Alicja Bemben

Uniwersytet Śląski
alicja.bemben@us.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-7342-7748

Old future, new past, or how Neil Gaiman tinkers with temporality in *Marvel 1602*

Introduction

Although the Marvel Cinematic Universe followers might associate the X-Men, Doctor Strange and Captain America with a set of fictional stories that gain their momentum from the WWII onwards, the comic-oriented buffs of the Marvel Universe might be familiar not only with the much more extensive history of these characters but also with the less popular, though baffling, takes on their adventures. One of such alternate histories is featured in Neil Gaiman's *Marvel 1602* series.

In it, selected characters of the Marvel Universe are reimagined to exist in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe and America. Goaded, among other things, by the anomalous weather phenomena spreading across the world and the scheming of Count Otto von Doom, Doctor Stephen Strange, Sir Nicholas Fury, students from Carlos Javier's Select College for the Sons of Gentlefolk, Carlos Javier himself and Rojhaz team up to save the world. In the midst of major historic(al) events of the time – the death of Elizabeth I, the autos-da-fé run by the slowly de-escalating Spanish Inquisition, the rise of James I – they struggle with their "future" supernatural enemies – the mentioned Doom as well as Magneto cast in the role of Grand Inquisitor Enrique – and discover that their world is

crumbling due to the arrival of Steve Rogers, aka Captain America, from the so-called Earth-460, i.e. an alternative earth from the circa 2020 future. Ultimately, they baffle Doom's undertakings, rescue the Four of the Fantastick, and sail to America, where they seal the rift shattering their world by sending Captain America back through it.[1]

When considered from the perspective of how intellectually capti-vating it might be, Gaiman's story, undoubtedly, offers a number of interpretative grounds that welcome attention – be it the re-design of the graphics to match the historical context, or the quantum physics that informs the creation and functioning of the presented world, or the ideological underpinnings of the hatred/fear of the other that religious and genetic otherness seem to share.[2] Much as these and many other aspects of the series merit investigation, the object of interest of this text is the set of narrative mechanisms its author uses to impose the fictional future – i.e. chosen conflicts of the Marvel Universe from the post-1940s – on the historical past – i.e. the major historic(al) events that took place in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe and America.

In order to substantiate the thesis that, in the *Marvel 1602* series, the common denominator of the narrative mechanisms with which Gaiman embeds fiction in history is the idea of repeatability of situational and behavioural patterns, the following line of argumentation is proposed. First, the presented musings are grounded in the mythographic perspective of Mircea Eliade. Second, an outline of how selected events of the so-called "age of heroes" are transplanted into the Elizabethan age is offered. Third, I show how chosen Marvel characters are reworked to match the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century context. Fourth, the reiterative quality of the mechanisms the author uses for these purposes is delved into in order to support the view that the repeatability of situational and behavioural patterns is the main idea informing the narrative structure of *Marvel 1602*. In the conclusion section, I capitalise on the presented findings and suggest their potential implications.

---

[1] Neil Gaiman, *Marvel 1602* (New York: Marvel Comic, 2003-2004).

[2] Renata Dalmaso, "When Superheroes Awaken. The Revisionist Trope in Neil Gaiman's *Marvel 1602*," in: *Feminism in the Worlds of Neil Gaiman: Essays on the Comics, Poetry and Prose*, ed. Tara Prescott and Aaron Drucker (Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012), pp.116-130. Interestingly, not much academic research has been devoted to this particular work of Gaiman. As a matter of fact, all the relevant works are either directly quoted or, at least, referenced to in the footnotes to this text.

Different Heroes but the Same Story

One interesting paradox connected with the Marvel Universe is that, much as its characters are either widely acclaimed or, at least, not direly and en masse trashed on the grounds of their unique(less) construction,[3] the stories with which this universe is built are regularly and roundly criticised for showing "the same" events.[4] How the paradox of idiosyncratic heroes and repetitive stories is reconciled in the minds of those who attack the comic books and films of the Marvel provenance might remain generally unknown; however, what might be said about it is that its one source is the definite separation of characters from the events that define them. If they are capable of praising the former and denigrating the latter, apparently, the two might be drawn apart in the critics' opinions.

