

The Super-Dressed Body: An Analysis of Alan Moore's *Watchmen* and the Reappropriation of the Costumed-Self

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Graphic novels have been in vogue since the early 90s, but they have only started to be taken seriously after the revaluation of Alan Moore and Frank Miller's works on reimaginings of superheroes, edging towards post-apocalyptic dystopian literary genre, filled with anxieties about identity. While the identity crisis regarding sexuality and violence can be observed in most narratives of 90s and 2000s, graphic novel presents a more "graphic" one, as it forces the audience to experience the narrative in a certain way, visualised by the author/artist. While the experience of the reader and the audience in the superhero graphic novel and the recently popularized superhero film genre, respectively, may seem to be similar in that the recipients are "fed" the images and the appearance of the superhero by the creator himself, the way these images are processed by the recipients are prolonged and enhanced in graphic novels due to the stillness of the images, as opposed to "moving" images on a film. Combined with its characteristics of novel it inherently possesses, the graphic novel proves to be the most fruitful medium to investigate the identity crisis represented via superheroes. The role of dress and costume in superhero narratives is of utmost importance, for vigilantism requires a concealment of the real identity and an emphasis on the alter-ego. Superhero costumes are the ultimate metaphor of how body is empowered and transformed by the dress choices, and how these dressed super-bodied vigilantes are at the edge of an almost primal, naked form of their selves.

My aim in this presentation is to shed light on this duality of the superhero identity by looking at the costumed, dressed and naked bodies in Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (1987), emphasising on the interchangeability of the costumed body, superhero-costumed body and naked body. The main point of departure in this presentation will be the appropriation of the costumed-self by the characters in *Watchmen*; and the aim will be to read their appropriations as performative representations, thus blurring the line between costumed self and the costume-less other. Rorschach, being a radical conservative and overly-masculine vigilante, dons his mask and costume as his true identity; Nite Owl's potency as a man is directly connected to his costumed-self, and his "true", primal and naked self is actually costumed body. Silk Spectre has the awareness of the sexual design of her costume, but she re-appropriates her costumed body, soon after disavowing it; and finally the only one who lost any chance of preserving a different identity altogether, Dr. Manhattan is completely and comfortably naked. All these examples will be discussed in detail and will be proven by a close textual and visual

analysis.

Biography:

Utku Ali Yildırım is an MA student in Bogazici University, Department of Critical and Cultural Studies and works as a Research Assistant in Istanbul Kultur University, Department of English Language and Literature. He completed his undergraduate studies in Bilkent University, Department of American Culture and Literature. He is currently working on his MA thesis on discursive resemiotisation processes of everyday words, and reappropriation of such terms. His other research interests lie with investigating the connection between narrative and identity, via graphic novels, literature, film studies, resemiotisation and media studies.