Remapping Evil: Locating, Spatializing, and Depicting Evil

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REMAPPING EVIL: LOCATING, SPATIALIZING, AND DEPICTING MORALITY

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother who instilled in me a love of reading and never ending curiosity; to my father who taught me tenacity and perseverance; to my daughter Helena Catherine who gives meaning and purpose to everything I do; and, finally, to Dorian whose love, support, smiles, and hugs have seen me through these last four years, and their culmination—this dissertation.
REMAPPING EVIL: LOCATING, SPATIALIZING, AND DEPICTING MORALITY

by

CHRISTIE DANIELS, B.A.

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation expands upon critical studies of difference by exploring one particular ideological construct and how its use propagates, maintains, and exacerbates ubiquitously existent social inequalities. The concept of evil has been employed in a way that marginalizes and villainizes individuals, groups, and even entire communities. Moreover, when they are deployed in a visual medium, the ideas and concepts conveyed are often not interrogated as closely as a written work would be. As a result, the guiding question of inquiry for this project is: How have western notions of good and evil been deployed and employed as a mechanism of hegemony and marginalization? In order to answer this question, this dissertation is primarily concerned with the visual depiction of morality. That is, it seeks to examine how good and evil are depicted images and how those depictions are ideologically-based. As a starting point, I examine textual representations of evil and posit “the text” as a hegemonic and established object of study and the visual as often dismissed as non-academic, trivial, or frivolous. Consequently, I argue that images and visuals in popular culture represent an important tool for imparting ideology.

This project represents a marrying of many rhetorical areas of inquiry by examining a core but accessible object of study. The perceived good/evil dichotomy is one that plays itself out in a variety of societal arenas. Particularly, graphic novels, whose adaptations form one of the more recent trends in popular film, provide fertile ground for the interrogation of societal values and mores. As such, pop culture artifacts represent an important area of study due to their ready acceptance by the public often without resistance or critical engagement.
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Chapter 1: Surveying the Terrain: Introduction and Overview

Many scholars have written on the nature and characteristics of societal hegemony and how it functions. This study expands that knowledge by focusing on one particular concept in Western culture that has been employed in the process of marginalization: the concept of evil. The concept of evil is often thought to be natural and, consequently, is often readily accepted as such. It is this lack of critical engagement with the concept of evil that allows it to function in a hegemonic capacity. This project primarily deals with the issues of hegemony and power differentials with which the rhetorical subfield of cultural studies concerns itself. Specifically, this dissertation expands upon critical studies of difference by exploring the ideological construct of evil and how its use propagates, maintains, and exacerbates ubiquitously existent social inequalities. The concept of evil has been employed in a way that marginalizes and villainizes individuals, groups, and even entire communities. Moreover, when they are deployed in a visual medium, the ideas and concepts of evil conveyed are often neither critically considered nor interrogated as closely as a written work. For this reason, these concepts and their interrogation need to be a fundamental part of both Rhetoric and Writing Studies disciplinary knowledge and curricula. As a result, the guiding question of inquiry for this project is:

How does the ideological construct of evil function to sustain and maintain hegemony?

In order to answer this question, this dissertation is primarily concerned with the visual conveyance of morality. That is, it seeks to examine how good and evil are depicted images and how those depictions are ideological. As a starting point, textual representations of evil, both literary and religious are examined. In particular, it will be concerned with how
religion fosters not only a specific definition and character of the concept of evil but, also, how it uses this concept as a tool of marginalization. Of primary concern is how literature as a mechanism of marginalization that dictates what is good or bad through a seemingly harmless form. Following this, it posits “the text” as a hegemonic and established object of study, and the visual is often dismissed as non-academic, trivial, or frivolous. Ultimately, images and visuals in popular culture represent an important tool for imparting ideology.

This project represents a marrying of many rhetorical areas of inquiry by examining an accessible object of study. The perceived good/evil binary is one that plays itself out in a variety of societal arenas. Pop culture artifacts represent an important area of study due to their ready acceptance by the public, often without resistance or critical engagement. Graphic novels, whose adaptations form one of the more recent trends in popular film, provide fertile ground for the interrogation of societal values and mores.

In terms of the field of rhetoric, this project is situated within two major concentrations of study: cultural studies and visual rhetoric. As such, it is critical that rhetorical scholars examine concepts that play an intricate and central role in the hegemony already investigated in the field of rhetoric. Moreover, it is the rhetorical scholar’s duty and responsibility to not only subject these concepts to further scrutiny but also to prevent them from operating on the unconscious level where they currently reside. Consequently, messages and expressions of hegemonic ideology can be reinforced, transmitted or challenged effectively and efficiently. Therefore, it is critical that rhetorical scholars examine these ideological issues wherever they appear and in whatever medium they occur. Furthermore, the scholars within the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies should endeavor
to conduct research in these areas and include this disciplinary knowledge in courses and curricula such as First-Year Composition.

**Constructing the Legend**

This project is, for the most part, a theoretical endeavor. In terms of a framework and methodology for the project, there are several primary theorists who have shaped what will be the direction of this work. These theorists address key concepts such as how to conduct rhetorical analysis in general, how to apply those principles of analysis to the still image or visual, how to examine the moving image or visual, and, finally, the usefulness of mapping in rhetorical analysis of all types. The first of these is Kenneth Burke and his work, *A Grammar of Motives*. Here, Burke provides two themes that are of particular importance to this project. The first theme is the Pentad, which he explains consists of:

> Five terms as generating principle of our investigation. They are: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency and Purpose. In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the act (names what took place in thought or deed), and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (agency) and the purpose.” (xv)

Burke argues that these terms are all intertwined and related but distinct enough to allow for adequate discussion and analysis. In fact, Burke states that any complete argument regarding motives will attempt to address each of the components of the Pentad (xv).
Moreover, Burke articulates that commentary regarding motives that makes use of all the parts of the Pentad can be regarded as “philosophies,” while commentary that does not is merely a “fragment” (xvi). Ultimately, these five parts make up what he terms “dramatism,” and the method reflects discourse as “action,” which should be the goal of any piece of rhetoric.

Burke also discusses the issue of scapegoating, which is of particular import to a study centering upon marginalization and hegemony. Essentially Burke argues that the society persecutes members and factions of itself with the intention of absolving its own sin. In fact, Burke asserts that “When the attacker chooses for himself the object of attack, it is usually his blood brother; the debunker is much closer to the debunked than others are” (406-407). Burke’s contribution of the Pentad and the notion of scapegoating are integral to the design of this study. These ideas serve as the basis by which the notion of morality can be examined in the various media chosen.

Shifting gears from Burke, in “Studying Visual Culture,” Irit Rogoff examines visual culture and the various means through which it may be studied. She argues that it is not so much visual culture but a culture that is “an entire world of intertextuality in which images, sounds, and spatial delineations are read on to and through one another, lending ever-accruing layers of meanings and of subjective responses” (Rogoff 381). One of the main points of Rogoff’s argument is that all of these varied types of messages interact and overlap in ways that rarely follow set rules and patterns. As such, Rogoff positions the study of visual culture as an area transcending disciplines and methodologies (383). Her primary interest is looking at this new area without the constraints of existing lenses in a process she terms “unframing” (Rogoff 384). Additionally, Rogoff discusses exhibitions, and, while
artifacts are assumed to be static and fixed, the audience and viewers contribute much to what meaning is actually made. As such, she views exhibitions as the sites “for the continuous (re)production of meanings” (Rogoff 385). She then proceeds to an examination of the act of seeing and how the Enlightenment contributes to notions of objectivity that lead to the development of approved ways of seeing, to use Burke’s terminology. She counters this with the idea that seeing is an ideologically situated act and is, therefore, variable and contingent (Rogoff 389). In fact, Rogoff extends this argument to include spaces and how they are rhetorically and ideologically situated. Finally, to end the piece, Rogoff argues that the goal should be an “unframed field of vision” where arguments and facts can be made and rearticulated (390). While Rogoff’s use of an “unframed field of vision” is problematic, her examination of visuals as rhetorical is important for this study as is her use of Kenneth Burke. Rogoff extends Burke’s ideas to a visual object of study, which is precisely what this project ultimately does. Rogoff’s importance in terms of this dissertation is her argument that visuals are worthy and necessary objects of study.

One means for making rhetorical analysis a visual endeavor is Fredric Jameson’s postmodern conception of cognitive mapping. Jameson argues that ideology is "a necessary function in any form of social life has the great merit of stressing the gap between the local positioning of the individual subject and the totality of class structures in which he or she is situated” (353). He explains cognitive mapping as a way to connect societal ideology to the individual lives that it affects. In fact, Jameson asserts that due to its aim of exposing ideological structures and formations, cognitive mapping is an absolutely essential activity for societal/institutional critique. Another point that Jameson makes is the emphasis of complexity that undermines the existence of overarching metanarratives (354). I agree that
the interrogation of societal metanarratives is an absolutely crucial activity to undertake not only for the necessary ideological analysis but, additionally, for its emphasis on the visual. What Jameson is proposing is that the heretofore unseen ideological structure be revealed and, more precisely, made visual. Jameson’s argument bolsters this dissertation’s ultimate claim that both societal critique and visual rhetoric should be foregrounded in the First-Year Composition classroom.

Building upon the theoretical work of Jameson, Ben Barton and Marthalee Barton provide a thorough examination of the genre of the map and its relation to ideology. They begin with the claim that visuals function as "embodiments of cultural and disciplinary conventions" (Barton & Barton 49). They continue by arguing that visuals not only embody ideological conventions but additionally act to preserve or perpetuate them as well. The authors note that visual artifacts carry on this hegemonic duty in ways that are often unseen and unnoticed. Barton and Barton explain that “the map in particular and, by implication, visual representation in general are seen as complicit with social-control mechanisms inextricably linked to power and authority” (53). They identify, in particular, the conventions that govern the map, which they term “rules of inclusion” and “rules of exclusion” (54). They explicate that "Rules of inclusion determine whether something is mapped, what aspects of a thing are mapped, and what representation strategies are used to map those aspects. These rules amount to either explicit or implicit, overt or covert, claims to power" (54). They go on to articulate that there are several strategies that are employed to utilize space in a hierarchical manner, and “the placement of visual elements becomes a way of imparting privilege” (55). For instance, they point out that centering is used to indicate importance and margins/edges designate insignificance. Likewise, placement at the top
and/or ordering things usually bestows some sort of privilege to those objects/items (55). As one of their main points, they focus a great deal of their discussion on ways to denaturalize these conventions/assumptions. As an example they state that though “the background of the map seems particularly innocent, it is an even worthier candidate for denaturalization—and, ultimately, for viewing as complicit with mechanisms linked to power and authority” (57).

In addition to this discussion of the various rules of inclusion and how they function, they examine rules of exclusion. As an example of this, they use the map of the London Underground to illustrate that while the map operates successfully at many levels, particularly in terms of readability, success comes at the expense of other goals, such as “geographic accuracy” (65). Barton and Barton’s point here is that for every feature that appears on a map, there are multiple features that are excluded from that map. The decisions made by the designer come from certain ideological assumptions and values and serve to preserve or reinforce them.

As a result of this ideological basis for visuals and their design, Barton and Barton call for “a new politics of design, one authorizing heterodoxy—a politics where difference is not excluded or repressed, as before, but valorized” (70). As a means to bring about this new politics, they argue for two metaphors of the map: the “map as collage” and the “map as palimpsest” (70). They assert that the collage has a “denaturalizing power” since it is “an assemblage of diverse elements drawn from preexisting texts and integrated into a new creation manifesting ruptures of various sorts” (70). They note that collages include a wide variety of individual signs and in some ways inherently disrupt customary conventions (70). More intriguing and perhaps more germane to this dissertation is the metaphor of the map as palimpsest. This metaphor deals with the limitations of the traditional map as a static
representation. Specifically, Barton and Barton posit that “denaturalizing the act of production also means not closing off the movement of contradictions by representing meaning as fixed and stable. The design tradition, of course, has been to stabilize meanings, but the designers of visuals can just as easily choose to destabilize meanings” (75). It is this last point that is of the most import. The emphasis on destabilization is clearly a postmodern priority and one of the primary goals of this dissertation.

Another guiding framework is Patricia Sullivan and James Porter’s book, *Opening Spaces: Writing Technologies and Critical Research Practices*, which outlines many issues related to mapping. Though seemingly unrelated to this study, Sullivan and Porter explain that the traditional understanding of a map is that it “represents information about an existing and static reality. Such maps are used more for organizational and representational purposes than for heuristic ones” (79). Their assertion is relevant to this project not in that the reality it endeavors to convey is static (it is not and that is an issue that Sullivan and Porter address), but, rather, that this dissertation seeks to depict evil from some of the great variety of places and contexts into which is inserted. Consequently, in line with Porter and Sullivan’s postmodern sense of the map, the examples and discussions presented will seek to depict many perspectives and conceptions of evil.

In keeping with their understanding of mapping from a postmodern standpoint, Sullivan and Porter note the limitations of a single static “map to ‘fix’ the categories, pictures, generalizations” and that avoiding this tendency in favor of a more postmodern sense of mapping “allowed varying and sometimes disturbingly dissimilar positions to shimmer in the discussion” (80). Similarly, this dissertation seeks to rectify static, simplistic representations of evil and allow a truly problematized, fluid, and contingent characterization
of evil to emerge. They outline several points important in utilizing postmodern mapping as they state that a “map can be judged, we think, on what it allows, on what it blocks, what else may be pictured, how it freezes time, and how it allows time to escape” (Sullivan and Porter 80). Moreover, in order to utilize the mapping techniques, they explain that it is important to show change over time, depict contrast and complexities, and use several maps to avoid “totalizing and freezing” the situation” (Sullivan and Porter 97).

In particular, the postmodern sense of mapping that Porter and Sullivan refer to is an especially important concept from the standpoint of research methodology and analysis. Typically, analysis is conducted in a linear fashion with one point building upon and/or following the next. For some arguments, this is effective but it also has its shortcomings and flaws. For instance, written analysis which is privileged in academia and even forms a large part of this dissertation is ill-suited for many forms of complexity. When it comes to illustrating the interconnectedness found in relationships and/or intricate narratives, there is a need for a spatial depiction which linear argument cannot adequately provide. As a result, mapping techniques and analytical methods as a heuristic tool provide for access to information and understandings which would remain unseen and undiscovered through traditional means.

Taking this notion of mapping a step further, in “Mapping the Other: The English Patient, Colonial Rhetoric, and Cinematic Representation, Alan Nadel articulates many of the rhetorical features of mapmaking as they relate to the movie. The piece opens with the statement: “One cannot colonize without a map, a gaze, and a narrative” (Nadel 21). This powerful yet rhetorically accurate assertion grounds much of what Nadel does in the chapter. He focuses especially on the rhetorical nature of colonization. In explaining this, he refers to
mapmaking as a theme in the movie as well as the main rhetorical concept that he wants to explore in relation to the movie. Nadel makes many points concerning mapmaking, but some of the most important deal with the colonial gaze as well the use of narrative to create and perpetuate that gaze.

With regard to mapping, he asserts, “Since mapping is the literal act of turning the other into a representation, it is a rhetorical process, one that is requisite to traditional narrative cinema” (Nadel 22). In fact, Nadel argues that the film, as any film does, is in itself a mapmaking endeavor where the audience is given access through the filmic medium to a world and realm that is not their own. Additionally, he argues that this act is mirrored by the character of the English patient himself who has to map out or reconstruct his own life (Nadel 24). Nadel also discusses the rhetorical nature of naming and spends some time dissecting the opening credits in terms of this phenomenon. He also examines how the very use of the cinematic medium is a powerful mode of storytelling and especially notes the ability of the medium to convey a sense of “historicity” in the narrative. That is, Nadel posits that this medium allows the narrative to appear to be objective and intended to be accepted as such. Nadel notes that the invisibility of this power mirrors that of mapping and colonial discourse (26). Finally, he ends his examination by asserting that the audience is colonized by the film, and that the hegemonic power exercised differentiates the film adaptation from the novel upon which it is based. Nadel combines the work done by Blakesley in the medium of film with many of the mapping concepts introduced by Sullivan and Porter. The application of the ideas of mapping to the medium of film will be useful for my final chapter, which delves into issues of mapping and postmodernism in earnest.
Research Methodology

In developing a methodology for the completion of this study, I began with Burke’s Pentad as an analytical starting point. His heuristic for revealing motives serves as a useful aim although with the fictional artifacts (novels, graphic novels, and films) that I am examining, there are, in actuality, two sets of motives—the motives of the author and the motives of the character as he or she moves throughout a given work. Of these two ways that motives can be revealed, those of the author (rhetor) are more significant. One of the key considerations for authors of fiction is the concept of verisimilitude or the believability of fictional characters and their actions. From a rhetorical standpoint, verisimilitude essentially becomes a question of conventions (and adherence to conventions) and recognition in relation to existing conventions and/or norms. Plainly, villains in a given work of fiction should, in some way, be recognizable in relation to expected characteristics of villains in a given genre.

Burke’s Pentad is very useful for verbal rhetorical analyses yet does not explicitly account for multimodality (as several of the above scholars’ work illustrates). So, I believe that the Pentad needs to be reconfigured in such a way as to directly address multimodal objects of study as well as promote and/or require multimodal analysis of those artifacts. Therefore, I propose mapping with its inherent multimodality as a method of analysis that both extends and reconfigures Burke’s Pentad. The Pentad, as configured by Burke, is extremely effective at analyzing linear, textual objects but as media becomes more visual and more multimodal, a strictly textual means of analysis of multimodal media becomes awkward and inadequate. The shortcomings of textual analysis become increasingly evident as both media and the narratives they contain become ever more complex and intricate.
These media necessitate new analytical methods capable of truly examining these rich media and all of their constituent parts. So, in order to adequately discuss the multimodal works under consideration, a method of analysis utilizing the mapping methodologies advocated by scholars such as Barton and Barton as well as Porter and Sullivan needed to be developed. With this emphasis on mapping, my model what I will call the Techno-rhetorical Triad, uses Burke’s Pentad as a base point and consists of three constituent parts—substance, impetus, and environment—which, like the components of the Pentad, are interrelated and inseparable. In fact, a more precise characterization of my model is a multi-level frame for analysis best depicted as three concentric circles. The reason for the levels being envisioned as concentric circles has to do with the fact that all of the parts of the model are intertwined and interlinked.

![Figure 1.1: The Techno-rhetorical Triad](image)
With the label “substance,” I refer to what Burke would call act and agent. I envision this as the most basic description of a given piece of discourse. The analysis in this level consists primarily of observation and reporting, albeit through a given lens or “terministic screen.” It is depicted as the innermost circle because it is the core from which the other levels emanate. The next level, “impetus,” involves motivations or purpose behind the events discussed under the label of “substance.” Of course, like the previous level, “substance,” observations regarded as “impetus” would derive from a particular lens, but the main difference with this level would be that what emerges is more analytical in nature. This level requires analysis beyond mere description of what is seen. It is shown as enveloping the inner circle of “substance” because in reality it builds upon mere actions by providing the agent’s reasons behind them. The final level, under the label “environment,” encircles the other two levels indicating that this final level encompasses them. The “environment” level utilizes what in Burke’s terminology would be the “scene” and “agency.” I have combined these two elements for a few reasons. First, I believe they both speak to issues of systemic and ideological power. Additionally, scene and agency are so interconnected that it seems ineffective and/or pointless to analyze them separately. Context (which I will use in place of Burke’s “scene”) necessarily serves as the genesis of constraints. That is, the agency available to a particular agent (rhetor) is contextually-bound and determined.

