

Issue 8, Winter 2005



"Ontology on the go!"

Table of Contents

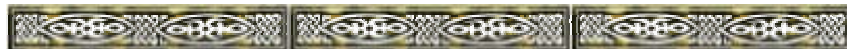
Editorial	<i>i</i>
The Noble Nature Lynn Loper	<i>1</i>
My Mother Hated Gardening Lynn Loper	<i>3</i>
Autres Forsytes, Autres Mores Kathryn L. Ramage	<i>5</i>
Poser Nation Kelly S. Taylor	<i>9</i>
Tearing Down the House of Morrison Chad Denton	<i>15</i>
An Interview with Phil Jimenez Chad Denton	<i>18</i>

This work is copyright © 2005 by The Journal of The Lincoln Heights Literary Society, PO Box 31513, Los Angeles, California 90031-0513. Copyrights for the individual articles are held by their respective author(s).

06 05 04 03 4 3 2 1

Editor in Chief - Ginger Mayerson; Editor Cache - Laurel Sutton; Art and Architecture Editor - Robin Austin; Business and Economics Editor - Ellen Bauerle; Gardening Editor - Lynn Loper; Politics Editor - James L. Capozzola; Religion Editor - Jane Seaton.

J LHLS is published three times a year on the web at www.liheliso.com.



Editorial

Gardening, literature, porn, comics... welcome to J LHLS Issue Eight!

Ginger Mayerson
Winter 2005



Lynn Loper

The Noble Nature

I really want my garden to look like the pictures in the catalog. I want Longwood Gardens in my back yard. Of course, they have hundreds of gardeners and volunteers at Longwood, and it's all I can do to get my husband to hook up the soaker hoses when it's hot outside. And Burpee doesn't photograph the stalks of their zinnias, just the heads, so you can't see the mildew. And yes, David Austin's roses look wonderful on the calendar, but for all I know he drowns everything in sixty kinds of chemicals and has a team that goes around wiring lush green leaves onto the stalks before a photo shoot.

But it doesn't help. I still want it, even though it seems that gardening is getting harder and harder. I don't have time and nature is against me.

Over the last few years, most of the summers here have followed a pattern: heavy spring rains, cold lingering far into May, making it hard to plant anything. Then it gets hot like someone hit a switch: 61F days and rainy on Tuesday, 88F and humid on Thursday. And it stays that way. Smothering humidity, no rain, temperatures over 90F that make the tomatoes drop their blossoms. Once in a while a thunderstorm blooms near us on the Weather Channel, but it always fades away or goes north before it hits us. The ground cracks, the dust blows around. The roadside weeds that started out so happily in the spring turn into brown skeletons.

So the May roses first get hammered by heavy rains, then cooked. The buds ball up instead of blooming and the delicate petals fall far too fast. This has happened in three of the last four years (the other year was an anomalous heavy rain year, and yes, I complained about that too). They lasted about three weeks instead of six. The annuals didn't get put in until late May, and the heat slammed them. Nothing got a chance to build up that green abundance down at ground level; everything was stinky all summer.

And the poor tomatoes thought I'd planted them in Mexico, and just gave up. We watered, we fed, but you can't really substitute for nature, and it's very hard to fool tomato plants. And many of the tomatoes we grew were eaten by a friendly gnatcatcher that sat on the chicken wire around the bed when we were outside. He defeated two nets and three pie plates on sticks. He was thirsty, poor thing, and even though we filled our bird bath every day, there wasn't enough to go around.

There were lovely things to be seen here and there this summer. I saw a bunch of cosmos behind a fence this summer in Lancaster that was just unbelievable. Of course, Lancaster County got rain. We didn't. And the Flower Garden Walk at Longwood was so lovely all summer. Red into yellow into gold into purples, with lots of butterfly-attracting plants (Note to self: remember! Pentas lanceolata!). But as I said before, they have an army of gardeners that work at night at Longwood. It's not uncommon to find that Tuesday's border of beautiful little copper-colored marigolds has turned into purple wave petunias on Friday. But most of the gardens around here were stinky, insect-squirrel-and-bird-eaten.

This summer, for comfort, I focused down onto one flower, one rose. I planted a new rose called Crocus that kept producing all summer, wonderful ivory-golden roses. As long as I didn't look at the thin stalks the roses grew on, it looked beautiful. My little Starlight zinnias love dry weather, and I had tangles of gold, yellow and white daisy-like flowers the size of my thumbnail all summer. Of course, they were tangles. Starlights have wiry thin stems that grow in every direction, angles, spirals, you name it. But the flowers are mostly pointing towards the sun. And there were zinnias up at the top of the mildewed, hairy stalks.

Now I'm stuck between the idea of a few perfect things and my dream garden of masses of color and baskets of tomatoes, and the reality of small beds in a shady lot near a busy road. I don't know what kind of garden I'll plant next spring. I've never been able to resist a garden catalog yet, and I have all those grubby notes about what did well, what didn't, and what I saw here and there that will probably lead me to try new things, none of which will do as well as I hope.

I think 'as much of it as you can get!' must be part of the gardening gene. I can't resist it, even when you know that it's going to be dry and that you don't have enough time or energy to feed and water all you want. I have to try. That's what being a gardener is. You keep trying, and when the rain betrays you and the slugs invade and you find several varieties of potato beetles marching through your garden, you focus down on the one rose left blooming. It's one more rose than there'd be if you hadn't tried.



Lynn Loper

My Mother Hated Gardening

For one thing, she didn't like to be hot, and the time when gardens in Delaware need the most attention is in July and August, when the temperatures run around 90F and the humidity around 100F. Living is sweating. You can go out in the early morning or late evening, but even then it's hard to tolerate.

She was afraid of insects. All it took was uncovering one big spider and she ran for the house. She loathed Japanese beetles, passed on to me her terrible fear of praying mantises, and mosquitoes left her and me with walnut-sized welts. Spiders live in mulch; Japanese beetles live on roses and azaleas, and mosquitoes come out in everything but bright midday sunshine here.

She said she loved flowers. But she didn't want to put any time into them. She would buy some 'Magic Garden' promotion from some ad in the paper, roll out the green felt, water it once, and complain when the gaily-colored flower bed in the ad didn't sprout by the next week. Once we saw some beautiful shrubs, American beautyberry and a miniature holly. She went to the nursery and bought some that same week. The nursery came and planted them. They left instructions, and I gave her an earnest lecture (one of many over many years) about watering. They were all dead in six months flat. "But I watered them!", she protested. There was no use in arguing. Standing there with the hose for fifteen minutes twice in six months felt like six months' straight work to her.

We found some tough perennials for her that came up without much care, and every few years my husband and I would go over and divide them for her: daylilies, rudbeckia, some liatris, some big tough irises. Three different times she paid landscapers a lot of money to come in, re-dig the beds, re-lay the path. Every time forget-me-nots and poppies and weeds ate them all.