In this context it might be advisable to allude to mythographers' widely-acknowledged view – and the Marvel Universe is undoubtedly a modern mythology[5] – that one of the primary functions of myths is to organise our understanding of the world by referring us to past events. Mircea Eliade – in whose approach to myths my musings are grounded – formulates this thought in the following way: "Man is what he is today because of series of events that took place *ab origine*."[6] Thus, if one defines oneself and, more importantly, if one is defined on the basis of the events in which he and/or his antecedents participated, separating one's behaviour from the situation in which it took place or from which it derives makes little, if any, sense. Ultimately, such a gesture renders only a partial picture of an individual. Accordingly, Eliade's take on myths offers good grounds on which to claim that the narrative mechanisms in myths are highly likely to have common denominators as regards the characters and the situations they depict. Bearing the above in mind, I would like to delve into the

---

[3] The Marvel Universe fans tend to outdo themselves in extolling their favourite heroes rather than in denigrating the figures they not really commend. One exception that proves this general tendency is Captain Marvel – to my best knowledge, this is the first Marvel Universe character that has meet with a very marked and indiscriminate negative reception. See: David Sims, "The Greatest Strength of Captain Marvel Is Also Its Biggest Weakness," *The Atlantic*, March 5, 2019, accessed 06 April, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/03/captain-marvel-review-brie-larson-anna-boden-ryan-fleck/584125/.

[4] Justin Kownacki, "Does Every Marvel Movie Tell the Same Story?," last modified November 5, 2017, accessed 06 April, 2019, http://www.justinkownacki.com/why-every-marvel-movie-tells-same-story/.

[5] Rebecca Childs, "A Journey Through the Marvel Mythological Universe," *Marvel*, accessed 18 March, 2019, https://www.marvel.com/articles/comics/a-journey-through-the-marvel-mythological-universe.

[6] Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1998), p. 92.

narrative mechanisms that Gaiman uses in *Marvel 1602* to substantiate the aforementioned thesis that their common denominator is the idea of repeatability of situational and behavioural patterns.

Fictional Future in Historic(al) Past

To delve into the subtleties of the narrative mechanisms with which Gaiman embeds the fictional future of the Marvel Universe in the historical past of the Early Modern Period, the basic elements of this "gesture" of his need to be defined. Thus, in the following section of this work, I delineate the past and the future in question and point to their temporal dependencies.

Although the Marvel Universe is fictional, it does have a strong connection with our reality. The set of the pocket universes which "host" the stories presented in the comic books of the Marvel provenance is anchored in the so-called mainstream Marvel continuity, otherwise known as Earth-616 or Earth Prime.[7] As William Proctor notes, "the mainline Marvel continuity universe, Earth-616, [is] a central hub, and *alternate worlds* [are] interconnected with it like spokes on a wheel."[8] Were one to investigate the characteristics of Earth-616, it should come as no surprise that the planet shares a substantial number of features with our own. It came into existence together with the Big Bang, life on it also emerged around 3 billion years ago, Egypt was a cradle of its civilisation, and major figures of the ancient world – Socrates and Plato, King Philip II, Alexander the Great – made room in due time for the nobility and the clergy of the later epochs – King Richard the Lion-Heart, Robin Hood, Genghis Khan, the more famous popes and the Borgias. Just as we had to struggle with the Black Death so did the inhabitants of Earth-616 and, just as Galileo, Leonardo da Vinci, Sir Isaac Newton, Nostradamus and Sir Francis Drake contributed to the development of our world, so they did to the bettering of Earth-616. The birth of the United States and its reaching for

---

[7] Deron Overpeck, "Breaking Brand," in: *Make ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe*, ed. Matt Yockey (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), p. 163. Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 6, p. 4. For the sake of brevity, I limit my discussion of the Marvel continuity to its eighth iteration, i.e. the one that hosts the marvellous adventures we have been familiarized with since 1939.

[8] William Proctor, "Schrodinger's Cape: The Quantum Seriality of the Marvel Multiverse," in: *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe*, ed. Matt Yockey (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), p. 329, 332. [My emphasis].

independence also happened on this earth and its humanity also did not manage to avoid the major wars that tormented us over the last centuries (the Napoleonic Wars, the Second Opium War, the World Wars, the Cold War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War).[9] On these grounds, one might formulate the conclusion that Earth-616 is very closely modelled after our Earth; of course, with the exception that a film of fictional events, heroes and villains is superimposed on it. If this is so, it might be further concluded that, if Gaiman locates his story on Earth-616, sets it in 1602 and 1603 Europe and America, employs a number of historic characters – for example, Elizabeth I of England, James VI of Scotland/James I of England, Virginia Dare – and follows the historic(al) events of the time – the establishment of the Roanoke colony, the waning of the Spanish Inquisition, the last days of Elizabeth I's and the early days of James I's rule – he undoubtedly gives his story a "real" background.[10]

