading from the epicenter of the conflict	Moore again uses sudden shifts in setting to suggest a causation

<p>– <i>A Halo of Flies</i></p>	<p>(‘Matt’ and Abby’s house) spreading to neighboring locations, influencing horrible events (a boy decides to burn a wino, a wife to kill his husband, a cat to sit on a baby, a guide dog to attack, a cow to give birth to something deformed). Arcane uses the undead to hold Abby down, while he tells her how he died and went to hell but his soul was able to escape it and possess Matt’s dying body. He then reveals that Matt was also a psychic, with reality-bending powers, but squandered his gifts with alcohol and sexual fantasies. Arcane just waited and influenced the events (helping bring forth the Monkey King and convincing Matt to drunk drive) to possess his body. The floor swallows Abby and the couple of following pages once again gives insight into the effects of Arcane’s newly acquired evil powers (a caretaker decides to injure her sick sister, two children wait to burn a cat in the microwave oven, tropical fish commit cannibalism, a ladybug plague infests a city, muffled voices come from the earth, terrible lights are sighted beneath the ocean). The effects are perceived by another DC character, the Monitor, who cannot interfere but places the waves’ source as being supernatural and in the level of some of DC’s most powerful beings. In Arkham Asylum, Woodrue has a fit and the Joker stops laughing. Arcane then gets out as it starts snowing, to face Swamp Thing. After recognizing Arcane and being informed of his enormous power, S.T. refuses to ‘dance’ for him, but has to go on after knowing that Arcane had Abby. A third journey into neighboring settings tells us that Arcane’s undead are loose in the world and ready to resume their killing sprees and that everything evil within 200 miles headed for Louisiana. Then S.T. enters the house and finds Abby already dead, as Arcane laughs.</p>	<p>relationship between the evil waves and the several horrible happenings, which places the main plot in the center of an event of increased significance (for interfering with the lives of everyone in reach of these waves), and again provides the reader with a feeling of synchronicity. Upon meeting his antagonist in possession of immeasurable power, S.T. asks the obvious question ‘if you are so powerful, why not kill me instead of going through a complicated plot to do the very same thing’ – therefore questioning a reoccurring trope in superhero comics. S.T. does not want to fight, and is only obligated to do so once he hears that Abby is captive. The presence of the Monitor in the comic is a prelude to a very significant event named <i>Crisis on Infinite Earths</i>, that engulfed the entirety of the DC Universe and reformulated many characters and continuities – S.T. and Constantine did not take part in the main conflict, but rather dealt with the mystic repercussions of the main event. The issue contains a hint of the Brujería, the enemy that will eventually bring forth the sleeping Evil which is the antagonist in the issue analyzed here (it is in p.11, the booming voices underground).</p>
<p><i>Swamp Thing #31</i> – <i>The Brimstone Ballet</i></p>	<p>S.T. picks up Abby’s body and struggles his way out of the house, followed by Arcane, who, in possession of extreme powers, keeps taunting his enemy. Arcane reveals to S.T. that Abby is currently in hell, and that when he came back, he brought some of the damned souls with him (the undead serial killers Sally Parks, Gus Pritchett, Betty Montclair, Mark Newell and Eric Loveday) to announce his Apocalypse to the world. S.T. keeps running with Abby’s body in his hands, with Arcane telling him it is useless. The Monitor is again shown, fretfully witnessing the happenings. S.T. thinks how everything fits together, the subtle clues given that announced the situation, which were ignored. Then he arrives at a green patch of earth and announces to Arcane that that is his place of power, that Arcane is in his territory, and punches him, hurting the villain. Surprised, Arcane cannot come to grips with how he can</p>	<p>Major change: the title of the publication changes to <i>Swamp Thing</i> (with the elision of <i>The Saga</i>). Issue numbering is unaltered, though, which is a strange editorial decision. The final confrontation is primarily anticlimactic, since (again) an internal struggle is ultimately what sets the fate of the villain, and his demise is also, ultimately, due to his own actions –the waning of the villain’s stolen power due to the unexpected exertion of the battle with S.T. and his ability to control Matt’s soul is responsible for his ultimate defeat. Yet, by the end of the adventure S.T. has not also</p>

	<p>be hurt if S.T. has no magic, but the monster reveals he is an elemental (and therefore a powerful magical force). S.T. then proceeds to beating the living crap out of Arcane, and, as the villain weakens, Matt's consciousness takes over his body, sending Arcane's soul once again to hell. Matt's body is still badly hurt from the car crash, but he decides to try to save Abby instead of himself with what he had left, succeeding in healing her body, but not in getting her soul back. Matt then falls unconscious, and S.T. puts his body near the road, where a police car finds him and picks him up to try to take him to a hospital in time. S.T. is left with Abby's body, alive but empty.</p>	<p>arrived at a victory, by any means. The final words in the story mirror the first ones, hammering the point that Abby's dead, whether or not her body is alive. There is also the confirmation of S.T.'s status as an elemental force and, as such, the hint that he is very powerful in his supernatural capacities. The insertion of the Monitor a second time in the plotline also hammers a point: that S.T. is tied to DC Comics' universe, and is <i>in tandem</i> with the synchronical storyline to come.</p>
<p><i>Swamp Thing Annual #2 – Down Amongst the Dead Men</i></p>	<p>S.T. is mourning Abby, and decides to try to follow her with his newly discovered supernatural/elemental powers. He lies down and concentrates, immersing in the Green's consciousness, but this time goes further. He arrives at a misty place that is an antechamber of death, and there finds Deadman (a DC Universe's ghostly superhero). Deadman guides S.T. to the gates of heaven, where he finds Phantom Stranger, who enters heaven with him. There S.T. finds Alec Holland, who thanks him for burying his remains and informs him that Abby is not there. The couple then takes the road to hell, and meet the Spectre in the way, as he is the guardian of the gates, apparently. Phantom Stranger is able to convince the Spectre to let them pass in their attempt to rescue Abby (seeing as the Spectre, another powerful mystical being of the DC Universe, had died as Jim Corrigan, a human cop, and had been resurrected himself), and they proceed to Hell. As they approach it, Etrigan appears. Taking a flower from the gates of heaven as payment for the 'tour', Etrigan agrees to guide S.T. to Abby. In hell, they pass some of S.T. former enemies, namely Sunderland and Arcane himself. They find Abby's soul and are able to pick her up and run away chased by demons, as Etrigan opens a portal that transports S.T. and Abby to the world. Abby's soul joins her body and she is whole again.</p>	<p>The issue, an annual (therefore a larger story) ends the arc. There are intentional symmetries with the classical tradition in the story, mainly the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and Dante's Divine Comedy. The idea of being guided through heaven and hell to find the idealized mate, meeting souls along the way has a lot of parallels to Dante (also the notion of the guide not being allowed after a certain point), while the idea of descending to hell to save the soul of the idealized mate has more in common with Orpheus (since Dante did not intend to rescue Beatrice). The trials of the hero are also particular, with the flower serving as the <i>obolus</i> given to Charon and an argument rather than a battle to pass the Spectre (as Oedipus answered the Sphinx's enigma). As always, there is no big fight at the end, and Moore manages to show his wide knowledge of DC's lore by placing the many mystical characters in the way.</p>
<p><i>Swamp Thing #32 – Pog</i></p>	<p>The issue begins with an alien crew, composed of cartoony animals, landing a turtle-ship on the swamp. The animals are looking for a place to settle, and go out scouting. The planet seems hospitable, until they stumble against a monstrous creature (S.T.), speaking a strange language. They subdue the stranger and go on exploring, but S.T. wakes up and the guard sets him free and tries to engage in conversation. Through drawings he explains to S.T. that they were happy in an animal world, but monkey-like animals took over and started corrupting the planet, so they left to find a new one. S.T. then</p>	<p>This issue has many interesting aspects, but is mainly a filler issue, in which Moore decided to put to good use the cartoony style of the artist (Shawn McCannus, the same who drew issue #28) and pay homage to the comic strip <i>Pogo the Possum</i> (as indicated by the title and the animals). Though the language of the animals is clearly English, the words and verbs are mixed and use unusual roots to convey</p>

	<p>takes the alien near a hamburger stand and shows him the primates eating meat. The alien is horrified and realizes that that world was taken as well. They leave, but (meanwhile) an alligator-like alien decided to go for a swim, found real earth alligators and tried to play with them. S.T. and the alien hear the screams and S.T. jumps in the water to rescue the body of the dead alien from the animals. They all join to bury the dead companion, say goodbye to S.T. and leave to space again.</p>	<p>their significance, so it seems very strange, almost a different language. S.T.'s utterances are shown in unreadable squiggles (since the story is told from the viewpoint of the aliens, S.T. is, logically, the one who speaks an incomprehensible babble). No other character appears, nor the plot advances in any significant way.</p>
<p><i>Swamp Thing #33 – Abandoned Houses</i></p>	<p>Abby is sleeping and dreaming. In her dream, she gets to a gate leading to two big houses on twin hills, by a graveyard. There, she meets Cain and Abel, the keepers, and they ask her if she wants a secret or a mystery. Cain is the keeper of the House of Mystery, and Abel of the House of Secrets. Abby chooses a secret, mainly due to Abel being nice, and he escorts her into his house. He picks up a bracelet, which is really a circular story (so he tells her) and starts telling the original 1971 story of S.T., featured in <i>House of Mystery #92</i>, which is reprinted in full in the next pages. Abel then tells her that Alec Holland was not the first S.T., and that in times of dire need, the Earth creates a champion. So the creation of the S.T. was not an accident. Having learned the secret, Abel tries to run away with Abby, so that she can pass on the information, but they are caught by Cain, who objects to his brother's intention on the basis that a secret cannot be spread, under penance of losing its secrecy. Cain kills Abel with a stone and, after revealing that they are the biblical figures, eternally punished for being respectively the first predator and the first victim, sends Abby into the waking world, where she tries to record the information she had in the dream, but forgets it before getting it written.</p>	<p>This is yet another filler issue, with art by Ron Randall (which is realistic, full of deep shadows, complex drapery and adequate to the ambience of the story). The reprinting of ready-made pages suggests (correctly, as it was made explicit later in interviews) a problem with the regular art, and another artist rushing to fill up the void. But the story does a lot more than filling up a publication gap – it actually unifies the two disparate origins of S.T. into the same universe, and it also brings back into the DC Universe the keepers of the two houses that were the old mainstream DC horror titles: <i>House of Mystery</i> and <i>House of Secrets</i>, in new positions, as keepers of stories. The idea that S.T. was intentionally created to fight for the Earth in a time of danger also furthers the plot (despite the absence of S.T.), helping to explain the character's role and supernatural status.</p>
<p><i>Swamp Thing #34 – Rite of Spring</i></p>	<p>Abby is visiting Matt (who survived in a comatose state and is unlikely to recover, according to his doctor) in the Hospital, but is eager to go back to the swamp. Later, in the company of S.T., she confesses that she loves him (S.T.). The monster, in turn, confesses that he has loved Abby for a long time. They kiss, they walk together a little, and S.T. tries to come up with a way (other than sex, which is 'impossible') for himself and Abby to commune. He grows a tuber from his substance, containing a part of his consciousness, and Abby eats it. What follows is a couple of pages of what can be described as illustrated poetry, in which Abby is contaminated by S.T.'s conscience and sees the world through his supernatural and demi-vegetable perceptions, as a web of interlinked systems. Abby also sees herself through his eyes, and realizes how much he loves her. When the effect passes, they</p>	<p>The issue picks up the story pretty much from the point where the Annual issue left, with the exception of the reader (not the characters) having been made aware of the existence of other previous iterations of S.T. The fact that the monster now has a love interest, with a sexual (or similar) component is a huge deviation from the lore, and an interesting device that helps humanize the character even further. The communion with Abby is shown as illustrated poetry, and has similarities with Moore's synchronic narrative shifts (sudden shifts in setting and focus on different aspects of nature). The lack of (physical)</p>

	decide to become a couple. The issue ends with a kiss.	conflict or any sort of intense action. The conflicts are internal.
<i>Swamp Thing #35 – The Nukeface Papers, Part I</i>	S.T. and Abby are lying in the swamp when newspaper pages fly around. A couple of hobos, Nukeface and Bob, light a fire in a wood to drink around, and talk for a while. Nukeface seems drunk and delusional, keeps calling the other (Bob) ‘Ed’ and says he is from Pennsylvania. He offers the other man his drink, and Bob is poisoned. Oblivious to Bob’s slow painful death, Nukeface keeps talking to him, and tells him of Blossomville, Pennsylvania, where a coal fire is burning for years, until he had to leave the town. And, in Blossomville, a couple (Wallace and Treasure Monroe – Treasure, incidentally, is pregnant) look around the ghost city. Wallace is troubled because of a mysterious ‘dump’ (nuclear waste) in the burning mines, which were abandoned. Wallace suspects the existence of Nukeface, having listened some kid utter the name. Back in the woods, Nukeface is fixing the newspaper fire and telling Bob, who is paralyzed and losing his teeth, that he found the dump in the mines and got drunk on the waste, until the dump was closed. Since he heard they were taking it to Louisiana, Nukeface followed the trail on foot, obviously, killing everything in his path. S.T. dreams of Blossomville, and knows something is wrong. He leaves Abby and goes look for Nukeface, who is telling the dead Bob that, as an American, he is convinced of the need for ‘nuclear fishing’ (nuclear fission... it took me a while) for winning the Cold War. A couple of men drop waste drums into the swamp, talking about how Wallace is coming to town. Nukeface says goodbye to dead Bob and goes on to find the dump, and is desperate that the waste is buried in the mood. S.T. arrives at this moment, and (calling him ‘Ed’ as well) asks for help, but his touch burns S.T., who screams and falls down. Nukeface tries to help him, making things worse. As a last resource, trying to help S.T., Nukeface shares a drop of his waste with him (making things worse) and starts telling S.T. about Pennsylvania.	The issue is filled with newspaper clippings, invariably related to nuclear energy and waste. They surround S.T. and Abby in the beginning, are the material of the fire Nukeface builds. The clippings form a <i>motif</i> that is going to be developed further in the next issue, which concludes the ‘adventure’. Blossomville is obviously a (poor) disguise for Centralia, Pennsylvania, in which a similar coal mine fire is happening since 1962. Firmly grounded in the American political scenario, Nukeface is a self-proclaimed ‘proud American’, and comes to symbolize an aspect of the country, drunk with nuclear power and oblivious to the poisons it pours in the environment. He is also not a villain so much as another victim of the toxic dump. Clearly out of his mind, there is no intention behind his killing spree – he is mostly trying to be a good chap to his friend Ed, whoever Ed may be at the time, and even shows concern at times. Nukeface is a Typhoid Mary of sorts, carrying forth a disease he seems to be resistant to (inadvertently, in his case). S.T.’s comics had, even in Moore’s run, touched the subject of preserving the environment in a very roundabout way, with the opposition between the swamp and the city, but this sort of direct referencing is new to the monster’s lore.
<i>Swamp Thing #36 – The Nukeface Papers, Part II</i>	Swamp Thing is dying, surrounded by newspaper clippings. He cannot move, so he just stands there for an entire day, slowly melting away, until Abby comes and he tells her he has a (unspecified) plan, and dies. Officer Bernhardt was looking for Bob, and sometime later Monroe comes with a strange story about his wife being taken by a monster, and they find Bob’s body. Monroe cannot stand Treasure’s eyes and starts running, and, as he does, he remembers how it all started – he was walking about when he found out about Bob’s disappearance, similarly to Blossomville, and later he heard children talking about Nukeface,	The story is told through multiple characters’ points of view, each accounting to the facts they were involved in, so the narrative keeps resetting itself to the point the events started (which vary from character to character). Slowly the reader can form a patchwork idea of the entire story – which the characters are unaware of. So, despite the characters’ view do not completely make sense, in the whole they have the entire

	<p>so he knew about the hobo-killing monster. He was obsessed and went looking for it (in vain), but when he got back home later Treasure had gone for milk. Worried, he went to the police and they started looking for her. After a while they found her, but she told Monroe what she had been doing, and he broke and started running away. Mrs. Morel (Bob's former landlord) recognized Bob's body and felt guilty for throwing him out. Treasure couldn't understand why Monroe was running from her, she just went out for milk and got lost. In the woods, she found Nukeface unconscious and stood with him, and covered him with her coat and said a prayer for him, then she left and found Monroe. Unaware she had been poisoned with radiation, she is confused. Billy Hatcher, a local kid, tells his peers how he met Nukeface and made a mask to play, and how he found out about Treasure being in the hospital and Nukeface's body never having been found. Abby wakes up from the slumber the previous day, goes to work but is worried about S.T. She starts to look for him, evading a search party, and finds him just in time to hear what he has to say. S.T. is going to send his mind to the Green and try to build a new body, but is not sure it will work. Then he dies. Nukeface wakes up, is confused about what transpired, but has new energies now, is decided to follow his 'stash' and find more of the good stuff he likes to drink. His final words are 'heads up, America, here I come!'</p>	<p>picture (that is, a very clever use of focalization). The use of motifs is prominent in this issue as well. Again, newspaper clippings related to atomic waste dumps are used both in unifying the multiple viewpoints and mold an overhanging setting, where radiation leaks and illegal dumps are part of the everyday reality of the country, bringing these themes to the front. Nukeface, the dim-witted and intoxicated but loveable (?) hobo with a taste for toxic waste refuses to mend his ways, or even acknowledge them, and plans to continue ambling about in the country he loves. The symbolism is completed with a final page in which the character is completely surrounded by newspaper clippings, turning his presence into a statement about the perils of nuclear waste and the necessity of caution when it is relatively easy to get intoxicated with the cheap short-term gains of nuclear power. S.T. is destroyed, with a plan to grow himself back, something that hasn't happened yet in the creature's lore. No conflict and (specifically) no win in the plot.</p>
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Table 3 - Beginning of Moore's run (*Saga of the Swamp Thing* #20 to #36)

The first thing Moore does on taking over the title is killing the protagonist and scattering all of the main characters, in a story ironically entitled *Loose Ends* (Vol.II, #20, Jan.1984). Though the changes Moore's run brought to *Swamp Thing* will be discussed further in the narratological analysis of the comic, as a term of comparison with other authors' treatment of the same subject – and, therefore, as a means of understanding Moore's unique features –, some changes were immediately noticeable and will be posited here, so that the reader can get a grasp on what may have helped to turn the title, in line for cancellation, into one of the most popular in DC Comics.

The first clue lies, metalinguistically, in the very first (page-length) panel of his run (see image below, along with a comparison between the physical appearance of the character in the first panel and after his *metamorphosis* a little further in the plot, relevant because depicted by the same artist, therefore indicating the purposefulness of the change), where the creature appears surrounded by ghostly, misty forms of the several protagonists and antagonists of the title, while he destroys, like Samson, the columns that frame the panel he is

in (which look like Mayan tiles covered in vines, with the names of the creature's creators and the staff involved with the issue). This is, symbolically, what Moore will do in the next editions: dismantle the structures that support the fictional universe of the comic and rebuild them (and, incidentally, kill or scatter every one of the characters surrounding Swamp Thing in the panel – some to be killed more than once – during the next editions).

The creature confirms Arcane's death (and Kriptman with him, though Kriptman is named by his *alias* Harry Kay in this story). General Sunderland orders the group's assassination, and Lizbeth and Barclay, after an attempt on their lives by Sundercorp men, go into hiding. Abby and Matt continue in the swamp. In the end of the story, Swamp Thing is shot to death by an entire platoon of Sundercorp men. And that takes care of tying the *loose ends*, leaving the slate clean for Moore to enact his change.

After a haunting edition in which the autopsy of the main character is meticulously performed, the reader finds out that Swamp Thing had *never* been Alec Holland, after all – just the swamp vegetation that, with its unique chemical composition and the bioregenerative formula, consumed Alec Holland's body and absorbed his consciousness, creating a body similar to the human shape because it *remembered* being human. So, all the hope of the character regaining his humanity was lost (funnily, because the character had regained his humanity before, but that is left unexplained), Swamp Thing experiences a mental breakdown, grows roots in a catatonic state and, when he rises again, he is conscious that he is not a human – and has connected with the Green, a shared worldwide vegetation consciousness (think Gaia, the spirit of the Earth, but focused on vegetation, not on animal life). This transformation is reflected in the character's appearance, which went from a grotesque human shape covered in vines to a vegetable mass, as the figure below indicates:

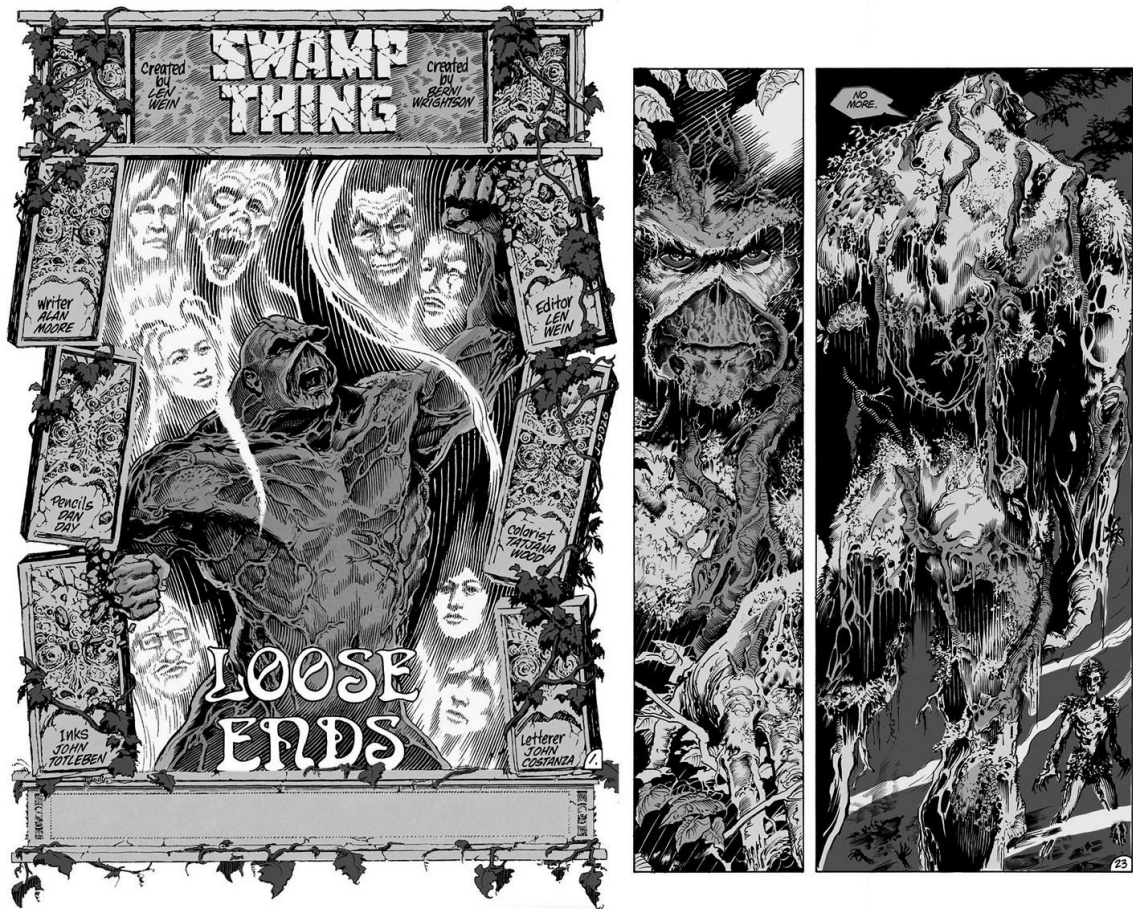


Figure 4 - Shades of Green (*Saga of the Swamp Thing* #20 p.1 and #23 p.23)

Another important marker is that the *text boxes*, or *recordatories* (as opposed to *speech and thought balloons*, representing the text with its origin depicted in the panel, pointing to it explicitly), which usually presented an omniscient narrator's considerations, now shift into first person narrative, a selective point of view framing the narrative. In every edition subsequently, a different character is the purveyor of this voice, while the omniscient narrator is free to comment on other character's viewpoints and settings. The reader now can identify with and gain more insight into the inner life of a character, and still have the all-encompassing voice as a guide to the other aspects of the narrative universe. In issue #20 that voice is Swamp Thing, then in issue #21 it shifts to Jason Woodrue, the villain that performs the autopsy and steals Swamp Thing's newfound powers, up to issue #23, when Swamp Thing provides the voice. Issue #24 has Woodrue again briefly, as he loses his mind, then goes back to Swamp Thing for a closure and the voice is Abby Cable's through to issue #27, guiding the reader through her life and her work in the orphanage and the problem with the demon(s). The framing goes back to Swamp Thing while he buries Alec Holland's body in issue #28 and then it steps back, during the horribly haunted issue that brings back Anton

Arcane, now in demon form (#29). The next issue (#30) is framed by Anton Arcane, mostly through direct speech (indicated by quotation marks – Anton apparently likes the sound of his own voice). Issue #31 is framed by Swamp Thing, who faces Arcane after Abby's death. Next issue is actually the Swamp Thing Annual #2, framed by Swamp Thing, who goes back for Abby's soul in hell, finding out about his mystical elemental powers in the process. Issue #32 is actually framed by an alien cartoon-like creature who arrives on Earth and meets Swamp Thing – with a very original voice and almost a distinct language. Issue #33 is framed by Abby again, as she dreams with the first adventure of Swamp Thing, with a full reprint of the 1971 original story. Issue #34 is framed by Abby's conscience again, in her first love experience with Swamp Thing. Issues #35 and #36 are framed by Swamp Thing, with the Nukeface Papers arc, which ends up with Swamp Thing dead, and then we are finally into *American Gothic* territory, and these will be dealt in more detail further on.

The framing of the narrative through the viewpoint of one character does not prevent shifts in focalization (they happen all the time), and Moore makes use of this resource to vary widely the setting of the comic on occasions, usually employing the recordatories as linking element between panels – that is prominently used to convey a sense of synchronicity, connecting different elements through a feeling of unity; for instance, throughout issue #30, when the narrative connects several cases of violence and demented behavior in different locations to the demonic influence of Arcane. The sudden shifts in setting are brought together by the overlaying narrative. Another resource of note explored by Moore is to vary the characters' speech patterns and voices (and in the case of characters with distinctive voices such as Swamp Thing, Arcane and the demon Etrigan, distinguish their recordatories and balloons from the others as well), both to mark their individuality, rendering them more clearly in the mind of the reader, and to differentiate between the narrative voices – so the character narrator and the third person narrator can coexist more organically.

Finally, the creature's life changed radically. No longer Alec Holland (though he eventually comes to terms with being called both Alec and Holland, since he has Holland's memories), Swamp Thing adopted the swamp as its home (and not a general location to which it got back by accident or because he wanted to explore the residues of the biorestorative formula, for instance). Eventually, he developed a love interest (Abby Cable, née Abby Holland, for they eventually perform a ceremony of sorts and marry, though not officially or legally in any way – the distinction is significant because Abby being accused of 'bestiality' and taken to court is a future plot point, though not covered in this study), together with a sex

life of sorts. Being connected to the Green also granted him control over plant life, and he developed a wide range of powers later on, as he learned the mystical side of his nature (a plant elemental, guardian of the Green) during the *American Gothic* arc, the last story of which is the focal point of this study. That led to a character that fit its setting a little less awkwardly than in previous versions (the setting being a DC Comics book, in which superheroes seldomly arrive at their adventures unwittingly falling off produce trucks), with plots that fit organically into each other and were not brought forth by an unbelievable series of unrelated accidents. That is, though *Swamp Thing* remained a comic in which the main character spent most of his time ambling about in the middle of a swamp, the new version of this character had a life – while the old one only hoped to find a way to get his life back. It is another perspective entirely. Which is, arguably, pretty much what Moore intended when taking over the character, if we are to take seriously George Khoury’s book-length interview with Moore, *The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore* (2003), in which, describing his impressions of the character, said:

I think at one point I described him as being very much like Hamlet covered in snot – that this was a character who really wasn’t that physically appealing and just walked around feeling sorry for himself most of the time and getting involved in supernatural malefic occurrences, more or less by accident. (MOORE, 2003, p.86)

By the beginning of the new arc, we have a more well-rounded, multidimensional character (not in the ‘comic book’ sense of multidimensional, by the by), involved in adventures not centered in action but in psychological horror, with a rich personal life, a girlfriend, a recognizable speech pattern, living in an explicit location (the swamps near Houma, Louisiana), still learning the full reach of his powers (along with the reader). Oh, and, incidentally, dead. This is the setting where *American Gothic* begins, which brings back the lore of the previous iterations of the character in a new, exquisite way, taking into account American tropes to create a new, different, horror atmosphere.

3. AMERICAN GROWTH

This chapter will dig into the arc *American Gothic* with a little more depth than it did with the previous issues of *Swamp Thing* (this being the story arc that leads to the apothecotic ending, object of this study), beginning with a brief analysis of the title (and the literary genre that inspired it) and proceeding in a reading of each issue with following comments and a special attention to character construction, as well as an attempt to trace parallels with the title's tradition and lore.

The story arc began to be published in June 1985, in *Swamp Thing* #37, and extended until *Swamp Thing* #50, the anniversary issue, published in July 1986, going on longer than a year and totalizing 14 issues in total. The arc is comprised of 8 different storylines: it begins in *Swamp Thing* #37, with Swamp Thing's 'rebirth', where he regrows his body and meets the English wizard John Constantine, who promises to give him insight into his newfound powers in exchange for his help with a series of supernatural occurrences, which will mount to the 'final' battle between Good and Evil fought in the last issue. After the regrowth, the next two issues (*Swamp Thing* #38 and #39) go back to the flooded town of Rosewood, where mutated vampires try to establish their society under the muddy waters. These issues are followed by *Swamp Thing* #40, with a story about a submissive housewife who changes into a werewolf. *Swamp Thing* #41 and *Swamp Thing* #42 focus on a group of undead slaves who rise to stop the curse on the house where a film crew is making a production about a slave owner. In *Swamp Thing* #43 a character named Chester finds one of Swamp Thing's tubers, takes it home to study it, and ends up giving two pieces away as a potential drug – which seems to have different effects based on the character of the person who consumes it, and which are linked to Swamp Thing's experience (and lore). *Swamp Thing* #44 focuses a serial killer named The Bogeyman. That is followed by *Swamp Thing* #45, with a story in which the main character is the Winchester haunted house, in California, poorly disguised under 'Cambridge' house, and also connected to a gun. *Swamp Thing* #46 is a tie-in with *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, a storyline famous for completely changing the DC Universe, and it is about how the entire planet is a chaos, in which time is scrambled, and it is revealed that Swamp Thing will not fight with the heroes, but face the supernatural waves of the conflict instead. In *Swamp Thing* #47, Swamp Thing travels to the Amazon Jungle to meet the Parliament of the Trees and find more about his role as a plant elemental, also being told by Constantine of the *true* enemies they are facing, a conclave of witches called *La Brujería* (in a Spanish speaking

Amazon, apparently). *Swamp Thing #48* shows the fight with the *Brujería*, in which they are betrayed and fail to stop the message that will wake the ultimate Evil. So, they have to prepare for the conflict. *Swamp Thing #49* shows the preparations for the final battle, in which Constantine gathers several occult characters from the DC Universe and Swamp Thing travels to the Underworld again, joining the armies of both Heaven and Hell to face the Ultimate Evil (not all demons are on the side of Evil, surprisingly). The last issue of the arc, *Swamp Thing #50*, the anniversary issue with the story “The End”, which depicts the final conflict and is the main subject of this study.

3.1 SWAMP THING #37 – GROWTH PATTERNS

Throughout this issue, S.T. regrows his body, destroyed by Nukeface in the previous edition. It starts with a small seed near an empty soda can (which dwarves the plant in the beginning), in a process that takes 17 days (which are numbered in the pages). During the first two days he is not conscious, and all we see the growth of a generic plant that we assume it’s S.T. simply because it’s shown in detail in the panels, as most plants aren’t. Abby is waiting for him to manifest. Meanwhile, a mysterious man named John (Constantine, who is going to be a key character throughout the arc) meets a *punk* woman (Judith) at a club and warns her that “he is coming back” (MOORE, 1985, p.2), only to be corrected – what is coming back is not a ‘he’, but rather “a massive extragalactic *energy field* that got drawn into a *black hole* eight billion years ago” (idem), and that it will arrive in a year or less. In the third day S.T. (who extended two anthropomorphized leaves on the sides of the shoot, reminiscent of a torso and arms), grows conscious, and realizes he did not die. He feels the earth and the sun, and concentrates in growing. Abby finds him the next day. John meets Benjamin, a stereotypical nerd (an overweight young adult with thick glasses, sweater over social shirt and tie, a stutter, braces, a straight fringe haircut, who lives with his mother in his overcrowded room, filled with books), who tells him that the great Cthulhu is coming back in a matter of twelve months, and that after that there is nothing written about the future in his charts. During day 6 Abby starts to take care of S.T., who has grown to the size of a tuberous fist, sinking his ‘arms’ into the ground, and he realizes that he has to develop his vocal apparatus to communicate with her (she doesn’t know what she is doing and needs guidance). He does so and develops a little mouth orifice in day 7. Day 8 comes (he is already a mossy mass with

roots and eye sockets) and John (here we find out his surname) is talking to a nun, who is supervising a group of kids in what appears to be a church, also talking about this something that is coming. The sister tells Constantine that it is Satan who's coming back, and that he'll arrive in less than a year. During day 9 S.T. develops his eyes and Abby has fit of nervous laughter, relieved to know he would be fine. Day 11 brings Constantine, in the studio apartment of a pink-haired artist (Emma) who is drawing a monster with a human form, but with the head turned to its back and a hand sewn to the torso. They are talking about how the South American people intend to bring 'him' back – that they would need to increase the belief of the entire population to do so, and that they would use the “classic frighteners” (p.11) to do so – that is, classic monsters from popular culture...werewolves, vampires, zombies, etc. During day 12 S.T. considers the changes he's been through, how he has regrown his body without the help of the biorestorative formula, and how his newfound knowledge is changing him. The next day Abby leaves his side to drive to work, only to be surprised by Constantine in her back seat (the previous panels featured a conversation between John and Emma explaining that John was travelling to Louisiana to meet a woman, who turned out to be Abby). She then leads him to S.T., where Constantine tells him that he can give him information about what he is and what he can do, serving as a guide of sorts. During their conversation, silent panels showing Emma drawing the monster are shown, and also panels with the nun, Judith and Benjamin. As they talk, and John tells S.T. to meet him in Rosewood in a week's time, Emma is attacked by the monster she was drawing. It throws her out of a window, while the other characters (Benjamin, Judith and nun) have seizures (which shows the reader that they are psychic). During day 17, S.T. is already uprooted, and thinking about where does he know the name of the city from.

3.1.1 Narrative Analysis:

Of narrative significance in *Growth Patterns* there is the use of the circle as a structural element of the page, which serves to focus the reader's attention (due to it being unusual in comics, where the rectangle/square form is ideal in terms of space, and most widely used) in certain panels. The thickness of the panel borders is also used to separate the different narrative instances, while the superposition of the dialogue over the limits of the panels (sometimes dialogue from different settings, as in the image below) is employed to create the impression of simultaneity. There are instances (i.e., and notably, page 21) where

the image from one panel bleeds into the one next to it, establishing a hierarchy and lending dynamism to the pages.

The parallelism of the narratives (in this case, the regrowth of S.T.'s body parallel to John Constantine's travels trying to investigate the arrival of this unnamed threat, Satan, Cthulhu or energy field) is a reoccurring technique, not only in this series but in several of Moore's other works, and it also lends a sense of simultaneity (and when multiple simultaneous narratives meet at one point this gives the reader the impression of synchronicity) and dynamism to the narrative. The different interpretations of the upcoming danger by the characters helps establish them (along with their names, though Moore may have been a little heavy on the clues on that front, giving the characters symbolic names that can be true spoilers to their personalities – and even to crucial plot points, especially in the case of Judith).

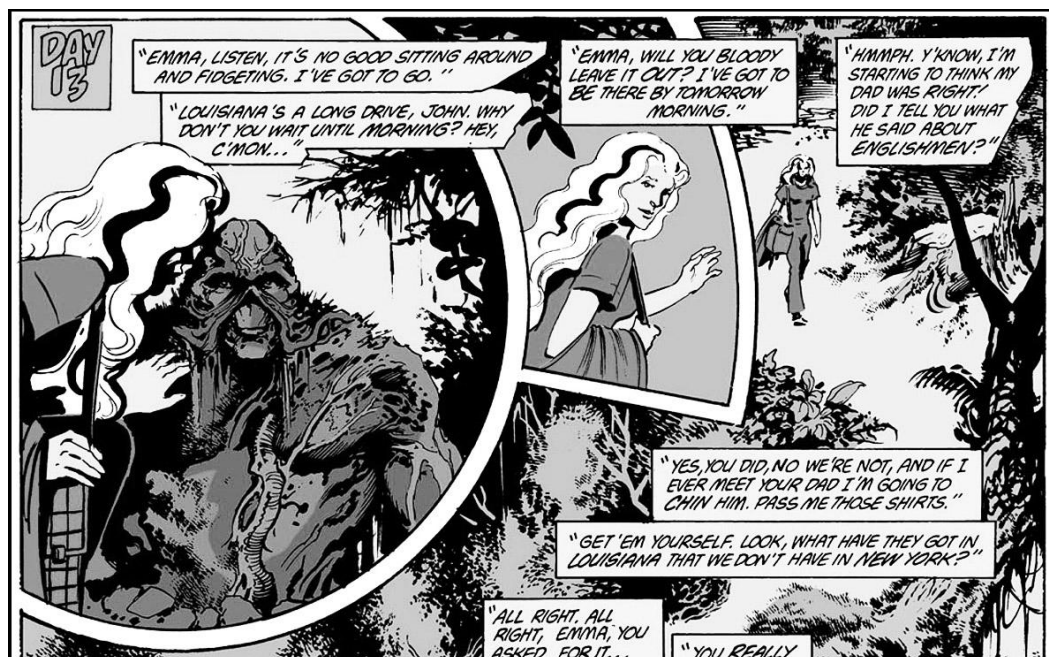


Figure 5 - Circle as structural element and superposition of recordatories (*Swamp Thing* #37, 1985, p.13)

The issue is intended to set the stage for the *American Gothic* arc by linking all the different adventures (yet to be lived by S.T.) to a common enemy, namely *La Brujería* (though we do not know this yet, at this point there is only an unnamed group in South America) by using 'classic frighteners', like vampires and werewolves and zombies (allowing the reader to infer that 'frighteners' refers to widely known monsters, deeply ingrained in the world's culture by different narratives and works of art). The plot serves to imbue the following issues with a sense of unity (since all the adventures are connected) and structure.

This idea also signals to S.T.'s origins and first adventures, where the monster fought analogues of classic monsters as well. This link becomes stronger with the next adventure, which is set in Rosewood, Illinois, and is a direct consequence of S.T.'s adventures in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #3*, where the flood caused by the explosion of the dam submerged the city, liquefying the invasion of *punk* vampires.

3.2 SWAMP THING #38 – STILL WATERS

S.T. says goodbye to Abby and sets in his journey to meet Constantine at Rosewood. Meanwhile, a group of five boys (Ronnie, Bill, Leon, Howard and Nick) strolls into the woods to bathe in a body of water (over the ruins of Rosewood). They play around until one of them finds out the water is full of leaches, and they quickly get out – except one (Nick), who grows pale and apathetic all of a sudden. That is because he is being attacked by several vampires, submerged in the still waters and protected from the sun. The boys, seeing something under the water, run away scared, abandoning their friend. The vampires, after draining the boy, dive to the ruins of the city. S.T., travelling through the Green (the morphyic field containing all plant life on Earth), remembers where he'd heard of the city before, and how the flood killed the colorful strain of punk vampires that once rose there. As S.T. grows his new body, Abby is pensive – her colleagues attribute this to the state of her husband, Matt, who's alive but comatose. Meanwhile John Constantine is drinking at a bar, with a heavy conscience after Emma's death (especially because she'd asked him to stay before being attacked), with a biker friend named Frank. Another biker calls Constantine a 'fruit loop', and Frank practically begs for the (apparently wimpy) Constantine to let it go, which he does (not before inadvertently breaking the glass he was holding and bleeding a lot, which scares the other biker). Back in Rosewood, the boys confer and decide not to tell anyone about what happened, but Howard (one of them) does not accept their attitude and wants to go back to rescue Nick. In the deeps, the vampires who drank Nick's blood visit a she-vampire, rotund and massive, who is in a flooded dark room, surrounded by snacks and candies. There, they take her (whom they call 'the bride' – formerly Charlene, a supermarket attendant) a rotten bridal veil and cut their palms for her to drink Nick's blood from their veins. Then they carry her out to meet 'death and extasy'. As S.T. raises from the soil, having finished growing his body, it is revealed that 'the bride' harbors within her what the vampires refer to as 'the new

generation'. S.T. meets Constantine near the waters, and the Englishman tells him that when Rosewood was flooded, the vampires in the airtight freezers of the supermarket were spared, and that they were constituting a society in the depths, ready to reproduce. Howard, goes back to the water to meet Frank, but the boy is not turned into a vampire, and with others ambushes the former friend, who is dragged into the water. In the deeps, the vampires perform a strange ceremony, where the tribe dances around the bride and the groom as they breed – the bride lays an enormous amount of eggs, amidst convulsions, as the groom fertilizes them; the process exhausts them and they dissolve in the waters, like salmon, while the eggs immediately begin to glow and, soon, hatch. Warned about the danger by Constantine, S.T., frustrated with the lack of answers to his questions, goes into the water to fight the vampires.

3.2.1 Narrative Analysis

The story works prominently with parallel settings, sometimes intertwined, sometimes with overlapping dialogue (the multiplicity of voices possible is one of the reasons that makes employing the structures of the *meganarrator*, *reciter* and *monstrator* profitable), up to three at a time (during Howard's attack). Recordatories give voice to a multiplicity of viewpoints, sometimes with faint separation between them. A wide array of visual narrative resources, prominently the panel shapes and borders (which are sometimes a lot thicker, sometimes with irregular edges and usually not in the rectangular shapes that are characteristic of the medium), helps to set apart the different narrations. Once again, the idea of converging actions is brought forth, but this time not taken to term – while it seems that the 'spawning' ceremony is the center point of the plot (the most important thing), the convergence, where all elements meet, is postponed to the next issue, the story ending in a cliffhanger where S.T. goes on to face the vampires. There is no physical conflict, and the several different narratives (S.T.'s, the group of boys', Constantine's, Abby's and the vampires') interact beautifully to give the reader a broader understanding that the characters themselves lack.

Of particular significance in this issue is the employment of motifs, analogues and visual metaphors not only to convey meanings, but also to make at least (unclearly as it may be) one full argument. Beginning with the insertion of the leeches in the water, just as the vampires attack Nick (underwater bloodsuckers) and continuing on the very next page, by showing a fish with a parasite attached and then, as the vampires dive into the depths, panel borders illustrated with deep-sea life, with abundant teeth and spikes in their carapaces, not very dissimilar to the presentation of the vampires (who were *punk* youngsters – that was an

invasion of *young* vampires, originally), with their prominent teeth and claws, and their haircuts reminiscent of spikes and/or dorsal fins. The argument goes on when Constantine tells S.T. how the virus that causes vampirism is anaerobic (doesn't like oxygen), even to the point of suggesting that wooden spikes kill vampires because they expose their bodies to the air (p.18, panel 4) – therefore, water is a more inviting environment to vampires, and one where they can breed, adapt and create their society. Finally, the vampires reproductive process is compared to (and probably inspired by) that of salmon, including the laying of eggs and the death of the exhausted adults after fertilization. That serves to associate the characteristics of vampires with deep sea lifeforms, and reinforce the possibility of their mutation into egg-laying, aquatic beings. There are also other similes developed through the book, such as a bat hunting a moth while Howard attempts to rescue Nick (and being hunted by a predator is precisely what happens to Howard). The bridal veil as a gift to the female vampire also helps to reinforce the idea that they are building a society by emulating a marriage ceremony (the constitution of a family being one of the basal stones of a society). The travels of S.T.'s consciousness through the Green are developed into a motif (geometrical forms with strong, saturated line colors and vegetable structures in minute detail are used consistently to convey the idea of a different sensorial experience). These details and narrative stances serve to aggregate meanings and diversify the reading experience without prejudice to the narrative fluidity – that is, despite the details are there, their identification is not crucial to the understanding of the story, so we have a narrative that can be read in many levels.

3.3 *SWAMP THING* #39 – FISH STORY

The issue begins with the parents of the group of boys pressuring them into telling what happened to Howard and Nick. This is intertwined with the vampire ceremony, with one common theme (with S.T.'s thought recordatories): the importance of children to a community. Bill tells the adults where they left Nick (Howard having gone to his rescue later), and they get into their cars to look for them, as S.T., under the still waters, enters the drowned city of Rosewood, wondering how in this instance he is a monster who is there to destroy a community. Soon he is surrounded by vampires. By the margins, Howard is still alive, tied upside-down to a rock, and Nick is next to him, explaining the former friend that the vampires kept him alive to serve as the first meal of their brood. S.T. fights the vampires,

who soon find out they cannot win against him and decide to lure him to the birth place, so that their brood can face him. He follows them to the stadium where the ceremony is taking place, and gets there just as the eggs start to hatch. Meanwhile, the parents of the boys get to Rosewood and find Nick and Howard. S.T. watches the hatching of the eggs, which beget strange, fish-like creatures that instantly start devouring each other, growing in size until in a matter of seconds only one is alive, already grown. S.T. goes on to face it, but the creature gracefully distances itself, then comes back with full speed, ripping S.T.'s body apart in several pieces (and failing to devour him, as vampires do not eat plants). As the monster goes to find other food source, S.T. lets his conscience merge with the Green once again. The parents of Nick and Howie go on to free them, despite Howard's warning that Nick is not himself anymore. Nick then attacks his mother and drags her into the water, to everyone's surprise, just as the brood arrives at the surface. The monster quickly kills Nick's father, while Howie is freed. They run away, but Bill's father (Osgood) stays behind to shoot the creature, being killed as well. As they get into the car to run away and the vampires carry the carcasses of the murdered parents into the water, S.T. starts to flex his muscles. He built a gigantic body, surrounding the entire lake, and his movement makes the waters run and join the nearby river, running in a lower terrain. As a result of the running water, the bodies of the vampires dissolve. The car with the parents barely avoids the current, but they manage to get away. Later, Constantine appears in the resurfaced ruins of Rosewood (filled with vampire carcasses), and congratulates S.T. (who is now able to grow an entire body in 51 seconds), but says that he did a mess out of everything, because the parents that escaped the flood were going to tell everyone, and their enemies would have achieved their goal of spreading the belief in vampires and the supernatural deeper into the minds of the population. He then tells S.T. to meet him in Kennescook, Maine, in two weeks (once again refraining from teaching S.T. more about his identity as an elemental, to the frustration of the protagonist), makes an off-color joke to a corpse near a bus stop and goes on into the distance, back turned to the reader, laughing.

3.3.1 Narrative Analysis

Superposition of narrative instances, often related to one another, as in the case presented in the first page of the comic, where the panels where the vampires and the parents both try to protect their children (the vampires by actually generating them, the parents by searching for the missing kids) are superseded by S.T.'s recordatories, commenting on the

importance of children to the community. The vast array of panel forms employed, instead of the traditional rectangular panels (which, again, optimize the space of each panel and helps the reader to follow the narrative order more fluidly), destabilizes the reading into a complex experience, where the size and composition of the panels, along with the superposition of elements, matter. Once again round panels are used to focus the attention of the reader (due to their uniqueness) and either set the stage for the next setting (which happens in page 6, where the last panel is a circle containing the stadium where the hatching of the vampire's offspring is taking place) or to call attention to the main element of the page (as in page 9, where the elements converge to an open panel, surrounded by arcs, in which the monstrous offspring is shown for the first time). This is often, as mentioned, superseded by recordatories, with differently focalized narrative impressions (by S.T. *and* by the vampires, which gives the reader insight into *both* monsters' mindframes, each seeing the other as the monster) about the action that transpires in the panels or somehow related to it, directly or symbolically. There are also moments in which the actions are not specifically framed by a conscience – speech balloons and actions in the panels – with an unnamed narrative voice, seemingly impartial. This myriad of instances requires closer attention from the reader, when following the narrative. When a narration calls attention to itself (metanarrative), the reader is being led into a questioning stance. In this case, led through a dialogue between opposing views of the action, and asked to ponder about it. The Manichean view is thus broken – the issue is not merely about a hero fighting a nest of vampires, but about the destruction of a community as well. Notably in page 19, where the vampires are dissolving, and the narrative voice (supposedly expressing the collective thoughts of the vampires) asks why they had to be destroyed if the only thing they wanted was a home to call their own, to live and to raise their children.

There are significant changes suffered by S.T. as well. Now not only able to regrow his body very fast, but also to grow in different sizes, to the point of embracing the whole (sunk) town of Rosewood. The speech pattern of the monster is abundantly used to describe his impressions, punctuated by reticence, which are supposedly a reflection of the character's difficulty to speak – which makes no sense in a submerged character who is not uttering a word. This resource is used to give the impression of a particular *voice* to the character (stylistically speaking), with a distinct speech pattern and vocabulary, but also makes the approximation with the poetical tradition, reticence being akin to pauses, which are akin to structural breaks in poetic verses – a resource which will be used thoroughly through the arc.

It is also noteworthy that S.T. is not involved into the rescue of either children nor parents, but merely there to fight the vampires, with a deep sympathy for them. That throws into question the role of the hero, and if S.T. is indeed one, or merely another monster, with bias towards mankind.

3.4 SWAMP THING #40 – THE CURSE

The issue starts to the (ironic) sound of Moon River, in a store where a housewife (Phoebe) thinks about how women's lives are "punctuated with blood", and how the Pennamaquot women were locked in menstrual lodges during their cycle, considered impure, as she buys groceries, which include a package of 'Feminex', sanitary napkins. As she passes by advertisements of women's products and an adult store, she thinks about a discussion with her husband (Roy) and how the native women might have felt while locked, in a phrase that is slowly completed through a page, then repeated, becoming a *motif*, "their anger in darkness turning, unreleased, unspoken, its mouth a red wound, its eyes hungry, hungry for the moon" (p.2). Meanwhile, S.T. is back in Louisiana, with Abby, and talk about his newly found powers and how they do not trust Constantine, how S.T. hasn't learned anything from him and how S.T. will not go along with his rules further than the following day, when S.T. will go to Kennescook, Maine, as agreed. In Maine, Phoebe and Roy are hosting a dinner for a couple of friends, and, as Phoebe serves coffee, they talk about how the house they live in was built on top of the Pennamaquot lodges, and how she'd been reading about them. She is invaded by strange feelings and a hunger for the moon, and Roy makes a remark about her eyebrows before bed. S.T. grows a body in the area, and immediately feels another elemental power, drawing him to its location. Roy arrives home at night, finds Phoebe outside, in a strange mood, and asks for dinner. When Phoebe is angered, the werewolf eclodes from under her skin, surprising Roy, who flees for his life. The werewolf chases him through (literally) their house, and, as he manages to exit through the back door, he finds himself facing S.T. Roy passes out as Phoebe/werewolf gets to him, and S.T. and her face each other. In his mind, S.T. hears the werewolf's thoughts, telling him that she is 'woman' and not to stand in front of her. He tries to protect Roy, but the werewolf is in its 'place of power' and too strong for him. The werewolf then turns to Roy, but it is incapable of killing him, destroying instead several properties of the couple (the greenhouse, the mailbox, the car). Still angry, she flees

and goes into town, destroying a bridal boutique, the adult bookstore and finally faces S.T. again. S.T. asks what she wants, and the werewolf answers (telepathically) that it wants to be free, which S.T. cannot help with. Realizing that she cannot get the freedom she seeks, Phoebe/werewolf goes into the supermarket and jumps on the knife display, being impaled by them. S.T. gets to her as she is dying (now turning into Phoebe once again) and Phoebe asks him to take her outside. He does, and she asks about Roy (who is fine) and dies, looking at the moon. S.T. leaves her under the moonlight. Later, Constantine arrives to give S.T. a paper with his next instructions, and the monster tells him they are done and it's going to Louisiana, to which Constantine promptly agrees (opening the piece of paper, S.T. realizes it says 'Louisiana').

3.4.1 Narrative Analysis

A crucial part of the issue, the symbolism that links the elements is beautifully constructed, through analogy (metaphor and metonymy), into a (somewhat complex) code. It goes like this: the Pennamaquot (an invented tribe's name, suspiciously sounding like a scrambling of 'I'm a quote [made by] a pen') women were locked in their menstrual lodges and considered impure. They craved liberty, during their cycle – or their 'moon', as the analogy between menstruation and the moon cycle (both lasting roughly 28 days) is also common in culture. Another moon curse is that of the werewolf – in which the victim turns into the creature during the full moon. What Moore does in the story is to establish an analogy between the menstrual cycle (which famously turns women cranky, due to the discomfort of the menstrual cramps) and the curse of the werewolf, where the woman turns into a werewolf during her menstrual cycle, when she is (according to the fictional Pennamaquot culture) unclean. Phoebe and Roy had moved to a house built where the Pennamaquot women's menstrual lodges once stood, and that triggered Phoebe's transformation. This transition is also shown iconically, with three drops of (menstrual) blood in several panels in pages 1, 2 and 6, gradually turning into a monstrous face, previous to Phoebe's transformation. The drops of blood and the sentence "their anger, in darkness turning, unreleased, unspoken, its mouth a red wound, its eyes hungry, hungry for the moon" (with iterations in p.2, 6, 7, 9 and 17), repeated and turned into *motifs* inside the narrative, are associated with the anger that causes the metamorphosis. But there is more than that – the werewolf's famed vulnerability to silver (part of the cryptozoological lore of the creature) is also mixed with the creature's soft spot for the full moon (where the metal's shine is used to symbolize the light of the moon).

So, we have a werewolf that craves silver (liberty, the outdoors, the moon), instead of avoiding it. Finally, the moon (and, by extension, silver) is turned into liberty, freedom – while in the lodges, the Pennamaquot women hungered for the light of the moon, as did the werewolf – and the Feminine principle as well, the light of the sun being masculine (page 17, which refers to the “masculine glare of the sun”). So, when Phoebe, uncomfortable with her cramps and constrained by the demands of her marriage (her role as the ‘good’ housewife), argues with her husband Roy, who is inappreciative of her efforts and troubles, she lashes out and turns into a werewolf – the final connection between the curse of the werewolf and the ‘women’s curse’ (no longer the Pennamaquot, but women in general). Angry with her constraints and unable to kill her husband (who she loves, after all), she leaves a path of destruction in her wake, but not random destruction – the werewolf destroys the greenhouse, the mailbox and the car (the environs, the address and their means of transportation, all elements that refer to a home – her ‘lodge’), and then goes on to attack other symbols of women’s submission: a bridal boutique and an adult books store. Finally, incapable of finding her freedom, she throws herself into a ‘paler version’ of the moon – the knife display at the supermarket, which ‘happen’ to be plated with a silver and nickel alloy, finding death, the only possible escape from her situation.

The complex symbolism of the story is used to argue that society is dominated by the male principle, which locks women in an unescapable trap, and only death could set them free. Internal focalization allows the reader a glimpse into Phoebe’s thoughts, which turn what could be seen as a creature randomly lashing out into a desperate, yet methodical, attempt to rebel against an overpowering structure. At the same time, S.T.’s impressions provide additional information about the nature of the transformation suffered by Phoebe – another elemental force. Or, as she thinks, in a (telepathic) dialogue that is not completely devoid of humor, “I am woman” (p.13, panel 7), the ‘hear me roar’ that would complete the feminist slogan and title of the song by Helen Reddy (1971) being left to the imagination of the reader.

Once again there is narration, made in recordatories that accompany the action in the panels. Those are focalized through the consciences of both S.T. (with his distinct and recognizable speech pattern and borders) and Phoebe (different pieces of a puzzle that allow the reader to understand the full story presented), as well as the unnamed narrative voice presenting the actions and direct speech in the panels. The composition of the panels is once again daring throughout the story, but used in a more significant way in pages 11 (in which the violence of the creature’s attack is graphically represented by panels with sharp edges and

filled with an overpowering howl, that extends through panels, encapsulating Roy in his failed attempt to seek safety), 17 (in which Phoebe, incapable of killing Roy, destroys every other reminder of her marriage he can find, in sharp panels with jagged edges that seem to rip the page apart) and 18 (in which Phoebe’s consciousness, as a woman surrounded by a bloody darkness and panels made out of broken glass, from the werewolf’s attacks to the stores, is the spatial and narrative center of the page):



Figure 6 – Composition (Swamp Thing #40, 1985, p. 11, 17 and 18, left to right)

In the issue there is no conflict that is determinant to the conclusion of the plot – what happens is that S.T. fails to stop the werewolf, who was another elemental force and in her “place of power” (p. 14, panel 3 – interesting to note that the idea that a mystic elemental force is stronger in their ‘place of power’ is precisely the reason given for S.T. being able to overpower Arcane in issue #31, as mentioned earlier), and the werewolf herself, unable to free herself from the binding situation (that is, kill her husband) commits suicide, no longer able to live under constraints. That is, an internal fight – once again. The epilogue, where Constantine mocks S.T.’s refusal to cooperate with his plans and decision to go back home (precisely where Constantine wanted him to be in the first place) also reinforces the idea of synchronicity in the story arc, as things seem to fall into place ‘by accident’.

3.5 SWAMP THING #41 – SOUTHERN CHANGE

The issue starts with panels presenting funereal imagery, from a coffin to a graveyard, to a house nearby. The images are superseded by recordatories (a voice-over of sorts) wondering about how the dead feel, in their slumbers, and if they talk and think about what goes above them. The next panels enter the house, and go to the basement, fixating in a post, and over them is a dialogue (with quotation marks, so we know they are voices) between Charlotte, wife of Wesley Robertland, who betrayed him with another man, who he regards lower than an animal, and Wesley orders him to be taken to the basement and flayed, while she watches (so we can suppose, by that and the style of the house, that the other man is their slave), putting to the test her theory that they are “no different beneath the skin” (p.2, panel 3). After a splash page with the title (in which the names of the creative team and editors all appears on gravestones), S.T. and Abby are talking about Constantine again, when Abby comments that there is a TV crew in town, filming a soap opera about the local plantations, and that local people are being hired to portray slaves. Abby mentions she is thinking about visiting the site to see the celebrities (Angela Lamb and Billy Carlton are named) and how she feels strangely about S.T.’s new powers. Meanwhile, in the plantation house where the soap opera is being filmed, the actors are inspecting the site, and Angela and Richard (the actor playing the slave boss) comment about Billy’s black power politics, with Angela sounding racist, which shocks Richard, but concluding that they are all in it for the money. Billy, on the other hand, is uncomfortable with Angela’s racism, but his manager points out that he needs the role, and that he seems strange and spacing out at times. S.T. and Abby stroll around in the swamp the next day, and Abby comments that she got a part-time job in the set, and comments that the actors seem to live in a parallel reality. Meanwhile, in the site, the rehearsals are not too good, since Billy and Angela can’t seem to get along, but suddenly Billy gets into the part of the enamored slave, begging for the discretion of his mistress, but calls the other character Charlotte, instead of Rebecca (as he should). Abby is casually telling S.T. about the celebrities when S.T. (also casually) finds a bird dying and places it inside him, to absorb it. In the set, Richard and Billy get into yet another discussion during rehearsal when Richard suddenly hallucinates turning into the slave master (which makes him perform well, to the director’s allure, only he calls the plantation Robertland, the real name, instead of the fictional Providence). S.T. nears the old house during a feast, and contemplates the graveyard and wonders about the dead. As the shooting grows near, Richard, who was anti-racism, starts demonstrating racist traits, while Billy and Angela (both racially bigoted) begin to get closer to each other, to the point of Billy mimicking the script and begging for Angela’s

discretion about his drug habit. Abby finds a colleague from the Elysium Lawns, who works in the kitchen, salting the ground around the graveyard, calling her ‘mistress’ and acting strange, and tells S.T. about it – he promises to revisit the place. In the set, Richard asks the director about Charlotte (mistaking Angela’s name), and is told she’s inside with Bitty. He gets mad about it, gathers two men and go look for her. Billy and Angela are inside the house, Billy feeling guilty without knowing the reason, while Angela hits on him. Suddenly they are calling each other ‘Charlotte’ and ‘William’, when Richard arrives. As S.T. and Abby arrive at the site and S.T. senses something is possessing the crew and the extras, as they dance around fires and kill chickens, Richard (who is being called Wesley now) hits Angela (Charlotte), as they start mimicking the dialogue in the beginning of the issue, and Richard (Wesley) sends Billy (William) to the basement to be flayed alive as Angela (Charlotte) watches.

3.5.1 Narrative Analysis

Under the narrative recordatories of the beginning of the issue (p.1), the panels tell a different story, as they take the reader from inside a grave (a completely dark panel) to the ground (the coffin wood breaking, the soil and then images from the graveyard) before entering the house of the plantation and focusing on the post where the slave was flayed. While the dialogue, recognizable through a different box color and quote marks, is relevant to the panels, their significance to the story will only be shown later – the panels show the abandoned house, while the action (the discussion between Wesley and Charlotte and the flaying of the slave William) is not portrayed. The action of this issue takes place between July 25th 1985 (the Feast of Papaogou), goes through July 26th (Mystère de Grande Saint Anne), July 29th (Offering of food to Maitresse Silverine and Offering of flowers to Maitresse Lorvana), August 25th (Communion table of Dan Wédo), the closing scene occurring in August 29th (Mystère L’orient). These festive dates of Vodun ceremonies are celebrated in Haiti¹⁴, the last mystery happening before Agwe, when offerings of goats, peppers and peppermint happen – what leads the reader to infer that what is taking place in the plantation, with the soap opera crew is somehow connected with Haitian mysteries and celebration. Reinforcing this idea, each page in which the dates are presented are decorated with *motifs* common to these specific celebrations, appearing symmetrically in the top of the page along

¹⁴ Information found in 06/21/2018, in HTML format, on the web address <<http://faculty.webster.edu/corbetre/haiti/misctopic/holidays/holidays.htm>>

with the first panel, usually in the form of a trapezoid with the wider side as the base, extending to the lower part of the page and exercising an organizing role. The *motifs* and decorations are recognizable both through being monochromatic (colored only in shades of blue), loose from panel constraints (loose on the page), symmetrical (mirrored on both sides, as decorations) and not an obvious part of the action.

Once again, the asymmetric structure of the panels offers a challenging, but very dynamic, reading – the superposition of panels and organization inside the narrative help to focus the attention of the reader and organizing the panel order. It is worth noting – and that is very prominent in this issue – the comparatively huge amount of text employed by Moore in the narrative, unusual in the medium, where the images can convey important part of the necessary information. The result is layers that delve into characters’ consciousness and present at times their versions of what is being presented in the panels, views that sometimes compete with each other (as in the case of the vampire society) and sometimes allow the reader a perspective of the scene that is not obvious through the images alone (the divagations of S.T. about the dead, for instance, or the idea of him being the monster in the previous issue). That is industrious to make the action both complex and complete, as the reader gets insight into different narrative perspectives, despite the characters remain ignorant of some of these aspects.

First of a two-chapter story, the issue constitutes a gradual mounting of narrative tension, directed to the climactic resolution of the story in the next issue, where the unavoidable zombies, prevalent part of the culture, will finally show up (I don’t believe that at this point, multiple references to Haiti and Vodou included in the story, the presence of zombies would be unexpected... especially in a story arc that seems to dwell heavily in very well-known horror traditions, such as vampires and werewolves – or, as Constantine calls them, the ‘classic frighteners’).

3.6 SWAMP THING #42 – STRANGE FRUIT

The issue begins with a page with five panels depicting a skeleton inside a buried coffin, with overlaying narration commenting how he could not sleep (in the last panel the skeleton is turned to its side). The dead rise from the graveyard, commune with each other, decide their common goal – or, as it is put in the last panel of page 3, “freedom from this

blighted soil, where buried grievances have poisoned the roots of the world and all its cultures, freedom from these tainted lands that bear such sour fruits” (MOORE, 1985, p.3) – and then start marching towards the light of the bonfires, where the crew and extras are sacrificing chickens and fruits, and dancing around the fires. S.T. and Abby watch what is happening, as Abby meets her colleague Alice once again, but she seems to be in a trance, trying to spread salt around the graveyard to stop the dead from coming back (the wind blew the previous layer), and S.T. says they should hurry up, because he feels a ‘darkness’ coming. Inside the house, the actor Richard (possessed by Wesley Jackson, the plantation owner) and Angela (or Charlotte, the owner’s wife), along with extras, are done flaying Billy (William) alive, when they are interrupted by Abby, trying to rescue them from the house. As the actors are acting strange and calling each other by the wrong names, she realizes something is going on, but before she can reason with them Richard (Wesley) stabs her and then decides to see what is going on outside, leaving Abby for dead. Outside, Alice, carrying a handful of salt, meets the undead, and tries to convince them to go back to sleep – but one of them calls her name, turning out to be her father, also buried in the old slave graveyard. He tells her that they couldn’t sleep in peace, and she joins them, embracing her father. S.T. watches the parade of the dead going towards the house, while Abby gets up and finds out that the knife in her chest is a prop – therefore, it is not possible that Billy is flayed as well, as Angela (Charlotte) says. Richard (Wesley) is confronting the people by the bonfires, from his porch, and they say it’s *Mystère L’orient*, and that zombies walk the night, and he has a flashback to where the slaves revolted and killed him, just as the undead reach him. They demand their freedom, as they had before, and S.T. understands that it’s a cycle repeating itself and tries to stop it, but Richard (Wesley) shoots him and he falls into a bonfire. As the zombies start towards Richard, S.T. gets up from the middle of the flames and decides to attack the source of the evil – the house, or, as he puts it, “if the bad tree... is to be destroyed... you must not bury... its fruit. You must burn out the roots” (MOORE, 1985, p.18). He enters aflame, and soon the house is burning, while he abandons the body and dives into the Green (not before remembering ‘Holland’s death). Later, he grows another body and meets Abby, who tells him how people were back to normal and remember things as a sort of dream, though some of them still seem affected, such as Angela (still in love with Billy, though not calling people by the wrong names anymore), who says that everything seems different – and for Billy as well, since in a last haunting panel we find out that, despite the fact that the prop knife was next to useless, he *was* flayed in his mind, the skin ripped from his torso as the panel focuses him. The director is

also in shock, and Richard ran into the house as it burned. S.T. and Abby then return to the swamp, but S.T. remembers to ask about a ‘small detail’ – what happened to the undead. To which Abby answers that some bodies were found in the ashes, so they probably had all been burned – where else would they go, after all? The next pages show the answer to that question, as (after learning that a group stole a van from the filming company, crashed into a post and went away laughing) Alice’s undead father finds employment in a small 24-hours cinema, selling tickets, and finds the opportunity perfect – long hours, without bathroom breaks or meals, in a small coffin-like box with a small window.

3.6.1 Narrative Analysis

While the narrative devices in the issue may look paler in comparison with complex buildings and panel forms as we have in the werewolf’s story, and even in comparison with the grounded (in Haitian traditions) presentation of the former issue, there are some consistent uses in the narrative, and it goes into the service of several jokes or small ironies that abound in the story. The first of which is presented iconically in the first page, if one is familiar with Alan Moore’s particular appearance – while it is hard to see a human with long beard and hair not looking somewhat similar to Moore, who in general looks like someone threw a t-shirt at a caveman, there seems to be a purposeful similarity between the dead in the grave and the writer (given that none of the several *other* undead has a similar appearance, one can assume it’s not accidental). The parallel between the undead’s restlessness with insomnia is also somewhat humorous, not to mention the useless prop knife in the middle of the issue (depressurizing the narrative tension and making the action assume a farcical tint – which may be appropriate for a story set in the middle of a soap opera shooting but is surely a cold water bucket in the fiery building of the mood towards the narrative climax). But there are other characteristics that make the story distinct as a unique take on the bringing forth of zombies: these ones are human beings, not merely monsters. As the werewolf and the vampires before them, they are people, and are excited to meet each other again, even old enemies forget their differences (which apparently end with their life) and lovers meet again with joy. Moore’s undead are not zombies, but people who happen to be dead, are restless and can’t sleep, so they go protest their lack of freedom (a plot that is reminiscent of Erico Verissimo’s *Incidente em Antares*, where the dead protest a gravekeeper’s strike in order to be buried). In doing so, they inadvertently repeat what happened once before, creating a cycle that S.T. interrupts.

There is an interesting use of warm colors to point out to the emotional intensity of the story, maximized by the fiery red and yellow of the bonfires (the undead are presented in cold, bluish tones, in contrast). The dead direct themselves to the center of the conflict following the flames, but before the climax of the issue the bonfire scenes present a magenta tint, while the yellow and red ones are reserved to the final conflict between Richard (Wesley) and the undead (slaves), first from a distance as the undead and S.T. approaches (last panel of p.3; last panel of p.11; panels 3,4 and 6 of p.13; and, finally, the panels where S.T. catches fire and runs towards the house in pages 15-18). The format of the panels is also an indicator of emotional content, varying more wildly from the usual rectangular form in shape in points of narrative tension, as in the confront between Abby and Richard (Wesley) in pages 8-9, or using a circular or trapezoid organization to center the attention of the reader (page 15, where the lines converge to S.T. being shot or page 14, where Wesley's horrific accuser is the horizon line marked by the composition). Also of significance is the omission of panel borders in the intense page where S.T. dives into the Green, which obscures the division of panels to create a confusing atmosphere where all happens at the same time, colored in warm tones and intensely emotional, with a shift in setting where the dry-brushed strokes of the flames give way to a clean-lined outline of geometrical forms (spheres and bubbles appearing to form a beehive, under the lines of a root, all colored blue and green). The issue ends with an exquisite note of pitch-black humor, when the zombie finds employment in a movie theater, full of poster of classic movies of the form (that is, with undead monsters in their titles), such as *Orgy of the Living Dead* (1965), composed of three different stories by director (Revenge, Curse and Fangs of the Living Dead, respectively, bundled together – the movies curiously portrayed no orgy nor zombies, only female vampires, the orgy being the sequential projection of the movies), all with 'living dead' titles; George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978); sided with violent exploitation movies such as *Africa: Blood and Guts* (1966) and *Twitch of the Death Nerve* (1971).

3.7 SWAMP THING #43 – WINDFALL

S.T. walks about in the swamp when a hanging branch snaps one of the tubers from his back. Later, the tuber is found by a man (a drug dealer named Chester) wearing 60's hippie style (leather fringe jacket with bottoms featuring the peace symbol, black power and

‘do it!’, abbreviated from feminist slogan ‘we can do it!’, jeans and a headband over long, pony-tailed hair and a side bag). Chester then takes the tuber with him, as he walks towards the road, hitches a hike to Baton Rouge and gets into his apartment, singing music related to the 60’s. After trying to analyze the vegetable, apparently without success, Chester receives a visit from Dave, who is distraught and tells him that his wife Sandy, who is sick with inoperable cancer, is dying and in pain, and he is looking for some drug to help her passing. Without anything at home, Chester offers Dave a piece of S.T.’s tuber (which is at this point sectioned in three pieces). As soon as Dave exits, Milo arrives, also looking for ‘dope’, and ends up leaving with another piece of the tuber (after implicitly threatening Chester and without paying for it, which establishes Milo is not a very good guy). Dave gives the tuber to Sandy, who begins to hallucinate and see the world in a different way (that is, the art changes to become similar to the pages in which S.T. dives into the Green). Milo, who is at a bar with a friend, also begins to hallucinate, though in a very distinct manner – he connects with memories from Alec Holland and, as in the origin of S.T., begins to burn. Sandy, on the other hand, seems to be contaminated with S.T.’s connection to the Green, and sees life in everything. She kisses David, who (tasting the tuber from her mouth) starts sharing her experience, and follows Sandy outside. Milo, who is freaking out in the bar, is thrown out, falls face first in a puddle and, watching his reflection (hallucinating) on the water, finds out he has become a Swamp Thing as well. Sandy watches the garden in the rain, the flow of water over the earth, and, as water changes its form, from ice to water and from water to vapor, she realizes she also shouldn’t be afraid. Swamp Milo ambles about confused about his identity (his memories mixed with Alec Holland’s) and is scared when a Frankenstein’s creature look-alike asks him for spare change, and starts running as everyone he meets is a monster from S.T.’s past. Sandy and Dave make love in the rain, for the last time. Swamp Milo is still running in the city full of monsters, thinking what he’d done to deserve this, and runs into traffic. Sandy feels the sun is coming and asks David for a kiss and, as they kiss, she dies, ending their experience. Swamp Milo is run over by a bus (driven by Arcane) and dies. Later, in Chester’s apartment, David tells Chester about what happened, thanking him for making Sandy’s last moments meaningful. As David leaves, Milo’s friend from the bar comes in, blaming Chester for Milo’s death and wanting to buy more of the stuff (Chester expels him, only to find out he had stolen a paperweight). Chester holds the last piece of the tuber, wondering if he should try it, believing the tuber only brought out what was already inside a person. He thinks about his life trying to weight the good and evil he’d done, and decides it is

only a matter of faith, after all – but then doesn't have the nerve to eat it, leaving it looming over the table, as his shadow projected on the wall is reminiscent of S.T.

3.7.1 Narrative Analysis

Since S.T.'s only action in the issue is to inadvertently drop a piece of himself in the middle of the swamp and the action has no consequences to the storyline, it is arguable that the issue is another *filler*, not directly related to the *American Gothic* arc. That is not to say it has no bearing in S.T.'s universe or that it performs no function in the series, though. What the issue does is dive deeper into S.T.'s lore, and expand the character's already great array of powers, this time by making his tubers (originally used for communion with Aby) into psychedelic drugs that act differently depending on the person consuming them – a gate to either Heaven or Hell, so to say. The (very Romantic) idea of the idyllic connection with Nature and the contact with Edmund Burke's idea of the Sublime is also ingrained in the issue. That is not also all it does.

Noticeable to the readers who are familiar with S.T.'s different runs, what Milo goes through during his nightmarish hallucinatory adventures (in which, very conveniently, he is contaminated by Alec Holland's consciousness) is actually a pastiche of the development of the character, in which its story is retold and which works as a *showcase* for some of the older antagonists. The beggar who scares Milo is the Frankenstein creature's analogue from *Swamp Thing #03*, or "The Patchwork Man". The two people he passes in the street are Sunderland, head of Sundercorp and one of S.T.'s main antagonists, and the fighter robot from *Swamp Thing #06*, "A Clockwork Horror". The prostitute with the dog is the vampire 'bride' from *Swamp Thing #38* and *#39*, holding on a leash the Monkey King from *Swamp Thing #25* to *#27*. As he walks into traffic, he passes by a zombie (which may be taken as a reference to either *Swamp Thing #10*, "The Man Who Would Not Die" or to Moore's own slave undeads from *Swamp Thing #41* and *Swamp Thing #42*), a werewolf (whose distinctly human nose is a direct reference to the Scottish werewolf (Ian MacCobb) from *Swamp Thing #04*). In the same panel, we see Cranius and Ophidian, from Arcane's un-men (present in several issues, but appearing firstly in *Swamp Thing #02*). After some images of apparently random hellish evil (children burning a dog and a land filled with cadavers being eaten by crows, both images reminiscent of the evil waves sent by Matt/Arcane in *Swamp Thing #30*, "A Halo of Flies"), the alien from *Swamp Thing #09*, "The Stalker From Beyond", while Arcane himself is driving the bus that kills Swamp Milo. What the issue does, then, is to call forth the S.T.'s

lore from the very beginning, purposefully mixing old and new and emphasizing the fact that the “classic frighteners” were already part of S.T.’s lore, a tradition continued by Moore.

There is also a very careful interweaving between the idyllic and nightmarish versions of the hallucinatory dreams, where they take place in alternate pages, each page beginning with text or images that bear a direct relation to where the other page left off. Milo (burning) saying he was going to die shifts to Sandy saying “life” (p.12, pan.01). When she says that David had to help her outside the setting shifts to Milo being kicked out of the bar. Milo crying about moss growing all over him (during his transformation into Swamp Milo) shifts to Sandy saying “all over the garden” (p.14); when she says there is no need to fear, the shift is to Milo screaming horrified; the vampire prostitute that screams that Milo should let love into his life shifts into David and Sally making love, and as they “run through it” in page 16 (“it” being their relationship), Milo is running. The alien war king Milo about the traffic light shifts into Sandy seeing a light, and her death into Milo screaming that he was not dead. That resource not only imbues the narrative with a sense of continuity, but also connects both sequences, reinforcing the parallelism between them (and how the different takes on a person’s life can signify Heaven or Hell).

The art is by Stan Woch and Ron Randall, and not Stephen Bissette and John Totleben, as usual – though since Stan Woch had been inking S.T.’s art for a while, so the art fits in so organically with the previous issues, with rough brush strokes, dry brush patterns and deep shadows (and prominence of outlines when the art refers to S.T.’s connection to the green), that the change may well go unnoticed, mainly present in the characters’ physiognomies, which are more realistic and present a larger array of human features, but lose something of the intensity of Bissette and Totleben mad, elongated faces and the figures drowning in shadows at times. A subtle change, then, but a change nevertheless (Bissette and Totleben will be back in next issue, with the regular storyline and advancement of the plot). The panel arrangement in the issue (that is, the composition of the pages) also employs different sizes and shapes to emphasize and focus the attention of the reader, and the dissolution of panels is used more prominently in Sally’s sequence of connection with the Green, while Milo’s nightmarish sequence abound with intense black shadows and panel borders.

3.8 SWAMP THING #44 – BOGEYMEN

The issue starts with two men talking at a bar, one of them (the Bogeyman) asks the other to pick a number between one and one hundred and sixty-four. The other man, wearing a blue cap, picks a number and the other describes a pair of eyes. The man at the bar picks another number, not quite understanding what sort of game is being played, and another pair of eyes is described, and the character describing the eyes (who is not shown throughout the issue, but rather is the point of view through which the action is framed – and this consistent throughout the issue) asks how, if he remembers every pair of eyes, could he be called ‘callous’. Abby is reading a volume of Clive Barker’s *Books of Blood* in her house, when a strange noise leads her, scared, to investigate her bathroom. In a scene with a humorous payoff where the slime monster seems scared by a plunger (p.03), S.T. comes out of her sink, to visit her. He wants to talk about Constantine, and how he feels frustrated with the lack of contact. Realizing his presence is making Abby uncomfortable, he goes down the tube drain (while Abby jokes about him sulking). Constantine, meanwhile, is with Dayton (an old DC character named Mento, leader of a group named Doom Patrol, who had a helmet that granted him psychic powers) who seems depressed and drunk – perhaps with good reason, since the pair is actually talking about the incoming Apocalypse. They notice the sky changing, and Batman comes asking them to get indoors. Constantine tells him about Dayton’s background and Batman goes on trying to help the population. Meanwhile, the man with the blue cap and the Bogeyman are outside the bar. The unnamed character with the blue cap is quite drunk, while the Bogeyman keeps describing pairs of eyes whenever the other says a number. Then (as the blue-capped man gets sick) the Bogeyman tells his story, how he believed a school janitor was the Bogeyman and killed him by putting ground glass in his coffee, and took the role of Bogeyman for himself, becoming a serial killer – hence the numbers and the eyes, each belonging to a victim. He then strangles the blue-capped man with a fishing line, which makes him the number one hundred and sixty-five. The Bogeyman takes the victim’s money (and the sum reminds him of another pair of eyes) and goes on through the swamp to find a road, believing the body won’t be found for weeks (only we see S.T.’s hand shutting the victim’s eyes close the very next panel). As the Bogeyman plans his escape, uttering road numbers (more eyes), he leans against a tree and is surprised to find out it is actually S.T., who is after him. He sees the monster disappear in the Green, but thinks it’s a trick. Believing he found a new victim, he unsheathes a knife and goes after S.T., wondering the color of his

eyes (and then faces the yellow-on-red eyes of the monster). The Bogeyman stabs S.T., cutting off his hand, but the severed hand begins to turn into another body of S.T., grabbing him. He cuts himself trying to escape, just to find S.T. rising again in front of him, particularly monstrous. He turns around, but there it is – S.T. again, completely made out of thorns. Suspecting this is happening to him because someone else took his place as the Bogeyman, he steps on a mud pool (quicksand) and is swallowed by it, as S.T. watches (he asks S.T. to tell the world he killed 165 people). After the Bogeyman goes under, a shilling dialogue goes on over black panels, where a voice tells the Bogeyman to pick a number, suggesting that he would now face his vengeful victims. S.T., horrified with the man he just met, wondering if there is any pattern to his recent adventures, if something can be divined from these American monsters, and wonders where Constantine is. The setting shifts once again to Abby, who is reading Clive Barker and eating chips on her bed, as the phone rings (frightening her). It's Constantine, asking her to tell S.T. that they should meet in San Miguel, California, a week from then, and that this would be the “last stop before the finale” (p.23).

3.8.1 Narrative Analysis

The issue is full of small jokes and puns, such as the word association between the *Bogeyman*, it being a different spelling of *Boogieman*, and a term that is half-way between *Boogieman* and *Bog-man*, or *Man of the Swamp* (which would mean that S.T., having killed him, indeed succeeded the Bogeyman in his ‘profession’). Both accounts of Abby being frightened while reading a horror book are also played humorously, first with S.T. coming out from the sink and sinking in the bath, then with the scare and the final joke (Constantine, through the phone, tells Abby that she could go back to her book, indicating he knew what she was doing, which leaves Abby wondering as he hangs up). At the same time, the Bogeyman’s Point of View is consistent through the story (every time the character is part of the action, his views are the one the reader follows). That allows for the eyes *motif* (since they are memories), but also plays into two different effects: it put the reader into the shoes of the serial killer *as* he kills a victim, and also, because he is hunted and murdered by S.T., puts in check the notion of hero and monster in the comic (in his eyes, S.T. is a horrible monster – and he appears to be so – while his eyes are precisely what horrifies S.T., who sees an ‘abyss’ and calls the Bogeyman, who is human, a monster). Another interesting play is the idea of S.T., seeing an abyss by looking in the Bogeyman’s eyes, actually breaking the fourth wall (that is, pointing directly at the reader, who is watching the story through the Bogeyman’s

eyes, after all). The playful intertextual relation between the comic and the anthology series *Book of Blood*, by Clive Barker (another horror anthology where typically American themes are embroidered with ‘classic frighteners’ such as werewolves, ghosts, serial killers and such), is also of notice – and so is the intertextual relationship developed with the rest of the DC Universe, which at the time is undergoing an extensive event, *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, through the inclusion of Mento and Batman, who pops out of nowhere only to disappear again a couple of panels later (leaving the reader wondering whether his role on the narrative was a demand of the editor, since he plays no part in the plot).

The fact that the monster in the issue is not one of the ‘classic frighteners’ (that is, monsters spun by the classic tradition of Gothic horror, such as vampires, werewolves, ghosts, witches, etc.) but a horror taken from real life and popularized by modern fiction, the *serial killer*, can be considered yet another wave at American culture (because of the intense production of pieces related to the theme, if not of serial killers themselves). The eyes *motif* appears repeatedly to reference the Bogeyman’s victims, colored blue (in this issue, the color indicates death, as can be deduced from the blue-capped man turning blue as he dies) and unbound by panel borders, seemingly dissipating in the gutters of the page, to indicate their oneiric, unreal nature. Once more, the panel shapes get more angulous and deformed in key emotional points of the narrative, markedly at the Bogeyman’s hunt by S.T., destabilizing the reader and giving the action a confuse, dynamic tint. As for relevance and advancement of the plot, there is the hint that next issue is the last adventure before the final confrontation, and that an event of cataclysmic proportions is brewing outside S.T.’s scope, that being the importance of Constantine to the story, as someone who knows what is happening and to serve as a guide to S.T. – Constantine also has multiple contacts and is apparently trying to form a team to fight something that is coming *after* the Crisis, not the Crisis itself.

3.9 SWAMP THING #45 – GHOST DANCE

The issue begins with a single panel, with white background, showing a hand hammering a nail into a wall, followed by a duel between two cowboys in the séance room (with thirteen Victorian fireplaces). As the duel goes on, and neither of the duelists fall, the reader realizes they are ghosts. Then there is a panel, similar in shape, form, size, angle and background to the one previously described, depicting two hands shooting a rifle (these panels

are repeated throughout the narrative), superposed by the narration of David, who is in the car, explaining to his wife (Linda) and their friends (Rod and Jude, also a couple), about the curse of Amy Cambridge's family, wherein the ghosts of those killed by the guns made by them (the Cambridge repeater, a cheaper version of the Winchester) demanded that the 'sound of the hammers' should never stop. Amy Cambridge then spend forty years building an enormous house, according to the orientations of the ghosts, in order to appease them. The couples leave their car and trespass into a property in order to find the house, a gargantuan structure with a hundred and sixty rooms, and abnormal architecture. Upon entering, in the best horror movie tradition, they soon get set apart and lost from each other. Rod looks for Linda, who is apparently his lover, and, upon entering a room, a female (the recordatories inform the reader that it's Franny Mitchell, who struggles with her wig, not wanting to expose the hole in her temple nor her brains in the back of her head) hand pulls him in and into the dark, towards the bed. They start to make love, but soon Rod realizes it's not Linda, but a ghost, and he runs away, mistakenly going through a door open to the outside, in the third floor and falling to his death. Linda is looking for Rod, and finds the séance room with the duelists (only they have been at it for a while, and there are only pieces of them shooting each other). Linda tries to back out from the room, but the passageway starts to fill up with firing squad victims, blindfolded, and they start feeling her as she passes out. Jude gets into a room with a thin closed right in the middle of it, and opens the door – only to see a herd of shot bison running towards her. Refusing to believe what she'd seen, she closes the door, convinced that it is all a hallucination, and is run over by the ghosts, who burst through the closet's door. David is walking through the house, which is quickly filling up with ghosts of Native Americans and cowboys, suicidal and entire families murdered by the Cambridge repeaters, and finally walks into S.T. (who he thinks is a 'wood elemental' a protective spirit). David tells S.T. of the curse of the ghosts, and pointed that since the hammering stopped, the ghosts were no longer appeased. Finally, David asks S.T. to save his wife. S.T. walks into the house and looks at the thousands of ghosts (of rabbits, of hunters, of cowards – shot in their backs). Finally, he finds Linda near the séance room, and realizes what he had to do: S.T. starts banging on the large table in the center of the room, thus bringing back the hammering. The ghosts, now appeased, rush towards the several fireplaces, being dispersed in (gun)smoke. S.T. then takes Linda outside and leaves the scene. David finds Linda, who, distraught about Rod's absence, informs David that they were sleeping together for six months. S.T. meets Constantine, who introduces him to Ben and Frank, two of his associates

(from *Swamp Thing* #37 and #38, respectively), and tells him that they are finally going to show S.T. the truth, with front row tickets to the end of the universe. By the end of the issue, David is buying a rifle to ‘have a talk’ with Linda (implying he is going to shoot her for being unfaithful), because the ‘sound of hammers’ shouldn’t stop.

3.9.1 Narrative Analysis

Along with the (now familiar) modification of the panels to heighten the response of the reader by twisting the very frames that ‘contain’ the story, the comic contrasts the building of the *motif* of the hammering of the nail/shooting of the rifle (in essence, the sound of the hammers – the hammers being those that build houses and those that strike the primer of the cartridge, detonating the gun, this analogy the driving *motto* of the issue) with the close rooms and dark corridors that make the setting of most of the issue. Like notes and silence in a symphony, the repeated panels with the *motif* (that is at one time different and the same) mark the rhythm of the issue, lands of blank open space in pages filled with irregular, dark panels depicting closed spaces.