Even in the house, on the rare occasions she cut some flowers and brought them in, she let them sit until the flowers dropped their petals and the water in the vase grew algae. "Nice flowers, Mommy," I'd say, and she'd say "Oh, aren't they pretty...oh," finally seeing them for the first time in days.

For most of her married life, she lived in a brick twin in Wilmington. There was a massive forsythia bush at one corner of the porch, a tiny flower bed fronted by a lawn of mostly crabgrass, southern ivy, and dandelions (our neighbor was devoted to Scott's lawn products and hated us). While I was in high school I kept the flower bed up, little marigolds and petunias and things. When I went away to college, she planted azaleas in the bed and around the side of the house. The side of the house faced due north and got no sun. They died and sat there, skeletons, for a year or two, until our neighbor pulled them out. The ones out front lived, but in tangled masses of witchgrass and other weeds. Point them out and she'd say "Oh, I know. I've got to get in there and weed." She never did. Once in a while our neighbor would whack the weeds in self-defense.

When she moved to the suburbs, there were beautiful specimen miniature evergreens, an oak tree, and some nice azaleas and holly planted out front. My husband and I spent two weekends building her a rock garden around the miniature evergreens. We mulched, we built a retaining bed, and it looked lovely, but in the spring she frowned down at it and said "There are no flowers". So we brought her splits of our own Siberian irises, brought her daffodils and tulips, veronica and candytuft, and ten packets of annual seeds.

She said she'd plant it herself, and we let her. The irises went in six inches from a downspout. The daffodils and tulips, candytuft and veronica and annuals went in under the porch awning, arid as the Sahara. "I thought you were bringing me things that would bloom," she said. I opened my mouth, and shut it. The next spring we went home, dug out some more irises and candytuft and veronica, and this time we planted them ourselves, in frilly little clumps in the rock garden, where they took and flourished.

So what about my mother? A woman who claimed she loved flowers and genuinely wanted a garden, but wouldn't do one thing to keep it up. The flowers under her nose could drop their petals, turn into stalks in algae soup, and she never even noticed it. What we managed for her went knee deep in weeds year after year unless we took care of it. Did she want me to be there, keeping it up? Not really. It irritated her to have us around weeding and watering.

I garden. When I was a teenager, I grew flowers in the front beds and tomatoes out back. As soon as I had an apartment porch it was covered with pots of New Guinea impatiens and geraniums and patio tomatoes. Now I have fifty or so old garden roses, perennials, vegetables, a cutting garden, and shrubs – more than we can take care of, really. But what can you do? It's a garden. You have to have a garden.

Last summer my garden was particularly fine. I kept telling her that she should come and see the roses, see the beautiful zinnias, and she said she would, but she always had something else that she wanted to do instead, something more important. And then she was too sick to come. She died in November.

I don't really know what the narrative is here. Cross purposes? I know that as long as she lived and as often as she wanted me to, I put in her gardens and watched her let them die, and I still don't know why. I tell myself that there are thousands and thousands of unanswered questions between mothers and daughters, and this isn't really that important. But I wonder.

J L HLS editor Lynn Loper gardens, lives and works in Delaware.



Kathryn Ramage

Autres Forsytes, Autres Mores

A look at moral perspectives in the various film and TV versions of The Forsyte Saga

Between 1906 and 1931, John Galsworthy wrote a series of novels and short stories that chronicled the lives of a wealthy upper-middle-class London family named Forsyte from the late-Victorian era to contemporary times. In these stories, Galsworthy introduced the concept of "Forsytism": the love of property taken to extremes, and applied to other people as well as to objects. Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga was immensely popular in its own day -- he won Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932 -- and interest in his work has resurfaced at intervals during the century since the first Forsyte novel was published, usually with a new dramatized adaptation.

There have been three major film/television versions of the Forsyte Saga: a 1949 MGM film starring Errol Flynn and Greer Garson, the massive BBC miniseries that kept a substantial portion of the British TV-watching public home at nights for weeks in 1967 (and led to the creation of *Masterpiece Theatre* after it aired in the U.S.), and the shorter Granada miniseries that aired in 2002-03.

Each production has, of course, noteworthy changes from the text -- parts of the story have been compressed or expanded as time allowed, secondary characters are removed, de-emphasized, or merged, and other alterations as are usual when converting text to film -- but what struck me when watching these various versions is how each presents a different slant on the key events of the story, reflecting something of the moral values of the era in which it was made.

The first novel, *The Man of Property*, begins in 1886 with 18-year-old June Forsyte becoming engaged to a brash-but-talented young architect named Philip Bosinney and introducing him to her extensive family of aunts, uncles, and cousins. June's father Jolyon (called "young" Jolyon or Jo; his father is "old" Jolyon), left his wife 14 years earlier to run off with June's governess, whom he married after his first wife's death; he lives estranged from his family, but is reconciled with his father after June's engagement. A cousin, Soames Forsyte hires Bosinney to build a house in the country for his wife, Irene. Soames is the "man of property" of the title -- the ultimate Forsyte, not for his wealth or desire to become a landowner, but for his view of his wife as his possession. When Irene has an affair with Bosinney, Soames retaliates by raping her (he thinks of it as "re-asserting his rights" over her). She leaves him, but Bosinney is run over by a carriage in the street and killed. At the end of this novel, Irene returns to her husband, having nowhere else to go.

In a subsequent novella, "The Indian Summer of a Forsyte," set 4 years later, the reader learns that Irene left Soames again soon afterwards to live on her own, and old Jolyon leaves her a substantial amount of money at his death.

In the second novel, *In Chancery*, Soames finally seeks a divorce after he and Irene have lived apart for 12 years, since he wishes to marry again and have a son. It is at this point that young Jolyon (now a widower for the second time) and Irene first become closely acquainted. Soames

has them followed and when he accuses them of having an affair, Irene says it is true, even though it isn't at that point; they become lovers that night. After the divorce, Jolyon and Irene marry and have a son, also named Jolyon (but called Jon). Soames remarries and has a daughter, Fleur.

In the third novel, *To Let*, Fleur and Jon, now 20, meet and fall in love, ignorant of their family history. Subsequent short stories follow up with Jon, Fleur, and the other surviving Forsytes in the 1920s.

It is the events in the first novel, *The Man of Property*, that are primarily of interest to me for the purposes of this essay, since they are the most morally ambiguous and, while all three film/TV versions generally follow the plot of Galsworthy's saga, are the most subject to reinterpretation.

Although readers through the years have had radically different opinions about their actions, Galsworthy's sympathies are clearly with Jolyon and Irene. The Soames/Irene/Jolyon triangle is modeled after Galsworthy's own marriage and his wife Ada's previous and unhappy marriage to his cousin Arthur. Galsworthy promotes a romantic "all for love" ethic in reaction to rigid Victorian morality and hypocrisy, and to the impossible divorce laws. This is a frequent theme in his work (for other examples, see his non-Forsyte novels, *Beyond* and *The Country House*): people in miserable, loveless marriages break away to try and find happiness elsewhere, in spite of the consequences to themselves or others. By these standards, we are meant to sympathize with Jolyon's leaving his first wife, and also with Irene and Bosinney.

