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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Graphic novels have spawned a body of literary criticism since their emergence as a specific category in the publishing field, attaining a level of respect and permanence in academia previously held by their counterparts in prose. Salem Press's *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels* series aims to collect the preeminent graphic novels and core comics series that form today's canon for academic coursework and library collection development, offering clear, concise, and accessible analysis of not only the historic and current landscape of the interdisciplinary medium and its consumption, but the wide range of genres, themes, devices, and techniques that the graphic novel medium encompasses.

The combination of visual images and text, the emphasis of art over written description, the coupling of mature themes with the comic form—these elements appeal to the graphic novel enthusiast but remain a source of reluctance to other readers. Designed for both popular and scholarly arenas and collections, the series provides unique insight and analysis into the most influential and widely-read graphic novels with an emphasis on establishing the medium as an important academic discipline. We hope researchers and the common reader alike will gain a deeper understanding of these works, as the literary nature is presented in critical format by leading writers in the field of study.

This volume, *Heroes and Superheroes*, is the first title in the *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels* series to be updated. The other volumes in this series: *Manga*; *Independents and Underground Classics*; and *History, Theme, and Technique* will be updated in the following months. *Heroes and Superheroes* collects the heroic tales of the super-powered crusader and the exploits of the morally ambiguous or derisive anti-hero that have become the seminal classics in the graphic novel landscape. Whether it is the vigilantism of Batman, the doubts of Spider-Man, or the tales of Norse myth in *Thor*, the techniques and traditions of literature are perpetuated in this medium of heroes and superheroes. Stories from the Silver Age of comics through the current day have been compiled and dissected to provide viewpoints that are easily missed during initial readings.

### SCOPE AND COVERAGE

With 20 brand new essays, this two-volume set covers more than 150 well-regarded works of the hero or

superhero genre, summarizing plots and analyzing the works in terms of their literary integrity and overall contribution to the graphic novel landscape. It contains works from prominent publishers, as well as leading hero or superhero titles from alternative and independent publishing houses. The entries in this encyclopedic set cover a wide range of periods and trends in the heroes and superheroes genre: from the social relevance of *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* during the Bronze Age of Comic Books to the grim satire of *Watchmen* in the Modern Age; from watershed events such as the death of Captain America to the trudging narrative and complexity of *Cerebu*; and from the caped and costumed crusaders who justly contest evil with supernatural abilities to the flawed and tragic antihero or the unheroic, brooding vigilante and their moral struggles and complexity.

In writing these essays, contributors worked from original sources, providing new criticism and content aimed at deconstructing the centuries-old heroic story and portraying the graphic novel as literature. To that end, essays look beyond the popular-culture aspects of the medium to show the wide range of literary devices and overarching themes and styles used to convey beliefs and conflicts. Furthermore, critical attention was paid to originators of the graphic novel and the birth of well-known characters, as well as panel selection and relevancy, and a particular work's influence on the creators' careers, other graphic novels, or literature as a whole.

Due to the tremendous complexity that defines the graphic novels field, we acknowledge that some important works and creators have been omitted from this set. In addition, while the series has an international scope, attention has been focused on translated works that have been influential in the development of a specific graphic novel tradition.

### ORGANIZATION AND FORMAT

The essays in *Heroes and Superheroes* appear alphabetically and are approximately 4 to 5 pages in length. Each essay is heavily formatted and begins with full ready-reference top matter that includes the primary author or authors; illustrators and other artists who contributed to the work; and the first serial and book publication. This is followed by the main text, which is divided into "Publication History," "Plot," "Volumes," "Characters," "Artistic Style," "Themes," and "Impact,"

sections which are further defined below. A list of films or television series based on the work and a user-friendly bibliography complete the essay. Cross-references direct readers to related topics, and further reading suggestions accompany all articles.

*Publication History* presents an overview of the work's origin and publication chronology. Many graphic novels were first serialized in comic book form, often as a limited series, and were later collected or republished in book format, while other graphic novels were conceptualized as novelistic works.