This background is, however, not only reality-derived but also historic(al) – and historic(al) in at least three senses. First, chronology-wise, the events and people of the late sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century are obviously a part of the earth's bygone days; they belong to *our history*. Furthermore, when considered from the perspective of the Marvel multiverse timeline, the events and people that Gaiman's work focuses on are also historical because they occupy a niche on the mainstream Marvel continuity that is located in the pre-1940s, i.e. they belong to the prehistory of what is commonly labelled as "the age of heroes," the original time of their appearance. Third, they are also historic owing to their relevance for the development of the said continuity – their pre-mature appearance on the continuity is shown in the text as a factor affecting its further development.[11] When juxtaposed, this substantial relevance of the setting as well as its chronological remoteness with regard

---

[9] "Marvel Universe Timeline," in: *Marvel Database*, accessed 18 March, 2019, https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Marvel_Universe_Timeline.

[10] One may, of course, question the realness of Gaiman's depiction of the chosen settings. However, this questioning entails the questioning of referentiality of any other "text" that employs real settings and ends up with one deciding that, e.g., London depicted in a reality-oriented text is either a reflection of the real London or just a figment of the author's imagination.

[11] As it is shown in a further part of this work, *Marvel 1602* is indicative of its events affecting the mainstream Marvel continuity. While Earth-616 is and remains the primal reflection of our reality, Earth-311, i.e. the pocket universe created as a result of Captain America's time-travel to 1587, is an alternate world that branches off from the mainstream Marvel continuity but that uses the realistic settings of Earth-616. I do not differentiate between the two earths in this case owing to their shared settings.

to the twentieth and twenty-first century justify interpreting it in terms of a historic(al) past.

This historic(al) past does not, however, constitute the only layer of temporality depicted in *Marvel 1602*. As has been mentioned earlier, it is combined with a film of selected adventures of Marvel's heroes and villains that, originally, are designed to take place on Earth-616 in the 1940s and onwards. To be more precise, it should be noted that, chronology-wise, these adventures belong to two futures. On the one hand, the author of *Marvel 1602* makes Captain America time leap from the dystopian Earth-460 pocketverse – circa from the year 2020 – to the year 1587 on Earth-616 within the mainstream Marvel continuity.[12] If this is so, a section of the fictional future of Earth-460 is embedded in the historical past in question. On the other hand, since Captain's untimely appearance is responsible for the premature coming of "the age of heroes," i.e. the appearance and adventures of mutants and fancy-skills humans, yet another segment of a fictional future embedded into the past of Earth-616 is that of the "marvellous" events taking part from the 1940s onwards on the same planet. From among these, Gaiman selects the conflict between the Fantastic Four, the X-Men and Doctor Victor von Doom, the tug of war between the X-Men and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, and a few other adventures, and plays them out in the Early Modern Period.[13]

On the basis of the above, one may venture to claim that Gaiman's reimagining of selected elements of the Marvel Universe is a form of reiteration.[14] Because the teaming up of the X-Men and the Avengers in the face of the world-destruction and the threat posed by Doom are

---

[12] 2020 is an approximation calculated on the basis of the information given by the so-called Watcher. In the sixth volume of the series, he explains that the time leap in question is to take place "in a little more than four hundred years from [1602]." Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 6, p. 4.

[13] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 6, p. 6 and Vol. 8, pp. 3–5. Since enumerating the titles in which these conflicts appear would generate a Brobdingnagian list, let me adduce the more important series: *New Avengers, Mighty Avengers, Avengers: The Children's Crusade*.

[14] At this point, I refer to no widely-acknowledged concept of reiteration but to the dictionary understanding of the word as "[t]he action of repeating something, typically for emphasis or clarity." *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, s.v. "reiteration," accessed 19 March, 2019, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/reiteration.

Since one of the purposes of this text is to flesh Gaiman's concept of reiteration out of his text, I work with the general understanding of the concept on the basis of which I present how the author himself sees it. Reading Gaiman's reiterative gestures through a particular, for example, narratological theory is not the object of interest in this text but be a logical extension of this work.

copied from their original context and pasted into the Elizabethan age, the introductory stage of "the age of heroes" might be said to have its general structure simply reiterated in a new context.

Nonetheless, even if this structure remains, by and large, unchanged, the detail amendments that Gaiman introduces into the construction of the 1602 versions of selected Marvel heroes are suggestive of the idiosyncrasies of his idea of reiteration. Since the purpose of reiteration is to emphasise clarity and offer a better understanding of a known concept, figure, process, etc., it is within the details of a reiterative gesture that one can discern what it is to clarify or elucidate. Therefore, in what follows, I focus on the "details" with which Gaiman complements the presented world, i.e. the selected heroes of the Marvel provenance. Bearing in mind the breadth of the populace that appears on the pages of *Marvel 1602*, I limit my analysis to three main characters of the series, i.e. Sir Nicholas Fury, Doctor Stephen Strange, and Rojhaz aka Captain America.[15] Along with pointing to the changes that Gaiman implements into the construction of these heroes, I suggest the narrative mechanisms that he uses for these purposes.

