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## Introduction: Alan Moore and Adaptation

By Rex Krueger and Katherine Shaeffer

Throughout his career, Alan Moore has shown both a penchant and a skill for reweaving the elements of earlier texts into new works and new worlds of his own. In doing so, Moore has walked a dangerous line. To adapt a text is, paradoxically, to both embrace and to let go of that text. Much like analysis, adaptation is a simultaneously creative and destructive act, which produces new material from the often-fragmented pieces of a source. The adaptations examined in this collection, which include both Alan Moore's adaptation of others' works and others' adaptations of his own, are varied in their execution and their degrees of success, but their analysis in the essays we present here consistently offers new ways of looking at the relationships between closely connected texts. To examine an adaptation alongside its source material—whether or not the source material is completely original in its own right—is to examine the space between two texts. This *space*, much like the gutter on the comic page, sutures even as it separates.

Adaptation both runs through the majority of Moore's work and describes the relationship that other creative people have had with Moore's writing. As we compiled this collection, we decided that we found adaptation operating on at least three distinct levels within Moore's work.

First is the adaptation that any writer or artist must perform when taking over an existing franchise within mainstream comics. As Jack Teiwes explores in his article "A Man of Steel (by any other name)" Moore's work with characters like Superman has involved consistently reworking and reimagining characters to fit his own vision. Teiwes presents us with a detailed critical overview of Moore's work on both the *Superman* series proper and his runs on other titles starring 'Superman' analogs (like Miracleman and Supreme). In the course of this overview, Teiwes examines how Moore reappropriates, deconstructs and reconstructs the tropes and mythologies that surround the very concept of the superhero.

This reimagining of an extant comics title is probably most evident in Moore's work with *Swamp Thing*, where as Colin Beineke notes, Moore revised the very origins of the titular character, a daring move which allowed for a significant change in style and tone within the franchise. In "Her Gardiner," Colin Beineke traces the development of Moore's *Swamp Thing* in light of the character's connection to the mythographic history of the Green Man. Moore's overhaul of this series, in addition to rewriting its mythos and transforming the very nature of its protagonist,

also allowed for an interrogation of ideas that might not have been possible under the title's old regime. As Megan Condis explores in her essay "*The Saga of the Swamp Thing: Feminism and Race on the Comic Book Stand*," Moore's adaptation of the Swamp Thing character created a space for the treatment of nuanced concepts like feminism in Native American cultures. Condis's article offers a political and conceptual framework for the *Swamp Thing* story, "The Curse," placing it within a larger critical discourse that raises questions about the work's own connections to the ethical world.

A second form of adaptation occurs when any writer takes a previously-existing property and adapts it to an entirely new story and setting as occurs in Moore's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and *Lost Girls*. In these cases, Moore revises (sometimes radically) the behavior or personality of a given character and places her in a novel or anachronistic setting. This tendency is probably most marked in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, where numerous public domain characters are thrown together and made to interact in ways that might be quite divergent from their original stories. Here, Moore treads a fine line between realizing his own vision and retaining some fidelity to the original authors from whom he borrows.

Finally, Moore's work has often been itself adapted, most notably into feature films. Recent adaptations have included Moore's *V for Vendetta* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. However, the adaptation which has certainly received the most attention is Zack Snyder's film version of *Watchmen*. In a pair of essays, Vyshali Manivannan and Paul Petrovic both explore how Moore's original graphic novel has fared in front of the camera lens, dealing with issues such as fidelity to the original text and differing viewpoints on women and feminism. Paul Petrovic uses the presentation of the *Watchmen* character Laurie as a site through which to understand the treatment of the female body in Snyder's filmic adaptation. Throughout his essay, Petrovic sets key scenes from the film and graphic novel side by side in order to examine the visual presentation of each of such issues as gender, sexuality and fetishization. Vyshali Mannivannan, in "Interplay Amidst the Strangeness and the Charm," offers a detailed and thorough account of the nuanced narratological methods in Moore's graphic novel. Manivannan's article exhibits a well-developed formal respect for the comic medium, acknowledging the importance of structure and design at the levels of the panel and the page. When we began collecting responses to our call for papers, we discovered that *Watchmen*, in both its comic and movie form, was by far the most common subject presented for analysis. This may result from something so simple as the story's *currency*—both its recentness and its value as a cultural artifact.

In offering this collection of scholarship, we do not intend to exhaustively explore every aspect of adaptation as it relates to Alan Moore's work. Instead, we present a selection of excellent original essays which we believe will open a productive dialogue on at least one aspect of an influential writer's work.

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## "Her Gardiner": Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* as the Green Man

By Colin Beineke

In 1984 British comics writer Alan Moore entered boldly into the ongoing dialogue within American popular culture regarding the current state of ecological thought and consciousness by adapting the folkloric motif of the Green Man into his revamping of the DC comics series *Swamp Thing*.<sup>[1]</sup> As American culture and society grows more aware of the need for increased ecological responsibility, including improved resource management and conservation of our remaining natural world, it is possible to find within the various facets, mediums, and manifestations of popular culture an ever evolving and advancing discussion that reflects these concerns.<sup>[2]</sup> In a quasi-riddle that clearly reveals one of the primary catalysts of these ecological concerns, Lee Rozelle asks "When does an awareness of home provoke terror and awe? When it's burning" (1).

Many of the current ecological problems faced today are a result of the severing of the world into two spheres—nature and civilization—by what Robert Pogue Harrison identifies as the "cultural imagination of the West" (Harrison IX).<sup>[3]</sup> This "cultural imagination" serves to precisely distinguish nature from civilization and then set the two spheres at odds. According to Harrison, "the governing institutions of the West—religion, law, family, city—originally established themselves in opposition to the forest, which in this respect, have been, from the beginning, the first and last victims of civic expansion" (IX). The drawing of this dividing line between civilization and nature has been present in Western art and literature since humanity first established its own cultures and institutions.

Harrison identifies this conflict in the world's oldest known literary text, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Harrison argues that Gilgamesh is the first champion of civilization, known as the "builder of the walls of Uruk"—the walls that serve to establish the rift between the natural world and the civilized world. Gilgamesh—as a representative of civilization—sets himself in opposition to the forests and nature, with Harrison contending that "the first antagonist of Gilgamesh is the forest" (14).<sup>[4]</sup> From this initial rift Harrison traces the way in which the conflict between nature and civilization manifests itself in the collective literary imagination of the West. Moore's work on *Swamp Thing* continues in the footsteps of this artistic tradition by using the medium of the comic book to comment on this split and its subsequent consequences.

Scholars have identified comic book writers and artists whose works demonstrate a concentrated and self-conscious desire not only to promote an awareness of ecological dilemmas but to dissect the causes, effects, and possible solutions for these problems.<sup>[5]</sup> I intend to argue that through an adroit adaptation of the Green Man motif Moore re-creates the character of Swamp Thing as a modern day incarnation of the Green Man.<sup>[6]</sup> Furthermore, the characteristics, attributes, and ideologies connected with the motif allow Moore, through Swamp Thing, to present an analysis of the way in which modern America views the relationship between "nature" and "civilization."

The Green Man, as a motif, appears in various world mythologies and folklores in a scattering of forms and manifestations. The view of the Green Man as a motif initially arose from the study of the still mysterious foliate heads of Gothic cathedral architecture.<sup>[7]</sup> The first published study of the vegetation infused faces appeared in 1939 in the journal *Folklore*. In her article, "The 'Green Man' in Church Architecture," Lady Raglan coined the term "Green Man" to describe the carvings and made some of the first suggestions as to their possible mythic

and folkloric sources. The name has since evolved to encompass all of the figures that fall under the umbrella of the Green Man motif.

Among the figures that have been identified by scholars as being part of the Green Man tradition are Osiris, Dionysus, Pan, St. George or Green George, Jack-in-the-Green, the Green Knight of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Robin Hood, the Wild Man and—in more recent, specifically American times—Johnny Appleseed and the Jolly Green Giant.<sup>[8]</sup> This is but a brief survey of the figures often associated with the Green Man motif. Scholars have devoted book-length studies to this mysterious figure and theories abound which attempt to explain the relevance, meaning, and significance of the Green Man.

According to Gary R. Varner, "the Green Man is an ancient symbol but one that is molded by the human psyche to fit within the structure of each society and time it resides in," and furthermore the Green Man "is what we make of him" (7). In other words, the Green Man is "adapted" by the cultural imagination of each subsequent "society and time" as needed. We will find that Varner's observation applies directly to the manner in which Moore takes advantage of the motif. One of the most commonly accepted interpretations of the Green Man motif is that it is representative of the relationship between humanity and nature. Depending upon what form the Green Man takes in each "society and time it resides in," it is possible to make assumptions about the way in which humanity viewed its relationship with nature. We will indeed see that Moore is using the Green Man motif as a way to expose ecological issues, scrutinize humanity's stance towards nature, and—in a positive change in tempo—offer hope for future treatment of the environment.

Another leading Green Man scholar, William Anderson, bestows upon the Green Man the alias of "archetype of our oneness with the earth," as taken from the title of his seminal work. Anderson's view of this "oneness" illustrates one of the more popular roles hoisted upon the shoulders of the Green Man. The Green Man is often assigned the duty of uniting the spheres of nature and civilization—to serve as an intermediary and mediator between the two. While we indeed see elements of this in Moore's *Swamp Thing* as the Green Man, there is no ignoring the fact that the Green Man is first and foremost a representative of nature—nature that has suffered much at the hands of civilization, and is thus often inclined to become an aggressive nature, a defender of natural spaces.

*Swamp Thing*, previous to Moore's revamping of the character, cannot be seen as a contemporary manifestation of the Green Man. An understanding of the difference between the pre-Moore *Swamp Thing* and Moore's *Swamp Thing* will assist us in comprehending the way in which Moore molded *Swamp Thing* into a modern Green Man. Before Moore's arrival as writer, *Swamp Thing* was a rather conventional horror comic. One of the central elements of horror in the comic was the dreadful transformation of scientist Alec Holland into a monstrous humanoid composed of swamp matter. This transformation occurred after Holland's lab was sabotaged and an explosion caused Holland's body to combine with the surrounding swamp and the chemicals with which he was working. While this origin story serves as a good basis for a horror comic, it would not serve Moore's larger purposes.

Swamp Thing could not be a human transformed into a plant-being and play the role of the Green Man. Swamp Thing would then merely be a man in a vegetable shell. Swamp Thing would be human at its core and thus biased towards humanity and civilization. Indeed, Holland's primary ambition in the original series was to uncover a way to return to his human state. In order to portray Swamp Thing as the Green Man, Moore had to rewrite Swamp Thing's origin and reverse the dynamic. Moore's rewriting is explained by character Jason Woodrue, an important figure we will encounter momentarily, as such: "We thought that the Swamp Thing was Alec Holland, somehow transformed into a plant. It wasn't. It was a plant that thought it was Alec Holland! A plant that was trying its level best to be Alec Holland" (Moore *Saga* 24).<sup>[9]</sup>

By effectively transposing Swamp Thing's origin, Moore is able to essentially anthropomorphize nature itself. Swamp Thing is able to shrug off its immediate connection to humanity (an event that has Swamp Thing literally bury Alec Holland's bones) and take on the mantle of the Green Man. Moore scholar Annalisa Di Liddo thus describes the character of Swamp Thing in terms that correspond with the Green Man tradition:

Swamp Thing is thus endowed with a proper "pantheistic consciousness" that urges it to fight against the threats of growing industrialization and uncontrolled urban expansion. As Swamp Thing develops the awareness of its ability to enter a state of communication with the environment, it becomes a sort of green superhero,

the incarnation of the primeval force of the elements, ready to rebel against man's violent invasion of natural spaces. (51-52)

This "ability to enter a state of communication with the environment" is portrayed by Moore as Swamp Thing's ability to physically and psychically enter into a realm known as "the Green." Upon entering "the Green" Swamp Thing is able to commune with all plant life on the planet. He is able to simultaneously experience the growth, death, and rebirth of all the earth's flora. He is thus able to recognize and pinpoint threats to the natural world, an ability we will see him utilize in his encounter with the Floronic Man.

Assisting Moore in his transformation of Swamp Thing into a contemporary Green Man were artists Stephen Bissette and John Totleben, supported by a wide-ranging artistic team. Previous to Moore, Bissette, and Totleben's intervention, Swamp Thing appeared as a green humanoid—smooth and rounded with little to no suggestion of his vegetable nature aside from his hue—Swamp Thing may as well have been a slimmer Incredible Hulk. Totleben comments on this appearance and the way in which his and Bissette's rendering of Swamp Thing served to portray his identity accurately as a plant elemental, as a Green Man:

The Swamp Thing as he was before we changed him around, he just looked kind of like a green man, with a flat face and a few roots, and that was about it. There was nothing that really gave you the feeling that here was this guy made out of moss and mud and these weeds and junk growing on him. That's how he's always been described in the text, but the art never really got it across ... I kind of see the Swamp Thing as just this caked up body of mud and moss and weeds, and I just want to make it look that way. (Burbey 91)

In their new interpretation of his physical appearance, Totleben and Bissette essentially transformed Swamp Thing from a man who happened to be green, to a Green Man—a figure composed of living vines, growing moss, decomposing leaves, and pure earth.

In his analysis of the elements that compose the appearance of the Green Man foliate heads, Varner isolates the various additions that Bissette and Totleben made to Swamp Thing's semblance and their symbolic significance, specifically the vines and leaves. Varner contends that vines were "the symbol of Dionysus," a figure strongly connected to the Green Man tradition. Leaves, because of their yearly death and reemergence, "denote fertility, growth and renewal. Green leaves are symbolic of life renewed" (192). Many of the figures associated with the Green Man tradition are representative of rebirth, including Jack-in-the-Green, Dionysus, the May King, and at times even Jesus Christ. The pattern of the seasons is reflected in the changing appearance of the vegetation that composes Swamp Thing's body. The onset of autumn sees Swamp Thing's leaves changing to yellow and red.<sup>[10]</sup> These various defining physical attributes identify Swamp Thing with the Green Man tradition and reveal his connection to nature. However, as we will later witness, such an appearance alone does not necessarily denote the presence of a Green Man figure.

Moore seems to be well aware of the Green Man tradition, as evidenced by the fact that throughout Moore's run on the series the notion that the current Swamp Thing is only the most recent figure in an ongoing cycle of such beings is often repeated and reinforced. As revealed to Swamp Thing's human wife, Abigail, by the character Abel,<sup>[11]</sup> "Alec Holland was not the first thing to walk the swamps! There were others before him" (Moore *Love and Death* 178). Moore expresses this notion most explicitly in Swamp Thing's encounter with the Parliament of Trees. Elusively hidden deep in the rainforests of Brazil is a mystical grove of Swamp Thing's "ancestors," previous incarnations of the Green Man, plant elementals who have retired to this peaceful recluse and given over fully to their vegetable nature.

One of Swamp Thing's predecessors explains, "All our stories are subtly different yet the underlying pattern remains constant" (Moore *A Murder of Crows* 109). This "underlying pattern" perfectly describes the Green Man motif and its subsequent tradition. Indeed, as Swamp Thing absorbs the memories of Parliament of Trees, it is possible to identify a wide variety of mythic and folkloric figures who are associated with the Green Man tradition and have received much attention from Green Man scholars. As a number of Swamp Thing's ancestors relate their personal histories, they reveal the names bestowed upon them by humanity, and in these names we see familiar Green Man incarnations.

The "ancestor" with whom Swamp Thing speaks refers to Swamp Thing a number of times as an "Erl King." Derived from Scandinavian folklore and made famous by Goethe's poem *Der Erlkönig*, the Erl king resides in the forest and preys upon travelers. While this figure has not been implicitly connected to the Green Man tradition, its connection to the forest makes it a prime candidate for Moore's adaptation. The English variant of the Green Man tradition identifies himself as Jack-in-the-Green, one of the most popular figures Green Man scholars have associated with the motif. An important element in the traditional May Day celebration, Varner explains, "the Green Man was present in each festival as the May King or Jack-in-the-Green and figuratively laid his life down so that the life of nature would continue" (81). Other figures, such as the Chinese "Ghost Hiding in the Rushes" and the African "Great Url" sprang from Moore's imagination and are Moore's own further additions to the Green Man tradition.

It is appropriate that the cover of the collection in which Swamp Thing's encounter

with the Parliament of Trees appears consists of an image of Swamp Thing in the form of a traditional Green Man foliate head. This Swamp Thing/Green Man carving is perhaps one of the most revealing pieces of evidence that Swamp Thing was intentionally modeled after the Green Man motif and is deserving of recognition as part of the modern day tradition.<sup>[12]</sup>

Perhaps one of the most effective methods of highlighting the defining characteristics and ideology of a fictional character is to create a foil for said character in the form of a similar yet opposing figure. In the case of Swamp Thing, Moore resurrected the obscure DC Comics villain Jason Woodrue, also known as the Floronic Man. Using his advanced knowledge of biology Jason Woodrue transformed himself into a plant/human hybrid and renamed himself the Floronic Man. While the Floronic Man does indeed share certain abilities with Swamp Thing—communication with and manipulation of plant life—he remains partially human. This is revealed in the very name Woodrue chooses for himself. The moniker "Floronic Man," composed of "floronic," a word suggestive of flora and plant life, and "man," reveals Woodrue's true nature as a hybrid being. As a hybrid, the Floronic Man is in essence comparable to the pre-Moore Swamp Thing, and thus the same logic applies to barricade him from the Green Man motif.

The Floronic Man serves as a faux-Green Man—an imposter and false claimant to the title. We can see this subtly illustrated in panels where Jason Woodrue peers out from the forest in such a way as to take on an image reminiscent of the Green Man foliate head tradition. According to Elizabeth K. Rosen, "Depicted with a

leafy crown and loincloth and striking a statuesque pose, the images of the Floronic Man at the moment of his transformation call to mind classical representations of Spring or nature gods or demigods such as Oberon or Pan" (7).<sup>[13]</sup> However, as we will see, *appearing* to be a Green Man does not necessitate actually *being* a Green Man. Believing himself to be a Green Man, and therefore responsible for the protection of nature against civilization, the Floronic Man, in a madness resulting from his forcing a connection to "the Green," begins an assault on human and animal life. Swamp Thing, suspended and at peace in "the Green," encounters the Floronic Man's imposed and corrupt connection to "the Green," represented graphically as a red and deformed tumor-like structure. As opposed to Swamp Thing's "green" mind, the Floronic Man's mind is described as "red," "painting everything with the sticky darkness of old blood" (Moore *Saga* 65).

Beginning his assault on the small town of Lacroix, Louisiana, the Floronic Man first targets and destroys what Harrison has described as "the governing institutions of the West," those set against nature: "The police house was first, and then the school, and then the church" (69). The Floronic Man's ideology is revealed in a demented speech in which he claims that his actions were commanded by "the Green":

I am Wood-rue. I am the pain and the bitterness of the woods! I am come to announce the green millennium! I am one with the wilderness, its will works through me. For I asked of it, saying 'What would you have me do?' And it said 'purify.' And it said 'destroy.' 'Destroy the creatures that would destroy us, that would destroy the ecosphere with their poisons and bulldozers! Cut them down, like blighted wood. Let us have another green world.' (Moore *Saga* 79)

The Floronic Man's actions and words serve to reinforce the separation of nature and civilization into separate spheres, spheres that are unable to exist cooperatively. His desire to wipe out humanity reflects some of the darker, misanthropic elements of deep ecology.<sup>[14]</sup> By flooding the earth's atmosphere with an excessive amount of oxygen he hopes to eliminate all human and animal life from the planet.

Swamp Thing, as legitimate Green Man, intercedes in the Floronic Man's rampage. Establishing a physical dominance over the Floronic Man, and breaking the Floronic Man's arm in the process—an act that demonstrates the Floronic Man's semi-human nature—Swamp Thing undermines the Floronic Man's plan with a simple question: "And what...will change the oxygen...back into...the gasses that...we...need...to survive...when the men...and animals...are dead?" (Moore *Saga* 95). Swamp Thing thus elucidates the inherently complex, yet understandably simple, symbiotic relationship that exists between plant and animal life, revealing to the Floronic Man that to harm one element of the ecosphere is to ultimately inflict harm upon oneself. Taking Swamp Thing's message quickly to heart the Floronic Man ends his struggle and loses his connection to "the Green." This episode highlights not only those actions that define Swamp Thing as a Green Man—his immediate connection to the natural world via "the Green" and his desire to maintain a balanced ecosystem, beneficial for plant life—but also those that would exclude him from the Green Man tradition—an overly aggressive attitude towards non-plant life and an abuse of his powers, two pitfalls into which the Floronic Man tumbles. Therefore, Moore's use of the Floronic Man as foil to

Swamp Thing serves as one of the most implicit tactics for revealing the Green Man in Swamp Thing.

Since their inception, comic book superheroes have proven to be fundamentally anthropocentric in their undertakings: their fantastic adventures and harrowing deeds almost exclusively played out against the urban backdrop of a Metropolis or a Gotham City; their main concerns being, more or less, the welfare and perpetuation of humanity and civilization. Aware of these conventions, Moore instilled within Swamp Thing the Green Man characteristics that would allow him to act outside of this established system. Peter Coogan maintains, "depending on the interests of the writer, Swamp Thing falls more or less within the SF/horror genre or the superhero genre" (56). However, it is of the utmost importance to refrain from strictly classifying Swamp Thing as a superhero—his province is that of the natural world, not the urban battleground of the city. While Swamp Thing exists as part of the larger DC Comics universe, Moore rarely has him interact directly or for long periods of time with the mainstream superheroes of the universe.

Geoff Klock acknowledges that "Moore understands the absurdity of Swamp Thing's sharing continuity with Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman and conceives of Swamp Thing as a hero of the margins" (192). With this statement, Klock is not contending that Swamp Thing is insignificant when juxtaposed to costumed superheroes; instead he is suggesting that "as a hero of the margins," Swamp Thing is motivated into action by forces and circumstances that occur outside the traditional perceptions of the superhero. While Superman flies to divert an asteroid threatening Metropolis and Batman diligently works to stock Arkham Asylum with inmates, who is left to act on behalf of the natural world? According to Klock, and correctly so, "The answer, of course, is Swamp Thing" (192).

One noteworthy and revealing example of this juxtaposition occurs during the course of the Floronic Man's misanthropic rampage. In this storyline, Moore introduces as "the over people" the Justice League of America, who observe the inflammatory actions of the Floronic Man from their orbiting space station. In discussing his depiction of the JLA in the storyline, Moore has stated:

Making the Justice League fit into a horror book was largely a problem of approach. What I decided to go for was a more oblique and shadowy representation of the JLA. They appear a little weirder and ominous and more frightening, unknowable entities of immense power that sit up there in space and watch over the affairs of men. (Burbey 84)

The space station itself is the epitome of the technological advancement of civilization, while its position in orbit securely separates it from organic and earthly domain of Swamp Thing. Moore purposefully refrains from naming the various superheroes seen populating the station and by describing them as the "over people," Moore is establishing the JLA as the unseen "powers that be," that are responsible for the protection of the planet and its inhabitants. However, these seemingly god-like entities are not focused on natural spaces and are not prepared for an environmentally related threat. As the figure of Green Arrow proclaims in alarm and surprise, "Man, I don't believe this! We were watching out for New York, for Metropolis, for Atlantis...but who was looking out for Lacrouix, Louisiana?" Not surprisingly, Green Arrow's question is met with silence "in the house above the world" (Moore *Saga* 84).

Green Arrow's outburst demonstrates that the powers or forces that have the ability to effect change, for better or worse, are not concerned with or aware of ecological problems. The JLA represents what we have seen Harrison describe as "the governing institutions of the West" (IX). Instead of protecting the planet as the interconnected and diverse body that it is, the governing powers are focused on the urban centers of human civilization and population. The result of this singular focus is the creation of a blind spot in regards to nature. Moore is thereby exposing the cultural tendency towards urban expansion and the simultaneous fencing off of nature into parks and reserves: the Western mindset that places more value on urban areas while isolating, ignoring, or raping natural spaces. However, with *Swamp Thing*, Moore was not merely attempting to expose these tendencies, but as we will now explore, he was endeavoring to portend the repercussions of such propensity.

One of Moore's most ingenious moments of adaptation occurs in a stand-alone issue entitled "Pog," which serves as a fable or parable of sorts that conveys a warning of potential ecological crises and brings to the forefront Swamp Thing as Green Man's role in these crises, as well as many of the naturalistic attributes that identify Swamp Thing with the Green Man tradition. "Pog," as a shorted rendering of Pogo, is a nod to Walt Kelly's influential comic strip "Pogo," which featured anthropomorphic animals in a lush swamp setting. Moore has transformed Kelly's characters into alien refugees from a planet, which they call "the Lady," that has been overrun by "one solitribal breed of misanthropomorphs" and are in search of a new peaceful planet to inhabit. The tale that "alien" Pogo tells Swamp Thing about his home planet serves as a parable of warning. It demonstrates what can result from the isolating or overly predatory action of a single species. Alien Pogo demonstrates the relevance of his story when after observing the action of humans he proclaims, "Oh no. Not here as well. They can't own this lady, too!" (Moore *Love and Death* 156). Alien Pogo thus implies that humans are susceptible to the same fate that afflicted his planet if they continue to make the harmful distinction between civilization and nature.<sup>[15]</sup>

Moore's adaptation of Kelly's unique use of language in "Pogo" offers insight into the character of the Swamp as Green Man. Kelly's characters often form their own words, as we have witnessed, by combining two or more words to form a hybrid, which simultaneously conveys the weight and meaning of its core components. In this way, the characters in "Pogo" are able to express themselves in a complex and oddly eloquent manner. The title of this essay is itself derived from a statement made by the alien Pogo to Swamp Thing regarding Swamp Thing's relationship to earth, "the Lady." Alien Pogo concludes that Swamp Thing must be "her guardiner." A clever welding together of the words "guard" and "gardener" reveals that the alien Pogo is quick to notice Swamp Thing's capacity as both a protector and nurturer of natural spaces—both roles the dominion of the Green Man.

By adapting Kelly's classic characters to fit into his Swamp Thing narrative, Moore is not only able to highlight the Green Man characteristics of Swamp Thing, but he is also able to bring the weight of Kelly's pro-environmental comic strip to his own storytelling. Di Liddo says of the "Pog" storyline, in relation to Kelly's work, that

Moore pays tribute to an older comic strip that belongs to a very different genre but that shares the setting of the swamp and above all its critical and debunking position, which highlights...the issue of man's relationship to the ecosystems of the earth, for Kelly's environmental stance was quite evident. (53)

Kelly held the belief that in many ways humanity is its own worst enemy when it comes to nature and the environment. One of Kelly's most popular quotations is a line created by the artist for an Earth Day poster from 1970, which proclaims, "We

have met the enemy and he is us."<sup>[16]</sup> This powerful statement perhaps best reveals the message of alien Pogo's parable and the message that Moore wished to convey in his salutation to Kelly. Moore himself has stated, "It's sort of my environmental stance with *Swamp Thing*. I used that story to extend it—to make sure people know that I was talking about the animal kingdom as well as the vegetable kingdom. That there were big problems in the way we treated most parts of the natural world," a sentiment which Kelly would doubtlessly have endorsed (Khoury 92).

In the two-part story arc "The Nukeface Papers," Swamp Thing encounters a walking personification of radioactivity, toxicity, and pollution. The character Nukeface, once a human being, was transformed into a radioactive madman by ingesting nuclear waste. In the way that Swamp Thing serves as an archetypal representative of nature, Nukeface appears as an archetypal figure of toxicity, pollution, and nuclear threat. The "papers" referred to in the title of the story arc are in fact newspapers, which play a double role in the narrative.

Appearing frequently in a collage-like style, newspapers relating incidents of nuclear waste accidents, such as the 1979 Three Mile Island incident, are spread across panels and splash pages. Not only do the newspapers convey warnings of pollution, the newspapers themselves, in an ironic turn, are manifested as litter throughout the storyline. According to Rosen,

To emphasize the reality of the threat and make clear that this is not merely the world of the author's nightmarish imagination, panels in this particular two-part issue are littered with newspaper pages on which actual stories about toxic fumes, nuclear accidents, sunken uranium shipments, deadly acid spills, and the ongoing political tussle over waste disposal are all clearly readable. These news articles bear witness to the ongoing environmental damage, and act as a bridge between the fictional world of Swamp Thing and our own world from which the newspaper stories are taken. The overlay of real environmental news over fiction is an example of extremely complex closure, and here is used to reiterate the reality of the danger. (6-7)

Rosen's analysis highlights one of Moore's typical moves when attempting to instill horror in his readers—the connecting of generic horror conventions with real

life horrors—bringing elements of the fantastic to bear on reality. Thus, while Nukeface is terrifying in his own right as a decomposing and toxic body, he also serves to illuminate the much larger environmental concerns that occur as a result of adapting nuclear fusion as an energy source.

Nukeface is seemingly unaware of what he has become and the harm that he can inflict. He is ignorant of the threat he poses to animal and plant life—fruit falls dissolving with radioactivity from nearby trees in his presence, and he inadvertently kills a homeless man with his toxicity. Unaware of the true danger he poses, Nukeface carelessly comments on the waste he has been ingesting: "'Waste.' That's what they call it. Waste from nuclear fishing. Supposed t'be bad for ya" (Moore *The Curse* 19). Nukeface's mispronunciation of "nuclear" and his substitution of the word "fishing" for "fusion" demonstrate his ignorance in regards to nuclear issues. The association between ignorance and the harmful nature of nuclear waste and pollution, exhibited by Nukeface's accidental killing of Swamp Thing, are Moore's way of commenting on the danger posed by a careless and ignorant handling of nuclear waste.

While the Nukeface storyline culminates in the "death" of Swamp Thing, as has already been established, rebirth and resurrection are defining elements of the Green Man tradition. Though his physical body may be destroyed, Swamp Thing is able to allow his consciousness to enter "the Green" and thus be reborn through any of the earth's vegetation.<sup>[17]</sup> Connected to the notion of resurrection is the concept of the Green Man as a sacrificial figure, sacrificing himself not only for the sustenance of humanity but also as a response to humanity's wasteful and destructive ways.

Totleben and Bissette illustrate this notion subtly in the Floronic Man story-arc, which ends with a full-page illustration of Swamp Thing assuming a Christ-on-the-cross pose. Rosen analyzes the page as follows:

With arms outstretched, head thrown back, and one leg bent at the knee, Swamp Thing is clearly meant to imitate the classic pose of Christ on the cross. The crucifixion image is set against a blood red orb, a clever visual link between the ecological concerns of the text and its apocalyptic framework since the moon or sun only look brilliantly red like this when air pollution causes a particular refraction of light. Simultaneously, there is an apocalyptic overtone to the color in this image, a subtext suggesting the potential apocalyptic consequences of our environmental destruction. (8)

Rosen's observations, which identify Swamp Thing as a sacrificial Christ-figure, not only reaffirm the attribute of rebirth often associated with the Green Man but suggest a further capacity for Swamp Thing to become a symbol for the relationship between humanity and the environment. It is nature, the Swamp Thing/Green Man, that bears the burden of modern society's industrialization and ecologically devastating actions.

In contrast to the parasitic relationship between civilization and nature we have seen illustrated thus far, the union between Swamp Thing and his human wife Abigail presents an image of humanity and nature interacting harmoniously. While the distinctions between "nature" and "humanity" may still exist, they do not serve to limit, harm, or cause conflict in the pair's relationship. The ultimate emblematic demonstration of a perfectly symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature is seen in the consummation of Swamp Thing and Abigail's love for one another. This sublime merger is manifested in a metaphysical joining of the minds accomplished through Abigail's ingestion of a fruit produced by Swamp Thing's body.<sup>[18]</sup>

Artists Bissette and Totleben outdo themselves with their blissful psychedelic rendering of this "sex scene" between Swamp Thing and Abigail. The artwork conveys the fusion of the two not as a strictly physical act but as more of a spiritual bonding, one that is highly reminiscent of a psychedelic trip.<sup>[19]</sup> Jack Bushnell describes the scene as "the most spectacular orgasm I've ever encountered in literature" (Bushnell 39). Through these psychedelic experiences, "the lovers become one with the waters, fish, insects, reptiles, and amphibians" (39-40). In other words, through her bonding with Swamp Thing, Abigail, as a human, is able to encounter "the Green," to truly interact with and experience nature, to understand on a profound level the interconnectedness that unites all life, human and plant. Swamp Thing, consequently, acts as a conduit through which Abigail can experience her "oneness with earth," the prime significance assigned to the Green Man by Anderson.

The peace and love between Swamp Thing and Abigail is short lived, however. When a journalist snaps some incriminating pictures of the pair together, the authorities step in and Abigail is arrested for, as colorfully described by one of the arresting officers, "shackin' up with somethin' that ain't even human" (Moore *A Murder of Crows* 141). Upon discovering that Abigail has been arrested, Swamp Thing flies into a fit of rage, becoming the Wild Man of the Green Man tradition. Lorraine Stock argues that "although the Wild Man's long hair, shaggy beard, and bestial body fur were most often brown, he was also depicted with green fur, reflecting the greenery of his habitat and perhaps connecting him to the Green Man" and furthermore that the Wild Man stood "as the cultural antithesis of 'civilization'" (240). Varner agrees that the Wild Man stood in opposition to civilization, stating that, "the Wild Man became the symbol of popular discontent with the burgeoning cities and court society; he was in a sense, a response of nature towards this unnatural existence and the destruction of the Wild Wood" (143).

Harrison identifies Orlando of Ludovico Ariosto's epic *Orlando Furioso* as belonging to the Wild Man tradition, and indeed the madness and subsequent rampage into which Orlando is thrown when discovering the loss of his love is highly reminiscent of the scene in which Swamp Thing discovers that Abigail has been arrested. Harrison describes the rage of Orlando as follows:

Orlando's vengeful fury gives him a superhuman strength that he now unleashes against the forest itself. With his bare hands he uproots the trees and casts them into the river, polluting its clear waters with tree trunks and debris. His fury, like his strength, knows no bounds. Not only does he uproot huge oaks, elms, and pine trees, but with hardly an effort he also splits their trunks apart. (96)

This description could easily apply to Swamp Thing's fury as he single-handedly tears trees from their roots and launches them effortlessly. As the Wild Man of the Green Man tradition, Swamp Thing is swift to direct his rage away from his natural surroundings and moves to demonstrate his true "discontent with the burgeoning cities."

Swamp Thing's calculated yet impassioned response is one of Moore's most implicit expressions of the relationship between civilization and nature. In an attempt to recover Abigail, who is being held prisoner because of her relationship with him, referred to as a "sexual crime against the laws of nature" by the authorities, Swamp Thing uses his abilities as a Green Man to engulf the city of Gotham with plant life in an episode known as "the greening of Gotham" (Moore *Earth to Earth* 49).<sup>[20]</sup> What Harrison describes as "Roquentin's Nightmare" comes to fruition in Swamp Thing's leafy subjugation of Gotham City:

Vegetation has crawled for miles toward the cities. It is waiting. Once the city is dead, the vegetation will cover it, will climb over the stones, grip them, search them, make them burst with its long black pincers; it will blind the holes and let its green paws hang over everything. (Sartre 156)

Harrison concludes that the "confessions" of Roquentin, the protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre's novel *Nausea*, are "the confessions of a humanist, a Cartesian, a cosmopolitan. Rarely has a long tradition of thought—the forest phobia of rationalism—been given such a telescopic formulation" (148). The fear

and apprehension of creeping and swelling vegetation, as expressed by Roquentin, is shared by a number of Gotham citizens.

Speaking to Batman, Commissioner Gordon considers the impact that the forestation of Gotham has had on its citizens. Gordon ponders, "Even if you get [Swamp Thing] to remove the undergrowth, I mean, what if this has gone too far? You see, he's given Gotham a taste of some sort of savage Eden. What if the city likes it? Some people are acting as if it's a natural born paradise...but all I can see is a green hell" (Moore *Earth to Earth* 52). Expressed in Gordon's statement are the two opposing views of Swamp Thing's "greening" of the city. While the event causes concern for the officials of the city, the general population indeed views the transformation as creating a "natural born paradise." As Swamp Thing observes:

I search the corners...of Gotham's heart for purchase...running invisible fingers... over the harps of its inhabitants' minds...some shiver...and turn the TV up louder... but in some...there is a resonance...a great, yearning response. (Moore *Earth to Earth* 57)

This "yearning response" is realized as Gotham citizens strip off their clothes and return to a semi-primitive state of living within the newly grown jungle. Meanwhile, a large gathering of supportive citizens flock to Swamp Thing, and as reported by a Gotham City news broadcast,

According to a random sampling of public opinion gathered earlier, 30% of Gotham's citizens feel sympathetic towards the swamp creature and his cause. 15% also stated that they preferred an overgrown Gotham. Already 'pilgrims' from outside the city have been reported heading into Gotham. (Moore *Earth to Earth* 66)<sup>[21]</sup>

While the percentage of Swamp Thing's supporters are in the minority, as are those who prefer the newly lush Gotham City to the former cold stone, the combined actions of these groups testify to the fact that among humanity there exist those who desire a less black-and-white world when it comes to terms such as urban and rural, town and county. Swamp Thing's "greening of Gotham" served as a catalyst to these individuals, allowing them to experience the natural world that their skyscrapers and streets had paved over and destroyed.

