

**Escape Through the Literary Borderlands: A Postmodern Examination of Michael
Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay***

by

Heri J. Albertorio Pizarro

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Approved by:

José M. Irizarry Rodríguez, Ph.D.
President, Graduate Committee

Date

Nancy Vanessa Vicente, Ph.D.
Member, Graduate Committee

Date

Leonardo Flores, Ph.D.
Member, Graduate Committee

Date

Rafael Boglio, Ph.D.
Graduate Representative

Date

Rosita Rivera, Ph. D.
Chairperson of the Department

Date

Abstract

This thesis explores how Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, winner of the 2001 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction, can be considered a postmodern trickster text that merges the literary and artistic art-forms of the high and the popular cultures. This will be done by looking at how the text embodies the aesthetics of postmodernism, particularly the elements of temporal disorder, pastiche and fragmentation. Furthermore, the thesis analyzes how the prose comic retellings of Joe Kavalier and Sammy Clay pushes the boundaries of fiction writing. Moreover, on how this text can be considered a trickster, this thesis shows how it too resembles the cultural merging characteristics of this worldly literary figure. Ultimately, this project analyzes the novel's potential of being a transformative text that escape the margins of literary fiction.

Resumen

Esta tesis explora cómo la novela *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* de Michael Chabon, que fue ganador del Premio Pulitzer 2001 en la categoría de ficción, se puede considerar un texto postmodernista *trickster* que fusiona las formas artísticas literarias y de las culturas alta y populares. Esto se realiza al ver cómo el texto encarna la estética de la postmodernidad, en particular los elementos del desorden temporal, el pastiche y la fragmentación. De otra forma, la tesis analiza cómo las narraciones en prosa de comics creadas por Joe Kavalier y Sammy Clay provoca los límites de la escritura de ficción. Por otra parte, sobre cómo este texto puede ser considerado un *trickster*, esta tesis muestra cómo también se asemeja a las características fusionadas culturales de esta figura literaria mundial. En última instancia, este proyecto analiza el potencial de la novela de ser un texto transformador que escapar de los márgenes de la ficción literaria.

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Chapter One: High Art and Popular Culture: Their divide, and their union

Introduction

In his Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, Michael Chabon presents a narrative where fact and fiction overlap, concepts of high culture and popular culture are interlaced, and introduces a story that portrays the concepts of metamorphosis, escape and transformation. The novel is about two cousins that produced a comic book during the Golden Age of comics in 1940's New York. Their creation, *The Escapist*, was a comic about a crime fighter and liberator of the oppressed. Published in 2000, this novel portrays a semi historical, fictional account of the birth of one of the major and influential art forms of popular culture today: the comic book. From its first page, the novel begins with a quote from one of the novel's main characters; an aged version of Sam Clay. He explains how in life, "You weren't the same person when you came out as when you went in...It was called 'Meta-morphosis.' It was never just a question of escape. It was also a question of *transformation*" (Chabon 3). In this quote, Clay, remarks at a comic book convention on the similarities between Clark Kent going into the phone booth to change into Superman and Harry Houdini's escape act from a packing crate. This thesis argues that this novel *Kavalier and Clay* undergoes a metamorphosis in which the main characters transform the very nature of artistic creation within the medium of comics and also transform themselves as they tried to escape physical, emotional, and social boundaries.

Praised by readers and critics alike for its geographical span which reaches from Nazi occupied Prague, to bustling, pre-WW2 New York, on to the lonely battlefields of icy Antarctica, and finally in the urbanized landscaped of suburban life in Long Island. *Kavalier and Clay* has also been commended for its historical allusions of actual artistic figures during the era of late 1930's to 1950's America, and for its sophisticated use of the English language. The novel itself

exemplifies the approaches and methods seen with postmodern texts because of its treatment of high and popular culture elements within the main narrative. Also because its author is participative with the book after its publication in the sense that he continuously wrote on and about this book post publication. One reason for this is how Chabon felt about the novel's reception. In an interview between Michael Chabon and Dave Weich for Powells.com, we get a sense that Chabon was worried that people were not going to like his novel and that the only ones that were going to enjoy it were comic book fans. Meaning that, initially, he thought his novel would only appeal to a particular core audience; an audience of comic readers of which Chabon himself belongs too. This, however, turned out to be quite different. In a review titled "A Life and Death Story set in Comic Book Land", *New York Times* literary critic Janet Maslin notes how Chabon "tells a bustling, convoluted story in an eloquent, exceptionally precise voice." She also remarks on how "dictionary busters like "susurrant", "nystagmus" and "psittacosis" readily turn up" (Maslin). Looking at both interview and review, this will give the impression that *Kavalier and Clay* has a rather extensive reach for a wide and diverse audience.

Another noted element from the novel was its allusions to comics and comic art in general. Seeing as the book's core narrative centers around two, fictional, comic book creators from the early 1940's, their troubles within the industry, and their development and overall growth within the field of comics, one has to start thinking how influential comics culture is to Chabon while writing this novel. *Kavalier and Clay* was written in the 1990's, a time when comics, as a cultural phenomenon, was undergoing a resurgence of social, and more importantly, scholarly interest. Due in part to specific events within this field which spurred Chabon to write about the early, booming days of the golden era of comics during the late 1930's and mid 1940's. In 1993, comics artist and scholar Scott McCloud published a seminal work that would become one of the

fundamental works for comics studies titled *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. In this book, crafted as a comic book in its entirety, McCloud supplied the language and terminology that is used as the current critical vocabulary for the study of comics. A year before this however, something unexpected happened. In 1992 Art Spiegelman's comic *Maus*, a graphic novel, won a Pulitzer Prize in the category of Special Awards in Letters. The comic, a graphic memoir, told the story of Artie and how he was struggling to learn and write about his father's experience in surviving the Holocaust during WWII. This provocative and culture-altering event brought forth a new and greater appreciation and consideration of comics in the mass and popular media. Nine years later, a second text, Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay*, wins the Pulitzer Prize by providing a semi historical fiction on the birth of this now blossoming industry and culture. Even though the book contained within its main narrative influences from the comics culture and history, such as the interworking of the writers and artists of these comics, and the overall fascination with superhero comics during the period, Maslin notes how "the book's essential seriousness and thematic heft are never diminished" (Maslin). Therefore, the 2001 Pulitzer Prize in fiction, elevates *Kavalier and Clay* to a level of prestigious recognition; a status of cultural significance it did not have before. Moreover, looking closely into the novel's thematic structure, one will see that it is a novel that contains aspects of both the high and popular art aesthetics.

From the novel's intricate writing style and being a recipient of a prominent award, to its content and subject matter being highly influenced by comics culture and history, what the novel *Kavalier and Clay* does is create a space where the high and the popular culture meet and start to merge into the one novel. Considering the possibility of this novel being a postmodern text, it is pertinent to study this book as such. Essentially, postmodernism proposes to be innovative with, and at the same time, be inclusive to the types of texts it embraces. For Linda Hutcheon,

postmodernism is “both academic and popular, élitist and accessible” (44). Thus, *Kavalier and Clay* is a postmodern novel that within its narrative blends the cultures of the high and popular, where Chabon additionally also uncovers the inventive way to blend the traditions of prose narratives with the discourse and narrative mechanics of the comics culture. By doing this, Chabon then transforms the novel as one that breaks new ground in both the study of contemporary literature, with all of its progressive innovations, and how the current booming culture of comics is influencing these texts.

A culture divided: the dispute between High and Popular Culture

The matter of culture capital, both with high and popular cultures, will be a starting point for the discussion of this text. To start, Raymond Williams, academic and culture scholar, suggests that culture can be used to refer to “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (80). In other words, culture includes texts and practices whose main function is to signify, to produce, or to be the occasion for the production of meaning. Furthermore, regarding a more specific meaning of culture, a working definition for the purpose of this study is based on culture and literary scholar Stephen Greenblatt’s suggestion that the perception of culture may be signaling to two contrasting elements. One is culture as a faction of constraint, and the other is culture as an agent of mobility. Regarding how culture operates as a means of constraint, Greenblatt illustrates how “the ensemble of beliefs and practices that form a given culture as a pervasive technology of control, a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained, a repertoire of models to which individuals must conform” (225). This means, according to Greenblatt, that within culture there are certain types of constraints and boundaries to maintain some sort of level of social temperance which can be defined as form to

control the masses. Furthermore, Greenblatt illustrates how within these constraints, “culture’s boundaries are enforced more positively as well” (226). In particular, these could come in the form of cultural rewards, like for example public honors and grand prizes. Looking into Chabon’s novel, and how it is a recipient of one of these rewards, in this case the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, the novel’s award can be seen as an act of cultural structuring (as in the choosing of which texts are deemed to be worthy of regard and which are not) where a particular segment of the system known as Culture is responsible for determining this text as the best fiction novel of the previous year and, by doing so, giving the novel a label that deems it worthy of praise and quality.

Now, as to how culture can also be an agent of mobility, it can be seen how within the boundaries, constant movement and reform needs to be present as well. For Greenblatt, “it is only through improvisation, experiment, and exchange that cultural boundaries can be established” (228). Meaning that, in order for culture to create and maintain its borders, it needs to reshape and restructure itself in order to accommodate the current, cultural needs of society. Doing so, will allow the current culture to remain relevant, and maintain its influence over society. Moreover, when referring to the experimentation that comes with culture’s mobility, an example of this can come in the form of Spiegelman’s graphic novel/graphic memoir *Maus* winning a Pulitzer in 1992, thus opening the gates for comics, and texts related to the culture of comics, to be included within the intellectual discourse of the higher, enveloping culture that controls the Pulitzer; which lead for Chabon’s *Kavalier and Clay* to be considered and subsequently win the prize in 2001. However, it needs to be made clear that what happened here was not an acceptance of one sub-faction culture within the larger, higher culture. What happened was that the higher, established culture, with its boundary making and cultural

reshaping traditions, took a novel, whose content is firmly grounded in the culture of comics; a culture known to belong to *popular* culture, and *transformed* it into a novel that now belongs to the canon of high culture literature. Thus making Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* a novel that could have belonged to the culture of the *popular*, but now is deemed to be worthy of belonging to the higher culture.

In terms of how popular culture works, as a cultural entity within the framework of cultural understanding and development, it is seen as the main challenger to what the higher culture assembles towards its collective. In contrast to high culture, with its static traditions set to pre-established and unchallenged motions, popular culture is always shifting, always changing. What is known as Popular is based on accordance to the tastes of the people that craft and mold this culture. Seeing as it is a culture that is not restrained by the rules and conventions that are present in high culture, popular culture is far more flexible in the kinds of texts it includes. Additionally, popular culture can be further defined according to five different paradigms provided by John Storey in his book *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*. Storey writes how popular culture can be defined as: a culture that is widely liked or favored by many people, a culture that is left over after it has been decided what high culture was, popular culture as mass culture, popular culture as a culture that originates from the people, and a popular culture that draws on the political analysis of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, particularly on his development of the concept of hegemony (10). For the purposes of this argument, the focus will be on just two of the above definitions. Firstly, when Storey illustrates how popular culture is seen as the culture that is left over as scraps after deciding what belongs to the higher culture he further elaborates this point by explaining how popular culture "is a residual category, there to accommodate texts and practices that fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high

culture. In other words, it is a definition of popular culture as *inferior* [italics added for emphasis] culture” (6). It is as if popular culture is not being defined by what it is, but it is defined by what it is not. In this case, it is popular culture, because it is not high culture due to its subjective relativity of the selection. Over time however, there are works that go from one end of the cultural spectrum to the other. Works that were considered to be part of the popular literary culture were now considered to be literary classics and over all standards of what literature is supposed to be (i.e. Shakespeare and Dickens). This shows that a text is not wholly fixed within a literary culture; it can shift from one to the other depending the tastes and needs of the populace. The second definition that Storey attributes to popular culture is one where culture comes from the *people*. By this classification, popular culture is created by the people to create their own space within the confines of the dominant culture. Within this *folk* culture, the people are reacting towards what comes from the mass culture by picking and choosing what will belong within popular culture. As Storey remarks “whatever popular culture is, what is certain is that its raw materials are those which are commercially provided” (9). This means that no matter what, the elements within both high and popular culture will be created by some industry that distributes their product throughout the two cultures.

Now, other scholars have looked into these differing representations of culture and have come up with similar interpretations of what culture is and how it is divided. Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux identify two main ways of thinking about culture: “culture as a ‘whole way of life’ and culture as ‘high culture---those artifacts representing ‘the best that has been said or thought’” (52). Also, they explore the tendency in people’s belief that “high and popular culture tends to correspond in many people’s minds to a sense of “good” art versus “bad” art” (64). This represents the notion that high culture was meant to be something that was good for the

individual, and that popular culture was thought of as garbage. If using the history of the comic book as a source of indication of popular culture as garbage, one will see how with the publishing of Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* was instrumental in the tarnishing of the medium of comics for years to come. Among his many claims, Wertham suggests that comics were racists, they desensitize children to gore and violence, and, regarding the popular super hero comics of the time, they endorsed fascism through characters that solved their problems through violence and abuse of power. More importantly, his most pronounced claim against comic books was that they promoted illiteracy and discouraged the reading of "real" books. It is this last claim that really drives the point as to how the comic book, a medium of the popular culture, was labeled as a lower tier text, below texts that were to be considered as "real literature". This notion of determining what is "real" literature and what is not will open up the debate for scholars to attempt to answer this quarrel. One of these is popular culture scholar Jim Collins, author of *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Post-Modernism*. He notes that previous debates about the validity of popular culture to co-exist with high culture comes down to the notion of legitimizing *other* forms of reading and literature; forms that were different from those of the high culture. Collins also observes that "what becomes increasingly explicit is a fear that "culture" as a set of practices, values, and institutions is no longer controllable by an intellectual class" (Collins 9). What this means is that what the high culture proponents fear is a popular culture that cannot and will not be managed; thus creating a resistance within the new publics and discourses (9). It is in this resistance that Chabon's novel comes into play; here, in the midst of the struggle between these two forms of culture, is where *Kavalier and Clay* will blend the two cultures into one text, a text that is able to traverse the special boundaries created by both cultures, and become an entirely different text.

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay: A novel in the great divide

For this thesis, Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* will be studied as a postmodern text in how it borrows from both high and popular cultures to *create* a third space for a transitional text that contains both discourses, transforming its very nature as a novel that exists within these two binaries. The novel centers on the fictional story of Josef Kavalier and Sammy Clay, two Jewish cousins who set out to work together and create a comic book super hero called The Escapist during the booming comic book industry of 1940's New York. Out of the numerous themes within this novel, the central themes are of escape, history, and the rising industry of the comic book and its relation to popular culture. Regarding the theme of escape, or escapism for that matter, this is something that is seen, according to Chabon, as "a charge leveled against comics: why would one want to waste time reading them?" (Chabon). By exploring the idea of escapism, it will challenge readers to think of this often misconstrued idea of how escapism within literature is seen as a negative notion by looking at how the novel explores different aspects of escapism, whether it is physically, socially, or individually driven within the characters. This can be seen from Joe Kavalier's escape from Nazi occupied Prague and learning to be an *ausbrecher* (escape artist), Sammy Clay's attempts to escape social-class mediocrity and repressed sexual frustrations, and their combined efforts in creating their comic super hero whose sole purpose was to liberate anyone trapped in the chains of tyranny and free the world from crime. Furthermore, the novel's historical treatment of how comics were part of the fabric and development of popular culture during the period covered in the book, aims in removing the negative label that exists amongst the two by showing how essential they both are in creating culture as a whole. In addition, Michael Chabon was able to weave a narrative where the main characters of the novel are able to interact with actual, historical figures present during the time

periods covered within the novel. For example, Joe and Sammy meet and interact with members of the art community of 1940's New York, such as surrealist Salvador Dali and film entrepreneur Orson Welles. With these encounters, Chabon created scenarios where Joe and Sammy, rising figures in the making of comics, were able to be seen on the same, artistic plane, as other members of the high art culture of this time. This also provides a space for Chabon's storytelling to unfold and present a revisionist retelling of actual events. Moreover, by inserting these popular components of the everyday life of the historical period of the 1940's, it gives the setting a more authentic feeling. The people of 1940's New York were talking about Dali and Welles, thus making them part of popular/high culture of that time. Chabon made his novel more historically genuine by not just focusing on the overall aspect and aesthetics of this time period, but also the popular culture details as well. Furthermore, the book features actual figures from the early comic book industry in order to give the story a more factual footing concerning the history of the comic books industry. With allusions to figures such as Milton Caniff, an early figure of the comics trade who Sammy idolizes because of his artistic style, a young and up and coming Stan Lee, and an early reference to Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster who are all now renowned to be the fathers of the early golden age era of comics, make the novel's comic elements fit so much better within the overall narrative.