The levels of analysis shall be configured as maps depicting the constituent actions, elements, or observations relevant to each respective level of the model. While, for this project, I am limited to maps that are static and in print form, this method need not necessarily be thusly limited. In fact, I envision a multimedia analytical approach that would serve to rectify some of the limitations of a traditional map by the utilization of
qualities/capabilities such as sound and motion. For the purposes of this project, multiple maps (one for each level described above), as called for by Sullivan and Porter, supplemented with textual rhetorical analysis, will be required to provide a complete analysis of each cultural artifact. Ultimately, I use the Techno-rhetorical Triad as a heuristic to gain valuable cultural insight from an ideological standpoint. Furthermore, I posit that this type of analysis can be used to promote vital and critical multimodal literacies and abilities in Rhetoric and Writing Studies courses, particularly First-Year Composition classrooms.

**Mapping the Route: Chapter Previews**

This project examines the concepts of good and evil as they interact in society in a hegemonic manner. In particular, it looks at the various means and societal institutions in which these concepts appear and how they are used in those specific contexts. It chiefly examines the emergence of depictions of morality from a textual medium to those that are visual and the concurrent evolution of the quality of evil and by extension good as well.

**Chapter 2: Following Directions: Textual Representations of Evil**

Chapter Two focuses on the textual use of the concepts of good and evil. Specifically, this chapter centers on the religious and literary spheres of influence with regard to issues of morality. These two spheres, what Althusser refers to as ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses), are text-centric and, in large part, have formed and perpetuated Western notions of good and evil. The chapter begins with a discussion of the religious contextualizations of the concept of evil. Then, it characterizes evil as a
mechanism for the maintenance of religious authority. More specifically, Chapter Two examines how the Christian religion needs evil in order to justify its own existence and import in society.

Additionally, the chapter will examine how the Enlightenment as well as the advent of scientific rhetoric and thought present a challenge to religious authority. This challenge and the subsequent diminishing of religion coincide with the emergence of the novel as a literary form. As Edward Said suggests the novel becomes an ideologically colonizing medium spreading Judeo-Christian morality in much the same way that Christianity’s “civilizing mission” did. In order to analyze this, the varying literary definitions of heroes and villains are discussed. Additionally, the chapter explores the implications of these literary works as well as literature in general as a reflection of cultural mores and a colonizer of people. That is, literature imparts desired cultural values upon the readers. In particular, and with regard to heroes and villains, the reader is taught what is good (possessing desirable qualities) and what is bad (possessing undesirable qualities). There are many means through which conceptions and definitions of good and evil are conveyed, and works of literature are a very effective and important example of that point. In terms of the mapping of these concepts, textual representations of morality, for the most part, have largely been oversimplified with good and evil being easily separated. Such a representation produces a portrayal of good and evil in a linear fashion that precludes adequate clarity and definition.

Chapter 3: Taking a Left: The Graphic Novel as the Textual-Visual Bridge

Visual representations of good and evil have often played on the linear manner in which morality is typically conceived in Western society. This chapter analyzes two graphic
novels, Sin City and Watchmen, due to their utilization of hero motifs as well as the availability of film adaptations. It examines how the visual and the textual are married to depict stories that, at their most basic level, are dependent on ideological constructions of morality. The visual, for the most part, relies on issues of recognition, resemblance, and remembrance. As such, Chapter Three examines how the qualities known as good and evil are literally mapped out on the frames of these two graphic novels. It is noteworthy that these frames poignantly bind the reality being presented to the audience. Additionally, the pages of a graphic novel still present a static reality that is frozen in time for at least that short frame, which, of course, illuminates one of the limits of the visual print medium. These novels make use of framing, color, and of course verbal content to create a narrative woven around issues of morality.

**Chapter 4: Further Down the Road: Translating the Graphic Novel to Film**

Chapter Four shifts gears and analyzes the film adaptations of the two graphic novels, which is significant because these efforts do not merely represent a simple act of translation. Rather, these narratives must be remapped to a new medium. Remapping, in this case, determines what can be presented and how it can be presented. While film solves the problem of the static snapshot in time, it presents new and complex challenges. One particular issue is how the audience approaches a film. Also, the timeline of a film is dictated by the medium itself, which contrasts with written media where the audience can deliberate on an image or a scene as long as they would like to. Issues explored in this chapter include: the effect that the ephemeral nature of the filmic scene has upon image creation; the effects of the medium upon authorial/directorial choices and the effects of these
choices upon the narrative itself; and the effect of visual representations of good and evil upon our understanding of these central societal constructs.

Chapter 5: New Excursions: Remapping First Year Composition

The final chapter of this dissertation explores the importance and ramifications of technology and multimedia upon the First-Year Composition classroom. This chapter begins with a discussion from a disciplinary standpoint on the effects of computer technology in the composition classroom. From this larger disciplinary perspective, the chapter moves on to examine the First-Year Composition curricular revision at the University of Texas at El Paso. This complete reimagining of the curriculum foregrounds technology and multimedia and does so through a rhetorical approach. Additionally, I explore my own changes to that curriculum in my individual sections of the course. Integral to these changes was my goal of emphasizing the usefulness of popular culture artifacts as a means to understanding the principles of visual rhetoric as well as the rhetorical appeals. The chapter ends with a discussion of the work that was done by students in the adapted course, their attitudes toward the course and their understanding of its concepts, and a look to the future intersections of the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies and multimedia technology.
Chapter 2: Following Directions: Textual Representations of Evil

Evil is a concept which permeates much of western society and as a result is present in many societal institutions such as religion. Evil, at its most fundamental level, is a rhetorical construct. That is, it is an abstraction created for a variety of purposes and uses. These uses are often of a moralistic or religious nature. It is important to note that even religion itself is rhetorical in nature and operates as a hegemonic institution in western society. Religion makes significant use of the concept of evil in its various doctrines and guidelines. Specifically, religion and those in positions of religious leadership often employ evil as an enforcer to perpetuate or increase their own power. Moreover, when religion began to lose its authoritative hold on much of western society during the Enlightenment, works of literature carry the ideological messages of morality. Ultimately, religion and literature serve to protect and reinforce hegemonic notions of good and evil in the western world. This chapter examines the institution of religion and its promotion and utilization of the concept of evil in a hegemonic sense. To demonstrate this use of evil and its effects, rhetorical texts by women resisting these effects are analyzed. Then, moving on from the discussion of evil and religion, this chapter tackles good and evil within the literary sphere. First, I describe various definitions of the concept of hero (and by extension villain). Then I discuss good and evil as they are depicted in the traditional sense, in a nonwestern novel, and in a postmodern novel. Within each of these varied literary settings, I note the various ways in which good and evil can be mapped out and the key features those maps exhibit.
From a theoretical standpoint, Mikhail Bakhtin serves as an appropriate starting point as he primarily explores and emphasizes the relationship between the sign and ideology in his work, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Specifically, he argues that “Everything ideological possesses meaning: it represents, depicts, or stands for something lying outside itself. In other words, it is a sign. Without signs, there is no ideology” (1210). He continues by asserting that the domain of ideology and the domain of signs are one and the same and that meaning making is not something that is static is done in isolation but rather is the product of the interaction between multiple signs and individuals. It is important to note that signs and ideology are imbricated with the concepts of hegemony and power because they establish discourse as being situated within an ideological framework, a framework that more often than not is hegemonic in nature.

It is critical to point out that the social creation of meaning is central to Bakhtin’s work. In discussing meaning as socially constructed, he notes that individuals have a worldview which they assume their audience share. Bakhtin explains that a cultured person is one that is able to approximate the expectations of his or her audience. Bakhtin further states that the resultant discourse is bound by social situation and that that discourse, termed “the utterance” is constrained or shaped by that situation (1215). These ideas introduced by Bakhtin, with their social emphasis, lay the foundation and open the door for examinations of the effects of society upon the meanings and interactions which occur within it. That is, the ideology (and the societal hierarchy which defines it) shapes the discourse occurring within that society. However natural they might seem, societal mores defining evil are rhetorically and ideologically derived and driven.
Also important to a discussion of ideology is the work of Louis Althusser. He introduces two key notions: The “Ideological State Apparatus” and interpellation. The first of these is the institutions that he asserts impart and enforce ideology. He terms these “Ideological State Apparatuses” or “ISAs” and some notable institutions that he includes are religion, the educational system, the political system, communications, and the cultural ISA which includes literature and the arts (110-111). He argues that that ISAs use ideology to operate whereas the state simply relies on violence. Despite this, he asserts that the ISAs are crucial for the maintenance of state power as they formed by the ideology of the ruling class but they are seemingly independent from each other and the state (114). In relation to this study, it is important to note that these apparatuses operate hegemonically and that three of the chapters of this dissertation addresses some of the ISAs that Althusser identifies.

Althusser characterizes ideology as not simply an imagined construct but one which has real effects and consequences. He notes the materiality of ideology and the ways in which it defines who, what, and how people should be. He concludes the essay with a discussion of “The duplicate mirror-structure of ideology” (135). Here Althusser asserts that individuals are defined or “interpellated” by ideology, that ideology defines hierarchy and that members of society accept that hierarchy and their role within it (135). It is this mention of interpellation which on one hand illustrates the ability of rhetoric to create reality. In terms of morality, concepts such as good and evil (particularly their oppositional characterization by western society) define the options available to individuals in society. And, as Althusser notes through his discussion of the materiality of ideology, there are benefits and consequences to the option taken (either good or evil in this case) by the individual.
Michel Foucault examines many of these same issues of power and ideology in his work, *Discipline and Punish*. In fact he notes that disciplinary power becomes an “apparatus of production” (153). Foucault goes so far as to state the individuals are merely elements that may be manipulated or used by others. His major illustration of this idea is the notion of the Panopticon, the ideal disciplinary power structure designed to “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). In this model, power is both obvious and invisible at the same time. Foucault argues that the effect of this upon the individual is that it “inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjugation” (202-203). Ultimately, this notion of power being invisible and individuals accepting and consenting to it, is reminiscent of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony.

In the *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci elucidates his notion of hegemony which necessarily involves the coercion and consent of less powerful individuals and groups in a hierarchy. Jacques Texier explains that Gramsci’s notion of the superstructure represents the historical context or frame and its interrelationship with the structure. Texier states that, “material forces are the content and ideologies the form and content has purely ‘didactic’ value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces” (58). Chantal Mouffe expands on this notion by examining the interrelationship between hegemony and ideology. She defines a hegemonic class as “a class which has been able to articulate the interests of other social groups to its own by means of ideological struggle” (181). She explains that this class can have two goals in mind: to mollify or resist the non-hegemonic or resolve the differences between the two classes (183).
Proceeding from Gramsci, Webb et al describe Bourdieu’s three major contributions to a discussion of power and agency. They argue that, in practice, people reenact the ideology around them in terms of both artifacts and acts, that language shapes people’s reality, and that concepts and ideas only obtain meaning through other concepts and ideas. They go on to examine Bourdieu’s concept of habitus which concerns itself with how a culture’s ideology becomes embedded and perpetuated in the everyday experience of individuals. In particular they note that while habitus does allow for some individual agency in a given situation, it also determines a large portion of how individuals act and how they perceive and thus shapes even the exercise of agency in a given context (36-37). The authors introduce many important ideas regarding Bourdieu’s notion of habitus such as its central role in the creation of knowledge and its effect on worldview which essentially impacts a majority of the human experience. Finally, and perhaps most importantly they note how habitus always involves the unconscious in some respect (38).

Bourdieu’s work is particularly salient in a discussion of evil from a rhetorical vantage point in a couple of ways. The first of these is how structure and agency are embedded through habitus. That is, the little mundane actions, activities, and endeavors such as the books we read, the films we watch, and the games we play on a daily basis that reinscribe the hierarchical structure and the distribution of power within that structure. In terms of evil, this is illustrated by the various cultural artifacts and activities that dictate what is good and what is evil and casts good as accepted and desirable.

In “Poststructuralism, Cultural Studies, and the Composition Classroom,” James Berlin summarizes postmodern theory and cultural studies theory with regard to discourse. He first echoes Bourdieu and others when he states that individuals are shaped by discourse.
However he extends and complicates discourse when he asserts that, “These signifying practices then are languages that tell us who we are and how we should behave in terms of such categories as gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, and the like. The result is that each of us is heterogeneously made up of various competing discourses, conflicted and contradictory scripts, that make our consciousness anything but unified, coherent, and autonomous” (18). In asserting this perspective, he debunks the notion that language is simply a tool used to convey knowledge and argues instead that language and knowledge are ultimately inseparable.

In particular, Berlin notes the imbrication between of ideology, discourse, and the subject. For instance, Berlin states that “the unique place of each of us in the network of intersecting discourses assures differences among us as well as possibilities for originalities and political agency. This does not mean, however, that anyone can totally escape the discursive regimes, the power/knowledge formations, of the historical moment. Political agency but never complete autonomy is the guiding formation here” (21). In particular, it is the incomplete alignment of various cultural codes that allows the individual some measure of agency, however limited. Berlin’s perspective of agency builds upon Althusser’s notion that “Ideology addresses or interpellates human beings. It provides language to define the subject, other subjects, the material and social, and the relation of all things to each other. Ideology addresses three questions: what exists, what is good, what is possible?” (Berlin 23). Ultimately, ideologies are replicated in everyday society, which is congruent with Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, and this everyday use acts to “support the hegemony of dominant groups” (Berlin 24).
In *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, Berlin argues for the influence of ideology upon culture. He observes that “Humans create the conditions of their experience as much as they are created by them” (xix). In fact, he invokes his notion of difference in which those voices that are silenced or omitted from the dominant discourse are recovered, which results in subjectivity that is diverse, complex, and multilayered (75). He utilizes Althusser’s notion of ideology as interpellation of the subject and, particularly, determining “what exists, what is good, and what is possible” (84). Furthermore, echoing Althusser, he explains that ideology is always reinforced socially and culturally, and that ideas and notions which seem natural and ordinary are, in fact, ideologically based (84).

**Religion and Evil**

Evil is a concept which is frequently employed in western society but seldom interrogated. Theological and philosophical examinations of evil often revere evil as a naturally occurring force. Other examinations regard it as a one that is supernatural. William Hart explains that the “word evil has a sordid history as a weapon of politics and religion, and even today it seems that those who brandish it most vigorously are the intolerant and the paranoid” (Hart xiii). He describes two “senses” of evil. The first of these has to do with tremendously bad events occurring and the second referring to the beliefs that comprise much of religion and its authority (Hart 13). Nietzsche alludes to this hegemonic function of evil as he states, “The lofty independent spirituality, the will to stand alone, and even the cogent reason, are felt to be dangers; everything that elevates the individual above the herd, and is a source of fear to the neighbor, is henceforth called evil” (Nietzsche 124-125). Yet it is Hart who ultimately provides a very usable definition of evil as “an
intentional human act that causes extreme harm to innocents and attacks our basic moral order” (Hart 22). Others regard evil not so much as a force but as the absence of the force of good. However, most of these descriptions fail to take into account that evil is a man-made construction. This fact is emphasized by the problem of evil which questions why an omnipotent, omnipresent God who is good by definition would allow evil to exist. In fact, Hart cites Augustine as saying that evil cannot exist and must be defined as the “absence of good” precisely for this reason (8). This problem provides fodder for lengthy and spirited theological and philosophical debates but its existence serves another important role.

William Connolly describes the problem of evil as – “two wills contending for hegemony within the human soul into two contending forces in the world, representing two contending deities, one good and the other evil. The dangerous implication of this translation is that the good God lacks omnipotence, perhaps even the capacity to deliver on the hope of salvation. Augustine found such a sacrilege unsettling enough to call it evil” (134-135). The apparent paradox between an infinitely good God and the existence of evil can be explained by the fact that like most concepts, evil is a rhetorical construction which assumes meaning given to it by humans. This is readily observable in the various definitions in the word evil as well as the way the term is applied. For instance, its use in the development and maintenance of the hegemony and influence of religion is particularly salient.

With regard to the concept of evil, it must be stated that a rhetorical conception of evil necessarily holds that evil is not an inherent component of entities or individuals. Rather, it is an abstraction created through language for concrete and specific purposes. As such, situated within rhetoric, evil is that which so fundamentally appears to violate the strictures
or mores of a society as a threat by that society to the extent that society must necessarily be protected by its influence. Nel Noddings explains how conceptions of evil feed into the derogatory ways in which women are often regarded. Noddings asserts that, “It is not surprising that women, considered inherently inferior in morality, have not been heard in moral philosophy. Traditional thought has linked women with that which harms or threatens us—that is, with evil—and the ‘us’ so universally threatened is not humankind but literally mankind” (Noddings 57-58). Noddings lists the many biblical stories and episodes, such as Eve’s corruption of Adam, which illustrate this belief that women are a threat to men in a variety of ways.

She continues with the very prevalent and persistent notion of the “angel in the house.” She states that, “Woman has been associated in a stereotypical way with both good and evil. As an ‘angel in the house,’ woman has been credited with natural goodness, an innate allegiance to ‘a law in kindness.’ But this same description extols her as infantile, weak, and mindless—a creature in constant need of male supervision and protection” (Noddings 59). Accordingly, women were bound to societal laws and rules by the potentiality of being labeled evil. Noddings claims that it was only through accepting this “angelic” role and adhering to its requirements that women could achieve good and prompt men to do the same (Noddings 59).

As Noddings points out, the true goal of this system is to keep women clearly in the private sphere of the home. It is within this sphere that women are hidden away and their influence in society is restricted. Noddings demonstrates that this view originates even prior to Christianity. Referring to Aristotle, Noddings argues that, “For him the male is clearly better, and women are deformed or incomplete males. The male is active and causal in the
world; the female’s essence is a lack or inability. It is natural and proper that the man should rule over his wife” (Noddings 62). Aristotle’s view of women as less than men predates Christianity and its polarizing of the forces of good and evil (God and Satan) and directly contrasts the complexity and depth found in the deities of Greek mythology. Consequently, Noddings explains that, “Aristotle also foreshadows a position that has plagued women for centuries—women’s moral inferiority to men. To be sure, Aristotle assigns different sorts of goodness to men and to women (and we must keep in mind that our modern notion of virtue did not yet exist), but the virtues he assigns to women are those of underlings and subjects, not those of rulers and leaders” (Noddings 62). So, when Christianity is influenced by the views of Aristotle with regard to women, it aligns women and their supposed deficiencies with the power of evil.

Partially owing to the viewpoint that women are inferior to men, women in western society are often silenced and/or unheard. Noddings argues that, “Natural goodness notwithstanding, women’s voices have seldom resounded in the public realm of moral debate. Women have spoken out on moral matters, as we will see, but they have often suffered ridicule for doing so, and men have frequently co-opted their most promising programs” (Noddings 59). The ethos of women is largely reduced and diminished. Again with the heavy reliance on the “angel in the house” ideal, women who transgress their assigned space are ignored or dismissed. Moreover, as Noddings illustrates, in the rare event that men listened to and actually agreed with what was said by women, their ideas would be stolen or co-opted allowing the men who surround them to regain their dominance in society. It is this hegemonic dominance which religion establishes through its doctrines and practices.
Religion is dependent upon notions of evil and the limiting of evil’s power and influence on society.