"Old" Characters in a "New" Context

Sir Nicholas Fury is one of the first characters of the series that we are acquainted with. In it, he is the head of the secret service, the so-called intelligencer, at the court of Elizabeth I of England. "All the *plots* and *counterplots*, all the words whispered and knives in the dark are his to unravel and employ," thus describes his tasks the comic book queen. This is so because Sir Nicolas Fury is, by and large, modelled after Elizabeth I of England's principal secretary – Sir Francis Walsingham. Just like the original spymaster, Gaiman's hero is also responsible for the creation and maintenance of a network of informers and spies with which to ensure the queen's safety.[16] Interestingly, this job description is also not much different

---

[15]   One might wish to include in this analysis also such characters as historic nobles (Elizabeth I of England and James VI of Scotland/James I of England), other key intellectuals (Carlos Javier and Sir Richard Reed) and superhumans (gifted students of Javier's school, Thor, etc.). It should, however, be noted that their role in the series is supportive. A preliminary research into their construction offers no conclusions contradicting the ideas proposed in this work, while widening the scope of the presented analysis would derange the cohesiveness of this text.

[16]   "Nicholas Fury (Earth-616)," in: *Marvel Database*, accessed 18 March, 2019, https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Nicholas_Fury_(Earth-616); Neil Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 1 (New York: Marvel Comic, 2003-2004),

from the one that could be ascribed to Nick Fury. Just as Elizabethan Fury heads the secret service of one of the major dynasties of the time, his modern counterpart manages S.H.I.E.L.D., i.e. one of the top anti-terrorist, peace-keeping and law-enforcement agencies of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[17] Furthermore, the men's physicality and behaviour are also not much different. One may safely assume that, if Nick Furry was costumed in Early Modern English clothes and had his hair refashioned, at first glance, it would not be possible to tell him apart from his gentrified version; and that, if Sir Fury was to aid the superheroes in their actions, his style of work might not differ from that of his American equivalent.[18]

Despite these striking similarities in major defining elements of the men's lives, Sir Nicolas Fury also differs from his "original" versions; unsurprisingly, at the level of particularities. For example, the 1602 intelligencer is endowed with the Elizabethan mentality and, unlike Nick Fury, he has a strong aversion towards the unknown and the magic, which, for him, boils down to trickery. Furthermore, in contrast to his twentieth-century equivalent, he is limited by the technology of his times – he has no ahead-of-time gadgetry at hand and fights thieves and murderers with chain mail, sword and bare hands.[19] Much as this discrepancy might be attributed to the author's wish to adhere to the selected historical context and draw on details from Francis Walsingham's life, this is only partially the case. Gaiman is rather selective in this respect and, while he makes Fury grow a goatee that the Elizabethan wore, he also opts for the eye patch that the spymaster never had.[20]

---

pp. 3-6, 13, 23; John Cooper, *The Queen's Agent: Francis Walsingham at the Court of Elizabeth I* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2011), p. 117.

[17] Paul Kléber Monod, *Imperial Island: A History of Britain and Its Empire, 1660-1837* (Oxford, Malden, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), pp. 78-80; Nicholas Canny, "The Origins of Empire: An Introduction," in: *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume I: The Origins of Empire*, ed. William Roger Louis, Nicholas Canny, Alaine Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1-5.

[18] In Stan Lee, *Avengers*, Vol. 37 (New York: Marvel Comics Group, 1963), p. 14. For example, Fury reveals—though with the use of dated-military slang—to the Avengers relevant classified information just as Sir Nicolas Fury does it in the series.

[19] Although Fury also undergoes a change of heart towards the Witchbreed—as the mutants are called in the series—and the monarchy—which by the way reflect the change he embraces in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—this type of reiteration is considered in detail in my analysis on the example of Rojhaz, i.e. the most pronounced case of behavioural reiteration.