The limitation of the settings, though, allied with the weird choices (such as the ghosts of rabbits and bison along with categories such as ‘cowards’) give the comic a campy look, the atmosphere of a B horror movie (in which closed, unvarying spaces, are both smothering and cheap, and therefore a highly used trope due to tight budgets). The solution of the plot (one needs to bang the fists on the table to appease the ghosts – even though there is noise of guns coming from the dueling ghosts themselves, which is what attracts Linda there in the first place) is also quite weak and nonsensical, the entire role of the main character being replaceable by a blunt tool of any sort. Once again, there is a marked attempt to present a different perspective on the regular ‘classic frighteners’ story, what, in Moore’s run, mainly means presenting the story through the point of view of the antagonists as well, but the ghosts in the story are mere plot devices, constructs, and the gimmick loses much of its force in the issue – you do not relate to ghosts fighting for a game of cards centuries ago, nor to a ghost who cannot get the wig right (while frightening a man into running to his death). Mindless ghosts do not entice and relatable characters make.

Yet, there are levels in which the story works: in linking the very American notion of the ‘right to bear arms’¹⁵ with the (*very* thinly veiled) Winchester Mystery House, in San Jose, California (considered one of the ‘most haunted’ houses in the world, a touristic attraction with guided tours)¹⁶, Moore is able to build a narrative in which the entire building (which is in itself a symbol for America in the issue, to the point of David saying in page 74 that the building was built, with nails, in the same way the Cambridge had built the country – bang! bang!) is an atonement for the deaths caused by the guns, built by the hammers in the same way the guns helped build the country. It does, indeed, cut deep into the American *mythos*, though it trails a tightrope between the horror and the farcical, due to the inventive, if not effective use of the developed tropes and *motifs*.

3.10 SWAMP THING #46 – REVELATIONS

The issue begins with a quotation of St. John’s Apocalypse, and presents a world in which the end of the world is happening – and, as it does, time and space are scrambled. S.T., Constantine, Ben and Frank are watching the resulting chaos, trying to prepare for their own trial – Constantine calls the present situation ‘fireworks’ (p.03). In their group, are lacking Sister Anne-Marie in London and Judith, who seemingly disappeared (Ben is supposed to keep an eye for the Sister, while Frank is to go back to L.A. and wait). As they make their preparations, S.T. and Constantine are teleported to the Monitor’s satellite, without warning (though Constantine seemed aware of the fact), and join a reunion of DC Comics’ prominent meta-humans, apparently involved in a crisis of some sort (it is, evidently *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, one of the first megaevents in Comic Books, that helped to shape the DC Universe into a more manageable size, largely changing the scenery for the Industry¹⁷), the event being responsible for the chaos on Earth. Luthor (an alternative version of Superman’s antagonist) is

¹⁵ A disputed political notion of actuality and the theme of the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution, according to the White House website. Information available online at <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/the-constitution/>>, last accessed on 07/03/2018.

¹⁶ As it can be seen in the house’s website at <<https://www.winchestermysteryhouse.com/>>, last accessed on 07/02/2018.

¹⁷ A summary of the plot and purchase link can be found at DC Comics’ website <<https://www.dccomics.com/graphic-novels/crisis-on-infinite-earths-1985/crisis-on-infinite-earths>>, accessed on 07/03/2018. I’ve also found the Wikipedia’s page on the event, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crisis_on_Infinite_Earths>, to be both informative, accurate and detailed, in its present iteration (also 07/03/2018).

explaining how many earths are merging together (which is essentially what the event did, bring alternate earth's characters into the fold of the main DC Universe, and disappear with several unsuccessful others), and S.T. feels a premonitory disturbance at the mention of the name. Incapable of relating to the whacky nature of their peers (some of which quite eccentric even for a seven-foot tall vegetable monster), S.T. finds the Phantom Stranger, who is looming in a corner, and is informed (again) that the role thin they are to play in this event comes *later*, after the battle has taken place – that is, the supernatural effects of this universe-killing struggle. Constantine arrives and takes S.T. to Luthor's presence, and fails to see how the event in the physical real can connect with the supernatural realm. Constantine says it's because everything is connected, and invites S.T. to teleport back to Earth and see for himself what is going on there – which he does. Faced with chaos and confusion (some of which filled with dark but humorous tones, such as anthropomorphic furry animals enacting revenge on a woman dressed in a fur coat, Clyde Barron watching the movie about his life and a singing tumor) wherever he takes his body to, he flees and finds Constantine, who informs him that the satellite was already destroyed, and that their true enemy is the *Brujería*, a society of male witches from Chiloé (an archipelagos in the Chilean south), Patagonia, in South America. This society, having felt the fragility of the universe, was gathering belief power (from the general population, which was mounting due to the employment of 'classical frighteners' to make a larger part of the population believe in the supernatural). Constantine tells S.T. more about the *Brujería*, their rites of initiation, their (human skin) waistcoats and the Invunche, the guardian of the cave, made by deforming a 6-months baby into a twisted monster. That is, according to Constantine, the reason why S.T. had to go and fight horror after horror – and that the culmination of the *Brujería*'s plan was to unleash an even greater darkness upon the supernatural real, in order to destroy Heaven itself. To be able to fight the final battle, S.T. would need knowledge – the 'bait' offered by Constantine to enlist S.T.'s help in the first place. Finally, Constantine informs S.T. of the existence of the Parliament of the Trees, near the source of the Tefé river, in the middle of the Amazon rainforest, in Brazil. Going there, S.T. would find the answers about himself that he sought. They agree to meet there after some time, which Constantine suggests S.T. should spend in saying goodbye to the 'missus', since they may lose their lives in the enterprise. As an epilogue, Sister Anne-Marie walks through Soho, in London, looking for Judith (page 20 brings Alan Moore and Rich Veitch in the background, a homage to *V for Vendetta* in Moore's t-shirt). Feeling increasingly restless, Sister Anne-Marie (who is being followed by something), enters the subway station, leaving

by mistake at a points-change stop, at a station closed during weekends. Unable to leave, the nun falls victim to the Invunche, the *Brujería*'s guardian of the cave.

3.10.1 Narrative Analysis

The issue makes abundant use of the (now already recognizable as a narrative trope in Moore's S.T. run) unsettling and angulous panels, intermingled with boundless panels and rounded compositions to unsettle the reader and maximize the sense of confusion – the setting is supposed to be chaos, after all. Visual representation of teleporting and rapid changes of setting help with this effect, though the overlaying narrative helps coalesce the units into an overarching narrative, where the very chaos and discrepancies are the theme. Constantine's explanation about the *Brujería* and S.T.'s role in the upcoming fight is composed of illustrations of Constantine's words (and not actions directly depicted in the panels), and mainly have no panel borders, juxtaposed one to another, mixing and overlaying each other at times – reinforcing their unreal nature. As Constantine explains S.T.'s role and adventures (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.17, reproduced below), the idea of the Americanized nature of the 'classical frighteners' is highlighted in an illustrated page that makes a (quite complete) visual summary of the story arc:



Figure 7 – *American Gothic* Illustrated (MOORE, Alan *et al.* *Swamp Thing* #46, 1986, p.17)

As can be seen, other than S.T.'s growth, the order of the *American Gothic* stories is respected by the illustrations, and can be read in descending order (the most recent adventures

superposed over the older ones), forming a narrative in themselves: first the vampires (from *Swamp Thing* #38 and #39, with the vampire offspring looming over the page, as both a menace and a reminder of the Creature of the Black Lagoon – another famous ‘frightener’), then the werewolf (From *Swamp Thing* #40), shown in silhouette over a red moon. The werewolf is superposed by three undead, representing the three editions with the monsters, both the zombie slaves (from *Swamp Thing* #41 and *Swamp Thing* #42) and the ghosts of the Cambridge House (from *Swamp Thing* #45). While the filler issue (*Swamp Thing* #43, the one with Chester and the hallucinations of Milo and Sandy, caused by the tuber) is not shown, it is coherent with the diegesis, since neither S.T. nor Constantine are aware of the story taking place in it. That would leave a hole in the representation, comprised by the issue with the Bogeyman (*Swamp Thing* #44), if the upcoming red stripes of the American flag did not spread into droplets of blood, forming a multitude of eyes (the overarching *motif* associated with the Bogeyman). Out of order as it may be in this representation, the eyes *motif* transitions into the next panel, with the implied joke of making Constantine’s one of the eyes associated with the serial killer. Over the horrors is S.T., holding his head, as if in pain or struggling to understand the meaning of all that (which is consistent with the character). Over all there is an illustration of S.T. over the United States’ flag, where the red stripes resemble blood splatters (which eventually dissolve into the droplets and from them into eyes). The image can be read as yet another representation of the arc as well – there S.T. walked a bloody path all over the United States of America, also contributing to reinforce the idea of the importance of the location to the arc as a whole (the horrors having been created with America in mind). The image is not merely an illustration, then, but an interpretive tool as well, that visually works to direct the reading of the entire arc in terms of the American lore and link it deeper to the American Gothic tradition.

Interestingly, the overall impression of the issue – which was famously an imposition of DC Comics onto the title, as per Moore’s own account of the fact, in George Khoury’s book-long interview with the author *The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore*, where Moore describes the effort to connect with the event ‘tedious’ and, overall, pointless (MOORE, *in*: KHOURY, 2003, p.93) – is that it works to distance itself from DC’s narrative, emphasizing that the role of the characters is not to take part in the conflict and relegating their own path to another plane of existence entirely. One may wonder if the rebellious nature of the writer has not had a part in this movement, but, be as it may, the title is clearly distancing itself from DC Universe’s main plot, a direction stated many times not only throughout this

issue, but in previous ones as well. And yet, ironically, Moore uses the crisis, which folds time, to create a metalinguistic moment in the arc, where the time being mixed in the plot reflects perfectly what he's done with the issue – if time is scrambled in DC's Universe, Moore uses this not only to bring up S.T.'s arc to mind once again (as seen before), but also includes a hint of *premonition* at the mention of the name Luthor, hinting at the future of the title as well (Lex Luthor, Superman's main antagonist, will perform a key role in the assassination of S.T. in the future of the title, helping old villains from Sundercorp to 'unroot' S.T. and make him lose his connection to Earth, thus obligating him to travel to outer space – that is not part of this study, though, and only relevant *en passant* for the analysis of this issue). Yet another hint of the road to be taken is the idea that, since the battle is to be fought in different fronts, the supernatural characters' role may lay on another plane – which is what is about to happen: Moore is taking a multitude of semi-abandoned mystical characters of the DC Universe and joining them for the final adventure, comprising almost an archeological compilation of the history of DC Comics' supernatural characters, but that is to be seen later. So, mixing of time and space is precisely what Moore does in the issue, having fun with the chaos on Earth and taking the opportunity to help the reader with an additional layer of information on how to interpret the full story arc, as well as giving a hint about the future – though the actual knowledge sought by the monster is postponed to the following issue. There is a perceptible advancement of the plot, however, and the antagonist behind all the horrors of the arc (the *Brujería*) is finally revealed, as well as their motivation (destroying Heaven).

3.11 SWAMP THING #47 – THE PARLIAMENT OF TREES

The issue begins with Howard Fleck, a photographer, presenting himself in an office and explaining how he happened to take some pictures. The pictures are shown as pieces of film hung out to dry after darkroom developing, showing first a crane, then Abby, undressing and bathing in the water, and then S.T. touching her shoulder. S.T. is kissing Abby, both unaware of the presence of the photographer, then Abby tells him that Constantine called to set up their meeting near the Tefé river the following day. S.T. shows concern for her safety, but Abby assures him that everything is going smoothly with her, it being almost as if 'something were watching over her' (precisely what the Howard is doing). After another panel with the photographer, narrating his disgust to see Abby kissing S.T., Abby starts telling

him about a dream she remembered, but gives up and bites into one of S.T.'s tubers (indicating that they are engaging in their version of sex). After another panel, where the reader learns that Howard, the photographer, is actually in a newspaper's editor office, intending to sell the photo, S.T. arrives at his destination, with the very exuberant diversity of green life covering him with leaves (usually he looks like a mud doll with roots). Constantine is waiting for him, surrounded by a tribe of natives, who, upon seeing S.T., show reverence and lead him to a certain place in the jungle. Constantine is barred from following him, humans being forbidden after a point, so S.T. goes forth alone. Arriving, finally, at the Parliament of Trees, a clearing with several anthropomorphic trees, he feels a deep sense of familiarity, as if he's been there before. Walking about among the trees, the recordatories making his thoughts intimate to the reader, S.T. complains he had not found any answers – to which a tree replies out loud that he'd posed no questions, surprising him. The tree tells S.T. he is welcome among his ancestors. It is revealed that the tree is actually Alex Olsen, the original Swamp Thing, introduced in 1971 with the 8-pages story named after its main character, in *House of Secrets* #92. The logic behind this is that there were several iterations of Swamp Things previously, throughout History and throughout the world, all with similar stories and backgrounds, dying by fire and engulfed by the swamp. Eventually, every one of them finds their way into the Parliament and grows roots there. Alex then asks S.T. if he is there to join them, but S.T. tells him he seeks knowledge to fight the upcoming threat. Instructed by Alex, he lies down and roots himself to the Earth, mixing his roots with those of the Parliament, diving into their collective mind. After experiencing several of other iterations' memories, learning more about his powers as well (the possibilities to travel through time, to animate multiple bodies and to animate dead wood are listed), the conscience of the Parliament notices his presence and talks to him. S.T. asks about his powers, in order to face the threat, and also about the nature of Evil, which has been disturbing him. In return, the Parliament tells him to avoid power, for it is not 'the way of the wood', and asks 'where is the Evil in the wood', exemplifying with a cycle in which an aphid eats leaves, ladybugs eat aphids and later are swallowed by the soil, which feed another plant and other leaves – so where is Evil in this cycle? With that cryptic answer S.T. is dismissed by the Parliament, feeling the journey had been quite useless. Coming out of the clearing, S.T. tells Constantine about the knowledge he's gathered (Constantine also finds it a waste of time), and tells S.T. about their next stop – the isle of Chiloé, amidst the forest of Quincavi, where the *Brujería* is hiding and planning the destruction of Heaven. S.T. is depressed for being thrown out of the

Parliament. Meanwhile, after buying Howard's photos, the editorial staff of the newspaper (*Houma Daily Courier*, as is shown in the door) discusses whether they should print them, unsure about a woman with what they suspect is a man in a bad costume (even believing to have found a zipper in S.T.'s body in one photo). Another member of the staff, though, recognizes Abby from the Elysium Lawns, where his daughter spends some time, being mentally unstable, and is indignant that a woman that does that sort of thing in the swamps can work near children – so they decide to print the photos.

3.11.1 Narrative Analysis

The double page made to look like a film hanged to dry and framed by the two panels with Howard's narrative about watching the scene and taking the photos turn the page into a meta-panel, with the illusion of time lapses between the taking of each photo (it is not, though – the reading order is wrong... if the reading order went by columns it would make sense iconically, but disturb the narrative order, so this approximation is perhaps the best possible approach, as can be seen below:

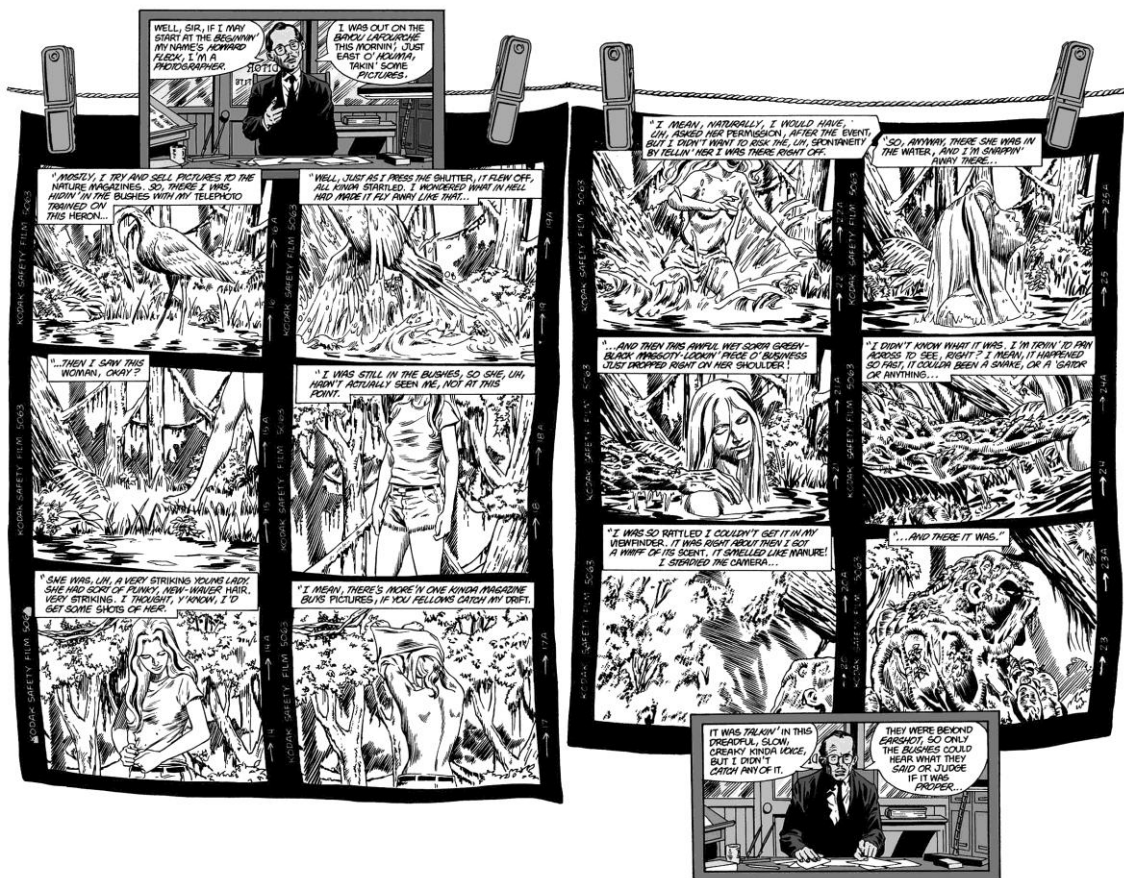


Figure 8 - Reading Photos (MOORE, Alan et al. *Swamp Thing* #47, p.01-02)

The loose panels containing the photographer, separated from the rest of the narrative by a different positioning and border of the frame (in fact becoming a different narrative frame in itself, despite the obvious pun), are repeated in different pages, thus changing the view of the action and adding a narrative layer (that makes the interaction between Abby and S.T. take place in the past rather than the present). This composition is broken in the last page, when the reader learns what happened. Effectively the parts end up working as a mini-mystery inside the story, since the apparently floating (panels and) narrative of Howard the photographer is peripheral to S.T. and Abby until the reader learns that the photos will be made public.

Curiously, in an issue where a good part of the action takes place in another plane of consciousness related to the Green, the common *motif* for the green mindscape of S.T. (that is, outlines without black shadows or strong lines, unusually colored and accompanied by symmetrical forms in the background) are not employed, maybe due to the art being by Stan Woch and John Randall, and not Bissette and Totleben. That also means the art lacks the profusion of black shadows, brush hatches (which made the art, facial expressions in particular, quite challenging and distancing to the reader, adding an extra layer of texture) and exaggerated forms of panels, sometimes mingling with each other and superposing over each other. The artists still use angular panels and round compositions to focus the reader, but the action seems more organized and behaved, easy to follow (by comparison) and conducive to a quicker reading flow. The emphasis placed in the change of S.T.'s appearance and the exquisitely drawn tropical jungle scenes are very beautiful, despite the lack of intensity in the visual narration. The prominence of shadows is focused, awkwardly, precisely in the place where they usually weren't – the Green, as the encounter with the Parliament is quite shadowy. Rectangular panels appear more frequently than in previous issues, giving stability in a comic that profited much in taking the carpet from under the reader's foot. That is not to say the narration is weak, though. But it does seem to lack the intensity of some of the previous issues, where the reading cannot find easy footing to rest. There is (again) the smoothing of transitions between pages or scenes by a point in common between the different settings (for instance, in turning from page 5 to 6, when the panel in which Howard says he would be capable of selling the photos anywhere shifts to another one where S.T. says he could regrow anywhere in the world).

More than merely presenting the Parliament and laying a mystery about the nature of Evil to be solved in a future issue, the story develops further tropes that were presented in

previous editions, mainly the dichotomy between the ways of the flesh and the way of the Green (that theme is briefly presented in *Swamp Thing #43*, when Sandy is contaminated by the Green aspect of S.T., becoming capable of communing with the wide net of life and understanding she was part of a process, a cycle of life, while Milo is contaminated by the ‘fleshy’ aspect of S.T., that is, Alec Holland’s conscience and trauma, the violence and horrors of his past struggles and experiences). Reinforcing this notion works to show that S.T. still has a lot to learn about the ways of the Green, but also brings forth the paradoxical nature of the monster, at one time animal and vegetable (and, arguably, not belonging fully to any of these reigns) and the internal struggle that this dual nature leaves him to contend with. Funnily enough, as the confront with the *Brujería* approaches, the promised meeting with the Parliament seems to be (but is not really) useless, despite S.T.’s learning more about his abilities.

3.12 SWAMP THING #48 – A MURDER OF CROWS

The issue begins, appropriately, with a murder of crows approaching, and, as they grow near, the panels grow dark, until they are completely black. The recordatories (voiced by Constantine’s conscience) are remembering that before the descent (into the *Brujería*’s cave) he saw the crows approaching, and how crows are a bad omen. Then the clack panels are illuminated by Constantine lighting a cigarette in the dark. He is in a dark cave, carved with threatening forms, such as demons, abyssal fish, reptiles and skulls, from top to bottom. Constantine wonders how old the carvings are. Then the match burns his fingers, and he drops it. As the recordatories tell the reader he is searching another one and the onomatopoeias superposed to the now reinstated dark of the panel, the reader finds out he’s opened the matchbox upside down and lost his light source, linking the ‘bad luck’ with the crows and thinking that nothing really went well since meeting the others in the morning. The darkness of the panels transitions (significantly) to Judith’s face, as Constantine, surprised with her presence, asks what is she doing there and where are Sister Anne-Marie and Ben Cox. Judith (who is accompanied by Frank, who is carrying a sawed-off shotgun, and plucking a flower from a tree to garnish her headband) informs Constantine that she never found the Sister, and that Ben Cox’s mother did not allow him to meet them there. Complaining about the situation, with two associates missing and S.T. late, the group is surprised by his voice, coming from

the tree Judith plucked the flower from – it was S.T. all along, looking magnificent, covered in foliage and flowers, with a head pattern reminiscent of the plumed headdresses of Mayan gods. Together the party descends into the caves (not before Constantine noticing the crows), S.T. letting his body die to meet them on the inside. That takes the reader back to the starting point of the narrative, Constantine having dropped his matches (and mentioning that the caves forked after the entrance, dividing the group and leaving him alone), and the page is turned into a black pool organized in panels, but with a growing speck of light gradually taking human form, approaching the reader, until it is clear that it is the Invunche, the guardian of the cave. The deformed creature attacks Constantine, banging his head against the cave wall, and Constantine slowly falls unconscious, thinking how something has gone wrong – a thought that is echoed by S.T., in the Green, as he notices that there is a mystical barrier, affecting the plants in the cave and stopping him from entering it. Unable to find an uncontaminated plant to project his conscience into, he laments the time lost with the Parliament and fears for the other's safety. Meanwhile, Frank and Judith descend themselves, wondering how are the others doing. Judith asks Frank whether his mate is jealous, and he reveals they have an open relationship – and after that Judith tells Frank to put his arm around her to keep her warm, then invites him to turn off the flashlight, which he does, and after a brief exchange (where Frank is concerned about Constantine but Judith intervenes that he can take care of himself, what about him) the speech balloons voice moaning, that subsides into darkness. And, from darkness, Constantine wakes up, chained in an empty pool surrounded by (stone) gargoyles and members of the *Brujería*. They inform him that he's lost their battle, that the monster is locked outside the cave and he is finished. Constantine interposes that he is not alone, but on comes Judith, saying she is sorry, but he *is*, indeed, alone. Judith reveals that she was caught by the Invunche in London, and offered a chance to join the *Brujería* as a messenger (a *voladora*), and that the Invunche killed Sister Anne-Marie, while Judith killed Ben Cox and his mother. Frank's destiny is more graphically shown, as Judith drops his head from a bag into Constantine's pool. Constantine begs Judith to consider what she is doing – and she answer him she is perfectly aware of it: the *Brujería* is bringing back the Original Darkness to, as she puts it, “smash the throne of the Divine Pretender” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.14, pan.3), after which there will be a new universe, and she'd have a place in it. Judith explains again the pan of the *Brujería*, showing Constantine how they were creating the 'essence' that would wake the ancient evil with the belief in supernatural (the panel shows men stirring clouds or fluid inside a pool, shaped like the country of the United States of America). The

pool containing Constantine starts to fill with mud, while the elder of the *Brujería* starts to help Judith with her transformation. He gives her a root, which makes her sick, and she vomits her entrails in a bowl, as a horrified Constantine watches. The elder then tells her to let her empty body wither, and picks up her head, still trying to talk. In doing so, the flower is dropped onto the ground of the cave (opening a way for S.T.). The elder picks up a black pearl (that is, the distilled essence of belief in evil they were preparing during the entire arc) from the USA pool and places it in Judith's mouth, as the dropped flower starts to grow into S.T.'s body. Judith grows bird legs from her throat, a tail from the back of her neck and the beak from her mouth, as S.T. fights and defeats the Invunche and as Constantine is slowly being drowned in the rising mud. As Judith's feathers are growing, and the wings start to unfold from her ears, S.T. has a choice between saving Constantine or stopping her transformation by attacking the elder. He chooses to save the Englishman, and Judith's transformation into a crow (with pink feathers in the forefront reminiscent of Judith's *punk* haircut), and she flies with the pearl in her beak – the *Brujería* won the message is sent. Judith flies toward the reader, similarly to the crows in the beginning of the issue. The blackness turns into Abby's black hair strand (the rest of her hair being white). Abby is arriving at the Elysium Lawns, and chatting with a colleague, as he asks her, apparently very awkwardly, if she'd head the Courier that morning. It turns out her photos with S.T. are on the front page, and her boss calls her into the office, where there are two police officers waiting to arrest her (presumably for being a sex offender working with children, as the indignant female officer informs her). The panels then focus on the black-over-white ink of the newspaper once again growing into a black blot, as the policewoman tells her the proof of her misdeeds are in black-and-white, though from where she stands it's mostly black.

3.12.1 Narrative Analysis

The story forms a closed unity, tightly tied together by the *motif* of the black panel. In the beginning (p.01), it is an omen of bad luck, predicting that things will go wrong – and indeed they do. The darkness returns when Constantine drops the matches (p.02-03), when Constantine's memories give place to his thoughts in the darkness of the cave (p.06), just before the attack of the Invunche, when Constantine loses his conscience (p.08), when Judith betrays them, turning off the flashlight and killing Frank (p.10), when Judith, now a bird, sets off with the pearl (the message – in p.20) and, finally, with Abby's arrest (p.22). The movement from darkness to light, and back into darkness, is a trope developed throughout the

issue, smoothing the passages between scenes (as does the use of synchronous dialogue and parallelism, as observed in previous issues – a use that continues throughout this chapter as well). This carefully significant transitions are used in the service of the narrative, as omens themselves – for instance, when the idea that things are going wrong transition into Judith’s glasses (p.03) and when Constantine’s realization that something is wrong is mirrored by S.T.’s discovery of the mystical barrier against his presence (p.08). The crow flying towards the reader of the beginning of the narrative is also repeated in the end, as Judith, now a crow, also does the same (therefore fulfilling the bad omen in the beginning of the narrative).

Taking composition into account, the disposition of the panels in the pages is a lot more structured in this issue, abounding with rectangles that give the reader a sense of stability (despite the continuous use of the circular composition to focus the attention of the reader for important parts or visually impressive images, such as S.T.’s tropical jungle Mayan god outfit in page 5). That is, until things start to go wrong, then all hell breaks loose and the distortion of the panels begins to intensify. That is seen clearly in page 07, as the arrival of the Invunche happens in progressively distorted panels (but Constantine falling into unconsciousness happens in rectangular ones). When Constantine wakes up, though, the disposition of the panels is once again unsettling (significantly, in page 11, the lines formed by panels 01-03 converge to center the page’s attention on Constantine, chained inside the pool). The narrative picks up from the crisis moment, when Constantine realizes all went wrong (as the crows had predicted) to use the angulous composition and its destabilizing effect to heighten the emotional content of the art. Significantly, the panels turn stable again (giving the reader a breather) during Judith’s transformation, the stability contrasting with the horror of the scene, with the arrival of S.T., in the last three panels of page 16, when Constantine is saved, in the last nine panels of page 20, and in the real world, where Abby is (though there is a lot of dramaticity and emotional content in her situation as well).

Conversely, the scene presented in page 14, panel 04, with the male witches from the *Brujería* dressed in human skin, stirring the big pool shaped like the USA as if it were a cauldron in which they were brewing their potion, in the best Shakespearean *Wyrd Sisters*’ style, can be seen as a visual representation of the entirety of the *Brujería*’s plan up to the point – stirring the scenery of the United States with their occult powers in order to brew a potion (that is, the black pearl that forms the message to be delivered by Judith). Not only that, the image is fed by the tradition of sympathetic magic, establishing thus also a link with the occult tradition (sympathetic magic is based on the principle that things that are similar to

each other are somehow connected, this the occult principle behind Voodoo dolls, for instance, a many Middle Ages' medical principles, that looked to the form of plants and substances to infer their effects in different parts of the body).



Figure 9 - Sympathetic Magic With the USA (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.14, pan.04)

The carvings in the cave (the mere idea of a cave carved from top to bottom being enticing) can also be related to Lovecraftian lore, being full of images reminiscent of deep sea fishes (with the cult of Dagon, the dagonites and other abyssal monsters and sunken cities being part of Lovecraft's fiction), notably in page 17, where a figurehead similar to traditional representations of Cthulhu is shown behind S.T. (who is turning to face the Invunche). Alan Moore is reputedly knowledgeable in Lovecraft's fiction, having written an introduction to an annotated edition of the author's works¹⁸, as well as authoring related works, such as *The Courtyard* (2003) and *Neonomicon* (2010), both published by Avatar Press – that is not to count the multiple references to Lovecraft's works in many of his other productions, including previous editions of the *Swamp Thing* (Ben Cox thought the impending threat was an awakening Cthulhu, for instance). So, the intertextual reference makes sense, even if the clues are mere inferences.

The chapter, it is important to notice, ends with failure – after all the preparation made through the entire *American Gothic* story arc, Constantine and S.T. failed to stop the *Brujería* in sending their messenger to wake the 'original darkness', whatever this entity may be. And

¹⁸ Available for purchase at <<https://www.amazon.com/New-Annotated-H-Lovecraft-Books/dp/0871404532>>, last accessed on 07/04/2018.

this is one point in which the plot falters, even to the end of the saga: by sending S.T. to stop the ‘classic frighteners’, that is, the symptoms instead of the cause of the problem, Constantine allowed the *Brujería* not only to be able to distill the black pearl, but also to get ready to send the message, while the reasonable approach to such a situation would have been to face the *Brujería* to begin with, or at least once S.T. found a bit more about his powers – perhaps the Parliament, then the *Brujería* instead of facing vampires, werewolves and zombies in the way, since clearly the Invunche was not a match for S.T. and (as we are about to see) neither are the witches. Of course, to say that is to make a basic mistake and, rather than analyzing the plot of the work, treating the work as real and suggesting alternatives that do not have a place in the given fictional universe – which can be fun, but it is also nonsensical, as far as the analysis of a work goes. The answer to that is, obviously ‘because plot’ – the adventures had to work out the way they did because there is a direction, a development and an aesthetical proposal to the plot. But, since this flaw is part of the narrative (and, unfortunately, cannot be unseen) and somewhat weakens the contract with the reader, it was worth mentioning. Then again, failure in crucial missions is also a common trope developed by Alan Moore in other works, such as *Watchmen* (1986).

3.13 SWAMP THING #49 – THE SUMMONING

The issue begins (narrated in first person by Constantine) with the Judith-crow flying with the black pearl on her beak, as S.T. frees Constantine. Encouraged by their success, the male witches from the *Brujería* prepare to face the intruder, as Constantine despairs with their failure. S.T. tells Constantine to get out of the cave (Constantine finds it useless, since everything is lost, but runs as S.T. pushes him), and turns to face the witches. The members of the *Brujería* tell him that S.T. is in their place of power, being in disadvantage – to that, S.T. retorts that they are in a cave under the clean earth, in the middle of a rainforest, and that they don’t even stand a chance. S.T. entraps the witches with roots (bursting out of the walls of the cave) and sinks them into the mud, collapsing the cave walls as Constantine finds his way out, being subsequently joined by S.T., with whom he discusses the situation. They decide to try to gather their contacts in order to face against the dark entity, when it rose – and that is the reason why the story is narrated, since Constantine is in Baron Winters’ house (Baron Winters is a character sorcerer from the DC Universe, created in 1982 and the main character in a

short-lived series called *Night Force*, which lasted for 14 issues, in which the Baron organized, and sometimes manipulated, the forenamed team of occultists into fighting several occult threats – his house, which he cannot leave, is a nexus that allows the Baron to access any point of space and time), in Georgetown, Washington, in order to enlist him into the fight. Baron Winters is reluctant to do so, but on hearing from Constantine that Sargon the Sorcerer had agreed to join the team, he agrees to do so as well. The following page accompanies the flight of the Judith-crow, and shows several other characters of the DC Universe sensing the threat and/or reacting to it: Dr. Fate (a sorcerer/superhero character created in 1940, part of the Justice Society of America, a Golden Age precursor to the Justice League, deriving his powers from an ancient helmet and the teachings of the Babylonian/Assyrian deity, Nabu the Wise), Dr. Occult (an occult detective with supernatural abilities created in 1935, deriving his powers from the talisman called The Mystic Symbol of the Seven), and, finally, Cain and Able (keepers, respectively, of the *House of Mysteries* and the *House of Secrets*, as seen in *Swamp Thing* #33), who get into a discussion about the species of the bird, resulting in Cain murdering Abel (again). S.T., meanwhile, is travelling through the Green until the region of the just dead, just as he'd done previously, in *Swamp Thing Annual* #2, in order to rescue Abby's soul. After a humorous scene where the presence of S.T. helps Deadman (the ghostly superhero, also from the aforementioned comic) to convince a man that needed to go back to life after receiving a cardiac massage (believing S.T. was a demon intent on taking him to Hell, the man thought it prudent to elope), S.T. informs the ghost of what they are about to face, and soon they meet the Phantom Stranger, who joins them in the way. Constantine is in a museum or Art gallery, trying to convince Sargon the Sorcerer (a character created in 1941, who derived his powers from the jewel on his temple, called the Ruby of Life, and pretended to be a magician in order to hide his powers in plain sight) to join the battle, but Sargon had taken part in *Crisis in Infinite Earths* and felt he had already done enough. Upon hearing that Baron Winters had agreed, though, Sargon decided to join the group (another humorous tirade of Moore, since the announced presence of Sargon was precisely what had convinced Winters to join Constantine). S.T., Deadman and the Phantom Stranger go on through white mounds, trying to find the Spectre, only to find out that the body of the Spectre formed the mounds themselves and they were walking over his naked torso. Upon informing the Spectre about the upcoming conflict, the entity reveals that he is already aware of it, and allowed Judith-crow to pass, in order to contend with the Darkness when it awoke, getting rid of it once and for all. Meanwhile, Constantine is meeting Zatara (a Mandrake-like superhero of the DC Universe

created in 1938, who focused his magic powers by speaking backwards and, like Sargon, disguised himself as a stage magician, top hat and cape) and Zatanna (daughter of Zatara, with similar powers) and explaining what happened. Zatara is hesitant to help, due to the high stakes, but Zatanna promptly offers her help – which forces Zatara along, in order to protect his daughter (which he succeeds to do only at the cost of his own life, but that is to come). As Zatanna escorts Constantine out, they chat (revealing that they knew each other from a tantric group – and that is to say ‘biblically’) and kiss, then Constantine leaves. S.T., Deadman and the Phantom Stranger reach the limits of Hell, where they are searching for Etrigan, the Demon (already known to the readers of the title). Etrigan is inside a crate full of boiling lava, and reveals that he tried to stop Judith-crow from delivering her message, but failed, surprising the others with the revelation that factions in Hell did not welcome the arousal of this new Darkness and were willing to fight against it. In Baron Winters house, where all the contacts in Constantine’s group (plus Dr. Occult, who showed up uninvited) are gathered and Constantine is trying to calm Dayton (Mento) down, the powers from his helmet being the key element to focus the group’s mystical energies into the other plane. Dayton is afraid of the upcoming conflict, never having used his helmet in such a way before. Constantine convinces him to wear the helmet and asks him to peek into Dr. Occult’s mind, since he does not know him, but Dr. Occult is able to block Dayton’s psychic probe. Constantine then asks Dayton to probe into the Spirit Dimensions, which he does, seeing the Judith-crow flying over a city in Hell, then over the chaos beyond Hell. Dayton catches glimpses of demons reacting to the presence of the bird (they will in the future become part of the Hell’s army that supports the Darkness) and of S.T.’s group (there to try to stop the Darkness), and also watches as Judith-crow is destroyed by the chaos beyond Hell, dropping the black pearl from her beak as she opens it to scream. The pearl falls on the water beyond Hell’s shores, which everyone in Constantine’s group senses, and Darkness begins to rise, setting the stage for the final war, to take place in the upcoming issue.

3.13.1 Narrative Analysis

The plot of the issue presents an interesting parallelism between S.T.’s efforts in gathering his party and Constantine’s – yet there is a crucial difference. While the Hell’s party was already familiar to the reader of the title, being essentially the same gathering to have encountered S.T. in his adventure in *Swamp Thing #33*, and to have guided him through Hell to rescue Abby’s soul (mainly the same characters, then, despite Dr. Fate, only recently

presented, joining them as well), Constantine's party is a little bit more unusual. Mainly composed of obscure mystic characters from the DC Universe, some of which hadn't seen publication in years (that being the main reason why I decided to include the dates of creation of these characters in their descriptions above): the very team who will attempt to rescue the world from the presence of Darkness are themselves rescues of sorts. In an effort to revitalize the occult part of the DC Universe, Moore brought them back from obscurity and gave them a role in the upcoming conflict, establishing thus not only the landscape of the Afterlife in the DC Universe, but shaping the occult life of the mundane universe as well. Some of these characters will fall into obscurity again, the apparitions of Dr. Occult will be sparse, Sargon and Zatara dying on the next issue. Constantine and Zatanna, though, will become successful characters. This archeological effort serves to consolidate Moore as possessing a deep knowledge of the fictional universe in which his character function and able to establish a dialogue between the past and present lore, a unification that was badly needed, as indicated by the *Crisis* event.

In formal aspects, there are interesting developments, beginning with the narrative frame that picks up the action where it had left off in the previous issue, at the start of the chapter, where the action shown is later revealed to be a narration by John Constantine informing Baron Winters of what transpired in an attempt to gather his favor (despite the fact that the text in the recordatories was clearly enunciated, which could be interpreted from the use of quotation marks in the panels, and that the voice belonged to Constantine, it being a first-person narration illustrated by the panels, at least until the dialogue between S.T. and the witches, the reader is thrown brusquely into an unfamiliar setting, in the middle of a dialogue and a cup of tea with an unknown character – quite different from the previous efforts to smooth transitions). Despite the beginning and the jumping from setting to setting, which is more noticeable in this edition due to both characters changing the location over and over again (though in S.T.'s case the locations, though differently presented graphically, are at least more abstract, being representations of the Spiritual Plane rather than worldly locations) the approximations between transitions are also, obviously, present in this edition, now recognizable as one of the frequently used tropes in Moore's *repertoire* – when Constantine mentions that the mystics are all “birds of a feather” (p.06) the narrative jumps directly to Judith-crow; when Cain kills Abel (p.07) there is silence, and the narrative jumps to S.T.'s appreciation of the lack of noise and anxiety in the Green; when S.T. says he fears not all the allies he needs to gather may want to come willingly (p.10) the narrative jumps to Sargon

refusing to join Constantine, and so on. The resource is exhaustively employed to smooth narrative transitions, which makes the points in which the resource is abandoned in favor of the dramaticity of a brusque cut all the more noticeable.

The panels with the bird *motif*, being regular, squared and stable, help to land the reading experience and stabilize the reader, at the same time working as a pacemaker that increases the narrative tension: at each iteration the bird grows closer to her objective, and the final conflict grows nearer: Judith-crow's flight, lasting through the entire edition, and her final destruction, are also used as a reminder of the unavoidable, upcoming confront. The panels with this *motif* are squared, similar in shape, size and composition (just the bird flying over the dark background, in a square panel with wide white borders, isolated from the sequence behind.) The use of angular panels to destabilize the reader is discrete (though present) in this edition, perhaps due to the organizing power of the bird's panels. There are hints of the use of warm colors to indicate highly emotional points of the narrative (Etrigan's colors always being a good reminder of the use, but the last flight of the bird over hell, described by a horrified Dayton, in page 20, should be cited as the most prominent example), as happened in previous occasions.

Finally, the focus of the narrative through Dayton's viewpoint in the last pages, after he puts on his helmet allow the reader to share his perspective and his confusion and amazement, adding *his* emotions and reactions (Dayton is afraid, hesitant and uncertain to begin with) to the emotional range of the narrative. That is an effective tool to impress wonder into imagery that may become monotonous to a reader accustomed to see a seven-foot-tall moss monster with bright red eyes, who walks among demons and ghosts, as the main character.

3.14 FORMAL CONSIDERATIONS

And that brings us to the conclusion of the saga, which is to be seen in greater length through the next pages – in a more detailed narrative account, based not only in the story arc itself (brief as the reading may have been up to this point), but also in comparison with the previous treatment of the character by other writers, until the point Moore took over the title, in issue #20 of the title. Up to this point, a series of observations were made, considering Moore's style of writing, mainly in consideration of reoccurring techniques and tropes

developed by the author. Many of these are apparent in other issues than the ones in which the characteristic was pointed out, but, due to not weighing so heavily regarding the specific edition as other, more prominent characteristics, were left aside due to concerns of space, time and focus (the most significant features of each issue being the ones highlighted). Some of the stylistic tropes appeared with significant consistency, and other features, which seemed to change the reading pace, ambience or the reading experience in general (such as the art changes, which greatly influenced the narrative pace and mood). These characteristics were:

- a) Application of internal focalization to highlight the different points of view about the narrative, notably including the antagonists in the adventures, which led the reader to question the commonly accepted roles of hero/villain in favor of a more complex relationship between the characters.
- b) Frequent and reoccurring appeals to the title's lore and history, including elements and plots that not only mirrored, but also quoted directly (visually or not) past elements of the title, to the point of bringing into continuity a different, previous incarnation of the protagonist, only featured in one edition and with no relation to the present iteration (meaning the Alex Olsen S.T.).
- c) As a means of easing the transition between pages and scenes, an approximation was made between the neighboring panels in which the transition took place, either verbal, thematic or iconic. That not only gave the impression of a smooth transition, but also of synchronicity, establishing a parallelism between the different scenes depicted.
- d) Conscious employment of elements of different traditions. From the literary, can be quickly cited the demon Etrigan's speech pattern (rhymed iambic pentameters), or the free-verse pattern of S.T.'s speech, with the frequent and reticent pauses (an element that is proper to the character, being absent in the similar entities of the Parliament of Trees), the quotation of books, such as Clive Barker's *Books of Blood* and mentions of entities from Lovecraftian lore, and even the title of the arc in question, *American Gothic*, relative to a literary genre. Old horror movies, such as George Romero's classics on undead, are also cited at times. *The Nukeface Papers* presented pages and pages of news related to radioactive incidents.
- e) The composition of the pages seems to favor angulous and distorted panels, sometimes superposed to one another, whose effect is to destabilize the reader

and imbue the action with a sense of confusion, to use converging lines and round compositions to focus the attention of the reader, and to use rectangular (that is, *normal* panels, according to the most common use of the page in comics) panels to imbue a sense of normality and steady the pace of the narrative.

- f) The use of *motifs*, repeated elements appearing multiple times in a same issue, acquiring a signification of their own, is also identifiable as one use by Moore that can be understood as developing into a trope (a stylistic characteristic) favored by the author.
- g) Despite the fact that the tradition of the genre has largely limited itself to stories in which a physical battle leads to the conclusion of the plot, that is rarely the case with Moore's production – the culmination of the plot usually subverts the expectancies of the reader, despite the building of narrative tension frequently suggesting an upcoming confront.

Those being some of the characteristics most notably present in the works analyzed (which, again, favored the most prominent qualities of each issue, and therefore allowing for a less than perfect compilation of features, but a worthy exercise nonetheless).

3.14.1 A Quick Look into the American Gothic

The title of the story arc also invites a quick look into the literary genre and its relations to the storyline in general – if only to see if the title is at all justified. The first part of *A Companion to American Gothic* (2014), dedicated to the analysis of the development of theory and studies pertaining the genre, argues that it probably rose to academic attention only in the 60s, with the publication of Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960), which defended that American fiction in general presented many Gothic characteristics, being “a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation” (FIEDLER, 1966, *apud* HOGGLE, 2014). Until then, the American Gothic productions had largely been regarded as “‘low culture’, even when the focus has been Edgar Alan Poe” (HOGGLE, 2014, p.3). That was mainly due to the genre being considered incapable of dealing with serious themes in its early critical assessment, a situation that was intensified in the 1920s with the rise of New Criticism as an important academic influence, which regarded most of the previous theories insufficiently ‘literary’, and (Old) Historicism, which considered literary texts as reflections of their context, and, as such, a mesh of ideas

and worldviews with an internal coherence, passible of decoding through knowledge of this context. Gothic being Gothic, that is, a genre pointing to the underside of culture, the clash or idea that's usually left in the shadow, was, logically, not highly considered by these theories. Their influence helped to keep the Gothic in the shadows as well (which is perhaps a proper place for a genre concerned with the dark) until the 60s, when a renaissance of sorts was made possible, mainly due to "renewed interest in psychoanalysis and Marxism, theoretical modes that have since been used extensively and effectively in interpretations of the Gothic in many forms" (HOGGLE, 2014, p.5). Fiedler, in particular, saw these theories, in relation to the Gothic, as a (dialectic) struggle between opposing forces – conscious *versus* unconscious; drive for economic power *versus* search for cultural autonomy.

After the 1960s revival, the idea of American Gothic was tested once and again with new, emerging theories that challenged and/or assimilated the pre-existing ones, such as Deconstruction (with which the idea of *monster* is brought to light by the notion of the centrality of the self and the consequent undermining of the estranging of the other for cultural purposes, for instance). As Hogggle puts it, "this view(s), as older theories could not see, is an excellent fit for a Gothic mode that has always been dependent on signifiers that have 'floated' away from grounded points of reference" (HOGGLE, 2014, p.7-8). Further studies through the 1980s and 1990s, preponderantly the phenomenological studies of Heidegger and the linguistic Marxism that bases Bakthin's and Derrida's views, have placed this instability as the (elusive) center of the understanding of the Gothic form, through the genre's refusal to admit a fixed norm other than the continuous pushing of boundaries and exposition of inconsistencies. Post-structuralism has also kept an attempt eye in psychoanalysis, regarding the Gothic, given the immense usefulness of ideas such as Lacan's uprooting of the signifiers in the study of a notoriously uprooting genre. Further theoretical developments, which applied the deconstructivism notion to societal (and, therefore, political) structures, such as gender, identity and the effects of colonization, helped to carry on the popularity of the Gothic – and the subversive undertones of the genre seem to be particularly adequate when dealing with the extremes that are so common in the American literary and cultural *zeitgeist* and which are, in fact, crucial for the very definition of the genre.

In *The Rise of American Gothic*, chapter 9 of *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002), Eric Savoy describes the genre as the underbelly of the white whale that is the 'American way of life', a shadow cast by the Enlightened principles of liberty and 'the pursuit of happiness'. And yet, this view is, for him, overly reductive, bearing in mind that:

These clichés, and the impulses in American life that they represent, are not in mere opposition; they actually interfuse and interact with each other. This realization will take us far in understanding the odd centrality of Gothic cultural production in the United States, where the past constantly inhabits the present, where progress generates an almost unbearable anxiety about its costs, and where an insatiable appetite for spectacles of grotesque violence is part of the texture of everyday reality. (SAVOY, 2002, p.167)

It is, therefore, in the dialogic relationship between the American Dream and American Nightmare that the genre is ultimately proficient, a wheel that feeds itself with the dynamic knowledge that the brighter the light, the deeper the shadow. A genre anchored in the imitation of formulaic devices present in the European Gothic, the American version generated astonishingly disturbing narratives, that fed off the mainstream culture to grow, innovative and experimental. According to Savoy:

Its power comes from its dazzling originality and diversity in a series of departures that situate the perverse – as forms, techniques, and themes – *inside* the national mainstream and thereby unsettle the implications of Walt Whitman’s brave assertion that “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem”(SAVOY, 2002, p.168).

Savoy equates the historical aspect of American Gothic with Lacan’s concept of ‘Real’ (that is, the real is that which is not bound by the symbolic process), where the tension between the symbolic and that which cannot be symbolized are a motto for the Gothic’s power of expression:

(...) it is that very struggle to give the Real a language that singularly shapes the American Gothic as broadly symptomatic of cultural restlessness, the fear of facing America’s darkly pathological levels. It is also, I suggest, what gives rise to Gothic verbal figures, their urgent straining toward meaning, and their consequent strains upon the limits of language. (SAVOY, 2002, p. 169)

As examples, the author brings the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe, which he sees as complementary – Hawthorne rises the shadows of America’s past, while the “fully realized aesthetics of the corpse and the darkest attractions of death” (SAVOY, 2002, p.180) required the presence of Edgar Allan Poe and his dark explorations of the human psyche. Savoy sees Poe’s achievements through a Freudian lens, pointing the melancholia and the obsession of death and how these authors influenced the subsequent production, from Emily Dickinson to Herman Melville to Henry James, and points out that, contrary to Harold Bloom’s idea of *Anxiety of Influence*, the driving force behind American Gothic is rather the influence of anxiety. Savoy sees the American Gothic, then, as a

profoundly experimental genre, feeding off the mainstream culture and thriving in its shadow, exposing its disturbing (perverted) entrails back to the light of mainstream, in a dialogic movement that both built and deconstructed American reality.

Therefore, what we have, in regards to American Gothic, is a genre that subverts the normative elements of American culture by exposing their flaws (much like an ironic comment would), and, by doing so, kindles discussion and thought on cultural matters specific to American culture, a positive reinforcement of thesis and antithesis in which the synthesis (the notion of American culture and identity), grows stronger.

In that sense, it is very easy to see how the title is appropriate to the story arc. Despite the conscious effort to, coherently with the title's history and developed tropes, make use of what is called in the story 'classic frighteners', there is also not only a movement to come to terms with the antagonists' viewpoint, in each issue (making it clear to the reader that, though there are antagonists and protagonists, there are not necessarily heroes and villains), but also the attachment of diverse symbolical and cultural tropes of American culture to the several storylines, so that the stories are not merely about monsters attacking, but refer to overlaying subjects that are part of the fabric of America itself. In Douglas Wolk's *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels work and what they mean* (2007), the author notes that:

[Moore had] identified what was interesting and useful about Swamp Thing as a character. Wein and Wrightson's original stories about the character had been an excuse to investigate the broader idea of what monsters are and what they mean. They'd had Swamp Thing travel across the United States, encountering monster archetypes (a Frankenstein-like "patchwork man", a werewolf, a witch). Moore's year-long "American Gothic" storyline had the same structure, but this time each horror-archetype monster was explicitly connected with one of the monsters of the American national psyche: the werewolf story was also about repressed feminism (think lunar cycles), the zombie story concerned American's gun fetish, and so on. (WOLK, 2007, p.231-232)

Wolk is quite right. In *Swamp Thing* #38 and #39, the conflict with the vampires from the flooded town of Rosewood turns into a struggle between two different communities, each striving to survive, each centered in protecting their youths. The vampire community, however, being visually and thematically inspired by youth originally (*The Saga of the Swamp Thing* #03 brought the idea of the *punk* vampires long before Moore had taken over the title), assumes a different meaning in their struggle to legitimize itself as a community, growing to represent youth itself, brewing and breeding in the *underground* (quite literally, in the case of Rosewood's populace, which adds to the argument) and seen with distrust by the more conservative majority of the population – or, by association, the vampirism is used to

represent the very idea of the rebellious adolescence, when the children, raised within the values and the costumes of the family, have to rupture the paternal bond in order to grow into independent adults, becoming something strange to the familial home in the process (at least symbolically). True, the phenomenon is not exclusively American, but rather a general stage, constantly revolving in the guts of every generation – youth growing independent and showing different values. But it is American as well. And the idea ‘of what monsters can this rising culture brew, being so different from us’, the concern for the future of the upcoming generation, is also dealt with, and made into a horrible, nightmare, through the monstrous figure of the vampire’s offspring.

Swamp Thing #40 is not merely about a werewolf, but about the role of women in American society, how they feel constrained (and angry) with their customary roles of housewives and how they seek liberty – the joke with ‘I am woman, hear me roar’ song and motto being one fastidious moment of irony in an otherwise very serious and dramatic plot, in which the protagonist (the werewolf), incapable of dealing with the anger for her constraints and incapable of hating her detractor (husband) seeks the liberty of death, in a very carefully constructed net of symbols, involving the treatment of women throughout history in various cultures (as exemplified by the Pennamaquot women locked in their menstrual lodges, the natural cycle of their bodies being considered impure).

Swamp Thing #41 and *#42* brings, similarly to the precedent *Swamp Thing #10* (where the monster is saved from Arcane’s grasp by the ghosts/zombies of slaves, who rise after the villain inadvertently reveals his plan to *enslave* the world), slave revenants. This story (which, again, bears similarities with the previous iteration) is set in a former *plantation*, a very American setting (sadly) in a moment in history, and the restless spirits of slaves cannot abide the idea of slavery being exerted again. All that is similar. But the emphasis on the spirits of the slaves being unable to rest properly in Moore (the entire, and quite monotonous, dialogue of the first page of issue #41) can be read to symbolize a country unable to properly put to rest the grudge of slavery, in which the former slaves watch sleepless, vigilant of ones that might once again rise to take other’s freedom – a very astute picture of racial tensions in America, a country famously concerned with ‘liberty and justice for all’ in which the price of liberty is said to be, in the words of Jackson¹⁹, ‘eternal vigilance’. The issue also comments on the

¹⁹ Originally attributing the words “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance” to Thomas Jefferson, I found the article about the source of the quotation by Anna Berkes, at <<http://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2011/01/eternal-vigilance-is-price-of-liberty.html>>, last accessed on 07/05/2018, and subsequently corrected myself.

culture of spectacularization in America, where the fascination with celebrities and their antics attracts a large part of the population not only to watch, but also to be part of the film crew, some of which descendants of slaves who go back to this role, for entertainment purposes. The racial tension between the stars of the show, Angela and Billy, both holding a grudge, and the conciliatory nature of Richard, also can be seen to represent the tensions existing in the nation – and, conversely, the transition of Richard into a racist slave owner (Wesley) can be said to represent how easy it would be for slavery to return (Richard, incidentally, does not recover from the possession but rather runs into the burning house, perishing in the flames). Incidentally, the ex-slave character, zombie or not, finding a place of employment with long hours and little pay, locked in a box for most of the week, may be also understood about a comment on where *modern* slavery finds its place in modern America.

So, the case that the arc is concerned with common American tropes, taken to horror proportions and developed symbolically to represent the country itself stands, even if some of the issues do not directly address (so clearly) the same agenda. *Swamp Thing #43*, for instance, the *filler* with S.T.'s tuber, can be understood in terms of a drug culture and the benefits and dangers of drugs, particularly in a country addicted to prescription drugs and wealthy enough to be the target of most cartels – but its main function as a unit inside the arc is to both bring back the character's history, thus connecting further the storyline with S.T.'s lore, and work the dichotomy between the flesh and the green, to underline the different, competing aspects of the protagonist (and help the reader understand his different perspective about some of his adventures and that of the Parliament of the Trees as well).

Serial killers are not an exclusively American phenomenon, but they *are* a large source of entertainment in America. Rare is the Detective or Forensics TV show who hasn't had to contend with one of these, and even excluding real offenders (such as John Wayne Gacy and Ed Gein), the Hollywood production of movies both inspired and fictional works based on serial killers is quite large. The press (and the police as well) tends to 'name' the killers (sometimes these names become more famous than the killer's names themselves), and to avidly follow their 'careers'. Moore, himself, has indicated interest in the matter, having written stories with them (prominently *From Hell*, from 1991-1992, a new take on the murders of Jack the Ripper, but also in *Swamp Thing #31*, where Matt/Arcane brings the serial killers back to life). *Swamp Thing #44*, though, takes the idea one step ahead, suggesting that serial killers are America's boogiemans (hence the self-given 'title' of the killer).

Swamp Thing #45 brings a story in which the “main character”, the Winchester haunted house, in California (or ‘Cambridge’ house, in Moore’s fictional universe) is used to discuss the repercussion of gun fetish in America. A society that is at all times concerned with its freedom, the ‘right to bear arms’ is, as discussed, a common point of contention in American politics. The issue is used to argue that, in a certain viewpoint, the entire country can be said to have sprung from the barrel of a gun (guns having been used, along contaminated blankets, to dispose of the ‘previous tenants’).

Swamp Thing #46, the tie-in with the event *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, shows a landscape of chaos and confusion. It does further the plot by the revelation of the nature of the enemy (the *Brujería*) and the killing of Sister Anne-Marie, but it is not easily related to any common American trope.

Swamp Thing #47, despite being centered on S.T. travelling to the Amazon and meeting the Parliament, bringing into continuity definitely Alex Olsen, as well as other S.T. analogues, also presents a quite allegorical obsession (and, paradoxically, Puritanism) of the press (represented by the *Houma Daily Courier*’s editorial staff), which at the same tie buys the sex photos and decides to publish them for moral reasons allied to personal interest (the daughter of one of the editors going to the same place Abby worked).

Issues #48 and #49 bring their adventure to a close (they lose) and help to set the stage for the last chapter. These issues are more related to the final issue than to American tropes, as a whole though it may become difficult to elide the fact that the South American witch tribe is completely focused on America (as if America were the center of the world), and that the (DC Universe’s mystical) movers and shakers meet secretly in Washington DC (more precisely, Baron Winters’ house) – a somewhat loose connection that is there, nevertheless and can be used to (weakly) argue the point that the story arc is 100% consistent (which it doesn’t need to be) in its concern with American tropes. What is important to underline is that typically American tropes and themes are dealt with in the arc, symbolically and in horror tones, which sometimes approach the farcical, but are there to approach dark, often unmentioned, aspects of American culture – which is precisely what American Gothic is all about. Therefore, the title is completely justified, up to this point (and even more so to those who read further, since the final story of the arc is concerned with America’s Manichean views, both religious and otherwise).

4. THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

So, here we are. This is the point where I tell you to go to Hell. I'll be your Virgil in this adventure, guiding you as well as I can into the structure of the final issue of *American Gothic* and, eventually, come through exactly at the point of departure. The work studied will have remained the same, the reading performed in these pages being, ultimately, nothing but what the name entails (a reading, an interpretation, the only role a critic can perform, based as it may be). Somehow, no matter how much effort is put into it, the process of critical assessment of a given work will ultimately lack the transformative power of the work of art itself. It adds nothing to it, only making it easier to see features already lying (dormant or explicitly) in the structure of the work itself, a sandcastle built atop another sandcastle, bigger and more complex. And with a better sand, too, properly moisturized. All in all, a perfectly useless effort, criticism. Incapable of anything but an opinion on a given work of art, as legitimate and respectable as any other opinion. And yet.

Yet, the analysis of such features, the dissecting of a work, exposing its ugly entrails to the world (perhaps an effort to divine the present or the future through the innards of the past) is precisely where the educational nature of criticism lies – unveiling the possibilities of signification to new generations in hope that the stakes will be risen even higher in the future, with readers made more complex and educated through our efforts. And that, the education of the reader, to quote Hamlet²⁰, “‘tis a consummation devoutly to be wish'd”. Because the world, like a good book, can be read at different levels of complexity, and a good reader is a reader that's better prepared for the world. Upon hearing, say, a political discourse, a good reader can listen to what is not being said, as well as that which is explicit; can understand the influence of context in said discourse, and even predict to a degree what, if anything, will come of it, how much is 'lip service' and how much sense the whole thing makes. A good reader can, based on the wording of a piece of legislation, predict how effective it will be, if implemented, and the points that will cause confusion. A good reader can understand that each fact or theme can have diverse viewpoints on it, and is better prepared to understand

²⁰SHAKESPEARE, William. Hamlet, Act III, Scene I, verses 1756-1757. Text in public domain freely available in [HTML format at the address: <https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/play_view.php?WorkID=hamlet&Scope=entire&pleasewait=1&msg=pl#a3,s1>](https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/play_view.php?WorkID=hamlet&Scope=entire&pleasewait=1&msg=pl#a3,s1), last access 07/12/2018.

another's opinion, for being capable to understand the particular *reading* that led to it. Good readers are necessary. Criticism helps a little.

4.1. A LITTLE STRUCTURE BEFORE "THE END"

In the upcoming pages, things will get even cheesier when half of the semi-abandoned mystical characters of the DC Universe unite to help the battle from the physical plane, whereas, in Hell itself, the really supernatural power engines will engage in battle directly against part of the Hell's army and the creature of Darkness, said to be Evil itself. Before the ensuing battle, however, one must prepare accordingly. In our case, this is largely a matter of terminology and theoretical background.

Our efforts towards the analysis of the final installment of the storyline start with a brief presentation of Narrative Theory applied to Comics, based on the summary presented by Herman & Vervaeck in their *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (2005), in particular due to their compilation of the different theories by Gérard Genette, Slomith Rimmon-Kennan and Mieke Bal, into a coherent whole that leaves, in my opinion, very little behind regarding the original works, and has the advantage of being an effort aggregating the thoughts of many of the most brilliant minds in the field. I have made a more extensive effort towards the theoretical particularities of each of these works in my master's thesis, *Quis Evaluates Ipsos Watchmen* (2014), where a detailed review of each text, along with comments, can be found (p.23-63) and further considerations on how to apply narrative theory to a more visual medium (p.155-190), which will appear on summation as I present the theoretical background underlying the following analysis.

Herman & Vervaeck attempt to unify, in the chapter of their book reserved for structuralist narratology, the progresses made by the authors in their respective theories. The authors begin by establishing a parallel between Gérard Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An essay on Method* (1983), Rimmon-Kennan's *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983) and Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1997), stressing the underlying pattern, common to the three works, which established the division of the narrative text in three different parts, one referring to the characteristics of the text, of the events described and of the organization of these events, as in the table below:

	Genette	Rimmon-Kennan	Bal
Story	Histoire	Story	Fabula
Narrative	Récit	Text	Story
Narration	Narration	Narration	Text

Table 4 – Narrative Terms (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 2005, p.45)

The authors, having found such similarities regarding every narrative's structure, organized their summary in tables of contents, listing the main narrative structures. Assuming the terminology proposed by Rimmon-Kennan to each different level of the text (that is, *story*, *text* and *narration*), perhaps for clarity reasons, since terms such as *fabula*, *historie* and *récit* are not nearly as intuitive, they present the concepts present in each level. The first table is related to *story*:

Actions/Events	– functions	<input type="checkbox"/> cardinal
		<input type="checkbox"/> catalyzer
	– indexes	<input type="checkbox"/> pure
		<input type="checkbox"/> informative
	– combinations	<input type="checkbox"/> arbitrary = pure + informative
<input type="checkbox"/> implication = catalyzer + cardinal		
<input type="checkbox"/> mutual implication = cardinal + cardinal		
		sequence
		embedding, . . .
Actants	– subject/object	
	– sender/receiver	
	– helper/opponent	
Setting	– bipolar scales and boundaries	
	– as an index connected to actant and action	

Table 5 - Story (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 2005, p.46)

Story is divided in three sections: *events*, *actants* and *setting*. Events are developments of the story, and must be linked to each other in order to form a sequence. Events that are related are called *bound motifs* (as opposed to *unbound motifs*), and are essential for the narrative. *Bound motifs* can be either static or dynamic (static motifs do not cause change, while dynamic motifs do). The authors use Roland Barthes' idea of *functions*, elements that are responsible for the horizontal progress of events, advancing the narrative through links of causality, opposition, temporality, etc. *Indexes* do not advance the narrative, but they bring forth meaning, instead, and indicate qualities. *Cardinal functions* open possibilities, while *catalyzers* present the development of these possibilities. Indexes can be *pure* (must be

interpreted by the reader) or *informative* (does not require interpretation). These structures may combine in complex ways (therefore the *combination* present in the table). The authors mention also Bremond and Propp's models as examples of alternative systematizations of events in narratives (Propp identifies a large number of functions, Bremond proposes a model also consisting of functions, but divided in possibility, realization and completion). Actants are classified according to the role played by the characters in the story, and can be active or passive, in Bremond's classification. The authors also mention Greimas' actantial model (consisted of six different classes, *sender* and *helper*, *object* and *subject*, *receiver* and *opponent*) as a better-known alternative. They also mention that such dynamics leads the readers to expect certain actions from certain actants, and this may serve as a tool for achieving different goals in a text (such as suspense). Actants with depth beyond the mere actions are characters (Forster's theory of round and flat characters is mentioned, as well as Rimmon-Kennan's three scales – complexity, change and penetration in the inner life). Setting is related to the space where the events happen. While events are dynamic elements of the story, other structures are fixed points. The setting can be used as an index for the action, being related to it through symbolic use of opposites and/or boundaries.

Time	– Duration	<input type="checkbox"/> ellipsis
		<input type="checkbox"/> acceleration/ summary
		<input type="checkbox"/> scene
		<input type="checkbox"/> deceleration
		<input type="checkbox"/> pause
	– Order	<input type="checkbox"/> direction = anachrony (versus achrony)
		* analepsis
		* prolepsis
		<input type="checkbox"/> distance
		* internal
– Frequency	<input type="checkbox"/> reach	
	* external	
	* mixed	
	<input type="checkbox"/> singulative	
	* punctual	
Characterization	<input type="checkbox"/> iterative	
	* durative	
	* simple	
	* plural	
	* external vs. singulative	
Focalization	<input type="checkbox"/> repetitive	
	* internal vs. singulative	
	– Direct	
	– Indirect: metonymy	
	– Analogy: metaphor	
Focalization	– Types	<input type="checkbox"/> external/ internal
	– Properties	<input type="checkbox"/> fixed/ variable (2)/ multiple (> 2)
		<input type="checkbox"/> space: panoramic/ simultaneous/ limited
		<input type="checkbox"/> time: panchronic/ retrospective/ synchronic
		<input type="checkbox"/> cognition: omniscient / limited
		<input type="checkbox"/> emotion: objective / subjective
		<input type="checkbox"/> ideology
	* unequivocal / polyphonic	

Table 6 - Narrative (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 2005, p.60)

Narrative deals with *time*, *characterization* and *focalization*. As in Genette's theory, time is divided in *duration*, *order* and *frequency*. *Events* may be presented in several ways: *ellipsis* (that is, the event is not presented at all), *accelerated presentation* (summary), *scene* (correspondence between event and narration), *deceleration*, until the *pause* (where no action happens). *Order* makes the relation between the events and the succession in which they are presented to the reader: *analepsis* (flash-forward), *prolepsis* (flashback), both divided in *internal* (that is, the out-of-order scenes are contained in the narrative), *external* (outside the narrative) or *mixed* (either end or begin within the narrative). Temporal dislocations have a certain *reach* (length), and go a certain *distance* from the present (first narrative). They can be *punctual* or *durative* (depending on whether it is only a scene or a sequence that is shown). *Frequency* deals with repetition, and can be *singulative* (one event, one narration), *repetitive* (one event, more narrations) or *iterative* (one narration, more events). *Characterization* happens when a character receives qualities. That can happen through *direct presentation* (of these qualities, descriptions), through *indirect presentation* (metonymy, the qualities are suggested) or through *analogy* with other characters or elements (metaphor). *Focalization* is concerned with the relationship between "the object and the subject of perception" (p. 70). It can be *internal* (character focalizer) or *external*, *fixed* (one focalizer), *variable* (two focalizers) and *multiple* (more than two focalizers). The focalizer can relate with the space of the narrative in different ways, it can control the space of a narrative (*panoramic*), can perceive several places at the same time (*simultaneous*) or can be restricted to the place where the focalizer is (*limited*). In regards to time, the focalizer can be *panchronic* (move freely through time) *retrospective* (looks only to the past) or *synchronic* (perception happens at the time the event is happening). The focalizer can be omniscient or have its perceptions limited to that of a character. It may be emotionally involved with the narrative (*subjective*) or not delve into emotions (*objective*). Finally, the focalizer may present its ideology *implicitly* or *explicitly* in the text (but it is important to keep in mind that an ideology is always present in the text, whether or not the focalizer is identifiable). When there are several ideologies coexisting in the narrative, it is called '*polyphonic*'.

Narrating	– Narrator types	<input type="checkbox"/> level: extradiegetic/ intradiegetic
		<input type="checkbox"/> involvement: heterodiegetic/ homodiegetic
		↓
		*autodiegetic *allodiegetic
	– Properties	<input type="checkbox"/> temporal : subsequent/ prior/ simultaneous/ interpolated
		<input type="checkbox"/> visibility : covert/ overt
		<input type="checkbox"/> reliability : high/ low
		<input type="checkbox"/> status : authority * diegetic * mimetic
Representation of consciousness		
	– Diegesis/ mimesis	
	– Indirect speech/ free indirect speech/ direct speech	
	– Diegetic summary/ summary, less purely diegetic/ indirect content paraphrase/ indirect discourse, mimetic to some degree/ free indirect discourse/ direct discourse/ free direct discourse	

Table 7 - Narration (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 2005, p.80)

Narration is divided in *narrating* and *consciousness representation*. The narrator can be a part of the narrative (*intradiegetic*) or not (*extradiegetic*). Regarding its level of involvement, the narrator is *homodiegetic* when it has experienced what it narrates, and *heterodiegetic* when it hasn't. If the narrator is also the protagonist of the story, it is an *autodiegetic* narrator. If the narrator is only a witness of what is narrated, it is *allodiegetic*. As for the temporal properties of the narration, it can be *subsequent* (things that already happened), *prior* (things that will happen), *simultaneous* (things that are happening) and *interpolated* (mixed). The narrator may be *overt* (present in the narration) or *covert* (does not appear much), *reliable* (high reliability) or *unreliable* (low reliability). The *authority* of the narrator may be derived from its personality (*diegetic* – social identity) or from its style (*mimetic* – honesty, reliability and competence). The representation of consciousness in the narrative can happen through indirect speech (or quoted speech), free indirect speech (stream of consciousness) or direct speech. The less intervention from the narrator, the more mimetic a text.

This third table concludes the presentation of Herman & Vervaeck's narratological model, which is a unification of the structures proposed by some of the most prominent structural narratological studies (including Genette, Rimmon-Kennan, Bal, Barthes and Greimas, among others). And, using this (highly efficient) model as the basis of our investigation, this work will propose changes in order to be able to deal with the

particularities of the medium – that is, since Comics is composed of both iconic and verbal signs, a different narratological approach must be reached.

In this work, the structure of the narrator will suffer a subdivision into different structures: *reciter*, *monstrator* and *meganarrator*. The *reciter* is the narrator responsible for the *verbal* part of the narrative. The *monstrator*, the narrator responsible for the *iconic* part (that is, the images). The *meganarrator* is the structure that coordinates the interaction between these two structures. These structures were taken from the chapter five of Thierry Groensteen's *Comics and Narration* (2013), where he proposes the name *fundamental narrator* for the overlaying structure, but since the concept is very similar to the optimally-named *meganarrator* present in Ann Miller's *Reading Bande Dessinée* (2007), this work is partial to Miller's terminology. These structures will allow not only the differentiation of the different types of data (images and words), but also the analysis of iconic elements, and how iconic choices, such as style, shadows and techniques, influence the reading of the comic. It is also of note to highlight the common practice of *teamwork*, preset in modern comics' production – with a writer and one or more artists, frequently an inker and a letterer as well, a division that seems to ratify the division of the narrative structure, being largely present in real life as well. Usually the style is particular to one artist, but in teams the work of the penciler (the one responsible for the images in pencil) is also influenced by the artistic style of the inker (who applies the ink, a process that can be very subtle in interfering with the pencils or very changing, depending on the artist) and the colorist (coloring can completely change the reading experience of a comic). So, what we have is a unique product, not exclusive to any of the artists' style, but pertaining to the entire team (usually the writer is the lead in these choices, but teams are collaborative by nature, and a team with Moore in it tends to be much more so). In order to focus on the analysis at hand, and not working into the theoretical background structures that are not mentioned in it, the pertinent authors and terminology related to images will be presented as necessary.

Other structures taken from Thierry Groensteen are the ideas of *restrained arthrology* and *general arthrology* (words derived from the Greek word for space, *arthros*, and focusing in the spatial interactions inside a page and in the work as a whole, respectively), objects of the chapters two and three of his book *The System of Comics* (2007). These are useful for understanding shifts of narrative rhythm and variations of consistent uses, or even relations between panels or images that are set spatially apart (such as the many visual references to older issues of *Swamp Thing* inserted by Moore in the story so far, or the consistent use of

motifs, which could not appear consistent at all, unless more than one issue of a series is considered).

4.2. ANALYSIS OF “THE END” (THE END OF ANALYSIS?)

If, for instance, “a character is the effect that takes place when an actor is endowed with human characteristics” (BAL, 1997, p.115), then those characteristics are the only thing setting the two levels (the strictly functional and the more complex structures being essentially the same) apart. It is, then, for the purposes of this analysis, interesting to join the similar structures (actions and events and actants and characters), both for organizational purposes and the possibility of developing a structure with further depth instead of going on to the next structure and picking it up again to analyze the next narrative level – a less confusing approach, so to say. Another choice here made was to swap the order of the elements and analyze the actants and characters before the actions and events (since someone is bound to be performing the actions, and a presentation of the characters may help the understanding of their actions and events they take part in).

There is still another issue here that must be addressed: the publication of comics in the 80’s hardly met academic standards: mostly the pages were unnumbered, sometimes critical information about the issues were lacking (such as local of printing, city the editor was located in, and so forth) and the insertion of ads between the pages sometimes interfered greatly with a story’s pace. The 1986 Anniversary issue #50 of *Swamp Thing* was not an exception to the rule, bringing several ads and a complete lack of page numbers. In reprints of the saga, this aspect of “The End” (the problem with the reprinting of the edition) is brought forward by the addition of a page (here counted as p.30) completely set in black, in latter editions, to preserve readability. That is to say that, since the original ads are omitted from collected editions, a one-page gap would have had the effect of separating the double-page spread (p.34-35), which only make sense together. To increase the problem, there have been other recent collected editions (an example would be *A Murder of Crows*²¹) with different paginations. For practical reasons, since it is unlikely the reader will have the 1986 annual edition, the following pages will be counted from the first page of the story onwards, discounting any ads and with the insertion of the totally-black page #30 to fix the last double

²¹ Available upon purchase at the Amazon store, at <<https://www.amazon.com/Swamp-Thing-VOL-04-Murder/dp/1563897199>>, last accessed in 09/16/2018.

page spread (which seems like an interesting editorial choice, it being coherent with the storyline). This would allow readers in any platform or of any edition or commemorative reprint to follow the pagination without any issues.

4.2.1 Actions and Events

E. M. Forster has famously written in his famous book *Aspects of the Novel* (1985) that “‘The king died and then the queen died’ is a story. ‘The king died, and then the queen died of grief’ is a plot” (FORSTER, 1985, p.86). What Forster was pointing out is that the difference between story (our notion of ‘actions’) and plot (our notion of ‘events’) is the emphasis on causality, which makes the event a logical unit, superior to a mere sequence of actions, which may be random. Slomith Rimmon-Kennan, however, has more to say about the difference between the different levels of the action; for her:

While granting that causality and closure (i.e. a sense of completion) may be the most interesting features of stories, and the features on which their quality as stories is most often judged, I would like to argue that temporal succession is sufficient as a minimal requirement for a group of events to form a story. (RIMMON-KENNAN, 2005, p.20)

The reason for her (somewhat radical) take on what constitutes a story (events) is that, whenever two actions are lined together, the reader may link them in a casual relationship through interpretative means, not needing an explicit causal relationship between the different actions – it would be enough that the actions follow each other in time (distinction which would make the structural analysis of some time-travel related sci-fi stories very interesting). Complex as the problem may be, since this work is not centered in the comparison between narrative levels, but in the understanding of the whole narrative, the story will be transcribed below as events (the most complete form, establishing casual connections, adding complexity to the narrative and presenting the sequence of actions as is perceived by the reader), in a slightly different formatting in order to distinguish it from the rest of the analysis:

Cain rises from the bottom of a well, at the prompting of his brother Abel, who threatens to throw molten lead on him. In their discussion, it is revealed that they were arguing what to watch on the TV (Cain suggesting that Abel wanted to watch a “reanimated valley girl”, probably referring to Abby – and putting in doubt the idea of their watching regular TV) when they started another argument, this time about a bird (probably Judith passing); Abel thought it was a raven, Cain that it was a

crow (Cain was right, according to Judith's presentation, though the distinction might not apply for magically-generated birds), after which Cain strangled Abel and threw him down the well tied to an anvil. Cain calls for a "house meeting" because something strange is happening. Abel notices something wrong with the sky, and Abel informs him (after making fun of him for not knowing and as they climbed a hill to look down at the landscape of Hell) that "meddlers" from Earth had succeeded in awakening the primal darkness from its sleep amidst the chaos beyond Hell, and that it is expected to rise against the Light, so everyone was choosing sides and preparing for battle. That presented a grave problem for them, who dealt with stories of 'right and wrong', because the upcoming conflict, involving absolute forces, might solve them once and for all. On the plains, S.T. and Deadman (who is troubled by the vicinity of their demon allies) watch the preparations for the battle. S.T. wants to know why their enemies did not attack and Deadman wonders if the Darkness is not thinking things over, after being excluded from the Universe since its formation. Deadman also mentions that Etrigan went to gather the 'higher' demons and that the Phantom Stranger disappeared, and observes that S.T. looks glum. S.T. then tells Deadman that he is troubled, because the conflict was nearing and he was doubtful about their stand – how useful it is to fight evil. He tells Deadman about his previous adventures, how he saw evil in many forms (emphatically, once again describing the encounter with the vampires as the fight of two different communities, and perpetrators and victims as part of a circle, how gender fought gender and race fought race), but did not understand its nature, and at the verge of battle he was still uncertain. In Baron Winter's house, Zatanna informs Constantine that the conflict draws closer, and, along with Sargon, Zatara, Baron Winter, Dr. Occult and Dayton (or 'Mento', in his superhero *alias*) they start the session, which is reminiscent of a *séance* in which they gather around a round table (which may have symbolic value), lock hands and project their consciousness into the afterworld – taking care not to release their hands, since apparently the feedback could kill them – to channel their energies through Dayton and help with the battle, attacking Darkness with them. First Dayton contacts Etrigan and describes him speaking with other demons who speak in rhymes, while putting on his armor, made out of huge living metal scorpions impaled on a spiked harness around the demon's body – that detail horrifies Dayton. Etrigan is talking to Lisquinelle, another rhymer, that they are the cream of Hell, but only a small part of a higher plan, and so he would help to maintain God's balance. They then get their mounts and ride to join the army. Dayton's mind then wanders to their other allies, just as Dr. Fate joins them (rising from the ground and surprising Dayton with the fact that his mind is not that of the man under the helmet, but that of the helmet itself). Fate (who S.T. doesn't know) mentions to have felt the mounting conflict from Salem, and that he is ready to defend

Heaven. Deadman starts to inform him that things are pretty calm, but is interrupted by a demon screaming about lights coming. It is the Phantom Stranger, who arrives surrounded by globes of light, who he describes as houris, valkyres or angels (syncretic statement that unifies the religions in the DC Universe, in a way), and which make the demons nervous. Dayton describes how they start to organize their army into ranks, with demon foot soldiers at the front (the cavalry of rhymers soon joining them), the angels behind them and S.T., Stranger, Fate and Deadman behind them. Constantine asks about the Spectre, but Dayton tells he hasn't arrived yet. Baron Winter asks Dayton to investigate their enemies, and Dayton reports that three demon brothers are helping organize the demons' army. As both sides stay motionless, the Darkness starts to rise from the chaos, immediately frightening Dayton with its immense size – Dayton starts begging Constantine to give up, but Constantine tells him it's too late. Sargon suggests they build their power level, but Dayton keeps complaining, so Zatanna is hesitant. But Baron Winter clarifies that it is indeed too late, and if any of them is going to leave there alive, the only way is ahead. Dayton doesn't think he is strong enough, but Dr. Occult tells him that one is as strong as one allows oneself to be (that being a rule of magic). Zatara then asks Dayton to inspect the battle and tell them how it is going. Dayton does so, and is horrified to contact Etrigan's mind and find out that the demon wants to charge against the Darkness. Etrigan and Lisquinelle are charging the demons who are near the Darkness, and Etrigan sacrifices Lisquinelle in order to break through. The *séance* directs their power to help Etrigan, but Dayton gets too close to the entity and senses its thoughts, seeing hunger for knowledge and understanding – and claiming it is in pain. Zatanna tells Dayton to not be taken over by Darkness and help Etrigan, but Etrigan is grabbed by Darkness and they lose contact. The Darkness then talks to Etrigan, who is trapped inside it – tells him that it has a great need, for when the Light was created, it became conscious of its self, and from then on it was not content. The Darkness then asks Etrigan what it is, and Etrigan answers: “Your name is Evil, absence of God's light, his shadow-partner, locked on endless fight” (p.16). To which Darkness answers that Etrigan only taught it fatalism and inevitability and spits him out, continuing its stride through Hell. Dayton then announces that Darkness had noticed them and tried to wave them off. A huge shockwave of power manifests itself inside Baron Winter's house, like a gust of hot wind, and Sargon starts to feel warm. Soon he is smoldering and asks for help, but Zatara tells him that he is upsetting Zatanna, and asks that he dies silent, like a sorcerer. Sargon then apologizes, says it was the pain speaking, not him, and explodes into flames, as Constantine and Baron Winter keep holding his burning hands, in order not to break the circle. Zatanna wants to end the session, but Constantine tells her that that isn't the sort of fight they can abandon, so they carry on. In Hell, the legion of demon foot soldiers started fleeing when

Etrigan and the rhymers' cavalry fell. They look at the towering Darkness (described as a mountain or island moving forward) and Dr. Fate flies towards the front, with Deadman on his heels. Fate faces the three demon brothers leading the charge (Abnegazar, Rath and Ghast, three demons from the DC Universe that, summoned by the enemy Felix Faust, fought the Justice League of America several times from the years 1962-1965), and asks them why are they cooperating with the creature, hearing back that they intend to be 'lords of misrule' in a new universe. Fate then kills one of them, but is distracted and ends up being swallowed by the Darkness. Inside it, the creature tells him that, in that place of order, light and names, it had received the name of 'evil', then asks Fate to tell him what evil is. To what Fate answers that "evil is a quagmire of ignorance that would drag us back as we climb towards the immortal light; a vile, wretched thing, to be scraped from the sandals like dromedary soil" (p.21). Darkness then tells him that Fate only taught it contempt, and that was not the answer required – and spits him out as well. Deadman catches the unconscious Dr. Fate and takes him to the others. Without the Spectre, they do not know what they can do against such a powerful enemy. The angels (or houris, or valkyres) attack. The heroes are the last line of defense. In Baron Winter's house, the *séance* continues, as Darkness attacks again. Dayton explains it wants them dead, because they are a distraction, and it's going to burn another of them. Zatanna starts to feel warm, but Zatara says "ssenkrad ekat em daetsni" ('Darkness take me instead' backwards) and burns in his daughter's place, warning Constantine that if Zatanna does not survive, he'll haunt the Englishman for eternity. Zatara then explodes in flames as well. Zatanna holds his burning hand, and, when Constantine tells her he knows how she must be feeling, she answers that if he did, he'd run away, crawl under a stone and hide. John still tries to apologize, but she just tells him to get on with the *séance*, and John asks Dayton what he is seeing. In Hell, the angels (or whatever) are useless against Darkness (Phanton Stranger mentions to have seen Metatron – the 'voice of God' – falling). Then the ground starts to shake, and they realize that the earthquakes are the steps of the giant Spectre, the most powerful among them. Dayton is connected with the Spectre, and can get a better idea of the shape of Darkness (which he compares to a maggot). The Spectre grows even larger and tries to face the Darkness, as Dayton adds their power to him, what seems like a useless effort. Dayton now describes the creature as having a bone cowl, over its blind head. Then four columns descend from further up onto the Spectre, and he is involved by the Darkness as well. Inside, the creature tells him that its hunger for understanding is growing, and if its questions are not answered it intends to snuff out the light to end the anguish it causes – the Spectre forbids it to do so, but the Darkness demands answer to its question: what is evil for? The Spectre answers that "evil exists only to be avenged, so that others may see what ruin comes of opposing that great voice and cleave

more wholly to its will, fearing its retribution” (p.28) The Darkness tells the Spectre he only taught it vengeance, and spits him out. With the Spectre lost, no one in the battlefield has any hope of winning, but Constantine asks Dayton about S.T., telling him that’s what he was prepared for. S.T. then enters the Darkness in resignation. The Darkness tells S.T. he is extraordinary, for coming voluntarily, and asks what he has to offer. S.T. says he’s nothing to offer, he cannot fight but cannot stay idle as well. Then the Darkness asks if he’ll answer its question: what is the purpose of evil? To that, S.T. says he cannot, that he already tried to make sense of evil but failed, that he’d seen evil’s cruelty and apparent randomness, he’d asked the Parliament of the Trees, and they seemed to say there was no evil... then S.T. repeats the story of the Parliament, of aphids eating leaves, bugs eating aphids and being finally devoured by the soil, which is rich by decay but allows life to thrive. S.T. then gets to the conclusion that maybe evil is the humus, formed by the decomposition of virtue, that allows virtue to grow stronger. The Darkness then tells S.T. that it feels a definite end coming, and asks him to leave freely, as he came. S.T. leaves, and Dayton is reporting what he sees to the rest of the *séance*, the demon brothers and Etrigan confused, the Spectre weeping, as the Darkness approaches the lighted region the armies were defending. Something then comes from the light, and the Darkness rises from the ground to meet it – which gives Dayton the opportunity to finally glimpse Darkness’ real form, making him mad. Darkness was a hand, that rose to meet another hand made out of light, and as they meet everything starts spiraling and falling, in a scene that suspiciously resembles a ying-yang symbol, reflected in Dayton’s pupils as the helmet fails and short-circuits, just as he screams that he doesn’t understand. The *séance* is over, they feel the power was discharged. They do not understand how they are alive, and weight their losses, unsure if they achieved a victory of sorts, despite Zatara and Sargon’s death and Dayton’s sanity. But Constantine says it looks more like ‘a no-score draw’. In Hell, S.T. awakens near Deadman, learning that the Spectre and Fate left. S.T. doesn’t understand the resolution of the conflict, but the Phantom Stranger explains to him that Light and Darkness, Good and Evil, still fought, but the nature of their conflict had changed, the atmosphere felt discharged, as if a conflict brewing since the beginning of the universe had been resolved. Now Good and Evil understood how much dependent they were on one another, and their relation became somewhat different – the Stranger mentions a flower blooming in Hell and an adder slithering on Paradise. They look towards the horizon, wondering if things are to

change. Cain and Abel, who had been looking at everything from their mound, start to discuss what happened. Cain hopes for a peaceful time, but Abel is concerned with what the changes in the conflict between Good and Evil might mean for the stories they tell. Cain then throws him off the cliff and walks towards his house, saying he is sure they'll think of something.

The plot of the narrative immediately suggests several different considerations. Perhaps most prominently because of the medium and occasional company of the protagonist, an approximation between the functions performed by the super-heroes in the narrative and the mythical heroes of old might prove helpful in unveiling symbolic meanings buried in the story of the monster. The dual nature of Swamp Thing (both a monster and the hero/protagonist of the story) is also of note, and the dynamic between these roles – but that is a matter for latter discussion, in the section reserved for the analysis of the character. Some elements of the narrative, such as the test of the hero (it being to answer a question, a riddle of sorts) and the trebling of the other failing heroes also bring forth memories of old stories and folktales, structures deeply ingrained in literary tradition, inviting a parallel between the character's functions and the classic structures such as folktales and Fairy Tales.