More importantly however, the novel is escaping from being defined as a high art or popular art novel by existing within the borderlands of these two cultural bodies, and borrowing from both, creating this unique space it has for experimenting with the mixing of high and popular literary art forms. As a writer, Chabon is aware of the interrelationship of high culture with the popular culture because of his upbringing in the late 1960's and early 70's when, as revealed in a 2008 interview, "the whole pop art movement was working very hard to break

down or erase the last of the remaining barriers between high art and low art.” It can be said that Chabon himself came from a period where boundaries of high art and popular art were challenged, something of which is present in this novel, and throughout his works, as he attempts in collapsing different elements with fiction and the real. In *Kavalier and Clay*’s merging and traversing the borderlands of high and popular culture, the novel is acting like the literary and cultural figure of the trickster. Traditionally, the trickster figure is one that exists between two worlds and one that brings about change. From the Greek figures of Hermes and Prometheus, who connected the gods of Olympus with the mortals below, to the Native American coyote, who travels along the borderlands of the physical and spiritual realms, these trickster figures are an ever present part of world culture. If considering this novel as a trickster figure, one will see how *Kavalier and Clay* will traverse these established borderlands to bring about change and also unity between high and popular representations of art forms.

In addition, one must also look at the stylistic innovation that comes from the narrative of the text. For some, specific parts of the novel, the traditional prose narrative shifts to a prose representation of a comic story that is written by the characters Joe and Sammy. In the novel, these comic stories tell the origin and adventure tales of the comic characters of both *The Escapist* and *Luna Moth*. As Chabon suggests about his prose representations of the comic stories:

I wanted to give readers the feeling of knowing the characters, a mental image. How was I to do that? If I wrote about them in the same language that I was using to write about Joe and Sammy, it would give the comics characters the same level of familiarity. I wanted to elevate *The Escapist* to that level, but I didn’t want to

lose the comic book flavor, so, for instance, I tried to preserve the dialogue in those sections, the way people talk in comic books. (18)

Chabon wrote the comic portions in the language that matched that of his novel, but while still remaining authentic to how characters spoke, in terms of the seemingly quick pace dialogue in these comics. He did not write down or overtly simplified these portions of the novel, quite the contrary. As an experimental writer, he elevated the level of diction of comics to that of a Novel so that when readers encountered these portions, they did not appear to be separate from the novel, but still be distinguished as prose representations of comic tales.

Overall, by looking at how all of these elements work together within the text, what this does is create a novel where cultural spaces of high and popular art, and the spaces where traditional narratives and more experimental narratives are blended together within the core of this book. Thus, allowing the text to be interpreted and studied as a text that merges the two cultures in one. When readers encounter a text that is in the liminal space between high and popular art literature, they are in a space where the text is not yet identified as one or the other; the text is just a narrative, just a story. Similar to the gutter in comics the “space that exists between the panels of comics” (66), as defined by Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* as, *Kavalier and Clay* fills that space and merges both entities in order to create and read a text that fits both high art and pop culture.

This argument will be further developed in the following four chapters. The second chapter will cover a major portion of the thesis’s theoretical framework: postmodernism. Throughout the chapter, Chabon’s *Kavalier and Clay* will be analyzed as a postmodern text using Linda Hutcheon’s theories as a main source. This literature review will define what it is in regards to the discussion within this project, and it will highlight certain elements within the

postmodern movement and how relevant they are to the debate between high culture and popular culture. In addition, this chapter will introduce the idea of culture industries and how the Pulitzer Prize is one of the most influential of the literary culture industries. Moreover, it will cover how this novel, a winner of the Pulitzer prize in Fiction in 2001, fits within this canon and how it meets the rubric necessary to win such award. Also, this chapter will provide a definition of graphic narrative and how that definition works within the interplay of comics discourse within this novel. Ultimately, the chapter will close with an analysis of how this novel, as a postmodern text that uses the discourse of popular culture and a winner of a Pulitzer Prize, will merge the boundaries of both High culture and popular culture.

Given the substantial amount of content related to the culture of comics, specifically historical accounts and personages from the Golden Age of comics that spanned from 1939 to 1954, chapter three, titled “Comics and the Postmodern Discourse”, will look at said culture and how it works within the novel. The chapter will focus on how, with the use of postmodern discourse and research of comics culture, this can be utilized to further expand the analysis of *Kavalier and Clay* by attempting to define this novel as a comic book. In addition, the novel’s relationship with this discourse of comics will be reviewed in order to understand how *Kavalier and Clay* finds a place within this comics culture. Furthermore, the chapter will address how a selection of the novel’s chapters are read as prose representations of the characters Joe, Sammy and Rosa’s comic book creations. These segments of the novel will usher in a *re-viewing* (the term itself a postmodern deconstruction and reconfiguration of the word by comics scholar Hillary Chute to serve multiple purposes) of these selected passages of the text and it will be done so through the use of postmodern aesthetics. From this analysis, what will be looked at is the specific meaning of those in-novel comic issues, their meaning for the characters during the

specific moment they appear within the novel, and exploring what could Chabon's purpose be in doing this. The chapter will also offer a technical approach to the dynamics of postmodernism and how the very idea of postmodern discourse can be seen in the novel by having this text be a blend of traditional, prose storytelling, with the popular culture mode of storytelling of comics.

Following this discussion will be the fourth chapter titled "Michael Chabon as the Postmodern Trickster" where the discussion of Chabon's novel will culminate by viewing both the novel and author as trickster figures. Using Lewis Hyde's and other trickster scholars' work on cultural tricksters, the chapter will discuss this idea on three tiers: Chabon (the author) as a postmodern trickster; the novel's content as a history-bending trickster figure; and the text as a Pulitzer prize winner as a culture meshing trickster figure. What this discussion will provide is a better understanding of how this novel, as a postmodern historiographic metafictional trickster, exists within the literary borderlands of High and Popular culture and serves as a bridge between the two. Concluding this thesis will be a brief subdivision detailing different approaches that could have been made with this project, exploring further narrative potentials within *Kavalier and Clay*, and any pedagogical implication this thesis can provide within an educational environment.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

With new changes and shifts occurring in literature, it is important to take notice when a novel such as Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* features so many qualities that beckon it to be studied as a postmodern text that blends multiple literary cultures, multiple forms of narrative within the novel, and is itself a transformative text. By transformative text, what this alludes to is the novel's ability to be molded and take the form of not just a Pulitzer Prize winning novel, but also a postmodern novel, and a trickster novel as well. It is this transformative nature, and the novel's capacity to be any and all of these distinct forms that will be explored. For these reasons, the following literature review will discuss the main theories and discourse that will be used for the argument of this thesis. They will be organized thematically and will cover postmodernism, postmodern comics discourse, narrative theories, culture industries, the Pulitzer Prize, and finally the literary and cultural trickster. Moreover, the principal scholarly source for understanding the principals and machinations of postmodernism will derive from scholars like Dino Felluga, Barry Lewis, and Linda Hutcheon. Ultimately, our goal is to illustrate how Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* presents and interweaves these different perspectives and motifs, and serves as a space where multiple orientations can traverse throughout its narrative.

Defining Postmodernism

For the purpose of this thesis, the aesthetics and approaches of postmodernism, mainly the aspects that study the blending of history with fictive literature, is explored. Moreover, the use of the tenets of postmodernism and narrative theory will be used as a lens through which Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* will be looked at, particularly its narrative structure. In selected chapters of the novel, it shifts to tell the story of a comic book superhero. This will blend traditional prose

narrative with a unique form of prose that alludes and makes homage to the narrative stylistics used in comic books. This will illustrate how *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* can be considered a transformative postmodern text.

According to Dino Felluga, postmodernism includes a “number of concepts...including subjectivity, temporality, [referentiality], progress, empiricism, and the rule of law. [It] also refers to the aesthetic/cultural products that treat and often critique aspects of "postmodernity"” (Felluga). This is an artistic movement that recognizes past movements and literary periods and is conscious about what has come before and where are things possibly headed. Moreover, by postmodernity, scholar Steve Mizrach, author of “Talking Pomo: An Analysis of the Postmodern Movement”, suggests that it implies how “any text contains additional meanings beyond what the author could have 'structured' into it, and that literary criticism is a process of creating meaning, not discovering it” (Mizrach). Nevertheless, the study of postmodernism has afforded several unique perspectives on this matter that range from negative to positive viewpoints.

When talking about some of the negative approaches and understandings of postmodernism, these can be seen in both Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard’s writings. In *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson argued that in the postmodern world, through the concept of pastiche, which indicates a “blank parody...that imitates a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, in a neutral practice of mimicry” (Jameson), the connection individuals have with history is lost. With this loss, history becomes a simulacra, or a series of styles or superseded genres. Of this simulacra, Jameson poses on how “the new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time” (18). What this means is that through the reproduction and representation of history through texts, history itself is being eroded and being replaced by these same

representations. As such, in Jameson's research of this occurrence, he noticed how in postmodern historical novels, like E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, a historical fictional novel published in 1975 set in pre WW1 New York City, the past was represented through the popular images within the text. With this, Jameson posits that ultimately, in works such as this novel, "we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach" (25). The concern of not only misrepresenting history, but also losing history by dilution through texts can also be appreciated in Jean Baudrillard's writings. His views paint "a rather bleak picture of our current postmodern condition, arguing that we have lost contact with the "real" in various ways, that we have nothing left but a continuing fascination with its disappearance" (Felluga). For Baudrillard, this postmodern period is full of nihilism and melancholia and how cultural and systematic hegemony is ruining culture and society. Of this, he wrote about how through the loss of history and media representations of such, these were just becoming simulations that were taking over what was in fact *real*. In what Baudrillard termed the *precession of simulacra*, where there is a substitution of the signs of the *real* for the *real* itself, he, regarding the period of postmodernism, argues that "there is no longer any distinction between reality and its representation; there is only the simulacrum" (Felluga). Reading this, one will understand why this dissolving of what is real can be a real problem. However, in attempting to represent realistic historical events in media and in literature, and by understanding of what this might entail, it can also bring new insight and different perspectives on what has happened in the past. Thinking about it this way would mean that by attempting to represent history in the postmodern age, it is by challenging what has been written about history and which will ultimately open new windows of representation and understanding of this already recorded history. The scholar that best illustrates these views is Linda Hutcheon who, in *The*

Politics of Postmodernism, separates herself from other postmodern scholars by proposing how “the prevailing interpretation is that postmodernism offers a value-free, decorative, de-historicized quotation of past forms and that this is a most apt mode for a culture like our own that is oversaturated with images” (94). Given our current multifaceted and multimodal culture where texts and history are always in constant flux, Hutcheon suggests that through postmodernism all of these occurrences will be better grasped. Further in her writings, Hutcheon illustrates how within historical novels, postmodernism can collapse the discrepancies between “reality” and “fiction” particularly within historical novels like Doctorow’s *Ragtime* and, as this thesis argues, within Chabon’s *Kavalier and Clay*. Therefore, to contrast both Jameson and Baudrillard, it is Hutcheon’s approach that will inform this thesis because it allows for a better understanding and an open interpretation of postmodern historical novels. Her arguments regarding historical representations through popular narratives do not limit our discussion to one that is solely negative. But, as Hutcheon puts it “Postmodernism is both academic and popular, élitist and accessible” (44). It is through these contradictions that will allow for *Kavalier and Clay*, to be studied and understood as a postmodern novel.

Why Postmodernism?

Even though this is an artistic approach that has gone out of favor in some artistic and academic sectors, it is still important to look into this movement to see what else it could offer with current contemporary texts. In an interview titled “The Legacy of Postmodernism” by J. Michael Welton, Glenn Adamson, current director of the Museum of Art and Design (MAD) in New York, who at the time, was curating an exhibition titled “Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970-1990”, recalls how in the late 1980’s, there was a growing exhaustion with the

term postmodernism. He explains how, out of the many reasons, the two most important were “the simplification of the idea, so that it seemed to be merely ironic or negative, rather than expansive and liberating; and the corporate use of postmodern imagery and techniques as a form of marketing” (Adamson). From what Adamson answered, it appears that in the 1980’s, postmodernism in an economic and socio-capitalist sense, became mainstream. In a way, it became a product that was marketed to the point of exhaustion. Nonetheless, just because it became unpopular within the realms of culture industries and Academia, it does not mean that the postmodern approach should be shunned away as if it were a mistake from a uniquely different artistic era. Quite the contrary, regarding postmodernism’s legacy, Adamson asserts that it’s “greatest success was in fracturing expectations about period style--so we no longer think of ourselves as working to a single shared “look”” (Adamson). This means that texts from a certain literary period did not have to be necessarily studied through the lens of that specific period, thus allowing for a postmodern flexibility. To this day, there is still so much to learn from this critical perspective, and as thus, by looking at contemporary 21st century texts, like Chabon’s *Kavalier and Clay*, a product of this postmodern culture, we can garner different aspects of this novel’s content, its varying narrative styles, and the author’s interaction with the novel’s material and its audience. This is achieved through how this novel showcases postmodern aesthetic elements, such as extreme self-reflexivity, or how the novel acknowledges itself as a text of historical fictional; a breakdown of high and low forms through the inclusion of the popular culture art form of comics and its culture; *retro*, or how this novel was written in the late 20th century but its story centers around the Golden Age of Comics of the 1930’ through the 1950’s in order to provide new insight to this period; and a *breakdown of temporality*, by inserting fictional characters and have them participate in real historical events.

Now that the reasons as to why examining the novel through the lens of postmodernism have been provided, what now needs to be considered is which particular aspects of postmodernism will be used to analyze *Kavalier and Clay*. Barry Lewis' essay titled "Postmodernism and Fiction", makes distinctions amongst postmodernist writing in accordance to when these texts were created. If these texts were from the years 1960-1990, it was still considered to be postmodernist for their "agonistic relation to modernism", i.e. writings that were rebelling against the aesthetics of Modernism. However, if it was created or published after 1990, it was deemed, according to Lewis, a "post-postmodernist" writing; meaning that it shared the same characteristics as the postmodernist texts that came before, but were less radical and more accommodating to the already established aesthetic of this approach. To clarify, even though Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* was written during this post-postmodern period and environment, it will be nevertheless considered and studied as a postmodern text. Lewis explains how even though there were postmodernist writers all across the globe, for him the best representatives of this period came from American writers, specifically, those who wrote novels. In his estimation of postmodernists writers, the novel allowed for the best vessel to experiment with these postmodern elements such as temporal disorder, pastiche, fragmentation, and vicious circles, "or a loss of distinction between logically separate levels of discourse" (Lewis). He further notes how these features were seen more predominantly in the radically groundbreaking writings of postmodern fiction from the 1960's till the early 1990's such as in Thomas Pynchon *Gravity's Rainbow* and Paul Auster's *City of Glass*. Even though Lewis does not officially declare these features to be present in "post-postmodernist" novels, by looking closely into these specific texts, one can see clear examples of these features still present within the post 1990's postmodernist novels. As such, when looking at *Kavalier and Clay* as a postmodern novel, one

will see how what Lewis described as the basic features in postmodernist fiction are present within this text. What follows is a breakdown of how Lewis' categories can be found and further developed in the novel.

Temporal Disorder and Hutcheon's Historiographic Metafiction

One of the first elements that Lewis highlights within postmodern fiction is temporal disorder. Within this element, history is distorted on purpose within the narrative of the postmodern novel. Two ways this temporal disorder is achieved is through apocryphal history, as in a history that is doubtful in its authenticity, but still believed to be true, and as well through the blend of history and fantasy. Apocryphal history entails the author creating "bogus accounts of famous events" (Lewis 114), this is seen in numerous ways in *Kavalier and Clay*, particularly in where Chabon introduces the superhero of the Escapist in a world where other, more historically known superhero comic characters of the Golden Age of comic books were also in the process of being created. Chabon does this to provide a contextual background so readers would be familiar with the historical setting of this well-known period of the comic book history. Lewis' second observation on how the postmodern narrative achieves temporal disorder is through the blending of history and fantasy. In a way, through this blend of history and fantasy, Chabon creates a metafiction where his fictional characters, and their comic creations, coexist in the same environment where definite historical figures, this being historically renowned comic creators of the time, and other historical personages actually roamed. If this be the case, then what must further be looked at is how this metafiction that Chabon has crafted fits within postmodern lore.

