

My Influences

~COMIC BOOKS~

-An Artist's *Personality Exploration*-

“Why Am I the Way I Am?”

Personality Conditions
and Other Recipes for
Becoming an Artist

How to Understand How One Becomes An Artist

by
Eric Homan

My Personal **Artistic**
and Aesthetic
Influences, *Stimuli*,
Role Models, **Rebels**,
Idols, **Prophets**,
Motivators, **Muses**,
Mentors, **Maestros**,
Kindred Spirits,
Dreamers, **Idealists**,

Believers, Heroes, Rebels, Alter Egos, Passions, Loves, Soul Mates, saints, Geniuses, and Gods

(Also known as Outsiders, Outcasts, Freaks, Geeks, Losers, Sinners, Uglies, Perverts, Poets, Fools, Radicals, Revolutionaries, Loners, Atheists, Eccentrics, Weirdoes, Crazies, Criminals, Recluses, Oddballs, Nonconformists, Malcontents, Maniacs, Mutants, and Misfits)

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Comic Book/ Graphic Novel/ Cartoon Writers/ Artists/ Animators

Considering that I grew up on reading comic books, I must credit many comic book writers and artists as the architects to building my imagination. In my opinion, comics are the most underrated source and resource of creativity being made in the past century. The following are the major ones, but I'd like to mention a few others who didn't quite make the list though I grew to appreciate and adore just as much: Rick Veitch, Dave Sim, Stephen Bissette, John Totleben, Ted McKeever, Chris Bachalo, Jack Kirby, Bob Kane, John Romita Jr., Dave Gibbons, Geof Darrow, Jill Thompson, Jeph Loeb, Robert Kirkman, Erik Larson, and so many others.... These writers and artists are like superheroes in themselves. That is why I aspired to be like them as an artist/ writer in my own creative right.

-Alan Moore/ "Swamp Thing", "V for Vendetta", "Watchmen", "Miracleman"

Just to let you know, my reader, Alan Moore is perhaps my all time favorite writer. And coincidentally, he's happens to write comics books. If I have to look for a creative role model that sparked my imagination the most when I was a lonely teenager with no direction, it was Alan Moore. Through his work on books as "Swamp Thing", "Watchmen", "V for Vendetta", and others, I realized how exciting and explosive words and images could be. One descriptive line that he wrote in an early issue of "Swamp Thing" blew me away with its wildly descriptive personification of nature: "Clouds like plugs of bloodied cotton wool dabbling uselessly at the slashed wrists of the sky". God, I love how over-the-top wacko out wow that it! He is my comic book writer super hero. His creativity showed me to light to my own. It opened up my mind to new types of visual thinking.

"Alan Moore's work connects on both an intellectual and emotional level, in a way that's unmatched in today's comics"... "The universe that surrounds Alan is the same universe that you and I also inhabit, but we just don't see the details that he sees. We don't hear the resonant chords he hears. We overlook the connections he makes us aware of"... "And Alan was there, watching, listening, absorbing, and, no doubt, just imagining...." -From an introduction by Dave Gibbons to *Across the Universe: The DC Universe Stories of Alan Moore*.

Notes from "Alan Moore's Writing For Comics": "Where ideas actually originate from is seemingly a major preoccupation for most people interested in learning how to write comics and is probably the single question that creative people get asked most often. Personally, I'd probably say that ideas seem to germinate at a point of cross-fertilization between one's artistic influences and one's own experience. Studying the work of other people will provide useful pointers as to how to formulate an idea, but the initial raw impetus comes from inside the writer or creator themselves, influenced by their opinions, their prejudices, by all the things that have happened to them and by all the all elements in their lives that go toward making them the sort of person that they are. It becomes a matter of tuning your perceptions to notice little quirks of circumstance that might otherwise slip by unnoticed, studying your own behavior and the behavior of people and events surrounding you, until you feel you have developed a coherent angle upon life and reality, at least one which relates to a perspective upon events that will suggest original and individual story ideas. My point is that you can't teach people to have insights and ideas. You just have to get your head pointing a certain way in regard to how you view life, and you'll find that the ideas then occur spontaneously with hardly any prompting at all"... "If you're going to spend a lot of time preparing a communication, it would perhaps be an advantage to at least spend a little considering the person to whom it is addressed... In my opinion, the best way to handle the problem of who one's audience is would be to let the material find its own level and its own audience. If the work has enough central integrity this will almost certainly happen, given time"... "You might also notice that people change their personality depending on whom they are talking to. They have a different voice in conversations with their parents from the voice that they use when addressing their workmates. They vary their attitude and their mood hour by hour. Often they will do things that seem completely out of character. Simple and unremarkable observations such as these help to gear the creative mind toward a more complete understanding of characterization than can be afforded by any snappy little generalizations"... "The idea behind the story was to examine the concept of escapism and fantasy dreamworlds, including happy times in the past that we look back on and idealize. It was a story, if you like, for the people I've encountered who are fixated upon some point in the past where things could have gone differently or who are equally obsessed with some hypothetical point in the future where certain circumstances will have come to pass and they can finally be 'happy'. People who say, 'If only I hadn't married that man or that woman. If only I'd stayed in college, left college earlier, settled down, gone off to see the world, go that job I turned down...' or who say, 'When the mortgage is paid off, then I can enjoy myself. When I'm promoted and I get more money, then I can have a good time. When the divorce comes through, when the kids are grown up, when I finally manage to get my novel published...'"... "If your ambition is to be a writer, a creator, then know that creativity is an ongoing and progressive phenomenon and that stasis and stagnation is sure death of it. If you wish to be a creator, then be assured that the actual problem lies in **avoiding** an easily recognized style. Just because you **can** do a particular thing well doesn't mean that you **have** to do it incessantly"... "Easy creative decisions, easy thing, approaches that will make the demands of writing for a living easier to bear: all these things can be fatal to the creative instinct, or at very least, less than fully nourishing. Attempt thing that you are not sure that you can accomplish: if you're certain that you can do a thing, this means that there is little to no point in actually doing it"... "It is much more exciting and thus creatively energizing if you are attempting something where you are uncertain of its outcome, where you don't know if it will work or not"... "Work without a safety net"... "In this scenario, having garnered a considerable reputation or level of acclaim, one becomes paralyzed by the dreadful thought of losing it all by doing something... undignified. Uncool. This is a trap. Reputation is a trap that will turn you into a lifeless marble bust of yourself before you're even dead. And then of course there is Reputation's immortal big brother, Posterity, worrying about which has driven better women and men than you into the asylum"... "Take risks. Fear nothing, especially failure."

Discovering Alan Moore and *Swamp Thing*: The first time I came across Alan Moore was when I was in the sixth grade and I borrowed the *Saga of the Swamp Thing* trade paperback. What I witnessed within those pages scared me. This was the first "Mature Readers" comic book I ever looked through, which left me feeling scared in a Catholic guilt sort of way. This was no funny book with the typical superheroes I'd ever experienced before. The imagery was disturbing and brilliant. I didn't ever read the entire book because it frightened me so much (I was only eleven, mind you). Yet two years later, I obsessed over this mere comic book that could scare me so, and purchased the book off my friend. After the first issue/ chapter, I knew this was the best comic book I'd ever come across.

"Will Eisner was immensely influenced by Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Orson Welles, in turn, had been very much influenced by techniques that were straight out of a comic book. For example, you have the silhouette of a house on a hill, with a voice over narrative that takes the place of a caption. There's always been this feedback between comics and films... I think for my own sanity and emotional balance... Fame does all sorts of unpleasant things to people. It tends to, in many cases, warp them. It doesn't necessarily make them happier... Some of my stories sometimes show naiveté, political naiveté or emotional naiveté, but at least it was an honest naiveté." -Excerpts from an interview with Alan Moore.

Alan Moore's "Miracleman #9", the mature, beautiful childbirth issue, blessed creative narrative onto me.

Trace moments of creative awe from reading the "articles" from "Watchmen" graced me. Alan Moore's brilliance resurrected my suppressed belief that there was nothing left to write. He took my silly fantasies about reality with costumed heroes and applied the psychological spice of why people would put on tights in the first place. With the creation of "Superman" in the funny pages, I could understand how people would be appealed to the dynamic absurdity of actually becoming a spandex fantasy character. It's Halloween as a career move.

"Miracleman" continued inside my hours with Alan Moore's creative conceptual writing and John Tobeten's visual extravagance.

Re-reading "V for Vendetta" was necessary to fill the afternoon as well as influence my creative writing.

I read some fascinating interviews with Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Frank Miller, and more. Quite inspiring to read that Alan read and believed in comics because of the creativity, the sense of awe they expressed in their literary and visual imagery ("Krypton's volcanoes spew molten gold").

"I think one reason I'm very interested in comics is that basically, it's an unexplored medium. Most of the other media have been explored thoroughly. Film has had its *Citizen Kane*, and literature has had its *War and Peace*. That is not to say there won't be other great works in those media, or that they are not worth exploring, but comics are relatively unexplored. There have been some notable works, but probably, we have yet to produce the first great comic novel. That excites me as an artist - the sense that you can actually make a difference in comics because you are there on the ground floor... I'm not interested in writing for films; not because I don't think films have a lot of potential, but because of the way that the industry is set up. I recognized that any screenplay that I wrote would probably be handed to other writers to do rewrites, because Hollywood tends to work on the assumption that if a thing has been written once, it is good, and if it has been written twice, it is very good, and if it is written three times, then it is excellent. By the end of the day, what is going to appear on the screen is only going to have a coincidental resemblance to the script that the writer originally put down. In comics, I have complete control, other than the input of my artists, which is always respected and valued. Every full stop and comma that I put down on that script is going to end up in the finished comic, and it just seems foolish to relinquish any of that control just because of the financial inducements of Hollywood. The money has always been very welcome, but at the same time, that has never been the prime motive. The prime motive is to have fun creatively." -Alan Moore in a *Wizard* magazine interview.

"I don't want to be the celebrity, the center of attention. Sometimes I find myself quite boring, believe it or not, and I don't want to dwell upon myself every single second of the day. I'd rather my work maintain my only profile. It doesn't really matter to readers whether I exist or not, now does it? It's only the work"... "I see this as kind of showing off a bit by writing five comic book titles at once. 'Hey, let's show off and dazzle the readers.' I don't indulge myself that often, so what the hell"... "To me, magic has an awful lot to do with creativity, and creativity has an awful lot to do with magic. So if I wanted to find out more about creativity, I'd have to take that last step over the boundary of the rational"... "I'd had a conversation with the god Mercury. During the experience, you believe you are actually talking to a god. Who's to say if you are, or if you're not? I've tried to keep an open mind about it. I tell myself, 'On one level, this is a hallucination. This is an element of my own personality, some subconscious element of myself.' On the other hand, I also have to allow that this might be something completely beyond my personality, a higher entity. I mean, if it barks like a god and smells like a god, it's probably a god. [Laughs]". -Alan Moore in a *Wizard* magazine interview.

"Well, the way I've approached this is that I look at the things that are my inspiration, which are things like the work of Will Eisner, the work of Harvey Kurtzman, stuff like that. Now if I want to copy Harvey Kurtzman, or EC Comics, then I have to follow their formula and end up with people saying "Good Lord (chock)!" The thing to copy is their relentless sense of adventure, the way that they wanted to do something different. So if you want to be like the,

don't do something like them, do something different like they did. That's the thing to copy – their basic approach to creative work, not their content or their style. These were people who thought 'We want something different. We want something that's never been seen before.' That's the element you should try to live up to, rather than just regurgitating all of their basic clichés"... "When I came to DC, *Swamp Thing* was a book that was selling 17,000; it was on the verge of cancellation. They have it to me, not because they necessarily trusted my talents that much, but they weren't risking much by giving me *Swamp Thing*. Vice versa. I couldn't ruin *Swamp Thing* because it was already ruined, at least in terms of sales, so I gave it a go. They didn't tell me 'write this Len Wein,' or 'write this like Chris Claremont.' They just said 'Do what you want. See what you can do with it.' The result, given that freedom and working with people like Steve Bissette and John Totleben and Rick Veitch, I think we were able to do some stuff that was really interesting."... "When we were doing *Swamp Thing*, we had an awful lot of blackness in there, but we also did stories like "Pop" and "Rites of Spring," the love story, and things like that, which are some of my favorites. We tried to temper the dark edges of the story with a genuine celebration of life and what was good about it. To me, that's the only way to do a horror comic; otherwise, people become dull and calloused and numbed to the horror. The human mind can only take so much horror. If it's refreshed occasionally, then you give it a chance for the scar tissue to heal over so that you can inflict sharp new pain [laughter] with your next story. But you've got to have that balance." –Alan Moore in a *Hero* magazine interview.

"The thing that impresses you about that story is that when the real world and the concerns of the real world impinge upon the artificial world of the superhero, then you sometimes get some quite funny, poignant or interesting things happening. Kurtzman did it for humorous effect, but the possibility struck me that by turning the screw the other way, it could have all sorts of effects. I thought, 'Wouldn't it be nice to take some charming old superhero and apply the real world to him?'"... "I've had letters from people who got terribly hurt and offended that I could betray them by doing an issue of *Spawn*, and basically... I like that. I was getting a bit bored with this image of me as this terribly serious comic book icon. It's been real *fun* doing these Image comics, just doing stories that are meant as entertainment. And I think I've managed to offend a lot of people who have an image of me as some sort of pristine champion of the difficult, the obscure and the alternative. I've got an awful lot of faith in alternative comics, but that not *all* I do. I like to have fun too." –Alan Moore in a *Wizard* magazine interview.

"Hopefully, it will encourage people to open up their sexual ideas and realize they are not wrong, they are not perverted, and they are not alone. I hate the idea of people sitting there having perfectly ordinary thoughts and daydreams and thinking that they are the only people who have thoughts like that – thinking that they are tragic, lonely, repulsive monsters... One of the main things that we wanted to do with *LOST GIRLS* -- one of the reasons why we wanted to do erotica or pornography or call it what you will that was art -- is because there is a very big difference between the effect of genuine art and the effect of pornography, as it stands. When we see a work of genuine art, it makes us feel less alone. We see something captured in that sculpture or that piece of music or that painting or that book -- it expresses something that, up until then, only we had perceived. We see something like an echo -- something that confirms to us that, yes, our way of seeing things is not wrong. There are other people who have seen things that way, too, and they've just expressed it better than we could... We're all quite lonely. If art has a real function, then surely part of it must be as a way of communicating mind-to-mind, often in ways that language alone can't manage. A piece of music can say things that words couldn't. A genuine piece of art -- we hear it or we see it -- it makes us feel less alone." –From an Alan Moore interview on his book "Lost Girls".

Notes from an Alan Moore interview: "But these days, everybody wants to be famous, and think all too often, you'll see somebody who has maybe written one good book, made one good film, produced one good record, one good comic book. And all of a sudden, everyone's telling him that he's a genius, and he probably thinks, 'Well, yes, I am. I always thought that I was sort of special, and, yeah, that's probably because I was a genius.' He'll launch himself out onto the billows of fame, and he'll be washed up in the tabloid press six months later, when his bloated, heroin-sodden carcass bobs up to a beach somewhere. Fame does all sorts of unpleasant things to people. It tends to, in many cases, warp them. It doesn't necessarily make them happier. It's nothing that I'm very interested in"... "When I was 40, I decided to become a magician, for various reasons. Most people get to 40 and have a midlife crisis, and that's just boring. They bore their friends by going around saying, 'What's it all about? What's the point?'" I thought it might be at least more entertaining to go spectacularly mad and start worshipping a snake and declaring myself to be a magician. It's been immense fun. And, more than fun, it's been illuminating. It certainly seems to have given me a lot of energy in my work"... "All I would be urging people to do in *Promethea* is to use whatever system they happen to feel comfortable with, whether that be Christianity, or paganism, or Hinduism, or anything else, to explore the kind of rich world that I think all of us have inside of us."