Perhaps one of the most well-known attempts to understand the deep structure and patterns of such narratives was exerted by the Russian scholar Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1984). Through a comparative study of 100 tales from *Naródnye Rússkie Skázki* (or *Russian Folktales*), by A.N. Afanás'ev, Propp attempted to compile into a model iterative structures which presented similar functions to the story (Propp used tales 50-151, which would correspond to 93-270 in the modern version of the text, according to the preface to the second edition of the book).

The Proppian model to the folktale is based on thirty-two functions exerted by what he calls *dramatis personae*, character types whose role in the story or tale is characteristic and falls into a given pattern. In a Proppian tale, an initial situation, (which may present some sort of *absentation* of parents or children or an *interdiction* that is usually *violated*) is disturbed by the action of a villain (*a villainy*). This villainy may be preceded by a *reconnaissance* by the villain (who is delivered the necessary information or means through *trickery* or *complicity*). This villainy causes something to go wrong (which Propp refers to as *lack*) and the hero feels or is told about that (*mediation*), and is set on his path (if the hero actively seeks the adventure, this is a *beginning counteraction*), step that is called *departure*. Having set off, the hero frequently meets with a *donor*, who tests the hero in some way (*first function of the*

donor). As the hero passes the donor's test (*the reaction of the hero* to the test), he *receives a magical agent* from the donor, to help with his quest, and is then *transported/guided* to another place. There, he fights the villain (*struggle*) and can be *branded* or marked somehow. The hero then achieves his *victory* over the villain, whereupon the *villainy is undone* (the hero obtains the object of his quest), a function that Propp considers the 'peak of the narrative' (p.53). The hero then *returns* from his quest, sometimes being *pursued* or chased by the villain's associates. *Rescued* from the pursuit, the tale usually ends. Sometimes, though, a *second villainy* may occur, which might make the hero *set out* in a quest once again, and once again be *tested by a donor, pass the test, receive a magical agent* and *be transported* home (since the main quest has ended). There he may *arrive unrecognized* to find a *false hero claiming* his feats. The hero then goes through a *difficult task*, and *succeeds*; he is then *recognized, exposing* the false hero. The hero may then be *transfigured*. The villain is *punished* (or pardoned) and the hero gets *married*. Propp also points out that some stories may have *obscure elements*, that do not fit these functions, but they are rare, and that only very rarely a tale will go through all the functions, and many of them may not appear at all in any one tale.

Another pressing point (for our analysis, that is) in Propp's book is the idea of trebling:

[...] trebling may occur among individual details of an attributive nature (the three heads of a dragon), as well as among individual functions, pairs of functions (pursuit-rescue), groups of functions, and entire moves. Repetition may appear as a uniform distribution (three tasks, three years' service), as an accumulation (the third task is the most difficult, the third battle the worst), or may twice produce negative results before the third, successful outcome. Sometimes action may simply be repeated mechanically; but at other times, to avoid a further development of the action, it is necessary to introduce certain elements which hold up the development and call for repetition. (PROPP, 1984, p.74)

That is, the repetition, frequently used to the mounting of narrative tension, but also to delay the resolution of the plot, is frequently employed in tales. What makes his observation interesting is not merely the recognition of the phenomena, for, as he says, the matter has been "sufficiently elucidated in scholarly literature" (PROPP, 1984, p.74) – but because a very peculiar form of trebling happens in the story. There is, indeed, an accumulation involved (specifically the strength, or power, of the hero opposing the Darkness). But the interesting point is that this trebling does not further the plot nor does it merely delay the action – there is a specific meaning to it, which shall be discussed further on in this work to argue exactly how

the character of the Swamp Thing differs from that of the traditional hero. On the same matter (regarding myths), Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote:

First, the question has often been raised why myths, and more generally oral literature, are so much addicted to duplication, triplication or quadruplication of the same sequence. If our hypothesis is accepted, the answer is obvious: The function of repetition is to render the structure of the myth apparent. [...] Thus, a myth exhibits a “slated” structure, which comes to the surface, so to speak, through the process of repetition. (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963, p.229)

So, not only iteration (repetition of structures) is a reoccurring phenomenon in myths, but it is also one of the features that helps the anthropologist distinguish this type of story, allowing recognition (a detail worthy of mention precisely because that is pretty much what happened in the case in point – the attention called to the classical or ‘deep’ structures because of the peculiar characteristics of the narrative). Identified the problem, then, another one ensues – how does the story fit Propp’s model²²?

Upon further inspection, it was clear that the analysis of the story “The End” could not be read as an entire tale – many elements, clear in the whole storyline (such as the origin of the magical agent, the fundamental piece allowing Swamp Thing to prove himself the hero and solve the final riddle – were only present in recollection. In order to analyze the coherence of the story with the Proppian model, then, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of *American Gothic* (one of the reasons why such an extensive analysis was necessary).

In the story, the *initial situation* (α) set through the first issue of *American Gothic*, in the story “Growth Patterns”, when S.T. is regrowing his body after the encounter with Nukeface, in the company of Abby. Contrary to Propp’s model, the donor arrives early, in the form of an Englishman with bad habits and colorful personality, John Constantine. Constantine comes to set the stage to the trials of the donor, in exchange for information about S.T. – so the steps of *trickery* (the Brujería using the ‘classic frighteners’ as means of achieving their ends - η^3), *complicity* (S.T.’s ignorance of the fact, so that he is compliant with the current order of things at the beginning - θ^1), *villainy* (the Brujería’s plan to gather belief; the murders they enact and command and their aim to end the universe, effectively declaring

²² A complete table with Propp’s model of the functions of dramatis personae is available as the Annex I of this study. It’s compilation was based on the organizational model proposed by Propp and on the structure elaborated by Grazielly Benvegnú Menezes in her work on morphology in “The Tale of the Three Brothers”, an inset story in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (2014).

war against this reality – A^{2;14;19}), and *lack* (when S.T. learns that reality is losing its balance – a⁶) are only learned retroactively throughout the adventure (however, they are laid here chronologically for the sake of comparison with Propp’s model). Through Constantine’s *mediation* (he dispatches the hero – B²), S.T. makes the decision to go along *beginning counteraction* (C) and *departing* (↑). Constantine repeatedly tests S.T., fulfilling the *first function of the donor* and giving him six different tasks (the vampires of Rosewood; the werewolf of Kennescook; the undead in Louisiana; the serial killer in Louisiana; the ghosts of the Cambridge house in San Miguel and, before telling him of the Parliament of Trees, the meeting with his crew and the trip to the space station in the Crisis crossover story – D^{7;7;7;7;7;7}). S.T.’s *reaction* to the tasks is to go through them, hesitantly, accumulating many doubts on the way (E¹). After Constantine’s tasks are completed, the Englishman teaches S.T. about the location of the Parliament of Trees, granting him the *magical agent* (F²) promised: more knowledge about himself. After the meeting, Constantine *leads* (G³) S.T. to the location of the Brujería, where they meet to face the villains. There, Judith betrays the group, but S.T. is able to turn things around and kill their foes, their confront ending in *victory* (I¹), but not before the villains accomplish their goal of waking the creature of Darkness, what for our purposes is a *second villainy* (A). Contrary to Propp’s model, then, the conflict with the villain does not solve the first villainy, and the peak of the narrative is postponed to the second conflict, where a solution is to be achieved (one hopes). Both Constantine and S.T. gather their allies: Constantine sides with Baron Winter, Sargon, Dr. Occult, Zatara, Zatanna and Mento in order to constitute what is akin to Proppian helpers, sending the hero and his allies magical help and occasionally distracting the creature of Darkness; S.T. sides with Deadman, Etrigan, the Phantom Stranger, Dr. Fate and (later) the Spectre, along with legions of demons and angels, in order to engage the creature directly. There a very subtle form of the false hero (L) appears, as, respectively, Etrigan, Dr. Fate and the Spectre face the creature of Darkness, each failing in defeating their foe. After which, S.T. faces the Darkness, but instead of attacking it (verbally or in any other way), he answers the question (a *difficult task* in the form of a riddle, or a question – M³) about the nature of Evil with what he learned with his adventures, actually putting to use the magical agent acquired through the donor in his confrontation with the villain. S.T. does not win a literal battle, but is able to enlighten Darkness as to what its role might be, and perhaps alter the nature of the final battle that takes place a couple of panels later. In that sense, he is able to fulfill the adventure in the classic model, only with the delay of the second villainy, and is *recognized* as the hero (Q) just as

Constantine expected. The false heroes are exposed (though only by their contrast with S.T.’s achievement - Ex). However, the greater twist in the plot relies precisely in the idea of the nature of Evil: in the end, it is revealed that Good and Evil are part of the wheel of the universe, and that in order for one to exist, the other needs to do so as well – that is, the villain of the story was no villain at all, merely part of the story’s engine. That rupture with the classical form proposed by Propp is irreconcilable with Propp’s premise, that sees the villain as one of the key elements to the plot, in fact demanding of the reader a reinterpretation of the story, from the beginning, under a new light – that accounts for the fact that the narrative tension built throughout the story arc ends up in a civil stalemate between the forces of Light and Darkness, and a less Manichean view of the world is needed. After that, supposedly, S.T. is free to return to his ‘bride’ (w^2) – though he does not explicitly leave Hell in the issue. The following table organizes the information in the Proppian model:

Definition	Designation	Description	Particularities and Application in the Story:
Initial situation	A		Swamp Thing is regrowing his body with Abby.
Trickery	H	The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings.	The villain assumes a disguise.
	η^3	The villains employ other means of deception or coercion.	The Brujería acts through the “classic frighteners” to increase humanity’s belief in evil in order to gather power.
Complicity	Θ	The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy.	
	θ^1	The hero agrees to the villain’s persuasions.	Swamp Thing does not realize the situation until warned by Constantine.
Villainy	A	The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family.	This is the motor force of the tale, for which all the previous functions are preparations. Sometimes the villain enacts two or more villainies at once.
	A^2	The villain seizes or takes away a magical agent.	The Brujería sets of the “classic frighteners” to gather people’s belief.
	A^{14}	The villain commits murder.	Constantine’s allies, during S.T.’s trials, are killed by the Brujería: Emma, Sister Anne-Marie and, through Judith, Benjamin and his mother and Frank.
	A^{19}	The villain declares war.	The aim of the Brujería is to destroy the Universe, in order to rule the next one. So, in a sense, at war with everything.
Lack	A	One member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something.	

	a⁶	Various other forms.	The actions of the Brujería put the entire universe at stake. So, lack of a sense (stability).
Mediation; The Connective Incident	B	Misfortune is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched.	
	<i>Seeker heroes</i>	B² The hero is dispatched directly.	Constantine promises S.T. knowledge about himself.
Beginning Counteraction	C	The <i>seeker</i> hero decides or is allowed to take action.	S.T. (after discussing with Abby) decides to go under Constantine's guidance.
Departure	↑	The hero leaves home.	S.T. goes to Rosewood.
The First Function of the Donor	D	The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or helper.	
	D⁷	Other requests.	S.T. is repeatedly asked to solve problems caused by the Brujería: 1) Vampires in Rosewood; 2) Werewolf in Keenescook; 3) The undead slaves in Louisiana; 4) The Bogeyman, also in Louisiana; 5) The ghosts of the victims of the Cambridge repeater, in San Miguel, CA; 6) Meeting his group and the superheroes in the space station.
The Hero's Reaction.	E	The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor.	In the majority of instances, the reaction is either positive or negative.
	E¹	The hero withstands (or does not withstand) a test.	Frequently Constantine voices his disappointment with S.T., but their association progresses nonetheless.
Provision or Receipt of a Magical Agent	F	The hero acquires the use of a magical agent.	
	F²	The agent is pointed out.	After the meeting in the space station, Constantine points out the location of the Parliament of Trees, which will give S.T. the information he sought about his origin, which was also supposed to help in the end.
Spatial Transference Between two Kingdoms; Guidance	G	The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search.	
	G³	He is led.	Constantine and his group meet S.T. near the Brujería hideout.
Struggle	H	The hero and the villain join in direct combat.	This step is different from the fight with the donor – in this struggle, the reward is the object of the quest.
	H⁴	Others	Judith betrays the group, but S.T. finds his way in and helps with the fight.
Victory	I	The villain is defeated.	
	I¹	The villain is beaten in open combat.	S.T. destroys the Brujería.
Peak of the narrative (no designation).	K	The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.	This structure (the very peak of the narrative) is absent: S.T. fails to liquidate the initial misfortune (the

			Darkness is still rising). The peak is therefore transferred.
Second Villainy	A	The message is sent by the Brujería and the Darkness rises (the hero fails to stop the first villainy, so it develops).	Swamp thing has to fight the new enemy, along with several of DC's supernatural characters.
Unfounded claims	L	A false hero submits unfounded claims.	The false hero claims the hero's feats. In this case, the 'false heroes' are the ones that fail to deliver the resolution of the plot – those who engage with the Darkness: respectively, Etrigan, Dr. Fate and the Spectre. This function is presented trebled. (:)
Difficult task	M	A difficult task is proposed to the hero.	
	M³	Riddle guessing and similar ordeals.	S.T. is asked by Darkness to define Evil.
Solution	N	The task is resolved.	Through his journey, that made him question the nature of Evil, and his talk with the Parliament of Trees (the magical agent), S.T. gives a satisfactory answer to Darkness.
Recognition	Q	The hero is recognized.	By a mark, a brand, a wound or something given to him.
Exposure	Ex	The false hero is exposed.	Only by opposition (while the other heroes fail, Swamp Thing's succeeds).
At this point, Moore's narrative begins to derail from Propp's model.			
Punishment	U	The villain is punished	The villain turns out not to be a villain, merely a part of the fabric of the universe. This leads to a reevaluation of the story as a whole.
Wedding	W	The hero is married and ascends to the throne.	
	w²	A married is resumed as the result of a quest.	S.T. is (supposedly) allowed to return to his life with Abby (unaware of her arrest for bestiality).
Obscure Elements	X	Do not conform to this classification and are not defined by any of the functions presented.	The narrative refuses the Manichean model of hero stories, proposing a different view instead, reliant on the co-dependence of the concepts of Good and Evil.

Table 8 - Morphology of "The End"

So, in a Proppian formula, the adventure could be summarized in something like: $\alpha \eta^3 \theta^1 A^{2;14;19} a^6 B^2 C \uparrow D^{7;7;7;7;7;7} E^1 F^2 G^3 I^1 X A L: M^3 Q Ex X w^2$. Of notice, in this structure, are the multiple villainies, which encompass seizure of a magical agent, murder and declaration of war; the multiple tests given by the donor, the two 'X', two obscure elements that, in this case, omitted crucial functions of Propp's model (end of initial lack and punishment or pardon

of the villain) and, finally, the fact that the hero does not return from his adventure (evident by the absence of the returning symbol, ↓).

Algirdas Julien Greimas later adapted Propp's model into something a little more manageable in the article *Actants, Actors and Figures*, originally published in 1973, printed in English in 1987. Although the base argument of Greimas' article relies in the distinction between the structures of *actors* and *actants* (what he here understand as *characters* and *actants*), the author proposes a different understanding of the deep structure of the text through the employment of a model of *actantial roles* (p.111-113), based on the opposition between actantial semes (smallest signifying unit). Greimas' model is based on three different axis: the axis of *desire* (links the actant *subject*, that is, the protagonist, with the actant *object*, or the objective of his search – counter intuitive as it may be, the object is also an actantial role in Greimas' model); the axis of *power*, or *competence*, in which the subject is disjointed in opposites (a *helper* and an *oppositor*) and the axis of *transmission*, whereupon the object is sought by a *sender*, who may or may not be the same actant *receiver* of the object (all the actantial roles proposed by Greimas are found in p.112 of the mentioned article). It is of interest to notice that the idea of disjunction of a seme is a key note on Greimas' semiotic theory, and he advocates the practice of acquiring complex meaning through the analysis of semes through his famous *semiotic square*, or *rectangle*, in which a seme – let us say 'cooked' is the idea we are working with – must be considered in binary oppositions, along with an opposing pair (if there is 'cooked' there must be 'raw', for instance, and therefore also things that are 'not raw' and things that are 'not cooked' – forming a complex system in which meaning is negotiated). The idea of opposition is, then important in Greimas' theory. A graphic representation of his actantial model would be something like:

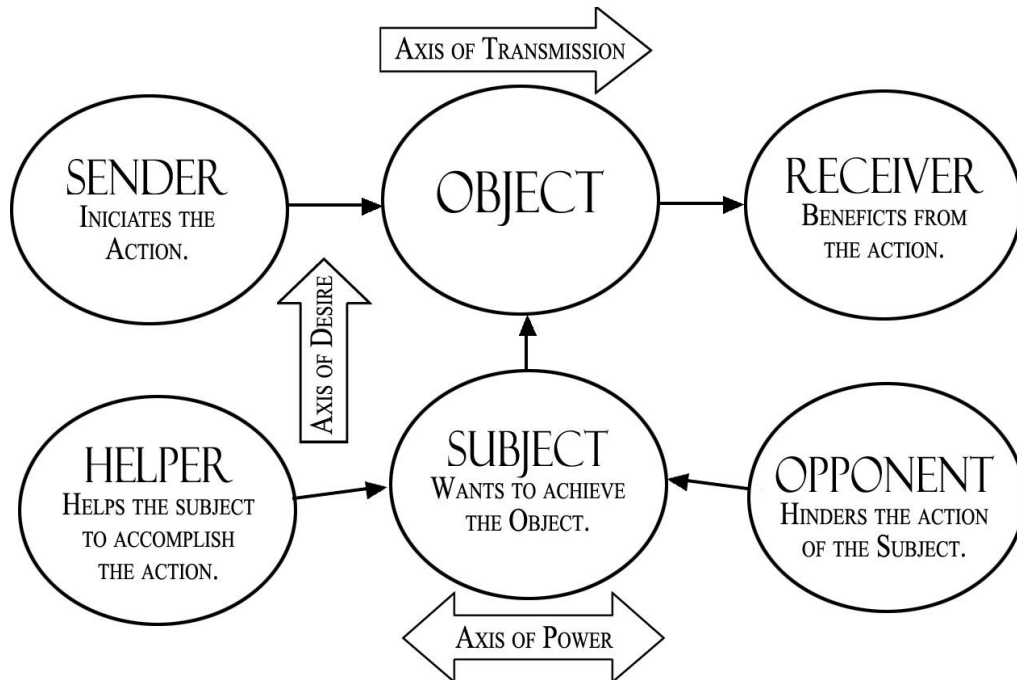


Figure 10 – Greimas' Actantial Model (cf. GREIMAS, 1987, p.112)

Associating each actantial role to a corresponding actor in the Swamp Thing story, the general meaning of the story would be rendered clearer: taking the obvious position that Swamp Thing is the *subject* of this structure, his *object* would be not to stop the Brujería, *per se*, but what the Brujería is trying to achieve, which is the rise and advance of the creature of Darkness. The *sender* who sets him on his quest is, obviously, Constantine (who is also a helper throughout the story arc, and particularly in the end, where he literally sends magical energy to distract the Darkness). The *receiver*, who profits from Swamp Thing achieving his goal would be pretty much the entire universe. As for *helpers* and *opponents*, there are a bunch. Constantine and his teams (both the team formed by Emma, Benjamin, Frank, Sister Anne-Marie and even Judith, at first, and the one formed by Zatara, Zatanna, Dr. Occult, Baron Winters, Mento and Sargon in the final fight) are helpers, and so are Deadman, Dr. Fate, Phantom Stranger, Etrigan and the Spectre. Judith can also be counted among the opponents, along with the 'classic frighteners' (in Propp they would be parts of the trials of the donor, so in a way structures that ultimately help Swamp Thing achieve his goals, despite having been sent by the Brujería; in Greimas' model, though, they are definitely part of the opposition, being structures that hinder the plot development – the plot does not go forward unless they are surmounted), the Brujería, and other minor characters such as the demons who engage them in battle and the Invunche (who is part of the Brujería). So, Greimas' structure would be:

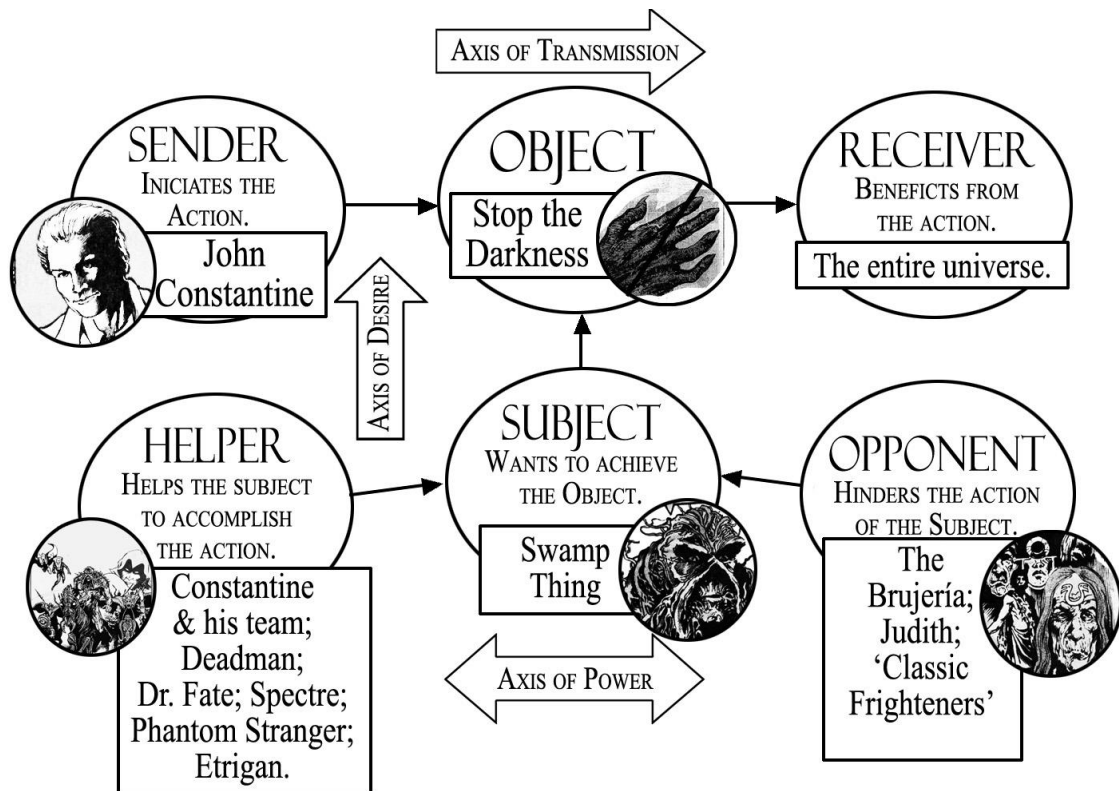


Figure 11 - Greimas' Structure Applied to *American Gothic*.

Of course, the efforts of the subject are ultimately rendered useless, because he fails to stop the Darkness, though he succeeds in engaging in conversation with it and, perhaps, helping things go towards a peaceful resolution – a state in which the object is and is not achieved. That is only to ponder that, though rendering the structure of the text clearly, Moore's story still falls very awkwardly in the mold proposed by Greimas (perhaps a little more smoothly than it did with Propp's, for Greimas' model is much more general, and, therefore, accommodating). That is mainly due to the resolution of the plot: similarly as what happened with Propp's model, Moore's story follows quite nicely in the path of the classical folktale until things take a wild turn near the end.

As Rimmon-Kennan points out, another structuralist, very similar to Greimas in his theory of functions, to deal with a deep story mode was Claude Lévi-Strauss. She even says that:

[...] the most important models of deep structure are those developed by Lévi-Strauss (1968, Orig. publ. in French 1958) and Greimas (1966, 1970, 1976). Although different in formalization, both consist of a correlation of two binary categories. (RIMMON-KENNAN, 2005, p.12)

So, very similar structures (though Rimmon-Kennan is talking about Greimas' semiotic square model, not the slightly more complex actantial model, which works with three axis of binaries rather than two (sender/receiver; subject/object; helper/oppositor).

Lévi-Strauss laid his methodology for the study of the deep structure of myths in chapter XI of his book *Structural Anthropology* (1963), entitled "The Structural Study of Myth". In it, the author is inspired by the Saussurean notion of the linguistic sign and the differentiation between *langue* (set of rules) and *parole* (language as practiced – spoken) to infer that the structure of the myths also worked as a language of sorts. That assumption derives mainly from the apparent randomness of the myths (where anything can happen) and the paradoxically organized form in which they tend to manifest (displaying similar structures) – not unlikely the Saussurean arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, which is made relevant both through conventions and employment in a structure. Lévi-Strauss organizes his approach based on three logical points:

- (1) If there is a meaning to be found in mythology, it cannot reside in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of a myth, but only in the way those elements are combined. (2) Although myths belong to the same category as language, being, as a matter of fact, only part of it, language in myth exhibits specific properties. (3) Those properties are only to be found *above* the ordinary linguistic level, that is, they exhibit more complex features than those which are to be found in any other kind of linguistic expression. (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963, p. 210)

Lévi-Strauss' approach is very similar to Propp's, in that he breaks the myth into its structural components, which he calls *gross constituent units*, or *mythemes* (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963, p. 211), thus reducing the essential functions to brief sentences (as brief as possible, but yet incredibly complex in comparison to the linguistic semes), and organizes them in tables (ultimately, though he at first refers to a system of cards), diachronically in lines and synchronically in rows, where a myth, organized in different line, brings forth variations of the same structures (which can be read in the rows, or the vertical axis). As one can see, the ultimate goal of this approach is to put it graphically, so as to be able to place similar structures in a way that they can be compared, in order to actually come into being – because in Lévi-Strauss method the mythemes are not constituted of isolated units, but of bundles of units, found by comparison:

The true constituent units of a myth are not the isolated relations but *bundles of such relations*, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning. Relations pertaining to the same bundle may

appear diachronically at remote intervals, but when we succeeded in grouping them together we have reorganized our myth according to a time referent of a new nature, corresponding to the prerequisite of the initial hypothesis, namely a two-dimensional time referent which is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic, and which accordingly integrates the characteristics of *langue* on the one hand, and those of *parole* on the other. (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963, p. 211-212)

Therefore, the organizing of the myth into bundles of relations that can be read both diachronically and synchronically (the aforementioned tables) allows the scholar to, through comparison, isolate these relationships and understand the deep structure of the myth. This is basically the system that Propp went through in order to come up with his functions of *dramatis personae*, but with one substantial difference: Propp's model is a closed one, with the thirty-one functions (plus the X one, which encompasses everything not predicted in the model), while Lévi-Strauss' is completely open to the interpretation of the scholar – as long as a mytheme can be logically argued and identified, it is valid. Lévi-Strauss demonstrates his technique through the analysis of the Oedipus myth: the myth is divided in four columns, in which he identifies two opposite manifestations of the same theme – namely, *overrating of blood relations* and *underrating of blood relations* (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963, p.215). One axis is reserved for the killing of monsters (associated by Lévi-Strauss with the *denial of the autochthonous origin of man* – due to monsters giving birth to human kind in old myths and being overcome by humans in this one), while the other to an opposite function, related to the characters' names (telling of their roles in the story, and so related to the *persistence of the autochthonous origin of man*). Lévi-Strauss' interpretation of the myth of Oedipus, then, is that:

The myth has to do with the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is autochthonous (see, for instance, Pausanias, VIII, xxix, 4: plants provide a *model* for humans), to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman. Although the problem obviously cannot be solved, the Oedipus myth provides a kind of logical tool which relates the original problem – born from one or born from two? – to the derivative problem: born from different or born from same? By a correlation of this type, the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure. Hence cosmology is true. (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963, p. 216)

So, the process culminates in a quasi-mathematical relationship between the two identified pairs of mythemes, where *A* is to *B* as *C* is to *D* (or *A:B:C:D*), from which derive the interpretation of the myth. Lévi-Strauss goes on to illustrate the need of considering

variations and earlier manifestations of the myth in one’s assessment through the analysis of all the known versions of the Zuni origin and emergence myth – but since this aspect of his theory is not relevant in the present case, only one story, with one version, being the subject of this study, we shall depart from his original text and attempt to put the method to our service in the story in question.

Having divided the story into twelve basic sentences, the following table is the resulting attempt to place them into relevant binaries, where two different movements were identified: first, the idea of *deployment*, where the crisis is caused by the Brujería sending the ‘classic frighteners’ into the world and, as a response, Constantine sending Swamp Thing to deal with them, and later telling him of the Brujería’s existence (ultimately setting him on the path to confront them) and sending him to the Parliament of Trees; finally, the Brujería unleashing the Darkness – so, in a sense, both manipulators (Constantine and the Brujería) send pawns to fight their battle, effectively turning the entire story arc into a Manichean battle of two opposing forces. The second movement identified is that between confrontation with Evil (reaffirming the Manichean notion of Good and Evil and the impossibility of a compromise), in which Swamp Thing is sent to battle the manifestations of Evil (frighteners, Brujería, Darkness) and relativization of Evil (where the protagonist cannot stop himself from breaking the Manichean worldview represented by the main plot, which eventually comes to become a *motif* in the story).

	Axis of Deployment of Heroes.	Axis of Deployment of Monsters.	Axis of Confrontation (Affirmation) of Evil	Axis of Relativization of Evil
Diachronic ordering (one element per line). →		Brujería sends the ‘classic frighteners’.		
	Constantine sends Swamp Thing out to stop the ‘classic frighteners’			
			Swamp Thing confronts vampires, werewolf, zombies, ghosts, the Bogeyman.	
				Vampires (<i>community</i>); Werewolf (<i>suppressed housewife</i>); Zombies (<i>cursed slaves</i>); Ghosts (<i>victims of the Cambridge repeater</i>); the Bogeyman (<i>insane child abuse victim, but a monster</i>).
	Constantine tells Swamp Thing of the enemy (Brujería).			
	Constantine sends Swamp Thing to the Parliament of Trees.			
				Swamp Thing gains crucial

			knowledge (<i>relativity of evil</i>).
		Swamp Thing and Constantine's group confront the Brujería.	
	Brujería wakes the Darkness.		
		Swamp Thing and his allies confront the Darkness. (They are tested).	
			Swamp Thing passes the test (<i>relativity of evil</i>).
			Evil and Good merge (<i>relativity of evil</i>).

Table 9 - Lévi-Strauss' Method Applied to *American Gothic*.

As a result of the development of these binaries, the story can be interpreted as a problematization of the Manichean paradigm sustained by the medium, where heroes representing the values of the culture are often sent to face monsters, representatives of its vices and taboos, thus reaffirming the values and the culture in the first place. This movement of reaffirmation of Evil is contradicted from within both with the notion that Evil seen through a different point of view (function normally performed by Swamp Thing – sometimes with help from the Parliament of Trees) – may not seem so clearly defined and the notion that Good and Evil need each other to exist, being terms of comparison themselves. Lévi-Strauss' method seems to be able to delve deeper into the broad meaning of Swamp Thing's story, not being tied to specific categories nor demanding specific structures in order to be realized. Of course, the highly interpretative nature of the procedures makes the effort a highly personal interpretation unlikely to be reproduced in a similar manner by another scholar, unless both are evaluating or comparing the same aspects of the myth – so perhaps the method seems so appropriate precisely because it was already the result of a conscious critical effort. But every process has its advantages and disadvantages.

Because we are dealing with the DC Universe, because the medium of comics is full of superheroes and the usual place (outside modernity) in which heroes can be commonly found is mythology, perhaps it would be useful to thread a little further down this road. Another (quite famous) method of mythical analysis is Joseph Campbell's idea of the *monomyth*, developed in the book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (2004).

In Campbell, the hero's journey is to be understood as a quest for wholeness, wisdom – in short, for an attitude that is conducive to a better state, what he refers to as searching for *the soul*:

It would appear, were we to follow the long genealogy of heroes and heroines in mythos, that it is via the soul being stolen, mismanaged, disguised, disrupted, preempted or trodden upon, that some of the purest features of the psyche may rise up and begin to long for—call for—the return of that radiant companion and counsel. [...] Since first daylight, the revelatory actions and lessons found in the oldest tales are ignited by and revolve around the loss of the precious thing. And then come the efforts, detours, and inspirations that suddenly appear whilst in pursuit of the recovery of the greatest treasure. (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.XIV-XV)

Societies then would reaffirm this quest by re-enactment of the myth – re-telling the story, celebrating the rites. There are some commonalities to most myths, which Campbell endeavors to point out throughout the book:

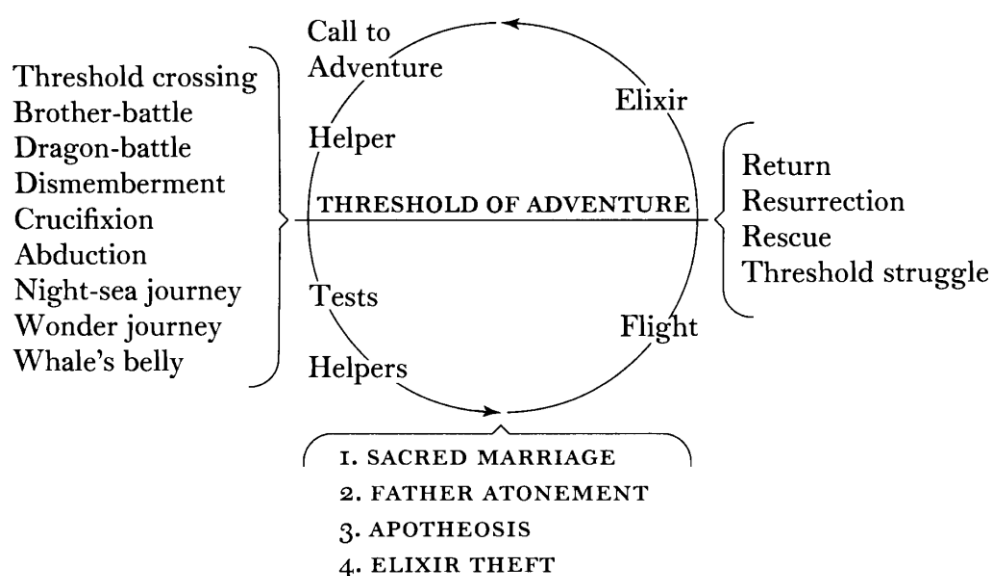


Figure 12- Structure of the Monomyth (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.227)

The mythological hero starts (as in Propp) in his *initial situation* which may be a house or castle; he is lured with a *call to adventure* (or carried away, or goes voluntarily, or prompted by a herald). The hero may *refuse this call* or accept it, case in which he is stopped (entombed). Those who accept the call usually receive *supernatural aid* of some helper, and get to a frontier of sorts, what Campbell calls the *threshold of adventure*, where he finds a *guardian*. The hero may defeat or argue with the guardian to travel to the other world (the magical world of adventure) or be killed and *descend to the underworld* anyway. In this new place of magic he undergoes *tests* and meets forces, some of which may decide or be compelled to help him (*helpers*). At his lowest point, the hero then must undergo the most extreme test and earn his reward. This *triumph* may be a representation of unison with the goddess-mother of the world (a syncretic version of Gaia), in what Campbell calls a *sacred marriage*; it may be the recognition of his merit by the father-creator (*atonement with the*

father figure); the hero may be turned into a divine being (*apotheosis*); conversely, if he has not secured any favors with his victory, he may have to *steal the elixir* (which can take diverse forms). This step is defined as an “expansion of consciousness and therewith of being” (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.217) – a place where the hero is transfigured, enlightened or freed in some way. Now, if the powers have favored the hero, he may *continue* his journey (now back to where he came, taking the elixir with him) with their blessing. If not, he has to *flee*. When he once again has to *cross the threshold*, his divine nature has to stay behind (if he was changed in such a way). The hero re-emerges from the underworld (or *resurrects*). The boon he brings back restores the world, solves the problem that made him leave in the first time.

Campbell’s approach is very reminiscent of Propp’s, but the differences are quite crucial: in setting a less specific, highly symbolic set of categories, the structure can be applied broadly to come to represent any sort of quest or adventure. That is not a happy accident – as Campbell considers myth to be an artistic or oral expression of structures deeply ingrained in the fabric of human existence, idea which pays a lot of tribute both to Freud’s idea of the unconscious and, particularly, Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious. Like Lévi-Strauss, Campbell believed myths talked through symbolism in a special sort of grammar – the difference being that, while Lévi-Strauss likened it to language, Campbell links the idea of the myth to an expression of the collective unconscious:

Dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream; both myth and dream are symbolic in the same general way of the dynamics of the psyche. But in the dream the forms are quirked by the peculiar troubles of the dreamer, whereas in myth the problems and solutions shown are directly valid for all mankind. The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one’s visions, ideas, inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man—perfected unspecific, universal man—he has been reborn. His second solemn task and deed therefore (as Toynbee declares and as all the mythologies of mankind indicate) is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed. (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.18)

And Campbell’s particular grammar is, like Propp’s before him, constituted of several steps likely to appear in a journey, not all present in every journey. But the model seems to be more generally constructed to allow a wider gamma of interpretations: every journey is an insertion into a different place, after all, and Campbell’s model can be applied to a vacation

trip or a dream as well as to a classic myth – perhaps the greatest difference between his and Propp’s model is the latter’s demand for the villainy, or the lack, making it indispensable a conscious opposition to the actions of the hero, while the former’s model requires merely a test, trial or tribulation of some sort, which can be interpreted in several different ways.

Taking Swamp Thing as the (somewhat obvious) hero of our story, he answers the *call to adventure* prompted by Constantine (his *magical helper*), who submits him to a series of *tests* (he has to confront: Rosewood’s vampires; the housewife/werewolf in Keenescook; undead slaves in Louisiana; the Bogeyman, also in Louisiana; the ghosts of the victims of the Cambridge repeater) in order to grant him the knowledge he seeks (his *magical help*). This knowledge is both about what is happening in the DC Universe (which is shown in the *Crisis on Infinite Earths* crossover issue), a communion with divine beings, so to say, and, finally, Constantine shows him the Parliament of Trees, where he gets knowledge about himself. This is, as mentioned, not an atonement with a father figure (as it may seem at first), but rather the receiving of a magical gift (arguable because this gift is ultimately used in his final victory, the meeting with the Parliament not being the moment of apotheosis). After that, the hero crosses over to the underworld (*threshold of adventure*) with some difficulty (the gate was guarded against him), but he battles and eventually wins against the Brujería, in the end (he is *tested*). However (and this is an interesting twist), the Brujería has achieved their goals, and the hero has to travel deeper into the underworld – though the transition is very smooth, for no guardian has to be vanquished, he merely gets there to find Deadman in a comedic scene where he is confused with a demon. There he stands his most difficult trial and his *status* as the *true* hero is recognized (by comparison with other more powerful supernatural beings of the DC Universe). Or, so to say, he is *transfigured*. One might also understand the idea of being engulfed by the primal Darkness and tested as an atonement with the father (or at least one of the aspects of the father), but it might demand a reasonably large good will towards the concept. Swamp Thing, emerging from Darkness (*resurrected*), does not need to bring the elixir back to the world, since his passing his test ensured that the elixir would restore the world (that is, change the nature of the conflict between Good and Evil instead of destroying the known universe). There is no movement of *return* from the underworld, however, maybe because Swamp Thing can visit the Underworld at will, being an elemental. Perhaps the reason is a bit more complex – but we will get into it.

As can be seen, it is not very complex to fit a story into Campbell’s model, and perhaps this is one of its most prominent qualities. Another is the understanding of the myth

as reenactment, as a celebration and (consequently) reinforcement of a given society's values and costumes. In the re-telling of stories, the performing of rites and ceremonies: "the whole society becomes visible to itself as an imperishable living unit. Generations of individuals pass, like anonymous cells from a living body; but the sustaining, timeless form remains" (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.355). So, the journey can also be read at a different, symbolic level of hero upholding the values of a culture (not the diegetic culture, of course, but the real life culture that generated the story). At that level, though a problem rises, for the doubt and uncertainty of the protagonist are ultimately validated and a relativism is established. If a hero represents the values of the culture that generated him, he necessarily fights the opposite values. When these are validated instead of the former, what is the lesson to be taken? The hero is in a moral checkmate, incapable of rendering his function and reaffirming the values of his culture through his support. This is an interesting dilemma, and one of the many points of contention between this story and the more well-behaved classical forms it seems to have to a large degree co-opted into its form.

And, with that question, this dive into the structure of the text ends. Of course, it is of no practical use to attempt to fit a text into a given theory for the purpose of testing the theory – the theory precedes the analysis anyway, so one might as well be spared of the effort. But there are many advantages, in a work dealing with tradition, to test how well the object fits the most well-known scholar's ideas of the form, if only for terms of comparison. But there were interesting developments in this exercise, prominently the notion that Moore's tale, with its moral relativism, lack of a real villain and hesitant hero, despite striking similarities with the classical forms (one might say too many for them to be coincidental) does not easily fit any of the molds presented (except for the one cast with the tale in mind, which was hardly surprising).

4.2.2 Actants and Characters

At this point, as anyone would notice, we have been dealing with terms like 'actant' 'role' and 'character' for a while now, even before starting the analysis or discussing what a character is. And that is as unavoidable as death or taxes, unfortunately: for an action to be performed (and therefore, for an actantial model to exist) there must be an actor. And every action develops in time, and happens somewhere, and its description involves a conscience – hence Narrative Theory. But even so, the divide between actants/characters and actions/events

is not even as clear as a line in the sand – it’s pretty much the sand itself, just as space and time are intrinsically linked concepts.

All that to say that by the moment we start looking at the concept of actant and character we have already seen a lot of what will constitute our analysis of actants, in its final installment – we have seen how these structures figure in several actantial models, some mythical, some directed at folktales or fairytales. It is interesting to briefly review the models with the emphasis on the actants, however.

4.2.2.1 Actants

A careful read of Propp’s table (the complete version of which is located at the end of this work) can render the following actantial roles:

Actantial Role	Related Functions
HERO	Departure (C, ↑); reaction to the Donor’s test (E); wedding (W*) – the function (C) is characteristic of the seeker hero).
VILLAIN	Villainy (A); preparation for the transmission of a magical agent (D); provision of the hero with a magical agent (F).
HELPER	Spatial transference of the hero (G); end of misfortune/lack (K); rescue from pursuit (Rs); help the hero with difficult task (N); transfiguration of the hero (T).
PRINCESS (sought for person)	Assignment of difficult tasks (M); branding (J); exposure (Ex); recognition (Q); punishment of a second villain (U); marriage (W).
DISPATCHER	Dispatch (B).
FALSE HERO	Includes decision to counteract and departure (C, ↑); reaction (E) and claims of the false hero (L).

Table 10 - Proppian Actantial Roles and Related Functions

So, in Propp’s model Swamp Thing would figure as the hero, the Darkness and Brujería as villains, Abby would figure as our princess and Constantine would be both our dispatcher and our helper (among others, most notably Deadman, Constantine’s parties, the Phantom Stranger, etc.). False heroes, as seen, can be understood as Etrigan, Dr. Fate and the Spectre. This was already seen here and demands no further clarification. And, as seen, Greimas’ version of Propp’s structure will reduce this table to:

Actantial Role	In Propp	Functions performed
SUBJECT	HERO	Seeks the Object.
HELPER	HELPER/DONOR	Helps the Subject acquiring the Object.
OPPONENT	VILLAIN	Hinders the Subject’s actions.
SENDER	DISPATCHER	Initiates the action.
RECEIVER		Benefits from the action.

Table 11 - Greimas’ Take on Propp’s Actantial Roles

The roles have already been discussed, with Swamp Thing as the subject, Constantine as the Helper (again, among many) and Sender, the Brujería as the opponent and pretty much

the entire universe as the receiver. The idea of the receiver is not present in Propp because in his model the adventure is ended through the balancing of the scale that was put off-balance in the beginning, while Greimas takes the idea in terms of axis (and if one sends for, one must receive).

While the method proposed by Lévi-Strauss is not fixated in actantial roles, but in general movements in the story (therefore not conducive to such a classification), an analysis of Campbell's monomythic structure can render clear actantial roles, such as hero, helper, guardian of the threshold and so on – though the reach and generality of Campbell's structures make them quite difficult to pinpoint. The actantial roles most commonly associated with Campbell's model are those proposed by Richard Vogler in the book *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (2007), which he calls *character archetypes*, in a reading of Campbell that is even more deeply influenced by the notion of Jungian archetypes and the collective unconscious. In fact, the central notion in Vogler's structure is that of the character archetypes as *emanations* of the *Hero* – that is, determined by the Hero structure to a degree. An iconic representation of Vogler's model follows:

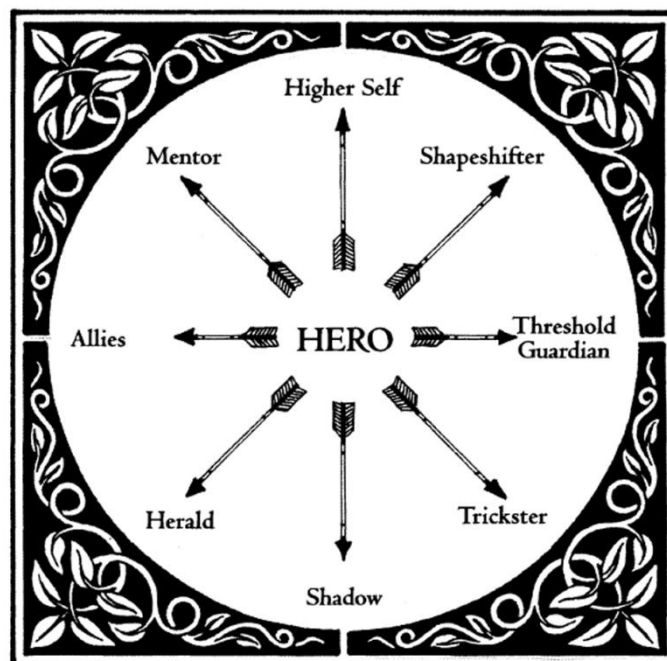


Figure 13 - Vogler's take on Campbell's actants (VOGLER, 2007, p.25)

As it can be seen, Vogler's model is centered in the figure of the hero, and the entire archetypal approach is considered based on what the other actants do in relation to the hero's mission. Actantial roles such as the *herald*, which is mentioned by Campbell as the "announcer of the adventure" (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.48), while others, such as *mentor* and *trickster* could be generally included in the notion of *Allies* (or Campbell's *helpers*, though he

also mentions the mentor as the ‘wise old man’ or women). Vogler proposed the following structures:

Actantial Role	Description of the Archetype’s function
HERO	The hero is someone willing to sacrifice on behalf of others. A structure akin to Freudian’s <i>ego</i> in its search for identity and wholeness, and therefore target of audience identification, the hero is often associated with action, sacrifice and growth.
HERALD	The herald shows (usually early in the adventure) to warn of a significant change to come. Psychologically, the herald calls for change, and a motivator.
MENTOR	The mentor aids or guides the hero. Akin to the psychological <i>self</i> , an idealized projection of one’s own. A teacher, a gift-giver, motivator and a determinant of the hero’s conscience.
ALLIES	Other helpers and companions, sometimes representative of unused parts of one’s personality that have their usefulness proven.
THRESHOLD GUARDIAN	The guardian of the gate. If properly understood, the guardian can be overcome and even turned into ally. Akin to the psychological <i>neuroses</i> , the ordinary obstacles, the guardian tests the hero, what may help his development.
TRICKSTER	Tricksters are mischievous characters, and serve the psychological function of questioning. Bringers of change and perspective, they frequently go on unchanged themselves.
SHAPESHIFTER	Shapeshifters are elusive archetypes, due to their main characteristic be that of changing. Psychologically, the shapeshifter is usually a representation of the Jungian <i>animus</i> or <i>anima</i> , the mystery of the other (usually in projection). The shapeshifter brings doubt and conflict to the story.
SHADOW	The shadow (akin to the Jungian shadow) is the dark side, the rejected or unexpressed aspects of the personality. The shadow is a reflection of the hero, and to a measure defined by it.

Table 12- Vogler's Character Archetypes (VOGLER, 2007, p.29-80)

The author regards character archetypes as facets of human qualities or personalities, to the point of connecting them to psychological structures. It is interesting to notice that, in his decomposition of Campbell’s roles Vogler sought only the structures more commonly found, making clear the point that “there are, of course, many more archetypes; as many as there are human qualities to dramatize in stories” (VOGLER, 2007, p.26).

The result of this decomposition is interesting, in that it helps place characters such as Judith, whose affiliation shifts during the narrative through the Brujería’s threats – making her therefore a shapeshifter according to Vogler. Constantine, in his turn, could be considered both the herald (since he is the one to announce the change) and the mentor (since he both guides and aids the hero, or Swamp Thing) – and also a trickster, not only because he tricks people into doing what he wants (as in obligating Zarata to take part in the group by enlisting Zatana, or convincing both Sargon and Baron Winters to participate by lying about the other’s intention to participate, independently) but also because he orchestrate the changes in the narrative, turning the plot into motion and having his ultimate nature remain mysterious (there are mentions of an incident in Newcastle, but Constantine’s past and powers remain largely

undiscussed throughout the narrative), and therefore undetermined – and that is unchanged, as well. Etrigan, Dr. Fate and Spectre can also be considered shapeshifters, since they change from other heroes and allies (which also encompass the Phantom Stranger, Deadman and Constantine’s groups) into failed heroes, or false heroes. The shadow, here, is also interesting, because it is not merely a shadow of Swamp Thing, but a general shadow, the shadow inside everyone, more a metaphorical concept than an enemy itself – and perhaps therein lie the unusual nature of the conflict: the only way to confront an idea is with other ideas, precisely what happens in the narrative. Also interestingly, the Brujería, if read as also a shadow, would suggest a conflict with Constantine, a group of dark wizards against another group of light wizards (Constantine’s allies), each with their monster (Swamp Thing and Invunche), fighting for the fate of the world, a chess game of sorts, with black and white pawns in opposite sides of the table. In that reading, Constantine would be the secretive hero of the story, and Swamp Thing would have to be considered an ally, an instrument of Constantine, invested with his secret weapon (the knowledge of Evil granted to him by Constantine, through the adventures and the Parliament of the Trees), as well as the Darkness would be considered merely the Brujería’s choice of weapon in this fight. That would be perhaps stretching a little thin the interpretive veil intentionally put over our eyes, but it makes sense if the metaphor stretches far enough without breaking the contract with the reader.

Having used the actantial roles to understand at least some aspects of the plot and how it relates to the structures proposed by many of the most well-known scholars in the matter, and, therefore, their points in contact with traditional sources, such as myths and folktales, one should derive the focus to what happens with actants when they become real boys. And that, to put it in so many words, lands us in the realm of what *characters* are.

4.2.2.2 *Characters*

This is perhaps the most complex notion to be discussed in this work. In fact, most of the analysis made until this point (the review of both volumes of the title, and the rest of the *American Gothic* story arc) was made because of the demands posed by the idea of the character, and the necessity to understand how Moore’s treatment of Swamp Thing differs from previous authors.

The problem with characters in Narrative Theory, however, is that it is a largely undeveloped field. As mentioned by Herman & Vervaeck:

The treatment of literary character as a set of traits may lead to static enumeration. Barthes famously considers a character a set of minimal semantic elements or semes. In this approach, character development is reduced to a change in the set, and dynamics come down to a sequence of two or more different stages of the set. Obviously, it is not at the level of character analysis that structuralist narratology has made its most significant contribution. (HERMAN & VERVAECK, 2005, p.70)

In Genette's work, little attention is paid to the role of characters and/or actants in the analysis of the narrative. Rimmon-Kennan is a little more charitable with the character's claim, and suggests a reconciliation of the two preponderant (and opposite) views on the matter: considering the radically different takes of characters as either merely an agent of narration or a mimetic person – up to the point of having an 'inner life' (as proposed by Ewen in 1971 and 1980, and cited by RIMMON-KENNAN, 1983, p. 44) –, the author points out the need for a theory that encompasses both possibilities. Rimmon-Kennan does not provide the theory itself, though, merely pointing out the necessity of dealing with the character structure. Mieke Bal's take on character is the more developed and interesting of the three, and will be dealt with in more detail.

Bal considers characters (in relation to actors) as "the anthropomorphic figures the narrator tells us about. By this, I mean the actor provided with distinctive characteristics which together create the effect of a character" (BAL, 2007, p.114). Characters, in a nutshell, do not have a concrete existence outside the text, and perhaps the reason for no consistent theory of character being available is precisely because of their human aspect, that tends to mislead readers into thinking they are dealing with more than mere constructs. Bal then goes on to determine the process of construction of characters (which she refers to as 'problems' in the study of character): even if there are multiple ways in which an actant can be imbued with qualities, there are some ways in which these qualities make themselves known. The first of which is *predictability*, where the reader gets to know more about the character, which makes it more predictable, and therefore more 'known'. Bal mentions the myth of Narcissus, suggesting that the man who falls in love with a mirror could be taken as an allegory of the reader, who, being human, tends to conflate character and perceived person, looking, so to say, in a mirror as well. The problem named *construction of contents* comments on how Characters must be constructed, the reader knowing relatively little about them in the beginning. Some tools for character building are *repetition* of character's behavior or reinforcement of descriptions, *piling up of data* about them, their characteristics can also be understood through their *relationships with others* and they may *change* throughout the narrative. However, these characteristics are only useful when the *outline* of a character has

been determined (that is, the reader can only make sense of them when understanding them in terms of a character's context or background). Bal suggests the organization of basic qualities into relevant semantic axes – those themes that seem to be pervasive in the story – in order to understand how the character figures in it, an approach not dissimilar to Lévi-Strauss decomposition of myths. Information about the character can be acquired explicitly, when presented by a character directly, through the narrator or deduced through the character's actions. The final problem, the *problem of the hero*, however, is where Bal seems to place the most comprehensive idea of what a character is and how it is perceived by the reader. According to Bal, the hero (she refers to the main character in the story) is perceived as such according to the table:

Quality	Description
QUALIFICATION	Comprehensive information about appearance, psychology, motivation, past
DISTRIBUTION	The hero occurs often in the story; his/her presence is felt at important moments
INDEPENDENCE	The hero can occur alone or hold monologues
FUNCTION	Certain actions are those of the hero alone: s/he makes agreements, vanquishes opponents, unmasks traitors, etc.
RELATIONS	S/he maintains relations with the largest number of characters

Table 13 - Qualities of the Hero (BAL, 2007, p.132)

What Bal is saying, essentially, is that the hero, or main character, is the one to appear most prominently in the story (the rest of the items are arguably caused by this prominence). But that does give us a good idea of what a character entails, in Bal's idea: a character is an actant about which the reader is given information enough to structure into a coherent narrative. That information is given through direct or indirect presentation, or can be deduced from the character's function or presentation in the narrative. Bal is quite rigorous in saying that it is important for the reader not to go beyond the text, though, and imbue the characters with human qualities, under penance of repeating the fallacy of Narcissus and looking into the narrative in the mirror.

I have already argued against this point in my work *Quis Evaluates Ipsos Watchmen? Watchmen and Narrative Theory* (2014), where I point out that:

[...] the idea of applying psychological analysis to fictional characters only stops making sense if one understands psychological theories as something other than patterns of behavior and deviation that are used to test for discrepancies in the psyche of humans. [...] Ultimately, what is being done is confronting one behavioral pattern with a behavior. (VIDAL, 2014, p.73)

The idea is made more strongly by the fact that Bal, in her analysis of Aptekar's painting (BAL, 1997, pp. 66-75), resorts to empathy with a narrative structure and a good deal

of anthropomorphism in order to imbue the mother with an unmentioned background, involving the sacrifice “of a career similar to and continuous with what she rejects for her child” (p.71), analysis that, limited to the information given by the text, should be limited to a mother who was an arts teacher and wanted her son to be a surgeon. And again, in another analysis – this time of the bas-relief *Arjuna’s Penance*, seeing the drawing with Arjuna in yoga position, with a cat also in yoga position and surrounded by mice laughing, Bal affirms:

The interpretation runs as follows. Arjuna is in a yoga position and is meditating to win Lord Siva’s favor. The cat, impressed by the beauty of absolute calm, imitates Arjuna. Now the mice realize they are safe. They laugh. Without this interpretation there is no relation between the parts of the relief. With this interpretation, the parts form a meaningful narrative. (BAL, 1997, p.144)

Her interpretation grants the cat the aspiration of sanctity and appreciation of beauty and calm – the reason for the cat’s pose or the rats’ laughter is not given by the image, resting completely on the shoulders of the reader. To me, it seems unlikely to read a story without a certain degree of anthropomorphism. If Bal herself is unable to evade the trap she endeavored to build, the logical conclusion is that it is useless to try – and so this work will not try to keep away from attempting to understand the characters’ behaviors, considering valid any position that can be logically argued and does not contradict the narrative, a set of rules as good as any in a path where the rules seem scarce.

The following sections will describe the main characters involved in the story arc (that is, including but not limited to the ones that appear in the final story). Moreover, there will be a comparison between the development of the characters throughout the title’s history and Moore’s treatment, whenever that is relevant. In cases such as Deadman and Dr. Fate, for instance, their presence in the series is more anecdotal than not, and other characters, such as the demon brothers, are mere references, serving little purpose other than the recognition by the reader – these cases will not be analyzed in depth, lacking the previous treatment that makes such a comparison relevant. Instead, their history and information will be seized from official sources from the DC Universe (either website or publications) and their relevance in the story in question briefly discussed – which will prove quite enough information for the purpose of this analysis, since their personal histories are not brought up in the story. The character of Swamp Thing, being the most relevant, will be, understandably, developed in more detail. Adding to the character list Abby Arcane/Cable/Holland is a sensible choice, because, other than Swamp Thing, Abby is the most prominent (or, in Bal’s terms, most

widely distributed, occurring most frequently in the story) character in the title, despite not being present in the specific issue. The character selected order was a mix between a separation of the different settings and the importance of the characters to the plot, starting with Constantine's team (mainly due to them not actually taking part in the fight directly, despite being the group that took the worst losses out of the battle), descending into Hell and going through the heroes' trials, ending with Abby and Swamp Thing himself.

4.2.2.2.1 Dr. Occult

Perhaps the most mysterious character in the story (which is fitting for a character dealing with the Dark Arts, but does very little to distinguish a character, if anything) due to his moderate presence (or lack thereof). He first appears in issue #49, soon after Dr. Fate, having a premonitory dream about the final battle, or, specifically, a dream with crows, death and hands clasped over a table – thus referencing their *séance* (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.07, pan.4). Later on, he arrives uninvited at Baron Winter's house (p.18, pan.2) and blocks Dayton and Constantine's attempt at checking him mentally through Mento's helmet (p.19, pan.5). Occult appears again only in *Swamp Thing #50* (p.11, pan.2) to suggest the group check their enemies instead of their allies; he later reassures Dayton about his capacity in quite a harsh way, citing a principle of magic determining that “ a man is as strong as he will let himself be” (p.13, pan.4); agrees that another attack is coming (p.23, pan.5); tells Dayton to hold on as he is losing his mind (p.34, pan.1) and, finally, says that he feels a power down and thinks they can let go of each other's hands (p.36, pan.2). His interventions are brief and to the point, but say little about the character. He is obviously powerful, senses things and is capable of blocking the Mento helmet. He is aware of the danger and accepts the possibility of dying. He presses Dayton on, when there is need. But the reader gets very little insight into his personality and inner landscape. That makes him look the most centered and professional character in the bunch – and at the same time blocks the reader empathy. Occult, in this story, is a guy you'd like on your side during the battle, but not necessarily during the celebration afterwards. According to *The DC Comics Encyclopedia* (Vol.I, 2004, p.95), Dr. Occult was rescued from becoming a child sacrifice to Satan by a group of mystics called the Seven, and was tutored in the mystical arts with the other survivor, Rose Psychic. Both had psychic powers, hypnotism and mystical abilities. They opened a supernatural detective agency in New York, in 1935. The character began publication in October 1935 in the book *Fun Comics #6* – so, despite not being a superhero *per se*, Occult is arguably the first hero of the Golden

Age, predating Superman (which only saw print in 1938). Perhaps, then, his participation in the story is more due to the character's historical importance than to his specific qualities or personality traits (since they have been, if existing, not mentioned at all).

4.2.2.2.2 Zatarra and Zatanna

Zatarra first appears in our storyline in *Swamp Thing #49* (p.14), in the house he shares with his daughter Zatanna, as Constantine is explaining the problem and asking them both to join their séance. Zatanna has trouble understanding the nature of the problem. Zatarra seems to be more enlightened than his daughter on the matter (what he demonstrates by unhelpfully pointing that the problem is more complex than she thought, on panel 3). Zatarra is undecided about whether or not they should join the effort, but Zatanna quickly adheres to Constantine's plan. Mentioning he remembers Constantine (who, we are about to find out, is an old lover of Zatanna), Zatarra then decides to go along to "escort" (pan.6) his daughter, while Constantine funnily whistles looking up, as if in an effort to ignore the discussion between daughter and father occurring next to him. Zatarra appears again in the issue talking to Dr. Occult (p.18, pan.2) and, as the group feels the awakening of the Darkness, extending a hand to protect Zatanna (p.21, pan.6). *Swamp Thing #50* brings Zatarra comically warning Zatanna he is watching her interactions with Constantine, as they are to link hands (p. 6, pan.4). He appears again on page 13, asking for a description of the battle (pan.4) and on page 18 (pan.1), demanding 'proper sorcerer behavior' from the dying Sargon, because his display of fear and pain is allegedly 'upsetting his daughter'. After Sargon burns, Zatanna is the next target of the Darkness, on page 23. But Zatarra says he will not allow it. Chanting the magic words "ssenkrad ekat em daetsni" ('darkness take me instead' backwards) on panel 9, Zatarra brings the attack unto himself. After threatening Constantine to haunt him for eternity if Zatanna doesn't survive their enterprise, Zatarra explodes in flames, as Zatanna desperately cries for someone to help him (p.24, pan.1-2).

Zatarra is presented as overprotective, tyrannical father that is prone to stereotypical fatherly behavior, frequently used for humorous purposes in the story. The exaggeration in this feature of the character conflicts with his daughter's development, which is (apparently) frequent cause of conflict between the two. At the same time he is proud of his profession, which can be read in his admonishing Sargon for not dying in the 'proper' way for a sorcerer. More than that, he is willing to sacrifice himself for his daughter without hesitation or regret, and his last thoughts are directed towards ensuring her safety. Despite having been used as a

buffoon of sorts, in his exaggerated presentation in the story, Zatara is ultimately redeemed of his tyrannical nature due to his final display of bravery, love and selflessness.

As for Zatanna, perhaps the most significant clues towards her presentation as a character in the story may be the ones where Zatara is absent, where we can see her act in a radically different way. Zatanna first appears along with her father in issue #49, but as the plot moves forward, with Zatara's decision to go along with them in the venture in order to 'escort' his daughter, the reader gets insight into other side of Zatanna, where she accompanies Constantine out of the building. They talk about how Zatara never trusted Constantine after they were in a "tantric studies group"²³ together (p.15, pan.1), followed by Constantine lamenting the change of Zatanna's costume, because the former one appealed more to the "delights of the physical world" (p.15, pan.2-3). The association of the word 'tantric' with the 'delights of the physical world' is made even more sexual with them kissing in panel 5. There is also a bit of a story to Zatanna's change of costume as well, and that is related to the lore of the characters.

According to *The DC Comics Encyclopedia Vol. I* (2004, p.336), Zatanna is the daughter of John Zatara. Zatara was already a stage magician when he discovered, at 19, one of the lost journals of Leonardo da Vinci, who was an ancestor of his. There he discovered his connection to magic, and the technique of spelling the words backwards to give them magical power. Like Sargon, Zatara assumed the persona of a regular stage magician to hide the fact that he could actually do *real* magic. After an adventure where he saved a woman named Sindella, Zatara married her, and she soon gave birth to Zatanna, dying soon after (apparently). Zatara raised Zatanna alone. As Zatanna was sort of a special breed – descendent of Leonardo da Vinci on her father's side, and of a kin of *Homo Magi*, human beings with natural propensity for magic on her mother's – Zatara instructed his daughter in the use of magic. Later, they were cursed by an enemy and had to be kept apart from each other, under penalty of death. At the time, Zatanna found one of Zatara's diaries and created a stage persona for herself, with a costume inspired by her father's. Zatanna was the one to break the curse that kept her and her father apart, and after finding out her mother Sindella

²³ While the definition of the word 'tantric' in the Oxford Living Dictionaries is "Adjective; relating to or involving the doctrines or principles of the Hindu or Buddhist tantras, in particular the use of mantras, meditation, yoga, and ritual", the association with tantric sex, which became very popular in Western culture in the 60's is made prominent in the comic by Constantine's comment and the kiss. Definition taken from the website <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tantric>>, available in HTML form. Last accessed in 11/06/2018.

was alive, they were reunited (Sindella had to sacrifice herself for Zatanna's sake, to save her from the Homo Magi).

So, despite both characters love each other very much, and have repeatedly fought to keep their family together, seeing as Zatanna and Zatarra's relationship seems a little strained because of the domineering personality of Zatarra, perhaps the idea of the change of costume by the daughter also has to do with the notion of freeing herself from her father's influence as well. A symbol of growing up, so to say. Zatanna is next seen again during the group's reunion, talking to Baron Winters (p.18, pan.2) and being protected by her father (p.21, pan.6). In *Swamp Thing #50* she is troubled by Constantine's behavior, apparently unaware of the seriousness of their endeavor (p.6, pan.1-3), and soon after admonishes her father for being overprotective. She is surprised that Etrigan is on their side (p.7, pan.3) and later starts getting worried when Mento struggles with the power levels (p.13, pan.2). Zatanna is surprised by the first attack (p.17), because apparently until then no one but Constantine was aware that this was a possibility, but they carry on with their ordeal. The second attack of the Darkness ends up targeting her. She is defending Mento when she starts feeling hot, and Zatarra takes her place through magic. Then, as Zatarra dies, Zatanna struggles with her pain to keep the circle intact, and, as Constantine suggests he knows how she must be feeling, she makes it exceedingly clear that she will hear none of that: "No, you don't. If you knew how I was feeling, you'd run as far as you could and crawl under a stone and hide! You involved us in this! My father's dead and it's in your hands!" (p.24, pan.4). Constantine tries to keep apologizing, but she dismisses him and tells him to continue with the séance.

Zatanna has two moments in the story, then, where her father does not hang as an overarching presence, a guardian or an escort. In one of them, she grounds her independence as a character, a grown woman with an intimate life outside of her role as a daughter – perhaps a necessary distinction to give enliven a character made so similar to her father. They had the same powers, a similar uniform (though not in this particular story), Zatarra was Zatanna's major influence. That distancing helps Zatanna to grow as a character, with an inner life and a personality other than 'daughter of Zatarra'. The second moment, as she gets angry at Constantine, is a recognition of her love for her father, but also of her capacity for anger and harm. So, if the first movement is a distancing one, the second brings the character close to her father, showing complexity and mixed feelings more realistic than any unidimensional approach would have been capable of. Life is complicated, after all, and people are rarely of one mind about each other. At the same time, she apparently refused to

accept any portion of blame for their predicament (she being the one who decided to go into the adventure, after all), which may either be a form of denial or the reflection of having been naively deceived by Constantine. Zatanna is shown both as a dutiful (and devious) daughter and a flirtatious ex-lover (of Constantine); as an independent woman and a tender and comprehensive team mate (she calls Constantine by the first name while others don't, and she tries to keep the others from being too harsh on the inexperienced Mento). That is the personality features Zatanna presents in the story. Of course, that is not all.

The main reason the characters are joined in this section is precisely because of their main roles in the adventure: if one would choose one word to define Zatarra in the story, I would say the word 'father' would be the most appropriate. Similarly, Zatanna could be described as 'daughter' first (and, perhaps, 'lover' for a second choice). They are far from unidimensional, but these roles are the ones most emphasized by the storytelling. And their relationship is so complex that merits a few more words, the analysis and the characters themselves being made richer because of their interaction.

As said before, seeking complex psychological backgrounds in fictional characters is an activity sneered at by most of the narratological community. Ultimately, characters, no matter how richly thought of, are only words on paper, without a psychological existence. But the fact that they are only structures doesn't mean they cannot be consistent structures, however, and present realistic or stereotypic behavior. In other words, really good characters mimic the complexities of human psyche. And the measure of how well a character is constructed psychologically may be comparing their behavior to a given model. In the case of Zatarra and Zatanna, their multifaceted presentation is highly reminiscent of the Jungian model, specifically the notion of the father complex.

First, however, it is necessary to approach briefly the basics of Jungian theory. That will be accomplished in the next paragraph with a brief review of the most read book on the subject, compiled by Jung himself, *Man and His Symbols* (1964). That will be followed by an explanation of the father complex, as shown in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. Vol. IV* – which is the place in Jung's work where the complex is more thoroughly explained. Finally, a comparison with the relationship between Zatarra, Zatanna and Constantine will be made. That is perhaps a lot of work to point out Zatarra and Zatanna's relationship as father and daughter, but it is, as seen, this feature that defines them as characters, and this role is so thoroughly depicted that is more than worthy of mention in a more detailed way.

In Carl Gustav Jung's model, as presented by its creator in the first chapter of the book *Man and His Symbols* (1964), the unconscious features as the depository of repressed features, drives, memories and ideas that the individual either does not want to deal with, or does not want as part of his *persona* (though the concept is a bit hard to describe, the 'persona' can be described as the social 'mask' worn by the individual, the public appearance that is also an ideal, to put it bluntly – and poorly). In that regard, the Jungian unconscious is similar to Freud's idea, described quite demeaningly by John Freeman in the introduction of the book as “a sort of a glory-hole of repressed desires” (FREEMAN, *in*: JUNG *et al.*, 1964, p.12), but while Freud's unconscious consists mainly of repressed drives and memories, the Jungian unconscious is populated by a rich symbolic landscape in addition to them – images and symbols with high emotional content and varyingly related to the individual's experiences. The book is in itself interesting enough, it being a compilation of Jung's theory intended for the general public, mediated by Jung himself and divided in five long articles, each written by an expert in the Jungian model, each a disciple and acquaintance of Jung, chosen by the familiarity with the concepts presented. The entire book was then filtered by Freeman, who proposed the compilation in the first place, in order to make sure that the layman would understand what was being said. In the first chapter, “Approaching the Unconscious”, Jung talks about the rich symbolic landscape of the unconscious mind, and particularly dreams, in order to propose the notion of a deep unconscious mind, in which lie basal images and symbols, common to everyone – the collective unconscious and its archetypes. In the second chapter, “Ancient Myths and Modern Man”, Joseph L. Henderson elaborates on the idea, presenting repeating mythic patterns in different cultural backgrounds, such as the image of the sun-god, the hero's journey (he cites four types of hero and relates the journey to other archetypes) and the initiation rites into adulthood, both male and female, and how the shift in modern gender roles poses a challenge for independent women to come to grips with their femininity. The notions of sacrifice, communion and transcendence are also discussed. Henderson concludes with the proposition that rites relate to different phases in an individual's life, and usually orient the individual on how to deal with conflicting personality aspects, in order to achieve a more balanced self. The third chapter, “The Process of Individuation”, by M. L. Von Franz, deals with the notion of the formation of the self, in which these basal, archetypal images are gradually elaborated upon, forming what is known as 'complexes' – that is, the dressing of archetypes into forms related to the experience of the individual. This process happens gradually and can be described as a rise to consciousness, or

to individuality. It also generates a consciousness, in opposition to the unconscious elements of the psyche. The summation of the conscious and unconscious aspects of a person is the *self*. The center of a person's consciousness is the *ego*. The ego, presented to the world (which varies depending on the context) is the *persona*, a societal mask fit for the occasion. But wearing a mask puts some aspects in the light, but also serves to hide many others – and therefore the individual, learning to behave in different societal backgrounds, also represses features, which is quite painful, and these features will thereafter inhabit the unconscious mind and press their way into consciousness. The summation of the repressed features, struggling to integrate with the individual and to rise to consciousness, is called the *shadow*. Since this conflictuous dynamic between conscious and unconscious is established, where one fights to repress elements that fight their way back into the world (through dreams, realizations or unconscious actions), a measure of integration with the shadow (that is acceptance of the parts of oneself that are repressed) is necessary in order for an individual to function properly in society. The more integrated the shadow is, the healthier is the individual's psyche. Franz then discusses the concepts of *anima* (or the female element in a male psyche) and the *animus* (male element in a female psyche) in their symbolism and how they can manifest in their positive and negative aspects in an individual's life, mainly through projection of father/mother characteristics into one's perception of the opposite sex or through manifestation in one's behavior. This is followed by the analysis of the *self*, “the innermost nucleus of the psyche” (FRANZ, *in*: JUNG *et al.*, 1964, p.196). Usually shown as an idealized form (male for men, female for women) or an animal, the self is a guide into wholeness because it represents the wholesome (wise) individual – the godhead, the integrated mind, how to deal with it and how it manifests in modern lives, both positively and negatively (a negative self-image may generate a megalomaniac or a manipulative individual, for instance). Chapter four, “Symbolism in the Visual Arts”, by Ariella Jaffé, focuses on the discussion of motifs that are universally considered sacred or mysterious in Art. Later on, Jaffé focuses on the production of 20th Century's visual arts, in an attempt to establish its significance not in usage of symbols, but *as* a symbol itself. The analysis starts with the symbolic ramifications of stone and animals, not only in generic totemic terms, but also in statuary and pantheons. Early religions believed in stones as the dwelling places of gods and spirits, a belief that gradually shifted in integration with adoration – stones eventually were shaped into temples and statues to celebrate the principles represented. In art, the sculptor's aim was to catch the ‘spirit’ of the stone. Frequently, the depiction of animals in painting and

statuary was used for symbolic purposes (either as indicators of a totemic relationship or as representatives of instincts or other features specific to animals), particularly in old pantheons. Animals remained both symbolic and totemic in other representations, such as heraldry and painting. Though the representation of animals has had many uses through the centuries, they are usually a representation of the instinctual nature of human beings, which must be celebrated (as the drive to life) and feared (for society demands the suppression of instincts). Following this analysis, Jaffé takes on the symbolism of the circle as a representation of the *self*, of wholeness, in several religions. The idea is not limited to circles, though, but also other geometrical forms, such as the triangle. Mandalas are also very present in Art history, notably in Architecture, where early cities were circular in form. The Christian cross also started with a more circular shape, but that gradually changed through times to a more vertically-oriented cross. Jaffé takes that to symbolize the human commitment to reason, established further in the Renaissance. The circle is also prominent in modern artworks, largely as a compositional motif – for as History advanced, artists started concerning themselves with the inner expression of the artist’s mind, therefore coming up with notions such as abstract paintings, surrealism and Dadaism, where the realistic representation is left aside in favor of the possibility of hinting at the unconscious. This may also be understood as a deviation from reality to the unconscious mind, or, so to say, an escape from reality, as a quality of modern art. She mentions Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Jackson Pollock, among others, as modern seekers of the unconscious, and attributes the play of opposites (contrast) as positive and negative aspects of the unconscious. Finally, Jaffé talks about the union of opposites, where, in modern times, the old and new tendencies seem to be conciliating in expression, with the visions and techniques of modern art being turned once again to Classical motifs, such as sacred painting. One cannot but also hint that this tendency pointed out by Jaffé may be also understood in terms of integration as well – art becoming whole again, just as a person is made whole(r) by the conscious integration of unconscious elements. The final chapter of the book, “Symbols in an Individual Analysis”, by Jolande Jacobi, is dedicated to explaining how these ideas fit together in the analytical practices of modern Jungian psychology. This is done through exemplification of the Jungian approach, with the description of the case of a patient (called ‘Henry’ in the chapter). In Henry’s case, the detailed analysis of the symbolism of his dreams unveils unconscious information about his current life and where he is getting it wrong. Henry is an engineer, overly logical, introvert and afraid of his unconscious feelings. Gradually, though, Henry starts perceiving his dreams

as pathways into a more wholesome existence – hints from his subconscious of how to better live his life. The release of unconscious material unto consciousness has a very positive effect in Henry's disposition in life, and he soon starts decoding his own dreams, which turn from horrid at the beginning of analysis to more positive, insightful ones as Henry becomes familiarized with the process of analysis. Interestingly, the most recognizable *motif* of the later dreams seems to be the image of darkness going towards the light, or diminishing somehow. M. L. Von Franz (author of chapter three) returns to conclude the book in "Science and the Unconscious", where the author points out that, despite the fact that we are far from understanding the unconscious or the archetypes wholly, their study has shown that they have a very pronounced impact in the lives of the individuals, as they are present not only in the minds of the people, but also in Art, myths and other cultural activities, intrinsic to society. Franz points out that of course, the analysis of the archetypal foundation of works of Art or Literature cannot be definitive, since these works have many other aspects to them, but it is a very useful take in understanding their underlying structure. Jung's theories have helped many other fields to advance, particularly Evolutionary Theory and microphysics (regarding Jung's notion of synchronicity), the place of the observer in the observation and so on. Finally, Franz concludes exhorting the readers to turn their eyes to their unconscious minds, which is the objective of the introductory book.

In summation, what we have in Jung's model is an individual (the wholesome individual is the *self*) with a personality (the *ego*, the center of consciousness, perpetually trying to attain the *self* – that is, trying to become whole, bringing the unconscious unto consciousness) developed not from a *tabula rasa* but from the elaboration upon instinctual ancestral images, the *archetypes*. With the individual's personal experience, archetypes are elaborated unto *complexes*. All that is unconscious behavior. The individual seeks a way to *individuation*, which is the rise of the unconscious unto consciousness. The development of a personality in a societal context also implies in deferring some behaviors and drives in favor of others, and so the ego elaborates a *persona*, a mask to use in public, to say it in an exceedingly reductive manner. Since favoring things also means repressing some aspects of oneself, the individual develops a *shadow*, which is made out of all the things the individual represses. *Integration* of the shadow into the conscious mind is important for an individual to be whole, and the more one represses, the less healthy their interaction with the unconscious world. Central to Jung's definition of consciousness is the idea of the archetype, a primeval image, innate, with a heightened emotional content. Archetypes are never displayed in their

original form, which is indescribable, but rather presented as complexes – that is, images that have been elaborated upon by one’s experience. As such, they are personal and diverse, pertaining to the individual rather than conforming to an established norm. Archetypes belong to the unconscious world, but they are represented quite often in art, religion and culture. Some relevant archetypes are the ones aforementioned (the *self* and the *shadow*), the *anima* (female representation in a male mind) and the *animus* (male representation in a female mind). Since the archetypes are based on personal experience, they vary in their characteristics, in an individual basis. Our interest, for the purposes of character analysis of the Zatanna/Zatara relationship lies within the idea of the father complex, and what one can deduce from Zatanna’s reactions to Zatara’s overprotectiveness. As Franz points out in the third chapter of the book, the animus may exhibit positive or negative characteristics, often appearing in the form of a ‘sacred’ conviction, being highly influential in a woman’s life:

Just as the character of a man’s anima is shaped by his mother, so the animus is basically influenced by a woman’s father. The father endows his daughter’s animus with the special coloring of unarguable, incontestably “true” convictions – convictions that never include the personal reality of the woman herself as she actually is. (FRANZ, in: JUNG *et al.*, 1964, p.186)

The animus in its negative form may manifest as a demon of death, a captor or an assailant. In its positive form, the animus is a guide and a creative force. The anima, in its turn, is usually manifested as the intuitive side of a man’s personality, and may be presented in its positive aspect as warm and receptive disposition and in the negative aspect as a poisonous, pessimistic and self-centered one. The relevant aspects of the father figure are detailed further in another article by Jung, “The Father in the Destiny of the Individual”, in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung Vol. IV* (p. 1473, par.744 and related footnote). The article focuses on how the father imago, the image of the father in an individual mind, or the father archetype elaborated unto a father complex, affects the life of a person. After the analysis of four cases (respectively: a 55-years-old widow who struggled with repressed desires for her father, marrying substitutes; a 34-years-old man kept in an infantilized estate of abnegation and obedience to his father and his elder brother; a 36-years-old woman ridden with guilt for marrying against her father’s wishes; and an eight-years-old boy who was jealous and afraid of his father), Jung presents a biblical example illustrating the ambivalent aspects of the father image: he recounts the story of Sara, daughter of Raguel, who wanted to marry, but every time she did an evil spirit, Asmodeus, killed the husband each night. After

this happened seven times Sara prayed to Yahweh and was sent Tobias, Sara's eighth husband. Sara's father, Raguel, pretended to go to bed but got up to dig out Tobias's grave during the night. But Tobias survived. Jung sees Raguel as both the concerned father, worried about his daughter's future, and the provident digger of his son-in-law's grave. But the figure of Raguel is also associated with Asmodeus – it is the jealous, possessive father with his daughter complex, unwilling to let his daughter go. Sara, in her turn, has a father complex where she is the obedient, infantilized daughter requiring permission from her father (Yahweh) to enter adulthood. The negative aspect of the father archetype is turned into a demon, while the positive also figures as a god. Jung mentions *en passant* to have attended a case with a very similar situation, but is forbidden by medical etiquette to mention it directly. One does not need to go so far, because this is very similar to the case in point.

Zatara is both the protector and the captor of Zatanna: he is interposed between her and Constantine, who plays the role of the daughter's suitor, using the authoritarian power of the tyrant to try to keep Zatanna to himself. He seems to think of her as a child to be protected from the world. Because the reader has insight into other activities of Zatanna (her taking part of the tantric group with Constantine), Zatara seems quite foolish in his overprotectiveness, and appears to be tolerated rather than obeyed in the story. The situation is made even more awkward due to the unmentioned erotic component that Zatara seems to be oblivious of – the tabooistic hint to incestuous possessiveness demands humor to expire the tension, and Constantine whistles comically as the scene unrolls. At the same time, Zatara's final action is precisely to protect Zatanna's life at the expense of his own. And this is what makes the characters 'work', in my opinion: coherent with the archetype, Zatara is both the jealous demon and the protective god – a fully fleshed character, not a unidimensional one. Zatanna, in her turn, is shown defiant of her father's authority at times, but nevertheless agrees to play the role of the dutiful child and humors her father's outbursts, living with him while having to remind him that she is, after all, not a child. So, the same ambiguity is shown by her side, playing the role of the lover (of Constantine as it is made abundantly clear through their interaction) and the dutiful daughter, as the occasion presents itself, displaying the tensions of growth. After Zatara's sacrifice, she not only laments his passing, but also demands to go on with the séance – contaminated with the certainty of the animus, her father's image, Zatanna shows a similar behavior. It is interesting to point out that, as a hero, Zatara's tendency in the story is to see his daughter as someone to protect (which makes sense due to his background). Moore's employment of conflicting characteristics not only establishes an underlying *motif* of

complexity and opposite forces in motion, but is also coherent with the story's overarching theme about the nature of Good and Evil.

4.2.2.2.3 Baron Winters

Winters first appears in the storyline in pages 5 and 6 of *Swamp Thing* #49, as he is being visited by Constantine, who is trying to convince him to take part in the action to come. His demeanor is arrogant from the start – with the white overcoat as a mantle and a leopard at his feet, sitting on a lavish chair, he seems like a king considering the plea of a commoner. Winters immediately assumes that what Constantine is doing is trying to borrow his house, and is indignant at that. Winters dismisses Constantine as a “jumped-up London street thug” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.5, pan.3) and that he and his ‘night force’ can deal more effectively with the problem. Constantine accuses him of being smug with other magical operators, and Winters points out there is a difference of ability between them. Constantine, comically, retorts by asking Winters to buy him a hot dog in the stand across the street, to prove his powers – and it is revealed that Winter, despite his alleged power, is not able to leave his house. Having humiliated Winter, Constantine professes his surprise at Winter's reluctance, given that Sargon, the Sorcerer immediately volunteered. That is a lie, but neither Winters nor the reader knows that, and the comical interplay between Sargon and Winters will only be realized when Constantine uses Winters to convince Sargon in a similar manner. The mention of Sargon's name immediately changes Winter's mind, and he accepts to enter the group and offer his house for the séance.

Those matters raise questions about the character, though, and a look into his past is required before moving forward in our analysis. Unfortunately, both the *DC Comics Encyclopedia* (Vol.I and II) and the DC Comics' website character search engine have no articles on Baron Winter, and, though both books have an article on ‘Night Force’, Baron Winters is described only as “mysterious”, “the group leader” and “occultist” in *The DC Comics Encyclopedia* (Vol. I, 2004, p.221) – all things the reader already knew about. Additional pieces of information are the fact that Baron Winters had a wheelchair-bound ex-wife, Katrina Winter, and a son, Gowan Winter. That does little to elucidate the character's predicament in the house, nor does the information in the same page revealing that once a year Winters had to “deliver an angel to Hell in a pact to preserve mankind's freedom”. All that leaves enough information for the reader to understand that Baron Winters is a leader occultist, prominent on his field and have coordinated a group of occultists. However, because

his house is apparently of relevance to the character (which can be deduced both from Sargon's interest in the house and Winter's inability to leave it), perhaps this would be an interesting direction in which to further the investigation, seeing that Wintergate Manor is one of the two settings in which the story happens, and therefore relevant to narrative analysis in itself.

On that regard, a brief reading of the original series adds to and takes from the information given. The magazine *Night Force* was originally published monthly by DC Comics, from August of 1982 to September 1983, totaling 14 issues. That happened after a preview in *The New Teen Titans* #21, published in July 1982. The driving force behind the series was the team of creators, Marv Wolfman (writer) and Gene Colan (artist), who previously worked together in the fandom-celebrated magazine *Tomb of Dracula*. Baron Winters is the main character, a mystic that accepts cases upon payment, but does not like to put himself into the middle of the action, proceeding to coordinate what he calls his 'night force' – essentially, a group of humans from different backgrounds (and that means taken from any age and place in History), who are put into the Baron's service or manipulated into action in diverse manners, in order to solve the problem at hand. These are frequently unwilling and, although Winters occasionally shows remorse for putting them in risk, that is his main *modus operandi*. Baron Winters is always followed by the leopard Merlin, with whom he constantly discusses (provided there is no one about to overhear). A bit of information is given about Winters' past – that he was married to Katina, a powerful handicapped sorceress and fellow student of magic, with whom he had a son, Gowon, who hates him. They are apparently part of a mystical civilization of Mayan or Aztec descent, and are at odds with Winters due to having been betrayed at some point. The house is part of Winters' activity, as a guardian against the darkness – but his role or activities are not explicitly said, remaining (maybe purposefully) a mystery. What is revealed is that Wintersgate Manor's doors provide access to any place in History, depending on the Baron's will (and the effects are apparently random when someone other than the Baron opens a door). Winters is also maybe immortal (and Katina along with him), since his son appears to be older than both Winters and his mother. Winters has operatives in several places throughout history, and they are his main means of action. He shows himself as proud and arrogant in public and profoundly apologetic and guilt-ridden when he is alone with Merlin, which is an interesting character twist. His power is questionable, as he seems to require help from other people constantly, rather than displaying any special abilities himself, other than

knowledge about the mystic arts, control of the special abilities of his house and capacity for manipulation. In the first story arc he helps a mental patient named Vanessa Van Helsing, granddaughter of the famous character, who has the psychic ability of tuning into and harnessing the energy of Evil (not dissimilar to the idea presented by Moore). Winters manipulates a parapsychologist named Donovan Caine and an alcoholic journalist named Jack Gold into rescuing her from the mental institution and help her with her powers, and later from a Russian parapsychological facility where her power is being weaponized – she was kidnapped by Russian agents disguised as CIA. In the second story arc, Winters deceives a rampaging homicidal maniac named Paul Brooks into entering a building where a mysterious creature holds tenants as hostages, feeding them whatever they want but keeping them prisoner. Brooks then has to (and eventually does) find a way of killing the monster. In the third and final story arc Winters is hired to rid a house of ghosts, and they turn out to be the ghosts of the seven heads of the biblical dragon, the Beast of the Apocalypse, murdered by Hitler (who refused to become their avatar and ambushed them) and lingering as spirits, trying to bring the apocalypse to fruition. They all have part of Satan’s spirit, and together they form a seven-headed dragon (as described in the Bible). First Winters enlists Vanessa Von Helsing, but, when he discovers the nature of the enemy, he is afraid and has to resort to his ex-wife Katina and his son Gowon. After Katina manages to destroy some of the ghosts it turns out Gowon was created and taught specifically to fight the Beast, and destroys it in a *deus ex machina* manner at the end of the adventure – most of the conflict happens in the astral plane. Winters’ activity, then, is much like Constantine’s in “The End”: he manipulates people into helping him, while showing very little in the matter of magical fireworks, so to say. His main power seems to be knowledge. That is not, however, the way the character is presented in the story in question, where he is rather manipulated than manipulator. But the readings helped to shine a light on the subject of Wintersgate Manor and its characteristics – a house that leads to any point in space and time.