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon names this fusion of history and literature as “historiographic metafiction”, which “confronts the paradoxes of fictive/historical representations, the particular/the general, and the present/the past” to obtain a better understanding of how fiction and history work together (106). Even though it confronts these paradoxes, it does not mend them. As a historiographic metafiction, Chabon’s novel has the ability to “keep distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context... [problematizing] the very possibility of historical knowledge...because of unresolved contradiction” (106). It is unresolved in the sense that, with History, it is fact based and unchallenged. As such, through the lens of historiographic metafiction it creates a narrative that experiments with history. With this, Hutcheon emphasizes how this type of narrative “asks us to recall that history and fiction are themselves historical terms and that their definitions and interrelations are historically determined” (105). What this means is that, for history and fiction, what they represent fluctuates with the passage of time; their meanings vary. In addition, with postmodernism, what will be revealed is how the historical and cultural context of the novel will react to the meeting of historical fact and also fictional characters. Hutcheon establishes how “historical fiction [is] that which is modeled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force (in the narrative and human destiny)” (113). What this refers to is how the narrative is shaped by historical events that lead to other fictional events in the *Kavalier and Clay*. Essentially, history is used in Chabon’s novel as building blocks to then base off of them the fictitious accounts in the novel; it does not wholly divert from history for it is using it as a sort of road map. In *Kavalier and Clay*, Chabon creates his own history-based temporal map by not just using the historical foot-hole of 1940's New York and Europe, but by also introducing fictional characters into this temporal map and have

them interact with the accurate, documented-historical events, allowing the novel to explore the boundaries of fiction.

Following this line of thinking, Joe Kavalier, Sammy Clay, and Rosa Saks, can be considered historiographic metafictional characters. Because they are amalgams of various character traits and personas from historical figures (these being comic creators) of the time. Moreover, when writing about these types of characters, Hutcheon illustrates how within historiographic metafiction, these characters are “the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history” (114). Therefore, by Chabon making his characters comic book artists, he automatically made them characters that were known to be marginalized in the outskirts of history and were known to be eccentrics within the fields of literary culture for this particular period. Thus, by creating this temporal disorder within *Kavalier and Clay*, readers are reintroduced to these almost forgotten personages of this very important period of literary and popular culture through the fictional manifestations of Chabon’s characters.

On Narrative Theory and Postmodern Comics Discourse

When looking at the comic book history within *Kavalier and Clay*, whether it be to the allusions to and retellings of early comic book creators, the radio serials based on the superhero characters from these comics, or to the persecution and censorship of said comics by the U.S. Government in the mid 1950’s, there is without a doubt an immense amount of comic culture’s history within this novel. This novel is postmodern because, upon reading it, one will see that amongst its lengthy text, there are two distinctive spaces of narratives. One is where the main narrative of the novel is developed, and the other space are the comic representations created by

the prior narrative's characters. H. Porter Abbot writes about the potential of these narrative spaces and what their function could potentially be:

[We] grasp narrative of any length not only in time but in *space* [italics added for emphasis] as well. The case is easy to make in film and drama. Filmed narrative, after all, is a matter of "moving pictures." And even plays on a bare stage present us with characters in spatial relations that shift over narrative time. Nonetheless, it was perhaps in part because the plays he watched were performed on a bare stage that Aristotle featured what he called the *muthos* or, roughly, the course of the action. (Abbot 160)

It is true that most narrative study has focused on Aristotle's *muthos*, what is also true is that the space where these narratives are taking place are important for the study of the whole itself. For it is in this space that the narrative is being formed and developed. As such, seeing as Chabon builds two worlds of narratives within his novel, the one where Joe and Sammy are existing and the other where their own created characters are present within the comic books, this notion of space, and by that reason, the idea of world making within a narrative must be considered. In "Exploring the Nexus of the Narrative and Mind", David Herman posits what *narrative worldmaking* entails:

In my usage of the term, worldmaking encompasses the referential dimension of narrative, its capacity to evoke worlds in which interpreters can, with more or less ease or difficulty, take up imaginative residence. I argue that worldmaking is in fact the hallmark of narrative experiences, the root function of stories and storytelling that should therefore constitute the starting-point for narrative inquiry and the analytic tools developed in its service. (Herman 14)

Herman here illustrates how the act of worldmaking within a text is absolutely essential for it is the comprehension of this feat, and through this, one will come to better understand the mechanics of storytelling itself. As seen above, this self-referential nature of a text is a characteristic found within postmodern narratives. Moreover, Herman furthers his metaphor of world making in narratives by suggesting that the creators of these stories, in any text for that matter, fashion a set of blueprints for what has been constructed within the narrative. For Herman, these blueprints “prompt interpreters to construct worlds marked by a particular spatiotemporal profile, a patterned sequence of situations and events, and an inventory of inhabitants” (17). With this said, one can start to see how the contents of a text, essentially its narrative mechanics, must be looked at closely to understand the narrative itself. Once understanding this idea of a writer’s process of worldmaking and this notion of blueprints within the text, the view of how these stories can be considered world themselves, otherwise known as diegesis will be key to get clear. According to H. Porter Abbot, “the term diegesis (which Plato originally used to refer to the telling, rather than the acting, of stories) has been adapted to refer to the world of the story – that “reality” in which the events are presumed to take place” (Abbot). It is this reality that exists and is created by writers who work within narrative worldmaking. Yet, this term, which now is also referred as story world, has been used to draw upon new meanings. Gérard Genette for example, drew upon this term to further expand its meaning by presenting differences amongst homodiegetic, heterodiegetic, and extradiegetic narratives. It is a homodiegetic narrative, when the narration of the story comes from a character from the space of the story itself. To contrast, in both heterodiegetic and extradiegetic narratives, the narration comes from outside the narrative world. Furthermore, another element introduced by Genette that plays a role in understanding narrative structure and what surrounds the narrative within

Chabon's novel, is that of *paratext*. With paratext, it is essentially everything else that is enveloped around the narrative of the novel. From the book's cover design, to postscripts and revised editions of the text, the paratext is another level where the novel *Kavalier and Clay* will be explored. Regarding the importance of Genette's paratext, he illustrates its significance for the narrative experience that exists between author and reader:

[Paratext] constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, and influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it. (Genette 2)

In this zone, before readers delve into the narrative of the author's text, they will first encounter the book's cover art and be steered into the discourse of what the novel will cover within the text. It is in this first contact with the book that will initiate everything that will come forth from reading *Kavalier and Clay*. Thus, by looking at all of these elements collectively, one will come to appreciate how they work together within the postmodern narrative found within *Kavalier and Clay*, particularly how in the novel there are two narrative worlds: the one Chabon creates for his main characters of Joe Kavalier and Sammy Clay, and the one where Joe and Sammy create for their own character of the Escapist. By including the idea of paratexts, this discussion will also cover the book's cover design and illustrate its effectiveness in creating a far more complete environment for Chabon's narrative.

In Barry Lewis' essay on the features of postmodernism, one will see how both the elements of pastiche and fragmentation work in identifying said culture within the space of *Kavalier and Clay*. With pastiche, which Lewis describes as a "kind of permutation, a shuffling

of generic and grammatical tics” (114), one will see how the culture and discourse of comics pertaining to the narrative techniques and traditions of comic books are integrated within the narrative of this novel. It is not just the history behind these early comic book creators that is featured in the text, but also the narrative practices of comics within the prose that is contained as well. Therefore, in this pastiche of traditional storytelling with the blending of the traditions of the comic’s culture, further strengthens the argument of how Chabon’s *Kavalier and Clay* can be recognized as a postmodern text. What is more, with the acknowledgment of the comic’s culture within the novel as a postmodern technique of pastiche, the other feature of fragmentation can be better understood and seen in *Kavalier and Clay*. With postmodern fragmentation, i.e. the type of fragmentation that concerns itself with breaking up the narrative’s plot and structure, the text is broken up into “short fragments, or sections, separated by space, titles, numbers or symbols” (116). These fragments take the shape of prose retellings of the comic book stories written by Joe and Sammy. Hillary Chute writes about these prose comics within the novel in her article “*Ragtime, Kavalier and Clay, and the Framing of Comics*” in an attempt to understand the metadiscourse of graphic narratives (comics) in this novel. Chute writes about these sections and how “the prose tumbles into lengthy sections that narrate recognizable comic book stories intradiegetically, giving these an unchecked narratorial viability that itself frames the “real world” goings-on of Chabon’s wartime New York City” (272). The intradiegetical is how these prose-comics are essentially a part of the telling of the novel’s narrative occurring within the space of these characters, rather than just objects alluded to in the novel. These prose-comic insertions are not just there to illustrate Joe and Sammy’s work, but rather to be part of the actual story of these two characters. This creates a formal feedback loop within the narrative which further blurs these boundaries. In an interview with David Walton for *Publisher Weekly*, Chabon

clarifies how he interpolated some passages that come from the comic book world, “I have tried to have these work not just on their own, but also to reflect and comment upon the larger narrative” (Walton 45). Meaning that with these comic stories in the overall narrative of the text, they serve to not only comment on what was going on in the story, but also serve as a reflection of the character’s concerns throughout the novel. Therefore, the presence of the prose retelling of the comics within the novel serves an essential importance for the telling of this story. This shows how the novel contains fragmented components of prose writing from more traditional forms of literature and how it blends with prose-representations of the popular culture art form of comics. As Chute illustrates: “*Kavalier & Clay* is about comics moving out from a degraded mass form (the pulps) to what Joe insists on: comics as a serious art form” (285). Using Chute’s writings about comics and postmodernism, it will garner further insight into the dynamics of comics and the union of high culture of this novel.

On Culture Industries

Previously, the matter of postmodernity, or being more specific, the culture of postmodernism, is a culture that not only recognizes what has come before and where are things headed, but how postmodernity also dealt with the matter of the complexities of the ever shifting nature of living history was discussed. The reason for this is that, according to Felluga, “we do not yet know which element in our culture will win out and we do not always recognize the subtle but insistent ways that changes in our society affect our ways of thinking and being in the world”. It is within this uncertainty of what will happen within the current framework of culture that postmodern texts thrive and stand out the most. By considering Chabon’s *Kavalier and Clay* a postmodern text that exists in this ever shifting environment will then allow for the study of the

culture behind this novel. As such, by *Kavalier and Clay* being a product of this postmodern culture, the literary culture of this novel, particularly the literary culture where Pulitzer Prize winning texts belong to, and the matter of Culture Industries will be explored in order to determine how they work within this postmodern environment.

Because *Kavalier and Clay* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2001, it made it part of the literary culture that is the Pulitzer canon; a canon that in itself is an example of what and how a culture industry works. Taking a close look into how culture is manufactured and then distributed amongst the masses, one will begin to notice how industrious, how mechanical the entire process is to begin with. Doing so, the workings of said *culture industries*, its mechanics and main players, will be brought to light to be better understood. To begin to understand what *culture industries* are, what they do, and how they play a role in the distribution of Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay*, one must first try and define what it is. If thinking of these culture industries as giant factories that create, assemble, and distribute packets of ideas based on existing and or governing ideologies, one might not be so far from the truth. The ambiguous nature of these industries can be seen anywhere. Given their ever present nature in the fabric of society and its individuals, one can make the claim that there might be a negative aspect to the power of these industries of culture. With writings from Theodor Adorno, German sociologist and critical theorist, readers will get a more negative aspect of the power that these culture industries possess in our society. This is seen more profoundly in Adorno's writings on mass culture, particularly in his article "The Schema of Mass Culture" where he introduces and details the concept of *Iron Romanticism*, a concept that details the imposing of an imperialistic and cultural regime for economical and totalitarian gains. By examining this concept, he explores its influence on the shaping of culture and its effects on the young individuals within a society. For example, Adorno

deplores how the product of these mass cultures seep into the subconscious of the individual without the individual knowing of it ever happening; thus being continually subject to the fabrication of expectations and false realities these culture industries create. In his writing, Adorno emphasized that: “Beneath the mantle of adventure they smuggle in the contraband of utility and the reader is persuaded that he does not have to renounce any of his dreams if he eventually becomes an engineer or a shop assistant” (Adorno 62). What he is trying say is that freedom of choice is being carefully swept away and the individual is merely fooling him or herself that they are indeed free to make life choices. However, it has to be said that Adorno’s writings were heavily influenced by his experiences with the totalitarian regime of 1940’s Nazi Germany and as such, they embody views that are reminiscent of that distress caused by these totalitarian culture regimes. Even though this is not the current reality within the German nation and its peoples, some of Adorno’s ideas can still be seen in a different light. Case in point, when transferring these ideas to a society that strongly upholds democracy, i.e. the United States of America, these ideas will seem farfetched and even unlikely to a society whose main ideological spectrum is one of freedom of choice. However, concerning how an ideology plays a role in the creation and distribution of mass cultures, Adorno argues that “reality becomes its own ideology through the spell cast by its faithful duplication. This is how the technological veil and the myth of the positive is woven” (63). From this, it can be said that, according to Adorno, the massive influence of the culture industries are filled with ideologies that not only will replace the real, but it will do so by replacing it with fabricated ideologies.

Considering the earlier account presented in the previous chapter of a rise in reading culture in the masses, this is an aspect that must be looked at and how Chabon’s novel falls into this discussion of culture industries and fabrication of ideologies. This is in due part to how, by

Kavalier and Clay being a recipient of a Pulitzer, it becomes a text that represents the ideological emblem which the Pulitzer, as a culture industry that establishes canon, represents. By taking into consideration Adorno's accounts, one can make the claim that culture industries are purely malevolent and their only purpose is to corrupt and make a profit at the expense of the loss of society's individuality. However, that is just but one perspective on the idea of culture industries. If the argument can be made that these industries, and the people that run them, are immoral, then the counter argument can be considered to reflect what these industries alternatively do is manufacture culture and allocate said culture to the masses. If instead of culture *industries*, they are called culture *distributors* it can be said that they do not produce *culture* itself, but package it and distribute it in the sense that it can be accessed by everybody and anybody who deems these industries as important or relevant. For authors that exist within the culture of this industry, they do not wholly create works that are meant to be packaged and distributed without purpose. As such, Chabon did not write *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* for the sole purpose of being considered, and ultimately winning, a Pulitzer Prize in the category of fiction. It just happened to be the outcome.

The Pulitzer and its Prize

In the previous chapter, the problem of the divide of High and Popular art and the ramifications that originate from this was lengthily explored. When culture is divided, there are cracks that are created in the separation, thus leaving huge gaps where things may be lost in them. Not all is lost however for in these separations, opportune spaces are created, which Chabon then explored in his novel. By reading and analyzing Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay*, the winner of the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for best work in Fiction, it can be said that this novel mends the fissures

left by that separation. Not that there has not been any good to come out of this divide. Because of it, artists in both fields have worked hard to make their own mark and create works to best represent each culture. However, when studying Chabon's novel as a text that blends the two cultures of the high and popular, one will realize all the possibilities and understanding to be gained from this union. Furthermore, to date, there is a current rise in reading cultures that focus a vast majority of their readership in literary best sellers. In *Bring on the Books for Everybody: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture*, Collins suggests that what caused this rise in literacy for the masses "wasn't a matter of radical innovations in literary craft but massive infrastructural changes in literary culture that introduced a new set of players, locations, rituals, and use values for reading literary fiction" (3). Meaning that the pleasures and gains from reading literature was not just for the academics, but could now be experienced by the masses as well. What this provides is a form of empowerment for the everyday reader; an empowerment that Collins claims "depends every bit as much on amateur readers feeling perfectly comfortable taking on books that were formerly thought to be fully accessible only to professionalized readers" (6). Seeing as these readers go for literary best sellers, it is pertinent to look at how novels that have won the Pulitzer Prize, affect the schema of mass culture readership.

