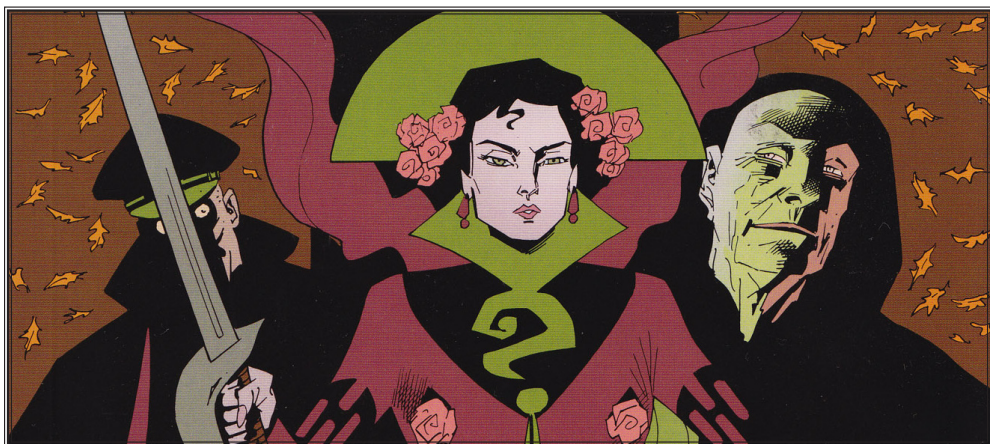


**THE LEAGUE OF  
EXTRAORDINARY  
GENTLEMEN  
CENTURY: 1910**  
**The annotations**



**by Messrs AMY POODLE, ZOM  
and Master BOBSY**

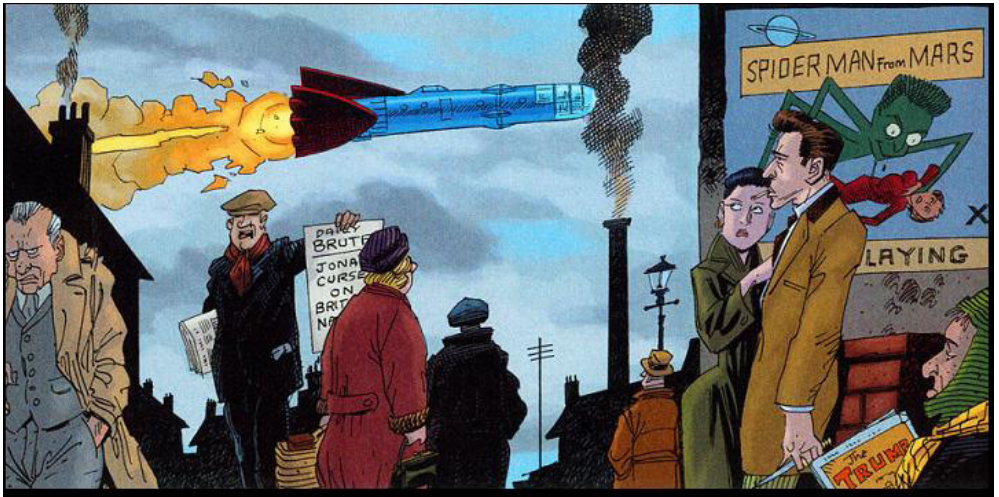
For me, the highlight of our interview with Kevin O'Neill was the big reveal that he and Alan Moore could conceivably continue producing the League forever, and at the very least, barring death or the end of the world, we're going to see five volumes of it. In all honesty there isn't a comic currently being published that I like as much. League of Extraordinary Gentlemen is such a total world, like a roleplaying environment. It has the energy of those old Warhammer sourcebooks, doesn't it? Shit, thinking about it it actually does have it's very own sourcebook.

Although that alone would not be reason enough to embark on a 22000 word article. Well, not for me at any rate. The real reason we decided to put together these meandering thoughts is precisely because the urge to respond to the League as a game of spot the reference is so strong. I'm not denying there's pleasure to be had from this and that it can enrich one's reading, but I'm concerned that sometimes, perhaps often, discussion of the League amounts to little more than inter-textual trainspotting and that other conversations are being drowned out. Note that I use the word 'conversations'; I'm not going to pretend for one minute that these annocommentations amount to hard criticism, they're too sprawling, disjointed and whittering to earn that title, but they are an attempt to say something about the League other than 'Orlando is the eponymous hero of a Virginia Woolf novel'. Century and the rest are so so much more interesting than that. All the textual hyperlinking goes beyond knowing literary backslapping. It possesses formally experimental, political and philosophical dimensions, and that's where the real action is. By choosing this sort of updating over that one, by painting Mina as a proto-feminist and the Golliwog as a liberated force, Moore is making choices that are worth thinking about and commenting on, but somehow much of the discourse around the League ignores that obvious fact. If the League is simply an exercise in referencing then it is a dead exercise. We would like to contribute to a discussion that enlivens it in a way that doesn't just increase its meta-textual density, its busy-ness, but also its artfulness, its intelligence and relevance.

I felt a little sad about leaving the 50s behind. I'm sure many people preferred the Victorian setting because it's more, ummm, generic. Pea-souper London's a space we're familiar with from a million movies and novels, instantly romantic and user friendly, and Dan Dare's England less so, but that's why I enjoyed it so much. It belonged to me! It captured the feeling of my grandparents' house and Harrow on the Hill in the late seventies where giant gas cylinders, brylcream, vests under the shirt and pebbledash were still in evidence, the 1950s and early 60s freeze framed in Greater London's time-capsuled living rooms, sprawling suburban cul de sacs and fading, paint chipped recreation grounds. And for this reason, for many of us there's something deeply nostalgic about the Black Dossier, because it's so specifically English, and its a brand of englishness that, unlike the England of the first two volumes, is still tangible, we can still connect to it. But, conversely, it doesn't speak to American experience at all. It doesn't represent an England many foreigners know, or maybe even want to know. In part that's because it's drab, you wouldn't want to holiday there that's for sure, but I know that's not the only contributing factor. I think for some American readers the problem is that it doesn't include them. And even if it is just the drabness that puts some people off, well, I kind of like it. There's

a certain twisty weirdness only produced within the pressure cooker environment of the meat and two veggy, betank-topped starchiness that lurks behind the scenes of the British national psyche, something to do with the Clangers, Port Merion and Blue Meanies. All that brown and grey is fertile soil for the periodic explosions of mad energy that have, from the 60's onwards, periodically redefined our cultural and social landscape, and whose first incursions are represented in the Dossier by the colourful rocket ships crowding out the view across the tarmac in the spaceport scenes and, most strikingly by... well, we'll get to that eventually...

So I was sad. I didn't want to wave goodbye to the spy novel atmospherics, the newly ploughed motorways and concreted over fields, although in the end I had to concede the rhythm of it was right.



After the millennia surfing, globetrotting, stylistic mash-up of the Dossier it felt good to return to the familiar territory of 1910. It allows us to find our footing again before we're launched across the decades, plus the Dossier's already inoculated the reader against the temporal vertigo we might have felt had we simply jumped from the first book straight to 1969 in the next one. The world feels solid enough now to withstand the fifty year displacements we're soon to undergo, and there's a real pleasure in cataloging the subtler developments this gentler scene shift presents us with, perhaps enhanced by our new sensitivity towards time and history in the world of the League as a result of having read the Almanac and the Black Dossier. The Belle Epoque has reached its peak and soon the fin de siecle concerns of the first two books will be (at least partially) realised, with the onset of the Georgian era and the First World War, and everything will be turned on its head. But right now we're creep, creep, creeping into the future, the odd motor car here, a new development going up over there, the stiff, buttoned up Victorian era giving way to the louche, flowing lines of Art Nouveau on the cover.



I don't understand why anyone would want to sleep in that bedroom. Are those Carnacki's trophies? I know he once investigated the Horse of the Invisible, but framing a picture of it and hanging it on your wall like it's family, that's just weird. Perhaps he's spent so long exploring the netherworld it's become 'home' to him, or maybe he needs a constant reminder of why his struggle against supernatural forces is necessary (or perhaps it's just that Kevin O'Neill needs something cool to draw).

Haddo's position within the story is unclear - is he hero or villain? The Mise-en-scene, the cool moonlit blue of Carnacki's bedroom juxtaposed with the hot reds of his dream, are cueing us to read Haddo as an infernal character, but Haddo's inspiration, Aleister Crowley, was nothing if not ambiguous. Granted, he ID'd as the Great Beast and he hated the Christian church, but that was because in his view Christianity was a dangerous, infantilising force and, let's not

forget, Lucifer was also the Lightbringer. Hmmmm... It's telling that the descriptors Haddo employs to describe the future, 'strange and terrible', are equally vague. They imply that whatever comes next is catastrophic, that we'll be transitioning into something dreadful, awe-inspiring and next to impossible for us presently to comprehend, but notice the absence of adjectives like 'evil', the lack of real threat. No death or torture is promised. Haddo isn't Sir Miles.

Okay, you probably got all that and we all know Alan Moore's on friendly terms with the apocalypse, but this is just a preliminary look at what the Moonchild might mean. More on him later.

### Pages 2 & 3

Even though O'Neill's known for his grotesques, and the man himself has expressed a preference for drawing freaky action in the past, I think he'd agree with me that the League has really brought out another side of him as an artist. His work on the book is a far cry from the brilliant but arguably one-note twisty skin splurge that defined his output for 2000AD in the 80s, and the stuff he's been producing in conjunction with Ben Dimagmawliw (we must not forget about him) has to be some of the most expressive yet simultaneously subtle, atmospheric and cinematic - yes cinematic (forget Mr. Brian Hitch) - comic art we've seen over the last decade.

Just look at this!



I truly believe that the the art in the League loses a lot of its impact when it's reduced to A4. Its natural habitat is the deluxe edition, or blown up on a computer. Or at least it didn't hit me quite so hard until I'd seen it on the big screen, so to speak. Look at the waterburst on the far right of the picture and the way it continues, dragging your eyes across the undertow until they settle on Jenny preparing to surface on the other side. It's as though Kevin's itchy pencil finger has now found focus, honing in on exactly where it's needed, in this case the violence of the bubbles and the water's rippling surface. And it's this control, this restraint, that now defines him as an artist. The splurge, the energy, is still there, only he's taken possession of it. It no longer possesses him.

Mmmm. Such a pretty couple of pages.

And that interests me too. The tension, which on first reading is not apparent, between the seemingly calm beauty of pages 2 & 3 and what, on closer inspection, they actually mean. Because it makes sense, given what we know about the Moonchild and Jenny's fate, that a huge moon should preside over the title page and the character who will initiate this chapter's catastrophe curve. Jenny, it could be argued, almost emerges from the moon. They're page 2's dominant elements, suspended there above the water, it's almost as though we're being asked to equate them, their loneliness and isolation. Because ultimately it is this separation, that Jenny is at one step removed from humanity, her humanity, that leads to the disastrous events that unfold. She's a creature of the moon, her natural habitat beneath the waves, a new monster prowling the submarine realm of the 20th century's nightmares.

*Pages 4 & 5*

I love the headboard's water feature. It's these tiny elements in service of character that make Moore's comics so enjoyable. I've just spent a couple of weeks in hospital and I know the value of small comforters when you're wrenched from your everyday life and into the arena of the unwell.

And it is a bit of a wrench, isn't it? Nemo got really old really fast. But that's how it is with death and illness. One minute your grandparents are driving, cooking their own dinner and bickering the way they did on their honeymoon and the next they're laid up in hospital barely able to speak. People fall apart suddenly. And so Captain Nemo who just ten years before was commanding the Nautilus in battle against martian invaders is now little more than a frail old man, all his glorious warring and adventuring a distant memory. This is a very adult, truthful observation on Moore's part. You know he's seen this firsthand, it's real, and it adds depth.

One can only speculate as to why Moore made the decision not to translate the dialogue in the League, but it does feel right. It adds to the exoticism, the sense of travel and adventure, the world building, as well as the fact that it's just more respectful. I get the feeling Moore dislikes how Anglo-Saxoncentric most modern comics are, that he might even view it as dangerous in the current climate, and perhaps made the decision that because the League encourages further reading and comics are a visual medium - meaning the reader can get some sense of what's going on without following the words - he'd leave the foreign dialogue intact. Anyway, we know Nemo's an angry man and we've all seen this scene before, the charismatic but ultimately emotionally constipated father figure throwing a tantrum because his wife or his children won't do things his way. We can get all that without being able to read Urdu. It's certainly a scene I'm familiar with and it's kind of cute.

#### *Pages 6 & 7*

Those pesky songs.

Personally I'm pretty cool with them, but I was one of those readers who loved the Vicious Cabaret when I first read it. For starters it was novel, but I also enjoyed the way it impacted the writing, the way its economy, compressions, its rhythms, gave the story added charge. The song's leg-kicking jauntiness, contrasted with the words, 'No queers... or yids...or darkies... etc.', knocked me for six, revolted me, years before I'd watch its inspiration, Bob Fosse's Cabaret. And, revulsion aside, I think I respond to the songs in 1910 in a similar way. The songs provide Moore with a license to go as far as he likes without resurrecting embarrassing memories of Swamp Thing at its worst. Those of us who secretly like it when he gets really purple can just relax and go with the flow because songs are allowed to be over the top. A bit florid. Camp. Dramatic. It's all good.