*Plot* provides an in-depth synopsis of the main story progression and other story arcs. As an aid to students, this section focuses on the most critically important plot turns in the series or work and why these were important.

Where applicable, *Volumes* orients the reader or researcher to the accepted reading order of the work. For series, it lists individual volumes or collections, often comprising different story arcs. The year when each collection was published is provided. Also identified are the issues that were collected within a volume, a synopsis of the volume's main focus, and its significance within the entire collection.

*Characters* present detailed descriptions of major characters in the story, beginning with the main protagonists and antagonists. The section discusses physical description, character traits and significant characteristics, the character's relationship with others, and the primary role a character plays in advancing the plot of the work or series. To aid readers, descriptions include "also known as" names and monikers.

*Artistic Style* provides analysis of the work's visual content, especially as it relates to characterization, plot, and mood; analysis of the illustrative use of color versus black and white; discussion of any changes in style as the story progresses; and the use of elements and devices such as dialogue, captions, panels, penciling, inking, and backgrounds.

*Themes* identify the central themes in the work and how they are expressed—for example, through plot or layout—and how they relate to characterization and style. It also discusses, when applicable, whether a major thematic point is a chronicle of the author's personal development, or a projection of it, and how this may resonate with readers.

*Impact* covers the work's influence on the creators' careers, publishing houses, the medium of graphic novels itself, and literature in general. The section also analyzes

the impact of the creation of new characters or series, and focuses on the critical reception of the work or series and whether it was atypical for its historical period.

*Bibliography* lists secondary print sources for further study and examination, annotated to assist readers in evaluating focus and usefulness.

## APPENDIXES AND OTHER SPECIAL FEATURES

Special features help to further distinguish this reference series from other works on graphic novels. This includes:

- Appendixes listing major graphic novel awards
- General bibliography
- Timeline discussing significant events and influential graphic novel predecessors which spans the ancient world through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to the present
- Biographical sidebars on an author or illustrator related to the work profiled
- The two-volume set features nearly 100 photos
- Four indexes round out the set: Works by Publisher; Works by Author; Works by Artist; and Subject

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many hands went into the creation of this work, and Salem Press is grateful for the effort of all involved. Names of the original contributors can be found at the end of each essay and also in the Contributors List that follows the Introduction. We are indebted to our editors, Bart Beaty, Professor of English at the University of Calgary, and Stephen Weiner, Director of Maynard Public Library in Maynard, Massachusetts, for their advice in selecting works and their writing contributions. Both are published in the field of comics and graphic novels studies. Beaty is the author of *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture, Unpopular Culture: Transforming the European Comic Book in the 1990s*, and David Cronenberg's "A History of Violence." Weiner is the author or co-author of *The 101 Best Graphic Novels, Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Rise of the Graphic Novel, The Hellboy Companion, The Will Eisner Companion, and Using Graphic Novels in the Classroom*. Their efforts in making this resource a comprehensive and indispensable tool for students, researchers, and general readers alike are gratefully acknowledged.

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## *LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN, THE*

**Author:** Moore, Alan

**Artist:** Kevin O’Neill (illustrator); Ben Dimagmaliw (colorist); Todd Klein (letterer); Bill Oakley (letterer)

**Publisher:** DC Comics; Top Shelf Comics

**First serial publication:** 1999-

**First book publication:** 2000

### **Publication History**

The idea for *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* had been on author Alan Moore’s mind for several years before it was created. Already well known for both British and American comic publications by the late 1980’s, Moore first developed the idea for *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* after he had started on *Lost Girls* (1991-1992). Moore pitched the idea to publisher Kevin Eastman, who had advanced him money for a future project, and presented artist and former colleague Kevin O’Neill with an outline in 1996.

After leaving DC Comics because of various disputes, Moore worked for other publishers. Jim Lee convinced Moore to develop comics for his company, WildStorm, and so the America’s Best Comics (ABC) line was born. While the ABC line was forming, Lee sold WildStorm to DC. Since titles had been created and various contracts signed, Moore agreed to continue with ABC in order to keep the creators employed, while Lee created a “firewall” between ABC and DC Comics proper.