Looking closely into the literary *industry* that the Pulitzer has manufactured since its conception in 1917, one has to question the influence this organization has had over the masses for close a century of existence. One way of looking at this influence is how the Pulitzer can be seen as a form of literary and culture archive, meant to preserve what was acknowledged as American customs and values within the chosen texts. Furthermore, as a yearly prize that honors works from assorted mediums that range from journalism, music, to works of prose in both fiction and nonfiction, the Pulitzer Prize has been a factor in the distributing of culture since

early in the 20th century. To understand where this prize stands in accordance to the discussion of culture industries, one must first understand what the stipulations and terms this prize goes by when awarding the chosen works of fiction for a specific year. The best way to go about this is by understanding the prize's rubric in regards to how a text is chosen as a winner. This is no simple task because, since its conception in 1917, the actual rubric has been in a flux in accordance to the passing of time and the changing of both preoccupations and complexities befitting of the time the chosen text was written in. For starters, the first book to win the prize in the category of Novel was Ernest Poole's *His family*. It won because it adhered to the standards of the first rubric which stated that the winner of this prize should be awarded to the "American novel published during the year which shall best present the *wholesome atmosphere* [italics added for emphasis] of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood" (Bates). By representing all of these very unique traits within the novel, it was able to stand out from other outstanding works that, in the present time, are far better known than Poole's *His Family*. From Edgar Rice Burroughs science fantasy novel *A Prince of Mars*, a planetary romance that was highly influential for future writers of this genre, to *The Job* written by Sinclair Lewis, a novel that uniquely had a female character as its main character (a rarity for the time), these novels are better known today for what they accomplished than Poole's novel for accomplishing in being the first Pulitzer prize winner for best American novel. Although Poole's novel was not as ground breaking as these previous texts, this does not depreciate the value of *His Family*, for it is a text that adhered to the wholesome nature of the prize and what, in the time, was considered to be good literature. As time progressed, so did the need to change the rubric for there were shifts in what the masses preferred to read.

If regarding the theme of change as an ever present and vital one for both American literature and the texts featured as winners of the Pulitzer Prize, a closer look must be considered into the changing of the prize's rubric and how the novels changed throughout the prize's existence. The first change to the originally established rubric came in 1929, where the rudiments of "wholesomeness" and "manners and manhood" were dropped and the rubric now stood to say that the prize will be given "for the American novel published during the year, preferably one which shall best present the whole atmosphere of American life". By introducing the aspect of "whole" within the rubric, this allowed texts that featured less than wholesome behaviors within their novels, and would broaden the span of themes that will be considered for the prize. This however caused confusion among the members of the advisory board for they did not know what whole could encompass. Thus, more changes were made to the rubric and in 1930 the rubric now stated that the prize will be given for "the best American novel published during the year, preferably one which shall best represent the wholesome atmosphere of American life". Even though the change of rubric came about within the time lapse of one year, and the changing of the rubric was minimal, it must be noted that the difference between the two is that previously, according to the 1929 rubric, the winning novel will *present*, as in introduce a text that will possibly make known to the readers of what was in fact an example of a whole, American life. For the 1930 rubric, it does not present, but it *represents*, meaning that instead of showing what American life was, it could possibly mean that it was showing a depiction or even authenticating what a wholesome American life could be. To add to the possible confusion this might have created for readers of this period, two more lasting changes to the rubric were made after the previous one was established. The first came in 1934 when a drama that portrayed a more Scottish life (*Lamb in His Bosom* by Caroline Miller) was denied the prize. This caused the

rubric to now reflect that the prize will be given to the “best novel published during the year by an American author, *preferably dealing with American life*”. The most recent change, and one that has been highly influential for the remainder of the prize’s history, is the dropping of the word *novel* and replacing it with the phrase *fiction in book form*. Not only will this include collections of short stories, but it will broaden the type of works that could win the prize.

Now, knowing the history of the Pulitzer’s rubric is significant in the sense that to understand the why of all these rubric changes is to understand that these were made to reflect the changing of the attitudes of the American individual. These changes are acknowledging the people’s interests and shifting preferences, thus making sure that the *popular* opinion is being taken into consideration within the construction of the Pulitzer canon. A way to appreciate this constant change is to apply Gilles Deleuze theory of politics of life and how it correlates with the prize and the American reader. For Deleuze, his main edifice was that everything is in the process of *becoming*. Moreover, in regards to human beings, he argued that there was no stable human being because it was always being affected by its environment. As a result, the individual that was, is, and will be will ultimately be different. Bearing in mind that this prize is one that is given yearly and in order to understand the reasoning of how these past texts were chosen, one must take a look at the history that surrounds the time of not only the choosing of the text but also the writing of it. Doing so, it will make it possible to understand the cultural tendencies that urged these changes to come into fruition. In the book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze illustrates how “A history of events and problems,[...], looks at how certain disruptions create new understandings of life, the human, time and space” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, pp. 292–3). Meaning that, if this is applied to understand the *why* of the Pulitzer Prize, one will come to the realization that both the prize and the American reader, i.e., the

American individual, are always in that state of becoming. The standards and the texts will never be the same because the American individual is in a constant search or flux for who they are and where are they going. The prize, as a culture industry, will attempt to shine a light on that ever changing course.

As a Pulitzer Prize winning novel, Michael Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* represents that original purpose of demonstrating and *archiving* the best representation of American culture through the winning texts. Harkening back to Frederic Jameson's concerns within postmodern culture, particularly how within this culture, there was a feeling of losing our connection to history, Jameson points out how with this loss and this weakening of history "both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose 'schizophrenic' structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts" (6). This means that in our withdrawal with history, within this postmodern culture, individuals are more concerned with stylized representations (albeit, possibly not accurate) of history and also favoring the present. From this, it seems that Jameson will look down at the efforts made by the Pulitzer's attempt in archival and representation of American culture because they focus on texts that were written in the present and how they epitomize what this prize has stood for since 1917. However, to contrast Jameson viewpoints, it can be argued that what the Pulitzer is doing is preserving these texts given the unstable postmodern environment to make sure that these texts, and what they represent, will be secure for future readers. As it stands today, the current rubric that is used is one where the winner of the Prize is a distinguished work of fiction by an American author, preferably dealing with American life. *Kavalier and Clay* upholds these standards by presenting a fictional, albeit historically fictional, tale of two cousins working in the new industry of comics during early

1940's New York. Regarding how the novel deals with American life, within its core narrative, readers will see the quintessential American mythos of marking your own place in the world and discovering one's own potential by transcending one's own current circumstances. From Joe Kavalier's artistic rise as a renowned and innovative illustrator of comics and struggles of incompetence of not being able to save his family in Prague, to Sammy Clay's efforts of doing everything he can to move away from social and personal mediocrity, failing to do so, and private struggles with his own sexuality, readers of this novel will come to see a plethora of qualities that deemed the 639 pages to be mulled over diligently. Furthermore, by being part of the Pulitzer canon, the novel is now representative of ever-present themes that run throughout the previous winners of this prize. These themes can go from the ever present reflection of the current setting/state of the American mentality, the importance of family, and the notion of multiculturalism in all its facets. It is this last one that is highly present within *Kavalier and Clay*, particularly how the novel provides the space for a text whose content, the culture and history of comics, comes from the popular culture and is now being included within the Pulitzer/High Culture discourse. Consequently, the novel is highly influenced by the culture of comics, a culture predominantly belonging to Pop culture, but is now being acknowledged by the High culture due to the Pulitzer, acting as a blender of both High and Pop Culture. Thus, by *Kavalier and Clay* winning the Pulitzer, it will be forever preserved as a text that has done all of this and is still capable of doing so much more by considering it a postmodern text. As such, *Kavalier and Clay*, in providing this space where the novel as a text that contains binary cultures, collapses the present hegemony that exists within the two and creates a text that sits, on its own, as something else entirely. In collapsing this hegemony, the novel will come to represent new characteristics that will deem it to be looked at through a postmodern lens. There may be a

contradiction to all of this, in that, this text is still a novel, and may be seen as a hegemonic re-appropriation of comics. Further along in this reading, this contradiction is resolved.

Coming full circle with the Postmodern Trickster

Having already considered the postmodern potential of *Kavalier and Clay* and how this is a text that permeates the literary cultures of the high and the popular, and also a text that exist within the boundaries of the culture industry, what is left to look at is how this text embodies the traits of the literary and cultural trickster. On this trickster, there have been several scholars to write about this cultural figure and its function. Paul Radin writes in *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, “Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. . . . He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being” (xxiii). For Radin, the trickster is one who corrupts authority and consequently establishes it as well; it is a figure that as it disorders, it creates a new order. On this same line of thought, there is also Lewis Hyde, who, in *Trickster Makes this World*, specifies how the trickster is a figure that has the ability to cross, break and blend the boundaries of culture authority. From the Greek god of Hermes and the titan Prometheus, to the Native American figures of Raven and Coyote, this trickster figure exists and prevails throughout most world cultures. Hyde highlights how this figure “is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox” (7). As an agent of doubleness, the trickster can be a part of either binary construct and is able to traverse both of these binaries. As such, the trickster has the ability to exist within the borderlands; neither here nor there, but just in the middle of binary cultures. There are other scholars that go beyond, in

terms of what Radin and Hyde have written about this figure, particularly in what the trickster can do. For instance, in “Transformations of the Trickster”, Helen Lock argues for a more aggressive trickster, one that is “immoral and blasphemous and rebellious, and his interest in entering the societal game is not to provide the safety-valve that makes it tolerable, but to question manipulate and disrupt its rules” (Lock). From this it can be said that this kind of trickster is one that does not just cross the borders and challenging these restrictions, but it is a figure that also redrawing these same borders. Seeing as this trickster has been a staple in mankind’s literary culture, this redrawing of boundaries has been a constant aspect throughout humanity. So when a new literary period rises, a trickster will be there to challenge and rearrange what is deemed to be the new norm. As Lock illustrates “tricksters have often been held to embody (before the fact, as it were) many of the same characteristics as postmodernism” (Lock). Therefore, when looking at the literary period of postmodernism, one can identify how this contemporary trickster, if it is defined as a postmodern trickster, is one that is largely self-aware; it knows it is a trickster and knows what it can do as such.

As postmodern trickster, both the text and author need to adhere to the principles of postmodernism to be considered as such. Returning to Barry Lewis’ essay “Postmodernism and Fiction”, the most appropriate postmodern traits to be applied for this occurrence are that of temporal disorder, and, for the furthestmost part, the trait of vicious circles. Going back to temporal disorder, Lewis argues that “postmodernist fiction does not just disrupt the past, but corrupts the present too” (114). Now, with the postmodern feature of vicious circles, Lewis explains that they “arise in postmodernist fiction when both text and world are permeable, to the extent that we [the reader] cannot separate one from the other” (120). This occurs when either the author steps into the narrative, an act termed by Lewis as “short circuits”, or when real life

historical figures appear in fictions, i.e. “double blinds”. As such, by combining these two features, it will allow for *Kavalier and Clay* to be considered a text that tampers with history by the hand of an overly active author. Regarding double blinds, particularly in historical novels, these were actual figures of history that were placed within these narratives that acted as how they were known to act to maintain some form of historical accuracy. However, when introducing these kinds of figures in a postmodern text, this form of accuracy is often played with to portray these historical characters in a different light; perhaps one that will reflect upon the novel’s narrative. Within postmodernist fiction, Lewis writes that “the boundaries separating the literal and the metaphorical will never fully form, and any moves to resolve matters result only in further entanglement” (120). An example of this can be seen in *Kavalier and Clay* where readers encounter the figure of Orson Welles and how he expressed his fascination with Joe and Sammy’s work with the Escapist. Historically, Welles is known as a major figure in the arts of radio broadcasting, theater and film. So when Chabon had Welles interact with both Joe and Sammy at the premiere of his renowned film *Citizen Kane* in 1941, readers could see the merger of these real and fictional worlds. This notion is seen a bit differently within Chabon’s novel, seeing as how the worlds of history and fiction are being consistently amalgamated, they will never really regain their own former footing, but will however remain united in the actual novel. Therefore, by introducing characters that are in fact historical figures, and having these characters exist in the same space as the main fictional characters of Joe, Sammy, and Rosa, the narrative of *Kavalier and Clay* and where it stands in regards to being either a historical or fictive tale, will not be resolved entirely. As a result, it will always be in the middle, the borderlands of these two worlds.

Seeing how much has been said about trickster figures and how these take the shape of characters and trickster narratives, what should also be considered is how the author of the novel can be deemed trickster as well. The plausibility of this can be justified by the idea that the nature of the trickster is not solely just applicable to trickster characters and figures, but it can also be applied to the writers of these trickster narratives, especially if those writers remain active with the text far after it has been published. If considering Chabon is a trickster author one has to see how played the role of trickster beyond what he wrote in *Kavalier and Clay*. One instance where this can be seen is when Chabon spoke about reading old issues of the Escapist comics, the ones his fictional characters from his novel created back in the 1940's, when he was a child during the 1960's and 1970's. With this lie, this trick from the author, he is creating a past that never was by talking about a comic book character that did not exist until it was first published within *Kavalier and Clay* in the year 2000. Thus, Michael Chabon, as a postmodern trickster novelist, is embodying this notion of temporal disorder in order to amplify the novel's historical metafictional footing in the space of contemporary literature. Therefore, by seeing Chabon as postmodernist trickster, he recognizes the dichotomies of the historical and the fictional, but also works to unite the two in a unique blend within the novel. He is the conductor of an orchestra that plays two very different styles of music, and is trying to make them work. Furthermore, in his own collection of essays titled *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing along the Borderlands*, Chabon believes that "the writing of fiction is akin to the work of a stage magician, a feat of sustained deception in which by imagery and language the trickster leads the audience to believe in the existence or possibility of a series of nonexistent or impossible things" (206). From this it can be understood that, in writing fiction, Chabon acts as trickster that meshes the truth (historical accounts) with the fiction (the characters he creates) and puts them in a novel

where both history and fiction are coexisting in a space of its own making. It is in this space where *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* recognizes the tensions that exist between culture industries and the texts that stem from them, blends the literary cultures that come from texts that won the Pulitzer Prize and are comprised of the discourse of comics, and can ultimately be regarded as a postmodern text. Doing so, it will allow for Chabon's novel to be regarded and understood to be a postmodern historiographic metafictional text that unites all of these different components together in order to create this transformative text that will allow for all of these diverse elements to coexist within this sole narrative.

Chapter Three: Postmodern Comics Discourse in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*

Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* is a novel that roots itself so deep into the culture and history of comics, that it might as well be called a comic book. However, it is neither of these, because it does not contain any of the imagery or structural characteristics that are identifiable in standard comics. What it does contain is an immense amount of content pertaining to the culture of comics. This is seen through the historical accuracy of the real-life personages featured in the novel from the Golden Age period of comics' history from 1939 to 1954. Because the book stands firmly on this culture, it is essential to look at the comics discourse within this novel in order to understand its significance within this text. This will be done by looking at these cultural elements through the lens of postmodernism, more specifically, through the already established postmodern aesthetics of pastiche, the permutation and or shuffling of narrative styles within the text, and fragmentation, a trait that concerns itself with the breaking and reordering of the narrative structure. As such, this chapter is directed towards defining, reviewing, and re-viewing the novel's postmodern relationship with the discourse of comics culture. When it comes to what will be defined, this chapter will demonstrate the novel's intricate relationship with the discourse of comics culture. Furthermore, these unique elements will be reviewed in order to understand this novel's place within this discourse. Subsequently, the chapter will explore how the novel's unique narrative structure, i.e., the prose retellings of the comic book stories, can be re-viewed to fully grasp the novel's potential as a postmodern text. Ultimately, the aim of this chapter is to highlight how the unique literary approaches that are used to study comics, can also be applied to *Kavalier and Clay*.

Defining *Kavalier and Clay* as a...comic book?

The notion that Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* can be deemed a postmodern text is one that enables this text to be studied under an umbrella of attributes that will open it up to numerous forms of interpretations. Concerning this segment and *Kavalier and Clay*'s relation to postmodern comics discourse, what will be determined is how, under this postmodern guise, can *Kavalier and Clay* be considered a comic book.

Firstly, what must be done to determine this rather unusual claim is define what a comic book is in order to see if this definition will work with what *Kavalier and Clay* is as a postmodern text. Comics, throughout its history, have had an excess of definitions that try to attempt to capture what qualities, in terms of its unique mechanics, work in its relation to other literary mediums and forms. Even though comics have been deemed as a medium of literature, given their unique characteristics, i.e. works that incorporate images and texts that are juxtaposed to create a narrative, they are better defined as an *art form* rather than just a medium for the simple reason that medium is a classification that is far too enclosing. Therefore, when reading a definition crafted by renowned comics pioneer and scholar Will Eisner who, in his book *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*, defines comics as “a form of sequential art, often in the form of a strip or a book, in which images and text are arranged to tell a story” (xvii), the claim of comics being a form of art is seen as justified. Now, the other comics scholar that is often referred to when it comes to defining comics is Scott McCloud. In his 1993 seminal comic book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, McCloud formulates a working definition of what comics are according to previous and current representations of this sequential art form. He defines comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the reader” (McCloud 9). McCloud's

definition is one that encompasses almost all sorts of comics, including paper-based and web-based comics, but more importantly, his definition is one that solely stays within texts that incorporate images. What has been said so far is effective in order to determine how comics are defined in accordance to their narrative structure and overall potential.