Despite the sympathy voiced by a collection of Gotham citizens however, in the midst of his grassy takeover of Gotham City, Swamp Thing is momentarily hindered by the guardian of the city, Batman, who acts as the apotheosis of civilization. Interrupting Swamp Thing's poetic musings over the change that he has affected upon the city, Batman violently cuts through the newly sprouted forest, wielding buzz-saws and defoliant, key weapons employed by civilization in its efforts towards deforestation. Batman thereby reinforces the pattern of civilization's desire to maintain dominance over nature. Despite a violent confrontation in which Swamp Thing defeats Batman, leaving him battered and bruised, Swamp Thing does not kill Batman or overreact to his provocation. This restraint in his contest with the representative of civilization confirms Swamp Thing's desire, as a Green Man, to maintain balance, and not treat humanity in the manner it has treated nature.

However, in his anger, and fully mobilized in his capacity as defender of nature, Swamp Thing unleashes a stream of accusations directed at humanity that echo those of the Floronic Man. Swamp Thing declares,

I have tolerated...your species...for long enough. Your cruelty...and your greed...and your insufferable arrogance. You blight the soil...and poison the rivers. You raze the vegetation...till you cannot...even feed...your own kind. And then you boast...of man's triumph...over nature. Fools, if nature were to shrug...or raise an eyebrow...then you should all be gone. (Moore *Earth to Earth* 42)

Here, Swamp Thing's argument is scientifically valid and is in fact mirrored in the arguments of deep ecologists. Deep ecologist Christopher Manes, for example, argues that,

If fungus, one of the "lowliest" of forms on the humanistic scale of values, were to go extinct tomorrow, the effect on the rest of the biosphere would be catastrophic, since the health of forests depends on *Mycorrhizal* fungus, and the disappearance of forests would upset the hydrology, atmosphere, and temperature of the entire globe. (24)

However, as true as Swamp Thing's statements may be, they seem to contradict the arguments he employed to check the Floronic Man. Therefore, which argument put forth by Swamp Thing expresses his true ideology? It could be argued that it is possible to hold both views simultaneously. In essence, Swamp Thing argues for balance and symbiosis. He desires a relationship between humanity and nature that is beneficial for both parties. His threatening comments are a reaction to the aggression displayed by humanity towards nature and are meant to demonstrate the manner in which humanity and nature rely upon one another for continued existence.

The "greening of Gotham," the complete encompassing of the city in plant life, was such an exploit as Swamp Thing had never undertaken before and revealed the true extent of his power as a plant elemental. Along with an increasing awareness of his abilities came an increase in his parallelism to other Green Man figures. During his invasion of the city, Swamp Thing speaks in a manner consistent with his vegetable nature. According to Di Liddo it is "a language that reflects [Swamp Thing's] peculiar qualities, for its balloons are always filled with dots; Moore thus underlines that his protagonist leads a vegetable existence, tuned on the slow rhythms of nature and not on the neurotic pace of human beings" (52). This slowness of speech, reflective of the slow yet steady growth of plant life, is seen mirrored in the Ents—the tree-shepherds—of J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings*. Indeed, the Ent character Treebeard can be readily linked to the Green Man tradition and thus to Swamp Thing. Prominent Tolkien scholar Verlyn Flieger has associated Treebeard with the overarching Green Man tradition. In fact, Flieger's description of Treebeard's speech pattern parallels Di Liddo's analysis of Swamp Thing's use of language:

Tolkien's linguistic invention, wholly imagined yet archetypally consistent, puts those slow years into words and gives them a voice. Just as much a part of Treebeard as his giant size and his vegetative nature is his language, those measured, polysyllabic Entish locutions that make a paragraph out a word like "hill," and take half a day to say "good morning." (95).

Flieger argues of Treebeard's manner of speech that "it is a voice both archetypal and individual, and implicit in it is criticism of the 'hastiness' of humanity, that cuts down what took years to grow and leaves a wasteland in its place" (95). Therefore, the very use of language by Treebeard and Swamp Thing demonstrate their "vegetative nature" while simultaneously containing a critique of the nature of humanity and civilization as hasty and destructive.

It is unequivocal that Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* may take its rightful place firmly rooted in the tradition of the Green Man. Assuming the validity of Varner's hypothesis that the Green Man acts as a sort of litmus test for the relationship between nature and civilization at a specific moment in time and space, allowing one to trace the evolution of this relationship throughout history, Moore has provided a contemporary Green Man that accurately embodies the current ecological situation. The ramifications and consequences of this relationship will take place outside the panels of the comics page and perhaps in the future when scholars and historians look back to Moore's *Swamp Thing*—just as we have looked back to other Green Man figures; they will recognize in *Swamp Thing* an attempt to comment upon, and perhaps even serve as a call for, reconciliation between the spheres of nature and civilization. The Green Man, though changing through time, has remained to this day a powerful and evocative figure within our cultural imagination. From his first appearance in *Gilgamesh* to his modern day manifestation as *Swamp Thing*, the Green Man has provided stories that, if they have not impacted and influenced our views of nature, then they have at least served as a mirror against which we can see our own treatment of the natural world reflected. Perhaps writer Jamie DeLano said it best in his introduction to the volume *Love and Death* where he logically concludes that "Sometimes stories can make a difference—even old ones" (Moore *Love and Death* Introduction).

## Notes

[1] Taking over writing duties from Martin Pasko, Moore's run on *Swamp Thing* ran from 1984 until 1987 and covers issues 21 through 64.

[2] This increase in awareness is evidenced by the heated debates over global warming, the popularity of the "Go Green Movement," the attention given to alternative and renewable sources of energy such as wind power and biofuel, the movement towards hybrid and electric cars, the expansion of recycling—seen especially in the popularity of products displaying "Made from Recycled Materials" labels, and many other such markers. For full studies of the development of environmentalism and the environmental movement in the United States see J.E. de Steiguer's *The Origins of Modern Environmental Thought* (2006) and Philip Shabecoff's *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (2003).

[3] I am indebted to Robert Pogue Harrison's original and insightful work of cultural and literary criticism "Forests: The Shadow of Civilization" for both provoking my imagination in this project and providing solid scholarship from which to build my own arguments.

[4] Harrison demonstrates how the word "forest" itself plays a role in this divide, stating "The most likely origin is the Latin *foris*, meaning 'outside.' The obscure Latin verb *forestare* means 'to keep out, to place off limits, to exclude'" (69). Furthermore, the figure who is representative of the forest in *Gilgamesh*—Humbaba, Guardian of the Cedar Forest—could be seen as the first literary incarnation of the Green Man.

[5] Of special note in this area is Kevin de Laplante's excellent essay, "Making the Abstract Concrete: How a Comic Can Bring to Life the Central Problems of Environmental Philosophy," found in the anthology *Comics as Philosophy*.

[6] While this essay will principally discuss the concept of adaptation in regards to the Green Man, it will prove necessary to also discuss the way in which Moore adapted a number of various comic book characters, among these both classic and seemingly forgotten figures of comic book history.

[7] One of the primary causes of the mysterious nature of the Green Man is his appearance—as a "pagan" symbol—in Christian architecture. I would contend that the Green Man's appearance in such surroundings can be traced to the development of Gothic cathedrals themselves, as Harrison argues: "The correspondence between columns and trees leads one to suspect that the archaic Greek temple [groves of sacred trees] is not unlike the Gothic cathedral in its religious symbolism" (178).

[8] Superman's archenemy, Lex Luthor, during his brief appearance in Moore's run, makes a veiled reference to Swamp Thing that reveals one of the most recent and popular incarnations of the Green Man. Luthor describes Swamp Thing as a "refugee from a canned sweet-corn label" (Moore *Earth to Earth* 56). This is an obvious reference to the popular advertising mascot for Green Giant vegetables, the Jolly Green Giant.

[9] Moore states on his transformation of the character of Swamp Thing that "I was trying to have the character slowly evolve into a kind of vegetable god" (Khoury 89). In fact, many of the figures associated with the Green Man tradition are "vegetable gods" of sorts: "some of these are Osiris, Attis, Adonis, Pan and Dionysus...[and] the goddess Asherah" (95).

[10] Bissette and Totleben take their adaption further by giving Swamp Thing chameleon-like abilities. For example, when in Brazil Swamp Thing is enmeshed with the local flora and foliage.

[11] Abel is another classic DC character into which Moore breathed new life.

Originally appearing as the host of the DC anthology *House of Secrets*, Moore's revitalization of the character played an important role in Abel and his brother Cain's appearance in Neil Gaiman's groundbreaking series *The Sandman*.

[12] The original catalyst for this essay was indeed the cover of the fourth volume of *Swamp Thing*. However, during the course of my research and composition of a study concerning this possible connection, I encountered an essay by Amanda Carson Banks and Elizabeth E. Wein, entitled "Folklore and the Comic Book: The Traditional Meets the Popular," that proposed a connection between the Green Man motif and Moore's *Swamp Thing*. I must therefore credit them with drawing first blood on this study.

[13] Varner explicitly connects Pan to the Green Man tradition; "The Green Man is another variation of the Great God Pan" (104).

[14] According to Greg Garrard, "One major, recurrent objection to deep ecology is that ecocentrism is misanthropic, and indeed certain advocates such as Dave Foreman and Christopher Manes have made inhumane and ill-informed statements about population control" (Garrard 22).

[15] Rosen accurately comments that "the specter of environmental apocalypse is constantly in the background of Moore's tenure on the series" (6).

[16] It is of interest to note that in the early 1990s *Swamp Thing*, in his live-action film and television incarnation, appeared in a Greenpeace anti-littering PSA.

[17] It is of note that *Swamp Thing* himself uses this form of rebirth as his primary form of travel—allowing his body to be destroyed in one place and reborn or remade in another.

[18] *Swamp Thing*, as producer of this fruit, takes on characteristics of a sacred, cosmic, or world tree. Such trees, like the Green Man motif, appear across world mythologies and folklores, and have often been noted as possible forerunners of the Green Man tradition itself. The fruits themselves produce varied effects on those who ingest them, effects, positive and negative, that relate directly to the moral character of the individual. The seemingly moral affection of the fruit indeed links it to such trees as the Biblical Tree of Good and Evil.

[19] Rosen contributes to the analysis of this scene, particularly concerning the link between *Swamp Thing* and Christ, by noting that "while Moore is definitely having fun with the sexual connotation here, there is no question that the reader is supposed to make the connection between this act and Christ's command 'to eat of my body'" (8).

[20] The manner in which "civilization" reacts to the "unnatural" relationship between *Swamp Thing* and Abigail is demonstrative of the tendency of the "cultural imagination of the West" to separate nature from civilization, and view a fusion or understanding between the two as unsettling and even offensive.

[21] During this episode there appears a scene of a young girl giving *Swamp Thing* a flower, which is highly reminiscent of the famous scene in 1931 film adaptation of Mary Shelley's gothic novel *Frankenstein*—Moore's nod to one of the founders of the horror genre.

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## ***The Saga of the Swamp Thing: Feminism and Race on the Comic Book Stand***

By Megan Condis

*Individual black women engaged in feminist movement, writing feminist theory, have persisted in our efforts to deconstruct the category "woman" and argued that gender is not the sole determinant of woman's identity. That this effort has succeeded can be measured not only by the extent to which feminist scholars have confronted questions of race and racism but by the emerging scholarship that looks at the intertwining of race and gender. Often it is forgotten that the hope was not simply that feminist scholars and activists would focus on race and gender but that they would do so in a manner that would not reinscribe conventional oppressive hierarchies. Particularly, it was seen as crucial to building mass-based feminist movement that theory would not be written in a manner that would further erase and exclude black women and women of color, or worse yet, include us in subordinate positions. Unfortunately, much feminist scholarship dashes these hopes, largely because critics fail to interrogate the location from which they speak, often assuming, as it is now fashionable to do, that there is no need to question whether the perspective from which they write is informed by racist and sexist thinking, specifically as feminists perceive black women and women of color (hooks 77).*

Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* #40, "The Curse," is a product of the complex history of race relations within the feminist movement. It presented a powerful portrait of the experience of women living under patriarchy to a mostly male audience of comic book readers. This audience, most likely, had encountered few examples of explicitly feminist literature within their medium of choice when the issue came out in 1985. However, a close reading of Moore's story reveals the extent to which the "race problem" tainted the First Wave of feminism, which urged women of color to throw their weight behind the feminist cause by impeaching men of color as especially misogynist. The comic accepts the assumption held by the white women of the First Wave that Native American <sup>[1]</sup> cultures treat their women with more cruelty than do "civilized" European or American cultures. Unsurprisingly, a revisionist historical accounting of the actual practices of Native American First Nations reveals that this assumption is based in racist and sexist anthropological scholarship. Studies of gender within Native American cultures were long corrupted by both an over-reliance on the testimonies of male voices within the populations that were surveyed and by the faulty extension of Western ideas about gender to non-Western systems of thought. Unfortunately, many feminists in the First Wave used this biased science in order to push for their own political platforms, arguing that white women should be given positions of power in colonial missions and in assimilationist efforts aimed at "saving" Native American women from their own culture. As Moore's comic shows, these racist sentiments tend to echo forward in time, creating further schisms within the women's movement and leaving many activists of color at the tail end of the

Second Wave when the comic was released feeling ostracized by the mostly white face of mainstream feminism.

Moore describes his storytelling efforts in "The Curse" as an exercise in solidarity with feminist thinking:

This story was about the difficulties endured by women in masculine societies, using the common taboo of menstruation as the central motif.... [T]he plot concerned a young married woman moving into a new home built upon the site of an old Indian lodge and finding herself possessed by the dominating spirit that still resided there, turning her into a werewolf (Moore, *Alan Moore's Writing for Comics* 6-7).

Through Phoebe, the middle-class housewife who transforms into an avenging werewolf, Moore confronts the pathologization of menstruation and mobilizes an alternative feminist reading of premenstrual syndrome or P.M.S. Moore's comic implies that the negative feelings that surround women's experiences of menarche and menstruation do not come about because of some mental weakness associated with their gender but rather are a reasonable reaction to the stresses associated with living as a woman under a pervasive system of patriarchy. According to this theory, menarche and menstruation are psychologically taxing for young girls and women because they are visible markers of their second-class citizenship, symbols of their induction into a womanhood in which they will take up the same burdens that they saw taken up by their mothers and grandmothers. Menstruation thus becomes a monthly reminder of the restrictions that bind their everyday lives (Lee 33). Though Phoebe fails in her attempts to destroy the gender-based power structure that causes her such distress, her suicide at the conclusion of the comic drives home to readers the depths of despair that women can experience (Moore, "The Curse" 21).

Throughout *Swamp Thing* #40, Phoebe repeatedly confronts the symbols of her own oppression as she goes about her daily routine, and her building anger is coded by the text as a rational and righteous reaction. For example, the opening panels depict the stigma and shame that Western culture attaches to the woman's body through the menstrual taboo. As Phoebe purchases tampons at a local convenience store, she watches as "the checkout lady places the package in a paper bag, as if to protect her other groceries" (Moore, "The Curse" 1, see Figure 1). We also see an advertisement for a douche in the background of the store. The ad is rather coy, referring to nebulous concepts such as "freshness and confidence" (Moore, "The Curse" 2), implying that the female body inspires something less than confidence when it is not constantly scrubbed clean by consumer products (see Figure 2). Both panels emphasize the notion that the woman's body and the menstruating body in particular should remain hidden. Menstruation is a process so disturbing that even the products women use during "that time of the month" must be cloaked in polite, sanitary language rather than discussed openly. This theme is reinforced by the title of the issue itself, "The Curse," which is an oft-deployed euphemism for menstruation.

Following this opening sequence, the comic presents a stunning variety of patriarchal institutions and abuses that women must negotiate on a day-to-day

basis. Phoebe encounters a display of knives that are advertised as "good news for housewives" (Moore, "The Curse" 1, see Figure 3), reminding readers of the disproportional share of domestic labor that married women often shoulder. On her way home, she passes by a sex shop where images of masked, depersonalized, porn actresses stare out from the window (Moore, "The Curse" 2, see Figure 4). When she returns home, her husband, Roy, roughly grabs and shakes her when she is late preparing his dinner. He then dismisses her feelings of rage and dejection by accusing her of having a mere case of P.M.S. (Moore, "The Curse" 9, emphasis in the original, see Figure 5). This last panel references a topic of debate among feminists: the medicalization of premenstrual "syndrome." Many believe that such a label could be dangerous in that it might be wielded as a weapon against all women in order to delegitimize their thoughts and feelings by providing a gendered, biological scapegoat for genuine anger and depression. According to Jacquelyn N. Zita, P.M.S. is "unique in so far as it's a syndrome that the whole society thinks exists and that the whole society thinks afflicts most women.... When the whole society is eager to ascribe anything problematic in a woman's feelings or behavior to the menstrual cycle, you've got to be extremely careful" (181). What Roy labels as an irrational and weak response is, in reality, a warranted reaction on Phoebe's part to the building pressures and stresses that she encounters because she is a woman living in the patriarchy.



The fact that Moore is able to mount a critique of gender relations using such a touchy topic as menstruation within the genre of the mainstream superhero comic is impressive by any standard. *Swamp Thing* is not an underground title. It is a mainstream release by the well-known publisher, DC Comics. *Swamp Thing* can be found on newsstands right next to titles like *Superman* and *Batman*. Making this accomplishment all the more astounding is the fact that, according to figures gathered by DC Comics in 1995, a full 92% of the label's readership is male (Carlson). Thus, Moore's willingness to sneak a feminist critique into the boys' club atmosphere of the corner comic book store is certainly laudable.

However, rather than simply lauding the comic as a powerful and progressive entry in its medium, we must also think critically about the discourses of race that Moore uses as a backdrop to his argument. Moore contrasts the images of modern day American style misogyny described above with a fictionalized history of Native American menstrual taboos. Pitch black, blood red, and bruise purple panels portray the lives of Native women as dark, dirty, and dangerous (see Figures 6 and 7). During their periods, the Native women in Moore's comic are sequestered in a Red Lodge, where they are treated like Typhoid Marys who must be quarantined for the safety of their Nation. According to this account, while in the Red Lodge, Native women "were forbidden to stand, or lie down or see the moon. Their food was passed to them on sticks beneath the silent gaze of their parchment-faced elders" (Moore, "The Curse" 1). "They ate from sticks, like lepers, and the gourds that they sipped water from were afterwards smashed and buried without trace" (Moore, "The Curse" 6). The anger of these women at what Moore describes as their brutal mistreatment by Native men, is taken up by Phoebe, our white, middle-class werewolf woman. This arrangement is necessary, we are led to assume, because Native women are no longer around to avenge themselves. Their lives are visually juxtaposed against the modern-day life of Phoebe as she reads an account of the Red Lodge that was once built on the site where her home now sits. Native life is literally relegated to the history books, implying, as many comic book depictions of Indigenous people do, that Native Americans exist solely in the past, that they have, for all intents and purposes, gone extinct (Sheyahshe 94).

Moore's fictionalized history of the Red Lodge is a reenactment of the earliest historical records and studies conducted by male anthropologists and by white First Wave feminists regarding women of color. These arguments used a Western lens of culture and philosophy to interpret Native practices. They then used their misinterpretations of those practices to justify the conquest of Native peoples. Swamp Thing #40 mimics their methodology, framing the issue of menstruation through the traditional Western canon and then interpreting Native practices so that they fit that lens.

The comic deploys numerous visual symbols typically used by the Western canon to denote the menstruating woman, such as the full, red moon (see Figures 8 and 9), which represents both the cyclicity of the female body and the fullness and ripeness of her reproductive organs just before menstruation (Delany, Lupton, and Toth 194). Phoebe's name also alludes to the moon; she shares it with the Greek moon goddess. Even the fetid swamp that our titular hero calls home often stood in as a symbol within the Western literary canon for the pollutedness and decay which men have often imagined menstruation to symbolize (though, of course, this symbol can also be read subversively as bursting with the power to nurture and sustain new life) (Delany, Lupton, and Toth 187).

"The Curse" also reinforces belief in one possible explanation of the Western taboo surrounding menstruating women: early man believed menstrual blood represented the possibility that a woman's life-giving abilities might be reversible, that she might also hold within her the power to take life (Delany, Lupton, and Toth 18). These fears about menstruation can be found in medical and scientific texts as early as Natural History by Roman philosopher, Pliny the Elder, which contains a diverse list of the possible threats that are posed by menstrual blood:

Contact with it turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seed in gardens are dried up, the fruit of trees falls off, the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; to taste it drives dogs mad and infects their bites with an incurable poison.... Even that very tiny creature the ant is said to be sensitive to it and throws away grains of corn that taste of it and does not touch them again. (549)

Later writers expanded upon this meme. A 1506 treatise claimed that menstrual blood was poisonous to men who dared to have intercourse with a menstruating woman (Crawford 61), and in the eighteenth century, some doctors believed that menstrual blood had the power to castrate (Crawford 61). These notions about menstruating women are also expressly addressed in the Bible, in which the menstruating woman is regularly depicted as "polluted and polluting" (Crawford 49). In the book of Isaiah, the menstrual rag is something which should be reviled and despised (The Holy Bible King James Version Isa. 30.22), and the book of Leviticus orders menstruating women to separate themselves from their community because they are "unclean" (Lev. 15.19).

Moore evokes the image of the menstruating woman as a harbinger of death and disease by setting up his bleeding werewolf protagonist in opposition to the Swamp Thing, a character whose power comes from the life-force of the planet and who is capable of re-growing parts of himself if he is injured. Interestingly, a letter from a reader published in "The Curse" sees the Swamp Thing's powers as a reason to question his long-established male identity. The reader asks,

Although Swamp Thing is psychologically a male, can he reproduce, since he can seemingly grow things at will from his body? In the past he lost his arm, and

that arm grew into a[n]... imitation of him. So, if he willed it to happen, could he reproduce a copy of himself? (Lindenmuth 25).

Although the reader does not explicitly make the assertion that, if the Swamp Thing is able to reproduce, then he must be a female, he does seem to question the notion that such an ability could belong to someone who is gendered male. For the record, the editors' refused to answer the question definitively, responding that, "given [the Swamp Thing's] highly evolved abilities, we can't say that it couldn't happen in the course of his existence" (Moore, "The Curse" 25). Thus, the character potentially can be read as an extension of Earth's life-giving force, the representative of the reproductive powers of the woman-as-mother.

Phoebe, then, is drawn in opposition to the Swamp Thing's creative power. She is a negative force of destruction and chaos. Her role as the Swamp Thing's doppelganger exists on the level of plot, in which she initially views him as an obstacle to her revenge, as well as on the visual level. Moore takes every opportunity to set up Phoebe and the Swamp Thing as mirror images of one another, implying that they are reflections of each other (see Figure 10). They are two sides of the same magical coin, much like the nurturing mother and the presumably-dangerous menstruating woman seemed to be.

Herein lies the problem. Moore's First Nation, the Pennamaquot (Moore, "The Curse" 1), have adopted the Western view that menstruating women are dangerous and destructive. They are shown sequestering their women in squalor and darkness

when their time arrives, as if to punish them for the sin of being embodied as a female. This portrayal was uncritically accepted by at least one comics fan, who wrote in a fanzine that

Moore supplies "The Curse" with historical context. Though I cannot confirm its historicity, I am inclined to accept as accurate the brief and pertinent account of the mores and customs of the Pennamaquot Indians that has been woven so skillfully into this tale. (Alexander 25)

One suspects that the inclination to accept a white man's tale of Native American savagery comes directly out of the ever present repetition of such accounts in the historical record. We expect to see Native Americans in this light. In this particular case, the quickness of the fan to condemn the Pennamaquot is, by turns, amusing and tragic, because that particular Nation was invented by Moore.<sup>[2]</sup>

Of course Moore is not the first feminist to accept the notion that Native American men have horrid attitudes about women. He is repeating the tropes created by early anthropologists to explain and understand Native American ceremonies and practices concerning menstruation. They viewed Native practices through the lens of their own culture's distaste for menstrual blood, causing them to misinterpret the behavioral data that they saw and to mistakenly attribute their own cultural assumptions about the bodies of women to Native Americans. For example, the isolation of menstruating women which anthropologists witnessed in the tradition of the Red Lodge was "interpreted by Western investigators as a sign of defilement and degradation" (Powers 56). It was assumed that the separation of the women from the men was carried out for the protection of the men from what must be the corrupting influence of the menstrual blood.

In reality, many Nations utilize the Red Lodge because menstruation is seen as the time at which women are at the "peak of their fecundity" and "are believed to possess power that throws male power totally out of kilter. They emit such force that, in their presence, any male-owned or -dominated ritual or sacred object cannot do its usual task" (Allen 47). It is not a question of purity versus impurity. Rather it is a question of balance. Menstruating women are at the height of their spiritual potency. The fullness of their power holds the potential to tip the balance between the male and the female out of harmony.

Another explanation, given by a contemporary Yurok woman, casts the Red Lodge as a kind of positive spiritual retreat.

A menstruating woman should isolate herself because this is the time when she is at the height of her powers. Thus, the time should not be wasted in mundane tasks and social distractions, nor should one's concentration be broken by concerns with the opposite sex. Rather, all of one's energies should be applied in concentrated meditation on the nature of one's life (Buckley 49).

Yurok women are not excluded from the life of the people during menstruation. On the contrary, their cycles provide them with the opportunity to exercise their power *on behalf of* the people by utilizing the power that they wield at this time to the fullest.

The misrepresentation of Native practices came to be a part of the anthropological record in part through the inappropriate privileging of the testimony of Native men over that of Native women, a discrepancy which ensured that Western anthropological studies would contain a distorted view of the role of women in Native society. It was incorrectly assumed by many social scientists that Native men were the sole keepers of tribal culture and knowledge (Buckley 57). On the contrary, "among many if not most tribes, important ceremonies cannot be held without the presence of women.... Each ritual depends on a certain balance of power" (Allen 47). Both genders play roles and tell stories that are integrally important to the well-being of the group. And yet, because the samples utilized by anthropologists were almost entirely composed of Native men, they were

told only one set of stories, which led to the creation of a view of Native American gender relations that distorted and inflated the importance of the male. White male anthropologists described the role of men in all First Nations as central when, in reality, the gender system of many Native American peoples insists upon balance and parity (Sellers 25).

These mistakes, which Moore's comic perpetuates, form one part of a larger pattern in which

Western studies of American Indian tribal systems are erroneous at base because they view tribalism from the cultural bias of patriarchy and thus either discount, degrade, or conceal gynocratic features or recontextualize those features so that they will appear patriarchal (Allen 4).

Western scholars saw their inquiry as being, in part, about the justification of white male privilege, and so they were quick to seize on an interpretation through which it appeared that abuse of women was the norm in other, supposedly primitive cultures, thus eliminating potential threats to the white, patriarchal worldview.

It is quite likely, however, that Moore's tale was influenced just as thoroughly by the accounts of Native gender roles put forth by white feminists. Unfortunately, the colonialist and sexist scholarship of white anthropologists was championed by the First Wave of the feminist movement, who used racist rhetoric to try and open up new venues for white female participation in the public sphere. Following the Civil War, during the debate over the adoption of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, white feminists worked to distance themselves from people of color so as to avoid some of the political fallout surrounding racial reforms (Newman 4-5). In doing so, the leaders of the white women's movement ignored those issues that primarily affected black women, including miscegenation, interracial rape, and lynching (Newman 6). According to Louise Michele Newman,

the refusal of white reformers to address black women's specific experiences of gender oppression meant that the white woman's movement would remain mostly white, even when individual women of color were invited to become members of white-dominated women's groups (6).

Such segregation, it was thought, would make women's rights seem more palatable to the average citizen, who was fed up with constantly hearing about "the race question."

Furthermore, First Wave feminists used the contemporary interest in evolutionary science and anthropology to fuel a public relations campaign aiming for the creation of new public positions of power for white women based on notions of racial hierarchy (Newman 7). They argued that their race-based moral superiority over people of color made them the perfect candidates to take on leadership roles in civilizing missions such as the education and so-called "uplift" of African Americans and the Christianizing and assimilation of Native Americans (Newman 8-10). In other words, they attempted to break out of the bonds of the domestic sphere by arguing that "they were effective civilizers, every bit the equals of white men" (Newman 14). Although such rhetoric was intended to cast white women into the role of self-sacrificing do-gooders out to give aid and succor to people of color, "the main beneficiaries of this civilizing work were white women themselves," who broke out of the role of the household caretaker and into the role of the imperialist colonizer (Newman 119).

In fact, some white feminists of the period had the gall to hold Native American men responsible for white women's subjugation by white men, arguing that "patriarchy was an invention of the primitive, and sexual differences were a constraining legacy [of evolution] that would have to be overthrown if the white race were ever to advance beyond its primitive heritage" (Newman 131). These white feminists held that the only reason patriarchy still had a hold on white society was because white men had not evolved sufficiently far enough away from men of

color, whose animalistic and barbaric natures were supposed to be the source of mankind's continued abuses of women. One can imagine such arguments for women's rights being better received by white men than the truth: that many Native women were powerful leaders in their communities, and that true women's liberation would involve moving away from the hierarchical ideals of Western civilization and towards those of the so-called "primitive" (Allen 23).

Perhaps this is one reason why Moore re-uses such tropes in his comic. He soothes his white, male comic book audience by sugar-coating his anti-patriarchal message with the reassuring thought that men of color treat women even worse than white men do. It is also possible that Moore was channeling the racial divides that were present in contemporary feminism in the 1980s when *Swamp Thing* #40 was released. Following the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the 1970s, the Second Wave of the women's movement once again found itself fractured along lines of race. By the 1980s, feminists of color were vociferously critiquing their white sisters for their tendency to frame their own concerns as if they were universal to all women (Breines 3-4) and for failing to address the ways in which issues of race and class impacted women of color living under patriarchy differently (Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" 95). Many felt that white feminists assumed that "the herstory and myth of white women is the legitimate and sole herstory and myth of all women... and that non-white women and our herstories are noteworthy only as decorations, or examples of female victimization" (Lorde "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" 96). Others criticized a tendency by white feminists to adopt a patronizing attitude towards women of color. Gloria Anzaldúa describes these women as "the pseudo-liberal ones who suffer from the white women's burden.... She takes a missionary role. She attempts to talk for us – what a presumption!" (206). Within academia, women of color often felt as though they had been reduced to the status of token minorities at panels on women's rights and felt personally dismissed by the leadership of many feminist groups (Lorde "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" 98). Many experienced white feminist groups, as doris davenport so candidly put it, as "elitist, crudely insensitive, and condescending" (86).

An episode recounted by self-described Third World feminist Barbara Cameron about an encounter with a white interviewer encapsulates the way in which this combination of ignorance and dismissal of women of color operated, not only in the Second Wave of the feminist movement but also in Moore's Second Wave feminist narrative.

A few years ago, a white lesbian telephoned me requesting an interview, explaining that she was taking Native American courses at a local university, and that she needed data for her paper on gay Native Americans. I agreed to the interview with the idea that I would be helping a "sister" and would also be able to educate her about Native American struggles. After we completed the interview, she began a diatribe on how sexist Native Americans are, followed by a questioning session in which I was to enlighten her mind about why Native Americans are so sexist. I attempted to rationally answer her inanely racist and insulting questions, although my inner response was to tell her to remove herself from my house. Later it became very clear how I had been manipulated as a sounding board for her ugly and distorted views about Native Americans. Her arrogance and disrespect were characteristic of the racist white people in South Dakota. If I tried to point it out, I'm sure she would have vehemently denied her racism (51).

Like Cameron's interviewer, Moore uses racist assumptions about Native men in order to push forward a (white) feminist agenda. His comic is a snapshot of the white feminist movement of the 1980s, both its earnest confrontation with the myriad facets of patriarchal oppression and its struggle to acknowledge and confront the vestiges of racism and colonialism within its own ranks.

A women's movement supported by such arguments is incapable of addressing the specific problems that women of color face due to the intersection of racist and misogynist discrimination. These erasures directly harm women of color because they elide the abuses perpetrated upon them by white men. For example, since the American government began trying to force Native Americans to

assimilate into the patriarchal systems of white America, Native women have found themselves to be under a statistically higher threat of violence from both white colonizers and from Native men themselves, some of whom internalized violent colonialist models and rigid, biblically influenced gender roles from institutions like the Christian boarding schools (Smith 13-27). Furthermore, many formerly gynocratic Native American societies have been re-organized following contact with missionaries and U.S. government-backed assimilationist projects to more closely resemble American patriarchal systems (Sellers 8). Today, Native American women are more likely than any other female demographic to be victims of sexual assault (Smith 26). They are twice as likely as any other group, male or female, to be victims of violent crime. And contrary to the ongoing narrative that Native men are the primary perpetrators of this violence, sixty percent of violent crimes committed against Native women are committed by whites (Smith 28).

"The Curse" utilizes outdated and flawed historical research in an attempt to craft a feminist message. This scholarship was wielded by the First Wave of feminism and has echoed forward in time, showing up once again within the Second Wave. If left unchallenged, this scholarship becomes common knowledge, showing up in unexpected places such as the comic book stand. Though the inclusion of a feminist critique of patriarchy within the male-centric world of comic books is a great step forward, Moore's repackaging of feminism's past mistakes with regard to race elides and erases many of the most pressing concerns of women of color. These women require a feminism that takes an intersectional approach to overlapping forms of race and gender-based oppressions.

## Notes

[1] This essay does not endorse the proposition that all Native American Nations are interchangeable. However, the racist/sexist anthropological practices that this essay intends to refute tend to lump all First Nations together under the same rubric. As such, many of the revisionist texts that I use as sources attempt to refute such claims from a collaborative, Pan-Indian revolutionary perspective. Whenever possible, I have attempted to utilize resources that focus on Nations of the Eastern Woodlands, where Moore's comic takes place. However, in some cases I refer to texts by the likes of Paula Gunn Allen and Andrea Smith. These texts use broad brushstrokes to explicate patterns that can be found in many (but by no means all) Native American Nations.

[2] The list of federally recognized tribes found provided by the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Department of Health and Human Services shows no group named "Pennamaquot." There is a Passamaquoddy and a Penobscot listed, and both groups reside in Maine, the state in which Moore's story takes place. One can imagine that Moore used these names as inspiration to generate the name of his fictional tribe. A Google search for "Pennamaquot" yields only one result: a plot synopsis of Moore's comic.

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## Interplay Amidst the Strangeness and the Charm: Under-language and the Attenuation of Meaning in the Film Adaptation of *Watchmen*

By V. Manivannan

Overlooking its famously nonlinear structure, incorporation of multiple genres and unremitting examination of comics culture, print media and television, Alan Moore's *Watchmen* is superficially conducive to Hollywood with regards to spectacle. In that respect, Zack Snyder's 2009 film adaptation of the same name doesn't disappoint. Perhaps the most lauded aspect of his version is its overly faithful frame-by-frame recreation of Moore's graphic novel, often directly reproducing whole chapters or panel sequences image for image, and sometimes word for word. While this literalistic translation succeeded in staving off criticism from most of Moore's fan-base, Snyder's *Watchmen* fails to account for the juxtapositions and evolutions of multiple meanings in comic art, where the arrangement and combined effect of image and text operate through a design idiom Moore terms "under-language": the interplay between words and pictures that gives rise to a language "that is neither the 'visuals' nor the 'verbals' but a unique effect caused by a combination of the two" (Moulthrop 2). It is the omission of this under-language in Snyder's *Watchmen* that leads to the film's attenuation of fundamental signifiers and semiotics in the original material, and this absence is only underscored by his obsessive devotion to the visual components of Moore's graphic novel. In a sense, it is precisely because of Snyder's assumption that the comic and film genres can be interchanged without loss of meaning that the full emotional import of the narrative is inevitably compromised.

A psycholinguistics approach ultimately allows us to correlate the shortcomings of Snyder's *Watchmen* with its simplification or omission of Moore's extensive under-language and interplay. Because the film medium cannot position text visually, and because Snyder uses very few recurring images and discourse or dialogue-image juxtapositions to affect lexical semantics, meaning is often abridged or disregarded rather than enriched. Moore, for instance, repeatedly expands on and reexamines reflexive imagery through shifting text-image and image-image juxtapositions, such as the Hiroshima lovers, present at Rorschach's trashcan mail-drop with the text "New York opened its heart to me" (Moore 11; Ch.5) and later, at Rorschach's arrest. Snyder omits the latter image entirely, and presents others without reflexive context.