England Their England: Monsters, Maniacs and Moore: Comics writer Alan Moore discusses his career and work including *Miracleman*, *Watchmen*, *Halo Jones* and *Swamp Thing* as well as the creative process, politics and the environment... This is the most animated, youthful, delightful, political, and energetic Alan Moore that I've never seen before. It even has Alan Moore sitting in an empty theater critiquing and questioning *Alan Moore* in the spotlight on the theater stage... "Don't you think you have the slightest touch of a Messiah Complex?"... "It's healthy if people disagree with me. I don't want everybody to agree with me. I just want people to think!"... "I'm trying to make complex ideas accessible to ordinary people"... "I had a pretty rich fantasy life"... "While in school, there were always three or four people who were better than me... at writing, at drawing. Now they are working in shoe factories"... "Some people have been upset that I show the reality of war in comic books"... "If tolerance and any

sensitivity of any kind is labeled loony or subversive, then I would be quite proud to be labeled *subversive*"... "You have to invest a degree of intensity of feeling to your work"... "Death is the only thing that gives life its sweetness." The Mindscape of Alan Moore: "I found myself surrounded by a monochrome world with limited opportunities. The only window out of that restricted world was the tales of mythology that I would read, or the bright 4-coloured superhero stories. Adventures of people who had no restrictions. People who could fly over the house tops, people who could become invisible. This was a very important key, to a very important door. It opened vistas of the imagination with which I was eventually able to transcend and escape the limitations of my origins"... "Comics were a staple of working class existence"... "A tremendous blow to my already insufferably huge ego"... "Quitting my day job and starting my life as a writer was a tremendous risk, it was a fool's leap, a shot in the dark. But anything of any value in our lives whether that be a career, a work of art, a relationship, will always start with such a leap"... "Most dystopian science fiction is not actually about the future, it is about the times in which it was written"... "I realized that I was becoming a celebrity, which was nothing I'd ever expected, given that a comic writer was the most obscure profession in the world when I'd actually entered the job"... "The thing is there is no manual for how to cope with fame, so you'll get some otherwise likable young person who has done one good comic book, one good film, one good record, who is suddenly told that they are a genius and who believes it and who runs out sort of laughing and splashing into the billows of celebrity and whose heroine sodden corpse is washed up a few weeks later in the shallows of the tabloid"... "Celebrities tend to burn out quite quickly. And I really didn't feel I wanted to be part of that world and so withdrew to the relative obscurity of Northampton"... "On my fortieth birthday rather than merely bore my friends by having anything as mundane as a midlife crisis I decided it might actually be more interesting to actually terrify them by going completely mad and declaring myself a magician"... "Their magic box of television"... "I believe that art and magic to be interchangeable"... "The book led to me thinking seriously about the possibilities of erotica"... "Energy that should be going into something honest like fucking is instead diverted into something appalling like killing"... "There is a brain-penis-blood ratio that tends to get in the way when writing intelligent pornography"... "If you want truly unique ideas if you're an artist or an inventor or somebody who deals in unique and fresh ideas then you will have to plunge right into the undergrowth, into the depths of idea space in order to find those ideas that have never been spotted before"... "I believe that the world is a construction of ideas"... "We are reaching a boiling point. I believe that our culture is turning into steam."

V For Vendetta: "We were told to remember the idea, not the man... because the man can fail"... "The only verdict is vengeance!"... Illustrated comic book frames translated to photo-real film frames... Creative terrorism of blowing up Parliament as scored to "The Overture of 1812". It brings to mind if 9/11 would have been more entertaining if such music had been played with fireworks being set off... "Add 'The Overture of 1812' to the blacklist. I never want to hear that piece of music again"... Charismatic terrorist comic book anti-heroes... "There is something wrong with this country"... "Words have a power"... "There are those responsible, and they will be held accountable"... "He promised you peace. All he asked back from you was your silent, obedient consent"... An apartment with walls of books... Baby, you've met your fantasy soul mate!... "People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people"... "Blowing up a building as a symbol can change the world"... "She's lying"... "Violence can be used for good"... "I wish I wasn't afraid all of the time"... A bishop that loves young girls... "I love the confession game!"... "It's hard to believe that behind this wrinkled, well-fed exterior there lies a dangerous killing machine with a fetish for foxy masks"... "What if the worst attack on our soil wasn't the work of religious extremists, but the work of our own government?"... An autobiography written on toilet paper... "I remember how *different* became *dangerous*"... "FOR YOUR PROTECTION"... "So now you have no fear anymore. You're completely free"... "Artists use lies to tell the truth"... "What was done to me created me"... "And they created a monster"... Using media to spread fear and terror throughout the land... "V" is obsessed with Errol Flynn movies... "The whole city has gone mad!"... A revolution without dancing is a revolution without having"... "Behind this mask, there is an idea"... "I fell in love with you, Evy."

12-3-93: I read "Swamp Thing #50". Talk about an excellent story! Alan Moore has finally produced a moment that I had been waiting so long to read. Swamp Thing peacefully enters the "evil" darkness and it asked "Swampy" what evil is? He answered by saying he didn't know for sure. He's seen evil before, but can't explain it. There's more to it, I assure you. It's just that the scene was played out unbelievably well done. Thank you, Alan Moore. You've made my day (if not my life).

12-8-93: I just finished reading "Swamp Thing #55", which continuously makes me (the reader) think specifically about life. Alan Moore is just *too damn brilliant* for his own good. I've never read so many thought-provoking comics since I began reading "The Sandman". Not bad for a "funny book", huh. Alan does a superb job of mixing fantasy, horror, and numerous imaginary planes. After reading one single issue by Alan Moore, I began to wonder about my life; what I've done, what I can do. So many questions arise from Alan's intelligent words of wisdom like what will happen to me once I die and why are we here? So many questions unanswered, which will perhaps go unanswered since some were never meant to be answered or questioned.

"I'm going to disappear for a couple of years, at least... who knows? Maybe forever. I'm going to concentrate on things that don't have to make money, where it doesn't matter to me if nobody buys them... where I can just do what exactly I want to do." -Alan Moore.

-Neil Gaiman/ "The Sandman", "Miracleman"

Taken from a "Hero" magazine interview with Neil Gaiman: Interviewer: "One last question: What made you

want to write comics, and what made you think that you could?" –Neil: "Arrogance [laughs] It's got to be arrogance; I can't think of anything else, looking back on it. But it's also something I wanted to do ever since I was a tiny kid. I was a voracious reader and I could never understand why comics were of any less merit or importance than any other way of writing. I think the thing that keeps me with comics is there's still so much to be done. There's still this huge unplowed field, this huge unexplored wilderness, and as long as I can keep doing new things and coming up with the new things. I will. Whereas there are lots of good novels out there; there are a few good movies out there. People have been writing great poems for years, but there aren't a lot of good comics. I like trying to write them."

Alas, "The Sandman", one of my favorite comic book series, has concluded in its 75th issue, their best and most rewarding issue – of my humble opinion of dreaming and creativity. The question of what the worth of creativity shall be for the dreamer's life? Simple people prefer the sly *flirt* of comedies to the provoking *fuck* of tragedies. Will Shakespeare and I also feature a kinship of creative frustration: writing is often "artifices using pretty words"; we – the writer – will have part of us in our character, life has no tale or plot – "We meet [too many] people once, and never see them again"; eventually, grand boredom occurs for passing by the qualities of "genius"; admiring hurt because it enhances the emotions – which can tenderly manipulated in creative uses.

On "The Sandman" and Neil Gaiman: "It was my monthly book. I was going to have fun, I was going to experiment"... We are composed of dream-stuff, and are universal and eternal... "My goal wasn't to be a crowd pleaser"... Weirdly rich fantasy lives... "I don't want to be me. Thank you for making me special, but I don't want to be special. I just want it to stop. Can you make me normal again?"

More on "The Sandman": If there are Order and Chaos gods, then there are Surrealism and Expressionism gods... Neil Gaiman grew up Jewish in the Church of England school that made him feel like an outsider: "Growing up in contrasting cultures provides a solid foundation for becoming an artist, because it creates a distancing affection that prevents you from accepting things, that forces you to look at everything with fresh eyes"... "His madness keeps him sane"... "I wanted her to grow up. It was time to break Rose's heart"... Raw emotions and raw dreams... "Your dreams serve you."

2-20-01: Feeling emotionally down and artistically out, I lied down on my bed and started reading "The Sandman Companion" – which ended up revealing Neil Gaiman's writing secrets. He happens to be extremely well read and uses his literary knowledge into hybrid stories involving his own characters. The revelation here is he *borrow*s. He wasn't just making everything up! He was being inspired... just as I was from reading "The Sandman". "A box of comics is a box of dreams."

Notes from "The Sandman: King of Dreams": "He has been starved of dreams"... "Morpheus must intuit that what he is doing is self-destructive"... "The nightmare evocation of childhood cruelties"... "Everybody gets hurt."

Like Neil Gaiman wrote: "Sometimes when you fall, you fly."

-Dave McKean/ "The Sandman"

One of the main artists whose digital art influenced me during my teenage years was Dave McKean. His work mixed digital and photograph illustrations. His execution of digital blurring of foreground and background elements (freeform blurring) offered that dreamish feel I've always sought. The viewer's sense depth of field gets thrown out the window of consciousness. His liberal use of warping and decorating text with hand-written elements expressed character and a personal style. His ambiguous dream imagery suggested shadows, mystery, sensuality, nightmares, and subconsciousness. His color scheme could be muted to black and white, or glowing with saturated colors – all depending on how content. McKean's Photoshop layered images mixed simplistic drawings and sketches, finely detailed photographs, expressionistic paintings, and decorative writing creating hybrid iconic dreamscapes.

My "Cages" notes: Stones that hum and make music... The fear of freedom... "the lines look how I feel." So do the colors and words... "Two and two make fish kind of day that doesn't make sense"... Mrs. What... "He was bored shitless. He hated this stupid little life. He needed change"... "I'm just trying to record the things that are important to me now"... I like your drawing. It had a sensitive quality"... My life is public property. I miss my secrets" –writer... "I miss being lonely. I miss being alone"... A psychopathic God... "You can go back to your hysterical church"... "Offer your purity to that idiot god you've invented"... "Because I upset a lot of people... because what I said might be true"... "I felt a real palpable feeling of déjà vu"... "Old Testament God"... "Creativity. That's your god"... "Each one of these people creates their own god... I'm her god... I'm a figment. I don't really exist"... "Well. I came here to work. To paint. To get away from family and friends... to think things through... and work."

-Chris Claremont/ "The Uncanny X-Men"

"What can be said about Chris Claremont, the Steven Spielberg of modern comic books?"... "He's always been called a writer of women"... "The response got much more extreme. But people got passionately involved in the book. They cared about it. They loved it or they hated it, but everybody talked about it. Everybody was aware of it. And to my mind that's what we are in large measure there to do. Books that people care about, that get them excited

and interested, and willing to come back next month to see what happens. A book that someone *likes* is a book that someone can put down and walk away from. And that's fatal in any publishing form. The rationale for changing Storm's hair, as much as anything else, was to continue the theme of suspense, of the unexpected. You should not know what is going to happen next month, you should never take a book for granted. You want to keep the reader guessing, because in and out of that guessing comes next month's purchase." -From an "Amazing Heroes" Chris Claremont interview.

5-26-06: (Written before seeing X-Men: The Last Stand): I have to admit that the X-Men have been part of my life since I was 14 when I started picking up back issues of *Uncanny X-Men* from the late 70s through to the early 90s. This was during the incredible reign of one of my favorite writers, Chris Claremont, who wrote the book for a whopping 15 years. He put his soul, imagination, heart, sensitivity, and most innermost thoughts into those books. The thought balloons he wrote revealed each character's most private thoughts and emotions. I loved how he exposed that hidden vulnerable side to those outcast mutant characters. It made them feel extra real even with their extraordinary super powers. And what appealed me as a teenage outcast artist to them was that the X-Men were outcasts in themselves from a society didn't understand them. They had mutant powers to express; I had creativity, emotions, and imagination to express. In a way, we were both superheroes with covert powers that we both kept hidden from the world. What Chris Claremont did so well was write thought balloons of what the characters were secretly feeling inside. It showed their fears, flaws, dreams, loves, and demons in a way that conventional comic books never expressed before. He broke new ground in giving superheroes souls. They were just trying to make it in the world just like everybody else. Reading and sharing their lives and experiences was something that got me through those painful junior and high school years. The X-Men eventually got dumbed down as an action book under other writers' hands when Claremont left the title in 1991. But those key issues he wrote were like magic to me. The X-Men were like friends of sorts, kindred spirits I admired and wanted to be part of. The twelve issue "Dark Phoenix" saga from the early 80s was a key story arch that subtly showed the transformation of how ultimate power can destroy someone as nice and pure as Jean Grey. Claremont revealed the extra layers of darkness to her character that other comic book writers never dared to explore, especially the emotional and the sexual sides. The story even ended with her suicide for God's sake. The animated version from the 90s that translated this story was cliff notes worthy only with a sanitized kids cartoon medium. Still, it was exciting to see your favorite characters and stories "coming to life" in an animated form.

Which brings me to the excitement of seeing the X-Men made real as a live action movie. True fans like myself know that I'm going to be seeing only a "cliff notes" version of stories that would take twelve hours to tell rather than under rushed two hours. Still, there's that massive rush of excitement to see characters "*alive*" in front of you on a massively large screen in surround sound. It makes all one's senses go crazy in an imagination buzz of seeing characters you'd only imagined inside your head from reading about them on 2-dimensional paper appear in 3-D and lifelike!! Stan Lee might have helped create the X-Men and has gotten cameo appearances in all the new Marvel movies that have been translated to the big screen over the past few years, but where is Chris Claremont's massive credit for creating the soul of these characters, not to mention the movie writers rewriting his stories for the movies without giving him screen credit?!?! Thankfully, this latest X-Men movie gives Claremont a 1.37 second screen cameo before Stan Lee's cameo. Still, if I directed the movie Claremont would get an opening title credit next to the title of the movie!

Chris Claremont uses flashes of personal honesty in his comic book work that continues to astonish and impress me. He's one of the few comic book writers who allows the reader to read what each character is privately thinking through thought balloons.

I have always had an interesting empathy for the X-Men. Mutants powers usually manifest during puberty. So I often imagine myself as a mutant with the secret power of great imagination. Because I use this gift to make self-expressive art, I feel like an outcast. Most people don't understand what my work is about, which leaves me feeling lonely and alienated. As a result of being an artist, I feel like my inner fantasy universe and emotions are a curse. It is these repressed emotions that leave me burning inside and keep me fighting the great battle... existence.

I identified heavily with the superhero outcast mutants from the pages of Chris Claremont's run on "The Uncanny X-Men" for their super human abilities and their emotional conflicts. They were looked upon as heroes and villains because they were so different. They saved the world, but were never respected for it. They were always turmoil in their lives, whether physically, mentally, or emotionally.

Reading Chris Claremont's "The Uncanny X-Men" was like being involved in an underground cult of

mutants and outcasts with extraordinary powers and lives. I wanted so dearly to be part of it... and I was. They were superheroes who feel that their special powers are more of a curse than a gift. That's similar to how some artists feel about their own talent and the harrowing emotions that it brings. Being different and special forever separates apart them from the rest of humanity.

Maybe this isn't important to many, but I really relished reading a couple of old Chris Claremont/ John Byrne "Uncanny X-Men" back issues. I've rarely ever read such a marvelous comic book series with actual emotional interaction between the mutant/ "outcast" characters.

4-5-09: Today, Sunday, was the 2009 Gem City Comic Con held at Wright State University's Student Union in Dayton, Ohio. Instead, I drove down early this morning so I'd make it there a half an hour early to get in line and get first dibs on as many great buys as possible. And I did quite well. Ironically, the first two stands I went to I barely got much at all. Yet it was the third where I struck gold, leaving with 180 comics for only \$150 (they had a special of 60 comics for \$50). After spending the first three hours on recent \$1 comics, I then spent an hour and a half on the 50 cent books where I got \$50 worth. Not bad at all for newer books that were originally \$3 to \$4.