**Sor Juana and the Erosion of Evil**

Building on the preceding notions of evil as unredeemable and the depiction of women as inferior and susceptible to the forces of evil, women in the Christian church have been, and in some cases, still are, silenced and restrained. The analysis of the works that follow by Christian women speak to the hegemonic power of Christianity and the societies based upon it. Specifically they resist the categorization of themselves as evil and the resulting ostracism and marginalization inherent in that characterization. As a result of these women and their writing being used in this dissertation as examples of this marginalization, I will reserve the application of my mapping model to the works of fiction that follow this analysis of the work of Sor Juana and Phoebe Palmer as they resist the marginalization of women from religious sources. The written rhetorical acts of these women as examples of the communicative constraints placed upon women with respect to the Christian church, often due to the employment of the concept of evil as a mechanism of control and the great rhetorical skill required to negotiate varying degrees of marginalization.

**Sor Juana and the Erosion of Evil**

Most of the marginalization of women at the hands of various factions and ideals of the Christian church that Noddings describes is common knowledge. What is not as well-known are the various rhetorical acts and instances of resistance by women to this marginalization. One of these resistant acts occurs in 1691, when Sor Juana pens “La Respuesta.” This text is essentially her argument that women should be allowed to study and
take an active role in the church. “La Respuesta” resists marginalization caused by the religious conception of evil. She summarizes her view on women studying in the church by stating, “all women should do so, but only those whom God may have seen fit to endow with special virtue and prudence, and who are mature and erudite and possess the necessary talents and requirements for such a sacred occupation” (81). While seemingly a call for the widespread inclusion of women in the church, closer examination reveals the narrow scope of the liberty for which Sor Juana is calling. She advocates for the freedom of gifted women within the church to apply their abilities and strengths to religious study. She places herself within this select group and argues for enhanced freedoms for that group of special women who meet these criteria. In other words, the only way for women to achieve the extra freedom and latitude that Sor Juana advocates for them is to prove that they possess this “special virtue and prudence.” Her call for limited freedom and equality is problematic in light of the fact that a determination of meeting this standard would, in all likelihood, have to be made by the very same men who enjoy the benefits of this discriminatory system. So, in essence, what Sor Juana is advocating would not change this marginalization based on the concept of evil but rather merely exempt herself and a few select others from being persecuted by it. Ultimately, this represents a first step towards the erosion of the hegemonic power of religion and its use of the concept of evil.

Additionally, Sor Juana also discusses the catalyst for her writing. She explains coyly that, “My writing has never proceeded from any dictate of my own, but a force beyond me; I can in truth say, ‘You have compelled me’” (47). This is significant because she is essentially eroding her own agency. The decision to do so is not a flaw but rather an expression of rhetorical awareness. She is writing at a time and in an environment largely
hostile to the self-expression of women, and, in recognition of this, she diminishes her own personal ethos hoping that the substance of her message will survive its being written by a woman. Ultimately, this degree of rhetorical prowess is necessitated by the constant threat of persecution and marginalization due to the concept evil and the societal consequences attached to it. She continues this tone as she explains, “And therefore I had nearly resolved to leave the matter in silence; yet although silence explains much by the emphasis of leaving all unexplained, because it is a negative thing, one must name the silence, so that what it signifies may be understood” (41-43). Sor Juana also displays her rhetorical acumen as she justifies her need to speak which is counter to societal and religious expectations of women. She also alludes to the fact that silence itself can be misunderstood and misinterpreted and she intends to clarify what she means before being silent. Women’s silence is often read as acquiescence or agreement and the truth is that women’s silence is often forced rather than chosen. Silence by women is enforced by the constant threat of being labeled as evil or immoral and it is this inaccurate yet ever present categorization (and the consequences that would result) that Sor Juana is resisting. So, Sor Juana rejects that imposition and chooses to speak, where she can. Essentially, despite the limited scope of her agency, she clearly seeks to create a rhetorical space for herself, at the very least, where women had previously been silenced.

Another issue that Sor Juana introduces is her intellect and abilities. Speaking of God she exclaims:

His majesty knows why and to what end He did so, and He knows that I have prayed that he snuff out the light of my intellect, leaving only enough to keep his Law. For more than that is too much, some would say, in a woman; and
there are those who say that it is harmful. His Majesty knows too that, not achieving this, I have attempted to entomb my intellect together with my name and to sacrifice it to the One who gave it to me. (47)

With this excerpt she illustrates the detriment that intelligence has been to her and the problems with which it has presented her. She presents two warring concepts as she wants to reject the intelligence she has been given while at the same time acknowledging the fact that her intelligence is a gift from God. It is especially significant that Sor Juana invokes the imagery of light which leads to associations with goodness and holiness. Essentially, she is arguing that goodness can exist in women which is a direct refutation to those who would place her speech within the domain of evil. Sor Juana deliberately and delicately asserts her own intelligence as a positive development while still maintaining the humility and self-effacement her status as a woman demands. The strategic nature of her approach again illustrates her rhetorical awareness of her situation.

Directly related to the concept of evil, Sor Juana comments, “And if evil lies in their being used by a woman, we have just seen how many women have used them most laudably; then what evil lies in my being one. I confess straightaway my rough and uncouth nature; but I wager not a soul has seen an indecent verse of mine” (97). Here, and with particular relevance, Sor Juana defends herself against the smear of evil. This is a clear indication of religious rhetoric being utilized to cast women as evil. Yet, even here, where she vehemently defends herself, she is simultaneously demure and acknowledging of her lower status in society. This coyness is representative of the immense pressure imposed on Sor Juana by the hegemonic institution in which she finds herself and the need for her to mold herself to its demands even as she resists them. This constant and savvy awareness of her social position
illustrates the precarious nature of Sor Juana’s station. In short, it demonstrates the great marginalizing influence of religion and the difficulty with which that influence is resisted. Overall, “La Respuesta” represents a chipping away at the immense and at this point in time all-encompassing authority of the Christian religion and its utilization of the concept of evil for maintaining that authority.

**Phoebe Palmer and Rhetorical Agency**

Another act of this rhetorical resistance occurs when Phoebe Palmer writes “The Promise of the Father” in 1859 which is much later than the work of Sor Juana. Her tone which is one of wit and sarcasm is meant to challenge the prevailing assumption that only men can preach in church. She opens by stating, “Do not be startled, dear reader. We do not intend to discuss the question of ‘Women’s Rights’ or of ‘Women’s Preaching,’ technically so called. We leave this for those whose ability and tastes may better fit them for discussions of this sort. We believe woman has her legitimate sphere of action, which differs in most cases materially from that of man; and in this legitimate sphere she is both happy and useful” (Palmer 1095). This beginning seems to soothe the egos of men concerned with their prominent place within the church hierarchy. In actuality, Palmer uses this intro one of irony and mocking as the rest of her text sets out to do what she says in this opening that she does not intend to pursue. This is a marked departure from the tone and tact of Sor Juana and reflects a vastly changed rhetorical situation in terms of the agency of women in society.

One of the most vivid examples that Palmer utilizes is that of the Queen of England when she states, “Look at Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, the reigning sovereign of the most mighty, intelligent people of this or any other age. Who questions her ability at
her station, and talks of her as having transcended the bounds set by public opinion of the sphere of the woman” (1096). This is significant for a few reasons. The first of these reasons is that all of the men who would block a woman’s ascension to the ministry would never dare challenge the authority of the Queen, as to do so would most likely result in a charge of treason and the resulting unfortunate consequences. Secondly, there is a religious dimension to this as well. As reigning monarch, Victoria would have been the head of the Church of England in addition to her governmental duties. So, she is an example, in both the political and religious sphere of a woman holding an authoritative position which men dare not question. In short, she is the antithesis to their assertion that women are incapable of performing more authoritative duties within the church. That is, Palmer uses the most powerful example of power and authority to challenge the marginalization of women at the hands of men in the church.

Continuing with her argument, Palmer indignantly asks, “Whence has the idea obtained that she may not even open her lips for God in the assembly of the pious, without being looked upon repulsively, as though she were unwomanly in her aims and predilections?” (1096). It is clear that she views it to be an absurd position that women cannot speak in church. It seems unimaginable to Palmer that women are looked down upon for their desire to speak in a religious environment. More appalling to Palmer is the means through which these arbitrary rules are enforced. Instead of merely enforcing a rule, women are morally attacked. That is, their desire to speak is seen as a failing of their piety and virtue. They are seen as less moral simply because they express their desire to speak and represent themselves and their own interpretations. It is notable that women’s desire to
speak which clearly threatens the male-dominated hierarchy of religion is attributed to a moral failing, or one might say, evil.

Finally, and most saliently, Palmer ends her piece with what is essentially a threat. She declares, “It is not our intention to chide those who have thus kept the Christian female in bondage, as believe in ignorance they have done it. But we feel that the time has now come when ignorance will involve guilt; and the Head of the church imperatively demands a consideration of the question proposed on the following pages” (Palmer 1099). She argues does not intend to denigrate the men, despite having spent a fair amount of time deconstructing some of their most strongly held beliefs. Her tone here reaches a climax of aggression as she equates men’s treatment of women as “bondage.” Also, she refers to men as ignorant which is the way that men often regard women. Yet, this assertion of ignorance gives men an excuse for the time being. That time ends on the very next sentence when she asserts that ignorance is no longer innocent. That is, as she has laid out the case for men’s wrongful restriction of women from the ministry, continuing to do so can no longer be justified by that ignorance. Any mistreatment of or discrimination against women is now willful and deliberate. In her argument, she has repudiated all of the common arguments against women in the ministry and as a result, any restriction of women from the ministry is not the result of a logical concern but rather the unjustified discrimination against women for the purely selfish reasons of men. She ends this threatening finale with one last caveat, that this deliberate discrimination will be held accountable and taken to task. Ultimately, Palmer takes a decidedly aggressive tone as she argues for the active and vocal role of women within the church. Palmer’s challenge to male authority represents a direct assault on the hegemonic power of the church and its use of evil as a mechanism of marginalization.
The Novel and the Depiction of Evil

The binary of good and evil, which takes center stage in religion, does not decline with the emergence of the novel as a respected literary form. In fact, as the societal dominance of religion wanes, particularly with the advent of the Enlightenment, novels include and propagate the conceptions of good and evil that are present in Christianity. Edward Said argues that the novel acts as a colonizing force in society. That is, echoing Althusser, Said believes, and rightly so, that the novel is a vehicle of hegemonic ideology. Said explains that “the empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction, very much like the servants in grand households and in novels, whose work is taken for granted but scarcely ever more than named, rarely studied (though Bruce Robbins has recently written on them), or given density” (Said 63). In fact, the novel is a form is so closely aligned with British identity that the novel itself can be seen to be a colonizing force (Said 71-72). Additionally, Said claims that traditional British novels are rife with “positive views of home, of a nation and its language, of proper order, good behavior, moral values” (81). In other words, all things British are heroic. These positive representations of British society become the “good” things to emulate which is where danger lies according to Said: “But positive ideas of this sort do more than validate ‘our’ world. They also tend to devalue other worlds and, perhaps more significantly from a retrospective point of view, they do not prevent or inhibit or give resistance to horrendously unattractive imperialist practices” (Said 81). In short, these depictions and the ways in which they become naturalized, lend themselves to the promotion and perpetuation of the hegemonic social order of the British Empire. Their characteristics, through repetitive yet subtle imposition of literature become and remain the norm, codified in
a country’s national literature. The very act of having the social order or imperialism reified through text, entrenches that order in such a way that challenging it and changing it become Herculean tasks.

Heroes and villains are one of the means through which literature works to enforce the same cultural mores over which religion once had a powerful grip. Related to defining the western concept of hero, Kegler and Simmons delineate the various personal and societal implications inherent in literary heroes and their characteristics. They explain that there are many aspects of the literary hero which lend themselves to analysis such as, “the role of the hero in terms of how he is depicted, what his characteristics are, what he seems to say to us about life. Or we can examine him from the point of view of his development in our literature as an image, not always heroic in the sense of having performed some feat or achieved some goal which we can admire” (Kegler and Simmons 409). In fact, Kegler and Simmons’ characterization of heroes is very useful in terms of identifying precisely what issues should be considered from an analytical standpoint. This, of course, echoes Said’s argument that novels and their heroes reinforce existing world views.

Boyeson explicates the relationship of heroes to the cultures that they emerge from by stating that heroes are the idealized member of a given nation (595). In this regard, the hero both physically and morally embodies the desired characteristics of a society. Jauss et al go a step farther and explain that, “The emotional identification of the spectator with the hero, as a communicative framework, can thus pass on traditional patterns of behavior or create new ones or introduce norms of behavior for the purpose of calling them into question or destroying them” (Jauss et al 289). Consequently, from a rhetorical standpoint, the analysis
of a nation’s or culture’s heroes gives us valuable insight into the ideology that underpins a particular culture or nation.

Rollin reiterates this insight when he argues that pop cultural representations of heroes provides “confirmation or reaffirmation of our value system which results from seeing this value system threatened, but ultimately triumphant” (Rollin 432). In asserting this insight, he cites many examples of pop culture heroes, such as Batman, and explains how they exhibit the characteristics valued by our society. He admits that heroes often, but not always, exhibit desirable physical characteristics but that they fail to be recognized as heroes if they transgress moral norms. That is, heroes have to reenact those moral characteristics that we value or we fail to see them as heroes (Rollin 433). These routinized conceptions of heroes and villains have great bearing on what values are transmitted and reified.

Depictions of Morality in James’ *The Portrait of a Lady*

One work that clearly illustrates this binary conception of good and evil is *The Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James. In James’ novel good and evil are demarcated and clear. There are many ways in which this is achieved. However, in order to analyze the depiction of good and evil, I will employ two of the three parts of the Techno-rhetorical Triad as explained in the first chapter of this dissertation. Since the substance portion of the triad, which consists merely of the acts and the participants, is in the case of these novels is fairly straightforward, I will focus on the impetus and environment maps and analysis. The impetus map, which includes the main action of the novel and the characters’ motivations behind those actions appears below:
Isabel and Osmond are established by James as polar opposites which echo their moral compositions. Intended as a heroine, James describes the protagonist, Isabel by stating: “her head was erect, her eye brilliant, her flexible figure turned itself lightly this way and that, in sympathy with the alertness with which she evidently caught impressions. Her impressions were numerous, and they were all reflected in a clear, still smile” (James 34). He spends much of the novel articulating above all else how headstrong and independent Isabel is, and does so in such a way that indicates that these are desirable qualities to have.

Her husband, Gilbert Osmond, as the villain, is clearly depicted in the opposite manner: “He was a man of forty, with a well-shaped head, upon which the hair, still dense. But prematurely grizzled, had been cropped close. He had a thin, delicate, sharply cut face, of which the only fault was that it looked too pointed; an appearance to which the shape of his beard contributed not a little” (James 204). Much is made of how false and calculating...
Osmond is. In fact, the narrator goes so far as to state that his devotion for his daughter stems not from any real love or devotion but rather from a calculation that this would serve his image. (341).

The fact that they are described in this manner corresponds to the conventions of a traditional British novel of the time. Yet this description reveals much more than the eccentricities of two characters in a novel. As indicated by their motivations, they are shaped and molded by the structure of the society in which they appear. These clear depictions of characters such as Isabel and Osmond, whose categorization into good and evil is so clear and delineated, reflects the system of morality in the novel where good and evil are likewise clear and distinct. The environment map for the novel, which appears below, illustrates these larger societal characteristics as well as where the characters fall in this societal structure.

![Environment map for The Portrait of a Lady](image)

Figure 2.2: Environment map for *The Portrait of a Lady*

What is plainly observed from this map is the binary construction of good and evil. This is indicated through a common trope in literature: the use of light to indicate good and
the use of darkness to indicate evil. One instance of this occurs when James comments on Isabel’s ability to see through her husband’s façade: “It was her deep mistrust of her husband—this was what darkened the world” (James 366). It is particularly significant that James notes that Osmond’s character does not merely make life more challenging for Isabel but acts additionally to detract from the world at large, implying an importance that only evil can occupy. One of the more interesting parts of James’ depiction of Osmond is the use of darkness to indicate both his villainy as well as the silencing/death of her individualism and independence. An example of this occurs when James writes, “When Isabel saw this rigid system closing about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, that sense of darkness and suffocation of which I have spoken took possession of her; she seemed to be shut up with an odour of mould and decay” (James 371). Consequently, Osmond becomes associated with decay and darkness which is precisely what one would expect from a villain. The most disturbing aspect of the novel is the ending in which Isabel surrenders to her husband. Actually, she disappears both figuratively and literally. We only know that she has gone back to her husband because we are told that is where she has gone. This echoes the silencing and marginalization that both Sor Juana and Palmer seek to resist and disrupt. In essence, James’s novel serves as a prime example of ideology in narrative form. The hero (heroine in this case) embodies the characteristics we are supposed to admire and the ending, while extremely disappointing from a feminist perspective conveys yet another characteristic James’ readers should admire, that of duty. Yet, in this case, we are completely unsatisfied with the good acts largely because we know they benefit an ungrateful, unappreciative villain and allow for the marginalization and oppression of women which modern society, for the most part, rejects.
**Midnight’s Children**

Current literary trends such as postmodernism buck this simplistic characterization of morality. In fact, one of the key concepts in postmodern literature is the treatment of its heroes. Postmodern literary heroes are often cast as complex and complicated. Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* provides Saleem Sinai as an example of the postmodern hero. The impetus map, featured below, illustrates the main tension in the novel with regard to its hero.

![Impetus Map for Midnight’s Children](image)

As the map depicts, Rushdie’s hero is very different from the hero in a traditional novel. Here, the hero’s qualities are not all good, and the simplistic notion of the hero as embodying a society’s values and mores is undermined through a variety of methods. One of

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*Figure 2.3: Impetus map for Midnight’s Children*
the first ways in which Saleem violates the norms of the traditional hero is with his appearance. In one of the many monologues in which Saleem speaks directly to the novel’s audience, Saleem explains that his “poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams” (Rushdie 37). While this is just one of the instances in which Rushdie contradicts the norms of the traditional literary hero, it is a salient one due to the fact that Western traditions establish the hero as a model both figuratively and oftentimes literally as well.

One of the more intriguing dichotomies introduced by Rushdie with regard to Saleem is the impotence/importance binary. In addition to the obvious word play between the two words, the fact that Rushdie would cast the hero of his novel with such an affliction as impotence undermines what few heroic qualities with which Saleem is embodied. Saleem illustrates this when, while describing his wife’s states of mind as “Distressed, perhaps, by the futility of her midnight attempts at resuscitating my ‘other pencil,’ the useless cucumber hidden in my pants, she has been waxing grouchy” (Rushdie 137). Rushdie is even more explicit when he has his hero utter the words: “I am unmanned” (Rushdie 38). These instances undercut what for many is the most basic characteristic of a hero: power. In fact, Saleem is utterly robbed of his masculinity both literally and figuratively in the sense that he is often depicted as powerless and a victim of circumstances beyond his control. In essence, in Saleem, Rushdie imbues many of the characteristics of women and villains.