From a pragmatics standpoint, the semiotics system established in Moore's novel is further undercut by Snyder's juxtapositions of visual signifiers and verbal utterances that do not serve to deepen our comprehension of either or both, acting merely as transitions from one scene to another. Not only does he not observe intentional overlapping in the graphic novel, but in an attempt to pay homage to Moore's under-language, Snyder overlaps almost identical dialogue from the novel with almost identical visual frames from the novel but in a way that is merely superficial: used almost as a time-saving device rather than an attempt at true

interplay. We see this clearly during the Dr. Manhattan interview, where overlapping dialogue is used simply to segue into Dan and Laurie's alley skirmish. In order to understand what is lost in Snyder's adaptation, which largely ignores formal analysis of Moore's comic, it is necessary to examine written discourse processing to determine how text-image and image-image juxtapositions and arrangements in dual-format media may either restrict or free viewer inferences concerning encoded information and emotions in a given scene.

The way we process information is highly contingent on the format in which we receive it, and dual-format media presents us with a subconscious conundrum that impinges on our comprehension of the text: what are we supposed to consider first? In both comics and film we are presented with both a visual and a verbal component, though the two are imparted very differently. In comics, the verbal component appears solely as the written word, but visual elements constitute both image and text since written discourse takes a visible form; as a result, both elements compete for our attention as our eyes track over the page. In film, our eyes track over a series of moving visual images in which information is encoded, while verbal narration or dialogue contributes to that information without guiding our eyes (Baggett and Ehrenfeucht 1). Pragmatics and Malinowski's contention that meaning is reliant on "context of situation," and that an utterance must be situated in its total environment to be adequately comprehended, recognize the necessity of setting to lexical meaning (Halliday and Hasan 6-8). These concepts are fundamental in examining meaning in dual-format media as comics and film are clearly affected by the juxtaposition of the verbal and the visual. However, the primary difference between comics and film is what our eyes are drawn to first, and how this initial eye-tracking dictates the level of our engagement with the rest of a given panel or frame, thereby affecting our inferences as well. It is in this difference that the success of the comic and failure of the film emerge. Moore activates the whole page from top-left to bottom-right through the interplay of text-image and image-image juxtapositions, while Snyder's images are predominantly centered, encoding the most information in one location and leaving visual holes where semantic and semiotic meaning elude us.

In our capacities both as readers and viewers, our sight is episodic; it moves systematically to the most "interesting" places on the page or screen, typically where the most information has been encoded. Beginning with these sites, our eyes continuously oscillate, tracking across the display and fixating on various points with seeming randomness in order to fully process the incoming image and the information it contains (Smith 56-60). Eye-tracking studies conducted by Underwood *et al.* suggest that the gist of a scene can be identified in the first few eye fixations, during which a certain degree of perceptual processing must transpire in order for viewers to determine which areas of the image are informative and therefore necessary to reexamine; this processing enables viewers "to calculate the most efficient scan-path for their eyes to follow" (120) before revisiting portions of the display to gather informative details. By providing the viewer with a general sense of meaning, the initial eye fixation may then be used to control subsequent eye movements, suggesting "that the early processing is concerned with assessing the spatial layout of the whole scene, rather than processing details" (120). Once the viewer establishes the general substance of the image at the global level, further eye fixations occur at the local level to expand on and refine initial inferences (120-1). For instance, Moore deposits readers into the world of *Watchmen* immediately:

In Panel 1, initial global-level eye-tracking allows the reader to infer that the smiley-face pin is lying in blood; successive eye fixations at the local level affirm this inference through the text "dog carcass" and "burst stomach," a violent, bloody image even if the blood in the image does not belong to the dog (Moore 1; Ch.1). In Panels 2 and 3, because the general idea of the image remains the same while gradually zooming out, the eyes fixate on new details, such as the emerging shoes, the storm drain, the sidewalk cleaner and the preacher of doom along with his sign, "The End is Nigh" (1; Ch.1). In short, eye-tracking takes a macro-to-micro approach in order to complete the viewer's understanding of the entire image, including both the visual and the verbal (Underwood 120-1).

Notably, the eye tracks differently along differently calculated scan-paths depending on the presence and location of accompanying text. According to Underwood *et al.*, textual elements in dual-format displays direct reader attention to one or more particular aspects of pictorial elements, yielding a more precise analysis of the image as a whole. The way in which this dictates our reading process is directly subject to the positioning of the text. Underwood's study utilized dual-format displays with discrete visual and verbal components and determined that, if discrete text appears after an image, initial eye fixations are various and sweeping, indicative of the viewer's unguided attempt to comprehend the essence of the whole image and its intended meaning. However, when discrete text precedes an image, eye fixations become very selective and restricted to the subject—the "search terms," so to speak—encoded in the text. In various linguistic studies, when viewers examined images with a goal predefined by separate text, their eyes were drawn to pictorial elements that would specifically help them better understand the text, as opposed to the general, wide-ranging eye fixations that result from unguided examination (Underwood 125-6).

Since comics consist of text-image juxtapositions, as opposed to discrete image and text, Underwood's findings apply somewhat differently. We read and process comics according to text-image juxtaposition within each panel and image-image juxtaposition across a page: that is, the order in which we encounter these elements in any given panel determines both our initial scan-paths and our specific eye fixations. Given that text may be juxtaposed anywhere over a given image, its presence alone does not guarantee that our eyes fixate on it first. However, when reading single-format print publications in English—the language in which Alan Moore's *Watchmen* is written—we read left to right, top to

bottom; correspondingly, it can be assumed that when we read dual-format print publications, such as comics, the elements we encounter first are those at the leftmost and uppermost side of the page, just as the ones we encounter last are rightmost and lowermost. Therefore, if text appears at the upper-left corner of a panel, we encounter it first; if it is located at top-center or elsewhere in the panel, we encounter it after viewing the image. In the latter case, when the visual is encountered first, we can assume that the eyes would initially track each panel as they would across a single-format image display, such as a painting or photograph, fixating broadly across the entire image to discern the essence of the scene before revisiting the "busiest" or most information-rich portions of the image. However, if the first element encountered is text, the eyes are likely to fixate as they would when reading a single-format text display; in this case, reader inferences are guided by the parameters given in the text.

To illustrate this, in Figure 1, Panel 1, the first element we encounter is textual, aligned almost flush with the leftmost, uppermost corner. As such, we read the text first, and our subsequent reading of the image becomes informed by our understanding of the text. The primary search terms provided by the text that predefine and guide our eye-tracking across the image are "Rorschach's journal," "dog carcass," "burst stomach," and "true face": from this we can infer that someone named Rorschach is observing the blood on the sidewalk; we wonder if the blood belongs to the dog; and we correlate the city's "true face" with the bloodstained smiley-face, a juxtaposition that transforms it into a signifier (Moore 1; Ch.1). In this way, interplay and under-language speak not only to the relationship between text and image but also to ideas neither propose explicitly.

A similar effect can be achieved in film, although somewhat modified as the interplay between text and image in comics is analogous to the juxtaposition of dialogue or narration within a given scene. Unlike comics, in which "pictures and the intervals between them create the illusion of time through closure, [and] words introduce time by representing that which can only exist in time—sound" (McCloud 95) and which remain stationary and available for us to revisit as many times as we need, in film we experience action and sound in real-time motion. Since images and spoken material are constantly moving, distributed over a length of time, we cannot revisit either the visual or auditory-verbal components, and our perceptual processing is absorbed by simply following along. Our eye fixations are likely to be multiple and broad since image usually precedes narration, and restrictive parameters provided by narration are typically contingent on our ability to hear and comprehend it as well as on how it is juxtaposed with the image (Goolkasian 452). As a result, we process auditory material such as dialogue, narration, and film score as supplementary to the background images, while our perceptual processing focuses primarily on the visual in order to follow the information. Thus, comics allow us to better integrate visual and verbal elements, due to the fact that we can frequently reaccess the material as needed.

Although Moore's *Watchmen* lacks an equivalent sequence, the historical montage near the opening of Snyder's film best illustrates how we prioritize the auditory and the visual, as well as how the two may be combined to produce meaningful interplay and under-language, and may thereby aid my dissection of the film's shortcomings. Set against Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A-Changin'," which provides the only auditory supplement to the visual sequence, the sequence cross-fades from one mostly-still image to another, interspersed with a few slow-motion actions such as a flashbulb going off, or smoke puffing around the mouth of a fired gun (*Watchmen*). The cross-fades recall the gutter between panels in comics and, like comics, require that we use the process of closure to fill in the gaps between scenes (McCloud 65-8). The images depict figures at the center of the frame, where our eyes initially fixate, and figures and events around them. Because the camera lingers on mostly-still images, and the few actions that do occur are slowed to resemble sound-effects in comics, viewers have time to perceptually process the sequence as they would a scene in a graphic novel, as seen in the image below:

Here, we are shown an image that is still, except for the gradual zooming-out of the camera, enabling us to process it as we would a comic panel. Set to the song lyric, "Come mothers and fathers throughout the land, and don't criticize what you can't understand," the scene slowly pulls back from blood-soaked sheets to the corpses of The Silhouette and her lover, to the visible text on the wall, "Lesbian Whores" (*Watchmen*). The juxtaposition of all three elements implies a correlation between them. Although the use of narration and dialogue is certainly different from the use of soundtrack, Snyder's use of Dylan here comes closest to successfully evoking under-language through the combination of the visual and the verbal. It is significant that the most successful aspect of the film is the one that least resembles moving image, demonstrating the importance of using formal analysis as the basis of comic adaptation and forewarning us of the shortcomings of an action-heavy, spectacle-reliant approach to the material. Unfortunately, this approach characterizes the rest of Snyder's *Watchmen*, as his text-image and image-image juxtapositions create little to no under-language, and the novelty of spectacle absorbs our perceptual processing to the point of obscuring semantic and semiotic meaning.

When information is presented across modality, "participants do not rely on spoken material for processing the background material" (Goolkasian 452); instead, participants rely on the pictures, where information is encoded most directly. Therefore, viewers' attention in film is more emphatically focused on the moving image, since the pictures contain the most information and, like dialogue or narration, are distributed over a length of time and aren't accessible for later reference. As such, while interplay and under-language may exist between the visual and the verbal, our comprehension of it may be eroded. Lexical semantics, a key feature of Moore's graphic novel, particularly suffer in Snyder's appropriation as the meanings Moore generates through under-language and repetition rarely

recur, appear in meaningless juxtapositions, or are absent altogether in the film. Moore, for instance, positions the Pagliacci joke with an image of the Comedian, masked and armed, standing amidst rubble and smoke below the line, "he feels all alone in a threatening world where what lies ahead is vague and uncertain" (Moore 27; Ch.2), an unexpected text-image juxtaposition that challenges our perception of what it means to feel alone. By contrast, Snyder places the same line with the Comedian's crying face, underscoring its expected meaning (*Watchmen*).

Moore himself asserts that "comics afford unmatched opportunities both for 'interplay' and other sorts of play, especially puns, doublings, echoes, and other strategies for overloading the signifier" (Moulthrop 2). In the graphic novel *Watchmen*, interplay is most effective when the visual and the verbal are arranged to encourage multiple forms of eye-tracking: first with specific eye fixation on text that supplies search terms to modify our inferences, and then to broad eye-tracking across the image as a whole to determine the essence of the scene, followed by specific eye fixation with regards to the search terms the text provides. In this way, the placement of one or more text boxes initially guides our interpretation and is then reshaped by the meaning we extract from the image, which in turn is modified when we revisit the text and apply additional meaning to existing lexical semantics. We extract the most encoded information from signifiers, semiotics, and semantics when our eyes track back and forth between the visual and the visual-verbal.

While the comics format of Moore's *Watchmen* allows readers to continually revisit both elements to parse the interplay and under-language between them, Snyder's film adaptation is paced too quickly for thorough psycholinguistic processing, thus constraining viewers' attention to where the most information appears to be encoded: usually characters' facial expressions or gestures, centered in the frame, or the spectacle of colossal, technically expert visual effects, such as the glass construct Jon creates on Mars or the destruction of New York. This is not to say that film cannot replicate aspects integral to the way we process comics; in fact, Moore employs techniques that seem to be the print equivalent of camera angle, zooming, match cuts—such as the flashbacks during the Comedian's funeral, which cut from a character in one context to a new scene or perspective containing that same character, position and posture unchanged—cross-fades, intercutting, and so on. However, Snyder's use of these same techniques fails to achieve the same effect, since he juxtaposes material to emphasize spectacle or to no seeming purpose, such as positioning the line "buried alive with them in sand-flooded chambers" to a close-up shot of Adrian Veidt's black cloak, after which the camera pan reveals the dead bodies of his scientific team, whereas Moore positions the same line with the recurring image of a motionless servant, so that only slowly do we realize, at the moment of this line, that he has poisoned his servants (Moore 11; Ch.11). Snyder also misappropriates these techniques to emphasize spectacle, as when his Dr. Manhattan brands his forehead without any accompanying indication of why or what the emblem signifies, the camera focusing on the sparks and steam under his finger. The only verbal component is, "They explain the name [Dr. Manhattan] has been chosen for the ominous associations it will raise in America's enemies" (*Watchmen*), whereas Moore's character explains that the symbol is a "hydrogen atom," the only symbol he respects (12; Ch.4). This juxtaposition reminds us that, despite his transformation, Jon retains emotional complexity, which Snyder removes from the character in favor of showcasing him instead as spectacle. In these ways, Snyder's attempt to reproduce formal elements at work in comics only serves to undermine character development and detract from semantic and semiotic meaning.

In contrast to the graphic novel, character dialogue and narration in Snyder's *Watchmen* are often juxtaposed with actions or images in a way that precludes interplay, as these combinations neither augment nor subvert existing semantic and semiotic meaning. Even though Snyder retains much of Moore's original text, his arrangement lacks the purposefulness of Moore's, which is evident as early as the film's opening: even though Snyder visually reproduces the first six panels with minute precision, his sequence excludes the excerpt from Rorschach's journal that conjoins the city's "true face" (Moore 1; Ch.1) with the bloodstained smiley-face pin, in itself an incongruous image. Without the accompanying phrase, the

viewer loses the full import of the semiotic meaning. Although the lines are relocated to the image of Rorschach picking up the pin and examining it, Rorschach's mask—completely shadowed and indistinct—is centered in the frame and therefore draws the viewer's attention, while the pin is invisible in darkness at the bottom of the screen (*Watchmen*). "Its true face," then, is reduced to its most obvious meaning, as it appears to apply to Rorschach, whose face has not yet been revealed.

The convergence of images with incongruous text, or vice-versa, can be treated in much the same way as McCloud treats non-sequitur relationships between panels, where images that are seemingly unrelated are placed side by side:

No matter how dissimilar one image may be to another, there is a kind of alchemy at work in the space between panels which can help us find meaning or resonance even in the most jarring of combinations. Such transitions may not make "sense" in any traditional way, but still a relationship of some sort will inevitably develop. (73)

To make "sense" of these combinations, it is imperative that the reader examine not just a single isolated panel, but neighboring panels as well. The evolution of lexical semantics in Moore's story arises out of unexpected juxtapositions and non-sequitur transitions, and so our eye fixations sweep not only within but also between panels as we attempt to resolve the relationship between the various elements being used. Through this constant, recursive eye-tracking, we become active participants in the story, parsing plot and under-language simultaneously in order to progress with the narrative. Although frequent non-sequitur cuts are scarce in commercial film, Snyder refrains even from unexpected juxtapositions, instead relying on obvious lexical semantics, such as the use of words like "alone" or "dark," in an attempt to mimic the under-language in Moore's work.

This tactic speaks to the deterioration of one of *Watchmen*'s primary "semiotic signatures," as Moulthrop puts it: its "principle of similarity-in-difference which is the logical underpinning of irony" (3). Incongruity in Moore's novel, whether within or between panels, is one of *Watchmen*'s chief conveyances of under-language, as juxtaposing this kind of difference compels reader participation through cognitive problem-solving to establish the relationship between the panels in question. McCloud terms this the non-sequitur transition, elaborating that "[b]y creating a sequence with two or more images, we are endowing them with a single overriding identity, and forcing the viewer to consider them as a whole" (73). While Moore's novel continually insists upon this type of perceptual processing, Snyder's film cinematically "spoon-feeds us" (Boucher), to quote Moore himself, using dialogue-image juxtapositions to, reductively, establish a character's personality, or dramatize the visual spectacle taking place.

The relocation of the opening lines falls into the former category. In Panel 3, Figure 1, the text appears at both top and bottom, framing the central figures of the sidewalk cleaner and the preacher of doom: the upper text box reads, "...and all the whores and politicians will look up and shout, 'Save us!'..." which then continues in the lower text box, "...and I'll look down and whisper 'No'" (Moore 1; Ch.1). The presence of two text boxes, placed within a multifaceted scene with an overhead vantage point, inducing an examination of the characters and the mingling water and blood, suggests that readers may revisit the image multiple times, with both broad and specific eye fixations (Underwood 125-6). Perceptual processing, then, focuses on inferring the relationship between seemingly disassociated image and text—at the very least a subtle indication that the preacher of doom is Rorschach's unmasked identity. The demands on our perceptual processing, however, are greatly decreased in the film, where the first text box is narrated by Rorschach as he uses his grappling hook to climb up to the Comedian's apartment—drawing on the obvious meaning of "look up." The subsequent cut is a close-up revealing Rorschach's mask, as he slowly lifts his head and stares us down (*Watchmen*). Here the juxtaposition seems intended solely to introduce Rorschach as unforgiving, and lacking in compassion and empathy. Moore reveals the mask from a distance, without juxtaposed text, playing on our curiosity and asking for our investigation of each introduced element to comprehend this new character. Again, this points to the notion that the dramatic,

fast-paced inflation of the film reduces and simplifies meaning.

Similarly, Snyder overlooks the function of lexical semantics during Rorschach's origin story: the kidnapping case that transformed him from Walter Kovacs to Rorschach. Snyder takes us from a pitch-black scene, which cuts to a door slamming open as an armed man enters the building, centered in the frame, pistol aimed vaguely towards the audience; Rorschach narrates, "It was dark when the murderer got back. As dark as it gets" (*Watchmen*). Due to the darkness of the scene, the place where the most information is encoded is at the center, in the form of the murderer, and our eyes fixate specifically here as he begins down the hall. Thus, our perceptual processing is likely to conclude that the dialogue-image interplay here refers to the obvious lexical semantics of "dark": literally, that it's nighttime, and figuratively, with regards to the murderer's nature, "as dark as it gets," (*Watchmen*) since he butchered a young girl and fed her to his dogs. Moore, however, complicates our perceptual processing by offering us two images that initially seem only tangentially related:

It is evident at a glance that these panels use the same basic image, the butterfly inkblot that to Rorschach resembles a "dog with head split in half" (Moore 16; Ch.6). Both panels appear with speech bubbles aligned at top center, and the similarity of the images draws our initial eye fixations to them. From broad eye-tracking, the primary difference is that in the first panel the inkblot card is cast in yellow, while in the second it is cast in red as well as being more zoomed-in (21). The color-casts alone are reminiscent of the bloodstained smiley-face and the lexical semantics of the "true face." Together, all of these considerations give rise to complex

under-language concerning Rorschach's identity, the unrelenting horror of the New York City he inhabits, and the conflation of the Rorschach inkblot with the dog's split head, which substitutes for the depiction of the act itself (21). After revisiting each with specific eye fixations, by the time we reach the narration in the second panel, where our specific search terms are predefined by, "Dark by then. Dark as it gets," (21) both lexical semantics and the semiotic meaning of the Rorschach inkblot have been compounded. "Dark" now applies to the changing tone of the story, loss of light, Rorschach's transformation, the dog's split head, and the blood-red cast of the inkblot card. The inkblot itself faces us in intimate close-up, as though the test were being administered to us, insisting that we perceive it as Rorschach does, suggesting that we have transformed as well. We are gazing into the titular abyss, complicit with Rorschach's experience, as the inkblot—the dog's split head—gazes back at us, questioning if Rorschach's origin can be faulted. Snyder, however, does not intercut between Rorschach's flashback and the inkblot card, thus omitting this evolution of semantic meaning.

In this way, unexpected image-image or text-image juxtapositions in Moore's novel, and the under-language encoded in them, complicate our perception of the material. Snyder, on the other hand, removes the necessity of complex perceptual processing by realigning juxtapositions into more expected, or seemingly purposeless arrangements. This is glaringly obvious in his adaptation of Chapter 3, which in both media functions like a series of intercuts between the Dr. Manhattan interview and Dan and Laurie fending off thugs in a dismal alleyway. Moore purposely juxtaposes text from the interview scenes with panels depicting the latter, resulting in interplay and the doubling of lexical meaning:

In this sequence, the text begins at the top left of each panel, thereby attracting our initial eye-tracking and guiding our specific eye fixations (Underwood 120). In Panel 2, Moore offers a foreshadowing nod to the psychic squid by overlapping "monsters from outta space," which describes Jon in the previous panel, with the cinema marquee depicting an alien and the title "This Island Earth," which recalls Moloch's retelling of the Comedian's mention of an island in his cryptic visit (Moore 11; Ch.3). Additional meaning lies in the fact that Laurie is with Dan, foreshadowing her leaving Jon. Because the text offers specific search terms that predefine our goal and therefore our eye fixations on the image, we are invited to question what a "monster" truly is through the conflation of the stereotypical inhuman, big-brained movie alien and Dr. Manhattan, in his increasing detachment to human life. Similarly, in Panel 4, when an army aide advises Jon, "And try not to get into tight corners" (11), meaning political no-go areas, the text informs our reading of Dan and Laurie entering a foreboding alley, thugs beginning to assemble behind them; here, the conflation of political "tight corners" and physically life-threatening ones suggests that information revelation is as severe—a nod to the novel's conclusion, where Rorschach, the man who knew too much, is killed and the discovery of his journal may prove just as shattering. The effect is the same in Panel 6, where "dark" recurs as both a superficial cosmetic effect and the threat Dan and Laurie are about to confront. Unexpected juxtapositions occur on the following pages to reinforce their inner conflict over having to draw on their superhero training to defend themselves. As they are surrounded by thugs in a panel captioned with TV studio laughter, they come to the unwilling realization that they must fight in another panel captioned by the interview question, "Will you be prepared to enter hostilities?" (12), followed by applause. Both laughter and applause appear at the bottom of their respective panels, and so when we again fixate on the images, we operate on those semantics to double their meanings (Underwood 120). The incongruity of the juxtapositions only emphasizes the surreality of the decision they are confronted with. The skirmish itself doubles the meaning of words such as "snappy," which refers both to rapid-fire questioning and the implication of a broken arm, or "super people," which refers to Dr. Manhattan but is juxtaposed on a long melee shot of Dan and Laurie beating up their attackers, implying that this is all they "do," both in and out of costume (Moore 13; Ch.3).

In Snyder's version, most of this doubling has been omitted or replaced with more explicit references to the narrative action, thereby compounding spectacle rather than semantic meaning. The dialogue, "Yeah, that's dark enough," is spoken as the camera jump-cuts to Dan and Laurie walking down a populated street at night, so that "dark" again is given its most obvious meaning (*Watchmen*). The Dr. Manhattan interview is still intercut with the alley skirmish, but the juxtapositions are expected and reinforce the visual spectacle of the fight. For instance, Jon states, "Even in a world without nuclear weapons, there would still be danger," just prior to Dan snapping a man's arm, blood bursting out toward the viewer; here, we apply "danger" to the spectacle of violence we have just witnessed, and lexical semantics remain unmodified. Jon's following answer, "I can only see my own past. My own future" (*Watchmen*), is placed against a seemingly random shot of the melee, while his concluding statement, "I am not omniscient" (*Watchmen*), is juxtaposed with Laurie repeatedly punching a thug in the face, the thug facing us with blood laced in his teeth. While Nova Express reporter Doug Roth's questions, as in the graphic novel, are superimposed on the alley skirmish, in the film they do not add to lexical meanings. Rather, the lines tend to end just before a brutal act of violence, such as Laurie thrusting a knife into the side of a thug's neck, then whipping his body around to block gunshots, in slow-motion frames that highlight the blood trickling out of his wounds (*Watchmen*). This suggests that Snyder interwove these two narrative threads not to reproduce Moore's interplay and under-language, but to punctuate the visual spectacle of violence, which he is known for in his other films. As such, the role of under-language in his *Watchmen* becomes a proverbial exclamation mark, bracketing blood and gore.

Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that, due to the way we process spoken discourse, it is even more essential to present dialogue and narration in meaningful juxtapositions so as not to overload viewers' working memory (Underwood 120-1). In a 1981 study of discourse processing in film,

Baggett and Ehrenfeucht determined that "there is no competition for [perceptual] resources when related information is presented in two media (visual and verbal/auditory)" (13) but acknowledged that "information from visual and verbal sources is encoded and retained differently. Lots of linguistic information is encoded, but only half of it is retained over a week. Far less visual information is encoded, but it all lasts over a week" (14). This finding indicates that the brain privileges spectacle over spoken narration, while print media, which allows the reader to revisit and reexamine text-image and image-image relationships as many times as needed, does not perceptually foster one component over the other. Therefore, despite the inclusion of dialogue and narration that may hint at interplay, it is the spectacle that commands our perceptual processing at the expense of semantic and semiotic meaning.

Interplay is further eroded during the exchange between Jon and Laurie on Mars, as they sail over the South Pole and Jon asks, in a tiny speech bubble at the top-center of a page-wide panel: "Would it [the landscape] be greatly improved by an oil pipe-line?" (Moore 13; Ch.9). Here, the spectacle is not of the strange, elaborate glass construct the two are riding, but of the Martian landscape, a vast, clay-red plain, streaked with rills of water. Reading left to right, our eyes first track generally over the landscape, then over the text at the top of the page, and then on the landscape again in a more specific, information-gathering way (Underwood 120). The glass construct is a dime-sized speck over the Martian plateau and therefore barely holds our attention. In the film, Snyder juxtaposes the narration with a medium shot of the glass construct. The landscape appears only as a few rolling mountain peaks in a sunny haze that glints on the revolving construct. As such, the under-language surrounding the phrase, "all of this," seems to attach to the construct as opposed to the landscape, changing its semantic meaning inherently.

But perhaps the most significant instance of the devolution of meaning through purposeless juxtapositions is the depiction of Dr. Manhattan's accident. Lent primacy in the film due to the character's central role in Snyder's plot, the sequence is an elaborate, technically skilled build-up to the image of Jon Ostermann being stripped of skin, blood, flesh, and bone (*Watchmen*), reproducing panels from Moore's novel but ignoring the crucial recursion they demand.

In this chapter more so than anywhere else, panels themselves become signifiers as they are introduced and reused throughout the chapter, changed only in that they are juxtaposed with different text. Recurrent images include the photograph falling from Jon's hand, watch cogs separated on black velvet, fingers brushing on a cold glass of beer, Jon kissing sixteen-year-old Laurie and his hands encircling her face (Moore 2-25; Ch.4). The repetition of these images, often in unexpected conjunctions, mimics the process of memory and the necessary perceptual recursion that allows us to make sense of our lives. Along with recurring lines of text, such as, "The photograph is in my hand" (1), "The photograph is falling" (2), and "The photograph lies in the sand at my feet" (5), these images act as checkpoints in our exploration of simultaneous time, reminders that these moments are experienced all at once and yet at different times. The resulting effect of all this is continual déjà vu, presumably the foundation of Jon's experience, where semantic and semiotic meaning are constantly compounded rather than attenuated.

For instance, Jon and Janey first brush fingers on the beer glass to an obvious description of the action: "She buys me a beer, the first time a woman has ever done this for me. As she passes me the cold, perspiring glass, our fingers touch" (5). It next recurs after Jon is locked in the intrinsic field chamber and is framed by two text boxes, the first narrating, "All the atoms in the test chamber are screaming at once," and the second, "The light..." (8). Here, the beer glass is immediately followed by the image of Jon's death. Because we first see the beer glass in a romantic context, its repetition here is all the more poignant and painful. In addition, the fact that it is the last image Jon thinks of before his death points to her importance to him, and to his humanity both as Jon Ostermann and as Dr. Manhattan, mediating the flashback sequence for us.

More significant is the recurrence of the panel depicting watch cogs on velvet. After

its initial two appearances, it later recurs with the lines, "Her mother still isn't answering. We decide to call again from my hotel. We both know what's going to happen. Events mesh together with soft precision" (6); the words alter our understanding of the image. Not only do the cogs signify the precision needed by a watchmaker, or Jon's fascination with it, but also signify fate, the idea of separate events converging, as the seemingly disparate images do (6). When we see the watch cogs again, it is directly after Jon's initial attempts to reconstruct himself, first as a nervous system, then as a circulation and musculoskeletal system; the panel text now reads, "Really, it's just a question of reassembling the components in the correct sequence" (9), imbuing the image with new meaning: that perhaps even before he became Dr. Manhattan, Jon was preparing himself for this moment, that nothing is coincidental, inconsequential, or unplanned.

The film medium constrains the kinds of frequent match cuts and non-sequitur intercuts used in the novel, but Snyder does attempt to replicate its effect, as seen in his inclusion of the images described above. The images of the cold beer glass and the watch cogs precede the accident, juxtaposed with narration that hardly diverges from Moore's. However, the beer glass is no longer Jon's final thought, replaced by the image of the watch cogs, as though Janey is less significant to him. Just like the watch cogs, the nature of meaning is, "a question of reassembling the components in the correct sequence" (*Watchmen*). Unfortunately for the film, there is no recurring narration and all of the images presented in this sequence appear once and only once; our sense of déjà vu, and of unraveling simultaneous time, is neatly eliminated.

Instead, the flashback mounts to a detailed, second-by-second sequence of the accident itself, emphasizing visual spectacle in spite of meaningful narration. We are given the watch cogs and the notion of reassembly as the camera pans slowly over the glinting parts, commanding our eye fixations. The narration's meaning is undercut not only by the primacy of the image, but also because we lack a referent to indicate *why* reassembly is important, as Jon has not yet been disassembled. Snyder juxtaposes the line, "I feel fear..." with a close-up of tweezers grasping a cog, finishing as the camera cuts to a close-up of Jon's eyes closing, "...for the last time" (*Watchmen*). Here it seems that he may have attempted to produce dialogue-image interplay, but the under-language is quickly forgotten in the slow-motion, 14-second sequence of the intrinsic field taking Jon apart. Our eye-tracking is immediately drawn to the center of the screen, where the most information is encoded in the form of Jon being taken to pieces by snapping electricity, disintegrating his clothing, his skin, revealing blood-dark bones and organs that also dissolve into dark, bloodlike strings, and then into whiteness (*Watchmen*). Since our perceptual processing privileges spectacle over spoken discourse, this image and others like it, such as the materializing circulatory system, the partially muscled skeleton, and Jon's full reassembly in the cafeteria, all overshadow the interplay and under-language Snyder attempts to impose on the scene.

Semantic meaning is again attenuated in Moloch's underground vice-den, where Jon explodes a man's head in a cloud of smoke:

In Figure 5, the two text boxes appear at the left and are the first elements we

encounter. The first, a description of the action in the panel, predefines our specific eye fixations, while the second guides our revisiting of the text, ascribing Jon's misunderstanding of morality to the moral ambiguity of the situation: that is, killing a man, a criminal, in an underworld criminal haunt, a place where morality does not exist (Moore 14; Ch.4). Figure 6 represents Snyder's version of the same scene. Before the criminal bursts apart into slow-motion showers of blood, Jon narrates, "He [Hollis Mason] calls my arrival the dawn of the superhero" (*Watchmen*). After the criminal is killed, the camera cuts to the gory remnants on the ceiling and then to Jon in the foreground as people flee behind him; Jon adds, "I am not sure if I know what that means" (*Watchmen*). Under-language may have arose if Snyder chose to place the entire line against the image in Figure 6, as the referent of "that" would then be unclear, referring either to "the dawn of the superhero," to the ramifications of killing, or to the importance of human life when it is so easily reduced to meat. However, Snyder's decision to split the narration between the gory remains and Jon's face empties any semantic significance the line may have had, as by the line's end we are no longer looking at the gore, and therefore ascribe the line's meaning to the image of Jon's face, which as an image adds nothing to lexical meaning.

Moore uses under-language and recursion similarly when revealing that Laurie's biological father is the Comedian. Here, reflexive imagery and visual and verbal elements combine to create a sense of mounting frenzy, frustration, and ultimately realization:

Several of these images appear earlier in the chapter, as Laurie recalls

formative experiences surrounding her identity, such as the snow globe that held her attention during her parents' argument, or the close-up of the Comedian's scarred face at the banquet (Moore 23; Ch.9). When we first encounter these images, they are told in sequences that make sense with regards to narrative action, delineated by minimal text that nevertheless predefines our search for meaning. When we first see the Comedian through the rear windshield, Laurie narrates, "We drove away in silence. I looked back and he just stood there, watching us go. He looked sad. I felt sorry for him" (16). The image is followed by text at the bottom of the panel, so that we revisit it after reading, "Of course, then I didn't know what the bastard had done" (16). This single panel encapsulates the extreme emotions Laurie has felt toward the Comedian, and the presence of conflicting emotions in the same panel indicates her mental struggle over it. By Figure 7, these repetitive images are transformed into a revelatory whirlwind, appearing in non-sequitur juxtapositions conjoined with text that is also being repeated, albeit juxtaposed on images different from the ones where they first appeared.

This confusion of semantic and semiotic meanings highlights Laurie's struggle with these memories as she fumbles toward the reason for human significance. As her reasoning progresses, the text boxes begin to crowd the page, furthering the reader's sense of frenzy and claustrophobia as we are asked to view each convergence of elements as a whole, as "however different they had been, they now belong to a single organism" (McCloud 73). The most prominently repeated line is the Comedian's, "What do you think I am? Can't a guy talk to his, y'know, his old friend's daughter?" (Moore 23; Ch.9), dialogue that Laurie takes apart, rephrases, and recycles until she is left with, "What do you think I am?" and, "Friend's daughter?" and, "His, y'know, his..." (23), while her mental protests slant across the panels, "No. No not him not...no" (24). This culminates in her stuttering on the revelation, desperate to discount it and unable to do so, "You're not my fuh, my fuh, fuh..." (24) as she realizes the actual line: "Christ, we were just talking. Can't a guy talk to his, y'know, his...daughter?" (24). The text boxes abruptly become sparse, and our eyes fixate broadly and freely on the open space in the panels, the most information encoded in the images of Jon's glass construct shattering and Laurie falling to her knees, having arrived at the devastating truth. And it *is* devastating. The unexpected recurrences and juxtapositions of visual and verbal elements, which force us to parse the experience along with Laurie, ensure that.

In Snyder's sequence, he incorporates two images we have already been presented with in the film: first, Laurie's parents arguing in the bedroom, a scene that more or less tells us that Sally is romantically attached to the Comedian when her husband says, "Call your friend Eddie, maybe he can give you a better life"; and the scene of Sally holding the 1940 Minutemen photograph, saying, "Even the grimy parts keep on getting brighter" (*Watchmen*). The sequence ends with two images we haven't yet seen: the shot of the Comedian through the rear windshield, and the continuation of her parents' argument, her father saying, "Guy tries to rape you, and years later you let him finish the job?" (*Watchmen*), spoon-feeding us information that is already obvious through recursion and perceptual processing, namely that the Comedian is Laurie's biological father. Because there is a lack of recurring images involving the Comedian, we have no reason to believe that she is conflicted about him, or even that she hates him; thus, her emotional reaction to the revelation feels contrived to say the least. Additionally, the scene transpires very quickly in real-time, while in the graphic novel the crowded, cyclical, claustrophobic nature of the panels requires exhaustive perceptual processing in order to comprehend them as one identity. Several text boxes within each panel operate like a series of panels, stretching time over a period rather than a single moment and giving us the illusion that time is progressing more slowly, and that Laurie's struggle is much more meaningful (McCloud 103).

Along those lines, discourse and speech processing are also of particular significance with regards to the adaptation of comics, as the verbal component in comics assumes the form of visually presented words, making it visual-verbal, while in film this component is verbal-auditory (Baggett and Ehrenfeucht 1). In Moore's *Watchmen*, the visual-verbal is utilized not only to create a sense of frenzy or dictate the scan-paths of our eye fixations—such as the mounting threats when Rorschach is being walked to his prison cell (Moore 6; Ch.6)—but also

to differentiate between reading experience and auditory experience. We see Moore draw on this especially with regards to Rorschach, whose lines take the form of journal entries, dialogue with the mask on, and dialogue without it. The journal entries, drawn to resemble yellow, ragged-edged scraps of notebook paper, always begin at the upper left corner of a given panel and for the most part remain at the top. From a psycholinguistic standpoint, because we already possess non-visual information about what a journal is, we process it as we would private, intimate discourse, one that may not be meant for our eyes at all; by contrast, the effect of Rorschach's narration of his journal in the film situates the journal's content in the realm of the public. Even though we are expressly told that this is a journal entry, Rorschach's narration is identical to his regular dialogue with and without the mask, and therefore we process each as spoken, public discourse. As such, overdramatic lines that are acceptable in journal entries as a result of private-discourse writing, such as "Beneath me, this awful city, it screams like an abattoir full of retarded children" (Moore 14; Ch.1), become contrived and unconvincing when spoken aloud in the film.

