Comics Forum Online: Year Two Review and Comics Forum 2013 Call for Papers

The Comics Forum website is two years old today! Following on from last year’s round up of articles, in this post I’ll be providing a review of all the pieces we’ve published this year, and launching the Comics Forum 2013 call for papers.

Comics Forum 2013: Call for Papers

After a fantastic event last year, I’m pleased to announce that the theme of our fifth conference is ‘Small Press and Undergrounds’. Leeds Central Library has agreed to host the event for a second time, and the call for papers is out now (see below).

Click here to download a PDF of the call for papers.

We very much look forward to welcoming a diverse selection of academics, researchers and creators to Leeds for what is sure to be a lively and engaging event covering a wide range of aspects of small press and underground comics. We’re working on lining up a great set of keynotes and will announce them here in due course.

The Comics Forum 2013 page on the website is also online now, and we’ll be updating that with all the details as and when they’re confirmed so keep an eye on that to stay up to date. If you’d like to receive all the latest updates as soon as they’re released you can also sign up to our RSS feed (click the orange button at the top of this box) or put your email address in the box on the right hand side of this page to get every update delivered straight to your inbox.

As in previous years the call for papers was designed by Ben Gaskell of Molakoe Graphic Design. A huge thank you to Ben for his hard work; we think it’s really paid off!
The second year of the Comics Forum website kicked off with the launch of a new set of resources in our **Affiliated Conferences** section as we added information and documentation from 2011’s **Comics & Medicine: The Sequential Art of Illness**. Later in the year we added many more conferences to the archive, including: the Dundee Comics Day series, Germany’s Gesellschaft für Comicforschung (ComFor) conferences, Graphic Details Symposium: Talking About Jewish Women and Comics, The International Comics Conference and Women in Comics. The Transitions series also joined the archive, and was the subject of an article by Nina Mickwitz. This archive is open for submissions; if you are a conference organiser (or have been in the past) and would like to archive your conference materials with us we’d be happy to host them. Get in touch at comicsforum@hotmail.co.uk to talk about setting up your archive. Don’t forget that Comics Forum also hosts a number of other resources including a **Scholar Directory** and a **Digital Texts** archive, both of which are open to submissions. The Digital Texts section saw a significant update this year with the release of Steven E. Mitchell’s ‘Evil Harvest: Investigating the Comic Book, 1948-1955’, which is available for download in full and for free now.

This year saw the launch of a brand new monthly column in the form of the **Comics Forum News Review**. Edited by Will Grady and featuring a **top line up of international contributors**, the review (published on the 4th of each month) launched in November and pulls together all the major stories from comics scholarship around the world. New contributors are always welcome, particularly for countries that aren’t already covered by our existing correspondents, so if you’d like to get involved contact Will at: comicsforumnews@hotmail.co.uk. Year two also saw the continuation of our column in association with major online journal **Image & Narrative**. Charlotte Pylyser, Steven Suriacourt and Greice Schneider contributed a series of fascinating articles on a wide range of topics including blank panels, comics and poetry, social aspects of comics, Chris Ware’s *Lint* as a comic strip opera, and the depiction of boredom in comics. Head over to the **column archive** to read all the instalments in this fascinating series, which will be continuing into the next year.

We were also very lucky to be able to feature articles by a wonderful group of guest authors this year. The study of comics was the subject of my interview with Mel Gibson and an article by James Chapman. Padmini Ray Murray considered the importance of book history for the discipline, and Michael D. Picone looked at the problem of definition. Christina Blanch discussed the massive open online course (MOOC) on Gender Through Comics that she started running in April 2013, while John Swogger considered the possibility of using comics for archaeology, a topic he also spoke on at the 2012 conference. Sara Duke took us on a tour of the comics collection of the United States Library of Congress, demonstrating the importance of looking at original art in an article illustrated with a range of beautiful examples. The intersections of politics and comics came under scrutiny in articles by Cord Scott and Jason Dittmer. Laurence Grove looked at the early history of comics in his guest article, while Martha Kuhiman considered the possibility of avant-garde comics in hers. Elisabeth El Refai wrote on visual authentication strategies in autobiographic comics, and Louise Crosby and Helen Iball talked about the launch of Laydee do Comics Leeds.