[20] To my best knowledge, no texts or portraits suggest that Walsingham ever wore an eye patch; addition-ally, he is portrayed wearing beard during his service at the court of Elizabeth I. Although Nick Fury is depicted with no eye patch in the comic books dealing with his early adventures—his identification mark in general—

This might be so because the features with which the author reworks Fury to embed him in the new context are not only the ones that the spatial, technological, etc., limitations of the period in question impose. It is the author's unforced choice to reimagine the hero who is in charge of an agency with near limitless funding, whose key workers are invariably superhuman and even divine and whose work area is otherworldly into a man who works for Elizabeth I of England, who believes that "in this world of secrets and powers, [man] must understand *many* things" but also needs to be satisfied with what providence brings him. It is his unimposed gesture as well to make Sir Fury a man who provokes a prisoner to hand-to-hand fight for his freedom.[21]

Although this exemplifying of how Gaiman draws on various sources in order to construct the Elizabethan version of Fury might be continued further, the constatation I would like to propose at this point can be sufficiently supported with what has already been adduced. The character construction that the author resorts to in this case is based on a two-level mechanism. When it comes to the outline of the Elizabethan version of Fury, it is a copy of Nick Fury's as well as Francis Walsingham's life framework(s). This outline is then completed in a patchwork manner either with reworks of details culled from the relevant historical context or with the upshots of the author's assumptions about what would make this character appealing, believable.

Even though Stephen Strange was originally born in 1930 and, in consequence of pursuing his medical interests, became a neurosurgeon of a worldwide class and wealth at the age of thirty, ultimately, he matches the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century context much better than his primary one. This is so because an end-result of the car crash in which he was involved in 1963 was that he changed his trade and became a mystic consultant. As one can easily surmise, a magician who lives in the so-called Sanctum Sanctorum, i.e. in "the focal point for mystical energies [and] the veins of magic running through the Earth," and who also communicates

---

Marvel 1602 is the only series in which he appears with a goatee. Anonymous, *Portrait of Sir Francis Walsingham*, 1585-1590, oil on panel, Philip Mould & Co, London; Stan Lee, *Sgt. Fury and the Howling Commandos*, Vol. 27 (New York: Marvel Comics Group, 1966).

²¹ "Nicholas Fury (Earth-616)"; Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 1, pp. 3-6, 13, 23 and Vol. 3, pp. 20–24.

by means of telepathy and mental journeys,[22] seems to be much closer to a twelfth-century alchemist trying to concoct the philosopher's stone rather than to a twentieth- or twenty-first-century scholar scrutinising ancient practices. Perhaps, this is why the "master of the queen's medicines," as the monarch addresses Strange in the series, is not markedly different from his modern equivalent.[23]

What does differ the contemporary and the Elizabethan versions of Doctor Strange is not so much their appearance, lifestyle and abilities as the way they react to the dangers they face. Of course, the Early Modern Strange has his costume adjusted to the fashion trends of the age, works for the incumbent queen and shrithes between the palace and his Greenwich house in a boat. But, unlike it is in Fury's case, these historical-context dependent changes seem to be of secondary importance with regard to the unique intellectual *modus operandi* that this version of the character is equipped with.[24] When leafing through the eight volumes of *Marvel 1602*, one may observe a striking consistency with which Doctor Stephen Strange comments on his environment, i.e. that informed by growing certainty. In the first five parts of the series, the hero keeps repeating *ad nauseam* that neither the reasons for nor the nature of the events happening at the time are known to him. In lieu of instant decisions and highly effective actions so characteristic of the twentieth and twenty-first-century version of Strange,[25] he offers merely suggestions and intuition-driven gestures inspired by his mirror-journeys, i.e. meditation-like internal flights. Perhaps the two most blatant examples of Strange acting upon premonitions are the scenes in which he rescues Virginia Dare and convinces Sir Nicholas Fury to launch an attack at Latveria.

---

[22] Stan Lee, *Strange Tales*, Vol. 110 (New York: Marvel Comics Group, 1963), pp. 28–32; Stan Lee, *Doctor Strange: Master of the Mystic Arts*, Vol. 169 (New York: Marvel Comics Group, 1968), p. 21; Roger Stern, *Doctor Strange & Doctor Doom: Triumph and Torment* (New York: Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2013), p. 11.

[23] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 1, p. 4. Peter Sanderson, "Time after Time: From 1602 to 2004," Introduction to: Neil Gaiman, *Marvel 1602* (New York: Marvel Comic, 2010), pp. 1–2.

[24] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 2, passim. Doctor Strange is also cast in the role of a historical figure, i.e. John Dee. Dee was a polymath who advised Elizabeth I, possibly helped Walsingham cryptography-wise, and was one of the most renowned specialists in magic, alchemy and astrology. Tim Martin, "The Original Doctor Strange, John Dee," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 15, 2016, accessed 06 April, 2019, https://www.smh.com.au/world/the-original-doctor-strange-john-dee-20160114-gm68kf.html. Since investigating how Gaiman reworks Strange into a Dee-like figure would neither debunk my earlier constatations nor add to these, I do not labour this point.