Under-language is promoted through visual-verbal elements, as well, to facilitate reader inferences about a given character or to emphasize the significance of dialogue over spectacle, or vice-versa. Rorschach's spoken dialogue is presented in white, ragged speech bubbles, the text written in slanted, spidery print; unmasked, he is given speech bubbles and print similar to Dan's or Laurie's. It is easy to assume that this is because the mask muffles Rorschach's speech, but even when his mouth is uncovered, such as when he is at Dan's apartment eating beans, his speech bubbles don't change (Moore 11; Ch.1). Only when he is imprisoned and bereft of his mask does he speak with standard speech bubbles, signaling that the mask is Rorschach's identity and cannot be removed without removing the persona itself, an effect that is lost in film.

The presentation of the visual-verbal is also key in emphasizing the elements we are meant to fixate on during eye-tracking. As mentioned before, in Chapter 9 when Jon mentions the oil pipe-line, his speech bubble is minuscule compared to the Martian landscape, so that our initial eye-tracking sweeps across the image rather than the text. Conversely, the scale and placement of text when Laurie and Dan first have dinner together reminds us of the significance of the Comedian's death. The sequence of panels begins with an overhead view of Dan's hand holding the smiley-face badge, Laurie's hand close to his, and zooms out to an aerial shot of the building, the street, and finally the city. As the view pulls back, Dan and Laurie shrink and the text appears to expand at the top of the panels, guiding our eye fixations so that the element of primary importance becomes the dialogue. At first the conversation is private and intimate, as indicated by the extreme close-up shot of their hands, but by the end the text is large, embedded in a view of the city and narrated by invisible speakers, reminding us of the magnitude of the fact that, "The Comedian is dead" (Moore 26; Ch.1). This is in contrast to the film, where the conversation transpires outside in the rain and the camera stays on Dan's face as he speaks the line, removing emphasis entirely (*Watchmen*).

It's difficult not to agree with comics artist Adam Cadre's assertion that, "for all the visual genius of the film, its messages are thrown serially across a giant screen, not deployed in an elegant, convoluted sign-system that demands artful discovery" (qtd. in Moulthrop 6). This is not to say that Snyder excludes semiotic systems from his film. In fact, he makes sure to include and expand on signifiers from the novel, most notably the smiley-face, watches, and Rorschach inkblots. However, Snyder incorporates signifiers in a way that ascribes little meaning to them, whereas Moore does not solely rely on the fact that the signifiers recur to imbue them with meaning. Rather, Moore sets up a system in which his signifiers enter into relationships with various text-image and image-image juxtapositions to acquire and develop meaning.

The meaning in the conjunction of "true face" and the smiley-face signifier is compounded when the signifier recurs as a crater on Mars. Each panel pulls back gradually, so that our eyes track over new elements first: text boxes, the shrinking figures of Jon and Laurie, a boulder that in the next panel is revealed to be

one of two eyes. The revelation of the smiley-face begins as Jon refutes his earlier statement that life is meaningless; we glimpse the right eye of the smiley-face and the wreckage of the glass construct as Jon explains how each human coupling is like a thermodynamic miracle; and finally, we see the whole smiley-face like the unfolding of some inimitable grand scheme. This initial glimpse is juxtaposed with the text, "Until your mother loves a man she has every reason to hate, and of that union [...] it was you, only you, that emerged. To distill so specific a form from that chaos of improbability, like turning air to gold...that is the crowning unlikelihood. The thermodynamic miracle" (Moore 27; Ch.9). The smiley-face sprawls across the center of the panel, attracting our initial broad eye-tracking before we focus on the text, which is spread around the perimeter of the smiley-face. In a general sense, we see that the smiley-face again is being set against a contradiction, this time of love and hate, but the text also provides search terms such as "miracles," and "unlikelihood," so that we impose those added meanings on previous context we have seen, thereby further developing its semiotic meaning.

In the film, Snyder reuses the smiley-face as Moore does in the novel, in the form of the Comedian's badge, the Argyre Planitia on Mars, and Seymour's shirt in the final frame, a mirror reflection of the smiley-face pin at the opening. However, aside from these recurrences, the signifier does not enter into a relationship with other images or text around it. On Mars, the conversation remains much the same but transpires before the camera zooms out to reveal the smiley-face; we are not forced to view text and image as a single identity, and so the signifier is stripped of this additional meaning. Likewise, the movie ends with a text-image juxtaposition meant to be self-reflexive: Seymour, a ketchup-stained smiley-face on his shirt, reaching for Rorschach's journal to the narration of a journal excerpt, "Tonight a comedian died in New York" (*Watchmen*). The novel, however, provides us with more under-language, as the text juxtaposed onto the image is, "I leave it entirely in your hands" (Moore 32; Ch.12). The text in the upper-left corner of the panel informs our specific eye-fixations, so that we track the hand, the journal, and the smiley-face, which has accumulated meanings of disaster, irony, and, strangely, hope; here, at the end, almost a mirror image of the opening, it seems to spell disaster again in a throwback to Jon's final words that, "nothing ever ends" (27).

Snyder also sets up the Rorschach inkblot as a semiotic system in his film, though the signifier tends to appear without juxtaposed dialogue or narration. Aside from the psychiatrist interview, where the cards are used in their obvious function to diagnose Rorschach's disorder, the inkblots appear as Rorschach's signature in written messages, in the psychiatrist's suitcase when New York is destroyed, and in the shape of his blood on the snow when Jon kills him. Due to the lack of interaction with other elements, the film gives us no predefined search terms and the signifier fails to acquire meaning beyond symbolizing Rorschach and what the character himself stands for: in short, the signifier falls more into the realm of spectacle than semiotics.

Finally, it is the ending where the book and film diverge in content with the film's absence of the psychic squid. This instantly polarizing question has been emblematic of the dissension over the success of Snyder's adaptation. Perhaps framing Dr. Manhattan for nuclear warfare is more concise and easily digestible, but it ultimately transforms Moore's ending. As Moulthrop explains, framing Jon creates a peace that is more stable and likely to last. At the film's conclusion, the discovery of Rorschach's journal and its indictment of Adrian Veidt bear little threat to Veidt's new world order. Even if *The New Frontiersman* publishes evidence of Veidt's attempt at utopia, and even if Veidt is punished for it, the threat—Dr. Manhattan himself—still remains at large, and the world is likely to remain fearful of his powers and his possible return. Consequently, nations are unlikely to war with each other and will probably remain united in case Dr. Manhattan is hostile and returns to destroy the Earth (Moulthrop 4).

By contrast, Moore's ending does not promise lasting stability. The final image of Rorschach's journal, pending discovery, does constitute a real threat in that its publication will likely catalyze an investigation that could uncover Veidt's

practical joke: "[o]nce the phony alien in New York is debunked, there will be no threat from beyond the stars to constrain nuclear brinkmanship. Rorschach's journal thus represents a terrible presence: quite possibly a truly ultimate weapon, or Doomsday Book" (Moulthrop 4). Thus, the predominant difference is that Moore seems to controvert the possibility of a utopia, while Snyder finds it plausible, though through a regime of fear. Moulthrop believes this indicates the post-Millennium, post-9/11 social and political climate of America, and that perhaps this is where its success can be found (5), though encoding this into a Nixon presidency and the social climate of a world where we won Vietnam, rather than a George W. Bush character and a climate of terrorism and uncertainty, seems at odds with the message itself.

However, in considering the value of Snyder's adaptation, it is important to note more than the absence of the psychic squid, contentious as that absence is; rather, we should look beyond narrative fidelity and consider the pitfalls of translating comics to the big screen without using formal analysis as a basis for adaptation. The comics medium, after all, is one that affords unparalleled opportunities to create meaning through various juxtapositions of text and image, giving rise to interplay and under-language that demand we actively participate as readers, reading recursively, discovering meaning on our own. It is unfortunate that, though Hollywood film is capable of reproducing some aspects of interplay and under-language, it fails to do so, resorting instead to expected juxtapositions and spectacles that, to paraphrase Moore, do little more than spoon-feed us regurgitated worms.

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## The Culturally Constituted Gaze: Fetishizing the Feminine from Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen* to Zack Snyder's *Watchmen*

By Paul Petrovic

Critics of the graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986-7) traditionally marginalize Laurie Juspezyk (Silk Spectre) in favor of mapping out more overt complex characters like Dr. Manhattan or Rorschach. Even monographs on Alan Moore's fiction, such as Annalisa Di Liddo's otherwise illuminating study, fail to address both the archetypal referents and the psychological and sexual politics inherent to Laurie's character.<sup>[1]</sup> Only Sarah Donovan and Nick Richardson articulate the complexities of the women in Moore and Gibbons's *Watchmen*, yet none have yet analyzed the one-dimensional, pornographic depiction of women as Zack Snyder's film adaptation of *Watchmen* (2009) constructs them. This essay, then, offers a corrective to the undervalued Silk Spectre, positioning her characterizations in the graphic novel and film against one another to assess each not in terms of historical fidelity to the other. Rather, the essay articulates why the visual choices that Snyder makes defuse so much of Laurie's sexual resistance found in Moore's text. That is to say, Snyder's *Watchmen* fetishizes Laurie's initial sexuality, recapitulating that erotic power into a far more regressive and objectified passivity.

Sketching out the criticism testifies to the disinterest with which scholars view Laurie. For example, in one of the first critical studies on *Watchmen*, Brent Fishbaugh rightly attends to Laurie's trajectory in the narrative, but ultimately sees her as little more than a counterpoint to Rorschach. Fishbaugh contends, "While Rorschach raises the question of 'nature versus nurture,' Laurie answers it to some extent when she breaks free of her mother's conditioning and begins to make realizations and choices for herself" (197). Jamie A. Hughes's research concerns *Watchmen* in light of Louis Althusser's theory on the necessity of antagonistic classes as represented by Adrian Veidt (Ozymandias) and Jon Osterman (Dr. Manhattan) (554). While such an idea breathes new life into readings of the text's end, it neglects Laurie almost completely. Elizabeth Rosen's analysis reveals a similar neglect even as it focuses on the role that nostalgia plays in forming Rorschach, Nite Owl, Sally Jupiter, and Ozymandias's identities. Again the lack of study on Laurie stands out. James Bucky Carter explores *Watchmen* and terrorism through a post-9/11 lens and draws "connections between Ozymandias and Osama bin Laden" (103). Brandy Ball Blake comes close to a sustained analysis in her examination of psychological trauma and the way that Laurie "contends with the rape of her mother" (para. 3), but Blake soon abandons that thought to concentrate on Dr. Manhattan and the way that time, and his existence outside of it, complicates his traumas. Finally, although Bryan D. Dietrich is interested in how Laurie and Dan Dreiberg have "so descended into their alternate identities that they cannot remember how they are without the costume, without the cape," he too is ultimately more invested in how pictorial stains repeat and are alluded to throughout the course of *Watchmen*. Time and again, Laurie Juspezyk is treated like a secondary character in critics' analyses. The release of the *Watchmen* film,

however, reveals anew the subtlety with which Moore and Gibbons instilled agency in Laurie.

These criticisms on Snyder's adaptation choices are not to be viewed through the restrictive and essentialist complaint about the filmic *Watchmen*'s lack of narrative fidelity. As film theorist Robert Stam notoriously asks, "Do not adaptations '*adapt to*' changing environments and changing tastes, as well as to a new medium, with its distinct industrial demands, commercial pressures, censorship taboos, and aesthetic norms?" (3). Stam's question, of course, is merely rhetorical. Any transfer of a text's medium or authorship will inevitably alter its meaning, however minutely, as the content is recoded and reinterpreted. That itself is not the problem. What this essay analyzes is the extent to which Snyder's "changing tastes" reveal an adverse taxonomy of sexual objectification. Such a maneuver fetishizes Laurie, a character who works so resolutely in Moore and Gibbons's graphic novel to attain resistance from her familial and social objectification. The filmic *Watchmen* thus simplifies Moore and Gibbons's most important female character into a subjectless object.

It is best to briefly sketch Laurie's role in the *Watchmen* narrative. Laurie is thrown into the superhero mix by her mother Sally, the first Silk Spectre, who feels nostalgic about her crime-fighting past and tries to relive it through Laurie. However, neither Sally nor Laurie is able to circumvent the power relations instituted by the patriarchal society in which they belong, so their respective empowerment can only be understood when constructed through sexuality. Indeed, Laurie's costume is self-consciously designed to be form-fitting, with her mother sexualizing her as more of a fetish model than a crime-fighter. Picking up on this point, Sarah Donovan and Nick Richardson contend that "it is acceptable for women to be crime fighters (and thereby take on a masculine social role), but only if their femininity remains beyond question (by their dressing according to a hyperfeminine social role)" (176). Similarly attacking the cultural stigma of the sexualized body, Florence Dee Boodakian suggests a coded surveillance inherent to eroticism, writing, "The *culturally constituted gaze* is more than a cultural lens because it has this *auto-surveillance* aspect that implies a controlling of the [...] body for culturally determined reasons that later become internalized" (63, emphasis in original).<sup>[2]</sup> For their part, both Sally and Laurie accept and internalize the restrictions placed on them by society, wearing costumes that certify their submission to the patriarchal surveillance, which is made worse because Sally designs Laurie's suggestive garb. The filmic *Watchmen* tries to deconstruct notions of the sexualized woman by being overt about this kind of sexual construction, changing Laurie's costume from a short black skirt and yellow gauze material in the graphic novel to a seemingly intertextual gloss of Comic Bad Girl dominatrix garb through her latex and thigh-high boots (Figures 1-2).<sup>[3]</sup>

However, though it seeks to hybridize the two, Snyder's *Watchmen* loses a clear sense of where postmodern irony is intended and where simple objectification comes into play. In an interview with Anne Thompson of *Variety*, Snyder ignores any mention of a patriarchal influence to the costume's construction, positing instead a naïve reading that Laurie "is clearly using sex as a weapon" (para. 6). Such gross simplification misreads the extent of patriarchal dominion over Sally and Laurie and, furthermore, collapses all of patriarchy's desires onto Laurie herself.

Boodakian's notion of the culturally constituted gaze, despite lacking any visible referent to feminist film criticism, builds on Laura Mulvey's concept of a male gaze instituted through the apparatus of the camera. Indeed, remember Mulvey's central argument: "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (11). Especially in the film, Laurie's costume seems constructed to such a mandate, offering a culturally determined and auto-surveyed objectification. Sadly, this notion of a patriarchally mediated costume extends far beyond Laurie's Silk Spectre identity. In both texts, the United States government tolerates her only insofar as they can depend on her body to placate Jon sexually. In their eyes she is only useful to keep him from becoming disinterested in protecting earth and, specifically, the United States.

Although both texts allow Laurie to be dismissive toward her costume, when Laurie enjoys a dinner conversation with Dan Dreiberger (the Nite Owl), the filmic *Watchmen* adopts a facetious rather than critical tone. As the graphic narrative of *Watchmen* conceives of the scene, Laurie asks Dan, "Do you remember that costume? With that stupid little short skirt and the neckline going down to my navel? God, that was so dreadful" (I.25). Her choice of adjective descriptors precludes an ironic reading and testifies to the rancor she felt when she donned the apparel her mother made her wear. However, the filmic *Watchmen* tellingly disposes of such bitterness when Laurie reminisces, "Do you remember my costume? All that tight latex... it was awful." Lacking any negative descriptors, Laurie's attitude here becomes coy and playful. The film features no residue of the culturally constituted gaze, or the psychological oppression that it fortifies, even though the graphic novel deliberately emphasizes this damage. Instead, whereas Moore and Gibbons construct Laurie as consciously resentful toward her mother for the attire that she wears while on patrol, Snyder's adaptation foregoes this kind of acknowledgment. The effect of such a change is that the filmic *Watchmen* conceals any recognition that it exists within a patriarchal world mediated by forces which objectify and otherwise marginalize social roles for women.

The next noteworthy difference between the two *Watchmen* texts occurs when Laurie and Jon begin to make love. Laurie mentions that licking Jon's finger is "like licking a flash light battery," conveying eroticism but denying the kind of fetishized close-ups in which pornographic features specialize (III.4) (Figure 3).

Indeed, Moore and Gibbons's text obviates that need precisely because Laurie's words already narrate what transpires between the panels, what Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, following generations of artists, calls "the gutter" (66).<sup>[4]</sup> Moore and Gibbons exploit the gutter for two diametrically opposite purposes. First, they allow readers to imagine scandalous imagery greater than they could ever include in the panel, and, second, Moore and Gibbons prevent Laurie from being objectified because of her sexuality. As French theorist Guy Gauthier writes, "to choose, for a figurative image, is not only to decide what is going to be visible, but also what must be concealed" (11). By censoring the images in the panel, Moore and Gibbons enable Laurie to continue being viewed as a woman, and not just as a fetishized sex object. Contrary to this concealment of the erotic, Snyder frames the scene to include extended hyper-sexualized close-ups of Laurie's open mouth and the suggestive image of Jon's thumb sliding into it (Figures 4-5).

Furthermore, the visual power relations invert between the graphic novel and film. In the graphic novel, Laurie licks him. In the filmic text, Jon thrusts his thumb into her mouth, positioning him as the dominant subject and Laurie as the sexual object who exists to fulfill him.

A further distinction between the two *Watchmen* texts lies in Laurie's realization of the two Jons that she finds in bed with her. In Moore and Gibbons's *Watchmen*, Laurie is irrefutably horrified that Jon would transgress against their sexual intimacy by generating a multiplicity of selves to pleasure her, and she screams out in terror. Moore and Gibbons position Jon in a state of confusion himself, pleading, "Laurie? Don't be upset. I thought you'd enjoy it" (III.4). Ominously, Jon cannot envisage what will please Laurie, despite his ability to see through the constructs of time. Snyder, for his part, reframes Laurie's sexual, and subjective, resistance to the three-way by seeming surprised but not entirely horrified, which is a tacit suggestion that such sexual progressiveness has already occurred. The film emphasizes the past tense on the verb, with Jon trying to calm Laurie by saying, "Please don't be upset. I always thought you liked this." The use of "liked," with its stress on their already having experimented with such coupling, certifies that what was suggested through her nonchalance is, indeed,

an irreproachable fact. Critics can, of course, contend that such progressiveness merely keeps the characters up-to-date with present-day discourse on the acceptance of sexual experimentation in the bedroom. However, such a move enters into a logical, as well as a linguistic, double bind. In the film, Laurie is positioned as the body which multiple Jons penetrate, which again relegates her to the role of object. His sexual dominance forces her to adhere to models of patriarchal subservience, even though Laurie's response, weakly vocalized, contends that "I don't—No. I don't want that." Moreover, and more severely, the linguistic pun of "Jons" becomes noticeable, setting up Laurie as a woman who is in effect prostituting herself. Regardless of Snyder's intention, his alteration here only affirms the extent of Laurie's internalization of the culturally constituted gaze.

When Jon abandons earth for Mars, she becomes, as she herself says, "so damn disposable" to the government (V.10). Afterwards, Laurie finds meaning to her life with Dan Dreiberg (Nite Owl), but again Moore and Snyder suggest different aims through Laurie's dependence on sex to recover agency as she comes to terms with her own confused familial history. In the film, following the trajectory of the graphic novel, the two have sex in Archimedes, Dan's airship, after rescuing civilians from a burning building. Energized by the vitality of their actions, they are spurred toward sexual fulfillment after Dan's inability earlier in the night. By focusing on their embrace through a full-body shot (Figure 6), Moore and Gibbons neither privilege nor fetishize the titillation of these two individuals traumatized and reaching out for any kind of comfort, be it sexual or psychological (VII.27).

Rather, they again exploit the gutter to suggest action through its ability to suspend time and motion. While Laurie's boots are present in the eighth panel, they are not cut to and focused on apart from her body, which, in turn, does not fetishize their appearance. The filmic *Watchmen*, however, amplifies the erotic into soft-core pornography (Figures 7-9).

Boodakian, in her analysis of erotic aesthetics, states that "[i]t is the covering/ clothing that creates the sexual titillation, rather than the fully nude body itself [...]. And while this works to enhance sexual titillation, it has nothing to do with erotic power" (15). Snyder uses frequent cuts and tracking shots during the sex scene to highlight and fetishize Laurie's body, destabilizing her erotic power, which should

be present in the scene, and instead favoring empty titillation. Laurie's thigh-high boots are given extensive coverage by the camera as it tracks up her leg, all but conferring more attention on her costume than on her actual body. She does not wield the erotic power; only her costume wields it.

The filmic *Watchmen* also surrenders to commercial pressure by focusing on Laurie during this encounter. In the graphic novel, Dan felt "so impotent" earlier that night, before they endeavored on the rescue (VII.19). Afterwards, though, Dan internalizes the excitement and gains renewed virility with Laurie. Their lovemaking finds its metaphorical fulfillment in Laurie's accidental trigger of Archimedes's flamethrower through the night sky, which is an image that affirms Dan's orgasm. Against this unambiguous referent, Snyder again falls prey to fetishizing Laurie's sexual satisfaction. Snyder privileges Laurie's orgasm by cutting between medium shots of Laurie's body gyrating and close-up shots of her face contorting with mounting pleasure. When Laurie accidentally triggers Archimedes's flamethrower here, it seems to signify her orgasm. Yet this scene is superfluous since there has been no prior indication that Laurie's orgasm is a newfound experience. Further, it perpetuates a filmic focus on women during the peak of the sexual encounter. Writing on the gendered treatment of the body in pornographic media, Linda Williams asserts that "even when the pleasure of viewing has traditionally been constructed for masculine spectators, as is the case in most traditional heterosexual pornography, it is the female body in the grips of an out-of-control ecstasy that has offered the most sensational sight" (4). This same single-minded focus on Laurie's pleasure, and orgasm, affirms that Snyder has been lulled into appropriating the tenets of pornographic discourse at the expense of being able to clearly attribute the orgasm to Dan. At best, by forcing the symbolism onto Laurie, the filmic *Watchmen* collapses the symbolism into kitsch.<sup>[5]</sup> At worst, it consigns Laurie to be little more than a doll trumpeted out to be penetrated and then discarded.

The idea that the filmic Laurie resists the culturally constituted gaze receives another strike at the end of *Watchmen*, when everyone has gathered at Ozymandias's lair. After Laurie, Jon, and Dan succumb to accepting silence as the only way to keep Ozymandias's vision for world peace afloat, Snyder again includes a moment that has no correlative in Moore and Gibbons's *Watchmen*. What is problematic is that this aesthetic decision constructs another scene where Laurie is relegated to a secondary object to be passed around. Snyder closes the scene at Ozymandias's lair with Laurie giving Jon a final kiss goodbye before he leaves earth for good (Figure 10).

This moment, far from adding an operatic, melancholy touch, suggests a psychological indeterminacy between her desire to remain with Jon or Dan. She ends up waffling in her affection, seeming like a child rather than the grown woman that Moore and Gibbons testify she's become. Indeed, although both texts show how Laurie learns the truth about her father, the Comedian, while with Jon on Mars, Jon becomes the expository mouthpiece in the film, telling her about the familial connections rather than letting her come to them via epiphany, as Moore and Gibbons construct the scene. Time and again Snyder devalues the importance that Laurie has in the text, abandoning her so that he can play with the visual iconography of the era or hyper-masculinize a(nother) fight scene.

After these numerous instances of objectification, Snyder struggles to return Laurie to the status of a real and subjective being. The penultimate refrain of the text, uttered by Jon to Ozymandias in the graphic novel to sober him about peace's lasting potential, is that "Nothing ever ends," especially not world conflicts (XII.27). Snyder, however, transposes that line from Jon to Laurie in a closing conversation she has with Dan. As she opines in her first true embrace of agency, "I know what Jon would say, nothing ends. Nothing ever ends." This iteration of the refrain should shift the power relations that were once tied to Jon onto Laurie. That is to say, she should be privileged precisely because this line is the haunting refrain that so much of the text cumulatively operates under, from the opening panel of the smiley face button to the closing repetition of Seymour's smiley-face t-shirt. However, precisely because the film has hitherto deconstructed all semblances of Laurie's agency, the line fails to find the prophetic peaks which Moore and Gibbons so successfully scaled. Instead, the line becomes a limp attempt to tap into the graphic novel's power, failing since Laurie has been so thoroughly determined by the culturally mediating gaze. Indeed, Laurie does not even receive her own words in this last gasp of an equalizing gesture. She is merely the vocal effect of what she affirms to be Jon's words.

Snyder has contended in interviews that his adaptation is exhaustive in its fidelity to the graphic novel, quipping that "I'm certain I changed 'Watchmen' less than the Coen brothers changed 'No Country for Old Men'" (Itzkoff para. 8). This essay reveals the fallacy of that claim and, moreover, it critiques the magnitude of Snyder's specious language. Although Laurie Juspezyk certainly operates with sexual characteristics throughout Moore and Gibbons's *Watchmen*, her creators are careful not to overextend the sense of sexual objectification. After numerous other Hollywood filmmakers' all-out failures to adapt Alan Moore's work, critics' hostility seems tempered by the fact that Snyder's adaptation is not an outright disaster. However, critics who have focused overwhelmingly on such issues as global politics in Snyder's *Watchmen* overlook its regressive gender politics (17). [6] Critics seem to have accepted this marginalized and pornographic depiction of women as an unfortunate side-effect, if they even recognize it as unfortunate. Nonetheless, the film's depiction of Laurie reveals that still greater attention needs to be given to the construction of the feminine, not so much because these films honestly care about bestowing agency to female characters, but precisely because they do not care that their portrayals of women are pornographic and part of the industrial demands of Hollywood cinema.

## Notes

[1] Di Liddo's disinterest is best exemplified when, after listing how the male *Watchmen* characters draw from distinct comic archetypes, she neglects to include any referent between Laurie's Silk Spectre and Charlton Comics's character the Phantom Lady (56-7), as Moore has indicated in numerous interviews.

[2] Boodakian is concerned with *auto-surveillance* of the nude body in particular, arguing that society is taught to hide it away from any kind of panoptic gaze, even on beaches, but this aspect of nudity is circumvented here because it will be covered in greater detail later in the essay.

[3] It is worth noting that Snyder's re-imagining of Silk Spectre's outfit paradoxically matches up with much of DC Comics's current revival of the Phantom Lady character. Meanwhile, representative examples of Bad Girls can be found in the exaggerated appearance of characters like Chaos Comics's *Lady Death* and many of Image Comics's early female-centered titles. Summarizing the Bad Girl, Geoff Klock states that they become "more pinup girls in capes than genuine characters" (111). Jeffrey A. Brown is more descriptive, stating that they are "uniformly illustrated as impossibly sexy, silicone injected, and scantily clad babes wielding phallically obvious swords" (176).

[4] In *The System of Comics*, Thierry Groensteen builds on McCloud, articulating how this hermeneutic exclusive to the graphic narrative medium operates, for "More than a zone on the paper, it [the gutter] is the interior screen on which every reader projects the missing image (or images)" (113).

[5] This sense of kitsch finds corroboration since the sex scene is scored to Leonard Cohen's classic song "Hallelujah," an ironic song choice that undermines any sense of Dan and Laurie's sexual, but more specifically psychological, release.

[6] To be fair, critic Ron Thomas is insightful in his consideration of Snyder's narrative end choice concerning the destruction of New York City. Rather than utilizing the teleported in "alien" squid that Moore and Gibbons weave throughout multiple back stories, Snyder opts instead to have Jon's teleportation from Mars back to New York City trigger tachyons that raze the city. Thomas argues then that the U.S. and the Soviets unite "against Dr. Manhattan, the American Doomsday device gone awry, and it puts the United States in a subordinate role" (17).

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## **A Man of Steel (by any other name): Adaptation and Continuity in Alan Moore's "Superman"**

By Jack Teiwes

Alan Moore's body of work on Superman has been long, sporadic and varied, and at its core has served as the site for his most prolonged and detailed examination on the topic of superhero comics, and especially the inherently metatextual nature of comic books' diegetic continuity. While Moore has explored several other themes in the process, analysis of his two most specific writings on Superman reveal a dialogic relationship between them, initiating and later revisiting a critique of the practice of continuity revision that became a major issue in superhero comics during the era of his contributions to the genre. Indeed, Moore's writings on Superman both directly and via pastiche versions have spanned the majority of his mainstream career and punctuated shifts in both his own approach and that of the comic industry itself.

As continuity and the alteration thereof have been common themes, all of Moore's Superman-related work engages in metafiction to one degree or another, and serves as chapters of Moore's ongoing examination of the nature of superhero comics as opposed to merely superheroes themselves. While other significant works by Moore such as *Watchmen* have engaged with superheroes on other levels, these core Superman-related works are concerned with superheroes specifically as comic book characters.

To this end Moore has utilised Superman and his analogues more times than any other character in his career. Why Superman? As both the most enduringly iconic manifestation of the superhero and the archetype whose creation originated the entire genre<sup>[1]</sup>, his history has by no coincidence been emblematic of trends in the publication of superhero comics and the treatment of their continuity, thus serving as a distilled example for Moore's explorations of these very issues.

Adaptation has always been a core component of Alan Moore's work, taking preexisting histories, characters and tropes, exploring and reinventing them in new and unexpected ways, utilising varying techniques of adaptation to explore, deconstruct, parody and comment upon their original sources. This has ranged considerably in application, from the direct, authorised use of pre-existing characters such as his work with mainstream Marvel, DC and Image characters (Captain Britain, Batman, *WildC.A.T.s* [#21-34, Wildstorm/Image Comics, 1995-1997]); the significant adaptive alteration of established continuity as a means of reinventing existing characters (Swamp Thing, Miracleman); through to the use of pastiche analogues of established characters (*Watchmen* [DC Comics, 1986-87], and many of his titles for America's Best Comics) that openly adapt identifiable originals; and finally to the appropriation and reframing of historical or literary characters now in the public domain (*From Hell* [SpiderBaby Press,

later Tundra Publishing, later still Kitchen Sink Press, 1991-1996], *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* [Wildstorm/DC Comics, 1999-present], *Lost Girls* [Taboo, later Kitchen Sink Press, later still Top Shelf Productions, 1991-2006]). Indeed, the majority of Alan Moore's major works in the comics medium have employed preexisting characters in one form or another, and thus examinations of his strategies of adaptation when doing so are of value to any study of his work.

It is significant, then, that Superman is the only character in Moore's career which the writer has revisited on so many occasions, or adapted in so divergent a fashion. Although Moore penned a comparatively small number of authorised stories using the original Superman property, his greater body of work on the character includes several other, far more extensive examinations of the Man of Steel through adapted versions of the character. These adaptations stretched to opposite ends of the spectrum from a very broad thematic approach to Superman's core concepts to a highly specific metacommentary on the minutiae of the character's comic history, and that of the industry in general, continuing a critical examination of comic book continuity revision begun in the handful of stories that fell between these two major projects.

Moore's first indirect engagement on the topic was via a drawn-out run on his UK title *Miracleman* (originally *Marvelman*)<sup>[2]</sup>, in which he deconstructed the very notion of a godlike superhuman in the Superman mould, entailing a radical reappraisal of superhero narratives. Following this, Moore wrote a few stories during the mid-1980s for DC Comics using the official Superman character, which yielded some memorable tales that both examined aspects of the hero's psychology before ultimately embarking on a subtle interrogation into the futility of revising comic book continuity. A decade later Moore revisited the Superman character via a blatant pastiche version, *Supreme*<sup>[3]</sup>, where, in stark contrast to the "realism" and broad thematic approach in *Miracleman*, he embarked on an elaborately detailed adaptation of Superman's history and mythos in an act not of deconstruction but *reconstruction* of both the character and the genre he originated, and in the process extended his earlier examination on the metatextual implications of continuity revision.



*The core trinity of Alan Moore's work on Superman in one form or another: Thematic exploration in Miracleman, unconventional extrapolations of the official Superman property, and comprehensive pastiche via Supreme.*

With *Miracleman* at one end, *Supreme* at the other and a handful of noteworthy stories with the genuine Superman in the middle, work both directly and tangentially concerning Superman has spanned a significant portion of Alan Moore's mainstream oeuvre, and has hosted a recurring examination of the nature of superhero comics. This is most readily evident in the case of the seemingly frivolous *Supreme*, in which Moore used a densely metatextual adaptation of Superman which serves as a celebratory reexamination of the character and the Silver Age of superhero comics as both a repudiation of the era of grim, "serious" comics he himself ushered in, and as a lively parodic exploration of the very notion of comic book history and continuity. In doing so, he was revisiting the key subtext of *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* (*Superman* #423 and *Action Comics* #583, DC Comics, 1986), the most significant of Moore's 1980s Superman stories, thus creating a dialogic relationship with his own earlier work, and a commentary on the development of the comics industry in the intermediate decade. This was achieved in no small part via his partnership with artist Rick Veitch, the most fruitful collaboration of Moore's entire Superman-related output, through their fastidious attention to replicating both the idiom and visual schema of the comic book techniques of yesteryear. These adaptive techniques and thematic explorations used in *Supreme*, and their consequent interrelation to his earlier work, are also of key interest.

### ***Miracleman and the "apotheosis of humanity"***

Moore's first examination of Superman was his most broadly thematic and yet most tangential in specific detail, via his opus *Miracleman*. A revival and radical reinvention of a defunct 1950s UK character, the title was a breakthrough project for Moore which in large part led to his gaining the attention of the American comic industry (Parkin, p. 28). Although *Marvelman/Miracleman* was clearly based on Captain Marvel<sup>[4]</sup> moreso than Superman directly, there are various allusions to him,<sup>[5]</sup> and Moore has stated that certain elements of the plot were directly influenced by the concept of taking ideas in the Superman mythos to their "realistic" extremes.<sup>[6]</sup>

Moore used the character to explore the fundamental notion of a protagonist with the powers of a demigod in the Superman mould, using what was to become

his signature deconstructionist approach to extrapolate this core concept to its logical extreme. Depicting the "real world" consequences of such a being's existence, Moore's benevolent Miracleman proceeds to fix the world's problems (whether mankind wishes him to or not) in the wake of a cataclysmic battle between superhumans, with the result of radically altering the human condition to a point where it has become virtually unrecognisable.

This "apotheosis of humanity" stood in stark contrast to the type of oneiric climate Eco attributed to Superman (Eco, pp.107-124), irrevocably subverting the typical outcomes of superhero narratives. In doing so, Moore deconstructed the genre itself by depicting the radical opposite of the non-interventionist postwar Superman<sup>[7]</sup> and other traditional depictions of superheroes as figures merely maintaining the status quo, both within their diegetic worlds and externally, in terms of not significantly developing as characters.

*Moore's evocative, almost poetic narration of Miracleman's reflections on these events is in stark contrast with John Totleben's highly detailed artwork, which depicts on a concrete level the shocking destruction of London at the hands of former sidekick Kid Miracleman. Totleben's broadly realistic linework serves to ground the almost surreal, Bosch-by-way-of-Auschwitz tableaux of sadistically elaborate dismemberments rather than stylise them, rendering the "reality" of such inconceivable carnage all the more unsettling. Moore's narrated use of the idioms "the cat is out of the bag" and "opening a can of worms" to describe the fundamental shift in human destiny that this new holocaust has caused is reinforced through Totleben's artistic use of an idiomatic reference to the notion that life as we know it has been "shattered", evoked by panelling repetitions of his image of Miracleman's grief in the shape of a jagged pane of glass which "zooms out" from the personal to the public, revealing the images in context as part of the horrific double splash-page. Having gone through a number of different artists due to the sporadic publication of the title, Moore's collaboration with Totleben for the entirety of the third "book" of his Miracleman run (issues 11-16) enjoyed the greatest cohesion between text and image as a result.*

Invoking the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, *Miracleman* is a work in which Moore explores in great detail themes of transcendent superhumanity and demigodhood that hold inescapable resonance for not only the character but even the core idea of Superman. It functions as Moore's magnum opus on the concept of the superhero as a genuine superhuman<sup>[8]</sup>; in presenting his largest, most far-reaching take of what would 'really' happen if superheroes and advanced aliens existed in our world and how utterly and irrevocably they would change society, Moore deconstructs the very notion of the superhuman.

*Miracleman* also contained one of Moore's earliest uses of metafictional themes within the superhero genre. Although the book is set in a "real" world in which superheroes only exist in comic books, *Miracleman* is explicitly fashioned in the guise of a superhero by the scientist who creates him with reverse-engineered alien technology. Gargunza, the scientist, had determined this was the best way of having *Miracleman*'s human mind accept his seemingly impossible superhuman abilities, the chance discovery of an actual *Captain Marvel* comic is

even depicted as his inspiration for this idea. Moore thus explains away the characters' original adventures depicted in the 1950s' comics as being the representation of implanted false memories designed to generate the desired superhero persona. This metafictional conceit was demonstrated in the first issue which begins with several reprinted pages of vintage Mick Anglo material<sup>[9]</sup> with typically sunny and simplistic 1950s imagery, which then give way to the moody and detailed pencils of Garry Leach representing the "real" world of the main story.