The 1949 film *That Forsyte Woman* was made under the Hayes censorship codes and according to the mores of its day, which were quite different from Galsworthy's. This film version seems to address the more questionable actions of the lead characters by eliminating them. Except for a coda in which we see Jolyon and Irene married and living in Paris after he has become a successful artist, the movie focuses on *The Man of Property* and does not cover the later parts of the saga. While the basic plot is unchanged, the slant on events is so different that it's almost not the same story.

We are told in a voiceover at the beginning of the film that Jolyon did not run off with the governess until *after* his first wife's death. Irene and Philip Bosinney fall in love, but "think of the family" and don't actually engage in adultery. Nor does Soames rape his wife; the most he does to prompt her to leave is slap her. And, in this version, everyone seems to be thinking of June: Jolyon tries to keep in touch with his daughter, but is forbidden from seeing her by his unforgiving family; Irene and Bosinney feel guilty about betraying her by falling in love, and Irene tries to see June and beg her forgiveness after Bosinney's death. In the novel and other versions, no one who has hurt June ever considers her feelings until well after the fact.

The two miniseries have more room to expand, and develop details that were not present in the novels. As noted, *The Man of Property* begins with June introducing Bosinney to her family; Jolyon's first, failed marriage happened years before. Only a few details about this incident are provided in the text. We are told, via one of the Forsyte aunts:

"...young Jolyon, June's father, who had made such a mess of it, and done for himself by deserting his wife and child and running away with that foreign governess.... A sad blow, though there had been no public scandal, most fortunately, Jo's wife seeking for no divorce! A long time ago! And when June's mother died, six years ago, Jo had married that woman, and they had two children now, so she had heard." (*The Man of Property*, Chapter 1)

Both miniseries begin at this point, and fill in the gaps according to their own lights.

The 1960s saw the beginning of what the British call "the permissive society," and a revival of free-love sensibilities in reaction to rigid social conventions -- rather like the era Galsworthy was writing about. The 1967 miniseries reflects these sensibilities. When Jo embarks on his affair with the governess Helene, he first rejects the conventional hypocrisy of keeping a mistress in secret, and only agrees to this arrangement at Helene's urging rather than create a scandal that would damage his reputation more than hers. It is only when his family finds out and his wife confronts him about the affair that he leaves her to live with Helene. Jolyon's position is made more sympathetic by additional scenes that portray his first wife as a vindictive bitch; she visits her husband's mistress to say a few cruel things, and refuses to divorce him. It is also suggested that she doesn't like sex and hasn't slept with Jolyon in years (which creates an odd double standard, since we are to sympathize with Irene in a similar marital condition).

The 2002 miniseries' values take a more family-oriented turn. While modern mores aren't as inflexible with regard to extramarital sex as they were in the Victorian era or mid-20th century, it isn't as easy these days to create a sympathetic hero who is having an affair with the governess behind his wife's back. In this version, Jolyon and Helene fall in love innocently; in fact, they don't even acknowledge their feelings for each other until after his wife and father voice their (for the moment unfounded) suspicions about the relationship and tell Jolyon he must fire Helene. Instead, the two confess their mutual love; Jolyon makes his choice, and leaves with Helene. Although Jolyon's first wife is not developed as extensively as she is in the earlier miniseries, we are again informed that there is "no love, no passion" between them, "only a daughter."

A father leaving his child is harder to sympathize with too, and in this recent miniseries, the subject of what to do about 4-year-old June is briefly discussed. Jolyon assures his wife that he wouldn't dream of taking her child away from her. This line is in keeping with Victorian law, by which children were considered the property of the father and, in a separation, a man could prevent his estranged wife from seeing them. I believe that it's meant to show Jolyon being generous to his wife by leaving June with her, rather than taking the child with him. Also, when Jolyon is reconciled with his family years later, there are scenes in which he expresses regret at being separated from his now grown-up daughter, and makes efforts to be on fatherly terms with June.

The novels provide more information on Soames' and Irene's courtship and early marriage, enough to see that the two were headed for trouble before Bosinney came in. We are told that Soames pursued Irene doggedly for over a year, and she refused him several times before accepting, with the following condition: "that if their marriage were not a success, she should be

as free as if she had never married him!" (*The Man of Property*, Part 2, Chapter 1) Soames does promise this, with no intention of keeping it, and will not agree to let Irene go when she asks him to. In *To Let*, Jolyon writes a letter to his son Jon, explaining the family history and why Irene's first marriage was such a disaster, presumably as Irene explained it to him (To sum it up, the first sexual experience came as something of a shock to the Victorian and utterly ignorant young Irene, and Soames' insistence on his marital rights only made a bad situation worse).

Both miniseries present some aspects of this failure. The later version is more explicit: the 1967 version hints at Irene's first miserable experience by showing her crying on her wedding night; in 2002, we are given a lengthy and uncomfortable-looking sex scene, immediately followed by Irene going into the bathroom for a contraceptive douche. Likewise, the rape scene is made more explicit in the more recent version.

While all three film/TV versions of *The Forsyte Saga* end at different points, it's interesting to note that each closes on forgiveness, or lack of it, between Soames and Irene. At the end of the 1949 film, Soames offers to buy a portrait of Irene that Jolyon has painted, and Irene expresses pity for him -- but there is less to forgive on both sides here. In the 2003 miniseries, Soames tells his daughter what he did to Irene, and that he regrets it; he sees how Irene flinches and runs from him whenever they meet. He obtains not only Fleur's forgiveness but Irene's, for in the final scenes, she agrees to shake his hand. While there is no traditional happy ending, this emotional resolution lets this version conclude on an optimistic note. This stands in sharp contrast to a similar scene near the end of the 1967 miniseries, where Soames, who has never felt guilty about the rape and continues to hate Irene for leaving him even 30 years later, refuses to take her hand when she offers it. There is no emotional resolution for these two.

References:

The Forsyte Saga

Quotations taken from the online text at

<http://www.classicreader.com/booktoc.php/sid.1/bookid.1839/>

That Forsyte Woman (1949)

<http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0041955/>

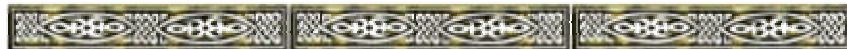
The Forsyte Saga (1967)

<http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0061253/>

The Forsyte Saga (2002)

<http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0260615/>

Kathryn L. Ramage lives in Maryland with her cats, Austen and Lucia. She studied literature at a British university, and likes to return to England for visits every 2 or 3 years.



Kelly S. Taylor

Poser Nation

My grad students love John Berger. His book *Ways of Seeing* is always their favorite reading assignment from my theory class. It could be because Berger's writing is simultaneously accessible and provocative. Or it could be because the book is filled with pictures of naked people. (In case you are suddenly considering graduate work, let me hasten to inform you that this -- regrettably -- is not the norm for theoretical works.) Berger's book deals with visual rhetoric, specifically how the conventions of art subtly communicate cultural values.