However, what has not been made clear is how comics and traditional prose narratives can possibly be linked as they are in *Kavalier and Clay*. In an interview conducted by Hillary Chute for the online magazine *The Believer*, McCloud was asked about how he sees images collaborating with prose in comics. His reply highlighted how this tension and fluidity between words and images within the space of a comic page, makes comics such a distinctive text. This struggle that McCloud is talking about, the tension that both words and illustrated images have to reach their full potential, but still have them work together to create one cohesive narrative, is one that is unique for this art form. But what happens when you have a clear comic story solely written in prose within a prose novel? Does the relationship between images and words change drastically because there are in fact no images, but just imagery derived from the text? Yes, a story in any form or medium, whether it is told through prose or through comics will regardless still be a story. However, within the novel *Kavalier and Clay*, there are these clear comic book stories that are solely written in prose, thus complicating this issue of whether or not Chabon's novel is just a novel, or something else. By utilizing the postmodern aesthetics to delve into these unique segments, the answers to these queries are acquired.

Observing postmodernism's relationship with comics, one will come to understand how this movement and medium were almost meant to be paired. One such scholar that recognized this unique pairing is Hillary Chute. In the article "The Popularity of Postmodernism", Chute first establishes this connection by defining comics as a "narrative word-and-image form that

often identifies itself as modernist, but which is rather-at least in its contemporary flourishing, an expansion and creation of new literary spaces- deeply enabled by postmodernism” (Chute 356). Chute notes comics’ connection with literary modernism due to how these narratives rely on imagism, one of Modernism’s main pillars, to convey the ideas within the text. Also, it is in this medium’s nature to always explore and exist, just like with Modernist writers, within the realms of the avant-garde. Two examples of comics that delve into the traditions of the avant-garde can be seen with early 20th century comic strips titled “Krazy Kat” by George Herriman (see figure 1) and “Little Nemo in Slumberland” by Winsor McCay (figure 2). Both of these artists, using the limited space of the newspaper page, created texts that provided readers with a depthless narrative that was not seen or done before in this art-form.



Fig. 1. Herriman’s *Krazy Kat* from Sept. 12, 1937

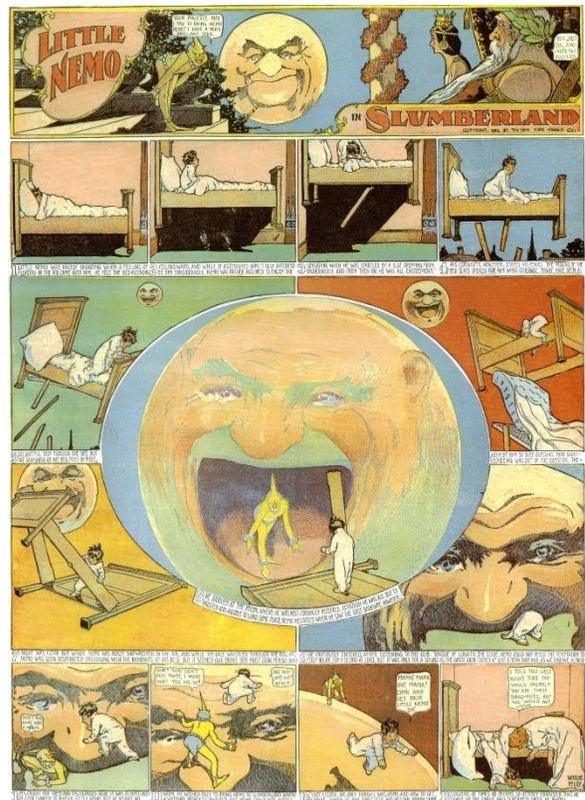


Fig. 2. McCay’s *Little Nemo in Slumberland* Dec. 3, 1905

However, remarking this connection, one can also realize that comics are more akin to the traits of the postmodern due to their ability to create and be fascinated with spaces within the text, as

well as their mass-market appeal and reproduction. As such, by comics being a text that attempts to address and be accessible to the highest amount of readers, as Chutes illustrates, “it nevertheless recognized itself as a mass media form, and in this way itself furthered and helped to define the [to use Marianne DeKoven’s term] “egalitarian mixing” that is now a recognizable feature of aesthetic and culture postmodernism” (357). It is this *egalitarian mixing* found in comics, this mass-market medium that remains avant-garde by consistently reshaping and redefining itself, that can also be found within Chabon’s *Kavalier and Clay*. Furthermore, observing the novel’s unique narrative style, it can be said that within the text, there is an equal mix of traditional prose writing and prose-comic narratives. However though, this realization does not make it a comic book for itself. Yet, it is these findings that allow for this novel to be considered something else besides a novel. *Kavalier and Clay* by definition, is not a comic book. What this text is, allowing for what has been said here, is not just an example of a contemporary 21st century postmodern novel, but more importantly, a transformative postmodern text that adheres to the discourse of literary prose narratives as well as comics discourse.

Reviewing the Paratext of Comics Culture in *Kavalier and Clay*

Concerning the novel’s rooting in this comics culture, and how it can be possibly defined by this said discourse, what must be looked at is what unique elements from this discourse are present within the text. Doing so, will further illustrate and clarify how this seemingly traditional prose novel can also be a part of the postmodern comics discourse. This will be achieved by reviewing and *re-viewing* these discourse elements found in *Kavalier and Clay*. What will be specifically reviewed are the particular elements of paratexts first described by Genette earlier in this thesis, more specifically the paratextual aspects of the novel’s cover design (two of which

will be analyzed) and as well as the novel's title. By reviewing these elements, what will be seen is how the text, by the hand of both publisher and the author, places itself within this discourse by how it was marketed, and also by its narrative focus, i.e. the comic writers of 1940's New York. As for what will be *re-viewed*, it is the diegetic segments of this novel, particularly the homodiegetic segments where Chabon presents the comic book stories, in prose form, created by the characters of Joe and Sammy which will be looked at through a postmodern lens.

A place to start appreciating how the discourse of comics culture is found in the novel is by looking at the book's cover art, in particular the cover art from the first paperback edition, and determine how it helps to introduce the reader into this culture (see fig. 3). When *Kavalier and Clay* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction on April of 2001, just four months after, the first paperback edition was published on August 25, 2001 with the seal that marks it a Winner of the Pulitzer Prize.

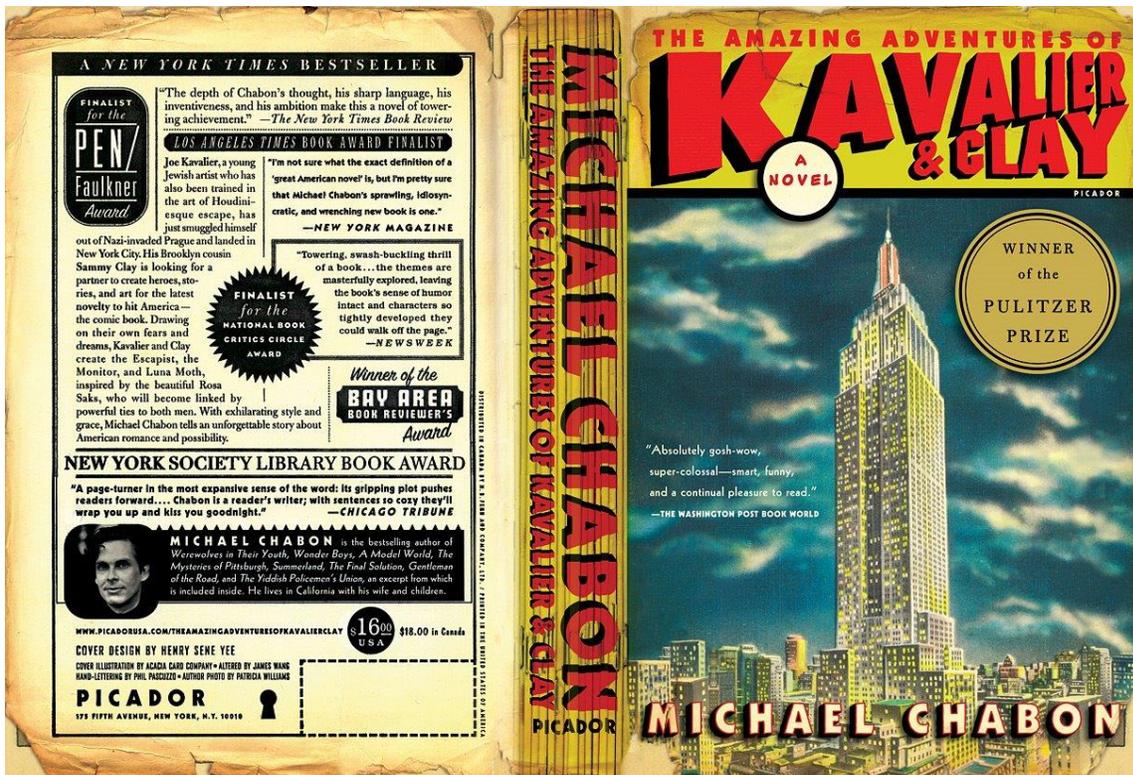


Figure 3. Cover art for *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* 2001 Paperback edition. Published by Picador, and designed by Henry Sene Yee.

What is really unique about this edition is how the cover art, designed by Henry Sene Yee, is an homage to those pulp magazines that were famous, yet not revered, back in the 1930's and 1940's. They were called pulp magazines for the material used was an inexpensive paper made from wood pulp, creating a magazine whose paper was a bit lumpy, yet characteristic to the touch. As such, this edition of *Kavalier and Clay* was designed this way to be marketed as a book that has connections to the time when pulp magazines were hugely popular, successful, but not yet respected because their potential was not appreciated by a broader audience. This pulp aesthetic of the cover art will concentrate readers' attention to the novel's treatise of the underappreciated yet vibrant culture of the pulps, and subsequently the culture of the early superhero comics of the 1930's and 1940's¹. Using Genette's research on paratexts, what this can be attributed to, and interpreted as such, is what is called the publisher's peritext (peritext being the elements that comprise the paratext). This publisher's peritext is defined by Genette as the spatial and material "zone of the peritext that is the direct and principal (but not exclusive) responsibility of the publisher... that exists merely by the fact that a book is published and possibly republished and offered to the public in several varied presentations" (Genette 16). It is this peritext that gives way for the initial contact with what the novel will be about by assimilating and embodying the aesthetics of the pulp magazines. This will provide readers with a leading context to the cultural history embedded in the novel's narrative.

Now, if considering the book's cover art as a gateway into the discourse of comics history and culture, then what also must be addressed is the 2012 trade paperback edition, designed by Will Staehle, and how its cover art was designed to look like contemporary comics (see fig. 4).

¹ It was this culture of the pulps that was highly influential in the early development of comic book culture, in particular, with superhero comics. The most recognizable example of the influence of pulp magazines had within the early conceptions of the superhero characters of Golden Age of Comics was with Bob Kane and Bill Finger's character of *Batman*, and how this character was inspired by Walter B. Gibson's pulp character called The Shadow.

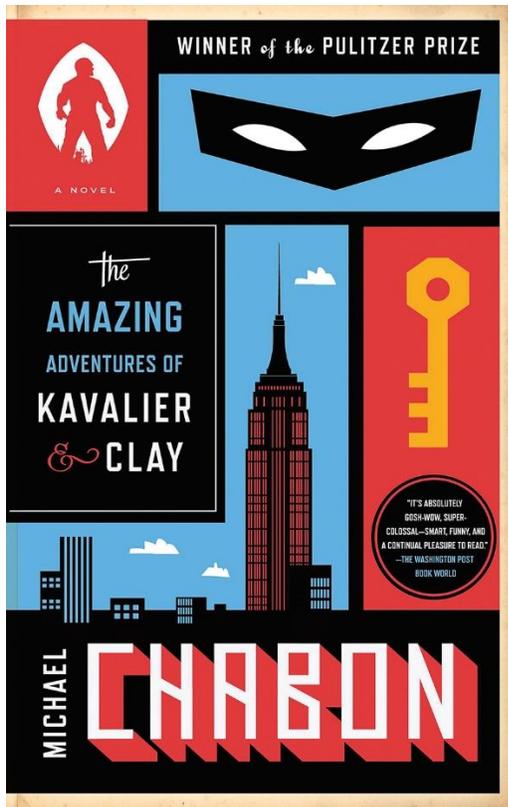


Figure 4. Cover art from Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* Paperback Edition 2012. Designed by Will Staehle. Published by Random House, USA.

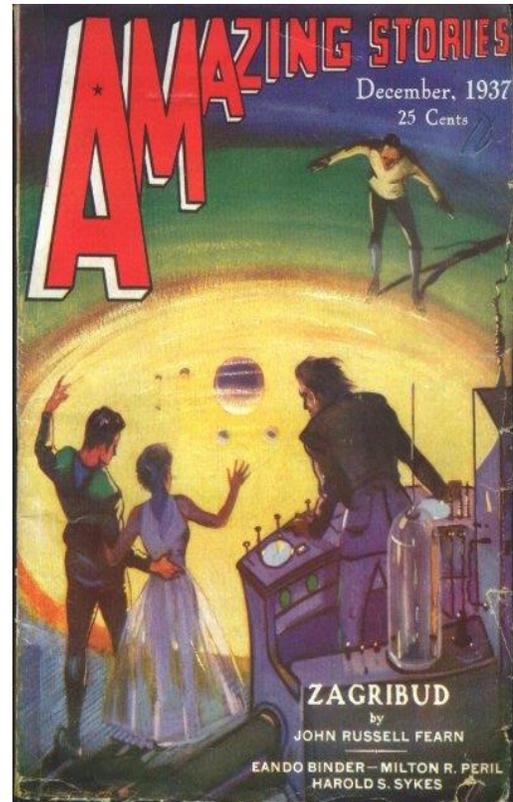


Figure 5. Cover art for *Amazing Stories*, Vol. 11 Issue 6. December 1937.

On first look, its square and structured design is alluding to the same structure of panels found in early and contemporary comics. This, and the inclusion of an emblematic mask used by superheroes, will provide readers a quick yet ample glimpse into what this novel will touch upon within its narrative. Therefore, given what has been discussed in this section, it appears that what is being done here with the cover art of both these editions of *Kavalier and Clay* is to allow potential readers to judge, or more prudently, consider these aesthetic comic elements before reading the already comics discourse heavy text.

Looking beyond the cover, readers will then encounter the book's characteristic title. Continuing with Genette's views on paratext, the title of a text is as important an element to discuss as is the novel's cover. The full title of Chabon's novel, according to how it is catalogued

in the Library of Congress, is *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay: a novel*. Looking closely into this title, one will see that it is comprised of multiple parts that will effectively inform the reader of the cultures present in this text. Genette's research points to two possible types of titles: thematic, which designates the subject or theme of the text, and rhematic, which designates the text as an object and identifies its genre. As such, the title of *Kavalier and Clay* can be thematic because it indicates the book's subject as one that focuses on the comic book and pulp magazine culture in the US of the late 1930's through the mid 1950's. This can be seen with the wording of the title, specifically with words like "Amazing" and "Adventures", and how they are very similar to the wording of pulp magazine titles like *Adventure* magazine (first published in 1910) and *Amazing Stories* (first published in 1926) (see fig. 5). Moreover, such wording can also be found in the titles of the those first comic book series from the late 1930's titled *Action Comics* (first published by DC Comics in 1938) and *Whiz Comics* (published by Fawcett Comics in 1940). On that same note, the novel's title can also be rhematic because, by recognizing this text as an object, it can be studied as such and understand how it works within the larger space of literary narratives. Therefore, surveying the book's title and juxtaposing it with the time it was first published (September 19th, 2000), it can be said that the work is one that blends both traditional and popular literary cultures within the space of this one narrative. Additionally, the title can even do double duty by being both thematic and rhematic, thus being, what Genette considers to be, a "mixed title" (88). Even though Genette argues that mixed titles "begin by designating the genre and therefore the text, then go on to designate the theme" (89) of the work itself, for Chabon's novel, the title functions a bit differently. Accordingly, what the title does is take both the elements of thematic and rhematic titles and provide a historical connotation for readers to understand how titles like these were used for texts of the era of pulp magazines and

early 20th century comic books. Doing so, it will provide a bridge between that historic period and the current contemporary times.