*Moore's use of reprinted Mick Anglo art from the 1950s sets the stage for what his take on Miracleman is not going to be like, transitioning through an ominously*

*pertinent Nietzsche quote, and into the bleak and confusing "real" world of Mike Moran's present day nightmares of his forgotten life as a superhero, realised through the dark and detailed artwork of Garry Leach, almost a polar opposite of style to Anglo.*

Although metafiction was not a major component of *Miracleman*, Moore employed the pointed acknowledgement of superheroes as comic book creations as an integral part of his thematic deconstruction of a godlike Superman-figure rather than dispense with the trappings of the genre altogether. It would be a technique that would recur in his later work, especially on *Supreme*.

## **DC Comics and the "real" Superman**

Following and parallel<sup>[10]</sup> to his work on *Miracleman*, Moore began working for DC Comics and made his name in America with an acclaimed run on *Swamp Thing*, leading to many brief, one-off stories featuring a wide variety of DC's stable of characters.<sup>[11]</sup> This period yielded Moore's few extant works on the official Superman property, starting with two obscure humorous prose pieces in UK annuals <sup>[12]</sup> before "graduating" to write the character in comic book form.

The first tale, which has remained very popular<sup>[13]</sup>, was *For the Man Who Has Everything* (*Superman Annual* #11, DC Comics, 1985), in which a villain traps Superman in an induced fantasy of what his life would have been like on Krypton had it never exploded. Despite the illusion being designed to be inescapable by granting one's heart's desire, Moore depicts instead a troubling vision of Kryptonian society on the verge of collapse, with Superman reluctantly rejecting this dream-state. The story suggests that the hero's own subconscious had problematised the appealing mirage and ultimately refused to accept it due to a profound and inescapable sense of survivor guilt. Moore took advantage of his *Watchmen* collaborator Dave Gibbon's talents for verisimilitude, with detailed, believable renderings of Krypton faithful to well-known fantastical Silver Age designs yet overlaid with a pervasive mood of gritty urban decay. Gibbon's mastery of subtle facial expressions (a relatively uncommon talent amongst mainstream superhero artists) was vital to Moore's deeply emotional tale of the hero's inner turmoil, whilst also providing bravura fight sequences for the parallel action story.

*Moore's first official Superman stories for DC were illustrated prose pieces rather than comics, a staple of the format of UK annuals. The illustrations by Bob Wakelin, although not using an image/text interrelation at the level of comics, do nevertheless use comic book conventions such as multiple images depicting the major story points divided into three panel-like segments, encapsulated within a "thought balloon" traditionally used for text. This positioning of the images within a thought balloon (as opposed to a speech bubble) emanating from the cab driver spinning the spurious yarn is likely significant, as it suggests the tale is a work of imagination rather than a recounting of fact. Given the prose format of the story, it is unknown if this composition of the image was personally dictated by Moore, or purely the initiative of Wakelin.*

For the Man Who Has Everything was another collaboration between Moore and Dave Gibbons, his partner on the seminal series *Watchmen*, and utilised many similar techniques. These included formal panel arrangements, highly detailed backgrounds containing obscure references, and the juxtaposition of panels depicting the disjunction between fantasy and reality (one of the story's key themes) or parallel action, as in this sequence where Robin's efforts to revive Batman are shown as roughly simultaneous to the beginning of Superman's epic battle with Mongul. To emphasise Superman's incredible speed as described in the text by Moore's omniscient narrator, Gibbons creates a cinematic slow-motion effect (combined with a "push-in" for dramatic impact) in which Mongul moves very little before being struck by the hurtling Man of Steel, a point further emphasised by Wonder Woman's minimal change of relative position as she falls limply from the villain's grasp, indicating the hero's velocity compared to the slower effect of gravity.

Following this uncommonly psychoanalytical Superman story came another in a similar vein, *The Jungle Line* (*DC Comics Presents* #85, DC Comics, 1985), featuring an unconventional crossover between Superman and Swamp Thing, with the former never even becoming aware of the latter's involvement, in a play on the conventions of superhero team-ups by colliding two properties of incongruous genres. Moore delves once more into Superman's psychology as the survivor of an extinct race, in this case having the hero experience terrifying hallucinations while succumbing to a deadly alien spore, all the while expressing fear of his own mortality. Moore and his versatile *Swamp Thing* collaborator Rick Veitch (who would later prove integral to his work on *Supreme*) created surreal visuals to represent Superman's hallucinogenic states, in marked contrast to the realistic pencilling of Gibbons on the previous story. While Gibbon's clean lines and painstaking backgrounds were perfectly suited to creating the believable dreamworld of Superman's imagined life on Krypton, Veitch's use of looser, more abstract renderings of the Man of Steel's nightmarish delirium were equally appropriate to the second tale's significantly different tenor.

This pair of standalone issues is unique in Moore's wider Superman-related work, being his only stories which focus on the significant 'Last Son of Krypton' theme of Superman's origins<sup>[14]</sup>, the character's own sense of being an alien, and raising issues of survivor guilt.<sup>[15]</sup> In depicting Superman as having deeply repressed trauma over being the sole survivor of a planetary holocaust, Moore's tales are rare and noteworthy probes into the character's psychology, providing a far more analytical and affecting portrayal of the character's conflicted attitudes to his lost homeworld and status as a refugee of a dead race than had been previously attempted by other writers.

Undoubtedly though, the most significant of Alan Moore's work featuring the official Superman character was his two-part story *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?*, which brought an end to the classic history of Superman and paved the way for its imminent revision.

To understand the purpose of the story in context, in 1986 Superman was foremost amongst the DC characters who were subject to significant alterations of backstory and status quo as a result of *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (DC Comics, 1985-1986), the company-wide crossover event designed to simplify and notionally modernise their sprawling fictional universe. Superman in particular had an especially thorough "rebooting" of his diegetic continuity, having not only the details of his origin story significantly revised but essentially his entire past history discarded and begun again from scratch.

*An unusual artistic collaboration, in which modern superstar artist Alex Ross paints with his signature photorealism over pencil art newly draughted by veteran star George Pérez, the original penciller on Crisis. Doubling as a promotional poster, this mammoth artwork dramatised several of the massive series' key scenes and recreated some of its most iconic images, while conveying the immense scope and complexity of the 12-issue series. The metatextual multiverse theme is given central prominence in the mirrored figures of the Earth-1 and Earth-2 counterparts of Superman, clutching alternate fallen comrades. The image contains 562 identifiable figures which, like the series itself, comprises virtually every character owned by DC Comics at the time.*

One of the major goals was to sweep away what was perceived at the time as the vast amount of extraneous, confusing, and notionally "dated" or "silly" elements of the mythos that had barnacled onto the character over the first four and a half decades (mostly during the Silver Age of comics, generally considered to span from 1956 to approximately the early 1970s)—in particular many of the Kryptonian supporting characters and associated concepts such as Supergirl, the Kandorians, Krypto the superdog, General Zod and the Phantom Zone criminals, Superman Robots, the bottle city of Kandor, multiple colours of kryptonite, even the Fortress of Solitude and Superman's early career as Superboy. The removal of these elements from continuity and the establishment of a new origin and status quo was to be masterminded largely by writer/artist John Byrne and would be unveiled in the limited series *The Man of Steel* (DC Comics, 1986).

However, scheduling issues caused a delay between the end of *Crisis* (theoretically the point at which company-wide continuity was altered) and the debut of *The Man of Steel*, leading to the Superman titles having to tread water for some months and continue depicting the pre-*Crisis* version of the character (Well, p. 87). As it turned out, this afforded DC a somewhat unique opportunity to give the departing "classic" version of the character a fitting send-off rather than just

abruptly switching over to the new version. The idea was to tell a celebratory "final" tale of the Silver Age [\[16\]](#) Superman in the form of an "Imaginary Story." [\[17\]](#)

DC turned to their "hot" writer Alan Moore, who was approaching the apogee of his career with the company with *Watchmen* debuting in the same month. Collaborating with the veteran Silver Age Superman penciller Curt Swan, Moore took to the project with gusto (Khoury, 2003, p. 121), crafting a concise epic in which Superman's story comes to a definitive, irrevocable close.

The prologue to the tale ends on an intriguing phrase: "*This is an IMAGINARY STORY... Aren't they all?*" and thus, from the outset Moore frames Superman and his final story in mythic terms, but also signals his metafictional awareness of the tale's unique position. From the beginning Moore seems to poke fun at the very notion of one type of fictional story being more or less "real" than another, suggesting a fallacy in the entire notion of the impending continuity rewrite [\[18\]](#) that overtly casts away old continuity within the narrative diegesis of *Crisis*, as opposed to his own more integrated approach of radically reinventing characters from within their established continuity, as he had already done on *Swamp Thing* and *Miracleman*. It was a metafictional theme he would revisit years later in *Supreme*.

In any case, although the Imaginary Story designation made the tale technically not part of the canonical history of Superman [\[19\]](#), it was an inordinately resonant one, since not only was the "what if?" formula of the Imaginary Story long-retired by this time, but furthermore the original function of such stories as a brief interruption that would be followed by a return to the status quo was subverted, since in this case the status quo itself was being erased and replaced by an entirely new version, something of which readers at the time were well aware. Indeed, the issues in which the story was published (*Superman* #423 and *Action Comics* #583) were actually the last issues published before Byrne's changes came into effect. Thus, to all intents and purposes, it really *was* the final story of the Silver Age, pre-*Crisis* Superman, even if it 'never happened' in terms of official continuity. [\[20\]](#)

The story involves Moore's systematic demolition of Superman's Silver Age mythos, in a compact yet grandiose narrative depicting Superman's last stand, wherein a conspiracy of old enemies wages a vicious campaign which exposes his secret identity, brings about the death of old friends and lays waste to the Daily Planet. Superman takes those closest to him to his arctic Fortress of Solitude to await the inevitable siege, which results in the deaths of friend and foe alike, until with Lois' help Superman kills Mr Mxyzptlk, the architect of these events



*Curt Swan, the most prominent and longest-serving penciller on Superman's comics over the Silver Age, brought his customary style of strong conventional storytelling and panel layout to this "final" tale of the Superman of his era. The collaboration with Alan Moore yielded some interesting results, such as this title page of the first installment containing a "zoomed out" visual repetition of the central image of the issue's cover in much the same technique to that used by Moore and Gibbons on the cover and first panel(s) of each issue of Watchmen. More generally, the use of Swan's familiar pencils served to heighten the impact of Moore's dark script, with the many acts of violence such as these depicting assault on the Daily Planet offices or the mutual annihilation of Krypto the Superdog and the villain the Kryptonite Man seeming all the more confronting due to their unprecedented nature. Despite being an "Imaginary Story", Moore's shattering of the status quo is legitimised when rendered by the Superman artist considered "definitive" by a generations of readers.*

Having broken his oath to never take a life, Superman atones by deliberately exposing himself to Gold Kryptonite (a variety which permanently negates his powers) and the world at large believes the Man of Steel to have perished. However, in a framing story set a decade later where the retired Lois is being interviewed about these events, we are introduced to her husband, blue-collar mechanic Jordan Elliot. Via some subtle clues we realise that Elliot is in fact Superman,<sup>[21]</sup> still just a normal, mortal man, thoroughly enjoying living out his days in suburbia with Lois and their newborn son.

Evoking the fairy-tale line "happily ever after" in marked contrast to Superman's famous catchphrase that he fights "a Never-Ending Battle", Moore's portrayal of a happy ending (albeit after considerable carnage) is, like much else in his tale, very unexpected. Moore's choice suggests that for all the bizarre and wonderful experiences of being Superman, all that Clark/Kal-El really wanted in the end was to be a part of humanity, to love and enjoy life. It is a curious conclusion, as other examples of Superman "End Tales" have emphasised notions of the character's presumed immortality<sup>[22]</sup>, his death or the perpetuation of his Never-Ending Battle.<sup>[23]</sup> The notion that Superman could have a mundane suburban

retirement and be utterly contented with it is perhaps one of the boldest ideas that the infamously dark Alan Moore has ever used in a superhero story.

*Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* stands as Moore's most renowned work on the Superman character and remains one of the most memorable Superman stories in comics, having been kept in print in various trade paperbacks [\[24\]](#) and referenced by other comics in the decades since. [\[25\]](#) Moore's approach to telling an intended final tale of the Silver Age Superman and his fantastical mythos was by no means simplistic, however, and conveys layers of meaning beyond its surface narrative. Although the tale does not involve any overt use of metafiction within its own plot compared to *Supreme* or even *Miracleman*, it is a major subtextual concern of the story in terms of its positioning at a watershed moment of change in the continuity of not only Superman himself but the entire "DC Universe". Moore's "Imaginary Story"—itself an inherently metafictional construction—served as a kind of subtly rebellious alternative voice in the face of the unstoppable, editorially mandated continuity changes taking place through *Crisis* and the imminent *The Man of Steel* which was by the same token an event with unavoidably metafictional overtones.

While it is not known to what extent Moore was appraised of the specific changes intended to be wrought on Superman's continuity by Byrne, he was unquestionably aware that the general purpose of *Crisis* and the Superman reboot specifically was to remove extraneous, "outdated" characters and history, and he was likely given at least a general understanding that most of Superman's supporting cast of sidekicks, pets and gadgets would be jettisoned. [\[26\]](#)

Also to be effectively jettisoned was Curt Swan, who had worked prolifically on the *Superman* titles for over thirty years and come to be seen as the character's definitive penciller to generations of readers, yet was now essentially given his walking papers to make way for the new, "modern" style of incoming artists John Byrne and Jerry Ordway. While it is unknown whether Moore personally requested Swan as his collaborator for this project, Swan was the natural, indeed obvious, choice, and Moore spoke highly of the experience (Khoury, 2003, p. 121). The genuinely Silver Age style of artwork which Swan brought to these issues perfectly reinforced Moore's storyline that was designed to close the book on the era with which Swan was so indelibly associated, and from which he would never truly re-emerge into the modern period.

*In another similarity to his work with Dave Gibbons, Moore has Swan create parallel pages for the dual conclusions of his tale in the final pages of both the "flashback" main story and the "present day" framing device set in the near future. Swan employs identically proportioned panel layouts and his compositions broadly mirror the blocking of the characters in the equivalent images from either page. Both pages conclude with the Man of Steel opening and looking back through a door in farewell, first as Superman to Lois, and finally as Jordan Elliot to the implied reader, breaking the fourth wall and corroborating the understated hints about his new civilian identity. Swan's portrayal of Elliot/Superman's parting wink recalls Moore's opening prologue at the beginning of the story's first issue (see Fig. 9) that described it as a tale that "ends with a wink",*

*but also evokes the manner in which actor George Reeves as Clark Kent would often similarly aim a wink directly to-camera at the end of episodes of the 1950's television series The Adventures of Superman (Whitney Ellsworth and Robert J. Maxwell, Kellogs, 1952-1958), in acknowledgement to viewers who were the only ones "in on the joke" of his secret identity. Although the television series and the comics of the Silver Age had little in common, they were both the primary portrayals of Superman in the popular consciousness for a common era, and Moore and Swan's intertextual referencing of the show served as yet one more farewell to a soon-to-be-bygone era for the Man of Steel.*

Moore's story can therefore be seen as very much a sweeping round-up of these precise elements, a virtual cattle-call of Superman's major enemies, old allies and outrageous accoutrements. The story reads as almost a catalogue of the more outlandish and "childish" aspects of Superman's ballooned Silver Age features, from Elastic Jimmy Olsen to the Legion of Super-Heroes, from the Phantom Zone to Gold Kryptonite.<sup>[27]</sup> While on the one hand a bleak little *Götterdämmerung* for Superman's supporting cast, it is also clearly a celebration, a swansong for these elements that were soon to be swept aside.

Yet, for all this revelling in the obscurata of the Silver Age, Moore very much appears to be subverting this task as well. Given the status of the tale as both "imaginary" and immediately preceding a massive continuity revision, the considerable death toll of these characters seems more than a little gratuitous upon a first reading—not a criticism one would commonly level at Moore's work. Looking at the tale today this might not be so striking, as the "kill 'em all" ethos of alternate-future "End Tales" has since become something of a well-worn trope in comics and television, but in 1986 was still relatively uncommon.

Instead, Moore appears to be rather slyly making an embedded criticism of DC's decisions to kill off a vast number of minor characters during *Crisis* that they no longer wished to use after the continuity revision. Further still, the story can be read as a critique of the very notion of the *Crisis* revision itself and its "metapocalyptic" approach to continuity. Seen in the wider context of his later career and specifically in terms of the strong similarities to his work on *Supreme* (which would use an *overtly* metatextual device of characters being "revised" out of existence), this "Imaginary Story" begs the question as to why, if these characters are going to be discontinued from continuity, do they actually need to be killed in the narrative itself?

*George Pérez's now iconic covers from the Crisis maxiseries were evocative of the violence wrought both literally upon DC's characters but also metatextually on their continuity. The apocalyptic and violent imagery was echoed by Moore and Swan's work on Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?, which followed soon after and served as a critique of both the means and ends of Crisis.*

Given his own chance at an "ending" for Superman not directly tied in to *Crisis*, Moore underlines the absurdity of killing off characters DC did not want to use anymore while preserving those who are simply going to be revised anyway because of some misguided in-universe logic.<sup>[28]</sup> Given the freedom of an Imaginary Story but

in the process mocking the very notion, Moore subtly suggests that these Silver Age versions of beloved characters like Lana Lang or Krypto the Superdog are not simply being written out, retired in an abstract way—they are being *killed*. After all, is not the removal of a fictional character from diegetic "reality" effectively equivalent to metafictional death? Why violently murder characters like Supergirl and Lori Lemaris in the pages of *Crisis* when just as many other "silly" details like Jimmy Olsen turning into a giant turtle are going to be simply swept under the metatextual rug by the forthcoming reboot regardless, without requiring the bodily death of the character? Moore's tale seems to aim the sidelong critique to DC that if they were going to murder some characters that they did not want anymore but then revise reality anyway, why not simply slaughter *everyone*...? Viewed in this light of a meta-critique, Moore's "Imaginary" killing spree in *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* served to make literal the violence being done to the "official" continuity, in order to highlight the essential ludicrousness of the whole endeavour.

As is often the case, Moore's tale works on both the level of a genuinely exhilarating, tragic and uplifting epic when viewed at face value, while subtextually functioning as both an oddly plaintive celebration of the wild and wacky concepts of the Silver Age Superman<sup>[29]</sup> that were about to be abandoned, and in doing so composing a subtle critique of the execution and even very concept of the drastic continuity reboot his tale served to punctuate. These were all themes which Moore would revisit in more depth in his final work on the topic of Superman a decade later, in the pages of *Supreme*.

### **Pastiche, homage and metatextuality in *Supreme***

Apart from penning a proposal in 1987 for *Twilight of the Superheroes*, an unrealised crossover event in which Superman would have played a key role<sup>[30]</sup>, Moore cut ties with DC not long after *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* and took a hiatus from mainstream superhero comics altogether. His return to the genre was somewhat unexpected, all the more so due to his new employers being Image Comics, then still a very new independent publisher with something of a reputation at the time for style over substance.

While in *Miracleman* Moore deconstructed the very notion of "the superman" to investigate its most extreme implications, and his small collection of official *Superman* stories plumbed the depths of the official character's psychology and brought his classic era to a close amidst some intriguing metatextual commentary, Alan Moore's final work on the Superman theme to date<sup>[31]</sup> in *Supreme* is at once his most celebratory and elaborately metafictional adaptation of Superman yet.

Once upon a time the notion of comic book characters having close resemblances to preceding characters in appearance, abilities or origins was a cause for accusations of plagiarism and grounds for litigation, as famously was the case with Superman's occasionally more popular alleged-derivative Captain Marvel, over whom DC sued Fawcett Comics (and won), before eventually buying out the character in 1973. However, at some point over the decades of continuous publication and generational change amongst creators, attitudes began to soften somewhat, and a strange new type of character emerged, that of the readily identifiable "homage character" or "pastiche version" of a much more familiar original.

*Just a few of the most prominent Superman pastiches, clockwise from top right: Hyperion from Squadron Supreme (Marvel Comics), Mr. Majestic from WildC.A.T.S (Wildstorm/Image/DC Comics), Samaritan from Astro City (Homage Comics/Wildstorm), Sentry from The Sentry (Marvel Comics), Apollo from The Authority (Wildstorm), The High from StormWatch (Wildstorm), and Omni-Man from Invincible (Image Comics).*

A technique favoured by many of the most acclaimed writers in the mainstream industry today,<sup>[32]</sup> the purpose of these often quite thinly-veiled imitations of well-established characters can vary from parody to lighthearted analysis of genre conventions, or even serious analyses of the mimicked character that would never be allowed with the actual property itself. Sometimes these ersatz versions of longstanding characters serve to play upon or subvert the familiar archetypes of the genre by playing them radically against type—depicting a Superman-esque character as a fascistic conspirator<sup>[33]</sup> or running a child abuse ring,<sup>[34]</sup> for example. The general rule of thumb is that pastiche versions of characters are used when it can be safely assumed that the owners of the character whom the writer is referencing would never permit their property to be depicted in the intended manner.

Thus, the more archetypal and well-established a superhero is and the more influential the character has been in the genre, the greater the likelihood that they will be pastiched over and over again. It is therefore unsurprising that this has happened to Superman with greater frequency (and from earlier in his career) than any other character, being himself the original, genre-launching prototype.

In this context Alan Moore's use of pastiche in *Supreme* was not a revolutionary act in and of itself.<sup>[35]</sup> What was highly unusual, however, was the way in which Moore took the freedoms of the pastiche convention to write not a vaguely analogous take on Superman so as to explore incongruous ideas or outright mock the original material, but rather to engage so wholeheartedly with the extreme specifics of the entire Superman mythos, and in doing so produce some highly metatextual commentary about the history of the medium itself.

As with many of the titles he wrote over the course of his mainstream career, Moore did not create Supreme, but rather reinvented for his own purposes what was originally a shallow, uninspired character. In some ways akin to how Miracleman was fashioned by Mick Anglo as an ersatz Captain Marvel, Supreme had been created in 1992 by Image Comics' controversial co-founder Rob Liefeld<sup>[36]</sup> as a superficially obvious but substantively divergent pastiche of Superman.

Somewhat dubiously claimed by Liefeld to be intended as an examination of what an immensely powerful character akin to Superman might be like without traditional heroic motivations and ethics,<sup>[37]</sup> the character was from the outset a typical example of the worst excesses of style-over-substance early 1990s overkill, of which Image was often considered the worst offender, and Liefeld the most egregious of the group.<sup>[38]</sup> Featuring a succession of contradictory origins as an angelic religious zealot, a resurrected prison inmate, and even a pantheistic god, Supreme was a violent egotist with little similarity to Superman other than in abilities and superficial appearance. As Moore himself put it, when describing the character before he came on board, Supreme was merely Superman portrayed as a "psychopath", a concept he felt simply "wasn't very interesting" (Khoury, 2003, p. 176).

*Prior to Moore's run, Supreme was a fairly ill-defined and generic pastiche of Superman, legible in the character's similar caped costume, chest insignia and superpowers. Although not overtly aping Liefeld's pencilling technique, these covers by Brian Murray demonstrate much of Liefeld's "house style", such as hyper-exaggerated musculature, grimacing faces and "pin-up" style covers containing a lack of narrative relevance to the interior story. Although many of the Supreme covers during Moore's run were similar in style (including several drawn by Liefeld himself) for marketing reasons, most issues had alternate covers which contrasted those in this style with compositions that were generally more tied in to the issue's content.*

When Moore made his surprise return to the mainstream in 1993 by working for Image, some considered him to be "slumming it" (Parkin, p. 57), or merely paying the bills to facilitate his "real" ongoing independent projects of the time such as *From Hell* and *Lost Girls*. It is a critique of some arguable validity, reinforced (or perhaps misled) by the fact that Moore had seemingly abandoned his famous technique of darkly cynical deconstruction of the superhero genre, and instead seemed to be writing fairly uncharacteristically traditional superhero comics. While things are rarely ever so simple when it comes to Moore's work, there is some truth to be found in the perception that his early 1990s Image work prior to *Supreme* was somewhat pedestrian compared to his seminal 1980s output.

However, by his own admission, there was a definite point to this, as Moore had grown dismayed over the years by the influence that his own work had exerted on the industry. He perceived, rightly or wrongly, that the unrelentingly "grim and gritty" direction that comics had taken since the late 1980s was largely a result of other creators (poorly) imitating the superficial results of his deconstructionist style—i. e. overt depictions of violence, sexuality and character neuroses, rather than Moore's more complex conceptual motives behind composing these representations. Moore thus claimed that he felt a sense of responsibility to help

the mainstream superhero genre reclaim a sense of joy and innocence without sacrificing literary merit (Khoury, 2003, p. 176). While initially this resulted in some fairly straightforward storytelling on titles like *WildC.A.T.S*<sup>[39]</sup> and *Spawn* (#8, 32, 37 [1993, 1995], as well as *Spawn: Bloodfeud* #1-4 [1995], and *Spawn/WildC.A.T.S* #1-4 [1996], all published by Image Comics), it was an impulse which would lead to Moore's new approach of "reconstruction" that informed his large output under his imprint America's Best Comics, launched in 1999. An important stepping-stone for developing this new voice was his work on *Supreme*.

If *Supreme* could have been considered a character that had only superficial similarity to Superman beforehand, Moore took him about as far in the other direction as possible. Accepting the offer from Liefeld to work on the character under the condition that he could completely ignore the title's preceding content, he proceeded to rework *Supreme* into an extremely *blatant* pastiche of Superman. Moore completely overhauled *Supreme's* entire fictional universe to resemble Superman, particularly the Silver Age Superman, as closely as possible—indeed, his new version of the character was effectively Superman in all but name, with only token deviations to maintain the distinction.

Having crafted a simulacrum of the iconic character but unencumbered by the restrictions that DC would naturally have placed on use of the original, Moore had free rein to explore the cornucopia of bizarre and fantastical elements which (at that point in time) had been unavailable to the Superman mythos in the decade since the *Crisis* reboot. Unimpressed with the resulting contemporary portrayals of Superman, Moore saw the potential in a pastiche version:

I suddenly thought, "Well, how could I rescue this lame, appalling Superman knock-off?" ...because at the time, I remember thinking that the regular *Superman* book actually was at least as much of a lame Superman knock-off as *Supreme* was. (Khoury, 2008, p. 174).

Indeed, Moore felt motivated to use *Supreme* to reclaim these defunct Silver Age concepts that had had been eliminated by *Crisis's* unraveling of continuity, cast aside for being notionally childish or outdated. Moore, conversely, sought to redress the expunging of these characters and ideas, to recapture and rehabilitate "...that rich mythology and continuity, all those kind of stupid but enduring elements [like] *Krypto the Super-dog*" (Khoury, 2003, p. 176). Thus *Supreme* was, in one respect, an unashamed celebration of the style of Superman comics stewarded by Mort Weisinger, the editor of the *Superman* titles throughout essentially the entire Silver Age, who was directly or indirectly responsible for the propagation of Superman's hugely expanded roster of associated characters and "classic" continuity elements that had been mostly swept away by the 1986 continuity revisions.

*Although not particularly informative about the issue's story content other than the characters featured, guest cover-artist Rob Liefeld's image clearly demonstrates Moore's pastiche of Superman's Silver Age mythos. Liefeld's cover depicts Supreme with his adoptive sister Suprema and dog Radar the Hound Supreme, flagrantly obvious analogues of Superman, his cousin Supergirl, and pet Krypto the Superdog respectively, all of whom can be seen for comparison on*

*the classic 1967 Curt Swan cover above.*

On this level Moore's reinvention of Supreme's world as a direct carbon copy of that belonging to Weisinger's Superman can be seen as pure homage, verging on affectionate parody. Under Moore, Supreme gains a vast supporting cast and a world almost entirely comprised of direct analogues of Silver Age Superman examples, such as archenemies Darius Dax (a Lex Luthor analogue), Optilux (the Brainiac equivalent), childhood sweetheart Judy Jordan (Lana Lang's stand-in), workplace love interest Diana Dane (Lois Lane), trouble-prone "pal" Billy Friday (Jimmy Olsen), superhuman adopted sister Suprema (cousin Supergirl) superpowered dog Radar the Hound Supreme (Krypto the Superdog), time-travelling teen allies the League of Infinity (30th Century group the Legion of Super-Heroes), android duplicates the Suprematons (Superman Robots), crimefighting super-detective ally Professor Night (Batman) and his sidekick Twilight the Girl Marvel (Robin the Boy Wonder), membership in superhero groups such as the faux-Golden Age team the Allied Supermen of America (Justice Society of America) and their Silver Age successors the Allies (Justice League), an immense secret headquarters in the flying Citadel Supreme (arctic Fortress of Solitude), a vulnerability to the deadly radioactive meteor Supremium (Kryptonite)... and many, many more besides. Even the cover of Moore's first issue (#41) is a direct evocation of 1939's *Superman* #1.

*Moore collaborated with cover artist Jerry Ordway to signal as overtly as possible his intent to transform Supreme from a generic to a highly specific pastiche of Superman. To this end the cover of Moore's first issue on the title is a mirror to that of 1939's Superman #1, an iconic cover second only to the previous year's Action Comics #1, Superman's first appearance. Not only does Ordway give Supreme a duplicate pose to Superman's (something homaged on several other pieces of comic art over the years), but he also recreates the distinctive decorative framing image, which Moore has filled with text in the same hyperbolic style of phrasing as present on the original. The comic's logo is even slightly redesigned to have a 3D-lettering effect similar to that of the famous Superman logo. Even the choice of Jerry Ordway as the cover artist is a signifier of Moore's goal in evoking Superman, as Ordway has a long (and, at the time, current) professional association with the character, having been the primary artist on Adventures of Superman for the first three years after Crisis, as well as a frequent cover artist and writer on the title (and Superman) for much of the late 1980s and most of the 1990s.*

This extremely detailed reproduction of Superman's classic mythos in the form of such deliberately obvious analogues quite surpasses any other examples in the pastiche subgenre, and yet served a purpose beyond merely revelling in the bygone age of comics that Moore felt he was instrumental in undermining<sup>[40]</sup>. More significantly, Moore used this facsimile of Superman and his swarm of paraphernalia to engage in an extensive and semi-satirical commentary on the history of not only Silver Age comics, but also the peculiarities of the very notion of comic book continuity, picking up threads from *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?*

In order to signal this approach and simultaneously create an in-story explanation

for discarding the previously established version of Supreme, Moore uses his first issue to introduce one of the key metafictional concepts on his run, that of "the Supremacy". The story shows Supreme returning to Earth after an absence, only to find it in a state of flux, and is confronted by a group of strange alternate versions of himself (including Blaxploitation female iteration Sister Supreme and cartoonish anthropomorphic rodent Squeak, the Supremouse<sup>[41]</sup>) who explain that Earth is undergoing a "revision" and that he must come with them to avoid possibly being erased from "the continuity". In explicitly peppering the dialogue with words like "continuity", the term widely used in the industry and fandom alike to describe comics' narrative history rather than some euphemistic term regarding the character's diegetic "reality", Moore makes his intent to employ metafiction clear from the outset.

*Artist Joe Bennett depicts Supreme in a fairly standard art style for the 1990s, but endeavours to stylistically distinguish Moore's other iterations of the character by altering his linework to suggest other eras and genres, such as the more animation-like proportions and fluid posture of Squeak the Supremouse, and the somewhat simplified detailing and rigid posing of Original Supreme evoking the work of Superman creator Joe Shuster. This deliberate visual discrepancy of art styles for different characters within the same panel works to foreshadow Moore's introduction of the metatextual concept of the Supremacy over the following pages.*

Supreme follows them into a white void dimension in which exists a fantastical art

deco city entirely populated by hundreds of alternate versions of himself, many of which are bizarre and improbable. Notably he meets a flightless late 1930s version known as "Original Supreme"<sup>[42]</sup> and also the realm's ruler, "His Majesty Supreme the Fifth, of the 1960s Silver Dynasty".<sup>[43]</sup> They explain to him the nature of the Supremacy, that reality is in a continual state of revision, in which periodic changes occur which rewrite not only the status quo but also works backwards to supplant preceding history itself – essentially an exact description of DC Comics' treatment of continuity in events such as *Crisis*, but from the comic character's own point of view.

It is further explained that when one of these "revisions" takes place, the old reality is simply replaced by the new one, as though it had never been... with the notably unique exception of Supreme himself. Every time there is a revision in reality, Supreme, instead of simply ceasing to exist, finds himself (and some of his supporting characters) in this void dimension, along with every other past version of himself that has been "revised". Dubbing their purgatory "the Supremacy", this ever-growing community of different versions of Supreme built a city for themselves where they all live together eternally, saved from the oblivion of being revised into nothingness.<sup>[44]</sup>

Moore's outré premise clearly posits a kind of metafictional Valhalla for past versions of Superman that have been removed from fictional "existence" due to real-life revisions in comic book continuity. In doing so, Moore refigures these kinds of continuity-revision narratives like *Crisis* as the whims of implied writers and editors who rewrite, retcon and reboot either small elements or entire histories, which are traumatically experienced by the characters themselves as an apocalyptic cancellation of reality as they perceive it.<sup>[45]</sup>

*Bennett's art continues to reinforce Moore's idea of "revised" former versions of Supreme coexisting within the Supremacy by differentiating the disparate iterations with art styles appropriate to the period from which they supposedly hail, i. e. the equivalent periods of Superman comics. Foregrounded in this image is a clear distinction between the modern Supreme with his vaguely Liefeldesque excesses of musculature and detailing, while Sixties Supreme is depicted in a deliberate "lift" of Curt Swan's early style, with attention to a leaner, more barrel-chested physique, a simpler, Swan-style face complete with a hint of Superman's spicurl, and even a different, anachronistic method of shading. Moore's dialogue cements the distinction, with the modern Supreme's naturalistic speech in marked contrast to Sixties Supreme's old-fashioned phrasing.*

With this satirical yet infinitely more elegant method of creating a diegetic explanation for continuity changes than DC ever managed with their convoluted *Crisis*-type crossovers, Moore not only creates a device to explain his own reconceptualisation of the character, but in the process creates a much more expansive commentary about the very concept that comic book continuity—and Superman's in particular—is constantly being revised and altered both implicitly and explicitly by successive creators and editors who take the character in a new direction. To drive the point home further (and fill out the numbers) Moore's scores of different iterations of Supreme includes analogues of the innumerable examples of "Imaginary Stories" from the Silver Age, as well as the many times Superman was temporarily altered by the bizarre effects of red kryptonite [\[46\]](#)—every such alteration counting as a "revision" for the purposes of the Supremacy's metaphysics.[\[47\]](#)

*Moore's artistic collaborators' depictions of large group scenes in the Supremacy serve not only to illustrate the general concept that all past "revisions" of the character coexist in this dimension, but furthermore contain many specific jokes and references (through Supreme-analogues) to obscure Superman stories and minor characters such as Supergirl, Superboy, Superwoman, Mr. Mxyzptlk, The Composite [Batman/]Superman, Comet the Superhorse, Streaky the Supercat, Beppo the Supermonkey, Titano the giant ape, various mutated versions of Superman under the influence of Red Kryptonite such as having a swollen head or lion's features and many more besides, as well as continuations of the super-pet theme such as "Supreme" versions of a whale, dolphin, turtle, elephant, rhinoceros, bird, butterfly, a UFO alien, an anime "mecha" suit, and even "Supreme" incarnations of unrelated superheroes such as Spider-Man, Kyle Rayner from Green Lantern, The Lieutenant Marvels from Shazam, the Thing from Fantastic Four and the Japanese "tokusatsu" hero Ultraman.*

Moore's conception of the Supremacy contains an evident link to his work a decade earlier on *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* in its critique of the practice of rewriting comic book continuity. As though recalling the line from his memorable prologue "*This is an imaginary story... aren't they all?*", Moore utilises his metafiction of the Supremacy to unpack, play with and further debunk

the absurdity of the notion that any one work of fiction can be regarded as more "real" or "in-continuity" [\[48\]](#) than any other piece which uses the same character. [\[49\]](#) Where Moore's earlier "end tale" of the official Superman's Silver Age incarnation served to criticise subtly the most drastic act of continuity revision in the history of the genre (from "ground zero" as it were) and mourn the passing of the character's outrageous mythos, his revisiting of the issue a decade later through a pastiched adaptation of Superman provided an opportunity to expound this critique far more openly, and actively celebrate and re-evaluate the rejected content that had been absent over the ensuing period.

Having introduced the Supremacy in his first issue, Moore did not revisit it for some time, instead setting about detailing his reappraisal of the Silver Age. Moore was quick to establish his new version of Supreme as an unmistakable ersatz Superman, filling in a new backstory as the hero starts to "remember" his new past, even though this current revision of reality and its history has only existed for days or weeks.