Last fall, my students were doubly pleased when I made a connection between Berger's observations on oil painting and artwork generated using Poser, my 3D graphics obsession of choice. I attribute my students' increased enthusiasm for this unit of study to either of the following:

1. They were challenged by the implications of my application of Berger's observations about seventeenth century iconography to the products of twenty-first century graphics technology.
2. They were pleased and surprised that their professor was telling them where to find free porn.

I know not into which of these camps you may fall, dear reader, but I hope that you too will find some value in my musings on this subject.

First, let's look at what Berger has to say about oil paintings. "Why oil paintings?" I always ask my students. "Why not watercolors or pastels?" They look back at me as if in response to the beginning of a bad knock-knock joke. For a generation whose primary experience of the process of creating with oils is limited to bad memories of paint-by-numbers disasters, it's hard to grasp the cachet of wealth, privilege, and exclusivity once implicitly communicated by this art form.

Non-artists are usually not aware of the economics of oil paintings. The materials for this medium are more expensive than watercolors or pastels -- in addition to being more messy and smelly. Oils dry very slowly. This quality tends to make producing a work into a labor-intensive process involving sketching, undercoating, layering tone, and endless hours of refinement of an image. In short, oil paintings were considered luxury items in their heyday because they tended to be more expensive to buy. They were more expensive to buy because they were more expensive to produce.

Oil paintings are still luxury items. You probably don't own one unless you are a current or former art student or a patron of the local "Starving Artist" group. However, thanks to Gutenberg, you're probably not suffering from a lack of access to this art form. If you get a sudden hankering to add some oil-painted loveliness to your abode, you can run down to Wal-Mart and buy a nice, framed picture of an oil painting for less than \$50. If your need is more intense and your funds are less abundant, you can google your chosen image, print it off and

thumbtack it to your wall for mere pennies. Two hundred years ago, our non-wealthy ancestors were not so fortunate.

I have a colleague who is very fond of DaVinci's Mona Lisa. His office is decorated with Mona Lisa greeting cards, ties, stamps, mugs, and scores of other assorted Mona Lisa junka-mo-bilia. In the 1700 and 1800's, a non-wealthy, non-art historian American might go through their entire life without ever seeing even one reproduction of that famous painting. For an individual of modest means without a connection to the art world to own as many reproductions as my friend does would be bizarre (Well, it's still a little bizarre, but not anywhere as bad as our department secretary's collection of circus clown paintings).

Another characteristic of oil paintings that photography has taught us to ignore is the ability of the medium to realistically re-create the rich carnality of flesh and other desirable surfaces. Watercolors and pastels always remind you that you are looking at an artificial image. The rich, subtle tones of oil can trick the eye into believing that you're looking at the real thing. In less than a generation, though, Photoshop has almost single-handedly replaced the pleasure we once took in trompe l'oeil with paranoia. We've gone from "Oh, that fruit looks so real I could eat it!" to "Is Hillary Clinton really holding an alien baby?"

Berger focuses most of his attention in *Ways of Seeing* on the implications of sense of ownership communicated by the "more real than real" images in oil. Oil paintings were not just a luxury item that one could possess; they were a luxury item that documented other luxury items that one also possessed in a way that preserved the aspects of appearance that made those items so desirable. Now we're not talking here about the classics of art history. We're talking about the kind of work the average oil painter had to do to keep gruel and grog on the table. Stop thinking about the Mona Lisa and start imagining hundreds of images of anemic looking English people, their big houses, and their not-so-anemic cows painted by Gainsborough wanna-bes. (Yes, there were artists who made the big bucks by specializing in painting livestock. No, their names are not known today, but what do they care? They ate three meals a day and died with both ears still on.)

Most people have no problem at all with looking at a richly colored image of a country estate, a prize bull, a lovely velvet gown, or a delicious bowl of fruit and saying, "Yes. This picture was painted and/or commissioned and/or owned by someone who wants to celebrate owning this very nice thing. Even owning a copy of this painting lets me vicariously enjoy owning this nice thing." It gets sticky, though, when there are pictures of people. We're not supposed to enjoy owning other people. Things get really rocky when the pictures are of women because Well, you go far enough down that road and it's gonna to end up with some white man not getting a job. At the risk of making himself unemployable, art historian and white guy Berger has bravely pointed out the following characteristics of the portrayal of female nudes in classical oil paintings:

- Female nudes always seem to be aware of being seen by the spectator. Frequently their gaze is directed at the viewer.
- Women's bodies are arranged to be on display for the man looking at the picture, even if this results in an uncomfortable, somewhat contorted pose.

- Beauty is competitive. When multiple women are displayed, their positions imply they are jockeying for a favorable position to offer themselves to the spectator or a male figure in the painting.
- Whereas a man's presence is dependant on the promise of power he embodies, a woman's presence expresses what can and cannot be done to her.
- Nakedness is a sign of submission to the owner's feelings or demands.
- Nudes are portrayed with passive expressions. Women feed appetite. They do not seem to have their own.

Well, great, you say. Sexist people living in sexist times had sexist art. Duh. Thank you for this entry in the Journal of the Blatantly Obvious.

Let's leave aside for the moment the impact it has on girls and non-white children to show them pictures where women and people of color are portrayed as trophies and fashion accessories while you tell them that these are works of genius. Let us instead look at the legacy of this Western art tradition. In his book, Berger discusses how iconographic conventions for posing subjects established by oil painters live on today in photography and advertising. I want to look at how it is manifested in our newest art medium, digital painting.

This brings us (finally!) to the free porn. Poser is a 3d graphics program created and distributed by Curious Labs (who I just found have recently changed their name to Efrontiers. Here is their website if you'd care to visit and download a demo of this program: <http://www.e-frontier.com/>). The program is relatively affordable (around \$200 as compared to \$1,000 + for similar programs). You may have seen images and animations created in Poser without knowing it. I've spotted Poser 4's default human models (affectionately known by users as Posette and Dork) in cutscenes from video games and ads on television. My grocery store has a continuous loop of them demonstrating how to use the self-service aisle. On the 'Net you've seen Poser generated images on websites, in ads, and in porn.

Let me make clear that there is nothing inherently lewd or salacious about this program. It is simply an art program that specializes in 3d models of human figures. Although the models are nude, the program provides an abundance of clothing for them. The default poses included in the package are very carefully non-sexual. Curious Labs even offers a "child-safe" version of the program that renders the models' skin textures in smooth, hairless Barbie form (because obviously it's the hair that's the problem). I also don't want to lead you to believe that everyone who owns a copy of Poser produces erotica (especially not solid-citizen professorial types like your author [Just in case my bosses or family happen to read this]). I'm sure there are artists who quickly clothe their pixel puppets and never render them doing anything more erotic than hugging a puppy. However, the Internet provides ample evidence that the creative imaginings of most people, when given a malleable manikin that they can pose or even animate in any position, will lightly turn to porn.