Then at 2:30 p.m., I attended in the upper rows the Chris Claremont session that was moderated by an enthusiastic and very well-read Uncanny X-Men fan who was an African-American in his twenties. Chris was a bit more loosened up for this "smaller" event, which made him quite a bit more engaging and endearing. For the last hour and a half, I quickly went through eighteen 25-cent comic book boxes and got \$25 worth of books. The male Marvel Zombies had gathered in mass and sometimes the aisles were so tight with fanboy (and a few fangirls) you had to squeeze to get through. I made a point to casually say hello to Chris Sprouse and his wife since we're from the same northwest side of Columbus. Then I got enough nerve to go see Chris Claremont at his booth right at 5 p.m. when the line was gone to thank him in person for what a great writer he has been. I gave him a copy of my "Comic Book Culture" DVD and told him a little of what it was about. He laughed a bit and smiled when I told him it was about how comics inspire creativity. He's too much of a veteran of the comic book industry to know "better". I guess it takes an "innocent" like me to fully appreciate it from afar. I also mentioned how he was a master of the introspective "thought balloon" during his run on the "Uncanny X-Men", especially his run with John Romita Jr. It was actually rather difficult to meet one of your idols because they've got a lifetime of writing experience and I'm just a gushing, stuttering "fanboy". It's hard to keep my composure and talk to him on a "normal" level. And it's hard to not sound too much like every other gushing fan. At least I tried. I doubt he'll watch the DVD, but I'm glad I gave it to him. Overall, it was a very good Gem City Comic Con, and it was very well attended. In fact, I got more at this convention every year than I usually do at any other one. It's really that good.

-John Byrne/ "Fantastic Four", "Alpha Flight", "The Sensational She-Hulk", "Next Men"

-Frank Miller/ "Daredevil", "The Dark Knight Returns", "Sin City", "Batman: Year One", "300"

Along with Alan Moore, Frank Miller was one of the great innovative comic book writers who made a big splash in the comic book world in the 1980's.

I read a written "speech" by Mr. Frank Miller, the creator of "Sin City", "Hard Boiled", and many other comic book masterpieces, concerning comic book censorship. He was very against the idea of censorship without regard. Through reading his argument, I had to disagree with a few of his remarks. He thought a rating system was a horrible idea. Well, if I had watched *Taxi Driver* or *One Flew Over a Cuckoo's Nest* at a younger or highly unstable time in my life, I probably might have ended up very screwed and *fucked up*. Certain kinds of entertainment have its negative effect on our minds. We do need to be careful.

"Sin City": written and drawn by a comic book legend, Frank Miller, he seductively lures you into the life of a man framed for the murder of a woman he loves. The book is in stark contrasts of black and white, which makes the mood of the story seem darker and more sinister.

"Comics have always been desperately important to me. As a refuge. As inspiration. As a vehicle for my fantasies. As a career." -From a Frank Miller speech at a Diamond Comics Seminar.

-Stan Lee/ "Spider-Man", "Hulk", "X-Men", "Thor", "Captain America", "Fantastic Four", etc. (The Marvel Superhero Characters)

With Great Power: The Stan Lee Story: Stanley Martin Lieber became Stan Lee. Stan-ley to Stan Lee... "Rascally Roy Thomas. Jolly Jack Kirby"... "The Comics Code stifled creativity"... "Before you quit and leave writing comics forever, write a comic book the way you want to write. Get it out of your system"... "Fairy tales for adults"... "Stan's superheroes were dealing with angst, self-torment, anguish"... "What makes Stan happy is peace and quiet... and his computer"... Readers could identify with the characters like Peter Parker... "Spider-Man is Stan"... "King of the

Comic Books"... "Comic can be something more than just something for young children"... "I'm doing what I've always wanted to do! I'm having fun! Don't punish me by making me retire."

When I was in junior high, one of my school assignments was to write to someone you respect or are inspired by (a state senator, an actor, a musician, a baseball player) and if you get a reply back you got extra credit. So I thought and thought about whom I would most want to write to. I was at the height of my comic book collecting I ended up deciding on Stan Lee, the amazing, incredible, invincible, uncanny creator of some of my favorite comic book characters, like Spider-Man, The Hulk, Iron Man, and the X-Men. A few weeks after I sent out my letter, I got a reply (actually from the Marvel Comics office of Stan Lee)! They sent me several photocopied biographies and news clippings from different magazines that were featured about him. It was simply touching and exhilarating to even get a reply back. Stan "The Man" Lee created and wrote so many astonishing and lasting super heroes that filled up my days with such fantasy, emotion, and vision. He was one of the lights in my imagination early on in my creative life. The more I learned about him and his career, the more I respected him. "I never wrote for kids – I wrote for me!" he once said. Yet he didn't do it all by himself; he had the help of some of the most talented artists of their time – Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and others. But in the end, it was Stan Lee brought mature themes and adult issues to his comic book characters. As a result, comics grew up from being "just for kids". Grown-ups could read them and appreciate their writing and imagination as well.

"Comic books are like a storyboard for a movie. The only thing you don't have is the motion and the sound."
–Stan Lee.

-Jack Kirby/ "Fantastic Four", "Hulk", "X-Men", "Thor", "Captain America", etc. (The Marvel Superhero Characters)

"And another round of applause – let's make this an even bigger one, I want the walls to shake this time – for the greatest artists in the history of comics, Mr. Jack Kirby. The walls had to shake for Jack. Just like they would have on one of his pages. An age passes with Jack Kirby. Now, comics folks, we're all fond of naming "ages" of comics. I call this age the Jack Kirby Age of Comics. By saying this I mean no disrespect to the outstanding works of Stan Lee and Steve Ditko and many others. We are in their debt as well. But it was Jack Kirby who defined the style and method of every comic artist who followed him. There is before Kirby, and after Kirby. One age does not resemble the next." – From a Frank Miller speech at a Diamond Comics Seminar.

-Will Eisner/ "The Spirit"

"Comics and movies, apples and oranges. True, both use pictures, primarily, to tell the story. But comics are not 'movies on paper.' I once thought they were, until I had a several –hour argument in Atlanta, many years ago, with comics master Will Eisner. Will won the argument, which should surprise nobody. He taught me that comics are a form of literature, not a sorry second to movies. Following Eisner's advice has made my work better. Comics artists should study our art form for what it can do, rather than how it can poorly imitate film." –Comments by Frank Miller.

-Scott McCloud/ "Understanding Comics", "Creating Comics", "Zot!"

Re-reading *Understanding Comics* during work, I realized how sensitive and thoughtful Scott McCloud was when addressing a ridiculed and stereotyped medium.

I'm afraid - in the horror of now - that *Understanding Comics* had some disturbingly provocative questions to "Why do I want to express my ideas?" and "Why am I doing this?" (i.e. writing these words). What makes me believe that I can express dreams better than someone else? Am I looking at just the "surface" of art instead of understanding it? (Van Gogh's thick paint looks powerful - could I do that).

2-11-04: Notes and impressions from Scott McCloud's OSU lecture at the Wexner Center for the Arts: He is, quite possibly, the best visiting artist speaker I have ever seen. Mainly, this is because he was the most literate and relevant to my interests and me. He's a theorist, futurist, teacher, and multi-media presenter... Space = Time... Moving through space is moving through time... Drunk on the possibilities of comics... The design challenge of comics on the Internet... Sequential art is comics... Finding the shape of a visual narrative and thinking of how to use it on "infinite canvas"... Theory is giving way to reality... Support superior creative endeavors online... Looping animation, visuals, and sound create a continuous motion... Using space by altering the amplitude of the panels... There is no waste of paper in digital art... Comics are a minority art form. It's a medium that is different and unique of all other creative art forms... Storytelling mediums are a way for people to escape. People want to lose themselves.

I did stay after the question and answer finale of his presentation to get both of his books signed. I even found the courage to express sincerely how profound his books have been upon my life as an artist. "I read 'Understanding Comics' every year. I especially enjoy the chapter on the six stages of being an artist. Thank you very much for your books!" And I shook his hand with a firm handshake and a smile and departed. He was the kind of guy I felt I could actually have a real conversation with as an artist peer to artist peer, rather than as comic book writer/ artist god to fan-boy geek enthusiast. He's an online comic book futurist/ theorist as I am a digital art futurist/ theorist. We're both speaking on the same higher plane of thought. I'm actually quite comfortable and confident with emailing him my own thoughts and writings (and possibly my own interactive art work). I'd be able to have *something* to say that is *worthwhile* of being said to someone I feel could give me real enthusiastic feedback from, which is something I've

been craving for years for.

Notes from *Making Comics* by Scott McCloud: Tom Richner and I both recently purchased Scott McCloud's latest book, "Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels", which could have easily been titled, "Making Storyboards and Layouts", or "Understanding Film Structure". This is an illustrated book in a graphic novel format that is as much about storytelling and film theory as it is about making comics. It's all the same basic rules of assembling images in sequence and creating a coherent information flow that make visual sense to a viewer. It's "Writing with Pictures". What (camera) angle to choose, how to frame your shot, how to pace your shots, when to use a close-up or a wide angle.... It's practically everything we go over in Time-Based Media Design and Video I all rolled into one easy to read book that's written with pictures and text that's ideal for right-brained, *visual*-minded people and artists. McCloud also wrote the incredible "Understanding Comics" in 1993. This new book goes into much more depth in the process and creation of sequential images. I love it. And he'll probably be speaking at the Wexner Center this coming spring.

4-4-07: The main thing I did today was go to the Scott McCloud presentation on "Making Comics" at the Wexner Center. I drove over with Tom Richner and James Whitworth since they didn't know where to go for the event. And it was a pretty neat event since various local comic book professionals were in the audience, including Jeff Smith of "Bone" fame. It was a packed presentation, too, with several people turned away because there were no seats left ten minutes before the presentation started.

I took the following notes: "Visual literacy from early grades at school... 'Maus' was a comic book with the urgency of a diary... A dance between words and pictures... Comics as a paper vaudeville... What I feel passionate about comics... Z axis comics."

-Mark Waid/ "Kingdom Come"

3-31-12: I've got a nagging feeling that digital comics will slowly take over in the years to come. Or as Mark Waid said in an interview, "I'm not a big fan of motion comics. Anytime you introduce movement, limited animation, voices or sound effects into the mix, it's not comics anymore, it's just limited animation. The key is making sure, like with a print comics, the reader maintains control over how he views the story at all times, the pace and how he processes the information. In that way reading a comic is a very personal experience. I didn't want to compromise that."

-Grant Morrison/ "Animal Man", "Doom Patrol", "The Invisibles"

Notes from *Supergods* by Grant Morrison: "The superheroes laughed at the Atom Bomb"... "Superman, however, was a Faster, Stronger, Better Idea"... "Superman is so indefatigable a production of the human imagination"... "As a result, stories got smarter, artwork became more sophisticated"... "Alcoholic perverts or suicidal depressives"... "We tell our children they're trapped like rats on a doomed, bankrupt, gangster-haunted planet with dwindling resources, with nothing to look forward to but rising sea levels and imminent mass extinctions, then raise a disapproving eyebrow when, in response, they dress in black, cut themselves with razors, starve themselves, gorge themselves, or kill one another"... "They came to save us from the existential abyss, but first they had to find a way into our collective imagination"... "It was a kind of animation but slowed down into a sequence of freeze-frames that required the reader to fill in the gaps between pictures"... Siegel and Shuster sold the rights of Superman for only \$130... "Like so many artists, musicians, and entertainers, they were creating a product to sell"... "But these were exactly the kind of damaged sex kittens who prowled regularly into playboy Bruce Wayne's anything-goes world. The bad girls of Batman"... "In his turn, Captain Marvel spawned his own imitator, the British Marvelman"... "Marston coupled his ideas with an unorthodox lifestyle: his wife, Elizabeth, was also a psychologist, and is credited with having suggested a superhero character of Wonder Woman... They shared a mutual lover, a student of Marston's named Olive Byrne, said to be the physical model for the original Wonder Woman"... "Marston's prose swooned over detailed accounts of Amazonian chase and capture rituals in which some girls were 'eaten' by the others"... "When Marston died of cancer in 1947, the erotic charge left the *Wonder Woman* strip, and sales declined, ever to recover. Without the originality and energy that Marston's obsessions brought to the stories, Wonder Woman was an exotic bloom starved of rare nutrients. Once the lush, pervy undercurrents were purged, the character foundered"... "The Gay Ghost"... "This was the first explosion of the rainbow"... "Barbarella would fuck her way across the cosmos with the untroubled gaze of a wide-eyed debutante. She was played by Jane Fonda in the camp 1968 movie version, a film that was, I have to admit, responsible for my own feverish sexual awakening and retains a fond place in my imagination"... "Batman inhabits a subterranean secret lair, dresses in badass black leather, enjoys the company of a small boy in tights, and has no steady girlfriend. Perhaps there remains to be written the great gay Batman story"... "Clearly these stories were written by perverts with an intent to pervert the young. They were entirely successful"... "There was the sense that the young Bruce Wayne, who died emotionally along with his parents in Crime Alley, had finally met a friend with whom to share his strange, exciting secret life. The emotionally stunted Batman found a perfect pal in the ten-year-old orphaned acrobat"... "Batman Becomes Bat-Baby", it was an anything-goes atmosphere"... "And so Lee, with nothing to lose, gave it a go and in the process founded an empire"... "I was obsessed with space, astronauts, constellations, UFOs – anything in the sky"... "The idea of infinite worlds, each with its own history and its own superheroes, was intoxicating and gave DC an even more expansive canvas"... "And in place of time, comic-book universes offer something called 'continuity'... "There is already technology that allowed people to drive remote-controlled cars with