We next see Winters talking to Zatanna (p.18, pan.2) at the gathering of the mystics for the Séance. As the pearl falls into the chaos (p.21, pan.6) and the characters sense it, he is at the forefront in a very approximate close-up of his hand, only recognizable due to the presence of the leopard painted in a similar color palette next to him. As the Darkness rises, he is part of the séance, warning Constantine of the dangers of mixing science and sorcery, since it is an “explosive combination” (p.7, pan.1), and, later, as Dayton hesitates to continue, he tells them that they are past the point of no return and they had to go on if they wanted to

survive (p.13, pan.3). As Etrigan dives into the Darkness, Winters calls Dayton's attention to the task at hand, because he is losing his focus (p.15, pan.7). As the story progresses he goes along with the action and, at the end, he is again given voice in page 36 (panels 2-5), where he asks if it is over, and, as Constantine expresses his disbelief of them actually having survived the trial, he reminds Constantine that they did not all make it alive – or sane, in Dayton's case. But there are always casualties in a war, and Constantine earned his respect for the way he conducted himself. That paints a character that is, indeed, very full of himself, but is also knowledgeable enough to warn his companions and try to focus their action when needed. The 'royal' (smug) element of his personality seems to last, though, to the end, with the equation of Constantine's role to that of a king or a commander leading them into battle. That impression is put in contrast with the foolishness displayed in giving in to Constantine's manipulation – so a presumptuous, foolish, but diligent, character, who takes their matter with seriousness and is fully capable to sacrifice himself in action – and respects those proven to be of a similar disposition. Winters, though, is not given a redemption act, as Sargon and Zatara. The fact that he respects Constantine after the end of the battle can be construed as Winters connecting with Constantine through loss and them having battled together, so that he is able to recognize Constantine's merit – but it can be construed as Constantine having to try himself before him for deserving his respect as well. And it must be said that, perhaps, that is to the Baron presenting himself as a flawed human being in the original comics, sometimes seen as selfish and smug – but, as mentioned, also guilt-ridden and ashamed in private. So, in that aspect, the essence of the character is maintained. Curiously, his relationship with Merlin is not apparent in Moore's take, but that may be because Winters is not left alone with Merlin at any point in the story, the one-sided dialogue where he apparently can hear the leopard (whose interjections are not shown in any way in the story) being one of the most distinctive points of the character. There is also no mention of him not being able to leave his house in the original storyline – in fact, he does so several times, but only to other places and times. In *Night Force #6* (Jan. 1983), significantly, he is rather leave the police enter the house chasing him and go through a door into 14th Century France (amidst the Black Plague) rather than accompanying them to the District – so perhaps he is only unable to leave the house in the present time, but is free to roam other moments in History.

4.2.2.2.4 Sargon the Sorcerer

John Sargent was the son of archaeologist Richard Sargent, who found the Ruby of Life in an expedition. Richard gave the ruby to his wife, and the stone was the first thing his infant son saw and touched. Later John found out about the ruby's power and decided to use them for the pursuit of justice. He adopted the persona of a stage magician, in hope of masking his truly magical nature, similarly to Zatara (information from *The DC Comics Encyclopedia*, Vol.I, 2004, p.266).

Sargon is first presented in the storyline in a museum exposition about the works of Hieronymus Bosch, being tricked by Constantine into taking part of the séance in Baron Winter's house, in *Swamp Thing #49* (p.11, pan.1-6). He asks Constantine why he should help in the enterprise, when he had already fought for humanity in the "dawn of time" (p.11, pan.1), during the Crisis event. Constantine argues that the Darkness would proceed to try to annihilate "everything good" (p.11, pan.2), to which Sargon answers that he'd embraced both Good and Evil through his life, and did not play favorites. Constantine then lies about Baron having offered the use of his house, which helps change Sargon's mind, seeing as he would like to visit the house (Wintersgate Manor) once again, curious about Winters' secrets. Constantine warns him about the danger of the enterprise, but Sargon is not afraid. This conversation not only presents the character as proud and somewhat foolish (for he is, after all, full of self-importance yet easily tricked by Constantine), but also makes two different references: one about Sargon's role in the Crisis event and the other about the history of the character itself, the last being relevant to this analysis.

Along with many forgotten characters of the DC Universe's mystic branch, Sargon was one of the heroes who helped with the fight against the Antimonitor, in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (I use here the page numbers of the Collected Edition, from 1998). He appears very briefly on issue #5 (p.141, pan.3) fighting the corrupted android Red Tornado, but, significantly to our study, in issue #10), first listening to Uncle Sam's speech (p.283, pan.8), then arriving with the other heroes at the dawn of time to find the villain expecting them (p.287 pan.7) and, finally, holding hands with the Phantom Stranger and Zatara, lending his power to the Spectre, who is facing the Antimonitor (p.289, pan.2). As one can see, a gathering of mystical characters that is very similar to the one presented in our study, but since Sargon is the only one who mentions Crisis, it is not relevant to delve into the other

characters' roles in the other storyline (if we were to, incidentally, Dr. Occult would be significantly more relevant than Sargon, but fails to mention it in Moore's story).

The second important reference Sargon makes is to his own lore. The Sargon article in *The DC Comics Encyclopedia* is quite poor for the purposes of this study, and the DC Comics official page doesn't even have a page on Sargon in the 'characters' section of their website. Thankfully, the fans are more zealous than the editor, and the Wikipedia entrance is a lot more well informed on Sargon's shift during the Silver Age, in which he played the villain for a while, under the influence of his mystical amulet, the Ruby of Life – hence his not favoring Good nor Evil comment²⁴. What makes this hint particularly significant for our study lies in the order in which the Darkness directed its attacks, Sargon being the first victim, followed by Zatanna, who is shown as quite devious in her own way, taking tantric classes with Constantine. It is, then, arguable that the Darkness attacks might have been directed at the 'weak links in the chain', so to say, in order of their level of affinity with Evil.

In issue #50, Sargon is shown as eager to start the séance (p.06, pan.3 and 5) and quite arrogant, as he calls Constantine "boy" repeatedly (again on page 13, pan.1). All business, he brushes away any distractions, focused on their objectives until the attack of the creature (p.17-18), when he starts burning. At first, his reaction is to ask for help and despair but, on being admonished by Zatara, who asks him to die with honor, like a true sorcerer (p.18, pan.1), Sargon asks for forgiveness and endures the pain of his final moments quietly, until he bursts into flames and drops on the table, still holding the hands of his allies.

The portrait of Sargon offered by the narrative paints him in quite harsh colors – he is shown as proud, arrogant, somewhat foolish and, finally, weak. But manages to redeem himself in the end and die with dignity.

4.2.2.2.5 Steve Dayton/Mento

Dayton is apparently depressed (which is suggested by his hunched shoulders, sad face with sunken eyes, his refusal to admit jokes and his drinking) and wants a drink, oddly, because he has one in his hand in the previous panel. Constantine retorts that he needs some fresh air and tells Dayton not to worry about the "crisis business" (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.7, pan.3), but with what comes later. Dayton then complains about Constantine's vagueness and they talk about Swamp Thing, who Constantine apparently considers crucial to the solution of

²⁴ Information available in .HTML format at the site <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sargon_the_Sorcerer>, last accessed in 12/03/2018.

the problem – only Constantine suggests he is not going to let him get more directly involved with the situation because he is so involved this would surely attract trouble. As they leave the house, they look at the sky, red and with a disgusting texture (made with dry brush and hatching techniques), covered with yellow lightning – then Batman arrives, telling them both they should remain indoors. Constantine informs Batman that Dayton is a superhero as well – Mento, once involved with the Doom Patrol and even married with one of them – and Batman leaves to (one would have to assume at this point) bother someone else, leaving them astonished.

This serves to reinforce the idea that Constantine had a contingency plan all along, as he worked to defeat the Brujería – and, more significantly here, it also serves to present Dayton/Mento to the reader. It does so by providing a superhero name and the group Dayton used to belong to, namely the Doom Patrol. *The DC Comics Encyclopedia* has this to say about the character:

Steve Dayton, psychologist and head of Dayton Industries, was once the fifth-richest man in the world. Yet his money couldn't win him the heart of Rita Farr – Elasti-girl of the Doom Patrol – and he invented the “Mento helmet” to enhance the power of his mind and to adventure alongside her as the super hero Mento. Farr eventually relented and married Dayton, and the two of them adopted the shape-changing Garfield “Beast Boy” Logan. When Elasti-girl died, Mento took revenge on her killers, General Zahl and Madame Rouge. Later, he discovered that he had terminal cancer. Dayton tried to use the Mento helmet to control the disease, but the effort drove him mad (*The DC Comics Encyclopedia*. Vol.I, 2004, p.200)

The article on Mento then goes on to list a number of activities and inconsistencies with the version of Mento presented in the story, listing him as a professional criminal, who founded criminal groups, re-named himself as Crimelord and eventually merged with a computer. That is explainable – the Encyclopedia was published in 2004, and one can assume Mento's career as a superhero went in a down spiral somewhere after 1986. Incidentally, 2004 was the year John Byrne brought the Doom Patrol back to regular life, Elasti-girl included. All that says that Comics is a very plastic medium, especially with the treatment of established characters by a succession of writers and artists, along with editor-oriented events, coordination of titles and editorial interference in the storylines. It is quite hard to follow at times. However, by the clues lain to identify him, his depressed demeanor and the fact that Batman did not recognize him as a villain or a hero, but remembers Mento “was attached” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.8, pan.3) to the Doom Patrol, it is reasonable to assume that the adventure is set after Rita Farr's death along with the Doom Patrol, but before Dayton is

driven insane by cancer and turns to criminal life. The notion serves to show the richness of the medium, in which the storyline of one title is incorporated into the next one and developed further, thus forming a complex universe with interconnected events. The problem is, the web of references and plots that can be construed to make part of the characters' lives and developments (as I am reasonably sure the complexity of this study already denotes) is not always easy to follow, and some allusions frequently demand an encyclopedic knowledge of the medium in order to be understood in full. So, it is interesting to bear in mind that, the Dayton present in the story has to be read in its context.

4.2.2.2.6 John Constantine

Constantine is an interesting character case because he was created in the comic, and therefore his entire history has already been reviewed in this work, to a degree – but there is an interesting twist to his origin. Officially, the first appearance of John Constantine was in page 2 of *Swamp Thing* #37, published in June of 1985. That is, if one takes into account Gary Spencer Millidge's biography and critical assessment of Moore's work entitled *Alan Moore: Storyteller* (MILLIDGE, 2011, p.117) or even Alan Moore himself in the earlier book-long interview with George Khoury, *The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore* (2003), where the writer states that "(...) it was in #37 that we started "American Gothic". #37 was where Constantine turned up for the first time" (MOORE in: KHOURY, 2003, p.93). But the thing is, in *Swamp Thing* #25 (p.21, pan.2), published an entire year earlier, a suspiciously similar character appeared in the title, behind Abby, with a mysterious smile in his lips (which is worthy of the reader's attention specially because of the tragic setting – he appears amongst bystanders on the street, near the scene of an accident) and, while everyone is turned to the scene of the death by swordfish impalement, he looks at Abby, who looks away crying:



Figure 14 - Possible Constantine and Abby in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* #25 (MOORE et al., 1984, p.21, pan.2)

So, whether or not the character appeared earlier remains largely a matter of interpretation (there is another possibility, as Reed Beebe notes in an article about the matter²⁵, but since the alternative first appearance is a special display of the story for promotional purposes, it loses in significance). In an interview published in *Wizard Magazine* #27 (1993), Moore gives more detail to the conception of the character Constantine, perhaps laying a clue to the origin:

(...) I can state categorically that the character only existed because Steve [Bissette] and John [Totleben] wanted to do a character that looked like Sting. Being given that challenge, how could I fit Sting into *Swamp Thing*? (...) It struck me that it might be interesting for once to do an almost blue-collar warlock. Somebody who was streetwise, working class, and from a different background than the standard run of comics mystics. (MOORE, 1993, p.44)

Aside from appearance of the lead singer of The Police, Moore also incorporated other qualities of Sting into Constantine. So, instead of a legacy of mysticism or an adventurer turned into a magician, Constantine is somewhat of a street thug meddling with magic – that much can be taken not only from Moore’s interview but also from Baron Winter calling him so in *Swamp Thing* #49 (p.5, pan.3). Other than that, with ‘different background’ Moore may have been also pointing out that, like Sting, Constantine is British, with one foot in the punk culture and the other in the *underground*, as he knows these very diverse characters from different backgrounds – who can be quite stereotypical at times (Judith is a nihilistic punk, Ben is a stuttering nerd who lives with his mother, Frank a biker troublemaker and sister Anne-Marie a devote nun). Constantine’s streetwise English background also shows in his speech record: in the first panel he is shown he refers to himself as ‘us’, as he talks to Judith, and finishes a question with ‘then’ – Judith exclaims ‘bloody hell’ in the same conversation (*Swamp Thing* #37, p.3, pan.1), also denoting her English roots. Constantine also elides articles and substantives from his sentences at times, uses words as ‘bloody’ and frequently, refers to interlocutors as either ‘mate’, ‘chief’ or ‘love’ (depending on their sex) and other common cues of the speech of England (such as ‘cobblers’ to denote nonsense, the phonetical transcription of speech, with the elision of the last ‘g’ in words ending in ‘ing’ to enhance the impression of the plosive stop, the word ‘kipped’, and so on – the examples are multiple). The idea of being work class also comes through, mainly from constant references to ‘the job at

²⁵ Available in .HTML format at the address <<https://medium.com/meanwhile/the-debate-surrounding-john-constantines-first-appearance-d4bc6649c094>>, last accessed in 01/20/2019.

hand', which is a mystery most of the time, to 'botched jobs' (when Swamp Thing fails to cleanly wipe out the vampires and leaves witnesses) and so on. He even goes as far as describing himself as Swamp Thing's 'manager' (*Swamp Thing #48*, p.5, pan.4), so a work-driven warlock, to say the least.

Another aspect of Constantine that stands to the eye is the humanity that, perhaps, is lacking in the other mystic characters, who are generally austere, knowledgeable (or at least seem to be) and driven – but very little else in terms of character building. Constantine appears as a mystery man, like many of those. One with a face suspiciously familiar, English accent and a general attitude of a swindler. He talks to his team about an impending danger a year away, to which all of them have attributed a distinct explanation. He is in an apparent relationship with Emma, the artist from New York, and crashes in her crowded studio apartment, as a regular person would – instead of, say, teleporting around in a magic house like Baron Winter. Constantine lays the rudiments of the plot for the story: someone somewhere was going to use the 'classic frighteners' to increase the belief of the entire population in order to bring a darkness back (*Swamp Thing #37*, p.11, pan.4) And he sneaks into Abby's car and surprises her, effectively committing a crime, threatening to expose her relationship with Swamp Thing in order to get leverage to talk to the monster. He declares himself, proudly, a 'nasty piece of work' (*Swamp Thing #37*, p.14, pan.2). As Emma is killed by the Invunche, Constantine is convincing Swamp Thing that he has crucial information about his existence.

Next issue brings him lamenting Emma's death and blaming himself in a biker bar with Frank. Another biker makes fun of him, which leads to Frank pleading for Constantine to let him be – that serves to cement the idea that Constantine is, indeed, a 'nasty piece of work', capable of posing a threat to a biker much bigger than himself (as can be seen in *Swamp Thing #38*, p.11, pan.1). When the monster arrives in Rosewood Constantine is waiting for it to educate him in the presence of the vampires and the necessity for Swamp Thing's intervention, holding the information he professed to have in order to convince the creature to fight. At the end of the adventure, Constantine appears in the remains of Rosewood, kicking skulls comically and displeased with the result. The morally ambiguous reason is that there were witnesses – people survived. They would spread the story, so it would have been better they died. Seeing a skeleton near a bus stop, Constantine makes an off-color joke about late buses arriving in bunches – which is quite funny and unexpected – and goes away.

By the end of the female werewolf adventure, Constantine shows up again to tell Swamp Thing where to go next, and something similar to a comedy routine ensues, where Swamp Thing refuses to look at the paper with the location and announces his intention of leaving Constantine's quest aside and go back to Louisiana, just to open the paper and read 'Louisiana' in it. Constantine's presence in the story gradually develop a humorous aspect, as the character starts taking the form of a trickster, sneaky and manipulative, interested solely in the completion of his plan. As Joseph Henderson writes in *Man and his Symbols* about the symbolism of the trickster archetype, the trickster is equated to an earlier development of heroes' myths, "in which the hero is instinctual, uninhibited, and often childish" (*in: JUNG et al.*, 1964, P.113). The Trickster develops, however, and gradually passes through a transformation – first in stories symbolic of transcendence, where a wild character is turned into a socially responsible being through an initiation, and then in a very different aspect, as described subsequently (also by Henderson): when men and women are at a critical stage of their lives, in dreams and artwork,

we again meet the Trickster theme. But this time he no longer appears as a lawless would-be hero. He has become the shaman the medicine man —whose magical practices and flights of intuition stamp him as a primitive master of initiation. (*in: JUNG et al.*, 1964, P.151)

Constantine is undoubtedly the shaman, that being, in a sense, his profession in the comic – but carries the juvenile attitude of the more rudimentary trickster with him as well. He literally helps Swamp Thing through a transformation by sending him into a quest culminating in a rite of passage (standing before his ancestors, the Parliament of Trees) so that he can assume his place in the world. And that place is that of defender, hero, protector against the Darkness. And his weapon is knowledge. But this analysis will get there in time.

Constantine appears again in *Swamp Thing #44*, first enlisting Dayton – where he mentions the Swamp Thing is crucial to his plan, but does not explain why, and shows up again (figuratively speaking) by calling Abby's house in the end of the Bogeyman issue – he asks her to pass Swamp thing a message to meet him in San Miguel in a week that this is the last step of their journey, and somehow knows that Abby is reading a book (her puzzled face ending the issue in a semi-joke). His mentioning the 'last step' is another manipulative touch, making it hard to refuse, especially considering the evident exasperation of the creature in their previous interaction.

After the encounter with the ghosts in the haunted Cambridge House, Constantine is waiting for Swamp Thing, along with Benjamin Cox and Frank North. He introduces his friends and tells Swamp Thing they are going to learn the ‘truth’. Constantine’s jokingly derisive treatment of Swamp Thing seems particularly obnoxious in this issue, perhaps because he is showing off to his ‘mates’, but this effect works in contrast of Swamp Thing’s frequently philosophical and depressive nature – a counterweight to the gravity of tragic character, so to say.

During the Crisis issue, John organizes his associates (Benjamin should keep contact with sister Anne-Marie in London – Anne-Marie is looking for Judith, who disappeared – and Frank should wait because he would be needed ‘in the last leg’). After giving them their orders, he and Swamp Thing are teleported to the satellite, where Constantine explains the issue (Crisis) to Swamp Thing, and also that their role in the matter comes *after* the superheroes’ battle (which would indicate that Constantine either knew the universe would survive or was preparing for what might come despite the danger). In the meeting, the Phantom Stranger talks a bit (grandiosely) with Swamp Thing and is surprised by the presence of Constantine, because, as he estates, he thought John had died in an exorcism in Newcastle the previous winter, to which John responds that the kid died and he spent months in a ‘loony bin’ (*Swamp Thing #46* , p.8, pan.4) – but other than that it went really well. Stranger comments Constantine’s ‘black humor’ as they leave to see Luthor. There, Constantine finally informs Swamp Thing not about what he is, which is what the creature wanted, but what is happening in the DC Universe and how their adventure is related to it: a cult is taking advantage of the Crisis in order to try to wake up the Darkness, and it is up to Constantine and his team to prevent that from happening. Later Constantine meets Swamp thing again on Earth and tells him about the nature of the Brujería, explains some of their rites and how they plan on banking on people’s belief in order to wake the Darkness. This is the point where Constantine breaks the facet of derisive humor and suddenly seems tired and sentimental – as he is describing the horrors performed by this cult, particularly how they create an Invunche, the guardian, by disjuncting a six-months old baby, he breaks up: “Look, I’m sorry... I’ll tell you some other time, okay? I have not been sleeping much lately. I’m a bit wobbly” (*Swamp Thing #46*, p.16, pan.5). He tells Swamp Thing the Brujería is trying to bring something big back in the mystic plane, and they were aiming to destroy Heaven, so Constantine, Swamp Thing and their group would try to stop them completing the conjuring ritual – but not immediately, because Constantine would make good on his promise and

introduce Swamp Thing to the Parliament of Trees, in Brazil. Constantine then mentions he always kept his promises... in the end (but the promise helped to keep Swamp Thing under his thumb). The issue brings a lot of complexity to the character. If Constantine before was presented as frequently derisive and obnoxious, manipulative and misleading, his breaking up allowed insight into a different aspect of his personality – a glimpse of the taxing nature of the knowledge held by the character. Along with the dangers faced by him and the possible consequences, as mentioned in the dialogue with the Phantom Stranger, in which we learn Constantine spent months in an asylum due to an exorcism gone wrong. The mere fact that the Phantom Stranger is aware of him leads to the idea of Constantine being an active character in the mystic scene in London. Perhaps even powerful, though he is shown to have failed. There is another note added to the sometimes goofy humor displayed by the Englishman, which now can be read as a defense, a façade.

His obnoxious self is back in the following issue, where, he leads Swamp Thing to the Parliament of Trees, explaining that there were other elementals before him, and they all eventually found the grove and mingled their roots there. Swamp Thing learns about the history of the other plant elementals, listens to what they have to say about Good and Evil and, as he is not ready, he is sent away to meet Constantine again. Constantine gets mad listening to the result of the conversation, summarized as “where is Evil in all the wood?” (*Swamp Thing* #47, p.20, pan.4), because the location of the Evil in the wood was their next destination, the headquarters of the Brujería, where they will be met by his ‘team of experts’ (p.21, pan.4).

Swamp Thing #48 is, for the purposes of understanding the character John Constantine, especially interesting, for it is Constantine’s narration that accompanies a good deal of the issue. It starts with him spotting a murder of crows filling up the sky, and having the distinct impression that it is a bad omen. As the page is covered in darkness, John lights up a cigarette to reveal he is in a completely carved cave, wondering how long the Brujería may have inhabited it... until he burns his finger with the match and, comically, as he opens the box to get another one he finds out, as the onomatopoeias of matches hitting the ground dance over the dark panel, that the matchbox is upside down. As John curses he remembers the beginning of the day, with Judith unexpectedly joining the group, but without sister Anne-Marie (who the reader saw being attacked by the Invunche) or Ben Cox. Judith says Ben’s mother threw her out and she went to see Frank instead. Turns out Swamp Thing is there as well, waiting, and they go towards the cave. Swamp Thing goes through the Green, while

Constantine, Judith and Frank enter by foot. As John enters, that's when he saw the crows in the beginning of the issue. As he recollects the memory, still in the cave, having split up from Frank and Judith, Constantine is attacked by the Invunche, who is surprisingly strong, and falls unconscious. He wakes up in a pit, surrounded by the members of the Brujería, who condescendingly inform him that he has failed to stop them. John tells them he is not alone, but Judith shows up to tell him he is, indeed, alone. She joined the Brujería after being threatened, and killed Ben Cox and his mother, the Invunche having killed Anne-Marie. She then drops Frank's head at Constantine's feet. The Brujería is in the final stages of distilling the essence of the belief in Evil, and then starts the ritual to turn her into a bird, as the pit where John is starts filling with (I hope is) mud. Constantine is still trying to convince her to change her mind, but after a while just stares horrified as Judith vomits her internal organs and shrivels until only her head is left. From the flower in her head Swamp Thing starts to form a new body, having been locked out of the cave by the Brujería's sorcery. As Swamp Thing defeats the Invunche she gradually turns into a bird. From Judith's head wings, limbs and feathers grow, until she is a bird, and the pearl they put in her lips is the message. In a crucial moment, Swamp Thing has to choose between saving Constantine, who is drowning, and stopping Judith, and chooses to do the former – Constantine is saved, but the message is sent. Constantine, as the issue ends, recalls the bad luck and the birds, calling his savior a "big, stupid idiot" (p.20, pan.3). The issue gives insight into Constantine's mind and feelings, as well as motivation. It turns out that, under the façade of black humor and pessimism, John is capable of self-sacrifice and abnegation. It also turns out John is a poor organizer of supernatural groups, having been outmatched by the Brujería in almost every step of the way. All his team is dead, save for himself and Swamp Thing – who is indestructible. John is, ultimately, a loser.

Swamp Thing #49 also starts with a first-person narration by Constantine, this time in quotations, telling how the monster saved him and the Judith/bird had gone. After saving him and ultimately losing the battle, Swamp Thing quickly disposes of the Brujería by controlling the forest above them as John runs for his life (making one think why he had to fight the Invunche by hand in the first place). Later they agree to seek help to try to face the Darkness. Which is why John is narrating the story in the first place – telling Baron Winter about it. John convinces Winter to take part in the effort by lying about Sargon's eagerness to take part in the action. Subsequently, as Swamp Thing goes, literally, to Hell, Constantine convinces Sargon to take part in the effort by lying about Baron Winter's eagerness to take part in the

action, making both look like idiots. Constantine then turns to Zatara and Zatanna, where, Zatanna agreeing to go, Zatara behaves like a jealous father, as Constantine whistles comically. As they go down the stairs, revealing that they had a relationship some time ago, Constantine admits to not have gotten far as a magician, perhaps for being too concerned with the worldly delights (he is talking about the revealing Zatanna's uniform). That serves to show that John's reputation as a magician is not great, as the reaction of the other mystical characters seem to indicate. Finally, they unite in Baron Winter's house, as Constantine is in the company of Dayton, who is very hesitant to take part in the action. Constantine, manipulates Dayton into doing his bid, and Dayton narrates to Constantine the preparations in the other world, as the Darkness rises. Constantine seems very old in the panel Dayton says the message has been delivered. In the issue, the manipulative nature of Constantine is put on prominence, notably by his sneaky way of convincing Sargon and Winter to take part in the action. John treats them as chess pieces, that needed to be together for the plan to work, to the point of almost bullying Dayton into wearing the helmet (certainly employing derision and mockery to convince him, as well as false assurances of safety). As it turns out (as he says in pages 18 and 19), Dayton's helmet and Baron Winter's house, Wintersgate Manor, are crucial to his plan: the helmet is necessary to establish the connection with the other world and the house to facilitate the contact, due to its extratemporal nature. So, John plays the part of a master manipulator once again, much as Winter was portrayed in the original series. That John is able to do the same to him may either speak highly of John's deviousness or poorly of Winter's. The fact that John, after having lost the entire team, may have promptly sought to get another one together for another deadly battle, using deceit and lies to do so, points to a callousness: John does not seem to hesitate in taking the necessary steps to win the battle, but while he is willing to die himself, he also negates others' industry to do the same – Dayton seems to be unwilling to risk himself, but that does not factor in Constantine's plan. The hint that another one of his efforts may have gone awry (the exorcism in Newcastle mentioned by the Phantom Stranger) also serves to suggest that maybe being in a team with John at the wheel might not be the brightest of ideas.

Swamp Thing #50 brings Constantine looking through a window, as Zatanna approaches. He tells her they should start the 'ordeal', and, at her finding it a weird choice of words, John attributes it to his 'quaint English figures of speech' (p.6, pan.2). As they prepare for the ordeal (we might as well use the word) under John's direction, he hints at the fact that breaking the circle may be dangerous, due to the energy flow. Dayton is concerned that this

energy will flow through him, but Constantine calms him pondering that if nobody breaks the chain, everything will be fine. Another (the third in a row) sign that the enterprise may be dangerous arises when Winter points out that mixing science with sorcery is dangerous, but Constantine goes on. Then Dayton starts tapping into the battle, and despairs as he senses the enormity of the Darkness. He begs Constantine for the séance to end, but Constantine says it's now too late: he's got his way. They are in the séance and cannot go back. The other mystics also urge Dayton on, and, damning Constantine, he goes on to sense Etrigan's mind. Constantine directs the group to add their strength to the demon's as Etrigan is swallowed. When Etrigan is expelled, the Darkness attacks them. Constantine warns the group about the shockwave and Sargon, after a moment of weakness, bursts into flames, burning Constantine's hand. The circle is still unbroken, and Constantine wants to carry on: "this isn't the sort of punch-up that we can just walk away from! We carry on fighting to the last man, if need be" (p.18, pan.5-6). After the fall of Dr. Fate, Constantine urges Dayton to go on describing what he sees, but the power is building again. Dayton is horrified with the possibility of one of them dying, but Constantine threatens him to shut him up. Zatanna feels hot, as obviously she is the next target of the Darkness, but Zatara calls the attack to himself instead, threatening Constantine with eternal haunting if Zatanna does not leave the séance alive. As Zatara burns, Zatanna holds Constantine responsible as well: "you involved us in this! My father's dead and it's in your hands" (p.24, pan.4). Nevertheless, she can go on with them. Constantine asks Dayton to continue. When the Spectre is defeated, Dayton has lost all hope, but Constantine eagerly asks about what Swamp Thing is doing, because "this is what I prepared him for" (p.29, pan.2). Swamp Thing has his talk with Darkness, then the Light comes down, Darkness rises and they merge, a glimpse of which lose Dayton his sanity. They feel the power discharge, and unlock hands. Baron Winter seems to respect Constantine for their victory, but Constantine says it is "more of a no-score draw" (p.36, pan.6). And, the threat having ended, the story draws to a close. In this issue, once again, the manipulative nature of Constantine is displayed, as he blatantly lies to the others about their safety before the séance begins. They are pawns on his table, and if they need to be sacrificed, they will, for the greater good. In that sense, Constantine can be considered a hero, but a particular sort of one. That is pointing, once again, to his trickster nature, wherein the wizard, with human appetites (as pointed both by his relationship with Emma and with Zatanna and his constant smoking – a vice is a thing that that superheroes, mystical or not, rarely portray), serves as a base sort of hero, capable of enjoying the delights of the sensible world, and frequently paying

for them or playing the fool (as Constantine's failures seem to indicate). Another point of approximation with the archetype is the humor that seems to accompany Constantine's appearances. In the trickster section of the book *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature* (2005), the archetype is made significant in society and psychology by incorporating the tabooistic notions of a culture and reaffirming it at the same time, providing the reader with the release of vicarious adventures by going against a society's appropriate behavior and usually being punished by it in the end (p.474). Though Constantine's group mostly survives the end of the story, the price paid is large. Constantine not only went through a considerable ordeal himself, but also gained the enmity of Zatanna – and the respect of Winter, himself a trickster character of sorts.

What we have, on looking at Constantine's character as built throughout the story, is a big question mark. Prone to questionable attitudes in the quest for a greater good, with a sensuous side uncommon to the heroes of the medium and, at the same time, the disposition to put himself in harm's way to defend humanity, with a humorous side to counterpoint his bitterness, Constantine is hung in the threshold between the hero and the villain, depending on one's answer to the question 'do the ends justify the means?'

One of the most famous characters to have developed from the series, Constantine eventually had his own series, *Hellblazer* (published for astonishing 300 issues before being cancelled, and which recently started publication of a new volume), in which every one of the traits laid here is developed further: his role as a trickster and as a fool (to the point of being displayed as an archetype in a series set in the end of the universe), being equated to an animal (the fox, another approximation with the archetype of the trickster), his smoking gave him cancer, he got better by fooling three demons, he continued to trick his friends and acquaintances, and occasionally sacrifice them, to achieve his ends. Even the failed Newcastle exorcism and the months in the loony bin were developed. Constantine had a feature movie and a TV series. And, finally, in 2018, the cycle closed when Sting incorporated the character to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the series.

4.2.2.2.7 Cain and Abel

According to *The DC Comics Encyclopedia* (Vol. I, 1994, p.58) Cain first appeared as a character in July 1961, in the horror magazine *House of Mystery #175*. The title consisted of a selection of non-related short horror stories in black and white, and Cain was the caretaker of the house, who also narrated the stories (and thus loosely linked one to another, as the

narrator, giving the title at least a resemblance of unity). The first panel with Cain has him gladly announcing directly to the reader that, once the reader payed the twelve cents for the 'rent of the house', he was stuck as tenant of Cain, who then introduced himself as 'Cain, the able caretaker'. Abel, the younger brother, appeared much later in a similar role, in August 1969, in the sister magazine *House of Secrets* #81. In the story he arrives at the house, where he'll live across from his brother, Cain, in the other side of the graveyard. The issue hints at their history, trying to scare each other with horror stories, and makes a veiled reference to the incident with the stone, involving the biblical characters. The *Encyclopedia* lists them as "inhabitants from the mystical supernatural realm known as Dreaming" (idem), but that was only established in Neil Gaiman's classic series *Sandman*, which launched in 1989. So, at this point, the presence of the characters in the story has to be attributed to the original characters, the latter being a development of Moore's version as well. The characters' physical appearance was reputedly modeled after one of Swamp Thing's creators, Len Wein (Cain) and an assistant editor in DC Comics, Mark Hanerfeld (Abel).

Cain and Abel first appear in the storyline in *Swamp Thing* #33, in the story "Abandoned Houses". Abby has a dream in which she meets the caretakers of the two houses and has to choose between learning a mystery or a secret. In fact, it would be better said that *perhaps* this is a dream, since when Abby asks whether she is dreaming Abel responds that she is not *exactly* dreaming, that they are actually "a projection of the human unconscious, existing as a projection of the brain's right hemisphere" (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.3, pan.2) and that her subconscious had sent her there to learn something important. The idea is significantly akin to Jung's idea of the collective unconscious, the investigation of dreams with the objective of unveiling personal or general knowledge being one of the foundational stones of psychology in general – though why in that case it wouldn't be a dream, happening during a sleeping state and being a construction of the brain, is beyond me. Perhaps the distinction was made to enhance the notion of the collectively held structures, instead of purely personal ones. On asking the difference between secrets and mysteries, Cain explains that mysteries are wondrous things to be pondered and shared, and secrets are truths that cannot be shared. Abby chooses a secret, and proceeds to Abel's house to listen to the original story of the origin of Swamp Thing, presented in *House of Mystery* #92 (1971) – and that is the secret: there were previous iterations of Swamp Thing, he was not the first plant elemental. That idea would be developed further in *Swamp Thing* #47, just before the confrontation with the Brujería. Abel tries to help Abby to keep the memory to help Swamp

Thing in his quest, evading Cain, but his brother finds out and stops them. Abel argues with Cain, saying the brother is jealous of his stories. Cain gets mad at the comment and says they are entrusted with the safekeeping of stories, having been on the first story, and goes towards Abby, but Abel holds him and throws him to the ground. Cain then kills Abel with a stone. As Abby, horrified, comments on the murder, Cain answers her that he “invented murder” (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.17, pan.7) – but not to worry: Abel will soon be well again. That was all they had to do, “now that nobody wants to hear the stories, anymore” (MOORE, *et al.*, 1985, p.18, pan.2). The sentence can be read as a meta-commentary on the cancellation of the publications where they figured as characters. In another link with the bible, Cain reveals they are being punished for being, respectively, the first predator and the first victim. Cain then sends Abby off, and she wakes up. Abby tries to write the story, but forgets it.

Moore’s versions of Cain and Abel are, at least, more explicit in regards to being the biblical characters than the original ones – rather than veiled references to Abel’s head being sore, they invented murder, and were part of the ‘first story’. However, they happen to tap into a deep tradition in the editorial seal, pay homage to two once popular and well-known magazines and deliver all this into a new form to the reader: they are the keepers of stories (Cain of mysteries, Abel of Secrets), part of the human unconscious, situated somewhere you can reach by dreaming.

And storytellers they are. *Swamp Thing #50* begins with a view from the bottom of a well, with the silhouette of a head peering down and saying hello. The figure then starts insulting the one down the well (at this point it might as well be the reader), threatening to throw molten lead down if they don’t come up. As the countdown begins, the reader sees a hand grasping the walls, and finally recognizes Cain, learning that Abel is down the well because they argued about whether the bird was a crow or a raven, soon after disagreeing about the TV channel, so Cain strangled Abel and threw him down a well tied to an anvil. Abel is surprised with the color of the sky, and Cain derisively informs him that a ‘primordial shadow’ (in perhaps yet another reference to archetypes) has risen, and it intends to march towards “the place of lights” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.2, pan.3), and there’s no certainty whether who will win the battle, because they are dealing with primordial forces:

This is ultimate dark, ultimate light. The forces and the stakes here are fundamental and absolute... and whichever side meets its final destruction this day, everything will be changed. On the battlefields beneath us, all our stories of right and wrong may come to their inarguable conclusion... and what then, my poor, wretched, overfed dolt of a brother? What shall become of us then? (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.2, pan.5-6)

Sounding a bit like a Shakespearean character, Cain stares down a hill. Down there, Swamp Thing, Deadmen and their forces are gathering, as the story begins to unroll. These pages (p.2-3), where Cain sets the story, are surrounded by a decorated frame, as if to suggest that a work of art, or a classical epic battle is about to begin.

Cain and Abel appear again at the end of the story, watching in the first plane as Deadman, the Phantom Stranger and Swamp Thing walk in the distance, towards what looks suspiciously like an enormous red sunset (in Hell???), wondering what will change with the end of the battle and the new dynamic between Good and Evil that resulted of it. The panel with this action (p.38, pan.5) is framed similarly to the page that opens the story, effectively closing it. Cain is concerned with the shift in the meanings of Good and Evil as well – the majority of the stories they tell are based on the conflict between the two forces, what would they become now? And then Cain throws pushes him over the limit, telling him not to worry about it (they’ll think of something) and walks comically, hands in his pockets, towards his house.

Funnily enough, Cain and Abel are not as much storytellers as critics in “The End” – their interaction constitutes a frame that both introduces grandiosely the story in the beginning, raising the stakes, and comments on its significance afterwards, both times encapsulating it in a decorated frame that detaches them from it. Their role, essentially, is that of a narrative instance that critically presents and analyzes the results of the story. Their presence and comments is a push for the reader to understand the proposition made with the story and how to understand it, perhaps due to the danger of a base interpretation of the plot, which is in essence quite farcical.

4.2.2.2.8 Abnegazar, Rath and Ghast

According to *The DC Comics Encyclopedia* (Vol.I, 2004, p.88), the characters, also called ‘the demons three’, first appeared in the comic *The Justice League of America #10*, in March 1962. The demons, who roamed the Earth in ancient times and were banished to Hell by entities known as Timeless Ones, could be summoned through artifacts (the Green Bell of Uthool, the Silver Wheel of Nyorlath and the Red Jar of Calytho), and frequently fought the Justice League – notably at the behest of the sorcerer Felix Faust. In this story, they serve as “organizers” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.11) of the forces of Hell siding with the Darkness, hoping to be the “lords of misrule” in a new universe (p.20). After that, Abnegazar is killed by

Dr. Fate. While the demons can be considered part of the tradition of the editorial seal and a reference inserted in the story, they serve little purpose in the narrative other than offer a justification as per why demons would side with the Darkness if the universe in which they exist would be destroyed by the entity – to put it shortly, hope for favors from the Darkness in a forthcoming next universe. It is hard to consider them characters (in opposition to actants) when so little is given about them, not to mention qualities that go further than their actions.

4.2.2.2.9 Deadman

Deadman is an old acquaintance, having led Swamp Thing to the gates of Heaven previously, in *Swamp Thing Annual #2*. Etrigan, the Phantom Stranger and the Spectre were also characters who took part in that adventure (and Phantom Stranger and Etrigan were already known by the monster from previous encounters). So, what happens is a friend's reunion, in a manner of speaking. In the previous adventure, as in this one, Deadman is first met by Swamp Thing in what is called the 'region of the just dead' (p.8, pan.5). A quick look into the character's lore may explain his role and reason for being there.

The reference to Deadman in *The DC Comics Encyclopedia* (Vol. I, 1994, p.86) is quite illustrative in that regard. According to the article, Deadman, the former trapeze artist Boston Brand, was assassinated by a mysterious man with a hook for a hand. Being rescued from the underworld by an entity named Rama Kushna, the goddess of balance, he became a ghoulish spirit with a sense of humor, roaming the earth invisible and immaterial, but capable of possessing the bodies of the living that goes around helping people and seeking revenge for his murder. Eventually Deadman hunts his assassin, unimaginatively named 'the Hook', who is part of an entity named League of Assassins. Along with his brother Cleveland and Batman, Deadman helps to stop the League from conquering the Himalayan land of Nanda Parbat. Having been avenged, Deadman is called to perform what is apparently one of the duties of spirits such as himself – greeting the spirits of the recently dead. Which explains Deadman's predication in the beginning of the story, as well as in the previous story, in *Swamp Thing Annual #2*: Deadman is not quite a guardian of the gates of death, but rather a receptionist.

In the story in question, Deadman is first seen in *Swamp Thing #49*, in the land of the just dead, comically trying to convince a man who had been resuscitated to return to the world of the living, which he refuses to do (p.9, panel 2-3). Seeing Swamp Thing, and mistaking him for a demon, the deceased man suddenly decides that the better alternative would be to

return to the living, and Swamp Thing and the Deadman are joined by the Phantom Stranger. Deadman is quite mundane in his comments, and frequently utters humorous remarks about death, for instance, in page 10, where he refers to the sudden appearance of the Phantom Stranger as prone to scaring someone to death someday, which is prefaced with “don’t you ever knock?” (pan.3), as if there were anywhere to knock in the first place. The absurdity of his jokes does contrast with the seriousness of the situation, but they do fall flat a good portion of the time. The trio then crosses the Spectre, learning that he let the bird pass in order to fight the Darkness. As they enter Hell, Deadman mentions that he knows Etrigan, who he considers ‘bad news’ (p.16, pan.2). Soon he is scared, shouting a comical ‘yaagh!’ as Etrigan eclodes from a boiling crater nearby. *Swamp Thing #50* brings Deadman back (p.4-5) talking to Swamp thing about how the demons make him uncomfortable, sizing their forces against the opposition and updating the monster on what he heard about the nature of the enemy and the actions of their allies. Finally, he observes that Swamp Thing looks concerned (which is a mighty deed of perception, I suppose, noting unusual preoccupation in the threshold of a battle for the fate of the universe). He is still talking to the creature when Dr. Fate arrives by surprise, and informs the monster of Dr. Fate’s identity, with a joke regarding Swamp Thing’s usual setting in the swamp (‘what kind of backwater do you live in?’, in p.9, pan.4) and Dr. Fate of the current lack of action of either side, regarding their battle. When the Phantom Stranger arrives with the ‘lights’ (angels), he first has the impression they are under attack, and, learning of the nature of the allies, observes the demons are not too keen on their presence (p.10, pan.5). Deadman witnesses the rise of Darkness (p.12, pan.4). Later, observing that their side is running away from the battle with Etrigan’s defeat, Deadman follows Dr. Fate into battle (p.19, pan.1 and 4-5), retorting to Swamp Thing, who tells him to be careful, that one day he’d get himself killed. Deadman witnesses as Dr. Fate is engulfed by the Darkness (he is holding a small demon in his hands, supposedly helping in the battle). In page 22, as Fate is spat from the creature Deadman rescues him, and informs the others that he is in shock, wondering what could they do to stop the Darkness (p.22, pan.4). He is the first to feel the tremor of the Spectre’s steps (which is perhaps an odd choice, because he does not touch the ground, but floats about), and is asking for Stranger’s help as the Spectre arrives (p.25, pan.2-4 and 6). His reaction to the scene, is “uh-oh. I’d rather be in Pittsburgh” (p.26, pan.1-2). Deadman appears floating about as Swamp Thing leaves the Darkness and, after the conclusion of the battle, as Swamp Thing awakes and asks what happened, Deadman informs him that he fell around screaming like everyone, but things seemed calm, and agrees with the

Phantom Stranger, who observes that the tension seems to have vanished (p.36, pan.3 and 7). Deadman gets the last word in the group, as Swamp Thing wonders if things will change, responding with a meager “they usually do” (p.38, pan.4).

The mundane nature of the character’s comments does contrast with the setting and the dramaticity of the adventure, in which everything is at stake. So, in that sense, much like Constantine, Deadman plays in this adventure the counterweight to the monster’s dramatic intensity, as well as to the seriousness of the characters surrounding them (with the exception of Etrigan, who can be quite humorous at times – having famously kissed Batman’s cheek one memorable occasion). And it works to a degree, because when every character is serious and driven there is little to distinguish their voices, save for allusions to their pasts. So, Deadman is characterized in the adventure by the humor, which is mainly consisted of mundane allusions and expressions which work by contrast with the extravagant settings, and the allusions to his being dead already. His zombie-like appearance (he still wears his trapeze artist’s uniform, which is an interesting visual touch, related to the character’s background) also contrasts with his irreverent behavior. Other than that, he mainly floats about making comments about the things that surround them, apparently taking little part in the battle (other than carrying a small demon and rescuing Fate). The problem is, the setting seems to be so overly dramatic that a lot of counterweight is required and the character appears to utter a joke in almost every single appearance. If Deadman opens his mouth, there is a joke attached to it – and that works along with the apparent idleness to make the character seem quite the oddball, who does not take their predicament seriously.

4.2.2.2.10 The Phantom Stranger

Strangely, the Stranger does not have a specific diegetic origin. In *The DC Comics Encyclopedia* (Vol.I, 1994, p.240), his origin is “a mystery”. The article places the first appearance of the character in *The Phantom Stranger #1* (1952), and states that “some believe him to be a fallen angel forced to walk the Earth and help those in need as atonement for some great sin”, adding that the character reputedly serves the forces of Order (to keep Chaos in check, so not a function so dissimilar to that of serving the Light to keep Darkness in check) and frequently offers guidance and protection, usually dealing with supernatural threats. His physical appearance is peculiar as well, the character wearing a suit over what seems like a white turtleneck, a hat which covers his face (though his eyes shine white in the shadow) and,

overall, a huge cape with a medallion and gloves, making he look like a caped vicar, without the black in the front of the clerical collar.

The closest we can get from a character origin is, coincidentally, a series of stories (one of them written by Moore himself) originally published in *Secret Origins: Starring the Phantom Stranger* (January, 1987), about two years before the publication of “The End”. In the case in point, which is akin to modern fake news, the plural in the title is justified, for not one, but multiple origins are displayed to the reader. The character is either: a) Isaac, a Jew from Bethlehem who lost his family when Herod tried to stunt the arrival of the Messiah by killing the young males, who was bitter with his fate and came to blame Jesus. He then bribed a legionnaire to take his place in Jesus’ torture, and was condemned to wander the Earth until Jesus’ return – eventually repenting and getting into the service of the Lord; b) An unnamed inhabitant in an ancient city condemned by God who, learning from an angel that he was to be the lone survivor and dedicate his life to the service of God, refused, pleading for the lives of his family and city and, having his plead denied, committed suicide. The city was spared, but the man was condemned by the angel with eternal life in the service of the Lord. c) A scientist from the future who, with the help of the Phantom Stranger, who in this story is his future self and arrived to warn them not to meddle with what they don’t understand, unveiled a plan in his own crew to erase all human existence by siphoning the energy of the Big Bang, and was able to spoil it only by sharing the Phantom Stranger’s power and teleporting to the Big Bang in order to stop the energy from entering a siphon and nullify the universe. In the process, he gained vast power. d) A powerful, unnamed angel, incapable of deciding whether to support the forces of Heaven or Lucifer, fell halfway to hell (and had to walk the rest of the way). Arriving there, he was also shunned by the demons as a ‘half-fallen’, had his wings ripped off by Leviathan and cursed to walk alone for eternity. This last story is the one written by Moore.

If the objective of the stories was to add to the controversy about the character’s origin, it can’t be said to be entirely successful – despite the varied and incompatible backgrounds laid in the book, a pervasive consistency remains to the stories. The underlying theme is that of a doubtful believer, denying the service of God at first (even the scientist refused to believe his former self before deciding to sacrifice himself for the sake of the universe) and, condemned to roam the Earth/universe eternally, eventually enters it. In that point, they are consistent. For the purposes of this analysis, though, it is fair to consider Moore’s contribution to the character’s lore, as the unnamed angel, for a couple of reasons

(besides the authorship): first, the Phantom Stranger, for the surprise of his allies, has acquaintances among the angels (*Swamp thing #50*, 1986, p.10, pan.2-4); second, in his previous interaction with Swamp Thing (*Swamp Thing Annual #2*, 1985, pp.10-27), as he serves as the monster's guide through Heaven and the intermediary plane where the Spectre delves, in order to get him to Hell in order to save Abby, they meet the Spectre. The entity at first impedes their passage, but, upon being recalled by the Phantom Stranger of his former human aspect (Jim Corrigan, a cop), the Spectre laughs and points out that "of all the presences, you were always my favorite" (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.21, pan.7). Since the Spectre is of divine origin, in the DC Universe, having once been the angel Raphael (as will be seen in his character analysis), it makes sense to assume that, in this story, the Phantom Stranger is a stranded angel. That much is, ever so slightly, implied. But it is important to note that, while one can make a justifiable assumption based on the character's lore and the clues laid by Moore in the Swamp Thing's storyline, the unveiling of the thread does not necessarily make for better storytelling – in fact, it spoils it, to a degree. One of the key notes of the character is precisely the mystery: how the character's alliances are varied and sometimes unexpected, how he has, throughout his history, refused to help characters at times, and his professed loyalty to a principle, according to a logic, that he keeps to his own, probably along with his origin. The Phantom Stranger is a mystery super-priest, about whom much is speculated, and it works well this way.

In the storyline of the Swamp Thing, the character is especially interesting because the Phantom Stranger shared the monster's magazine in the beginning of the second volume, with short stories of about eight pages. That doesn't mean they interacted within the pages, though. They first met in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #14*, in the story "Crystal Visions, Shattered Dreams", where the scientist Nat Broder is turned into a crystal life form:



Figure 15 - Swamp Thing Meets Phantom Stranger (MISHKIN, Dan *et al.*, 1983, p.15, pan.4)

Seemingly all-knowing, and with an interest for the predicaments of those he sees fit to help, the Phantom Stranger was little more than a narrative device, a conduit for the narrative voice, until he intervened with the plot to provide a key advice or save a victim in peril as a *deus ex machina*, at the end of the adventures. This is precisely the reason why the verbose hero got away with being shrouded in mystery for so long – the Stranger was very seldomly the focus of the narrative, but rather the moral choices or situations suffered by those in need. In the adventure, the Stranger advises Nat Broder's fiancée, Sally, to see the evil that has overtaken him and take the steps to destroy him, while Swamp Thing takes care of the physical aspect of the fight – the moral dilemma is hers alone, and so is the attitude towards the resolution of the plot. Generally, the Stranger did little but serve as a narrative voice, as a moral compass and a source of advice, both to heroes and to villains, when one cared to listen to him and repent.

The monster and the Stranger next meet in *Swamp Thing Annual #2*, where Stranger serves as a guide into and through heaven, leading the monster up to the limits of Hell. There they meet Etrigan, who takes over the job of escort. In that occasion, in an exchange with Deadman, pontificates that it's not a coincidence finding them there, for "the Stranger goes where the Stranger is required" (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.11, pan.2), and on being enquired about the nature of the one that 'requires it' by Deadman, merely smiles. Very mysterious indeed. After witnessing a brief encounter between Alec Holland and Swamp Thing (and being confused by that, which in itself is surprising), Phantom Stranger is the key to getting them through the Spectre's guard.

The next appearance of the Phantom Stranger is at the satellite, in the Crisis issue, *Swamp Thing #46* (p.8), where he is aware of their role to play after the Crisis – just like Constantine is, which would mean that their incurse into the cave to stop the Brujería was doomed from the beginning, which may indicate a plot hole. But he hints that they will meet again in the battle that would come *after* the Crisis event. And, once again, he is surprised, this time by Constantine's presence in the satellite, for he thought Constantine had died in Newcastle. So, sometimes this characters displays impossible knowledge, sometimes is surprised by plot twists at times (making one wonder if the role as a narrative voice and commentary does not serve to illustrate the complexities of the plots as well), and a reoccurring trope that eventually gets quite repetitive is, as can be seen in the image above, referencing himself obliquely in the third person through a vague mention to 'stranger' or 'strangeness'.

In *Swamp Thing #49*, as Swamp Thing starts once more traversing the lands of the dead, in a way retracing his steps from the *Annual #2*, the Phantom Stranger greets Swamp Thing and Deadman in the land of the just dead (p.10) and goes along with them, to gather their forces. Once again he is the guide to the Spectre – Deadman is unsure, never having been that far (p.12, pan.1) – and, learning of the Spectre’s plans to fight the Darkness, they proceed to Hell, to which they arrive in page 16, looking for Etrigan. The demon surges from a boiling pit after a rhymed introduction, telling them he failed to stop the bird, and that he and half the forces of Hell are siding with them. In page 21 (pan.2), as the Darkness rises, they are in anxious wait, as Dayton describes them.

In the beginning of the story in *Swamp Thing #50*, Deadman repeats to Swamp Thing what he had learned from the Stranger about the Darkness, how it had been excluded from the universe since its formation (p.4, pan.4), but the Stranger himself vanished, which frustrated Deadman, who calls him ‘Lone Ranger’ (p.4, pan.5). It turns out he had not vanished, but went to gather reinforcements, appearing with the spherical angels in page 10 (pan.2-6). He comments the low tide of the battle, due to Etrigan’s fall, on page 19 (pan.1), and on page 22 (pan.2-5), he confesses himself impotent to comprehend the Spectre, and the tide of the battle troubles him, them having nothing to do but what they can, with everything at stake. As the angels fail against the Darkness, when the Spectre arrives, Stranger is so surprised he drops his hat. The Phantom Stranger watches as the Spectre loses and Swamp Thing enters and exits Darkness, and only at the end, after the resolution of the conflict, he is there to explain the shift in the relationship between Light and Darkness, or Good and Evil. His comments are the most enlightening regarding the situation:

In the heart of darkness, a flower blossoms, enriching the shadows with its promise of hope. In the fields of light, an adder coils, and the radiant tranquility is lent savor by its sinister presence. Right and wrong, black and white, good and evil... all my existence have I looked from one to the other, fully embracing neither one... never before I understood how much they depend upon each other. (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.38, pan.1-3)

So, we have this character built as an extremely enlightened being, sometimes seemingly omniscient, but which at times is surprised by the developments around him. Who seems to have a very acute, albeit unexplained, comprehension of the realms of magic, driven by a mysterious force or purpose, which he explains to no one. He seems to be on the side of Good, or order, or God, but there was an incident in his past that put him in this path, probably due to his hesitancy in choosing one side rather than the other. The Phantom

Stranger seems to be very powerful, but frequently chooses to serve more as a moral compass, advisor, commenter or organizer than display his powers magnificently, as superheroes usually do, interfering only when needed.

4.2.2.2.11 Etrigan

Etrigan is a demon. Worse: a bright-yellow demon, wearing what appears to be a long-sleeved red leotard, with a thorned belt and a blue cape. The colorful creature's *debut* was in his own title, *Demon #1* (September, 1972), and the particular aesthetics that guided his creation was that of Jack Kirby, the legend, himself. In the book, the demon serves Merlin and helps defend Camelot from the attacks of the sorceress Morgaine Le Fey, who seeks the immortality that can be bestowed by a spell in a *grimoire* in Merlin's possession. As the reign is overwhelmed by enemy forces, the wizard destroys the city to spare the world from the sorceress' eternal rule. Merlin takes the step to disappear from the world, including turning Etrigan into an amnesic man (Jason Blood), and hands him a magic formula that is the key to his restoration. Jason Blood is immortal and, though he has no recollection of his former life, he is haunted by dreams and visions of Etrigan. In modern days, Blood is lured by Morgaine (who is dying of old age, but still alive due to her powers) into Merlin's grave, and turns back into the demon. Though he fails to stop Morgaine from rejuvenating herself, Jason is now in possession of the magic words that can summon the powerful Etrigan: "Change, change o' form of man! Release the might from freshly mire! Boil the blood in heart of fire! Gone! Gone! The Form of man! Rise the demon Etrigan!" (KIRBY *et al.*, 1972, p. 23, pan.4-5).

The mythology, as is prone to happen in characters that go through decades of publication, got progressively develop throughout the years, and the origin of Etrigan was developed quite a bit with additional information. According to *The DC Comics Encyclopedia* (Vol. I, p.89), Etrigan is the son of the archfiend Belial, and was particularly prone to evil. So much so that Belial, incapable of stopping his son, created another one, Myrddin (who was to become Merlin) and educated him in the arts of magic so that he could control his half-brother. Merlin bound Etrigan to the soul of Jason, a knight of Camelot, making him immortal. As a character, the demon has been used in many ways through the decades, both in humorous exploits filled with the vicarious pleasure of experiencing the satisfaction of evil impulses without the bonds of morality and in more serious and dark adventures. The stories concocted by Moore are usually ambivalent on that matter, but despite the fact that the author can use the demon effectively in humorous situations, there is a prominence of the last kind.

Etrigan's rhymes have an interesting story of their own, which is marked by inconsistency²⁶. Though the first time the demon appears in modern times comes accompanied by an invocation, the demon's speech does not rhyme originally. Len Wein, however, in 1984, wrote a story with the demon in which his speech rhymes – and so did Moore the same year, while edited by Wein, in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #27*, in the story “By Demons Driven” (where Etrigan and Swamp Thing fight the Monkey King), a homage to Jack Kirby, creator of the character. It bears to say, the demon in Moore's hands may be sprouting not merely rhymes, but *good* poetry for the first time ever in the issue:

As for these shrieking statues, I'll not weep.
They'll perish as they've lived: dazed, witless, sheep
In slaughterhouses far beyond their ken.
I shed no tears for those who die unshriven
For they are men. Just men.
And what are men but chariots of wrath
By demons driven? (MOORE *et al.*, 1984, p.1)

In the story, Etrigan is chasing the supernatural trail of the Monkey King – actually a new take on an old character, the Kamara, the fear-feeding shapeshifter beast controlled by the sorceress Ugly Meg, both appearing in *The Demon #4* (December, 1972) – and helps to get rid of it. Of course, things are not so black and white around Etrigan, and his first approach is to try to kill Paul, the boy influenced by the Monkey King, to unroot the demon and send it back to Hell, in which he is stopped. When Paul confronts the Monkey King, effectively shrinking it in a sequence reminiscent of old cartoons, Etrigan eats it, with apparent delight. The character of Etrigan is shown as sadistic and despising human's weaknesses and their propensity for Evil. He laughs with cruelty as he rips the Monkey King apart with his claws (p.2-3). More graphically, the close-ups on the demon's face reveal a snout akin to a dog's or a cat's, with long fangs and spikes instead of eyebrows, an approach that distances itself from the character's more human traditional depictions. Etrigan is also shown drooling in several panels, denoting both his animal qualities and his lust for violence and pain. The change in visual makes the demon seem like a wild predator, a contrast with the speech pattern of sophisticated rhymes. He is merciless, but he seems to lament the necessity of killing Paul, though not to the point of hesitance (p.9, pan.3). In the end, Etrigan also helps

²⁶ The most detailed source I could find on the matter is the article written by Brian Cronin, available in HTML form at <https://www.cbr.com/the-abandoned-an-forsaked-does-the-demon-rhyme-all-of-the-time/>, last accessed on 01/29/2019.

Swamp Thing by attempting to call his and Abby's attention to the presence of a different evil – Arcane, though he does not say so explicitly.

Swamp Thing meets Etrigan again in *Swamp Thing Annual #2* (1985, p.25), where he arrives in the form of a yellowish whirlwind, much like Bugs Bunny's old antagonist, the Tasmanian Devil – perhaps yet another of Moore's homages, for the character of Etrigan, driven by instincts and looking for fun, seems to fit the mold perfectly, with the exception of the rhymes. Etrigan is willing to help to guide Swamp Thing through Hell, but asks for a fare – a flower plucked in Heaven by the Phantom Stranger. Supposedly, Etrigan's intention is to show it to the condemned in order to heighten their pain in Hell's desolation – but Etrigan plants the flower as soon as they enter Hell, what attracts the mocking of two nearby demons (Muttlecraunch and Flutch). One of them references Etrigan's fusing with Jason Blood as being "half a man" and comes up with a reason for the demon's speech pattern: "Etrigan's a rhyming demon now and far above such banter with his kin" (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.28, pan.5). Apparently, then, the speech pattern of the demon is due to a promotion in the hierarchy of Hell. Similarly to what happens in Dante's story, Swamp Thing meets enemies in Hell – first Sunderland, who is slave to Muttlecraunch and Flutch, then Arcane, rotting full of insect eggs. As they find Abby being assaulted by other demons and rescue her, Etrigan is accused of turning against his kin, and the demon answers by burning them with his fire. As they run away, Etrigan opens a portal to teleport Swamp Thing, in one of the demon's best moments in the issue, mainly due to his mathematical description of the spell (itself a play with the two-dimensional quality of Comics):

By root of minus nine and circle squared
Set right and true against dimensions three
Let our ill-angled passage be prepared
Between the folds of rare geometry (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.36, pan.5)

Etrigan then kicks Arcane's head (which is stopping them from leaving) and asks Swamp Thing to tell Abby when she wakes up that now there is a flower in Hell, named after her – it is unclear whether this is intended as a sentimental note or as a reminder of the abuses suffered in Hell by Abby (since she would not remember her stay), but as the demon's laughter accompanies them through the tunnel, I'd vouch for the latter. In the issue, Etrigan behaves as a trickster hero, interested in his own amusement rather than following a code or any set of rules. He is plastic and animalistic as a trickster frequently is, and also opens way for a good dose of humor in his interactions.

Etrigan's next appearance in the comic happens in *Swamp Thing #49*, where he emerges from a boiling pit, scaring Deadman and already making ironic comments on the presence of the group in Hell, there to fight Evil:

Does Heaven come to Hell in search of aid?
Are those cast out soon welcome back inside
When danger threatens? Sirs, I am dismayed!
I'd credited the angels with more pride.
Or is it, like so much within our lives
A case of needs must when the devil drives? (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.16, pan.3-5)

Etrigan helps to set the action, describing the divisions of Hell and the numbers for the battle to come. In the process, he reinforces the idea of rhymer's being an elite troop of sorts, by counting them separately:

On that point Hell's unable to agree:
The baser fiends look forward for the show,
While higher cadres tend to side with me
In favoring the devil that we know.
[On being asked how many stood with them:]
Perhaps two hundred of the rank and file,
Nine rhymer's, and a troop of cavalry
Take arms against this resurrection vile
As many siding with our enemy.
This war shall burn white-hot, and should we fall
Then madness without end shall claim us all. (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.17, pan.3-6)

Etrigan and the others stand, feeling the pearl fall from the beak of the Judith/bird (p.21, pan.2), as the issue closes.

The next time Etrigan appears is already in *Swamp Thing #50* (p.7), as he prepares for battle along with other rhymer's. Once more, the idea of the rhymer's being a "rank" (MOORE *et al.*, p.7, pan.4) is reinforced. The scene is at first described by Dayton, but the narration shifts to a third-person view without recordatories the following page, as Etrigan and Lisquinelle, another rhymer, finish their preparations and climb on their mounts. Etrigan explains to Lisquinelle his reasoning for siding with the Light in the battle – basically, he serves God by being a demon – and in the process, once more reinforces the idea of the rhymer's (perhaps Moore wanted to make the idea definitive and decided to mark it exceedingly well in the issue):

We rhymer's are Hell's cream, the pit's elite,
And yet, but fragments of a higher plan.
God's balance must endure, and it's defeat

Shall not go unopposed by Etrigan. (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.8, pan.5)

After a funny interaction where Etrigan jabs at another demon's (Spattlefleck's) poor rhymes, they mount and join the others. On page 11 (pan.1) they join the front and on page 14 Etrigan charges towards the Darkness. His interaction with the other rhymer makes a reference to the demon's first adventure with Swamp Thing, as he mentions that fear is "but a monkey" (p.14, pan.1). After a charge (and a delightful exchange about arterial sprays) Etrigan breaks through the ranks of demons and is able to confront the Darkness, being subsequently swallowed. On being asked what Evil was, Etrigan answers:

Your name is Evil,
Absence of God's light
His shadow-partner,
Locked in endless fight (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.16, pan.4)

Despite having named Darkness, all Etrigan was able to do was to focus on the inevitability of the fight between Light and Darkness, and was thus rejected and expelled, unconscious. He appears again on page 33, just standing in expectation as Darkness is about to rise against the Light. And this ends the character's part in the story, for when Swamp Thing wakes up Etrigan is not about.

Etrigan is responsible for a good deal of the best lines in the story, and quite an original take for a demon – where demons serve God's plan and will defend it when threatened. He is frequently a source of humor in the issues, and Moore seems to have a lot of fun with the character, to the point of offering criticism about the quality of the rhymes of the rhymes in the issue. But it needs to be said that the humor surrounding the character is easily missed, case in which the character may appear displeasing and/or disturbing. His animalesque appearance helps to reinforce the idea of a sensual being, that is, a creature driven by sensual experiences, joining adventures for the fun of it most times, but generally present when needed. The overfed idea of the rhymer as a class in Hell's hierarchy did not take, by the way – it eventually turned into a curse by Morgaine, and comes and goes according to the disposition of the writer.

4.2.2.2.12 Dr. Fate

Dr. Fate first shows up in the storyline in *Swamp Thing* #49, where he is awakened by his helmet, and reaches for it – the narrative specifies that he is in Salem, in a "house with no

windows or corners” and that the helmet’s voice is “dry as Egypt” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.07, pan.2). He then shows up again as an ally, appearing out of nowhere and surprising Swamp Thing’s party, in the anniversary issue, *Swamp Thing #50*, where he is again surrounded by allusions to Egypt – more specifically, when Steve Dayton/Mento senses his arrival, he describes his mind as ‘ancient and vast and dusty’, reminiscent of ‘sand blowing endlessly across endless bronze desert” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.9, pan.3). The character’s uniform, like Deadman’s, is more visually related to superhero costumes than to magicians or sorcerers in comics (due to the influence of Mandrake’s famous cape and suit, most mystic characters wear suits, overcoats and cloaks – frequently with hats, top hats or even turbans, which are used to add mystery to their figures, similarly to the traditional detectives’ attire). Immediately Deadman makes it clear that Fate is a character that everyone not living in a ‘backwater’ should know who Fate is (and, therefore, he is famous and a significant character in the story). His speech manner is grandiose (and therefore he is either proud or full of himself) and he makes himself part of the group immediately by pointing out the arrival of the Phantom Stranger, who is, as he says “known to us all” (p.10, pan.2). In page 19, he goes off to fight the Darkness’ minions and, after a brief exchange with the demon brothers, kills Abnegazar (which proves him capable of being merciless) immediately before being engulfed by Darkness. Inside, when asked what Evil is, shows contempt by describing Evil as a “quagmire of ignorance that would drag us back as we climb towards the immortal light; a vile, wretched thing, to be scraped from the sandals like dromedary soil” (p.21, pan.3), insulting the creature before being expelled and going in shock, out of the battle. As a result, Fate seems quite foolish in resorting. Adding that to the information pool, we have a character that is significantly powerful (everybody should know him, he succeeds Etrigan in talking to the Darkness, he kills a demon lieutenant and faces the entire demon army), but too proud and foolish for his own good, resorting to insults when power does not solve the problem. The manner of the character’s presentation in the story, it is important to notice, is consistent with the character’s background and tradition: Dr. Fate, a mixture of sorcerer and superhero, first appeared in May 1940, in the title *More Fun Comics #55*. Fate is a mystical entity, a Lord of Order named Nabu, tasked with fighting the forces of Chaos, who spent a long time in suspended animation inside a pyramid (hence the references to Egypt) when the archeologist Sven Nelson released him, being subsequently killed by a poison gas in the chamber. Nabu then tutored Sven’s son, Kent Nelson, taught him magic and gave him the helmet, amulet and coat of Dr. Fate (powerful magical items). The character’s first story shows him saving Inza

Kramer from a warlock named Wotan and marrying her. They both live in the character's other-dimensional sanctum, a tower in Salem – hence the house without windows or corners (character information found in *The DC Comics Encyclopedia* Vol.I, 2004, p.93). So (as a Lord of Order), it is understandable the incapability of Fate to empathize with Evil (associated with Chaos in the character's lore). In a manner that is similar to that of the Spectre in the story, the fact that the character serves the forces of Good makes communication with Evil unlikely – the conversation demands an unbiased look at Evil, of which neither of the tested heroes is capable.

4.2.2.2.13 The Spectre

The DC Comics Encyclopedia (Vol. I, 1994, p.282-283) entry on Spectre has two different versions of the character, each with its first publication date. Having been specified in the comic that we are talking about Jim Corrigan's Spectre (*Swamp Thing Annual #2*, 1985, p.22), the first appearance of the character happened in *More Fun Comics* (February, 1940). Jim Corrigan, a merciless cop with a religious background, is killed by a mobster. As his soul cried for vengeance, the Spectre answered the claim and infused Corrigan's soul with its power, bringing his body back to life. After having his revenge, Corrigan decided to use the power of the Spectre for Good.

One of the most powerful entities in the DC Comics' universe, the Spectre was originally the angel Raphael, who rebelled against Heaven with Lucifer, but later regretted his actions and sought God's forgiveness. God then transformed him into a spirit of vengeance and set him loose on Earth in 776 BC. As the embodiment of God's wrath, the Spectre was the one who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, spread the plagues over Egypt and destroyed the walls of Jericho. When Jesus was born, God decided that Forgiveness and Vengeance shouldn't coexist on Earth, and banished the Spectre to Limbo. When Christ died, the Spectre once again was able to roam the Earth, but needed to bond with a human soul to do so. Hence Corrigan. The Spectre was left weakened after the events in Crisis, where he travelled to the dawn of time to fight the Antimonitor – so he is arguably in a weakened state in the story that is the object of this study, though the story itself never mentions that.

In the Swamp Thing's continuity, the Spectre lurks between Heaven and Hell. In Dante's model, that would be Purgatory, but the idea of transitioning to Heaven by purging the sins is not mentioned in the story at all, so it is safe to assume it may as well be Limbo, the first circle of Hell in Alighieri's work, and, in DC continuity, the dwelling of the Spectre –

incidentally, the concept of Limbo was banned by the Catholic Church in 2007, but continues to exist in DC's Comics, and includes a place where obscure and forgotten characters dwell when they are not in print. In *Swamp Thing Annual #2* (1985), as explained by the Phantom Stranger (p.17, pan.1-2), the Spectre is a sentinel that prevents traffic from one place to another, at first forbidding them to go forth in their attempt to bring back Abby's soul, but, upon being reminded that he himself was resurrected, as Jim Corrigan, the Spectre laughs and lets them through. Limbo, in the comic, is referred to as "borderlands of form and reason" (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.19, pan.1), with several references to madness ahead, which suggests that there is a psychic component to the background as well – Moore seems to hint very heavily at the idea of the Jungian collective unconscious, without committing to it explicitly.

The Spectre seems to be very rigid in his role as a sentinel at first, to the point of being unreasonable, for learning that Abby's presence in Hell was wrongly attained by someone who had no right, the Spectre pondered that everything happens according to "one voice that speaks in all things" (p.21, pan.1), and therefore her fate was justified – denying the possibility of something being wrong and, ultimately, if one is to take the reasoning far enough, arguing himself out of the job, for if everything happens justly, whoever crosses the line was meant to do so. But the Phantom Stranger does not do that, he appeals to the human side of the Spectre, who laughs and lets them through, apparently waving his duties aside. That trope of conflict resolving itself without violence is very present in Moore's stories, but does caesure the character of the Spectre in two, one arrogant, powerful and duty-oriented and another with human feelings and sense of humor. That perhaps is the intention of the exchange, a nod to the character's history, where a wrath angel needs a human host to control it.

The Spectre appears again in the storyline in *Swamp Thing #49*, as Deadman, Swamp Thing and the Phantom Stranger go looking for him and try to gather allies for the upcoming battle (p.12-13). As he tells the trio, he let the bird (Judith) pass with the pearl in her hand to bring back the original Darkness, with the intention of destroying it later, assuring them that, as the champion of the "voice which speaks in all things" (p.13, pan.4), he would be at the battle when needed. In this instance there is no glimpse of the human side of the Spectre, except, perhaps, if one considers Deadman's comment in the same page – if the Spectre let the bird through to have a competition, then he'd be bored, and that is a human thing. Be it as it may, the character seems overzealous, serious and driven.

In *Swamp Thing* #50 (1996), the Spectre arrives on page 25 to fight the Darkness. Already gigantic in size, he grows even larger and holds the Darkness, but it turns out that Darkness was even larger than anticipated, and engulfs him as well. Inside, the question asked by Darkness is “what is Evil for?” (p.28, pan.4), to which he responds “evil exists only to be avenged, so that others may see what ruin comes from opposing that great voice, and cleave more wholly to its will, fearing its retribution” (p.28, pan.4). At the answer, Darness retorts that the only thing the Spectre’s taught it was “vengeance” (pan.5), and so spits him out. The answer says more about the Spectre himself than about the Darkness, for it makes him look driven, proud to ser the ‘voice’, but also incapable of reasoning, once again, and even foolish, for being stubborn enough to insult an enemy that has him at his mercy, for no reason. He is beaten, and later on, at the arrival of the Light, he is weeping and asking God for forgiveness, having failed against Darkness (p.33, pan.4). Taking that along with the fact that the Spectre purposefully allowed the bird to pass, in order to have that battle, establishes him further as a proud and foolish character, who could not even vent the possibility of being beaten and had nothing to resort to other than his (enormous) power, at the end. A powerful, but other than that empty, character. His rigidity, especially in the latter appearances, makes him seem unrelatable, impression that is added to by Dayton’s comments, where he cannot tap into the Spectre’s mind, for he is way too powerful to comprehend, and the Phantom Stranger’s comment (on p.22, pan.2), that the Spectre is beyond his comprehension, and perhaps beyond sanity.

4.2.2.2.14 The Darkness

Darkness is, in my opinion, one of the strangest monsters to ever have fought a superhero, because it starts as a vague notion and does not quite evolve from that in the eyes of the reader until the very end – when it reveals itself as a gigantic human right hand, ready for a handshake that was obviously the objective of the slow building of the plot. Problem is: that raises more questions than it answers. Why a hand? Why human, for that matter (the DC Universe has a multitude of aliens)? Was it attached to a body (the art does not show)? Is this to be read as a joke? Or should one take the handshake as something deeper, a philosophical and aesthetical proposition?

The first thing we hear about Darkness is from Constantine, saying in *Swamp Thing* #37 that “he” is coming back – being immediately corrected by Judith, who says it is not a ‘he’, but rather “a massive extragalactic energy field that got drawn inside a black hole eight

billion years ago” (MOORE *et al.*, p.2, pan.1-2). Later in the same issue, Constantine talks to Benjamin, who also says that ‘he’ is coming back – only Benjamin is referring to Cthulhu, one of the elder gods of Lovecraftian mythology (p.5, pan.4). Sister Anne-Marie also says it is a ‘he’ coming back – only she attributes the danger to Satan (p.8, pan.5). Talking to Emma, before her murder by the Invunche, Constantine sees a couple of clues about the plot of the story arc: something important is being brought back, everyone agrees that in about a year’s time. Bringing back this entity requires increasing the belief levels of the entire population, and the ones intending it are from South America and, in order to do that, they would use werewolves, vampires, dreams, haunted houses, the ‘classic frighteners’ (p.11, pan.4).

Constantine doesn’t really tell Swamp Thing much about their predicament throughout the story arc. There is a reference to Armageddon in *Swamp Thing #38* (p.21, pan.2), but it is nothing specific. In the end of *Swamp Thing #39* Constantine talks about “something big”, that “they” are planning, but they need the right atmosphere (p.22, pan.3). In *Swamp Thing #40* the monster complains to Abby about Constantine’s being evasive and only hinting about a ‘great threat’, a conspiracy manifesting itself in ‘supernatural outbursts’ (p.5, pan.1). There is an oblique mention to Apocalypse in *Swamp Thing #44* (p.6) during Constantine’s conversation with Dayton, and the series of supernatural occurrences is commented, but no mention to the Darkness. Finally, in the end of *Swamp Thing #45*, Swamp Thing is introduced to Frank and Benjamin, and promised answers. *Swamp Thing #46* brings forth the Crisis, and in a chat in the satellite, the Phantom Stranger tells Swamp Thing that their role in the battle is to be played later (p.8, pan.1). Finally, during their meeting with Alex Luthor, almost a year after the journey began, Constantine tells Swamp Thing that a South American cult had anticipated the Crisis and plotted to take advantage of it, and it is up to Swamp Thing to deal with it in the ‘spiritual dimensions’ (p.9, pan.3-5). Through pages 13 to 16, Constantine explains the plan of the Brujería, and the Darkness is first mentioned in the final panel of the page: “You must also understand that the darkness you’ve seen in the heart of America is not a fraction of the Darkness that the Brujería hope [sic] to bring upon us.” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.16, pan.4) Even then Constantine is not sure about the nature of Darkness, mentioning the theories of Judith, Benjamin and sister Anne-Marie *en passant* – he only knows it’s nothing good (p.17, pan.1-2). The Brujería would bring back their ‘entity’ in order to destroy Heaven (p.17, pan.6).

In *Swamp Thing #48*, finally the notion of ‘original darkness’ is brought forth by Judith, the betrayer of the group: “They’re going to bring back the original darkness and

smash the throne of the divine pretender. After that, it'll be a new universe... and I'll have a place on it" (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.13, pan.3). In *Swamp Thing #49* (p.1, pan.4), the summoning is explained to the reader: "the bird would take [the pearl] to a place beyond maps, where it would wake something beyond naming". The Darkness is mentioned in the story as "a power that would level up Heaven" (p.3, pan.4) and "entity" (p.3, pan.5). The Phantom Stranger refers to it later (p.9, pan.5) as "a terrible shadow that will fall upon Paradise", and Swamp Thing calls it the "coming Darkness" (p.3, pan.6). As Swamp Thing's group walks towards Hell, in their encounter with the Spectre, the Darkness is referred to twice as 'original Darkness', and said to be "a whispered legend even in this place where all is legend" (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.12, pan.2-3). Zatara is a little more helpful in his description, answering his daughter that the Darkness was "much more than Satan. It's the primordial shadow itself. Evil is only a part of what it is" (p.13, pan.2-3). So, the character is built with oblique references: the only information the reader has is that it is ancient, it is dark, it is not good, it is Evil and it is very, very big. It seems to be consistently called 'original darkness' or 'primordial shadow' (which are synonyms), and not much else.

Thankfully, Moore passes the job of explaining the plot to more experienced characters in the beginning of *Swamp Thing #50*, and Cain gives the reader a marginally better notion of what is 'it' after all, and why the references made to it were so vague, while informing his brother Abel, who was dead in the bottom of a pit when the adventure started: "this is no fallen angel of Leviathan Heaven faces... this is the soul of darkness itself. A complete absence of divine light" (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.2, pan.4). As Abel is still reluctant to admit that the Darkness might pose a threat to Heaven, Cain drives the point home: "Idiot! This is ultimate dark, ultimate light. The forces and the stakes are fundamental and absolute... and whichever side meets its final destruction this day, everything will be changed" (p.2, pan.5)

Deadman drives the notion further on the next page, by revealing that "this thing's been excluded from the ordered universe since its formation" (p.4, pan.4) and that maybe it was thinking things over before making any move. As the Darkness starts moving out of the chaos and into Hell's shores, Dayton despairs at the sheer size of it, which apparently defies all reasoning, for "it's too big to think about it" (p.12, pan.4).

As Etrigan attacks the creature, Dayton accidentally taps into its mind, also adding a description of what is in front of the demon: it is an enormous being composed of pitted and eroded "black corrugations", with individual "plates" that open like mud to swallow Etrigan,

who feels cold when touched by it. For Dayton, its mind feels hungry for knowledge and understanding, being in pain (p.15, pan.2-6). Inside Darkness, the creature reveals its own perceptions of its origin to Etrigan: it was absolute, and had no understanding of self. When Light came, it understood its 'otherness', and became aware of itself. That was very displeasing. So it asks Etrigan what it is, and, having been named and told its purpose was to fight Light, spits the demon. Darkness then attacks the group of magicians on the other plane, but this is described as an instinctive move, like an animal shaking off a fly (p.17, pan.1).

When Dr. Fate is engulfed by Darkness (p.21), it tells him that, in that strange place of light and order, it had been named Evil, but it didn't know what Evil is. So it asks Fate, who responds with insults. Darkness spits Dr. Fate off, insulted. The Spectre gains a little more perspective on Darkness, being able to see it from a more privileged advantage point (p.27), and to him (filtered by Dayton's narration) it seems "convex and featureless", like the head of a maggot, only (as he climbs it) with a "cowl of bone" or a "slug with a beetle's shell" (p.27, pan.4) – the Spectre is seeing a finger, the 'cowl' being the nail... the 'towers', or 'chimneystacks' that fall over him (p.27, pan.6) are the other fingers. To the Spectre (p.28), Darkness says that its hunger for understanding grew larger, to the point of thinking of destroying the Light in order to extinguish the anguish it caused it. The Spectre is disturbed at the thought, and as usual mentions the "voice that speaks in all things" (p.28, pan.3), to which Darkness retorts that the voice does not speak in it, that being the problem, to begin with: the lack of understanding of the nature of the light presented a question for which it had no response, the doubt, the questions in need of an answer being the origin of the pain it felt. It then asks the purpose of Evil. When the Spectre says that Evil is to be avenged for the education of others, it counterpoints that it also has suffered for the existence of Light, waiting for eons in doubt, and asks the Spectre if these, too, did not demand retribution. As it spits the Spectre, the Swamp Thing enters it voluntarily (p.29, pan 5). Darkness is surprised at the action, calling the monster "extraordinary" (p.31, pan.1), and asking him the purpose of Evil. Instead of answering based on animosity, Swamp Thing considers the question and confesses not to know the answer, but passes on the musings of the Parliament of Trees, suggesting that perhaps Good and Evil perform complementary roles, where Evil is formed by the decomposition of Virtue (which he equates with Good) and from this decomposition Virtue would grow stronger, one effectively feeding the growth of the other. Then Darkness frees Swamp Thing, as it senses a final end approaching, and rises to meet the Light. The shift of perspective allows the reader to see Darkness for the first (and last) time: it is a black hand,

with long nails, like the stereotyped claw of a demon (it is, after all, Evil). It rises to meet another right hand, human in shape and clear, looking illuminated, representing Light, that is descending from the sky. And then they fuse, and establish a different relationship between them.

So the character of Darkness is established mainly as curious, hungry for knowledge and anxious about the Light – Darkness, once conscious of a Self, sought the next thing distinct from itself. The only thing it knows about itself, apart from its recognition of individuality, is what it is told. The conversations Darkness has with the other characters are representative of a learning curve.

Character	Question	Answer	Learned
Etrigan	What am I?	Your name is Evil./ Absence of God's light,./ His shadow-partner,./ Locked in endless fight. (p.16)	Fatalism
Dr. Fate	What is Evil?	Evil is a quagmire of ignorance that would drag us back as we climb towards the immortal light. A vile, wretched thing, to be scraped from the sandals like dromedary soil (p.21).	Contempt
Spectre	What is Evil for?	Evil exists only to be avenged, so that others may see what ruin comes of opposing that great voice, and cleave more wholly to its will, fearing its retribution! (p.28)	Vengeance
Swamp Thing	What is the purpose of Evil?	Perhaps Evil... is the humus... formed by virtue's decay... and perhaps... perhaps it is from... that dark, sinister loam... that virtue grows stronger? (p.32)	Perspective

Table 14 - Questions and Answers

First it gets its name. Along with the name, comes a destiny: without even knowing what it is, it is presumed to do something. Perhaps that is the reason why it is bothered with Etrigan's fatalism. Funnily enough, the idea of the struggle, the fight, is not acknowledged until later.

Knowing it is Evil, Darkness wants to know what Evil is. Asking Dr. Fate about it may not have been the greatest of ideas, for the sorcerer responds with a torrent of insults worthy of an obnoxious Cyrano de Bergerac, starting with the notion of a quagmire of ignorance and ending with a basal reference (which is quite humoristic, one must recognize) to camel excrement. What the Darkness learns from it is contempt. It not necessarily develops contempt for Fate (it could have as easily killed him), but learns that those who are directed towards the light have contempt for Evil. That, for Fate, Evil was something that stopped people from entering the Light.

If so, what would be the point? Having a name and a general direction towards a sense of identity, Darkness sought a reason for its existence. And, from Spectre's answer, it learned not a purpose, but rather the notion of struggle against a foe that wants payback for those deviated from the light, Evil, being that which fought the Light for those that sought it. This time, however, having been sewn with a name, the knowledge of an opposite and purpose to contend with it, the Darkness is bent towards the possibility of fighting the Light. It is a mounting process coherent with the information learned – and the fact that those conversing with it were filled with animosity.

When Swamp Thing arrives and talks about a different notion of the interaction between Good and Evil, it is time for the conflict. It is not made clear in the story that Swamp Thing's dialogue had any sort of definite effect on Darkness, that it convinced it in any way that affected the resolution of the conflict. But if one takes into consideration the mounting of the information it received, it seems arguable that the possibility is more likely than not, seeing as the Darkness' disposition seems to have shifted, and a fusing between Light and Darkness occurs, rather than a fight.

The problem with Evil in this story, though, is that it is not: the character of Darkness does not hold any animosity against the Light – rather painful curiosity. It did not consider itself an antagonist except in the most general meaning of the word, as an opposite. Darkness shows no disposition to harm or kill those that opposed it, until provoked and insulted. The only reason it is Evil, then it's because it is told it is. Yet, throughout the story we are told that it inhabits the madness and chaos, it is Evil and comes to destroy Heaven. The characters, both heroes and the ones that summoned it, seem to assume that Darkness' ultimate goal is to destroy Heaven, but that is proven wrong. In fact, is curious about the Light and its relation to it. So much so that it decided to shake its hand, ultimately.

That and the notion of Darkness as an 'ultimate' force, as Cain poses it (p.2, pan.5), are very reminiscent of both the idea of the Jungian shadow *and* of the monster as an embodiment of actions or characteristics shunned by the society that generates it. The reason why Darkness is Evil is because it is not Light, and it is not Good (as Light supposedly is). And those that fight for the Light do not recognize its characteristics as acceptable. It is an interesting point to note that the existence of Light *brought* Darkness into being, in a sense. Much like the notion of a light shedding a shadow, or of a personality, adapting to society, suppressing the characteristics and drives that are not conducive to the rules by which it lives. At the same time, both Light and Darkness being right hands would suggest an independent

existence from the Light – perhaps to enhance the notion of a merging happening in the end. The Darkness, absolute and ultimate, is innocent. And, because it is shown as such an archetypal force in the story, acquires an ample symbolic meaning. Maybe it is the shadow within ourselves as well – and it being innocent a large hint on how to deal with it. But more on that later.

4.2.2.2.15 Abby Arcane/Cable/Holland

Despite the fact that Abby does not actually figure in the present story as a character, no analysis of Moore's run of Swamp Thing's characters would be complete without her. She is one of the most iconic developments of the saga, and arguably started being considered along with Swamp Thing, as an equal, in subsequent developments. They had a baby. She eventually became an elemental. They loved each other every step of the way.