Despite my obvious fascination with the psychological impulses that drive the average user to put their computer dollies in compromising positions and take pictures of them, what I'm here to

discuss is the themes that emerge in the images that are generated and the methods with which we consume those images.

There are also important similarities and differences in the way we consume oil paintings and digital art. One reason why it may seem odd to talk about the erotic appeal of oil paintings is that the primary place where most people see them is in a museum. Most museums tend to be about as erotic as a dentist's office. They are also very public places, where even if you are alone, you are aware that you are being watched by security cameras. Most of the classic oil paintings, however, were created to be viewed privately. The digital art on the Internet is also created to be viewed privately. The feeling that the figures in the artwork are posing for you is intensified in both cases by the exclusivity of the experience.

An important way that the consumption of digital art is different from that of oil paintings is that the viewing experience is paradoxically both private and interactive. In the web galleries for Poser art, viewers have the chance to leave comments for the artist. Some of these comments address technical issues in creating or presenting the image. Some comment or expand on narratives provided by the author to frame or explicate the artwork. A few even address comments to the figures themselves as if they were real. However, if you think that Berger's observations are just so much liberal hand-wringing, I direct you to the bulk of the feedback on the images displayed. Without much searching, you will be able to read the comments of (probably male) viewers who explicitly revel in the pleasure of simulated power, possession, and dominance over the figures in the artwork, the same pleasure that Berger posits as being generated by the creation of a position of implicitly male dominant spectatorship in oil paintings of female nudes.

Like oil painting, Poser generated images present textures and surfaces with eye-tricking realism. Natural and fantastic fabric and skin are reproduced with obsessive detail. Adding to this illusion of the real is the fact that Poser images, unlike oil paintings, can move.

As Berger might have predicted, Poser has been used to produce untold millions of images of naked women with vacant expressions who have been contorted into pseudo-classical display positions that implicitly or explicitly communicate sexual submissiveness towards an implied male gaze. If you'd like to see some of these, take a random tour of the galleries at Renderosity (<http://www.renderosity.com/>) or 3D Commune (<http://www.3dcommune.com/>). For more explicit examples, I recommend Renderotica (<http://www.renderotica.com/>).

The Poser women are easy to objectify because they are objects. Actually, it's stretching it to even say they are objects. They are lines of code. They are not real people. They do not suffer as a result of anything done to them. And, boy howdy, are things done to them. Renderotica has among its many galleries a few sections devoted exclusively to images of torturing and maiming these digital damsels. There's a least one Poser artist who specializes in creating elaborate Rube Goldberg devices for the sole purpose of decapitating Poser women.

One way that Poser art differs from classical oil painting is that those objectified are not exclusively female figures. In the twenty-first century, we are working slowly but surely towards being equal opportunity objectifiers. There are male figures too. Much of the artwork

featuring males still presents them as aggressive, powerful figures in control of their surroundings. There are, however, a limited number of images of male figures in submissive display poses. Tellingly, most of these men appear in the guise of elves or vampires. Their non-human appearance clearly marks them as fantasy creatures divorced from everyday existence. Female figures, however, appear in costumes from the most fantastic to the most mundane. While I could easily dredge up a dozen pictures of naughty ladies in business garb, I can't recall having ever come across an image of a scantily-clad and biddable male CEO.

Another difference readily apparent to a viewer of Poser images is that female figures appear in more aggressive poses than would be normal or acceptable in classical oils. Female figures often brandish weapons or wear fierce expressions. In my opinion though, the mixed message of aggressive-looking females in submissive-looking positions is just a variation on the theme of objectification set by the oil painters of old. Having a figure bare her teeth while she bares her all for the viewer may simply be a way for male artists to express frustrations they have with modern, emancipated women. These buxom digital amazons are no less objectified than their simpering oil-painted sisters. The gun may say "no, no, no" but the bare breasts and battle thong still say "yes, yes, yes."

To be fair, there are also a good number of Poser-generated images that boldly contradict the conventional iconography of objectification. Because Poser images can be created by anyone who has the cash to buy the program and the computer that will run it, images are not exclusively from a white, heterosexual male perspective. I have seen many images that interrogate traditional notions of beauty, race, gender, and sexuality. There are even a handful of images that explicitly comment on or resist objectification. My favorite of these is an animated .gif file that pictures a naked figure reaching out of the Poser screen to slap the hand of the artist attempting to manipulate her (<http://liheliso.com/images/Poser/Poser1.gif>).

So what am I saying? Oil Paintings are evil and should be burned? Definitely not. I think we shouldn't remain silent about the sexist and racist attitudes that are readable in the choices made by artists. I also think we could stand to be stingier about labeling images as works of genius (in art and elsewhere). However, I'm not for throwing sheets over all the nudes at the Metropolitan Museum. I'm tired of well-intentioned modern-day Victorians running away from all the unpleasant reminders of our less-than-enlightened past. Let's look at them, discuss them, and learn from them. Isn't that what museums and schools are supposed to be for?

Do I think Poser is a tool of the devil and should be erased with a huge bulk magnet? Oh, sweet Christmas, no. I think it's a wonderful program that allows people who can't draw the opportunity to unleash untapped creativity and create very satisfying works of art. Do I think everyone who creates porn with Poser and posts it to the Internet is a sexist freak? Well, some of you are, but I think that the creating and sharing of erotic artwork can be a healthy expression of one's sexuality. I am hopeful that Poser and programs like it will continue to become more affordable and accessible and will spawn a new generation of artists who will create a new iconography of the erotic that will question and resist unproductive traditions established by "geniuses" of Western art.

I hope this essay causes you to consider the rhetorical power of art. Fine art as well as "not so fine" art communicates messages about what we consider normal and natural. Even images of our fantasies speak to how we feel about our reality. I am not saying that we must not fantasize. We must, however, remain aware of where fantasy ends and reality begins. This is not as easy as we try to make it seem. When you are told night after night by your television that beer makes you attractive to women, the right toothpaste can get you laid, and shampoos can give you orgasms, does it really never affect the way you regard beverages and hygiene? When you see images day after day that imply that only very thin people are sexy and that good women should be submissive, does it never shape your picture of an ideal mate or a perfect relationship?

To ignore mistakes we've made in the past as a culture does not make them go away. In fact, ignoring them makes them come back. Art, like all other forms of human expression, communicates messages about how we think life is and how we wish it could be. Create art, enjoy art, but be honest about what it says and what it makes you think.

Ways of Seeing

John Berger

BBC and Penguin Books, 1972

Other Poser examples: <http://liheliso.com/images/Poser/Poser2.gif> and
<http://liheliso.com/images/Poser/Poser3.gif>

Dr. Kelly S. Taylor is a professor at North Texas State.