their minds. What's to stop someone becoming Auto-Man, the Human Car?"... "In so many ways, we're already superhuman"... "Superhero science has taught me this: Entire universes fit comfortably inside our skulls"... "These creative people would sustain the likes of Spider-Man, dripping blood and sweat into the kin to give their lives to him"... "The wealth of new and provocative ideas in *OMAC* would be staggering if this was any artist other than Jack Kirby"... "Stan Lee's own tortured teenage soul"... "Stories had no real beginning or end"... "As the Beatles gave sound a visual dimension, Thomas brought sound to the comic page"... "They were 3-D Sensurround comic books"... "Starlin's existential heroes"... "Wonder Woman's outsider sexuality"... "So these thoughtful and informed comics were powerful ammunition for me, as they were for all the other earnest teenage fans so captivated by the imaginary universes of Marvel and DC that they'd lingered there past the age of twelve and become trapped like Lost Boys"... "Like the astronauts who'd found God in orbit (in 2001)"... "With nothing normal to do in the evenings after school, I cooled my fevered imagination in the pages of fantasy novels and superhero comics"... "That made him even cooler, a martyr to his art"... "Gerber brought the same unique sensibility to the comic *The Defenders*, which teamed a group of Marvel's loner heroes"... "It's deadpan surrealism with the humor of comedian Andy Kaufman. Plots involved a self-improvement cult in clown masks called the Bozos"... "Living to drawn and drawing to live"... "Photographer Bob Carlos Clarke's fetish girls were punk. Comics were punk"... "I was eighteen and still hadn't kissed a girl, but perhaps I had potential. I knew I had a lot to say"... "Ugly kids, shy kids, weird kids: It was okay to be different. In fact, it was mandatory"... "I still had no girlfriend, but I was learning how to make my fantasies into reality, and that was a start"... "But the shine was off, Comics and superheroes were boring. I was a sci-fi punk. Fuck you"... "The world of *X-Men* was far from plausible, but Claremont cannily grounded his wide-open imagination in the engrossing and convincing emotional lives of his cast"... "The mutant X-Men could be adolescents, or gay or black or Irish. They could stand for any minority, represent the feelings of every outsider, and Claremont knew it"... "But there were other people just like me, all over the country, looking for an outlet for their anger and their creativity and finding comics"... "If you think that Kryptonian supersperm would naturally be capable of fertilizing anything, including cats, dogs, cattle, horses, and winsome squid – in which case we'd have a lot more to worry about than just undying spermatozoa"... "And another thing: Does Superman go to the bathroom? If so, what the hell does his shit look like?"... "Moran eventually committed a kind of suicide by saying 'Kimota!'"... "His stainless-steel Olympus across a world redeemed into wonder, where the fantasies of the comic books had become the stuff of everyday life in a permanent, orgasmic Silver Age"... "Supersex"... "I was drawn back to comics"... "We provided a lifesaving transfusion of nihilistic humor and wild invention"... "Evolve or die"... "*We* are Seymour, reading the journal, joining the story right here where, as we'd been reminded the first time, 'The end is nigh.'"... "And where the chance discovery of Rorschach's crazed journal undid the perfect plan of the perfect man"... "See if I could simulate the style"... "My experiments on *Animal Man* were described by critics as 'metafiction,' or fiction about fiction"... "I explained to my character how the people who wrote his life needed drama and shock and violence to make his story interesting. The implication was that our own lives might also be 'written' to entertain or instruct an audience in a perpendicular direction we could never point to"... "**I can see you!**" It was the violated superhero finally confronting the voyeuristic reader"... "I wanted nothing less than first contact with fictional reality"... "I was drifting closer to what could only be termed a kind of psychedelic hyperreality"... "I'd type in strings of nonsense words, which the computer would dutifully correct to the nearest equivalent, giving my dream horrors dialogue exchanges like this: 'DEFEATING BREADFRUIT IN ADUMBRATE.' 'CRASHLAND FOR AWARD PRIMATE.' 'YUCCA OR PRIORITY?' 'LEMUR NEVER HIBERNATE'"... "As a hunched defensive loner relaxed into his own skin, got laid, got a haircut, chilled out, and began to dance with cute girls. The brief age of art superheroes had arrived"... "I decided I would plant my flag in the world of dreams, automatic writing, visions, and magic"... "I would shave my head before male pattern baldness could ruin my Beatles cut and be my own naked self"... "What would happen if all those macho men superheroes came out of the goddamn closet?"... "We felt different, we felt like pioneers"... "US comics' response was devastating when it came and effectively ended the art school phase of mainstream superhero comics"... "I'd-do-it-for-free fans turned pro; This was a medium where outsider artists could work out their kinds on a regular basis, in public, and make big money in the process"... "Superman could become Sureme in Liefeld's hands, or Mr. Majestic in Jim Lee's. Lee's Wonder Woman was a warrior nun named Zealot; Liefeld's was a princess named Glory"... "Image had identified and then supplied a huge, new market: bored teenage boys growing up with *The Terminator*, PlayStation, and Mega Drive who wanted no-nonsense action heroes in the Arnold Schwarzenegger-Bruce Willis style"... "Liefeld's enthusiastic, arrogant amateurism enflamed a generation of young artists. If Rob could get away with his barely original characters, his blizzard of crosshatched lines, the heroic legs that tapered to tiny screwdriver feet, and the multitudinous array of new muscles he'd invented for the human forearm alone, anyone could do it. He was mocked, but his style was his own"... "The Image heroes *killed*: readily and without mercy"... "It was cocaine comics"... "My own personality seemed crudely fashioned, and often ill-fitting. I was thoroughly sick of chronic vague depression"... "I'd already made my mind up to accept complete surrender to a process of transformation, an ego-dissolving ordeal that I felt sure would give me new things to write about, new things to say, and a new way to see the world"... "The world felt intensely awake and alive, as if I'd somehow learned to dance with it a little"... "It was hard to believe that people were paying me for what I soon came to realize was something close to self-therapy. I could assume only that my problems and doubts, my hopes and dreams, were shared by many others who could relate to the way I was framing them as fiction"... "This is what you wanted. The secret of the universe"... "Frank Quitely was able to draw anything from memory and imagination"... "Like the sliver blobs who'd brought me

there"... "I was now able to 'see' 5-D perspective"... "There would always be writes, telling the same basic stories over and over"... "Television talks about the 'fourth wall' of the set as being the screen itself. If so, this was a glimpse beyond the fifth wall of our shared reality"... "I was haunted, inspired, possessed"... "This sounded even better than 5-D angels"... "As you might imagine, it was hard to sustain this level of controlled breakdown while running a business. My cometary rise was equaled by a fall; a plunge into dissolution. The more perverse and inhuman the enemies of the Invisibles became, the sicker I got. By the time I realized I'd become semifictional, it was too late to defend myself"... "All of it went into the comics. Every breakthrough, every breakdown, became art and dollars. *My diary had become my story*"... "It felt like some extended art installation was finally over"... "Still, I was single, newly confident, and wealthy. I was a globe-trotting freelance writer who specialized in a kind of neosurrealism that allowed me to get away with pretty much anything. I already had an articulate, enthusiastic readership"... "I'd minded childhood nightmares and adolescent lonely nights. I was writing *The Invisibles*, which satisfied my desire to create the kind of progressive highbrow action-philosophy sex comics I loved most, and I wanted to remind prospective employers that I could still do something more mainstream"... "By 1995, the epic battle was against reader apathy"... "Issue no. 1 of the relaunched *Justice League of America* in 1987 had depicted its characters from an overhead perspective, giving the reader an elevated position that allowed us to look down on a newly humanized and relatable group of individuals. At my request, Howard Porter drew our first cover shot of the JLA from *below*, endowing them with the majesty of towering statues on Mount Olympus, putting readers at the level of children gazing up at adults. *JLA* was a superhero title kids could read to feel grown-up and adults could read to feel young again"... "Reconnected readers to wonder"... "Meteoric streaks, distant explosions, and rainbows"... "Alex Ross was perfect for a generation losing its strength to dream"... "All the usual pundits and pessimists predicting yet again the death of comics"... "Clark returned to his framing roots as a superfarmer"... "Batman agreed to be the child's godfather – all in plainclothes. It was a farewell not to superheroes but to costumes and to posturing, and to the never-ending Dreamtime that recycled their stories with no hope of lasting change"... "I loved to listen over and over again to HAL 9000's death scene from the soundtrack of *2001: A Space Odyssey*"... "For twenty-first-century comics as they tried to emulate the look and feel of \$200 million movies, even copying filmic narrative structures"... "I knew the Justice League of America was suddenly obsolete (with *The Authority*). This was the future, and it was time to move on"... "I was taken to see *The Matrix* by my new friends and saw what seemed to me my own combination of ideas enacted on the screen: fetish clothes, bald heads, kung fu, and magic, witnessing the Gnostic invasion of the Hollywood mainstream"... "Mark Millar truly loved superheroes, and we got on immediately, sharing a surreal and gruesome sense of humor"... "What Ellis had begun and Millar had completed was to make the Justice League and Avengers look out of date and out of touch. The threats in *The Authority* were enormous: insane tyrants commanding armies of genetically modified suicide supermen"... "An omnipotent pedophile sadist who caused the sky to rain dead pets and abortions"... "Millar played it all for laughs"... "*The Authority* was castrated, reduced to a pallid shadow of its confrontational, hip, and cheeky glory"... "Re-created the world with one simple product: a battery that never ran out"... "On one side were 'dark' or Gothic offerings like Sam Raimi's manically inventive, pulp-infused *Darkman*, *The Crow*, and Todd McFarlane's disappointing *Spawn*, which failed to capture the Marilyn Manson goblin screech of the comic book. On the other side were bloated *Dick Tracy*-style living cartoons and period pieces with no discernible audience, such as *The Rocketeer*, *The Shadow*, and *The Phantom*, or interesting awkward oddities such as 1999's *Mystery Men*"... "Old versus new. Tradition versus tomorrow"... "Immediately, the sexual tension that had given the 'Lois and Clark' stories their edge just bled out, and the audience evaporated"... "Catwoman, who like Burton's Batman took her inspiration from punk and bondage clothing, with a shiny vinyl catsuit"... "When Burton left Gotham to pursue his personal visions"... "Schwarzenegger's Mr. Freeze was a lumbering, sleepwalking cliché emitter"... "I can think of no more potent image of this union of real and imaginary than the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. How many times had we seen those towers fall? How many times had this soul-wrenching vision been rehearsed in our imaginations, and repeated in our fictions, almost as if we were willing it to happen, and dreaming of the day? From the moment the towers were completed in 1973, they became a target for a sequence of imaginary demolitions. King Kong was the first to climb them... They'd been smashed by tidal waves, blasted by aliens, shattered by meteor strikes, and pulverized by rogue asteroids. The terrible fall of the World Trade Center towers on September 11 had the curious inevitability of an answered prayer or the successful result of a black magic ritual. Adding to the aura of the uncanny surrounding that day was its aftermath were the creepy clairvoyant comic books published in the weeks and months prior to September 11, all of them haunted by eerie images of planes and ruined towers. Garth Ennis's *Punisher* depicted a hijacked 747 on a suicide dive into twin silos. *Adventures of Superman no. 596*, a book written by Joe Casey several months earlier but published on September 12, began with a scene showing Lex Luthor's twin LexTowers in the aftermath of an alien attack. It mirrored, almost exactly, the photographs on the front pages of the same day's newspapers. So accurately did the pictures match that DC made the book returnable in the event of an inadvertent offense"... "September 11 was the biggest challenge yet to the relevance of superhero comics"... "Next to policemen, firemen, doctors, nurses, and selfless civilians, the superheroes were silly, impotent daydreams, and for the moment, they seemed to falter, aghast. They hadn't been prepared for this and had nothing useful to offer"... "Bendis came from the independent comics scene and, influenced by playwright David Mamet rather than Stan Lee, he made alarmingly convincing dialogue the focus of his style and broke the rules of comic-book storytelling"... "They were final proof that even death, despair, and loneliness could be commodified and repackaged as an overpriced Hot Topic satchel"... "The emphasis veered away from escapist comic fantasy, nostalgia, and surrealism toward social critique, satire, and filmic vérité wrapped in the

flag of shameless patriotism and the rise of the badass-motherfucker hero"... "Superheroes were big business as geek dreams became movies, TV, and games"... "We (humans) hated them (mutants) for the same reason we secretly hated our children: because they were here to replace us"... "Mutant musicians releasing records that could be heard only on infra- or ultrasonic frequencies, art that used colors only mutant eyes could see"... "Then, shortly into the project, came the artistic reverberations of 9/11"... "The geeks were in the spotlight now, proudly accepting a derogatory label that directly compared them to degraded freak-show acts. Bullied young men with asthma and shy, bitter virgins with adult-onset diabetes could now gang up like the playground toughs they secretly wanted to be and anonymously abuse the threaten professional writers and actors with family commitments and bills to pay"... "Storybook surrealism"... "Nevertheless, I'd become fascinated by the power and the existence of the evil-has-won narrative and resolved to explore it further in a major DC universe crossover event"... "Voluminous Goth girls, victims of some unspeakable abuse"... "Suffice it to say that San Diego, as we call it, is the world's largest pop media culture marketplace fringe madness festival"... "Transform into a science fiction/ horror/ sex simulation of Oz"... "The people who connected with my stories were the sort of people I hoped would enjoy them, and I got on with pretty much all of them. I didn't find them creepy, or nerdy, or geeky, or whatever the marketing labels became"... "*Wanted* began its journey as a proposal for DC's *Secret Society of Super-Villains* title, and every character was a variant of a DC stalwart, so the Joker became the diabolical Mister Rictus. Clayface was reborn as Shit-Head, Two-Face was Johnny Two-Dicks"... "The comic book was just a pitch now, a stepping-stone to celluloid validation"... "One image will be branded into my brain folds forever: of the formerly breezy Sue Dibny sobbing in her husband's wraparound arms on the reflective floor of the Justice League satellite headquarters - a beloved childhood locus of excitement and opportunity - with the arse ripped out of her tights after what looked like forced back-door entry by Doctor Light"... "For the Dibnys, the Silver Age was well and truly over. The death of dreams was becoming a defining myth of post-Trade Towers America"... "The men who watched superporn where girls poured steaming sulfuric acid over perfect, invulnerable breasts"... "*Batman & Robin* - an acid-tinged modernization of the sixties TV show as if directed by David Lynch"... "Had the brief, angry, sex-mad, and individuality adolescence of superhero comics come to a close at last? Comics were no longer come last-chance hotel for fantasy-prone mavericks who found other entertainment outlets too tame or too restrictive for their visions. They were now a respectable stepping-stone to Hollywood and big money"... "Sexy waling dead through a bombed-out city"... "We love our superheroes because they refuse to give p on us. We can analyze them out of existence, kill them, ban them, mock them, and still they return, patiently reminding us of who we are and what we wish we could be. They are a powerful living idea"... "Superheroes inspired my creativity."

The Invisibles: #8(Volume 1): Grant Morrison is a mastermind of *ideas*... The head of John the Baptist sings "Right Round Baby"... "We're coming upon a world that looks like *Auschwitz*"... "Smart Drinks"... "I want to feel my *heart* beating again. I want to *sweat*"... "We're going to dance ourselves dizzy"... "Our little daughter lies dead. Work is all that consoles me"... "I cannot stop talking to the future. I have so much I must say to the unborn, suffering multitudes. I *know* where utopia lies. It is here. Where is the love, beauty, and truth we seek but in our mind? The golden country, forever new? The home of all hearts, untouched by time and pain? Here. Waiting for us to grow up and recognize it and come home"... "Don't worry about me. I feel quite at home in all this bloody chaos"... "Weird shit goes on all the time"... "Our shadows will rule the earth."

"It's not real." -Crazy Jane from "Doom Patrol #63".

During the year of 1999, I purchased for a discount price the entire back issue run of "Doom Patrol" and "Animal Man" that were written by a British writer called Grant Morrison. What lied within those pages astonished me intellectually, emotionally, and imaginatively. This was some of the best disturbing fantasy writing I've ever come across. He single-handedly resurrected my interest and faith in the creative medium of comic books again. Within my hands was the clearest potential for this visual and literary medium.

"Along the way, Morrison tosses out some of his trademark wild ideas, allowing them to settle into the plot with minimal exposition. Concepts like "meganthropes" and the "yoctosphere" percolate in the reader's mind, stimulating the imagination." -From an Internet review of "All-Star Superman", written by Grant Morrison.

-Warren Ellis/ "Transmetropolitan", "The Authority", "The Planetary"

Brilliant funnybook writer and novelist Warren Ellis ("The Authority," "Global Frequency," "Planetary," "Astonishing X-Men," "Ignition City," "Mek," "Red," "Reload," "Iron Man: Extremis," "newuniversal," "Ultimate Fantastic Four," "Ultimate Galactus," "Ocean," "Orbiter," "Jack Cross," "Ministry of Space," "Fell," "Gravel," "Dark Blue," "Scars," "Wolfskin," "Blackgas," "FreakAngels," "No Hero").

"I love the way science *sounds*. I love the ideas for their art. There's a crazy beauty about a theory of dimensional structure that assembles itself into a snowflake, or the idea that reality is a two-dimensional plane of information and the 3-D universe is a hologrammatic side-effect. And that's how I write science fiction. I use the sound of the ideas and then make it all up." -Warren Ellis.

"Explosive storytelling and provocative politics." -Entertainment Weekly.

"Hot Comic-Book Writer: Ellis' writing has a depth that's rare in comic books and a worldview that's grim but oddly tender." -Rolling Stone.

“Warren Ellis is writing our lives and you’d better listen.” –Grant Morrison.

“Ellis both subverts and elevates.” –Joss Whedon.

“Warren Ellis can be fierce about a multitude of things, yet one suspects he is fiercest when it comes to his demands upon himself.” –Alan Moore.

-Peter Milligan/ “Shade, the Changing Man”

4-24-05: I finished reading the entire run of *Shade, The Changing Man* by writer Peter Milligan. It was like harvesting an idea farm. I took pages of notes and quotes from the series and possible references of inspiration for my expanding imagination.

Today is all about reading “Shade, the Changing Man”: “I’m all lived out”... “Too sensitive, too dreamy, too impulsive, too bad”... “The Night of the Insane Sky”... Orange dolphins... “Shade, I’ve been thinking... I think we should go our own ways. I mean, there’s so much working against us. It’s been fun and that but there’s too much history. And I don’t want to get serious yet. You’ve got your work fighting the madness and I’ve got to find out what my life’s all about... I can only do that on my own. I’ll keep in touch. Maybe when I’ve worked a few things out of my system we can try again... take care, darling”... “It’s wearing me down, this worrying about her”... Farting sheep... In modern day, Billy the Kid works at an electronics store... “Such emotive language!”... “I love you but I’m not sure if I want to be with you”... “I want to go to a bar and be anonymous”... “The stillness was what I needed”... “They get along so well together... and I’ve nothing to say”... “What am I? Part dream, part person?”... “All we have, all we are, are cliches”... “I think I’ll make love to the earth, as a little thank you, and offer her my copious seed” (planting semen in the ground)... “What is a personality anyway? A bunch of reactions, memories, genetic characteristics, tics and patterns and predictable responses. Ah, the hell with it. Personalities are overrated anyway. I’ve spent too long worrying about my life. I want to live a little”... “You’re just scared of deep emotion. And I don’t blame you”... “I’m a little mystery queen. Even when I’m about to die I like to sound interesting and special”... “I am living art”... Just because a man’s in touch with his sensitive side doesn’t mean he’s homosexual.”