Taking into consideration our previous discussion, the other form as to how the discourse of comics can be reviewed within this novel is by looking at *who* the novel focuses its story around: comic book artists. It is wildly regarded that comic book artists, and cartoonists for that matter, have not been justly represented judging by how they are portrayed, if ever, historically. More often than not, it is these comic book artists' creations, and not the actual artists themselves, that are more widely known. Regarding the history of these cartoonists, there have been some works that do touch upon their history, some non-fictional, others fictional. An example of a fictional account of this history of the early comic book artists is Will Eisner's graphic novel *The Dreamer*. In the semi-autobiographical book published in 1985, Eisner tells the story of young comic artists, himself and other known artists like Jack "King" Kirby, in the very first years of the growing comic book industry in mid-1930's New York. *The Dreamer* presented a little known history of these early writers to a very "centralized" audience, e.g. mainly comic book readers or devotees to the history of comics, and was not readily known to the general masses. Now, with the publication of, and subsequent winning of the Pulitzer, Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* reintroduced this particular history to the much wider audience of people who read literary best sellers.

Chabon's inclusion of the unique elements of both the bygone pulp-magazine aesthetic and the concentration of his narrative on a particular set of historical, yet marginalized figures of the culture of comics, it can be recognized that his intentions may be to preserve these aspects and have the novel work as a form of historical and cultural archive. On the matter of texts working as archives, Jared Gardner suggests in his article "Archives, Collectors, and the New Media

Work of Comics”, that comics “are archives in the loosest, messiest sense of the word—archives of the forgotten artifacts and ephemera of American popular culture...” (Gardner 787). This notion can be appreciated due to how, historically, comics have been a mirror to the artistic and social preoccupations of the current times. Throughout history however, due to their comic aesthetics, these texts have been regarded as ones that are disposable which lack the seriousness and maturity to even be considered literary texts that inspire insight in readers. Part of this is their initial production conditions: comics were first published in newspapers, which are disposable publications that, for the average everyday reader, become useless the next day. Furthermore, comics emerge from that tradition and their standalone publication in the comic book format using cheap pulp materials suggested the same.

On the contrary, with the progression of time and attitude towards this art form, this notion of comics being mere disposable texts has been increasingly dismissed because, as Gardner illustrates, “comics do open up (inevitably and necessarily) a space for the reader to pause, between the panels, and make meaning out of what she sees and reads” (791). Applying this to the study of *Kavalier and Clay*, the spaces within the novel will allow readers to consider the dynamic intricacies of how the comics discourse blends itself so well with the narrative that Chabon has crafted around these fictional and historical characters. Returning to the discussion of the comics discourse, when Gardner describes the nature of the comic book collector and their desire to fill in the gaps left between each individual issue of a running story, he remarks on the outcome of this ambition:

It is the compulsive need to fill in the gaps, to make connections between issues (the serial gap inherent to comic production, mirroring and complicating the gaps between the frames themselves) that drives the “collector” in search of

missing issues. Indeed, the archival drive that motivates the form's production and reception is a forge for the (always uneasy) collaboration between reader and writer that is central to the comics form. (Gardner 800)

If considering this notion of a reader's need to fill the gaps in the text to be essential, then this will make sense when applied to a story Chabon once told about himself coming across his first issue of the "Escapist" comic book. Upon reading the introduction to *Michael Chabon presents: The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist Vol. 1*, a collection of comic stories based on superhero characters created by Chabon in *Kavalier and Clay*, readers will encounter this fictional account and how he remarked on how he was never the same again after reading his first issue and yearned to learn more about this character. So much more that, when researching for this book, he then decided to focus his tale on the accounts of Joe and Sammy (who are in fact, fictional) for the writing of what would later become the novel *Kavalier and Clay*. Some readers will not know that Chabon is in fact making all of this up, the fact that he found an old copy of the *Escapist* is false for the mere fact that he himself created this character after the events described in his own novel. However, the readers that do believe this fabricated past, they will want to learn more about "The Escapist" and will subsequently want to learn more about the artists Joe and Sammy. Thus, if considering Gardner's description of comic book readers and their eagerness to make those connections, they will then turn to Chabon's novel, the only text where one can find Joe and Sammy's story, and learn more about these characters, their past, their struggles, and what came to be to that Golden Age comic book superhero. It is this inherent sense of nostalgia for a bygone time, an unread (yet never realized/real) comic book character, and an almost forgotten pair of comic book creators, which drew new readers into *Kavalier and Clay*. They did it to reconnect to this almost forgotten past; a past that was and was not as well.

As such, with the inclusion of these elements, *Kavalier and Clay* functions as a postmodern temporal artifact that encapsulates these diverse aspects in order to be appreciated and grasped within the discourse of comics culture. Thus, by reviewing the elements that allow for *Kavalier and Clay* to be considered part of the comics discourse, and understanding the purpose and potential of the novel's paratextual elements, it can be said that this text shares many of the qualities and characteristics that become other comic books, without being a comic book itself. This in itself will help show the text's potential in being a [transformative] text that can be both a traditional novel and also a comic book.

Pastiche, Fragmentation, and the Re-view of the Comic's Culture in *Kavalier and Clay*

After defining and reviewing the unique elements of the comics discourse found in *Kavalier and Clay*, what is to be done next is to *re-view* the diegetic segments of this novel, particularly the homodiegetic segments where Chabon presents the comic book stories, in prose form. It is these comic book stories, created by the characters of Joe and Sammy, which will be looked at through the postmodern lens. This will be done by using the postmodern elements of pastiche, which refers to the blending of narrative techniques within a text, and fragmentation, or how the text is broken up into short fragments or sections and is separated by spaces, titles, or symbols.

By looking at how pastiche is seen in this novel, it is done by observing how the narrative techniques of both traditional prose writing and comic book writing are blended within the same text. This is seen within the novel when Chabon inserts comic book stories in between the chapters of the text. The first instance of this happening occurs in chapter 8 of part 2 titled "A Couple of Boy Geniuses". In the previous chapter, readers find both Joe and Sammy

contemplating as to what kind of superhero they should create and what is the overall “Why” for their character. In chapter eight of the novel, the entire setting, character set, and overall narrative style shifts to one akin to a comic book story. What is being portrayed in this chapter is in fact the first issue of Joe Kavalier and Sammy Clay’s “The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist #1”. It is here where readers are introduced to the backstory of what will later in the issue/chapter become the superhero the Escapist. It takes a while for the reader to realize what is going on because the entire dynamic of how the story was being told previously has significantly changed. In the chapter that follows, the story picks up right where it left off in chapter seven with Joe and Sammy exchanging ideas back and forth about their character. By looking at this as an example of postmodern pastiche, it can be seen how these two seemingly different narrative styles were able to co-exist with each other and were also able to craft a narrative that made sense to the overall idea of this particular segment of the novel. Another instance where a sudden comic book story appears within the narrative of the novel is when Joe thinks about creating a female superhero based on his girlfriend Rosa Saks. This occurs around the midpoint of the novel, in chapter 13 of part three titled “The Funny-Book War”. Just like with the previous instance, the comic book story appears effortlessly amongst the main narrative. In the previous chapter, Joe is taking a stroll through Union Square in Manhattan where he spots, on a young maple tree, what appeared to be a giant luna moth. Inspired by this and his blossoming relationship with Rosa Saks, he decides to create a new superhero character based on both Rosa and the moth. Therefore, when readers encounter the origin story of Miss Judy Dark, Under-Assistant Cataloguer of Decommissioned Volumes at Empire City’s Public Library (Empire City being the name of the fictional city where all of these superhero stories take place), who in this chapter becomes Luna Moth, Mistress of the Night, readers will be more aware that this is in fact

a comic book story, and the transition from one style to the other is a lot more fluent than before. What this ultimately does is allow the reader to experience a text that not only blends these two very different styles within the one novel, but also considers it to be “normal”, or put differently, for what is occurring in this novel to be par for the course. Ultimately what this will do for *Kavalier and Clay* is make it a text that not only experiments with pastiche, but succeeds in creating a transformative text that is able to do this admirably well.

Now, if the study of pastiche can be considered the *how* this novel works has a postmodern narrative, then the study of the postmodern element of fragmentation can be seen as the *why* this so works well within *Kavalier and Clay*. With fragmentation, it can be said that the reason for the insertion of these comic book stories as fragments within the main narrative of the novel, is to not only highlight the artistic abilities and creativity of Joe and Sammy’s work, but more importantly, they are there to also reflect the preoccupations of these two characters and serve as a sort of window into their own consciousness. In her article titled “Ragtime, Kavalier & Clay, and the Framing of Comics”, Hillary Chute argues that the novel “*Kavalier & Clay* presents a trajectory, showing us how its creative cartoonist protagonists embrace and adopt various comic book methodologies for the project of representing history” (282). Therefore, when creating their superhero The Escapist, Joe and Sammy wanted to have a character that not only had purpose, but was in fact meaningful for them in terms of properly representing the history of the times, but more importantly, their own histories. Likewise, this superhero character reflects their desires to *escape* their current troubles: Joe’s wish to liberate his family from Nazi controlled Prague, and Sammy’s wish to escape personal and professional mediocrity. So when readers of this novel encounter that first issue of The Escapist, they will be able to appreciate how these concerns are present within this one comic issue. As such, when looking at the rest of the novel, readers will

find how the walls that separate the fictional tales created by Joe and Sammy, and their own real lives, start to break down. When this happens, these two realities start to bleed into each other, thus creating within the novel a space where this form of convergence occurs in order to illustrate the reasoning of this fragmentation.

To further understand this point, this convergence can be seen when Joe receives the news that his father died due to illness in Nazi occupied Prague. This motivates him to take real action against the Nazis by any means necessary. Joe proceeds to discover the headquarters of the Aryan-American League (on the Upper East Side of Manhattan) and its sole member Carl Ebling. What followed was a brutal, yet short confrontation between Joe and Carl Ebling in his lowly office. From the novel, readers will see that Joe introduced himself as Tom Mayflower, or the character better known by his superhero alias The Escapist. After a physical altercation between the two, one that ended with Joe launching Ebling across the room and knocking him unconscious, he drew a sketch of his character and, signing it with “*To my pal Carl Ebling...Lots of luck, The Escapist*” (205), leaves the office victorious. As previously discussed in “Ragtime, Kavalier & Clay, and the Framing of Comics”, Hillary Chute “suggests that trauma breaks the boundaries of form, mutating the very shape of representation” (286). Although what Chute was referring to in her article was how the creation of the graphic novel (within the narrative of this text) stems from Joe’s real-life WW2 experience in Antarctica, what I am suggesting is that this mutation also occurred within Joe and how he became his own creation. The chapter further expands on this idea by presenting how Joe, upon reaching the headquarters of the AAL, imagined himself fighting the members of this league in comic book form: “Standing there, starting up in the window, Joe underwent a dark fantasy of running up to that office and bursting into that warrant of snakes, feet flying right up at you out of the panel [a comic book panel] as

jagged splinters of the door shot in all directions” (Chabon 198). Consequently, from this course of action, Joe *re-views* himself as his comic book character The Escapist and, as a result from this brief clash, he and his character, were one in the same. For this moment, Joe was able to escape the traumatic aggravation of his futility in order to become whole.

This is not the first occasion where this kind of transmutation, or something akin to this, between Joe and his work occurs. In the novel’s sixth part titled “The League of the Golden Key”, which takes place in 1953, 11 years after Joe’s departure from New York to fight in the war, readers will come to perceive an instance where Joe’s creations come to reflect his own personal transformation and his growth as a comic book artist. First, there is the episode where he steals an old Escapist costume in order to perform a stunt that would have him jump from the Empire State Building. With this performance, Joe was “promising a demonstration of human flight of the sort still routinely found, even in this diminished era of super-heroism, in the pages of comic books” (Chabon 531). By physically embodying his comic book character the Escapist, Joe is demonstrating to a crowd comprised of uniformed police officers, a group of young orphans, Sammy and his son Tommy that the power of these superhero characters to inspire wonder and hope in a better tomorrow still exists. Therefore, it can be inferred that what Joe was doing, as the Escapist, was providing a means of liberation, not only to himself, but current readers of comic books to allow themselves to be hopeful again, to make them believe that “A man can fly” (531). Here in this passage, readers will come to appreciate Chabon’s sense of nostalgia for this long passed Golden Age of super-heroism within these first superhero comics. Chabon thus creates a sense of nostalgia for a time that was in fact historically real, but achieved through characters that are completely fictional. This play of temporal disorder within this text is one that purposefully distorts history within the narrative of this historical metafiction novel.

Essentially, this action is *tricking* the reader to feel this nostalgia for a time that was, but at the same time, never was.

Throughout the novel *Kavalier and Clay*, readers encounter a text that is consistently delving in the discourse of comic's culture, particularly through the book's focus on the comic book artist. Therefore, the book illustrates how the story's main comic book artists, Joe, Sammy, and now Rosa, all shifted with the times, *re-viewing* themselves in order to find their place in the new era of comic book publishing that the novel culminates with. In the later parts of the novel, Sammy re-views himself and his place within the now changing industry of comics by becoming a writer of the ever-growing popularity Romance comics. As for Rosa, who throughout the novel was portrayed as a surrealist artist, found her own artistic liberation by working on Sammy's romance comics as one of the main illustrators. These comics came about from the shift of tastes that swept through all of post-WW2 America. During the war, comic books were filled with superhero characters, whose heroics battling overseas, provided the young soldiers with some sense of semblance and reassurance in their cause by seeing their favorite characters fighting alongside them. However, for some of these soldiers returning home from all of which war entailed, they grew tired of seeing violence being represented in the comics they now read in post-WW2 America. So with their changing tastes, came also a change in the industry and the kinds of works that were now being published. Stories of superheroes were now being put to the side to make way for other kinds of stories, particularly romance comics that featured stories of teenagers in love and their relationships. However it is with Joe that this notion is seen profoundly, and how in the book's final chapters, readers see how he has been working on a new, and much more different, comic book. Titled *The Golem*, it is a story that befalls heavily on Jewish tradition and folklore and on the ever important figure of the Golem of Prague. Although

not really featured in prose-comic form, it is important to note Joe's fascination with this figure and how it echoes throughout this lengthy text. It was the Golem that aided in his escape from Prague. It was the Golem that Joe first imagined when thinking about a design for a comic book superhero, which was then eschewed in favor of *The Escapist*. It was this figure of the Golem that provided inspiration for Joe's newest creation: the graphic novel. It is through their comic creations where these characters, particularly with Joe Kavalier, find solace and echo their struggles and desires.

As for this novel, it is by means of these narrative machinations of pastiche and fragmentation that Chabon incorporates and blends the narrative traditions of prose and comics discourse to tell these characters' stories in the most unique of ways. Reflecting on how *Kavalier and Clay*'s unique narrative structure can be used to define, redefine, and re-view its place in the postmodern discourse of comics, it can be appreciated how this is a text that can easily blend the discourses of traditional prose narratives, and more experimental comics narratives. Observing the book's production and how the paratextual elements of it further influenced and developed this novel's relation to the discourse of comics further expands the notion of this novel's cultural versatility. Looking back, one will come to realize that a story about comic book artists, figures who delve and experiment in the borderlands of the common and the avant-garde, could only be told in the manner this novel was written in.

Chapter Four: Michael Chabon/*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* as the Postmodern Trickster

Throughout this thesis, Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* has been looked at, read as, and studied as a culture-merging, transformative postmodern text. What this chapter will now focus on is how this novel works as a literary trickster. As literary trickster, what this alludes to is to how this the cultural and mythical figure will be, for the purposes of this work, regarded in a literary sense, i.e. the novel and writer of the trickster narrative. This novel will act much like the culture figure of the trickster is known to act: challenging authority, bringer of innovation, amalgamating binary cultures, existing within and merging distinct binary forms: high culture and low culture, fiction and history. This chapter will recapitulate what has been previously discussed regarding the relation Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay*, as a postmodern novel, has with the trickster figure, and then proceed to formulate new ideas that focus on how both author and text are analogous to what it means to be a literary trickster.