Yet Saleem is not merely a victim and he is not Rushdie’s villain. To demonstrate this, Rushdie at times does empower Saleem with an importance usually reserved for a traditional hero. One of these occurrences happens early on in the novel when Jawaharlal
Nehru writes to congratulate the infant Saleem as he is born at the moment of Indian independence saying: “We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, a mirror of our own” (Rushdie 139). In this instance, Saleem’s life is closely aligned with the fate of the new democracy as if Saleem himself is so important as to affect the future of the new nation. The sense of importance is evidenced by Saleem himself who states, “already my presence is having an effect on history; already Baby Saleem is working changes on the people around him” (Rushdie 148). Throughout the novel, Rushdie weaves the thread of the pull between the contrasting characteristics of importance and impotence to the point to where Saleem contradicts himself and ceases to be a reliable narrator for his own story. This constant contradiction that is embodied in Saleem leads to a complicated notion of what a hero is as the environment map for the novel, below, depicts.

Figure 2.4: Environment map for *Midnight’s Children*
The map shows a changing portrait of good and evil. Here, good and evil still have some clarity although there are areas which overlap and/or are ambiguous. Rushdie situates many of his characters in this ambiguous moral space. For instance, Saleem, the supposed hero, has many qualities and characteristics that readers are not used to their heroes possessing. Conversely, Shiva, who is cast a bit of a villain, possesses characteristics which address many of Saleem’s weaknesses and/or faults. Additionally, the physical characteristics of the agents in the novel are not the only means by which Rushdie critiques morality as it is typically depicted in western society. One of the recurring themes in the novel is that of the “optimism bug.” In the novel, there are multiple characters which argue or stand for optimism. As the main backdrop of the novel is the newly formed Indian state, one would assume that there would be much cause for hope and optimism. Yet, Rushdie likens this trait to that of an infectious disease when he comments, “That was the end of the optimism epidemic…. She was possibly the last victim of the optimism bug, and in her case the illness didn’t last long” (Rushdie 53). Here Rushdie aligns optimism with defect and illness (an alignment usually reserved for villainy). Throughout the novel, it is the defiance of traditional characterizations of concepts and themes which complicates the novel and its ultimate message. Evil, as one of the fundamental concepts governing Western society is likewise challenged and undermined. It is precisely this confusion and deconstruction of mores which challenge the reader to question the moral lens with which they approach Rushdie’s novel.
Ceremony

Native American culture and literature have very different conceptions of morality than Western society. As with many collective societies, many Native American tribes lack the Western concept of the hero. Rather, in Native American culture everyone is valuable and has a role to play. This philosophy is reflected in Native American fiction where leaders are not superior to anyone else but fill their niche in tribal life. Moreover, the protagonist of many stories in Native American works of fiction is not seen as a hero but rather as lost and disconnected, with the narrative itself focusing on how to reintegrate that individual back into the tribe and heal them. Instead of identifying good and evil as defined by Western culture, Native American culture stresses harmony and balance.

In *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen describes the unique characteristics of Native American society. Allen, whose analysis centers on the strong role of women within tribal life, characterizes tribal life by stating, "The coming of the white man created chaos in all the old systems, which were for the most part superbly healthy, simultaneously cooperative and autonomous, peace-centered, and ritual-oriented" (31). Allen continues by arguing that identity in Native American tribes is determined by and linked to the tribe. One of the more important things that Allen points out as being important is the power of narrative and the oral tradition. She asserts that, "Since the coming of the Anglo-Europeans beginning in the fifteenth century, the fragile web of identity that long held tribal people secure has gradually been weakened and torn. But the oral tradition has prevented the complete destruction of the web, the ultimate disruption of tribal ways. The oral tradition is vital; it heals itself and the tribal web by adapting to the flow of the present while never relinquishing its connection to the past. Its adaptability has
always been required as many generations have experienced" (Allen 45). She goes on to emphasize the role of language in bonding and unifying the tribe.

It is this bonded and unified nature which typifies much of Native American tribal life. Allen explains that "relationships among all the beings of the universe must be fulfilled; in this way each individual life is fulfilled" (56). The interconnectedness of which Allen speaks is involved in all facets of tribal life such as a non-linear sense of time and self-esteem being seen as “dynamic” (57-59). A major component of this dynamic self-esteem is the degree to which individuals are connected to the tribe. She argues that "The natural state of existence is whole. Thus healing chants and ceremonies emphasize restoration of wholeness, for disease is a condition off division and separation from the harmony of the whole. Beauty is wholeness. Health is wholeness. Goodness is wholeness" (Allen 60-61). Moreover, it is when this wholeness or connection is broken or lacking that things are out of balance or harmony and the aim to restore this balance and/or harmony is the focal point of most Native American literature. She further explains that Native American narratives represent a documenting of a fundamental activity in the tribal life wherein "The formal structure of a ceremony is as holistic as the universe it purports to reflect and respond to, for the ceremony contains other forms such as incantation, song (dance), and prayer, and it is itself the central mode of literary expression from which all allied songs and stories derive" (Allen 62). Ultimately, Allen indicates that the goal of the ceremony is to join and/or rejoin the individual with the tribe. In fact, Allen says, "an isolated or alienated individual is a sick one, so the healing practice centers on reintegrating the isolated individual into the matrix of the universe" (88). Once the individual is reintegrated into the tribe, balance and harmony is restored. To illustrate this philosophy of harmony and
balance, Silko’s *Ceremony* uses a creation story within the narrative of the novel depicting the creation of white men as depicted in the impetus map below:

![Impetus Map](image1.png)

**Figure 2.5: Impetus map for Ceremony**

In the story, white men are created by Indians practicing witchcraft. She addresses the concept of evil when she explains, “That is the trickery of the witchcraft. They still want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening” (Silko 132). This story is important because it establishes two things: 1) Evil in the Native American world is not an outside force but something internal; and 2) Evil is not something to be eradicated but rather kept in harmony. As a result, Native American tribes typically have a different view of good and evil as the environment map below indicates.

![Environment Map](image2.png)

**Figure 2.6: Environment map for Ceremony**

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Whereas the Western notion of good and evil is absolute and good must triumph, the Native American philosophy stresses balance of “good” and “evil” above all else. In *Ceremony*, Leslie Marmon Silko writes, “But don’t be so quick to call something good or bad. There are balances and harmonies always shifting, always necessary to maintain” (130). In fact, many Native American tribes would regard this question of good and evil as a Western invention with little importance or relevance to tribal life. The Native American emphasis on harmony and balance results in a culture that is more accepting and less judgmental and may provide an example of life unencumbered by rigid conceptions of good and evil.

**Implications**

Ultimately, it is clear that a simplistic, static view of morality, such as that found in Judeo-Christian rhetoric and traditional Western literature, does not work. This fact is evidenced by religion’s diminished role in the Western world. Additionally, modern and postmodern depictions of heroes and villains illustrate that the simple binary of good and evil is insufficient to express the complexity of the human condition. Complicated and dynamic three-dimensional portrayals of characters have emerged as a means to reflect a society where morality is less absolute and more contingent. So, the preceding analyses of both rhetorical texts and works of literature illustrate the varying degrees to which ideology, especially morality, enters into the structure of these works. Additionally, the works of literature underscore the wide reach of ideological mechanisms in society. As we engage these works, they shape and mold us. Therefore, the
The act of reading a novel, no matter how entertaining, becomes so much more than mere amusement. The critical question that must be asked is “How have they shaped us and our world?” Moreover, it is only through seeking the answer to that critical question that the often unseen ideological forces behind the mask of entertainment are brought to the surface and laid bare.
Chapter 3: Taking a Left: The Graphic Novel as the Textual-Visual Bridge

Morality is not just an important motif in religion and literature. It also plays out in popular culture and its emphasis on heroes and villains. This chapter focuses on the genre of the graphic novel. This genre is particularly important for reasons such as its mass production and wide appeal as well as the fact that it is often not the focus of scholarly and critical inquiry. I have chosen three of the graphic novels in the *Sin City* series (*The Big Fat Kill*, *The Hard Goodbye*, and *That Yellow Bastard*) and the *Watchmen*, primarily due to the availability of their film adaptations (which will be discussed in Chapter 4). Another reason for their selection is their emphasis, like most graphic novels, on morality, specifically good and evil and heroes and villains. This chapter will begin with an overview of significant theoretical arguments in visual rhetoric. I will then examine good and evil in the traditional verbal sense. Following this textual rhetorical analysis, I will visually analyze, using my model of the Techno-rhetorical Triad, salient examples from these works. I then introduce the foundational rhetorical concept of *techne* as discussed by Atwill and Lauer, and proceed to examine not only what these works endeavor to accomplish from an ideological perspective but also *how* they go about doing so. Finally, I argue that the ability to analyze multimodally is a critical and fundamental ability due to the increasingly visual nature of our society.

Overview

The everyday practices and artifacts that Bourdieu terms as habitus are rarely solely textual. Images are often dismissed as lacking the ability to critically engage and articulate arguments. As such, the ideologies they convey can often be accepted without much
interrogation and analysis. Of critical importance to this project is how images and visuals are created and how they carry ideological messages and notions. Mary Hocks and Michelle Kendrick (2003) explain that “The relationships among word and image, verbal texts and visual texts, ‘visual culture’ and ‘print culture’ are interpenetrating, dialogic relationships. The contradictions, overlaps, and paradoxes inherent in the rhetorical use and interpretation of words and images have been with us since the earliest verbal and visual communication systems” (pp. 1-2). As a result, it is of critical importance to analyze and interrogate both the characteristics and the qualities of visuals as well as the texts we encounter on a daily basis.

In his piece “Rhetoric of the Image,” Roland Barthes discusses many of the issues introduced by the rhetorical consideration of the image. He begins by articulating the main criticisms of the ability of the image to convey meaning. In particular, he states that the image is criticized for being both “rudimentary” and rich at the same time (152). One of the more intriguing points raised by Barthes is his assessment of the photograph. He claims that the photograph, while able to manipulate some characteristics, lacks the true transformation necessary for coding and results in “message without a code” (Barthes 154). He identifies three messages being delivered: “a linguistic message, a coded iconic message, and a non-coded iconic message” which he terms “the linguistic message, the denoted image, and the connoted image” (Barthes 154-155). Barthes notes that these messages interact with one another. One example of this is his conception of anchoring where the linguistic (verbal) message narrows the scope and meaning of an image (Barthes 156). One use of this that Barthes notes is the speed and apparent ease of the image as related to verbal content (157).
Yet Barthes focuses his discussion on the photograph and its variations from other images. Specifically, he is particularly interested in the photograph’s inability to accomplish the transformational tasks of coding. The result of this is that the viewer is presented with what Barthes terms as a “literal message” (157). Herein, while clearly adjusted from the actuality from a dimensional perspective (i.e. taking three dimensional objects and translating them to a two dimensional form), what is within the viewfinder of the camera is reproduced without the ability to edit and order the contents. To differentiate this, he juxtaposes this with a drawing by stating that “the operation of the drawing (the coding) immediately necessitates a certain division between the significant and the insignificant: the drawing does not reproduce everything (often it reproduces very little)” (Barthes 158). More importantly, Barthes notes that there are rules that guide the creating of a drawing with regard to coding.

As such, Barthes argues that the photograph is an act of “recording” and not “transformation” and the impact of this is particularly seen in the objective nature that photographs are often felt to possess (Barthes 158). Overall Barthes argues that “The image, in its connotation, is thus constituted by an architecture of signs drawn from a variable depth of lexicons (of idiolects); each lexicon, no matter how ‘deep,’ still being coded, if, as is thought today, the psyche itself is articulated like a language” (Barthes 160). He is particularly concerned with connotation as this where the meaning of the image is found. He also notes the role of ideology in connotation and ideology’s centrality in the process of connotation that despite the abundance and variety of symbols/signifiers (Barthes 161). In terms of this study, Barthes is essential because he firmly establishes the visual artifact as an
object of study. Furthermore, his articulation of the means by which images signify is necessary to any study focusing on visuals and argumentation.

In “Medium as ‘Message,’” Kenneth Burke weighs in on the discussion of visuals and media as he responds to Marshall McLuhan. In this response, Burke is especially concerned with the mode of communication replacing the actual content of the message. He attacks the overstatement inherent in McLuhan’s catchy turn of phrase celebrating the importance of media. Burke admits that media does matter but it does not supplant what is being said (413). Burke punctuates this when he says, “The medium is the message. Hence, down with content analysis. We should at least pause en route to note that the formula lends itself regularly to caricature” (Burke 413). In likening the work of McLuhan to caricature, he essentially argues that while media is important, it cannot and does not replace content. To further this point, he creates a scenario where what is being said does not matter but rather all that is significant is the mode of transmission (Burke 414). One of the most salient points that Burke makes is in relation to McLuhan’s treatment of point of view. Burke argues that the new media can obscure individual subjectivities or points of view but “tactics of that sort ‘subliminally’ conceal from us the strictly terministic fact that any particular nomenclature (such as the one used in McLuhan’s book) functions as a ‘perspective,’ or ‘point of view’; and to idealize a problem in its particular terms is to consider the problem from that special angle of approach” (Burke 415). Instead he offers a more muted acknowledgement of media’s influence on message, when he, states that content should take advantage of the benefits and strengths of a specific medium. Overall Burke supports the notion that content is subject to and molded by the contextual restraints imposed by the medium as opposed to content being completely irrelevant as it would be under McLuhan (Burke 416). This
smaller work by Burke is particularly salient in that it introduces the idea of the medium both as important due to its shaping of the message. This idea that the medium used shapes or affects a narrative message is one of the key issues under consideration.

J. Anthony Blair argues for visuals as argument in his essay entitled “The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments.” He begins with a general examination of the fundamental rhetorical concepts of argument and persuasion and then turns his attention to visuals as argument (Blair 41). One of the foundational concepts that he utilizes is the Aristotelian concept of the enthymeme and its deliberate omission of one premise of an argument with the aim of requiring audience participation in the making of meaning (Blair 41). In terms of visuals, one topic of particular interest to Blair is the ability of specific colors to inspire certain emotional reactions. Blair explains that “Certain blues are cool, certain greens are relaxing, certain reds are warm and comforting” (43). While he is not sure whether this rises to the level of persuasion, Blair clearly argues for the examination of that possibility (43). In continuing his defense for visual argument, Blair cites the common claim that images are vague and he rebuts this by maintaining that verbal arguments are likewise vague and ambiguous (46). Additionally he notes that visual arguments are rarely presented absent of verbal input and this verbal inclusion often removes any ambiguity that may be present (Blair 47). In particular, Blair believes that images and films excel at narratives and in this way they are well suited to make arguments of this nature (56).

Moreover, he explains that “argument in the traditional sense consists of supplying grounds for beliefs, attitudes or actions, and we saw that pictures can equally be the medium for such communication. Argument, in the traditional sense, can readily be visual” (Blair 59). In the end, Blair comes to the conclusion that visuals can and do argue effectively for
those arguments suited to their use. Visual and verbal arguments are not interchangeable and each is very useful for making arguments suited to each type. That is, there are, to be sure, things that a visual argument cannot accomplish but so too are there things that its verbal counterpart cannot do as well. Blair’s ultimate point however is that there are also many things that visuals can accomplish and one of those is argument (Blair 59). Blair’s piece is significant because he reinforces the notion of visuals as argumentation. In fact, he reiterates many of Burke’s arguments about media shaping discourse by positing media as a contextualizing and constraining force. This position is relevant to this dissertation because it essentially justifies the study of various media due to a medium’s ability to shape a given message and its reception.

David Birdsell and Leo Groarke in “Toward a Theory of Visual Argument” also call for the ability of images to argue. The first claim that they address with regard to this issue is the assumption that images are too ambiguous in comparison to verbal symbols. Their position is two-fold: a) images can sufficiently carry meaning and b) words have their limitations (Birdsell and Groarke 310). The authors of course acknowledge that images do possess ambiguity but they explain that this potential for vagueness is a feature of language itself and not solely a property of images (Birdsell and Groarke 310). Additionally, they note that visual and verbal meanings are not equivalent and that meaning is contingent on a variety of factors (Birdsell and Groarke 313-314). Birdsell and Groarke identify “At least three kinds of contexts are important in the evaluation of visual arguments” and the ones they identify are the “immediate visual context, immediate verbal context, and visual culture” (314-315). In particular they note that film particularly illustrates the visual context wherein individual images are part of a larger overall argument (Birdsell and Groarke 314-315).
In terms of immediate visual contexts, the authors note that more than just the images themselves are necessary for interpreting images. As such the scene and situation that images find themselves in also contribute to making meaning from images. Also, the authors note that images are seldom seen devoid of verbal content. Regarding this the authors comment, “It does not follow that the role of the image in a verbal-visual equation is unimportant, or secondary. Words can establish a context of meaning into which images can enter with a high degree of specificity while achieving a different meaning from the words alone” (Birdsell and Groarke 315). However, one of the most significant issues that Birdsell and Groarke introduce is that of resemblance (and representation). In their brief exploration of resemblance and representation, they identify three key elements needing examination which are “the disjunction between resemblance and representation, the consequent conventionalization of representation, and the susceptibility of resemblance to visual and verbal challenge” (Birdsell and Groarke 317). While they do not dwell significantly on the topic, their inclusion of it points to its importance in exploring visual argument. Birdsell and Groarke’s contribution to this study is their fervent defense of the visual as a means of argument as well as the reiteration of media’s role as context and constraint. More importantly, in terms of this project, they introduce the concepts of resemblance and representation which are key issues to be addressed in the analysis of visual argumentation.

Expanding on Birdsell and Groarke’s brief mention of resemblance and representation, Robert Schwartz tackles these issues extensively in the chapter of his book Visual Versions entitled “Representation and Resemblance.” He begins with the notion that resemblance and representation are inherently linked. He explodes this assumption by stating “Obviously, resemblance is not a sufficient condition for representation…. 
Representation requires that one object refer to (stand for, be about, be a symbol for) the other, and this ‘semantic’ relationship is not guaranteed by resemblance” (Schwartz 143). Related to this, Schwartz explains that even if resemblance does not equal representation, there is the belief that resemblance is still involved. As such he asserts that this viewpoint linking resemblance and representation intuitively makes sense but still has its drawbacks. The biggest of these is the inability to adequately define resemblance using any non-individualized criteria (Schwartz 143-144). This is difficult because if resemblance is judged how an individual basis and forms at least part of representation, there is no generalizable way to decide when an image represents something else (Schwartz 144). Schwartz claims that “In order for resemblance to play a significant role in distinguishing pictures from other symbols, we must be able to give independent empirical content to the claim that pictures resemble what they represent” (Schwartz 144). So, from this argument, Schwartz considers the alternative: excluding resemblance from the definition of representation.

Schwartz argues that the notion of representation occurring without resemblance is problematic because its presents the following quandary: “If pictures do not resemble what they represent, it is thought that the relationship between pictures and their referents must be arbitrary, like that between words and their denotata” (144-145). He counters this by explaining that words must be individually learned whereas pictures may be interpreted and understood without having been explained or taught previously (Schwartz 145). This leads Schwartz back the original conundrum: if the relationship is not arbitrary, then it must be due to resemblance. He disputes that by saying what is there must not necessarily be resemblance but rather simply a systematic use of images which guide the understanding of new images encountered (Schwartz 147).
Another argument that Schwartz disputes is the notion that image systems do not require learning which again leads back to the notion of resemblance. He dismisses this notion out of hand by saying, “even if resemblances were not relative to skills, interests, theory, perceptual abilities, etc. and discerning resemblances required no learning, some instruction would be needed to determine when and how things function as representations” (Schwartz 148). In fact, Schwartz comments that there is no way to negate the learning and transferring of knowledges and competencies as a factor in the processing of new images. Rather, Schwartz seems to believe that various experiences form the basis for acquiring the skill of processing and interpreting images (Schwartz 149). Schwartz relies increasingly on perceptual transfer as the basis for integrating new images into an individual’s image store and he discounts resemblance as the sole mechanism for accomplishing that process (Schwartz 149-150). In fact, Schwartz posits, “Instead of concentrating exclusively on the relationship between picture and object, more attention should be paid to the relationship among symbols within the given system, to see how and if learning some of the symbols plays a role in enabling us to comprehend the significance of other new symbols in the system” (Schwartz 150). Related to this, he concludes by saying that the development of more reasonable models for representation and resemblance’s role within it can enable individuals to better perceive the world around them and the many things within it (Schwartz 152). Schwartz is useful as an in-depth exploration into the concepts of representation and resemblance. These ideas are key in analyzing how visuals are able to convey a particular message.