-Mark Millar/ “The Authority”

The Authority #20: This is Mark Millar letting his imagination go off wild and uncensored with impossibly powerful superheroes and super-villains: “Ever wonder what Nat King Cole sounds like at the force of ten Hiroshimas?”... “The worst he can do now is d-create the universe from the Big Bang to the end of time”... “The hour you granted him can be stretched to infinity once his brain adjusts to the fifteen new senses he’s just acquired”... “Did you know, for example, that the young doctor was capable of movement beyond three dimensional space? Imagine fighting someone who could shoot you as you emerged from your mother’s womb or hold a pillow over your face in a retirement home as you traded blows. Worse still, imagine the local doctor, back when you were in high school, giving you a funny feeling you’d carry around for the rest of your natural life. Hello again, Miss Angela Spica of Class 48. Remember me?”... “I can turn back time and get them just as easily as I can turn these raindrops into mummy’s secret abortions.” And so he turns raindrops into black, ugly discarded aborted fetuses falling from the sky! It’s comic book surrealism at its finest and most twisted. “Turn the moon into a skull. The earth into a tumor. Make the sky rain pillar-box red until every drop of blood was squeezed from God’s infected veins—”... “There’s nothing funnier than people dying knowing that they’ve accomplished absolutely nothing.”

“Millar to Direct Superhero Movie”: But this is one of several big surprises planned for next year and you’ll hear a bit more about this in February when we start to release details. What is it? Who is it about? Well, that’s all a secret for now, but I learned a lot from Kick-Ass and love having the same creative freedom I have with comics when I work in cinema. I never want to be a studio bitch and go in there pitching for them to love me. The closest I came to this was a couple of calls regarding Superman, but pretty much none of my plans ever revealed as I didn’t like the idea of anyone nicking them.

Similarly, I don’t like the idea of asking for funding and justifying scenes with the money-men so I’m doing what Matthew Vaughn did with Kick-Ass and just making it outside the system with private investors. The financing is all secured and the movie stands or falls on how good I can make it, doing what Matthew did and just selling it once completed.

As you can imagine, I couldn’t be more excited. More as it happens, but this might just beat out War Heroes and American Jesus as my follow-ups to the Wanted and Kick-Ass movies. Have two other pictures about to go into development (and Wanted and Kick-Ass 2, of course), but I think you need to scare the Hell out of yourself every once in a while and something totally new like directing should do the trick.

-Garth Ennis/ “Preacher”, “Hellblazer”, “The Punisher”

11-22-98: I read *vulgar, exciting fire* today. I noticed myself falling in it. I was **exposed**, surrounded, overwhelmed, and manipulated to some much evil, hatred, nihilism, alcoholism, pot, stupidity, cruelty, hero’s profanity, massacre, child abuse, gore, lust, exhilaration, vacant religious beliefs, fun guns, horny demons, parental anger, I can go on and on. It was life devoid of love. Just a cold, cynical humor to sprinkle it with vacant joy. I shouldn’t have been exposed to all this! It’s become a plague with a “*****” rating - and a year-long blockbuster, an internationally accepted drug. We’re all vulnerable and contagious to the

profanity, sex, violence, anger - and the list of pain and pleasure keeps building as we grow older. I reacted because it was hurting me. Desensitizing me. Taking over me. It was "Preacher".

5-21-99: I am now convinced that "Preacher" is one of the greats in comic book literature art. I read its fifth trade paperback collection this evening and felt several reactions: the characters developed, the ideas were original, the plot was building... then there was the in-your-face violence, shocking/ gross-out obscenity, old Western movie lore, oral sex scenes, "God" that quit his job, main characters who openly take drugs for "soul -searching", a vampire best buddy, an "arse-faced" rock superstar... It's all too amazing; it's all too much. Imagination is becoming impending, almost engulfing to my senses so hungry for something to impress me, to fall in love with, to masturbate to, to inspire to. Here is a book of visual art and word balloons that I would have to give two grades to: ***1/2 stars and *1/2 stars. It is half grandiose, half trash. It's like love and sex. Which one is more appealing? Which one is more beautiful? Which one is more "dirty"? In the meantime, I loved it while being repelled by what I was being exposed to. This book belittled me with its originality, offended me, *complicated* me. It made me reexamine my artwork and myself. That is where the art comes in. Not in the book... but in me. Catharsis.

-Ed Brubaker/ "Catwoman", "Daredevil", "Captain America"

Another major comic book writing talent to be reckoned with.

"I like this CATWOMAN. I like her a lot. She looks great. She's a charmer, and she's just nuts enough to make sense. She brings her own perverse justice to Gotham's streets. Brubaker's got the chops. This is one damn fine comic book." -Frank Miller.

"Creating a story that's exactly what you want it to be, and having it printed around the world a few months later... That's the beauty of comics." -Ed Brubaker.

-Brian K. Vaughan/ "Y: The Last Man"

Another major comic book writing talent to be reckoned with.

"New comic series don't have fans, they have families, small groups of diverse people who band together to help keep alive some weird thing that matters only to them. So to those of you who finished this issue and think you might want more space helicopters and naked robots in your future... welcome to the tribe." -Brian K. Vaughan about his new series *Saga*.

-Robert Kirkman/ "The Walking Dead", "Invincible"

-Erik Larsen/ "Savage Dragon"

"Recently, while away from home for several months, I returned to find I had been robbed. They took almost everything, but most dear to me they took my collection of comics. I had spent my entire life on them and they were gone. The time, the effort, the love, the money, all gone. In addition, the many long boxes full of comics they also contained notebooks, and art pads full of my writing and art, concepts and ideas. I was crushed and back to at square one. Everything I had a passion for and loved, worked so hard for was gone in a blink. You see, I desire to some day write comics. My laptop has some material on it but I prefer to write by hand. Archaic, yes, but more therapeutic, I feel. Thousands, literally, of pages of writing just gone and my collection also.

To me, this was going to be the end of my journey. Perhaps comics and I were not meant to be. I should just stop reading, stop writing and forget my dream. But then I remembered Erik Larsen. And how so many years ago he had a house fire and lose everything. You did not quit. You did not give up. You moved on and still became successful in your field. You published your dream character and still get to do exactly what you love every month. Giving up is easy, finding a reason to carry on can be hard but its more satisfying in the end.

So, Mr. Larsen, thank you. Because of you I've started over. I have one long box with a few books in it and soon it will be full and I will have to buy a second and so on and so on and so on. It's a fresh start. I've also done my best to piece together old notes of my own ideas that I recall, but also have developed more new stories and will continue to pursue my passion. Whether I ever make it or not, who knows? But I'll always know I tried and didn't give up, even when I felt like I couldn't go on. I even self published a novella recently, so I'm making some progress. It's a start and I hope to make that jump to comics soon!

Thank you, again, for your inspiration and I hope to see Savage Dragon on the shelf for years to come!" - From the letters page from *Savage Dragon* #174.

-Glenn Fabry/ "Preacher", "Hellblazer"

Glenn Fabry's "Preacher" covers are like Norman Rockwell's "Saturday Evening Post" magazine covers through a very disturbing, twisted mirror.

-Brian Bolland/ "The Killing Joke"

The Norman Rockwell of eccentric, quirky comic book covers. See issues of "Animal Man", "Wonder Woman", "The Invisibles", and "Doom Patrol".

-Frank Frazetta

Frank Frazetta: Painting with Fire: "I consider myself to be a creative artist... not just a fantasy illustrator. I work purely from my imagination. No swipes. No photographs. I stress good composition and design that borders on the abstract in spite of the subject matter"... Dynamic and dramatic images... "He painted with a primal urgency"... "We inspired one another to do better"... "His work transcends the fantasy genre"... "All I need is fuel for the fire to get working"... "I can't help it. I seem things in a manner that others don't"... "He does very voluptuous, beautiful women... He paints women with big butts. But there's muscle behind there"... "He went through depression... He had nothing more to prove"... "I'd say the grandchildren keep him alive"... "His work is like food for the soul"... "His work has been hugely influential on Hollywood. George Lucas has bought several of his paintings"... "An artist is nothing without an audience"... "He was working in a style that was laughed at and frowned upon by the fine arts community... But he made his own niche for himself."

Fire and Ice: The "animation" is mainly panning over drawings or just tracing over live-action actors! I do like the painted environments in which the characters live within. It's like living inside a Frank Frazetta painting!... "My son speaks more with his heart than with his head. But he speaks for all of us!"

-Simon Bisley/ "Doom Patrol"/ "Lobo"

See brilliantly twisted artwork from issues of *Lobo* and *Lobo's Back* limited series, *Batman/ Judge Dredd: Judgment on Gotham*, and cover art for *Doom Patrol*.

-Peter David/ "The Incredible Hulk", "Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man"

During his time on "The Incredible Hulk", writer Peter David would take conventional superhero storylines (fantasy mixed with action and pathos) and insert his own personal brand of wit and humor to them. The result was an enormously satisfying read.

The greatest awakening influence came to me through a comic book - "The Incredible Hulk #377". Bruce Banner's personality was explained so realistically by Peter David's writing skill. Banner was a reflection of my own repressed ego that defies me emotion at times of despair and blinds my way to love. I gave myself the diversions of imagination, writing, movies, and (ironically) comics to keep myself sane and alive: "safe". Also Banner never drank because he wanted to always be in control. And how I will be able to succeed in living will be to explode my rage, anger, and other repressed quakes to shake up for once. I actually learned from the shock of reading my imaginative, comic book alter-ego with time and deepest thought.

-Jeff Smith/ "Bone"

Jeff Smith is someone I admire because he's a Midwest writer/ artist from Columbus, OH who's *made it* without sacrificing his artistic integrity to L.A. His *Bone* comic book has such great charm, wit, imagination, character development, excitement, mystery, craft, romance, and humor! It's unlike a lot of what's out there in comic book land. It's not your average stock-and-trade superhero. It's a bit like "Peanuts" mated with "Lord of the Rings" crossbred with Mickey Mouse. It's a wildly fun hybrid to read. And what crazy innocence that runs through the primary characters. Fone Bone, who doesn't even have any discernable genitalia, has a massive crush on the lovely teenage forest girl, Thorn. It's just so wonderful to share part of their world (loosely based on Hocking Hills in southeastern Ohio).

11-21-02: Jeff Smith, creator/ artist/ writer of the comic book "Bone" who lives in German Village, came to give a talk in the animation classroom this afternoon. Having been a fan of his work for years, I couldn't help from smirking to myself like a giddy six-year old boy from being in the presence of an idol. Yet after a while, I realized that he was just like any of us artists in the room. He was an ordinary guy wearing casual clothes with artistic and creative talents and a down-to-earth personality. I remained thrilled to be there in that room as a peer.

-Brian Michael Bendis/ "Ultimate Spider-Man", "Daredevil", "Powers", "New Avengers"

Before *Ultimate Spider-Man* and a gig on *Daredevil*, the writer (and sometimes artist) toiled through the 1990s as an accomplished indie creator of crime fiction comics. Through publishers Caliber and later Image, Bendis wrote acclaimed crime fiction. Alas, his success didn't pay the bills. Surviving on nothing more than Ramen Noodles, Bendis did his comics on the side while working as a comic store clerk, drawing caricatures at parties or cartooning for the *Cleveland Plains Dealer*.

1-24-06: "Over the years, Bendis tipped over conventional storytelling with one piece of advice the writer says he'd love to give every writer in comics - "Get scared." Brian says, 'Write yourself into a hole that you're terrified you can't get out of, do that, and then find the way out,' and if you know Brian, he says stuff like that with a glint in his eyes, almost insane."

"Joe Quesada suggested a handful of writers who took cracks at it and didn't do very well," says Jemas. "out of desperation he said, 'Well, there's this one guy from Cleveland, who hardly anybody's ever heard of, but he's a very talented writer - all I have to show you is a book about a serial killer.'" -Taken from various "Wizard" interviews.

From the *Powers* #7 letter column: "I just wanted to say thank you for making comics better than anyone

would ever have dreamed they would be. As an aspiring artist/ writer myself you are one of the greatest inspirations. OK I'm done kissing ass. Peace out Brian." – "I've never dreamt about comics. I did dream once that Belinda Carlisle and Jane Wiedlan from the Go-Go's were taking turns with my.... Wait, what was the question?"

From the *Powers* #11 letter column: "Dear Brian Michael Bendis: I think a full head of hair is a negative for any comic writer. I call it the Balding Wrier Theory. If you look at Wizard's Top Ten Writers list it's a balding frenzy. What do you say we take a look at some cats that are Hasselhof Challenged? Jeph Loeb... great writer. Christ Claremont (pre Soveirn Seven) great writer. Peter David.... Good writer. That J. Michael St-Straz-Stray-whatever the hell his name is, he's okay. Erik Larsen... well, with the stuff he's been writing lately he may be growing his hair back. But you get my point, balding for a comic writer is a positive thing."

From a transcript of a question-and-answer portion of Brian Michael Bendis's panel at the Mid-Ohio Con 2001: "Question: As a writer, do you think the industry has too much of one thing?" –Bendis: "It's the same with movies. Every time you buy a movie ticket, you cast a vote to get 10 more movies like that next year. When you say you're going to see *The Flintstones*, you guarantee that there will be 10 more bad cartoon movies next year.

It's the same thing with comics. You guys go, 'What the hell, I'm going to buy a big-breasted sword book.' Well, that means you're going to get 1 more next year. The people in comics try to deliver to people what they think they want. They just go for the trends.

With comics, recently, they're being writer-focused, which I've never seen before. When I was first breaking into comics, it was all artists – it was Image and the double-age spreads. Like every page had to have a giant image on it with a little panel at the top and bottom to do the storytelling. Me and [David] Mack would sit there and go, 'Oh, when is this going to be over?' It was cheesy and over-rendered and boring, and it just went on and on and on.

Over the last couple of years, the names you hear – Azzarello and Jenkins and Rucka – you're hearing writers' names. It's very cool to be part of that because comics are about ideas now, not about images. Based on that alone, you're a lot less shallow of a medium.

I actually feel that there's so much of everything and that everyone's working so hard to be at the top of their game that I'm not bitching for the first time ever, 'When are these cheesy books to stop?' The crossovers seem to be coming down, and those are gone.

It's a good time. Comics always seem to do really well creatively when no one's paying attention, like when the sales are down so there's no money involved, and it's like, 'Go do whatever you want.' So everyone gets to go nuts."

"Having done a little TV and movie work every once in a while, I can tell you that the Hollywood dream is a lie and that comics is the one truly spectacular creative medium. I wrote something for Hollywood that made me really happy and if it doesn't get made, and it probably won't, I don't know if more than twenty people will ever see it." – Brian Michael Bendis on Hollywood vs. Comic Books and audience vs. creativity.

"I try with everything have to write something I think doesn't suck, it never gets more complicated to me than that. I sit with the script for months coming back to it and asking myself full out, would I buy this? If the answer is yes, I hand it in, if not, in the drawer it goes." –Brian Michael Bendis.