When the first issue of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* appeared in March, 1999, DC’s name was not on it. Though the first three issues came out quickly, the final three were delayed for various reasons, the best known being that DC Comics publisher Paul Levitz ordered issue 5 “pulped,” or destroyed. DC feared that Marvel Comics would take offense to that

### **Kevin O’Neill**

An illustrator who began his career in the 1970’s on British humor titles, Kevin O’Neill made his reputation on *2000 AD*, where he was a frequent cover artist and the co-creator of the story *Nemesis the Warlock* with writer Pat Mills. With Mills he also created for Epic Comics *Marshal Law*, a superhero comic book parody featuring extreme violence and sexuality. O’Neill is probably best known for his collaboration with writer Alan Moore on *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, a set of miniseries for America’s Best Comics, DC Comics, and Top Shelf. O’Neill’s art has varied tremendously over the course of his career, and alters to reflect the themes and ideas of each individual project. He is known for a mixture of high level of detail, period accuracy, and a slightly cartoony tone in his *League* stories, while earlier work in *2000 AD* and *Marshal Law* reflected a more extreme level of cartoonishness.

issue’s inclusion of an advertisement for a nineteenth-century feminine hygiene product called the “Marvel Whirling Spray.” During this time, two Bumper Compendium Editions were also published, reprinting the first two and second two issues, so that those who did not get the original issues could catch up.

As with the first volume, the second volume of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* was a six-issue limited series, and the first three issues came out promptly in 2003. An original hardcover graphic novel, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Black Dossier*, came out in 2008. It was not part of the original ideas that Moore had for the series’ stories, and it began almost as a “fill-in book” before Volume 3 could begin.

Moore had his final break with DC during the creation of *Black Dossier*. Besides problems related to a lawsuit over the film adaptation, Moore says that there



Comics creator Kevin O'Neill at the Big Apple Summer Sizzler in Manhattan on June 13, 2009.

(Courtesy of Luigi Novi via Wikimedia Commons)

was more interference from DC on this project. In addition, because of copyright issues, the release was delayed in Canada and the United Kingdom.

Because *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* is a creator-owned project, Moore brought the third volume to Top Shelf Comics, with Knockabout Comics distributing it in the United Kingdom. The third volume consists of three 80-page issues in “bookshelf” format. The first, “1910,” came out in 2009, with issues 2 (“1969”) and 3 (“2008”) released in 2011 and 2012, respectively.

### Plot

In the world of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, characters from various works of fiction exist together. The first two volumes take place in England in 1898. At the start of the first volume, Champion Bond of Military Intelligence recruits Mina Murray (recently divorced after the events of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, 1897) on behalf of his superior, “M,” to gather a group of individuals to defend the British Empire from an imminent danger.

Mina first locates adventurer Allan Quatermain, who is in a Cairo opium den, having become an addict.

When she is endangered, he snaps out of his stupor to help her. As they flee to the docks, they are rescued by Captain Nemo and his submarine, *The Nautilus*.

They next head to Paris, where Inspector Dupin helps Mina and Allan find a strange man who has been killing prostitutes: Edward Hyde, the monstrous alter ego of Englishman Henry Jekyll. After Hyde is subdued and captured, the group returns to England.