[25] Jason Aaron, *Doctor Strange Vol. 1: The Way of the Weird* (New York: Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2015), p. 9.

In the first scene, we can see that the doctor, thus far immersed in reading, stops his work to declare tangentially, first, that he needs a fishing net, a black and red candle and chalk, and, second, that he is going to the queen's palace. When his wife, Clea, asks him about his intentions, Strange gives her, paradoxically, a very telling answer – "I have absolutely no idea."[26] Not knowing what for, the man heads for the palace; not knowing about the events taking place inside of it, he reaches one of its towers' roof just in time to catch Virginia Dare – now transformed into a gryphon – in the net and, then, to bespell her back into her human form with the use of the mentioned candles and chalk.[27]

In the second case, Strange also uses premonition to proceed with the matters at hand. When he joins Sir Nicholas Fury and Carlos Javier to convince them that, to save the world, they need a man, officially, long dead and, unofficially, held captive in Count Otto von Doom's dungeons, he offers no hard facts or logical arguments with which to support his ideas. Instead of these, he responds to Fury's criticism of his "unwarranted" suggestions referring to his astral visit at the intelligencer's camp: "I can prove nothing. I am merely a mountebank. You said so yourself, to me, this morning, when I was a hundred miles away. Did you enjoy your bread and cheese?"[28] Ultimately, Fury and Javier agree to follow Doctor's suggestions. This, however, happens not because they are *reasoned* into his point of view but because they decide to *believe* him.

Premonitions that turn into truths[29] constitute not only a distinguishing mark of this character but also the key mechanism with which it is constructed. The sixth volume of the series opens with the doctor regaining consciousness on the Moon, at the feet of the so-called Watcher. The near-omniscient extra-terrestrial explains to the highly confused man that his world is crumbling and – much more importantly from the perspective of the argumentation presented in this text – confirms virtually all of Strange's premonitions. It transpires that the Watcher is their source – he admits to feeding the doctor with these to push him to save his world.[30] If this is so, one may infer, first, that the premonition-into-truth reiteration is the base

---

[26] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 2, p. 18.
[27] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 3, pp. 4–7.
[28] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 5, p. 20.
[29] Truth in the sense of a verified and confirmed state of affairs.
[30] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 6, pp. 3–6.

of Strange's functioning within the series, and second, that this reiteration is of an intellectual type – Doctor's premonitions, as well as his actions, are reiterations of the intellectual conceptions with which he is fed.

Until Rojhaz – the astonishingly blond and startlingly pale Indian guardian of Virginia Dare – reveals that he is Captain America who has time-leapt to 1587, one can only surmise that he is the first Avenger.[31] As the clearly least outspoken character in the series – additionally, pretending to speak broken English – he offers only one hint at his identity. When the young girl takes a wild guess that, in 1602, five hundred citizens might dwell in London, Rojhaz reveals his "future" knowledge saying that their actual number reaches thousands.[32]

Fortunately, since actions speak louder than words, the hero's undertakings reveal much more as to who he is, and hence, point to the subtleties of his construction. First, when Virginia is attacked at the queen's palace, Rojhaz protects her using a tray as if it was his renowned shield. When pursuing the transformed girl, he climbs a few-storey wall as if effortlessly.[33] What is more important is that the Indian "guardian angel" cannot but react in the typically Captain-America way when faced with situations that "push" the right buttons of his personality. Finding the Roanoke colonists starving, he helps them survive the first winter and stays with them as their protector. When asked by Doctor Strange to answer *honestly* about Virginia's condition, the man reveals her greatest secret.[34]

What might discourage one from seeing Rojhaz as a version of Captain America is his overprotectiveness of Virginia that borders on obsession as well as his unaccounted indifference when it comes to Stephen Strange's beheading and the world coming to an end – the latter of which, as we later find out, happens because of him.[35] However, these gestures of his become more understandable when one reaches the last volume of the series in which the Indian tells his story and reveals his world-view.

---

[31] Those who either know or might guess that the name Rojhaz is pronounced / r d z/, and hence, is a bastardisation of Captain's surname, might surmise which Avenger the pale Indian is. "Steven Rogers (Earth-460)," in: Marvel Database, accessed 18 March, 2019, https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Steven_Rogers_(Earth-460).

[32] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 1, p. 22.

[33] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 2, p. 23 and Vol. 3, p. 4.

[34] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 2, p. 17, Vol. 3, p. 4 and Vol. 4, p. 18.