In this way the songs enliven the image. We're well trained in watching pop videos and musicals, etc., and the music (I can't be bothered to put the word in quotes anymore) encourages us to view the panel as a performance - it takes on a theatricality, the movement and gesture heavy with significance, transformed into tableaux, or to dance. It's a highly effective way to ramp up emphasis. The musical scenes do resonate quite differently from the others - they achieve a kind of shortcut to depth. Perhaps this is why Lord Nuneaton, in his review, found 1910 both ultra dense and ultra light simultaneously.

Another thing I imagine feeds into some people's problem with 1910, and it is definitely the least well received League book so far as I can see, is probably its positioning. It

arrives on the shelves well over a year after the Dossier and inevitably this slither of a book at a mere eighty pages, and in large part comicbook at that!, draws unfair comparisons with what has to be the largest, densest, most original hunk of LOEG goodness yet. It was never going to live up to the standards set by its predecessor, was it? It was always going to feel linear and lightweight in comparison, its return to an, only just, post Victorian London almost conservative. That Moore decided to slow up the pace of the story at this point probably contributed to this feeling too. But he's allowed to do that, it's not such a bad thing, in fact I'm loving the contrast, the story's propriety, and, regardless, I'm sure by the time Century's third chapter rolls around we'll all feel we've enjoyed proper dinner.

\*Like many of us I'm starting to get the impression Mr. Moore's turning into something of a neophobe, an impression which probably hasn't helped this book: the depressingly predictable comments about how modern music is simply a recycling of all that's gone before, how modern comics are the same, etc... and then further to that an admittance that he doesn't really know much about popular culture! I strongly dislike it when someone launches into a diatribe about how crap something is without, apparently, any real experience of the thing itself. But moreover, when it's someone of Moore's intellectual stature, it's disappointing. One commentator took particular offense at what he saw as Moore's hypocrisy, arguing that you can't criticise today's creators for mining old ideas when you're the author of a book whose appeal rests on sampling and splicing together pre-existing fictions. The bloke gave me pause, because here I am cussing Geoff Jeans for the same thing, going on about how septic, ingrown and unimaginative the Blackest Night project is, whilst simultaneously urging the League on anyone who'll listen. So why do I love the League but loathe the Nice?

I guess because, as I think I made clear in my Blackest Night rant, I've got nothing against writers rehashing old ideas and playing games with continuities per se, so long as that's not all they're doing. So long as there's genuine imagination there and real vitality to the work. A reaching for something else. Oh, and the writing's good. And I think LOEG ticks all of the boxes above.

### *Page 11*

I don't think Orlando deserves some of the harsher criticism directed his way. Oh yes I understand where his (or rather, Moore's) detractors are coming from, Orlando is after all a being who has had thousands of years to come to terms with his indeterminate condition and the mincing gaylord we're presented with here seems a pretty piss-poor and lazy representation of the place s(he) would have arrived at come the arrival of the early 20th century. Orlando should be a queer theorist's dream, someone who evolves the concept as far beyond social constructionism as the car from the wheel. I can see why, on the strength of this text, people view the character as a depressing disappointment, a missed opportunity for Moore to say something really interesting about the cavernous gaps in heteronormative reality. But instead he seems to be running away with his tail between his legs.

But look a little closer.

Orlando only emerges as a flat-out failure of the imagination if we view the comicbook section of 1910 in isolation, set apart not only from the other books, but also the ten page text segment at the end. Both the Black Dossier and the New Traveller's Almanac afford us access to another side of Orlando, his autobiography and his journals, his history and his thoughts, and like so many of Moore's characters, when we get a chance to peer at the person behind the persona, what's revealed is anything but uncomplicated. Moore has always demonstrated an awareness of the disjunction between the mask we wear in public and who we are in private. I recently read an article by a real Moore hater who'd made up his mind, based upon a unengaged reading of Watchmen, that Moore hates his characters, citing Owlman's impotence and Rorschach's oedipally informed sociopathy as evidence. I couldn't understand where the writer was coming from, concluding that whoever it was must have willfully ignored the articulate and above all coherent logics the text provides as a framework within which to contextualise and, ultimately, empathise with these people. While necessarily simplified, and more emblematic of actual real world psychologies than anything else, Rorschach and Nite Owl's inner worlds are consistent and workable and as sympathetic as anyone's. Moore isn't gloating at Nite Owl for not being able to get it up, rather he's genuinely exploring the idea of impotence - Man in relation to his youth and in relation to the Bomb. And likewise with Rorschach, how a lifetime of neglect and abuse impacts a mind, and the thought-fortress it needs to erect in order to survive. We're not being asked simply to abhor or, at best, pity him, but also to shudder: there but for the grace of God go I. And all it takes is a sudden, abrupt shift in perspective for the fat, comfortable, complacent armchair opinioniser in all of us to slip away, down into the abyss. And isn't that afterall the point of Watchmen, to destroy the ideas of black and white morality in favour of a more, dare I say it, aesthetic as opposed to judicial view? To see the grey which is everywhere, flooding the ruined cityscape of New York at the end. Watchmen hates conclusivity. It despises the idea of the easy reading on all levels, and especially of people, just as all Moore's work does. On the face of it these figures are, respectively, an ineffectual weakling and a psychopathic vigilante, but there's always a person there too, as messy and sophisticated underneath their clothes as any of us. Just look at Campion's autobiog in the Dossier. All the usual prejudices are in evidence, the misogyny, the racism, but no-one could deny that Moore uses this section as an opportunity to get underneath the guy's skin and that in the final analysis he wants us to relate to him. Part of me feels he included that piece as an attempt to apologise for creating a character so readily dislikable - even more so than Moriarty whose mind's workings we are at least allowed a glimpse of before the lunatic psychopathy grabs the wheel and steers London towards pint sized apocalypse - to flesh him out a bit before subjecting him to yet more degradation in the pages of 1910.



Campion Bond • 1888

Admittedly, to describe the material concerning Orlando, both autobiographical or otherwise, as a great outpouring of perspective and/or emotion would, I admit, be pushing it a bit. There's not a lot of confessional stuff to be unpacked, but I'd argue that reading



between the lines we're provided with a great deal of information. There's the haughtiness and arrogance, Orlando's understanding of himself as precisely what (s)he might be, the spirit of the whatever age s(h)e's residing in at the time and the inflated sense of self worth attendant on that, the loneliness and isolation except in the company of fellow immortals, his almost psychopathic tendency to approach life as a game, as cyclical and inconsequential, and the consequent amorality and warmongering that spring from this view, and an increasingly dislocated sense of self. Indeed, by the time we reach the Life of Orlando's end, it's difficult to understand him as possessing a stable core. So much time has passed, so many adventures, that personhood collapses. All that remains are a few fragmented psychic strange attractors. Immortality is life as ongoing comic title, as soap opera. It can't be contained or boxed in by narrative. There is no beginning middle and end for Orlando, only episodes, the slippery surfaces of continuity, and his 'life' is as revisable, the stories s(h)e tells about himself as untrustworthy, as what's between his legs. The text provides us with some interesting psychological tangibles, certainly enough to take us beyond straightforward caricature, but inevitably there's something at Orlando's centre that remains unknowable, uncategorisable, an 'eternal ambiguity'. And not because of laziness, but because it makes sense.

You want liminality? You got it.

But back to dress up, I enjoy the public face Orlando wears in 1910, strikingly different one might note from the person we meet at the start of *Into the Limbus*, Prospero's sharp edged, gallant and wise companion in *Faerie's Fortunes Founded* and the supplicant lover of this episode's homage to *The Story of O*, precisely because of the silliness and campiness. It throws all the other stuff into stark relief, and in the end the tension serves to make Orlando seem even more otherworldly. Recently Orlando has begun to resemble one of the gay archetypes popularised last century, and this is significant. As it should be. These are the costumes hanging on the shelf, and Orlando must always be well dressed. Always reflecting the time in which (s)he lives.

I just like camp. And even though I dislike the perpetuation of stereotypes and I can get with concerns heading in that direction, I worry that some of the haterz might be using the debate surrounding the character's campiness as an escape valve for their own strong revulsion to same.

*Pages 14 & 15*

I wonder if this scene really serves as a symbolic starting gun for Alan's disgruntlement with the 20th century. It's not been ten years since the *Nautilus* dropped anchor in Wapping and already the age of adventure is being sold back to the public as tawdry spectacle. Life lived vigorously, mysteriously and extraordinarily, commodified, gift wrapped and now going for a few shillings. A tour of what we could have been if we hadn't got caught up in front of our copies of *The Daily Brute* and the TV set.

Essentially, this scene is the opening salvo in Janni's degradation (the next being the taking of a slave name, and after that being reduced to the status of a serving girl, and from there.....) - indeed, strange, maybe even offensive as it sounds it may in fact serve as the ultimate degradation. Remember, Janni and her father are an incredibly tough pair. As is made more than evident later on, *Lincoln Island* is populated by some of nastiest, most

violent, rape and pillage inclined motherfuckers (probably literally) out there, and Janni's at home with these people. None of them would actually touch her, but likely as not she has a very different attitude towards sexual violence than the rest of us, and the rape later on is simply the final straw. Perhaps, and I know this may anger some people but, hey, it's important to remember there are some very alien psyche's out there, people who wouldn't be touched by violence in the same way we would, the honour-blasting soul-fuck of that cardboard Nautilus, its trampling of her lineage, her heritage, is the thing that really sees her parked squarely above the precipice down which she eventually plummets. Just look at the way she runs away from the thing, head in hands, or wiping her eyes in disbelieving terror. It's hard to tell which it is, but she's clearly lost and very distressed.

Could it be, then, that Janni's decision at the end of the book is, in part, a reaction against this? A visceral refusal to see herself reduced to a flat, inert amusement. She'd rather see the world burn first. Because it's not just individuals she wants to see wiped off the map, it's the entire dockland community, or maybe, to take it further, London itself. I think in some ways we need to look at Janni's actions as an act of resistance, an attempt to destroy this crucible of 20th century capitalism and it's early attempts to convert everything into exploitable, knowable, marketable narrative. Janni as a one man revolution, roaring out of the nightmares of Marx and Engels, colliding pavement and beach.

And further to all that....

It's difficult to know how to refer to Janni, because even though the anglicised name she takes is exceedingly problematic, it seems to be how she refers to herself after the events of 1910. This does not mean, however, that we should necessarily be comfortable with that fact. Jenny Diver is a slave name, one she does not take for herself but is given by the pub landlord in a base demonstration of ownership that culminates, inevitably, in her brutal rape. This question of ownership extends into broader questions of racial and cultural representation and the kind of race-based errors the dominant majority make, often on a daily basis - i.e. just because a negro might refer to himself as 'nigger', it doesn't mean it's okay for me to. It is likely that, aside from cover, from the simple expediency of disinformation, Janni adopts this new identity as a reminder of the violence, hatred and stupidity that her enemies are capable of, that birthed not only her but her father's rage, the reason why she fights, the captain of a vessel symbolising her rejection of a world inflicted on her, one she and her predecessor and successors intend to destroy, attacking, pillaging, levelling....and then diving down, down, escaping, to her refuge beneath the waves.



(Not a panel from page 15. Don't get confused!)

This is the first page to introduce Suki, one of 1910's weirder characters. She differs strikingly from Jack in that her song, *The Black Freighter*, has nothing to do with her or what she's doing. It can't be rationalised as an externalisation of internal monologue or a speech, rather it happens to her, transforming her from a dockside prostitute into a meta-textual Cassandra, a warning siren, prophesying the doom to come. One is tempted to draw comparisons between Suki and Mr. Norton, but other than their ability to float above the narrative their similarities do not run deep. Suki is permeable in a way Norton is not. If he is a reader, then she is effectively the story's glove puppet, it's knowing eye, unwilling, or more likely unable, to affect its own outcome, only to gently tut to herself and the reader as events play out as they will. Let's face it, she's been here, on page 15, a million times, watching the same depressing scene again and again, Janni arriving at the Cuttlefish scared and confused.

And in this way she differs from the traditional, fourth wall busting, musical device of a character who comments on the action, because she's not in a musical but a comicbook with all the immediate reread potential that implies. It must be exhausting being Suki's fiction suit, and with the knowing \*ffffp\* it's possible Moore's commenting on that.

*Pages 18 & 19*



These next couple of pages demonstrate a real lightness of touch on Moore's part. The decision to weave the gloomy panels describing Raffles' robbery in and out of Mina's, in contrast, well-lit exploration of the club downstairs imbues them with a sneaky, furtive mood, like a black cat prowling around the margins. This is the kind of thing Moore does really well and confirms him as a master of the comic book form and not simply a great wordsmith. It's gentle, subtle, it sets a mood, while keeping the 'camera' invisible, and is indicative of a confidence and maturity absent from the work of flashier, showier, perhaps younger and hungrier writers with more to prove. This is stately and dignified comics. It does the job expertly but doesn't draw attention to itself.

*Page 23*

I love the way the building in the centre of the uppermost frame bulges while the streets surrounding it dwindle off into its doldrums. This image elegantly describes the busy, labyrinthine quality of the now endangered Victorian slums. But not only that, the twisty, almost corkscrewed perspective speaks to Jack's dementedly murderous mindset and reverberates with the symbolic energy of German Expressionism. O'Neill's work has always encouraged comparisons with this movement but it seems especially relevant

here, given the time in which the action is set, right on the cusp of modern cinema and the arrival of Robert Weine and the rest, and also the advent of the second world war. O'Neill's destabilised architectural landscapes unfold across a Europe teetering on the brink of uncertainty and conflict. Traditional perspective buckles under the weight of a bloodied, body strewn tomorrow, about to quickly put paid to Victorian notions of the end of history.