While Schwartz introduces an interesting and theoretically engaging conundrum, the focus of this project does not ultimately require this question of representation and
resemblance to be answered with absolute clarity. What is apparent, even through Schwartz’s examination, is that there is something pre-existing which enables recognition. Conventions are one of the sources of this pre-existing knowledge. Charles Kostelnick and Michael Hasseck explore conventions and their role in visual language in great detail. Citing Rudolf Alnheim, they explain that “a variety of perceptual operations underlie our interpretation of the external world, among them focusing on certain images within a given field, locating boundaries between images, sorting images into groups, deciphering hierarchical relationships, inferring the whole image from the parts, and so on” (Kostelnick and Hasseck 51). What they describe are the fundamental activities that go on when an individual is confronted with an image. Moreover, it is important to note that these activities take place in an exceptionally brief period of time (often instantaneous or near-instantaneous) and leads to them operating almost on an unconscious level. The authors explain that most of these perceptual acts depend on a variety of factors related to experience. With respect to this particular project and the concept of evil, the act of deciphering good from evil is an activity that begins almost at birth and is constantly reinforced in society through a variety of means and vehicles.

**Verbal Elements**

In terms of the narrative, clearly the verbal content in both graphic novels plays an important role in creating and/or shaping the creation of good and evil as well as heroes and villains within these narratives. The very genre of the graphic of course privileges visuals (which will be examined shortly) but also, likewise, involves verbal content. In fact, invoking the word “novel” as a partial label for the genre is a strategic move. This label, as
opposed to the seemingly inferior label of the “comic book,” attempts to impart some of the literary cache and prestige of the traditional novel to a form not usually deemed scholarly or worthy of academic investigation. By utilizing that particular word, many of the characteristics of the original and highly esteemed genre of the novel, especially that of verbal content and its importance, are imported into the resulting hybrid genre of the graphic novel.

While I will not dwell significantly on the verbal content, there are a few things related to the narratives which much be discussed. The bulk of the verbal content in the *Sin City* novels is contained in the narration. All three novels under examination feature the first person narration of the protagonist moving through a world of violence and corruption. This narration provides the necessary contextualization of the actions depicted in the novel. This is absolutely critical because outside of this narration, the language featured is largely minimal and crude. In short, the rhetorical makeup of the world of *Sin City* is one of action and motion. There are large expanses of pages where there are either no words or solely onomatopoeias (or words such as pow! and zap! that mimic the sound that they make) to accentuate the actions depicted. Consequently, the three *Sin City* novels clearly privilege the image as the main storytelling mode.

While *The Watchmen* is, of course, very visual, it also contains many textual elements which have great bearing upon the narrative. First, the literary technique of the story within a story is utilized with the comic book occurring within the graphic novel. This technique is utilized to reinforce the main themes of the story especially with regard to violence and survival. Additionally, the clock metaphor is utilized throughout the narrative and in a myriad of ways. For instance, a clock is featured prominently when Jon has the accident that
turns him into Dr. Manhattan. Moreover, each chapter ends with a depiction of the
Doomsday Clock which is meant to illustrate how close the world is to nuclear war. In
addition to the persistence of the clock metaphor, each chapter is ended with supplementary
textual material which provides important background information of many of the characters.
However, it is Rorschach’s journal which serves as the most important textual inclusion. His
journal provides the narration for the novel. It is important to note that the reliability of this
narration is called into question by Rorschach’s actions and leads the reader to question the
motives of Rorschach and the validity of his observations. From a plot standpoint, his
journal drives much of the plot and serves as the hint that the peace achieved at the end of
the novel will be short-lived at best. Yet these verbal elements are not the soul or even the
heart of the narrative told by these graphic novels. To arrive at the crux of the arguments
that these novels put forth, one must analyze the visual elements contained in these works.

Visual Analysis

In order to truly evaluate the rhetorical strategy employed in these graphic novels, I
have decided to employ the Techno-rhetorical Triad, as defined in the first chapter of this
dissertation, in a broader sense. While I clearly envision as being able to examine any
artifact, I feel that the model’s best use at this point is to articulate the worlds of these
graphic novels in a global sense. There are a few reasons for this judgment. Primarily, the
model and its means of analysis serves as an effective means through which to convey the
gist of the narratives of these works. Moreover, the model is an efficient apparatus for
illustrating the main relationships and actions which form the plot of these graphic novels.
In turn, the plots of these graphic novels are absolutely crucial to analyzing the ways that these artifacts construct their narratives.

**Sin City**

To begin the analysis, the most fundamental components of the narrative must first be delineated. The map of the “substance” below illustrates the major characters in the graphic novel and the major actions which constitute the story.

![Substance Map for Sin City](image)

**Figure 3.1: Substance Map for *Sin City***
Of primary importance while designing this map was the inclusion of these important characters and events. From a mapping standpoint, it was of critical importance at this first stage of the analysis to indicate spatially the relations between characters and their actions. It was also necessary, as Sullivan and Porter as well as Barton and Barton note, to exclude characters and events because maps include and exclude information in accordance to the map maker’s goals and purposes. In making these rhetorical/design decisions, I privileged clarity over detailed depictions of all characters and all action. As a result, the most important characters and their actions are included in the maps. In the case of the *Sin City* novels, there was the unique challenge of trying to depict the action in three full novels. I, of course, had the option of creating three separate maps, which in a way I did with the three circles enclosing the action for each respective novel. However, I thought it was especially important to combine those representations together to depict the interconnectedness of the world of *Sin City*.

In terms of the “impetus,” there are main themes that are stressed throughout the work which play themselves out in the motivations of the various characters’ actions, as depicted below:
As is plainly evident, two of the main motivations are vengeance and protection. What is ironic is that often vengeance has a negative connotation and protection has a positive one and in this graphic novel these motivations are aligned exactly the opposite way. That is, the “hero,” Marv is driven by vengeance and the system, and its beneficiaries which are the “villains” are aligned with protection. This misalignment can be directly attributed to the dark world of *Sin City* which prominently features violence and in particular killing as its most frequent actions. The impetus of depravity is used to explain the motivations of the villains for the otherwise inexplicable acts they have committed which set the plot of these
novels into motion. Overall, a picture emerges of a world governed by power and violence almost exclusively.

This penchant for violence directly speaks to the “environment” created in the novel. The world of *Sin City* is one where corruption governs. The map below provides a pictorial depiction of this world.

Figure 3.3: Environment Map for *Sin City*
As a general guiding schematic, this map attempts to spatially represent where characters fall on the good and evil spectrum as well as how they are connected. Additionally, it was important to represent the agency possessed by characters as well. What emerges is a portrait of power corrupted wherein an omnipotent legal system unjustly operates at the will of the privileged. In the novels, the Roark family emerges as a symbol of connected privilege bending the system to their will. In the map, those not connected to the system, and inherently possessing less agency, are placed both farther away from the political system and closer to the good end of the spectrum. It is important to note that while these characters operate as the closest thing to heroes in the *Sin City* saga, they cannot be considered good in the traditional sense and as such were not placed completely at the good end of the spectrum.

**Watchmen**

While the *Watchmen* does not feature the same measure of gloom and doom as the *Sin City* novels, the usual clear cut division between good and evil is anything but clear. The map below depicts the major characters in the novel and the major events which drive the novel’s plot.
In creating this map, the primary goal was to demonstrate the relationships between the various characters and the events which occur between them. While again decisions had to be made about which characters to include, the four characters of Ozymandias, Dr. Manhattan, the Comedian, and Rorschach are by far the most significant in terms of the plot of the story as well as in terms of questions related to good and evil. As far as the events, the most significant in terms of the plot are the creation of Dr. Manhattan, the Comedian’s death and Rorschach’s hunt for his killer, and the collaboration between Ozymandias and Dr.
Manhattan resulting in the murderous plot devised by Ozymandias to save the planet from nuclear war.

Many of these acts result from the various subject positions of these characters. They are all, in varying degrees, regarded as heroes. So, for the most part the purposes behind their actions result from what can be couched as good or noble intentions. The map below depicts the mindsets of the characters and the resulting effects of these mindsets.

![Impetus Map for Watchmen](image)

As the underlying purposes for the characters’ actions were examined, it became quite apparent that the characters literally lined up into pairs with opposing concerns. For instance, Dr. Manhattan and Rorschach have the opposite concerns of objectivity and moral code. Dr. Manhattan’s objectivity fuels his actions and feeds an ever-growing apathy.
towards the human race. Conversely, Rorschach’s strict adherence to his moral code, at the exclusion of all else, feeds his judgment and disgust of the humans by whom he is surrounded. Interestingly, these opposite concerns/worldviews lead both characters to the conclusion that they cannot live on Earth with Rorschach essentially committing suicide through Dr. Manhattan and Dr. Manhattan simply deciding to leave the planet.

Ozymandias and the Comedian also line up in a similar manner. The axis of their alignment deals with their view of humankind. Ozymandias takes a more hopeful view and the Comedian is more of a cynic. These seemingly polar worldviews lead both characters to the same place—the justification of killing innocent people. These binary alignments imply a criticism of binary qualities which I would argue can be extrapolated to a criticism of the binary construction of good and evil.

This assault on the binary conception of good and evil plays itself out in many ways but the most significant is the morality of these “heroes” themselves. The following map depicts the characters’ qualities in terms of good and evil and the instability of those qualities.
Figure 3.6: Environment Map for *Watchmen*

All of these main characters challenge the notions of good and evil in a variety of ways. Dr. Manhattan, situated at the top of the map, is literally above the fray with his absolute objectivism. Ozymandias spends much of the novel as the hero but this conception is challenged in the end of the novel where he orchestrates the murder of millions of innocent people for what he believes are just reasons. Rorschach spends much of the novel as a mostly good hero who goes a bit too far (in terms of violence) to punish the wicked. He moves more solidly toward being thought of as good as he is redeemed in the end and is the one hero who is unwilling to sacrifice his moral beliefs at any cost. The Comedian spends much of the novel as almost a villain as various characters recall his brutality and cruelty. He is partially redeemed as several characters reflect back upon his life and
essentially acknowledge that he was not as bad as they had once thought. In terms of his moral makeup, while there is slight movement toward the good end of the spectrum, he is not completely redeemed. Ultimately, the message that the novel conveys is twofold: a) no one is either completely good or completely evil and b) good and evil are simple concepts that need to be complicated and problematized.

A Question of Techne

It is not enough to analyze what visuals and other artifacts are saying. Rather, what is critical is to uncover the means through which ideological constructs operate. At its root, the means by which ideology operates is a question of techne about which Lauer and Atwill state, “productive knowledge (identified with techne) is described as ‘a state or capacity to make, involving a true course of reasoning.’ A techne is especially concerned with ‘contriving and considering how something may come into being which is either capable of being or not being.’ This definition carefully distinguishes productive knowledge from any theoretical knowledge, particularly the natural sciences, which are concerned with ahistorical, logical relationships of necessity” (Lauer and Atwill 28). In other words, techne has to do with knowledge of things whose existence is not mandated by nature like air or gravity which always exist and for the most part cannot help but exist. In order to analyze this “know-how,” the main visual elements contributing to each narrative which need to be analyzed from a rhetorical perspective are perspective, color, and contrast.
Kress and Van Leeuwen explain that “perspective is unique to images” (Reading Images 17). In particular, they explain that images are not made up solely of the technical decisions and choices but also are reflective of societal mores as well. In Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design, Kress and Van Leeuwen state that:

This implies the possibility of expressing subjective attitudes toward represented participants, human or otherwise. By saying ‘subjective attitudes’, we do not mean that these attitudes are always individual and unique. We will see that they are often socially determined attitudes. But they are always encoded as though they were subjective, individual and unique. The system of perspective which realizes ‘attitude’ was developed in the Renaissance, a period in which individuality and subjectivity became important social values, and it developed precisely to allow images to become informed by subjective points of view. (135).

In particular, the Watchmen utilizes perspective in interesting ways. There are two main instances where the perspective utilized comes to the forefront of the narrative. There are many images which illustrate this. One of these depictions, pictured below, looks down at Silk Spectre and the Nite Owl talking about the Comedian’s death (26; ch. 1).
In the above image depicting the rooftop conversation between Silk Spectre and the Nite Owl, there are clearly multiple levels of hierarchy. The vantage point of the viewer is from a great distance above the two, and they are positioned on a rooftop which is above much of the city. This image serves to establish a hierarchy with some people located above or superior to others.

The other major occurrence of perspective deals with Jon’s changing dimensions and their depiction. There are two images of Jon (Dr. Manhattan) in larger proportions: one when he is doing his work (20; ch. 1) and when he is ending the Vietnam War (20; ch. 4). Here, his changing scale clearly marks him as superior to humans. This prompts the question of whether he is human or a God (or god-like presence)? Following his accident, he is increasingly apathetic/überlogical. What is morality for Jon? Is it moral to abandon Earth? Jon’s inaction throughout the graphic novel reintroduces the problem of evil into the
discussion in that Jon has the power to stop evil and yet it still exists. This is a clever way of introducing the age-old problem of evil into the novel. For instance, instead of simply eliminating all of the nuclear weapons (and thereby erasing the threat), he takes part in Adrian’s plan to solve the crisis. Ultimately, it is the author’s/artist’s savvy utilization of perspective which allows the reader to align Jon with a deity as opposed to merely a victim of a nuclear accident.

Color

In terms of images, color is also another fundamental concern. Kress and Van Leeuwen address the ability of color to connote when they state that “colour offers semiotic possibilities of a specific kind, for instance the possibilities of a specific kind, for instance the possibility of ‘association’ with other colours, with other materials (air, rock, wind, sea/water, cloth, etc.), and with other culturally salient aspects (‘sun’, ‘shade’) and their meanings in a culture, and at a particular time” (Multimodal Discourse 27). They continue by explaining that the many appeals that a particular color may have is derived from a cultural source. That is, the ideological underpinnings of a given society go a great distance toward determining the semiotic ability of a given color. The authors articulate this when they explain:

a specific colour, as signifier, has, first of all, of itself, a potential for meaning as a signifier due to and in its materiality and interaction with the physiology of bodies. Second, it also has meaning potential because of its cultural history. How that potential will be realised in an actual sign is a matter, jointly, of the interests of the maker of the sign, of the potentials of the signifier material, of
the cultural history of that colour (e.g. what specific colours have been given what meanings in what contexts in a given culture, e.g. ‘pink is for girls’), and of the discourses within which the sign is articulated (59).

In *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, Kress and Van Leeuwen explain that there are three scales of “colour as a marker of naturalistic modality”:

1. *Colour saturation*, a scale running from full colour saturation to the absence of colour, that is to black and white.
2. *Colour differentiation*, a scale running from a maximally diversified range of colours to monochrome.
3. *Colour modulation*, a scale ranging from fully modulated colour, with, for example, the use of many different shades of red, to plain, unmodulated colour.

(165).

This taxonomy employed by Kress and Van Leeuwen provides useful terms for examining the strategic usage of color in graphic novels.

With regard to color, the *Sin City* novels analyzed can be described as primarily lacking color saturation. In particular, *The Big Fat Kill* and *The Hard Goodbye* both are completely colorless (i.e. exclusively drawn in black and white). *That Yellow Bastard* is the notable exception with the Junior Roark, the villain, (pictured below) being depicted in bright yellow.
The effect of this vibrant use of color in comparison to the black and white illustration of the rest of the novel is striking. It stands out and it does so with the implication of unnaturalness. The bizarre color of Junior’s skin emphasizes that he is not like the rest of the characters in the novel and by implication, not like us. He is a monstrosity and this characteristic is emphatically achieved through the strategic withholding of color throughout the novel with every other character and object depicted.

In terms of the use of color, the *Watchmen* takes a decidedly different approach. In contrast to the dearth of color in the *Sin City* novels, the *Watchmen* is printed on glossy
magazine paper and features vibrant color. As such, there are two main issues that arise with the color usage in the graphic novel. The first of these is the employment of color saturation to indicate emotional or physical trauma. An example of this use of color saturation occurs in the following frames, pictured below, where Rorschach discovers that Molloch is dead.

![Figure 3.9: Molloch is dead](image)

Here, it is plainly seen that the regular action of the scene, while colorful, is depicted in muted tones. The frame depicting Molloch shot through the head is utilizes a great deal of vibrant red, neon green, and bright yellow. The shocking effect that this color combination has on the reader is a direct mirror of the shock that Rorschach experiences as he makes the discovery. Moreover, the use of that volume of red in the frame is symbolic of the violence of which Molloch was the victim. The neon green reinforces that sense of shock by appearing in places that are normally white (i.e. the whites of the eyes and teeth).
In other places, the use of color is restricted. One of these instances occurs when Dr.
Manhattan is on Mars. These pages feature two muted primary colors (Jon as a pastel blue
and the Martian landscape as pink). There is a blandness to these colors wherein the
normally vibrant colors of red and blue are lightened and convey that blandness to the reader.
This restraint in color choice gives the sense that somehow the planet of Mars is missing
something, and indeed it is: life. All of these color choices reveal a rhetorical savvy which
communicates much of the authors’ intent through a visual mode.

Contrast (light v. dark)

The theme of light and dark (which I will refer to as contrast) has a long standing
history in Western thought. On this theme, Plato, explaining his metaphor of the charioteer
writes, “One of the horses, we said, is good, the other not; but we did not go into the details
of the goodness of the good horse or the badness of the bad” (44, 253D). Plato continues,
“The horse that is on the right, or nobler, side is upright in frame and well jointed, with a
high neck and a regal nose; his coat is white, his eyes are black, and he is a lover of honor
with modesty and self-control; companion to true glory, he needs no whip, and is guided by
verbal commands alone. The other horse is a crooked great jumble of limbs with a short
bull-neck, a pug nose, black skin, and bloodshot white eyes; companion to wild boasts and
indecency, he is shaggy around the ears—deaf as a post—and just barely yields to horsewhip
and goad combined” (44, 253D-E). Plato’s discussion of the charioteer establishes light and
dark as equating to the moral concepts of good and evil that persists, even today.