[35] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 2, pp. 8-9 and Vol. 4, pp. 18-20. Captain's time leap is said to be destroying the time structure of the presented world. When Rojhaz learns that, to save this world, he must abandon it, he flees from the Avengers. Gaiman, Marvel 1602, Vol. 8, pp. 25-29.

When pressed, Rojhaz admits that, before the future World War II, he was injected with a serum that made him "a fighting machine." Transformed into Captain America, he saved millions of lives and helped to end the war. Not long afterwards, he crash-landed in the ice-cold waters of the English Channel and, as a result, spent a few decades frozen in ice until he was thawed and helped back to his life of a hero. Unfortunately, over the years the bad times came. His fellow heroes either died, were killed or locked up. He himself was, finally, hunted and shot. Nevertheless, instead of dying, he found himself in a new place. Not knowing the location, not knowing the language of the local people, but – most importantly – not having a place to go to, he decided to stay where he was. After a few years, he encountered a group of colonists and Virginia Dare among them. This turned out to be the defining moment of his new life:

> She was a baby then. But I knew what she was. What she represented. What she *meant*. My America… I knew I had to protect her. To guard her. To fight for her, if I had to. I wasn't going to let her die. I failed before. I wasn't going to fail again.[36]

If the purpose that Rojhaz/Captain America sets himself is to protect Virginia Dare/America, his struggle to keep the girl alive at all costs is not only consistent but also points to a mechanism according to which the events of his life develop. Should one juxtapose all his life stories that the series offers or hints at, the following reiteration of Captain's life pattern might be observed:

> 1941 – Steve Rogers becomes Captain America;
> 1941–1945 – Captain America fights for his country, "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness";
> 1945 – Captain America crash-lands and disappears from the face of the Earth;
>
> 1964 – Captain America is brought back to life;
> 1964-onwards – Captain America joins the Avengers and fights for his country and universe;

---

[36] Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 8, p. 5.

2020 – Captain America is hunted and shot; he disappears from the face of the Earth;

1587 – as a result of a time lap, Captain America appears in colonial America;

1587–1603 – Rojhaz/Captain America acts as the "guardian angel" of Virginia Dare/America;

1603 – Rojhaz/Captain America is hunted and disappears from the face of the Earth.[37]

This appearance-struggle-disappearance mechanism around which Steven Rogers' life is built might be interesting for as many reasons as many interpretative vistas one could attribute to it. However, when looked at from the perspective of *how* it reiterates in different contexts of the Marvel Universe, adaptability seems to be its feature that comes to the fore most explicitly. Despite its fictional provenance, the mechanism turns out to work perfectly with the Earth-460's fictional background as well as with the historic(al) background of Earth-616.

Repeatability of Situational and Behavioural Patterns

Much as it is possible and legitimate to conclude that, when reworking the selected 1940s and 1960s characters and conflicts of the Marvel Comics, Gaiman draws on the narrative mechanisms he finds suitable to create the version of the Marvel Universe he considers captivating, simultaneously historical- and fictional-context adequate, etc., a common denominator of his choices might also be observed. Although the mechanisms that he resorts to concern different types of reiteration, their underlying assumption seems to be that of the repeatability of situational and behavioural patterns.

Were the aforementioned conflicts that fuel the mainstream Marvel continuity at different time points extracted from it, one might note that they are constructed around the same pattern, i.e. as a series of gestures segueing from conflict emergence to conflict resolution. Whether this is

---

[37] "Steven Rogers (Earth-460)"; David Roach, Andy Mangels and Peter Sanderson, "Captain America," in: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed 18 March, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Captain-America; Gaiman, *Marvel 1602*, Vol. 8, pp. 3-5, 26-32. Owing to the chronology problems that the Marvel Universe poses, these dates reflect most wide-spread assumptions about when the enumerated events occur.

the struggle between the Fantastic Four, the X-Men and Doctor Victor von Doom or the clash between the X-Men and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants in the fifteenth and sixteenth or twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it seems justifiable to treat them as iterations of the stories originally proposed by Stan Lee between 1940s and 1960s. In other words, these are a few confrontational situations that, for Gaiman, constitute the base and the pattern with which the expansion of the Marvel Universe progresses.[38]

Apart from *situational* patterns that reiterate in this universe, one could hardly miss the fact that the analysed *Marvel 1602*'s characters *behave* in ways corresponding to these of their "originals." Nick Fury as if cannot but remain a spy at the service of those in the saddle and in a perennial vacillation between the people and the values he serves. Despite his death at the hands of James I, Doctor Strange seems to rise in the series to the rank of a spiritual entity that uses human flesh – regardless of whether this is the one from the Early Modern Period or more contemporary times – as a mere container of his mystical power. Finally, Captain America who cannot die might also seem a character that wanders across time only to be summoned at the moment of danger to play his role of *deus ex machina* and, then, vanish.