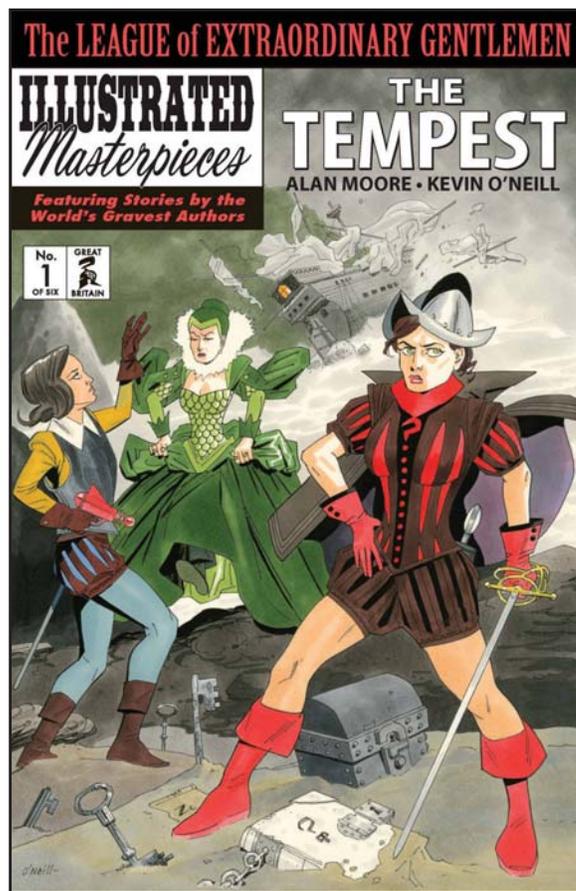
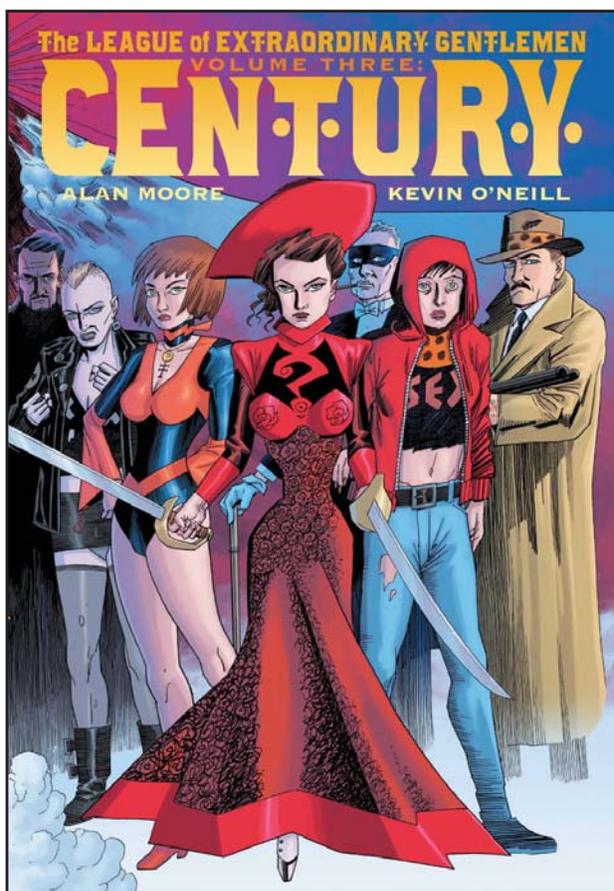
Mina, Allan, and Nemo next visit a girls’ school, where a rash of mysterious pregnancies is being caused by Hawley Griffin, the Invisible Man, who is raping the older girls. The team captures Griffin and returns to the League’s headquarters in their secret annex.

Hyde and Griffin are granted pardons in return for joining the League, and the group is sent on its next assignment: to recover the antigravity element cavorite from the Asian crime lord “Devil Doctor,” who rules London’s East End and who has stolen the cavorite for evil purposes. They recover the substance, but, after handing it over to Bond, discover that M is Professor James Moriarty, Sherlock Holmes’s archenemy, who intends to use the cavorite to launch his own aerial assault on the East End.

The members of the League realize they have been used and that Moriarty’s attack would kill them; thus, they go on the offensive. While the Devil Doctor’s forces attack Moriarty’s flying fortress, the League uses a balloon to reach it. While Nemo, Griffin, and Hyde go after Moriarty’s men, Mina and Allan pursue Moriarty, who ends up causing his own doom when the container for the cavorite is shattered and he grabs it, making him “fall” upward into space. The League survives the ensuing crash and, at the request of the new M, Mycroft Holmes (brother of Sherlock), remains together.