Excerpts from a conversation between *Powers* creative team, writer Brian Michael Bendis and artist Mike Oeming: BB: *Torso* was selling 2200 copies"... BB: "I was literally starving to death, with no money. And everyone kept telling me how I was going to breakout"... MO: "I was still working part time in security at the time till issue four or five"... BB: "That surprises a lot of people that Mike drew the first three issues of *Powers* in a security booth"... BB: "Woody Allen always said to write what you can't say in real life. So there is always a character speaking the way I'd like to speak but clearly cannot without being slapped in real life"... "Retro Girl was based on the death of Janis Joplin. I read *Pearl: The Obsessions and Passions of Janis Joplin*, the biography and was very moved by it"... MO: "That whole story arc was built for me cause it's built on the idea of a girl who swallowed a superhero's cum and getting powers for fifteen minutes"... "For visual references there wasn't any specific television shows or if we'd talk about TV shows early on, *Homicide* was definitely up there, but I think it was more about films that relate to the storytelling not specific scenes. I think one of the biggest films for us was *Taxi Driver*. The storyboards in the special edition DVD and the slow paced storytelling was a big thing for Brian and I and just for the noir feeling was these old detective flicks like the *T-Men* and a couple other ones by John Alton. The film is the most black and white noir-ish film that there ever was." BB: "John says, 'Don't be afraid of the black, be afraid of the white' and I got chills"... MO: "Pete had some trouble figuring out the color scheme. Brian referenced the scenes in Mexico from the movie *Traffic*." BB: "I'm in love with the work of our great cinematographers and Vittorio Storano, his work had a lot to do with the coloring for *Powers* and they were very specific and thankfully we've had very talented people able to accomplish this." MO: Colors, and how they affect mood of a scene"... BB: "Coloring, lettering, font choices and font placement, can affect or adversely pro-affect a person's enjoyment of a story. That's another reason why I get so involved, is because I know most people can't tell the difference where the writing, the art, and the coloring begins and ends, nor should they. And it's up to us to make sure that it's a complete experience."

"I looked outside of comics for my influence. My influences are mostly cinematographers. My film noir style is that of John Alton, who invented film noir cinematography when he was on T-Men and if you watch the movie *Visions of Light*, you'll see about ten minutes dedicated to his work. That movie profoundly rocked my world. It did, just under my skin, fucked up my shit, because I was on that road, without knowing some of the things that I discovered in that documentary, and then went and found out about. And, so John Alton and Janusz Kaminski and all these cinematographers, they're telling stories, with pictures. And I thought writers should look outside comics for their writing, artists should look outside of maybe even art or painting or whatever as their things, at cinematographers.

Not solely, and I know that the art of moviemaking is not the same as comics making, but there is a visual language of storytelling with images that was very intoxicating to me, and still is. And most of my notes to artists are shots from movies or ideas from movies where I say, 'You know that shot from *NO Country For Old Men*, or that shot from *Close Encounters*.' –Brian Michael Bendis.

"But with that... I am now officially convention retired. I will see you all online. My decision to retire from conventions has nothing to do with you and my feelings towards you, it's just that - like the Beatles - I've just gotten too big to tour. :) No, actually I took a long look at what my goals are and they all have to do with family and writing. So I will be staying home and doing those things. Conventions for a professional can become quite a trap. You can literally be anywhere in the world every weekend and before you know it you haven't created enough new things. And while those convention experiences are truly magnificent, at the end of the day, making comics is the goal. But I'm online all day long... so if you need me you will be able to find me." -Brian Michael Bendis in early 2012.

-Paul Chadwick/ "Concrete"

Concrete #2: "Stars in the sky, stars in the sea – what a joy to be alive in such a world! And there's Maureen on deck..."... "Boy, that doesn't look good, does it?" –"Cumulo-nimbus. A storm"... "A silhouette lacking a rudder and part of the keel... which means they can't sail it... which means they're still marooned... which means they could die... John, Larry... and Maureen"... "Oooh... Life's sweet mysteries"... "The close quarters may have made me act in ways... I wouldn't have ordinarily acted. You know?"... "Sometimes I wish I could have been in the raft – the water got kind of lonely"... One of the great miracles of Paul Chadwick's "Concrete" books is the inclusion of the sweet presence of Maureen. Multiple male characters have heavy crushes on her loveliness, and they rarely are able to fully act upon them to her. Both Concrete and Larry, Concrete's aid, fancy her quite heavily. Chadwick also explores issues of loneliness and isolation that are uniquely perceptive and sensitive. How would you feel if you were transplanted into an alien body made out of stone, but still had the mind and emotions of the human male you once were? You gain all these incredible abilities, yet you lose your human body that would allow you to make love to a woman. With a body of stone, you are now isolated and forever imprisoned in a body of rock. You have no sex organs, yet still feel the hormones you were born and grew up with. This book takes a keen look at these feelings and repressed urges. Chadwick is also immensely sensitive to the environmental world around him and the magic that lies underneath its surface. Whether it be on land or sea, he uses this book as an exploration device and self-expression for his most fertile musings on the wonderment of our dear planet Earth. He shows us through a sensitive super-being with incredible sight what we might have missed. His writing is more reverie than recordings. He is the dream-catcher. He sees and experiences the world as if he has been born again, except with his old adult mind and feelings. Only his alien body is new and so full of possibilities of doing something extraordinary.

"So many elements of "Concrete" came from my life. I think this helped it overcome its deficiencies in writing and art to achieve a sort of clunky charm. It seemed personal, unpolished, exuberant"... "After those ten issues of and number of "Dark Horse Presents" short stories, I felt drained. It was also a time when many things were offered to me. With some regret I realized I lost focus and substantial momentum – and good will among readers"... "I've slowly come to appreciate that a comics writer-artist is my position, and the time to produce is a rare freedom and opportunity. So I'm free. Free! To devote *all* my energies wrestling with my own self-doubt, sloth, perfectionism, fear, artistic shortcomings, desire for approval, distractibility, and disorganization. In short, Paradise"... "Nobody travels to the extremes of human character without great suffering. In fact, nobody changes much at all without it. Looking at my own life, I find I've made major changes only in a state of desperate unhappiness. It's a larger application of the athlete's conditioning credo: no pain, no gain"... "As I recall, Dazzler had originally been conceived as a film vehicle for Bo Derek"... "One foot's planted in our world, the real world, devoid (except for Concrete himself) of fantastical trappings; and the other foot's in Concrete's mental life, which is *full* of the fantastic"... "What motivates Concrete is what most of us are after. He has to make a living. He wants to be liked. He wants to do a little good – but he's not 'heard the calling' for any particular cause. In early outings, he pursued childhood dreams of outdoor adventures: climbing Everest, swimming the Atlantic." -Paul Chadwick.

"When *Concrete* is praised, it's usually for that personal quality. Concrete is more a thinker than an actor; his fears of displeasing people, of doing the wrong thing, of failing, all make him the most equivocal character in comics. The internal life of this pathetic, smart, oversensitive, rock-coated giant is what's entertaining about the series. I've also drawn on my own life for story material. Write what you know, they say (and draw it, too).

"Orson Welles once said a movie studio is the best model railroad a boy could wish for. Maybe so for that Olympian egotist; fighting the battles to get the right image and sound on screen, shot by shot, are beyond me. For me, the best toy is an 11 x 17 piece of Bristol board and a soft pencil." -Paul Chadwick.

“And this collection of *Concrete* stories proves the point. The tales herein are less high-powered rock ‘em sock ‘em’ drama than meditations on our world – on our devastated ecology, on art, loneliness, and the casual caprice of fate – all filtered through the sensibilities of Concrete, whose grotesque condition at once distances him from the world of men (and more importantly for Concrete, women) while perversely bringing him closer to hidden world in the sky, the earth, and the sea.

Concrete’s exquisite torment is the emotional core of these stories, and the great miracle of this book is that his torment doesn’t have the whine of self-pity. More often than not, Concrete overcomes what others might perceive as adversity to take joy from his condition. And so, stories that in other hands might sink into despair become celebrations of the wonder of intellectual curiosity and the fulfillment of dreams.” –From an introduction by Mark Verheiden from *Concrete: Short Stories 1990-1995*.

-Mike Mignola/ “Hellboy”

Hellboy: Eating rotten eggs are a delicacy for Abe... A true comic book movie that actually doesn’t compromise its vision and characters for the movie format. This one actually *works*. I was highly impressed. It fulfilled my dreams of transitioning terrifically quirky comic books to a wider audience through a Hollywood-produced, big-budget film. Even the characters were great and imaginative. The character of Liz came from a psychological ward because she has difficulty controlling her **blue** flame powers. Her anguished emotions literally exert fire. And wouldn’t you know it, Hellboy is in love with her. He’s a “freak” like her, and he’s fire proof as well.

Hellboy: “He likes that way – the whole lonely hero thing.”

-Eric Powell/ "The Goon"

"We need to create an environment where the best new idea, well executed, could be the top-selling book - where we're not putting all of this industry's efforts to survive into a rehash of a rehash." -Eric Powell, creator-writer-artist of *The Goon*.

-Bill Sienkiewicz

Stray Toasters by Bill Sienkiewicz: ...the disturbed third cousin of Dave McKean. Bill’s a mix of media from his deepest subconscious and most twisted emotions. He combines sketches, painting, ink splatters, collage, photography, and text into an Expressionist madness of sequential art ... “Have you ever thought of getting some therapy for yourself?” ... Crows with razor sharp teeth... “Psychopoetry”... Toast with red paint jam... “Oven of a bitch”... “Cooking with Physics’ with your hostess, Ellen Einstein”... “We’re going to make a favorite of mine, black hole devil’s food and time continuum cake”... “Be with us next time when I’ll be making a white dwarf testa soufflé, with religious repression of sexuality thrown in for spice, and hope the whole thing won’t collapse in upon itself”... “It was silly of me to worry”... Green nosebleed... Postcards from Hell... Man in a blender costume... “Our dreams are symbols.”

-Todd McFarlane/ “Spawn”

Todd McFarlane: *The Devil You Know*: Running down his dream... “He’s a really normal guy with a disturbing and wondrous imagination. Everyone has a dark side. He can just express it and market it”... He lived in a trailer park... “Talk about surreal”... “He has this drive in him to succeed.”

-Craig Thompson/ “Blankets”

“Craig Thompson weaves an engaging story by laying everything out in the open so that you can’t help but be sucked in. From the shocking abuse he incurred at the hands of a malicious babysitter to his covert abandonment of his parents’ devout religious faith, he leaves no page of his personal life unturned – even at the risk of igniting a few bridges. “My siblings loved [Blankets], but my parents were initially enraged by my decision to make aspects of our private life public,” reveals Thompson. “It definitely inspired discussions that we avoided for a long time, but it was good to get that stuff out on the table”... “One of the fears with autobiography, or with something so insular and self-focused, is that people won’t be able to relate to it because it is so egocentric, says Thompson of his experience constructing the autobiographical epic. “It’s been really refreshing to find out that a lot of people are identifying with it.” – Concerning Thompson’s graphic novel “Blankets”.

-Brian Wood/ “DMZ”, “DEMO”

DEMO #4: *Stand Strong*: “When you’re 18 years old, there are not a whole lot of options that exist for you. You can easily get locked into boring routines, bad patterns, shitty jobs, family obligations and stagnant relationship. And I think if I hadn’t had the inheritance cash in hand and the burning desire to go to art school, I would have stayed there working low-pay maintenance jobs and growing old with the same kids I screwed around with in study hall. This is neither good nor bad. It’s just a reality. For those locked into it, you can either let it drag you down and turn you into someone you don’t want to be, or you can be proud of that reality as something that defines who you truly are, and stand strong.”

DEMO #8: Mixtape: From the letters page: “The characters of *DEMO* are “superheroes” of the M. Night Shyamalan mold – they’re real people in real lives who find they have powers. Instead of a costume, headquarters, and glory, their powers cause confusion, alienation, and fear from a world that doesn’t understand them. By keeping them in “our” world, rather than setting their stories in a comic book fantasy land, Wood’s characters ring with a trueness that’s instantly identifiable. This it’s “Oh look, Kitty’s pissed at Professor X again, ho-hum,” this is “I’ve felt that way, I’ve been that scared, I’ve felt that alone.” Somewhere in the pages of each issue to date, there’s an emotional gut punch, just waiting to be thrown.”

-Moebius

Moebius' fantasy graphic novels prepared me for the imagination needed to save me from the colorless rain and the sincerity of my desperate existence.

Moebius 5: The Gardens of Aedena: Moebius is one of my favorite science fiction writer/ artists. I love how he takes the reader to a new planet or dimension of the imagination. The amazing thing about Moebius' artwork and storytelling is how he can transport the reader to these other worlds that actually resemble our own and have the protagonists react to it as if it were an alien world. They see grass and call it “carpet”. They see apples and can’t tell if they should eat them. They’re hungry enough to taste anything – even the grass. It’s a way for the reader to see the world through wondrous eyes. That is the magic of his art... “At the time, I was in an environment that was creatively extremely favorable. First, I was feeling the kind of inner exaltation that you often experience when you embark on a new project. Second, when you’re in a foreign country for the first time, your creativity is always boosted, you could say, virginized”... “I did these stories by drawing a series of little sketches, like a very rough storyboard, on a notepad. It was quite a thrill, because when I started, I never knew what was going to happen”... “I had more strange dreams last night, but I can’t seem to remember them”... “Atan! It’s fabulous! This new life has transformed us! Don’t you feel a stirring inside? Let’s make love! Now!”

Moebius 9: Stel: Moebius' *Aedena Cycle* is, in like fashion, an ever-growing dream, carefully assembled from the daily fragments of the artist's life and soul... “I’m getting sleepy. Maybe I’ll get an inspiration in my dreams.”

2-4-94: I’m reading a few stories from *Moebius 6* and for an instant I felt ashamed and embarrassed for buying such a “graphic novel” since some episodes contained harsh language and graphic nudity. Yet then I thought about my average day and how much vulgarity I experienced every second. I’m surrounded by vulgarity all the time at school. Sex is everywhere and no one even blushes when it is mentioned. So why do these pictures cause such a strain of worry in me? Did I grow up *too* Catholic and conservative?! Perhaps because the words and images are always there, for as long as ruin and disaster come. Words are powerful. They create emotions, imagination, and ideas that are just as infinite. I still adore Moebius' work. It's incredible stuff.

2-6-94: Tonight I was reading *Moebius 1*, which packs enough imagination to energize a dead mind. All sorts of writing ideas surfaced in my mind while reading that ingenious graphic novel. The book was worth every dollar I paid for it. I even got my prewriting ideas written down.

3-10-12: News of the Surreal (for Real): “French comic book artist, designer Moebius dies.” **Moebius was a legend, and a huge influence on me as a teenager as I discovered more international graphic novels. He was one of the most brilliant, creative, and imaginative artists I've ever seen.** Harry Knowles: “I first became aware of MOEBIUS as I read STARLOG voraciously absorbing every detail about the making of Ridley Scott's ALIEN. Along with Ralph McQuarrie, MOEBIUS was my fave childhood conceptual artist. When TRON came about... I was... blown completely away. By that time, I was already reading HEAVY METAL MAGAZINE - I'd seen HEAVY METAL about a dozen times at the drive-in with my parents. The TAARNA sequence just screaming Jean Giraud aka Moebius. We know his work cinematically on films like WILLOW, MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE, THE ABYSS, THE FIFTH ELEMENT and we can see his influences upon countless other films.”

-Katsuhiro Otomo/ “Akira”

Akira: A sensitive child's reaction to brutal violence causes the world to explode. Anger and other emotions as a mutant super power!... “It was a dream that I had.... So many people, so many will die!”... Explosions detonate throughout the city from fanatical terrorists... Tetsuo, who was teased all too often as a kid, develops great psychic powers that he cannot entirely control because of his unstable mind... “Now do you understand how it feels to be little and helpless!?”... An epic fight in an Olympic stadium... “Are these all your dreams and memories, Tetsuo?”

Akira: Stylized kinetic comic book animation... Features one of the great otherworldly soundtracks I've ever heard. The drums make you feel exhilarated and charged with wonder and awe... Terrorist explosions in city skyscrapers? This could be neo-New York. “The city will crumble. So many people will die”... “Their new powers is the next step in human evolution”... Lord Akira the Enlightened... Malfunctioning space laser cannons destroying areas of the city... A proton emotion collapse.

I privately watched Akira, an awesome Japanese animated film about Neo-Tokyo after WWII. Though there was a lack of deep emotion to the movie, the visual brilliance of the animated style was fantastic. Another plus was that Akira was once a critically acclaimed comic book.