So, Abby is a necessary step in talking about Swamp Thing as a character in Alan Moore's run – and the problem is, if you consider, as this work set off to do, only the final chapter of *American Gothic*, Abby would be necessarily left out, nevermind the facts that she was important in the story, that she helped to provide a worldly perspective to the crazy adventures Swamp Thing got himself into, that she was the key point of the previous story arc (where Swamp Thing rescued Abby from Hell) and will be the key figure of the next story arc (where she is accused of bestiality by Gotham's authorities, for being with him, an important wave to the very Gothic notion of abjection). She is important, and, in this issue in particular, was left out. But a character analysis of Swamp Thing could never be made without the presence of Abby, as a character in Alan Moore's run, even if only for the sake of contrast. So this section is about Abby. It is brief, considering the merit of the character, but it is, as Swamp Thing's, comprehensive, encompassing in summation everything Abby went through as a character in Swamp Thing.

The Dc Comics Encyclopedia, both *Vol.I* (2004) and *Vol.II* (2008), which is a revised edition, do not have an Abigail Arcane/Cable/Holland entry, and the information about her is scarce and inconsistent – in Anton Arcane's entry (Vol.I p.20) she is his niece, but in Swamp Thing's entry she is briefly mentioned as his daughter (Vol.I, p.297) – a detail that was not corrected in Vol.II. Fortunately, this work has already done the leg work to access the character Abby Arcane/Cable/Holland's story and can bring justice to Abby on that regard.

Abby started up very early in the saga, in *Swamp Thing #3* (1973, p.7, pan.4-5), as she introduced herself to Matt Cable in her native village in the Balkans. Abby was the village

medic, daughter of Grigori Arcane, later to be known as The Patchwork Man, and niece of Anton Arcane, the sorcerer/scientist that wanted Swamp Thing's body in order to achieve immortality. By the end of the Balkans adventure, learning of her father's and her uncle's demise (well... resurrection and second death in her father's case – it's complicated) decided to go along with Matt in his chase of Swamp Thing and become part of his organization, point in which her medical background is completely forgotten. The reason why they leave the village is not clear, if their objective was to capture Swamp thing, last seen there, but they leave anyway, taking him along, and go through several adventures, where Abby's inquisitive and sensitive personality served as a contrast to Matt Cable's devoted obsession with avenging his friends Alec and Linda's death by capturing Swamp Thing, unaware of the monster's identity. After being saved by the monster from the Scottish Werewolf (*Swamp Thing #4*, 1973), the couple goes to investigate the clockwork town (Burgess Town, *Swamp Thing #6*, 1973) and gets captured by the Conclave, being saved by the monster once again in Gotham City (*Swamp Thing #7*, 1973). After that, Matt is called to accompany a group searching for an alien life form (*Swamp Thing #9*, 1974), and capture it – which involves a bit of torture, to Matt's discomfort –, only to have it saved by Swamp Thing. Cable joins Abby again in their search for Swamp Thing (*Swamp Thing #11*, 1974), this time not to capture the creature, but to try and understand it – Matt having finally realized the monster had saved his life many times to date. They are captured by the psychic Conqueror Worms and Dr. Zachary Nail, and the monster helps free them once again. In the issue, Abby is there to ask for clarification, most of the time (a narrative device in order for Matt to utter his reasoning and purposes, for the benefit of the reader), but at the end she intervenes in favor of Swamp Thing (WEIN, Len *et al.*, p.1974, pan.2 and 4). In *Swamp Thing #13* (1974) Matt's group, Abby included, successfully capture Swamp Thing, and are horrified to see him tortured and studied. Abby and Matt concoct a rescue plan, after Matt learns of Swamp Thing's origin, and Abby insists to go along him. Swamp Thing, then, is rescued, for a change. Abby shows sensitivity and empathy, as well as determination to put her life on the line to help Swamp Thing. In *Swamp Thing #15* (1975), they are looking for Swamp Thing, as the monster stumbles into the priest, Father Bliss, who is unwittingly helping the demon Nebiros bring forth Armageddon. The group gets captured, and it is Abby who comes up with the answer to their trouble – smash the orb holding Swamp Thing's soul (MICHELINIE, David *et al.*, 1975, p.15, pan.4-5). Later she is shown lamenting the death of their friend in the adventure. Abby is once more shown as being very sensitive, and the issue hints at the possibility of her being

supernaturally so. One of her determining qualities as a character seems to be empathy, just as Matt could be defined by his determination. In *Swamp Thing #16* (1975) Matt and Abby go on mission to rescue their friend Bolt, who was kidnapped by The Conclave. They only arrive in *Swamp Thing #17* (1975), and Abby is once again suggested to have psychic powers (MICHELINIE, David *et al.*, 1975, p.5, pan.1-2), as she senses evil in the jungle. They are captured (it seems to be their main activity at this point). With the help of the monster, they are able to stunt the plan of Conclave's Nathan Ellery (resurrected) and rescue Bolt, evading in a helicopter, but realize it's leaking gas and they are going to fall. It takes a month for them to reach the ground, but in *Swamp Thing #18* (1975), where they stumble upon Serenity Village, the elderly retirement village where Aubrey Trask is using people as sacrifices to magically rejuvenate the interns. They are – you guessed – captured and about to be used as sacrifices when Abby uses her powers to loosen the ropes binding her (MICHELINIE, David *et al.*, p.14, pan.3-4) and escapes, but is captured by the seniors. She then (p.15, pan.2-3) calls Swamp Thing telepathically, and soon it is once again the key to dispel the threat when she tells Swamp Thing that the book is the key to the spells (p.16, pan.5). For the first time, Abby has an active role in the adventure, and that seems to trouble Matt (p.18, pan.3-4). In *Swamp Thing #19* (1975) the party arrives in Gatorberg, Florida, to look for Swamp Thing. Abby stays behind as the group goes to investigate a nearby location, and overhears a conversation about harassing the local native American, who is ostracized and losing his environment to construction, and she is repelled by the hatred, clearly sensitive to it (MICHELINIE, David *et al.*, p.16, pan.1-3). When Swamp Thing's double is destroyed by the explosive, Abby thinks he is dead (p.18, pan.3). As a character, Abby still seems clairvoyant and sensible, not necessarily action-driven, but rather insightful.

Abby next crosses path with Swamp Thing in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #16* (1983), after the creature's shenanigans with the Apocalypse and a brief encounter with the Phantom Stranger. She is working as a waitress in the motel New Moon, and waits Liz Tremayne and Dennis Barclay's table, unwittingly (p.13, pan.2). She is not mentioned or does anything else through the story, but in the beginning of the next book, *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #17* (1983), Abby and Swamp Thing meet as she is feeding a stray dog in the back of the motel (PASKO, Martin *et al.*, p.2, pan.4-6). They talk about their lives since they got apart, and Abby reveals that she is now married to Matthew Cable, which surprises the creature – his face looks very disappointed, though nothing in previous issues indicated that Swamp Thing nurtured any sort of romantic feelings towards Abby:



Figure 16- *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* #17 (PASKO, Martin *et al.*, 1983, p.17, pan.3-5)

Abby invites Swamp Thing to visit Matt, surprisingly, in order to convince him that he is not crazy. They gather Liz and Dennis and go to their shack, and Abby's behavior intrigues the monster – she seems shy, as if something was very wrong with her (p.4, pan.2). This 'something' does not take long to materialize (literally, in this case), for they are attacked by a monster on arrival. Swamp Thing manages to overcome the creature, but Abby reveals that they had been plagued with these monstrous apparitions for weeks, and they meet Matt drunk inside. Abby has been living in a nightmare, with monstrous apparitions and an alcoholic husband for a while, but does not imagine that this has to do with Matt having developed powers after being tortured by Dennis, while working for Sundercorp, as Dennis reveals after going out to get his medical bag in the motel (p.21, pan.1-4). Matt thinks the apparitions are alcohol-induced hallucinations rather than real monsters, but learns the truth eventually, in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* #19 (PASKO, Martin *et al.*, p.3, pan.5), as one of the monsters saves Abby. His realization gives him some control, and seemingly things are fine, but the group is attacked by Anton Arcane, back in a monstrous insectoid form, and his un-men. Arcane had already captured Kriptomann and manages to capture Abby and the Swamp Thing as well. Arcane intends to turn Kriptomann and Abby in insectoids as well, but Swamp Thing is able to save himself and Abby after Kriptomann sacrifices his life to stop Arcane. This iteration of Abby is a lot less self-reliant, unsure and shy, as Swamp Thing observes, mainly due to the menial jobs she has had to undertake, due to the support Matt needed and the attacks of the mind-monsters. Aside from her resilience and fealty, there are not many clues to

what Abby is as a character, just that she seems to be immediately relieved after Matt regains control and passes out, as if she were very tired. The issue is the last one before Moore's treatment of the character began.

In *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #20* Abby's marriage starts showing its first signs of falling apart. She arrives to find Matt in the dark, worried, and tells him everything is ok. She sits down and eventually tells him what happened and asks Matt if it is true that he is responsible for the monsters. He tells her that this is true, but he was able to keep his power under control, and it will not happen again. Matt says "they" are ok again and suggests sex, as if his recovery immediately resolved their marital problems (as it seemed to do in the previous issue), but Abby tells him she needs more time, and goes for a walk. Matt, left alone and disappointed with Abby's reluctance, reveals that he is not rid of the power, but just learned to control it (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1984, p. 9-12). Matt is drinking again when he hears a helicopter and goes searching for Abby, who is moody under a tree, and they see their house be bombarded by the Sundercorp men, who are there to take Swamp Thing (p.17). Abby's rejection and Matt's disposition to hide his powers from Abby suggest a distancing between the two, and so do Matt's resuming of his drinking habits and Abby's apparent seclusion by the end of the story, where she is removed from their home and seems indifferent at its destruction.

Abby's emotional distance from Matt continues in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #22* (1984), where they start the issue looking for Swamp Thing. There is a notable inversion of their relationship from the very first page, for while the 'old' Abby used to follow and support Matt in his search for the monster, Moore's Abby is walking ahead, searching for the monster, while Matt is behind, complaining about Abby's obsession and wanting to go back to their motel. Abby is now the driven one, and Matt seems to wait for her approval at every step of the way. Just as Matt is saying that they should give up because he was tired and the swamp was too big for them to find the monster, they find the monster (which makes Matt seem even more foolish). Swamp Thing is rooted, and Abby is very distressed about it, especially after hearing the news about his vegetable nature from Woodrue, who is nearby. She demands explanation, then leaves, with Matt once again trailing behind. Abby is more assertive, demanding explanation about Swamp Thing's condition, and about Woodrue's relation to Sundercorp. Later in the issue (p.9-10) Abby is walking by herself and wondering how could she feel so alone while living with someone, arrives at their motel to overhear a female voice with Matt, but, opening the door, she finds nothing. She then visits Swamp Thing (p.14),

crying and begging for him to come back from his vegetative state, for he was “the most loving, the most gentle, the most human man that I’ve ever met” (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1984, p.14, pan.4-5). One cannot but wonder where could she have had all this contact with Swamp Thing, for it surely happened off-panels. The intensity of their relationship and the adoration of Abby both seem forced in the issue, but do not harm the character construction (mainly due to the reader having very little to rely on previously).

As the monster wakes, in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #23* (1984), Abby is driving alone at night, thinking about her childhood in the Balkans and how other kids picked on her because of her white hair, calling her “crazy Abby” (MOORE *et al.*, 1984, p.8-9) when she sees Woodrue’s victims and runs away from the attacking plant life, screaming for Alec’s help. She manages to get to where he is lying, as the vines catch up with her and start pulling her by her legs, but she clings to Swamp Thing, begging him to wake up. He does so, responds to her call saying he is ‘not Alec’, and starts walking towards Woodrue. Abby follows (MOORE *et al.*, 1984, p.14-17). Abby is still feeling lonely in the issue, she is shown crying all the time and much of her assertiveness seems to have gone, though the unusual circumstances may have something to do with it (attacking plant life can do that to a character, apparently). For the first time, there is insight about her childhood, and how she felt alone and was considered weird and strange. At the end, she follows Swamp Thing, as she used to follow Matt, as Matt followed her in the last issue. Apparently, the following behind the one you want to be with is turning into a *motif*, though she might seek safety instead.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #24 (1984) brings the final conflict between Woodrue and Swamp Thing, with Abby in the middle of it. She arrives as Woodrue is fighting the Swamp Thing in Lacroix, Louisiana. She asks a man what is going on and is caught in the middle of the fight, as she is confronted by Woodrue. She tries to reason with him, but Woodrue tries to kill her with a chainsaw taken from a local – then Swamp Thing intervenes and saves her. She asks for clarification on the fate of Woodrue, when the fight is over, and by the end of the story has a chance to ask Swamp Thing about him not being Alec Holland – to which he answers he is Swamp Thing. And, as long as he is happy, Abby is fine with it. She hugs him, and then asks where he will go, and it turns out he will go to the swamp, as he always does. In this issue, Abby did very little but play the damsel in distress, and ask for clarification about obscure points in the story, allowing the reader a summary by the end of the story (the planet should know a little more about plant biology, incidentally – the plants

produce all the gases they need, switching to an analogue of human respiration at night). She is quite helpless before Woodrue, and seems lost and confused during the entire issue.

On *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* #25 (1984), however, is Abby-centric. She is visiting Swamp Thing in the morning, playing and chatting, getting to terms with his newly discovered nature, and informs him that she and Matt have been distant, and that she had gotten a job at the Elysium Lawns Center for Autistic Children. Abby talks about her encounter with Paul, and her interview (which the reader gets to experience in third-person view). Paul does not like Abby too much because he finds her “too witchy” (MOORE *et al.*, 1984, p.6, pan.4), but Abby gets to see his work and is enthusiastic about the kids at the Center. Then she goes to find Matt for lunch before leaving to Baton Rouge to buy “stuff” (p.8, pan.2). She and Matt have a discussion, where he complains Abby does not seem interested in him at all, and she leaves to Baton Rouge. At that point, Matt reveals he still has his powers (they might have gone forgotten – Abby’s powers apparently have), and in a haunting scene tinted with red and yellow makes Abby’s clothes stand up and kneel before him. In Baton Rouge, Abby stumbles into Harry Price, who shows interest in her, but Abby tells him to get lost just instants before Price gets impaled with the swordfish. Abby starts crying and goes away from the scene, but Jason Blood stops her. She asks him “who the hell are you?” (p.21, pan.5), which makes him laugh – for indeed, with Etrigan involved, Hell is an appropriate word.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #26 (1984) begins *in media res*, with Abby and Swamp Thing running towards Elysium Lawns, as Abby recalls the earlier meeting with Jason Blood, who tries to warn her about Paul, in the center, and that she should work to save the children, who were in danger. Abby, however, gets defensive and mad, and ends up not listening to his arguments (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, p.3-4). It is not clear whether this affects the outcome of the situation, however, since it is based in a foretelling of the future by Blood (p.5, pan.1). The action shifts to the present once again, and they are running among dead birds and small wildlife. Abby then starts remembering her start in the clinic, being attacked by a naked youngster as she entered the building, and, as the day progresses, she learns that many of the children had soiled their beds during the night, and many needed to be contained during the day due to hysterical attacks (hence the center running out of mattresses) – more, the artwork of the children was filled with images of monstrous monkeys. Paul talks to Abby about the Monkey King, and tells her she is going to die soon (in Moore’s run of Swamp Thing, such predictions tend to come to life more often than not). At night, she tells Matt about it, but he

does not believe her nor thinks she should get involved. Ironically, Matt calls Abby “Florence Nightingale” (p.12, pan.6) – and that settles it. Abby goes out, refusing the car keys, decided to tell Alec about it, and then going to Elysium Lawns. As she arrives at Alec’s place, he already knew something was wrong. So, they run towards the center, and enter the building in the middle of the Monkey King’s assault on the children, as every child dreamt with their worst fears or traumas, they confront the demon, as Etrigan arrives through the roof. Up to the end of the issue, Abby is the agent of focalization, and this shows not only her confidence in Alec’s judgement, but also her assertiveness in the protection of the children and her difficulty in communicating her thoughts at times – or, as she says, “Abby babble” (p.14, pan.5). The lack of interest shown by Matt is another factor driving them apart, for he seems uninterested in the children’s safety and thought Abby should not get involved and is unable to understand why she had to go back after hours (p.12, pan.2). Through Abby’s comments the reader gets insight into her despair at, seemingly, arriving late, and how strange the mystical element feels, where she can sense something is wrong without the words to explain it.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #27 (1984) starts with Etrigan attacking the Monkey King, the shape-shifting demon of fear who had its appearance copied from one of Etrigan’s early comics (as commented, the Monkey King is similar to the Kamara, a fear-feeding shapeshifter demon summoned by the sorceress Ugly Meg, in *The Demon #4*, December, 1972). Abby’s concern is with Paul, who the Monkey has hold of. As Etrigan and the Monkey start fighting, Paul is released and Abby holds him in her arms and absconds. The Monkey King realizes she is taking Paul away and tries to pursue her, but Swamp Thing stops him. As Abby hesitates to run and leave Swamp Thing behind, in an iconic moment, he reminds her that he, too, is a monster and can take care of himself (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, p.6, pan.4). Abby then runs to the swamp and loses patience with Paul (who insists in spelling names, probably traumatized by his parents’ Ouija board incident), immediately apologizing and explaining herself – she was scared as well (p.8, pan.2-4). Etrigan catches up with them, with intent to kill Paul in order to section the Monkey King’s hold to the material plane. Abby tries to stop him, but is helpless against the demon. Swamp Thing, however, saves Abby once again at the brink of time, and faces Etrigan as Abby runs away from them, just to find herself at the mercy of the Monkey King (p.12, pan.5). The creature attacks her, and takes the form of Matt, telling her of his love (it bears to remember that, supposedly, that would be Abby’s deepest fear) and Paul intervenes to confront it. Different from the others, Paul has a hold on the Monkey King, but despite the demon trying to assume the shape of his mother, Paul is not

afraid of him – and, as he asserts himself, the demon shrinks until he fit the palm of Paul’s hand. Etrigan then grabs it and swallows it, telling Abby to be careful, because other forces may have influenced the apparition of the demon. Abby feels that is important, then asks Alec to take Paul back to the Elysium Lawns and chases after Etrigan. She finds Jason Blood instead, and learns of their link. Abby asks Blood to explain what Etrigan said, but Blood can only tell her to be careful, for Etrigan might be telling the truth. At the end of the issue, Matt (who had been dying in a horrible car accident and allowed a demon unto himself during the issue) arrives, apparently unharmed and in a working vehicle, to take Abby back to their motel. Abby, through the issue, shows sensitivity to the mystical energies, and though she plays largely the role of the damsel in distress, which has been her major part in the title up to date, she is also the protector of Paul, partnering with Swamp Thing in order to save the children. Abby is frequently scared (as she confesses to Paul) and horrified, but at the same time gets voluntarily involved in the supernatural outburst for the sake of others. Moore seems to acknowledge the previous theme of Abby’s psychic (or supernatural, as it is more prominently suggested) powers, but does not unveil them explicitly – the manifest as ‘feelings’ and sentience of mystical presences. Abby is, however, able to contact Swamp Thing in moments of danger, apparently – detail that acknowledges the lore.

In *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #28* (1984), Abby reveals, upon Swamp Thing’s question, that she and Matt are doing a lot better, that he has stopped drinking and is looking for a house, and that she is better now – in fact she seems enthusiastic about autumn and the nature in the swamp (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1984, p.2-5). Swamp Thing then goes into a journey of self-discovery, to bury the body of Alec Holland, taking the reader with him, so this is the last we read about Abby in the issue. Her enthusiasm contrasts with what was depicted in previous issues, and even if the plot makes clear that she had a couple of weeks to change her mood (p.3, pan.5), the change seems artificial and rises the suspicion of the reader. The comic, displaying Abby’s frequent visits to Swamp Thing but always with the absence of Matt, works to focus on their relationship and to alienate Matt from the reader’s sympathies.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #29 (1984) starts with a haunting third-person narration of what goes on in Abby’s mind, portraying her deeply traumatized and in fetal position, apparently in shock, after a hysterical bath where she scraped off some of her skin to get rid of “the smell” (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1984, p.1, pan.3). Painfully aware that something went very wrong since last issue, which was somewhat optimistic even if the reader knew something strange was going on with Matt, the narrative then goes back in time, into Abby’s

dreamlike recollections, to tell the reader what happened. Abby was again visiting Swamp Thing, concerned that he'd been upset at her for calling him 'Alec' – he says it doesn't matter, which is good, because this keeps happening through the entire publication history of the character, his awareness of his true vegetable nature remaining only a half-acknowledged fact. They embrace, and the narrative shifts again, from her smelling Swamp Thing (contrary to what one would assume, she likes the smell) to the distressing burnt-insect smell she can't get rid of. Another memory succeeds, and Matt is surprising Abby with their new sultry house, and she is worried about the money to sustain it – then Matt announces there is another chapter to his surprise, and they visit Matt's (alleged) newly found workplace, 'Blackriver Recorporations' (an ironic title to the firm, as we're about to see), where Abby is introduced to Eric Loveday and the crew. Abby keeps having flashes of the reality, where Matt's colleagues are resuscitated serial killers and everything around her are ruins, but slips back into the fantasy. Matt takes her back to their house and they have sex – and the reader learns that this is the probable reason of her trauma, since she keeps avoiding it and drifting to other aspects, even apparently invading Swamp Thing's dream where he finds a dead bird moving (p.12, pan.3-6). Abby then goes to the library in Houma, to find information related to her work with autistic children, and stumbles upon a book about one of Matt's colleagues, Sally Parks (Parks is portrayed with a distinctive mole on the upper lip so that she's more easily recognized by the reader). Abby takes the book home and confirms that Sally Parks was very much dead, and slowly (through the entire page 16 – though in reality she displays a very quick understanding of the highly unlikely situation, which could be explained by incipient psychic or supernatural powers *or* a good old little reliance in the reader's suspension of disbelief) realizes what had happened with Matt. He had been possessed by her uncle Anton Arcane. The realization, and the sexual implications about incest (and insects, a clever wordplay through this issue) drive her to try to burn her clothes and then to the frantic bath and the semiconscious recollections, putting the reader up to the present time. Abby picks herself up, suddenly aware of the necessity to elope, but her escape is cut off by the arrival of Matt, with the zombie crew, saying they are there for dinner. Incapable of pretending that nothing is wrong, and at a loss of words, Abby is captured by Arcane and the undead. Swamp Thing, however, has sensed the problem through the dead bird filled with insects, and apparently is coming to rescue Abby. A deep dive into the character's mental state, the issue portrays an Abby fighting the realization about her present situation, and incapable to move *or* to cope with reality until she acknowledges what happened – a perfect depiction of trauma.

One must realize by now that being captured by Swamp Thing's enemies is the most consistent activity Abby performs. Nevertheless, Moore's treatment and the prodigious insights into Abby's life do help to build a character more interesting than a strange lady from the Balkans that might or might not have psychic powers. Abby's concerns are with her life, with money, with her work, the kids she helps to take care of and also with Swamp Thing, who she shows a lot of affection to. Even that is a better explanation than just following the monster for no consistent reason, as happened before.

In *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #30* (1984), the undead hold Abby down as Arcane, in typical comic-book-villain fashion, explains how he returned from the dead to possess Matt's body and, consequently, take control of his powers as well. Abby's character development is very slight in the issue, and manifests mainly through Abby's difficulty to acknowledge Matt's faults as a person, rather preferring to blame the entire incident on Arcane (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1984, p.7). Other than that, the villain disposes of Abby, apparently sending her through the ground in what perhaps is also a representation of Abby's soul being taken to hell, pushed by dead hands through the floor (p.9). Arcane baits Swamp Thing into the house, only for the creature to find Abby's body in the bed, already dead (p.20-22).

In *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #31* (1984), Swamp Thing carries Abby in his arms to the swamp, his place of power, where he is able to fight Arcane with his newly found mystical powers as an elemental. As Arcane weakens Matt's mind wakes up and is able to shut himself down, sacrificing himself, and to heal Abby's body – her soul, however, was taken to Hell. Being dead throughout the issue, there is not much to say in the matter of character development. After a self-insert of the art team as policemen rescuing Matt's injured body, the issue ends again with Swamp Thing carrying her body. This issue reached the stands in December, 1984.

Next issue is *Swamp Thing Annual #2* (1985), where Swamp Thing goes to Hell in order to rescue Abby's soul, with the help of Deadman, the Phantom Stranger, the Spectre (not a whole lot of help – he did not escort Swamp Thing like the others, but let them pass) and Etrigan as guides, much as Dante had his Virgil (and Beatrice, who guided him through Heaven, only Swamp Thing goes the other way around). Though Abby is passive and unconscious throughout the issue, there is character development, mainly due to the symbolism of the quest, linking not only to Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, but also to the mythical quest of Orpheus to rescue Eurydice from Hell – not only a heroic journey in

Campbell's terms with Abby being in place of the Elixir, who will heal the land, but also establishing Abby as the idealized love of Swamp Thing (as both Beatrice and Eurydice were) further than she had been in the comic book up to date. In the end Abby wakes up, to find herself in the freezing swamp, with Swamp Thing crying near her, apparently relieved.

After the issue with the homage to Pogo, of which Abby is absent, her next appearance is in *Swamp Thing #33* (1985), the story with the republication of the original Swamp Thing. Abby is dreaming with things she heard from people (identifiable through quotation marks), whereby we learn what is going on in her life: she is alone, Matt is now apparently another romantic involvement with a vegetable and she is fine professionally, but emotionally distant from her co-workers. They find her secretive and mysterious. And these words take Abby, in her dream, to the houses of Mystery and of Secrets, where she meets Cain and Abel. Abby is confused, but has to make a choice between learning a secret or a mystery. Since Cain's answers have been condescending to her, she chooses Abel's house (Mystery), and they both go inside. The place is messy, and full of old things that are, apparently, symbolic representations of different stories – Abel refers to the house as the “part of the unconscious where all the stories are born and kept” (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1985, p.5, pan.2). Abby turns skeptical about the possibility of learning anything of importance in the place, but Cain finds a bracelet-shaped story, and Abel starts telling her (apparently the story becomes Abby's dream as well) the origin story of Swamp Thing, a reprint of the 1971 story from *House of Mystery #92*, already analyzed in this work. After the story, Abel explains to Abby that there were many other iterations of Swamp Thing: it is an elemental, generated by the Earth as a defense mechanism in dire times. Abel then tries to sneak Abby out of the house without Cain's knowledge, in order for Abby to retain the information. Abel wants her to tell Swamp Thing about his role as Earth's protector, so that he can better perform his duties. As they are leaving the house, Cain intercepts them. Abel pleads for him to let Abby retain her memory of the story, for her world is in danger, but Cain refuses – they are the guardians of secrets and mysteries, and secrets cannot be told. Therefore, Abby should forget the story she heard. Abel tries to stop Cain, but is murdered by him with a stone (mirroring their Biblical origin), and Cain sends Abby back to the waking world. Abby wakes up dizzy with sleep, and tries to write the story, but the phone rings and she is distracted. When she picks up the note, she can't remember her dream or why she was writing it. As for character development, Abby takes the side of the weak, favoring Abel. She is charitable and continues to be empathic. The

story also lets the reader know about the later developments in her life with Matt, now in a coma.

Swamp Thing #34 (1985) is somewhat famous for being the issue where Swamp Thing and Abby finally tell each other their feelings... and that extensive psychedelic sex scene where Abby and Swamp Thing merge minds, and Abby is able to see the world through Swamp Thing's connection to the Green. In the beginning of the issue, Abby is visiting Matt in the hospital. There is little chance of him waking from his coma. Abby has grieved for some time, and is now coming to terms with Matt's absence. Her thoughts keep going back to plants, to spring and to nature outside – Romantic thoughts, in both the literal and the literary meanings of the word. At the end of the page (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.1), Abby is anxious to get to be with Swamp Thing. As she does so, she is pleased with spring, and the way he looks during the season. Abby tells Swamp Thing she needs to talk to him, and that there was little love between her and Matt even before the accident, and she developed feelings for someone else and was concerned whether it was wrong or not (p.4). In a very roundabout and awkward way, Abby tells Swamp Thing that she loves him (p.5, pan.1-5), and he replies that he had loved her “deeply... silently... and... for too many... years” (p.6, pan.5), but was afraid to frighten her. They kiss – and in case the reader is curious, Swamp Thing's lips taste “like lime, but not as sharp” (p.7, pan.4) – and Swamp Thing decides that, since Abby is human, she needs more from love than the taste of lime, deciding that they, as a couple, need some sort of communion. Abby says she thought about it, and was fine with them not being able to have sex – their communion doesn't have to be physical (p.11-12, pan.3). Swamp Thing then rips off one of the tubers growing on his body, washes it and gives it for Abby to eat. She does it, and starts being affected by Swamp Thing's consciousness, what drives her to see the world through his conscience of the Green. What Abby sees is a world made out of auras of light, where all life grows interconnected: bugs seem like jewels, people an agglomeration of shiny threads that interlace as they touch, a “blazing cat's cradle” (p.13, pan.5). The art style and composition changes to express this shift in perception, the panels merge with each other and are overlain with Abby's narration and descriptions. The narration is consisted mainly of poetical descriptions of nature and creatures. Abby is capable of touching mentally the mind of Swamp Thing, and sees herself through it – through his eyes, she is beautiful, and that pleases her. She feels like him, they merge:



Figure 17 -- Abby and Swamp Thing Merge (MOORE, Alan et al., 1985, p.14)

Swamp Thing #35 (1985) is the first issue of “The Nukeface Papers”, another very famous story in the run, and in it Swamp Thing and Abby are resting (Abby is asleep) and Swamp Thing senses the presence of Nukeface and goes out to meet him, and get severely hurt in the process. Abby barely shows up in the issue.

Swamp Thing #36 (1985) closes the story, but in the end there are multiple views of characters involved, each telling their versions of what just occurred. One of this is Abby Cable (she appears previously in the issue as well, but little to no information is given, since the focalization is in Swamp Thing), and tells about what Abby has been through since last issue. She wakes up alone, Swamp Thing having gone away towards Nukeface, and takes the bus to Houma, where she works at the Elysium Lawns. While she is looking at the work of one of the autistic children (Tommy), she has a vision of Swamp Thing in trouble, and knows something is wrong. She then goes looking for Swamp Thing, avoiding the search parties looking for Treasure Monroe, and finds him half-disintegrated by Nukeface’s toxicity, hanging on to life in order to tell her what is going on and say goodbye, in case his plan of growing another body does not work. Abby is courageous and resourceful, able to deal with both the supernatural and professional aspects of her life – in fact, she seems emboldened now that her romantic life has stabilized (if one can call it that, dating a monster) – to the point of going to the swamp alone at night to look for him. She is still very shaken by the prospect of losing Swamp Thing, and the idea of a mental/spiritual connection between them is, once again, reinforced, though Abby is no longer able to use this connection with the supernatural

to anything else than to connect with Swamp Thing (she untied a rope in previous issues, so it is a shrinking of sorts).

In *Swamp Thing* #37 (1985) the arc “American Gothic” begins. Through the issue, Abby takes care of Swamp Thing, for a change, as he regrows his body by inseminating a random seed with his consciousness (while Constantine consults his acquaintances about the Darkness and Emma gets killed by the Invunche). The issue starts with Tim, one of Abby’s colleagues in the Elysium Lawns, once again offering Abby support in case she needs it, with Matt’s situation going on. Abby says she is worried about a ‘travelling friend’ who she hopes will get back ‘okay’, in a veiled reference to Swamp Thing’s possible rebirth, as he told her he would try it. Another pun on vegetables ensues, and Abby finds Swamp Thing’s minuscule new body (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1985, p.4). Abby does not know how to take care of plants, which is weird, for she has been shown consistently mystified with her environs and makes some mistakes, including spraying insecticide on her lover. So, Swamp Thing concentrates on developing a mouth to communicate with Abby. Upon this revelation, she immediately demands thanks for the water (jokingly). If anything, Abby is happy. Relieved, perhaps, to see Swamp Thing coming back as he said he would, but also curious and intrigued with the new challenge of taking care of him. When he develops his eyes and tells her she is beautiful, though, Abby is depicted through his view, reddish and with a contorted face, turning to the other side, as tears start to drop from her eyes. He asks her if she is crying, but she says he sounds like Jiminy Cricket and explodes in laughter, which makes him grimace – it is a humorous scene, but the implication is that Abby’s laughter and tears may have also been of relief. On another visit (or perhaps later that day – it is unclear, for there is no caption telling which day is it, but the narrative follows the pace of one day *per* page until Swamp Thing meets Constantine, then the pattern is abandoned), Abby tells the monster how worried she was during his absence, drinking wine near a fire at night, now clearly comfortable (p.10). The jokes, the laughter and the details, with Abby taking garden tools and food make it seem like a picnic, or a camping trip where she visits a friend, a joyous occasion. She tells him of the rumors about the death of Nukeface, which the reader knows are false, and asks him how long he would be rooted, since she clearly misses him. She sleeps by him (p.11, pan.1). On page 13, Abby is shown kissing Swamp Thing goodbye in the morning, supposedly to go to work, getting into her car and driving off, only to find Constantine inside the car behind her, when he asks “how’s the boyfriend?” (p.13, pan.5). Abby takes Constantine to meet Swamp Thing, and says that the Englishman knew everything about them. Constantine tells Swamp

Thing that he has information about the monster's true nature, and Abby warns him not to trust Constantine (p.16, pan.3). Abby then confronts Constantine (p.17, pan.5), but her efforts in brushing off the Englishman are vain. When Swamp Thing is unrooted – Abby jokingly laments the fact that she was no longer taller than him – she invites him to a honeymoon of sorts, and to bathe in a nearby lake during the next weekend and spend some time together (the narrative does not hint at them being apart for long, but maybe Abby is referring to him being on his feet), but the monster is so concerned with Constantine's words that he barely hears her, which disappoints her greatly: her face appears engulfed in shadows in the last panel of the issue (p.23, pan.6).

Swamp Thing #38 (1985) starts with Swamp Thing saying goodbye to Abby, intent on following Constantine's "trail of hints and glimmerings" (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1985, p.1, pan.3). She is very upset, and distances herself from him in several small ways – not responding when he said he would come back every few days (p.1, pan.4-5), not wanting to stay for his departure (p.2, pan.1) and then literally walking away, both feeling awkward and hurt, as Moore says: "each loving the other... each hating themselves for being so unfair" (p.2, pan.3). As Swamp Thing regrows himself in Rosewood, Abby is pensive, and is called out by her colleague Deanna, at the Elysium Lawns, for not hearing what she said (p.9, pan.1-3). When Abby says she is thinking about somebody, Deanna says that she had to accept the fact that her husband was a vegetable (referring to Matt, but the humorous double entendre makes Abby jumpy). Deanna says it is not easy losing someone, and Abby agrees with her, pointedly. She is shown through the next two pages looking away dreamingly, retired from Deanna's company, showing that she feels lonely without Swamp Thing. In terms of character development, the dialogue with Deanna is the most crucial scene in the issue, precisely because it brings nothing new – it does not advance the plot in any significant way nor does it provide new information to the reader: we already knew Abby was missing Swamp Thing, it had already been established that she was emotionally distant from her colleagues, and that it was hard for her when he left. The only thing this scene does – besides the not at all bad joke, which is always a good touch and prone to happen in Moore's fiction – is to place Abby in parallel with Swamp Thing, and that firms Abby's place as his companion, even though she is not present during his adventures during most of this arc. It shows the reader that Abby's life is part of the story as well, indissoluble from Swamp Thing's, and the fact that she exists independent of the main action and is given attention is specifically for highlighting her importance in the diegetic universe. More: this issue showed Abby can be moody, and

unsatisfied, and in those cases she usually recoils unto herself (much as she did when her marriage with Matt was not going well). Abby is very generous with her feelings, and cannot disguise them well. She is extroverted when happy, but introverted when unhappy. And, to her colleagues, the fact that she is constantly jumping at the frequent mentions of vegetables must be a mystery (or would, if they existed independently, but the observation is worthy of mention because Abby's work environment dynamics, with the 'accidental' allusions to vegetables, is a small inconsistency in the plot and interferes slightly with the reader's immersion, though it does not invalidate the contract – more than a series of improbable coincidences, it is Moore's narrative voice, tongue stuck to his cheek, showing himself between the lines and inviting the reader for a laugh).

Abby's next appearance is in *Swamp Thing #40* (1985, p.3-5), in the swamp at night, where she is welcoming back Swamp Thing with a kiss under (over) the moon. She did not expect him to come back so soon, so she is happy about it. They talk about Swamp Thing's newly discovered locomotion power, and how nice it is that, no matter how far away he is, he is always close to Abby. Then Abby diverts the question towards Constantine, and whether or not the Swamp Thing trusts him – the answer is no. In fact, the monster plans on leaving Constantine's path after his trip to Kennescook the following day. Abby asks him if he is confident, and admits to being selfish in not wanting him to go in the first place, but Swamp Thing objects that Constantine had offered him no knowledge that he couldn't have gotten to by himself. Then Abby comes out with this tirade:

Y'know what? You don't ask me to feed you, or tidy the swamp, or iron shirts, and I get fresh flowers all year round. You're just the sort of person I imagined marrying, when I was little... except, you know, not green... and without all the patches of fungus. (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1985, p.5, pan.5-6)

So, playful as it may be, the analogy comes with an idealized version of her relationship with Swamp Thing, where the monster is put besides a regular patriarchal husband, who wants his wife to take care of the house and iron his shirts – and compares favorably. The monster becomes sort of an undemanding fairy tales prince... provided she sees only selective part of their relationship. That may indicate (the fact that it stems from a joke is noted, but the analogy is there nonetheless) Abby's infatuation with her boyfriend, a general behavioral pattern in Abby (seeing the best in life and people) or, simply, humor, perhaps tinted with a little bitterness. It is left to the interpretation of the reader, ultimately. But the conversation is used to make their unusual environs seem – and feel – like a regular

family home. And I believe that to be the function of the scene in the general plot. Life with Abby is becoming a significant part of the monster's life, and that is reflected in the story, among the main action and the supernatural battles, far more interesting visually. This dichotomy establishes a duality to Swamp Thing, as well.

In *Swamp Thing #41* (1985), Abby and the boyfriend are walking about in the swamp, as he tells her the last developments with Constantine – the “Darkness that is stirring within this country... will shortly... manifest itself here...” (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1985, p.4, pan.3). Abby is skeptical about it, since things seem to be going fine. Abby then informs Swamp Thing that a TV crew is there to film a soap opera about the plantations at a local old house, and ponders about the irony of casting the locals, descendants of slaves, as slaves in the program – is it sad or funny? To which Swamp Thing responds “it's human” (p.4, pan.7), and Abby mentions that she is curious and star-struck (she knows the celebrities taking part in the show), and will go by the filming setting later to check it. Then she comments about how strange it is the new notion that Swamp Thing is an energy field inhabiting a husk he can discard, and how that changes the physical aspect of their relationship: “I feel as if you're somewhere else and I'm hugging your jacket” (p.5, pan.4), and he says Abby's feelings are unnecessary – to which her jabs back “it's human” (p.5, pan.6). Again, the dichotomy is established, heightened by the jab at the end, where Swamp Thing's demeaning words about humanity are thrown back at him with a different meaning attached to them (now humans are insecure and emotional, not merely capable of sad and ironic situations). The scene is a dialogue, with negotiation of terms and different views. Abby is thus established as a legitimate character, not merely a follower of Swamp Thing and an inquisitive pretext for him to explain plot elements – though one does not exclude the other, and things still need to be discussed and explained for the reader to know them, what I mean is that Abby's character becomes more complex than the role performed before Moore. Later on the issue, as the TV crew starts losing control to the ghosts, Abby and Swamp Thing are once again walking about the swamp (p.12). Abby is telling Swamp Thing how the actors' relationship is belligerent – but she took a work there, though she did not need the money, perhaps due to morbid curiosity. As she is doing that, Swamp Thing surprises her by picking up a dying bird, saying a couple of gentle words – and then stuffing it within himself, so that his body can absorb the bird's “riches, as it decays” (p.12, pan.6). Abby seems surprised, but brushes it away saying that this is what she likes in her boyfriend, “something new every day” (p.12, pan.7). After that, on another day (p.18), Abby meets Alice, another worker from the Elysian Lawns, as she

is laying a salt pattern around the graveyard. Abby asks if the salt is to keep slugs out of the graveyard, but Alice, apparently in a dream-like state, answers mysteriously (or in what passes for a mystery in the plot, but not quite to the reader, already used to undead and the other ‘classic frighteners’) that it’s not for keeping anything *out*. Later, when she is with Swamp Thing and reporting the encounter, she says the atmosphere of the place is really strange, and that Swamp Thing should investigate the place, especially with Constantine’s heed about the Darkness. Swamp Thing says he would, perhaps the following day, but Abby insists he should go immediately, and they leave – not before Abby finding it strange that Swamp Thing does not tell her to wait for him because of the danger and, as he mentions he respect her strength, she tags along (perhaps a little wary). There is, in their interaction, again the impression of distinct persons talking, especially in Abby’s insistence that Swamp Thing goes immediately and in her strangeness in him allowing her to accompany him – well-written conversations bear surprises and misunderstandings. Abby is more firmly in her feet after the interaction, character-wise. As they arrive, there are huge bonfires and people dancing around them (p.22), and the place is, as Abby says, “coming to life” (p.23, pan.4).

In *Swamp Thing #42* (1985), Swamp Thing and Abby begin the issue in the front of the house, among the bonfires. Abby senses that is not a stunt for the TV series, but a real supernatural occurrence, the “clamminess” (p.5, pan.1) in the air reminiscent of their conflict with the Monkey King. Swamp Thing describes what he feels is happening, a pattern of emotions infecting the soil and guiding the people to repeat it, in a dream-like state. Abby again sees Alice, carrying salt to the graveyard, but when Abby stops her to ask what is going on she is unresponsive, apparently sleepwalking. Alice’s only concern is to spread salt around the graveyard in order to keep the dead inside. Abby asks about the actors, and Alice tells Abby they are inside the house, so Abby asks Swamp Thing to accompany Alice and goes to the house herself. She arrives as the possessed actors finished the reenactment of the torture of the slave, tied in the basement. Abby confronts them, trying to get them to leave the house, but when she asks about the missing one, Billy Carlton, the actress answers that Richard skinned him, and presents her the knife. Richard takes the knife from her, and Abby tries to tell them they are actors, but ends up getting stabbed by Richard. Later, as the zombies attack the house, Abby finds out the knife is a stage prop, harmless, and goes to release Carlton in the basement. As they are getting out carrying Carlton (p.16), Abby sees Richard shooting Swamp Thing, who falls backwards on top of a bonfire. She runs to help, as the zombies start advancing, but Swamp Thing gets up, in flames, and runs inside to burn the house down and

end the cycle. He dives into the Green and, when he regrows his body, Abby is there to tell him what happened. She is helping the afflicted on the environs of the house, called an ambulance and checked their state. She thinks they will be ok, and they leave – until Swamp Thing remembers to ask Abby about the zombies, but she thinks they have been destroyed in the flames as well, after all, “where else would they have gone?”. Certainly not to the city, nor would they find work in old movie theaters specializing in zombie stories. Abby is, in this issue, complementary to Swamp Thing’s brand of heroism. She is able to be at the places he is not – to interact with people, and talk instead of fighting. She can help in her own way, and that is a hero’s mark, not a helper, but a different brand of hero.

Abby next appears in *Swamp Thing #44* (1986). She is in her living room, reading a horror book – Clive Barker’s *Books of Blood* (1984-5), unspecified volume – when she hears a strange noise coming from the bathroom and goes to investigate, comically holding a sink plunger in order to defend herself, and finds out it is Swamp Thing, coming out of her bathroom sink – figuring out she was tired of visiting her on the swamp, he decided to shift his consciousness through the flora in her pipes and surprised her in her home. Glad her hair was already white, Abby and her boyfriend ensue in a conversation about how Constantine hasn’t contacted Swamp Thing yet to give him his next assignment – Abby is happy about it, but he feels lost without the Englishman, because he feels something is wrong, and without Constantine he is not sure about what his role in it may be. The conversation, however, is extremely awkward, because Abby is clearly not structured to welcome a huge moss monster in her house – she needs to lay a newspaper path for him, because the carpet is new, towels on the sofa for him to sit (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1986, p.5, pan.6), remind him to keep on the towels and that he cannot stand in front of the window, in case a neighbor sees him. Realizing he is inconveniencing Abby, Swamp Thing returns to the bathroom and leaves through the bathtub, being dispatched with a pun by Abby: “if you are going to sulk...” (p.6, pan.7). The episode is filled with humor, and the interplay of the characters – Swamp Thing concerned with the state of the supernatural world and Abby with her carpet – is appropriate not only to help Abby develop as a character, being scared while reading a horror book and with a human and material world to care for, while her boyfriend is more the immaterial, monstrous world, type of guy, but it also helps entice the imagination about the extreme oddity of their relationship, making Abby more human at the same time it humanizes Swamp Thing, once again. By the end of the issue (p.22), Abby is still reading the book, now in her room at night, eating potato chips on the bed, when the phone rings, scaring her and making her drop the

chips. It's Constantine, asking Abby to tell Swamp Thing their final stop before the finale, and telling her to go back to her book, leaving her wondering how does he know what she was doing in the first place. Again, the notion of the scare while reading a horror book, which entices the identification of the reader, is pointed with humor, and so is Constantine's little jab at Abby's reading. Her puzzled (and tired) expression at the last panel shows no love for the Englishman.

Abby comes back in *Swamp Thing #47* (1986), wearing her birthday suit, finally visiting that lake with Swamp Thing and, unbeknownst to her, being photographed by a wildlife photographer, who later sells her pictures with the moss monster to the local paper, the *Houma Daily Courier*. She embraces Swamp Thing – and then remarks that he smells bad. He tells her he absorbed a muskrat the previous day, and the conversation reminds her of Constantine, for some reason – she gives him the location of their next revenue (Tefé River, South America, the following day), and he says he would leave soon. Abby tells him to take care, for she does not trust Constantine. Swamp Thing interjects that he's indestructible, but would Abby be all right? She says everything is going fine. During their conversation, since Swamp Thing mentions “secrets and mysteries” (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1986, p.5, pan.2), Abby recalls her dream about Swamp Thing's origin, just to forget it almost immediately once again (p.5, pan.3). Since Swamp Thing is going away for a couple of days, she invites him to their special brand of sex, and bites into a tuber. That is the last we see of Abby during the issue, but we are aware that the newspaper decides to print the photos of the romantic couple, mainly due to Abby's working at Elysium Lawns, where the daughter of one of the newspaper's editors attends.

Swamp Thing #48 (1986) is the issue with the crow *motif*, where Swamp Thing and Constantine, with Constantine's friends, ultimately fail to stop the Brujería sending the message that would wake Darkness. After they lost their battle, when Constantine is talking about everyone losing, the last crow-covering-the-panel progression unravels into Abby's dark streak over white hair. She is arriving at work at Elysium Lawns, talking to Tim, who very awkwardly calls her attention to the *Courier* newspaper of the day, which has an article entitled “Beauty and the Beast? Beautiful Child Minder's Monster Games” (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1986, p.22, pan. 4). Just as she realizes what is happening, she is called to her boss' (Deanna's) office, where two police officers are waiting for her to arrest her for being a sex offender – working with children, which helps to heighten the emotions about. Officer Peggy is particularly disgusted by Abby's supposed behavior, and tells her she makes her sick (p.23,

pan.3). Abby is arrested, and, as the officers take her away in cuffs, they tell her they have been getting reports about Swamp Thing, and don't think her lover is a man on a suit, as the newspaper does – unluckily for Abby, it is suggested, she is being arrested for bestiality. For having sex with someone she considers one of the most kind and human persons she ever met. And that is where we leave Abby, about to be accused of bestiality, arrested with prostitutes, be taken to Gotham and eventually be rescued by Swamp Thing, back from space and with vengeance in his eyes. That is after he gets killed again, travels through the universe and even out of the scope of this study.

But Abby, even Abby up to the present issue, says a lot about Swamp Thing. The monster fighting supernatural battles is also Abby's husband. It is an interesting way of both enhancing Swamp Thing's monstrosity, by putting him close to a beautiful woman, and more human at the same time, through their relationship, their trials and errors, and their insecurities and dependency. Abby is, on that note, the human contrast to the monster. The fact that she always calls Swamp Thing 'Alec' also denotes his duality, where she is in love with the monster, who is, to her: "the most human man that I've ever met" (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1984, p.14, pan.5). Abby's development as a character is more noticeable in the scenes that are anti-teleological, that work not to advance the plot, but to slow it down, sometimes for no visible purpose, providing the reader with no information critical to the understanding of the story. They are there because the story is not absolute, because building the characters inside it also modify the story as a whole, even if the story does not go forward in an expedient pace. Moore paid attention to those details, and in doing so made a remarkable character, Abby. She is the counterpoint to her lover, and helps to give the reader both a human perspective of how strange it would be to have contact with a monster, but also to humanize Swamp Thing – he is a mossy Romeo, a gargantuan behemoth with a heart of gold. Abby is Swamp Thing's Sancho Panza, and it is through their interaction that we see both of them shine. To put it shortly: by making Abby a more complex and interesting character, Moore did not merely created a beautiful thing – he created two. And that is how Abby is understood to the present day.

4.2.2.2.16 Swamp Thing

Swamp Thing, logically, is the character to be more extensively studied in this work. Fortunately, as with Abby, most of the leg work has already been done – and with Swamp Thing, to an even greater degree, in the chapters second and third of this work, where, aside

from an analysis of the title run, a special attention was paid to the character development of Swamp Thing, the difference in treatment in Moore's run and, also, the frequent allusions to different traditions. Because a doctoral dissertation is not meant to be read along a stack of books, or demand previous knowledge about a given title, having to stand alone and provide the reader with all the elements necessary to accompany the reasoning it develops, the necessity of familiarizing the reader with the character and the book was present from the beginning of this investigation, and involved considerations about Swamp Thing as a character, and his development through the years.

Therefore, and due to concerns related to both space and time available, not to mention the somewhat more precious resource that is the patience of the reader, in this work the character analysis of Swamp Thing was displaced and, instead of detailing the character's every appearance in the title, which would result in a larger study than the run of the title itself, probably, restricted to the broad analysis of the title and character in specific, already made in the preceding chapters. Much of what had to be said was already said in that department.

And yet. Yet, that does not mean that there is little else to be said about the character of Swamp Thing in this work – in fact, there is a way to go in understanding the hulking monster, starting with the analysis of Swamp Thing's activity in the story in question – which was not analyzed until this point. More than that, the role of the monster in the conclusion of the story, his position as to the main plot elements, doubting the very concepts of Good and Evil to the last moment of the story and perhaps influencing the final combat between these forces, may be due to his very particular nature – both a monster and a hero. That is an important character-related feature that deserves a couple of lines. So, this section will focus on the story at hand, "The End", featuring in *Swamp Thing #50* (1986), the rest of it having already been discussed, and the relevant character features presented by Swamp Thing in this story – which happen to also comprise his thoughts on the adventures he has had throughout the entire story arc. Because Narrative Theory is antithetical to interpretation, rather focusing on the features presented by the text and the manner of their presentation, the interpretive consequences of the features here listed will be relegated to the next chapter of this work, where at last all these features here presented will be put to the service of an interpretation of the story.

Swamp Thing starts appearing in the issue amidst a troop of demons, along with Deadman, who is, as usual, floating about (p.3). The impact of the scene lies not only in the

heroic posture or the bizarre creatures among the group, but also on the fact that there is not too much of a difference between Swamp Thing (a huge moss monster), Deadman (a bald cadaver, half-mummified and fluctuating on the air) and the demons, though they are differently colored in shades of red (Deadman) and green (Swamp Thing), while the demons are portrayed in shades of blue mixed with magenta – interesting to note that, perhaps, this is due to that very problem of monsters among monsters ending up indistinct. Nevertheless, Deadman complains to Swamp Thing about the smell of the demons – Abby has mentioned something similar about Swamp Thing in two different occasions, incidentally: while they were at the motel (*The Saga of the Swamp Thing #17*, 1983, p.3, pan.1), where her impressions appear in a recordatory; and later, in Moore’s run, there is the ‘muskrat incident’ (*Swamp Thing #47*, 1986, p.4, pan.1), where she talks about his smell and he tells her he absorbed a dead muskrat. Swamp Thing sees the side of the demons, and understands their motivations – even Hell has its *status quo*. Deadman reminds Swamp Thing that, even so, the majority of the demons joined the other side. They wonder why they do not attack, since the Darkness had emerged several hours previous to their conversation, and Deadman poses that, according to the Phantom Stranger, the Darkness had been excluded from the universe since its creation, so it might be trying to understand things before doing anything bold. Swamp Thing asks about Etrigan and the Phantom Stranger, and Deadman tells him that Etrigan went off to assemble “the higher demons and the cavalry” (p.4, pan.5), and the Phantom Stranger had disappeared, making a sour comment, with another pun reminding the reader that he is a ghost, on the other hero’s lone stance. Once again, Swamp Thing says he understands and respects the other, and feels a lot of silent sorrow from the ally. Deadman observes that Swamp Thing does not seem too gaudy himself, and Swamp Thing explains the problem that ails him:

I am... troubled... the coming conflict... finds me uncertain... in my heart. On the long... and winding path... that led me... to this place... I have seen... much that is evil... I have helped... one community... destroy another... because it was different... and because it posed a threat... and afterwards... I thought... did History’s vilest butchers... do any worse? Is evil... unavoidable? I have seen... human beings... both tormentors and tormented... locked into a small circle... of pain and retribution... gender against gender... race against race... generations lost... in a maze of death... and guilt... and gunfire... I have seen... the human monsters... that this awful pattern... has shaped... rejoicing... in the senselessness they see in life... by killing without a motive... the man who started me upon this dark trail... promised me answers... but the answers... seem black... and unbearable... and as the storm approaches... I need him... to explain them... to me. But I... am in the country... of the dead... and he... is a universe away. (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.5, pan.2-3)

So, Swamp Thing, at the beginning of the adventure, is full of existential doubts about the nature of Evil and the path he has taken up to that point. This view does resonate with what Swamp Thing has learned from the Parliament of Trees, but not with Constantine's view, more specifically Constantine's reaction to what the Parliament said, in *Swamp Thing #47* (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.20, pan.4-5). That, incidentally, puts yet another layer of inconsistency to Constantine's plan. According to him, the enemy is, indeed, Evil, and must be fought against. But it is more than mere doubt – Swamp Thing has a different view of the adventures he has undertaken so far. A far more relativistic one, where the vampires or Rosewood are a community, destroyed for being different and posing a threat; the werewolf and the returned slaves are symbolic of conflicts of race and gender; the ghosts in the Cambridge House mere victims of violence, trapped in a maze and the Bogeyman, the serial killer, a monster that was twisted and created by this pattern of conflicts and violence.

In one word: Swamp Thing empathizes with the monsters. It could be argued that this one characteristic may have been developed through Abby's company, her being the very empathic and gentle creature that she is, or it may be a symptom of another thing that is brought forth through the contrast with Abby's character: despite Abby's better judgement, Swamp Thing, besides being the hero, is a monster himself, as he makes abundantly clear in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing #27*, when Abby is concerned with leaving him behind while he fights Etrigan and the Monkey King: he is the third monster in the room (MOORE *et al.*, 1984, p.6, pan.4). That makes him a very unique character indeed. Since the interpretive consequences of this unique morphology of Swamp Thing are relevant to the story, we shall deal with them in the next chapter, where the argument relative to the interpretation of the story will be developed in detail, but right now it suffices to say that perhaps the reason why Swamp Thing is so sensitive to the other's perspective is precisely because, as a monster, ostracization is not a stranger to him, and he is accustomed to be on the other side of the monstrous scale.

Back to *Swamp Thing #50* (1986), the monster next appears in the issue walking besides Deadman (well... he is walking – Deadman is floating as usual), in an allied demon encampment, when Dr. Fate appears in front of them (p.9, pan.3). Fate arrives criticizing the "beggar's army" (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, pan. 4), and Swamp Thing is curious about who that is, which both exposes his *status* as a newcomer to the mystical realms and gives Deadman the chance to utter a pun about 'backwater' and then humorously remember the double meaning when directed to the particular interlocutor and apologize. Fate starts to boast about

how he will fight the Darkness, and Deadman interjects that Darkness seems quiet at the moment, when the Phantom Stranger arrives with the host of angels, which surprises Swamp Thing (p.10, pan.3). Mostly, Swamp Thing and his group apparently amble about while they wait for something to happen. Darkness starts moving, and Swamp Thing is, along with everybody, wary (p.12, pan.4). Etrigan attacks, is tested, and fails. After spitting the demon out, Darkness attacks the wizards, killing Sargon. Back in Hell, Swamp Thing is alongside Fate, the Stranger and Deadman, watching as their allied forces start to break with Etrigan's fall. Swamp Thing once more is understanding of the others' predicaments, refusing to blame the demons for being afraid of something too big to fathom (p.19, pan.2). As Fate and Deadman attack the enemy forces, the monster warns Deadman to be careful – giving him another chance for a humorous remark, this time about him being dead already. Fate is engulfed, tested and spat, and as Deadman recovers his body Swamp Thing talks to the Phantom Stranger. What he does is to sum up the situation (a need, for the reader has no visual insight into the battle – it is mostly commented by people on the panels, much like the flying sheep sketch by Monty Python), which is bleak: with their demon allies gone, all that is left in Darkness' path is the angels, and Swamp Thing's group, now reduced to himself, the Phantom Stranger and Deadman. Understandably, Swamp Thing wants to know where the Spectre is, but Phantom Stranger says he cannot comprehend the mind of the Spectre and he might even be crazy, for all he knew. Facing the ultimate defeat, Swamp Thing bitterly questions the point of his *American Gothic* odyssey, and what use was the Parliament of Tree's "cryptic... useless... advice" (p.22, pan.3). As the angels fall battling the creature, and all that is left is the group, Swamp Thing is looking at Darkness, trying to understand its form, when he feels the tremor-like aftershock of the Spectre's steps, and wonders if the afterworld is collapsing under Darkness' weight. The Spectre fights the creature, is engulfed, tested and fails, then Swamp Thing enters Darkness by his own volition.

Darkness is hugely impressed by the creature's gesture, finding him "extraordinary" (p.31, pan.1) and asking why he came, what the monster answers by saying that he was not able to fight Darkness, but could not just stay and watch, so he decided to face it in resignation, while the others around him despaired. There is something to say to that. His attitude stands alone: the other characters came for a fight, and faced the battle ahead, with an impossible enemy, from a warrior stance: they came and they fought, and they lost – the battle and their composure, resorting to insults and derision when their power waned, confrontational to the last moment. This seems to be part of the hero's trial – his entering the

‘belly of the whale’ is essentially what Swamp Thing did differently from the others: not belligerent, not defiant, not pretentious, but in resignation. Then he is able to talk to Darkness without preconception or aggressiveness. In a way, his reaction further legitimizes Swamp Thing as the hero of the story – at the lowest, most despairing point of his trials, he stands composed and faces his fate in resignation. And that is precisely what makes him extraordinary and effective in his conversation with Darkness. The true hero of the story is that who commits to the role to the last stance – who does things properly and does not allow himself to be debased by hatred or prejudice. Another monster, no less.

Darkness then asks Swamp Thing what is the purpose of Evil, which makes Swamp Thing go back to his questioning stance, where he reevaluates his journey through the United States, fighting many aspects of what is considered Evil, without being able to understand it. Swamp Thing places the center of his doubt in Evil’s randomness, the idea that Evil does not choose sides, ravaging “innocents... and guilty alike” (p.31, pan.4). The monster tells Darkness about the Parliament’s answer, which he first understood to mean that there was no Evil, but now reassesses in a very different idea: that Evil is part of a cycle, where “perhaps Evil... is the humus... formed by Virtue’s decay... and perhaps... perhaps it is from... that dark, sinister loam... that virtue grows strongest?” –the final question mark denotes the tentativeness of the answer. To that, Darkness answers that it saw, or understood, what was meant. As Darkness felt the end of the conflict approaching, it asked for Swamp Thing to leave, what he does. After the end of the conflict, with the merging of the two forces, Swamp Thing wakes up with Deadman calling him. He asks what happened, not fully understanding the nature of the conflict. He asks the Stranger, who was about, what happened – and the Stranger explains the shift in the relationship between Good and Evil, even if the nature of them had not shifted. The end of the story comes with the heroes walking towards the incoherent sunset as Cain and Abel watch them, wondering how things will change.

Swamp Thing, in this story, could be summarized with the word “doubt”: of all the heroes involved with the fight with Darkness, he is the only one who is not sure about his role, or the side he is in, for that matter.

4.2.3 Setting

There are, arguably, four different locations to the story in question. The first one is more of an advantage point than a location, being part of Hell itself, seemingly –but as it serves as a platform to watch the battle and impose upon the happenings shown in the issue an

organizing view, it is fair to understand it that way. Of course, by that is meant the *plateau* with the two sister houses harboring the two brother keepers, mirroring the magazines in which they first appeared:



Figure 18 – Brothers Keepers Over Sister Houses. (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.1, pan.6)

As Abel exits the well, wet and with the anvil still attached to him, making him bow under the weight, each brother stands next to the house they keep. The graveyard between the houses, present both in the context of the character's original publications and in their previous iteration in the series is here omitted to favor the well, which is also the reader's entrance point to the story (as the first panels show Abel's perspective as he climbs out of it). Their presence in Hell poses a peculiar question, regarding what we know about the setting in question: if, as Abel stated to Abby in *Swamp Thing* #33, the brothers and their setting are "a projection of the human unconscious, existing as a projection of the brain's right hemisphere" (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.3, pan.2) and they can see the story unraveling in Hell, to the point of being able to comment on it from beginning to end, at the starting and ending of the narrative, then it stands to reason that either Hell is either pretty close to dreams or it pertains to humanity's unconscious – the notion of a collective unconscious having already been established in the diegetic universe. The link between dreams and the unconscious is well established as well, being one of the roots of psychoanalysis – but to what extent does the DC Universe's Hell is linked to the collective unconscious is a mystery that the story does not properly clarify, despite the link it establishes between the two.

Hell, our second location, is treated prominently in the diegetic universe, the history of the title publication and the story itself, broadly, as a place existing in the supernatural realm.

As such, its geography is largely presented in previous issues, most notably in *Swamp Thing Annual #2* (1985), where Swamp Thing travels beyond “life itself” (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, p.5, pan.7) crosses the region of the recently dead, a place filled with ectoplasm, a fog-like substance in continuous shift, populated with the spirits of the recently dead, in transit to their final destinations (either the light or the dark), along with Deadman and lingering mindless creatures made out of the ecto-fog and attracted by violent emotions, the Poltergeists. Leaving the foggy region, one enters the flower field in the path leading to the light, a Heaven of sorts. This appears in the issue as a walk through a flower field filled with increasingly brighter light, until the landscape shifts to a rich natural landscape, filled with trees. The Phantom Stranger, though, makes it clear, as Swamp Thing asks whether the place is really Heaven, that it was “an aspect of Heaven”, for “Heaven has as many semblances as there are creeds... as there are souls” (p.14, pan.2). Despite the suggestion that Heaven is personally tailored to each inhabitant, however, Swamp Thing meets Alec Holland there (and that makes sense, in a way, his mind having been based on the deceased *alter ego*) and refuses to meet Linda Holland, who is also at the place, and wants to reincarnate, which apparently is a choice, and have children (p.16, pan.2). As Swamp Thing and Phantom Stranger walk past Heaven, the landscape seems to shift: Swamp Thing mentions that the weather grew progressively colder, and the trees and nature around them progressively shifts from richly leaved trees to thorny twigs and vines, with wildlife progressively deformed and insect-like (as noticeable by the spider-like foliage in the third panel below):



Figure 19 - Approaching Hell (MOORE, Alan *et al.*, 1985, p.17)

The panels, which by their angulous shape portray a gradual descent, grow progressively dirtier, with dry-brush ink effects, and the characters are involved by darkness as they approach Hell, first having to be let through by the Spectre, who is supposedly at this

point of their journey to stop things from evading Hell. Interestingly, the Spectre refers to the place where they stand as the “borderlands of form and reason” (p.20, pan.1), reinforcing the idea of a psychic component to DC Universe’s version of Hell. More so when, during their argument, the Phantom Stranger tries to convince the Spectre to let them pass by making the point that, similarly to the Abrahamic notion, Hell exists in that universe specifically to punish the guilty (and, therefore, the punishment of an innocent, such as Abby, would be a negation of that purpose), thus subjecting the place to a metaphysical purpose – what would require the filtering of a moral compass, and therefore a conscious mind. The Spectre’s wavering of his supposed duty in allowing them to pass through, though, nullifies the notion of a moral imperative and makes the Spectre look like a whimsical meddler rather than a guardian – but the ‘meaning’ of Hell, a place of punishment for the ‘condemned’ (p.21 and 22), is sustained relativized as it may have been.

As the couple, having passed, approaches Hell, Swamp Thing comments on how horrible the place is, to which the Phantom Stranger responds that the place is not as bad as Hell itself:

We are approaching the very edge of rational being here. What you see is the thumbprint of chaos. A little ay ahead, the senseless raging of chaoplasm begins, and continues to infinity. We approach the last place that can truly be called a place. (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.24)

What, then, turns Hell into the sad and grim place it is it’s nearness to the end of everything comprehensible, where the mere idea of existence loses its sense (hence the ‘edge of rational being’, the terrain (Hell) being on the border of endless chaos. It is interesting to note that, once again, Hell as something that is beyond understanding is presented to the reader. The landscape is gradually filling with thorns and decomposing carcasses being eaten by little creatures covered with plates or with spigots, reminiscent of abyssal fishes and arthropods (frequently a colorful blend of both), in a landscape tending towards spiked vines and hang organic-looking beads, sometimes eyes or skulls. Page 25 brings a bigger panel with a landscape, as Swamp Thing prepares to enter the place, and it is dirty with dry brush effects, filled with dead and thorny vegetation, with strange structures that seem like decaying buildings in the distance, but do not make architectonic sense and are partially omitted by the excessive texture of the scene and the lack of color differentiation and end up looking lost in the distance and hidden by fog. They are approached by Etrigan, who offers to accompany Swamp Thing in exchange for the flower the Phantom Stranger carried from Heaven, which he plants as soon as they pass the gates. Etrigan describes Hell as a “fortress dire, where all

once warm and sweet grows cold and sour” (p.29, pan.2) and, indeed, they pass an enormous gate with a huge wall and surrounded by giant spikes, like a fortress, of which no hint had previously been given. In fact, no further hints of structure or organization are given in the issue besides the vague wall and the vague structures in the distance – so how is Hell reminiscent of a fortress is hard to say. Having entered Hell, what happens is the intensification of the tropes developed in the way to Hell, with the landscape shifting even more notably to a dirty and confusing mess of spikes, abyssal fish and insectoid forms, with the added note of death and putrefaction increased, now no longer limited to carcasses being devoured, but also extended to the life forms (if so they can be called) of Hell: the demon Flutch, who mocks Etrigan, seems to be decomposing, and as they go deeper the theme of skulls and tortured, twisted life (sometimes mixing with the plants) is taken further. That happens particularly in page 31, where floating skulls and skeletons seem to fill the sky about Swamp Thing and Etrigan, and tortured and hybrid lifeforms, eating each other or pierced with thorns or spikes and arrows, walk about, reminding the reader of some of Bosch’s paintings. The dry brush effect and the dark background are used to increase the impression of grit and dirt as Swamp Thing comment Hell.

At this point their dialogue is particularly interesting, for it bears more information on the nature of Hell, which is still quite flimsy in the reader’s mind – it is described as a fortress, but it does not appear to be so; it serves a purpose but the rules can be changed; it is equated to lack of reason and madness, and so on. Their discussion involves how Hell was created. Swamp Thing asks Etrigan how could God allow a place like that, and Etrigan responds (I added the poetic scansion to suggest a separation of the discourse in different verses and stanzas – in this case, a sonnet, though because the scansion is not marked in the demon’s speech that division is debatable):

Think you God built this place, wishing Man ill./ and not lusts uncontrolled or
swords unsheathed?;/ Not God, my friend the truth’s more hideous still./ These halls
were carved by men, while yet they breathed.// God is no parent or policeman grim./
dispensing threats or punishments to all./ Each soul climbs or descends by its own
whim./ He mourns, but he cannot prevent their fall.// We suffer as we choose.
Nothing’s amiss./ All torments are deserved.../ ...None more than this./// (MOORE
et al., 1985, p.31)

The implication of Etrigan’s revelation is that a soul’s consignment to Hell is volitional, and a result of each one’s choices, while living. The presence of the Spectre is suggestive of a non-escaping logic to Hell: that is, no soul damned to Hell is allowed to leave

(otherwise the Spectre would not try to stop them from rescuing Abby). That is not to say anything about demons leaving Hell in the DC Universe, since Etrigan himself was a recidivist in the practice of visiting Earth. The notion poses a few problems, though. The Spectre being convinced to let them pass is a significant one, which leaves the reader wondering what, if the notion of allowing the rescue of a soul is that whimsical, was the entity doing there in the first place. But to that there is the added possibility of a soul being unjustly condemned to Hell – coherent with the Phantom Stranger’s argument, that idea seems to invalidate the purpose of the place. And, finally, the purpose of Hell in the DC Universe poses the same problem presented by the Abrahamic notion of Hell. In the book *The Problem of Hell* (1993), Jonathan L. Kvanvig describes the deep philosophical problems related to the notion of punishment eternal in the light of other related ideas, such as Justice and the loving nature of God:

Within those versions of theism of a Judaic heritage—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—is an especially compelling version of the problem of evil. In addition to the evils that are commonly experienced, in many such traditions a different kind of evil is said to be true of our world. That special kind of evil regards the afterlife, in which some humans are with God forever and some are in hell, which is an excruciatingly bad thing; according to the standard traditions, being in hell is the worst thing that could ever happen to anyone. As with less horrendous evils, the first question is how such an evil is, or could be, justified. The theological portrayals of hell make this question the most difficult for the theist to address. Ordinary pain and evil, it may be thought, can be accounted for if events in the future "make up for" what leads to them, but the evil of hell leads nowhere; at no point in the future will something of value make up for the evil of hell or will some reward be granted to those who endure the suffering of hell. Hell is apparently paradigmatic as an example of truly pointless, gratuitous evil. Thus, arises the problem of hell. (KVANVIG, 1993, p.3)

That is, Hell seems to have no purpose in the Abrahamic (Judaic) tradition other than a storage place for those shunned by God’s light. Their suffering has no redeeming purpose, it is merely punishment eternal, eventually demanding the consideration of how can the finite evil performed by the sinner be proportional to the infinite retribution of Hell. Hence the creature’s questioning how could a supposedly benevolent God allow such a place. The demon’s answer is even more astonishing, in that sense, essentially highlighting God’s impotence before humanity’s free will – they suffer the results of their choices. The idea, however, is unsustainable in light of Abby’s unjust condemnation, and essentially contradicts the traditional punitive notion of Hell, which is sustained by the Spectre’s presence and existence inside the diegetic universe (the Spectre is, after all the embodiment of God’s wrath, an archangel turned into a spirit of vengeance). The DC Universe’s Hell seems to fall into

what Kvanvig calls the “strong view of Hell” (1993, p.19), a more traditional interpretation based on four premises:

(H1) The Anti-Universalism Thesis: some persons are consigned to hell; (H2) The Existence Thesis: hell is a place where people exist, if they are consigned there; (H3) The No Escape Thesis: there is no possibility of leaving hell, and nothing one can do, change, or become in order to get out of hell, once one is consigned there; and (H4) The Retribution Thesis: The justification for and purpose of hell is retributive in nature, hell being constituted so as to mete out punishment to those whose earthly lives and behavior warrant it. (KVANVIG, 1993, p.19)

Or, in other words: a) Hell is discriminating – not all people go to Hell; b) Hell is a place, as opposite to a state of spirit; c) People in Hell cannot leave in any circumstance; d) Hell is punitive, a retribution for misdeeds and choices or people during their lives. There is little doubt that most of the premises apply to the place in question – those are the rules, at least, though it seems very easy to come in and out of Hell during the adventure. Etrigan even knows a spell to release souls from the place.

In summation: apparently, Hell, in the DC Universe, is very much like Hell in religious tradition: a concept filled with inconsistencies, that can span various (and contradictory) rationalizations. But the punitive quality, the non-crossing rule (that is, those in Hell will never go to Heaven, there is not a redemptive quality to Hell’s torments), the reasonably well-established geography of the place *as* a place, all that seems to indicate a narrative intent to equate the version of Hell presented in the story with the ‘strong view’. Despite that, some inconsistencies are presented in Etrigan’s rationalization. Then again, Etrigan is a demon, and these, also according to traditional views, are known to lie on occasion.

As Swamp Thing and Etrigan advance, they meet Arcane, being punished, his body a huge pile of (seemingly decomposed) covered with insects, and reportedly with insects hatching inside his body and eating him slowly, which he deems “very appropriate” (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.32), probably due to his past involvement with insects in the formulation of his un-men. Arcane is apparently pleasantly surprised to see Swamp Thing (who he calls ‘Holland’), and is even conversational. Arcane is glad he was able to get his revenge before he was sent to Hell, and tells Swamp Thing his niece (Abby) is a way ahead, making a point of stressing that Swamp Thing might not want her in her present state. As they leave, Arcane asks how many years he’d been in Hell, and, when Swamp Thing answers that it was “since yesterday” (MOORE *et al.*, p.32, pan.5), Arcane screams with pain and surprise. Obviously,

time runs differently in DC Comics' version of Hell, and a day seems like a number of years for those who suffer. Not that there would be any logical point in trying to stretch eternity for any length of time, but the detail is interesting for diegetic purposes as well, perhaps relating to the third setting in the story, Wintersgate Manor. Swamp Thing finds Abby covered in demons, who are trying to decide what to do with her, and fights them off, catches Abby in his arms and starts running, helped by Etrigan. As they run, there is the first glimpse of the buildings once seen at a distance – thorny constructions with impaled bodies and the general appearance of having been in the bottom of the ocean for a while, including abyssal fish carcass, vulture-like beings and piled bodies:



Figure 20 - Spiked Buildings and Abyssal Fish Detail (MOORE *et al.*, 1985, p.32)

Etrigan performs the spell and sends Swamp Thing and Abby on their way, comically kicking Arcane's head off for good measure, and the scenes in Hell are over for the issue. The next contact the reader has with the terrain (according to the logic of the story arc, that seems to encompass the graveyard and the sister houses) is in *Swamp Thing* #33 (1985), with Abby's visit in dreams. The scene and the scenery have already been commented above. Abby and Swamp Thing start their relationship, Swamp Thing faces Nukeface and *American Gothic* starts. The monster fights several of the 'classic frighteners' and the Brujería, technically losing, and finally, as Judith-crow flies over the terrain, *en route* to drop the pearl, in *Swamp Thing* #49 (1986), Hell is once again mentioned. It is noticeable that there is a peculiar description of the path taken by Judith-crow: first she is described as flying "over the world" (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.7, pan.1), then she passes "beyond the frayed edges of our agreed reality" (*idem*, pan.3); proceeding over the "fogbound shorelines of the waking world" (*idem*, pan.5). Judith is seen in the distance, flying over the strange moon, as Cain strangles Abel

(idem, pan.6). That indicates that the path to Hell in the diegesis goes beyond reality and beyond conscience, and the ‘sleeping world’ is on the way – detail that eventually will be reinforced in Neil Gaiman’s series *Sandman*, where the sister houses and their keepers are part of the *Dreaming*. What that also does is link Hell with the unconscious world once again, just as Abel had suggested they were nothing but products of the human brain. As Judith-crow moves, Swamp Thing is also going to Hell to face Darkness – only through the already described road of the Green, from the region of the recently dead through Heaven (though that part of their journey is elided in the issue, only hints of the flower fields shown on page 10 – panels 5 and 6), finding the Spectre on Limbo, where he describes the Judith-crow’s also passing Heaven, flying, and “into these dusk latitudes beyond” (p.13, pan.1). Swamp Thing, Deadman and the Phantom Stranger once more cross the thorny and strangely organic landscape that precedes Hell, and meet Etrigan inside a crater filled with boiling lava or bile. Before that, the Phantom Stranger speculates where Judith-crow might be going by describing everything on their path: “beyond this is Hell. Beyond Hell, only the raging incoherent chaoplasm” (p.16, pan.1). So, beyond Hell, something chaotic, ‘raging and incoherent’, is to be found. On the following page, Etrigan describes his attempt to kill Judith-crow while she was well on her way: “I saw a sooth-black crow glide overhead and onward,./ beyond reason’s farthest shore./ Passing from sight, ere I could strike it dead,./ my spittle singed its feathers, but no more.///” (MOORE *et al.*, p.17, pan.1-2). The demon describes Hell, then, as ‘reason’s farthest shore’, as if Hell itself is at the limit of madness. And the demon proceeds to state their mission: “this war shall burn white-hot, and should we fall.../ Then madness without end shall claim us all.///” (idem, pan.4-5). There is a deliberate effort from the narrative voice, then to equate Hell with the limits of sanity, beyond which all is chaos and nonsense. There is a distinct psychic component to the characters’ discourse about Hell, a subtext pointing out that Hell’s final location might be inside of the human psyche, after all. As the demon looks at the distance, a storm brews in the background, black clouds filled with thunder and lightning, a grim omen of the battle to come (idem, pan.5). In the distance, many spiked buildings can be seen, and they are surrounded by sick-looking vegetation and small creatures full of spikes, as if to say that Hell has its ecosystem – and it is not friendly. The last glimpses of Judith-crow and of Hell in the issue are seen through Dayton’s eyes, as he tries to inform Constantine of what is going on in the spirit dimensions. Dayton sees the bird, and concentrates on the landscape. He describes Hell as “something as big as a continent”, as a “fortress, like a huge concentration camp” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.20, pan.1-2):

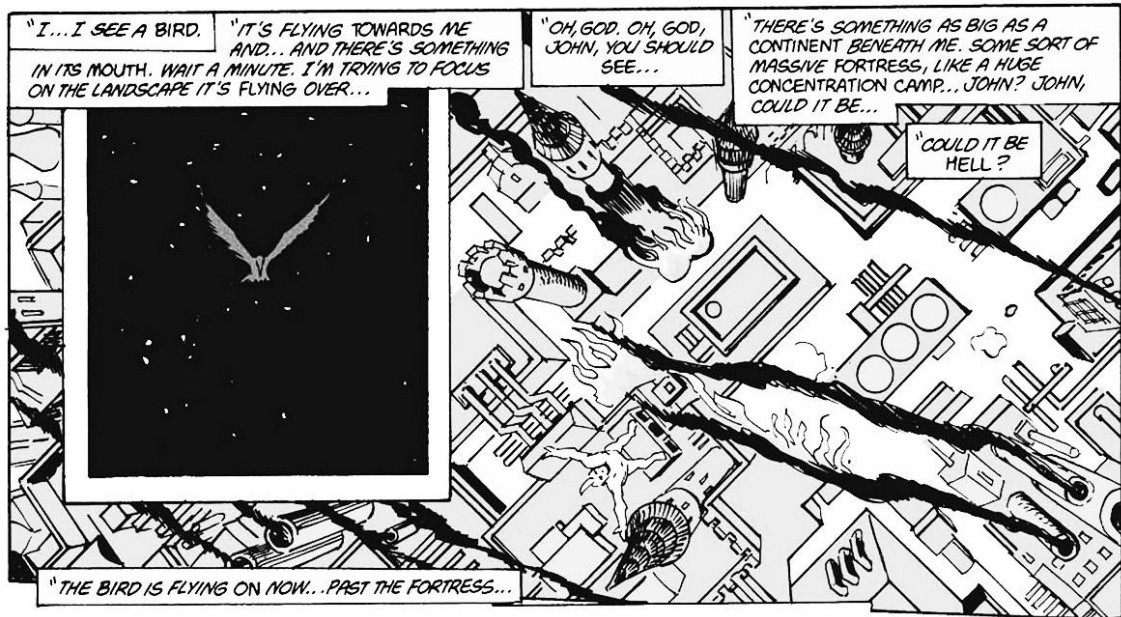


Figure 21 - Hell is a 'Concentration Camp' (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.20, pan.1-2)

What appears in the panel, though, is a set of buildings, some medieval-looking such as castle towers and some smoking chimneys, with bonfires and monster statues, seen from above. The scene is not even remotely related to what is shown in the subsequent story, or in the previous ones. The notion of Dayton's conscience filtering what he sees is thereby suggested, and heightened with the fact that, as seen from above, the burning city seems suspiciously similar to a computer chip, with connectors in series and round structures similar to capacitors in a circuit board. There is, then, the insertion of a visual metaphor suggesting that this Hell is what Dayton sees through the technology of his chip, and perhaps filtered by his conscience as well, in a manner similar to Swamp Thing's visit to Heaven, where he once accesses an aspect of it, Heaven not being the same thing to everyone.

Judith goes on to the chaos beyond which Dayton describes as "not real geography" (*idem*, pan.3), with everything changing states and forms from one instant to another, making him nauseated. Dayton then finds the minds of the demon brothers, in an irregular terrain, once again filled with carcasses being eaten by thorny animals, skull and bones *motifs* and spiked buildings in the distance, which is becoming familiarized as Hell. Judith then drops the pearl, and the Darkness starts rising. Funnily enough, there is a scene with two demons by Hell's shores, apparently trawling (one of them carries a net) as the Darkness rises, giving the very alien territory a quite mundane note – of course, not dispensing the carcass-filled landscape, the thorny vegetation nor the spiked buildings in the distance:



Figure 22 - Demon Trawlers (MOORE *et al.*, p.22, pan.4)

Swamp Thing #50, though, brings a slightly different image of Hell: it does not present distorted buildings in the distance or proximity, but is rather filled with demons of varied shapes and forms and vague, irregular terrain. There are three panels focusing the environs of the action in Hell in the issue: the third panel of page 4; the first panel of page 12 and the final panel of the issue, the fifth panel of page 36.



Figure 23 - Looking at Their Troops (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.4, pan.5)

The image brings a demon in the first plane, with a horned chameleon-like face, wings and a tail with a face, holding a dented spear with a hanging severed demon head with its tongue stuck out, sitting on what seems like a pile of bones and decomposing flesh. In the second plane are Swamp Thing and Deadman, along with other demons, looking at their legions in the distance: the background is full of demons in the distance, all over the landscape, including the strange geographic accidents and rock formations. The background disappears at places, where a vague hatching makes for a transition into the whiteness of the page, once again the notion of fog or smoke masking the distance view. Instead of a hint of buildings in the far background, as the reader should be accustomed to see by this point, there are forms reminiscent of a mountain range, delineated with hatching, mainly. Not that this changes significantly Hell's landscape in the title, mainly because the buildings were frequently seen – but never entered by the characters. It is true that mystery is a very useful tool to hint at unspeakable horrors in the dark corridors of strange buildings, but the narrative does not develop these tropes. What this does in the context of the comic, without focus on the horrors of Hell, but rather focusing on character development and teleology, is to place the landscape of DC Comics' Hell as eminently composed of wide, open spaces – ridgy and rough at times, but very little seems to happen between walls in this place. The following image portrays the Darkness rising, ready to enter the shores of Hell:

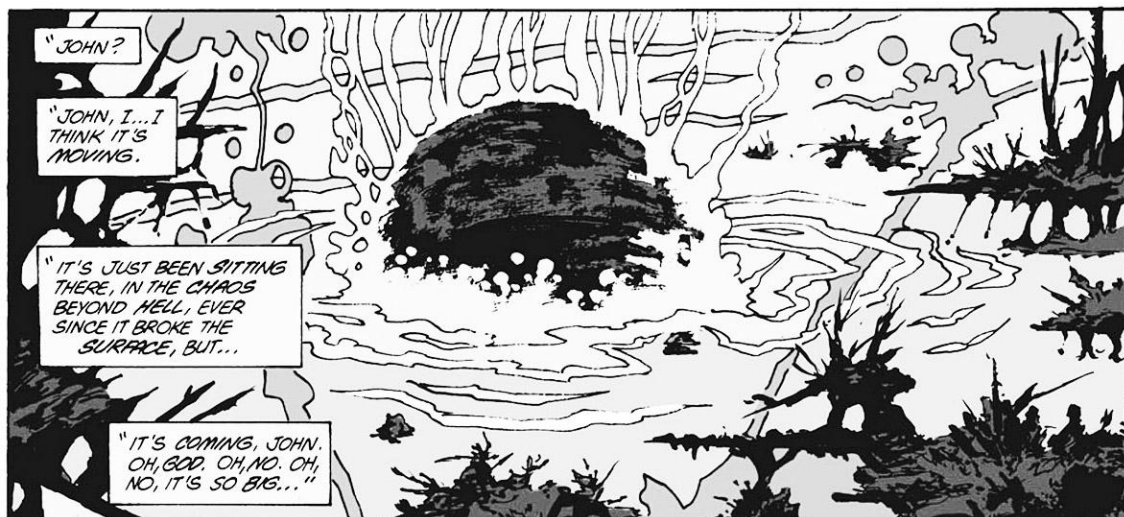


Figure 24 - Darkness Rising (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p. 12, pan.1)

Darkness sits in apparent water, smoldering and causing a lot of fuss in the waters about it. The terrain is, once again, composed of strange formations, seemingly dead vegetation of some sort, full of spigots and thorns. The techniques of dry brush and rough strokes work to give the landscape an unamicable impression – and it is significant that

Darkness is painted in similar manner. It is, however, confusing how literal the idea of Hell's shores is interpreted in the story – because the diegesis had previously established that beyond Hell was not Hell's ocean, but rather the 'chaoplasm', extending infinitely. So unless the chaoplasm manifests as a substance similar to water (and this is not the case, as established by Dayton's description of the terrains beyond Hell), the demons had very little business fishing there in the first place. It is one of the many instances in the work where poetic license stuck out its head to breathe, and reinforces the notion that likens Hell with part of the unconscious – another place where symbols, metaphors and metonymy have an important role. This is also prominent in the last landscape of Hell offered to the reader, the very last panel of Hell in the story:



Figure 25 - Walking Towards the Sunset (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.36, pan.5)

Cain and Abel in the first plan, from their advantage point, watch as the silhouettes of Swamp Thing, Deadman and the Phantom Stranger walk towards the sunset. They are leaving a rough terrain, full of scorch marks and heavily worked with black ink and broken earth

patterns, towards what appears to be a meadow or grove of some sort (the impression is aided by the color, which shifts from an orange tone in the scorched earth behind the trio to a light green ahead), and tree tops can be seen in the distance. Above that, light-pink clouds extend over what seems to be an enormous and incoherent setting sun, painted in red. The scene is carefully planned, the vanishing point is the red sun, and both Cain and Abel's attention and the lines in the picture work to pull the reader's eye to that focal point. Once again, poetic license seems to have crowned in the narrative, not only because of the sun, but also because the fog that had, until that point, been omnipresent in the afterworld (with the exception of Heaven, but that, also, was surrounded by fog), is suddenly cleared in their path (the rest of the scene is still enveloped in clouds and fog). That scene works in many different ways. First, it establishes their destination – the heroes will now walk back, past Heaven and into the region of the recently dead. Swamp Thing will go back to Earth, Deadman will stay to greet the arrivals, as is his role, and the Phantom Stranger will follow his path, as he does, perhaps staying near Heaven, as before. But that is not all: the scene is also a recollection of the path taken to Hell, both in the storyline and in the previous annual issue – a look back, in order to the previous tasks undertaken by Swamp Thing. Finally, the hero walking towards the sunset is a well-established trope in modern heroic fiction, particularly in Western stories (where the symbolic value of the end that comes with the sunset is augmented with the idea of going deeper into the west), and the scene links with this tradition, except with a discrete change: the sun, by the logic of the story, would be the living world replacing the idea of death with an idea of wakening – another link between the afterworld in the DC Universe with the human unconscious.