Volume 2 alludes to H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (1898). The volume opens with various races of Mars, led by earthlings Gullivar Jones and John Carter, attacking a destructive mollusk-like race. The mollusks abandon Mars and land in England. As in Wells’s novel, the invaders first use heat rays and poison gas and then overcome Earth’s heavier gravity by putting themselves in giant, heavily armed tripods.

Believing the “Martians” will be victorious, Griffin decides to betray humankind and give information to



League of Extraordinary Gentlemen. (Courtesy of IDW Publishing)

them. When Mina discovers him stealing military plans, he attacks her.

Soon after, Mina and Allan are sent to the South Downs to locate a scientist who may have something that will stop the invaders. After an unsuccessful first day, they return to an inn, where they have sex. Allan then discovers the reason that Mina always wears a scarf: Her experience with Dracula has left her throat horribly scarred. The next day, various human-animal hybrids take the pair to their creator, Dr. Moreau, the scientist for whom Mina and Allan were looking. He gives them the secret weapon they need.

Meanwhile, in London, a Martian weed has clogged the Thames, disabling *The Nautilus*, and the Tripods are destroying South London. Hyde returns to the League's headquarters, where he finds and kills Griffin (whom he has always been able to see), more for what he did to Mina than for his betrayal. Mina and Allan return to London with their package, give it to Bond,

and meet up with Hyde and Nemo at the north end of London Bridge, the last spot where the Tripods can cross the river. Because the weapon is not yet ready, Hyde sacrifices himself to delay the Tripods, destroying one before he is killed.

The weapon is launched and is revealed to be a hybrid virus that destroys the Martians. Nemo is disgusted that he has unknowingly used germ warfare and quits the League. At the end of book, Mina tells Allan that while she loves him, she needs some time alone.

Each of the first two volumes also contains a text story. The first volume's "Allan and the Sundered Veil" describes an earlier adventure and includes characters created by Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, H. P. Lovecraft, and others. The second volume contains "The New Traveler's Almanac," which provides more information about the world of the League; most importantly, it offers veiled hints that Allan and Mina found a

magic pool that restored Allan's youth and granted immortality to both.

The main story of *Black Dossier* takes place in 1958, when the government of "Big Brother" has just lost power. Still-young Mina and Allan steal the dossier, which contains information on them and other incarnations of the League. While running from government agents, they read the information and eventually escape by being transported to the mysterious Blazing World, home to earlier and later League members as well as all sorts of other characters.

Much of the dossier is text telling the League's history. It contains information about the life of the immortal, gender-changing Orlando, the formation of "Prospero's Men," and "The New Adventures of Fanny Hill," a sequel to *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748, more commonly known as *Fanny Hill*), featuring her adventures with the eighteenth-century League. The post-1898 adventures of Mina's League, foreign and future Leagues, a 1930's adventure as told by Bertram Wooster, and a 1950's adventure of Allan and Mina written in the style of a Jack Kerouac story are also recounted.

The third volume, *Century*, includes the threat of the mystical Moonchild, who may also be the Antichrist. Besides featuring Mina and Allan, other characters include Orlando, Thomas Carnacki, and A. J. Raffles. *Century* also contains a text story, "Minions of the Moon," set during various eras of the League's world.

### Volumes

- *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Volume 1* (2000). Collects the first limited series as well as the covers of the Bumper Editions. Features Mina and Allan's introductions to the League and their subsequent adventures in Victorian England.
- *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Volume 2* (2003). Collects the second limited series as well as *The Game of Extraordinary Gentlemen* from *America's Best Comics Sixty-Four Page Giant*. A germ-warfare weapon is launched at the Tripods. Mina and Allan become romantically involved.
- *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Black Dossier* (2008). Set in 1958, the volume shows Allan and Mina stealing a dossier that contains historical information about the League.
- *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Volume 3: Century, 1910* (2009). Features Moonchild and a cast of other characters. Mina meets with a time traveler who speaks cryptically about twenty-first-century events.