-Daniel Clowes/ “Eightball”, “Ghost World”, “Pussey”

Eightball #4: I read a comic book called "Eightball", by Daniel Clowes, that has completely decimated all other mainstream comic books in its wake. It's more like an independent comic book call to arms that attacks with such vile self-loathing of almost all things. It tears away all the scum in our society that we take for granted, like mass marketing, bland music stuffed down our throats, formulaic "action" films, and consumerism gone crazy. "Dull, derivative, watered-down 'music' that so many people exclaim, 'How meaningful and sensitive!'" and "How poetic, poignant and touching!" Listen to this: "Just about anything that represents a personal, singular vision, whether high art or obscene pornography like 'Eightball', has been effectively disenfranchised from the mainstream and removed from the marketplace. Instead we have widely distributed, committee-manufactured, 'marketable', diluted gruel for the masses!" This is truly a great book written with sympathy, empathy, love, and even hatred for rejects, losers, has-beens, never-weres, and eccentrics. "With the increased 'blanding' of movies, television, literature, music, etc. comics will emerge as the preferred cultural interest of free-thinking intellectuals." "Mainstream comics will fade out of existence and be completely forgotten by all but a few obsessive pack-rat collector nuts..." ("These are my toilet paper tubes from the 1940s. I also have an exhaustive collection of check stubs, airline schedules and Marvel comics.") Here is a writer/ artist who is fed up with life as it is and wants to rewrite it, attack it, dismantle it, destroy it, ridicule it, rape it, and hug it... sometimes at the same time. It's comic book equivalent of an atomic bomb for the brain.

Eightball #15: "Being on the road all the time I find myself longing for female companionship and I have to watch what I say to the pretty ladies so I don't appear too flirtatious"... "I would never admit it but I guess deep down I want to be rich and famous and loved by all the beautiful women"... "I'm an expert on outsider art"... "All afternoon she sat there staring and making small talk - asking me questions and stuff... It was good for my ego to have a smart young lady taking such an interest in me but, to be honest, she made me a little nervous"... "I wondered why I picked a career like drawing caricatures in the first place... I guess I must have known that the only way I'd ever make it as an artist was to limit my audience to stupid people"... "What was I thinking with this diary? I honestly thought I was something special."

Wilson by Daniel Clowes: "Living the dream"... "Spiritual replenishment"... "I'm all alone. No mom, no dad, no brother, no sister"... "Jesus H. Christ. I didn't know what I had until it was long gone. Maybe Pippi and I could have had a family. Who the hell knows? I should've been more willing to compromise. I should've"... "The funny thing is, I never gave a shit about having a family until recently. Never thought about kids, or a mortgage - none of it. It's always been me, me, me. And now it's too late. I can't start having babies at my age. I should have thought about it 15, 20 years ago. They should be heading off to college by now!"... "Maybe somewhere a wife and son are out there, waiting for daddy to come home..." - "Nah, you're right. She prob'ly just got an abortion"... Watching cinema of skyscrapers falling down for entertainment... "What makes you so sure it was yours?"... "I remember imagining being an adult and thinking how great it would be. Total freedom, money, power, But you don't get how it is. When you're a kid there's all this fu8ture, all this potential. But after a while, it dries up. I'm not going to be the president, or a baseball player... I'll never have any real money... You have to start looking at things in a different way... It forces you to live in the moment though. A hot shower; the crunching of leaves - shit like that becomes pretty important all of a sudden"... "I've only had this one for a few weeks and already it's a ton of stress"... "I don't feel anything for her. I tried, but there's nothing there." - "Hey, it talks!"... "Believe it or not, I actually used to kind-of fantasize about going to prison. It seems like a good place to do some serious thinking. Maybe read some books, do some writing... collect your thoughts, y'know?"... "An overdose? I knew it! I'm not laughing. It's horrible... horrible... I loved her so much..."... "What the hell do I care? I'm all alone in the world"... "I've been in therapy for a long time"... "I don't want any more drama in my life"... "I need to stop moping and count my blessings."

Pussey! by Daniel Clowes: Possibly one of the grimmest graphic novels I've ever read. It's a lifetime's worth of hopes, dreams, and failures in 54 desperate pages... "Do I need this one (this comic book issue)? Gotta check my list"... "Eventually the thrill wanted and I moved on to other interests"... "Old enough to indicate severe emotional problems or mild mental retardation"... "I had to find some niche in an openly hostile marketplace. I started going to comic conventions with the vain hope of 'promoting' my comic, but this only added to my **complete and utter despair**. In ten years, I had grown from an alienated teen who found comfort in the childish familiarity of comic books, to an 'adult' who was now, in turn, rejected by the very world in which he once found solace. You can't win!"... "During this period of early disillusionment"... "While I became increasingly frustrated with my own inability to escape the comfort zone of perpetual adolescence, I began to regard my brethren as no worse than **emotional invalids**, struggling like everyone else for some shred of happiness"... "I can say that the initial spark for many of the Pussey stories came from some misplaced, low-grade desire for 'revenge'. Spending years in a room working on stuff that nobody likes in a debased medium for no money can take its toll on your self-esteem"... "At a certain point, the world of comics changed, and I no longer had to have any contact with the phantasy marketplace. However, through some unfathomable cultural downgrade, the elves, ninjas, and super-champions of my youth have infiltrated and overtaken the world at large!"... "Has our world become so **terrifying** that even the masses now seek assurance in what was once the sole province of the socially unfit?"... "Comics... too often they're dismissed as **SIMPLE-MINDED, IRRELEVANT PABULUM for MENTAL DEFECTIVES**"... "Though I can't help but wonder why it's so wrong to make a few bucks from exploiting the repressed homosexual urges and castration fears of undeveloped adolescent minds (especially when they belong to 37 year-olds!)"... "To create modern myths for adults, or at least college students"... "Bloodmonger? He's like Conan the Barbarian in space"... "You will struggle"... "There are **NO VACATIONS** in this business!"... "Comic books... By their nature they are both our most **INTIMATE** and our most **EXPRESSIVE** art form. Comic books reflect a more

personal viewpoint than movies or television. Their subject matter is **ESSENTIALLY LIMITLESS!**"... "So! You're s **SNIVELING, LITTLE COWARD! EXCELLENT!** That's a quality I admire in an artist!"... "Don't you get it, man? You're **ARTISTS!** You gotta **SUFFER!**"... "The more you suffer, the better the art; the more copies we sell... **Get it?**"... "I'm not interested in anything beyond my own insulated little world!"... "I-It was s'posed to be kinda like 'Batman' crossed with 'Star Trek'"... "**PAYMENT? ARTISTS DON'T GET PAID! THAT'S NOT ART, THAT'S PROSTITUTION!**"... "**THIS SUCKS! IT BENDS THE ENVELOPE OF MEANINGLESSNESS!** This is **DERIVATIVE, MINDLESS TRITE, MUNDANE, CLICHÉ-RIDDEN SLOP!**"... "The best way to get started is to work directly from **REAL LIFE.** Try to do a story based on your own **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**... something you know about intimately"... "Pussey has a positive self-image!"... "**C'MON!** I need you! I want you to violate me in every way imaginable!"... "Never actually been on a date"... He accidentally has a masturbation fantasy starring his mother... "Doesn't it sometimes **BOTHER** you that you're so attracted to escapist fantasies involving lithe musclemen in tight, revealing clothes? What's that all about?"... Desperate, overweight, and lonely fan-girls want him... This world is filled with sweaty nerds... "Meanwhile, back in reality"... "The collector's most indispensable possession? His checklist!"... "Seems like an awful lot of work... So when are you gonna sell 'em all and make your profit? -"When am I **WHAT?**"... "Well... it seems to be very popular a-and my fiancée Nancy seems to think that I should get some **MONEY** from it s-since I i-in-vented Mr. Powerful a-and-" -"I'm afraid that's impossible, Billy! You were **PAID** for Mr. Powerful -- I don't recall any complaining when I wrote you that first check! You signed a contract!"... The publishers strong-armed their comic book creators and swindled them out of millions of dollars when their creations became huge moneymakers... "You don't like it then **QUIT!** I'll find a hundred guys who'd do it for **EIGHT** (dollars a page)!"... "I was the dreamer if you will, he the technician who put those dreams on paper... I think you'll agree that ours was a very successful marriage"... This is like the Stan Lee/ Jack Kirby conflict... and Stan Lee is the greedy, over-praised jerk and devil... "Artists often hone their skills by copying master-drawings... Your Pussey's inspiration this evening is long-time Belt-Boy artist Mort Grindstein"... "I've appropriated a lot of images from your comics in my shit and I think you'd really dig it! I'm having an opening at the Snokehorn Gallery this Friday"... "Bring art to the **PEOPLE!** Not some **SNOOTY RICH FUCKERS!**"... "By the way kid, you sold two more pieces! The \$2,500 and the \$3,750. You should do more of the ones with the word balloons... those are moving!"... "Um... well, like why do you do these big paintings instead of like drawing regular comics and making up characters and stuff?" -"Cause by doing this it's a fuckin' commentary on society and shit... It's like I make it into fine art!"... "**Everything** is art! If I put it on that wall, it's **art!** And if it sells, it's **good art!**"... "It's a fucked-up thing, this art business... if the art establishment says that paintings of toothpaste tubes are 'in' then suddenly you got a hundred guys painting pictures of toothpaste tubes! That's why guys like you and me are **outlaws** in the art world! -ssuck- You don't fit into their fuckin' **categories!**"... Those are **mine**, man! I'm a naïve artist! I base my work on the art of Methuselah Schunkman, a retarded, hillbilly painter from the '30's... He was a **REAL** artist!"... "You're so quiet over there, Danny!"... "The years pass, and while others engage in various childish pursuits, you hone the craft that will one day make you famous. It is a struggle wrought with sacrifice and, sadly, a neglect of those subtle lessons of interaction that separate the tortured artist from his people"... "Son, are you a homosexual?"... "Ew, he's one of those guys who's into **Star Trek** and **science fiction** and **comic books** and stuff... Eww, it literally makes me **physically ill** when I think of people like that!" -"In a way it's just **so, so sad!**"... "What a weird fuckin' dude that Pussey is..." -"He's the kind of dude who might snap and kill a shitload of people someday!"... "Yeah, I heard he makes like **half a million dollars** for every comic book now..." -"Are you sure he graduate with us? I don't remember him..." -"Me neither... Is he married?"... "And though yours is a **hard-won, self-determined** success"... "And now is the time for **reflection**"... "First plucked from the oblivion of painful adolescence to spearhead his blossoming team of **young mythmakers!**"... "It's a product of Dan Pussey Studios... A lot of the production work is done on computers now. We're in the process of phasing out a certain amount of the hands-on-" -"You're **swiping** from me, Pussey!"... "And you still have to swipe from an old man who **never made one goddam penny in this business!**"... "Sigh! Look Pussey, I'm sorry... You young kids are a helluva lot smarter about business than we were, and that's all there is to it! I'm just a bitter, old failure! Hell, I'd be willing to bet I swiped that pose from Roy Hoover in the first place!" -"Actually, I swiped it from another guy who probably swiped it from you!" A whole comic book industry where each "creator" swipes the work from others. It's all one giant recycled field of books... "Listen, Pussey... Dr. Infinity told me that he'd give me some work if I could learn to imitate your style. How about helpin' me out here?"... "What's **this?** Has our hero taken a **bride?** It's Lisa Herrick, former Homecoming queen of young Dan's graduating class! After high school, she married the co-captain of the football team (who now runs a tire shop) but her heart was **stolen away** when she learned of dashing Daniel's **mega-success!**"... "Sometimes she dressed up as **Karate Kitten** (from **The Devastators**) for special appearances and conventions!"... "There goes the **future of comics!**"... "Well... I, of course, owe a lot to all the great artists of the old days of comics, like Dan Pussey, who is still doing totally great stuff"... "I hate to be the one to say it, but as far as I'm concerned, the whole damn comic industry is headed **straight down the toilet!** It's all just violence! Whatever happened to a **good story?**"... The price of his books start to go half-off... "Think of the comics field as a great tapestry, Mr. Pussey. A tapestry with many weavers. Each man can weave, sew or embroider only so long before he must **pass on the needle**... Ours is a **tapestry of dreams**, my friend, and you have woven a **mighty share**, but dreams are the province of the young." -"...So that's it...? ...It's all over?" -"Don't be ridiculous! There will always be work at Infinity Comics for a man with your skills... We need an continuity editor on Undersea Elf Patrol right now, in fact"... "I'm going to handle your case **personally**, Mrs. Pussey... In light of the **humiliation** you suffered during this

marriage, I think we're entitled to a **lion's share** of his assets"... The young artists taken over the older artists... "The Twentieth Century! Those were the days of dial telephones, free TV, and, of course, comic books! Just ask grand-dad -- I'll bet he had a whole stack of 'em under his bed! Hard to believe it now, but they were mighty popular for a good part of the 1900's, and a lot of men made their living in the comic book field"... "Though these stories are but dim memories, having faded from our thoughts like so much of the printed material from the Twentieth Century, the legend of **Dr. Infinity** lives on! He was as adept at business as he was at spinning a yarn and he died a beloved millionaire. He was both **showman** and **poet**: half P.T. Barnum, half Hans Christian Andersen and **All American!**"... "Daniel Pussey: Respiratory failure. Worked in printing industry and telecommunications. No survivors"... "What would a grown man want with such foolishness?"

Mr. Wonderful: "No, she looks far too wholesome and undamaged to have been set up with the likes of me. Unless... Perhaps there's some hidden flaw, or some awful personality quirk. Who am I kidding? She could have leprosy, and I'd still be out of her league"... "Dear God, kill me now"... "What's happened to our civilization? When did it become okay for non-crazy people to babble their personal nonsense in public?"... "I was married for 12 years, and then it ended, and since then I've been in a bit of a dry spell. Let's just say my wife had some issues with fidelity, and several of my friends were involved, and when it ended I had neither wife nor friends"... "Six years without a date of any kind. I had given up all hope"... "It was sort of like 'Breakfast at Tiffany's,' except in this version, Holly Goughtly is an unstable, crank-snorting sociopath. It would up costing me \$800, my grandmother's earrings and a laptop, but such is the price of transformative human events, I suppose"... "Already a broken man, and now this... What happened to me? I let so many years slip away... It's unbelievable how fast it goes... I can't talk to people anymore. Too many years alone, living in my own head. I've forgotten all the subtle nuances of human interaction"... "Each new generation seems more and more alien to me. I don't want to know about their various fads and technological achievements. I don't care to dwell on the signifiers of my increasing irrelevance"... "All I want is someone to eat breakfast with on Sunday morning"... "My own personal apocalypse is of no significance at all, and I don't blame anyone but myself, and I will die, alone and forgotten"... "Most beautiful women turn so bitter when the realities of aging set in. Hard to blame them. I suppose. It must be kind of awful"... "Aargh! I should have memorized a list of conversation topics before the date. I've already used up my basic chitchat material!"... "Here was a chance to cement our bond in mutual misery with my own unstoppable legacy of romantic woe"... "I want her to know the real (me)"... "I've had my ups and downs"... "I'll be the first to admit that I can lose my temper on occasion, sometimes to an inappropriate degree. I'm not exactly sure what it is about this particular fellow, but he seems to provoke in me a certain kneejerk negative response"... "Hey, isn't tonight 'sex night?'"... "You let yourself be seduced by false hope, Marshall"... "I was pretending to be all cute and bubbly, but my mind was racing with the most horrible thoughts"... "It's kind of a relief, to be honest. I don't know if I could handle the pressure of a relationship with someone like that"... "Did I really imagine I would 'get lucky' when she saw how neatly I stacked my disturbing heaps of pack-rat junk?"... "Don't you just think I'm a total mess?"