Sin City, to a degree, utilizes the concept of contrast to visually depict good and evil.
One example of this is the included cover art in The Big Fat Kill (pictured below).
Here, Dwight and Gail are shown against a dark murky background. In terms of light and dark and the resulting link to good and evil, this image is particularly poignant and significant. First, the brownish background the two characters appear in front of can be directly correlated to the moral compass of the world they inhabit. Sin City is a morally bereft, dark place where violence is a frequent and mundane experience. An allusion to this violence obviously is intended with the guns that both characters possess. Dwight, the protagonist, is not depicted in the usual heroic tropes of lightness. Rather, he is cloaked in darkness (literally) and lacks the usual attractiveness of a hero. In fact, in any other context, he would be judged to be a villain. This aligns with his morality in the novel which can’t be really described as good but rather not as bad as most. Yet, the most intriguing depiction in
this image is Gail. She is light-skinned but dressed in dark clothing thus communicating the contradictions that her character embodies. As the leader of a gang of prostitutes, she takes on a protective role which would ordinarily belong to a hero. Yet she is not purely good in the traditional sense as her provocative apparel and hairstyle convey. Even so, she is a bright spot in a very dark world and she stands out in the novel in very much the same way that she stands out in this image.

The *Watchmen* also employs the use of contrast in its narrative as it relates to morality. There are a couple of important places where this use of contrast takes place. The first of these is the positioning of Ozymandias as the “hero” of the graphic novel. In fact, with regard to symbolism, there is a great deal of it to be seen in the character of Ozymandias. The name Ozymandias itself is a reference to the Greek name for the Egyptian pharaoh Rameses II. Of course, this allusion brings into the character of Ozymandias a sense of entitlement to power that plays itself out in the assumptions that lead to deaths in the name of world peace. Ozymandias literally decides the fates of both these individuals and the world, and necessarily places himself above everyone else as he makes this fateful decision. Physically speaking the fair skinned, blond Ozymandias is established as the golden hero (8; ch. 11). Through much of the novel, the fairest of the Watchmen is portrayed as the most heroic and moral of them. This positioning also has religious overtones in that he creates a world, a Garden of Eden so to speak, and then wipes it out. In this way, he literally plays God and destroys his Garden of Eden.

Contrast also comes into play with respect to Rorschach’s mask which is literally white and black (p. 18; ch. 5). This mirrors his outlook in which things are clearly delineated as good and evil. He cannot adjust to a world that requires compromise and chooses death.
One of the indications of the moral ambiguity of the world in which Rorschach finds himself is the fact that the black on his mask is always shifting. He spends much of the narrative trying to sort the world into good and evil and what is evil is constantly changing, morphing. Culminating in the final scene where what he sees as an ultimate act of evil is the act that potentially saves the world. Confronted with this contradiction, Rorschach cannot cope or compromise and has Dr. Manhattan put him out of his misery.

Ultimately, the depictions found within the *Sin City* novels and *Watchmen* play off of the pervasive Judeo-Christian metanarrative of good vs. evil. The fact is that both works utilize and subvert these constructions visually as well as narratively. The question of morality, of the existence (and delineation) of good and evil, guides the viewer as they travel through these works. With regard to the *Sin City* novels, the reader is continually wrestling with the question of who is good and who is evil. Yet, the more intriguing of the two works from this perspective is the *Watchmen*, which introduces many morality-related issues. The first of these issues is the depiction of Jon/Dr. Manhattan as a kind of Christ figure. Of course this depiction explains his position as the moral arbiter of the final scene when Rorschach questions the morality of Veidt’s/Ozymandias’s actions. Speaking of Rorschach, he is potentially the truest hero in the work as he is not willing to relinquish his notions of good and evil merely to save the planet. His mantra, expressed in that crucial ending, is not to ever compromise “not even in the face of Armageddon” (20; ch. 12). Veidt serves as a stark contrast to Rorschach in that he is will to make moral compromises in what he believes is a moral goal. Consequently, Veidt’s morality must be considered but is never fully resolved in that we never know whether Veidt’s actions constitute evil or necessity and the
narrative leaves all of these questions largely unanswered and subject to the moral compass of the audience.

In this chapter, out of necessity for manageability, visual and verbal elements were separated and broken down. While this makes analysis more feasible, it distorts the way that works like these are typically received. Usually, instead of taking the time to analyze elements such as the color, or contrast, or perspective, or verbal content, readers are tasked with processing all of these elements fairly simultaneously. In particular, when “reading” a truly hybrid work such as a graphic novel, the audience takes in both the verbal and the visual content and processes through their own individual “terministic screen” to use Burke’s term. In doing so, in a printed work, the pace of this process is largely set by the individual. The visual content leads us to process quickly and typically with a lower degree of critical engagement. Yet, upon a slower more deliberate review, with more care taken, the image and text before us become objects of analysis and study. The issue with this, of course, is that, while we are typically trained to analyze the textual or verbal, we tend to take the visual elements at face value. However, in an increasing (but never solely) visual society, it is essential to be able to critically analyze and not merely accept different sets of messages.
Chapter 4: Further Down the Road: Translating the Graphic Novel to Film

Moving on from the genre of the graphic novel to the genre of film further complicates the work of conducting a rhetorical analysis. The very nature of the medium of film implies many considerations which are absent from the graphic novel. Issues such as motion and sound are new considerations for this genre. Additionally, the ways that previous considerations such as color, perspective, and contrast are handled necessarily change due to this more complex genre. First, I will lay out relevant theoretical considerations to the filmic media from a rhetorical standpoint. Then, I will again apply my multimodal mapping model to analyze the film adaptations of the *Sin City* novels and the *Watchmen*. Ultimately, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of the rhetorical analysis of films such as these.

Rhetorical Explorations of Film

In order to adequately explore the ways in which ideological concepts such as those of good and evil are transmitted or conveyed through film, it is necessary to examine the ways that visual artifacts function rhetorically. In his book *Rhetoric and Popular Culture*, Barry Brummett states that images “must be interpreted so as to extract meaning from them” (162). Here, Brummett directly states that the visuals we often take for granted as true must be interrogated for meaning. In his introduction to *Uncovering Hidden Rhetorics*, he argues that what is often at the root of popular culture artifacts are social beliefs and values. He defines social issues as those “conflicts, hopes, fears, and possibilities that have to do with how power is managed, how people live together or in oppression, how people construct their identities, communities, and lives” (1). He asserts that it is these issues which have
great import for the daily lives of individuals and/or groups in society and that sometimes the addressing of these issues occurs not in an open, direct manner but rather hidden in the popular culture artifacts that we consume on a daily basis.

Related to Brummett’s emphasis on the importance of popular culture artifacts to crucial social issues, Lisa Glebatis Perks’ “The Evil Albino: Cinematic Othering and Scapegoating of Extreme Whites,” which examines how albinos are cast as villains in many popular films such as the albino in *The Da Vinci Code*. Perks asserts that the casting of albinos in these roles can be considered an expression of Kenneth Burke’s concept of scapegoating in which “evil traits are projected onto one group of people (who may be united by a common religion, appearance, nation of origin, or other characteristic), thus effectively enhancing the perceptions of purity and innocence of an already dominant group” (72).

Perks explicates that this process begins with the negative portrayals of these individuals in popular film. She claims that these recurring roles have the effect of reinforcing the superior hierarchical position of those in a place of privilege (75). In short, “othering is an ideological mechanism through which dominant groups keep themselves in power and is usually the means to a sinister end such as the exploitation of a group of people” (Perks 77). In this way, works such as film, and the way that they depict evil, have the effect of reinforcing and recreating power structures and the power differentials which occur therein.

While Perks argues for the importance of examining works of film relation to societal power structures and ideology, David Blakesley, in his essay, “Defining Film Rhetoric: The Case of Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*,” examines the visual rhetoric of film. In this essay, Blakesley provides much the much needed theoretical ruminations for the rhetorical examination of film. To open his piece, Blakesley explains that “We have witnessed a visual turn—
especially in the mid- to late-1990s—with tremendous interest in understanding the function of the image in its own right as well as the interanimation of the visual and the verbal in our means of (re)presentation” (111). Blakesley argues that visual artifacts are involved in meaning making and he invokes Kenneth Burke’s assertion that, “A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing—a focus on object A involves a neglect of object B” (112). Yet, Blakesley explains that the visual is not seen in isolation but usually in combination or in concert with the verbal. Film, he argues, is the clearest articulation of this point with visual information and verbal information being conveyed and perceived simultaneously (Blakesley 112-113). In attempting to answer the myriad questions which a rhetorical examination of film mandates, Blakesley uses the concept of identification to examine spectatorship with regard to the film (113). He then utilizes the Burkean notion of the terministic screen to describe the filtering effects seen through a rhetorical examination of film.

In his invoking of Burke, he cites the multiple means of examination which form a rhetorical approach to film: film language, film ideology, and film interpretation. When referring to film language, Blakesley introduces the notion that there is a framework (or “grammar”) that has set guidelines and is used in a productive manner. Blakesley states, “The elements of film language include but are not limited to its visual elements, which include camera movement, mise-en-scène (placement in the frame), color, proxemic patterning (spatial relationships among characters and between the viewer and the visual material), the subjective camera and point-of-view shot, special visual effects, visual editing, iconic symbolism, visual representation, and so on” (Blakesley 114). Moving on from film language, Blakesley proceeds to a discussion of film ideology. Here, as the term suggests, film is highly intertwined with either the transmission or perpetuation of existing ideology or
focuses on challenging and disrupting the dominant ideology. Apart from the ideological messages present in film, Blakesley also explains that the visual medium of film itself imparts ideological concepts as well (115). With regard to film interpretation, Blakesley asserts that “This approach treats film as a rhetorical situation involving the director, the film, and the viewer in the total act of making meaning. Its subject is often the reflexivity of interpretation, both as it is manifest on screen and in the reception by the audience/critic” (Blakesley 116). After explicating these various rhetorical methods for examining film, Blakesley ends the piece with a detailed analysis of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*.

In the introduction to *The Terministic Screen*, Blakesley continues to delineate many of the parameters and guidelines for conducting rhetorical analyses of film. He begins with what is essentially a sketching of the rhetorical situation for the film in question. He also cites Rorty as explains that taking a rhetorical view on film is a way of filtering some things out while allowing other things to emerge. This leads, as the title indicates, to Burke’s notion of terministic screens. In this discussion, Blakesley describes the ways in which a rhetorical approach can focus yet illuminate a discussion of film. He further expounds on this by explaining the four methods by which film operates rhetorically: “film as language,” “film as ideology,” “film interpretation,” and “film identification” (Blakesley 4). Blakesley also employs Burke’s term “ways of seeing” to describe the rhetorical approach taken by the authors of the works in the collection in their varied examinations of film (Blakesley 8). To end his introduction to the volume, Blakesley notes situated nature of film and the ways in which society and its values impacts film. Moreover, Blakesley invokes Burke and his “rhetoric of motives” as he examines rhetorical concepts such as ideology, power and hegemony and the central role that those concepts play in the creation of societal artifacts.
such as the film (Blakesley 9-10). Blakesley serves as an excellent foundation for going about the work of analyzing film from a rhetorical perspective.

Jude Davies explores what Blakesley terms “film as ideology” in his article “‘Diversity. America. Leadership. Good over evil.’ Hollywood multiculturalism and American imperialism in Independence Day and Three Kings.” In fact, he states, “There should be no surprise to see Hollywood film performing cultural work that prepares the ideological ground for a particular political discourse regarding the American nation” (Davies 398). Much of what he finds relates the George Bush’s rhetoric following the 9/11 attacks and how that discourse relates to the discourses found in movies such as Independence Day and Three Kings.

Davies goes on to say that the rhetoric of George W. Bush can be summed up as “simple assertion of America’s innate goodness and the consequent implicit answer: ‘because they are evil’” (404). In short, the motifs of good and evil are not limited to graphic novels and films. Rather these motifs served as the basis for much of the foreign policy decisions being made under President George W. Bush.

Popular culture’s relationship to ideology can be more directly seen in films such as The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, as James Russell examines. Russell sites this film as potentially more insidious in that it is directed at children who are more susceptible to being won over through subtle means such as those found in works of popular culture. In fact, Russell cites the purpose of the original book which serves as the basis for the film as being to “make it easier for children to accept Christianity when they met it later in life” (62). As a result, Russell asserts that Narnia depicts an “idealized vision of a harmonious, utopian Christian nation” (62). Yet, the film is
not explicitly and overtly Christian and thereby appeals to mainstream audiences while all the while performing its hidden evangelistic work. In fact, Russell identifies one of the purposes of the film as a Christian entry into the culture wars who see their conservative values as being under attack by the majority of works of popular culture (68). This examination by Russell explains how, with regard to this one film, illustrates how popular culture is used with the implicit aim of imparting the ideology of a particular group.

In terms of this analysis, this chapter is very similar to the preceding chapter on the graphic novels. However, due to the limitations of this project (and the medium in which it is presented as well), all of the various modes present in genre of film could not be addressed. Modes such as sound, of course, play a large role in what is communicated in any given film. However, due to the emphasis of this particular project on the visual elements of these works, auditory modes will in large measure not be examined.

Rather, this chapter, like its predecessor will examine according to the model of the Techno-rhetorical Triad, the three constituent parts of the substance, the impetus, and the environment. This model consisting of the substance, impetus, and environment components, which allow for the examination of multimodal artifacts from a rhetorical vantage point. However, this chapter situates the discussion of techne as it relates to the two films of *Sin City* and the *Watchmen* within these three constituent parts rather than as a separate addendum. The reason for this, as implied by the name of the model, is that the model is designed to be adapted and applicable to a wide variety of genre and media. Implicit in any complete rhetorical analysis is a discussion of how a given rhetor (in the case the director of the film) seeks to achieve their rhetorical purpose. In other words, techne is
not merely an additional consideration but an integral part of the rhetorical artifact and, resultantly, any complete rhetorical analysis.

**The Visual Rhetorical Analysis of Film**

To begin the analysis of the film *Sin City*, the first important points to lay out are those related to the basic events and actors in the plot of the narrative. The substance map for the film, illustrated below, these basic yet vital points.

![Substance Map for Sin City](image)

Figure 4.1: Substance Map for *Sin City*
This map is essentially the same map as that of the graphic novels. The reason for this is that the main parts of the narrative are identical. In fact, this film is quite loyal to the original graphic novels. In essence, the film attempts to translate the narrative of the graphic novel to the filmic media. The essential actions of the narrative are for the most part preserved and depicted. Yet while this change in media does attempt to maintain the key components of the original narrative, this is not, and cannot be merely an act of translation. Rather, this represents a reconfiguring of the elements of the original narrative of which the major events in the plot are the foundation. To depict this similarity in the events in both the graphic novel and the film, the only changes to the map are updated depictions of the characters as they appear in the film. With regard to techne, due to minimal level of interpretation required to illustrate the participants and events required by the substance part of the model, in my estimation, the remaining parts of the Triad serve as more fruitful ground for the examination of techne.

The impetus part of the model adds a layer of interpretation and as a result, that map, pictured below does have some subtle changes as compared to the depiction of the graphic novel.
Figure 4.2: Impetus map for *Sin City*

Again, the map is largely the same except for the updated character depictions. This is owing to the fact that the same events are depicted and the agents behind those acts have largely the same motivations/purposes behind their actions. The other noticeable change is the fact that the characters of Marv, Hartigan, and Dwight are circled in gray. This marking denotes the fact that these characters serve as the narrators for their respective parts of the narrative. Through the first person narration provided through these characters, we are directly provided with the reasons why these characters move through the plot of *Sin City* in
the ways that they do. For instance, we know what Dwight is thinking as he drives with Jackie Boy’s body in the car because he tells us. Similarly, we know what motivates Hartigan and why he kills himself as well as why Marv hunts Goldie’s killer because, again, both characters share their reasoning with the audience. In short, the technique of having he characters narrate the story provides us with the impetus behind their actions.

However, it is the discussion of environment which provides us with the most fruitful examination of this film. The environment map for *Sin City* below provides a visual foundation for this discussion.

![Environment map for Sin City](image)

Figure 4.3: Environment map for *Sin City*
Like the substance and impetus maps before it, the environment map contains updated depictions of the characters as they appear below. Apart from that, this map depicts the inclusion of the technical elements of contrast, perspective, and color which adheres to the goal of integrating a discussion of techne within the rhetorical analysis outlined by the tripartite model. These technical elements are placed in the background of the map to denote the fact that these techniques are employed to create the characters and environment of the film and shape the audience’s perception of the people and events in the film.

The first technique to be discussed is the technique of contrast which can simply be regarded as the employment of light and dark. As noted in previous chapters, these light and dark are often utilized to denote the concepts of good and evil. The film of *Sin City* is no different. Much of the film is dark and murky, reflecting its moral climate. Additionally, there are instances where light and dark are employed to denote the comparative morality of the characters involved. One such scene is depicted below.
In this scene, Marv and Kevin are fighting after Marv discovers that Kevin is Goldie’s killer. Here Marv is partially clad in white while Kevin is predominately dressed in black. This visual choice makes use of the evil as dark, good as light trope and clearly marks Kevin as the villain. However, in Sin City fashion, Marv cannot really be considered a hero. Good is a relative term with Marv being a criminal on parole who seeks revenge on the killer of the prostitute, Goldie. This is also denoted visually with Marv’s pants being dark. The clouded nature of Marv’s morality is readily apparent and reinforced through what he is wearing. In terms of the film as a whole, this symbolic indication of the fundamental concepts of good and evil is a theme that reverberates through the entirety of the film.

Another striking technique employed in the film is the use of perspective. One example of this occurs in the scene pictured below.
Here Bruce Willis’s character Hartigan rises to save Nancy, an innocent child endangered by the villain Junior. In the moments immediately prior to this shot, Hartigan is down on the ground with chest pains and the scene pictured occurs when he fights through the pain to enter the building where Nancy is being held. In this dramatic moment before he enters the building, the perspective of this shot with the camera below accomplishes a few things visually. First of all, the mere fact that the camera is below him indicates that he is above and by extension superior. This is significant because Hartigan is the only intrinsically good protagonist of the three intertwined narratives that comprise the film. Additionally, that upward-looking perspective casts Hartigan as equal in scale to the buildings that surround him. This connotes his presence as a larger than life character and, in fact, he is the only hero in the traditional sense appearing in the film.
Perspective is a prominent feature in the next scene, pictured below, as well. Here, the beginning of culminating scene of the Big Fat Kill is depicted.

This scene again features a shot of the camera looking up at the gang of women on the roof as the massacre of the police begins. The perspective of this scene begins with this close shot of the women and then, in a way that still pictures cannot adequately depict, the camera pulls away and descends quickly. As this action progresses, the scope of the event (the sheer number of women shooting on the rooftops and their deadly accuracy) convey the extreme level of violence which characterizes the world of Sin City.

Furthermore, this scene is also one of those in which color is used to striking effect. Due to the fact that color is withheld from most of the movie, when it appears, it shocks the
audience and drives the director’s point home with amazing effect. Here, the red tint applied to the stormy sky evokes the obvious concept of evil and, derivatively, hell. In fact, this employment of color indicates that even this level of violence is excessive even for world of Sin City.

Color is also used effectively in the scene pictured below where Hartigan is confronted in his jail cell by Junior, who has been transformed and disfigured by medical treatments after his earlier battle with Hartigan.

Figure 4.7: Hartigan and Junior (That Yellow Bastard)
Here, the unnaturalness of his appearance is once again striking. While in the graphic novel, it is apparent that his color and appearance are meant to stand out, in the film his physical features, particularly the shape of his head are obviously abnormal. Here again, color plays the key role where Junior’s skin color in combination with his other features cast him almost out of the role of human. Of course, this is meant to reinforce the idea that Junior is not merely someone who does bad things but is so unbelievably evil that he cannot be considered human.