We also featured a range of case studies, with Malin Bergström discussing Darren Aronofsky and Kent Williams’ *The Fountain*, Nicolas Labarre taking a detailed look at David Mazucchelli and Paul Karasik’s adaptation of Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* and Aletta Verwoerd addressing Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Eric Berlatsky looked at homo- and misogyny and triangular desire in early Superman comics. Other writers who considered specific works included Barbara Uhlig, who looked at Lorenzo Mattotti and Jorge Zentner’s *Caboto*, and Gwen Athene Tarbox, who talked about the graphic novels of Bastien Vivès. Hannah Miodrag discussed *The Long and Unlearned Life of Roland Gethers* by Shane Simon, and Fabrice Leroy talked about Joann Star’s *Fascin*. Most recently, Philip Smith has looked at the use of hybrid languages in Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese*.

September 2012 saw the start of a month long series dedicated to the short works of Alan Moore. Edited by Maggie Gray, who also introduced and concluded the collection, *Rummaging Around in Alan Moore’s Shorts* included articles by Lance Parkin, Daniel L. Wernack, K. A. Laitty, and two articles by Marc Sobel. José Alaniz also wrote an article for the series, and later in the year presented a fantastic talk on *Death and the Superhero* at the Henry Moore Institute in the second of our ‘Comics Forum presents...’ talks.

A number of our guest-authored articles were nominated for 2012’s Hooded Utilitarian Award for Best Online Comics Criticism; a thank you to HU for the nod. The final list of articles can be found here.

**Coming Soon**

Over the next year we’ll be looking to continue expanding our offerings on the website and presenting articles by top writers on the medium. We’ll soon be making available MP3s of the two events in the ‘Comics Forum presents...’ series so far and launching permanent pages for each of these events. Later in the year we have the 2013 conference to look forward to, and members of the Comics Forum team will also be hosting a table at the Thought Bubble sequential art festival as we did in 2012. This was great fun last year; thanks to everyone who came over to see us for a chat! I will also be speaking on comics scholarship and Comics Forum at Laydee do Comics Leeds on the 20th of May (next Monday). The event takes place at Wharf Chambers in Leeds from 1830-2130; do come along if you can.

A massive vote of thanks to all our readers, authors and guests. We really appreciate your support for Comics Forum and it’s only thanks to you that the conference and the website are able to continue and...
Suggestions and comments are always welcome either through the comments section on website posts or by email to comicsforum@hotmail.co.uk. I would also like to extend my personal thanks to the whole Comics Forum team, who have been generous enough to give a lot of time and effort over the years to make sure the conference and website run smoothly.

Here’s to another wonderful year.

Ian Hague
Director, Comics Forum

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I would like to thank all the contributors to this series considering Alan Moore’s short form works, and thank Ian Hague and Comics Forum for having us. I hope readers have found the articles interesting, enjoyable and thought-provoking. To me, they have certainly demonstrated that many of the acclaimed qualities of Moore’s larger projects are equally present in these more academically disregarded works.

Recurrent themes identified across the contributions include an exploration of the potency of language, as Jose Alaniz puts it, ‘the perception-shaping power of words’. Alan Moore draws attention to the ideological operations of language, the way it serves to demarcate borders of inclusion and exclusion. However, he also insists on the utopian potential of words, and their ability to remake the world. As Daniel Werneck points out in relation to Moore’s treatment of Aklo as a ‘language virus’, this focus on the ‘role of words in modifying a human’s perception of reality’, is closely connected to his interest in the occult, and conception of magic as convergent with the liberatory capacity of creative practice.

Read the rest of this entry »

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Moore vs. Albarn: ‘Between the Angels and the Apes’ by K. A. Laity

For fans of the esoteric the news was wonderful: Alan Moore writing an opera on mystical adviser to Queen Elizabeth, John Dee, with Gorillaz. It sounded like a match made somewhere in an alchemical lab with every potential of turning into gold. There was just one problem: Gorillaz couldn’t be bothered to come up with some artwork for Moore’s magazine Dodgem Logic, despite having the issue held for them several times. As Moore told it:

And then we just got through to the point where I just met them, I said, yeah, I can get the other two-thirds of the opera written by the end of February, middle of March at the latest. It will mean working flat out, but I can do it. You still alright for that deadline for issue three? And they said yep, and it turned out they...
While Moore's relationships with other former collaborators have also been fractious at times, there seems little reason to doubt this. Further interviews with Albarn have tended to use neutral language along the lines of 'Moore moved on from the project' despite the latter's clear enthusiasm and expertise on the topic. (Fitzpatrick, 2012)