And it makes absolute sense that the scenes trailing Macheath are the ones conveying this, Moore having already previously identified Jack the Ripper as one of the principle diabolic deities presiding over the twentieth century.

### *Page 30*

This page contains the first of two references 1910 makes to Allan's new found bisexuality. I enjoy Moore's invoking of the old fashioned, and very British, attitude of 'what goes on in the privacy of your home is entirely your business' here. It's dignified, even if it is symptomatic of a deeply repressed, oppressed society. It's just very, very polite, isn't it? Respectful. Quaint, though, this notion of private life and boundaries, positioning 1910 as another age entirely, but ever so gently. Aaaaah, again it's the little details that bring this book alive!

Raffles and Quartermain's exchange complicates the book's relationship with queerness, because here, in Quartermain, we have the traditional adventure hero tacitly admitting to a sexual relationship with another man. This guy isn't a spiky queen like Orlando, he's a as straight acting as they come - as straight as they come even - and while I think Moore probably enjoys subverting the macho archetype, making evident the homoerotic overtones running throughout its fictions, I think his real agenda here is to undermine binary notions of sexuality. I don't believe Allan's gay and he's not 'bi' either, he's what he is moment to moment. Essentially this scene is a pretty bloody well definitive statement on where Moore stands in relation to Queer Theory: he buys it. And he wants you to know about it. This stuff isn't just arbitrarily dunked in there. It serves story in the sense that

Allan probably wouldn't be embracing all these new possibilities if it wasn't for the Water of Life, but there's a didactic agenda going on also. And questions... you have to ask who tops and who bottoms, Allan or Orlando? If Quartermain's made the - at least for his old self - unlikely leap into Orlando's arms, then nothing's safe is it? Nothing is precious, including traditional gender roles. Especially, I suppose, where Orlando's concerned.



There's an enormous number of paintings/photos of the League's first incarnation littering these books, and what I want to know is when they had the time to pose for them. As far as I understand it, Moriarty's aerial bombardment and the Martian invasion occurred in quick succession, and, well, fuck off - Mr Hyde watching the birdy? Please.

But this is a dramatic moment. A line drawn under the first two volumes and the Victorian age of adventure and exploration they represent. Just as, post Volume 2, the narrative and the mode of presentation have complexified, so have the League's principle players, Allan, Mina and Orlando, been reborn into an ostensibly similar but in reality utterly new and uncertain world. It's a strange inversion, but this earlier League, full of monsters, misfits and geriatrics, feels, weirdly enough, more innocent somehow, less muddled and messy. It's heroics, although often an accidental byproduct of what, initially, would often appear to be a set of interests and attitudes mutually opposed to those of its masters, particularly in the case of Hyde and Griffin, in far sharper focus than the clumsy hacking and slashing that round off this installment.

So, yes, this panel is the capstone to all that and a life whose contours were clearly defined, yet to be made fuzzy, less certain, luminous, and, maybe, less thrilling by the absence of death.

### Page 37

There's a lot of rape in Alan's oeuvre. I'm not sure if it features in all his work, but I think it's fair to say that it does in most of it: Miracle Man: check, Watchmen: check, Smax: check, From Hell: CHECK!, The Killing Joke and V: may as well be checked, Lost Girls: CHECKITYCHECKCHECK!!! So far in the League - and this is just off the top of my head without having scoured the text bits - we've had three rapes (if you include all the Edmonton schoolgirls as \*one\* person, which is dodgy I know) plus one symbolic one

(when Griffin attacks Mina) and I genuinely don't know what to think about it. I know we've had this conversation before, but that's just it: how can Moore still be unaware of his books' predilection toward sexualised violence when everyone's always going on about it? Is he unaware? One thing's for sure, if he got online, then he'd know, he'd know it all. Arrgh! I so, so, so want to see someone bring it up with him in an interview. Not in a combative way, but just to see it addressed.

More inarticulate thoughts on the subject:

I've mentioned Bulk Meat before, yes? He once said something quite penetrating about Alan Moore, how 'he possesses an acute awareness of our naked bodies beneath our clothes'. To be honest, knowing Bulk he probably hadn't read any Moore, but just thought he'd toss off an opinion about this guy, this bearded comic guy, in the rather arbitrary way he was inclined to toss off opinions at the time, from commentary on the way female sexuality was represented on Top of the Pops - read: designed to provoke male rage - to legal advice. Because you never knew if these opinions were well thought out or flippant and insincere, you had to take them all at face value and swirl them around your head a bit to see if their taste worked for you. This particular statement did, I have to say. It was around about the same time Alan was having Sophie Bangs do it with that old wizard bloke. It would have been very easy to dismiss that issue of Promethea as Alan engaging in more sexual defilement, but I'm Alan's friend really, and while I accept that the constant reprisal of certain iffy themes in his work might suggest some unhealthy preoccupations, I'm also aware that our relationship to these things is often complicated, and that even though, for instance, yes the whole Silk Spectre thing is daahaaark, the observations made about life being a messy business and forgiveness and love and the rest of it are, outside of the ready made realms of apologist critique, quite profound and important. Moore is often profound and important when discussing these fucked up areas. His victims are, maybe with the exception of Griffin, rounded individuals, with agency. There are consequences to the violence. Nothing feels particularly salacious or voyeuristic. He's always aware of the skin under our clothes. Our humanity. That we can bleed. And maybe that a shrivelled old body isn't as disgusting as we might have thought it was, having fed off mediated prosthetic memories with their eternal focus on youth and beauty since toddlerhood. So, persistent rapeyrape aside, I think Moore has had, by and large, a positive influence on the culture. If his work belongs to the cannon of oppression it's at least inhabiting the greyer areas on the outer fringes where, although misogyny may still reside, it is of a deeply conflicted kind, and the work at the very least has something to say. Something maybe we should hear. Maybe he's setting up a false dichotomy at the end of Lost Girls. Perhaps our choices aren't death or debauchery. But in a world as violent as this one, the erotic imagination, even where it strays down paths we'd prefer not to tread, is something to be celebrated. And at the end hasn't it become a metaphor for ALL imagination, all heat, quickness, vigour and, for life?

There's one thing we haven't had from Moore's rapey back catalogue, but the League delivers in spades: PAYBACK! Yep, good old fashioned, revenge. One could argue that Hyde performed this function for Mina back in Vol 2, but that's just it. It was a pretty satisfying scene in revenge terms - perhaps transgressing the boundaries of satisfaction and setting foot in 'okay that's enough now with the horrific inflicted feminisation' territory -

but how much more satisfying if it was Mina wielding the giant phallus? I don't know any better so I'm going to postulate that Moore's subconscious moral compass has at long last revolted against the other, grimmer urges contained within his work, and while the bad guys are still getting away with it, they're not getting away with it, if you get me? Because this time it's not just a big old dick tearing up... ahem... Griffin's back-alley, but a real-life shredding of a dockside thoroughfare by no less than a GIANT SQUID!11!23!ETC! Now if the superphallic overtones of that scene aren't pumping you in the face, all I can say is you must be immune to symbolism altogether. The power lodged in Jenny's trigger-finger makes the Bride look like a bitch. She's got an army of brutal killers and the most technologically advanced weaponry in the world at her disposal, and the reason why she doesn't participate in the carnage herself? That should be obvious. It's not that, like Mina, she has any moral qualms at all about torturing and slaughtering her abusers, it's that as far as she's concerned they're worms and she a pirate-queen. Yes, the wanton murder is vile, yes O' Neill makes us queasy with all the spleens, severed backbones and melting flesh, and, yes, we empathise with Mina's disgust and frustration, but at long last Moore has finally provided a rebuttal to the sexual violence that has been a feature of his comics since the late seventies, and it feels good. Explosive. It needed to be said. Even if he describes the money-shot page as his and Kevin's reaction to DC bullshit, I'm just happy the text has thrown its hands in the air and shouted 'Enough's enough! Now enjoy my tentacles fenestrating you!'

I'm still torn as to whether or not all this justifies Jenny's battered body picking itself off the paving stones fifteen or so pages before though.

Arrg.

Maybe next time no rape, or indeed any of its iterations, at all, eh?

I've said the 'R' word too much. I feel dirty now. Here's Zom with the sense.

Zom: I have no evidence of his intent, but by refusing to exclude rape from his depictions of violence and power in action in my view Moore is fulfilling an important function. While ninety nine percent of popular fictions are happy to present us with a picture of violence that excludes most of the troubling bits, a violence that is fundamentally fun and entertaining, Moore is prepared to go to much more uncomfortable places and thank God for that because, lest we forget, rape is very much part of our violent world, and I think that our consistent attempts to edit it out of our experience are nothing short of dangerously immoral. If it were the case that Moore's rapes were simplistically titillating or gratuitous without purpose I would be concerned, but taken on a case by case basis I think they are defensible within their respective contexts.

Further, and to go back to Bulk Meat's point about the physicality of Moore's characters, I think it's important that we try to understand the importance of bodies and bodily relationships within Moore's works and to see his focus on rape as a part of a complex view of physicality and physical interaction. While Moore has his eyes on the stars his hands are down his pants scratching his balls. Moore's characters are physically intimate in ways which are seldom seen within popular adventure comics. I'm thinking of V hugging Evey; Mina and Alan undressing, washing and getting ready for bed in a dingy hotel room; Night Owl's coital failure and Silk Spectre's offers of physical yet non-sexual sympathy and consolation; Jane holding hands with her lover in V for Vendetta; the fact

that Moore's lovers hold hands full stop.

These moments litter Moore's comics and are backed up by sophisticated conceptions of the body: Mina's attraction to Alan's scars and aged body; Alan lustily licking Mina's ruined neck; O'Neill's fleshily rendered human forms so at odds with our airbrushed culture; the idea that sex can be transcendent as evidenced in Promethea and Felix Faust's trysts; the point put forward by Lost Girls that eroticism is complicated, troublesome, beautiful, ugly and important; the notion - embodied by Mina, Alan and Orlando - that sexuality isn't fixed; the cold blooded actualisation of the relationship between sex and power made manifest in Hyde's hideous revenge upon Griffin; the thought that immortality, the ultimate rejection of the body, may well present us with a crisis of being. The list really could go on and on and gives the reader strong grounds for digging a little deeper into Moore's deployment of rape as a plot element.

With that in mind, our attention should be drawn to the fact that it is demonstrably the case that Moore has complex views on the subject. The first instances of rape to be found in LOEG come in Volume 1 during the sequence set in the Correctional Academy for Wayward Gentlewoman, but even a cursory reading reveals this section of the text to be deliberately unrealistic, absurd and fantastical, it's reference points being humorous, Victorian pornographic pamphlets (or so Jess Nevins tells me). The fact that Moore wants to admit a relationship between fantasy and rape isn't in any way the same thing as treating the subject frivolously and, when seen within the context of the rest of his work, doesn't work to undermine the horrific reality of real world rape. What it does do is insist that our understanding of rape be broad enough to accommodate the fact that rape has long held a position of prominence in the landscape of sexual fantasy and that the subject is a good deal more complicated than tabloid journalism would have us believe. I should add that Moore complicates his position even further later in the second volume when he has Griffin symbolically rape Mina, a horrible, brutal scene which retroactively works to problematise Griffin's earlier actions and in turn the link between fantasy and sexual violence discussed above.

Needless to say, rape within Moore's oeuvre does take on far more straightforwardly horrific dimensions. The aforementioned rape-murder of Griffin by Hyde in the second LOEG volume is a case in point - a scene which is amongst the most brutal and disturbing depictions I've seen in any medium. Amy's suggestion that the scene can be read as Mina wielding the phallus, that it is in some way a cathartic revenge fantasy is persuasive. Part of me wanted it to be that, but a big part of the horror is subliminal understanding that, no, there is no way on Earth that Mina would want this, it just isn't in her. The truth is - and the script has set us up with this understanding with all the gestures to the fact that Hyde really is one hell of an nasty bastard and not just our big bad friend - that this is all Hyde, and that what is happening, while it couldn't be happening to more contemptible character, is nothing less than monstrous. No-one wants this except Hyde, and Hyde wants it because he enjoys it, because he can, because he is in control (to the Invisible Man: "I can see you". shudder!), because he has a dick that fucking big. It's his phallus, that's for sure.



The notion of catharsis is further complicated by Hyde staring out of the frame at us - "I can see you" takes on a double meaning - as if to implicate us, as if the text is saying is this what you want, really?. In fact with this violation of the fourth wall Moore isn't just making us complicit, he's attempting to envelop us in the scene, to force the terror in that room upon us. There is nothing pleasurable for us here. This isn't simply entertainment, or at least it isn't entertainment as I understand the term.

Going back to Century and the rape of Janni (or perhaps more appropriately Jenny Diver) on one level we are in familiar territory, after all Moore went to great pains to present the, not merely sexual, but all encompassing physical subjugation of working class women as reality of the Victorian (and one would assume the succeeding Edwardian) era. Here however he goes further into the subjective experience and gives us a vision of rape as cataclysm. If the musical number is a device that offers us the chance to wallow in idea and/or an emotion, then surely the emotions and ideas during the apocalyptic scene at the docks are all Janni's. This is her hatred, her rage, her black vision, the external articulation of gang rape-trauma. Yes by this time it's MacHeath's song, the lyrics are his, but the Black Raider, the fire and the death, the desolation, that's all Janni's. After the massacre, when Mina asks her who she is we know that she will answer "no-one" not simply because she's fulfilling a genre imperative, but because the devastation all around them is a vision of what has been done to her soul.