Chad Denton

Tearing Down The House of Morrison

Like soap operas, superhero comics are a notoriously conservative genre, even despite the celebration of such innovative imaginations as Grant Morrison, Alan Moore, or Warren Ellis. Gay superheroes -- or at least uncloseted gay superheroes (we're looking at you, Iron Fist and Chang-Shi) -- are still immensely rare and, actually, in a recent storyline the Powers That Be At Marvel put the knife to their token homosexual, Northstar. Talk about throwing away the black pearl. Then there's minority superheroes -- sure, it's not as bad as it used to be in the halcyon days of the Golden and Silver Ages, but there are probably just enough prominent black superheroes in the DC and Marvel Universes together to fill a college classroom. Then there's the endless recycling of plots and characters, the multi-title crossovers, and, of course, the retcon.

Retcons -- which are basically retracing a past story's impact on continuity and altering it, if not deleting it entirely, using reasons consistent with the story's logic (in theory) -- are probably an inevitable part of any serial genre. Usually they're a cheap tactic for bringing the readers in -- bring back a dead character or change the ending of this-or-that big storyline and you'll get *some* kind of attention and, really, bad publicity is almost as good as positive publicity -- or for bowing to the fanbase's conservatism and nostalgia. It was in the latter case that Marvel Comics made the decision to undo one of the most innovative runs in their top franchise's history: Grant Morrison's run on *New X-Men*, which began in 2001.

Grant Morrison, who had made his name in mainstream comics by providing fresh and ambitious interpretations of DC's "Animal Man" and "The Doom Patrol" and with a psychological take on the hard-edged post-Frank Miller Batman in "Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth," came along at the perfect time. Marvel Comics had just come under the new and 'progressive' regime of Joe Quesada and Bill Jemas while 2000's *X-Men* movie had been -- let's face it -- an unexpected critical as well as financial success, turning Marvel's less than reliable luck with film adaptations completely around along with the *Spider-Man* film. The X-Men franchise, which had been creatively moribund since at least the mid-1990s, stuck in its own soap opera-esque formula, needed to be reformed and streamlined to coincide with interest in the characters sparked by the movie. Along with a humorous and surrealist renovation of the old "X-Force" title (later to be renamed "X-Statix") by Peter Milligan and a run on "Uncanny X-Men" by Joe Casey, Morrison's "New X-Men" was to be the crowning achievement of Quesada and Jemas: the revitalization of a franchise that had long ago become a by-word for convoluted and inaccessible continuity, nonsensical editorial interferences, and commercial excess.

There were many different ways Morrison changed the very foundations of the franchise -- bringing the idea that the X-Men ran an actual school for mutants (before, there were either no young students or just a team of six or seven or so young mutants under the X-Men's tutelage) and jettisoning the colorful spandex in favor of drab but stylish uniforms similar to the ones worn in the film, for example -- but at the top of his agenda was exploring the concept of 'mutants' as more of a general sci-fi possibility rather than in just a limited superhero context and as a thinly veiled metaphor for racism and homophobia by crafting stories that involved mutant culture and the politics and logistics of life as a mutant. Naturally quite a few of the old-school fans hated it,

but many appreciated a genuinely new approach, especially since one had not really been taken since Len Wein, Dave Cockrum, and Chris Claremont revived "Uncanny X-Men" in 1975.

As with his previous runs in "Animal Man" and "Doom Patrol," Morrison wrote with a definite conclusion in mind, leaving a run that could be read as one overall story. He destroyed the mutant island nation of Genosha, having it be the victim of a single monstrous act of genocide launched by a sociopath named Cassandra Nova; there were references to not only mutant bands, but also mutant fashion designers who made products that fit mutants' unique physiologies; introduced the concept of mutant youth rebellion with the Omega Gang; took an old Claremont-era villain, Emma Frost, and turned her into a sexual yet feminist heroine; and transformed Magneto, previously interpreted as either a tragic figure or a menacing villain with political overtones, into a pathetic symbol of purposeless, inept extremism and terrorism, a resounding interpretation for readers nowadays.

At the time Morrison's run ended with the "Here Comes Tomorrow" story arc last year, the Quesada/Jemas experiment was winding down. Peter Milligan's "X-Statix" was also drawing to a close after Marvel refused to allow Milligan to use a mutant Princess Di for a story arc while Jemas' darling, a new Epic Comics imprint designed to give writers and artists trying to get into the industry a big start, came apart even before it could get a full-on launch. Marvel Comics' revolution was sputtering to a halt and it seemed like the *ancien regime* would come back in full. But few people predicted just how quickly Morrison's contributions to the X-Men franchise would be attacked and dismantled.

First it was 'revealed' that the Magneto who acted in Morrison's story arc "Planet X" was an imposter (as of this writing, it has been implied that the imposter was a doppelganger created by Magneto's daughter, the Scarlet Witch, but we'll get to all that). True, the fact that the story ends with Magneto's death had to be altered at some point, but making it so that Magneto was not the villain in "Planet X," a story that more or less took the different and somewhat contradictory approaches taken to the character in the past decade and brought them to their logical conclusion, was a firebombing approach -- and an insulting one. Then in Joss Whedon's "Astonishing X-Men," which many considered to be the successor title to Morrison's "New X-Men," the first order of business was reverting the characters back to the pre-Morrison typical superhero costumes, an editorially mandated change that required a few pages of explanation from the mouths of the characters.

There were other changes that I won't get into here, but the most far-reaching and, in my opinion, nonsensical, came with the heavily advertised "House of M" story-event. In response to DC's widely hyped "Infinite Crisis", Marvel laid the groundwork for an 'event storyline' of their own. The Scarlet Witch, a mutant superhero long associated with the Avengers franchise, has gone insane (this brings us to comics writers' rather disturbing use of female characters, but that's a whole other set of issues) and it is 'revealed' that her 'hexing' powers are really just a repressed form of her true mutant superpower: the ability to reshape reality itself -- or rather to have the superpower to be an endlessly usable *deus ex mechana*. At the end of "House of M", the heroes gather and, naturally, fight; revelations are of course made, and the Scarlet Witch hits the switch, turning the world back to normal except for one thing: thousands of mutants would lose their powers. There would be no more mutant subculture, no more mutant bands or fashion designers.

The franchise was to return to the same old "feared and hated" stories that had been mined to exhaustion in the 70s, 80s, and 90s. The new direction and the new concepts Morrison pioneered were abandoned before a new generation of writers even had a chance to use them.

I recognize that complaining about this kind of thing is a bit like writing about politicians breaking their campaign promises. Even in 'progressive' times, creative considerations take a back seat to marketing-driven editorial decisions and appeals to the fanbase. This is true for any medium or genre. And of course to fans of Morrison's run none of this should undermine the enjoyment that can still be gotten out of the story he built from a deceptively simple idea linking superheroes to persecuted minorities originally spun by two young Jewish men in 1963. Still, it is depressing that so much energy and so much ink and paper were spent on turning back the changes a critically-acclaimed and generally well-received three-year run gave to a set of characters and concepts that were trapped in a storytelling limbo since the early 1990s. Instead of building on, the Powers That Be over at Marvel Comics have decided to tear down -- and to spend a great deal of effort in doing so. It is somewhat ironic that House of M #8, the issue that establishes this old-new status quo for Marvel's stable of mutants, ends by quoting the laws of physics with, "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." It seems that this law will continue to hold true for mainstream superhero storytelling and the genre or at least Marvel's share of it will, for the foreseeable future, remain in a state of creative paralysis.