**The Watchmen**

Like Sin City, the Watchmen provides us with much to discuss in terms of the concepts of good and evil and how they are visually achieved. In terms of the narrative, again, the plot is primarily the same, as the substance map below depicts.
Here, like the maps for the *Sin City* film, the map is updated with the characters as they appear in the film. The events for the map that appear in the film are the same and that is reflected in the map itself. It is important to note that there are some differences in the narrative in the graphic novel and what is shown in the movie but the events that appear in the map are largely the same. This similarity reveals the attempt by the makers of the movie to remain fairly loyal to the narrative of the graphic novel.
Similar to the impetus map for *Sin City*, the impetus map for the *Watchmen*, which appears below, is very similar to its graphic novel counterpart.

Figure 4.9: Impetus map for the *Watchmen*

Here, the map is updated with the characters as they appear in the movie. Again, it is important to note who the narrators are because they provide us with the impetus behind their actions. Of the four main characters, there are two who have significant narration in the film. Dr. Manhattan/Jon narrates his accident and his viewpoint of the events taking place around him. More significantly is Rorschach’s narration for a couple of reasons. First, and foremost, Rorschach’s narration is present a great deal more than Dr. Manhattan’s. The
The audience is told large portions of the story through Rorschach’s vantage point. Additionally, the insight his narration provides directly relates to events as the plot of the film unfolds. Without this narration, Rorschach may not even be considered a hero in any sense because the moral code that governs his gaze and resultant actions would not be visible to the audience. Hence, through the device of his journal, Rorchach fills in many of the details surrounding events and, in fact, provides the impetus for all of his actions, including those at the end of the film.

As was the case with *Sin City*, the discussion of the environment in the *Watchmen* provides much to analyze from a rhetorical and visual standpoint. The environment map, with updated depictions of the characters in the film, appears below.

![Environment Map for Watchmen](image)

Figure 4.10: Environment map for the *Watchmen*
Additionally, the map features the techniques of contrast, perspective, and color in the background. Similar to the Sin City environment map, these techniques appear in the background due to the fact that they are vital in the construction of the concepts of good and evil and their visual depiction.

The first of these techniques as employed in the Watchmen to be examined is that of contrast or the use of light and dark. Specifically of interest are the instances of light and dark as they are used to connote good and evil. The figure below, features two such uses of light and dark in this way.

Figure 4.11: Black and white?
The first one, depicts Ozymandias, the supposed golden hero. However, this depiction is quite dark as opposed to the very light depiction of him in the graphic novel. Additionally, some of the events have changed in the film which cast Ozymandias as slightly more sinister and more morally conflicted. Additionally, the second image, that of Rorschach, also employs this tactic although in his case, the depiction of light and dark is literally built into his mask. Rorschach’s mask consists of splotches of white and black which have a couple of meanings relevant to the morality of his character. First, it reinforces the notion that for Rorschach, morality is black and white. That is, things are either good or evil with nothing in between. Also, it hints at the fact that Rorschach is considered good by some and evil by others. In both of these cases, the strategic use of white and black (light and dark) helps visually depict a world where good and evil are fluid and always in flux. It is this moral fluidity that ultimately pushes Rorschach, with his rigid moral code, to decide that he can no longer live in a world such as this.

Another technique employed in the Watchmen is that of perspective. Two shots exhibiting this technique occur in the figure below.

Figure 4.12: The View from Up Here

The first of these shows Ozymandias looking out of the window of his office on the city below. In terms of perspective, this is significant because it places him literally above
the inhabitants of the city below. This hierarchical functioning of perspective allows Ozymandias to embody the idea of one of the Watchmen, those who watch over the rest of us. Ozymandias throughout the narrative of the film expresses the idea that he is superior to other people as he proceeds with his plan to save humanity from itself. The second image likewise demonstrates a hierarchy in the film. Here, at the Comedian’s funeral, the camera is directly above the cemetery plot where the Comedian will be buried as well as his casket. The Comedian completes his fall from grace and is literally lowered back to earth. In short, in death, he ceases to be one of the Watchmen watching over us and becomes simply another body buried in a cemetery.

Finally, with regard to color, the Watchmen uses color in a vastly different manner than Sin City. The most obvious way is that the Watchmen is full of color whereas Sin City withholds color and reserves it for very specific purposes and emphasis. Yet while the Watchmen is saturated with color, it does color strategically at times. The image below is one of those instances.

Figure 4.13: Silk Spectre and Dr. Manhattan
Here, Dr. Manhattan is on Mars with Silk Spectre and she is trying to convince him to come back to Earth and save the planet from nuclear war. In this scene the cool blue of Dr. Manhattan is contrasted by the warm tones of the Martian landscape as well as Silk Spectre. This contrast is no accident. Dr. Manhattan represents absolute objectivity devoid of emotion and Silk Spectre is ruled by emotion and the attachments that come from it. The scenes such as these of Dr. Manhattan on Mars are some of the more visually striking scenes in the film. Furthermore, it is the deliberate use of color that makes these scenes so powerful.

Rhetorically speaking, these techniques are well used and help craft the narrative that they are charged with creating. These two films, *Sin City* and the *Watchmen*, tell the story of “heroes” in their various configurations trying to restore their own personal senses of order to the societies they inhabit. Yet the stories of the films are not merely those of mere entertainment. Both of these films serve as stinging critiques of the moral environment in modern/poet-modern America. In these critiques are embedded varying notions of good and evil and as a result speak to much more significant issues than heroes and villains in a film.

**Conclusion**

These examinations of the *Sin City* and *Watchmen* films accomplish an important goal in terms of unmasking “hidden rhetorics” to use Brummett’s terminology. These works, like most works of popular culture, convey much related to contemporary American society. The use of popular culture artifacts like film is by no means isolated. Consequently, as new media are discovered and employed, ideologies and the people who adhere to them will use them for their purposes and aims. Thus, identifying and limiting the power of these “hidden rhetorics” will be dependent on the ability to be aware of both the ideologies themselves as well as the media that protect and perpetuate their existence.
Chapter 5: New Excursions: Remapping First-Year Composition

The hegemonic uses of concepts such as evil for the control and marginalization of members and/or groups in society is by no means a new concept, as this dissertation has demonstrated. Moreover, the ideologies supported and propagated by such uses persist. But it is critical that explorations of ideologies not be limited to esoteric theoretical discussions found only between the pages of academic journals and within the walls hosting annual academic conferences and meetings. While I, of course, am not attacking these venues as necessary, important, and valid, the concepts that I have wrestled with throughout this project need to make their way outside of the pages of this dissertation. These concepts that are so critical to and embedded in daily life need to be the subject of public discussion and knowledge. In short, awareness of power structures, ideology, and their practices need to form the basis of an integrated, complex system of literacies that I will term social multimodal literacy. I envision this type of literacy as not limited to technology, or the techne related aspects of various rhetorical processes, or social awareness and engagement, but rather as sufficient mastery of the network of all of these individual literacies combined.

When one speaks of literacies, a wide array of competing and, at times, discordant definitions come to mind. For the sake of clarity, I will define “literacy” as minimal ability required to be considered a competent and accepted member of society. Inherent in this definition are two sets of concepts. The first set is, power and authority. That is, the notion of literacy itself represents a judging of whether people have met or failed to meet a given standard. This standard is established by operations of power and usually entails stakes of some sort. In other words, people with some form or version of authority have decided upon what they agree is the standard, impose that standard upon others, and attach some sort of
consequences for those who fail to meet the standard. The second set, which I would argue is equally important, is the notion of adaptability. This concept of literacy does not specify media or modes of communication because adaptability is the never ending mutability of technology. To limit the definition of literacy to just writing or just writing in a specific, rigid genre ignores new literacies and the new media which construct them. The metaphor of shooting at a moving target is particularly apropos here. As society progresses, so do ideas of literacy and competency.

As a field, the discipline of Rhetoric and Writing Studies grapples with these multi-layered issues within our intellectual and research endeavors. Yet, that important and vital inquiry-based activity is not enough. Many of the issues broached by this dissertation build upon areas of research by other rhetorical scholars. Yet it can easily be said that most college graduates never confront these issues. The idea of a postsecondary education is built upon the idea of producing, at the very least, a literate citizenry. However, if these fundamental literacies are not addressed by current curricula, postsecondary education is incomplete at best. In short, literacy issues need to find their way into university general curricula. The First Year Composition classroom is an appropriate and necessary place for these concepts to be discussed and explored. The benefits of such a curricular focus are two-fold: first, the inclusion of rhetoric’s disciplinary content as well as multimodal material serves as a solidifying agent in terms of RWS disciplinary identity and second, students develop the necessary abilities to be truly literate in an increasingly multimodal world.

In order to examine literacy issues related to multimodality in composition, this chapter first outlines various opinions in RWS regarding new media. Next, I explain the redesign of one First-Year Composition program that integrates and foregrounds the use of
new media in the promotion of multimodal literacy. I will explicate the ways in which I have structured one of the courses to include popular culture artifacts, such as graphic novels and films like the *Watchmen*. Finally, I will discuss what students actually produced in that modified course, as well as student attitudes toward the course in light of these changes.

**Multimodality and Composition**

In “Delivering College Composition: A Vocabulary for Discussion,” Kathleen Blake Yancey examines the increasingly multimodal world in which today’s students find themselves. She points out that the multimodal, multilayered communication being called for in composition is not a concept that needs to be taught to students but rather something that students are already doing. To illustrate this phenomenon, she points to a “new digital divide” which can be described as “the gulf between the so-called digital ‘natives’ and their digital ‘immigrant’ parents” (3). With the use of the immigrant versus native metaphor, Yancey illustrates how the generation currently in our classes has grown up with technology that their parents either are not savvy with or have had to learn. She explains that the communications that take place within these newer technologies often fail to be endorsed and promoted by the academy. Yancey continues by explaining that “By contrast, composition instruction seems fairly staid, even if on campus it does occur across a wide variety of sites—in classrooms, still, and augmented and expanded in various other sites: writing and learning centers, writing-across-the-curriculum programs, informal individual tutorials, within first-year experience programs and learning communities” (3). She points out that it is this stagnant characteristic of composition instruction that will be its undoing. Composition instruction, she argues, must be adaptable to rapidly changing technologies and the world that embraces them. In fact, she asserts that the term writing must be extended and re-envisioned as composing which she defines as “composing as work with various materials to create diverse kinds of communications for various purposes and audiences, a composing
that may move us from print to screen, from poster to person—and back again” (12). It is only in this new and adaptable form that composition instruction can survive as well as thrive.

One implementation of composition in this new world is described by Irwin Weiser in “Faculties, Students, Sites, Technologies: Multiple Deliveries of Composition at a Research University.” Weiser articulates the ways that Purdue University has implemented technology into its composition curriculum. Weiser states, “While I know that we are neither unique nor among the first adopters of computer technology in composition, we have from the start of our use of computers in writing recognized that new technology, new teaching environments, and new media mean that composition instruction changes. In particular, we have been aware that the mere availability of technology does not mean that it will be used—or used in ways consistent with the goals of the composition course. Continuing professional development opportunities for instructors who want to teach in computer classrooms have enabled us to deliver technology-enriched composition courses that are compatible with our program goals” (35). He also refers to the many challenges of administering such as a multi-faceted program, in particular collaboration and learning communities with other disciplines. He defines six principles that must be adhered to when engaging in such cross-disciplinary collaborative efforts. These principles are concerned primarily with the status of the writing instructor in the collaboration as well as the integrity of the writing program and/or course (34). The principles that Weiser identifies are:

1. The goals of the writing program and the writing course must be maintained.
2. Composition course content and assignments should be determined by the composition instructor, though in collaboration with other instructors in the program.
3. Composition instructors must be involved as equal participants in the program.
4. Composition instructors should have appropriate support from both the writing program and the cross-disciplinary program.

5. Instructors’ participation must be voluntary.

6. Initial participation by the writing program does not constitute a permanent commitment.

These principles are vital because they ensure that the composition instructor and/or course will not be relegated to merely a service function and they protect the goals of the composition program from being undermined by external influences.

Todd Taylor, in his article, “Design, Delivery and Narcolepsy,” examines the design of composition courses, literally from the perspective of a designer. He notes that composition instructors are not necessarily adept at speaking of curriculum from a design vantage point, and explains that “a good design must provide users with (1) an effective conceptual model, (2) reliable feedback, (3) limited pitfalls, and (4) positive affordances” (Taylor 131). In particular he explains that one of the design failures is determined by what works or does not work for the user. He extends this metaphor to the composition classroom by arguing, in effect, that if “the student can’t use the course effectively, the design must change. The conceptual model for the writing-workshop class is contained and apparent within the design itself: students will become better writers by practicing writing, not by talking about writing in abstraction” (Taylor 133). Taylor argues that a teacher-centered model doesn’t work because it fails to allow students to actively learn. That is, students learn how to write by actually writing rather than listening to someone tell them how to write. He continues by saying that the workshop model adheres to a model that would provide for active rather than passive learning, and he ends by discussing how writing (or to use Yancey’s preferred term composing) will and should morph into multimedia production, which he argues students are already quite adept at outside of the composition classroom (139).
Marvin Diogenes and Andrea A. Lunsford also seek to redefine writing in their piece “Toward Delivering New Definitions of Writing.” Diogenes and Lunsford argue that composition has a tendency to be assessed and defined by those outside of the discipline, and that those external forces often fail to understand the complexity of writing and its instruction (Diogenes and Lunsford 146). To this end, they have delineated course goals for the courses which make up the first-year composition sequence at Stanford. The second semester course, they explain, is the course that is most-centered on delivery and multimedia. The course goals for the Professional Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) 2 course, as stated by Diogenes and Lunsford, are:

- To build on the analytical and research-based argument strategies developed in PWR 1 through more extensive work with oral, visual, and multimedia rhetoric.
- To identify, evaluate, and synthesize materials across a range of media and to explore how to present these materials effectively in support of the student’s own arguments.
- To analyze the rhetoric of oral, visual, and multimedia documents with attention to how purpose, audience, and context help decisions about format, structure, and persuasive appeals.
- To conduct research (including field and experimental research) appropriate to the specific documents being created.
- To reflect systematically on oral, visual, and multimedia rhetoric and writing.

(147).

This curriculum and its requirements enables students to assess, analyze, and actually use the media around them. In short, students are not made to use a specific media but rather are encouraged to find the media that best communicates the message they wish to convey. Students are thus given experience in both the rigorous intellectual work of invention and analysis as well as rhetorical decision-making. Consequently, students leave with the
intellectual and rhetorical acumen to thrive in a world characterized by rapid technological
development and innovation.

Yancey reiterates this call for a technologically savvy version of college composition
in her piece entitled, “Delivering College Composition into the Future.” She acknowledges
the multitude of media in which current students can and do compose. Yet she admits that
there are challenges to this new character of the field of composition which has traditionally
been taught by practitioners lacking adequate training and/or disciplinary background. She
explains that “there is also some evidence that composition is increasingly defined as a
discipline, which shift could have the potential to change all composition courses precisely
because the faculty agent is expert” (205). Yancey argues there is a shift in disciplinary
vocabulary where the technological demands placed upon us also allow us to integrate more
disciplinary content, such as visual rhetoric for instance, into the composition classroom
(206). Yancey concludes by arguing that “the compositionist brings experience that can be
delivered to students, that can be used to support and guide them in their compositings, and
that can research the effects of this kind of practice, one located in expertise” (207-8). It is
this emphasis on expertise that will allow both composition and the large field of Rhetoric
and Writing Studies to thrive and blossom.

However, in order for these changes to take place, curriculum design is not the sole
concern. One of the more pressing concerns for the future of composition deals how it
should be assessed which Diane Penrod examines in her book, Composition in Convergence.
She asserts that the question of assessment is complicated by the widely divergent media and
technology. Yet she explains that, “writing instructors realize that technology, assessment,
and literacy are not separate from social conditions; rather, all are directly influenced by the
swiftness of societal development and the pressures various social and political institutions”
(xxii). She argues that the process of technological change is multi-layered and this
development impacts composition assessment. She continues:
Paul Saffo (1992) called this the ‘30-year rule.’ According to Saffo, the first decade generates excitement and bewilderment toward a technological product, but not many users. In the second decade, the technology creates societal flux, as standards ebb and flow to conform to the increased use of technology in mainstream culture. The second decade is the most chaotic, as the technological object undergoes a period that decides which forms or versions of technology will succeed or fail in society. With the third decade comes a ‘so what?’ response to the technology, because it has been fully assimilated, virtually ubiquitous, in society. By the 30-year mark, people are very familiar with the technology; some use it extensively, and others have moved on to new ideas or technologies (xxiii).

Within this process of development lies composition and its assessment. The act of convergence that she speaks of deals with the changing technologies and necessarily changing notions of composition assessment. She explains that composition must adapt to changing technologies or risk becoming obsolete. Similarly, assessment must be developed to ensure that changing forms of composition are recognized and valued in the university setting.

From these larger issues of disciplinary survival and flourishing, Penrod moves to the ways in which composition can be assessed in the classroom. She notes the collaborative and/or social nature of networked writing and the ways in which the instructor’s comments/responses are deemphasized. She notes that writing in an online context becomes more real and/or authentic than writing merely done solely for the purposes of a university course (3). Moreover, she states that “Productivity no longer refers to a set number of words or pages to be churned out; rather, productivity connects to how effectively writers communicate in a given context” (5). She goes on to say that students value what they are writing in a networked setting more and are more engaged in the writing process (6).
Additionally, she asserts that the issue of networked writing in the composition classroom really becomes one of survival for composition specialists. She explicates, “For computers not to kill the composition teacher, it is increasingly more important for writing instructors to be well trained technologically and assessment-savvy—ready to teach in whatever configurations for Composition and its specialists to speak authoritatively about writing in a digital age and to move out of the literal and figurative academic basement it has dwelled in for more than a century” (27). Necessarily, Penrod argues, definitions of writers and “texts” must adapt to changing technological contexts. The foundation that students need, in Penrod’s opinion, is one based in rhetorical concepts and theories which enable students to accommodate whatever media they encounter or need to utilize (31). The foundation of which Penrod speaks, of course, requires students to have access to various forms of technology and media as well as experience utilizing these for rhetorical purposes.

**Remapping First Year Composition at UTEP**

The sea change that the preceding scholars refer to is inescapable and must be dealt with on an institutional level. With this in mind, the First-Year Composition program at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) recognized the importance of this monumental issue. Upon examining the existing curriculum, professors within the English Department recognized the need to revise the First-Year Composition curriculum to account for as well as foreground both the use of technology, multimodal literacy, as well as Rhetoric and Writing Studies disciplinary content. Upon receiving a grant from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the second semester course (English 1312) was redesigned with that funding.