Over-wrought? Historionic? Gratuitous? Maybe, I'm not really in a position to judge, but I'm prepared to believe that Moore isn't far off in his assessment of what the aftermath of gang rape could feel like.

Amy again: while all the above is true and good, and absolutely cannot be dismissed if one is attempting a rounded and balanced overview of Moore's work, I still think the prevalence of, urrrgh, that bloody 'R' word again, in some problematises things. Or perhaps you're suggesting that given Moore's general, fleshy concerns, and his latterday focus on power and inequality, it almost needs to be included. I think I might be able to get with that.

Zom: S'what I said, innit.

Moving further down the page....

Suki is positively terrifying in this scene, channeling all the terror and violence of the rape taking place in the wings, but more than that, the way she glares out the panel, ferocious, accusatory, implicates the reader. Our own salacious desire for drama is as much to blame for how events play out, for what happens to Janni, as the rapists' lusts. But instead of a broken, compliant female victim, the comic cuts to an avenging fury, because this is what's being birthed here, Janni's righteous revenge, nothing exciting or sexy, nothing dramatic, but something horrible and annihilating, a scream that will resound across the 20th century and beyond.

Laura Mulvey a go go....



Bobsy: The Andrew Norton (late of Iain Sinclair and Dave McKean's *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*) section is probably the most 'difficult' few pages of any LOEG comic to date, at least in terms of unraveling the references. While far from the be all and end all of the series, the trainspotter element is a huge dimension of the book's appeal, keyed as it is so perfectly to the cognitive weaknesses and preferences of the intended audience (guilty/so afflicted). The obscurity of these pages is probably itself a nod to Sinclair's famously opaque prose style: When I did *Lights Out for the Territory* at university a decade-plus ago, the tutor, a specialist in Seventeenth/Eighteenth Century Eng. Lit., who apparently rarely read any prose that was less than two hundred years old, managed to read out about four lines of text before giving up. 'I mean, it's practically gibberish, isn't it? I mean, what is "MTV"?' The room thought he was joking for a few quiet

moments, but no, we had to explain what MTV was and that, actually, Mr. Sinclair was indeed writing an interesting and legitimate, if modern and somewhat thick, form of the Mother Tongue. Jess Nevins skips the visual references on the first Norton Pages ('The Norton Pages' has an appropriate kind of ring to it, doesn't it?) completely, so no-one else need feel bad about being a bit mystified by these rapidly-passing scenes.

Norton himself looks like Sinclair of course, a defiantly school-teacherish kind of look, with the worn-through gumshoe addition of the Constantine overcoat for effect, to locate the character as a fictional type, a London man, the cultured flaneur with aspirations to reconstructed wide-boy status. The connection supplies an unavoidable suggestion that Norton might have a foot in our world too, that he might be aware of his own fictional status, and an avid reader of the lives of the other fictions he meets on his road. Time seems to move around him like the pages of a book, almost as if he is a strange subatomic particle interacting with both this and our own universe on an erratic, though predictable, path – if you know the right equations, as Mycroft, whose extraordinary talent is for knowing everything, particularly how the obscure and enormous pieces of a given picture relate, apparently does. These weird essential elements, the unaccountable facets of existence which make existence possible, is a clear motif in 1910. It's all about the bootstraps – a dream of the future starts a set of occurrences which makes that future possible, just as Norton's gnomic utterances will surely point Mina in the right direction for what to do in '69.

It starts off easily though. Norton, in Sinclair drag, fixed in space and spastic in time, is standing still, a temporal statue, a refugee from an empty plinth, while time and King's Cross whirl into being all around him. (That's enough of that. Please try to make sense. - Ed.) Mina Murray and A.J Raffles kill time in 1910, hanging around, waiting for Norton's

moment to arrive.

Scenes from the spot's history ('fictional' history, remember, though this book takes even more pleasure than its predecessors in playing loose with the pointlessness of that distinction) play out before Norton's coolly ironic gaze. He sees Boadicea/Boudiga/Bodacia, roaring through her final battle, prior to her urban-legendary interment under King's X Station. As said above: easy.

But it gets tough quickly: Does anyone out there know the provenance of this scene, with its so obviously placed markers – the sad Saxon chief, the tree being cut, the lady with two buckets – the imagery is almost a pick and mix of English fairy tale motifs, but who out there can place the exact source?

It doesn't get any simpler: The next panel sees Norton in late Tudor times, a standard caricature of Bardic Bill (you know, him out of Sandman?) idly watching Norton idly watching a sewer being dug and a scene of early-theatre slapstick play itself out on the busy London streets. 'The boy who ran away with a pie' sounds like another scene from a half-remembered children's fairy-story, but where is it exactly? The Shakespeare aside is surely a red herring, the only famous pie featured in his oeuvre being the rather grisly one from Titus Andronicus. There is a famous London pie shoppe, with a similar cannibal connection, but the period and the part of town are both way off from this. The only famous fictional pie shop of the time I can think of is Mrs. Miggins' from Blackadder, but that's not her with the rolling-pin, the look's all wrong. Readers, help!

Norton's final stop-off before he arrives to meet our Leaguers is again just... difficult. It looks like a Victorian scene, navvies backchatting the foreman as they dig out the rail tunnels, running across old plague pits perhaps... Where's this from? You hear 'London-fiction-Victorian' and you think 'Dickens', but what scene from Dickens involves the construction of the Tube? Other likely refs are Quatermass and the Pit, or Death Line (Donald Pleasance's best horror movie, and a direct influence on V for Vendetta), but in both cases the geography is off. 1910 is an impossibly lean book, there is no way that these panels aren't speaking to something, but what? By now we are way into the rabbit hole of fiction, it could even be a ref to a Pogues song.

The first two Norton Pages is a frustrating, tantalising spread, but it's important not to look too closely and miss the wood for the trees. Literally - take another look at these Norton panels and marvel at just how in control of all this O'Neill is: The tree, thicker and older, whose loss the chief regrets is the same tree that Queen B.'s chariot is riding past. In the same spot a few hundred years later, the tree-space is represented by the wooden beams of the Tudor house, which another few hundred years later is excavated as a pile of planks on a dump in a building site. The timelessness of the tree – and of 'Wood-the-Idea-in-Space' – contrasts to the similarly static and 'rooted', but altogether different, timelessness of Norton. Notice how abruptly the arrival of industry obliterates the idea of wood in that spot, replacing it with the implacable brick and concrete of the station's facade.

(King's Cross is very much a transitional sort of town, straddling both Islington and Camden, its historic – real-world – origin as a Fleet crossing, the reputation as a hub of crime and prostitution, the vague memory of it once being a popular spa spot – it's all connected to travel, and to water, the element of motion and fluidity. The fixity of the tree, the long view, is a sharp and refreshing alternative to this correspondence.)

Next spread. Panel 2. Mina: Um... "hi." Always thinking on her feet.

Gaslight Understudies. Marvellous. As in 'under-studied.' The 'marvellous' isn't ironic – a pair of reforgeotten potboiler b-listers like Mina and A.J is just who one imagines Norton would be pleased to see.

Coffins at Carfax ... Blood for Oil. In League-land, Patrick Keiller would have had a genuine Woking crater, the film would be a real documentary.

Dead Trails. Abandoned Panics. These lines, this whole sequence, make plain the absurdity of trying to 'figure out' Sinclair's proselike poetry. Dead Trails is at once an explicit reference to Raffles, the thief who apparently evaded capture only in his death in a Flanders field; an indictment and apologia for the act of deep topography, always with that ghoulish twist, nothing like a murder site, a historic massacre to add a frisson to that afternoon stroll – that's so central to Keiller/ Sinclair /Moore's work; the language deployed is always so dense, so rich, and so allusive as to be ultimately elusive). Meaning becomes as open as the looping route of a drunken Soho derive.

Abandoned Panics is a throwaway phrase amorphous enough to fit almost any gloss you care to paint it with. It brings to mind, to pick something from the air, the arrival of the Demeter in Whitby, or the King's X fire of 1987, or the apocalyptic climax of 1910 itself. It's so allusive, so heavy and yet so free of gravity, that any ascribable meaning ultimately collapses from the pressure placed on the structure. The trick, to the phrase as it is used here, and to Sinclair's prose more generally when it get's a bit topheavy, is to stop trying to understand each nuance of each word and just surrender to the music of it: just enjoy the complementary N and A sounds of 'AbANdoNed pANics' for what they are.

Crowley manque. So is there a 'real' Crowley, as well as Haddo, in Leagueland, who Norton compares him to? Quite possibly so, Crowley having been fictionalised under his own name as well as in the many guises that Moore plays with elsewhere in the issue. If Haddo, blasting rod and all, is a manky version of the League's Crowley, then what's He up to?

Over polished occasional table. Perhaps the easy connection is to spiritualism and the contemporary popularity of seances and table-rapping, but in this and the previous quote there's a sense of derision aimed somewhere. Given that Moore detourns Haddo here into a competent and victorious villain, whose mission is, of course, ultimately going to be revealed to be a positive one, it's hard to know who the barbs are aimed at here, but a good candidate might be Haddo's creator Somerset Maugham. Understandably enough for someone who was such a bastard so much of the time, few portrayals of Crowley prior to the seventies are remotely positive, and none have been as sympathetic as Moore's

own depiction in *Promethea*. But it's fair at this stage for Moore to seek to redress the balance in favour of a man who has influenced his own personal life so much. There are many events in Crowley's remarkable life to find criticism with, but have no doubt that the opprobrium heaped upon him prior to his partial 'rehabilitation' was largely on account of his queerness, and in particular his refusal to quietly bow down before society's homophobia and keep it quiet, as Maugham among so many others apparently felt they had to. 'Overpolished table' is an exactly catty description of Maugham's precise and pretty, but somehow lifeless prose, and the stuffy yet vacuous atmospheres of middle-class drawing rooms that it evokes - over-English passions held in check by plundered teak wall panelling, nervous sweat beading the stiff upper lip as imperial guilt and personal repressions turn inward and feed on themselves.

Paradise backpackers. There's a simple reference to Kings X's status as a transport node, a transitional territory, feeding into the obvious 7/7 reference (how can Norton know that unless he knows 'our' world? I'm pretty sure that apart from maybe a TV drama-doc, and the fictionalising effect of news reportage, CCTV and camera phone footage, Mohamed Sidique Khan and chums' exploits have remained steadfastly real-world so far). That aside, tying apocalyptic thinking to gap-year jollies isn't as daft as it seems - apocalypse isn't just the end of the world. Like any good holiday, it's also the start of the next. London as Sagittarius perhaps, the cigarette burns being the 7/7 explosions. Surely it's impossible not to jump to the least worthy conclusion about this line: King's Cross, despite the citywide gentrification of the past decade, is still associated nationwide with prostitution and vice. Surely Mr Moore wouldn't dare to be casting backhanded aspersions upon a certain Baron Archer of Weston Super Mare's recreational activities? If so, the cause of the animosity is surely that of the inferior artist, jealous at the popularity of our nation's greatest living novelist?

Magic revivals. The *Magic Revival*, 1972 book on Thelemic and Theosophical traditions by arch drude, and genuine pupil of Crowley Kenneth Grant. Many beards were grown in the seventies on the back of this tome. Moore is a fan of Grant's supercharged, impossibly esoteric writing - read all about it on page 155 of this .pdf here: <http://www.biroco.com/kaos/kaos.pdf>

Hyde Park happenings. The big Hyde Park event of 1969 was the Rolling Stones concert in memorial to Brian Jones, played to a crowd of a quarter of a million people. It's one of the more famous or oft-reported events of the decade - Jagger's prissy reading of *Adonais*, thousands of released butterflies expiring quickly in the London sun, Mick Taylor's awkward debut, support act King Crimson playing the Stones off the stage. It'll be interesting to see what Mina and co got up to while they were there.

David Livinoff's ventriloquism. Litvinoff, a recurrent name in Sinclair's work, so technically both a fictional and real-life human, so available to Norton in both dimensions, is basically a Face, that strange breed of anonymous celebrity so key to London life, who exists between the cracks of time, greasing history's tectonic plates. Like Norton himself, someone whose very existence can be summed as the right face, in the right place, in the right time. Litvinoff taught Jaames Fox how to talk gangster for his performance

in Performance, set in Notting Hill, stamping ground of Hendrix, Hawkwind, Jerry Cornelius and Withnail (who lives in Camden but obviously parties in NH). The next book is going to be SO GOOD.

Jack the Hat. Jack Mcvitie, one of the dodgy sorts whose murder led to the conviction and incarceration of the Kray Twins, 60's real-life East London underworld kingpins. Norton's witnessing of the Hat hit is one of the key chapters of *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*.



Norton's final panel shows him, still at Kings X, surrounded by characters from various forms of mid-late 1960s mass-entertainment. From left to right, with plenty of omissions, they are: Mrty Feldman, probably playing a character from a sketch in *At Last the 1948 Show* (previously reld by Moore in *V for Vendetta*); a slightly generic looking woman of the time, who, difficult to tell, could even be our old friend Mrs. Peel; the old guy is 'lovable' bigot Alf Garnett, and a pair of other characters from comedy race-hate show *Til Death Us Do Part*; the guy in yellow – on the basis of location and the art portfolio he's carrying go for Percy Paynter from *Man Pinches Bottom*; a familiar civil servant off to another day of work at the Ministry of Silly Walks; an unknown hippie, Andy Capp and family; Garth; and ...hmm, dunno... Napoleon Solo? Is he meant to be Asian, in which case is he Jimmy Woo, agent of Steranko's SHIELD?