There are other instances of a piece of background with patterns of scorched earth, and silhouettes of rugged and spiked vegetation or carcasses, but it must be said that the majority of the panels are either involved in mist or composed mainly by demons, which supposedly makes sense, this being a battle in Hell. Since the demons are part of the landscape of the battle, it makes sense to make a quick observation about their general appearance. On page 11, Dayton takes a look at both sides, focusing both Etrigan's group of rhymers and the enemy legions for a first impression:

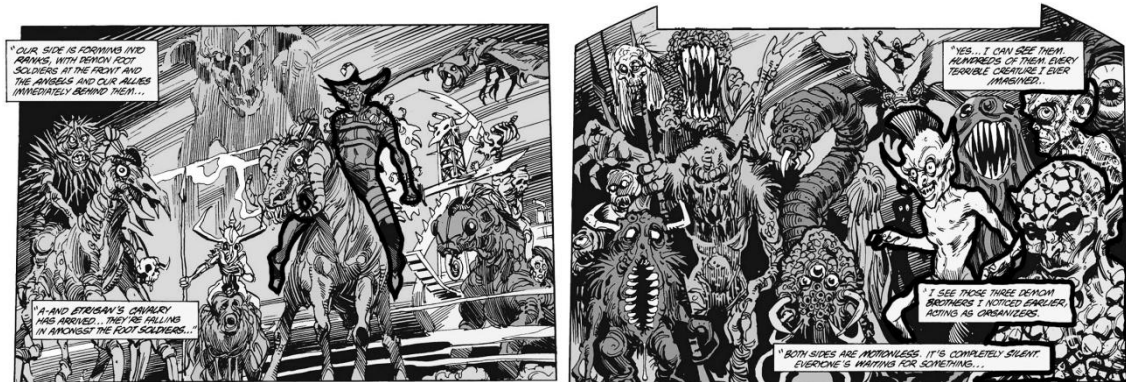


Figure 26 - Demons (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.11, montage of pan.1 and 3)

As the figure above indicates, there is a lot of variety to demons' shapes and sizes. Aside from the characters that figure previously in DC Comics' continuity (Etrigan, who is significantly changed in character design by his combat armor, and the demons Abnegazar, Rath and Ghast, all highlighted in the image above), the demons seem to be largely inspired by the animal kingdom, with an apparent predilection for insects and arthropods (insect tongues and stings on the horses at the left panel, and multiple eyes and stings on the demons in the right panel, along with organic exoskeletons and the scorpions in Etrigan's armor). The demons are made further unamicable by the display of a prolific multitude of pointed teeth, horns and spikes and the hint of decomposition and ruined, running flesh. The demons in the issue are not as single-mindedly based in deep sea creatures as in previous issues, but their influence can still be felt in the carapaces and teeth – two of the main constitutive elements of deep dwellers, along with opaque, semi-blind, round eyes.

Hell, as a setting in the issue, then, is slightly changed. The images of buildings, carcasses and spiked vegetation are deterred in favor of open spaces full of fog, images of scorched earth, and an overwhelming number of demons serving as background – perhaps for reasons of diegetic consistency, since a battle of large numbers would certainly not be fought inside buildings, and during such an event the main composition element in the landscape is bound to be the soldiers fighting the battle, which is what they are there to do in the first place, but the effect of changing the reader's perception of Hell remains. That makes the earlier comparisons of Hell with a fortress seem nonsensical. There are also several indications that the setting is intimately related to the human unconscious, to the point of the symbolic use superseding the narrative consistency. Hell, in the story, is at the same time a place and no place, as much a result of the brain's chemistry and a mystical location beyond death. No choice is made between the two aspects is hinted at.

This rule, however, is not absolute, and there is a unique exception to the setting elements pushed forward by the narrative. This happens in pages 7 and 8, wherein Etrigan is putting on his armor. At first, the demons are in a dark and indistinct environment, picking their living armor pieces from boiling cauldrons, but as they go get their mounts, they walk down stairs, clearly in an indoor environment, looking like a mixture of medieval dungeon and stables, where a multitude of small demons are preparing the strange creatures:



Figure 27 - Strange Dungeon (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.9, pan.7 - detail)

Finally, there is the third setting present in the story: Wintergate Manor, the three-store mansion in Georgetown, Washington, home of Baron Winter. More specifically, if one wants to be stricter, the room where the séance happens – there is actually no scene in the issue taking place outside the specific room. The point is made interesting by two different pieces of information pertaining the locations in the story: first, that time in Hell, as seen above, runs differently; second that, as John Constantine puts it in *Swamp Thing* #49, because the impending threat would surface in the “afterworlds beyond Earth”, the mystic assemblage he gathered would only be able to help with a “suitable base of operations” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.5, pan.5). That suggests that Baron Winter’s mansion is needed for them to be able to help with the threat. Since the distinctive characteristic of Wintergate Manor is precisely that of not being bound by time or space, the logical conclusion is that, in order to be able to experience Hell in real time, so to say, through Dayton’s helmet, with the difference of between the different planes’ time pace, would be to have the séance in the house, what suggests that Constantine’s whole plan relied in both Dayton’s helmet and the manor’s special nature to work. The first appearance of the manor was in *Night Force* #1 (August of 1982),

and the design obviously was used as inspiration for the one in the story (*Swamp Thing* #50, 1986, p.6, pan.1), though it only appears in one panel from the outside:



Figure 28 - Comparison (*Night Force* #1, 1982, p.6, pan4; *Swamp Thing* #50, 1986, p.6, pan.1)

The house has distinctive features of late Victorian and early Queen Anne architecture style, which is consistent with the city it is supposedly in, according to the website of the National Park Service (NPS)²⁷ of the USA, which says that:

After the Civil War, the brick rowhouse made its appearance in Georgetown. The brick rowhouses of the 1870s and 1880s exhibited elaborate bracketed cornices and then corbelled cornices in the 1880s and 1890s. It is the Queen Anne rowhouse that found the greatest favor with Washington builders and was also used frequently in commercial architecture. Residential architecture of the 1890s took the form of a rowhouse in a minimalist late Victorian, late Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival styles and various combinations. (NPS, 2019)

The house presents the octagonal towers, arches and large windows that characterizes Queen Anne architectural style, without the characteristic asymmetry of the front. The house in the right, however, has a different and very distinctive feature: it is made of wood. That is not consistent with either the manor of the original series nor with Georgetown's architectural history, which privileged stone buildings long before the brick rowhouses rose (NPS, 2019,

²⁷ NPS, *Georgetown Historic District*. Text available in .HTML format at the address <<https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/wash/dc15.htm>>, last accessed in 03/26/2019.

par.5). Be it as it may, the house's great singularity was to be unstuck in time, Baron Winter not being able to leave it in the present, but being free to roam History and Space. That led to a distinctive and eccentric disposition of the furniture in its portentous and labyrinthine interior, with memorabilia and furniture of different precedence in History and from different cultures, to the point of having different rooms dedicated to different places and ages (as can be seen in *Night Force #11*, 1983, p.14, where, intending to visit America in the 1930s, Winter helps Vanessa Van Helsing to prepare by showing her a room, bought in a movie studio auction, complete with matching wardrobe). The room figuring in "The End", however, is quite restrict in the choice of furniture, having few recognizable elements.



Figure 29 - Ruined Room (MOORE *et al.*, p.34, pan.3)

The seven mystics occupy a round table, sided by heavy chairs, richly sculpted. The table, during the séance, is the focal center of the attention, the rest of the scenery being obscure most of the time. Some elements can be distinguished, mainly due to the shockwaves of the attacks of the creature of Darkness, which swoosh the furniture about. There is a pendulum clock, perhaps significant as symbolic of the peculiar characteristic of the house – for a clock would arguably be useless in a house that is asynchronous with time – and a sofa by the window through which Constantine is looking when he is introduced in the issue. Little more detail is given about the setting in the issue. The table, however, is significant in more ways than one, mainly because of the number of magicians. According to Ernest Busenbark, the number seven is:

One of the most venerated and most magical of numbers, the number par excellence among the nations of antiquity. Pythagoras called it "the vehicle of life". It contains body and soul, spirit and matter, since it contains the triangle and the square. In the Bible, 7 is the number of the holy or divine day. All of the great festivals are related to 7 days, weeks or years. In the East 7 is associated with oaths or covenants. The divine mysteries and the activities of the Holy Spirit are 7 in number. Most of the associations of 7 have reference to some direct relation of the divine and human. It is therefore the number of religion. It is called the number of life because of the belief that 7 month babies usually live while those born in the 8th month do not. It is sometimes called a virgin number because it is the only number between 1 and 10 which cannot be produced by either dividing or multiplying another number. It has been called motherless and fatherless; and virgin, or Minerva, because it was not

born of a mother but was generated out of the crown or back of the father, the mind. (BUSENBARK, 1997, p.243-244)

As is prone to happen in symbolism, the mystical numbers are frequently represented graphically as n-pointed stars, a symbol inception of sorts, the star representing a number which, in its turn, represents several other things. That becomes significant when the mystics hold hands around the table and the scene is depicted from a particular angle, so as to be similar to a magic circle:

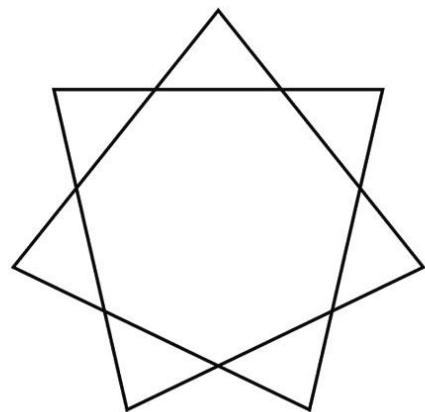
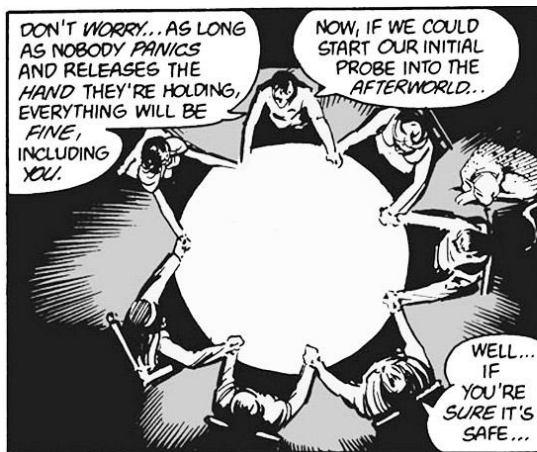


Figure 30 - Hidden Heptagram (MOORE *et al.*, p.6, pan.6)

The association is subtle, but definitely present (especially when one becomes familiarized with Alan Moore's biography, more specifically his familiarity with the Kabbalah and the lives of Dr. Dee and Aleister Crowley, key figures in magic history). That also links the scene to the entire mystical tradition, adding many possible layers of interpretation and symbolism.

There is still another notion that makes the setting of the story interesting, which is the division between Earth and Hell (Dayton sees Cain and Abel as he is looking at Hell, then it is fair to assume two different worlds), Earth being the world above. The setting for the adventure is similar to that of traditional Greek theater, where, according to David Timson, in the book *The History of Theatre* (2012):

A flat space before the temple was where the choruses performed their choric dances, and this became known as the *orchestra* or dancing-place. On the edge of this space there might have been a tent or hut for the actors to change their costumes and masks: this became known as the *skene*, or what we would say, 'scene'. The audience stood or sat on the slopes of the hill, an area known as the *theatron* or 'watching-place'. [...] In time it seems that the roof of the *skene* became an upper acting area where Gods could make pronouncements or where a solitary watchman could stand, as if on the roof of the palace, as in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. Height in performance may have been achieved with a crane called *mechane*, certainly used by

Euripides who ended many of his plays with a visitation from the Gods – a *Deus ex machina*. (TIMSON, 2012, loc.155-174)

There we have, then, the notion of an upper stage, reserved for the gods would pontificate, or discuss human affairs, sometimes being descended by a crane to solve the problems posed by the play – a plot device that eventually got known as *Deus ex Machina*, which, according to the *Penguin's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1999, p.216), grew to mean an “unanticipated intervener who resolves a difficult situation, in any literary genre”. While Constantine and his group are not gods, the dynamic of the setting is reminiscent of this structure, and so is the introduction/closing of the adventure by Cain and Abel, who seem to step up to comment on the story at times, pontificating to the audience, so to say. The difference is that the ‘gods’ do not get to effectively influence the outcome of events in the end, neither the commenters are the source of any coherent certainty other than a general notion that stories will go on: the *Deus ex Machina* in the plot is the Light that descends to face the Darkness, such as unanticipated intervener that it does not even merit a character slot in this work, only appearing to mingle with Darkness in a veritable handshake. While the link with Theatre’s history may at first seem to be a stretch of the reader’s good will towards this study, if taken into consideration with the publication’s history, particular that of Moore’s run, where Swamp Thing has descended to Hell to rescue his Eurydice and in the story in question is tested along with several other heroes, the idea seems not only plausible, but also necessary in the interpretation of the story.

The fourth and final setting in the story, as it may be construed, is the inside of the creature of Darkness, and it is represented in the panels as a completely dark environment (makes sense) in which, in turns, Etrigan, Dr. Fate, the Spectre and Swamp Thing are asked a question and their answers are weighted by Darkness, who in turn decides if they are appropriate or not, forcefully expelling the hero tested if the answer is deemed inappropriate and letting them go freely if they get it right. Being expelled seems to debilitate the heroes, for Etrigan and Dr. Fate are unconscious when they leave Darkness, and the Spectre seems beat up and incapable of getting up – though in his case it might be because of the defeat itself, since he is awake and crying. Swamp Thing, who got it ‘right’, does not appear to suffer from this effect. Engulfing the antagonists seems to be the only way for Darkness to communicate with them, since there is no mention of it speaking in any other way and even sensitives cannot feel what happens inside the creature – perhaps due to fear of psychic feedback, as indicated when Dayton was advised not to contact the creature directly (MOORE *et al.*, p.15,

pan.4). A couple of panels later, Dayton also gives a final hint about this strange shapeless setting when he says it's very, very cold (same page, pan.6).

The reason why the scenes that take place inside Darkness are considered a different location (though they technically take place in Hell) is also due to their symbolic value: they are equivalent to the underworld in heroic narratives, where the heroes are tested and either fail or prove their worth, earning the elixir. Many of the steps of a heroic journey involves crossing a gate to a different, magical place, in order to be tested – Campbell calls that the *threshold* (CAMPBELL, 2004, p.71). What Darkness does in the story is to work as yet another threshold that each hero must cross, for they cross a barrier (Darkness) and end up in a different, exotic location, where each hero is tested with a question about the nature of Evil. It is a mini extra journey, so to say, but quite ingenious – it works to enhance the stakes of the particular moments, where the danger is most pressing and the stakes higher for each hero. If Darkness did merely ask a question, standing still to listen and judge the answer, effectively stopping the action, the dynamic of the plot would suffer the abating of the narrative tension, for now Darkness would be agreeable enough to listen, and so capable of reasoning and conversation. Graphically, the strangeness of the fully-black panels, where the heroes float in nothingness, also work to impress a distinguished look to these moments, effectively linking them and adding a layer of significance that suggests that they are to be read in relation to each other. So, a very strange location, just as Darkness is a very strange character. But also, a very enticing and symbolically rich location.

4.2.4 Time

Having studied the locations where the story takes place, it is important to place the story in time as well. Time and space are such intimately linked concepts that is very hard to make one from another, and, as a result of that particular dynamic, a lot of reference to space will be made in this section as well – mainly as markers of narrative shifts in setting, those being the major clues of parallel developments and/or the entrance points of other displacements, but this section also completes the preceding one, and vice-versa.

Perhaps the most accomplished methodology for the analysis of time in a narrative was the one proposed by Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method* (1980). Genette distinguishes three different narrative levels: *story* (the signified, or narrative, content); *narrative* (pertaining to the signifier, the narrative text itself) and *narrating* (the producing of the narrative). Genette thinks narratives can be accurately studied with focus on

three different structures: *tense* (focused on time); *mood* (focused on narrative representation) and *voice* (centered on the narrating itself).

Genette decomposes *tense* into *order* (the succession of events in the story and in the narrative), *duration* (how long the events take in the story and in the narrative) and *frequency* (repetition in the story and in the narrative). This section will comment on the notions in the referred story.

4.2.4.1 Order

The study of the *order* in a narrative is a comparison between the chronological order of the events and their occurrence in the narrative. Because narratives are not necessarily linear, *anachronies* (sections that break the diachronic time) are quite common. Genette lists, as examples, *prolepses* (narrating in advance an event that takes place later in the story) and *analepses* (narrating an event after this event takes place in the story). Anachronies have a *reach*, meaning they leap a certain amount of time to the past or the future, and an *extent*, that is how long they last in the story.

Analepses can be either *external* (those that take place before the first narrative begins), *internal* (those that are part of the first narrative) or *mixed* (they start in a point previous to the first narrative and end after the beginning of the story). The analepses may interfere with the plot (*homodiegetic*) or not (*heterodiegetic*). Analepses can be divided into *completing* analepses (when they go back to a previously narrated event to fill gaps in the narrative) and *repeating* analepses (when the narrative re-tells an event). An analepsis can also be *partial* – that is, goes back in time but then proceeds to further the narrative. When it is not possible to identify the conclusion of an analepsis, it is called *open*.

Moments in which the narrative skips (gaps in the narrative) can also be divided into *ellipses* (a temporal skip with no information added) and *paralipses* (a sidestep to another aspect of the narrative). This is significant in the story in question, but not exactly as described – more on that below.

Prolepses (anticipations) can also be divided in *external* (often functioning as epilogues) and *internal*, and they can also be *heterodiegetic* and *homodiegetic*. Prolepses can also be divided into *completing* and *repeating*, depending on whether they overlap with the narrative (repeating) or are just used to provide additional information (completing). *Complete* prolepses are the ones that extend to the moment anticipated. Most of them,

however, are *partial*, “interrupted in as abrupt a way as they were begun” (GENETTE, 1983, p.77-78).

Finally, there are also *achronies* in narratives: events without any temporal reference attached to them. Achronies are dateless and ageless, events with no place in the chronology of the narrative.

Timewise, the narrative in question is very enticing, mainly due to the notion of time in DC Comics’ Hell running differently from Earth’s time. So, according to the logic of the diegesis, the entire story most likely took no longer than seconds, or moments, relatively speaking. But, since the members of the séance are displaced in time, an effect of them being in Wintergate Manor, the notion can be put aside with a mere brief comment. But even then there are a couple of problems to the length of the story, for it seems to develop in a reasonably short amount of time, being a somewhat quick read, as it is usual in the medium, but the notion is troubling – the duration of the séance is concurrent with the battle, though one does not necessarily last as much as the other; battles tend to take longer, preparations included, while a séance can only last as long as their participants are able to remain awake and holding hands. Bearing in mind that the time span of the battle was enough to gather and equip two armies, cavalry and reinforcements included, and for the creature of Darkness to traverse the entirety of Hell, from its outer shore until it neared the region of light, as is described in the narrative, with the battle of the armies around – so the demons fighting alongside it had to be able to keep up with it, it is reasonable to think that this would configure an entire campaign, not a mere battle. But one does not row against the story’s waves, and, because the battle must be definitive and final, as posed many times, it is at least acceptable, for aesthetic purposes, that it all develops in one battle, during a séance – yet another instance of poetic freedom sticking out its head to breathe, momentarily breaking the surface and the narrative immersion with it. The following table will dispose the events of the story as they appear, in order, divided into the four different settings offered by the narrative. As is frequent in the story, Dayton’s narrative will overlap with scenes in Hell, so both settings will be addressed concurrently and are both highlighted by the background color. The row in the left is reserved for comment on the narrative devices employed, and for readability reasons, the Graveyard with the brother’s keepers and the Darkness will fall into the same row, since they never overlap, and will be presented accordingly.

in th	Narrative Device	Graveyard <i>or</i> Inside Darkness	Wintergate Manor	Hell
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<p>Prolepsis (Cain foreshadows the battle, telling Abel what would happen). Regular diachronic development (as they climb the hill and talk).</p>	<p>Graveyard: Abel recovers and climbs up the well with the anvil, and Cain informs him about the impending battle. They then climb a hill to an advantage point where they can see the action, as Cain explains to Abel the stakes.</p>		<p>Cain explains to Abel how the battle will be like, and that, according to “informed sources” (p.2, pan.3), Darkness would go after the place of light. That everything would be changed. Furthermore, Swamp Thing’s group is preparing for battle as the brothers come to watch.</p>
			<p>After a transition panel where the brothers can be seen in the distance, Swamp Thing talks to Deadman in Hell. They converse about what is going on their side, and Deadman notices Swamp Thing’s preoccupation. He asks what is going on.</p>
<p>Analepsis (Swamp Thing reevaluates his journey in light of the puzzling nature of Evil, in his perception). Regular diachronic development (Swamp Thing continues to talk to Deadman).</p>			<p>Swamp Thing responds in a panel full of floating images of the ‘classic frighteners’ and Constantine. He tells Deadman that he is still confused by what he has seen.</p>
		<p>Constantine’s team gets ready for their séance, though Dayton is hesitant. They lock hands and Dayton starts peering into the afterworld.</p>	
<p>Parallelism (it is not technically a paralipsis, for the reader continues to experience both time frames concurrently, each in a specific</p>		<p>Dayton sees Etrigan dressing up for battle, and describes the scene to his companions, horrifies with the living armor.</p>	<p>Etrigan is preparing for battle in Hell,</p>

	medium – verbal and iconic). That is a trope in the narrative and a particularity of the medium.			
				Etrigan and the other rhymers (Lisquinelle and Spattlefleck are mentioned) finish putting on their armors and go down the dungeon to get their mounts. As they mount, Dayton’s voice is superseded again.
	Parallelism.		Dayton describes Swamp Thing and Deadman walking through an allied camp, and Dayton senses Dr. Fate arrival (he is horrified realizing the helm is the face).	Swamp Thing and Deadman are joined by Dr. Fate.
				Swamp Thing and Dr. Fate are roughly introduced when a demon screams about the presence of ‘lights’ and the Phantom Stranger arrives with the angels. Swamp Thing is surprised that the ally knows angels, and Deadman mentions the demons are less than glad. They go back to vaguely preparing for battle as Dayton’s voice once again is superseded.
	Parallelism		Dayton warns the séance that the battle is about to begin, and describes the forces as he sees. Constantine asks about the Spectre, but Dr. Occult asks for a description of their enemies, and Dayton looks, mentioning their huge numbers and that the Demons Three were acting as organizers, and the Darkness is idle – only it soon starts to move, and Dayton is surprised. For a moment, the setting goes back to direct speech in the séance, but soon it	(Dayton’s impressions about the sizes do not suggest the passing of time, but are rather descriptive in nature). Darkness starts to rise, surprising Swamp Thing’s party with its size.

			returns to narration over Hell, where Darkness is rising. Faced with the creature's overwhelming size, Dayton wants to give up their enterprise.	
			Constantine tells Dayton it is too late to give up, and they prepare to send their energies towards their allies. Dayton is once again reluctant, but since they don't have a choice, he agrees. Dayton starts describing the battle again, focusing on Etrigan. Dayton's voice soon disappears.	
				Etrigan is in the vanguard of the battle, fighting demons, and decides to attack Darkness personally, abandoning his rhyming companions to their own fate. Dayton's narration takes over.
	Parallelism.		The page is divided into faces and flashes of the séance and of the actions being described, which take place in Hell. Constantine decides to aid Etrigan. Dayton briefly connects with the creature, but is warned not to do so. As Etrigan is captured, Dayton is surprised with the cold the demon is feeling, but Winter warns him to keep his mind clear and add their power to Etrigan's – only it is useless, and Dayton loses contact with him.	Etrigan is charging the creature of Darkness, but is swallowed by it.
		Inside Darkness, Etrigan is told the creation triggered its sense of self, and that made it very unhappy. It asks the demon what it is, and the demon answers it is Evil, and it is the shadow cast by light, supposed to oppose the light in an eternal fight. Darkness, then, deeming the demon's view as fatalist,		

		expels Etrigan. The moment Etrigan is expelled, Dayton senses him, unconscious.		
			The narrative moves back to the séance, which is being attacked by Darkness, instinctively, as Dayton points out. Sargon is burned alive after the shockwave, bravely managing to do so without breaking the circle. As the group briefly hesitates, Constantine dramatically prompts them to carry on with the session to the last man, if needed.	
				The scene cuts, without transition, to Hell, where Deadman, Swamp Thing, the Phantom Stranger and Dr. Fate are watching the battle. Seeing that the fall of the rhymers scared their troops, Dr. Fate decides to attack the enemy army, and Deadman accompanies him. Fate kills Abnegazar, one of the Demons Three, but is distracted and swallowed by the Darkness.
		Inside Darkness, Fate is asked what Evil is, and responds with an insult. Full of contempt, the Darkness expels him back to Hell.		
				Deadman rescues the unconscious Dr. Fate. Swamp Thing and the Phantom Stranger wonder about the arrival of the Spectre, and, hopeless, Swamp Thing wonders what was the use of the Parliament's advice. The angels advance to confront the creature, leaving the group as the last resource in the impossible battle.
			Without transition, the setting goes back to the séance, where Constantine's group is waiting for Dayton to	

			<p>compose himself. Dayton warns the group that they are a distraction, so Darkness wants them dead, and another attack comes. Zatanna starts to feel warm, but Zatara recites a spell that pulls the attack unto him. Then he threatens Constantine with eternal haunting, should his daughter not leave the table alive, and bursts into flame.</p> <p>Without breaking the circle, holding her dead father's burning hand, Zatanna blames Constantine, and he asks Dayton to tell him what is going on at the other side.</p>	
				<p>Without transition, the angels prove useless in the battle. Suddenly, they feel Hell shake in tremors, and find out that this happens because of the arrival of the massive Spectre, who confront Darkness.</p>
	Parallelism		<p>Dayton senses the Spectre's arrival, and compares tapping into the spirit's mind with swimming in the Atlantic. As the Spectre grows, Dayton sees through his eyes, and has a confusing idea of Darkness' form, seeing it as a gigantic worm with a cowl of bone. Dayton is confused by the columns (fingers) descending from the sky to enfold the Spectre, and as soon as the Spectre is absorbed into Darkness, Dayton loses contact.</p>	<p>The Spectre grows in size to confront the Darkness, and tries to face it physically, only to be engulfed by the creature. He is absorbed into it.</p>
		<p>Inside Darkness, the Spectre is asked hat is Evil for. He responds that Evil is to be beaten in order to help guide others to the light. Saying that the Spectre only answered with vengeance, the Darkness expels him,</p>		

		like the others.		
	Parallelism		Dayton reports the Spectre being beaten. The allies are finished, impotent against the Darkness.	The group stands in front of the fallen Spectre, the most powerful of them, and one of the most powerful beings in the DC Universe.
			Constantine asks what the Swamp Thing is doing. Dayton asks him what's the point, but Constantine says that is what he prepared the monster for.	
	Parallelism		Dayton reports Swamp Thing looking at darkness, looking uncertain as the Stranger looks dismayed, and then Swamp Thing enters the creature voluntarily, and is gone.	Swamp Thing looks at the creature and enters it.
		The Darkness, amazed by Swamp Thing's attitude of coming to it without wrath, asks him what does he have to offer, but he just couldn't stand without acting. Then Darkness asks him the purpose of Evil, but Swamp Thing does not know. He tells Darkness that he has failed to make sense out of Evil, the randomness and destructiveness. The best he could figure out, after the Parliament's answer, was that Evil was part of a cycle with Good, where Evil is formed by the deterioration of Virtue, and allowed Virtue to grow stronger. Darkness, then, feeling the approach of an 'end', allows Swamp Thing to leave it freely, which he does.		
	Parallelism	Swamp Thing leaves Darkness. (Since the transition is made visually, both settings are present in the scene at the same		Swamp Thing arrives in Hell. (Since the transition is made visually, both settings are present in the scene at the same time.)

		time.)		
	Parallelism		Dayton tells the others Swamp Thing exited Darkness, and is confused that he looks unharmed. Darkness goes on towards the Light.	The heroes are in the background as Darkness moves out of the panel, distancing itself from them, who are watching.
			Dayton tells Darkness approaches the limit of the region of Light.	
	Parallelism		Dayton reports that Etrigan and the Demons Three are just ambling about, scared by the upcoming event, and that the Spectre is weeping and asking God for forgiveness.	Scenes of Hell showing Etrigan on the foreground, with the back turned to the reader smoking and looking dejected, by his posture, and the Demons Three (now two) carrying their dead brother; the Spectre is lying down with tears in his blank eyes.
			Dayton now looks surprised, as he announces something coming, as big as Darkness, from the place of Lights.	
	Parallelism		Dayton describes how the 'black thing' rises to meet this something, and he can get a better perspective on its form now. As he discerns the true form of the 'shell of bone', he starts to despair in comprehension of the immense scale of the thing he is perceiving.	Darkness rises to meet the newly arrived entity, and the reader can see the form of light emerging (they are fingers) from a shining pattern.
			As Dayton's helmet emits sparks, he looks in pain, throwing back his head with clenched teeth and eyes shut tight, as he realizes (and enunciates) that he knows what the immense form he perceived before looked like, and the towers that engulfed the Spectre. He cries for God, as Dr. Occult tries to calm him down.	
	Parallelism		Dayton continues reporting. Darkness has risen up on the sky, so its form is discernible, and there is something bright reaching down from Heaven towards it.	Seen from above, Swamp Thing's group are looking up, supposedly at the scene described by Dayton in the panel.

			Dayton, with a mad expression in his face (clenched teeth and wide-open eyes), describes how Light and Dark are almost touching, and he fears everything would be destroyed, His helmet continues to spark.	
				The scene shows two hands, one with pointed nails and very detailed with patterns of dry and wet brush, full of shadows and painted in a blue color, surrounded by a bluish aura, and the other without nails and delineated without dark shadows, painted yellow and orange. The background is neutral (grey).
	Parallelism	The three following panels are the fulcrum of the issue, where everything gets together, quite literally: in the first, Dayton describes the hands of Light and Darkness ‘clasping’, flowing and running together and everything ‘swirling and falling’, as a vague background suggests a black and a white hand holding, with a stream of demons falling into it from one side and Dr. Fate, Etrigan and Swamp Thing to the other (representing both sides engaged in battle), all that over Dayton’s eyes; the second panel is black and white, with what appears to be a whirlwind (as judged by the conversion of the lines nearing the limits of the image) with a center reminiscent of a ying-yang shape, all that superseded by Dayton’s comments, specifically that he can see it happen, but it appears to not make sense out of it; the third panel is a close-up of Dayton’s eye, covered by sound effects (so a very loud panel), where the close-up in one of Dayton’s eyes shows what he is seeing: a yin-yang symbol in place of the pupil. The sound effects are that of electricity sparkling atop, and in the bottom Dayton screaming he doesn’t understand (only the final ‘a’ of ‘understand’ turns into a scream superseded by a final electric shortcut happening).		
			Feeling the energy discharged, Constantine’s group ends the session. The close-up in Dayton’s face recedes to a panoramic of the séance, so the reader can appreciate the consequences: the room is a mess, there are two burned bodies on the table and Dayton is apparently maddened by the sight of Darkness, muttering to himself that he has seen its shape. They ponder about their victory, which seems more like a draw to Constantine.	
	Analepsis			In Hell, Deadman wakes

	(the Phantom Stranger explains what had happened graphically before, adding information)			Swamp Thing up and they talk about how the ground disappeared and everyone fell down screaming, but things seemed to have quiet down. The Phantom Stranger appears and they try to make sense of the result of the battle. Stranger informs them that the conflict between Good and Evil was altered, and that the tension between the two forces is gone. Though neither the nature of Evil nor that of Good changed, their relationship is altered to a co-dependence, instead of a conflict. They wonder how things will be from then on.
	Parallelism	In a transition panel, Cain and Abel are still watching the events, as the heroes walk in the background.		The silhouettes of Deadman, Swamp Thing and the Phantom Stranger walk into the sunset, as they suppose things will go on changing.
		Cain and Abel discuss what happened. Cain is relieved that they are still there and Good and Evil still exist, but Abel is distressed with the possible effects their new relationship will have in the stories they keep, because they are all about Evil and Good, Darkness and Light, fighting each other. Cain tells Abel not to worry about it, because they will think of something – and throws Abel over the edge. The narrative ends with Cain walking towards the graveyard with the two houses (the gravestones shown in the panel have the names of the creators).		

Table 15 - Narrative Developments and Time

Immediately noticeable in the story is the constant employment of parallelism, where a scene is narrated by Dayton, who is in the séance, but lived at the same time, iconically, by characters in Hell. When a narrative sidesteps into another setting, keeping with the flow of time, Genette calls it *paralipsis* – but this is a different phenomenon, for rather than the elision of a narrative in order to portray another there are two different concurring settings, being experienced by the reader at the same time – one iconically, through the display of the moment, another one through commentary, or (intradiegetic) narration by a character in the story. Genette’s classification is linked to the idea of *ellipsis*, suggesting that one setting is omitted rather than represented in a different manner. And perhaps it is, for there is no verbal content to the Hell scenes where Dayton’s commentary is present, and there is no iconic content illustrating Dayton’s enunciations, so it is a partial ellipsis – and therefore a paralipsis. However, the idea of a paralipsis that is only partial does not seem fit to describe what happens in the case in point. Parallelism seems a better fit term for the notion of two concurrent settings present in the same panels in different mediums, and more readably understandable. The parallelism in the narrative serves to make it dynamic, as the reader must follow different sets of parallel actions, figuring out how they come together, to collapse the narratives in a synchronic moment, the apotheosis of the plot (the union of Darkness and Light, in the present case).

The structure of the paralipsis is used more pointedly to different effect in the narrative, however, shifting from the different settings as the other is elided. That dynamic is present when the discourse is direct in the panels, lacking narration, and the shifts are generally diachronic, the action in one setting following the point in time where the shift happened. The story plays with this device to effectively present two parallel stories, which happen at the same time in different settings, adding to the complexity of the story without losing consistency. The ellipsis, one might add, also plays a very poignant note in the language of Comics, since the skip from one panel to the next must necessarily be filled by the reader’s mind.

Another point that is interesting to make is the presence of analepsis and prolepsis in the story, both used to the same end – that of guiding the reading of the story. First, we have the dialogue between Cain and Abel, in which Cain explains the magnitude of the confront that is going to happen, mentioning that everything will be changed after it. While it is a poor description of what is to come – and change indeed does happen, though not in the form anticipated by the character – it serves as a foreboding of the battle, and therefore can be

interpreted as a prolepsis. A couple of pages in, Swamp Thing tells Deadman about his doubts, and in doing so he recaps his adventures, very briefly. That re-telling of the story, though, brings with it the interpretation Swamp Thing gave to the adventures, which is important to set the trope of relativization of Evil that is going to make its most important appearance during Swamp Thing's trial. Those anachronies are disguised by the characters' discourse and are narrated and explained, rather than presented directly – but are there nevertheless. Another one worthy of mention is the final dialogue between Swamp Thing, Deadman and the Phantom Stranger, where the Stranger explains what happened really – for the conflict between Good and Evil was presented only graphically by a merging of the two hands and the ying-yang symbol. That explanation is quasi-didactic in nature, a tool for ensuring that the reader understands the message.

4.2.4.2 Duration

The *duration* of a narrative can only be measured by establishing a relationship between its temporal and the spatial dimensions. A good measure for that notion would be that of narrative pace, or rhythm. An *isochronous* narrative, then, is a narrative with a constant pace, a constant equation between the space it occupies and the intradiegetic time. Changes in pace are called *anisochronies*.

Tools that could be used to indicate the narrative rhythm are (here organized by quickness): the already mentioned *ellipsis* (the narrative omits a period of time), the *summary*, which “with great flexibility of pace covers the entire range included between scene and ellipsis” (GENETTE, 1980, p.94); plus *scene* (where a rough equivalency is maintained between narrative and story – such as in dialogue) and descriptive *pause* (no diegetic time passes – as in descriptions).

On that note, a good example of a summary would be Swamp Thing's report to Deadman, on page 5, where it figures as both a summary (because it very quickly retells the entire story arc in light of Swamp Thing's newfound perceptions about Evil), a repetition (because it retells) and an analepsis (because it is a narration of something in the past) – making quite a presence in this section of the work.

The problem found with the method is that, as seen, the intradiegetic universe presented is complex, to say the least, in matters of time. There are no clear markers of the time span of the story, the reader has no idea how long do battles between armies of demons take, and even less of the speed of the advancing Darkness or the space it had to trail. Since

there are parallel plots, then, a look into the séance might help to illuminate the reader on that department, but it doesn't. As seen before, all the reader knows is that the séance took place in one sitting. There is one clock flying in one scene, during the first attack of the creature (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.17, pan.3) displaying the time eight o'clock, AM or PM – it is impossible to tell. On a further scene (p.36, pan3) the clock is displayed again, this time signaling three o'clock, AM or PM. Only it is fallen to the side by the previous attack, and is clearly moved by a pendulum, so it either kept functioning against gravity or its hands were disturbed by the force of the attack. Either way, it is impossible to speculate how long the session took, besides the fact that the séance happened around a table, with seven characters that had to lock hands and could not leave – say, a week before dehydration becomes a threat. Cain and Abel also watch the entire story from a hill – but as far as we know they are immortal, biblical and may have taken their time up there. And that is the best one could do. All those problems rise directly from being consistent with the diegetic universe, not to mention the facts that the house they are in is also special, and not bound by time, and by the suggestion, already mentioned, that time works differently in DC Comics' Hell, as the dialogue between Arcane and Swamp Thing in Hell suggests. All that to say: it's complicated – which is another way of saying that, to this matter, the narrative does not provide an answer, and in a narrative analysis that is an answer in itself.

What is possible is to analyze the pace in the narrative. There are 39 pages in the story (again: adding the completely black page 30, probably employed in a very significant way inside the narrative to fix the final double page, 34-35, where the hands of Good and Evil meet). Inside these pages, there are roughly 215 panels, depending on interpretation (here transition panels, where two settings are present, as when the heroes are expelled from Darkness, are counted as one, and so is the metapanel of page 5). So, an average of 5,5 panels per page. That measure shows a poignant consistency - six panels per page in the majority of the pages, as the table below indicates. Each cell represents a page, and the number inside is the number of panels in the page (the page number is subscripted to the number of panels). Numbers run through (N) are pages in which a panel occupies roughly half the page, and cells with thicker margins represent either double pages (in which the illustration extends beyond the limits of one page and partially or fully occupies a second one – obviously that is mostly, if not exclusively, used in the pages displayed together in the open book, that being the main reason why, we assume, the black page was inserted) or pages with panels occupying roughly the entirety of the page – the black page 30 is stressed in black:

6 ₁	7 ₂	1 ₃	5 ₄	3 ₅	6 ₆	6 ₇	8 ₈	5 ₉	6 ₁₀
3 ₁₁	5 ₁₂	7 ₁₃	5 ₁₄	9 ₁₅	7 ₁₆	6 ₁₇	6 ₁₈	5 ₁₉	6 ₂₀
6 ₂₁	5 ₂₂	10 ₂₃	6 ₂₄	7 ₂₅	2 ₂₆	6 ₂₇	6 ₂₈	5 ₂₉	1 ₃₀
6 ₃₁	6 ₃₂	6 ₃₃	4 ₃₄	4 ₃₅	6 ₃₆	7 ₃₇	5 ₃₈	6 ₃₉	-

Table 16 - Disposition of Panels in the Narrative

So, more than half the pages of the story has six panels on it, and widening the scope to pages of similar disposition (five to seven panels) the number grows to 28 pages, 70% of the pages in the narrative will fall under this limit. If, in order to determine a narrative rhythm to the story, one must understand its normal pace, it is fair to say that this is the normal pace of the story. Outside that scope, and used to rare (and therefore significant effect) are pages with larger or smaller panels, used for different effects inside the narrative. In fact, one can say that large panels are reserved for either significant or visually impressive moments of the narrative, seeing as a larger image requires more time to absorb, and more attention from the reader, while smaller panels are used to create an idea of parallelism or to illustrate a quick exchange, effectively fragmenting the reading into a sense of quick-paced simultaneous action, adding to the feeling of urgency and building the narrative tension. There are four full-page panels in the narrative:



Figure 31 - Full Page Panels (MOORE *et al.*, 1986; p. 2-3, pan.7; p.26, pan.1; p.30; p.34-35, pan.4)

The first instance of a full-page panel happens in a double page spread (2-3), and it brings the first appearance of the protagonist of the story, along with Deadman, all surrounded by demons. The demons are colored in blue tones, variations of magenta and a very desaturated yellow (in the skull-faced demon at Swamp Thing's left), so the bright green of the monster and the bright red of Deadman's suit make them jump to the foreground, capturing the attention of the reader. A slightly low angle makes Swamp Thing look even bigger, and helps capture the brothers fading in the distance, in the background. So, a significant moment where the hero is introduced. The second full page panel (sort of) is that on page 26, where the Spectre stands before Darkness, ready to face it. On the foreground, so

little they are hard to see, are Swamp Thing, Deadman and the Phantom Stranger. That is why, despite having a circular panel superposed (reminiscent of a magnifying glass, in the context of the scene), this work understands it as a whole panel, with a detail amplified. The scene is impressive, and the detail helps to call attention to Deadman at the bottom, which, in turn, makes the reader perceive the scale of the scene. Were this detail not there, the reader might not realize the presence of the group, having been drawn to look so insignificant in the scene. So, a scene that is both visually impressive and significant in the plot, the two greater powers ready to battle. The vanishing point is also low in the scene, somewhere below the Spectre's knee, perhaps leveled with Deadman's face on the larger panel, so the reader has a low vision of the Spectre, which makes him look more visually impressive. After page 30, the fully-black page here included as part of the story (it can also be considered an editorial choice, since it was not present in the original, but the fact that it is necessary for any printing of the story remains), come the large panel composed by the union of panel 4 of page 34 and panel 1 of page 35 – since each has half a page, it is a full page panel – where the hand of Light and the hand of Darkness are shown for the first time, a crucial moment in the plot, seen from a very far distance (again, due to scale and the hands' sizes in the diegesis), what could be called a testimonial shot, but privileging slightly the hand of Darkness, it being closest to the foreground. The panel is the apex of the narrative tension of the story, the point where, to misquote Cain, the elemental forces involved are about to fight their definitive battle, changing the entire Universe thereon. Again, a slightly significant point of the plot, and also visually impressive – more so due to the fact that the reader has tried, with the other characters, to devise the shape of Darkness from the beginning of the narrative. As for the other significantly large panels, there are about seven panels in the narrative to occupy roughly half a page:



Figure 32 Large Panels (MOORE *et al.*, 1986: p.4, pan.3; p.5 pan.2; p.11 pan. 1 and 3; p.19 pan. 5; p.29 pan.1; p.38 pan.5; p.39 pan.6)

As seen in the previous section, the third panel on page 4 is one of the few establishing shots in the issue, showing not only a demon ready for battle, but also an army of demons in the background. It helps set the mood for the upcoming battle – which is a good thing, since

the battle itself happens mostly out of the panels. The next page brings the metapanel that will be studied in further detail in the next chapter: the panel itself holds an important key to the interpretation of the story, for it allows the reader a glimpse into Swamp Thing's mindset about their adventure and the road so far. Page 11, also discussed before in detail, is an impressive scene, divided into two distinct panels (1 and 3), showing both sides engaging in battle. The fifth panel of page 19 has an impressive scene of battle, one of the few, where Dr. Fate attacks the enemy legions. The first panel of page 29 shows the fallen Spectre, with the heroes contemplating him, a moment of despair, when the supposedly most powerful among them has fallen. Finally, the fifth panel of page 38 brings the conclusion of the story, with the heroes walking towards the sunset, and the last panel of the issue (p.39, pan.6) is a characteristic note of black humor, indicating that things go back to their normal, for just as Cain keeps killing Abel, so the stories, too, shall continue. A moment of (murderous) levity that is characteristic of Moore's works.

That is not to say that there are no instances of large images in the page, sometimes dwarfing the ones in larger panels in scale. There are relatively many cases like this: Wintergate Manor (p.6, pan.1); Dayton's head and Etrigan impaling a scorpion-like creature, both on page 7 (pan.5 and 6); Darkness starting to move (p.12, pan.5); Etrigan during battle (p.14, pan.2); the arrival of the Spectre (p.25, pan.7) – and those are some examples. Those are cases in which large images are squeezed out in pages, so as to still look big and visually impressive, carrying narrative weight because they demand a little more time to visually apprehend, but they share a relatively smaller space in the page. That is to say: there are many variables in understanding the narrative pace, but larger images, as mentioned, due to calling attention to themselves by their sheer size, are equivalent to a narrative pause, where the eyes of the reader linger. In the present issue, what these scenes have in common is that they are either important for the narrative or visually impressive, and therefore add to the dynamic form of the medium. So it is fair to understand that the size of the images is also employed to mark the narrative pace and give the reader hints of the important elements of the plot, as well as adding a more dynamic feel to the narrative (say, for instance, depicting an impressive scene of a battle that is barely taking place in the panels).

Similarly, one can find regularity in the employment of smaller panels. Notable for that use are pages 8, 15 and 23, containing 8, 9 and 10 panels, respectively:



Figure 33 - Small Panels in Dense Pages (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.08,15 and 23)

The exchange in page 8 is interesting, for the five panels in the head of the page illustrate an exchange between Etrigan and the rhymist Lisquinelle, in which the latter observes how strange it is that demons and angels fight together, and Etrigan answers that, as demons, they also serve a higher purpose and have a place in the universe, so they should oppose the upcoming Darkness. Despite the philosophical nature of the exchange and the fact that, action-wise, there is very little happening in the scene, the images struggle to give the scene emotional weight by, with a close-up in Etrigan's inhuman eye, now adorned with a demonic starfish, and the gesture of holding a scorpion-like creature over his head to, the next panel, dramatically smash it against his horns, as he screams his name. What this caesura does is to slow down the reading time by giving extra images and details for the reader to decode, along with relatively shorter verbal chunks, so what could have been said in a single huge and verbose panel is divided into many, slower, smaller ones, which adds to the scene importance and weight not only because of the space it takes (and, as seen above, space is reserved for important or impressive scenes) but also because it purposefully slows down the reading for the sake of narrative tension, all in order to deliver the relatively poor (in a manner of speaking, due to the context of the story) pay-off of the squelching of the scorpion, impressive as the image may be. The narrative then goes back to a more consistently rushed pace (proper of the medium and more consistent with the rest of the story, three panels per half a page), as the demons walk through corridors and down stairs, chatting, exchanging quick versed jabs at each other – which do not cover in any significant way the length of time needed to walk through a flaming corridor, down stairs and mounting strange beasts, but rather work as background chatter as the images tell the story of their progress more effectively. That is to say, images and words do work together to convey an idea of the passage of time and actions

performed, but are not always necessarily consistent with each other, rather to be understood as, both, illustrations of the story. A good example of that is the exchange between the rhymers in page 14, where not only the struck demon has time to utter verses while being killed (pan.4), but also Etrigan spouts a full stanza about arterial spray while splitting the head of a demon enemy with his sword (pan.3).

On page 15, similarly, the caesura of the action works to slow down the reading, as the central, larger panels are sided with smaller panels superposed in each side, which either comment what is happening in the ‘main’ scene of the page or guide Dayton on his approach to the scene he is describing (specifically, not to contact Darkness fully and not to lose focus when Etrigan gets enveloped, their minds being linked) – so in a sense, the page is fully about the larger panels, but there is a very rigid sense of organization to it. The small panels (all of them headshots focused on the determined expressions on the part of the mystic characters and Dayton’s reactions) on the right side of the page, in a column, are the mystical characters orienting Dayton; the large panels in the center are the action happening, with Dayton’s description and comments; the small panels in the left side are all of Dayton, reacting to the scene. So, there is a consistency to the presentation, where the action is prefaced by the suggestion of an action, which in itself comments the panel, then the action happens and Dayton reacts to it:

Small Panels in the Right	Large Central Panels	Small Panels in the Left
Panel 1: Constantine tells Dayton to direct their power towards Etrigan	Panel 2: Etrigan is attacking, with Darkness in the first plane. Dayton starts to focus on Darkness	Panel 3: Dayton taps into Darkness’ mind, and feels its hunger for knowledge.
Panel 4: Zatanna warns Dayton not to make full contact and concentrate on Etrigan.	Panel 5: Etrigan is physically fighting Darkness, but is starting to be absorbed into it.	Panel 6: Dayton feels Etrigan drowning and the cold inside Darkness, and starts to lose focus.
Panel 7: Baron Winter calls Dayton’s attention to the task at hand, and urges him to focus on Etrigan.	Panel 8: Etrigan is still struggling, but is being swallowed by Darkness. Dayton says he thinks he can get out.	Panel 9: Dayton loses contact with Etrigan.

Table 17 - Page 15, Panel Scheme.

Bearing in mind that the action in the large panels largely speak for themselves, perfectly understandable without the interventions of the small panels, one must assume that there is a utility to them other than furthering the plot – in fact they are antithetic to expediency, they delay the action with preface and reaction. What this does is once more to

add dramatic weight to a scene that, action-wise, would be relatively brief, little more than a couple of seconds (since Etrigan's mount is in full gallop and only some two meters away from Darkness and is immediately swallowed, which can be taken from the fifth panel, where the mount is engulfed by the side, seemingly interrupting Etrigan's attack). This extension does not only augments the space taken by the action, but also serves to provide Dayton's amazement and fear, and lend the emotional intensity of a human confronting unimaginable situations, as well as the mystics' interactions, with their grounded attitude and expedient commands to Dayton, which help to add to the scene the notion of a high stakes battle actually happening, in opposition to a crazed rampage of a gaudy yellow demon attacking an indistinct black pudding and being swallowed by it. To that, the large panels add the horrified facial expression of the demon being swallowed, last panel (pan.8) of a progressive close-up – which is a strange choice, to make the reader close to the berserk, treacherous demon. But it works, the reader can read the horrified expression and, to a degree, feel through Dayton the profound cold and emptiness that the demons are swallowed into. So, the narrative once again slows down in order to raise the narrative stakes and add dramaticity and tension to the story.

Page 23 is interestingly symmetrical, with wide panels displaying parallel images of holding hands on the top and the bottom of the page, and they serve to frame the rest of the panels, which show the faces of integrants of the séance – thus reinforcing the idea that they are locked together in their deadly enterprise with no means of escape, the burnt hand of Sargon on the top a reminder of what may happen at any time. In the middle of the page, framed by the locked hands are eight panels, very similar to one another in size, proportion, angle, composition, color palette, everything – they are headshots. The varying element is the face portrayed (the character), their expression and their utterances. With so little to understand in the reading of the images, despite the chunks of dialogue – which are not long, topping in 21 words with Dayton in panel 6 but relatively less in average (about 14 words per panel, pending on how one considers the stuttering and the meaningless interjections) – the effect achieved is that of a very quick interaction, quasi-simultaneous utterances in an action-heavy sequence. So, despite the rigid composition of the page, the numerous panels in tight sequence, all in the same setting with little variation of content, just a different character with an expression and a quick utterance, serve to give the reading of the sequence an idea of synchronicity, as if all events depicted in the eight panels happen at the same time. That is a significantly different use of caesura than the previous ones, which are employed to slow down the reading in order to add narrative tension – this time, the breaking of the narrative in

smaller panels, mainly due to their unity of content, is used to speed the action, effectively creating a meta-moment where all events displayed in the page are happening at the same time, speeding the reading.

4.2.4.3 Frequency

Frequency is concerned with repetition in the narrative. For Genette, there are four ways this repetition can happen:

Narrating once what happened once and narrating n times what happens n times. Genette calls those *singulative* narratives (determined by the equality of the number of happenings and narrations).

Narrating n times what happens once – say, through different points of view.

Narrating one time what happened n times. These structures, where a singular narration (usually with a formulation such as “every day” of “that week”) is used to account for repeated events, Genette calls *iterative*.

Interactions can be, themselves, *external (generalizing)* or *internal (synthesizing)*. *External* interactions deal with longer periods of time, surpassing the scene they are inserted into, while *internal* interactions deal with the period of time of the scene itself. There are also the *pseudo-iterative* scenes, which are scenes in which the author relates an interactive scene with too many detail for the reader to believe the repetition, thus breaking the contract (GENETTE, 1980, p.121).

Regarding the narrative at hand, there are many small repetitions in the narrative, where the action is, say, portrayed in one panel and mentioned later on. That is the case, for instance, of page 22, where Deadman rescues Dr. Fate, discarded by Darkness, and Swamp Thing (unnecessarily) narrates the scene to the Phantom Stranger on the following panel:



Figure 34- Repeated Narration (MOORE *et al.*, p.22, pan.1-2 - detail)

The monster's words do not add anything of significance to the plot, except for mirroring the reader's doubt and adding the inconsistency of Fate still being in Darkness' path after being thrown out – no point discarding him alive exactly where it was about to step, so to say. So, the information is repeated, though its repetition is irrelevant to the plot – but it serves to demonstrate an important feature of iconographic narratives, which is the possibility of narrating the same fact through two different mediums. And that quickly becomes relevant when we think about all the scenes showing parallelism in the narrative, the instances where Dayton is narrating to the séance members what is happening on the other plane while the reader can see what is being described, complemented with Dayton's impressions. That feature is recidive in the narrative, and consistently used to add to the narrative tension both through expansion and through Dayton's amazement, as seen before.

Other instance where repetition appears significantly is in the metapanel of page 5, already commented here, where Swamp Thing tells Deadman what he has been through in the *American Gothic* story arc, but in his own words, effectively re-interpreting the story in light of his perceptions for the enlightenment of the reader. It is, therefore, fair to say that repetition, in the issue, has two main purposes: that of adding to the narrative tension of the story, by making the repeated facts more significant both through the repetition (which increases the real state of the narrated scene in terms of space, and, as we have seen, space is a significant mark of a scene's importance to the narrative) and through added information, frequently with high emotional content, mainly from Dayton's perceptions, but also to orient the reading in other ways, such as in the page 5 metapanel.

Another interesting use of repetition, though it can be considered so only through analogy, is the sequence of what we refer to in this study as the heroes' trials. Because of their unique appearance (with full-black panels, featuring only the characters, floating about, in very dark cold colors) and their consistency (wherein an engulfed hero is asked a question, responds, and has the answer judged either to be rejected or accepted, then is either discarded or sent away), it is unavoidable to understand them as linked events. It is, indeed, a feature of popular tales and myths that, seen, Propp calls trebling (PROPP, 1984, p.74) and Lévi-Strauss refers to as repetition, in this case quadruplication (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963, p.229) – a function that is repeated in the narrative. Propp attributes to trebling the narrative function of delaying the outcome of the narrative, and Lévi-Strauss considers the repetition of structures fundamental in the process of recognition of the mythic structure, but it is fair to say that, in

this narrative, what this particular repetition does is create a mounting tension to the outcome of the trials, where progressively powerful characters are tested and fail, to then be supplanted by Swamp Thing. That legitimizes his heroic role – and happily it does so, for it is his only apparent contribution to the battle. So, not a repetition, strictly speaking, in Genette’s terms, for it is not the very same event that is repeated – but an undeniable repetition in terms of story structure, and so worthy of mention.

4.2.5 Narration

As Herman and Vervaeck point out, regarding level and involvement of the narrator (2005, p.85), there are six types of narrator: 1) the *extradiegetic and heterodiegetic* narrator, not narrated by another agent and dealing with things it did not experience; 2) the *extradiegetic and autodiegetic* narrator, standing above the events narrated, though it experienced them as the central character; 3) the *extradiegetic and allodiegetic* narrator, with is not narrated by another agent but is merely a witness of the event narrated; 4) the *intradiegetic and heterodiegetic* narrator, who is part of the narrative as a character but narrates things it did not experience; 5) the *intradiegetic and autodiegetic* narrator, a character narrating thing experienced directly; 6) the *intradiegetic and allodiegetic* narrator, a character narrating things it merely witnessed.

In Comics, however, there is a specific problem that the interesting theme of the limitations of the narrator – notion that led Mieke Bal to propose the idea of incorporating the problem of focalization as one of the basic structures in the analysis of narratives, because of the importance of recognizing the layers of significance that can be impressed by a partial, a limited or an untrustworthy narrator – poses a couple of problems. First, if the narrator’s voice, its viewpoint and limitations, are to be recognized, a narrator that is telling a graphic story would not be seen on the page – such are the workings of vision that the one viewing does not view itself. Yes, this problem is even more crucial when determining focalization in comics, specifically internal focalization, but it is also significant here in order to point a problem arisen from the iconic nature of the medium: practically every comic, even those narrated in the first person, in which the narrating character appears on the pages (other than through mirrors or reflections) is bound to be considered to have an extradiegetic narrator, a voice organizing the panels and the images, choosing the angles, the stylistic choices, etc.²⁸

²⁸ Granted, there are exceptions to the norm, and some comics strictly follow the first-person view – and that is the main reason why the word ‘practically’ has been chosen: there are exceptions, but they are usually so rare as

Therefore, the notion of an intradiegetic narration would remain largely theoretical in comics, precisely the problem that led Kai Mikkonen to expand on the notion of internal focalization in his article (2012, p.71).

To tackle that problem, as already mentioned, this work will adopt the structures of the *meganarrator*, the *reciter* and the *monstrator*, in place of *narrator*, so that specific features of the complex blending of voices that is a comic book can be more clearly brought to the attention of the reader, such as the notion of style in representation, the difference between the iconic and the verbal in a comic and the many possibilities of the interaction between those aspects.

4.2.5.1 Meganarrator

The meganarrator is the narrative structure that rules the interaction between the iconic aspect (monstrator) and the verbal aspect (reciter) of a comic's text. It is a voice, unmentioned and unnamed, that gives very little hint of its presence, but nevertheless hovers over the events, organizing their presentation. As such, it could be considered an extradiegetic, heterodiegetic, narrator whose main occupation would be regulating the other narrating instances in the text.

As such, it is interesting to try to analyze the different narrative voices involved in the development of the action, mediating the events, so to say. There is, as indicated, the outside voice of the meganarrator, which is, as the sum of two very versatile presences (monstrator and recite), itself versatile, and knowledgeable in the resources of the medium and the literary tradition: the alternation of voices and the superposition of direct and mediated narratives (prominently in the sections in which Dayton enacts his narrating role), along details like the presence of Cain and Abel, opening and closing the story, as they did in their original titles, indicate knowledge about both the tradition and history of the medium, and the knowledge of the medium's resources and devices, at least enough to coalesce the different voices and instances into a coherent narrative. Multiple references to the literary tradition also make themselves noted, pointedly in the language of the characters of Swamp Thing and Etrigan,

to prove the norm. A very notable work in this small pool of rebels is, coincidentally or not, a story featuring John Constantine, in issue #120 of *Hellblazer* (1997), of which Constantine is the main character: page after page of the first-person impressions of an unnamed intradiegetic (allodiegetic or autodiegetic is debatable, because the narrator is a somewhat passive witness to what happens, but also invited by Constantine and its presence elicits stories from other characters) narrator – but the illusion is broken by text boxes now and then, and the action dives into the display of other characters' narrated memories briefly before returning to the first-person view... whether or not these are attributable to the imagination of the character listening to the stories or the one telling them is up to the reader.

both speaking in poetry, but also in the structure of the text, as already pointed out, due to the similarities to the hero's journey, along with the trebling that makes it even more recognizable. The meganarrator has a very poignant sense of humor, transparent in its employment of the resources of exaggeration and symbolism in style, the instances of dark and violent humor, cartoonish at times, the more than occasional puns, and the quasi-farcical resolution of the conflict. But, oddly, at the same time, the meganarrator's 'voice' comes out as quite strict, maintaining a strong grip on the reading of the story itself, full of devices placed with the intent of guiding the reader towards the desired conclusion, as we will see in the next pages. It is a playful guide, with a dark sense of humor, who uses (very knowledgeably) every possible resource, both literary and of the comics' tradition, in order to lead the reader through the desired path, hiding the farcical nature of the plot in a classical form, in order to reach the almost comical pay-off of the story. And then spend a couple of pages marveling at how all the tension, carefully built through focalization and framing by other narrative voices, all reinforcing the importance and magnificence and oddity of the story, is suddenly gone – and, despite all the professed high stakes, not much has changed.

In that regard, the meganarrator comes off like a voice full of authority and knowledge, with its tongue firmly lodged on its cheek, putting all its resources to the service of a joke – albeit one with an underlying philosophical proposition. Now, it is important to bear in mind that this is not to say that the voice is inappropriate or unfit for the narrative in question. In fact, it is very effective in heightening the stakes and the tension enough to keep the reader invested, and to guide the logical development of the plot through the character of Swamp Thing (as well as with the parallel with the hero's journey) in order to make it understandable and believable – despite the many flaws with the mysterious 'plan' by Constantine and the leap of interpretation with Swamp Thing's own assessment of his adventures in the arc so far, whereas he had not consistently associated his oppositors directly with Evil before *Swamp Thing #47* (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.17, pan.4), but rather with hidden aspects of moral and society – as an American Gothic consistent title would. So, it is the framing by Swamp Thing, guiding the reader in this particular interpretation, that makes the plot logically consistent, although the shift in tone can be perfectly noticed by the more attentive reader.

Since the juggling of other narrative voices is one of the prerogatives of the meganarrator, and in this story particularly relevant, it is interesting to pay a little attention to other voices found within the text, their characteristics and how they change the reading of the

story. There are mainly three significant narrative instances within the text, other than the meganarrator itself: Cain and Abel, the brothers who frame the story in the beginning and in the end, both presenting and interpreting the consequences of what happened; Swamp Thing, in his assessment of his previous adventures in the *American Gothic* arc, which he narrates to Deadman and is very important for the reader to understand his state of mind, and therefore his answer to Darkness, a crucial point in the plot; and, finally, Steve Dayton (Mento), who narrates what is going on in Hell to those present in the séance, and is industrious in maintaining the narrative tension by adding emotional content to the battle in Hell with his personal, inexperienced, take on the events:

Relevant Narrative Voices Within the Text	
Cain and Abel	Intradiegetic and (supposedly) allodiegetic narrators, they are used to frame the story, in the beginning, telling each other (and therefore the reader) about what is happening and how big are the stakes. That is done to maximize the tension linked to the adventure and heighten the emotional content. Then, at the end, they close the story by commenting about what happened, and how, despite the changed relation between Good and Evil, the stories they guard, or care to, will probably not change very much, and lighten the mood further by paying the whole adventure off with a joke, belonging in a cartoon, where Cain throws Abel down a precipice. The exaggerated nature of the brothers also helps to frame the story as a farce, seen over and interpreted by an ironic and hyperbolic duo. They infect the story with their own characteristics, so to say, just by framing it. And that is their purpose in the narrative – along with a reference to the old sister magazines, where the titular character first appeared and where, similarly to what happens in this story, their main activity was presenting stories and talking about them when their narrative was concluded.
Swamp Thing	Swamp Thing is a tough cookie to crumble, narratively. Intradiegetic and autodiegetic (because he is inside the diegesis and narrates something that happened to him), as he is telling the story to Deadman (what is called <i>mise en abyme</i> , a story inside a story, yet another wave at the common complexities of Literary tradition inserted into the narrative) he could be considered extradiegetic to the story he tells, while remaining autodiegetic. But this is just a playful curiosity, since narratively he is two levels below the meganarrator (if one reads the story as also framed by Cain and Abel, which this work does, while recognizing it is a matter of interpretation). What he does, as an intradiegetic autodiegetic narrator, is to tell Deadman why he is troubled, by presenting a very summarized assessment of the story arc, and how his multiple contacts with what was called Evil were arbitrary or subject to interpretation, and that this was disturbing to him, who was still trying to find answers to the problem of Evil. What this does, in the narrative, is to provide the reader with an interpretation of his adventures in the story arc in terms of the nature and relativity of Evil, and how this relativization had not been solved up to that point. His narrative, in his characteristic style, is full of scansion and has a very deep, very poetic feeling to it, as will be noted below, and that preciousness of language lends substance to his words. In his discourse, the vampires are a community, the curse of the werewolf was a gender struggle, the slave undead a result of race conflicts, all about “tormentors and tormented... locked into a dismal circle... of pain and retribution” (MOORE <i>et al.</i> , 1986, p.5, par.2), so without clearly defending each side. This is a necessary step for the meganarrator to push this notion forward in Swamp Thing’s answer, so it works as a narrative device to establish this theme,

	that will be paid off in the hero's trial. A guidance from the strict conductor of this piece, to keep readers in the path and the story coherent.
Dayton (Mento)	Finally, the somewhat tragic character of Steve Dayton. Or, when going by his superhero <i>alias</i> , Mento. Significantly, as the narrative study developed (a trivial commentary for which I ask to be excused), as I got more familiarized with the character's history and background, going deeper into his role in the narrative, it got progressively harder to call him by his superhero name. Originally, the idea was to call Dayton Mento when he was wearing his helmet, since that is his main tool as a superhero, but the plan proved inconsistent: Dayton has very little superhero-like in the story, even if wearing the device that gives him superpowers. He is, on the contrary, the human counterpoint to the universe of magic portrayed in the story, and that is precisely the reason why his viewpoint is both important and precious to the story. Intradiegetic and allodiegetic, Dayton reports what he 'sees' in the 'other side', in Hell. The very abundant need for quotes when dealing with these supernatural realms, which have no clear limits or rules, particularly in a superhero comics universe (mainly an aggregate of several characters, each starting in a different title and probably with slightly different rules for their magical exploits). Dayton is, therefore, the outsider to the magical rules, capable of amazement and impressionable, that will at times inform the séance members (and the reader) about the events happening in Hell, bringing along with them his own impressions – which may seem exaggerated at times, but their goal in the narrative is to entice the reader and raise the tension in the story, so that is appropriate.

Table 18 - Intradiegetic Narrators

With so many interior voices, it is quite clear that the meganarrator works very hard to stop the reader from deviating from the narrative path. The reader's involvement, however, is assured by the expert placing of narrative tension, where the shift to the next page is prominently encouraged by the promise of either a revelation or an impressive action or image – sometimes just an indication that something significant is about to happen. Simply put, the emotional stakes are raised to be payed off on the next page, ensuring the reader's attention. Bearing in mind that not every page shift is a page turned – usually there is the first page of the story, then followed by pairs of even-and-odd pages, sometimes used as a whole, through composition or an image extrapolating the limits of one page, sometimes used as distinct units, each with its set of panels and common reading order – the technique is quite well-known and widely used in the industry. In “The End”, this is significantly true:

The first page of the story ends with Cain telling that something unexpected is coming, and when they present the problem and start witnessing the battle, page 3 finishes with the first appearance of Swamp Thing; page 5 ends Swamp Thing's memories, as he is feeling abandoned and lost in his quest for Evil; page 7 ends in a dramatic close-up of Etrigan's animalistic face, impaling a scorpion in his armor as he smiles; in the end of page 9, a demon is screaming about the arrival of 'lights', that is, the angels that come with the Phantom Stranger; page 11 is a huge presentation of demons, two sides in an impasse, waiting for something, supposedly ahead; page 13 ends as Etrigan is charging towards Darkness; and

page 15 as he is swallowed by it (with Mento's comment); the end of page 17 is the horrified face of Sargon, realizing he is starting to burn and starting to despair; in the end of page 19 Fate attacks the opposing army; the end of page 21 is Fate being expelled from Darkness, and the end of page 23 is when Zatara starts to smolder in place of Zatanna, as she implores for him to take the spell back; the end of page 25 is the arrival of the Spectre, and in the last panel of page 27 the fingers of Darkness close around him; page 19 ends with Swamp Thing entering Darkness voluntarily, and page 31 ends in a panel where Swamp Thing announces that he has comments to make about Evil, despite confessing not to understand the concept; in the end of page 33 the first clear glimpse of Darkness' form is seen, as it rises in the air, and the end of page 35 is the apex of the story, as the connection with Hell is ended as the merging of Good and Evil push Mento's helmet into a short-circuit – the panel shows Dayton's eye with a yin-yang symbol in the pupil, surrounded by electric noises and Dayton's scream. In this point, the narrative tension also seems to be relieved, and page 37 ends in a panoramic scene, with Deadman, Swamp Thing and the Phantom Stranger in the background commenting the battle, showing flowers growing in Hell's soil as the foreground. Page 39 pays off the final joke, with Cain leaving the cliff side to go home, with a comically relaxed posture, apparently oblivious to the fact that he just murdered his brother (again).

So, the meganarrator orients the pace of the narrative through narrative or emotional tension, by carefully placing crucial moments in the final panels of the pages, so as to entice the reader to close up the physical gap between pages. Another resource in which the text is quite rich, and which I have mentioned before, also in the section on the meganarrator, in my previous analysis of *Watchmen* (VIDAL, 2014, p.273-279), concerning the use of synchronicity to ease the shift in the transitions between scenes, as per Moore's own admission in his article turned book, *Writing for Comics* (2003) – originally written in 1985, as the writer was active in both *Watchmen* and *Swamp Thing*, among other titles:

(...) the reader should not wake up until you want them to, and the transitions between scenes are the weak points in the spell that you are attempting to cast over them. (...) One thing I tend to do which eases the transition and is sometimes all that is needed to accomplish a good transition is to write in basic units of a single page, so that the reader's action in turning the page becomes the beat in which I change scene without disturbing the rhythm of the story. Another approach to vary the "overlapping dialogue" technique and use a synchronicity of image rather than words, or even just a coincidental linkage of vague abstract ideas. (...) The transition doesn't always have to be smooth. If you're skillful enough you can sometimes manage a very abrupt transition with such style that no one will notice any break in flow until the moment has passed and they are safely absorbed in the text scene within the story. (MOORE, 2003, p.17)

As in *Watchmen* (1986), transitions are significant in “The End” – fortunately, the narrative itself teaches the reader what to wait for when entering the comic: since the reader starts the story at the bottom of a well, through Abel’s eyes, and then the field of vision recoils from the brothers, leaving them in the distance as Swamp Thing, Deadman and an assortment of demons take over the foreground (shift from page 2 to page 3), this is telling of a quite sophisticated narrative pattern, while the presence of the brothers in the last panel ‘softens’ the shift. That prepares the reader for the transition into Swamp Thing’s memories, in page 5, where his face, lighted in a way so as to be covered in shadows on one side, gives place to images of his adventures and of Constantine, all floating in the shadow spanning from his head (mind). At the bottom of the page, Swamp Thing is still narrating, the verbal element keeps the scene consistent as the third-person point of view once again takes over. The scene shifts abruptly to Wintersgate Manor, where the séance is starting, but as Dayton starts to probe into Hell there is a panel (p.7, pan.2) where his head is superposed to the image on the other plane (so, a scene with both places at the same time), which makes the transition to Hell expected and easy – and as his narration gives way to the direct third-person view of the scene in Hell, much more so, since images of the other setting were already being displayed under Dayton’s narration. This device is reoccurring in the story, and Dayton’s narration is frequently a cue to the transitions in the issue. So, the meganarrator is ready to transition abruptly or smoothly, depending on the demands of the scene.

The narration, then, is painfully aware of the multitude of resources offered by the medium, and deploys them very aptly both to involve and distance the reader (as we will see later, particularly in the analysis of the monstrator and its approach to the characters). The weaving of this net of narrative stances is crucial in giving the reader the necessary involvement to carry the reading to term, thus fulfilling the contract with the reader – which sometimes is threatened by aspects such as the flimsy nature of the plot, a battle between Good and Evil, and the apparent lack of consistency between whatever Constantine’s plan might have been and his previous actions in the arc.

4.2.5.2 *Monstrator*

The monstrator is the narrating stance responsible for the visual elements of a comic. As such, it is comprised of the images, their angles, their disposition in the pages, as well as the iconic elements that interact with the text, such as the form of the onomatopoeias and other forms of inset elements – the names of the creators in the graves, at the end of the

stories, is an example of inset text, part of the images themselves, which denote a playful and irreverent narrative voice. As Douglas Wolk notes in *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What they Mean* (2011), there are other elements in the monstrator to be taken into account when reading a comic, mainly related to the representational nature of images:

When you look at a comic book, you're not seeing either the world or a direct representation of the world; what you are seeing is an interpretation or transformation of the world, with aspects that are exaggerated, adapted, or invented. It's not just unreal, it's deliberately constructed by a specific person or people. (...) I don't think comics *require* metaphors to be built into their structure, other than one very basic one: cartooning is, inescapably, a metaphor for the subjectivity of perception. No two people experience the world the same way; no two cartoonists draw it the same way, and the way they draw it is the closest a reader can come to experiencing it through their eyes. (WOLK, 2011, p. 20-21).

Wolk sees the style as a metaphor – the world filtered through an artist's impression. This approach succeeds in taking into consideration the many choices implicated in each image (angle and framing, style, light, etc.), every one personal and reflective of an uncanny world view. That is to say that the notion of style is a necessary step in analyzing a comic, because it denotes particularities of the monstrator as a narrative voice.

To that end, this work will take advantage of the syncretic nature of the works of Will Eisner, the seminal *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985), and Scott McCloud, with his two books on the form *Understanding Comics* (1993) and *Making Comics* (2006). These are, I think, largely successful in achieving a methodical, enriching view of their subject matter, up to the point of allowing an acute analysis of the graphic properties of the medium of Comics. Since McCloud's works are confessedly inspired by Eisner's – *Understanding Comics* is in fact dedicated to him personally – to the point of admitting the possibility of being a larger development, they are the focus of this analysis, being also the ones where the basis of a fuller theory of the analysis of style in Comics is briefly presented. Though the books have many severe structural flaws in the theories they present, mainly in their methodological approach (or lack thereof), maybe due to both Eisner and McCloud lacking an academic background, they are able to present a theory (because they are complementary and essentially the same) that is both logical, practical, concise and richly illustrated in their books, and therefore able to be understood without a background in the Philosophy of Art or a more extensive knowledge of Art History. This brief approach, mainly derived from practice (both Eisner and McCloud were comics creators) is precisely what is needed for allowing the reader to follow the process of the critical assessment and/or addressing the subject in settings where a

working knowledge of the possibilities of style must be achieved without the luxury of spending a lot of time in directed readings – such as a classroom, for instance. All that to say that this work is painstakingly aware of the flaws in some of the arguments presented in the books: McCloud's attempt to define comics is nothing short of disastrous, his classification of shifts between panels is confusing and largely based on personal interpretation, while Eisner's concern is not to present evidence of his claims, but to present the reader with practical notions. On the other hand, this work is also able to see their significant advances towards the issue at matter: while Eisner is one of the first authors to deem the medium worthy of serious research (and also considered by some one of the creators of the Graphic Novel), McCloud has developed his study into a reasoned methodological approach, very rich in terms of exposing and exemplifying the medium's resources. For instance, Eisner provides the very insightful notions of *bird's view* (an image presented from an advantage point above, making it seem small and inconsequential) and *worm's view* (an image presented from below, making it seem significant and intense) and the *splash page* (a page of introduction to the narrative, to set the mood, usually very impressive visually) in his book as well (EISNER, 1985, pages 90 and 62, respectively), among many others. McCloud, while considering the difference between Comics and Manga, gets to an interesting conclusion that suggests that Manga, besides focusing more on world building and atmosphere, through the display of different aspects of a scene in order to set the mood of scenes, also makes a very poignant use of realism in opposition to simplification in order to respectively distance and involve the reader (MCLOUD, 1993, p.80-82 and p.42-44, respectively). But those are only examples to show that their works are very broad, addressing a wide range of subjects, such as pacing and decomposition of action in panels, and time, movement and sound as displayed iconically. Despite all this richness, this section of the work addresses mainly their exploits regarding the notion of style. The reason for that choice is that the notion of a style putting forth a narrative voice is relevant to the notion of the iconic narration, but other aspects of their production will also be noted, if and when clarification is necessary. Once again, a more detailed commented review of the books can be found in my previous work (VIDAL, 2014, 74-117), and the works themselves are widely available, in print for a number of years and reasonably well-known by those with interest in the medium. The selection of the sections presented below is intended to highlight the main topics discussed regarding style, mainly in regards to McCloud's production, and are fruit of further research on the matter.

McCloud has three key concepts in his theory: the notions of *icon*, the notion of *cartoon*, and the notion of *closure*. These three concepts are the base of his idea of the triangle of style, or a method developed to make a classification of the different styles found in comics' art. They are based on the notion, taken from Eisner, that, historically, language developed from the pictorial representation of the world into a system in which the link between the symbols and their representation became a matter of convention, where the icon no longer bore a visual similarity to that it referred to. That is what McCloud calls *icon*. For him, there are two different sets of icons, pictorial and non-pictorial:



Figure 35 - Icons (MCCLLOUD, 1993, p.28, pan.1-2; p.30, pan.1)

As the image above indicates, despite the fact that non-pictorial icons may be represented in a varied sort of ways, their meaning is usually fixed, while the pictorial icons, due to their representational nature, may approach their subject in different manners. While McCloud mentions only the degree of realism in the images, the implications of the idea go far deeper – that is, the idea that the representation itself is in accordance to the creator's aesthetic and capabilities, and therefore can be read as an interpretation of the world, rather than mere representation. Moreover, McCloud notes that the omission of details in the simplified approach represented by the cartoon also enhances, so to say, the elements left in the icon. Undressed to a more essential estate, with less lines, the images become more generalizing – and, by extension, more promptly acquired in the process of reading. Therefore, as it is progressively simplified, a face loses all distinct characteristics and becomes only that – a face, not particular in any significant way, not the face of a person, but more akin to the graphic representation of the idea of a face, a simplification referred to by McCloud as *cartoon* (MCCLLOUD, 1993, p.29, pan.3). For the author, the simplification is intimately related to the way humans see the world around them, not paying attention to every detail, but rather focusing on key information:

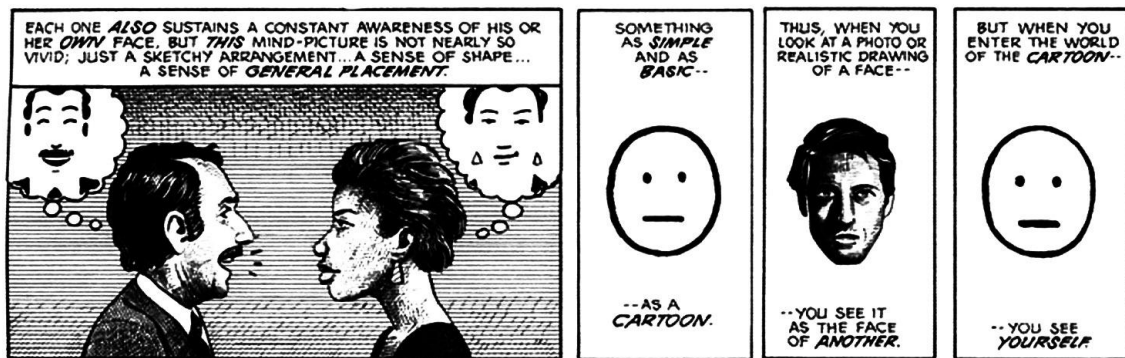


Figure 36- Simplification and Identification (MCCLLOUD, 1993, p.36, pan.1-4)

The result of a simplified approach, then, is the greater involvement of the reader, who is able to understand the essence of the image presented without the complications of the real world – and, by contrast, a more realistic approach alienates the reader because it is more specific. That is not to say that a realistic style is less effective a way of representation than cartooning – it rather depends on the objective of the representation. Portraiture, for instance, is an art form based on realism because the objective is to registrar a particular, specific human face. Caricature distances itself from realism, reducing the forms to exaggerated simplifications for humoristic purposes. Cartooning deals with the general, it is universal rather than specific.

The means through which humans can understand imperfect or simplified representations is what McCloud calls *closure*, a way of mentally completing vacancies in order to see the relation between the representation and the represented:



Figure 37 - Closure (MCCLLOUD, 1993, p.64, pan.1 and 3)

With that notion at hand, McCloud develops a way of understanding the peculiarities of a given style through his notion of the opposition between reality and the world of language and ideas (to where the simplification points, as the more simplified an image the more abstract it becomes, until it turns into pure language and loses all iconic resemblance).

Along with this idea (because simplification cannot explain alone a given style), McCloud points to something he calls the *picture plane*, “where shapes, lines and colors can be themselves and not pretend otherwise” (MCCLLOUD, 1993, p.51, pan.1). That is, art decomposed of its representational quality, losing its connection to external reality:

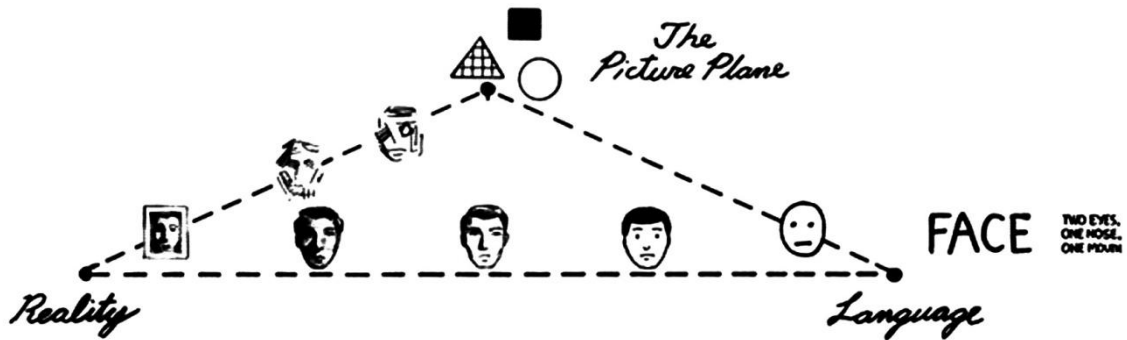


Figure 38 - Triangle of Styles (MCCLLOUD, 1993, p.51, pan.1 - modified to fit the page)

McCloud later goes on to attribute meaning also to the characteristics of the lines themselves, in what is a remarkable insight towards a theory allowing the reader to get a sense of the stylistic choices and how they reflect on the reading of the images. McCloud’s general ideas on lines and characteristics are listed on the table below (with special attention to the character of the line McCloud considers ‘savage and deadly’ – the straight lines denoting a quick brush movement, along with the small ink splatters convey the notion of an energetic stroke, concentrating in the overall shape of the line acquired with the fast motion, with no care for minute detail, so arguably the ‘feel’ McCloud attributes to the line is what the reader intuitively gathers about its production from its shape and characteristics):






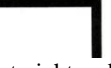



LINES			
DIRECTION	 Horizontal lines are passive and timeless.	 Vertical lines are proud and strong.	 Diagonal lines are dynamic and changing.
FORM	 Lines with acute angles are unwelcoming and severe.	 Round and variable lines are warm and gentle.	 Geometrical, straight and regular lines and angles are conservative and rational.
CHARACTER	 Lines with strong stroke movement savage and deadly.	 Unstable and variable lines are weak and uncertain.	 Regular and round lines are honest and direct.

Table 19 - Line Types (MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.125)

This classification of lines in *direction, form and character* (to which I would add also the *thickness*) can be used to understand the dominant feeling of its reading. As observed before, a lot of the process of reading lines seems to be intuitive and related to the techniques

and ways through which those lines are produced. Of course, the shapes and forms of lines vary widely according to their means of production, which in Comics traditionally are largely contained to ways of working with India ink, namely technical pens, brushes and nib pens (there are many exceptions, including works completely painted in oil or watercolors, such as *Kingdom Come* and *Moonshadow*, respectively, but those are, as mentioned, exceptions – in which the analysis of lines wouldn't count as much as shapes, forms and color palette and the general approach to the representation, as will be seen later in this section):

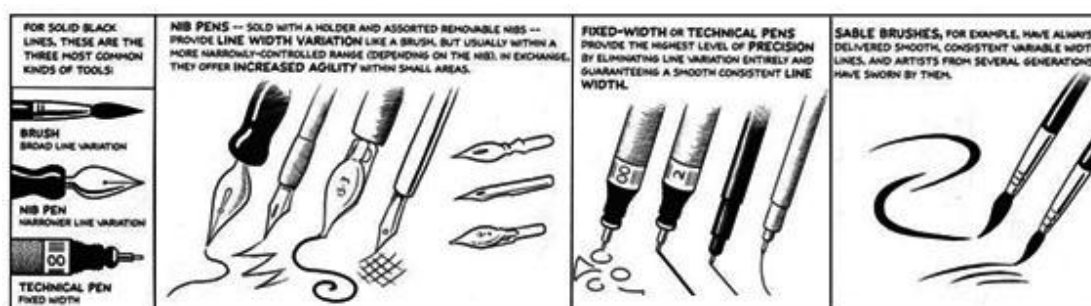


Figure 39 - Brush, Nib Pen and Technical Pen (MCCLLOUD, 2006, p. 191-193)

So, certain nib pens and brushes are able to work with a degree of variation of the width of the line, variation that enhances the contours of the lines and makes the reader conscious of their production context (the slight pressure changes that make a huge difference when dealing with brushes and a slight one when dealing with some nibs). This feature, along with the regularity of the lines and the characteristics of their angles, helps to impress a certain feeling to the reading of the images. As for the angles of the lines, a summation of the theory can be found in the image below (the original information is an extrapolation of McCloud's analysis of different styles, and can be found at MCCLLOUD, 1994, p.128):

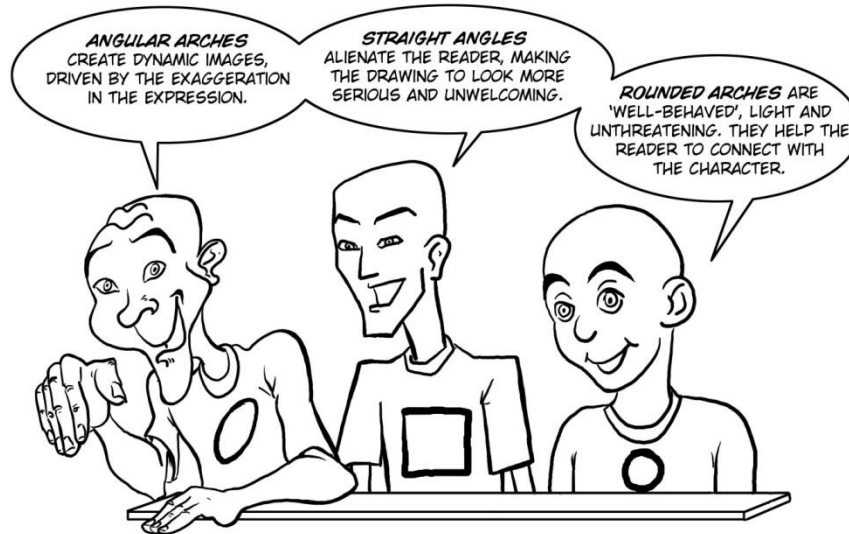


Figure 40 - Angles and Arches in Drawings

McCloud reputedly gets to this approach by comparing the goals of the Impressionist artists, such as Edvard Munch and Vincent Van Gogh, with the more intimate view of art of the Expressionists, such as Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee, which employed colors and shapes symbolically, with Kandinsky even hinting at a psychology of colors, where 'warm' colors expressed more intense emotions than 'cold' tones of blues and greens (MCCLLOUD, p.122-123). In the section dedicated to creating characters in the book *Making Comics* (2006), McCloud puts in a couple of works regarding expressions and style of characters, and how their characteristics vary according to the narrative's tone and purpose:



Figure 41 - Cartoonish and Realistic Characters (MCCLLOUD, 2006, p. 72)

So, for the author, characters are often derived from single ideas, and as such symbolic, in a degree. Hence their capacity for stereotyped appearance or behavior – treated as ideas, often maximized to facilitate identification, characters are frequently prone to

exaggeration. Once created, the characters must be put into action, and, to make them appear to perform actions, the artist must have a basic repertoire of body language and facial expressions (which implies a basic knowledge of human anatomy and facial expressions in particular) – in which features such as exaggeration and realism can also be used selectively. In the section reserved to expressions McCloud makes perhaps the most notable breakthrough in his books: the many uses of style inside an image, where his stylistic notions of *realism* and *simplification* are completed with the added notions of *exaggeration* and *symbolism*, which, in my opinion, is very similar to the semiotic system proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce, in his division of the signs into natural signs, pointing to a relation with their object (indexes), the iconic signs, looking like their objects and the symbolic signs, to which meaning was attached through conventions:

One very important triad is this: it has been found that there are three kinds of signs which are all indispensable in all reasoning; the first is the diagrammatic sign or icon, which exhibits a similarity or analogy to the subject of discourse; the second is the index, which like a pronoun demonstrative or relative, forces the attention to the particular object intended without describing it; the third [or symbol] is the general name or description which signifies its object by means of an association of ideas or habitual connection between the name and the character signified. (PEIRCE, 1994, p.146 – Vol. I, par.369)²⁹

The similarity can be used to understand McCloud's approach more pointedly, since simplification is always present in a representation (not even a photograph can capture the fractal complexity of real life, so a degree of simplification is necessary), realism is trying to attain accurate representation and exaggeration is intimately related to the effort of drawing (reducing an object to a more basic form through elimination of detail and focus on limits and distinctive lines), by over-stating the distinctiveness of the lines. To that, there is the possibility of adding elements of symbolic nature, in order to convey meanings not so promptly represented graphically – which is essentially of McCloud did in his work when presenting symbols as an iconic language of sorts:

²⁹ My first contact with Peirce's take on symbols was in the widely known José Teixeira Filho's partial translation of the author's production, entitled *Semiótica* (2005 edition, the classification here referred to being, between p.63-77). Since the summation here presented is not in the more widely known book in Brazil, it bears to say that the section that would correspond to Teixeira Filho's translation is in Chapter 3 of Vol.II of the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (1994, p.376-388 of the digital edition – par.274 to 309).