Conclusions

Historical novels have already shown that it is perfectly viable and – owing to their readership and scholarship popularity growing – desirable to embed fiction in history. Comic books whose background are realistic bygones have, nonetheless, remained on the margins of interests of those who investigate the relationship between literature and history. On the one hand, the potential that this relatively new medium has in this respect concerns not only but, perhaps, primarily the emergence of a new area within the history-cum-literature research; which, of course, entails the emergence of new type of questions and, hopefully, answers: What type of understanding of the past one may derive from a work in which the textual component is limited to the advantage of or is enhanced by the

---

[38] Much as this conclusion might goad one into thinking that the Marvel Universe is merely self-imitative, I expand on this matter contrarily in the conclusion section.

graphic one?[39] How does the graphic representation of the past affect one's shaping of an "objective" vision of it?; to give two examples.

On the other hand, yet another way in which the potential of this medium can be realised is to investigate whether, and if so, how, this medium allows for addressing some of the questions that have been fuelling the intellectual debates rumbling across the world and have remained unanswered. One question that the graphic presentation of the reiterative temporality and character construction in Gaiman's text invites concerns a dilemma that historians have faced recently more acutely than ever. Works of history have been losing their popularity across the world and these are popular-culture images that, in their lieu, shape the historical consciousness of new generations. These are, therefore, comic books, cinematic adaptations of historical works, and other products of mass culture, that are most responsible for how future generations will conceptualise history. It is of heft to realise what social consequences – both positive and negative – might ensue from historical consciousness built, *inter alia*, on the basis of graphic presentations of the reiterative temporality and character construction.

One – not so much typically social as intellectual – consequence of the fact that Gaiman's *Marvel 1602* is informed by the idea of repeatability of situational and behavioural patterns is that this text offers an alternative to how we might perceive the relationship between the past and the future. A common (mis)conception about this relationship is that the past provides us with stable grounds on which to project our future. Working on this assumption, it is no wonder that we scrutinise the past events of our life in order to establish the trajectory along which we "move" towards our future. However, as Gaiman's text shows, the past is not as stable as we might wish it to be. According to the writer, not only is it subjected to continuous changes because of our everlasting pursuit of new "data" that force us to keep reinterpreting it but, what is perhaps more important, the past is concatenated with the future by means of no trajectory. If the past of the Marvel Universe – and, by analogy, ours as well – is stitched with the use of facts and fictions which, additionally, are ever-reinterpreted, discovered and rejected, it offers no trajectory thanks to which one could build one's

---

[39] James R. Fleming, "Incommensurable Ontologies and the Return of the Witness in Neil Gaiman's *1602*," *ImageTexT*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2008), accessed 18 March, 2019, http://imagetext.english.ufl.edu/archives/v4_1/fleming/.

whole future life. Rather than that, this past seems to be a patchwork of events that, on the one hand, are constantly reworked, destroyed and expanded; and, on the other hand, leave one with the possibility of a certain choice. If, like Rojhaz/Steve Rogers/Captain America, we do not want to change, we actually might know our future to an extent. Most likely, it will be a collection of very alike behaviours and situations – a patchwork of not much different squares. If, like Sir Nicholas Fury and Doctor Stephen Strange, we decide to use our past as a springboard into the unknown, not only do we actively take a step into and shape our immediate future but also give ourselves a chance that your next "adventures" will be somewhat different than the previous ones. Gaiman's text might thus be a push to reconsider what visions of the future are possible when conceived from the perspective of either determinism or conditioning.

Alicja Bemben
Old Future, New Past, or how Neil Gaiman Tinkers with Temporality in *Marvel 1602*

The purpose of this article is to substantiate the thesis that, in the *Marvel 1602* series, there is a common denominator of the narrative mechanisms with which its author embeds fiction in history and reworks selected characters from the so-called mainstream Marvel continuity. As such denominator, I see the idea of repeatability of situational and behavioural patterns. With this end in view, I open this work by outlining how selected events of the so-called "age of heroes" are transplanted into the Elizabethan age. Second, I show how chosen Marvel characters are reworked to match the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century context. Third, I expand on the reiterative quality of the mechanisms the author uses for these purposes to support the view that the repeatability of situational and behavioural patterns is the main idea informing the narrative structure of *Marvel 1602*. In the conclusion section, I capitalise on the presented findings and suggest their potential implications.