Zom: I'm intrigued by "Gaslight understudies" and the strong possibility that understudy also takes on some of its theatrical meaning, that our heroes have only been preparing for their true roles and that the time will soon come when they have to get on stage and really perform. This view makes considerably more sense when you bear in mind that Norton is an atemporal creature - from his vantage point the true performance is already and always has been taking place. The Mina we know is waiting in the wings of history, but will one day be called upon to fill the role.

I'm also fascinated by the thought that a very real Aleister Crowley might be preparing to step out of the shadows. My first reaction was to dismiss the idea out of hand, a redundancy too far, but upon reflection I think that it does have something going for it. The League is a text which forces us to recognise that we are involved in the fiction. Inter, intra and meta textuality constantly draw ones attention to the act of reading, what one brings to the experience, and our complicity as readers; as do those instances where Moore has his characters address an audience who may or may not be us (Hyde in Volume

## 2, Prospero in the Black Dossier).

In Century the introduction of Norton further complicates the picture. The character reminds me of a reader, specifically a reader of a comic or a book, flicking through the pages, able to travel forwards and backwards in time at will. His dialogue is less like conversation or riddles, more like poetic musings in the style of Sinclair as he thumbs the pages and something catches his eye. Oh, and he wears glasses - nothing says reader like glasses. Moreover he shares our interests, we know this not only because he's wearing an anorak (reconstructed wideboy or geek, Bobsy? I'm going with geek), but because he is a fictionalised Iain Sinclair.

Sinclair's proclivities match those of the fully paid up League enthusiast. He's a cataloger, a searcher after hidden symbols and meanings, in that way he can be seen to stand in for us, and by literally being located in the text he points towards the reader as embedded within it. His gnomic utterances hard to unpack because they represent his private efforts to create connections within the overarching text, and his personal idiom. If you and I were in Norton's shoes we would be equally opaque, equally difficult to decipher.

This idea of the reader and the text interacting, this literalisation of it, when added to the myriad other ways in which the text admits our presence (the musical numbers are another case in point), and seen within the context of a fictional history that roughly maps across our own and that is heading towards an apocalypse, forces me to speculate whether the world of the League is going to collide with ours? How could we not be included in the demolition of a space which attempts to capture all our fictions. In that way, is Aleister Crowley lurking around the corner? Will the "manque" or flawed Crowley, the limited fictional version, meet the full four-dimensional person? Norton's inclusion suggests that this outcome is at least possible, it sets a precedent, and encourages us to think about the ways in which we each experienced such collisions every time we open up any of the League books or indeed any text, be it made of paper or tarmac.

Amy: Yes, and that's why he's, in Holmes' words, 'Good with the occult stuff', because he unlocks the secret, hidden city. And, yes again, he is a reader, a reader of the League, which is why he's trapped in London, where the bulk of the League's adventures take place, where we're trapped the vast majority of the time.

At the beginning of this piece, oh so long ago it seems, I nodded to the idea that the League's meta-textuality might possess significance beyond the nevinisphere, and given the points Zom's touched on above, now seems like a good place to explore this a little further. Because, it seems to me, LOEG serves as continuation of the themes present in Ian Sinclair's work, transferring the psychogeographical instinct from the physical fact of London's streets to a fictional counterpart. Peel back even the remotest filmy corners of the League's world and underneath is a heaving sea of meaning and story, a readymade sacred space, transforming all its readers into geek-shamen. More and more I'm of the opinion that Alan Moore views LOEG as a way for his readers to unconsciously rehearse magickal thinking, that the League is an exercise in derive, that the process of reading it, and making all those connections, all that unearthing, will help re-energise our

relationship with the world outside of the comic. We know about Moore's concerns with the modern world, our lack of authentic engagement and interaction, the death of the holy, etc., and the League might just be the medicine he's prescribing. The League aren't extraordinary simply because of their superpowers, immortality, invisibility, a woman leading a group of men, blah,, but because they have a hotline to Mythos, the world is reimagined in their shadow, and a reimagined world is a repossessed world, plonking the power firmly at the feet of the individual, and once s/he takes ownership of her world again, well who knows what might happen?

These are heady, grandiose aspirations for an insy winsy cwomic, but nevertheless this, I believe, is what Moore's about with the book, even if he doesn't know it yet. I'm not sure it'll work, but I like his intention.

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One of the most boring things about many new action films is their ostensible selling point, the action itself. The constant desire to pile spectacle on top of spectacle often means any drama gets cancelled out altogether. I want the sense that my heroes and heroines really are in peril, not superbendy CGI people whose primary purpose has nothing to do with fulfilling traditional narrative goals like surviving, getting the girl and beating the bad guys, but rather subjection to a million and one loony toons style permutations in as many credulity busting action sequences as the studio can afford. What's more, I'm convinced Alan Moore agrees with me.

There's been a deliberate effort to scale down the action sequences in the League. We had the huge opener in Vol 2 and every book contains its own set pieces, but it's always been a far cry from the Ultimates and the widescreen urge generally. There's never the sense that Moore's attempting to outdo the last blockbuster, instead he spends his time on old fashioned things like plot, drama, atmosphere and character. He's also a fan of subtler, unexpected wins: he asks us to marvel at anachronism, often gently positioning the reader as someone experiencing an already familiar technology or idea for the first time, all the airships, proto-machine guns and rockets, of course, and, in the Black Dossier for example, concepts like 'secret agent', 'top secret', 3D and exploding cigarettes too. Moore wants to recharge these things, to represent them to us, and often does little with them except hang them in the conceptual air, so to speak, allowing their original significance to speak for itself without adornment, without ramping the special effects up to n.

And here he does it with a flare.

By the turn of the century fireworks had been around for hundreds and hundreds of years, but the understatement of the first two thirds of 1910, its unwillingness to show off, transforms this panel from one Mark Millar would dangle in a slip-frame on the side of the page to a full on event worthy of a splash. I understand that this page represents a significant narrative turning point and Moore's attempting to illustrate that, but in order to ram the point home he's relying on its beauty and balancing that with the lack of spectacle in the comic preceding it. I mentioned his gentleness and his subtlety before



and the flare is as good an example as any, especially when you consider what this book would be like in different hands. Some readers express frustration with LOEG's spot-the-fiction gameplaying, but, think about it, the comic could go so much further, be so much more conceptually gaudy than Moore and O'Neill make it. It almost wants to go further, doesn't it? Every page could not only be filled with Andy Capps and Blackadders, they could be swamped by every madcap fiction going. Moore's work is teeming with the potential to overdo it, and yet he never does. I suppose the best point of comparison I can come up with is *The Sopranos* - bombastic subject matter, but reigned in, keeping the explosions to a minimum, so when the big guns are brought out it's often to far greater effect.

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The orientalist overtones of Haddo's lair do more than nod to notions of occult and secret knowledge, they also presage the interests and fashions of the late 19twens and early 1920s, and this combined with Soror Iliel's convention blasting tattoos and aggressively self assured sexuality and the way in which the order aligns across their real world counterparts, the Golden Dawn, who played more than a bit part in the cultural life of the decade, positions the cult as perhaps this chapter's most thoroughly modern inhabitants.

In this sense, then, Allan and co. would still be out of their depth even if all the ancient magicks and whatnot were subtracted from this scene, because behind Haddo's mocking, contemptuous smile lies a completely different kind of arcane power, rooted not simply in times past but also times to come. This lot, unlike the League and the rest of the book's cast, possibly with the exception of Orlando who Haddo makes conspicuously short work of, are striding into the future unafraid, lounging around in the new century's ornate backrooms, biding their time. Waiting for their moment. These are people attuned to the times in which they live, people who will, if they get their way, in the end define them. Allan's crew appear quaint and cobweb strewn in comparison. It's the old versus the new and the new always wins.

I've heard people remark that 1910's latter focus on poverty and inequality represents a shoe-horning of the Threepenny Opera's themes into a story that isn't really designed to accommodate them. I originally found this line of thought pretty compelling because it's true that 1910 hardly spends any time highlighting the exploitation of the underclass, and it certainly seems as though we're supposed to take it as read that everyone has a shitty time without any narrative preamble....

Another BUT.

As with Orlando, one needs to look at the bigger picture. When MacHeath's song is viewed in the light of the series as a whole it emerges as a long overdue response to a set of concerns bubbling under the surface. From the squalid poorhouses and besieged, sky-watching Limehousers in Vol 1, the fleeing londoners trapped on the bridge at Nemo's mercy and the possibly hundreds of victims dying offscreen from anthrax in the middle of Vol 2 and at its end respectively to the enslaved inhabitants of the Ingsoc years prefacing the Dossier, the League has, since its inception, demonstrated a keen sympathy for the huddled masses in the face of a powerful minority. And nowhere is this more evident than in the art. Yes! This is comics, remember? Dirty, huddled poor people pour from O'Neill's pen like shit from an arse - they blister up from the concrete and leer out of the margins. His pages are overcrowded, infested with life, with its dirt, its pong and heavy fleshy electricity. It may be that it was O'Neill's art, and not simply Brecht, that inspired Moore to address the issue of class inequality in 1910. It wouldn't surprise me in the least. While Moore was trying to hack the mind of James Moriarty, his colleague was toiling away down there in the smoggy, festering london streets, and staggering out of an East End pub just as the sky began to rain fire.



Zom: So are the musical numbers a barrier to enjoyment as some contend, indeed do they work at all within the context of a comic book, a medium notable for its lack of an aural dimension?

Moore has been trying to get away with musical moments in his comics for almost as long as I can remember and mostly, to my mind, with questionable results. I can't vouch for those possessed of musical ability, but the absence of sound forces my brain into attempts to fill the space, an effort which I am ill equipped to undertake and never fails to throw me out of the narrative. Given that comics are a medium that can accommodate this sort of thing - you can reread and skip the lyrics for example, or you can come back to them once you've figured out how you want them to sound - I'm not absolutely against the inclusion of songs (I use the term warily), but I do tend to stumble over them on my first read through.

In Century my concerns are more urgent, at least ostensibly. The music is integral to the text: it foreshadows, colours, contextualizes and drives the plot, it emphasises themes and emotional tones just as it would if one were watching genuine musical theatre. In this way it's not unlike the use of music in other Moore works. The Limp's lyrics, discussed elsewhere in these annotations, were designed to make Promethea shine by comparison; the Vicious Cabaret in V for Vendetta serves an expository function and works to heighten the sense of urgency and drama, so the difference here is more in the degree of use than in purpose. The link with the Threepenny Opera complicates the picture still further given that Moore's musical numbers are variations on real songs. Moore expects us to know how they should sound and almost certainly intends to lend his narrative gravitas and punch through their inclusion. So when Jack MacHeath steps into the city night not only am I supposed to hear Mac the Knife, I'm supposed to feel it's electric thrill too; and when Suki Tawdry sings Pirate Jenny, I'm supposed to feel the music's haunting, sad and sinister presence.

Does this add up to a problem? If you're unfamiliar with Brecht and Weill's musical the answer has to be a resounding yes not only because you'll probably be trying to figure out how all this should sound, but because you're missing much of the atmosphere that Moore hopes to evoke. However - and I think this isn't an insignificant point - if you have access to a computer with an internet connection it's a problem that's easily remedied, after all it's not as if Mac the Knife is a tough tune to find on YouTube, and if you go looking for Pirate Jenny the first hit you'll come across will very likely be an eerie rendition by Anne Kerry Ford which I can't help but feel informed O'Neill's creepy depiction of Suki.

While we're about the business of making the musical elements palatable, we must also recognise that they have much in common with the intertextual references which are the building blocks of Moore's project. They might be more in your face than the references to Dracula and more difficult to process but the idea that a moment can be injected with vitality and meaning that hails from outside the text isn't one that any fan of the League can be said to be unfamiliar with.

It is interesting to consider that a subtle distancing effect might be exactly what Moore

is trying to achieve. Brecht is famous for his efforts in this regard and Moore's thematic concerns here are more explicitly social and political than they have been in previous volumes, so the idea that Moore might want us to be a bit less passive, a bit more engaged with what he's trying to say rather than simply caught up in the story or in games of spot the reference is far from implausible, particularly when you take into account his comments in interviews about how *Century* will address some of the real world problems of the 20th Century.

Finally, musical theatre in its modern form was at its zenith during the early years of the Twentieth Century, although its toughest roots stretch back to the middle of the preceding hundred years, and its tendrils weave their way through millennia all the way back to Greek antiquity, the time of Orlando's birth. As in the *Black Dossier*, Moore isn't simply colonising stories, he is colonising the forms of our storytelling and the moments in which those forms were in the ascendant. Maybe the next books will see him tackle film, the multimedia revolution, and our era of user generated content.

### *Pages 60 and 61*

#### Janni Destroys Everything

I'm sure there are those of you out there who saw the twist coming a mile off - in fact I'm convinced Bobsy, he of 'oh, Bruce Willis is a ghost!'-having-only-seen-*The Sixth Sense's* trailer fame, will have got it straight away and will be scratching his head as he reads this, but for all those who didn't, who haven't studied the *Threepenny Opera* since we were 17 and weren't paying that much attention anyway, and that includes both me and Zom, it's amazing to note how spectacularly well-flagged the true identity of 1910's 'vicious killer' actually is.