In keeping with his usual habits, Moore simply got on with the various other projects he had going and published the incomplete libretto for the opera in Strange Attractor (2011). Damon Albarn made his own opera anyway, Dr Dee (2012). It received mixed notices; Pritchard in The Guardian called it more of a masque than an opera, while Christiansen in The Telegraph praised its dazzling staging and design. Albarn's CD, however, comes across as less successful, offering rather tepid meanderings into psychedelia - what The Quietus called, 'less philosopher's stone, and more curate’s egg: a handful of fine songs where Albarn plays to his existing strengths, but mired in a sea of over-reaching folly' (Graham, 2012). As Kitty Empire writes in The Observer, 'this record isn't anywhere near as dense with magic as you might have expected. Rather, Albarn remains nostalgic for a strange, lost England, one not a million miles from PJ Harvey's on elegant, moving songs such as "Cathedrals"'. (Empire, 2012)

Moore's notes offer a much richer—if nonetheless tantalisingly incomplete—glimpse of what might have been. The lovely thing about 'Between the Angels and the Apes' is how the notes reveal (once again) Moore's structural approach to composition; as Richardson observes, 'Rarely does a comic by Moore seem like it just "goes": every page, every issue, every arc seems to be following an almost mathematical formula' (2012).

Consider the opening section of the outline:

If we're to create an approximately ninety-minute piece on the subject of Greatest Dead Englishman John Dee, then a solid and conventional place to start structurally would be a classic three-act construction with sections of a half-hour each. This also seems to fit nicely with the triangular Greek delta symbol (which is how Dee identifies himself in the facsimile notes presented in A True and Faithful Relation of What Passed for Many Yeers between Dr John Dee and Some Spirits [Meric Casaubon, 1659]) and is also the elemental symbol for fire, which is in turn the element that represents the highest spiritual component of the magician or, indeed, the ordinary human being).

(Moore, 2011:242)

Moore further breaks down each section into subsections with flashbacks, framed by opening and closing scenes of the dying Dee in Mortlake with his daughter. Doing so brings a female voice and perspective to what tends to be a male-centered story in most retellings which center on Dee and his later partner in endeavours, Edward Kelly.

The elements of Dee's life and world that catch Moore's interest show his magpie attraction to the wondrous and grotesque. He wants the first section to focus on Dee's imprisonment 'for treason after casting an inauspicious horoscope for Queen Mary', when his cellmate happened to be the leper Bartlett Green (Moore, 243). Moore suggests doubling the role with that of Kelly 'to make a subtle connection between these two mysterious figures (both of whom had bits of their bodies missing)' (245).

It almost seems as if Moore comes up with the idea of breaking the fourth wall in the opera while he writes his outline, suggesting that the magician can sense the audience as 'spirits of futurity' watching him from the time to come. Like the final chapter of Voice of the Fire, breaking that wall breaks down the sense of certainty about the barrier between reality and fiction. His approach to Queen Elizabeth is that she's a kind of Faerie Queen, and he suspects 'that Dee's devotion to Elizabeth was at least partly erotically inspired' so imagines her as more 'otherworldly and erotic' than traditionally envisioned. This recasting of the much-reproduced image of the queen has the practical aspect of making her 'distinctive and unusual enough to make the character seem fresh again' (244).

To capitalise on the fluid aspects of live performance, Moore suggests, 'we will need at least two or ideally three performers to take the part of Dee himself. The main one will be the elderly and dying Dee who both opens and closes the opera, but we might need two other performers to depict Dee at the three stages of his life' in the flashbacks (245). Moore begins to sketch out not just the narrative of the opera but many of the staging and costuming plans. A fully realised conception begins to emerge from what had been planned only as a libretto, leaping into life like his own magical performances, bringing an organic whole out of a mix of words, image and sound.

For example, his conception of Queen Elizabeth, in which he name-checks Miranda Richardson's wonderfully demented embodiment of the monarch in Blackadder, suggests she must be 'strange and Fey' and should 'accentuate the fact that English royalty of this period (and, arguably, any other period) were incredibly strange and exotic creatures who were literally as different from the human beings around them as if they had actually been the faerie race of Spenser's poem' (248). She has to be a highly sexualised figure to demonstrate her
powerful appeal (and for Moore, a powerful woman is always appealing), but also to give an opportunity to employ 'fantastical and psychedelic' interpretations of period costumes, a theme he carries over into musical suggestions as well. Readers of The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen would find this Elizabeth right at home in the 1969 iteration of the League. Moore muses on 'intensely mathematical and Hendrix-fast harpsichord pieces' that might be inspired by letting the mind race over the re-imagined Elizabeth.