Traditionally, the figure of the trickster is one that exists between two binary worlds, worlds that exist in the same plane, but are vastly separated due to incremental differences. In this existence, trickster is a being that brings about change within its present environment. From the figures of Greek mythology of Hermes and Prometheus, who connected the gods of Olympus with the mortals below, to the Coyote of Native American folklore, who travels along the borderlands of the physical and spiritual realms, these trickster figures have been an ever present participant throughout world culture. By having the novel *Kavalier and Clay* merging and traversing the forms of the binaries of the high and popular cultures, it is behaving like Hermes or the Coyote, it is acting as if it were a literary and cultural trickster. An example of this is how

the novel brings together cultural discourses of the literary and the popular by being a Pulitzer Prize winning novel that also features the discourse of the comic's culture. Therefore, by considering this novel as a trickster figure, one will see how *Kavalier and Clay* will traverse established forms to bring about change and unity amongst high and popular art cultures. As a result of this, and by recalling one of the major themes present within *Kavalier and Clay*, this novel is *escaping* from being prefixed as a high art or even a popular art novel by existing within the borderlands of these two cultural bodies. Thus, by borrowing from both, it creates this unique space for itself to experiment with the mixing of high and popular literary genres.

Defining the Trickster Figure

On the timeless, culture blending and border crossing trickster, seeing as they have been a fixed point within world culture, there have been several scholars that have attempted to understand this cunning figure. Cultural anthropologist Paul Radin has remarked how trickster is one who corrupts authority and consequently establishes it as well; it is a figure that as it disorders, it creates a new order. In *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, a text that aimed at analyzing Native American tricksters, Radin comments on how trickster is “at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. . . ” (xxiii). For Radin, the trickster figure is seen as both destructive force and facilitator of the new. However, for others scholars like Lewis Hyde, trickster is seen as much more than just a bringer of destruction. In his book *Trickster Makes This World*, Hyde identifies how the trickster has the ability to cross, break, and blend the boundaries of culture authority. Hyde underlines how this figure is “the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox” (7). As an agent of

doubleness, the trickster can be a part of either binary construct and is able to traverse, regarding literary cultures, both of these binaries. As such, the trickster has the ability to exist within the borderlands; neither here nor there, but just in the middle of both binary cultures.

Further research into Hyde's work will provide added insight on what other powers does this trickster possess. To contrast Radin's views on the destructive trickster, Hyde's perspective befalls on how, acknowledging but not solely banking on their reputations as disruptive forces, "tricksters are regularly honored as the creators of culture. They are imagined not only to have stolen certain essential goods from heaven...but to have gone on and helped shape this world..." (8). It is these creators of culture, the bringers of fire and new vision that are essential for cultures to remain predominant within humanity. Viewing this in a more specific sense, particularly by looking at how trickster figures work within culture industries, one will see that they are essential for the back-and-forth that exists between the literary industry and its consumers. Moreover, if this notion is carried out to the culture industry of the Pulitzer Prize and recalling how this is an industry that builds cannon, one will realize that even here, trickster is present. The reason for this, as Hyde demonstrates in his text, is because trickster must always be in-line with cultural powers:

[The trickster] needs at least a relationship to other powers, to people and *institutions* [italics for emphasis] and traditions that can manage the odd double attitude of both insisting that their boundaries be respected and recognizing that in the long run their liveliness depends on having those boundaries regularly disturbed. (Hyde 13)

In having these boundaries regularly disturbed, or better yet challenged, new changes will be produced within these industries. With regards to the Pulitzer Prize and how the novel as

trickster functions here, it is this force that triggers the much needed change within this industry in order to recognize the changing shifts that exists in American literature. As such, when considering Michael Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* as a trickster text, one will realize that a text which blends the discourses of high art and popular art literature is one that is causing this disturbance that will bring about change. In causing these changes, it will create an opportunity for other texts to participate within this concourse of high art and popular art/culture texts. Being that creating opportunities, vis a vis opening doors, is one of the traits found within the trickster figure, then trickster *Kavalier and Clay* can be seen as a text that acts as a gateway for both high art and popular art discourses. This will allow readers to become participants in these multiple discourses within the one text and, within the space of the novel, traverse and experience the traditional prose writing of a Pulitzer Prize winning text that tells a story that is wrapped up in the culture of comic books.

There are other scholars that go beyond in terms of what Radin and Hyde have written about this figure, particularly in what other abilities trickster possesses. For instance, in "Transformations of the Trickster", Helen Lock argues for a more aggressive trickster, one that is "immoral and blasphemous and rebellious, and his interest in entering the societal game is not to provide the safety-valve that makes it tolerable, but to question manipulate and disrupt its rules" (Lock). From this we can understand that this type of trickster is one that does not just cross the borders and challenge these restrictions, but it is a figure that is also redrawing these same borders. Seeing as this trickster has been a staple in mankind's literary culture, this redrawing of boundaries has been a constant aspect throughout humanity. So when a new literary period rises, like for example the rise of postmodernism, or a new art form becomes popular and accessible to the masses, as it was with comic books, a trickster figure will be there to challenge and rearrange

what is deemed to be the new norm. When talking about postmodernism and how trickster could possibly play a role in this artistic movement, Lock argues that “tricksters have often been held to embody (before the fact, as it were) many of the same characteristics as postmodernism” (Lock). Therefore, when looking closely into how both this trickster figure and this artistic movement, as similar entities, can be detected within *Kavalier and Clay*, one will notice that both of these seek to blend multiple cultures, whether they are the cultures of high and popular art, or the literary forms of traditional and avant-garde. But more importantly, for what is being argued here, both the trickster and postmodernism have a sense of self-reflexivity. It is with this self-reflexive nature that allows the novel *Kavalier and Clay* to explore multiple venues within its own literary environment. Thus, Chabon’s text is not just a standard case of a literary text, but more of an active “being” that shifts and reshapes the culture it is actively participating within. It is because of this that *Kavalier and Clay* is a trickster text because the book continuously works and reacts with its “form” in order to appropriate itself amongst the multiple artistic and literary cultures and the readership that come along with this. As a result of this, the text is acknowledging its varied audience and its capabilities as to what it can do as a postmodern trickster text.

Michael Chabon as Trickster Author

After discussing the varied abilities of the trickster, what will be thoroughly looked at is how Chabon as the author of the novel can be considered a trickster as well. What is usually the case is that characters, and in the case of texts as well, are the ones that are deemed as trickster. However, it should not be overlooked the author’s potential at being a trickster himself. For this,

a closer look at his writing style and what Chabon himself has written on the trickster figure must be studied.

To start, looking into what kind of writer Michael Chabon is will help better understand the kinds of work he produces and the possible reasoning behind them. A review of Andrew Hoberek's article "After Postmodernism" will be a good starting point for this. In the article, he comments on postmodernism's embrace of popular forms of art in a manner that modernism never did, and from this, it created an appropriation of popular genres that would now be also termed as "literary". By popular genres, to what these refer to are areas of popular culture that were never seen as high art, i.e. science fiction, detective, pulp texts to mention a few. Michael Chabon is often seen as a genre writer whose works span the areas of comics, historical fiction novels, detective novels, and even songs. His exploration within these multiple genres can be seen throughout various art-forms. For instance, in 2004, four years after the publication of *Kavalier and Clay*, the comic book company Dark Horse published the comic collection titled *Michael Chabon Presents: The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist Vol. 1* (figures 6-7). In this volume, different comic artists offered their own versions of Chabon's fictional comic book hero The Escapist. What is interesting about this collection is how Chabon introduces it and how, by stating how he remembers the first Escapist comic he ever came by, is establishing his own historical background and connection with this character. He is not speaking of the Escapist as a character he created for his novel, but a character he encountered while rummaging through his cousin's comic collection in the early 1970's. As a trickster author, he is creating a fictional history so that the reader of this collection will be tricked into believing that the character of The Escapist is one that has existed for a long time. Chabon further achieves this deceit by remarking on how he again encountered this character at the end of 1995 while he was researching for the



Figure 6. Front Cover art for Michael Chabon Presents: *The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist* Vol. 1. Art designed by Chris Ware. 2004.



Figure 7. Back Cover art for Michael Chabon Presents: *The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist* Vol. 1. Art designed by Chris Ware. 2004.

novel that will become *Kavalier and Clay*. Through Chabon’s research of comic book history, with books titled *The Steranko History of Comics* and *The Art of the Comic Book* by Bob Harvey, he was “intrigued by hints and references to ‘the great lost superhero of the Golden Age,’ and in time decided to make that character, and his youthful creators, the subject of [the novel’s] fictional history” (Chabon 4). What Chabon is doing with this fictional account of him encountering the Escapist through his research is giving this character, and its creators, a new sense of discovery in the form of a long lost relic; one that in fact never existed before Chabon himself made it all up. Further into the comic collection, Chabon provides another space for this lie by giving readers a well-researched account of the publication history of the Escapist. Titled “Escapism 101” and written by Malachi B. Cohen, an anagram Michael Chabon, this faux-article, which was reprinted in this collection from the American critical magazine *The Comics*

Journal, informs readers of the complete history of the Escapist comics, its creators, and publishing woes throughout its extensive life-span. What this fictional article does, with its matter-of-fact tone and even citing Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* as a "detailed if somewhat hyperbolic and unreliable documentation of the period" (25), is provide readers further opportunities to believe in the fact that this comic character and its comics were in fact real. With this act, Chabon as postmodern trickster further creates a temporal disorder within the already established history of the comic book industry by grounding his fictional accounts into this very real history for this art form.

In addition, there are other areas where Chabon is acting like a trickster, particularly how he is bleeding through the boundaries of other genres and art forms and simply not just staying within the parameters of a novelist. For example, he has co-written both *Spider-Man 2* and *John Carter* films, re-establishing his connections to the comics and pulp fiction culture through a different medium. Recently, his exploits have reached new plateaus by venturing into the music industry. With his collaboration with British producer Mark Ronson, Chabon participated as co-writer to half of the records in the 2014 album *Uptown Special*. This precise union came about after Ronson read Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* and became enamored with it and its writing style. From this, Ronson contacted Chabon, an avid and knowledgeable fan of all things music, and started working together. Chabon's reaction to this news can be seen in Hannah Ellis-Petersen's article from *The Guardian* and how, for him, "It was something I had never, ever remotely imagined having the opportunity to do at all, even though I am a huge music fan and have been obsessing over lyrics and writing lyrics for my whole life" (Petersen). This fascination with music can be particularly appreciated in his 2012 novel *Telegraph Avenue* which takes place in a record store in Berkeley California, and from there started working on the album which

served to bring back that enthusiasm they both shared for 70's and 80's soul and funk records. It can be seen here, even outside the confines of his familiar grounds within the space of literary texts, Chabon as postmodern trickster is breaking the boundaries of time to create something new. As such, Chabon, by this matter is also crossing this divide between genre writers (of popular culture literary traditions) to serious artist, like those that win Pulitzers and become part of the high/serious literary tradition.

However, with these genres, they are often regarded as texts for mere entertainment and are frequently misconstrued as such and devalued of their literary potential. Nevertheless, just because a text may cause entertainment for its reader, it does not take away any of its literary value or regard. It is in this space where Chabon operates in the creation of texts that entertain and have literary merit. A manner of which he accomplishes this through his writing is by reveling in the delights of lying. From his own book titled *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlands*, a collection of essays that comment on his views and writings on comics, tricksters, and other genre figures, Chabon remarks on the pleasures of lying through his writing:

It was the pleasure that a liar takes in his lie as it enters the world wearing the accent and raiment of the truth, sounding so right and plausible that--- if he is any kind of liar at all--- he begins, himself to believe it. It was the pleasure that a maker of golems takes as the force of his words, the rhythm and accuracy of his alphabetical spells, blow life into the cold clay nostrils, and at the great stony hand unclenches and reaches for his own. (Chabon 191)

This section comes from the chapter titled "Golems I Have Known", and in it, Chabon writes about how his writing style, the mixing of lies with truth, the merging of history with fiction, are

akin to the making of the Golem figure. It is in the act, much like in the creation of a Golem, where one recites the right words in order for the Golem to come to life that Chabon enjoys when it comes to his own writing. As such, viewing Chabon as a trickster author would illustrate how he himself embodies the traits of this figure by being able to transform himself through his works. He serves as the catalyst that initiates the transformation of his texts for them to be trickster texts.

Chabon's novel *Kavalier and Clay*: A Postmodern Trickster

Realizing that within *Kavalier and Clay* a reader is able to appreciate the qualities of both the trickster figure and postmodernism, it is prudent to take a closer look at how this plays a role for the understanding of this postmodern trickster novel. To accomplish this, one must take a closer look at what specific aspects of postmodernism are more akin to the qualities a trickster figure possesses. Doing so, how *Kavalier and Clay* can be deemed a historiographic metafiction, a term devised by Linda Hutcheon that has been previously discussed in this work, will be better appreciated. Furthermore, by also reviewing Barry Lewis' elements of postmodernism, more specifically the element he termed as vicious circles, it will garner a better understanding of this novel's postmodern/trickster attributes.

One of the main features that both trickster and postmodernism share is how they both come to terms with history, or to be more specific, the narrative that can be taken from history. In Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she cites literary theorist Paul de Man when he remarks how "the binary position between fiction and fact is no longer relevant: in any differential system, it is the assertion of the space *between* the entities that matters" (de Man). Hutcheon quoted this from de Man in order to introduce the notion of how postmodernism works

in between the domains of fiction and history. Likewise, it is this same space where *Kavalier and Clay* cements its narrative; a narrative that blends fiction with historical facts. What this means is that the postmodern text makes history be significant and active, rather than just passerby. At the same time however, the postmodern text will challenge the established narrative within history. Therefore, when viewing how this functions in Chabon's novel, it can be seen in not just the novel's treatment of the early history of the comic book industry, but in every other aspect surrounding it like for example the U.S.'s involvement in WW2, the rising influence of popular culture through other mediums such as film and radio, and the growing suburban culture of the mid 1950's. So we can conclude that history does play a large role in establishing the ethos of Chabon's narrative. Regarding to the return, or better yet, the appreciation of history within postmodernist fiction, Hutcheon argues that in "postmodernist writing of history and literature, it does so by first installing and then critically confronting both [the] grounding process and those grounds themselves. This is the paradox of the postmodern" (92). As such, postmodernist fiction acknowledges history, but at the same time it has the liberty to distort it within the fictional narrative. It does not put History on an untouchable pedestal that cannot be challenged because, within this type of fiction, History is not sacred for it is another form of narrative. Therefore, when reading the story in Chabon's historical fiction of *Kavalier and Clay*, readers will have to take with a grain of salt all of the historical accurate details found in the novel. Even though it was well researched and the main historical elements from the story are in fact accurate, specifically the ones that touched upon the beginnings of the comic book industry, there are the subtle changes that *trick* the reader in believing that the story being told has the potential to be true. Thus, as this novel being an example of what a historiographic metafiction is, a text that blends fiction and history and experiments the authority of the latter, it will cause quite the

challenge for the reader because of what is doing with the narrative of history. On this point, Hutcheon illustrates how “historiographic metafiction shares the Foucauldian urge to unmask the continuities that are taken for granted in the western narrative tradition, and it does so by first using and then abusing those very continuities” (98). Consequently, when considering *Kavalier and Clay* as a historiographic metafictional text, what is being established is how this novel is challenging historical continuity by creating a narrative within this already established history. This is why, even though the stories of Joe, Sam, and Rosa are fictitious, they feel real because they are grounded on actual histories of these early comic book writers. As such, by *Kavalier and Clay* being a postmodern novel it is experimenting with the binaries of fiction and history within the narrative constructed by its author.