Rereading the book with foreknowledge of what will occur, it's so obvious Moore could almost be laughing at us. And not just because of the way the plot's heading and the obvious points of comparison between 'the *Black Freighter*' and the *Nautilus* and the *Nemo's* temperaments, but the ominous segues that presage or preface practically every scene Janni features in. From the opening sequence ending with Janni swimming towards the ship and Carnacki waking up screaming, to Mina, after the seance, assaying that 'ominous things are happening' right before we cut to Janni and Ishmael's meeting in her room above the *Cuttlefish* hotel, there are loads of such examples. Go and take another look if you don't believe me. Go on. Frankly, I'm with Bobsy now - it's amazing we didn't notice! Perhaps one of the reasons for this, apart from the more conspicuous red herrings, Jack and Haddo for instance, is because, the odd foray into furious psychosis excepted, in order for us to get onside with *Nemo* the first two volumes paint him as a fairly cuddly, likeable character, and his crew as an honorable, disciplined bunch, more like a private navy than scallywags, than pirates. But pirates they are, and despite the warning signs, both in this text and before it, we can, most of the time, easily dismiss these concerns as the racist fantasies of a British Empire intent on defaming its enemy, reducing all that 'science pirate' stuff to bad press.

In the end, then, I think 1910's closer, all the wanton, random destruction, comes as

an even greater shock, carrying extra charge, because it reveals something to us not only about Jani but about her father, Ishmael and Broad Arrow Jack we'd rather not look at - something we'd, up until this point, and let's face it we are four books in now which is a heck of a long way, been able to sweep conveniently under the carpet.

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'There are pirates everywhere!'

'Gosh, I like the sound of that.'

Moore is an absolute master of the telling phrase and this is such a good example of that. It's hard to tell what Orlando means here. Is he turned on or is he simply excited at the prospect of violence? The line is deliberately open-ended, isn't it? Because, yes, pirates probably do feature in his fantasies, given that not only are they symbolic of a particularly brutish kind of male sexuality but also because he's spent a good deal of time amongst them raping and pillaging and has a bit of a taste for the lifestyle himself, and, yes, he obviously loves a good fight. Sex and violence seem to Orlando to be very much two sides of the same coin. It's almost as though as his life has lengthened the distance between the erotic and thanatic has begun to collapse. One could put this down to a simple binary reading of what it means to be both male and female, both nurturing and destructive, but I'm not convinced this is what Moore is saying. Rather I imagine that he, like Freud, views these urges as fundamental to both men and women and that, even as everything else recedes, they shine more and more brightly.

Having said that though, part of me thinks it's interesting that Orlando has, as far as we know, never had a child. One can't help wondering how this would effect his psychology. Perhaps it would make him more humane....

Zom: I think that's idealising parenthood somewhat.

These pirates are nothing short of destruction incarnate, which makes Orlando's suggestion that he finds their presence exciting more than a little jarring. Thanks to the Black Dossier we know about Orlando's buccaneering past, and that he knows exactly what pirates are capable of. Ze hasn't conveniently forgotten what they are really about, and that it is precisely this knowledge which so enlivens his spirits.

This is the monstrous Orlando that Mina refers to, a creature capable of staggering amorality. The enormous capacity for violence that ze goes on to demonstrate reinforces this and is given an extra frisson by the way it rubs against the restrained, inoffensive and quaint idiomatic qualities of his dialogue. Instead of the blasphemous and therefore stronger and more appropriate given the orgy of violence that will follow "God" we get "gosh"; "I do like the sound of that" has the innocent quality of a line uttered by a child from a Famous Five novel, or by a Bright Young Thing. Taken out of context it points towards the onset of something fun, like a game or a party, or an enjoyable yet fleeting thought - what we get is Hell, and a Hell which Orlando must have been anticipating.



‘It’s not if you will do something, but WHEN...’

Alan Moore’s reimagining of Mr Mxyptk in *Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow* as a fifth dimensional being attempting to stave off the soul-fucking byproducts of immortality by adopting a series of bewilderingly arbitrary lifestyle choices, playing the role of a supernatural do-gooder or devil, dressing in the skin of an impish leprachaun and wreaking mischief on Metropolis, or simply not breathing for millenia at a time, serves as an interesting point of comparison to Allan, Mina and Orlando. In that the aforementioned are in every way other than their unnatural life-spans, human, their response to their condition will be limited by that fact, so sentient life the universe over can breathe a collective sigh of relief, no cosmic hissy fits are likely to be forthcoming, but their psychologies may be similarly affected. In the end its possible they could screw up just as badly.

The consequence and meaning annihilating perspective of eternity and the limitless potential for boredom could easily unhinge even the most stable and resilient mind and as Mina says, Orlando, the longest lived of them all, ‘is a bit of a monster...’ Perhaps the implication here is that we will all become monsters given enough time. Mina, with Orlando as her reference point, is right to be afraid, right to be disgusted by hir casual attitude to violence. Her anger in this scene isn’t simply a response to the monstrous events occurring at that time and at that place, but also directed inwards, towards the monster in her future, her own inbuilt capacity for moral callousness, for psychopathy. The future isn’t frightening simply because it is unknown, but because she is unknown within it. She and Allan have stepped into the endless. An endless capacity for anything - for, as the song says, love, but also for hate and pain and criminality, making a mockery of every moral and ethical constant one clings onto over the course of a relatively tiny average human lifespan.

Zom pointed out to me that Moore may be using immortality as a means to critique the current mindset. Okay, fair enough, his problems with the modern world seem a little

unfocused, a little confused - it's hard to say exactly what Moore thinks - but from what I've read I'd hazard that his concerns focus primarily around a death of meaning brought about by an extravagance of everything, choice, story, sex, etc and authentic experience having been replaced by simulacrum. If I'm right about this, whilst I'm loathe to follow Moore all the way down grumpy lane, I think his frustrations are understandable. There does seem to be a general resistance to the idea, at least in the West, that we live in a solid world, where everything can't just be reduced to a series of hollow narratives, that our lives have implication and consequence. It's not that we're always like this, we have to put food on our family table, but we're guilty all the time of confusing illusion with truth, with facts, our lives with story. And so it is with Mina and the rest. The world has ceased, for them, to produce effect - it has become like a film, consequence free; an event, a spectacle, sure, but not something substantive, nothing that can in the end imperil them. Can they be killed? Orlando survives Haddo's blasting rod, afterall, one hit from which is normally enough to kill a man. Perhaps Moore is arguing that in the end what will provoke nuclear annihilation, destruction of our biosphere, etc., is this sense of invincibility, the underlying feeling that we are supergods. Already having survived thousands of prosthetic relationships, adventures and armageddons, we imagine that we shall somehow endure forever and that our immortality provides us with a license to commit atrocity. Nothing is true, everything is permitted.

Zom: Assuming the Moore of 1999 has quite a bit in common with the Moore of ten years later, I think we can safely say that Promethea lays out one very specific problem with today's world: a failure of the imagination. Promethea's New York is a city lit up by police UFO's, science heroes and villains, towering skyscrapers, and the headlights of flying cars. Its inhabitants have access to astonishing technologies and miraculous medicine and yet there's hardly a panel which isn't sullied by rain or petty crime or homelessness. Human cruelty, corrupt politics and the tedium of day to day existence are still very much in evidence. This is a city that should be a wonderland but isn't because people have forgotten how to dream thanks to having their fantasies sold back to them in the form of soul crushing banalities like the Weeping Gorrilla cartoon (quotes: "some days are better than others", "I hate my body", "can't we listen to that Radio Head track one more time?" Mummy!). Elsewhere in the strip characters can be found munching Hezbollah Surprises from the Gadaffi Cafe and listening to rock bands that have mistaken posing for music, all the while above their heads radiant neon is harnessed to sell products.

And if all that wasn't clear enough, into the mix walks Promethea, a seven foot tall goddess with snakes made of magic and super powers that make the local superheroes look like kids playing dress-up. A creature, we're told, entirely made from meaning, that spends the first few issues (I can only talk about the first few issues because the last time I read Promethea was a very long time ago and don't want to spoil my reread by actually doing thorough research) being juxtaposed with the drabness of the city and it's fictional landscape and coming out tops. In one notable sequence, Moore has Promethea battling two rather spectacular demons from "the Howling" whilst the aforementioned band hee haw cliches from the stage. Moore's depiction of the pop group is more than a little hamfisted and silly and the scene itself hardly stands up as a genuine argument

given that Moore is happy to construct it entirely from his own biased viewpoint, but it makes his point in no uncertain terms: One of these fictions has weight and power, the other celebrates the fact that it's crippled by naming itself The Limp (Moore's ableism not mine). A couple of issues later Moore makes a similar point when he has Promethea punch out the magical manifestation of Weeping Gorrilla who up to that point had threatened to ensnare her with his siren whining. That Moore has Promethea break the morose monkey's spell with the words "I have to believe there's hope... I have to believe there's happiness..." is far from incidental. Which conception of humanity would you rather believe in? Which is more powerful?

Promethea hails from the supernatural realms which Moore, within the text, explicitly states are immaterial, built from the stuff of imagination. In order to become Promethea, Sophie Bangs must literally imagine herself into the role, better and brighter than everyone and everything around her. Moore's intention here is obvious: Promethea is an example to us all. If we want to live in a nicer world, a world of beauty and power and love, then we have to dream harder and dream better. We need fictions that will inspire us to greatness, not Weeping Gorrillas and The Limp. Whether you buy this or not is beside the point, it's Moore's circa 2000 opinion and I think it (Zom finally gets there) might well have some relevance for the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen.

As Amy has outlined above, Century and much of the fiction that depicts immortality posits that given enough time and enough vitality people will do things that would have once seemed entirely out of character, things which their younger selves might have considered abhorrent or incredible. They will betray their promises of love, battle supervillains amongst the stars, lose themselves in vice. As the man says, it's not a matter of if you will do something but when. The problem, while tied to the sheer immensity of possibilities opened up to immortals, is specifically about the death of meaning and value. How can anything stand out let alone be important when everything is possible and everything ends? Moore seems to be offering a solution to the problem with the troglodytes (see below for Amy's take on them), the suggestion being that in order to withstand eternity one could retreat into the caves, reabsorb oneself into earth and live entirely in the realm of instinct, rutting and shitting and killing when the urge takes you. Moore describes these "immortals" as possessed of an "ancient stillness" and the charisma "not of men but of mountains", these are creatures who have eschewed ambition and planned intent, they simply are. The troglodytes can't have a crisis of being because in order to have such a crisis you have first to put some stock in conceptions of being - the meaning of being. Mountains don't worry themselves about such things.

It is hard to imagine that Moore intends his beloved characters to end up in that kind of state, but what are the other options? Like Amy I'm of the opinion that the patient is Mina and madness is certainly another possibility, but after twenty years spent reading optimistic and surprising Alan Moore comics one can't help but feel that Alan's plan is a little bit more open ended than that, a touch more positive, a bit more unpredictable. If the patient does turn out to be one of the core cast I believe madness will be a stepping stone to something else rather than an end in itself, or that it will be used to signpost



a very real threat to those who haven't succumbed. The other possibility is to cheat and reintroduce death for all, although the idea that one of them might die is far from implausible, again as a means to bring a sense of threat into the narrative. Moore could simply intend for his characters to just keep on living and somehow find peace with a transient universe, it certainly seems to have worked for Orlando, however it could be a little early to say on that score given that our exposure to the character, the autobiography in the Black Dossier notwithstanding, has been limited, and Moore does like to spring a few surprises on the audience when the camera moves into close-up, especially where the League are concerned.

I'm wondering if there isn't another route, one which takes on the thematic concerns of Promethea, and Moore's cultural (spiritual?) concerns more generally. Perhaps the crisis of being that Moore alludes to with the patient (madness and crises of meaning and being go hand in hand) and with Mina's anxieties, and to some extent has manifested in Orlando's protean soul, and the stark and incongruous juxtapositions to be found in Century's text section, will come to be more overtly tackled later in the volume, and perhaps Moore will use it to underline exactly what he thinks is wrong with our world. Like the denizens of Promethea's New York, Mina, Alan and Orlando could find themselves unable to connect to what is of genuine value and that catastrophe could well, in turn, be reflected in Moore's pre-apocalyptic vision of the League's Earth, a vision which I suspect we've seen a glimpse of in Promethea. In healing the world - or attempting to heal the world - perhaps the characters will also find a way of healing themselves, and maybe come up with a way of facing eternity that works. The exact mechanism isn't clear to me, but flooding the world with meaning by building a bridge between the League's realm and the Blazing World - another iteration of Promethea's Imateria if ever there was one - sounds like a good start, and it's one which Moore has signposted heavily in the text, most notably in the Black Dossier's Faerie's Fortune's Founded where plans for such a link are openly discussed.

Promethea, a living, immortal story, describes herself as "full of meaning" and perhaps it is Promethea's "holy splendour of the imagination" that will ultimately rescue our heroes from the black pit of infinity.