‘Between the Angels and the Apes’ is a fascinating look at a show that will doubtless never be, that includes some of the text as well as the notes for the piece. Taken in that same spirit of imaginative psychedelia, it can create an amazing opera in your own head.

Works Cited

Albarn, D. 2012, Dr Dee, Virgin Records [Music CD]


K. A. Laity has written several essays on Moore’s work as well as on various aspects of magic and comics. Her works include Owl Stretching, Chastity Flame, Unquiet Dreams, Rook Chant, Pelzmantel, Unikirja and many stories, plays and essays. Laity has been described variously as an all-purpose writer, Fulbrighter, uberskiver, medievalist, humourist, flâneuse, techno-shamanka, Jane Quiet scripter, Broad Universe social media wrangler, and Pirate Pub Captain, currently anchored in Dundee, Scotland. Website http://www.kalaity.com

This article is part of a series on Alan Moore’s short comics, guest edited by Maggie Gray. To read the other articles in this series click here.

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Posted by Comics Forum on 2012/09/26 in Guest Writers, Rummaging Around in Alan Moore’s Shorts  4 Comments

The Shadow Over Northampton: The Transmogrification Of The Lovecraft Mythos By Alan Moore by Daniel L. Werneck

‘The Courtyard’ is a short story, written by Alan Moore and first published in 1994, as part of an anthology namec The Starry Wisdom: A Tribute To H. P. Lovecraft. The prose was later adapted into comics form by Anthony Johnston, with artwork by Jacen Burrows, and published by Avatar Press in early 2003. The same publisher re-released this title in four different editions between 2003 and 2009. This success led Avatar to offer Moore the opportunity to continue the story, and Neonomicon was published in four issues from July 2010 to February 2011. It is a direct continuation of ‘The Courtyard’, to the extent of making the two stories indissociable.

One of the most typical aspects of the “Lovecraft myths” is how the author designed his fictional world to be an
open literary game that could be played by other writers. Lovecraft was joined in this game by some of his contemporaries, and even replied to them by reusing their characters or fake myths in his own stories, thus creating a rhizome of citations that grew without control, like memes, incorporating elements conceived by various authors into a masterful puzzle of fake occultism and make-believe mythology.

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Posted by Comics Forum on 2012/09/19 in Guest Writers, Rummaging Around in Alan Moore's Shorts

1 Comment

Alan Moore’s Lost Treasures: ‘The Hasty Smear of My Smile…’ by Marc Sobel

‘The Hasty Smear of My Smile,’ a four-page story which ran as a backup feature in the final issue of Peter Bagge’s *Hate* (#30), is a miniature masterpiece. It’s a capsule version of Moore’s considerable skill and the epitome of everything that makes him fascinating as a writer. The story essentially brings personality, perspective, voice and history to the Kool-Aid man character, a ubiquitous corporate mascot used to sell swill to unsuspecting children.

The Kool-Aid Man, originally named the ‘Pitcher Man,’ was created in 1954 by Marvin Plotts, an otherwise anonymous art director for a New York City advertising agency hired by General Foods, the powdered drink’s corporate manufacturer. Plotts, who claimed that the inspiration for the character – a glass pitcher full of cherry red Kool-Aid with arms, legs, and his signature broad smile – came from watching his son draw smiley faces on a frosted window. Fairly simple in concept, Plotts could not have imagined how successful his character design would become. Within just a few years, his beaming ‘Pitcher Man’ was at the heart of a massive advertising campaign aimed at America’s schoolchildren.

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Posted by Comics Forum on 2012/09/13 in Guest Writers, Rummaging Around in Alan Moore's Shorts

2 Comments

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Alan Moore (born 18 November 1953) is an English writer primarily known for his work in comic books including Watchmen, V for Vendetta and From Hell. Frequently described as the best graphic novel writer in history, he has been widely recognised by his peers and by critics. He has occasionally used such pseudonyms as Curt Vile, Jill de Ray, and Translucia Baboon; also, reprints of some of his work have been credited to The Original Writer when Moore requested that his name be removed.