Chad Denton

An Interview with Phil Jimenez

A native of California, Phil Jimenez's professional comics career began with work on WAR OF THE GODS #4, DEATHSTROKE ANNUAL #2, and art chores on TEAM TITANS and NEW TITANS, all published by DC Comics. His later work spanned the DC Universe with GUY GARDNER: WARRIOR, JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, LEGION OF SUPERHEROES, and DC ONE MILLION 80-PAGE GIANT along with work on Wildstorm's PLANETARY/THE AUTHORITY: RULING THE WORLD, Marvel's X-MEN: LIBERATORS, and DC/Vertigo's TRANSMETROPOLITAN: I HATE IT HERE. His career first gained recognition when he illustrated for the 1996/1997 TEMPEST limited series for DC and the second volume of Grant Morrison's THE INVISIBLES for DC/Vertigo in 1997. From 2000 to 2003 Jimenez had an acclaimed run on WONDER WOMAN where he handled illustration and scripting duties. Recently he finished a three-issue story arc for Marvel's NEW X-MEN with Grant Morrison and is currently writing and illustrating his own creator-owned project, OTHERWORLD, for DC/Vertigo. Outside comics, Jimenez has contributed art for the first permanent AIDS exhibit at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, has been featured in "Out" and "The Advocate" magazines and listed as one of Entertainment Weekly's "Top 101 Gay Movers and Shakers," and did a brief hand-model cameo for Tobey Maguire in the "Spider-Man" film. Mr. Jimenez was kind enough to give J LHLs and Mr. Denton this interview in March of 2005.

Chad Denton: Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule for this interview. What are you reading these days, inside and outside the medium?

Phil Jimenez: Almost all of the material I read these days revolves around social science and history of some sort; very rarely do I read fiction. That said, I've been reading Karen Armstrong's *The Battle for God*, about religious fundamentalism; *Special Effects* by Pascal Pinteau, about the history of SFX in film and in the world around us, from theme parks to museum exhibitions; and *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*, edited by Karal Ann Marling, about, well, designing Disney. I've also been reading various books on screenwriting, genre fiction writing, and a few other odds and ends here and there. I've also been doing copious amounts of research for *Otherworld*, from dragon lore in Chinese mythology to technological trends in urban areas worldwide. Sounds a little dry, I know, but I really get into this stuff!

In the medium, I'm really into *Birds of Prey*, *The Ultimates*, *Astonishing X-Men*, and *Teen Titans*.

CD: Which artists are you following? Any new talents in the field that have caught your eye?

PJ: Ivan Reis is fantastic. There's a whole wonderful crop of artists out there, coming from Spain and South America, I believe, and I adore them. While they're not new, I just love Bryan Hitch's work, the art/color teamwork of John Cassaday and Laura Martin, and I will always drool over work from Adam Hughes, Jose Luis, Garcia Lopez, Ryoichi Ikegami, and George Perez. I'm a big fan of representational, less cartoony art -- of art that suggests that the artist knows the structure

of each object he's drawn, in and out. I love it when an artist makes me feel something, really connects me to the art I'm looking at.

CD: Unless you are self-taught, where did you receive your training?

PJ: I was essentially self taught; however, I did take an illustration class at Parson University in Los Angeles, and moved to New York City to attend the School of Visual Arts as an illustration/cartooning major. I received a fantastic education there, and it really helped me push my art further and faster than if I had not pursued a formal education. I studied under some great teachers -- Will Eisner, Jack Endewelt, Jerry Zimmerman -- cartoonists and illustrators who really made sure they got the best out of me.

CD: Have there been any artists that have influenced your style?

PJ: George Perez is the most obvious and extreme influence on my style. From the time I started drawing comic books for my friends in junior high school, George's work had a very real, almost palpable affect on my work. His was a sensibility that just spoke to me, and still does, profoundly. While my work is no longer as heavily influenced by George's as it once was, I actually see what I do as not so much imitation but perpetuation. I believe that what I'm doing is taking a sensibility and furthering it, making sure others see it -- taking the craft to the next generation as it were. I always hope that George knows that's what I'm doing; that I'm trying to further a sense of storytelling and image making to others, hoping to affect them as deeply as he has affected me. Renaissance artists did this all the time; they created whole schools around learning a particular sensibility. While I think everyone should bring their own thoughts and creativity to the table, I also think that there's a craftsmanship that needs to be learned, and -- I keep using this word -- a sensibility that's worth spreading.

CD: How did you enter the industry?

PJ: I was hired right after my sophomore year of college by Neal Pozner, who was an editor at DC Comics. He'd gotten a hold of my portfolio and contacted me at my mother's house and offered me a job -- a two part story in *Showcase*, a book featuring talented young artists and writers. From then on, I was working -- although my first published work was in *War of the Gods #4* -- four pages of pencils over George Perez's layouts. While the project wasn't well received, the project was -- for me -- heaven.

CD: What would you tell anyone -- writer or artist -- seeking to get their foot in the door?

PJ: Patience and polite persistence are the key. New writers and artists are competing against establishing giants in the industry, names that already sell the material. If you're going to make an impact, you're going to have to have work that's like no other, or you're going to have to be persistent and pursue jobs over and over again. Building relationships with editors, writers, other artists -- these are important steps to getting work in the industry -- as is having a really strong portfolio.

CD: How do you handle your work load and what is your usual schedule in that regard?

PJ: My workload is overwhelming right now (thank God) and my schedule is unusually extreme. In a perfect world, I'll wake up between 8 and 9, work for a couple of hours, go to the gym, return, and then work on and off for the rest of the day, about 8 or 9 hours total. This is on a good day, however; some bad days, I might only work 6 hours. I generally work 6 days a week, but not the same amount of time on each. I also tend to really love working late at night -- it's a very quiet time for me, a very productive time. I find that working on multiple projects that require lots of meetings also slows me down tremendously; I wish I could spend two weeks just drawing, without having to meet over production schedules, plot revisions, or cover concepts! But I'm very blessed to have the amount of work that I do. It's rare in this business and I know that. I'm very, very lucky.

CD: Do you have any rituals you have to go through when you draw?

PJ: My nutritionist made me very aware of certain rituals I have, particularly eating rituals, while I work. I move around a lot, I find; return a lot of e-mails. I like to step back from my work constantly. I like to kickbox and rollerblade to get away from the work. I do lots of layouts and thumbnails to figure out complicated pieces. And I like to eat...

CD: How do you approach writing and scripting?