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'I'm glad you weren't hung for your murdering, Jack. Us girls need protecting. This world's awful dangerous.'

is a line that probably baffles some people, me included when i first read it. One immediately obvious interpretation is an underlining of the idea previously expressed by Macheath's song that his lustful, passionate criminality is infinitely preferable to the structural, unconscious and inhuman derelictions of Class, Power and Status, that this devil is better because known, indeed, capable of being known, but I there's another reading that might not be readily apparent to readers not possessed of an englishman's toadying reserve and timorous, uncomplaining nature: Suki's suffering from that peculiarly british brand of Stockholm Syndrome, the one where instead of denouncing the Krays as horrid fucking murderers we instead brand them 'Good old boys' or at worst colorful

'villains' and celebrate the fact that 'They loved their Mum'.

Good old Jack, eh?

He's not bad really. Just a bit tasty.

Good old Jack.

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Moore doesn't share the view that apocalypse has to mean the end of everything. His cosmology, like that of many occultists, positions it as more of an initiation than anything else, an opening into a broader reality. The mother of all initiations, for sure, but nonetheless something that, in a sense, we should look forward to. It might be fair to say that the League and Haddo are in the long term working towards the same goal, and while Mina and the gang might not know this in 1910, who's to say they won't by 2009? Part of me can't help wondering if, like at the end of *Promethea* and that stunningly invisiblesque roof-of-the-world scene, we're approaching Vol 3 territory here, but I'm more interested in how the Moonchild's going to interact with other fictions than anything else. Does the child from the end of *Rosemary's Baby* survive to become the anti-christ? Or will it be Damian, hero of *Omen* novels, 'born' on our cinema screens in 1976, the year of *Century: 1969's* epilogue, who fulfills the prophecy. Or will, as is more likely, the Moonchild be a composite of them all. After all, apocalypse has become a composite event, one that is all things to all movie directors, and its harbinger's nature, angel or demon, must perhaps be equally fuzzy and unclear.

Especially considering all this moon business. Has nobody noticed this stuff sidling up alongside the main body of the comic? The two stories are completely interlinked. Everyone's all about the Moon. Not just Haddo, but Prospero and the secret chiefs of the *Blazing World* too. What are they hiding up there that they don't want mankind to discover till the opening years of the 21st century? It should be bloody obvious what, given the first chapter of *Into the Limbus* spells it out in massive letters: T-H-E M-O-N-O-L-I-T-H. There's no other possibility really, is there? And remember, it's not till 2010, when the world is poised on the brink of armageddon, just after *Century* ends, that world peace is assured and humanity is alerted to the presence of cosmic forces that build suns for fun, and that we may all be arabesques in a far grander design.

woah.

Or is she just plain nuts?

I'm going to go out on a limb here and suggest that the patient in question is Mina. We know that in the final book the Murray Group is represented solely by this individual, plus she's female, and it seems obvious to me that if the League had to be whittled down to one person, Moore would choose Mina. We also know this character is in psychiatric care, so I think it's fair to say that book two of *Century* concludes even more disastrously than book one. Oh, the speculation... Insanity in the League books is, more often than not, significant, provoked by contact with otherworldly creatures or realms, and this leads me to form fairly loose but nevertheless broadly specific conclusions about what might have happened. We know there's plenty of black magic in *Century* and one has to wonder what gets called down or what gateways are opened at the end on the next installment. Does Mina fall down her very own rabbit hole like Bellman and Alice before her? I can just

see one of those evil Kray analogues we've been forewarned about chuckling to himself and rubbing his hands together as that prying, stuck up tart whose been meddling in his business for the past seventy pages gets dragged screaming into his antique looking glass, struggling to free herself from the vice-like grip of the oversized blue hands clutching and pulling at her hair and wrists. Actually, maybe for a second there it looks like she might succeed, but then a great white fist roars out of the mirror's surface, enormous fingers wrap themselves around her waist, and she's gone. There is giggling. A cooing voice whispers 'Good glove' .....

Brrr.

Troglodyte People.

It's possible that the callous whimsicality that goes hand in hand with immortality is an adolescent phase, that there are moral and ontological possibilities lying beyond it. In this schematic the greek gods are revealed as little more than moody teenagers, pale reflections of the vastly more spiritually capacious, stately and above all else, inscrutable beings they will become given a few billion years. This is the kind of immortal Neil Gaiman was trying to describe in his first issue of *Miracleman*, one whose psychology has progressed so far past our major preoccupations, love, sex and death, that the motivating forces behind his actions are, from the point of view of us mere mortals, impossible to comprehend. And beyond this last vestige of selfhood we find the troglodytes described here, who are at last almost become physically reabsorbed back into the universe from which they sprang, into the trees and the rocks. Occult, unknowable - the mirrors of eternity.

And while we're discussing this stuff, it's just occurred to me what the water of life actually is: orgone. These guys are quaffing pure, undistilled orgone. Well, in actuality it could be any one of them, elan vital, the elixir of life, etc., but it does look an awful lot like Grant Morrison's take on orgone in the second part of *Karmageddon*.... So that's my theory and I'm sticking to it until someone comes up with a better one.

*Pages 74, 75 & 76*

There is an effectively unhappy tension between the first chapter of *Into the Limbus* and this one - the closeness Allan and Mina share there, as though they've both dropped acid for the first time and suddenly realised it's not a game, huddling together in preparation for the coming storm, in stark contrast to the dissolution and alienation evident in this sequence and those following it, with Allan and Mina separated not only in physical terms, but elementally, one exploring the earthly realms of the flesh, while the other forays into the lunar, the sphere of imagination, dream and prophecy. This represents, in microcosm, the amoral phase of immortality discussed earlier, where truth and meaning, where constants, are substituted for experimentation and pleasure. Where the boundaries are tested to breaking point. A riposte to the ennui and boredom attendant on eternal life.

It is intriguing that Mina appears more resistant to this attitude, one it's likely we would all fall into given enough...rope. One can only speculate as to why. But I think I may have an answer. I'll preface this section with the usual mindless caveat that I'm not overly precious about authorial intent, this is simply one reading among many, one I find particularly satisfying. Now, having got the apologies out of the way, we can get down to

business, because I think the whole thing rests on Mina's past and her relationship with Dracula.

Vampires, in whatever shape or form they arise, largely tend to say some fairly specific things about immortality. Whether as a consequence of nature or nurture, they tend towards the frilly realms of decadence and the dilettante. Vampires are gluttonous, defined by hunger, and often by an aura of luxury. They have a cold and callous attitude to all things mortal, detached, merciless and unconcerned. These are qualities Orlando shares and, by this point, Allan himself is fast approaching. Vampires represent immortality frozen at this point, rarely progressing beyond raw sensualism, other than in the odd exceptional case like that self-immolating chap from True Blood, or maybe Bill. It is tempting therefore to postulate that Mina, having enjoyed an intimacy, indeed, some sort of weird mindmeld, with one of these creatures, may well instinctively recoil from individuals that reproduce his attitudes and behaviours. She understands the uselessness, the futility and the lack of imagination at their core - the horror. While Allan and Orlando flee from the collapse of substance, Mina is seeking to actively engage with and create it, pursuing a project that will supply all life with purpose. The world of the League provides Mina with a familiar out - nihilism conquered by doing god's work - but even if it didn't, she understands that if meaning doesn't exist, someone has to invent it. She's the grown up getting on with it all while her teenage companions wallow in the filth of their own sense of hopeless pointlessness. You get the feeling there might be a mild tinge of jealousy there, and resentment that she has to always play the adult, sacrificing herself for the greater good because no-one else can be bothered, but moreover I think the overall tone is one of slow, regretful sadness. She knows where Allan's road will lead him, and she doesn't intend to follow him down it.

Ever the schoolma'am, she knows fun is fun, but it has its place, and it should never be the be all and end all, the focal point for one's existence. The armageddon waiting in their future, when the League has all but completely collapsed, contains this other thematic dimension. You can party till everything burns, one's own nihilism becoming a self fulfilling prophecy, or you can work, you can create, strengthening and bolstering this unmoored lump of rock, making of it a work of art, a thing of significance, you can save the World.

It's clear Moore's having a joke at the 90s' expense here. That is to say, WHAT IS THAT THING? Is he the first to equate Image era physiognomy with genetic mutation?

That it's also equated with supervillainy is interesting. Just as steroid ingestion leads to violent rages and mood swings in the real world, so are the super-steroidally enhanced of the League's similarly affected (see all the stuff about the Space Wizard appearing drunk). If that guy has a twelve-pack like that then, well, I dread to think what his brain looks like. Yuck. In the same vein, I believe the League books will demonstrate a decreasing interest in the idea of superheroes the further we travel, temporally, from their original source. This will serve a useful purpose in terms of copyright infringement, but it also conveniently maps across Moore's current view that superheroics, at least in the sense we traditionally understand them, are now irrelevant. And the failure of Mina's attempt

to forge a british superteam follows a similar logic, the logic of the third incarnation of the League, that a group of individuals that powerful and unstable won't be able to form a useful, cohesive unit beyond the requirements of some catastrophic but temporary event like the martian invasion, that beyond the close of the last 'good war', in a post manichean world where bold gestures and statements of moral certainty no longer have any place, they simply fall apart.



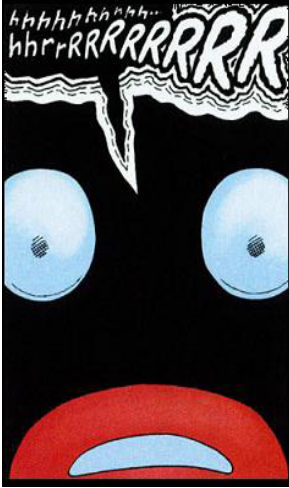
But, hey, the text section is set in the early 60s when the notion of goodies and baddies had yet to take a kicking from mass media, the death of Camelot, political scandal, Vietnam and the next fifty years of fuzzy wars for oil, geo-political leverage, ghostly WMDs and neo-con ideology... So, yeah, superheroes and their primary coloured moralism still work....just, even though I get the feeling the concept of the superteam's probably enjoyed it's last hurrah just prior to where we enter in.

There aren't that many (i.e. no) superhero text stories I've taken the trouble to read, so correct me if I'm wrong, but I imagine most of them are rather by the numbers, and I'm interested in the way Moore plays with this new (in the sense that nobody good's done it before) approach to an old subject matter. It seems to me he's using this as an opportunity to take advantage of our unfamiliarity with this form of super-storytelling and the way it ramps up the weirdness quotient, the tired superhero standards, solar fortresses, spaceships and other-dimensional science gods, reinvigorated by exposure to the norms of text: extended

descriptive passages, internal monologue and the participatory, total, yet open ended closure the reader's forced to perform when working with nothing other than blank prose. He's playing with our communal garden expectations of the subject matter right from the start, employing the text's voice, it's eyes, the conclusions it reaches and the definitions it arrives at, to destabilising effect. For example, as I said above the traditional way of reading the superhero's spandex suggests a brash, macho, swaggering ethical compass, but the in-text description of Captain Universe's costume as 'rose and primrose' serves to undermine this somewhat, softening the rigid, sealed off moral body of the superhero via it's intimations of early sixties good housekeeping colour schemes, twin-sets and floral wallpapers, complicating and feminising it. The narrative's gaze penetrates beyond the curtain, revealing a far more sophisticated, rich world from which the rather pedestrian, unreconstructed Captain Universe's emanates, but one he and the average comic reader remain blissfully unaware of. We don't require the latterly slathered on weirdnesses of view-screens on eye-stalks and poly-waters in order to frame the question we know Mr. Universe should be asking himself every second of every day - 'Have you ever noticed

how strange all this is?’ And we also have to take into account the possibility there’s a literal dimension to this as well, that the strangeness doesn’t reside solely in the cognitive dissonance inhabiting the space between prose and comicbook, that Universe’s mission control is identical to Mina’s and he’s an unwitting pawn in a game far vaster than he knows, the failed superteam Prospero and co.’s latest attempt to bridge the concrete and the imaginal.

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I’ll admit to a degree of trepidation when typing the word ‘Golliwogg’ and I’m grateful for the out Moore provides via the suggestion that this appellation is a corruption of the aeronaut’s actual name. Indeed, translated into his mother tongue the name not only loses all negative connotations, but gains a set of completely new, positive, ones. Sure, the Galley-wag describes himself as ‘common’, but this is an extra layer of meaning slathered on top of his name’s primary connotations which are a world away from the subjugated, fuzzy-wuzzy ‘little wog’ of colonial fiction. Taken one way the title ‘Galley-wag’ puts one in mind of a gallant, swaggering ship’s captain; a being with agency, depth, wit - sexuality even - the exact inverse of the powerless ragdoll propping up the marmalade market until the late 1980s, and, okay, taken the other we have the suggestion of someone toiling away beneath the timbers, but this is not where the character

finds himself now. Now, as in the first interpretation, he commands the vessel. He was a slave but now he’s free.

I think Kevin O Neill has mentioned that Florence Upton’s Golliwogg was intended as neither derogatory or racist, but in this I think he’s guilty of the common mistake of confusing intentionality with racist discourse. It doesn’t matter what Upton \*thought\* she was saying with her creation, the Golliwogg was obviously bound up with pre-existing, flourishing ‘darkie’ imagery - imagery it is impossible his creator would not have been aware of - that positioned the negro as, at best, a kind of fabulous, exotic beast. Magical and marvellous he may have been, but always other than human. But, yeah, I do agree with O’Neill that the character as originally conceived seems far, far more complex and interesting, far weirder, than subsequent incarnations, and even though I’m not convinced this was an attempt on Upton’s part to break the shackles of the Black Man, or that it affected the popular conception of him one iota, I’m very interested in the fact that all it took from Moore and Kev was a gentle nudge and this figure bursts forth as a genuinely successful, explosive, detournement of racist iconography.