The second postmodern element that is prevalent within *Kavalier and Clay* and is very similar in their attributes with the figure of the trickster is what Barry Lewis termed as vicious circles. Reviewing on what has been said about these vicious circles, Lewis illustrates how they “arise in postmodernist fiction when both text and world are permeable, to the extent that [the reader] cannot separate one from the other” (120). This can happen when one of two things occurs: when a real historical figure comes out in the story, or what Lewis terms as a “Double blind”; or when the author of the story steps into it and becomes active in the actual narrative, otherwise known as a “short circuit”. Therefore, with the combination of these two elements within the novel *Kavalier and Clay*, it can be said that Chabon himself is the one distorting history by playing around with what is historical fact and what is fiction. This can be particularly noted with how Chabon portrays actual historical figures by converging with his own fictitious creations. Noting that the basis for the two of the three main characters, Joe and Sammy, were actual, real-life cartoonist of the early comic book period and beyond, the very fact that these

main characters were amalgamations of these real life people is to show just how Chabon took this real event in history, and portrayed in a different, albeit, fictional light. With this in mind, it is pertinent to restate what Lewis says about postmodern fiction and how “the boundaries separating the literal and the metaphorical will never fully form, and any moves to resolve matters result only in further entanglement” (120). This idea that Lewis is describing, along with the notion that Chabon as an active author that twists history is akin to what is described of tricksters: disrupters of any kind of establishment; the establishment here being the narrative of History. Therefore, in view of all that has been said here, it is not just the text that contains characteristics of the postmodern and trickster, but it is the author that also participates within this discourse. Thus, both text and author are one in the same when it comes to this idea of being postmodern tricksters.

Trickster Within: The Golem as *Kavalier and Clay*'s Trickster Figure



Figure 8. Golem of Prague with creator Rabbi Judah Loew

If author and text are deemed and studied as postmodern tricksters, then why not go even further and look within *Kavalier and Clay* for an example of this figure. A careful reading would suggest that the Golem of Prague (seen in figure 8), a figure that is interlaced throughout Joe Kavalier's story in the novel, is in fact one that embodies the characteristics of the trickster. This section will illustrate how this can be, and in what manner this will affect the reading of this novel as a postmodern historiographic metafictional text.

The Golem in *Kavalier and Clay* is the same golem that was created by Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel in the 16th century to protect the Jewish people in Prague from Roman persecution. In the novel, the Golem appears sporadically throughout the text allowing readers to become familiar with this figure of Jewish culture. It first appears as Joe's means of escape when leaving Nazi occupied Prague. Then, when first thinking about what kind of superhero he and Sammy were going to create, the first thing that came to Joe's mind was the Golem, which was later put to the side in place of The Escapist. However, later in the novel, when Joe comes back from Antarctica and secretly settles down in Manhattan, he starts working on a new project: a wordless, lengthy comic that would have the Golem as the main theme and character and would center on this and other figures of Jewish lore. Titled *The Golem*, this would come to represent Joe's greatest comic work within the novel. More importantly for Joe, from working on this comic, "telling this story--- was helping heal him" from the hardships of losing his brother Thomas and from his time in a U.S. military base in Antarctica" (577). For this thesis, and looking at how Joe's work with this comic fits within the argument for how this novel is a postmodern trickster, his artistic endeavors for this period must be considered. From her article "Ragtime, Kavalier & Clay, and the Framing of Comics", Hillary Chute illustrates how "although Joe pioneers an artistic form of comics, his aesthetic is inclusive of the "lowbrow".

The Golem transforms a lowbrow form but does not disdain from that form; instead, it incorporates and expands on the premises of the form of comic books” (287). In creating this artistically profound comic that does not distance itself from its lowbrow, popular aesthetic, it can be interpreted as a postmodern text for its inclusion of both high and popular aesthetic traditions. Moreover, what makes Joe’s *Golem* comic a postmodern trickster is the very fact that, by including both the high and the popular art form aesthetics, it makes it a transformative comic that challenges the very boundaries of the two art forms.

Now, it should be noted that Joe’s *The Golem* was presented in the novel as a word-less comic because Joe had not written any dialogue or captions in the pages. All that was developed of this 2,256 page comic was the art and, when readers encounter this text through Sammy’s reading of it, he does it by just following along the visual narrative provided by Joe’s artwork. From this interaction between Joe and Sammy, one will see how Joe is not sure if readers will like this story for he thinks it is too dark for a comic book (576). Prior to this moment, comics of this period were just mostly read by young audiences comprised of children and young adults. Adult themed comics were not the norm during this time because there was not a profound adult audience for comics. For Joe, *The Golem* was just more than a new comic he was producing, it was an outlet for him to purge all the bent up grief and rage he felt from leaving Rosa all those years before. Readers will realize that Joe poured everything he had of himself into this comic and saw how the more he did this “the more convincingly he demonstrated the power of the comic book as a vehicle of personal expression” (579). Prior to this, comic books were just texts that told tales of fiction and social satire. However, in the novel, Joe stumbles on a new purpose for this art form: that of memoir. Readers who are versed in the comic’s discourse will now that, in contemporary comics, works like these called graphic memoirs, one of the most recognizable

and critically acclaimed one being Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. If once again considering how this can be an example of a postmodern trickster, it can be said that Chabon's purpose for Joe's *The Golem* was to show how his character can further elevate the avant-garde nature of comics by producing a work like this, and by also having his character, in his own way, create and present the graphic memoir to unite both the discourse of the literary and the popular.

Ultimately, by looking at Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay* as postmodern historiographic metafictional trickster, it is being recognized as a text that does not just stay within the one literary culture, but a text that explores other literary cultures and art forms within the unique space of this novel. As such, this novel challenges the very idea of a work's transformative abilities that will garner a space for further potential interpretations. Thus, this Trickster novel will usher in a new wave of texts and ways to interpret these texts that will serve both readers and scholars alike.

Conclusion

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay by Michael Chabon is one of the most compelling and groundbreaking texts of the early 21st century. Focusing this thesis on how metamorphosis, escape, and transformation are seen within the story of two Jewish cousins and how they cemented their place in the new and growing industry of comic books gave way to numerous observations and scholarly advances. This was done by taking unique approach in the study of this novel by studying it under the guise of two very different, yet very similar methods. One of them was to consider and define how this novel can be deemed as a postmodern text, and the other was how it exemplified the characteristics of the literary trickster figure. Doing so, produced a thesis that revealed how Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay*, because being a contemporary novel that won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 2001, can also be a postmodern historiographic metafictional trickster.

Each segment from this work provided a distinctive viewpoint as to how *Kavalier and Clay* works within everything that was proposed previously. In the first chapter, the cultural divide between high and popular cultures were explained to provide a firm foundation for one of this work's core ideas. This idea being how high and low art forms, even though distinctive in their own manner, are always in constant flux with each other and what defines each of them is always changing. This then led to the discussion of how culture industries are responsible in providing a gateway for either of these cultures. An example of a culture industry was the American institution of the Pulitzer Prize and how, for more almost a century, it has chosen texts to best represent the values of this institution and the current best work of a given year. For Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction in 2001, this chapter looked at this text as such and how it distinctively was able to present and merge cultural binaries of

both high and popular art forms within its core narrative. This led to use the aesthetics and mechanics of Postmodernism in order to better understand how this novel could belong to both high and popular cultures.

For the second chapter of this thesis, Postmodernism is introduced, defined, and characterized as the main approach for which *Kavalier and Clay* will be studied. Through the use of postmodernism, particularly the use of scholarly works from Felluga, Lewis, and Hutcheon respectively, it provided the base for how Chabon's novel could have been considered a postmodern novel. Out of the many postmodern characteristics discussed in this chapter and how each one influences texts from this period, the ones that stood out the most were self-reference and temporal disorder. It was the latter that proved to be the most significant of them all for, in *Kavalier and Clay*, it was expressed how this novel blends history with fiction by introduction of the fictional characters of Joe, Sammy, and Rosa, into the very realistic world of 1940's through mid-1950's America. Through Linda Hutcheon's term of historiographic metafiction, this notion of merging fiction and history and how it was seen throughout *Kavalier and Clay* is used to comprehend this third space this novel created for itself amongst the spaces of History and Fiction. Furthermore, by exploring the diegetic and paratextual characteristics of this novel, postmodernism provided for a more complete analysis of enveloping comic's culture that exists within *Kavalier and Clay*.

For the third chapter, the over abundant and ever expanding culture of comics discourse found in the novel was explored. Firstly, comic books as a whole were considered postmodern texts for their avant-garde nature and how they appeal to the masses as well. From this line of thought then, Chabon's novel was considered a comic book as well for they share many of the qualities that define them both as postmodern texts. This notion was particularly noted by

looking at the prose comic book retellings within the novel and how, the insertion of them, represented the postmodern elements of pastiche and fragmentation. This allowed for the idea of *Kavalier and Clay*, a novel steeped in the culture of comics, to be considered on par with comic books for they are both postmodern texts. Secondly, the notion of paratexts, as in, the elements that surround novel, in particular the cover art, was studied and how it played a role in introducing and establishing the comic's discourse within *Kavalier and Clay*. Through the study of its cover art, it was remarked how both the cover art for the first and latest paperback editions of the novel were created to reflect both the cultures of Pulp comics from the 1930's and more contemporary comics. This, and the inclusion of the prose retellings of Joe and Sammy's comic creations within the novel, created a postmodern space in the novel where the popular and the avant-garde could co-exist in the text.

Subsequently, in the final chapter of this thesis, these notions of the blending of the avant-garde with the popular, fiction with history, and the high and with the low, was all melded together and studied through the guise of the literary figure of the Trickster. This trickster, that challenges authority and is the bringer of innovation, was found to have very similar characteristics to that of postmodernism. This was seen in how the novel, as winner of the Pulitzer Prize and a text that is embedded with the culture of comics, was able to blend the two into the one text. By doing so, the readership of the two are able to experience the same text. Moreover, by the novel exploring the boundaries of fiction through the inclusion of historical aspects and characters in the narrative, it is acting like a postmodern trickster, for this figure is one that blends differing binaries and challenges authority, in this case, the narrative of History, genre, form, and the dichotomies of high vs. popular culture. By *Kavalier and Clay* creating a narrative that blends history with fiction, it is creating a space where varied readerships can

approach and appreciate this novel. Lastly, in the novel's narrative itself, Chabon was able to incorporate the legendary figure of the Golem of Prague and have this figure be a catalyst for Joe's artistic evolution as a comic artist and for his own development to find his place again within his family.

Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* is a novel that truly does something great. It is a window to a time that revolutionized the very nature of popular culture and it is novel that takes great care to portray one of our most cherished art forms: comic books. The novel's power to escape the restraints of classification to transform into a text that takes the shape of something else entirely is one that is truly admirable for this text. To shape the text, both reader and author are participant. It is akin to the creation of the Golem, and how this novel is breathed life by both author and reader. There is a segment of the novel, where Joe explains his belief on the purpose of the Golem, which best reflects this idea:

The shaping of a golem, to [Joe], was a gesture of hope, offered against hope, in a time of desperation. It was the expression of a yearning that a few magic words and an artful hand might produce something--- one poor, dumb, powerful thing--- exempt from the crushing strictures, from the ills, cruelties, and inevitable failures of the greater Creation. It was the voicing of a vain wish, when you got down to it, to escape. (Chabon 582)

It cannot be said for certain that this was what Chabon was originally thinking about when writing this novel. Nevertheless, it is important for the reader to have these liberties with the text so that they can escape the already established notions of what has been said in order to create new works that will transform the very nature of what is being read and how we write about these texts.

Pedagogical Implications

With every new and exciting find within any field of knowledge, it is the sole responsibility of the person or persons conducting that research to also comprehend on how to take these findings, and share them in the classroom. With this work, there is no exception particularly because it was through a class that I was first introduced to the novel this thesis is based on.

Given that *Kavalier and Clay* is based firmly on actual historical events of the comic industry, it will be pertinent to read the text to learn more about the origins of this ever important piece in the grand puzzle called Culture. First off, students will be able to learn and appreciate how the early writers of comic books lived, worked, and developed their ideas through a text that illustrates this efficiently by means of an engaging narrative. From this, they will come to understand how one of the most popular art forms today was first established and how, through all its highs and lows, did it get to how it is currently. Moreover, due to the historical periods covered in the novel, and how it ranges from early 1930's Europe and the beginnings of German concentration and invasions, the early 20th century immigrant experience in New York, how young men and women were concerned and reacting towards WW2 through comics, and the rise of suburban culture and the exodus from the cities of the mid 1950's, this novel will provide a unique and more personal perspective on these events through the points of views of the main characters. If history is a narrative, then what better way to understand this vast and complicated narrative than through well thought-out characters like Joe, Sammy, and Rosa?

Furthermore, this book can be used to study the Pulitzer canon to then trace how the ideologies that pervaded all throughout American literature since the prize's inception have changed to reflect the ever shifting nature of the American reader. By studying this, it will open

up new discussions as to how culture is developed and distributed to literary canons such as this one and how they can consistently change through time. This will allow students to reflect on how something as assertive and influential as literature can transform, and escape its own established boundaries.

As a trickster novel, the reading of *Kavalier and Clay* will offer students the opportunity to learn firsthand what a trickster text is and how can an author be a trickster as well. By using the teaching methods of “Text-to-Text, Text-to-World, and Text-to-Self”, both student and teacher alike will have the opportunity to learn from the experience of reading a trickster text. With “Text-to-Text”, students will be introduced to this mythical and cultural figure by reading a contemporary example of it in the form of *Kavalier and Clay*. From this, they will learn about its main characteristics and discover the previous incarnations of this trickster that exist all across world cultures. By using “Text-to-World”, the students will apply what they have learned from the main characteristics of the trickster figure, how it is a challenger of authority, bringer of the new, mixer of cultures, and will then determine what other figures in their daily lives, whether in their favorite books or television shows, or even real life personages, embody the traits of the trickster. This will allow the student to become active outside the classroom, and will have them practice their critical thinking skills. Now, it will not be just students that will appreciate the fruits of learning about the trickster, but teachers as well. In using “Text-to-Self”, teachers of all kinds can use what they learned from this figure to reflect on how they themselves can be a trickster for their students. Teachers will learn that they are the ones that will challenge their students, to provide them that flame that will spark their knowledge, and to provide a space where their culture and the students’ culture will clash and coexist as one space where both parties will have the opportunity to grow and learn from each other.

Suggestions for Future Research

Throughout the writing of this thesis, a number of ideas and contemplations arose that, even though they do not fit within the argument of this work, should still be considered for future works. The following are a selection of these ideas and ruminations and how it will expand on what has been established in this thesis.

At the beginning of this process, before deciding on writing about *Kavalier and Clay*, there was another text that was considered. *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz was to be paired up with Chabon's novel for their similarities in how they incorporate the discourse of popular culture into the very heart of the narrative. I believe that a good number of the observations made on this thesis, can also be found and further expanded when talking about Diaz's work. Furthermore, looking at what other texts should be taken into account, it can be done with other novels that are similar in how they treat the history of comics. Examples of these can come in the form of Lee Henderson's historical fiction *The Road Narrows as You Go*, which tells the story of cartoonist Wendy Ashbubble as she explores the underground comics scene of 1980's San Francisco. Furthermore, similar in how it uses the comic book aesthetics in its narrative, *The Amazing Absorbing Boy* by Rabindranath Maharaj, tells the story of 17 year old Samuel as he leaves his home in Trinidad to now live in troll ridden, molemen infested Toronto. As for a novel that delves into the culture of superhero comics and the power they have to maintain friendships, Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* is one to consider as well. By reading and studying all of these texts under the premise of how, a working knowledge of the culture of comics is necessary to fully grasp what these works propose, it will further expand the dialogue established in this thesis.

Gerard Genette's ideas on paratext was an essential component in this thesis that proved useful to understand the discourse of comics found in *Kavalier and Clay*. This was done by specifically analyzing the cover art of the paperback editions. Now, seeing as these are times where texts are read more and more on e-readers, is this notion of paratext aestheticism found in the e-book version of *Kavalier and Clay*. From what has been covered here, I do not think that this is possible. Because of this realization, this will give more importance to the printed version of this work. Thus, open up no ideas as to how some texts are better read in print, taking advantage of the already established print culture, and how other texts are meant to be read as e-books.

On the matter of tricksters, this can be delved into by heading in two directions. First, seeing as the trickster figure is one that has been present in world cultures since the inception of culture itself, why not look into possible tricksters within contemporary texts. This was done here in this thesis by looking at the text, the author, and the Golem as trickster figures. If looking at comic books, particularly superhero comics, one will see that there is a figure that resembles one of the classical examples of the trickster. The character in question is DC Comics' The Flash and he resembles, in ability and characteristics, the trickster figure of Hermes. It will be interesting to look at how The Flash, throughout its published history from its inception in 1940 till the most contemporary representations of this character, and see how similar this character is to the worldly trickster. Another area this trickster figure that can be looked at is how the comic The Escapist found in this novel can also represent the traits of the trickster. This will be achieved by looking at how the creation, success, and inevitable downfall of this comic affect its creators Joe and Sammy and their own journeys in the developing, and slightly treacherous, industry of comics.

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