### Characters

- *Wilhelmina "Mina" Murray* is a character from *Dracula*. Following the events of the novel and her subsequent divorce from Jonathan Harker, she was recruited to form and lead the League.
- *Allan Quatermain* is an adventure character created by H. Rider Haggard in 1885. Though old, he is recruited by the League. He later begins a romantic relationship with Mina, and after having his youth restored, he fakes his death and poses as his long lost "son," Allan, Jr.
- *Captain Nemo*, a.k.a. *Prince Dakkar*, was introduced in Jules Verne's *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1869-1870; *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, 1873). A Sikh from India, he aids the League in the first two volumes but resigns after the Martian invasion. His death is shown in *Century*.
- *Dr. Henry Jekyll*, a.k.a. *Mr. Edward Hyde*, is from Robert Lewis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and is found in Paris by Allan and Mina. Over the years, Hyde has greatly increased in strength and size, towering over the others; he is also very resistant to harm. He reluctantly joins the League and is later killed during the Martian invasion.
- *Hawley Griffin*, a.k.a. the *Invisible Man*, is the titular character in Wells's 1897 novel (though Moore gave him the first name). After faking his death, he hid in a girls' school, where he was captured by the League, into which he was later inducted. Only his physical body is invisible, and he has to remove his clothes to be fully unseen; he occasionally wraps his head in bandages or uses greasepaint to allow himself to be partly

visible. After betraying Earth to the Martians and attacking Mina, he is killed by Hyde.

- *Professor James Moriarty*, a.k.a. *M*, is the arch-enemy of Sherlock Holmes. Believed dead, he is both the leader of a criminal empire and the head of Military Intelligence who forms the League. He is killed at the end of Volume 1.
- *Campion Bond* is one of the few wholly original characters in the series (though he is intended to be the grandfather of Ian Fleming's fictional spy James Bond). He works for "M" (both versions) as the "handler" of the League.
- *The Devil Doctor* is the unnamed leader of the Chinese criminal gangs in London and a rival of Moriarty. While not explicitly stated, he is most likely based on Sax Rohmer's Dr. Fu Manchu.
- *The Martians* are the version from *The War of the Worlds* and, as in the novel, travel around Earth in tripods and use heat beams as a weapon. However, Volume 2 hints that they are not native to Mars and instead were using that planet as a base.
- *Orlando* is the gender-switching immortal from several literary sources, most notably the 1928 Virginia Woolf novel *Orlando: A Biography*. Orlando was a member of several Leagues, including Mina's second one.
- *A. J. Raffles* is the "gentleman thief" from E. W. Hornung's stories. He was a member of Mina's second League until his death in World War I.
- *Thomas Carnacki* is the occult detective "Ghost Finder" created by William Hope Hodgson. He was a member of Mina's second League for several decades.
- *The Moonchild* is a magically created being who may be the Antichrist.

### Artistic Style

Moore's scripts for *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* were extremely detailed, giving O'Neill page-by-page and panel-by-panel descriptions, ranging from the number of panels to the position of individuals in a particular panel. Moore occasionally let O'Neill draw it differently and allowed him to choose some of the Easter eggs, objects found in the backgrounds of the League's headquarters and elsewhere that refer to other

literary works. Besides researching books and minor characters, O'Neill went to the actual locations where certain scenes occurred, sometimes adapting them for how they may have looked at the time of the story. One interesting design choice was that Allan Quatermain was partly based on some film roles played by Sean Connery, who would later take the role in the film adaptation.

The most artistic diversity in the series is found in *Black Dossier*. Besides incorporating the style of the previous volumes, O'Neill provided different types of art in the various text stories, often attempting to match the era in which they take place. "The Life of Orlando" is done in a more "cartoony" style as it was supposed to have been told in "comic cuts" of a magazine; phony turn-of-the-century postcards are "reprinted," and there is even an eight-page pornographic comic in the style of the old Tijuana bibles. The most interesting artwork in *Black Dossier* is near the end of the book, which is done in 3-D for the Blazing World scenes; on a few pages, one image can be seen by looking through the red lens, and others can be seen in the same spot by looking through the green one.

