The Watchmen’s Symbolism

In graphic novels, symbolism, the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities is shown quite often to depict the theme of the story going on. In the comic “The Watchmen,” by Dave Gibbons and Alan Moore there are a plentiful amount of symbols being thrown around at random throughout the book, or are they really random? The most distinct symbol in this story is the smiley face, depicting what’s going on during the tougher times of the comic or relating to the death of the Comedian. Throughout the novel anything from a pirate to a random octopus can be symbolized for something. The interpretation can be seen in many different ways because there is never a definitive answer to what each symbol represents.

The most interesting symbol has got to be the smiley face with the drop of blood on it. There can be many interpretations to “The Watchmen’s” yellow badge of a smile, but the most logical reason it keeps popping up because it points out the moment of happiness in spite of the possible attack of a nuclear arm race from Russia. Also it first appeared after the death of the Comedian starting the ball of motion for the smiley face badge to keep appearing. He wore the smiley pin when he was rarely happy to begin with and in fact mocks those who were happy. Sometimes it gave you the feeling that something bad was usually going to happen or has already happened. This is the untold can’t miss symbol of the graphic novel “Watchmen”.

Watches and clocks are another key symbol used in the story to countdown to doomsday appearing on the front cover and usually at the end of each comic. Not only were we waiting huge events to occur in the future but throughout the book it seemed like time was never on the watchmen’s side. I feel like the author tried to make people wonder about what this clock was counting down for every comic until the end. It can have plenty of interpretations but usually symbols aren’t too easy to pick up on unlike the Smiley face badge which can represent many different meanings. Not only does a watch lead to the creation of Dr Manhattan, but also it links him to his former girlfriend Janey which also links all the way
back to show that Jon’s father had been a watchmaker.

The last main symbol which brings tears to many peoples eyes are the cast shadow of a couple kissing on the wall otherwise known as the Hiroshima lovers. Several characters express uneasiness around this symbol. Rorschach described it in his journal as “silhouette painting in doorway, man and woman possibly indulging in sexual foreplay, haunting the doorway”. A cast shadow like that may usually have been made by some sort of nuclear attack almost instantly freezing the couple in time and depicting their shadow against a wall. This is one of the more anxious symbols to me because all it made me think was how tragic it would’ve been for that couple to die in such a way. But obviously there can be multiple reasons for what this picture can mean.

No matter what you read in books or watch on tv, you'll always find symbolism. Each symbol meaning something the same or totally different related to what's going on in a story at the time. No matter where we were in “The Watchmen” Alan moore as the author, always found ways to sneak in a little bit of symbolism in every comic. Each symbol makes its own meaning and changes outcomes in every way, but it's our jobs as the reader to figure out what the author is intending.