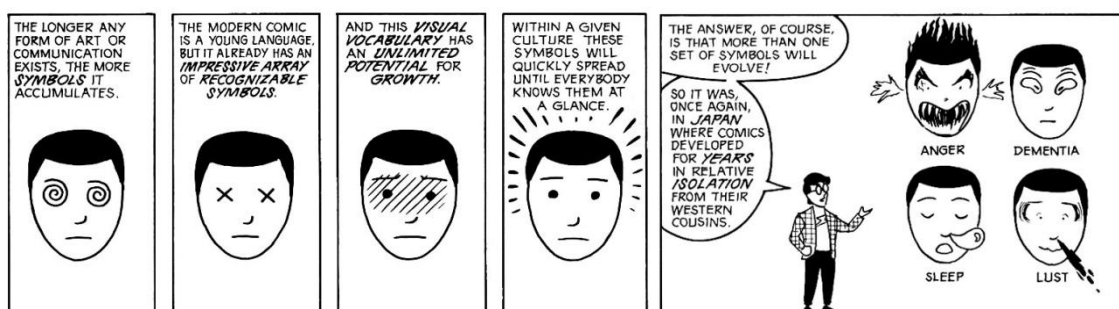


Figure 42 - Symbols as a Language (MCCLLOUD, 1993, p.131, pan.4-7 and 9)

Therefore, McCloud gets to what, in my opinion, is one of the most accomplished and succinct methods for the analysis of style in drawing – curiously, the notions of exaggeration and symbolism are added *en passant* to his previous take, reliant on simplification and realism and the ‘idea plane’, which is discarded. And good riddance, I might add, for it was quite difficult to understand apart from the notion of simplification, which is essentially precisely the same thing – that is, the idea of reducing the complexity of the representation by reducing the number and complexity of the lines. Along with the notion of paying attention to lines and general angles, they are arguably a fairly complete notion one might hold while approaching a drawing, and the point was made only in an image sequence, lost in the section on facial expressions of his subsequent book, *Making Comics* (2006):



Figure 43 - Realism, Simplification, Exaggeration e Symbolism (MCCLLOUD, 2006, p.94)

To that, I would add that the system developed by Peirce has basically the notion that signs represent through three different ways: either they bear a direct relation to their object, which may be similarity, or they have an indirect relationship (the natural signs, that do not directly remember the object, but bear a relation with them, as a footprint to a foot), or their relationship with their object may be conventional. That is essentially what McCloud does, succinctly, but with the added notion of exaggerating the simplified lines, their distance from each other and their angles or arcs, to enhance the strong features of an image. So, using lines:

a) realistically b) symbolically c) maximizing their contrast with each other and their direction

or angles (exaggeration). So, every sign type in Peirce’s semiotic categorization can be understood in an image alone (Peirce would consider an image an icon or an index, so this argument serves to highlight the many different possibilities opened by the conjunction of Peirce and McCloud’s efforts). Conversely, colors can be used in the same way: realistically (with an accurate representation of the world, as proposed by the Impressionist movement), by contrast (where colors of opposite or highly contrasting values are juxtaposed, what would be a distortion of reality similar to exaggeration of lines and which had a lot of prominence in Pop Art) and symbolically (where a given color acquires a signification based on how it is used in the artwork, either implicitly or explicitly, as exemplified per Expressionist art).

I would complete the notion in saying that different degrees of realism, exaggeration and symbolism can be used inside a singular image, as McCloud himself pointed out when dealing with the opposition of realism and simplification in Japanese comics:

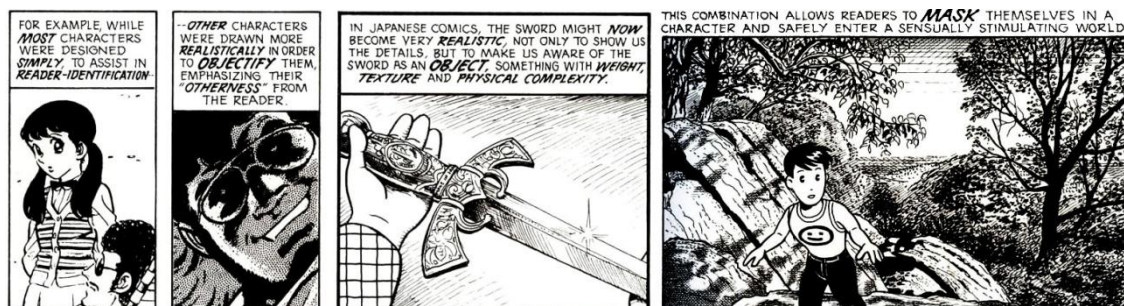


Figure 44 - Realism X Simplification (MCCLLOUD, 1993, p.42-43 - montage)

So, the possibility of understanding different meanings through the selective use inside images opens to other wild notions, such as the selective realism of images and selective approach to a character’s anatomy, for instance. Therefore, the Hulk, as a character, can be read in terms of the enormous muscles, hands and feet, in opposition to his minuscule head – and therefore, a character full of strength and capacity for action, as per the hands, but with a very limited intelligence and interior existence. Or, in the example below, where the selective application of realism is used to heighten the emotional content of the expression of the cartoonish character, by adding to it with a dramatic (realistic) hand gesture of supplication (dramaticity that is cut with a joke, so it serves to raise the emotions to the comical pay off):



Figure 45 - Selective Realism (VASQUEZ, 1998, p.8)

Having established that lines, their angles and the selective approach to simplification, exaggeration, realism and symbolism can be used for a relatively fair account of stylistic choices in drawing, and that this methodological account is useful in determining meanings derived directly from these choices, which sometimes easily elude the eyes of the reader, there are still a few words to be said about shadows, their intensity and direction, and how they are used sometimes in establishing meaning or setting the mood. The following images, as in a couple of the figures above, those were made to illustrate this specific point, here and in previous works, and as such are not referenced as previous publications.



Figure 46 - Intensity of Shadows

Briefly, the notion proposed here is that the intensity of the shadow adds to the emotional content of a drawing, mostly because the interplay between shadow and light gives more depth to an image, and so the information about it is hugely increased – a two-dimensional image suddenly provides the reader with cues to read it tri-dimensionally. As a result, the effort in reading the image is augmented, and the eye tends to linger and give importance to what is portrayed. When that object is a facial or bodily expression, the result is more importance put in the feeling portrayed, and therefore a more intense emotional content in the image. The difficulty is significantly added to when absolute black, similar to the lines of the drawing, is used in shadows, because the idea of limit, pervasive in drawings, is partly erased, and the limits between shadows and objects are sometimes blurry. This technique, by adding confusion to the mix, can also be used to confuse the eye, obligating the reader to

decipher in terms of light and darkness an image that would otherwise be promptly decoded, and this confusion can set the mood as mysterious, a dark world where a lot happens that is not seen. Funnily enough, if McCloud's argument for the generalizing nature of the cartoon, where detachment from realism makes the cartoon more relatable because it is universal and connects easily with the reader, the notion of obscuring the image bears the same narrative weight, perhaps even intensified – if every line serves to specify an image and its elision generalizes it, nothing could be more general than no lines at all, and shadows do this work as perfectly as a blank page does. The side note to that is: the hidden is unknown, and that is more unpleasant, for humans, than what is seen – perhaps an evolutionary trait that makes people weary of the darkness, where predators and possibly unwanted surprises are a possibility. So, this generalizing nature of darkness is added to negative feelings – bad things tend to lurk in the dark. So, dark shadows are both intense and unpleasant, depending on their use. Sometimes they hide things, sometimes they are used for showing them.

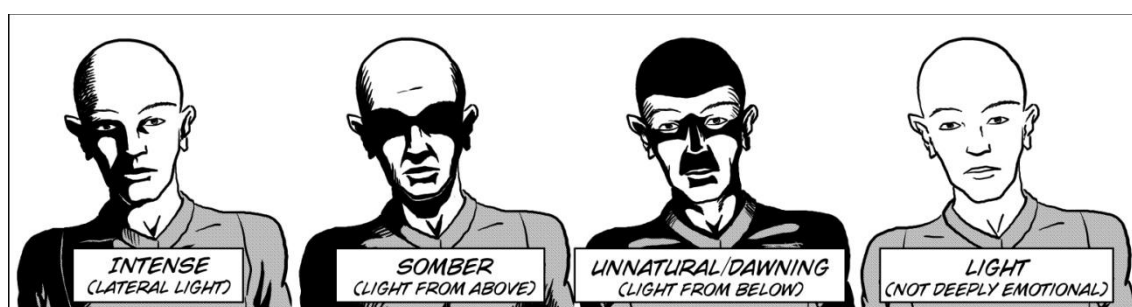


Figure 47 - Direction of Light

Another possibility, as with any signification system, is the symbolic use of light inside narratives, which tends, as pointed by McCloud, to eventually take the shape of a language in itself, as uses become consistent and their signifiers naturalized. This is just an observation to point out the universality of the technique of adding symbolism to images and how Peirce's division completes Eisner and McCloud's theories, essentially giving them a more methodical (née academic) foundation and allowing a wide range of possibilities to the techniques so richly demonstrated by the authors. So, while the lateral light is used to heighten the emotion of an expression, the light from above is frequently used to hide the eyes completely, giving the expression a more threatening and mysterious quality. Light from below is unnatural, usually the light comes from above in natural settings, or even laterally, when sun is rising or setting, so the use of dawning light has been used consistently to indicate the dawning of an idea, frequently an ominous one, or altered states of mind. Conversely, the shadowless image above, on the right (a control of sorts), tends to seem also

emotionless, by comparison, and relatively bland as a result – even though it is a repetition of the very same drawing.

So, with this, a fairly complete method for the analysis of a comic's style is achieved. Many other features could be included, of course, such as panel transitions and their internal composition, but for the sake of brevity these aspects will only be mentioned when relevant, with the added information of any reference needed.

Before anything else, it is interesting to note that a lot of the characteristics of the monstrator are owed to the art team, which in this issue is constituted of Stephen Bissette, Rick Veitch and John Totleben, possibly Tom Mandrake³⁰, along with Moore, who scripted the pages and is known for collaborating closely with the artist when writing a comic. Tatjana Wood is the colorist of the series and John Costanza the letterer. Because in Comics all the involved in the production of a title work together, but rather keep to their specialties, it is common to separate the notions of art, colors and story when commenting the work of a given artist. The final product, however, stands on its own as the result of their collaboration, even though certain characteristics of the output of an artist are usually pervasive in their production. For instance, an artist's drawing style is highly distinctive and easily recognizable by those familiar with the artist's *oeuvre*. So, even though, as writer, Moore is the one coordinating the story and the appearance of the pages, the iconic aspect of the pages is owed mostly to the artists. The reason it is an important point to highlight is that a drawing style, unique to each artist, is not specific to the work in question, but rather a constant in the artist's trajectory – a style that must be taken into account by the team as a whole in the making of the story, and setting its tone. Of course, the story is here considered in whole, the fruit of the collaboration between many authors.

To the monstrator. There is a distinct tendency towards hyperbole in the drawings. This can be seen from the very beginning of the story, in the characters of Cain and Abel, who are very exaggerated in both their bodily expressions and their appearance. Cain seems quasi-feral in his look: the pointy ends of his hair seem like animalistic ears, feature reinforced by his pointy ears and heavy, furry brow. He is lean and seemingly energetic, a spring seemingly always ready to leap, while Abel looks like a poor schmuck slodging about, either struggling to get on his feet or literally crawling behind his brother. Cain has good posture, which is even exaggerated (one does not hold a good posture, with his hands on his hips, while

³⁰ There is a 'special thanks' to Tom Mandrake in the bottom of page three, so it can be assumed that he helped somehow with the edition, though exactly where, how and why that happened are a mystery.

climbing a steep hill, as he does in p.2, pan.4), and is composed and assertive, while Abel already begins the story soaking wet and bowed down, holding a huge anvil, then struggles uphill. All Abel does is struggle, at first with the anvil, then with the information Cain presents him, and finally with gravity. The differences between them are intensified by their contrast, they are like Dom Quixote and Sancho Pança. As observed before, their interaction is not only exaggerated, but reminiscent of children’s cartoons, in their violence and stereotypical nature (in cartoons, an anvil is a perfectly appropriate manner of hitting somebody, just like a 16 ton weight, and, like a Looney Tunes’ character, Abel can be hit with an anvil and survive to tell the story). So, there is also a lot of humor in the monstrator’s narrative, and that is explicit from the onset of the story.



Figure 48 - Cain and Abel's Features (montage, referenced in the image)

As a term of comparison, the image above is a montage of the first appearances of the characters (by order): Cain, in *House of Mystery* #175 (1968), followed by Abel, in *House of Secrets* #81 (1969), and Cain, in the same issue. The two images in the right are Cain and Abel as they appear in the issue. Both Cain and Abel look significantly younger than their counterparts, both are a lot leaner and with slightly different features. While both brothers had the curls in their hair that looked like horns, originally, Cain has all but lost the feature in the issue, while Cain’s furry appendages are maximized and make him look like a predatory animal – personally, my mind goes straight to ‘owl’, mainly due to the round glasses and the ‘ears’ (curls). Cain’s features are full of spikes and closed angles, which makes him look even more aggressive, while Abel’s rounder features are more amicable. Abel’s ears do not appear so prominently as Cain’s, perhaps due to their hairstyle (in the end of the issue Abel’s appearance calls back his curly ‘horns’, but they are low on his head and look more like hair, also helping to hide his ears and make him look more human than Cain). The former iterations of the characters were also more ‘cartoony’ in their exaggeration, meaning the angles and lines are more distinct in their contrast to each other and privileging oblique arches than in their further presentation, which sacrifices assertiveness in the shapes and strong lines in favor of a more somber feeling, with intense shadows and wide usage of hatching, filled with quick and solid brush strokes (as can be noted in both Cain’s hair and Abel’s clothes in

the image above), resulting in a less formulaic character composition. Interestingly, the exaggeration remains as one of the tropes of the characters, but the approach is somewhat changed: while the original versions of the characters relied in angular arches and lines, resulting in a more ‘cartoonish’ style and exaggerated features and expression, the version in the story in question is still exaggerated, but more charged with symbolism than stereotypation – see, for instance, the characters’ hair, where Cain’s aggressive nature is highlighted through exaggeration in his ‘horns’, while this feature is attenuated in Abel. Despite the exaggeration at specific points, the characters’ anatomy is portrayed more realistically than in their original forms, while the employment of brushes and abundant hatches gives the art a more ‘artsy’ feel (connects them more prominently with techniques associated with tradition and techniques, such as brush strokes and realistic portrayal). As with written language, art that calls attention to its complexity and techniques results in an unveiling of an authorial voice, therefore being associable with intention (in opposition, simplified and angulous art privileges the character’s actions, being more immersive and relatable, as McCloud puts it).

So, from the first pages, the reader gets the distinct feeling of a voice (monstrator) with a dark sense of humor (mixing a cartoonish plot of murder through anvil with the grim scenery of a graveyard), a tendency to exaggerate features and postures, frequently to enhance symbolic elements in the images. This is also clear in the approach to other characters:



Figure 49 - Etrigans (respectively: *Swamp Thing* #50, 1986, p.8, pan.5; cover of *The Demon* #01, 1972)

Etrigan, as observed, has a very animalized face, in which the insertion of details serves to make it even more inhuman. A feline snout, with accompanying teeth, in place of a somewhat human mouth with large canines, as Etrigan is usually represented in comics. As a term of comparison, on the left of the figure above is Etrigan as originally appeared in his own title, in Jack Kirby’s style, in 1972. In Kirby’s version, Etrigan is depicted in simple lines, with heavy black shadows for intensity. Not a lot of detail in the face, suggesting a more

human face (because the other human faces also did not bear a lot of detail, so they looked alike in comparison), with clearly defined small horns and what seem to be pectoral fins in place of ears, along with a little overdeveloped canines. To be sure, large mouths are a given in Jack Kirby's style, so this feature in Etrigan does not seem monstrous, but rather a stylistic choice. In the modern version, though, the addition of details to these features turns the brows and 'fins' into spikes, the flat nose into a snout and the addition of a pupil turns the demon's eyes into bizarre structures without an iris, where the sclera advances over the pupil. While the insertion of realism into details fills the lacunas in Etrigan's shape with dehumanizing information, the exaggeration of the features makes the horns a lot larger, as with Cain's hair, and turns the demon's face into a pin cushion of spikes and pointed teeth. Really something to look at.

The presence of spikes, teeth and carapaces, as well as a variety of wildlife characteristics, is coherent with the presentation of the demons in the book, which, as previously noted, are very imaginative and visually impressive – if not pleasant to look at. The notion that closed angles (the spikes and teeth, which are usually pointed) and realism (insertion of details) tend to ostracize the reader has a lot to do with this feature, but the fact that many of the demons' limbs and forms has to do with insects and deep sea life, that is, lifeforms that are not so present in everyday experience, because rarely looked at up close, might have been employed to enhance this effect. Moreover, insectoid demons are coherent with the title's lore.

While the demons are given a profusion of spikes and animal qualities, the heroes themselves have their dehumanizing qualities, which serve to put them in contrast with the 'regular human' characters in the issue, the majority of which seem to be overpowered wizards of one sort of another (so a lot of relativity to the notion of a 'regular human', but the distinction is still present to be argued):

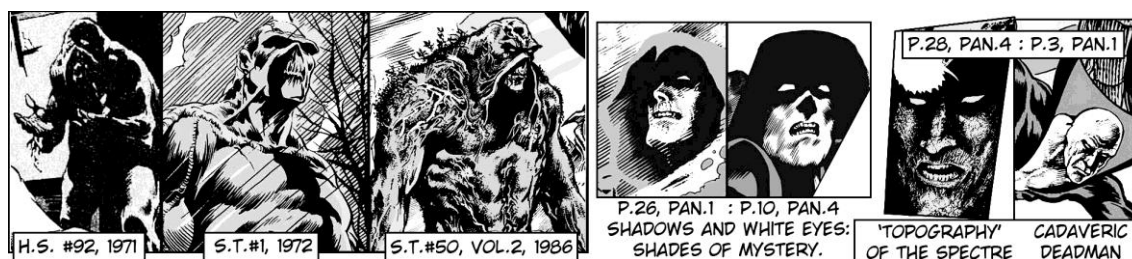


Figure 50 - Hyperbolic Characteristics (montage, referenced in detail in the paragraph below)

Beginning with Swamp Thing, it can be argued that the changes effected during Moore's run (already commented during the analysis in section 2.4 of this work) walked back

in some of the tropes regarding the creature. To start with, one of the monster's features to change for the serialization (as commented in section 2.2) was that the character, originally quite a lumpy creature made out of moss, with clubbed feet, incapable of speech, became largely humanized as a hulking mud-man with roots for veins, a well-defined human-shaped body, a neck (which he originally lacked) and difficulty to speak. That change, as can be seen in the images above, in the left, allowed the monster both facial and bodily expressions, while the original was veiled in shadow, with the exception of his big, sad, simplified and amplified, cartoony, expressive eyes. By order, the images are from the monster's original appearance in *House of Secrets #92* (1971, p.9, pan.1), followed by the first edition of the serialization, *Swamp Thing #1* (1972, p.16, pan.1). The third image is the monster's first appearance in the story object of this analysis, *Swamp Thing #50* (1986, p.3, pan.1), and, as one can see, he differs greatly from the mud man the character used to be. First, he seems even taller (a feature that can be guessed by the relatively smaller size of the head in relation to the body) and more muscular. Though he still is covered with roots, they do not give the same impression of veins in muscles, but rather real roots holding together a large vegetable mass – as seen, the addition of details gave the character a much more plant-like appearance, that was sometimes shown to vary according to his environment and the surrounding plants. Once again, realistic detail is inserted in the mix to alienate the reader: the monster, covered in more vividly detailed plant life, is no longer as relatable, but that reinforces the alterization, the notion that the character is a monster, indeed. More than that, the relatively human body took a step back in time, as the neck was again removed in favor of a massive trunk-like appearance, furthering the de-humanization of the character but heightening the impression of his plant-like nature, which is coherent with the character development during Moore's run. This elision places the character, visually, much closer to the original version than he was before Moore, and is an exaggeration (or re-exaggeration) of a feature that was originally attenuated in favor of expression, as seen above. So, arguably, the visual ostracization of the reader is one of the objectives in the character's transformation, even though the focalization was frequently used to fill this gap with a very distinctive, much more verbal, prolix and even poetic, at times, monster. It is just used to say that a monster poet is, after all, still a monster.

Among the other characters, the Spectre is perhaps the one in which the greatest effort was made in terms of keeping the reader at arms' length. First there is the elision of his eyes via a hood (a trait that is also distinctive in the Phantom Stranger, perpetually under the shadow of his hat, as can be seen in the image above, middle section). That is used to make

the character mysterious. His size in the story keeps him apart from any meaningful physical interaction with the others, and there is also a selective employment of realism that makes the character of the Spectre even more unrelatable, which is the insertion of a myriad of lines and details in the character's skin. As the image above (in the right side) shows, the Spectre's face at times looks like the scorched earth that is part of Hell's settings, gritty and grainy, full of lines and details. That feature might actually also be a trait acquired due to his gigantic size (something established in the classical literature, *vide* Lemuel Gulliver's comments on the skin of the Brobdignagians, which always seemed unpleasant to him because their pores and skin conditions were so big – and as the next chapter of this work might show, the references to the classics are ample and pervasive in the story), but it also does work to distance the reader. Similarly, the expression lines in Deadman's skin are also filled with wrinkles and marks, particularly about his lips, that, along with his empty scleras, make him look like a dried-up corpse – shrank lips and an abundance of expression marks in the environs of them are features usually attached to zombies and very old people, in comics. It is, then, fair to say that there are de-humanizing touches in all the characters in Hell, brought forth by stylistic choices, a way for the monstrator to signify subtle pieces of information that frequently go unnoticed by the reader, at least consciously.

Constantine's group, on the contrary, is (supposedly) composed of humans, though the colorful display of characters, first imagined as superheroes, is visually interesting enough to lead the reader to understand that regular humans would feel out of place in their midst – as Dayton's impressions, who is himself a superhero of sorts when he is wearing his helm, and already knew about the others, can show by his reactions. The eccentric display of top hats, turbans, capes, trenchcoats (in a later comic written by Neil Gaiman, *Books of Magic*, another gathering of magical characters makes Constantine wonder why so many of them use trenchcoats and coin the term 'trenchcoat brigade' for their group) and full-on superhero costume, in Zatanna's case, is enough of a statement towards their appearance, making them look like an association of carnies rather than of regular people – which is not too distant from the truth, given many of the member's relation to the stage. There are, however, significant stylistic choices used particularly during the scenes of the séance, which contribute to them in significance:



Figure 51 - Faces, Dawning Light, Hatches and Expressions (MOORE *et al.*, p.13, pan.1-2; p.17, pan.6)

First, as is developed further in the next section of the work, facial expressions are crucial to the scenes of the séance (perhaps a necessity in a context in which the action happens around a table and all participants are with their hands locked together the whole time. Nevertheless, along with the intense shadows, which add to the emotional content of the scenes, the light is dawning on their faces, as if the table itself is its source. As noticed, these unnatural shadows are frequently used for either symbolizing something dawning, an idea or a state of mind, or to display altered states – which makes the scenes pregnant with mystical notes, something subtly wrong with the lights, and the impression that something is prone to happen very soon. But in the séance scenes, the lights and the facial expressions are complemented by an abundance of hatchings. In the figure above, there are two interesting examples of that. On the panels on the left, the hatchings in the background not only provide the scene with something other than blank space to look at, they provide a gradation, indicating and reinforcing the direction of light. In the panel on the right, however, the most interesting use of the hatchings is brought forth: instead of using deep shadows or marked lines to detail the characters' expressions, the monstrator employs hatchings to just vaguely denote the dark and clear areas in Sargon and Constantine's faces, where the light areas are the prominent (protruding) ones, therefore illuminated, but also uses lines mainly to highlight the key features of their expressions – mouths and eyes. This has precisely the effect conveyed by McCloud's simplification (in fact, their faces even look like McCloud's model, without a nose or distinctive features clearly marked), but with a different touch: their eyes and mouth are still realistically drawn, displaying facial expressions of surprise and fear. So, the elusion of details makes the faces pure displays of emotion, without other distracting features, deeply expressive, as the realism in their faces orchestrates, but with the amplification and generalization brought forth by the cartoon's simplification. Killing two birds with one stone, so to say.

In general terms of lines, techniques and approach to anatomy, the monstrator's style is not, as is the case in many mainstream comics, restricted to technical pen or even nib pens,

but employs brushes in a varied manner. That is not to say technical pens are not used, absolutely: they are responsible for the unidirectional hatchings that are so prominent in the comic – in the backgrounds, where they are used to suggest mist and hide what would be in the distance; in the characters' expressions, where they are used to hide features and/or give the impression of a tri-dimensional object, adding depth by suggesting shadows, or to create midtones, as is usual with hatches. So, the work with technical pen is one of the characteristics that is peculiar to this style, used in an ample scope of techniques for different effects, but the work with the brushes is perhaps even more significant, in that the wide strokes are used to imbue the art not only with dramatic lighting, through the intensely emotional black shadows, but also with a dirty, gritty feeling that frequently makes the art quite uninviting by alienating the reader through the insertion of gritty lines and blots, information that frequently is not used for representational purpose, but only as noise (here understood as information that does not contribute to the conveyance of signification, but rather as competing information). The effect is distancing the reader by making the reading process harder, therefore adding an unpleasant feeling to the page. In the case of a horror comic, the effect is not only appropriate, but works in conjunction with the tropes developed to enhance the impression of violence and deadliness, as indicates the table on lines, displayed above. In the following image, a wide array of brush strokes works full force to imbue the scene not only with a violent feel, but also to add unpleasant notes:



Figure 52 - Brush Strokes and Splatter (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.21, pan.6)

The use of ink splatter (very clearly displayed, particularly in the right side of the image above), a technique also made possible through the conscientious use of a brush, can also add to the gritty feel of the art, but in the upper right section of the image also helps to add a feeling of movement, being consistent with the direction of the action (works as a line

that indicates movement). Other resource that is amply used in the style is the dry brush technique, where a brush almost emptied of ink is scrubbed against the page, darkening only the salient portion of the paper grain. This results in a very gritty line, which is quite hard on the eyes, because it is completely irregular and suggests either a carelessness or a violence in the brush strike. This is frequently associated with Darkness, in the story, and helps to give ultimate Evil its unpleasant note.

Another interesting trait in the monstrator of the story is in regards to the general arthrology of the text, specifically in the way the composition of the pages is arranged, so as to destabilize the reader: instead of traditional panels, with conventional squared angles, there is a predominance of asymmetrical panels, comprising the majority of the issue. In fact, most of the squared panels are reserved to the séance or moments in which nothing too emotionally charged or visually impressive happens – isles of relative normalcy in a story that takes place majorly in Hell.

After Abel rises from the well, in the darkly comedic pay-off where the insults cease and they set the ‘stage’ for the beginning of the adventure (p.1, pan.5-6), the panels are squared, but that quickly changes to a slightly inclined panels as they climb the hill. The scenes in Hell with the preparation for the battle and Swamp Thing’s recollections are asymmetrical and superposed to each other, particularly when the narrative enters Swamp Thing’s memories – then images float about over each other, and mix in a confusing scheme. As the séance is prepared in page 6 (pan.1-3), Constantine is looking through the windows, feeling the Darkness’ proximity – so the panels are irregular. However, as they sit on the table, clasp hands and start probing the other plane, the panels turn regular. On the next page, as Dayton taps into Etrigan’s mind, the panel loses its borders (p.7, pan.2), but the next panel, set in the séance, is regular. That establishes a duality of sorts between the séance and the scenes in Hell, where the destabilizing effect of twisted panels (the reader, used to ‘look through a regular window’, so to say, is presented with different possibilities – either the action is twisted or the viewpoint is, seeing as windows are quite invisible sometimes, particularly when open) is contrasted with ‘regular’ ones. Page 9 breaks this rule, maybe for the sake of light comedy in the interaction between Swamp Thing and Dr. Fate, where Fate’s impressive arrival and grandiose remark (he talks about the “beggar’s army” ready to face the threat) is contrasted with a very reasonable “who are you?” from the Swamp Thing (p.9, pan.4). Then the Phantom Stranger arrives along with the angels, and Dayton looks into both sides in a little more detail, a scene that is interrupted by a ‘regular’ panel (p.11, pan.2), as

Dayton shifts his attention from one side to the other. In the page Darkness rises (p.12) all the panels are irregular, but on the next one the strongly marked panels (thick blue borders) in the séance are regular again, up to the end of the page, where the stability is broken by yet another of Dayton's dives into Hell, as the battle ensues. On page 15, as Etrigan attacks Darkness and is swallowed, there is the altercation of the séance and Hell, as Dayton progressively describes what is happening. In the page, all of the séance panels are regular, but the ones in Hell are slightly twisted upwards (considering the reading order, from left to right). Etrigan is tested and fails, and then Darkness attacks the séance. In the page that happens (p.17), there is no regular panel, which breaks the pattern that was being established, in favor of the emotional tone of the scene, where Sargon explodes in flames (p.18). In pages 19-22, Dr. Fate decides to attack the demons, is swallowed by Darkness, is tested and fails. Deadman rescues him as the angels prepare to face Darkness. Page 23 is another island of stability, visually speaking, up to the symmetrical nature of the page. As this was already commented, the members are iconically trapped by their locked hands, an impression that is maximized by the first and tenth panels. Their quick, desperate interaction shows no exit, and Zatanna realizes she is the target of the next attack, but Zatara saves her. So, a deeply emotional page, for which the regularity of the page seems odd, taking into consideration the choices made up to that point. But, by contrast with the following page, where Zatara bursts in flames and Zatanna expresses her anger and grief (which is completely irregular), the whole scene makes sense: the emotional pay-off and apex of the scene's action is irregular, but the setting for the scene is not. Therefore, contrast. On pages 25-28, all irregular (even the full-page panel in page 26, depicting the Spectre's arrival, scene that is interrupted only by Deadman's comment, irregular edges are inserted), the Spectre faces Darkness, is swallowed, tested, and fails, being expelled. On page 29, though, as the team in Hell looks dismayed at the Spectre's ruin, a panel of regularity, where Constantine asks Dayton about the Swamp Thing, is inserted (p.29, pan.2). The next three panels (pan.3-5) are interesting, because they do not deviate greatly from the 'norm' (though in this issue the norm is inverted), being roughly the same size and shape, only slightly twisted – which serves to reinforce the monster's calmness and composure as he enters the Darkness. Through pages 30-33, Swamp Thing is tested, apparently passes the test and is asked to leave Darkness, as Darkness starts to rise to meet the Light. All those pages are comprised of irregular panels, and that is particularly true for the double page 34-35, where the 'hands' of Darkness and Light meet and starts to fuse: the panels start very twisted (1-3), but then, as the hands fuse, the reading order

of the panels changes drastically, and the end of the page is read diagonally (pan.4-7). That is the climax of the story, the most intense point. Suddenly, on page 36, as the panels (pan.1-3) recede from a close-up on Dayton's (now demented) eyes, they are stable, regular again. Just as the séance participants comment that the 'power' seems to have been discharged. The stability of the page, however, is broken by Dayton's insane face, as Constantine and Winter ponder the price paid in their effort. Swamp Thing wakes up in Hell, to be greeted by Deadman, and the Phantom Stranger arrives. The panels are still superposed, as they ponder what happens. On page 38 (and even on page 37, pan.7, which is regular but superposed by two irregular panels, so the scene turns regular precisely in the panel they comment that the atmosphere seemed to have been discharged, as it happened in the séance), however, as the Phantom Stranger comments the change in the nature of Good and Evil, the panels are regular. Things turn tense again when Swamp Thing shows concern by how things should change (p.38, pan.4), but go back to their regularity in the last panel of the page, which goes back to Cain and Abel as the heroes walk into the sunset. The final page of the story is completely regular, even if there is a lot of violence and dark humor to the notion of Cain pushing Abel off the cliff. This reinforces the idea of a discharged atmosphere – their revels now have ended, the narrative concluded, and the reader can expect an island of stability to heighten the impression that the battle occasioned change, that a large shift happened.

So, it is fair to say that the device is used consistently to heighten the impression of urgency and raise the stakes in the story, working in opposition to 'regular' squared angled panels, who are in the plot like islands of calm in a consistently shifting world. Interestingly, the symbolic use of colors in the issue, where warm colors are employed to represent heightened emotional content, is used pointedly in two occasions: the séance scenes are displayed prominently in shades of orange, yellow, magenta and reds, starting from the point the characters clasp their hands (p.6, pan.4), with the exceptions of a few panels, usually not the heavily emotional ones. So, arguably, the intensity of the colors and the focus on expressions make the séance scenes the most emotional ones in the issue, rather than the battle itself. The heroes' tests, for instance, which are dark and painted with cold colors, seem more emotionally neutral, despite their importance to the plot. The other case in which high emotional content was displayed in warm colors, this time almost exclusively shades of red and orange, is Swamp Thing's recollections in the metapanel of page 5, where the horrors the character lived are put together in reddish tones, and with that device gain in threat and intensity. On that note, Swamp Thing's color – the green – is in the issue used to bring forth

the titular character, among so many other colorful, monstrous ones. While blues are used to dim the emotional content, mainly in backgrounds and things that do not need to call attention, green has a very special place in the issue – Tatjana Wood is a very competent colorist, even with the limited resources of the time. There are only two things that are painted green in the issue, both of singular importance: the uniform of the Spectre, one of the most powerful mystical characters in the DC Universe, and Swamp Thing. So, amid all these blues, yellows and reds, displayed in midtones and a myriad of different shades, the shades of green are quite easy to identify in the pages, being the ones that differ from the rule. Considering that the Spectre arrives quite late in the adventure, to be subsequently squashed, metaphorically speaking, the use of green is quasi-particular to Swamp Thing, and the distinct appearance of his eyes, of the opposite spectrum (red), help make his monochromatic self more visually interesting.

So, all things considered, the monstrator in the issue is a quite knowledgeable guide, capable of eliciting a vast array of effects through a conscientious display of particular techniques. The exaggeration in the lines of the characters is frequently lended to symbolic usage, and a pervasive dark humor is displayed in the style, as well as emotional intensity, deriving both from the expressions of the characters and the symbolic content of colors. The eclectic display of techniques in the style – with wild brush strokes, intense shadows and abundance of hatchings, sometimes to unusual effect – helps give the impression of a sophisticated voice, even if the resources are frequently used to distance the reader. An ‘artsy’ style, so to say, but focused on wild and violently emotional scenes. Which is very appropriate indeed, given both the story itself and the history of the title.

4.2.5.3 *Reciter*

The reciter is the structure responsible for the verbal part of the text. And there is where the grounds for confusion start to proliferate more poignantly – confusion between the verbal narrative element, as it comes forth in the reading of the text, and the man responsible for the words themselves, and previous and further productions, tropes commonly developed, and so on and so forth. The lack of distinction between the two would be highly out of place, because, as Rimmon-Kennan took the trouble to point out (2002, p.89), the author has nothing to do with the text *or its narrative structures*, and even the conflation between the implied author (the fictional figure of the author elicited in a reader’s mind) and a narrative voice would be a mistake – the voice heard throughout the text doesn’t necessarily bear any relation

to the implied author's figure, possibly being that of a character, an intradiegetic narrator, a voice put to a specific use by the authorial voice, as in the case of a purposefully unreliable narrator. So, making these distinctions is important in the understanding of a text. And yet.

Yet, as with the drawing style, the writing style might carry over, from one work to another, because it is a particularity of the artist – there are very few who can successfully vary their tones and voices significantly, and most are readily recognizable by readers familiarized with their production. That happens by comparison, and while each work of art is self-contained, some characteristics tend to bleed through, with the experience of reading a specific author.

In the case of Alan Moore, the author tends to employ a variety of tropes and techniques in his stories, and those who are familiar with his *oeuvre* can identify quite easily his favorite tropes and techniques, and even predict the course of the story by things as simple as cadence, as Wolk points out:

Whenever one of his characters has something meaningful to say, the language Moore uses shifts into an iambic gallop: *da-dum, da-dum, da-dum*. It's there in V's big speeches, in William Gull's monologue about the architecture of London in *From Hell*, in all the dramatic scenes of *Lost Girls*, and particularly in Moore's prose novel *Voice of the Fire* (WOLK, 2007, p.235).

What can be gotten from that is: style, be it in writing or drawing, or verse, by that matter, *bleeds through*. The reciter relates to Moore's style in many ways, and this will be occasionally pointed out at times, as unavoidable as death or taxes. Therefore, even though this work aims to avoid a generalizing view of the author's production, and concentrate in the artwork presented, the notion of a pervasive authorial voice might linger, at times, like Damocles' sword, ready to drop without a moment's notice and shatter any attempt of presenting the artwork as a cohesive whole. We might as well get it over with: mention the particularities of Moore's style, how it is manifested in the reciter's structure in this particular story and proceed with the analysis.

The first thing a customary Moore reader would say, when asked about the author's productions, is that his comics – and his prose fiction as well, by the way – is quite verbose. Specifically in Comics, a well-regarded notion is that excess of dialogue might slow the reading too much. Such a use would disregard the very dynamic qualities of the promptly-recognizable images, which make long descriptions redundant, a quality that gave the medium, traditionally, a very plastic pace and, usually, more focus on teleology than in the development of abstract concepts. A rule of thumb is that a comics' writer should avoid

panels with many words, usually about 30 words per speech balloon and try to avoid many balloons in the same panel. The British publishing company, 2000 AD, where Moore confessedly learned how to write comics (KHOURY, 2003, p.64; PARKIN, 2013, p.72), has in its ‘submissions’ section the following guidelines to prospective writers:

A useful rule of thumb for script-writing is to have no more than 25 words per speech balloon, and no more than 3 balloons/captions per panel. Average 5-7 panels per page. Never use two words (or panels) where one will do. Condense it down, keep it moving. Keep the reader intrigued, surprised, and wondering what’s going to happen next. Less is more. Boil your barrel of weak beer down into a shot-glass full of rocket fuel! (2000AD, 2019)³¹

Other editors, such as Dark Horse, have guidelines with 25 words per balloon, and a maximum of two balloons³². Moore himself, in his *Writing for Comics* (2003), talks about limiting himself to 35 words of dialogue per panel (MOORE, 2003, p.18). So, it is a consensus of sort that words hamper the reading pace, and should be kept to the minimum, those of significance to the plot. But that is not always the case with Moore – he tends to be quite expansive in his dialogue. But not for the sake of discourse in itself: as it has been noted here, differently from many authors to have taken over the title of Swamp Thing, Moore introduced scenes and lines of dialogue that did not concentrate in the action or the advancement of the plot, but were rather anti-teleological. He did it for the sake of character development, and this is also the case for the story in question.

On that note, as I have noted in my previous analysis of *Watchmen* (VIDAL, 2014, p.287), Moore strives to give his characters different voices and world views, having achieved, in that particular work (in my opinion) what Bakhtin calls *polyphony*, a true multifaceted presentation of the world, where each character presents its own worldview, none prevailing over the others. And, though the story in question does a substantial amount of legwork in trying to distinguish the characters’ voices, speech patterns and vocabulary (as will be noted), this is sadly not the case in “The End” – there is clearly a worldview orienting the action, even if it is towards moral ambiguity. So, rather than independent worldviews, the characters are bound to a world guided by a consciousness, which very commandingly orients the reading of the story, leaving no space for doubt or interpretation – to the point of having

³¹ 2000AD Submissions Guidelines. Essay in HTML, available at <<https://2000ad.com/submissions>>, last accessed in 06/17/2019.

³² DARK HORSE, Script Guide. Document in .PDF format, available at <<http://images.darkhorse.com/darkhorse08/company/submissions/scriptguide.pdf>>, last accessed in 06/17/2019.

not only one but two separate dialogues evaluating what happened and what would change in the future, at the end. What is done to differentiate the speech patterns is rather taken from each character's lore, and relates to their specific characteristics – so the Phantom Stranger always introduces himself with 'stranger' in the phrasing, Deadman always jokes about him being dead, and so on and so forth. Of course, perhaps that is what is possible when juggling so many different characters (16 in the story, not counting the Demons Three or the Light, whose appearances are very brief to be telling in any significant way, but counting the Darkness), most of them with a rich lore of their own, having appeared in different titles and adventures throughout the years – stick to the basics of each one, and try to make that as clear as possible. But that note serves to illustrate both the complexity and the limitations of the medium. That can also serve to point out the familiarity of the author with the tradition of the multiple characters, a feat that demands a lot of reading and research (as hopefully this work has illustrated by this point). This is also a particularity of Moore's work – an extensive knowledge of the medium of Comics and its tradition, and the literary tradition in general (this notion will be developed a bit further in the next chapter).

Both these features – attempting to give each character a distinct speech pattern, coherent with the character's lore and knowledge of the tradition – are relevant in a specific way: the aesthetic use of language: being not only verbose, but also extremely well-read, Moore strives to impress distinct speech patterns in his characters, and lend them their own poetic qualities. As previously noted, the speech pattern of Swamp Thing shifted to a more paused and selective speech, not only referencing Nature frequently, but also pausing selectively, at irregular places, what gave his speech the pattern of poetic scansion. Etrigan went back into rhyme – this time with good verse (occasionally good, as will be noted soon), and that makes all the difference in the reading of the story. That is another important note to the verbal aspect of the story – it is prolix, eloquent. And, frequently paired with the author's characteristic dark humor, very entertaining to read.

All these features, pervasive in Moore's *oeuvre* (the implied authorial voice that can be found throughout his production), are present in the reciter of the story as well: it is verbose (without being wearisome); it is prolix, striving to impress each character with its own voice, be it through specific vocabulary choices, level of colloquialism or speech pattern; it is knowledgeable in the literary and the medium's tradition (employing both rhymed and blank verses and making references to each character's background) and, despite the obvious effort spent in these many and difficult features, has a dark sense of humor that allows for

irreverence, at times (as in Etrigan’s rhyme about the ‘arterial spray’, or the colorful insults Cain spews over Abel). Despite being quite wordy, the reciter can vary widely the output in order to maximize the impact of a visually impressive scene. Good examples of this use are the page with the arrival of the Spectre (p.26), where there is only a brief comment by Deadman, leaving the whole page for the reader to explore with the eyes; the double page where the hands approach (p.34-35), where the impressive scene is uninterrupted by dialogue (which surrounds the central panel, but does not interfere with it) and the final panels of pages 38 and 39, each ending with an effect phrase over a visually impressive scene (a story that effectively ends twice). This technique is very competently applied in the story, to the point of, whenever the panel contains only a few words, it is quasi a certainty that something visually impressive or significant happens in the panel.

The table below lists the speech particularities of each character:

CHARACTER	SPEECH PARTICULARITIES
Cain	Cain is a master crafter of creative insults for Abel – the alliterative “cringing clot of cholesterol” and “porcine pantywaist” (p.1); “idiot” and “poor, wretched, overfed dolt” (p.2); and “mollusk” (p.39). Also of violent imagery, always pregnant with death threats. Cain also frequently expresses his derision towards his brother through expletives like “hah!” or “pah!” (p.2). Cain is verbally sophisticated, to the point of being snobbish, frequently using complex and antiquated structures to express himself – full of words such as “pantywaist” (p.1) and “meddlers” (p.2). Cain is a source of certainty, informing his insecure brother (and the reader as well) about the stakes in the beginning of the story and reassuring the stories’ continuation in the end.
Abel	Abel’s speech pattern is a lot more colloquial than his brother’s. He seems a lot more unsure, both about himself and the world around him, impression caused by his stuttering and constant questions and asking for clarification. Arguably, in the first scene that could be attributed to him being dead down a well with an anvil tied to his body, only by the end he is still doubtful and asking for Cain to consider his views and concerns about the nature of stories. And that is perhaps the greatest difference between the brothers – Abel is not assertive, but rather imploring. Whatever he wants to say comes in the form of a question, even if it is an opinion. Allied to his imbalance, as seen above, Abel seems extremely insecure, not only fearful of Cain. So, the characters are opposite not only in body language and anatomy, but also in their verbal patterns: Cain assertive and snobbishly prolix; Abel an insecure and colloquial stutterer.
Swamp Thing	The characteristic speech pattern of Swamp Thing is marked by a profusion of pauses, represented by multiple occasions of suspension points, at irregular intervals, effectively reminiscent of poetic caesura. The creature speaks in blank verse. His speech has frequent analogies to natural phenomena, as if Nature is the basis from which Swamp Thing understands everything. This can be understood both in terms of the creature’s background as a botanist and as a plant elemental, though more detailed scientific botanical information, which would reinforce the monster’s scientific background, does not appear in the series until later (also by Moore). Allied to that, there is a specific presentation of the creature’s speech, with differentiated recordatories and speech balloons (his speech balloons have irregular, thick lines as edges and are light orange in coloration, while the recordatories are lighter, with a yellowish tint, and surrounded by a white strip, with rounded corners) to give the impression of a peculiar, uncommon

	characteristic to his voice. In this point, the monrator and the recite are united in presenting the character’s speech in a different manner.
Deadman	Deadman’s speech is colloquial and irreverent at times, with frequent puns and allusions of his being dead. His speech is characterized by abbreviations and contractions (such as ‘dunno’ and y’know’), reminiscent of a speech pattern rather than of verbal text. This colloquial note and the frequent jokes with his death are counterproductive in the serious environment he is set in, almost as if Deadman is tonally wrong in the issue – though he rises to the occasion later, by rescuing Dr. Fate and even making the moves of taking part in battle, though that suits him very strangely (since Deadman’s lore is that a spirit with the capacity of possessing bodies, him physically fighting demons while floating about in his characteristic manner seems quite strange). Deadman’s carefree attitude towards the world (a hero that has already been killed has very little to be concerned about) is the closing note of the issue, previous to Cain and Abel’s discussion.
Constantine	A working-class magician Englishman, or, as Baron Winter puts it, a “jumped-up London street-thug” (MOORE <i>et al.</i> , <i>Swamp Thing</i> #49, p.5, pan.3), Constantine usually speaks not only with a colloquial tint to his pattern, but also with what he himself defines as “quaint English figures of speech” (MOORE <i>et al.</i> , <i>Swamp Thing</i> #50, p. 6, pan.2). However, his speech pattern in the issue is not distinguishable from the others, except for his ‘street’ attitude – such as mentioning madness would make Etrigan “officer material” (p.15, pan.1), suggesting a grounded pragmatic view of their situation and a labor perspective, and practical, brief words to his pears, such as “brace yourselves” (p.17, pan.2) and “carry on” (p.18, pan.6), as well as referring to their battle as a “punch-up” (p.18, pan.6), though admittedly not one they could walk away from. However, in page 23, the reciter reinforces the ‘Englishness’ of Constantine, making him utter the well-known expletive ‘bloody’ not once, but twice (p.23, pan.3 and 7). On the following page, after Zatarra’s death, another ‘quaint’ figure of speech appears, “sick as a parrot” (p.24, pan.6). And that is pretty much it, Constantine does not get much more English than that, even if he mentions a “no-score draw” (p.36, pan.6) – which one can interpret as relating to the English working-class love for football. The ‘street’ colloquialism and English working-class register of Constantine help to define the character as devious and manipulative, in a street-wise manner.
Zatanna	Zatanna’s verbal activity in the issue indicates a high degree of empathy, a complex relationship with her father and, finally, naiveté regarding their activities – of which she finally wakes up, too late to save her father. The character has few lines in the issue, and they can be quickly commented: she is the only amicable enough to call Constantine by his first name, and already starts the issue showing concern with him, asking him if he was sleeping well (p.6, pan.3). Following that (p.6, pan.7), she has a small ruse with Zatarra, who is playing the possessive father, and admonishes him. Zatanna is candid, admitting she did not know Etrigan was on their side (p.7, pan.3) and, when Dayton is trying to convince the group to cease their activities, she is the only one concerned with him (p.13, pan.2). Zatanna advises Dayton to not make full contact with the Darkness (p.15, pan.4) and , when Darkness attacks, asks John what is happening (p.17, pan.4), being surprised when Sargon is attacked (p.17, pan.6). Zatanna addresses her questions to John, whom she trusted to command their activities. When Sargon dies, Zatanna is horrified with his fate and Constantine’s hand, burned in the process (p.18, pan.5). Zatanna once again shows empathy for Dayton, as she tells John not to bully him (p.23, pan.2) and starts to feel hot, slowly realizing that she is the next victim of Darkness (p.23, pan.8). Up until that point, most of Zatanna’s elocutions are either trying to see others’ side or asking for clarification, but here she steps up to her role as a wizard, realizing her dire situation and begging her father not to sacrifice for her (p.23, pan.10). As Zatarra dies, when Constantine tries to show empathy, she immediately shuts him down: Zatanna has gone through a tough realization throughout the issue, finding out they were deceived by Constantine, and steps up to the occasion by making it very clear that she holds him responsible for what happened to her father – and Constantine should be afraid (p.24, pan.4). She effectively steps into her father’s shoes, both in

	<p>threatening Constantine and by being ready to sacrifice herself, too, to the task at hand (p.24, pan.5). So, from her enunciations alone, the reader can realize the character's trajectory, from naiveté to resentment and fury – and a degree of resignation. Yet, she never stops calling Constantine John, being much more personal than the other characters. She also treats Dayton almost like a child, being very considerate towards him (at least in comparison to the others' no-nonsense attitude) and his lack of magical background, to the point of asking Constantine not to 'bully' him.</p>
Sargon	<p>There is not much to say about Sargon the Sorcerer's verbal pattern in the issue, save, perhaps, that he is better and more knowledgeable than you. Whoever you are. Sargon is derisive, treating Dayton and Constantine as either the condescending 'young man' (p.6, pan.3) or the derisive 'boy' (p.6, pan.5, when Constantine tries to explain the need to keep the circle intact and p.13, pan.1, as Constantine apologizes). In the beginning, he is seemingly anxious to start their séance, and during their trial seems very concentrated in their activity, always ushering others to concentrate or to hurry. When he starts feeling the effects of Darkness' attack, however, Sargon's speech changes: suddenly stuttering and unsure of himself, he begs for the other so save him, losing control of his emotions. During this time, he is turned inwards, first describing his first impressions of the attack stuttering, in three speech balloons in which he repeats the pronoun 'I' seven times, then self-referencing in the third person in order to reinforce his significance – at the prospect of losing his life (p.18, pan.1). Admonished by Zatara, Sargon for the first time puts himself at the same level of others, asking for their forgiveness and calling them 'friends' (p.18, pan.2). So, a very touching redeeming moment, where with the realization of death, despite all his power, comes both the humility to realize his place among the others and the courage and resignation to accept his fate with honor (though he slipped quite pathetically on that department, he is able to compose himself).</p>
Baron Winter	<p>There is hardly anything distinctive in Baron Winter's elocutions in the story. One could say that the character, managed by the reciter, seems to be reasonable, although very proud, but capable of reassessing his own behavior and learning. At first, he is impressed with the mixture of science and magic (p.7, pan.1), and in his next appearance he agrees with Constantine that they had to go on with the séance, as much as he might hate to admit it (p.13, pan.3) – so, a proud character, who likes to be proven right and does not hold Constantine in high regard. Winter screams at Dayton not to lose focus and try to help Etrigan avoid the Darkness' embrace (p.15, pan.7) and, as the Darkness attacks the group for the first time, he is the character sharp and experienced enough in the ways of magic to provide the reader with a metaphor, an analogy to exemplify what is happening, namely "the force of his blow, racing 'round the circle, looking for a weak link in the circuit" (p.17, pan.5). That is a mildly odd modern metaphor to fit perfectly an antiquate character, as he is shown to be in his specific lore, but it works. When the merging of Light and Darkness happens, he asks the others whether it is over, since the power does not seem to be running anymore, and he is the character to point to their losses, the two deaths and the maddening of Dayton. However, he is happy with the result, pondering that in wars such as that, there are always losses, and telling Constantine that he thought he had "fought a good campaign" (p.36, pan.5) and has his respect. Again, that does mean that he is proud of himself, at least enough to think his respect is worth something, but it also means that he sees their enterprise in terms of battles, and mentions to have experience in these. Other than that mention, which points to experience and equivalence of their séance with military campaigns, there is very little distinctive in Baron Winter's verbal discourse for the reader to grab.</p>
Steve Dayton (Mento)	<p>Dayton's record is full of hesitations, usually represented through stuttering the beginnings of words, or repetition of first word. That is present in many points in the story, and is interesting specifically in that stuttering can manifest in many different ways, including struggling pauses and in the middle of words, but in the case in question – and with more than one character, so it is not restricted to Dayton, but also to Constantine, Zatanna, Sargon, all of them do stutter in times of tension, and all in the same way – only the beginning of words and sentences is</p>

	<p>repeated. This can be read to mean that, in the story in question, stuttering is a mark of uncertainty, surprise and tension, rather than a speech pattern that is usually associated with Dayton – it works symbolically in the verbal spectrum of the story. Dayton’s record is also full of requests for clarification and reassurance which helps to mark him as something of a newbie to the mystical endeavors of the DC Universe, what has also been remarked by Zatanna (p.23, pan.2). More than that, since Dayton’s activity in the issue is mainly comprised by <i>seeing</i> and <i>describing</i>, his speech pattern is abundant with expressions of him coming to grips with what he is seeing – along with the aforementioned stuttering, his record is also abundant with expletives, shouts of pain and surprise, denial, and references to things coming into his view, or to the activity of focusing on specific things on the other side. Dayton’s speech appears in two different forms, direct and indirect. Whenever his speech is indirect, it is marked by quotations, and this is important, because it gets hard to identify, at times, because it is majorly represented in recordatories of many different light colors – but not always, being inset in the panel sometimes, floating above the action portrayed. As the next section on focalization will make clearer, Dayton’s capacity for amazement, his unfamiliarity with the characters and the mystical aspect of the DC Universe, is fundamental to the story’s emotional tone, and so his voice is importantly loaded with emotional cues. Dayton’s is the narrative voice that interprets what happens in Hell, the main device for the reader to understand the grandiosity and emotional contend of the images portrayed in the story. He, like Zatanna, calls Constantine ‘John’, indicating friendship with the Englishman – and making it all the more clear how unfair was Constantine’s retribution in entrapping them, even after offering frequent reassurance that nothing would happen to him.</p>
<p>Dr. Occult</p>	<p>Dr. Occult has very little to say in the story, and not a lot that is distinctive, but he does set to the reader one of the important rules of magic, establishing that Dayton would have to rise up to the occasion (p.13, pan.4). As a magician himself, that denotes not only that he’s already surpassed his own trial, but that he is stoic and devoted to his craft as well. Other than that, Occult warns the group about another coming attack – adding that they should prepare for “another onslaught” (p.23, pan.5) – tells Dayton to hold on as he despairs (p.34, pan.1) and, finally, is the one that senses the energy is gone and they could let their hands go, at the end (p.36, pan.2). Not a lot to go on, but his enunciations mark him as diligent and ready to sacrifice himself.</p>
<p>Zatara</p>	<p>Zatara’s lines in the issue are restricted to his father role, first by warning Zatanna (a fully-grown woman) that he is watching her and Constantine, as they link hands (p.6, pan.4); then the admonishing of Sargon when he is afraid to day, because “you are upsetting my daughter” (p.18, pan.1), which makes him seem overly harsh and pitiless, until the moment when he proves that he is ready to have the same standards applied to him, as he calls unto him Darkness’ attack, by saying the magic spell “ssenkrad ekat em daetsni” (p.23, pan.10), or ‘darkness take me instead’ inverted. That interesting verbal quality of Zatara and Zatanna’s spell is, as seen, reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci and plays a very important distinctive note in the character’s lore, so it is appropriate that it is used in the issue. Zatara is the diligent, loving and somewhat foolish father in the issue – but also a wizard that knows how to die with dignity. It is interesting to remark that, in contrast with Sargon, Zatara ends up a great deal more composed.</p>
<p>Etrigan</p>	<p>Etrigan’s speech is a lot of fun, as this work already had the occasion to comment. Not only is it rhymed, but also in good metric (at least under Moore) and, usually, to good effect or towards a remark about demons. Etrigan is also frequently self-referential in his verse, because the very characteristic of his speech is, in his lore, sometimes used as introduction to his arrival (his voice appears before him, then the suspense pays off with his image, along with his name). In the story, however, the demon is somewhat muffled in his speech – his rhetoric is weak and contradictory: in previous appearances in the series Etrigan seemed to relish in pain and suffering, but in the issue his actions are attributed to fealty to God’s plan (p.8, pan.5). Added to that, the demons appears very little in the issue, limited to the scene where he is preparing along with other rhymers, in which he puts on his armor, stating his motivation, then gets his mount to go to the</p>

	<p>battlefront, taking the time to jab at another demon’s verses: “most noble Spattlefleck, your rhymes improve./ Could they do otherwise? Now, let us mount./ These slobbering horrors and remove./...to where the blood runs hot from glory’s fount!” (p.8, pan.7-8). As can be seen, it is a weak, general criticism, a stanza that relied a little too much on their mounts’ appearance, which is not relevant or unexpected, and ends suggesting that the demon is after glory, wherein contradicting himself in regards to his previous statement of purpose – which was already contradictory. So, not a good use of Etrigan’s rhymes. That misuse is remedied in the demon’s next <i>performance</i>, as he starts by referencing the Monkey King, mentioning that “fear is but a monkey” (p.14, pan.1). The rhyme, which is poor and relies on his demon companion’s rather exotic name (making one wonder whether the demon’s purpose was not enable that rhyme, since it does very little in the story) is succeeded by a more entreating remark, as Etrigan engages in violent battle: “Vile traitors! You do well to be afraid! / ‘tis Etrigan whose whrath you tempt this day!./ Your flesh is butter, ‘neat my smoking blade;/ I bathe within your fine arterial spray!” (p.14, pan.3). The verse is amusing and unexpected, the imagery of butter under a hot knife is aptly suggested and the demon’s knowledge of blood splatter analysis is funny, but appropriate. After a remark about the folly of seeking friends in Hell, Etrigan’s last utterance are the verses with which he responds to Darkness. Uncharacteristically, he repeats himself out of a rhyme scheme, and then is expelled. Etrigan’s rhymes, though sometimes a strain to the plot when ill-fitting, help to imbue the story with a classical touch, pointing directly to the poetic tradition, mainly that of couplets (which is quite extensive and encompasses the heroic tradition as well).</p>
<p>Dr. Fate</p>	<p>Dr. Fate’s speech is grandiose, formal and brings many references to ancient times, particularly of Egypt, grounding the character into its lore – so are a very nice addition to the story, helping the brief appearances of the character to gain consistency and engaging the knowledgeable readers. Fate starts looking down at the army in their side, calling it a “beggar’s army” (p.9, pan.4). In the next panel, he suggests his intention to stand alone in the path of Darkness to stop it from attacking Heaven (in retrospect, that makes him seem folly and overly full of himself). Fate suggests to know angels (p.10, pan.1) and the Phantom Stranger. After he attacks the enemy’s army and meets the Demons Three (he recognizes them, another interesting reference to the character’s lore), as Fate is on the verge of being swallowed by Darkness, he utters “merciful Isis” (p.20, pan.5) – another reference to his origin, though that has changed a lot since. Finally, his pride and high opinion on himself are brought forth by this answer to Darkness’ question with a spew of insults ending with the suggestion that Evil is “a vile, wretched thing, to be scraped form the sandals like dromedary soil” (p.21, pan.3), which contains not one, but two references to the ancient Egyptian desert (sandals and dromedary). As the reader deciphers the meaning of ‘dromedary soil’, however, humor ensues, because it is rare to see superheroes talk this way, even if through euphemisms.</p>
<p>Phantom Stranger</p>	<p>The Phantom Stranger’s utterances are not impressed by any particular pattern outside of the fact that he makes consistent references to being a stranger – an oblique way of referencing his ‘superhero’ name (whether he is a superhero or a mystical detective is hard to say, though). One thing that is interesting about the character’s speech in the issue is the suggestion that once angels have been his friends – if they are not his friends “these days” (p.10, pan.4), they have been at some point. But he does find time to reference his ‘strangeness’. This is a reference to Moore’s version of his origin, as an angel who took no sides, as already pointed out. It is a very subtle reference, but it is reinforced by the revelation, when the angels are fighting, that “they knew me when I had a name” (p.25, pan.1). The Stranger is profoundly disturbed during the fight, to the point of losing his composure and his hat, but his character, which has been traditionally pointed out as having particularly insightful knowledge, at the end of the story, is the one to help Swamp Thing (and the reader) to understand what happened with Darkness and the Light, and how the concepts were dependent on one another (p.38, pan.1-3). So, the Phantom Stranger’s ‘voice’ in the issue is that of reason, a voice with an interpretative role and which frequently bears important</p>

	information, much like Cain's (I could not say that Abel bears any information in the issue). On that note, Dayton's voice is also a bearer of important emotional information, but it cannot understand or interpret, so the roles are quite distinct.
Darkness	Different from the usual scheming supervillain character in superheroes' comics, the Darkness does not show any evil intent, nor has a greater plan or scheme. Nothing other than curiosity seems to move it, and it is not particularly aggressive or interested in its contenders. Darkness calls every being it gets in contact with 'little thing'. At first sight, this might sound like a derisive comment, this turns out not to be truth, because Darkness never shows derision – it is, rather, interested in what the other characters have to say, only attacked when provoked and only showing despise (by ejecting the heroes after their trials) when offended or taken for granted. Darkness is full of questions, having relatively no answers. But it seems to develop over time, with the answers it gets, for not only the questions change, but the information acquired is elaborated into further questions. It first asks what it is (p.16, pan.4), it is told its name is Evil, and that it fights light unceasingly. Then asks what Evil is, is told a bunch of insults – and the information that it's contrary to the light (p.21, pan.3), then it asks what is Evil for, and is once again answered that it opposes Light (p.28, pan.4). As one can see, though it aggregates information, not much information is given. Finally, with Swamp Thing, who answers with an analogy, Darkness is able to decide what to do.
Spectre	The Spectre only has two utterances during the issue, which make him an unscritable character, of sorts. First, he forbids Darkness to extinguish the Light – but it was already clear that he had no stake in that fight, so his gesture makes him look desperate, proud and foolish. Finally, asked about the what is Evil for, he asks that Evil exists only to be avenged, in order to illustrate to others what happens to those who do not follow the Light – namely, retribution. His speech reinforces the notion of punishment (which is very coherent with the character, but also makes him seem very limited on his thinking, because restated. Moreover, this makes the Spectre seem full of empty threats – and therefore undignified, a significant shift, especially when attached to one of the most powerful characters in the DC Universe.

Table 20- Characters' Speech Pattern (by order of appearance)

The reciter, then is quite versatile and knowledgeable in each character's lore, at least enough to reference their origins and characteristics without incoherence. It is also capable to relate to other traditions, such as rhymes and blank verse, in order to impress each character with a distinctive speech pattern, and even vocabulary (as in the case of Swamp Thing, with his references to nature, and Fate, with his old Egypt references). In such a verbose work, this effort pays multiple times, for it helps the reader to tell the voices apart, even if it is limiting in regards to character development. That is because a character which has a characteristic mentioned does not necessarily evolve, and multiple such references in a story with a limited space tends to limit the developmental choices. But it must be said that it works – most characters are distinctive and well-referenced. Of course, that does not mean that every character is well represented – Dr. Occult, for instance, is not, and nor are Sargon or Zatara. Or the Spectre, despite his importance. What can be said is that, in a situation where speech and images compete for space, in a quite prolix adventure, the recite makes every line count, generally.

There is also the use of repetition (the particular type of stuttering mentioned above) as indicative of emotional content, as well as a variety of expletives such as “aaaaa!” (p.17, pan.4) to denote surprise, fear, pain or denial (“no!”, in the case in point). Most of these come from Dayton, who also is very submissive to his friend John and seems to address most of his comments towards him. The reciter employs all these resources in order to gradually mount the narrative tension, so by the time the Spectre arrives and all seems lost, almost every protagonist is giving off signs of emotional language.

A distinct sense of humor can be felt throughout the issue, verbally, as well – the ‘arterial spray’, the jab at the demon’s rhymes, Zatara’s obsession with Zatanna and Constantine’s relationship, Deadman’s constant humorous remarks and the stream of insults Darkness suffers can be cited as examples, besides the hyperbolic nature of Cain and Abel’s dialogue. All in all, a voice that is knowledgeable, very adept in the tradition of both Comics and Literature, with a lot of versatility in style that is capable of imprinting in multiple characters distinctive voices (if not worldviews). A voice that uses modulation, repetition and expletives to control the emotional tone of the narrative. This voice also has a lot of dark humor to it, and it seems to have a lot of fun playing with the characters’ idiosyncrasies.

4.2.6 Focalization

Focalization’s concern is, as seen before, the relationship between that which is perceived with the one perceiving it. This section will list the focalization shifts in the story, as well as provide comment on two particularly significant uses of focalization, namely the Swamp Thing’s interpretation of his *American Gothic* journey and Dayton’s role in the story. First, however, there are some words to be said about focalization as a narrative structure, in itself and how it can be worked in the iconic aspect of comics.

The notion is taken from Mieke Bal’s *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1997), who defines it as the study of “the relations between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented” (p.142). The notion is very similar to that which Genette presents as a quality of the narrating instance in the ‘Mood’ section of his book, *Narrative Discourse, an Essay on Method* (1983), where he christens the term in order to avoid the “too specifically visual connotations” (p.189) of other commonly used terms in narrative studies, such as ‘vision’, ‘field’ and ‘point of view’ – the difference being that Bal

grants the focalization the status of a narrative structure in itself, Genette regarding it as a quality of the narrating instance. Bal argues that this accounts for cases in which the narrator is unreliable, and so the reader is shown partial (in the sense that it may be unknown or twisted, or unknowingly twisted) information. While Genette himself came to dispute the notion that his proposed structure did not account for the unreliable narrator, this work is subscribed to Herman and Vervaeck's account of narrative structures not only because of the cohesive qualities of their research, but also because, even if Bal did not significantly differentiated the term from Genette's notion (and the judge is still out there), a specific section about focalization, separated from the narrating instance and as an instance in itself, (the *focalizer*), is very useful indeed in a work that, among other things, aims to understand how the narrative guides the reader's input and the reading itself.

Focalization, as seen before, can be *internal* (when the focalizer is a character in the story) or *external* (when it is not), *fixed* (one focalizer throughout the narrative), *variable* (two focalizers alternating with each other) and *multiple* (more than two focalizers). The focalizer's relation with the narrative space can be *panoramic*, where the focalizer controls the entire space of a narrative, *simultaneous*, where the focalizer perceives several places at the same time or be *limited*, that is, restricted to the place where the focalizer is. The focalizer can be *panchronic* (or move freely through time) *retrospective* (looking only to the past) or *synchronic* (the perception happens only at the time the event is happening). The focalizer can be omniscient or have limited perceptions, usually those experienced by a character. It may be emotionally *subjective* (involved) or *objective* (not involved emotionally). Finally, the focalizer's ideas and ideology can be presented *implicitly* or *explicitly* in the text (an ideology is always present in the text). When there are different ideologies coexisting in the narrative, it is called '*polyphonic*'.

Of course, there are different problems that arise when a medium is conveyed in two different languages at the same time, mostly in the realm of the images, where issues of focalization are not always clear. To that, an approach that is particularly helpful is that of Kai Mikkonen, in his article *Focalisation in Comics: From the Specificities of the Medium to Conceptual Reformulation* (2012), who suggests that the reading of the narrative information in graphic stories involves not only a distinction between narrator and focalizer, but also the consideration of factors like narrative voice, verbal focaliser (sic.), centre of visual perception, centre of attention, picture frame and many other elements such as color, tone, hue, texture, style of the graphic line, caricature and form of speech and thought balloons (p.71).

Mikkonen argues that, despite the fact that large majority of the panels are either unclear or third-person shots, a window the reader watches the images through, so to say, there are strategies that the reader can use to approach the idea of internal focalization in images other than what he calls the *point of view* (that is the scene as seen through the eyes of a character, with or without distorted perceptions – in this work also referred to as *ocularization* shots), mainly described as cinema shots: the *eyeline shot/match cut* (structures related to a character seeing something, first showing the character looking, then what the character sees), the *over-the-shoulder* shot (the camera either gets close to the character's point of view or follows closely the character's movements), the *reaction* shot (shows a character's facial/bodily reaction to something that is seen), the *perception* shot (a distorted view, or hallucinations). Other factors, such as the character's placement and gaze can influence the reading – for instance, when a character is looking straight at the reader an effect of shared subjective perspective may be created. The tone of a narrative can also be influenced by factors such as lighting, frames shape and size, graphic line, colors, etc. The techniques interact to form a complex gamma of possibilities. Focalization in comics, thus, is majorly doubled and/or ambiguous. The dynamic interaction of words and images can “enable graphic storytelling to fully exploit the distance between a self who speaks, a self who sees and a self who is seen, or the split between a narrating and an experiencing self” (MIKKONEN, 2012, p.88).

A more detailed review of Mikkonen's work and comparison with similar modern takes on focalization in graphic narratives and the application of Narrative Theory to the study of comics can be found in a previous work (VIDAL, 2014, pp.155-190), which is accompanied by a consideration of the effect of different styles of drawing in the reading of the narratives, and also a minor contribution to the study of style, with the proposed reading of shadow intensity and direction as altering the mood of the story and adding signification to selective exaggeration in anatomical proportions as a means of signification (big brains and heads suggest thinking, hands and muscles suggest power, and so on). But the notion of features such as proximity, reactions and perceptions in the visual medium is significant in this work, and as such deserved a little more space in the building of the theoretical blocks necessary to rest our analysis upon. The idea of referring to ‘shots’, ‘takes’ and even ‘viewpoints’ is also helpful – despite used mainly for descriptions of movie scenes and camera work, the approach fits well to the medium in question. That said, this analytical effort is not focused on listing the types of focalization found in the narrative, but rather on getting a

working understanding of how focalization is employed in the narrative and how it is significant to the reading – the difference being that between analyzing focalization in the narrative and testing the theory presented.

First, however, there’s also the need of a few words on how to identify emotions in characters, for the purpose of understanding this particular of focalization. Scott McCloud argues that facial and bodily expressions “aren’t something we can opt out of easily, as with words. They’re a compulsive form of visual communication all of us use. We all know how to ‘read’ and ‘write’ them with our faces” (MCCLOUD, 2006, p.81). So, a language we all learn how to read from a very early age. However, McCloud still identifies six basic expressions, which he demonstrates mainly through images, without descriptors: surprise, fear, disgust, anger, joy and sadness (MCCLOUD, 2006, p.83). He then proceeds to develop these expressions in various degrees of intensity, and then mix them in several ways, to exemplify their seemingly infinite possibilities, especially when taken into consideration along with the angle from which the image is depicted, the context, the world build and the interaction between characters, all adding slight variations to this notion. The basic facial expressions and their starting developments by McCloud are inserted in the Annex 1 of this work, for exemplification. But McCloud cites Paul Ekman briefly (p.82, pan.7), and Ekman seems to be the expert who inspired McCloud’s classification of basic expressions (only McCloud substitutes Ekman’s ‘happiness’ with ‘joy’, for some reason).

Paul Ekman, in his *Unmasking the Face* (2003), identifies six basic expressions, and their key features – Ekman identifies three basic sections in the face, the brow, the eyes and the jaw and mouth:

EMOTION	DESCRIPTORS
SURPRISE	Raised eyebrows (curved and high, the skin below the brow stretches), eyes open wide (the sclera shows above the iris, and sometimes below), jaw drops open, but without tension or stretching of the mouth (p.45)
FEAR	Brows raised and drawn together (the wrinkles are in the center, and not stretched), the upper eyelid raises (exposing the sclera) and the lower eyelid tenses and is drawn up, the mouth is open and the lips are either tensed or stretched, but in both cases drawn back (p.63)
DISGUST	The brow lowers, pressing down the upper eyelid, while the lower eyelid is pressed by the raise of the cheeks. The nose is wrinkled. The upper lid is raised, and the lower lip is also raised, and either pressed up against the upper lid or is slightly lowered and protruded, showing the teeth (p.76).
ANGER	Contracted brows, drawn together, with vertical lines appearing above them. The upper eyelid is tense and may or not be raised by the action of the brow, while the lower eyelid is tensed and may or not be raised. The eyes have a hard stare, and may or may not bulge. The lids are either pressed together, with corners straight or down, or open squared, as if in a shout. The nostrils may be dilated (p.95-97).

HAPPINESS	As the cheeks are raised by the smile, the lower eyelids are pressed up, but not tense. A wrinkle (naso-labial fold) runs through the corners of the nose to the edges of the mouth. The lips' corners are drawn back and up, and may be parted or not (p.112).
SADNESS	The inner corners of the eyebrows are drawn up, while the skin below the eyebrow is triangulated, with the inner corners up (meaning the eyebrows are drawn together). The upper eyelid inner corner is raised. The corners of the lips are down – or the lip is trembling (p.126).

Table 21 - Facial Expressions according to Paul Ekman (2003)

As with McCloud, there are many gradations to facial expressions in Ekman, but the basic ones should suffice to allow descriptions where needed in the reading of the story – because they need to be recognizable to the reader, and as consequence are frequently exaggerated, like so many other things in the universe of Comics.

4.2.6.1 Analysis

Focalization is very significant in the narrative. It starts with internal focalization in the character of Abel, in a series of four panels containing ocularization shots of what Abel sees, coming from the bottom of the well. Those are the reader's point of entrance into the narrative – from the bottom of a well, as the first indistinct pool of yellow light progressively becomes understandable, as the forms of the bottom of the bucket on top of the well and Cain's head become recognizable. This internal focalization is matched with the brothers' farcical dialogue, particularly from Cain, raising the stakes of a common discussion about whether a bird is a raven or a crow into death threats and verbose insults. There is no inner monologue, as indicated from the presence of speech balloons rather than recordatories with unuttered words – so the dialogue is 'directly heard' by the reader. That first scene sets the tone of a narrative that is playful, smart and intense, and does not shy from hyperbolic violence in order to develop its tropes. That is heightened even more by the fact that, when the focalization is retrieved from Abel's viewpoint, the reader can see an iconic anvil tied to Abel, such an exaggerated feature that brings to mind the old and exquisitely exaggerated Looney Tunes cartoons. The brothers' exchange does close on the characters' faces as they argue about their responsibilities and the importance of the battle ahead, but not necessarily to the profit of the reader, since their expressions do not seem to be overwhelmingly significant, and then the shot recedes to distance the reader from the brothers, as they climb the hill, in a more panoramic manner. The large panel on page three focuses Swamp Thing and Deadman, along with demons, leaving the brothers in the distance. Despite the internal focalization on Abel, no insight into his mind was given to the reader other than the ocularization shots, so it is fair

to infer that it was a device to, figuratively speaking, give birth to the reader into the narrative, so as to start in a playful and visually interesting manner.

The external focalization on the action proceeds, as Swamp Thing and Deadman comment on their situation, sided with demons and preparing for battle, and the whereabouts of their allies. Deadman voices his exasperation with the Phantom Stranger's lack of team spirit and Swamp Thing mentions he respects him, Deadman commenting on how Swamp Thing seems concerned on the first panel of page 5. Then there is the metapanel, in which the floating images of the 'classic frighteners' and Constantine are displayed, in strong red and orange colors, framed on top by a very large partial close-up of Swamp Thing's face, which detach itself from the other images by contrast, being majorly green. The image centers on the eye of the monster, with contracted brow and eyelid, seemingly in an effort of understanding, which he goes on to explain. The metapanel, then, works as a dive into the creature's mind (the red images as memories, or indexes of his revaluation of all his adventures in the arc), and the verbal record shifts from speech balloons to recordatories, but with quotation marks, indicating uttered speech. This means the dialogue (or rather a monologue with a mute interlocutor) continues as Swamp Thing is immerse in his memories, trying to make sense of them and explain his troubles to Deadman. In the last panel, which can also be read as part of the composition, the dialogue shifts to speech balloons once again, indicating that the focus has detached from Swamp Thing's inner thoughts.

After a panoramic of Wintersgate Manor, a close-up on John Constantine shows his concerned and determined face from the outside of the window, facial features that are complemented by his reference to the coming conflict as an "ordeal" (p.6, pan.2) and by Zatanna's comment that John looks "tired and worried" (p.6, pan.3). Interestingly, the panel two's hatching and noise, created to mimic the raindrops on the glass and make only the outlines of the images clear make Constantine's expression the most detailed and clear information, and therefore the focus of the reader's attention. As the group prepares to begin their session there is a variety of angles, but of significance as focalization there are only a close-up on Dayton's head (p.6, pan.5), showing his hesitancy through his facial expression and his stuttering both, and a detachment from the emotional aspect of the scene to the scene itself as the group clasps hands and resembles a star (pan.6). Dayton starts to describe what he is sensing in Hell on page 7, followed by one of the most ominous facial expressions possible, on Baron Winter, in the first panel, which is very effective, lit from below for dramatic effect – even if his eyes seem to be a foot apart. On the second panel, though, there is a telling cue

for how the narrative point of view is going to work, as there is a panel inception of sorts, with Dayton's eyes oversee the figure of Etrigan lifting a scorpion-like creature among other demons, seen only in silhouette. The smaller panel is framed by the lightnings in his helmet, and the panel serves to indicate that it is Dayton's conscience assessing the information (through the helmet). Not only these things appear in the panel, but they are also described by Dayton, with the additional information that the demon is "preparing for war" (p.7, pan.2). The focalization shifts to a third-person view of the séance, as Zatanna and Constantine seem surprised with the information provided by Dayton and ask for more details. It is interesting to note that, though there are many instances of close-ups of hands, faces and burnt bodies, the majority of the panels in which the séance appears after they clenched hands is angled so as to give the reader the impression of sitting in the room, mainly at the table (but sometimes behind the characters or over their shoulder). This contributes to the reader's immersion in the narrative as well. But what is established in this page is still more interesting than the focus on the characters' expressions to provide insight in what is going on emotionally with them: the notion that, whenever Dayton is narrating the battle, which frequently comes accompanied by images, the scene is focalized through his conscience. That becomes important as Dayton's emotional reactions to the things he sees in Hell and during the battle, strong enough to break him down and leave him mad at the end, give the reader a control subject, so to say, to measure how a normal person, uninvolved in magical exploitations, would react to the sheer proportion of the events told in the story. In the following panels this is made clear, as the rest of the page shows Dayton's head, apparently focused and serious, as he describes the images of Etrigan preparing for battle (they appear in the left side of the page). They show a gradual close-up on Etrigan, first from a distance (taking into consideration panel 2), then he getting something from the boiling cauldron and, finally, a close-up of his face, with lots of hatchings and detail, as well as an animalistic take on the demon's face, to detach the reader even further, with a cruel smile full of pointed teeth and in the act of shoving a scorpion on a spike just as Dayton realizes, amazed, that his armor is alive. On the next page there is a shift on focalization to a third-person view, in which Dayton's narration is substituted by direct speech, but it is Dayton's strong emotional reaction that gives the scene its intensity – without that, the demon might look plain silly squelching a bug onto his horns, in the fifth panel of page 8. The focalization shifts again to Dayton's narration, with images of Hell, as Dr. Fate arrives, teleporting near Swamp Thing and Deadman, in what may be one of the best examples of what Mikkonen calls match cut or eyeline shot, first with a panel where

Deadman and Swamp Thing look surprised, wide eyes, open mouth and vacant expressions, followed by a panel in which the reader looks over the shoulder of the heroes at the imposing arrival of Fate, materializing before them. Once again, Dayton's focalization adds emotional depth to the scene and the character of Dr. Fate, linking it to his origin in ancient Egypt through the mention of sand and deserts, as well as mentioning how ancient his mind is (p.9, pan.1-4); and, in a nervous manner, stuttering and talking directly to John Constantine, his only known friend in the séance, for support, surprised at the exotic and inhumane quality of the character when he realizes the mind belongs to the helmet, not the person behind it. Focalization shifts again to a third-person view as the direct speech appears once again and the characters are introduced, and a close-up on the face of a horrified demon in the first plane (p.9, pan.6) prepares the reader for yet another tense moment, which is the arrival of the 'lights'. There is no shift in focalization during their exchange, where the heroes show surprise at the Phantom Stranger knowing angels, other than the dramatic shot of the Stranger from below (what is called 'worm's view'), which makes him seem large and significant – the relative close-up, making him look physically big on the page also helps to that effect. As the angle shifts to a panoramic, detaching the reader from the scene and giving him a general look of the heroes distancing themselves, the focalization once more shifts to Dayton's consciousness, as denoted by the restart of the narration. On page 11, Dayton's emotional (as told by his stuttering) description of their side and the opposite side is interrupted by a panel in which the focalization shifts to a third-person view of the séance (but with a testimonial shot, at eye-level with the others in the séance), but soon resume to contemplate the Darkness, as it starts to move. Interestingly, Dayton's consciousness also acts precisely like the omniscient narrator, not only capable of moving freely through the action but also capable of insight into the characters' minds.

Page 12 is particularly denoting of that feature, as the grandiose scene, where Darkness starts moving into Hell, is shown. Because of its size, which is acquitted with the high stakes and narrative tension, and because of the need for mystery, and importance in the story, the reader is only supposed to understand the Darkness' shape in the final pages, where all is revealed. So, it is impossible to show Darkness in any visually relevant manner beforehand. More: Darkness, in the page, is moving in an indistinct scenario, marked specifically by chaos, and any attempt of scale (say, putting a minuscule demon next to it) would make it a lot less impressive than the descriptions given – in the page it is described as "too big to think about" (pan.4). So, the idea is a creature defying all possible representation,

but in the page it looks like a blob of dirty dry brush strokes moving out of what looks like water, surrounded by smoldering vapor. The narrative solution to that problem resides precisely in focalization: first, through Dayton's narration. Upon realizing that the creature began to move, Dayton is so surprised by its size that he inadvertently almost lets go of Occult's hand, condemning them all. He then immediately begins begging Constantine to give up the enterprise and allow him to take his helmet off, because the Darkness is so big and terrible he has problem dealing with its mere existence, and he begs: "no more" (p.12, pan.5). Not only that, but the page, featuring Darkness first at a distance, then what would amount to a close-up if there were any decipherable feature in the image, is interrupted by three panels with stupefied faces: panel 2 shows three demons with eyes wide open in surprise, panel 3 shifts focalization again to the séance, in third-person view, and shows Dayton, also with a surprised and fearful expression, and finally panel 4, bringing Swamp Thing and Deadman with wide eyes and open mouth, also full of surprise, as well as an intense (dramatic) shadow in Fate's helmet. That is, the horrible blob of dry-brush strokes is virtually surrounded of fearful and horrified people, telling the reader how big and horrible it is. This reliance on focalization, and Dayton in particular, for piling up the stakes and mounting the narrative tension is quite consistent through the story.

Page 13 starts with another shift of focalization to the séance, in third-person view with direct discourse, where the mages usher Dayton onwards. The exchange is presented in four panels with testimonial shots, where the reader is at the other characters level, seemingly at the table, but panels 3 and 4 have the distinct masked figure of Dayton on the first plane, with wide eyes. His expression contrasts with those of the mages, who seem determined, but calm and serious. That, and the large close-up on Dayton's head, in particular his scared eyes, in panel 6, make the mages seem more imposing, by contrast (while he looks whiny and scared). At the bottom of the page, Dayton's conscience once again takes the reigns of the story, in an interesting shift where his narration (in third person this time, as indicated by the voice balloons) is superposed to the scene in Hell, where Etrigan prepares to charge against Darkness. The scene shifts straight to a third-person view of the battle, as Etrigan betrays Lisquinelle, but Dayton's focalizer takes over once again, impressed with Etrigan's boldness and insanity. In page 15, already discussed in detail in this work, due to it being one of the pages filled with small panels, quick shifts in focalization occurs, as the setting changes from the séance to Hell. That serves to highlight the dubious character of the images of Hell, which are at one time what Dayton sees and, depending on the reading, what happens in Hell as

well, and which Dayton describes with complementary information. As per usual, the scenes of Hell are marked with Dayton's consciousness and the scenes in the séance, which in the page are mostly limited to reaction shots, are seen through a third-person undetermined focalizer, apparently at eye-levels with the séance participants. In the scene, Dayton offers additional information about Darkness – it hungers for knowledge, and it is cold.

In the last panel of the page, Dayton loses contact with Etrigan, and that ends his focalizer for the moment, so that Page 16 shifts to a third-person focalizer inside Darkness, as Etrigan is tested. And here there is an indetermination as to whether the Darkness' discourse represents internal focalization or not, for they may be the creature's inner thoughts the reader perceives (along with Etrigan, through speechless communication of some sort), since there is no source for the utterances, the words are lost in pools of black. The reader sees Etrigan from the outside, including his direct speech, but if through the conscience of Darkness or not, that rests only on the eyes of the reader. When Etrigan is expelled, the voice of Dayton takes over for a panel, before the narrative shifts once again on page 17 to a third-person focalizer, in the séance – but one very close to Dayton, focusing on his eyes, contracted with what seems like determination, as he warns the group that Darkness noticed their presence and is trying to get rid of them, instinctively. Constantine, with a pained look on his face (which is also displayed in close-up), warns the presents that some sort of shockwave is coming, there is a panoramic panel, in which the furniture is flying around the room as the attack hits, a panel with Dayton, head tilted upwards, in pain, in the first plane, without leaving a testimonial position, as if the 'eye of the reader' was leveled with the eyes of the other occupants of the table. In the last panel of the page, though, Sargon the Sorcerer is shown on the first plane, a large close-up, as he realizes with surprise and dread in his eyes, that his chest is beginning to burn. In page 18 there is a haunting progressive close-up, lasting four panels, in which Sargon starts to despair, but, admonished by Zatara, collects himself, asks for forgiveness and bursts into flames – but manages to save his dignity in the process. The panels slowly approach the character, progressively, in his moment of pain, ending up with the large (in the page) burning body fallen over the table, still holding hands with his colleagues. The 'camera', so to say, intently approximates Sargon, focusing his emotions and pain, in order to enhance the reader's identification and the emotional content of the scene. It is, in that regard, a form of focalization, only a lot more subtle than textual focalization appears, usually. And, again, the size of the character in the page, when not the panel, acts to establish a hierarchy, in which the body, the larger character in the page, is also the emotional peak of it. The angle then recedes

to a panoramic view of the room, with the full table in view, giving the reader a detached look of the scene grotesque, six people very strangely dressed, holding hands with a smoldering cadaver, still burning, and a close-up on Constantine's face, dramatically lit from behind (missing the opportunity of a reddish tint on the colors to suggest the light came from Sargon's body) with a determined expression, uttering that they'd continue to the last man.