The first priority in redesigning the curriculum for the new course was to define the goals of the sequence as a whole. Ultimately the goal of the First-Year Composition Program at UTEP was defined as developing “students’ critical thinking skills in order to
facilitate effective communication in all educational, professional, and social contexts. This effective communication is based on an awareness of and appreciation for discourse communities as well as knowledge specific to subject matter, genre, rhetorical strategy, and writing process” (Brunk-Chavez). In order to accomplish this, English 1312, the culminating course of the sequence:

- presents an approach to communication that helps students determine the most effective strategies, arrangements, and media to use in different rhetorical contexts (Compose).
- teaches students a systematic approach for analyzing rhetorical situations and then producing a variety of documents and presentations while gaining more confidence and fluency in visual, oral, and written communication (Design).
- provides a space for informed advocacy because communication is central to being an active and engaged member of society (Advocate). (Brunk-Chavez)

The grant allowed for what, in actuality, is a completely new course with little similarity to its predecessor. The course is delivered in a hybrid format where students meet in a computer classroom once a week and have what is termed a hybrid day on what would have been another class meeting day. This is advantageous for several reasons. First, from a spatial standpoint, it allows for two sections of the course to be held with the classroom space of just one section of the previous version of the course. Additionally, the assessment of the course is electronically distributed so that most of the major assignments are graded by teaching assistants (TAs) rather than the classroom instructors. The TAs that function as graders are first-year TAs and the grading experience serves as an introduction to the curriculum before these TAs move into the classroom in their second year. This ensures that classroom instruction comes from individuals familiar with the First-Year Composition program and its assignments and goals. Moreover, since the TAs have graded the assignments prior to teaching them, they are better able to instruct students on the basis of this experience.
The curriculum itself emphasizes many of the principles espoused by Anne Beaufort in her book, *College Level Writing and Beyond*. One of the first points that Beaufort makes deals with issue of learning transfer and the notion that transfer should be an aim of First-Year writing programs. Beaufort claims that, “For the majority if students, freshman writing is not the precursor to a writing major. It is an isolated course, an end in itself, a general education requirement to be gotten out of the way” (9). Therefore, she argues that many students are left unprepared for the types of writing and communicating that they will throughout the remainder of their academic and professional careers. As a result, of the isolated nature of the course content of many first-year writing courses, most students do not transfer skills from these courses to other facets of their education (11). The reason for this poor transfer is that fact that, according to Beaufort, these courses instruct students that there is one way to write instead of providing them with the rhetorical and analytical skills to navigate different communicative settings and contexts (11).

She explains that “the writing is being analyzed without examining how subject matter, rhetorical occasion, and discourse community context interact” and, as a result, “writing becomes writing for the sake of a writing class, rather than writing for the sake of intellectual pursuits” (Beaufort 12). Beaufort continues by explaining that the types of writing done in more traditional writing courses is not really applicable to any other setting that students will encounter.

In addition, Beaufort states that these course also lack “a sense of a whole, a way of conceptualizing how the different aspects of writing are related and fit together” (17). In order to remedy this shortcoming, Beaufort has devised a model consisting of “five overlapping yet distinct domains of situated knowledge entailed in acts of writing: discourse community knowledge, subject matter knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and writing process knowledge” (18). This model forms the theoretical basis for the redesigned English 1312 course.
With regard to writing process knowledge domain, students learn about their own writing process as well as how the writing process will be tailored to the specific assignment and its requirements. For the genre knowledge domain, students will be exposed to a variety of genres and will learn the conventions of each genre as well as how choose the most effective genre for their message and audience. In terms of the rhetorical knowledge domain, students will learn about purpose and audience, the three rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos and logos as well as learning how to construct an argument. The subject matter domain will prompt students to develop a deep understanding of the topic they have selected. Finally, students will learn the concept of the discourse community which is the domain in which Beaufort situates the preceding four knowledge domains. The course, with its emphasis on technology and research, integrates these knowledge domains with instruction on and experience with “research strategies,” “technological literacies,” self-regulation,” and “collaboration” (Brunk-Chavez).

The resulting course features six major assignments. The first of these is the homepage assignment which requires that the student create a well-designed homepage which serves as the main page for their e-portfolios. Students are required to present themselves in a professional manner and, as such, are pushed to make decisions based on context, purpose, and audience. The next assignment, the genre analysis, requires that students collect two items on the same topic from different genres and analyze the genres. This assignment is intended to increase student awareness of genre conventions and provide them with examples of how constraints mold discourse. The third assignment, the literature review and research report is the major research project for the semester. Students are required to research their topic and provide a literature review which includes primary research. Aims of this assignment include: conducting primary and secondary research, acquiring subject matter knowledge on their chosen topic, and presenting research in an objective manner. It is important to note that this assignment occurs in the middle of the course rather than its typical placement at the end. The ideas behind this are that students
cannot reasonably write about a topic of which they have little knowledge as well as the fact that the information that they uncover while completing this assignment provides the background information for subsequent assignments. The next assignment, the documentary assignment, is by far the most challenging from a technological standpoint. Students must utilize what they have learned about their topic and create a short documentary. This assignment stresses the students’ ability to utilize the research that they have gathered in order to make an argument as well as to construct a multimodal argument. The online opinion piece likewise tasks students with advocating a viewpoint on their topic in an online setting. Finally, the e-portfolios again require students to present themselves in a professional manner while demonstrating the wealth of knowledge they have acquired over the course of the semester (Brunk-Chavez).

**Working Backwards: The Redesign of English 1311**

Following the redesign of the English 1312 course, the realization was made that the English 1311 course did little to prepare students for English 1312. So, after instituting English 1312, revisions to the English 1311 curriculum began in earnest. The new English 1311 course was designed to prepare students for the type of writing that they will do throughout their university experience as well as in professional and civic environments. Through the course assignments students will learn to write to explore, to inform, to analyze, and to convince/problem solve. The curriculum of the course is intended to empower students to determine the most effective rhetorical strategies, arrangements, and media to use in different rhetorical contexts (Brunk-Chavez). Ultimately in redesigning this course, an effort in which I played a large role, there were two main curricular goals: to align the course content with that of English 1312 and to give students experience utilizing technology that they will encounter in the second semester course.
In order to accomplish these goals, the course at the time of its redesign had ten major assignments, some of which tended to break down into clusters of assignments. It is important to note that there are more assignments in English 1311 than English 1312. The aim of this was to provide students with experience in many different genres of composing. However, to make the course manageable for students, the lengthSCALE OF THE ASSIGNMENTS was reduced to allow for a shorter time period between assignments. The first three assignments in course, the discourse community map and response, the homepage, and the agency discourse memo provide introduction to the course setup and pacing. The discourse community map and response is intended to introduce students to the concept of the discourse community by having students examine discourse communities of which they are a member. Students are asked to examine the conventions as well as the types of discourse that occur in these communities. Additionally, students then construct a map of these communities which introduces them to the multimodal nature of the course. Following this assignment students complete the homepage which is meant to prompt them to represent themselves in a professional manner as well as design content for the web. The third of these initial assignments, the agency discourse memo requires students to analyze the discourse practices of an agency of their choosing and report those findings in a memo. This assignment is intended to introduce students to the genre of the memo as well as reinforce the idea of discourse communities and their practices.

The next grouping of assignments concentrates on informative writing. The first assignment in this grouping is the annotated bibliography and it is intended to allow students to practice proper APA format as well as to prompt students to begin researching their chosen topic of a community and/or social issue. The next assignment, meant to work in tandem with the annotated bibliography, is the community problem report where they write a short formal report presenting the research they have found on their topic. This assignment is meant to preview the literature review and research report assignment in English 1312.
The next set of assignments focuses on analysis. The first of these is the rhetorical analysis in which students conduct a rhetorical analysis of either a given or chosen text. This is meant to familiarize students with the rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos and to allow them to see the importance of the rhetorical appeals. The other assignment in this set, the visual analysis, is essentially the same assignment but students are required to analyze a visual instead of a text. This is meant to demonstrate to students the ways in which visuals can employ the rhetoric appeals and make arguments.

The final set of assignments deals with advocating or writing to convince. The first of these assignments is the opinion piece. Here students write an opinion piece voicing their opinion, with support, on their topic. This is meant to preview the online opinion piece found in English 1312 and to allow students to solidify an argument related to their topic. The next assignment is the visual argument and students to create a visual which makes an argument about their chosen topic. Additionally, students are required to enclose a project assessment memo which outlines their rhetorical processes and decisions during the completion of the visual argument. In conjunction with the visual argument, students are required to present their project to the class.

**Tweaking English 1311**

In teaching my individual section of English 1311 in the Fall 2009 semester, I began from the solid foundation of the newly revised curriculum. In addition to the program goals outlined above, I approached the course by utilizing two graphic novels. I deliberately selected the *Watchmen* due primarily to the fact that I was conducting research on it. In addition, I decided to close the course with the graphic novel, *Persepolis* as a result of the recent Iranian presidential election. In order to tie these works together, the course itself had the following theme: Authority, Morality and Discourse. *Watchmen* provided the ideal opening for the course in that it was a work of popular culture that was both accessible and
engaging for students. Even more significantly, as explored in previous chapters in this dissertation, it provided a challenge to the traditional binary construction of good and evil. The *Watchmen* provided an effective entry point into the course theme. From this beginning, the course progressed through the various assignments with only one significant addition (the *Watchmen* essay) and minimal adaptations to the assignments outlined in the program curriculum. To end the course, *Persepolis* provided a work of popular culture that was directly relevant to current events. The inclusion of *Persepolis* allowed students to examine how good and evil function in the real world. For me, this proved to be a fortuitously timed inclusion where students read and analyzed the events presented in Satrapi’s novel and were able to have recent events directly related to what they were reading and seeing. Additionally, and perhaps of greater importance, students were able to see, firsthand, that the concepts of good and evil are critical concepts that have great bearing on human interaction.

In order to teach the class with this topic, for the most part, I was able to use the same assignments in the standard course. There were however a few assignments that needed changing and one additional assignment. The first change in the course was the addition of the *Watchmen* essay. This assignment required students to write a standard essay answering one of two questions designed to have students engage with the course theme of morality, authority, and discourse. The questions students were able to choose from were:

1. Explain the question “Who watches the watchmen?” in terms of the issues of power, authority, and morality. Use specific examples from the novel/movie to support your claims.

2. Examine the morality of the characters of Ozymandias, Dr. Manhattan, and Rorschach. Can any of them be considered good? Or evil? What do you think the authors meant by constructing these central characters in the way that they did?
In terms of the modified assignments, the first assignment that was changed was the agency discourse memo. Instead of having students examine the discourse of an agency, students completed a character discourse memo in which they explained the discourse practices of one of the characters from the *Watchmen*. The next assignment that was affected by the theme of the course was the community problem report. This assignment wasn’t changed so much as students were limited to a social issue which could be aligned with the course theme. Finally, for the visual argument assignment, students in the course were limited to the option of creating a poster and their poster had to relate to a social issue found within either the *Watchmen* or *Persepolis*.

In modifying the course, I had two primary objectives related to the inclusion of the graphic novels *Watchmen* and *Persepolis* in the course. The first reason related to student attitudes toward the course. As a required course, students often enter English 1311 with a poor attitude. By poor attitude I do not mean that students are “bad” or “problematic” or “troublesome” but rather that they walk into the classroom with the mindset that they just have to get through the course. Obviously, when a “survival” approach characterizes the majority of the students in the course, the instructor’s job is all the more challenging. Rather than forcing students to write about topics they do not care about or even have a marginal interest in, it was and is my belief that if you can find artifacts and objects with which students already interact, their attitude will shift from one of survival to one that is more engaged in course material. This increased engagement likely results in more attention to course assignments and in turn to increased student performance.

In addition to increasing student engagement, the changes in the course were also designed to enhance student understanding of course material. Due to the course’s inclusion of RWS disciplinary content, I posited that having accessible artifacts to utilize to discuss course concepts would benefit students’ mastery of the course material as well., I believed that the modified course accomplished both of these aims and in a rudimentary effort to gauge success in these two areas, students were given a ten question attitudes survey at the
end of the course. The first nine questions of the survey allowed students to rate the course, their attitude toward it, and their learning. The final question allowed students to comment on their experience in the course. Of the 25 students in the course, there were 16 who voluntarily responded to the survey. All of the respondents answered the first nine questions, but there were only 5 respondents to the last questions and the responses to that question were fairly basic and reiterated positive responses that can be gained by analyzing the responses to the previous questions.

The first question of the survey asked students what grade they expected to receive and the responses to this question were weighted toward A’s and B’s in a way that the actual course grade are not. I attribute this disparity to the likelihood that students who were performing at a higher level in the course were the students most willing to take the survey. The second question asked students to rate the difficulty of the concepts covered in the course. The bulk of the students answered either “somewhat difficult” or “average” which indicates that most students who responded to the survey felt challenged but not discouraged by the difficulty of the course material. This is important because students tend to become disengaged in a course when the material is either too difficult or too easy and the answers to this question indicate that this was most likely not an issue. The next question asked students to rate their interest in the course. These results indicate a significant split between students who were really interested in the course and students who were really uninterested in the course, which could have something to do with students’ reactions to either the films or the graphic novels included, or the course theme. Another possible explanation would be the ambiguity in the question, which might result in different students interpreting the question differently, thereby prompting the varied responses.

The next three questions asked students about the inclusion of the Watchmen in the course. The fourth question in the survey asked students whether the inclusion of the Watchmen increased or decreased their interest in the course. The response to this question is overwhelming in terms of a positive reaction for including the graphic novel and film in
the course. Obviously, there is the potential that some of the students that did not respond to the survey may not have liked the *Watchmen* but in terms of interest and engagement, the apparent conclusion is that the inclusion of this film and graphic novel enhanced students’ most students experience in the course. The next question on the survey asked students if the inclusion of the *Watchmen* increased or decreased their understanding of the rhetorical appeals. Here again, the response is overwhelmingly positive which seems to indicate that having accessible and interesting ways of illustrating concepts such as the rhetorical appeals was predominantly helpful for students. Question six of the survey asked students if the inclusion of the *Watchmen* helped students understand visual rhetoric and design. With this question, the results were once again overwhelmingly positive and indicate that the graphic novel and/or film helped students understand concepts such as visual rhetoric and design.

The next three questions dealt with the inclusion of Persepolis. The seventh question, below, asks students whether the inclusion of *Persepolis* increased or decreased student interest in the course. Once again, like with the inclusion of the *Watchmen*, students indicated overwhelmingly that this graphic novel and film increased their interest in the course. This is a positive indication in that if students were more interested or engaged in the course, they would most likely have put more effort into course assignments, particularly those dealing explicitly with one of these two works. The eighth question of the survey asks students whether *Persepolis* increased or decreased their understanding of the rhetorical appeals. Here students again indicated that the inclusion of the graphic novel and/or film increased their understanding of the rhetorical appeals. This is clearly important because it indicates that the inclusion of this material, while enhancing student interest in the course, likewise enhanced student understanding of course material. The final quantitative question asks to students whether the inclusion of *Persepolis* increased or decreased their understanding of visual rhetoric and design. Students again indicated that the film/graphic novel enhanced their understanding of visual rhetoric and design. This seems to clearly point
to the fact that students have something of interest to them which allows them to observe important rhetorical concepts.

Yet what students feel and believe about the course and what they actually produce in the course can be two very different things. So, below I have included three sample final projects from students who volunteered in the course. The first project, pictured below centers around the student’s topic of gun violence.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 5.1: Student Final Project 1

This project represents the mastery of many elements of visual design. First, the student has restricted the use of color to white, black, gray, and red. This color restriction draws attention to those things that appear in red, specifically, the text as well as the heart. This use of red indicates the violence which he is arguing against. This student’s work is
characterized by a well-planned design and strategic font choices, all of which indicates the mastery of the principles of visual rhetoric. In the utilization of these tools of visual rhetoric, the student clearly demonstrates his engagement with his chosen social issue. The student utilizes the principles and techniques mentioned above to convey a clear, strong message which takes a stand on his chosen issue.

The next example, appearing below, is likewise very effective from a rhetorical standpoint.

This student’s topic focuses on Ozymandias’s actions at the end of the Watchmen, and whether his sacrifice of millions of people can truly be considered a good thing. The student’s use of color is exemplary, strategically using a great deal of black to indicate the
evilness of Ozymandias’s actions. The liberal use of red also conveys the violence of his actions as well. The bodies lining the bottom of the poster convey the scope of his murderous plot and the poster, with all of these elements working in concert, clearly denote the student’s argument and position on the issue.

Another effective portion of the assignment is the student’s engagement with the course theme. With the question, “For the greater good?” the student directly addresses the issue of good and evil as it relates to Ozymandias. As a result this student, through their use of visual rhetoric,

The final student sample that I have included below illustrates arguments on the status of women introduced in *Persepolis*.
This student’s use of color is similarly effective, with pink signifying women. There are multiple symbols of equality that reinforce the student’s position on the issue. While the student succeeds in terms of the use of images and colors, the student’s use of textual content could be better. The slogan included by the student is vague and could be more effective particularly in terms of pathos. The challenges faced by this student illustrate the difficulties which multimodal assignments can present. Yet despite these challenges, one of the successes of this student’s work deals with her engagement with serious issues in global politics. In fact, this student is one of many who chose to focus on the issue of human rights related to the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is particularly significant in that prior to the course, and the graphic novel Persepolis, students in the course did not express an interest in global or even domestic political current events. To conclude the course, the vast majority of students chose to focus on Persepolis rather than issues introduced by the Watchmen.

That said, after teaching the course in the fall, I examined areas that could be made better and made two changes in the spring course. As a result of my examination of how the fall course proceeded, I ended up modifying two of the assignments. Both of the modifications had to do with the final project. The first assignment that I changed was the presentation. Instead of having the presentation simply tied to the final project, I decided to make the presentation a truly independent assignment. In keeping with the goals of exposing students to technology, I had the students research one Web 2.0 technology and present it to the class. The thinking behind this change was that by the end of the course students would be exposed to over twenty Web 2.0 technologies and that the presentation would become something that students would truly have to invest some time and effort for which to prepare. The other assignment (the visual argument) I changed from a poster to a public service announcement. The main reason behind this change was to provide students with experience using the software required in English 1312 for their documentaries on a manageable scale.
Conclusion

Ultimately, the work undertaken in this dissertation represents a starting point both in terms of research and pedagogy. Related to the more theoretical explorations found in the chapters on works of literature, graphic novels, and films, the analyses found therein could (and should) be expanded to include other media and/or facets of the media that were not sufficiently examined due to the constraints of this project. In terms of the implications for pedagogy, there are a wide variety of opportunities for future research. First, the curricular ideas and principles explored herein can and should be utilized in courses in addition to First-Year Composition. Additionally, further research needs to be conducted on the effectiveness of these principle and techniques. Truly empirical studies on a much larger scale need to be pursued to determine if the inclusion of popular culture artifacts in composition really result in increased engagement on the part of students as well as increased learning and performance. Moreover, the evaluative process of pedagogy and curriculum design should continue on a routine basis in order to determine if the courses we design and teach truly serve the needs of our students and society.

Specifically with regard to my individual course, one of the key aims was introducing rhetorically-informed concepts into the First-Year Composition classroom. There were many goals behind this pedagogical decision. The first was to have students engaged in material that they can enjoy and/or to which they can relate. Additionally, there was an aim to increase student awareness of the ideas concerning the use of authority and power and the often unseen ways with which power can be exercised. That is, students should develop an awareness of the habitus, to use Bourdieu’s term, around them and its relationship to the exercise of power and authority.

Ultimately, this dissertation has at its core explored the formation of one core concept in Western society—evil. This invariably begs the question, “does evil exist?” On one hand, this dissertation has spent a great deal of time arguing for evil as a rhetorical construction. Yet, the question of materiality has also been raised as well. In other words, while evil may
and is constructed through language, it is not merely words on a page or images on a screen. Evil is in a great many ways, very real and laden with consequences. So, without indulging a philosophical discussion on the existence of evil, a rhetorician could argue that it exist because we have constructed it but not in any naturally occurring sense of the word “exist.” In fact, the current complicated nature of evil can be seen as the enormous progress of the deconstruction of an idea so sacred that at one time it was virtually unquestioned.
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Vita

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