Employing the popular, usually apocryphal notion that one of Superman's powers is immortality as an in-universe explanation for his lack of aging after decades of publication, Moore's new version of Supreme had (like Liefeld's original) been around since the 1940s. This allowed Moore to play with the whole history of the Superman mythos, so that unlike the official Superman character whose frequent revisions and floating timeline constantly obfuscate any notion that his in-story career has ever lasted much more than a decade prior to whatever happens to be the present date, Supreme is depicted as having quite literally been around since before WWII, having never aged beyond prime adulthood.

However, this long history is of course only subjectively true for Supreme as the continuous revisions in continuity mean that he has only actually existed for a very short time. In telling his story the Shusteresque "Original Supreme" relates that he was "...born 1920. That was the first '1920', incidentally. There's been lots." [\[50\]](#)

As Supreme begins to explore his newly remembered (and newly created) past in his second issue (#42), Moore unveils the primary image/textual storytelling device which he proceeds to use over the course of his run, that of creating deliberately anachronistic vintage style artwork and dialogue within a modern comic book. Moore consistently wrote an extensive flashback sequence in virtually every issue to be pencilled by his past and future collaborator Rick Veitch [\[51\]](#). Rather than function as traditional flashbacks, Moore uses a hypodiegetic framing device of a comic-within-a-comic created with elaborately detailed period-accuracy.

Moore had used a similar device years earlier with "Tales of the Black Freighter" in *Watchmen*, a pirate comic being read by a minor character in the story which is juxtaposed with the panels of the main plot to provide various thematic resonances. [\[52\]](#) In this case, however, Moore uses the device in a far more elaborate and metafictional fashion, as they represent the character's literal memories through a highly stylised lens.



*Rick Veitch's comic-within-a-comic flashback sequences employ meticulously retro pencilling to ape the prevalent comic art styles of the pertinent decades in which Moore indicates Supreme's memories took place, in some cases even evoking specific artists' techniques. In this instance Moore and Veitch homage Mike Sekowsky's iconic 1960 cover that depicted the debut of the Justice League of America with their pastiche version The Allies, with near-identical composition and linework, deliberately flat colouring and paraphrased cover-text, down to the logo design, censorship seal and publisher's insignia.*

Moore's collaboration with Veitch on these flashback sequences displayed particularly close attention to the marriage of word and image to create distinctive and quickly recognisable imitations of vintage comic books of various eras. While Veitch meticulously used his astounding skills of imitative linework to produce remarkably perfect simulacra of the various dominant art styles of relevant periods in comics history,<sup>[53]</sup> Moore complemented these images with dialogue composed in a similarly impeccable recreation of the hyperbolic mode appropriate to the style of writing in vogue for each applicable decade of the comics.

*Moore's dialogue and captions are carefully matched in tone to Veitch's replication of the prevailing art styles of the 1950s and 1970s, respectively. Great attention to detail is paid by both collaborators, such as Moore's choices of adversaries reflecting the trends of each decade, early team-ups of non-superpowered villains that pastiche Lex Luthor and the Joker fighting the familiar team of Supreme (Superman) with Professor Night and Twilight The Girl Marvel (Batman and Robin the Boy Wonder), a typical 1950s type of story awash with zany plans and oversized props, compared to a faintly psychedelic conflict with Jack O'Lantern, representing resurgence of antihero supernatural characters such as The Spectre (permitted by a change in censorship) as well as the new trend for heroes to fight each other for contrived reasons, bringing together various 1970s comicbook tropes. Veitch complements Moore's attention to detail with that of his own, not only using entirely different pencilling styles befitting the relevant decades, but also using appropriately differentiated panel layouts and storytelling (highly formal in the faux-'50s, experimental and overlapping in the would-be '70s), altered colouring techniques representing advances in printing technology, and even simulated yellowing of the paper to varying degrees.*

Depending on which decade between the 1940s and the 1970s that the "memories" are set in, Veitch and Moore alter their nuances of art and writing accordingly, and in doing so create even deeper layers of historical reference, for example aping the style of not only Superman comics but also the extremely different and distinctive styles of vintage *MAD* Magazine and EC Comics artists and writers of the relevant periods, so commenting upon the issues of Cold War paranoia and early counter-culture that had influenced their work.



*Looking beyond Superman, Supreme also pays homage to other significant examples of comic art from the 1950s outside of the superhero genre, in these cases EC Comics' various gruesome horror titles and the raucous satire of MAD Magazine, respectively. Once again Moore and Veitch are at pains to replicate the particular modes of text and artwork that defined the sources they are referencing.*

Even obscure historical "inaccuracies" are purposely included, such as portraying the childhood stories of Kid Supreme in a 1950s style despite being set in the 1920s, a metatextual acknowledgement that this was the era in which the *Superboy* comics they are imitating were actually published rather than conforming to their diegetic chronology. Just as Moore had worked with genuine Silver Age legend Curt Swan on *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* some years after his style had been in vogue, Veitch's images repeatedly reach back through the stylistic history of comics to create as close an evocation of Swan's heyday as possible.

Moore and Veitch's collaboration on these "comic flashbacks" is a remarkably synergistic endeavour, down to minute details of both art and writing that evokes multiple eras of history in the American superhero genre, recreating the styles of line, panel layout and visual storytelling, the use of virtually defunct techniques such as thought balloons (instead of "thought captions", a technique popularized decades earlier by Moore himself) and narration captions in the style of an omniscient editorial storyteller, extradiegetic title pages and the subdivision of stories within a single issue into shorter "chapters". Veitch's strikingly accurate mimicry of bygone draughtsmanship is enhanced even further by deliberately recreating flatter, more primitive colouring techniques and artificially yellowed paper to complete the illusion. Among the comics *cognoscenti* these faux-vintage pages could almost pass for actual comics of their times were it not for the anachronistic presence of the modern Image Comics character Supreme standing in for Superman.<sup>[54]</sup>





*Moore and Veitch worked closely on evoking the scripting and visual storytelling style of the Silver Age Superman comics, often for the purpose of gently parodying the types of plots and social values that the comics of that era often contained, which seem farcical or outmoded by today's standards.*

Apart from creating a considerable visual and literary dissonance and beyond being simply "retro", Moore uses this technique to openly celebrate and dissect the stylistic history of Superman and mainstream comics in general, leading to *Supreme* being so densely packed with minutiae and such an abundant amount of subtle in-jokes and references that a reader's enjoyment (and possibly even comprehension) of *Supreme* is entirely proportionate to the depth of their knowledge of Superman and DC Comics' long history.

*Veitch apes Jack "King" Kirby in Moore's (unexpectedly) final issue, one which is uncharacteristically light on specific Superman parody, choosing instead to focus on a rapid-fire pastiche of a diverse stable of creations in a tribute to the then recently-deceased master of the medium. Demonstrating perhaps the apex of his talent for artistic mimicry, Veitch meticulously reproduces Kirby's dynamic compositional style, idiosyncratic draughtsmanship and sundry details such as heavy blacks, squared fingertips and rugged faces. To exaggerate the*

*contrast between this realm based on Kirby's imagination and the "real" world, Supreme himself is drawn separately by Rob Liefeld and inserted into Veitch's panels, creating a strong visual dissonance.*

Unfortunately, Veitch was the only artist who remained on the title throughout Moore's run, contributing to almost every issue. Somewhat similar to his problems on *Miracleman*, Moore was paired with an inconsistent succession of artists to depict Supreme in the present day sequences, including Chris Sprouse, Matt Smith, Ian Churchill, Joe Bennett, J. Morigan, Mark Pajarillo and Rob Liefeld. This inevitably led to a lack of artistic cohesion for *Supreme*, as the contrast between the modern pencillers and Veitch's faux-vintage art styles failed to coalesce into a stable binary opposition, especially given the at-times jarringly dissimilar styles of the various "present day" artists who worked on the title, with only Chris Sprouse (Moore's future collaborator on *Tom Strong*) pencilling several consecutive issues.

This was unfortunate, as a consistent artist on the present day portions (virtually regardless of style) would have served as an excellent counterpoint to highlight the oft-times nuanced internal variation within Veitch's "flashbacks", with their aforementioned capacity to differentiate between the prevailing styles of draughtsmanship in different decades of vintage comics. One cannot help but suspect that this may have had an effect on Moore's scripting of these modern sequences, as the writer was clearly investing greater effort into his collaboration with Veitch on the retro content than that set in the modern era. As such, the "modern" pages of *Supreme* often lack the particular spark of image/text synthesis that is typical of Moore's work, and was clearly evident in the Veitch sequences.

This disparity may well have been due to the fact that, although Moore admits that he does not "really have favourite collaborators", he nevertheless prefers to write to said collaborators' individual artistic strengths, approaching his scripting informed by a close familiarity with their work (Khoury, 2008, p.110). One can only imagine this kind of nuanced stylistic relationship was often difficult to develop given his brief and irregular partnerships with many of the *Supreme* pencillers.



*The rapid turnover of artists collaborating with Moore on the "modern day" sequences throughout Supreme yielded such differing results that these highly inconsistent approaches never gelled into a cohesive stylistic contrast to the pseudo-vintage "flashback" sequences by Rick Veitch. Pictured here are three pages demonstrating the wildly different linework of Chris Sprouse, Ian Churchill, and Melinda Gebbie, respectively.*

Moore's 23-issue run on *Supreme* falls fairly neatly into two story arcs. The first has been collected in trade paperback under the title "The Story of the Year", while the latter is dubbed "The Return". Although individual issues appear deceptively episodic (likely another homage to vintage DC comics, which rarely contained ongoing plotlines), both arcs surreptitiously sow the seeds for dramatic conclusions which tie together various disparate elements, especially those from Veitch's flashbacks.

In yet another layer of Moore's metafiction, we are introduced to Supreme's alter ego as the meek, bespectacled Ethan Crane who, as an artist for Dazzle Comics, works on the comic book "Omniman"<sup>[55]</sup>, who is yet another blatant Superman pastiche.<sup>[56]</sup> In a brief moment of self-mockery, Moore even references his own contribution in *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* to the elimination of Superman's old continuity by having the obnoxious British comic writer Billy Friday enthusiastically plan to "snuff Omniman and all the crap supporting characters from the Sixties in one issue!" (*Supreme* #43).

*Moore uses Supreme's secret identity as comic book artist Ethan Crane to create ever more layered pieces of metafictional humour in scenes set in Dazzle*

*Comics' offices, a closer-to-home analogue for Clark Kent at the Daily Planet. Moore uses these sequences to poke self-referential fun at his own career and resulting trends in mainstream comics through enfant terrible British writer Billy Friday, as well as further exploring the comic-within-a-comic technique used throughout Supreme by using a different twist, having Omniman, the Superman-esque character that Supreme himself illustrates, apparently spring to life and debate which of the two of them is real and which merely a comic-book character.*

Using Veitch's vintage-styled sequences, much of "The Story of the Year" details how Supreme reacquaints himself with the various elements of his Superman-mirroring mythos, such as visiting his hometown of Littlehaven (Smallville) and encountering his past sweetheart Judy Jordan (now an elderly grandmother), returning to his Citadel Supreme, rescuing Suprema from a cosmic villain, reuniting with old comrades The Allies, and rescuing others still from the clutches of erstwhile foe Optilux.

However, Moore subtly threads elements through these seemingly unconnected stories and reaches an unexpected climax in which former archnemesis Darius Dax, who died in the 1960s, suddenly resurfaces having used his technology to possess the body of Judy Jordan some thirty years prior<sup>[57]</sup> and laid an elaborate trap for Supreme. Amidst a flurry of further homages, Dax is defeated via an outrageous time travel conceit whereby the villain becomes the very meteor that gave Supreme his powers in the first place.

With this predestination paradox (the first of a few time-loop devices used during his run) finishing off the first story arc, Moore's second, still seemingly-episodic storyline expanded its metafictional approach and took the members of Supreme's large supporting cast in new directions. Where "The Story of the Year" established Moore's thinly-veiled analogues of the Superman universe and supporting cast, "The Return" takes these characters, one by one, to their logical conclusions in ways that would never be permissible with the original Superman characters they represent. It bears some similarities to his approach with *Miracleman* (and, indeed, much of his work in general) of taking the core concept of a character and extending that to a point where, unlike the Silver Age stories that have inspired them, they radically break free of their oneiric climate.

*Moore extrapolates some of his adaptations of Superman's Silver Age myths to their bizarre conclusions, such as having the Krypto analogue Radar discover sex and, due to his superpowers, sire an unmanageable horde of dangerously powerful puppies within 24 hours. Matt Smith's stylised artwork with its crisp lines and heavy blacks counterbalance the rampant absurdity of the story through keeping the visuals comparatively sombre, in an issue in which Veitch's vintage flashback sequence uncharacteristically serves as an unrelated backup story.*

Examples include the android Suprematons seeking independence as sentient artificial lifeforms, Billy Friday's strange transformations (akin to those of Jimmy Olsen in the Silver Age) proving genuinely traumatic, a heroic but flawed member of the League of Infinity abusing his ability to time-travel altering the outcome of the American Civil War, and Radar the Hound Supreme impregnating hundreds of normal dogs at superspeed resulting in a plague of super-puppies and his departure from Earth.

Perhaps most notable was Moore resolving Supreme's conflicted romantic feelings for Judy Jordan and Diana Dane via an elaborate "have your cake and eat it too" scenario involving generational disparity, android bodies and displaced consciousness, a solution which provides an interesting thematic epilogue to a notably angst-ridden scene in his *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* in which Superman confesses to Perry White that he judges himself a coward for never making the choice between Lana Lang and Lois Lane, in yet another link between Moore's two thematically intertwined Superman adaptations.

*Moore parodies various different eras of Superman comics' rather antifeminist portrayals of Lois Lane when her analogue Diana Dane meets her various anachronistic counterparts in the Supremacy.*

Yet while in "The Return" Moore breaks with the status quo of the tales to which he pays homage, his methodology is far less cynical here than his old deconstructionist style—instead of showing a darkly "realistic" take by imposing the probable effects of Superheroes on "reality" as in *Watchmen* or *Miracleman*, Moore's approach to breaking the status quo of his Superman analogues in *Supreme* acknowledges the absurdity of the genre's conventions and exists unashamedly within them.

In this respect Moore's work here is again something of a thematic continuation and extrapolation of *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?*, where he was similarly free to wreak havoc on Superman's mythos without worrying about the consequences to ongoing continuity. The significant difference with *Supreme* was that with the benefit of a much, much longer run than his two-part Superman "end tale", Moore was able to devote a whole issue to just about every weird and wacky Silver Age concept that took his fancy and deal with it in his own terms, rather than requiring them to all be shoehorned into a single tale of Superman's final undoing. In this respect *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* was something of a trial run for his later adaptation *Supreme*, as the latter expanded greatly upon Moore's major thematic concerns therein regarding a celebratory re-examination of the Silver Age and a critique of continuity revision.

*Joe Bennett's "Origin of Supreme" cover pays homage to that of Curt Swan's famous cover for the first issue of the Alan Moore-penned Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow? Although on one level perhaps just another bit of self-referential humour (and even conceivably of Bennett's invention rather than Moore's), the cover perhaps serves a similar function as the mirrored cover from the previous issue (see fig. 22) as a subtle statement of intent, in this case to pick up and expand metafictional themes Moore had begun in his earlier Superman work. It is worth noting that even the original Swan cover was self-consciously retro for its time; declaratory text-heavy covers with box-out images having long gone out of vogue by 1986. This was yet another indication of Moore's goal in the story of paying tribute to the Silver Age, and something of a prototype for the vintage-style text and art he would create with Veitch for Supreme.*

Unfortunately, Alan Moore's run on *Supreme* came to a premature end with the closure of Awesome Comics, leaving his second story arc incomplete.<sup>[58]</sup> However, his intended direction was clear, having introduced the idea partway through "The Return" storyline (*Supreme: The Return* #2, 1999) that archnemesis Darius Dax, upon his death at the end of "The Story of the Year", finds himself in Daxia, an exact equivalent to the Supremacy where all revised versions of Dax wind up upon being erased from continuity. Conspiring with his fellow Daxes to cheat death and return to reality, the stage was evidently being set for a metafictionally-explosive confrontation with an all-out war between Daxia and the Supremacy (Parkin, p. 76).<sup>[59]</sup>

Assessing *Supreme* in light of Alan Moore's oeuvre may seem challenging at first, even if only in relation to his other work on the concept of Superman. Superficially, it could be accused of being a comparatively "slight" work, lacking the deeply challenging themes and high-concept deconstruction of *Miracleman* or the emotive tenor and epochal significance of *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* On the other hand, Moore's goal with *Supreme* was almost diametrically opposite to that of *Miracleman*, and its dialogue with his earlier DC work continued and expanded upon a significant topic in examining the history of the superhero comic medium and the process of continuity revision in particular.

As an adaptation *Supreme* also represents Moore's most prolonged body of work<sup>[60]</sup> on the Superman figure and by far his most detailed examination of the character's history, not to mention the entire Silver Age of comics by extension. In delving into this material with such specificity Moore goes to great lengths to demonstrate how, in intelligent, interpretive hands, even the most outlandish concepts from these bygone eras of comics can still be viable. Furthermore, Moore uses possibly one of his most densely metafictional notions to date to lampoon the periodic overt changes to something as fundamentally "unreal" as comic book continuity, *especially* in the case of a figure like Superman.

*Supreme* also acted as very much a prototype for the immediate next step in Moore's career, in which his America's Best Comics imprint would put out a multitude of titles that (all of which Moore initially wrote himself) continued the heavy use of metafiction and pastiche<sup>[61]</sup> but increasingly recombined with other elements, adapting older, pre-comic sources such as in his Doc Savage-inspired pulp homage *Tom Strong*, the television police procedural format "super cops" title *Top Ten*, and his acclaimed *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, which assembles the great figures of Victorian popular literature in a proto-superhero team.

*Supreme* was thus significant as something of a turning point in the millennial period of Moore's career, being the first protracted, fully-realised example of his new approach to writing for mainstream comics that lasted for the better part of a decade. His new adaptive style of "reconstructionism" was positioned in opposition to (and apology for) the grim trend in American comics for which he felt responsible with his popular deconstructionist techniques (Khoury, 2003, pp. 120-121, 176). As Moore put it himself:

*I suppose with things like the ABC work, with Supreme, with 1963, it was kind of an attempt to say, 'Look, you know, get over Watchmen, get over the 1980s.' It doesn't have to be depressing, miserable grimness from now until the end of time. It was only a bloody comic. It wasn't a jail sentence. (Khoury, 2003, p. 120).*

## Conclusion

Alan Moore's work on Superman—including Superman by any other name—occupies a curious, elusive, and somewhat under-appreciated corner of both his own career and the larger, nebulous entity of Superman's own history. While one would not be likely to consider these intersections as definitive examples of either collective, they provide illuminating glimpses into how this archetypal, genre-defining character has provoked and stimulated one of the most revered and conceptually ambitious writers ever to grace the comics medium.

Even when not writing the official version of the character, Moore's engagement with Superman in one form or another has run virtually the entire breadth of his professional engagement in the mainstream comic industry. Notably, there is no other character that Moore has revisited so many times, and at such length. Moreover, the Man of Steel has been subject to several of the differing techniques of adaptation that Moore has employed across his career. From the disturbing, philosophical deconstruction of Superman's deepest thematic implications in *Miracleman*, through a dark yet celebratory refiguration of the official version's mythos at a turning point in his history, and culminating in an extensive reappraisal of the character's rich lineage of a bygone era of comic storytelling through audacious pastiche, Moore's adaptations of Superman have presented an evolving vision of the character. Merlin-like, Moore's Superman has almost grown in reverse compared to the tide of history for mainstream superhero comics, from darkness through to a new light in an intriguing parallel to the author's own superhero-writing career.

Most significantly though, Moore's latter two Superman-related projects, *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* and *Supreme* demonstrate a decade-spanning dialogue between significant moments in Moore's own career, from the height of his mainstream popularity only a short while before abandoning the mainstream altogether, then forward to the turning point in his return to

the mainstream that established the course forward for much of the next decade, before once again abandoning the industry almost entirely. Through a paired analysis of the two intertwined Superman works emerges an engaging critique of not only the specific *Crisis* event, but which also grows to encompass a much wider critical view of the very nature of superhero continuity and the ways in which it is constructed, violated, privileged, marginalised and reborn, exploring through metafiction the nature of a bygone era of comics, and finding it worthy of embracing once more.

To what extent Moore's adaptations have had a lasting effect on the ongoing existence of DC's official Superman franchise is difficult to quantify definitively, given the vast number of contributors that have worked on the character both during and after Moore's official and pastiche work on the character. Nevertheless, one can certainly detect some footprints that the wild-bearded Englishman has left in the snow around the Fortress of Solitude.

While a direct causal link between Moore's work on *Supreme* and the writing of later Superman scribes Mark Waid, Jeph Loeb, Joe Casey, Kurt Busiek, Mark Millar, Grant Morrison *et al* remains unacknowledged, his role as an industry trendsetter is hard to discount, even though his "second wave" of mainstream superhero work is not yet as widely lauded as his groundbreaking debut. At the very least, Moore's work on Superman and his pastiches demonstrated intriguing foresight in his major reappraisal of the merits of the Silver Age, given that virtually all the zany elements cast out of official canon in the mid-1980s which Moore eulogised in *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* and later adapted anew for *Supreme* would, over the following half decade, crop up in the mainstream *Superman* comics. To date, we have seen the virtually wholesale reintroduction of diverse Silver Age elements, all championed by Moore—multicoloured kryptonite, Superman's cousin Supergirl, Superman Robots, an arctic Fortress, General Zod, Luthor as a mad scientist, the bottle city of Kandor, a shared history with the Legion of Superheroes and, of course, Krypto the Superdog.

## Notes

[1] This attribution is discussed at length in Coogan, Chapter 8, "The First Superhero".

[2] The original black and white publication run of *Marvelman* was incomplete, appearing in UK anthology magazine *Warrior* #1-21 (1982-84), which was subsequently reprinted and coloured, and then had its story completed in the American comic book format as *Miracleman* #1-16 (1985-89), published by Eclipse.

[3] *Supreme* #41-56 (Image Comics, later Maximum Press, later still Awesome Comics, 1996-1998) and *Supreme: The Return* #1-6 (Awesome Comics, 1999-2000). Similar to *Miracleman*, and indeed as with many of Moore's independent projects, *Supreme* was subject to some changes in publisher during his tenure, with Image publishing the first two issues, Liefeld's independent Maximum Press putting out #s 43-48 before transferring to Liefeld's new company Awesome Comics. It was then cancelled mid-storyline with issue #56 and subsequently continued with restarted numbering as *Supreme: The Return* (albeit with no actual interruption to the story) for six issues before sudden cancellation, leaving the story hanging without a conclusion. In spite of the complex publication history, Moore's uncompleted run falls quite neatly into two story arcs and has been collected as such in trade paperback form by the publisher Checker as "The Story of the Year" and "The Return". Even though the second story arc had run for several issues in the original numbering before the book was relaunched with the subtitle, "The Return", this serves as a convenient title for the second arc and will be referred to as such herein.

[4] The original 1950s *Marvelman* was a character almost directly mirroring *Shazam*'s Captain Marvel (unusually so for the time, although today it would be considered a fairly standard case of pastiche), created out of necessity when British publisher Len Miller lost the rights to use the American character in the UK. (Khoury, 2001, p. 6.) However, given the legally-contested extent to which Captain Marvel himself was inspired by Superman in turn, there is an obvious lineage.

[5] Apart from their obvious similarities in the level and specific nature of their superpowers, the term "Superman" is mentioned in the comic itself several times, both in reference to the DC character and the Nietzschean concept. Other elements are clearly more beholden to Superman than the original Captain Marvel template, such as the Silver Age Superman's more aloof attitude towards his own humanity, *Miracleman*'s alliance with a benevolent group comprised of aliens and superpowered humans reminiscent of Superman's membership in the Justice League, the character *Miracledog* being an obvious homage to Krypto, Gargunza owing as much to Lex Luthor as Sivana, and the temple *Miracleman*'s pantheon builds for themselves at the end of *Olympus* is clearly reminiscent of the Fortress of Solitude with its many wonders and strange trophies.

[6] In particular, Moore described his conception of the horrifically apocalyptic battle between *Miracleman* and former sidekick Kid *Miracleman* as an attempt to depict just how much destruction a battle between Superman and Bizarro in downtown Metropolis would "really" cause. (Khoury, 2001, pp.18,20.)

[7] As opposed to the rambunctious pre-war Superman of the first few years of publication, who was a somewhat anti-authoritarian figure who battled corruption and greed on behalf of the downtrodden of the late Depression era.

[8] Although *Watchmen* is generally considered to be Moore's definitive text about superheroes, it should more accurately be regarded as chiefly concerning "costumed heroes" rather than actual superhumans, as the only character in its large cast who actually possesses any real superpowers is Dr. Manhattan.

[9] Although interestingly enough, Moore in fact reworded the dialogue in the speech balloons to sound even more clichéd and exaggerated than the real 1950s text actually was.

[10] As with many of Moore's projects written outside of the "big two" publishers, *Miracleman* had a very drawn-out publication schedule which entailed significant delays and a change in publisher. As such, although his original run on the character in the UK *Warrior* magazine beginning in 1982 predated his work for DC, the story was not concluded until 1989 under the auspices of Eclipse. Therefore, *Miracleman* essentially spans the breadth of Moore's career in mainstream comics prior to his reemergence in 1993 at Image Comics. (Parkin, p. 55.)

[11] Notably including the graphic novel *Batman: The Killing Joke* (1988) and many other short stories, most of which are collected in the trade paperbacks *Across the Universe: The DC Universe Stories of Alan Moore* (2003), and *DC Universe: The Stories of Alan Moore* (2006). All preceding volumes published by DC Comics.

[12] "Protected Species" from *The Superheroes Annual 1984* (DC Comics UK, Autumn 1983), and "I was Superman's Double" from *Superman Annual 1985* (DC Comics UK, Autumn 1984).

[13] The story has been adapted almost verbatim into an episode of the high-octane animated series *Justice League Unlimited*, under the same title in Season 1 (Warner Bros., 2004. Written by J.M. DeMatteis, with adapted story credit to Moore and original artist Dave Gibbons), and is reputedly the only screen adaptation of an Alan Moore work endorsed by the author. Significantly, the tale has also been reprinted several times, such as in the anthology trade paperback *The Greatest Superman Stories Ever Told* (which has seen multiple editions since 1987), as well as being included in three collections of Moore's DC work: *Superman: The Man of Tomorrow* (B&W, 1988), and the aforementioned *Across the Universe: The DC Universe Stories of Alan Moore* (2003), and *DC Universe: The Stories of Alan Moore* (2006). All preceding volumes published by DC Comics.

[14] Given that the characters of *Miracleman* and later *Supreme* were both superpowered humans rather than actual aliens, and *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* focuses on so many other elements of Superman's Silver Age mythology that the issue of his being Kryptonian does not feature significantly. This was not altogether odd given that the story's "end tale" premise required no reiteration of his origin, and the continuity at the time of publication had already eliminated Supergirl and the surviving Kryptonian city of Kandor as then-ongoing elements, thus leaving Superman himself as the last Kryptonian character present (with the technical exception of Krypto the Superdog).

[15] Although Moore's earlier prose story "Protected Species" concerned Superman's status as an "endangered species", the short tale was written from the perspective of an alien "animal bagger" pursuing Superman, and was played chiefly for humour value.

[16] Although by this stage well into the Bronze Age of comics (the parameters are debated, but are generally held to span from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s), the Superman revised by *Crisis* was perceived (especially in retrospect) as essentially still being the Silver Age conception of the character, especially given his until-then unbroken continuity.

[17] A type of story, once common in the Silver Age, wherein the story content was explicitly understood to take place outside of the wider diegetic continuity and have no bearing on future issues of the comic in question.

[18] A similar notion is expressed in Klock, p. 22.

[19] More so than in the sense that the pre-*Crisis* continuity was about to be stricken from ongoing canon, as by the broader metatextual rules of DC continuity the Silver Age history had been canon before being replaced by a new version of "reality", whereas "Imaginary Stories" were generally held to have *never* been canon in the first place. That said, there have been various attempts in later years to suggest that even these tales were in some tangential sense canonical by relegating them to alternate universes.

[20] Something further complicated by the fact that the metafictional model used by *Crisis* implied that the existing character was literally changed by reality (almost like an amnesiac given a new identity) instead of actually being physically differentiated from the new version. Conversely, this *had* been retroactively declared to be the case with the Golden Age Superman, designated a separate duplicate character named Kal-L (as opposed to Kal-El) residing on an alternate-reality Earth, meaning that (prior to *Crisis*) the two supermen could cross worlds and meet each other. The fact that, on the diegetic level, the post-*Crisis* Superman was deemed the "same person" as the Silver Age one precluded the idea of Superman's "end story" being in-continuity, even a continuity that was about to be completely swept away.

[21] For example, the first syllables of his name make up "Jor-El", Superman's Kryptonian father.

[22] A frequently-evoked trope (in part by casual observers by way of a glib explanation for Superman's lack of aging due to the common device of a floating timeline), but the idea of Superman possessing effective immortality as an actual superpower has never been definitively established in mainstream DC canon with any diegetic permanence.

[23] Indeed, the whole notion of Superman retiring was portrayed as a pivotal mistake in the narrative of *Kingdom Come* (DC Comics, 1996), although the tale did conclude with a similar assertion of the character's essential humanity, but without the sacrificing of his powers or commitment to using them for the benefit of humanity.

[24] *Superman: The Man of Tomorrow* (B&W, 1988), *Superman: Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?* (1997), and *DC Universe: The Stories of Alan Moore* (2006).

[25] For example, in Jeph Loeb's *Superman/Batman* #18 (2005), and Grant Morrison's *Final Crisis: Superman Beyond 3D* #2 (2009).

[26] For example, Supergirl had already been killed off in the *Crisis* maxiseries.

[27] The Superman Robots (Superman's many android servants made in his own image for use as decoys) seemed to be just about the only major omission, but this was a continuity issue, as they had already been decommissioned in the 1970s.

[28] i.e. the aforementioned notion that the post-*Crisis* Superman, Lois *et al.* are literally the same people as their pre-*Crisis* selves around whom reality (including their own memories) has changed, rather than being bodily "replaced" by another version, which was the metafictional concept Moore would later use in

*Supreme*. The flaw, of course, is that many of the supporting characters killed in *Crisis* with the intention of never being used again actually did crop up again in the new continuity regardless (such as Lori Lemaris), making their violent deaths in *Crisis* ultimately unnecessary and merely gratuitous.

[29] Decades later Grant Morrison had a similar approach to his take on the out-of-continuity miniseries *All-Star Superman* (DC Comics, 2006-2008).

[30] The existence of the proposal document for the unrealised maxiseries is a piece of comparatively obscure apocrypha that has survived and been disseminated via the internet. Although never used or referred to by DC in any public official capacity, it reputedly remains the legal intellectual property of DC despite its barely schematic form. Indeed, DC have made some attempts to prohibit the proliferation of this document, taking legal steps such as submitting the document for copyright a decade after the fact. Some question if this constitutes an effort to suppress knowledge of the document for various reasons. For a discussion of DC's legal actions (retrieved on 4/5/2008), see: <http://www.hoboes.com/Comics/Twilight/dc/> For a discussion of the document's authenticity (retrieved on 4/5/2008), see: <http://www.hoboes.com/Comics/Twilight/comments/>

[31] Or likely ever, given his retirement from mainstream comics altogether. (Khoury, 2003, p. 181, and Khoury, 2008, p. 208.)

[32] In particular: Warren Ellis, Mark Millar, J. Michael Strazynski, Garth Ennis and Neil Gaiman, to name but a few.

[33] Garth Ennis' *The Boys* (Wildstorm/DC Comics, later Dynamite Entertainment, 2006-present).

[34] In this case by Alan Moore himself, with a very minor character in *Top Ten* (America's Best Comics/Wildstorm/DC Comics, 1999-2001).

[35] Moore was no stranger to pastiche himself, with Miracleman being originally a transparent clone of Captain Marvel long before he ever got his hands on him, and most of the cast of *Watchmen* being retooled versions of Charlton comics characters, necessitated when DC refused him the rights to the characters proper. *Supreme* itself served as something of a springboard for Moore's extensive use of pastiche in his America's Best Comics line, such as the Doc Savage-esque *Tom Strong* (America's Best Comics/Wildstorm/DC Comics, 1999-2006), his loosely Wonder Woman-inspired *Promethea* (America's Best Comics/Wildstorm/DC Comics, 1999-2005), and scores of other characters in *Tomorrow Stories* (America's Best Comics/Wildstorm/DC Comics, 1999-2002) and *Top Ten*.

[36] Although it should be noted that the original *Supreme* artist Brian Murray has asserted himself as co-creator on his own website: <http://www.murraystudios.com/credits.html> While Wikipedia also affords him this credit, official publications list Liefeld as sole creator of *Supreme*. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme\\_\(comics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_(comics))

[37] Letters Page, *Supreme* (vol. 2) #1.

[38] Although Liefeld apparently had little actual input into the *Supreme* title specifically.

[39] It should be noted that this Jim Lee-created title featured the one other Superman-analogue Moore has used in his career, the Kherubim (alien) warlord Mr. Majestic. He is not discussed here in detail as the character was but one of many

in the title's large ensemble cast and Moore did not pay the character particular attention, with the one exception being a one-shot "The Big Chill" which depicts Majestic as one of a small group of immortals who are the final remaining beings in existence as the universe collapses at the end of time. Although not particularly evoking the Superman character in any other way, Moore does touch upon the common but somewhat apocryphal view that Superman does not age and is therefore immortal. *Wildstorm Spotlight #1 Featuring Majestic* (Wildstorm/Image Comics, 1997).

[40] During his work on *Supreme*, Moore penned *Judgement Day* (4 issues, Awesome Comics, 1997-1998), a crossover-style limited series which encompassed the shared fictional universe of all Liefeld's characters such as Supreme in an even wider metatextual exploration of the history of mainstream comics, including pastiches of non-superhero genres such as Western, Fantasy and Pulp, using similar artistically-distinct flashbacks to *Supreme*. The title ultimately served as a critique of the "grim and gritty" tone of superhero comics by portraying reality as being controlled by rewriting a magical book which, in the hands of the self-aggrandising hero Sentinel, had been used to change the once uplifting nature of superheroic narratives into squalid tales of psychotic vigilantes. Although Moore does not target himself openly (if anything, he makes a visual reference to Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* [4 issues, DC Comics, 1986]), the inference to his and Miller's unintended influence is clear with the narrative's dating of the "middle nineteen eighties" as the point at which "reality" began to darken.

[41] An obvious analogue of Mighty Mouse, himself derived from Superman.

[42] A reference to the fact that Superman, upon his debut in 1938, was not initially depicted as possessing the power of flight, merely being able to "leap tall buildings in a single bound."

[43] A nod of the head to Moore's preference for the classic Silver Age iteration of the character and an indication of what will be at the core of his approach to the character.

[44] For Moore, it was key concept in his approach to his Superman pastiche, realising that:

...once I'd come up with that fairly simple idea, I realised just how rich and funny I could make my treatment of it... where I could parody the various ills of the comic industry and where I would play with wonderful ideas... which was always the thing that Superman represented to me as a child. It didn't represent to me power or security, or anything like that; it represented wonderful ideas. (Khoury, 2003, p. 176.)

[45] Klock compares the idea of the Supremacy to Moore's earlier metafictional concept in *Swamp Thing* of the viewpoint of omni-dimensional access known as Aleph. (Klock, pp. 23-24.) Also using Moore's notion of the Aleph as a springboard for a far more expansive analysis of highly intertextual metanarratives in comics related multimedia is Angela Ndalians' chapter "Enter the Aleph: Superhero Worlds and Hypertime Realities", in Ndalians, *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero*.

[46] Such as turning into a giant, splitting into two separate individuals, regressing to infancy, growing the eyes and antennae of an huge ant, or going temporarily insane, to name but a few.

[47] Indeed, Moore allows for more variation amongst his past versions of Supreme than was ever really the case with Superman, in particular allowing differing iterations to have completely unrelated origins such as gaining their powers from radiation, a magic belt buckle, etc – itself an observation of the changing trends in fashionable or "believable" origins over the decades for superheroes in general. Tellingly, the

only version of Supreme to actually have an alien origin mirroring Superman's own is the aforementioned Supremacy ruler Sixties Supreme, "Last Son of the exploded planet Supron" (*Supreme* #41).

[48] Klock also briefly offers an alternative, yet complementary analysis which interprets Moore's Supremacy device as the expression of an awareness that superhero narratives are enriched by acknowledgement of their complex, contradictory histories, even if false ones need to be created for them. (Klock, p. 191.)