PJ: Usually it's a matter of getting a plot approved by an editor. I sit down, map out the pace of the 22 page book page by page, then type it up as a plot. Once that's approved, I draw it, and then go back and script the dialogue to the artwork on the page. It's the old "Marvel Style", I guess they call it. I'm definitely still learning the process, and think of myself as an artist first and a writer second (by a long ways). My approach is simple -- try to create stories that will move me, touch me, leave me with moments that I'll remember for a long time, and give me something really interesting to draw. What I've learned about scripting is that not everything said aloud translates into text. I tend to "act" every line I write -- say it aloud, to hear the rhythm of the dialogue and get the voices right. However, some of that stuff doesn't translate on to the printed page, and I'm continually amazed at how well other writers really have an ear for that. It's a true talent.

CD: Could you tell us a little about your work and accomplishments outside of comics? Anything you want to mention?

PJ: I've had a few things that have been lots of fun. I got to work on the first Spider-Man movie, doing artwork as a hand double for Tobey McGuire. I did artwork for the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry; I've designed murals, storyboarded commercials, been featured in magazines like Entertainment Weekly and the Washington Post, and I'm featured on the Wonder Woman season 2 DVD box set. I've traveled pretty extensively. I would love to do production design on a film and write some TV, ultimately. But life's been pretty darn good, I have to say.

CD: I have to admit, one of my favorite recent comics was one of your issues of *New X-Men* where Jean Grey forces Emma Frost into a nightmarish voyage through her past. What is it like to work with Grant Morrison?

PJ: Grant Morrison is probably my favorite writer in comics, in terms of his scripts. He just seems to "get" me -- I feel like he writes for me, and that he knows how to write a script for artists. I think part of this is because he's brilliant, and partly because he's an artist himself. He understands the visual-ness of comics. He's just fantastic.

CD: What impact, if any, do you think your homosexuality has had on your career?

PJ: I think it's had a huge impact, in that it's shaped how I see the world, how I accept things into my life, reject others, and how my overall sensibilities have been transformed by being gay. I bring all of this to my work, so it makes me notice things others might not notice. I bring to the work a slightly different perspective, despite my mainstream preferences and art style. I think being gay is incredibly important to the work I do and what I want to say with it.

CD: Do you have anything to say to gay writers and artists who have ambitions in the medium?

PJ: Be really, really good at what you do.

CD: Would you like to see more gay superheroes? If so, what kind of gay superhero would you envision?

PJ: This might be horrible, but it was something I rarely thought about. My super -heroes were Amazons -- Wonder Woman and Troia -- because of what they represented to me. Wonder Woman wanted more than anything else in the world for human beings to peacefully coexist with each other. I can think of no greater sentiment than that, and that's why she's my hero. I didn't really need a gay hero to identify with; what I look for in my heroes is an end goal that means something to me. It's why Superman and Batman mean less to me than Wonder Woman; she's a teacher and ambassador of peace, while Superman's essentially a cop and Batman's a crazy guy in need of therapy.

CD: I believe that when you started on Wonder Woman, you had no previous writing credits. What was it like starting out like that? Did you feel as though you were undergoing a crash course?

PJ: Actually, I had several writing gigs before Wonder Woman. I worked on the miniseries *Tempest*, the *Girl Frenzy: Donna Troy* one shot -- both of which were very well received -- and some issues of *Guy Gardner*, and the ill-fated *Team Titans*. So I came to Wonder Woman with some experience. What I didn't expect, however, was the amount of editorial restrictions and storytelling changes I'd be asked to make along the way. That really threw me for a loop, and it affected the way I told my stories. They were often paced differently than I would have liked, and I had to incorporate story changes I was not expecting. And I had to kill her mother off half-way through my run! I would love to go back to Wonder Woman knowing what I do now, and give it another "clean" shot, without so much editorial hooplah, and without two consecutive crossovers, to boot!

CD: What's it like working with a prominent character with such a rich history for two years? Have you ever imagined having a conversation with her?

PJ: Oh, all the time. I think anyone who knows that character imagines having a conversation with her. She's inspiring. Like I said above, I wish my time with her had been "cleaner" -- less drama involved editorially, fewer changes, a clearer thru-line. But in the end, I got to write and draw Wonder Woman, make an impact, and that means the world to me.

CD: I've seen your run praised as a time when old characters were revived and re-imagined in a fresh light. Did you feel yourself limited working with a character who had been interpreted and defined in so many ways over the years?

PJ: My goal with Wonder Woman was not to redefine her, so much as combine all the previous incarnations of her, many of which were not complimentary to each other, and make sense of it all. I was trying to reinvigorate her. I had wanted to remind readers of her mission and purpose; why she existed; I wanted to really amp up her rogue's gallery, and wanted to solidify her always morphing supporting cast. I simply love working with this character. In many ways, it would be my dream job to return to her, knowing what I know now.

CD: Tell me about *Otherworld*. It seems a work very much influenced by mythology and dark fantasy. What were your influences in that? What do you hope to achieve with it?

PJ: Everything I've ever read or seen is probably an influence on *Otherworld*. It is, in many ways, an homage to those influences -- everything from Saturday Morning cartoons to Star Wars to the books I'm reading now. There are so many fantastic ideas in the world, and so many I'm interested in questioning and exploring. *Otherworld* is influenced by mythology, certainly, but also by the ideas some mythologies represent. It's an exploration of things like religious fundamentalism, unfettered capitalism, democracy, military dominance, entertainment technologies, race and gender relations, sexual mores, Westernization -- and I get to do it with super-heroes, science fiction, and fantasy. I get to cross genres and create a world where I can ask our characters, especially our lead character Siobhan, "if you know there's something bad in the world -- you've seen it, experienced it, either personally or through the media -- what is your social and ethical responsibility to do something to make it right? How much of your world and creature comforts are you willing to give up to make someone with less than you, to make their life, better?"

CD: Is *Otherworld* something you've hoped to do for a while? Would you like to work on similar projects in the future?

PJ: I've been working on *Otherworld*, I realize now, for more than 10 years...going on 15 now, probably. At least, it's been in my head that long. I hope that people enjoy *Otherworld* enough that it goes on past its 12 issues; I really have grown to love these characters and really care about what happens to them. Plus, I can continue to ask questions of them, and I can sort through my own mental "stuff" while seeking the answers.

CD: Do you have any dream projects? Anything on the horizon?

PJ: *Otherworld* was truly my dream project. It's been one of the most pleasing experiences I've ever had in this business. Utterly fulfilling. And that's saying a lot, considering the fun I've had the past 14 years or so!

CD: Thank you, Mr. Jimenez.

Chad Denton is currently working to complete his MA in Early Modern European History at George Mason University and his non-fiction book on notorious monarchs and royals in European history, AUTOCRATS, is scheduled to be published by the London-based Aucturus Ltd. in Spring 2006. But he also has a love for writing comics; he co-created SCRAPYARD DETECTIVES with Bill Galvin for the non-profit organization Smiles Against Hate, is currently writing a superhero murder mystery series HUBRIS for the online press Cloven Hand Comics, and is a regular reviewer for LHLS. Besides dabbling in short fiction, he has begun work on his next non-fiction book, VIVA LE ROY, a novel, and is still insane enough to still be trying to break into the comics industry. Mr. Denton's website is at <http://www.drowndedinink.com>