Some interesting techniques were used for the lettering. Not only are the styles of the word balloons different for various characters, but non-English dialogue, including Martian, is also left untranslated. While the Martian lettering was contrived, there is a correspondence to what Moore had in the script in English. (All real foreign languages were also written in English and later translated for the finished work.)

### Themes

One of the major themes, or ideas, of the *League* titles is the concept of the "crossover," in which two or more characters from different, and sometimes totally unrelated, works of fiction interact. In comics, this technique dates at least to the 1940's Justice Society, in which characters from various comic titles teamed up, and beginning in the 1970's, characters who are supposed to be in different "universes," such as Superman and Spider-Man, have interacted.

While many of the main characters in the League are examples of various fictional archetypes, Moore enjoys including lesser-known characters. For

example, a character from Victorian erotica runs the girls' school in which Griffin is hiding, and the students have ties to *Pollyanna* (1913), *The Bostonians* (1886), and *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903).

The stories also have an element of satire about them; the first stories partly satirize what author Douglas Wolk referred to as "the terror of Victorian culture that were expressed ... in its cheapest literature: the dangerous allure of the British Empire's exotic fringes, uprisings by 'Mohammadans' and 'Chinamen,' science gone amok, [and] sexual libertinism." The short story "Allan and the Sundered Veil" was written in the style of a penny dreadful (a type of early pulp fiction novel), and many text pieces in *Black Dossier* parody a particular author's or period's style.

### Impact

*The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* has had a great impact on readers, both scholars and the general public. When the first issues originally came out, they were the impetus for discussions about the sources of the characters; some readers even questioned how much literary knowledge was necessary to follow the series. Librarian Jess Nevins began to annotate the various issues, occasionally with the help of other readers. This led Nevins to publish his annotations in several books.

Moore has heard from readers of all ages in the United States who began reading the books referenced in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, including some of the lesser-known titles. Moore has said that he was "favorably surprised" that even the most obscure references got an enthusiastic response from the American audiences and that it "warms his heart" that this very "English" story is popular with American readers.

David S. Serchay

### Films

*The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. Directed by Stephen Norrington. Angry Films, 2003. While

Allan (Sean Connery), Nemo (Naseeruddin Shah), and Jekyll/Hyde (Jason Flemyng) are close to their comic book counterparts, Mina (Peta Wilson) has vampiric powers, and the Invisible Man is Rodney Skinner (Tony Curan), a thief who stole Griffin's formula. Also added are Dorian Gray (Stuart Townsend), who cannot be killed, and Tom Sawyer (Shane West), a young American secret service agent. M (Richard Roxburgh) sends them to deal with the mysterious Fantom, ultimately revealed to be M (who, as in the comic, is also Moriarty). This loose adaptation garnered poor reviews and became the subject of a lawsuit by writers who claimed that it plagiarized a script that they had submitted in the 1990's. Like all film adaptations of his work, it was disavowed by Alan Moore.

### Further Reading

Edginton, Ian, et al. *Victorian Undead* (2009-2010).  
Ellis, Warren, and John Cassaday. *Planetary* (1998-2009).  
Moore, Alan, and Melinda Gebbie. *Lost Girls* (1991-1992).

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Khoury, George. *The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore*. Raleigh, N.C.: TwoMorrows, 2003.  
Nevins, Jess. *A Blazing World: The Unofficial Companion to "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Volume 2."* Austin, Tex.: MonkeyBrain Books, 2004.  
\_\_\_\_\_. *Heroes and Monsters: The Unofficial Companion to "The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen."* Austin, Tex.: MonkeyBrain Books, 2003.  
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**See also:** *Planetary*; *Batman: The Killing Joke*; *Promethea*; *Watchmen*