[49] Perhaps best expressed when at one point Supreme is introduced to the twin Supremes White and Gold, who describe themselves as "imaginary versions who were no less real than anyone else after our revision!" (a reference to the classic Imaginary Story "The Amazing Story of Superman-Red and Superman-Blue!" *Superman* (vol. 1), #162 (July 1963).

[50] When the new Supreme later protests that he has been active ever since the '40s and merely has developed strange memory gaps, Original Supreme remarks "Banana oil! Your past hasn't been written in yet! You probably popped into being just a few weeks back!" (*Supreme* #41). Of course, this is also a joke on the fact that, in the real world, Supreme is merely a pastiche character that had at that point only existed for around four years.

[51] The pair worked together on *Swamp Thing* and *Miracleman*, and would later go on after *Supreme* to collaborate on the "Greysheet" feature in Moore's anthology comic *Tomorrow Stories* (1999-2002, America's Best Comics). Veitch himself had already written and drawn his own rather bleak deconstructive parody of Superman in his series *The Maximortal* (7 issues, King Hell/Tundra Publishing, 1992-1993).

[52] Moore had even briefly used a comic-within-a-comic device as an introduction to *Miracleman*, reproducing pages of a vintage 1950s *Marvelman* comic with more exaggerated dialogue by way of juxtaposition with his dour, "realistic" tale to follow. This was later recontextualised when it is revealed that *Miracleman*'s creator Dr. Gargunza had based *Miracleman*'s false memories on comic books.

[53] Including not only those of Superman comics, but also the extremely different and distinctive styles of vintage *MAD* Magazine, EC Comics etc.

[54] This was not the first time Moore had used this technique, having previously produced a similar work with Veitch three years earlier, a wide-ranging parody of the early years of Marvel Comics entitled *1963* (Image Comics, 1993), including fake period fan letters, editorials mimicking Stan Lee's idiomatic prose, and advertisements for non-existent comics in the style of the time.

[55] No relation to the aforementioned Omni-Man of Image Comics' *Invincible*.

[56] This is taken to ever further extremes in issue #53 where Mr. Mxyzptk analogue Szazs "the Sprite Supreme" appears to bring Omniman to life, leading to a confrontation between two comic book pastiches of Superman (one literally so, even within the context of the story) arguing over who is "real". Evidently, Moore sought to address the question of privileging different iterations of fiction on as many levels as possible.

[57] This is even a double homage, referencing the Ultra-Humanite, a very early mad-scientist enemy of Superman's that even predated Luthor, and had a penchant for transplanting his brain into new bodies as a method of escape. His first such body-change was into that of a woman.

[58] Unlike other works such as *V for Vendetta*, *Marvelman*, *From Hell* and *Lost Girls* that suffered similar setbacks but were later completed with other publishers, it is fairly unlikely that Moore's work on *Supreme* will ever see completion. Although he had reputedly scripted the final two issues which would have completed the story arc (Parkin, pp. 62, 76), the fact that a decade has passed and he has not attempted to revisit it speaks volumes, combined with some possible acrimony with Liefeld (Khoury, 2003, pp.174-175) and his widely-stated (and thus far upheld) intent to never write mainstream superhero comics again.

[59] Also, anecdotally, "Citadel Supreme", a website dedicated to Moore's run, claims: "From an interview published with Alan Moore on the now defunct Mania website, he reveals that there would have been a battle between the heroes of the Supremacy against the villains of Daxia ... from the chronology given in the interview this would have started in *Supreme The Return* #7!" <http://www.comicbooks.westumulka.com/supreme/worldown.html> (Retrieved on 8/10/2008).

[60] In terms of volume rather than time, that is pagecount and number of issues, as opposed to years passed, in which case the distinction would go to *Miracleman*, but again due solely to its sporadic publishing schedule.

[61] Amidst a plethora of other personal criticisms, Rob Liefeld somewhat controversially claimed that, in creating the America's Best Comics imprint, Alan Moore had essentially copied his approach to *Supreme* and other titles he had penned whilst working for him at Awesome Entertainment. Although broadly speaking a somewhat justified observation, the tenor of Liefeld's attack was not given much weight in the comic community. ("Rob Liefeld shoots on Alan Moore" Interview with Rob Liefeld by Luke Y. Thompson, *Orange County News*.)

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## Review of Annalisa Di Liddo's *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel*

By Eric L. Berlatsky

Di Liddo, Annalisa. *Alan Moore: Comics as Performance, Fiction as Scalpel*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2009. Print.

As Annalisa Di Liddo notes in the Introduction of this book from University of Mississippi Press's Great Comics Artists series, much ink has been spilled in response to Alan Moore's work. Most is more hagiography than biography, more lavish praise than balanced analysis, but Moore is, nevertheless, also among the most discussed figures in academic comics studies. Featuring prominently in books by Geoff Klock, Richard Reynolds, Bradford Wright, and Thierry Groensteen, Moore has also been the subject of numerous articles in *Imagetext* and other comics journals. Discussions of *Watchmen* (1986-87) and *From Hell* (2000) have even found their way outside of the insular world of comics criticism and into journals typically devoted to "literature" without pictures. To this point, however, there had been no scholarly book-length treatment of Moore's *oeuvre*, making Di Liddo's a landmark.

Di Liddo takes her trailblazing role seriously, as the book reveals the appropriate immersion not only in Moore's comics, but also in the growing academic literature on the medium. She bemoans the "all-too-celebratory" nature of previous Moore books and aims to correct their "deficient critical attitude" (14). All of this is to the good, and there are times when Di Liddo lives up to her stated goal of a "more systematically critical study" (14). The term "critical" is something of a misnomer, however, in two distinct ways. First, while Di Liddo aims to separate herself from recent Moore celebrations (Gary Milledge and smoky man's *Alan Moore: Portrait of an Extraordinary Gentleman* and George Khoury's *Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore*), in the end she is almost never actually critical of Moore's work, his politics, or his philosophy. While she is better than most of her predecessors about offering the possibility of critique, she hesitates to actually make clear arguments about where Moore's work falls short in her own estimation (and thus also where his successes are greatest). Likewise, while Di Liddo is adept at locating motifs, themes, and trends, she is less willing to actually make a case for what an individual text (or even a constellation of texts) actually tells us about social, political, or philosophical issues. Moore himself, in a bewildering blizzard of interviews, is quick to explicate many of his basic thematic concerns, and Di Liddo rarely goes beyond what Moore himself has said.

As such, while Di Liddo's book is an important step forward for Moore criticism, it too often leaves its readers at the doorstep of some significant insights, while declining to fully open the portal.

The introduction addresses the by now singularly uninteresting question of defining the term "graphic novel." The less said about this the better, and the book properly begins with the first chapter, which is more fully illustrative of the book's strengths and weaknesses. Di Liddo begins by discussing Moore's formal approach to writing comics. Di Liddo informs the reader of Moore's tendency to write in the fullest of "full scripts," with an impossible amount of detail, commentary, and conversation for his artistic collaborators. This leads to an interesting and compelling commentary on Moore's late-career tendency to value the written word over the image, and how this preference ultimately leads him both into the study of magic and to non-comics projects, like his first novel *Voice of the Fire* (1996). Di Liddo also gives due attention to Moore's collaborative instincts and visual imagination, how he writes to the strengths of his artistic partners, and is more than willing to accept input and transformation by the visual artist despite the seeming impregnability of his scripts. All of this, while well known to the Moore aficionado, will surely help the neophyte reader or scholar. The strengths of this section of the chapter are balanced, however, by significant weaknesses. Di Liddo relies overmuch on Moore's mid-eighties "how-to" essay, *Writing for Comics*, a piece Moore has at least partially disavowed since, and which, at the very least, is significantly out-of-date in relation to his later work. Similarly, Di Liddo's focus on Moore's "intertextuality" is both undertheorized and curiously unmotivated. In her discussion of the "barrage of direct and indirect quotations" (42) of Victorian literature in *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman* (1999-present) volumes, she is largely willing to settle for the fairly obvious observation that "intertextuality" is a frequent practice of Moore's, and that he sees literature as "an inexhaustible repository of stories" (43). This is true, as far as it goes, of course, but leaves out the question of why Moore so frequently borrows his characters and stories and to what purpose. Is his practice "deconstructive" of the tradition? A parody of it that critiques elements of what has gone before? Or is it merely a pastiche that has no critical perspective on the work that it cannibalizes? While Di Liddo approaches these questions in later chapters, she never fully engages with theories of intertextuality, the distinction between parody and pastiche, or any number of other theoretical perspectives that might have led to more revelatory conclusions.

The latter half of the chapter is devoted to Moore's reworking of the superhero tradition, particularly in *Swamp Thing* (1984-87) and *Watchmen*. In some ways, this section works better, with Di Liddo devoting space to the ways in which *Swamp Thing's* use of intertextuality (especially with Walt Kelly's *Pogo*) is instrumental in the series' critique of environmental destruction. The treatment of *Watchmen*, however, is surprisingly brief and Moore's *magnum opus* is never given due attention in the course of the book. Di Liddo traces Moore's use of E.C. horror comics, Coleridge, Poe, and Brecht in the *Tales from the Black Freighter* inset to exploit a range of intertextual connections. Even so, Di Liddo hesitates to draw any conclusions about how Moore uses these strategies in service of (for instance) the political stance *Watchmen* takes, or in terms of Moore's critique of the very genres from which he is borrowing. More than works like *Supreme* (1996-2000), or the 21st-century ABC Comics line, *Watchmen* and *Marvelman/Miracleman* (1982-89) are clearly critical of the whole notion of superheroes and the incessant borrowing from that tradition is not *merely* borrowing, but also part of a critique of "superpowers" in comics and the "Super Powers" in the Cold War. Di Liddo's tendency to merely identify borrowing without delving fully into what it means or why it is important is disappointing. Also problematic are a series of factual errors. Hardly significant in themselves, they indicate a less than full knowledge of the material under discussion. Di Liddo claims that Moore himself invented Marvelman for *Warrior* magazine in 1982, adapting the figure from Fawcett's Captain Marvel (48). In fact, Marvelman was created in the mid-fifties

by Mick Anglo. Di Liddo also claims that *Swamp Thing* #21, "The Anatomy Lesson," was Moore's "first issue" (50). In actual fact, it was his second, as he used his first to tie up the hanging threads of his predecessor's tenure. Errors of this kind most offend the fan community and have little impact on the substance of Di Liddo's argument(s). It is worth remembering, however, that comics scholarship often begins with fan appreciation (as Di Liddo acknowledges) and that a critic's grasp of basic facts and chronology should be stronger than those of the fan.

There is little doubt that the middle of Di Liddo's book is the strongest part and she hits her stride in chapter two, particularly. Her discussion of time and space in Moore's work is welcome, as it is a complex theoretical issue that needs critical explication. Her treatment of Moore's neglected space opera, *The Ballad of Halo Jones* (1984-86), is especially good, as she looks closely at Moore's (and Ian Gibson's) use of circular structures, both in terms of plot (Halo's residency in the circular "Hoop") and in artistic form (the use of circular panels). Di Liddo also makes some bona fide critical claims about the meaning of the text, suggesting that all of the formal circularity reflects the thwarted and frustrated life of the intensely "ordinary" Halo Jones, whose experience reflects that of the "ordinary" citizen of Thatcher's mid-eighties England (71). A close comparison of a panel from *Halo Jones* to the Japanese print, "Mount Fuji as Seen from Kanagawa" is both compelling and enlightening, revealing influences and meanings not evident on the text's surface (68-69).

Di Liddo's discussion of *From Hell* (1988-1998) in the same chapter is also interesting, if not quite as strong in its critical perspective. It is here that Di Liddo elaborates upon and elucidates Moore's obsession with time as merely a fourth spatial dimension, which contains an order and pattern that would only be fully visible from outside the spacetime continuum. Moore first explores the idea in depth in *Watchmen*, and it is curious that Dr. Manhattan's four-dimensional consciousness never finds its way into this chapter's treatment of Moore in the context of Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope." In *Watchmen*, the interest in "simultaneous time" is explored through quantum mechanics and Einstein's "general theory" of relativity. *From Hell*, conversely, is preoccupied with the relationship of magic (Moore's late-career obsession) with the experience of simultaneity. In this context, the Jack the Ripper killings and the mythology surrounding them become part of an exploration of the cultural and social patterns of the twentieth century whose origins lie in Whitechapel. Di Liddo does a nice job explicating Moore's theoretical positioning of the killings and also discusses the book's gender politics. Never, however, does Di Liddo bring the question of Moore's feminism together with his vision of a patterned four-dimensional spacetime. If the Ripper's murder of the London prostitutes is "predetermined," part of an eternally spatial and patterned timeless present, how can we be critical of the Ripper's (and his society's) treatment of women and the poor (and especially poor women) as the book elsewhere implies we should? In this context, how can the book say anything useful about politics and ethics, which necessarily rest upon human agency? *From Hell* is far from conclusive on these topics, and even the notion of four-dimensional spacetime may be a figment of William Gull's deranged mind in the context of the book. Nevertheless, some coherent and sustained argument about these issues would be welcome.

Finally, chapter two discusses *Promethea* (1999-2005). Here again, Di Liddo is at her best in discussing the formal design of particular pages. She nicely pinpoints the ways in which Moore and J. H. Williams III repeatedly construct "timeless" double-page spreads that work against comics' normal tendency to progress sequentially from panel to panel. By creating a multiplicity of "circular" pages that lead the reader through conversations and actions that have no beginning or end, Moore and Williams make a comment about the peculiar sequential and simultaneous spacetime created by, or reflected in, comics (and magic, and theoretical physics). Moore's notion of "ideospace," a communally shared realm

of imagination, is also discussed in relation to *Promethea*, which functions both as a presentation of these ideas and as a neo-Romantic celebration of the powers of art and the imagination. Insofar as *Promethea* is itself a theoretical explication of Moore's esoteric notions, the burden is on Di Liddo to not merely repeat those ideas, but to critique them, or take them further. She rarely does so, however, neither interrogating the potentially problematic Romanticism nor the comics' lack of narrative drive. While Di Liddo mentions those who claim that *Promethea* is made up of "substantially uninteresting philosophical and religious disquisitions" (86), she is unwilling to make such claims herself, or to defend the text with full throat. If she is to bring up the debate about the problematic nature of *Promethea*'s plot or lack thereof, it is perhaps not too much to ask her to make her own contribution to that discussion.

The third chapter shifts focus to Moore's interest in English cultural identity. Here, Di Liddo looks closely at *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman*'s critique of Victorian Britain. Di Liddo convincingly delineates *The League*'s deconstruction of the British Imperial hero, its implicit critique of imperialism, and its rejection of the patriarchal sexism that found its height in the nineteenth century. Her discussion of Moore's critique of Margaret Thatcher's government is also illuminating. Through a reading of Moore's "Mirror of Love" poem (1988) as a response to 1988 anti-gay legislation, *V for Vendetta* (1982-89), *Skizz* (1983), and the unfinished *Big Numbers* (1990), Di Liddo limns Moore's anti-Thatcherite politics, particularly in terms of the prime minister's treatment of marginalized communities. Di Liddo's research into the political, social, and economic facts of Thatcher's Britain is fairly minimal, but the close reading of Moore's output during the period adroitly reveals the politics at its heart. Even here, however, Di Liddo misses some opportunities to discuss the ways in which Moore's critique of England's past and present also translates into a serious critique of contemporary neo-imperialism. *Big Numbers* is centered around the erection of an America-style shopping mall in "Hampton," a thinly veiled copy of Moore's own Northampton, and the attention to the failure of Thatcher's Britain is met equally by a critique of American global expansion. Moore's love/hate relationship with America never arises in Di Liddo's book, but it is a compelling mirror to his treatment of England and central to much of his work. The nineteenth-century fin de siècle of *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman* might be read equally as a critique and mockery of the British Empire and of its American successor. Chapter three closes with a discussion of the psychogeographic elements of Moore's novel *Voice of the Fire* (1996) and its link to Raymond Williams' thought. Again, while Di Liddo cleverly reveals Moore's increasing fascination with "regional consciousness" as a means to a more universal perspective, the link between the novel's immersion in "place" and space and Moore's fascination with the nature of time are left curiously unexplored, despite the concerns of chapter two.

The final chapter focuses exclusively on Moore's work of deluxe pornography, *Lost Girls*. Unfortunately, this chapter is Di Liddo's weakest, featuring hesitant claims about the quality of the book and few insightful critical moments. The chapter begins by listing a number of *Lost Girls*' intertexts and predecessors, building on its origins in *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Peter Pan*. While this section enlightens the reader on several possible precursors to Moore's reworking of these texts, curiously absent is any discussion of Moore's previous exploration of a "pornotopia" in the pages of Howard Chaykin's *American Flagg* (1985). Moore's *Flagg* stories take a negative view of sexual permissiveness in Kansas, and, in doing so, explicitly rework *The Wizard of Oz*. Likewise, Moore's depiction of Stravinsky's "Rites of Spring" in *Lost Girls* is preceded by the (in)famous sex issue of *Swamp Thing* (#34), which shared a title with the ballet. These precursors and intertexts within Moore's own work are left unmentioned despite their obvious relevance to Moore's developing attitude toward sexuality.

These shortcomings are not substantially overcome by Di Liddo's close reading. In interviews and didactic moments of the text itself, Moore posits *Lost Girls* as a

"make love not war" book. Sex is offered as a chronotopically eternal realm of the imagination, a paradise of sorts, in which any thought, at least, is fair game, providing a necessary outlet for our baser urges. Through close readings of *Lost Girls*, a sampling of the available interviews, and a variety of critical reviews, Di Liddo successfully conveys both Moore's intellectual position and those of the book's numerous detractors. She does not, however, offer much that is critically new. She does not engage with the available feminist debate over pornography, nor does she approach the book's dominant focus on same-sex desire through the prism of queer or gender theory. While Di Liddo gently critiques the book's heavy edifice of formal structure, she does not address why this structure, so praised by many in *Watchmen*, may be counterproductive for a work of pornography. Di Liddo's discussion of Angela Carter's *The Sadeian Woman* brings the text into some relevant theoretical context and her reading of the conclusion of the book is compelling. Still, it is hard not to wish for a reading of *Lost Girls* that goes beyond what Moore himself has asserted and that engages more fully with the existing theoretical literature on pornography.

The conclusion briefly explores Moore's career-long interest in performance and compares Moore with some of his contemporaries in prose. Both sections are promising, and provide some productive angles of criticism. At the same time, however, they reiterate the weaknesses of the rest of the book in their tendency to be more descriptive than critical. In the latter section, she does little more than list the "commonality of narrative motifs and stylistic patterns" (172) she sees between Moore and authors like Peter Ackroyd, Iain Sinclair, and Angela Carter. As Di Liddo remarks, however, Moore is a cultural, literary, and artistic sponge and one could name any number of important influences on his work. Naming a few names and motifs may be useful to suggest further reading, but it does not constitute deep analysis of Moore or the other authors in question.

As a Moore reader for more than 25 years and as a literary scholar, I opened Di Liddo's book in the hopes of being enlightened about Moore's work and career. More than that, I hoped for an authoritative and thorough account that would erect a high bar for future Moore critics to hurdle. Perhaps these expectations were unrealistic, and Di Liddo disavows any attempt to "cover" Moore thoroughly and in all his complexity. The book, then, is both disappointing and encouraging. While it leaves too many questions unaddressed and too many arguments unmade, it does provide a useful beginning for thinking about Moore's work in its totality.

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## Review of *Mechademia 4: War/Time*

By Ellen Grabiner

Lunning, Frenchy, ed. *Mechademia 4: War/Time*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print.

When asked if they are familiar with "manga" or "anime," what comes to mind for many are the sparkly-eyed, spiky-haired characters that populate martial arts-based kids' shows like *DragonBall Z* and *Naruto*, or perhaps the luscious, mainstreamed anime of Miyazaki. But it is the rare consumer of manga who, when asked, would think to juxtapose the thinking of Michel Foucault or Jürgen Habermas, Friedrich Schiller or even Henry Jenkins to these transmedial artifacts of Japanese culture. But this juxtaposition is just what the reader of *Mechademia 4: War/Time* will discover in this amalgam of essays.

The fourth volume of the annual forum for "anime, manga and fan arts," follows three previous issues in which the overarching themes have included an investigation of emerging worlds of anime, the "traces of the webs of desire that structure anime" (<http://www.mechademia.org>), and the limits of human identity, respectively. The current volume, *War/Time*, is published by the University of Minnesota Press and edited by series editor Frenchy Lunning, professor at the Minnesota College of Art and Design. *War/Time* finds itself appropriately located in a moment where perpetual war pervades the everyday. And yet, war remains as invisible and out of reach to most of us in the west as the coffins returning en masse, bringing our dead from the Iraqi desert to US soil.

The arts have historically served as the polished shield of Perseus, allowing us enough remove that we might look into the horrifying face of the gorgon of war. Art can mitigate, can help to make it tolerable to look upon the havoc wreaked by war. And while the almost decade-old incursions into Afghanistan and Iraq remain largely hidden from our view, war continues to permeate the art of our time.

The mainstream film *Hurt Locker* (2008), about the day-to-day lives of members of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal squad whose job it is to diffuse bombs camouflaged by insurgents in a war-torn Iraq, wins the academy award for Best Picture. *Avatar* (2009), in which a capitalist, industrial, military complex attempts to destroy the world of the indigenous Nav'i with the use of robot weaponry—incidentally appropriated from the *meka* of anime—is the highest grossing film.

Ever. And *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), the animated film by Israeli Ari Folman, in which memories about Folman's involvement in the first Lebanon War in the early eighties are excavated, wins international critical acclaim.

The collected essays of *War/Time* take as their jumping off point the notion that the discrete boundaries of war and peace have been blurred and now run together. In the preface to this volume, Thomas Lamarre, professor of East Asian Studies at McGill University, draws on the thinking of Michel Foucault, among others, to undergird the essays that follow. No longer do we alternate between times of war and times of peace, but instead, following Foucault, Lamarre suggests, "war becomes a technology of social control...and is the permanent basis of all modern institutions of power" (xi). When we have all war all the time, we no longer have wartime, but instead *war/time*, in which the slash signifies a gap within which "war acts as a control on the everyday time of orderly social productivity, while that everyday time spurs the spread of war" (xi).

The essays in this collection inhabit, investigate, stretch, and illuminate this implicit gap, some more directly engaged with war and its discourse than others. This fourth volume of *Mechademia* makes visible multiple and disparate ways in which the everydayness of war has permeated the Japanese postwar experience.

But this anthology goes further than that. In the essay "Theorizing Manga: Nationalism and Discourse on the Role of Wartime Manga," author Rei Okamoto Inouye locates the power and potential of wartime manga within an edifying historical context. Looking at the birth and evolution of the discourse surrounding manga in Japan beginning in the 1920s and 30s, she points to the distinction between what Japanese refer to as *nansensu*—manga purported to be modeled on silly American cartoons—and the attempt to elevate anime's status by seeing its potential as a form of propaganda. This overview highlights the people and organizations behind the movements and tensions surrounding various factions of manga during the twentieth century and concludes with the observation that the "hybridity" of the medium is a good fit for our fragmented postmodern moment (35). Similarly to the way that Japanese manga artists organized to transcend the ubiquitous silliness of the *nansensu* cartoons and promote, instead, anime's artistic potential, the essays in this volume expand the power, depth and breadth of the contemporary discourse surrounding anime, and in the process open a discursive space to a larger public. *Mechademia 4* is impressive in its grasp of, and reckoning with, the far-reaching tentacles of Japan's history, which insert their way into contemporary Japanese life.

At the same time, if one is unfamiliar with the genre, this volume is by no means a primer. It assumes a knowledge and a familiarity on the part of the reader not just of manga, but of Japanese history and culture, and of the many theoretical lenses that are drawn upon to elucidate the specific examples under exploration. Many of the essays included in the volume zero in on a specific TV series, movie, graphic novel, or video game, without the knowledge of which some of the salient points of the works may be inaccessible to the reader.

Like many an anthology, some of the pieces are stronger than others, and the subject matter is far ranging, sometimes flung beyond the constraints of what one would normally consider "war/time." It is to Lunning's credit, however, that the volume is organized in a manner that strengthens the pieces by virtue of their placement and the pacing of the whole. If one wanted to draw on the metaphor of the *meka*, a reader could imagine Lunning sitting in the pilot's seat of an unwieldy robot monster of essays, orchestrating its cumbersome movement so that it appears smooth, organic and all of a piece.

This collection is, in fact, rife with all manner of metaphors, some explicitly the authors' focus. For example, in "War by Metaphor in *Densha otoko*," Michael Fisch deftly explores the usage of the metaphorical language of war adopted by an online community offering the protagonist, "Train Man," advice on his love life. An astute observer, Fisch builds bridges between the trope of train as *mise-en-scène* for romance and digital narratives, between the comedic effect of appropriating the metaphor of war to express love, and the unlikely effect that has of mobilizing society and creating community. Overall this essay is a smart take on the blurring of semantic, narrative, and social media as together they function to disseminate and even participate in the otaku's romantic adventure.

Christophe Thouny, in his essay, "Waiting for the Messiah: The Becoming-Myth of *Evangelion* and *Densha otoko*," also draws on *Densha otoko* to exemplify his metaphorical construction of "The Waiting Room." Building on the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, Thouny suggests that in the face of a time in which the everyday and war coexist, we are suspended, hovering in a liminal space, a "space of transit in which a collective subjectivity can recover a form of agency in narrative becoming" (112). Addressing the surprise success of both *Densha otoko* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* across television, movies, video games and online social media communities, Thouny points to the possibility of new forms of social collectivity that consequently, and perhaps necessarily, will alter narrative production. While I particularly appreciated the fluidity of Thouny's "waiting room" metaphor, his portrayal of *Densha otoko* in a messianic light stretches the credulity of the reader.

Several other pieces grapple with the metaphors embedded within the anime they are analyzing. For example, in "Transcending the Victim's History: Takahata Isao's *Grave of the Fireflies*," Wendy Goldberg investigates the deeper meanings of fireflies gleaned from Japanese culture. In *Grave of the Fireflies*, the viewer accompanies the ghosts of two children, a brother and sister, who, in flashbacks, watch as the events that led to their deaths transpire. Goldberg's lovely essay is as multi-layered as the anime it describes. It gives the reader not only the rich and tragic storyline but also a window into the visual trope symbolic of the firefly, as well as insight into the post-war suffering of a haunted, nationalistic people (52).

In "Monsters at War: The Great Yokai Wars, 1968-2005," Zilia Papp carefully traces the ways in which the historical signification of yokai, "cute folkloric monsters," has fluctuated over time and across media (225). The yokai alternately come to stand for the outsider, more specifically the "West" or the Allied forces, for "Japanese-ness"—"a representation of an imagined, shared nostalgic Japanese past"—or even embody the dangers of environmental pollution (233). Papp's overview illuminates the mutable fluidity of the yokai across media, and, like Inouye, emphasizes the ways in which manga, and the yokai specifically, have fulfilled the needs of a militaristic propaganda machine (237).

Several of the pieces stretch the limits of the war/time theme by reaching to the furthest outskirts of the motif. In "Haunted Travelogue: Hometowns, Ghost Towns and Memories of War," Michael Dylan Foster zeroes in on the role of nostalgia as Japan struggles with post-war loss and destruction. Foster contrasts his visits to two museums. On the one hand, he details his experience in Sakaiminato, a village that has been "revitalized" as a theme park along a train route, as homage to the yokai world of Mizuki. In contrast with the "yokai world stitched into the landscape" (167), the second museum, the Mugonkan, a more traditional museum housed in a "sober, cement building," is dedicated to the work of artists killed during the Pacific war (174). Foster cites Svetlana Boym's typology here, suggesting that in order to ascertain whether nostalgia ends up being restorative or reflective, the reader/viewer must, as Foster demonstrates, approach the idea of "yearning" critically. Taking that suggestion to heart, this reader felt the travelogue went too far afield from the thrust of the collection, and my interest

and attention flagged.

The travelogue motif is extended to the virtual world in Christopher Bolton's edgy and inventive piece, "Virtual Creation, Simulated Destruction, and Manufactured Memory at the Art Mecho Museum in Second Life." Here the reader ventures to the middle of one of Second Life's oceans to the archipelago on which stands the Art Mecho Museum, featuring a "cluster of aesthetic, social, and theoretical practices surrounding Japanese anime and manga" (199). Mirroring the experimental orientation of the museum and its impact on the nature of identity, Bolton chose to present this essay as a dialog between himself and his avatar, Kuri Basiat. As the conversation unfolds, it evokes the uncanniness found in the *mise-en-abyme* that results, in part, from an emphasis on watching oneself watch oneself. Bolton aptly brings to light the oscillation between the two-dimensional qualities of many anime characters and the ways in which they sit in three-dimensional, perspectival realms. He suggests this layering is also a function of Second Life itself, alternating between "immersion or suspension of disbelief and self-conscious spectatorship" (202).

Echoes of the binary war/time relationship resound throughout the collection. We find East/West, US/Japan, civil/military, and in particular, analog/digital, caroming in "Oshii Mamoru's *Patlabor 2: Terror, Theatricality, and Exceptions That Prove the Rule*" by Mark Anderson. The frighteningly realistic replication of instruments of war in *Patlabor 2* brings into high relief the issue of technology and the ways in which it mediates our experience. Here one can't help but juxtapose the recent leaking of video footage taken from the gun-site of an Apache helicopter flying over Iraq. The unintentional slaying of Reuters photographers, the mistaking of cameras for weapons, and the "video game-like" display, all too deadly in real life, are evoked in *Patlabor 2*. The myriad screens and sensors eerily replicated, call into question the awful human consequences of the distance afforded by technological warfare. Evoking Baudrillard's simulacrum, Anderson questions the multiple orders of reality, and the resultant blurring of the line between terror and warfare.

Stepping back from the blurring of lines, we confront oppositions to *war/time*; and here we can't but find *love/time*. In traditional manga, this distinction is clear. As Rebecca Suter explains in her introduction to "From Jusuheru to Jannu: Girl Knights and Christian Witches in the Work of Miuchi Suzue," we have *shōnen* manga, the martial arts, rock and sock 'em boys comics, pitted against *shōjo* manga, what we might call manga for girls, or romance comics. (I can't help but indulge in a bit of my own nostalgia here! My son, Alex, and I were serious Trekkies, watching and re-watching every episode of the *Next Generation* series. At the start of each episode, Alex would announce whether this one would be an episode that he would like—one with lots of hand to hand combat and explosions—or one that I would like—one with lots of romance and relationship themes. Some things do transcend cultural constraints.)

Suter points the reader in the direction of what she calls *sentō bishōjo*, a motif translated as "battling beauty," in which the love and battle tropes overlap. Threaded though her essay are the ways in which the girl knight genre explores notions of gender construction and performativity, as well as the function of appropriating western historical settings as a way to "address social and political concerns in a displaced, allegorical mode" (243).

In "The Filmic Time of Coloniality: On Shinkai Makoto's *The Place Promised in Our Early Days*," Gavin Walker explores love in yet another context. *The Place Promised in Our Early Days* (2004) doesn't employ an appropriation of an historical era, but instead an alternative present, in which Japan has been split into two: the northern part, or the "Union" and the southern part, occupied by the

United States. In this alterity, we are introduced to even more parallel universes as the backdrop to the poignant adolescent love story of three young friends. Walker sees this visually stunning film as emblematic of multiple divisions: between the narration and what the audience witnesses, between north and south, between city and countryside, etc. And he suggests that aesthetically it exemplifies the *sekai-kei* style of anime. In some sense this style is reminiscent of the Classical Hollywood narrative, in which two story lines interlace: the romantic love story as a counterpoint to a "world-historical, interplanetary or international conflict" (7). Walker deftly and credibly makes visible the impact of the disruption of linearity by virtue of a visual aesthetic that opposes the scale of "love/time" to the scale of "world/time" in *PPED*.

Bookending Inouye's historical essay, "Theorizing Manga," which appears at the beginning of the volume, we find Mark Driscoll's, "Kobayashi Yoshinori Is Dead: Imperial War / Sick Liberal Peace / Neoliberal Class War." Parallel to the trajectory of the fall in popularity of Kobayashi, Driscoll traces the political and social see-sawing of a "neo-liberalized" Japan over the last two decades. Using Kobayashi as a barometer, Driscoll explores the tension between a disaffected, modern or "westernized" youth and the appeal of a nostalgic return to the "collectivism of a militarist 1930's Japan" (291). Cataloging recent political twists and turns, Driscoll paints Kobayashi, and by proxy, his anime, as metonymic of a kind of Japanese ultra-nationalism.

Tom Looser dubs Driscoll's disaffected youth the "Gundam generation" and in his essay, "Gothic Politics: Oshii, War, and Life without Death," suggests that although they have never experienced war, they "know" it through their virtual adventures. Looser writes about Oshii's novel, *Blood: The Last Vampire: Night of the Beasts*, telling the reader it is a "tritely traditional narrative," and "by some accounts, just a boring book," begging the question, why write about it at all? While the connections he was attempting to draw between death and politics are compelling, his prose tended toward the repetitive, alternately opaque and pedantic, and at times even listy.

The spotlight both Looser and Driscoll shine on a disaffected youth brings to the fore the assumption that postwar Japan is characterized by and inescapably steeped in a militaristic, imperialistic past, as well as colored by its tragic victimization at the hands of the United States. And yet, there is evidence that these very same young people are woefully ignorant of their legacy. In the opening scenes of Okazaki's film *White Light, Black Rain: The Destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (2007), random young Japanese residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are asked, "What happened on August 6, 1995?" and not one of them has a clue. While the essays in this volume make clear the extent to which, at least on a subtle level, war has inserted itself into the language, entertainment, social connections, and technology of Japanese youth, it would have been of interest to contrast to what extent a certain obliviousness or rejection of this paradigm is also prevalent in manga today.

*Mechademia 4: War/Time* concludes with back matter including several book reviews and an interview with Murase Shukō and Satō Dai, artists who collaborated on the anime *Ergo Proxy*. A short, quirky, surreal, "comic interlude," entitled "Land Mine in Central Park," written by Yoji Sakate, translated by Manami Shima and illustrated by Chinami Sango, serves as the perfect light dessert to the feast of the collection, counterpoint to the extraordinarily diverse and complex "manga" meal proffered by the selections of *War/Time*.

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## Comics OR Philosophy? A Review of *Comics as Philosophy* (2005)

By Mervi Miettinen

McLaughlin, Jeff, ed. *Comics as Philosophy*. Minneapolis, MN: University Press of Mississippi, 2005. Print.

For an essay collection that aims at exploring the connections between philosophical inquiries and comics, *Comics as Philosophy* should be approached with caution. The aim of the eleven essays of the collection is to "explore the ways in which comics, both in form and content, can articulate and complicate philosophical concerns" (xi), and themes ranging from ethics and aesthetics to ecocriticism and existentialism are presented with the mention of comic books that justifiably bring forth and "articulate" these issues. To its credit, *Comics as Philosophy*, published already in 2005, clearly precedes the recent trend of combining popular culture phenomena with philosophical approaches, and the collection does manage to incorporate a wide variety of philosophical issues into a single volume. However, the book is regrettably uneven in its quality of essays, and several of the essays approach their subject with the somewhat unimaginative formula of merely locating philosophical issues within comic books instead of analyzing the way comics as an art form itself can access philosophical debates. Furthermore, the total lack of images within the book is a serious disadvantage to the overall aim of the book.

One of the major issues when accessing the collection is the somewhat misleading premise of the book's title, which proposes to approach comics as philosophy. However, instead of even considering how the medium itself relates to philosophical issues through the multimodal hybrid of text and images, several of the essays (including editor Jeff McLaughlin's own "DC's Crisis and Leibnizian Possible Worlds") follow a disappointingly mechanical formula of introducing a philosophical concept or a school of thought, locating and/or applying it in a comic book, and then using this level of the comic book to illustrate the philosophical concept. The focus is predominantly on the philosophical, for which comics are seen as an illustration. For example, Kevin de Laplante's discovery of how Paul Chadwick's *Concrete* can be used to teach issues on environmental philosophy is presented in a way that not so much addresses the comic as philosophy as the philosophical concept, which the comic then simply helps him to teach. Ultimately, *Comics as Philosophy* is an essay collection on comics by philosophers, not comics scholars—Robert C. Harvey's short and amusingly cynical "etymological safari" on the definition of "comics" (his ill-fated word of

choice is "cartoon") and Amy Kiste Nyberg's well-crafted discussion on the ethics of the Comics Code are the few exceptions. Revealingly, both of these articles pay but a formal attention to philosophy, and their inclusion in the collection remains unclear.