Because that is, I believe, exactly what the Galley-wag is. I’ve already nodded to the slavery theme embeded in his name, and I want to continue mining it here because it is

a very strong thread running throughout the Dossier, from the looming shadow of the recently collapsed Ingsoc government, to the web of spies and surveillance Mina and Allan find themselves caught up in. A world with everyone constantly monitored and watched, where everything is under control, and the general populace are still, albeit covertly, and conceivably with a newfound sense of false freedom, being manouvered into specific roles prescribed by their invisible masters. There are cracks in the foundations, exemplified in the text by the space-port, bubbling under with dreams of unknowable futures and strange new worlds, but above the fruit lozenge coloured spaceships broods an overcast sky as claustrophobic, as British, as it ever was. No, it's not until the dossier's end when we arrive in Dunbayne, at the castle and the fantastic, moored Rose of Nowhere, with its bold and fearless crew, that Moore decides its time to light the touchpaper and set the 50s aflame with the rosy pinks and starry yellows and greens of a new decade and another reality altogether. The dramatic rhythms of the piece position the Galleywag, both symbolically and literally, as an agent of freedom and transformation. He arrives encoded with the energy of social change, of a revised physics and psychology, embodying the notion that the world is far bigger and stranger than the sub-reality inflicted on us by the current powers that be. The Galley-wag is the LSD in the ointment, reminding us that, even when things appear at their most oppressive, viewed from another angle there's always magic there - the little gollie transformed into the Galley-wag.

And anyway, while one could draw a, albeit slightly wobbly, line connecting the Negro to the Golliwog, the Galley-wag isn't a negro at all. The bizarre combination of Upton's newly unearthed ur-gollie with Moore's singularly unique and original conception (a superdense negative being from the underverse (a mindless one!) whose hypercondensed poem-speak wrecks bowels, initiates nose-bleeds and seduces peg-legged doll-ladies into bed) generates an air of unfamiliarity around the character which translates into a genuine sense of confusion when Drummond and others insist on describing him as a 'coon' or a 'wog', something he's palpably not. In this way the Galley-wag serves to underline the stupidity of racist caricature and the unfamiliarity of the bigot with those he denigrates. I'm certain Moore's well aware of this tension, and it is intended as a rather black joke on the nature of ignorance.

(But having said all that, the other day when I was reading the Dossier at work revising for this, I did so furtively, undesirous of the negative attention our hero might provoke and any subsequent arguments that might result, seeing me flailing about in an attempt to explain all this to an understandably massively pissed off co-worker and ultimately ruining my reputation in the call-centre forever. Apart from with that weird bloke who we all suspect might have, errr, goose-stepping tendencies but can't be sure....)

I'd also like to focus a little bit on the Galley-wag's aforementioned turn of phrase and what it reveals about him. As we've previously noted the thick, cemented together layers of meaning constituting much of his words echoes the super-density of his form, but there are other \*cultural differences\* expressed through his language. His insistence on referring to our world as a 'whirl' for a start, suggesting liquidity, a softer, faster more fluid universe, where the largest interstellar masses are more like gigantic whirlpools than

solid objects. Then there's his rather idiosyncratic oath, calling upon 'the Great Quim o' Singularity' and his greeting, celebrating and equating bread with tits, invoking not a masculine, solar deity, but a perennial, nurturing femininity, something that makes sense in a universe defined not by dispersion and explosion, but by contraction, where the sun concedes to black hole and the astral to the physical. Another fact we might glean, is that the Galley-wag, a hyper-sexualised being whose speech reduces everything - or at least an awful lot - to a wonky but nevertheless concrete bodiliness, comes from a culture obsessed with, perhaps because they possess such an abundance of it, materiality, with substance, and far from being afraid of his physicality and what it means, as so much of Britain would have been during the fifties and early sixties, he is joyously in possession of, and laissez faire with, his lusts.

I could go on about the Galley-wag's speech patterns all day, but I have other things to do, so just one more thing: 'sallymappin'. Foreplay and intercourse as exploring , a topologising of territories, mapping one's body and desires across another's. And from henceforth I shall refer to women only as sallys.

#### *Some General Thoughts About the Text Sections*

I remember someone on Barbelith complaining when Moore unleashed Dr. Moreau and his patchwork Kenneth Graham characters in volume two. He (?) felt it was a step too far, that it bordered on outright silliness and disrupted the verisimilitude. He argued it was unrestrained, that it represented a turning point for the LOEG books, from, as he saw it, a semi-believable postmodern riff on Victorian adventure and fantasy fiction to a superfictional freeforall. And, yes, he was right, the book had blown past its original remit - it was now beginning to experiment with the other, far grander idea of Ideospace - but some of us didn't think it was a bad move, and by that time it was hardly a surprise. While LOEG's comic book sections generally adopt a measured approach, the text sections are often positively bonkers. So far, the Dossier aside, we've had drug induced trips to the future and other dimensions, the zany geographical shopping list of the Almanac and now a trip to the moon on a flower-powered galleon. This is very strange, really, and it seems to say some interesting things about Moore's attitude to 'his' world. By the time we'd arrived at the Deep Dark Wood, the New Travellers Almanac had already introduced us to regions of the League's world that stretched credulity far beyond the simplistic meta-Victorian romp of the original volume. The signs that Moore wanted to take the book further were, however, there almost from the start, after all the Lovecraftian mythos that formed the mythic backbone of Allan and the Sundered Veil first emerged in the 1920s, but it took until midway through the book's second 'year' for post-Victorian fiction to explode into the main body of the text, and once the floodgates were open it seemed anything and anyone would be allowed admittance, from the Golliwog to the Just So animals. This is a bizarre inversion, this use of text section as testing ground and playing field for the less than dignified realms of general fiction, from TV shows to newspaper strips, because it refutes normal expectations. Text, and by 'text' we're really referring to books, generally provokes reverence. The book is the stately old man of media, comic books his retarded second cousin. We expect text to deport itself in a suitably respectable manner, especially when juxtaposed with comics, synonymous with



fantasy, pulp, childishness, even illiteracy. So why is it that here the reverse is true, that it is LOEGs comic sections that aspire to at the very least a token realism, that they represent, generally speaking, the more book's more conservative tendencies? The reader mentioned above didn't balk when the NTA introduced him to the bloody water babies two issues earlier, did he?

I watched the Culture Show interviews with Alan Moore on YouTube the other day and was struck by the fact that his only seeming complaint about the film adaptation of *From Hell* was that they replaced his gruff, working class Abberline with, well, Johnny Depp. Sure, the feature was only about five minutes long and must've been cut to fuck, but that didn't stop me wanting to shove the bearded one out of the way and defend his work properly for him. Seriously, that film bore about as much similarity to the book as the Oxford English Dictionary does to *Star Wars*. Not least because it genuinely is unfilmable.

I think many people are labouring under the misapprehension that *From Hell*'s footnotes somehow form a discrete section of the work, that, as with most books, they can be viewed as separate from the text's main body, its genuine body, in this case the comic. This way of thinking is entirely wrongheaded, as the *Dance of the Gull Catchers* makes abundantly clear. The vastness of the footnotes, their sheer unprecedented scale, transforms them from mere addendum to a work in their own right, but more than that, because of their intimate relationship to the comic, because of the moment to moment interplay of meaning between the two, and because one can't be properly understood without the other, I'd argue we can only locate the true *From Hell* in their overlap. A genuinely holographic work, *From Hell*, and impossible, therefore, to capture on film. I bring this up not only as a random splurging attempt to defend the work but also because LOEG has so far extended this approach across four books now, the dossier being the purest example, where the footnotes move beyond text into a many headed, hydraic, multi-mediated artwork informing every nook and cranny of the story, all the volumes and all of those to come I'm sure, and arguably this is the case with all the text sections, circling round and weaving in and out of the substance of the meta-comic. Post the Black Dossier, this has become impossible to ignore and I believe has begun to inform all our readings. When Bobsy described 1910s comic section as a representative of a new 'laser age', I liked it, not only because I think it sounds cool, which it does, a beautiful unflowering of the prismatic, but also because, although I didn't realise it at the time, it brilliantly described the relationship between *Into the Limbus* and the *What Keeps Man Alive?* If the former is a continuation, the next installment in the ongoing saga of a fourth dimensional narrative bouncing around in time and space, then the latter could rightly be described as a hyper-focused, burning hot laserbeam. The tension between the two approaches, one enlivening the other, is very exciting and feeds directly into the questions raised earlier concerning the playfulness of the text and the straightlacedness of the comic.

Moore's comic work has always had a cogency that other writers can't touch. Indeed, it is the same with his prose, with everything he does really, but it is the super-shape, the

composite of all the text sections taken together, and how they penetrate the text from above, that sets one apart from the other. I think either consciously or otherwise, Moore feels words have this freefloating, divebombing potential, that they possess a ghostly-soft quality the hard, direct pictoriality of comics do not. Words have less definition, are less concrete than pictures, permeable and able to permeate in different ways. Moore's comics have the quality, the straightforwardness, of the day to day, but the words surrounding and entwining them the cyclic, mythic qualities of emotion, imagination and dream. It seems to me that to Moore, unlike with, say, Morrison, to pictorialise is to make concrete, to make a statement about the way things are - it is a bolder move than to write - and so the text becomes a glorious unlocking of the image, its histories, its futures and meanings, the insane environs of its world. This is why the almanac can be crammed with floating islands stuffed full of flat-headed, coin eating mud-goats, or whatever, and we don't blink, the solidity of the overall picture fraying at the edges as narrative collapses into pure language, pure undistilled prose, and why it and the other 'bonus features' have the feeling of the alembic about them. Perhaps Moore would have a different attitude if he began his career not as an artist and script writer, but simply a writer: who knows?

AND IN CLOSING.... (literally)

Zom: What Now? The image image on the back cover is mired in ambiguity: is the woman awaiting the thrusts of a knife or the attentions of a lover? Has whatever was to be played out already taken place? Are we looking at a body or a woman waiting to die? Are we looking at agony or ecstasy? Exhaustion or death or anticipation or terror? The monochrome red and black suggests passion, but of what kind? Sex and violence are here held in suspension, both equally possible.

One can't help but feel the infernal heat of From Hell blowing over the narrative. The image is clearly a Walter Sickert pastiche and as any reader of From Hell will know, Sickert has long been bound up in the Ripper myth both as a player in the story and as a Ripper suspect. Then there's the visual cues that suggest that the people in the scene are none other than Jack MacHeath and Lulu. Lest we forget Century 1910 has established that MacHeath was responsible for the Ripper Murders. Finally, we have been introduced to Norton and by implication the psychogeographic concerns that preoccupy William Gull, From Hell's answer to the Ripper mystery.

By evoking From Hell Moore teases common threads to the surface: the unknowable might of the future, dark magick at the turn of the century, blood on the streets, murder and rebirth, the role of women in society. More importantly story and myth explicitly power both of these narratives and in this way they are open to receive each other on a level beyond the exigencies of plot, character and even fictional space. In this image such a union takes place and we are left anxious and wondering.

Amy: The way its fleshily claustrophobic atmosphere juxtaposes so deliciously gruesomely with what's just come before. The moonlit expansiveness of the text's final chapter is here stoppered, all potentiality narrowed down to a black and muddy red spotlight bed, to lust and murder. Is the woman in this tableau lost in the throes of sexual ecstasy or is she

dying? Although I'm sure she's supposed to be Lulu, the woman stabbed to death on page 24, and the man Macheath, I originally mistook the couple for Allan and Orlando lost to their lusts amidst the the labyrinthine bedrooms and dungeons of the Chateau de Roissy, possibly because their chapter was fresh in my mind, having served as the precursor to the text sections involving Mina (which can easily be understood as a single piece, one chapter neatly following on from another), unconsciously making the connection between their Story of O inspired parisian adventure and the image's sexually violent, S&M, overtones. To me, the image still possesses this ambiguity, and I think is all the more powerful for it.

In many ways it follows on nicely from Huckleberry Friends, serving as a continuation, and in some ways a literalisation, of its themes. Because if the Rose of Nowhere's voyaging represents a journey into the subconscious, the journey beyond the eye, into the Limbus, then it makes sense that turning the page we should find a woman dreaming on her bed, untethered from the physical, weightless, riding the astral tides on either the wings of Eros or those of an angel newly released from a life of prostitution and squalor. It's enjoyable, possibly comforting, to read the image this way, Mina as Lulu ascendant, free, escaped, but what if we plough on fearlessly into the image? What then? Because as I said at this entry's beginning, there's no way out of that room. It's the book's end, we can't go forward. This is it. Because finally we're left with Moore's usual philosophical caveat - when all's said and done we can never forget the physical realm, the messy, accident prone world of blood, spunk and flesh. The dream we're embedded in all the time. And it certainly bodes ill for the next installment - the skeleton in paradise. Alan Moore's explored this territory before, at the end of From Hell, where the Gull's victims appear to him unscathed, happy and whole, in heaven, or a laudanum dream, take your pick, but this is more interesting to me because it's a subtler, less obvious way out of the trap, not immediately apparent on a cursory reading, not part of the narrative basically. Or not in the way that we normally approach narrative anyway, from left to right, front to back. There is a way out of the predicament we find ourselves in. We refuse to play by the rules, jump off the board as Mina has done....

.....and simply slip the text into reverse and head back behind Lulu's veiled eyes.

'What Now' indeed?

?