Page 18 shifts focalization again, without transition, to a third-person view of Hell, while Dr. Fate attacks the demons. Despite the apparent lack of shifts in focalization during Fate's attack, a close-up on his 'face' (p.19, pan.3) rises an interesting question as to whether even a very close depiction of a face fully covered with a helmet is usable for focalization purposes – the main component, the facial expression, being hidden in the case. Nevertheless, the character, because of the form and position of the helm's eyes, contracted and without any humorous squint, make the character seem serious in most of the panels, but in the next page (p.20, pan.5) there is a significant change in the use of shadows and even a suggestion of an expression in the helmet, no longer contracted in determination but rather surprised at the proximity of Darkness. So, even if an expression would be impossible, in the diegetic universe, the style (that is, the notion that every element of the image is not only representation, but also art, and as such to be read according to the notion of an aesthetic volition guiding their production) and narration contribute to make even the expressions of a helmet significant. Which is an interesting point to make, even if the effect is subtle. In the panel in question, deep shadows give the scene dramatic intensity, while the character is made more vulnerable through the angle of the 'shot' (bird's view). The angle also allows the artist to suggest the expression in the helmet's 'face', seen at an unusual angle:



Figure 53 - The Impossible Expression (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.20, pan.5)

Dr. Fate is swallowed by Darkness and the focalization again shifts to Darkness (as we choose to read these instances). Fate is tested, but his despise for Evil makes him fail to give an appropriate answer, and he is expelled to the outside, which signals another shift in focalization, to a third-person view (p.21, pan.5). This view continues until the end of page 22, with a close-up of Swamp Thing's serious expression as they contemplate their scarce possibilities of victory (p.22, pan.3). Then there is page 23, where the reaction shots of the characters are framed by the hands clasped. This page is a rich example of Mikkonen's idea of closeness and reaction shots as vehicles of focalization, for these elements are displayed very consistently in it. First, a close-up on the hands is used to bring the reader's attention to the shift in setting, but in a very particular manner: it presents the hands of Sargon and Constantine, clasped, Sargon's hand a smoldering burnt ruin, without any more context or transition. The sudden shift in setting and focus on the hands brings back Sargon's death, which was also very closely focused by the narrative. Then, as the characters realize Darkness prepares another attack, there are eight reaction shots (p. 23, pan.2-9), where the main information lies in the characters' facial expressions. First Zatanna, engaged in their task with a determined expression on her face (but still concerned for Dayton's feelings and admonishing Constantine for bullying him), Constantine retorts, also with a serious face, low brow and a pronounced squint, but with a clenched mouth with contracted upper lips, begrudging Zatanna's remark. Next, Dayton with raised brows and tightly shut eyes, with the lower lips bent down, in pain, followed by Dr. Occult's face, with fear and surprise on his wide opened eyes and mouth left open. Then Dayton, still in pain, now with wide open eyes and screaming, fearful, and Constantine, with a contracted brow, elevated in the corners and low in the middle (an expression of anger), a squint in his eyes and open mouth, as he begins to threaten Dayton to shut him up. In the next panel, Zatanna again, this time surprised and fearful, with eyes wide open (surprised), arched eyebrows (fear) clenched teeth (tension) and lower lips descended (dread). This is followed by Zatara, in the last panel of the sequence, with a squint and low brow (determination). These panels in themselves make a case for considering proximity and expressions as a manner of focalization, for they are a poignant example of the artist's capacity of delivering subtle but deeply meaningful expressions, that help to deliver the emotional tone of the narrative. This is done both through contrast (in the case of Zatanna, when her expression shows a wide variation at the realization of her impending doom) and through the use of expressions to reinforce or add to the already emotional context (for instance, in the case of Dr. Occult, who, judged only by his utterance,

might be calm and collected rather than fearful and surprised – the facial expression adds the additional information). The page closes with another pair of clenched hands, those of Zatara and Zatanna, where Zatanna's hand is smoldering. Considering the symmetry of the page, where the reader has in sight the burnt ruin of Zargon's hand, it is clear what is going to happen next, an ominous moment in the story. In the first panel of page 24, there is a very close-up on Zatara's face, where he seems a little scared (eyes wide open) but resigned (no squint of tension), as he threatened Constantine, and then he bursts into flames. Zatanna (p.24, pan.3) keeps holding her father's hand as he burns, with Constantine's face large on the first plane. This looks like an 'over-the-shoulder' shot, the reader gets close to Constantine's perspective as he sees Zatanna's suffering, at the same time that the droplets of sweat on his face and his slightly scared (open eyes) and dreadful (lower lips descended) show he is afraid she will let go. Panel 4 mirrors the first, this time with a close-up on Zatanna's determined (a squint on her open eyes) and furious (arched eyebrows, clenched teeth and tense, contracted lips exposing the teeth in aggression). Since they are both close-ups on the faces of characters, turned to different directions but with different angles (Zatara is seen in worm's view, slightly from below, while Zatanna is seen straightly, but with a slightly bowed head, also denoting a little aggression), a dialogue of sorts is established between them: Zatanna is, indeed, her father's daughter – also, the first thing she does when he dies is to continue to threaten Constantine. A close-up on Zatara's top hat (pan.5), scorched and smoking, serves to retract from the intensely emotional scene, a movement continued by the panoramic view of the séance's table on the next panel.

This detached, third-person look continues through page 25, in which the only notable employment of focalization is that of panel 6, where the Phantom Stranger, looking quite deranged without his mystery hat, is on the panel's first plane, looking very surprised (raised brows, open eyes and mouth agape) at something coming, which the others ignore. Turns out it is the arrival of the Spectre, who stomps into the page on the next panel (though if that is or not a close-up it is impossible to say, due to the sheer scale of the character). On page 26 the third-person focalization continues, though there is a reaction shot of Deadman, who seems surprised (as he says he'd rather be in Pittsburgh). On page 27 there is another instance of parallelism, where the conscience of Dayton narrates what the reader sees on the page. Dayton is very fearful of the Spectre, and is hesitant to contact his mind – until he cannot avoid it and inadvertently catches the Spectre's human name (Jim Corrigan). Dayton is constantly surprised by the sheer scale of the conflict and the power of the Spectre, but seems

a little more collected during this exchange, for he is capable of describing what is going on without stuttering too much, though his enunciations are filled with repetitions, questions and exclamations, as if what he sees is both scary, amazing and difficult to understand (which is precisely what it is, but it is interesting that Dayton's discourse can deliver all these features through the mere description of the scene through Dayton's eyes). Imagewise, there are two close-ups of the Spectre, but both say little about his inner state of mind – he just seems determined. In the first one (pan.1) he has small skulls inside his eyes. This is a use of symbolism, undeniably, but is actually part of the character's lore from his first adventures, and indicates that the Spectre is in the process of enacting vengeance, his sole purpose in the DC Universe. The second one (pan.5) is, perhaps, the most interesting, for his expression changes slightly. He does not seem scared or tense in any way, but his eyelids are tightened, as if he was struggling to see something – as the rest of Darkness descends upon him.

On page 28, there is another case of internal focalization on Darkness, as the focalizer shifts from the parallel stance, with utterances focalized on Dayton and mixed focalization (mainly third-person views), in the iconic spectrum. Spectre is tested and fails, and is spat out, having delivered only vengeance. There is a close-up on the Spectre's face, with very a detailed look of his very rough face, filled with scorch marks and brush patterns. The effect is alienating the reader, to a measure, by enhancing the realism of the scene. This is, as seen, consistently used in the character of the Spectre. Dayton's narration (and focalization) takes over on page 29, for the first panel. The focalization then shifts to a third-person view of the séance, as Constantine asks Dayton what Swamp Thing is doing, then returns to the narration and images of Hell when Dayton resumes his description, obliging Constantine and focusing on the monster, as he enters Darkness willingly.

Through pages 31 and 32, internal focalization is centered on Darkness, and its dialogue with Swamp thing, where he is asked the purpose of Evil and, upon reflection, comes up with a tentative definition involving Evil and Good (actually, 'Virtue') as part of a cycle. Sensing an 'end' coming, Darkness asks for Swamp Thing to leave, which he does. There are not many cues to a visual focalization, as far as body language and facial expressions go, but there is a significant panel (p.32, pan.2) in which Swamp Thing is gesticulating, with his hands open before him. That is enlightening when considering that gestures are something people do to enhance communication, when they are trying to get something across – so, Swamp Thing is effectively trying to have a dialogue with Darkness. That did not happen with the other heroes in the story, who mainly stood floating in Darkness,

in awkward positions (Swamp Thing looks a lot more composed in these panels). There is another close-up of Swamp Thing's face, but he only seems serious and concerned – not really an unusual expression in the issue and not seemingly overly relevant in terms of focalization. At the end of the page Swamp Thing leaves Darkness in a transition panel, at the end of the page.

On page 33, Dayton's narrative returns over the images of Hell. He is surprised and curious with the monster's singular return (not spat out, but leaving calmly), but is more concerned with the advance of the creature, which is almost at the limits of Hell and ready to attack the light. There is a close-up of Dayton's contorted face, wide eyes and extended eyebrows, teeth clenched and lips receded, in fear and dread, as he makes his comments. Dayton then assesses the despairing nature of their situation: the demons three carrying their dead brother, the Spectre weeping and asking for forgiveness. Dayton finally despairs of any resort and says that it is "too late" (p.32, pan.4), but, in a close-up of Dayton's face, still with a similar expression, but with open mouth and seen from below (worm's view) so as to seem significant, Dayton notices the Light appearing, as big as Darkness, and starts screaming at the prospect of witnessing such a conflict. He narrates as the Light descends and Darkness rises to meet it, finally able to understand its shape, and then starts to lose his mind.

In the double page, 34-35, focalization also plays an important role. The page starts with a close-up of his face, tilted upwards and contorted with pain, as he says he understands the shape of Darkness. The focalization then alternates to the parallelism of the narrative, with Dayton's utterances describing Darkness, but only partially, through very short, broken sentences, as the image rises and shows the entire group of heroes looking up, at a distance. The narrative shifts the focus once again to Dayton's face, with eyes wide open, without a high brow (they seem more maddened than fearful, as if Dayton is looking out at the infinite distance, totally focused) and clenched teeth. After a panoramic view, in which the reader can perceive Darkness and Light as two hands, for the first time, there is a montage, narrated by Dayton directly, only images of Hell and Dayton's eyes seem to be in the same frame. One can understand that as internal focalization in Dayton's mind – and use the panel as an indication that whenever Hell appears along with Dayton's narration internal focalization is happening – or as a narrative device to indicate iconically what is being narrated at the moment by Dayton, the apex of the narrative, the culminating point where it all comes together. Or both. Then, there is the image of everything mingling into the yin-yang symbol and a very close-up of Dayton's eye, who screams that he does not understand what he sees,

for it doesn't make sense. The limited focalization is used in a very clever way at the moment, for even if Dayton does not have words to express what he sees, the reader understands perfectly what is going on – the external focalizer makes sure of that when covering Dayton's pupil with a yin-yang symbol just as Dayton professes not to understand what he sees (as his helmet short-circuits). With that, Dayton's role as a storyteller is done, he can no longer tap into the other world, nor is he capable of it. That is the last instance of parallelism in the book.

Page 36 starts with a close-up of the eyes of Dayton, with eyebrows arched up and a squint. The panel can be understood in tandem with the previous one, case in which it becomes almost a 'camera' movement, where a super close-up on Dayton's eyes is receded to show his face for shock effect, with his maddened expression, seeming pained and amused at the same time, with the mouth agape and tongue comically sticking out, more of a caricature of madness than a facial expression one would be likely to find in real life. This case is undoubtedly of focalization, but rather than allowing the reader to contemplate Dayton's feelings it first presents an intriguing expression that the reader cannot promptly discern (for it is rather difficult to read the expression in the eyes of panel 1) and then recedes to a caricature, an exaggeration – where it can be read as a visual cue or as a joke, due to its hyperbolic nature. So, the shift is to a detached third-person view of the scene. The movement continues one more panel and shows a panoramic (but not detailed) view of the destroyed room, with torn furniture, allowing the reader to evaluate the gnarly outcome of the battle: two cadavers, Zatanna mourning her father and Dayton mad with a silly expression in the middle of the table, a Christ figure of sorts, who paid a great price in the process of saving all (his posture is similar to that of Jesus in the Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci, and so the analogy is brought to mind):

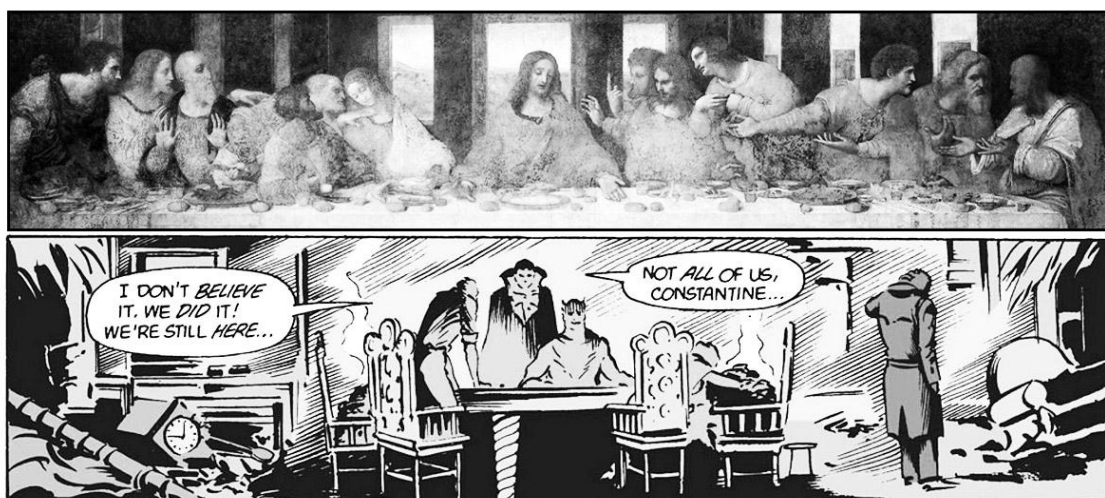


Figure 54 – Comparison Between Two Tables (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p. 36, pan.3; VINCI, Leonardo da, *The Last Supper*, mural, 1495-1498 [detail])

The focalizer remains in third-person view to show how coldly Baron Winter copes with their losses (pan.4-5), ignoring the maddened figure of Dayton and congratulating Constantine, who himself seems very satisfied. Both characters smiling, slightly. That indifference is referenced in the last panel of the page (pan.6), where Constantine ponders that their success does not seem like a victory, but rather a “no-score draw” (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.36, pan.6) – a scene superposed by Dayton’s mumbling face, still with the vague open-mouth smile, eyes wide open and drooling, as he shows his incapacity for letting go of what he saw by mentioning the Darkness’ fingernail. His broken mind is also symbolized very poignantly by the fallen pieces and wires of the helmet, which was linked to his mind throughout the narrative.

Page 37 begins with an interesting panel of undoubtedly internal focalization, all the way to distorted perception, as Swamp Thing is waking up and at first cannot discern who is talking to him. Interestingly, the indistinct figure still has a voice balloon pointing to it, to indicate direct discourse. This is the only case of internal focalization through a direct ocularization shot (other than the ones Dayton ‘sees’ with his mind) in the issue that are not ‘over the shoulder’ of a character or suggested through proximity. The next panel is a close-up on the monster’s eyes, who are relaxed semi-shut, as if the character is just waking up, and then the narrative jumps to a panoramic view of Hell’s ground, with the now usual scorched earth patterns about them, as Swamp Thing gets up. So, once again, a movement of distancing from a character’s perspective to a third-person view of the scene. As the characters discuss the changes in the atmosphere due to the shift in the relationship between Good and Evil, the narrative recedes to focus prominently in the first plane elements of the landscape, where some flowers bloom in Hell – so, even if the presentation of elements in the landscape are usually considered elements of zero focalization, they reinforce the character’s discourse and support it, in a manner (p.37, pan.7). This continues through page 38, where the Phantom Stranger addresses the shifts in the landscapes of Heaven and Hell directly, as the panel shows a fallen demon’s head with a flower sprouting from its horns (p.38, pan.2). Finally, as the characters conclude their adventure by supposing things would continue to change, the angle of the panel recedes to show Cain and Abel once again in the first plane, watching the heroes walk in the distance, an over-the-shoulder shot aimed at shifting the narration instance and giving the reader a different, more detached, perspective of the events (that of Cain and Abel). To mark this transition, the panel is framed by a line pattern of squared spirals. The

focalization then shifts to a third-person view of the discussion between the two brothers, where Abel is still looking at the distance close to the edge of the cliff, concerned with the future of their enterprise as ‘keepers of stories’, and Cain is more stoic about it. As Abel insists in worrying Cain pushes him over the edge. On panels 3 and 4, there are close-ups of Abel’s face, first concerned and slightly scared, with eyes wide open, raised brows and a squint, and then surprised (the squint vanishes) as he feels Cain’s hand on his shoulder. After the push, the narrative recedes to a more distant, third-person view, to indicate that things go back to their normal (wish Abel in the bottom of a hole, as in the beginning of the narrative) and show Cain, calmly and with his hands in his pockets, walking towards his house, as clods and turf still fall down from the edge a reminder of Abel’s fate. Cain is from his inception an exaggerated character, but his corporal expression is purposefully cartoony in the scene, in order to make it funny, in which the detachment of the receding focalization aids. It is a playful ending, where the authors’ names are referenced, in homage, in the tombs in the graveyard – with a special mention of Stephen Bissette’s tendency to be late with his work, as he is referenced as “late for his own funeral” (p.39, pan.6). The story ends in a violent, recurring, joke (for everybody but Abel, that is). What this final section does is to help to reassure the reader that, despite the unexpected outcome of the battle, it is unlikely that stories are changed in any significant way, other than that of relativization of Good and Evil – the forces continue to exist, and so will the stories. Only the notion of absolutes is shattered. In a sense, the characters act as guides (or gatekeepers to the story, which makes more sense considering their background), helping first, in the beginning, the reader to understand what is happening and how important is the battle fought – then, at the end, closing the story and analyzing the probable outcome. It is a subtle focalization that helps the reader to see things like Cain and Abel do and understand their take on the story.

“The End”, it can be said, employs focalization in many significant ways. In the iconic representation, it is used both through close-ups on faces in order to convey complex facial expressions (and the feelings that go along with those) and through ocularization/over-the-shoulder angles of depiction, which would put the reader close to the viewpoint of the character. That last resource is commonly accompanied by a partial or even full facial expression in the character (either in the panel in question or in the subsequent ones, in a ‘reaction shot’). So, it is interesting to note that the iconic representation of focalization is very rarely limited to ocularization shots, but rather very subtly conveyed through proximity and focus on reactions – so always an external third-person point of view, even if, for

focalization purposes, some of these moments are emotionally linked to a character's perceptions and emotions, which guide the reading of the story, to a point. That apparent paradox is due to the very representational quality of the art, and a particularity of the language, which has notorious problems in representing that which is not physical.

Focalization in the verbal spectrum, likewise, is not necessarily linked to a character's stream of consciousness directly displayed, but exceedingly more subtle than that – whenever a character narrates something, for instance, they are interpreting what they are narrating as well. Of course, like most aspects of a text, when scrutiny goes up to a certain level, the matter of focalization becomes very complex and manifest in every sentence – so a level of discernment must be used in the analysis to consider them in tandem with the reading of the story, in order to identify the uses that are important and convey relevant meaning.

There are two instances in “The End” which are very significant to the reading of the story, radically shaping the mood and logical developments involved. Those are the metapanel in page 5, where Swamp Thing recesses the journey up to that point, and manifests his concerns towards the nature of evil, relativizing his adventures to a high degree. This, to a degree, allows for his succeeding on his test – for his concern about Evil as a philosophical concept, even in relation with his adventures, had not been so clearly expressed up to the moment (this will be developed in more detail in the next section, along with a consideration of Swamp Thing as a character and his relation with tradition). The other very significant use of focalization in the issue is through the character of Dayton, and his impressions about what he senses/sees in Hell. The story is built so that he is the conductive voice that narrates to his fellows in the séance what goes on in the other world, so it is his voice that comes through, frequently accompanied by his mental images/scenes from Hell, in most of the instances where there is parallelism in the story. And there is a very good reason for that.

A telling matter of focalization, that sometimes goes ignored or unmentioned in the analysis (because of its focus in whose voice orients the narrating), is that pertaining those voices that are excluded from the narrative. For instance, Darkness is a lot more relatable than Light, and ends up a lot more sympathetic at the eyes of the reader because there is more insight into what it wants – it hungers for knowledge because it was bothered unto being, so to say, by the creation of Light, who only shows up in a couple of panels. The Spectre is also, as the Phantom Stranger mentions, a mystery to the reader – and to themselves, even possibly mad (p.22, pan.2). In “The End”, the reader gets very little insight into what goes on in the minds of the members of the séance, other than Dayton. It is, perhaps, a necessary step in

order to mount the narrative tension and deliver a considerable payoff, to hide the final plan of Constantine, in order to surprise the reader (assuming Constantine had a plan other than trust Swamp Thing, which is quite murky in the story, as mentioned), but there is also other possible reasons for the elision of the inner existence of the mystical characters present. First, magic is supposed to be mysterious. Requiring nothing other than knowledge to be performed by anyone in the diegetic universe (despite Zatanna's origin and Sargon and Dr. Occult having amulets as the basis of their powers, Constantine and Zatara are just humans), it is important that the reader gets a superficial understanding of the general rules, but not insight into the mystery, which is part of what makes magic enticing. That is why everything the reader must know is uttered, and the rules explained as necessary – for example, the notion that they could not unlock hands or they could all die, or that a man's strength in magic is dependent on his will, as Dr. Occult suggests, in a moment of need (p.13, pan.4). But there is another reason for the focalization to rest on Dayton. As Zatanna observes during their trial, "we're used to this sort of stuff" (p.23, pan.2) – while Dayton is, like the reader, unknowledgeable in the rules of magic. Neither has experienced battles with demons, ultimate stakes or even a working understanding of the process and energies involved. It is due to that reason that Dayton is allowed (in the narrative) to wonder, and be surprised and horrified on cue. What Dayton does in the narrative is to be the control sample, the regular person in the middle of the magi, who reacts to things in the same way a reader would, if confronted with the same wonders – and so, he acts as an emotional guide of sorts, so that the reader can understand how amazingly horrible, terrible and powerful the forces involved, how estranging are the demons represented in the narrative (a point that is reinforced by Deadman early on, but Dayton helps to bring home when he looks at Etrigan), how difficult it is for a human to experience this battle, ending up mad at the sheer magnitude of what he has experiences. It is Dayton's voice, uncertain and scared, that stutters its way through the story, reminding the reader how impressive are the things experienced – perhaps a necessity in a medium where, despite being notorious for the high stakes, visually impressive narration and exaggeration, things can become a little strange when colorful characters get together to fight an ultimate battle that ends in a handshake. So, in order to prevent the farcical nature of the story to take precedence, Dayton's wonder is brought forth to root the reader's emotions in the story and prevent the detachment that might ruin the mood. He suffers for us.

Cain and Abel act in the story like guides, with an introduction, commentary on the stakes and, finally, an assessment of the results. Swamp Thing is the critic that assesses the

road so far, and helps the reader interpret the story arc so as to give the narrative a logical conclusion. Dayton is the maestro of the emotional tone of the narrative. Those agents of focalization are industrious to make the difficult, stereotypical narrative work without falling on a full-on farce, even if the narrative voice seems to have its tongue firmly lodged on its cheek at the conclusion.

5 A FEW MORE LEAVES

Our revels now are (almost) ended. The complex matter of the narrative analysis of the story in question has been developed, the perhaps even more complex matter of the character analysis in comic books exemplified – and proven that it is, indeed, complex. The illustration of how a mere comic book can lend itself to a deep and rigorous narrative analysis is done. And yet, there is still ground to cover. At times, the endeavor seemed like something out of a Samuel Beckett play, as in the beginning of *Endgame*: “Finished. It’s finished. It must be finished. It must be nearly finished.” – each step, each short sentence receding from a state of certainty, falling into the realization of incompleteness, that something is still to happen before the end. And that is very appropriate here, the end of an analysis of “The End”. One cannot but feel that Beckett would approve. What is pending here is an interpretation. Or at least a general interpretation, since aspects of the work have been commented and related to different theoretical backgrounds, as the reading of the text ensued – an interpretation of sorts.

Such are the beauties of Narrative Theory: it demands one goes through a given text over and over again, with directed attention to different structures, and gives the reader a crystal clear view of the text studied – along with several possibilities of the text’s assessment. But it does not demand an interpretation of the text as a whole, a syncretic reading, so to say – it exists to understand structure and enlighten, all the while leaving aside the matter of interpreting. That is the prerogative of the reader. Seeing as that is basically what a critical effort is – a reading – it is still a hill to climb in this study. A point must be made, coalescing the data gathered into significance. A reason for this work to exist. And it is, in my opinion, quite ripe at this point.

As Julia Kristeva points out in *Word, Dialogue and Novel* (1986, p.34-61):

Bakhtin’s term *dialogism* as a semic complex thus implies the double, language, and another logic. Using that as a point of departure, we can outline a new approach to poetic texts. Literary semiotics can accept the word ‘dialogism’; the logic of *distance* and *relationship* between the different units of a sentence or narrative structure, indicating a *becoming* – in opposition to the level of continuity and substance, both of which obey the logic of being and are thus monological. Secondly, it is a logic of *analogy* and *non-exclusive opposition*, opposed to monological levels of causality and identifying determination. Finally, it is a logic of the ‘transfinite’, a concept borrowed from Georg Cantor, which, on the basis of poetic language’s ‘power of the continuum’ (0-2), introduces a second principle of formation: a poetic sequence is a ‘next-larger’ (not casually deduced) to all preceding sequences of the Aristotelian chain (scientific, monological or narrative). (KRISTEVA, 1986, p.42)

In her assessment of Bakhtin's notion of *dialogism* (that is, the idea that a text can be influenced by multiple voices – hence the 'dialogue' – and multiple works as well, whereas an intense, combative, dialectic quality arises, defiant of closure and establishing approximations with other texts), Kristeva expands on the author's criticism of the language as a closed system, which strives to point out a) that there is an underlying logic to language, that no language exists devoid of context and the words of a sentence depend on each other to coalesce into meaning; b) that when context is relevant so is the contextual background of the utterance, and therefore different utterances can bear different backgrounds; and c) this opens the possibility of a multitude of influences and voices being present in a given text, encompassing the whole of the tradition. She picks up the Bakhtinian notion of the text as a dialogue between struggling viewpoints (with all that a viewpoint encompasses, including influence) to coin her own term, expanding the term into the notion that every text can be understood as a mosaic of references, every idea as part of a dialogue with tradition, approach which she deems *intertextuality*.

Kristeva does that by supposedly 'fusing' two different axis of signification found in Bakhtin's work, one that understands the text as an utterance, from a subject to an addressee (the axis of *dialogue*) and other that takes into consideration the relation between a text and its context (deemed the axis of *ambivalence*). According to Kristeva:

In Bakhtin's work, these two axes (...) are not clearly distinguished. Yet, what appears as a lack of rigour is in fact an insight first introduced into literary theory by Bakhtin: any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read at least *double*. (KRISTEVA, 1986, p.37)

And, because a dialogue is always an opposition of sorts, academia not being exempt of controversies, there are those³³ who see the coinage of the term as a rhetorical sleights-of-hand to take possession of Bakhtin's notion, others defend Kristeva's views as a legitimate development. As I could muster, the essential difference is that Bakhtin was addressing the internal qualities of a work, and Kristeva took the notion forward to encompass any work and poetic language usage. Be it as it may – and I wouldn't approach the subject with a 50-foot

³³ As can be seen in the article available at the address <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-4017-170107-2616>>, last accessed in 07/08/2019.

stick – the notion of the pervasive quality of tradition into any given text is firmly set: it is there, conscious or not. But the point whether or not it is conscious, I argue, can be important in the reading.

The more attentive reader will have noticed that this work started its ramblings by ripping off Jane Austen, more precisely the first lines of *Pride and Prejudice*: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” Now, the reason why one would do it is clear to any reader. One would struggle to find a better way to establish a novel about marriage – the ironic narrative voice, pairing over the universe, pointing out, humorously and derisively, the utilitarian usage of common sense, concisely speaking volumes about the society commented in mere lines, is just too much fun to ignore, and it makes itself poignantly felt from the first sentence of the novel. That is the reason it is remarkable, that is why it is remembered. No matter the placing of the comas – the sentence is brilliant.

In referencing it, I am doing a number of things: making it clear to the reader that I am knowledgeable about the novel, that I appreciate it, that it is an important part of my net of influences, enough for the sentence to be remembered. Moreover, it argues the point that I belong to a certain tradition – which I am reinforcing with the citation (now) and the parody (then). It is a communion of sorts, and, as any reenactment, a celebration of the tradition referred. There are other cases in this work where tradition was called upon to try to bring the reader closer by establishing a connection through common background; the beginning of the previous chapter is an example – starting with a good-natured joke regarding the setting of the adventure to be analyzed, a parallel between the reading of the analysis and Dante Alighieri’s journey in *The Divine Comedy* is traced – reminding the reader of the well-established literary trope of going through Hell to accomplish a feat, which can be read as a metaphor in itself. The beginning of this chapter brings a well-known sentence by Shakespeare from the Act IV of *The Tempest*, when Prospero summons spirits to perform a *masque*, where they interpret the figures of Iris (goddess of the rainbow and Juno’s messenger), Ceres (goddess of agriculture) and Juno (queen of the gods). After the spirits wish them well and dance for them, Prospero talks to his guests, construing their human lives as equally ephemeral to those of the spirits:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (SHAKESPEARE, *The Tempest*. Act.IV, vs. 148–158)

And how appropriate it is, at the closing of this work, to borrow some of Shakespeare's poetry to try and make the opposite point – that the significance of Art resides precisely in the fact that, transitory as human life may be, some form of transcendence is still possible through those things that remain. When Gilgamesh returned to Uruk-Haven with Urshanabi, the ferryman, he invited his friend to examine the bricks of the city, confirm their solidity – having failed in both being a successful king and gaining immortality, Gilgamesh admired the work of those who had left behind a legacy, not having been capable to 'write his name on bricks' himself³⁴. Now, millennia later, very little of Uruk-Haven remains – aside from Gilgamesh's story. The Sumerian king got his immortality, after all. And such is the power of stories: the really good ones have a knack for staying relevant. They influence and are referred by latter productions, and become universal, an effective part of the cultural background. As *per* Kristeva and Bakhtin.

The notion becomes all the more significant when a given text intentionally makes multiple approximations with tradition, and that is precisely the case of "The End". In this section of the study, as a general interpretation of the text, I gather some of the arguments pertaining the subject that were mentioned throughout the study in order to make the point that the work's (and Moore's, generalizing the argument) poetics is reliant in the discretionary employment of tradition, first in order to imbue the work with a multi-faceted aesthetic quality, allowing the reading in different levels, depending on the reader's familiarity with the medium and knowledge of the specific tradition employed, then in order to break with this tradition, ultimately building and argument towards a novel way of storytelling. And that the story does that by appropriating yet another set of traditions, which are used to subvert the expectations of the reader.

Now, it bears to say that Moore is well-known to be both very knowledgeable and keen on using his references in his *oeuvre*, with works such as the several editions of *The*

³⁴ A free translation to the epic is freely available, in HTML format, at the address <<http://www.aina.org/books/eog/eog.htm>>, last accessed on 07/06/2018. The referred part is in the end of chapter 6, but other references to 'writing the name of bricks' as a metaphor for building a legacy can be found throughout the text.

League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (1999-present), itself a mosaic of references to literary works; *Lost Girls* (1991-2006), an erotic tale with literary characters (Wendy Darling, from Sir James Matthew Barrie's *Peter Pan and Wendy*, Alice from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, and Dorothy Gale, from L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*) as protagonists; *Neonomicon* (2010) and *The Courtyard* (2003), tributes to Lovecraftian fiction; and *Promethea* (1999-2005), a syncretic history of Magic and the female principle disguised as a superhero's story. On the matter of superheroes, not only a great portion of Alan Moore's career was based on writing superheroes, but also of both critical assessments of the common superhero tropes, but also of the history of the medium. *Watchmen* (1986) was both a discussion of common superhero tropes and a deconstruction of the genre, as I have mentioned in my thesis (VIDAL, 2014, p.319-324), but it also develops a parallelism with the history of the medium, through parallels between the superhero groups of the diegetic universe (the Minutemen, the ill-fated Crimebusters and perhaps the Watchmen) having parallels with the story of the editor (respectively, Justice Society of America, and the silver age and bronze age Justice League). *Supreme* (collected in 2003), a take on Superman, went through the many phases of the hero's publication, both through imaginative though history-grounded plots and the variation in style and composition in the medium. Among Moore's recreation of superheroes (along which is Swamp Thing, by the by) are *Tom Strong* (1999-2006), another recreation of Superman, with a steampunk, science-hero grounding, and *Top 10* (1999-2001), a re-imagination of the routine of a police department in a superhero-bound world. Not to mention *Marvelman/Miracleman* (1982-1984), a less magical take on Captain Marvel (Shazam), another rip-off of Superman. All this to say that Moore knows his Literature, his superheroes and the history of Comics, and those are tropes that usually accompany his works.

In the book *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel* (2009), Annalisa Di Liddo points out the use of tradition as a basic feature of the writer's work. In the first chapter, in which she investigates the formal aspects of Moore's *oeuvre*, she makes three different points: a) *the language of comics and the aesthetics of the Graphic Novel* (p.27), in which she mentions Moore's knowledge of the aesthetics and language of the medium; b) *the rewriting of literary sources* (p.35), in which she points at the familiarity of the author with the literary tradition and how Moore tends to appropriate it in his works; and c) *revisiting the superhero tradition*, in which she comments on how Moore also employs the tradition of Comics. As one can note, all the points Di Liddo considered relevant have something to do

with tradition, either literary or of the medium of Comics. So it is fair to say that these elements occupy a very important place in the author's work.

Of course, the notion is also very relevant to the story in question. The reader familiar with the series would have noticed the many approximations with Literary tropes taking place in the series, the shift in the character's speech patterns and the narration, with large sections focalized through characters, giving them more depth. The similarities between the creature's speech with blank verse would not have been overlooked, and neither would have been the plots in which many different settings converged into a synchronous point, or purposefully mirrored classical story structured (and here I am referring specifically the *Swamp Thing Annual #2 [1985]*, with Swamp Thing going to rescue Abby's soul from Hell). So, the reader will have a notion of what is going on, both in terms of continuum and of the stylistic choices to be found.

To begin with, the first thing a reader sees when approaching a comic are the images, and, by consequence, the style. That is true even when the reader does not have the common habit of leafing through the comic beforehand – images have a less conventional relationship with their object, and as such are more promptly perceived³⁵. As we have seen, the style of the comic in question is particularly suited both for horror stories and to give the reader a strong impression of an 'artsy' approximation to drawing: the hyperbolic approach to the characters, amplifying physical characteristics to highlight symbolic features, the pitch black dark shadows used to heighten the impression of mystery, emotional intensity and the complexity of images, adding depth; the approach to the inking, which highlighted brush strokes and splatter techniques is in itself a deviation from the cleaner style most commonly found in comics, with clear constant lines and solid shadows, a resource that both turned the reading more complex by adding information, like the abundant use of hatching, dry brush and ink splatters – something used to alienate the reader, to some measure, prominently related to Hell's scenery and the Darkness, so a feature symbolically related to Evil as well. That is, in itself, an approximation to the classical tradition of painting, where brush techniques are the common usage and drawing lines used more punctually (again: painting works with form, color masses, and drawing with limits). The style marks the comic as gritty, complex and

³⁵ As per Luiz Antonio de Cagnin's assessment of Peircean semiotics, in which the author considers that, since they relate directly to their reader's world experience, signifying through similarity and not needing the mediation of a code, images are more promptly read (CAGNIN, 1975, p.30-31).

unwelcoming, more demanding than a clear-cut comic, and a simple look will show that the amount of text in the pages requires a more directed effort from the reader.

On entering the comic, the reader is confronted with Cain and Abel, another wave at tradition – both biblical of the title. There is a dark humor to their exchange, and even when they ensure the reader that the impending battle is of the utmost importance, a satirical note surrounds their exchange. Following this introduction, the reader is shown the first scene in Hell, with Swamp Thing and Deadman among demons, monsters among monsters. But we will get to the notion of ‘monster’ eventually. The fact that the battle occurs in Hell is also telling. Not only of the extreme nature of their situation – for Hell is a place situated beyond hope, as it is written on the door in Dante’s poem – but also of a connection to a very specific lore, that of Abrahamic religions. Many cultures have developed their views of the Underworld, but the idea of Hell as a place of expiation of sin (as it appears in the story), of retribution, the inhabiting of demons, is quite recognizable – a point reinforced by the presence of angels, and the supposed origin of the SpectreSpectre and the Phantom Stranger.

As Swamp Thing recalls his adventures in conversation with Deadman, there is a very particular panel that takes the story to another level of complexity altogether:



Figure 55 - Metapanel (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.5)

Perhaps the first thing that should be mentioned about it is that, though it works as a metapanel (where the figures merge together into one complex whole), that is mainly because of the superposition of the elements. There are, in fact, three distinct moments in the image, marked by the transitions from direct speech (word balloons) to recordatories, and back again to balloons. So, it is fair to understand that, as Swamp Thing dives into his memories to explain to Deadman why he is troubled, the reader goes along, and his disembodied voice (where word balloons have no point of origin to refer to) accompanies visual images of his recollections. That happens precisely at the point where he starts to refer to specific elements of the *American Gothic* story arc, and, tellingly, the text not only ditches the representation of direct speech but also starts to come in quotation marks, itself a sign of indirect speech. In the first moment, the monster speaks directly to Deadman, telling him that he is feeling uncertain about what he has seen throughout the arc. As he references the path taken, and how he has seen many aspects of Evil, the narration shifts to the recordatories, with the quotation marks to indicate that the speech is actually happening (not an internal monologue), and the enunciations accompany the images floating in the dark, respectively a vampire, a werewolf, undead images (a group of undead walking and one zombie shooting a gun), with the prominence of John Constantine, superposed to them and colored differently (with a yellowish tint, whereas the ‘faces of Evil’ referenced by Swamp Thing are colored in a reddish specter). The selective use of colors, as already mentioned, suggests a psychological view of colors where the reds are employed to display the highly emotional content (cf. GAGE, 2012, p.58-69, about the Neoimpressionist movement).

As noted before, the images summarize the entire *American Gothic* arc, first with a reference to the *punk* vampires of Rosewood, from *Swamp Thing* #38 and #39, which he considers to be a community, destroyed because it endangered another, placing himself as the offender and wondering if the worst butchers in History had done worse and if Evil is unavoidable. Then the descriptions become more generalizing (and yet quite thorough):

I have seen... human beings... both tormentors and tormented... locked into a dismal circle... of pain and retribution... gender against gender... race against race... generations lost in a maze of death... and guilt... and gunfire... I have seen... the human monsters... that this awful pattern... has shaped... rejoicing... in the senselessness they see in life... by killing without motive... the man who started me... upon this dark trail... promised me answers... (MOORE *et al.*, 1986, p.5)

From the quotation above, the “tormentors and tormented” who are locked into the circle are probably referencing the conflict between the undead slaves, the Louisiana zombies

of *Swamp Thing* #41 and #42, who come back to fight their oppressor and enslaver, also caught in the circle. “Gender against gender” is a reference to the story in *Swamp Thing* #40, set in Kennescook, Maine, where the oppressed wife is infected by an old curse and turns into a werewolf. The “generations lost in a maze of death and guilt and gunfire” are a clear reference to the ghosts in the old Cambridge house in San Miguel, CA (a stand-in for the Winchester House, a historic touristic attraction in San Jose, CA), both humans and animals killed by the gun “Cambridge repeater”, featured in *Swamp Thing* #45. Finally, the “human monster” refers to The Bogeyman, the serial killer obsessed with eyes from *Swamp Thing* #44, while the figure of Constantine, hovering over them, is presented as “the man who started me upon this dark trail”.

This is a situation in which what is elided is as important to the interpretation as what is present. Away from the panel are any references to *Swamp Thing* #43 (the issue with Chester, the old hippie who finds the tuber); *Swamp Thing* #46 (the tie-in with the *Crisis* event); *Swamp Thing* #47 (the meeting with the Parliament of Trees, which is significant to this story); *Swamp Thing* #48 (the fight against the Brujería) and *Swamp Thing* #49 (with the preparations for the final battle and Judith’s travel to awake the Darkness). Or, to put in other words, elided are any deviation from the trope of facing the ‘classic frighteners’ and the issues that do not take place in America (well... the United States of America). It seems quite obvious in the reading of the story arc that some of these deviations are made which are organic to the plot – the conversation with the Parliament of Trees and the fight with the Brujería are the two most prominent examples of that, both relevant to the story and fitting organically, though if one wanted to keep the American trope constant it would do as well to fit the Parliament with the giant sequoias in California and the Brujería spanning from the tradition of Salem, Massachusetts, bringing witches and evil trees into the fold of horrors. And there are, as well, those deviations that fit quite strangely into the story, namely the issue with Chester (*Swamp Thing* #43) and the *Crisis* issue (*Swamp Thing* #47). If the problem with *Swamp Thing* #43 can be deduced (because of the shift in the art) to be yet another result of time constraints in the production of the artwork, and so the filler is a story that does not advance the plot, but rather insists on looking behind, re-introducing the entire lore of the title as homages. The notion is reinforced by Gary Spencer Millidge in the book *Alan Moore: Storyteller*, where he comments that “after continuously wrestling with the inexorable monthly deadlines, Bissette and Totleben were replaced by new regular artist Rich Veitch with issue #51” (MILLIDGE, 2011, p.117). The *Crisis* issue seems to be more curious –

basically, the problem with the monster being taken into a satellite for no good reason, only to talk about a conflict in which he was not going to take part, or so that some people could look at him.

In the book *The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore* (2003), when commenting the story arc, Moore himself manifests displeasing with the issue:

So it was in #37 that we began “American Gothic”. #37 was where Constantine turned up for the first time. I knew that with “American Gothic”, what the plan was to run through a lot of stock cliché horror formats because one of the things that I thought that Len [Wein] and Bernie [Wrightson] had done on the original run that was so good was that they’d taken sort of very stock horror standards and had done interesting things with them – “The Patchwork Man”, things like that. So what I decided to do was to sort of try and take a pretty standard roster of horror – werewolves, vampires, zombies – and this included a number of suggestions from the original list that Steve [Stephen Bissette] and John [Totleben] had made – and I decided to sort of string these together into a kind of an odyssey through American horror. I wanted to explore these kinds of standard horror figures but try to do it in a new way, so that I could connect these kinds of icons of horrors with horrors of the real world. And I thought that that would be a way of giving them an extra edge, an extra bite. If they could be made more relevant to the world in which the readers existed, symbolic of things bigger than just another vampire story, another werewolf story, then that could yield rewards. Now I think that the whole thing of having to tie in with the tedious *Crisis* crossover – I say that with no disrespect to Marv Wolfman or George Pérez – I think that the idea of trying to connect up all of the disparate books in a line is a fairly ridiculous one; there’s no point in it other than conning the reader into buying books that they otherwise might not pick. But we were told we had to include it, so we tried to do as good a job as possible, and tried to write our mandatory *Crisis* issue with as much style as possible. (MOORE, *in*: KHOURY, 2003, p.93)

So, the (successful) intent was to create links between the classic monsters of the original run – which, in turn, connected to an even older tradition – and horror-instilling tropes of the American reality. Since, as seen, the metapanel is a summary of Swamp Thing’s adventure, a recapitulation of ‘the road so far’, the selective approach to the adventures does a couple of things to the reading of the series. First, it ‘sets the record straight’, so to say, in showing the reader the relevant pieces to put the story together, which are fitting to the final chapter – and that is another reason, out of the interpretive one, that make it a guidance of sorts. Second, it reinforces a couple of things: the link with America – and therefore with the tradition of the American Gothic, another wave at Literature – and the link with the ‘classic frighteners’ – by displacing the issues that fell off the trope. The metapanel, as such, enacts an unifying power over the narrative, tying in loose ends, as far as Swamp Thing’s perception goes, but also bringing back everything under a new light. And perhaps that detail is more important in reading the story than it appears at first sight.

Another thing that will soon strike the eyes of the reader is the multitude of colorful characters, taken from a myriad of different titles of the DC Universe, from the beginnings of the genre onwards, put together as yet another unifying force – this time, two teams with the mystical characters of the DC Universe, acting in two different settings. It is, then, a little strange that Moore finds it so abhorrent to connect disparate books into a cohesive universe, since his story arc does precisely the same thing – perhaps the difference was in the intent to demand the reader to buy other titles, whereas the *American Gothic* is self-contained. But the fact is that not only the effort demands an extensive knowledge about the DC Universe to begin with, it also recuperates and reinforces those characters that were majorly left aside by the editor, in favor of more profitable and popular ones.

The comic is quite verbose – in itself unusual in the medium – but not in a way that cramps up the reading. That is mainly because of the way in which it is narrated. Now, there is a number of identifiable literary techniques to the comic: there are narrations inside the narration (*mise en abyme*), a literary trope Shakespeare, among others, was so fond of; these narrations are interlaced and superposed into definitely interesting ways, in order to employ each one's strength to push the plot and the theme forward; about that, there are different characters' voices filtering the information through focalization. In fact, most of the characters seem to have either a defining voice or an element taken from their tradition, employed consistently, to make them recognizable and, to a degree, honor their origins – in other words, to wave a hand at their specific lores. That is usually a trope developed from the necessity of constantly presenting titles and characters from new readers, so these things are frequently related to the character's name or one of their qualities – Etrigan commonly rhymes with his name when first appearing, while the Phantom Stranger phrases something with 'stranger' when showing himself; Deadman throws a joke about being dead; the Spectre something about the 'voice that speaks in all things' or a reference to a superior power. And no on and so forth. Some characters, however, seem to take the notion to a whole new level: the yellow demon speaks in rhymes; the swamp monster in blank verse. And, as verses go, these are not bad.

The heroes, which are disposed in a very classical setting – not only a part of the action is set on Hell, which brings to mind Greek myths, but they are also in a stage of sorts, where the characters above, as Olympians, try to help and meddle with the exploits of those below – antics which are topped with a quasi-literal *Deus Ex Machina* in the end. These heroes are also, unsurprisingly, heroes – something that automatically brings the heroic

tradition to the forefront, establishing a natural connection between the ancient and the new manifestations of their journeys. And, since the parallel is so easily established, there are evident similarities between the story's structure and that of mythic journeys and fairy and folktales that invite a comparison. It is, from the beginning, clear that what is taking place in the final chapter of the series is the apotheosis, the culminating point of the journey, the final battle where the hero is tested and, proven worthy, earns the elixir, which he will bring back from the (literal, in this case) underworld. The hero has travelled through the threshold of adventure, had his tribulations along the way, found helpers and was given the magic words needed for his victory. He descended into the underworld and his trial is about to take place. As in with classic trebling, the hero is not the only one to be tested, for he must prove himself worthy, so others will try – and fail – where he will prevail, not merely against a foe, or a mere villain, but against Evil itself. The parallels with the classical structure are clear, and already discussed, at this point. The efforts to heighten the narrative tension, reinforcing the 'fundamental and absolute' stakes, the grandiose, quasi-stereotypical nature of the action and the enemy at hand, it all contributes to expose the hyperbolic aspect of the action and, thus, marry the classical structure with the exaggeration that is a trope commonly developed in Comics. That is not all, because the dark humor notes present in very pointed places in the story allow the reader a glimpse of a narrative stance full of knowledge of both the medium and the tradition it employs, with a lot of love for the heroic tropes developed, being able to use them so well – but also with a tint of irony and realization about the farcical nature of the action.

Also clear at this point are the many and constant appeals to other sorts of tradition – from old horror movies in the zombie tradition or more general, Universal monsters to famous paintings. These all coalesce into a comic with a high artistic value, precisely because of these references and tropes, which are aggregated and appropriated into the work's poetics. The references make it a lot more 'artsy'. One does not get much more archetypal than that.

But this is the precise moment where the logic falters, because despite all the signaling towards the emulation of different traditions, despite all the employment of literary forms and classical structure, the story ultimately fails to deliver on that premise: the hero does not vanquish Evil; the final conflict, to which the narrative had been mounting, does not happen. It is, instead, refuted as a bad premise and argued out of existence in favor of a more complex view of the relationship between Good and Evil. So it runs counter the tradition in that aspect, it breaks midway into its fairy-tail structure to pick up on other, completely different, premise.

The hero's journey is interrupted at this point, and from then on the comic can be better read in terms of dialectics, where a logic is counterposed by another. The shift occurs at the apotheosis, as the tension reaches its apex and the ultimate fight is expected to happen, Good descended from the sky to fight Evil in a *God Ex Machina* manner and they are reaching each other:



Figure 56 - Good and Evil Shake Hands (MOORE et al., 1986, p.34-35)

Not that this shift does not wave away tradition, as well, and ancient Chinese tradition, at that: in the lower right corner of the image above, one can see that, as Good and Evil merge and fuse, revolving around each other and sending the universe falling into a spiral of confusion, a very distinct form appears in Dayton's pupil – that of a yin-yang symbol. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (1999):

Yin and yang always describe the relationships that are constitutive of unique particulars, and provide a vocabulary for “reading” the distinctions that obtain among them. The complementary nature of the opposition captured in this pairing expresses the mutuality, interdependence, diversity, and creative efficacy of the dynamic relationships that are deemed immanent in and valorize the world. (YIN YANG. In: *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 1999, p.985)

What happens, then, is that the notion of opposition between Good and Evil, a driving *motto* in the story from the beginning and the basics of its logic, is shifted into that of complementarity between those forces. Suddenly, Good and Evil are not opposing forces, but different aspects of a same force, a cycle, symptoms of change. As the Occidental tradition of the heroic form gives way to the Oriental tradition of the *I Ching* the battle becomes redundant, and the logic behind its outcome is displayed iconically through the symbol. To be later explained by the characters in terms of consequences to the dynamics of their world, and their stories – namely, very few, but that is something that is also present in the philosophy referred: the world changes regardless of a philosophical approach. The suddenness of the shift, which empties the narrative tension without warning, takes the manner of a Freudian joke, more than a mere anticlimax, and exposes the narrative voice’s masterful conduction of narrative tension, in favor of a very particular sense of humor. It is, then, the conflation between different traditions that allows for this shift, effectively an argument against a Manichean way of looking at the world.

That idea is very consonant with Moore’s poetics. At about the same time he was writing both *Watchmen* (1986) and this issue of *Swamp Thing*, Moore talks about his ideas about the usual way of making comics in the already mentioned series of articles *Writing for Comics* (2003):

Most comic book stories have plots in which the sole concern is the struggle between two or more antagonists. The resolution of the struggle, usually involving some deus ex machina display of a superpower, is the resolution of the plot as well. Beyond the most vague and pointless banality like “Good will always triumph over evil” there is no real central idea to the majority of comics, other than the idea of conflict as interesting in itself (MOORE, 2003, p.7)

So, it is not an accident that, as observed in sections 2.4 and 3.14 (particularly, item ‘g’ of the formal aspects analysis) of this work, physical conflict rarely has any positive effects in the resolution of the plot, whilst being a reoccurring trope in most comics. That is true particularly for this issue, in which the physical conflict was substituted by a dialogue, an interrogation. A question to answer as the hero’s final test, while the apotheosis takes place elsewhere.

While the use is quite rare in Comics, because of the medium’s usual focus on visually surprising elements and power fantasies, in Literature it is a reoccurring one. The Sphinx’s question to Oedipus is the trial the hero must pass. When force fails, Odysseus must use his mind to fight Polyphemus, whereas a key part of the strategy is answering ‘Outis’ (or

‘Nobody’ – in the Roman version of the tale it is ‘Nemo’) to his question (later, when he is blinded by the group and screams that ‘nobody’ hurt him, the other giants in the island do not come to his avail). The gods frequently tested mortals with questions, and the tradition persisted and spread. Sir Gawain’s final test, before the Green Knight, is a question as to where did he get the magic belt. To marry Porcia, in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, suitors chose between caskets of gold, silver and lead, and promise not to marry ever if the answer was wrong. The princes of Morocco and Arragon fail in the test, but Bassanio gets it right. Sméagol and Bilbo played a deadly game of riddles in J. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, in order to decide whether the creature helped Bilbo find his way out of the cave or devoured him. In Terry Pratchett’s *Masquerade*, Granny Weatherwax, in her own version of a detective’s role, asked each character met what would be the first thing they would take from a house on fire (determining through ‘headology’ their psychological features). The silly questions asked by the Bridge Keeper in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* are also a reference to this tradition. And so on and so forth – those being the examples that were promptly brought to mind. What happens in “The End” is not an abandonment of tradition, but rather a shift, in which one tradition gives way to another, the fight to a question, the battle to a symbolic representation of change. And the hero, who had received the magical word from the Parliament of the Trees, is able to deliver on his task in heroic fashion, bringing the plot to a resolution by different means than expected – a relativization of the idea of Evil instead of the affirmation that would be represented by a real conflict (of any sort).

And Swamp Thing is, perhaps, the most adequate character to deliver this message. Upon rethinking the monster as a plant and connecting him to the Green, Moore made sure to make it painfully clear that, despite the very relatable take on nature and the heroic disposition, Swamp Thing was a monster. What was taken away from the character was not the illusion to ever becoming human again, but rather humanity itself – other than Alec Holland’s memories. This is brought forward now and then, as in the already mentioned scene from *Swamp Thing* #27 (1984), where Abby is fleeing from the battle between Etrigan and the Monkey King and Swamp Thing stays behind, heroically, to give them time to escape: Abby is concerned about leaving him behind because of the ‘two monsters’, but he interrupts her by breaking the Monkey King’s jaws with his bare hands and saying, succinctly: “Three monsters. Run.” (MOORE *et al.*, 1984, p.6).

So, the hero is also a monster, and Moore explores this point to make him empathize with other monsters, eventually allowing him to overcome his trial. But the idea of a monster

hero is more troublesome than it seems at first, because heroes and monster occupy diametrically opposite roles in culture. As seen through the notion of the hero's journey as proposed by Joseph Campbell, the hero's role is central to the myth, which is reenacted through celebration and re-telling. The notion is approached with more depth by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, in the book *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (1948), where he states that:

Myth, as a statement of primeval reality which still lives in present-day life and as a justification by precedent, supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief. It is, therefore, neither a mere narrative, nor a form of science, nor a branch of art or history, nor an explanatory tale. It fulfills a function sui generis closely connected with the nature of tradition, and the continuity of culture, with the relation between age and youth, and with the human attitude towards the past. The function of myth, briefly, is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events. (MALINOWSKI, 1948, p.122)

The idea is more thoroughly developed into a general theory of culture in the book *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays* (1960), where the idea of a common tradition is seen as a basic constituent of any society, usually spanning from a mythical common origin:

The charter of the tribe-nation can always be found in those traditions that deal with the origins of a given people, and that define their cultural achievements in terms of heroic ancestral performance. Historical legends, genealogical traditions, and historical explanations used to account for the differences between their own culture and that of neighbors, would enter into this, too. (MALINKWSKI, 1960, p.165).

So, the myth is the basis of society's values and costumes, with the hero's exploits exemplifying and reinforcing traditional values inside the culture. Heroes exist, in other words, to defend the culture, usually against a threat. And frequently this threat takes the form of a monster. But what is a monster?

In the fourth chapter of *A Companion to American Gothic* (2014), entitled *American Monsters*, Jeffrey Weinstock briefly comments the meaning of the word – 'monster' comes from the Latin *monstrum*, related to the verbs *monstrare* (show, reveal) and *monere* (warn, portend), or, in other words, the signifier points to something other than a being: a monster is also a warning, an omen brought forth by its deformity. According to Weinstock, "the monster is thus a kind of omen that gives shape to moral vice, reveals the will of the gods, and forecasts the future." (WEINSTOCK, 2014, p.41)

Monsters are, therefore, a reflection, products of the anxieties and repressed tabooistic desires of a given culture. At the same time, the monstrous body serves to signal a threat, point to a problem. Much like Davis' phrenological signs, monsters are cultural creatures, standing out as aberrations that aggregate, in their very physicality, that which is shunned by culture – bodies made of and by culture, with a lot to tell about the society that generated them. In his article "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)", in the book *Monster Theory* (1996), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen points out that the monster is essentially the symbol of a creeping change that has come to alter (or 'contaminate', if one's prejudices align the shifting culture) the overarching paradigm – his theses themselves sliding into change: 01) The monster's body is a cultural body; 2) The monster always escapes; 3) The monster is the harbinger of category crisis; 4) The monster dwells at the gates of difference; 5) The monster polices the borders of the possible; 6) Fear of the monster is really a kind of desire; 7) The monster stands at the threshold... of becoming.

Cohen's idea of the monstrous body, then, is not only as a harbinger of a shift, but also, and perhaps because of its otherness, object of desire and abjection at the same time. Created because it's the embodiment of something relevant to a culture, the monster's existence is itself symbolic of relevant cultural questions.

Therefore, while heroes exist to reinforce cultural norms, the monster is a detractor from them, opposite roles coexisting in the vegetable body of Swamp Thing – an innate conflict that, as Michael Bradshaw points out in his article "The Sleep of Reason: Swamp Thing and the Intertextual Reader", in the book *Alan Moore and the Gothic Tradition* (2013), is present in more ways than one in the adventures of the monster. Bradshaw even attributes to the plant side of the creature the apparent abhorring of violence as a means of resolution to the plot:

His is not a conventional hero's role; he often functions more as a catalyst of the actions and transformations of human characters who orbit around him. Already exhibiting the wise passivity of an 'earth elemental', the Swamp Thing sometimes stands motionless in the epicenter of horror plots; as a constant, empathetic and often silent presence, he is of course exactly what Abigail needs in a partner. The Swamp Thing's greater resentment is reserved for Constantine, who disturbs his peace and forces him repeatedly to take futile violent action without knowledge or understanding, imposing on him the role of anthropocentric, aggressive superhero. Each monster he defeats is a moral indictment of the 'red world' of humanity – the werewolf driven to distraction by the weight of historical misogyny, the almost pastoral separatism of the aquatic vampires. As an 'elemental' with the guardian's role of mediating between vegetable and human worlds, this self-alienation is clearly the Swamp Thing's appointed lot; the more he is compelled to act violently, the more strongly is felt his innate condition of passivity and watchfulness. (BRADSHAW, *in*: GREEN, 2013, p.135-136)

And thus the character's monstrous body, with a trunk instead of a torso (the slight absence of neck and the woodknot-like structure in place of a nose), covered in moss, represents the passiveness of the vegetable world – and, in perhaps more dreadful notes, as Maggie Gray notes on the same book, in the article “A Gothic Politics: Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* and Radical Ecology”, the creature's shape became also symbolic of a very Romantic trope, not only that of Edmund Burke's *sublime*, but also that of the underlying trope of the *revenge of nature*:

The creators used the title to raise issues of air and water pollution, the greenhouse effect, nuclear weapons testing, pesticide use, littering, desertification, toxic waste, acid rain, deforestation, soil erosion, animal testing and vivisection. Combined, these threads (...) created a constant subtext of wide-ranging environmental destruction, even in issues where this topic was not addressed directly. (GRAY, *in*: GREEN, 2013, p.47)

As Ian Malcom, a famous chaos theorist, said ominously (before the group started their antics while being chased by dinosaurs), Nature tends to find a way – and that is true also for DC Universe, for Swamp Thing's existence as an elemental is due to the necessity of bridging the gap between the Green and humanity. So, there we have it – a monster, culturally relevant, harbinger of change (pointing out an impending ecological disaster), already a bridge of sorts, inviting the reader to a more desirable, natural and peaceful, existence.

However, when the monster plays the role of the hero in the story, he brings along something that, as *per* Moore's assessment, had been absent in the stories of the genre: perspective. Besides being a warning, the monster is also never part of the society it warns against. It is ostracized, reified. The monster is the other. And Swamp Thing is not, in the story, merely a bridge between the Green and human kind, but also a bridge between heroes and monsters – he has the perspective to relativize the monsters, to understand that the only reason they are considered monsters is because of the prejudices of the society he defends. Vampires, werewolf, ghosts and zombies, in fact, were all victims, seeking either retribution for the sins committed against them or a place in the world they were shunned from.

In a sense, that is the great slight-of-hand performed by Moore in the story: as the moment where the classical apotheosis is to happen, the hero turns into a monster. He shows the different perspective, allows the reader an unprejudiced glimpse at the heart of the *other* – and the narrative veil, the many preconceptions in action during the entire story arc, are lifted. The battle, then, cannot continue. The hero is no longer on the side of right, but at the service

of a guilty society, whose moral deformities produced the monsters it fought to suppress. All that was before the eyes of the reader the whole time, but never elaborated, never thought. *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, as in Goya's painting. At the end, the underlying trope is revealed, the story is irredeemably changed and the conflict ends in a handshake – because there is no longer a 'right' and a 'wrong' side to root for.

In the end (and in "The End"), the story is about acceptance of Darkness, recognition of the other, and a relativization of everything we deem 'Evil'. And that happens in a story where the fight against a foe inhabiting 'madness and chaos' is largely equated with the notion of sanity: fought in Hell, 'reason's farthest shore' to prevent 'madness without end'. So, what Darkness brings into the world is madness, by inserting itself into the world of Light, threatening to destroy it. In the end, upon the realization (brought forth by the Swamp Thing) that Darkness is, along with the world of Light, just part of a whole, they merge. And, after they had done so, the world seems cleared, discharged, like the air after a storm.

At this point it is hard not to read the story in terms of the Jungian concept of the integration of the shadow, or the realization of the personal unconscious, where a person must first realize the existence of the shadow archetype in order to be able to understand how it influences their lives and perceptions:

It is only when we throw light into the dark depths of the psyche and explore the strange and tortuous paths of human fate that it gradually becomes clear to us how immense is the influence wielded by these two factors that complement our conscious. (JUNG, 2014, p.22)

Blinded to the shadow, a person is caught into a veil of projections and is unable to see the real world. Therefore, the need to explore and incorporate the shadow into the conscious world, recognize the shunned parts of oneself, is a first step into reason and clarity. Looking into the eyes of Evil and seeing only a mirror, so to say, in order to understand how much of our preconceptions and flaws was put into considering it Evil in the first place. Finally, coming out of the encounter with a better understanding of the world than that we came in with. In that sense, the story is also a metaphor for shadow work, the need of integration for the sake of sanity. It poses the argument that the reader is blinded by prejudices, and such ideas as Good and Evil (and, why not, Justice, Truth, Moral, and so on and so forth) are but illusions. Such things as dreams are made of.

It is a story that exposes the preconceptions hidden in the notion of Good and Evil to denounce the Manichean way of seeing the world dwelling under the surface of the common

tales of the genre it is inserted in, and to break these prejudices, subverting the reader's expectations precisely in the most poignant moment of the plot, in order to argue for a better, healthier way of storytelling. It is syncretic in its approach, bringing together elements from different traditions in order to build a consistent, cohesive, complex diegetic universe, filled with references and tropes, benefitting sometimes from the contrast between the aberrant characters and the depths a rich imagination can find in them.

And a 7-foot-tall green brute with the soul of a poet, a pile of moss with a heart of gold, is just the heroic and monstrous puddle of contradictions capable of bringing such a story to a term.

6 THE RINGS IN THE TRUNK

The seed of this work set out in ‘Germination’ to do a couple of reasonably simple things: to decompose the structure of the story “The End”, from *Swamp Thing* #50 (1986), into its narrative elements, in order to get a clear view of its cogs and springs – to see what made it work. In doing so, and because the story was so reminiscent of fairy tales and folkloric stories and the hero’s journey, it also set out to inspect the recognizable elements of tradition in the story. Since it was a comic, it was logical to extend this notion also to the tradition of Comics in general and the title, in specific, especially when two of the key elements of the story were the colorful display of characters and a recollection of the story in itself – two different ways of looking back, pointing at what came before. Another matter of particular interest rested on the broad shoulders of the protagonist, the changes he suffered as a character under Moore and how they changed him. Undeniably something had changed: the work left obscurity and attained relative success in a few years, with a sequence of story arcs still in publication, decades later, and which found the appreciation of many fans worldwide.

And so this weird shoot of a work felt the need to extend many leaves, in trying to understand the journey of the monster, surly and miserable like ‘A Moss-Covered Hamlet’, from its beginning in *House of Secrets* #92, in 1971, to the end of *Swamp Thing* #36, in 1985. In this section, a particular and very pungent shift in tone was felt from the beginning of Moore’s run, in *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* #20 (1984): assuming much darker tones and a very poignant narrative, full of literary techniques previously absent from the title, such as shifts in focalization, carefully orchestrated narratives, in which verbal and iconic reinforced each other to ease the transitions, development of *motifs* and other tropes, like symbolism and synchronicity (multiple subplots converging to a point in the narrative). Another significant change in the style of the narration was that, for the first time, the art and the plot seemed to establish a dialogue in the issues, reinforcing each other. Not only that, but the usual focus on the action, impressive scenes and advancement of the plot, common in the title, gave way to scenes that went out of the way of the plot in favor of character development. To put it bluntly, the actants became characters for the first time, gaining in complexity and, as a consequence relatability. And what is perhaps the most impressive in this narrative ‘twist’ is that it was done so as to completely change the nature of *Swamp Thing* and, incoherently, making him more relatable by turning him into a monster. With the characterization came life’s complexities, and suddenly the characters were in complex relationships, unrequited

loves, love triangles – even the dark notes of incest appeared in the pages. Moreover, a swamp creature whose only obsession was to regain its humanity suddenly had to learn how to live as a monster, and find its place in the world – a much more relatable endeavor than ambling about in the swamp while being, all the same, a monster. At the same time, the narration demonstrated a wide knowledge and respect for the character’s journey up to that point, making frequent references to the title’s history and lore, as well as referencing other comics and authors. Not limited to that, references to other traditions, classical paintings and Literature, started frequently showing in the pages, a use that increased as the story arc *American Gothic* began.

This “American Growth”, then, bloomed into a multitude of references to the most varied traditions, as the title retraced its first steps and connected with its roots, through a veritable gallery of archetypal monsters and nightmares, always served to the reader with a particular twist – that of, according to the Literary tradition of the American Gothic, always being connected with American tropes, so that the monster became also complex, dark reflections of the society that generated them. Those tropes were developed without forsaking character development, but the title notably had tilted towards a new direction, a hidden objective promised, with huge revelations at the end of this line of American horrors. This series of tribulations, aided by a supernatural agent (Constantine), who eventually introduced Swamp Thing to the Parliament of Trees to learn the knowledge necessary to win the final battle already smelled, perhaps a little strongly, of the very well-known tropes of the hero’s journey, but the complexity of the narrative and of the antagonists helped distract the reader from the somewhat obvious path: the *punk* vampires, symbolic of the alienation of the rebel youth and the difficulty of dialogue between generations; the she-werewolf, a complex dance of signs representing the revolt of a woman feeling trapped by a male-regulated society; the zombie slaves, denouncing the racial tensions in America with a grim reminder of its racist past; the ghosts in the Cambridge House, a lament for lives lost in a country founded on the barrel of a gun, a commentary on America’s gun fetishism and violence; the Bogeyman, a serial killer, a (until fairly recently) prominently American trope and Hollywoodian obsession. While all that was developed the anti-teleological nature of the narrative continued to manifest itself – insistent on looking backwards, recapitulating, rethinking, paying homage to previous works. A festival of references.

Finally, the growth bears fruit, and these ripen in a final battle, where the hero and a host of allies face “The Root of all Evil”, ultimate Darkness, while the reader must deal with

the perhaps as ominous prospect of reasoning the story's complex structure. Achieving baobabian proportions, the narrative analysis of the different aspects of the story is, in itself, anti-teleological, for it comes back and forth multiple times in the consideration of its diverse aspects. While the analysis of the story's *Actions and Events* shows many similarities and arguably intentional approximations with fairy tales and folktales, myths and the hero's journey, through comparison with the structures and methods of analysis proposed by, respectively, Vladimir Propp, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Campbell, the story proved to be elusive to a conclusive parallel with the classical structure, deviating significantly from the patterns suggested (except in Lévi-Strauss' analysis, which forsakes the proposition of a pattern in favor of a comparison between the myth's own elements). Which is significant in itself, even when many of the characters' roles in the stories had clear parallels with other models of *actants*. The analysis of the story's *Characters*, however, is probably one of the most interesting points in this research, for it consists in a practical demonstration of the validity of Narrative Theory's take on characters for the analysis of a long-running comic book, and probably the most detailed analysis of Swamp Thing as a character to date, also making approximations between characters and their roles in the story (and even giving way to understand them in terms of Carl Gustav Jung's archetypes, in the cases of Zatara, Zatanna, Darkness and Constantine). The analysis of the double *setting* in the story (Hell and Wintersgate Mansion) is filled with symbolism and, prominently in the case of Hell, connections with myths and traditions, but also reminiscent of a Classical Theater's stage in its organization. The story's analysis of *Time* is organized in three different aspects, each significant in itself: the analysis of *order* shows several instances of parallelism, mostly related to Dayton's narrating a scene in Hell, which is concomitantly shown to the reader; the analysis of *duration* revealed a tendency to use the number of panels in the page, the relative size of the images and the amount of dialogue to control the reading pace; finally, the *frequency* has an interesting role in the story in the different heroes' trials, though it is not a scene repeated, but several similar scenes – the trebling commented by Propp. The analysis of *Narration* is here divided into different structures. First, a *monstrator*, structure responsible for the iconic aspect of the text and which displays a wide array of brush and hatches' techniques, giving the art an impression of sophistication, while the approach to angles and lines favors a more realistic representation, with deep shadows and selective application of details to give the art emotional range and, at times, alienate the reader. A symbolic and exaggerated approach to the characters allies with the realism of the details to heighten the

characters' features. The monstrator also works to destabilize the reader by twisting the panels, turning the reading into an unstable experience and placing 'safe footing' (regular panels) in key points of the narrative. Second, a *reciter*, responsible for the verbal aspect of the narrative, which is varied in the representation of the characters' speech patterns and tends to connect them to their specific lores, for ready recognition (a necessity of the many different voices involved in the narrative). Significant in the structure is the use of poetical caesura and rhymes, in the speech of the demon rhymers and that of Swamp Thing, as well as Dayton's speech pattern, full of hesitations (stuttering) and vocalizations of surprise or denial, which serve to rely his heightened emotional response to what he witnesses. Finally, the *meganarrator* is very able and knowledgeable in orchestrating the interaction of reciter and monstrator, sometimes using their interaction to ease the transition of panels or reinforce an impression. Big panels sometimes display very little dialogue, consisting of a narrative pause of sorts. The inset stories are used as a means of controlling the reading of the story: Swamp Thing's assessment of the adventure serves an interpretive finality; Dayton's narration gives emotional weight to the narrative and Cain and Abel help the reader to enter, read the tone and interpret the story, at the beginning and at the end. Finally, the *focalization* is used as a key feature in the narrative mainly through the eyes of Dayton, whose perspective on the events he witnesses – the horror and reaction to the impressive scenes – guides the reader's perspective and lends emotional intensity to a narrative that, without him, might seem farcical at times.

Sprouting "A Few More Leaves", already feeling the winter in the wind, the work endeavors to pick up the pieces of information lain throughout the analysis so far in order to understand them in terms of the role of tradition, both in the story and in the works of Alan Moore in general. As it was pointed out, the many references and recognizable structures within the text (and previous ones, which work to influence the reader's expectations) establish a dialogue with different lores, and these similarities are purposefully used by the author to subvert the reader's expectations, at the blink of time, and replace the expected fulfillment of narrative tension expected from a heroic narrative for the relativization of the notion of Evil and denial of the (until then narratively supported) Manichean view of the world, turning the story into an anticlimactic argument in favor of a different way of seeing the world, and stories along with it. Instead of fighting, Good and Evil merge, in a movement reminiscent of Jung's concept of shadow work, or the assimilation of the Jungian shadow, a process necessary for a healthy existence – a notion reinforced by previous passages equating

Hell with madness. In the end, the story is a plead for sanity, and the narrative tension collapses unto itself. All that is left are a few pages, where the characters comment how the paradigm shift is not a harbinger of material change, but rather of change of perspective. And, at the closing of the cycle, these last leaves too shall fall, and in time mingle with multitudes of others, in other seasons fallen, to be one with “The Rich Soil”.

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APPENDIX A – PROPPIAN TABLE

Item	Definition	Designation	Description	Particularities
	Initial situation	α		
I	Absentation	β	One of the members of a family absents himself from home.	
		β^1	The person absenting is a member of the older generation.	For work; to the forest; to trade; to war; 'on business'.
		β^2	The death of the parents.	
		β^3	The younger generation absents themselves.	They go visiting; fishing; for a walk; out to gather berries.
II	Interdiction	γ	An interdiction is addressed to the hero.	Interdictions are always broken.
		γ^1	Prohibition.	Stops the hero from doing something.
		γ^2	Order or command.	Commandment or suggestion to do something.
III	Violation	δ	The interdiction is violated.	Paired with II, can happen through the suggestion of an interdiction.
IV	Reconnaissance	ϵ	The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance.	
		ϵ^1	Reconnaissance aims to find children or precious objects.	
		ϵ^2	The victim questions the villain (inverted form).	
		ϵ^3	Reconnaissance through other personages.	
V	Delivery	ζ	The villain receives information about the victim.	
		ζ^1	Villain receives information directly.	
		$\zeta^2 - \zeta^3$	Inverted or other form of information gathering evokes a corresponding answer.	
VI	Trickery	η	The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings.	The villain assumes a disguise.
		η^1	The villain uses persuasion.	
		η^2	The villain acts by the direct application of magical means.	
		η^3	The villains employ other means of deception or coercion.	
VII	Complicity	θ	The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy.	Deceitful proposals are always accepted and fulfilled. The villain may take advantage of a <i>preliminary misfortune</i> (λ) to propose a <i>deceitful agreement</i> .
		θ^1	The hero agrees to the villain's persuasions.	
		$\theta^2 - \theta^3$	The hero reacts mechanically to the	

			employment of magical means.	
VIII	Villainy	A	The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family.	This is the motor force of the tale, for which all the previous functions are preparations. Sometimes the villain enacts two or more villainies at once.
		A¹	The villain abducts a person.	
		A²	The villain seizes or takes away a magical agent.	
		A^{II}	Then the seizure is forcible (subdivision).	
		A³	The villain pillages or spoils the crops.	
		A⁴	The villain seizes the daylight.	Found only once.
		A⁵	The villain plunders in other forms.	Other manifestations of seizures, grouped for convenience.
		A⁶	The Villain causes bodily injury.	
		A⁷	The villain causes a sudden disappearance.	Through bewitching or deceitful means.
		A⁸	The villain demands or entices his victim.	
		A⁹	The villain expels someone.	
		A¹⁰	The villain orders someone to be thrown into the sea.	
		A¹¹	The villain casts a spell upon someone or something.	Ex: A ⁹ ₁₁ (turns him into a dog, then expels him).
		A¹²	The villain effects a substitution.	Ex: A ¹² ₁₁ : turns bride into duckling and substitutes bride by daughter.
		A¹³	The villain orders a murder to be committed.	Usually a proof is required (heart, liver).
		A¹⁴	The villain commits murder.	This function is also usually accompanied by others. Ex: A ¹⁴ ₂ (seizes object then murders owner).
		A¹⁵	The villain imprisons or detains someone.	
		A¹⁶	The villain threats forced matrimony.	
		A^{xvi}	Same, among relatives (subdivision).	
		A¹⁷	The villain makes a threat of cannibalism.	
A^{xvii}	Same, among relatives (subdivision).			
A¹⁸	The villain torments all night.			
A¹⁹	The villain declares war.			
VIIIa	Lack	A	One member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something.	
		a¹	Lack of a bride or friend.	
		a²	Lack of a magical agent.	
		a³	Lack of a <i>wondrous</i> object.	Not a magical object.

		a⁴	Lack of a specific form.	Ex: magic egg containing Death.		
		a⁵	Lack in a rationalized form.	Ex: money, means of subsistence.		
		a⁶	Various other forms.			
XIX	Mediation; The Connective Incident	B	Misfortune is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched.	Function that rings the hero into the tale. The heroes can be either a 1) <i>seekers</i> (help others – B ¹ to B ⁴); 2) <i>victimized heroes</i> (help themselves – B ⁵ to B ⁷).		
		<i>Seeker heroes</i>	B¹	A call for help is given, with the resultant dispatch of the hero.		
			B²	The hero is dispatched directly.	Command (threats) or request (promises).	
			B³	The hero is allowed to depart from home.	Initiative from the hero himself.	
			B⁴	Misfortune is announced.	Hero leaves without being directly asked.	
		<i>Victimized heroes</i>	B⁵	Banished hero is transported away from home.		
			B⁶	The hero condemned to death is secretly freed.	Here the hero has both initiative (seeker) and opportunity (victimized).	
			B⁷	A lament is sung.	Specific for murder. It informs the hero of the misfortune and demands counteraction.	
		X	Beginning Counteraction	C	The <i>seeker</i> hero decides or is allowed to take action.	
		XI	Departure	↑	The hero leaves home.	(↑ ≠ β)
ABC↑ = Complication of the plot. Later on the action is developed.						
XII	The First Function of the Donor	D	The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or helper.			
		D¹	The donor tests the hero.			
		D²	The donor greets and interrogates the hero.			
		D³	A dying or deceased person requests the rendering of a service.	It may be a service or a test.		
		D⁴	A prisoner begs for his freedom.	A fish out of water; a genie within a lamp.		
		*D⁴	Same, accompanied by the preliminary imprisonment of the donor.			
		D⁵	The hero is approached with a request for mercy.			
		D⁶	Disputants request a division of property.	Sometimes the interference of the hero is volitional.		
		D⁷	Other requests.	There may be more than one request at a time.		
		D⁸	A hostile creature attempts to destroy the hero.			
		D⁹	A hostile creature engages the hero			

			in combat.	
		D¹⁰	The hero is shown a magical agent which is offered for exchange.	Robbers, merchants, mysterious strangers.
XIII	The Hero's Reaction.	E	The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor.	In the majority of instances, the reaction is either positive or negative.
		E¹	The hero withstands (or does not withstand) a test.	
		E²	The hero answers (or does not answer) a greeting.	
		E³	He renders (or does not render) a service to a dead person.	
		E⁴	He frees a captive.	
		E⁵	He shows mercy to a supplicant.	
		E⁶	He completes an apportionment and reconciles the disputants.	Or deceives the disputants.
		E⁷	The hero performs some other service.	Requested or volitional.
		E⁸	The hero saves himself from an attempt on his life by employing the same tactics used by his adversary.	A turnback of forces.
		E⁹	The hero vanquishes (or does not vanquish) his adversary.	
		E¹⁰	The hero agrees to an exchange, but immediately employs the magic power of the object exchanged against the barterer.	
XIV	Provision or Receipt of a Magical Agent	F	The hero acquires the use of a magical agent.	1) animals; 2) objects out of which magical helpers appear; 3) objects possessing a magical property; 4) qualities of capacities directly given.
		F¹	The agent is directly transferred.	
		F²	The agent is pointed out.	
		F³	The agent is prepared.	
		F⁴	The agent is sold and purchased.	
		F⁵	The agent falls into the hands of the hero by chance (is found by him).	
		F⁶	The agent appears of its own accord.	
		F⁷	The agent is eaten or drunk.	
		F⁸	The agent is seized.	
		F⁹	Various characters place themselves at the disposal of the hero.	
		f⁹	An animal promises future help.	Magical helper in a future point of the narrative.
XV	Spatial Transference Between two Kingdoms; Guidance	G	The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search.	
		G¹	The hero flies through the air.	
		G²	He travels on the ground or on water.	
		G³	He is led.	
		G⁴	The route is shown to him.	

		G⁵	He makes use of stationary means of communication.	Finds passages; stairway; across bridges; ropes, etc.
		G⁶	He follows bloody tracks.	
XVI	Struggle	H	The hero and the villain join in direct combat.	This step is different from the fight with the donor – in this struggle, the reward is the object of the quest.
		H¹	They fight in an open field.	
		H²	They engage in a competition.	
		H³	They play cards.	
		H⁴	Others	In tale n°93, a weight competition is done.
XVII	Branding; Marking.	J	The hero is branded.	
		J¹	A brand is applied to the body.	
		J²	The hero receives a ring or a towel.	
XVIII	Victory	I	The villain is defeated.	
		I¹	The villain is beaten in open combat.	
		I²	He is defeated in a contest.	
		I³	He loses at cards.	
		I⁴	He loses on being weighted.	
		I⁵	He is killed without a preliminary fight.	
		I⁶	He is banished directly.	
		*I¹	If two or more heroes have gone to battle, one of them hides while the other is victorious.	
XIX	Peak of the narrative (no designation).	K	The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.	This function pairs with villainy (A).
		K¹	The object of a search is seized by the use of force or cleverness.	
		K^{1a}	Sometimes this is achieved by two characters, one of which orders the other to perform the seizing.	
		K²	The object of search is obtained by several personages at once, through a rapid interchange of their actions.	
		K³	The object of search is obtained with the help of enticements.	
		K⁴	The object of a quest is obtained as the direct result of preceding actions.	
		K⁵	The object of search is obtained instantly through the use of a magical agent.	
		K⁶	The use of a magical agent overcomes poverty.	
		K⁷	The object of search is caught.	
		K⁸	The spell on a person is broken.	
		K⁹	A slain person is revived.	
		K^{IX}	The revival is preceded by the obtaining of an agent.	Ex: water of life.
		K¹⁰	A captive is freed.	
KF¹	Direct transmission of the object of search.	Same as in the receiving of a magical agent.		

		KF²	Indication of the location of the object of the search.	Again, same as in the receiving of a magical agent.
XX	Return	↓	The hero returns.	Sometimes it is fleeing.
XXI	Pursuit; Chase	Pr	The hero is pursued.	
		Pr¹	The pursuer flies after the hero.	
		Pr²	He demands the guilty person.	
		Pr³	He pursues the hero, rapidly transforming himself into various animals, etc.	
		Pr⁴	Pursuers (dragons' wives, etc.) turn into alluring objects and place themselves in the path of the hero.	
		Pr⁵	The pursuer tries to devour the hero.	
		Pr⁶	The pursuer attempts to kill the hero.	
XXII	Rescue	Pr⁷	He tries to gnaw through a tree in which the hero is taking refuge.	
		Rs	Rescue of the hero from pursuit.	
		Rs¹	He is carried away through the air.	
		Rs²	He hero flees, placing obstacles in the path of his pursuer.	
		Rs³	The hero, while in flight, changes into objects which make him unrecognizable.	
		Rs⁴	The hero hides himself during his flight.	
		Rs⁵	The hero is hidden by blacksmiths.	
		Rs⁶	The hero saves himself while in flight by means of rapid transformations into animals, stones, etc.	
		Rs⁷	He avoids the temptations of transformed she-dragons.	
		Rs⁸	He does not allow himself to be devoured.	
Rs⁹	He is saved from an attempt on his life.			
Rs¹⁰	He jumps to another tree.			
This ends the first series of functions, with the possibility of a new villainous act.				
VIII_{bis}		A	Ivan's brothers steal his prize and throw him into a chasm.	
X-XI_{bis}		C↑	The hero once more sets out in search of something.	This element is sometimes omitted, and as is element B (dispatch).
XII_{bis}		D	The hero once again is the subject of actions leading to the receipt of a magical agent.	
XIII_{bis}		E	The hero again reacts to the actions of the future donor.	
XIV_{bis}		F	A new magical agent is placed at the hero's disposal.	
XV_{bis}		G	The hero is brought or transported to the location of the object of the quest.	In this case, since the main quest is ended, the hero reaches <i>home</i> .
From this point on, the new villainous act generates new functions.				

XXIII	Unrecognized arrival	O	The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country.	
		o¹	The hero arrives back home.	He is apprenticed to an artisan.
		o²	The hero arrives to the court of a king.	He serves as a cook or groom.
XXIV	Unfounded claims	L	A false hero submits unfounded claims.	The false hero claims the hero's feats.
XXV	Difficult task	M	A difficult task is proposed to the hero.	The following subdivisions are only the examples given, not a classification.
		M¹	Ordeal by food and drink.	
		M²	Ordeal by fire.	
		M³	Riddle guessing and similar ordeals.	
		M⁴	Ordeal of choice.	
		M⁵	Hide and seek.	
		M⁶	To kiss the princess in a window.	
		M⁷	To jump on top of the gates.	
		M⁸	Test of strength, adroitness, fortitude.	
		M⁹	Test of endurance.	
		M¹⁰	Tasks of supply and manufacture.	As an artisan.
		M¹¹	As tasks of manufacture.	Other: cooking, dancing, etc.
		M¹²	Other tasks.	
XXVI	Solution	N	The task is resolved.	
		*N	Preliminary solution of the task.	The task was completed before it was settled.
XXVII	Recognition	Q	The hero is recognized.	By a mark, a brand, a wound or something given to him. This function is paired with J.
XXVIII	Exposure	Ex	The false hero is exposed.	
XXIX	Transfiguration	T	The hero is given a new appearance.	
		T¹	A new appearance is directly effected by means of the magical action of a helper.	
		T²	The hero builds a marvelous place.	
		T³	The hero puts on new garments.	
		T⁴	Rationalized and humorous forms.	Usually links with previous happenstances in the tale.
XXX	Punishment	U	The villain is punished	
		U_{neg}	The villain is pardoned.	Magnanimously.
XXXI	Wedding	W	The hero is married and ascends to the throne.	
		W_{**}	This happens at once.	The hero may receive half the kingdom and inherit the rest later.
		W_*	The hero simply marries.	The bride is not a princess.
		w¹	A promise of marriage.	If a new villainy interrupts a tale shortly before a wedding.
		w²	A married is resumed as the result of a quest.	The dead wife comes back to life.
		w³	The hero receives another type of compensation instead of the	

			princess' hand.	
XXXII	Obscure Elements	X	Do not conform to this classification and are not defined by any of the functions presented.	



ANGER



DISGUST



FEAR



JOY



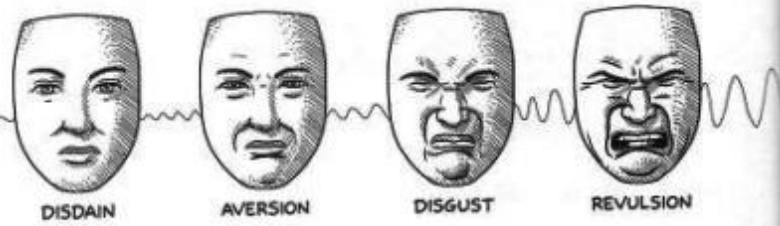
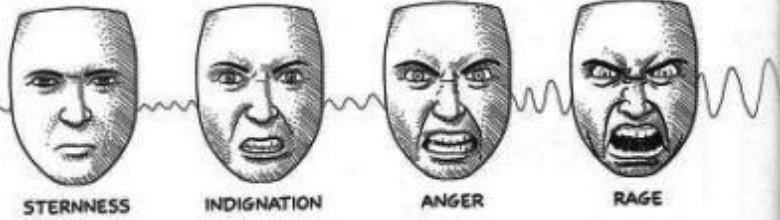
SADNESS



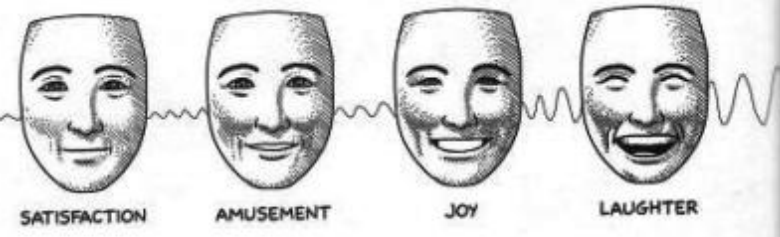
SURPRISE



FOR EXAMPLE, BY VARYING THE INTENSITY OF OUR PRIMARIES YOU CAN SEE OTHER FAMILIAR EMOTIONS EMERGE.

SO INGRAINED ARE THESE INTERMEDIATE EMOTIONS THAT EACH ONE CARRIES A SPECIFIC MEANING --

-- AND EACH GETS ITS OWN NAME.