Despite its unevenness, a collection such as this is still a welcomed addition to the field of scholarship on comics, and at their best the essays offer a fresh approach to both comics studies and philosophy that is both innovative and well executed, with clear precision and knowledge of both fields. Jeremy Barris' take on good and evil in "Plato, Spider-Man and the Meaning of Life" reveals a deep appreciation and knowledge of both texts, and demonstrates a clear joy of writing on the topic. Barris' argument on defining the meaning of life through a balance of good and evil creatively juxtaposes the traditional views of Plato and Spider-Man without mechanically applying one to the other. Similarly, Iain Thomson's "Deconstructing the Hero" approaches Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's acclaimed *Watchmen* with a carefully crafted essay that avoids the pitfalls of mere application, producing a discourse on superheroism and philosophy where Nietzsche, Heidegger and Moore engage in a fruitful dialogue on the fate and relevance of the superhero at the end of the 20th century. Another source of scholarly joy is Pierre Skilling's rather long reading on the politics of Hergé's *Tintin*—the only non-English language comic book within the collection—which produces a multifaceted view of the governmental politics embedded in *The Adventures of Tintin*, even though Skilling's view of *Tintin* as a "work aimed at children" comes through as almost apologetic. These articles stand out as testifying to the collection's challenging title: to analyze comics as philosophy, not just to apply philosophy to a reading of a comic.

Several of the essays in the collection deal with heroes, whether super or otherwise. Stanford W. Carpenter's essay "Truth Be Told: Authorship and the Creation of Black Captain America" is based on his interviews with the authors of *Truth: Red, White & Black* (2003), which tells the story of black men being tested for the super soldier serum, rewriting the history of Captain America. The essay has the potential to discuss the ethical dimensions of authorship and comics, which is far from unproblematic, especially within the genre of superhero comics: as superhero comics have been written and illustrated by a large number of authors, the questions of origins and authorship are of serious interest.

Disappointingly, Carpenter's essay resembles more an elaborate letter to the editor than a scholarly essay, as he (rather naively) focuses on demanding authorial control in the critical analysis of comic books instead of approaching the theme of authorship itself. Aldo Regalado's essay on the American superhero and his ties to race and modernity has a very promising premise, too, but ultimately his argument is overwhelmed by his use of unclear terminology and the questionable decision of claiming Tarzan as a "superhero". Both essays call attention to the production of comics, but fail to address the philosophical dimensions of authorship satisfyingly. Terry Kading's "Drawn into 9/11, But Where Have All the Superheroes Gone?" is the last essay of the collection, bringing together the real-world tragedy of 9/11 and its relevance on the superhero genre. However, cut off from the other superhero essays, it appears somehow forgotten, as if an afterthought to claim more relevance for the publication today. This also illustrates a larger problem with the collection: the essays all exist as separate texts, and the lack of cohesion within the collection becomes apparent as no real dialogue is formed between the essays, despite their inherent potential to do so. This is indeed especially apparent in the superhero themes, which could have been tied together to produce a multifaceted and analytical discussion on superhero comics and philosophy.

As already briefly mentioned, for a collection aiming at analyzing the way comics can be accessed as philosophical articulations, *Comics as Philosophy* rather surprisingly does not include a single image. Thus, Laura and Paul Canis' article "Jean-Paul Sartre Meets Enid Coleslaw: Existential Themes in *Ghost World*," though a

well-researched piece of work on its philosophical content, leaves a lot to be desired when imagining the possibilities of locating existential themes of the comics through Daniel Clowes' visual language alone. In order to comprehensively offer an academic approach on comics as philosophy, the crucial importance of visual analysis seems to have been by and large forgotten. This is the case despite Robert C. Harvey's essay at the very beginning of the book, defining comics as consisting of "pictorial narratives or expositions in which words usually contribute to the meaning of the pictures and vice versa" (20). Instead of pictorial analysis that would approach comics as a multimodal object, several essays exert little effort in trying to combine the visual aspects into their philosophical issues. A stronger emphasis on visual analysis, complete with at least a few carefully chosen images, would have strengthened the collection, enabling it to live up to its name. Similarly, a thematically motivated division into smaller subchapters would have undoubtedly enabled a more favorable comparison between the essays. As it is, the order of the essays does not support any coherent or logical framework, instead offering a rather random collection of essays on a variety of philosophical topics under the heading *Comics as Philosophy*.

The result is an ambitious, yet disappointingly uneven collection of essays written mostly by philosophers on philosophy. Lacking the methods of comics studies, several of the essays fail to adequately take into account both the visual and the textual aspects of comics when discussing their merits in philosophical debates. The essays also betray a confusion as to who is the intended audience—despite the scholarly pretext, some of the essays are nothing more than basic introductions to philosophical issues illustrated with a comic book example, while others are highly complex essays that demand a wide knowledge of philosophical issues in order to follow them. However, there is hope that the collection will inspire both philosophers and comics scholars to look further from their own respective fields and to actually produce research that demonstrates the way comics can be accessed *as philosophy*.

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## Editor's note:

As it has done in most cases in their *Conversations* series, The University Press of Mississippi has chosen the perfect editor for interviews with Art Spiegelman. Joseph Witek's highly influential *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* (1989 and still in print) was the first major study of Spiegelman and remains one of the best books to do close readings of comic book texts in a way that reveals their cultural and ideological significance. This book benefits from his careful research and expertly written introduction.

—Donald Ault, ImageText Founder and Editor

## Review of *Art Spiegelman: Conversations*

By Laura Perna

Witek, Joseph, ed. *Art Spiegelman: Conversations*. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2007. Print.

In Joseph Witek's introduction to *Art Spiegelman: Conversations*, it's clear that the editor of this volume views his subject as pivotal to American comics, from the underground comix of the 1960s to today. Spiegelman's "accomplishments as an artist, editor, publisher, critical thinker, teacher, and public figure ... make him one of the most influential figures in the history of the comics medium" (x). The twenty-two chronologically ordered interviews that follow largely support Witek's conviction; happily, *Conversations* also includes plenty of content that does more than simply applaud Spiegelman as the patron saint of American comics.

The material that Witek has collected in *Conversations* represents over 25 years of Spiegelman interviews, and it covers such a broad range of subject matter that to summarize everything would hardly be a summary at all. While readers will begin to notice that certain interview questions and topics come up again and again, the book manages not to be repetitive (with the exception, perhaps, of Spiegelman's birth year and place: Stockholm, Sweden, 1948—I didn't even have to look it up). Add to that the widely varying interview styles and formats and the subject's palpable energy, and *Conversations* is as enjoyable to read as it is informative.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, nearly every interview in the collection includes at least a few questions about Spiegelman's Pulitzer-prize winning Holocaust story *Maus* vol. I & II (1986, 1991). From the first chapter, a 1979 interview, to the last, a 3-pager from 2006, Spiegelman dutifully answers questions about his use of animals as characters, his relationship with his father, and the complications of representing history and biography. As the collection progresses, readers can discern *Maus* taking on a life of its own, independent from its creator; interviewers expand their scope to inquire about the book's influence and place within comics history, how it is used in classrooms, and its publishing history. Several interviews, even more recent ones, focus on *Maus* entirely, but not always from the angle one might expect. For example, in "From Mickey to *Maus*: Recalling the Genocide through Cartoon" (1987), an interviewer from the *Oral History Journal* delves scrupulously into Spiegelman's process of turning recorded interviews into comics. "Pig Perplex" by Lawrence Weschler (2001) is concerned with the struggle to get *Maus* published in Poland: "depicting Jews as mice and Nazis as cats was entirely unobjectionable, they felt, but Poles portrayed as pigs? Impossible!" (230).

After late 2001, readers will notice a marked shift in the common content among chapters: every interviewer at least addresses *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2002- 2004), Spiegelman's graphic response to the attacks of September 11th. His discussions of the strips' newspaper-sized format and other technical elements will be of interest to comics formalists; his motivation for creating the work, though, will strike a chord with a much broader readership. He explains that, "September 11 forced me to take inventory of everything left in my brain ... Over the past few years, I had stopped doing [comics] because they were too hard ... I made a vow as we all huddled safely that day, in the shadow of no towers, that I would draw comics again" (236- 237).

A significant percentage of *Conversations* concerns Spiegelman's efforts as an editor, specifically of the works he founded and edited with his wife, Francoise Mouly: *RAW Magazine* (1980- 1991) and *Little Lit* anthologies (2000- present). The Spiegelmans' effort to make comics accessible to both creators and audiences remains fairly consistent over time. For example, in 1989, Roger Sabin asks "do you think that [*Maus*' popularity and recognizability] will overshadow what *RAW* is all about?" Spiegelman responds, "I hope not ... you're probably going to read the rest of it even if you did pick it up for *Maus*, and you'll probably get hooked on some other artists in there" (107). He echoes this sentiment years later when he talks about *RAW* and *Little Lit*. "There's no reason to do *RAW* any more," he says in 2002, "there's ways for all of these cartoonists to get published now. There weren't when we started *RAW*. Now there's a need for us to ensure that there's another generation of readers—let alone comics readers—and certainly comics readers would be nice if there's going to be comics in the future" (257).

As Witek mentions in his introduction, his subject's professional ventures span farther and wider than simply making and editing comics. Readers learn about Spiegelman's earlier endeavors as a commercial artist, working for the Topps Bubble Gum Company and drawing freelance cartoons for various magazines. After a few chapters, one gets the sneaking suspicion that his mission to create a culture of conscious comic-readers and artists with options is driving his professional life: he has no shortage of anecdotes and observations from lecturing at multiple universities and museums, curating museum exhibits, and generally advocating for the comics medium. Long before *Conversations* comes to a close, the volume brings into sharp focus the multiple ways Spiegelman has shaped and responded to the development of comics in the US (and perhaps even abroad). Witek nails it when he says, "reading the pieces [of his published words] together ... one can make out the underlying story of how the cartoonist Art Spiegelman made himself possible" (xv).

It is unfair, though, to speak only of Spiegelman's professional efforts as subject matter in *Conversations*. Witek's thoughtful choice for the opening chapter, a 1979 15-pager conducted by *Cascade Comix Monthly*, introduces a broad range of topics that the reader will encounter again and again throughout the collection. In addition to asking many career-related questions, interviewer Alfred Bergdoll also broaches such topics as the current (late 1970s) comics scene in the U.S., the subject's favorite artists, and comics as/and fine art. Indeed, as the book progresses, interviewers pick Spiegelman's brain on topics like comics as art and mass culture, art in general, visual culture, Jewishness, and contemporary American culture. A couple of interviewers broach the subject of Israel; another concerns herself entirely with the ways dreaming, sleeping, and unconsciousness play into Spiegelman's creative processes. In more than one instance, Spiegelman fields questions concerning lauded comic scholar Scott McCloud, *Peanuts* cartoonist Charles Schultz, Dutch painter Jan Vermeer, the basement of the MoMA, *An American Tale*, women in comics, and much, much more.

Through all of this material, one notes that some of Spiegelman's thoughts and ideas remain quite stable over time. In 1989, he tells Roger Sabin about how he conceives of the comics form as very similar to the process of thought. "You think in a combination of shorthand images and words. I don't think it's just me because I'm a cartoonist ... comics have a pipeline to something very basic about the way people think" (109). In a 2004 interview with Witek, he's still singing the same tune. Conversely, it is interesting, and at times, even poignant, how his perspective changes. For example, he comments more than once that he "like[s] the idea of not being at home anywhere. 'Rootless cosmopolitan' [a term Stalin applied to the diasporic Jew] is an accurate description of life at the end of this century ... I don't really associate it with Jews anymore" (174). In a post-9/11 interview, he reveals "how much I really love Canal Street ... now I understand why the Jews didn't leave Berlin after Krystallnacht ... no, I'm not a rootless cosmopolitan, I'm a rooted cosmopolitan ... I do love at least my part of the city" (260-261).

*Conversations* will be a valuable resource for those studying (and perhaps even teaching) *Maus*, comics history and theory, and cultural responses to 9/11. Fortunately, for readers who know a thing or two about Spiegelman and his work already, there's still a lot learn.

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## Review of *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*

By Matthew Pustz

Gabilliet, Jean-Paul. *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*. Trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. Print.

At the end of his book *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, Jean-Paul Gabilliet argues that the academic study of comic books in the United States is not as well developed as it should be. He notes that although recent years have seen "a notable growth in works written by academics who bracketed their fannish enthusiasms in order to produce rigorous studies," the field has yet to achieve "institutionalization in the form of textbooks" (304, 305). Given the fact that comic books achieved cultural legitimacy in France decades ago, it makes sense that a scholar from there—Gabilliet teaches American Studies at the University of Bordeaux—would recognize this gap and try to fill it by writing a book-length study that attempts to relate the entire history of this publishing format in a thorough, balanced, analytical fashion. In doing so, Gabilliet takes an important step toward achieving the institutionalization that he noted was missing from American comics scholarship.

If Gabilliet is, in fact, trying to create that first textbook for the field of Comics Studies, he achieves moderate success. However, even though this book was originally published in French in 2005, the author might have been beaten to the punch by other works. Most prominent among these is Bradford W. Wright's *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (2001), which covers much of the same ground as *Of Comics and Men*. More importantly, perhaps, Gabilliet's book is not exactly the "cultural" history that it promises to be. It does, however, fulfill an important role in the burgeoning field of comics studies by putting the existing knowledge about the institutional history of the publishing format into a very thorough, clearly written text that will serve generations of scholars very well.

*Of Comics and Men* traces the history of American comic books from their beginning in 1842, with reprints of the work of Swiss illustrator Rudolphe Töpffer, to more or less the present day. The book is divided into three parts, with the first focusing on this basic historical narrative. The second section of the book examines the

producers and consumers of comic books. The last section analyzes how comic books have been the targets of censorship while at the same time moving toward (but not quite achieving) cultural legitimacy. The book ends with an appendix featuring the various regulation codes the industry adopted as well as a useful bibliographic essay that maps out the ways in which comic books have been written about in the decades prior to the translation and publication of this book.

Gabilliet's historical narrative will be familiar to scholars who have studied the evolution of the comic book. There are a handful of things that Gabilliet does, though, that make his book stand out from others with a similar purpose. First, he begins the story of the development of comic books earlier than many other historians who often begin with *The Yellow Kid* in the 1890s. Instead, Gabilliet argues that the comic book began in Europe in the first half of the 19th century. He goes on to establish the connections between comic books and other 19th and early 20th century publications like newspapers and dime novels. These are the two roots of the American comic book: newspaper comic strips and pulp fiction. Unlike other scholars, Gabilliet emphasizes the pulp fiction element, suggesting that these magazines helped to establish the audience for comic books.

One of the major topics addressed throughout Gabilliet's book is the important role of distribution and sales in the evolution of comic books and their readers. This role began to be significant as early as the 1930s when publishing entrepreneurs tried to figure out how they could make money by collecting previously published comic strips into cheaply bound pamphlets that could then be sold to children. Later, during the 1970s, distributor corruption hurt the industry and distorted the sales figures of well-regarded series that were being siphoned off to the early collectors' market. Gabilliet reports that one result of this system was that "in 1974, as little as a quarter of all printed comic books were physically placed for sale at retailers" (141). Distribution was also an issue in the 1950s when censorship codes and laws governing the sale of comics to minors were effectively enforced by the people selling comics. Retail outlets are a central part of Gabilliet's story, too, and by focusing on them he is able to squash some of the most important fan-inspired myths of comics history, namely those related to Frederic Wertham and the introduction of the Comics Code. From the fan perspective, it was Wertham, his testimony before Congress, and the publication of his book *Seduction of the Innocent* that ruined comic books in the 1950s. While Gabilliet does not deny that this was an element contributing to the decline of comics sales in the second half of the 1950s, he emphasizes more sociological factors, namely the increasing popularity of television and the growth of suburbs which went hand-in-hand with the shrinking number of retail outlets for comic books.

Developing a complex explanation for the decline of comic book sales beginning in the 1950s is one of the important services *Of Comics and Men* performs for the field of comics studies, but there are others as well. First, Gabilliet brings together a great deal of fundamental data that will be useful to a wide variety of comics scholars. For example, the book provides readers with some specific statistics as to the numbers of comic book stores in the North America. This information was certainly available elsewhere in bits and pieces, but Gabilliet pulls it all together to give us a clearer picture of the rise and fall of the direct market. Knowing that there were 100,000 retailers selling comic books in 1952 (139) and that there were 2300 comic book stores in 2002 (152) gives readers a clear sense that comic books have moved from being a mass medium to a niche form of entertainment. Gabilliet also creates a balanced portrayal of Frederic Wertham, a person who is normally demonized in more fannish accounts of comic book history. In Gabilliet's interpretation, Wertham was a progressive, much like the turn of the century crusaders who saw corruption and wanted to reform society to help get rid of it, even if that meant, for example, banning the sale of alcohol. Gabilliet is critical of Wertham for sloppy science and for appropriating the rhetoric of people more conservative than he, but he also reminds us that Wertham had good intentions

and that the plan he advocated—the labeling of comics to control children's access to certain titles—was essentially what was put into practice years later.

One additional strength of *Of Comics and Men* is the inclusion of a chapter on comic book readers. It is easy to write the history of comic books focusing on the publishers and the creators by emphasizing what title was published by which company with stories by which particular creators. Gabilliet's book does that (in its weakest moments, the historical narrative becomes bogged down in laundry lists of creators and publishers rather than doing real analysis), but it also emphasizes that comic books were made to be read and enjoyed, and that the formation of fandom is an important element in determining what stories are told as well as how and where the comic books themselves are sold. Devoting a chapter to fans gives them the respect that they deserve. He performs a similar service for the production side by devoting a chapter to a detailed explanation of how the industry has functioned since the 1930s up to the present. But while including these chapters is an important step forward, Gabilliet could have made it even more clear that producers and consumers are central to the history of comic books by integrating the discussion of these topics into his main chronological narrative.

Separating topically-related discussions from the historical narrative also causes some awkward transitions, especially in Chapter 4 where the focus is on the post-World War II period when comic books achieve their greatest popularity but also experience their fall from grace. Here, Gabilliet writes about the different genres that were popular during this period and argues persuasively that EC was not really a major player in the industry during the early 1950s. And then the chapter pretty much ends. The next chapter picks up with a discussion of the impact of the Comics Code and the consequences of a "moral panic" that damaged the industry (41). But there's no explanation of what that "panic" was all about or what might have caused it. It feels like there's a chapter missing here where Gabilliet should have discussed Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, and the whole anti-comics crusade of the late 1940s and early 1950s. That discussion shows up eventually, more than 150 pages later, in a chapter that consolidates his analysis of a variety of attempts to either censor or control children's access to comic books. It's a good chapter, and in some ways it makes sense to address this issue all at once, but it really takes away from the linear historical narrative that makes up the first part of the book. In fact, it undermines the chronological organization of the book by suggesting that it might have been better organized with thematically or topically unified chapters instead.

Gabilliet ends *Of Comics and Men* with two chapters on "consecration," or the extent to which comic books have achieved legitimacy both within the community of readers and beyond in the larger realm of the American culture. While these discussions are interesting, and I think that Gabilliet means for all of the chapters of the book to lead up to this analysis, they allude to the idea that "consecration" is the only way of judging or establishing the value of comic books. The tone of these chapters suggests that Gabilliet feels that, without broad cultural legitimacy, comic books cannot be worthy of (or produce) rigorous academic study. Near the end of the book, Gabilliet scoffs at the notion, common in "American 'cultural democracy,'" that a text or material object "can derive legitimacy from its simple participation in the construction of a collective national identity (as an incontrovertible element of the American way of life)" (299). What Gabilliet is missing, though, is that legitimacy and the significance of a text as a cultural document have almost nothing to do with each other. Comic books are, in fact, cultural texts that can "legitimately" teach us about American life and American history. This, ultimately, is what "cultural history" as a field is all about.

Or, perhaps it is only what "cultural history" is all about in the United States. This is, after all, a work of French scholarship originally published in France in 2005. It

is possible that the scholarly tradition there focuses more on the idea of cultural legitimacy than analysis of particular cultural texts. We get that idea from the tone that Gabilliet takes when describing "American 'cultural democracy.'" He seems appalled at the notion that American scholars of comics (and perhaps of anything else) would give the honor of scholarship to something that they did not see as culturally "worthy" of respect or legitimacy. His focus on the economic forces shaping the comic book industry might be a more standard French historiographical approach, and it's actually a very useful addition to traditional American scholarship about comic books. But for an American scholar looking for a work of cultural history, as the book's subtitle promises, *Of Comics and Men* is a bit of a disappointment.

From this perspective, one of the biggest problems with the book is that it rarely makes connections to any sort of wider cultural context. For example, he tells us that the hysteria over comic books in the late 1940s and early 1950s "unfolded at the beginning of the cold war," but there's no sense of what the connection is between these two events or why the Cold War would have had any effect on why people were reacting so strongly to comic books during this period (217). Gabilliet does write about the broader cultural concerns about juvenile delinquency and the fact that the opinions of scientific-sounding experts "were held in very high esteem by Americans during the Cold War" (227), but there is still no sense of why these ideas would have come about during this period or what their connections to comic books might be.

Gabilliet also simply does not do very much cultural analysis. He almost never does any interpretation of any comic books, characters, genres, or themes. He writes about the boom in superhero comics during the late 1930s and early 1940s, for example, but he never speculates about why they were becoming popular. A close reading of an early Batman or Superman story, for example, would have helped to shed some light on this question, and it also would have helped us to better understand that particular historical period. Doing this kind of cultural analysis of actual comic books—and perhaps even including some images, of which there are none here—might have lengthened his historical survey, but it would also have enriched his *cultural* history by fully demonstrating some of the points that he is trying to make in the book. A parallel work of cultural history, Robert Sklar's classic *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (1975), demonstrates what Gabilliet's book might have included. Sklar's book is an institutional history of movie studios and film audiences, but it goes beyond this. In analyzing many of the films that he mentions, Sklar gives us a rich understanding of why people would actually be going to the movies in the first place. In contrast, Gabilliet gives us no sense of what has historically attracted people to comics; there is nothing about the connections that readers made with the crazy mythological images of Jack Kirby or the intimate autobiographical stream-of-consciousness of Robert Crumb. Comic books here are just things that people spent money on and time with, for reasons that are never examined. Gabilliet rarely writes about their broader cultural significance, either. This is a particular weakness when *Of Comics and Men* is compared to its most similar counterpart, Bradford W. Wright's *Comic Book Nation*. Wright's focus might be on the evolution of youth culture, but his close analysis of specific stories and characters allows readers to see how comic books reflect American culture and can at times even reveal unexpected truths about American life and American values. Gabilliet's book simply does not do that.

Considering his focus on the cultural legitimacy of comic books and his discussion of the academic field of comics studies as a means for achieving that legitimacy, it is surprising that Gabilliet does not directly engage with established works of comics scholarship. Although he does include a very useful bibliographic essay, there is little analysis of the work of his predecessors in the main part of the book. Bradford Wright, for example, is mentioned twice—once in a list of works that he praises and once to note that Wright analyzed the ways in which the Vietnam

War was portrayed in comics from the 1960s. Amy Kiste Nyberg, the author of *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (1998), perhaps the most important study of the evolution of the Comics Code, is mentioned only in the aforementioned list and in a handful of endnotes. Gabilliet would position himself more confidently in the emerging field of Comics Studies if he participated in a dialogue with the work that came before *Of Comics and Men*. As such, this book may not be the groundbreaking work that Gabilliet and his publisher, the University Press of Mississippi, want it to be, but it is nevertheless an important clearinghouse of information that will be very useful for other scholars who want to use comic books to address questions of cultural history.

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## Review of *The Anime Machine*

By Caleb Simmons

Lamarre, Thomas. *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*.  
Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print.

*The Anime Machine* by Thomas Lamarre is the author's attempt to change the face of animation studies within Western academia focusing primarily on Japan's anime through an investigation of the "facts of animation" that follows the model of experimental science and technology studies. He argues that in its current state media studies of animation tend to fall into determinism that is derived either from apparatus theory borrowed from monocular perspective theory in film studies or from a socio-cultural explanation of the common motifs found in Japanese animation (i.e. ambivalence to technology, weapon fetishization, etc). Lamarre insists on opening the academic study of animation to include a non-determinist materialist exploration of the composition of animation through the multiplanar composing of animation on the animation stand that provides manifold possibilities in the construction of perspective, motion, and sexuality. However, the pragmatic implications of his novel theory of the animetic process are mooted by his assumption that the abstract machine, like the scientific method, exists objectively and unadulterated by various other influences, which are folded into the animetic machine from its inception. Despite whatever exceptions one might take with Lamarre's work, the proverbial baby should not be thrown out with the mildly murky bathwater. The work constitutes a landmark within the study of animation and its relationship to technology and media.

Lamarre keenly begins his new media theory of animation by separating his work from that of the apparatus theoreticians with whom he shares similar language, but radically different perspectives. He retorts their determinist theory with one of "underdetermination" derived from Félix Guattari's *abstract machine* from which Lamarre derives the term "animetic machine." The animetic machine is the abstract existence of possible compositions of the mutliplanar animated image that exists prior to the creation of any particular technology or apparatus through which the image is constructed. Likewise, the machine is not a structure that can determine the subsequent image but exists as the sum of all components that can exist within the creation of animation. The animetic machine is substantiated with the composition of the varying layers of animation (i.e. background, foreground, characters, etc.) to produce an image that moves not only between frames but within them through the quasi-apparatus of the animation stand.

Key to animetic machine theory is the space that occurs between the panels layered in the animation stand during compositing, what Lamarre calls the "animetic interval." The animetic interval separates animation from other forms of the moving image like traditional cinematic film. Whereas film shot from the single perspective on a moving camera has space between frames or two-dimension interstices, animation is composed with a fixed camera, which creates movement within the image by altering the additional lacuna between layers within the image, creating three-dimensional depth. The author believes that an analysis of animation must first explore the movement within images before attempting to understand the movement across them.

Following the abstract animetic machine through compositing, animation becomes contained within two dominant structures—open and limited composition. For Lamarre, these provide a glimpse into animation's relationship with modernity and technology. He focuses on the chasm that exists between Cartesian one-point perspectivism, the representative form of the modern image, and the multiplanar and multiperspectival image of Japan, which some have labeled as a post-modern expression of image. Lamarre argues against limiting Japanese animation to post-modernity expression because it limits the medium's relationship to both modernity and technology. Much of the remainder of the book examines three examples of this relationship: Miyazaki Hayao and Studio Ghibli (minimalizing technology), Anno Hideaki and Gainax Studios (recreating technology), and CLAMP's animated manga (perverting technology). These examples concretize the highly theoretical model proposed by Lamarre in the previous chapters, showing how the animetic interval can be manipulated in order to compose an inventive image of the world that is unbound by the limits of modernity and Cartesianism, which he calls animetically thinking technology.

While Lamarre's theory of the animetic machine is intriguing and provides a genuinely novel exploration of animation, the abstraction of the machine is given an elevated position. The animetic machine, abstracted from tangible technologies or apparatuses, is presented as a pure and unalterable condition. Therefore, Lamarre posits that social and economic issues should not be considered before the serialization of the image through folding (invention) and refolding (reproduction) through the divergence of the moving image from animation to other forms of media (i.e. toys, movies, games, etc.). Lamarre argues that it is in this stage that various machines are converged with the animetic machine. As a result of the convergence of these various machines, social and economic considerations are introduced into the foray of animation by the capitalist desires of marketing firms and studios. However, this necessitates the question of the pure existence of the animetic machine that is somehow separate from the social and economic concerns of animators or the animetic process of production. Though the author is quite convincing in his argument for a specific animetic way of thinking about technology, modernity, and humanities' relationship to them, to remove the process, even within its most abstract form, from the context from which the animated world is being constructed is overly ambitious. Because of the author's desire to focus on the "facts of animation" centered around the movement of images within animation, he falls prey to the same shortcomings for which he critiques others who view animation as texts or as socially constructed within nationalism or Japanese xenocentrism, much in the same way as many authors writing from the experimental science field on which he models his theory. His discussion of "how spacing matters" quickly turns into one of "why spacing is all that matters" to the neglect of other highly relevant influences within the process, creating an inherent hierarchization in the components that must come together in the production of animation, with pure vision of the moving image taking precedence. The pedestal on which he places the decontextualized conception of the moving image within animation is exacerbated by the highly repetitive chapters within the highly theoretical opening portion of the book, which at times read more like a collection of essays on the animetic machine and interval than

a coherent monograph.

However, Lamarre is at his best when he is putting his theory into practice exploring the movement and spacing within animation in chapters four to twenty-two. Lamarre shows an acute ability to deconstruct the multiplanar image and demonstrate how the spacing between layers thinks differently about the human perspective and its relationship to technology. In his case studies, the abstracted machine is masterfully discussed alongside the social context of animation, which displays the tremendous possibilities that can result when the spacing within the image and how it produces movement is added into the researcher's toolkit.

Animetic theory should not be limited to the study of animation; it poses interesting possibilities for comic studies as well. Much of the material discussed by Lamarre regarding spacing between images within film is also common to analysis of composition within comics through frames and their interstices. Comic studies scholars could benefit from greater analysis of the movement within the frame and its role in attributing perspective. Thinking more "animetically" about spacing and perspective would no doubt yield similar results about the way comics think technology not only through narrative and overarching motifs but also through the actual production of images, which contain the movement of characters through imagined spaces.

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## Review of *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*

By Anastasia Ulanowicz

Chute, Hillary L. *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*.  
New York: Columbia UP, 2010. Print.

Women have been making comics for a very long time. Consider, for example, the illuminated manuscripts produced by teams of medieval nuns working in ill-lit and often freezing scriptoria. In the margins of these rich and complex tomes exist playful—and often subversive—self-portraits of their female designers, whose existence and contributions would otherwise be forgotten to history. Of course, the role played by women in creating these texts is not widely known: with the exception of such token luminaries as Christine de Pisan, most contributions made by early women artists have remained marginal, as it were, to aesthetic and historical inquiry.

It should go without saying that, today, women no longer need be cloistered virgins in order to produce imagetexts. The comics underground of the 1970's, for example, was enriched by works produced by the Wimmen's Comix Collective; more recently, Alison Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For* has underscored the political dimension of comics. And yet, all too often, the contributions of contemporary female comics authors have been relegated to the proverbial margins by literary scholars and comic book aficionados alike. Indeed, as Hillary Chute observes in her introduction to *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, women artists have been all but ignored by academia and the popular media: a *New York Times Magazine* article published as recently as July, 2004, for example, "excerpt[s] the work of four [comics] authors, all male; depicts seven authors in photographs, all male; and mentions women only in passing" (1).

One of the objectives of Chute's book, then, is to draw women's imagetexts from the cultural margins to which they have been consigned and to reposition them within the arenas of popular and academic inquiry. Of course, as Chute admits, a great deal of such repositioning has been managed by contemporary female authors themselves: texts such as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003) and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006), for example, are critically-acclaimed best sellers whose cultural cache now rivals that of Art Spiegelman's landmark comic, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986/1991). What Chute's scrupulously researched and exquisitely written study offers, however, is a critical perspective on the ways in which these newly-recognized texts can enrich scholarly discussions of

gender, sexuality, self-representation, and trauma.

Although Chute acknowledges a host of women comics authors throughout her book, she focuses primarily on the work of five authors: Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Phoebe Gloeckner, Lynda Barry, Marjane Satrapi, and Alison Bechdel. By concentrating on a limited set of authors, Chute effectively places into relief the rich diversity of women's contributions to comics. These authors' texts, she demonstrates, are formally distinct: their work ranges from the "hyperexaggerated impressionism" of Kominsky-Crumb (29) to the "minimalism" of Satrapi (133) to the uncanny blending of "meticulous, painstaking realism" and expressionist "non-realism" of Gloeckner (61). Moreover, Chute maintains, the work of these artists is as diverse in content as it is in form: for instance, Barry's depiction of the quiet desperation of working-class American childhood contrasts markedly with Satrapi's representation of upper-middle class childhood in revolutionary-era Iran.

Even as Chute calls attention to the distinctiveness of each of the oeuvres she discusses, she also observes the ways in which they address convergent questions of self-representation. What unites these otherwise disparate contributions to comics, she explains, is their shared investment in both telling and showing intimate experiences. For this reason, she characterizes these texts as "graphic narratives" rather than as graphic novels, since they are "not novels at all" but instead exercises in "self-interpretation" and "written and drawn documents of real life" (2-3). Such graphic narratives, she continues, "reject the categories of nonfiction and fiction altogether in their self-representational storylines": whilst they aim to document lived experience, they also self-reflexively call attention to the discourses and texts that mediate the transmission of such experiences (3). Thus, for example, Bechdel's literary bildungsroman, *Fun Home*, is framed by allusions to Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, just as the attempt at self-examination in Barry's *One Hundred Demons* is drawn from the "lost and found" section of newspaper classified ads.

According to Chute, what distinguishes these women's narratives from equally self-reflexive but word-specific texts—say, Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*—is their particular blending of visual and verbal language. By using the "inbuilt duality" of comics—that is, "its word and image cross-discursivity"—these imagetexts "stage dialogues among versions of the self, underscoring the importance of an ongoing, unclosed project of self-representation and self-narration" (5). Comics, Chute reminds us, are fragmentary by virtue of their very form: they are composed of discrete frames that are simultaneously linked together and separated by gutters. Moreover, the medium necessarily involves a tension between verbal and visual forms of representation—a tension that potentially produces a degree of cognitive dissonance in both the creator and the reader. Thus, it follows that any attempt at life-writing made through the medium of comics involves an especial awareness of alternate, and often conflicting, modes of self-representation. Chute supports this argument with beautifully composed close readings of key moments in her chosen texts. For example, in an analysis of the "Resilience" chapter of Barry's *One Hundred Demons*, she tracks the shifts in tense and perspective of the verbal narrative and demonstrates how these subtle alterations are supplemented and complemented by the recursive, nonsequential images that accompany them. Such verbal and visual slippages, she argues, place into relief the ultimate instability of the self that Barry nevertheless valiantly attempts to "map" (115-117).

In turn, Chute continues, the juxtaposition of words and images in graphic narratives has the potential to destabilize the *reader's* sense of self as well. Citing Marianne Hirsch's claim that "to be a spectator [...] is to respond through body and affect, as well as through the intellect," (61) Chute argues that the blending of

words and images in graphic narratives compels the reader to respond both viscerally and intellectually; in turn, this simultaneous response prompts the reader to reckon with a certain "ambivalence" that characterizes her reception and interpretation of a given text and her position as a reader more generally (62). Thus, for example, Gloeckner's imaginative and sensual portrayal of her decomposing body in *A Child's Life and Other Stories* elicits both revulsion and desire—a complex response that is amplified by the accompanying written foreword to the narrative (62).

Questions of destabilization, disorientation, and fracture are, of course, crucial to the examination of trauma, and certainly, Chute's study serves as a significant intervention in the field of trauma studies. Drawing on the work of such trauma scholars as Dominick LaCapra, Chute argues that women's graphic narratives may help us to "rethink the dominant tropes of unspeakability, invisibility, and inaudibility that have tended to characterize trauma theory" (3). Although she concedes that the gutters and ruptures that structure comics attest to the aporia and losses that characterize traumatic experience, she reminds readers that such cracks in representation occur precisely (and necessarily) within moments of *presence*. That is, even as women's graphic narratives admit the impossibility of completely representing trauma, they nevertheless make visible fragments of traumatic experience that formerly have been neglected, repressed, or censored. Graphic narrative, Chute argues, establishes an "*idiom of witness*, a manner of testifying that sets a visual language in motion with and against the verbal in order to embody individual and collective experience, to put contingent selves and histories into form" (3). In making this argument, the author gestures toward the political, and specifically feminist, implications of women's graphic trauma writing. The "idiom of witness" established in comics, she maintains, makes possible the depiction of "concerns typically relegated to the silence and invisibility of the private, particularly centered on issues of sexuality [and...] childhood" (4). Thus, for example, Gloeckner's *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* makes visible the complexities of incest, just as Satrapi's *Persepolis* exposes the troubled intersection between private and public responses to war.

Attendant to Chute's discussion of absence and presence is her consideration of the bodily and the material. Women's graphic narratives, she observes, are particularly attuned to representations of the body: not only does their work focus closely on the female body's experiences of both pleasure and pain, but it also considers the physical exertions of, and material traces left by, the woman artist. Citing Barry, who insists that "HANDWRITING is an image LEFT BY A LIVING BEING IN MOTION it cannot be duplicated IN TIME OR SPACE" (128, sic), Chute argues that the material practices involved in the production of comics allows for the artist's "corporeal habitation" within the text (200). This is especially the case, she maintains, in Bechdel's *Fun Home*, whose individual panels were drawn from the artist's scrupulous photographic restaging of its events. As Bechdel's formidable work demonstrates—and as Chute in turn insists—the work of women's graphic narratives dramatize the subtle borders between immediacy and mediation.

The existence of permeable and negotiable boundaries in comics serves as a key theme in Chute's study, and the author handles it—as well as the attendant theoretical questions it invites—with agility and grace. In this way, this carefully researched and elegantly written work serves as a crucial contribution to the field of cultural and critical studies. Moreover, it constitutes an important intervention in the on-going project to restore comics studies to its rightful place within the mainstream of literary inquiry.

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