-Adrian Tomine/ "Optic Nerve"

Optic Nerve #3: "Convention tomorrow -- should be interesting. There's a couple artists I **have** to meet. It'll be weird talking to these people after reading their stuff so much"... "I guess I used to want people at school to 'accept' me or whatever, but now, **fuck it**. My new plan is to just ignore all of them... I hate their obnoxiousness and stupidity just as much as they hate my shyness and intelligence. I keep telling myself, not much longer to go, anyway. College **will** be different. Can't wait to be on my own, around people that know more than me for a change. Counting the days..."... "In the afternoon, I spot this sort of cute boy and follow him around at a safe distance. Okay, maybe he's not really **cute**, but there's something about him. I decide he's, like, the boy version of me. Actually, he reminds me of this guy from school that asked me to go to Homecoming with him last year. I was so surprised when he asked, I started making up all this crap on the spot"... "I think people are often rather numb these days, both as a reaction and an adjustment"... "Do you have a girlfriend (or boyfriend, if that's your thing)? Because it seems like you're a bit depressed or something. But I guess that's what makes your comics so bitchin'. So, I guess you should stay single because then if you were married, you might make your character all happy and it wouldn't be fun anymore and no one would like it. Right?"... "Sadness mixed with frustration, anger, confusion, depression... I could go on and on."
Optic Nerve #4: "You shouldn't have said that." -- "I can't help it if that's what I think. I'm just trying to be honest"... "Generally, I was happiest when I was alone anyway"... "His sister, who was a few years older, was walking around in a white bikini with her hair dripping wet. I filed the image away in my mind for later"... "I just wanted the Fourth of July to be over. I wished it was a normal day"... "After a few minutes of small talk, Tara loses interest in her friends' conversation and imagines the fascinating discussions taking place elsewhere in the bar"... "In particular, she regrets ever confiding in him her erotic attachment to the scent of old books."

Optic Nerve #5: "That's why this is like every artist's dream come true! She blew me off in high school, years later she sees my book, and now she wants to get in touch with me... But the fact that she's trying to contact me at all is incredibly gratifying. It's like the tables have turned. I've told you... lust and revenge are great motivators when it comes to writing"... "Hey, you'll have my sympathy when you have to go get a job like the rest of us"... "Martin spent his high school and college years trying his best to be invisible. He wasn't particularly attractive, and he lacked the self-

confidence and charm that might've compensated when it came to interacting with the opposite sex"... "I just... I can't relax around this much *festivity*"... "I mean, just the other day he said something like 'You can't complain until you get a *real* job like the rest of us'"... "That weekend, Martin opened his senior yearbook for the first time since graduation. The photos instilled an uneasy, almost sick feeling in him, but he studied them intently. 'God, you're gorgeous'"... "It was during those high school years that Martin began writing stories, mainly as a distraction from loneliness. Now he wondered what course his life might've taken if things had gone differently with Samantha... if he'd even be a writer at all. He was certain that somehow, his life would've veered off in a completely unknowable, perhaps happier direction"... "So you pretty much always write about yourself, huh?"... "They say everybody has one great book in them"... "You can't keep using the fact that you never got over high school as an excuse for acting like an asshole!"

Optic Nerve #6: "Yeah, so I can meet a bunch of other desperate losers." -"Well, things must not be miserable enough if you're still not willing to change, Hillary. Maybe you've just gotta hit rock bottom before you decide to try anything"... "How do they just 'turn it on'? It's like, they walk in and they're instantly laughing and dancing around. Is it genuine or are they forcing themselves to act happy?"... "That fat cunt!"... "Saturday arrived eventually, and as I prepared for my 'date,' I developed a sensation of both anxiety and excitement. I had a mild case of nausea, and I kept getting what felt like hot flashes"... "I bet two and a half years without any physical contact would erode anyone's standards"... "I'm glad I caught you 'cause I was... I felt like talking to someone"... "Do you want me to just leave you alone? Because I..."... "Disgruntled phone operators? Fucked-up people with too much free time?"... "But I mean, if it was just one shitty thing at a time, I could deal with it, but it's like a... tornado. Like a... *shitty* tornado"... "It's just, like I said... I'm a mess and-" -"Well, that's okay. I have a thing for messes. That's my type. Of course, it helps that you're so pretty"... "Or maybe it was just depression-induced sluttiness (probably), but right then, there was nothing I wanted more than that kind of passion and abandon"... "...I mean, whenever I whine about not having a girlfriend, the guys from work drag me out to clubs or bars, and the whole time I'm thinking 'the kind of girl I'm looking for wouldn't be at a place like this'."

Optic Nerve #9: "Because everyone knows it's garbage, but they clap for it anyways because it was made by some Chinese girl from Oakland!"... "I just hate that she has to take a conversation about some stupid movie and turn it into a personal attack on me." -"A personal attack? God... I'm sure she was just responding to your charming negativity"... "It was because I was a nerd with a bad personality and no social skills"... "I try to study, but all I can think about are the incoming freshwomyn. That's what they're called. (Sigh) They're so cute and naive. My goal is to at least make out with a hundred girls by the time I get my Ph. D"... "I'm still waiting for her to show up some day with herpes all over her mouth"... "It might be too weird for you"... "Look... this stuff is just, you know... fantasy. It's *supposed* to be different from reality"... "It's like you're obsessed with the typical Western media beauty ideal, but you're settling for me"... Self-loathing comics... "God... I hate the way everyone in the bay area *worships* New York! Trust me: it's highly over-rated"... "Well, if you want her to, then you're gonna have to be strategic. You can't act all pathetic and lonely and desperate." -"But that my specialty!"

Optic Nerve #10: "I was just... overwhelmed! It was like a combination of, of... experimental music, performance art." -"Well, we're taking the physicality of modern dance and improvisation of free jazz and infusing it with a punk sensibility"... "That girl from the theater? Hell, Mr. Humbert!"... "If you hang out with her one more time and don't make a move, be prepared to be banished to 'neutered Asian friend' territory forever!"... "Oh, that's one of my works-in-progress. I wake up every morning, go pee, and then take a picture. I've been doing it since January." -"Are you serious?" -"Well... yeah. Patterns start to emerge... like when I'm dehydrated, or when I get my period. It'll be a huge installation someday." -"That's pretty amazing"... "I'm just not really into kissing. You know... *germs*"... "You brought me to a *dyke* party?"... "Oh, cheer up. Would you rather be getting blue-balled by the pee girl again?"... "Do you think we should, uh... I mean, can I give you a kiss..."... "You're a good kisser." -"I know. I'm very orally fixated"... "The eagle has landed"... "I need to talk to you." -"Whenever someone says that, it means 'I'm about to really bum you out'"... "It's a problem of mine. I'm not very good at being alone"... "Listen... you gotta come to New York. You're obviously about to kill yourself in that apartment."

Optic Nerve #11: "Yeah, but at least you were horny for those other girls, so that made it easier"... "I just think it gets a little... dicey when you start making moralistic generalizations based on your own wounded ego"... "I guess I didn't know that 'taking some time off' meant that you could *lie* to me and fuck around behind my back!"... "I should've been more direct with you a long time ago, and I apologize for not doing that. But even at my most frustrated, I felt a lot of sympathy for you. And that's how you basically kept me trapped for the last two years"... "I think you also have a problem with depression and anger management... weird self-hatred issues... and just *relentless* negativity. You're critical of everything, you have no career ambitions anymore, you have... what? One friend?"... "I can't move 3,000 miles to be with someone I'm not having intercourse with."

-Gary Larson/ "The Far Side"

I grew up faithfully reading Gary Larson's surreally twisted comic strip "The Far Side", not knowing how deeply it would influence my creativity later on in life. He also found his ideas and humor through viewing the world from an askew point-of-view. It was like reading a Salvador Dali painting in cartoon form. Larson took every day occurrences and pointed out the weirdness within with a savage wit. He expressed a demented commentary on our society, history, and way of life that I would later inspire me with my own surrealistic expressions of the world. On a personal note, I thank Gary Larson for helping me get through my

teenager years with a view into "The Far Side" to give me humor therapy I could understand. I also wanted to show my own unique perspective on life from an angle of humor laced with surrealism. Larson was also another one of those artists who I read always wrote or sketched down an idea the moment it came to him. I've followed his advice ever since and found the practice "art-saving". His creativity also seemed sparked by his misinterpreting reality and expressing what he sincerely misunderstood. I've also had a similar problem throughout my life and used it to my advantage by making it into art.

-Gahan Wilson

Somewhere beyond the far side lies the work of this innovative cartoonist. It's demented humor to the 11th degree. His work can be weird and wonderful, silly and surreal, playful and psychotic, grand and grotesque. And, God, I love it so. What a delightful break from reality.

-Bill Watterson/ "Calvin and Hobbes"

3-20-95: Tonight I read more Calvin and Hobbes comics, which is easily the best "comic strip" I've ever read. Where else can you read such serious issues about crummy school learning issues slanted with such a smart, humorous edge? Calvin's dementedly creative snowman sculpting are also brilliantly wonderful! Where else, might I question, does an imaginative kid wake up his slumbering mother to ask, "Do you think love is nothing but a biochemical reaction designed to make sure genes get passed on?!?" Love it.

Calvin and Hobbes showed me how I can use and express imagination to its brilliant effects.

While reading through the "Calvin and Hobbes Tenth Anniversary Book", I realized how close this mere comic strip was to fine art. It expressed issues in an intellectual, satirical, and always entertaining execution. In short, it tried to honestly say something.

Is there anything more special than being transported into the mentality of a radical six year old and his imaginary tiger?

Withdrawing in the brilliant imagination and humor of "Calvin and Hobbes", I discovered the fictional characters as new role models of inspiration for me.

"The only way to learn how to write and draw is by writing and drawing ... to persist in the face of continual rejection requires a deep love of the work itself, and learning that lesson kept me from ever taking Calvin and Hobbes for granted when the strip took off years later." -Bill Watterson, writer/ artist/ creator of "Calvin and Hobbes".

-Dr. Seuss/ *The Cat in the Hat/ Oh, the Places You'll Go!*

Adults and teachers are not bad people. It's just that they smother the imagination rather than mother it (to paraphrase Dr. Seuss).

Dr. Seuss's *The 5000 Fingers of Dr. T* delighted me in its vivid creations of fantasy.

-Matt Groening/ "Life Is Hell"/ "The Simpsons"

I read "Life Is Hell" at the impressionable age of 19-21 when I was an undergraduate art student discovering the world, my art, and myself. It's subversive honesty spoke directly and hilariously to me. It was the most intellectual comic strip I've ever come across. There was just something about a bug-eyed bunny that made my inner neurotic, depressive, creative side laugh out loud – hysterically and madly. Creator Matt Groening spoke to me with his "School Is Hell", "Love Is Hell", and "Work Is Hell" series. He is one of the most unflinching, confessional artist/ cartoonists I've ever known. And he also created "The Simpsons".

I follow Matt Groening's comic strip of *neurotica*, "Life In Hell", for exposing existential panic, contemporary despair, and self-doubt (in the clever guise of simple cartoons). "Would you rather be smart and joyless or stupid and happy?" Indeed.

While reading "Life Is Hell" in my soft, brown computer monitor chair, I relished in the comics' insane humor and psychological insights. I also pondered about how this day would be.

I've come to realize how much "The Simpsons" has affected my personality, creativity, sensitivity, and humor. Quite disturbing to learn that "my" creativity didn't come from me – it mostly came from watching TV. I had believed that "Siskel & Ebert: The Movie" was originally my idea.. until I saw it on a rerun of "The Simpsons" tonight and realized it wasn't. Even the words I speak and write are not my own. I **learned** this language – I did not invent it.

"The Muppet Show" and "The Simpsons" both had a subversive, adult humor.

It actually happened. A cartoon show, "The Simpsons" addressed emotional suppression of anger more directly than I've ever witnessed. One of the characters, Ned Flanders, refused to let his rage be shown until he finally let it out in an enormous out-burst. On Christmas Eve, I experienced the same kind of suppression in which I nearly exploded with insane rage from holding back so much pain.

I watched “two good reasons to live” – “The Simpsons” and “The Critic”.
“The Simpsons: Trick or Treehouse Halloween”: Zombie Shakespeare, zombie Einstein, and zombie George Washington attacking you in the school hallway.

-Mike Judge/ “King of the Hill”, “Beavis and Butthead”

“King of the Hill: Season One”: This show is absolutely one of the best written, insightful TV shows on TV. And it’s a cartoon. Maybe that’s what it takes in order for an audience to see people more plainly – abstract them into cartoonish forms while retaining their realistic, humanistic qualities... Sex education Peggy Hill style... “I’m so depressed I can’t even blink”... Why does she have such **black tears**?... “Sometimes you just don’t *listen*. It’s like you’ve got a problem with concentration”... “You need a role model, Bobby. A hero”... “You look pretty.”

“King of the Hill”: In order to get into an art gallery, you have to spice up your background by making you insane or a stupid hillbilly artist. You can’t sell your work if you’re “ordinary”. Ah, the hypocrisy of the art world.

-Trey Parker & Matt Stone/ “South Park”

“South Park”: They take serious recent issues (genetic cloning, assisted suicide, hunting, anti-Semitism, religious holidays) and go to the most aggressive extreme without regret. The comedy it exerts is not just shock value - it unravels the most disturbing qualities of our daily lives. It brilliantly and vulgarly expressive especially when from a group of “innocent” children’s point-of-views to make it all more pointed and shocking.

“South Park”: One of the very few shows that takes on serious, recent issues like Catholic priests that have sex with server boys because that’s the only place they can find sex. The Holy Doctrine can’t be changed so that priests can have sex with women. Leave it to this brilliant show to parody an insane situation and take it to the extreme. They even achieved some hysterical sight gags like people “eating” their food by shoving it up their butt and excreting it out their mouth in public. “It is time to change.”

“South Park”: Gloriously exploring the loop holes in the Catholic faith. This is intellectual stupidity... “So Jesus is made out of crackers that we eat during Communion? Does that make us cannibals?”... If the handicapped cannot confess their sins because they cannot talk, do they go straight to “hell” by default? How insane!?!... “We were all born with original sin”... “Instead of going from one relationship to the other, I’ve forgotten to be dependent on myself and find the security of being by myself”... “Saddam, you’re an asshole.”

“South Park”: Revealing the perversities of modern life in the clever guise of crude cartoon animation.

“South Park”: Multi-colored tornado worm hole in outer space!... Black oceans... TO PLEDGE CALL: 1-800-555-0396... “South Park” is such an excellent showcase of opinionated humor and satire. They take on an issue in each episode (Christian missionaries in Africa) and attack their injustices from a liberal, independent point of view. They have something to say and they’ll express it as offensively or vulgarly as possibly since what they’re addressing is rather vulgar in itself. How dare missionaries manipulate lesser fortunate people to believe in Christ! (The only problem with the show is that it is rather one-sided to make their points.) Aliens have never heard of Jesus, so why should they care to be converted? They’re happy the way they are without Christ or the Gospel in their lives. They won’t be burning in hellfire for not knowing Jesus!!

“South Park”: We should all go back to 3rd grade to those days of innocence before writing cursive, fractions, and biology tests ruined it all... “I could have done so much more with my life. I wasted it. I wasted it!”... Our turkeys are stoned humanely... **The tooth fairy does not exist. Our innocence is gone**... “There’s no tooth fairy?! I suppose you’re going to tell me now that there is not Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, or Jesus now! What is real anymore?”

“South Park”: Santa’s Fortress of Solitude... Jesus Christ – mercenary... Santa Claus getting his testicles electrocuted! And this is a Christmas special!!

“South Park”: “We should all say our parents *molested* us! Then all our parents would be taken away!” The adults are gone! The children reign! Brilliant satire on our society’s hypocrisy!

“South Park”: It exposed the truth that women with larger breasts are treated “better” than women who are not as large... “Friends are forever”... “My God, it’s true! Bebe’s boobs filled our brains with illusions”.

“South Park”: A community of friends and family have an “intervention” because one of the children is “different”. Because he’s an individual or you live an “alternative” lifestyle, the people who “love” him want him to change.

“South Park”: “He’s even more miserable now since he’s gotten his dream and lost it!”... A fetus that grows out of a woman’s face instead of from her belly.

“South Park”: Dialog from a pointlessly attitude-drenched naive teenage girl: “Ya, and my mom won’t even let me smoke. It’s my body! I should be allowed to do whatever I want!” Why not put a gun to your head as well? It’s *your* body. I dare you... “You’re sabotaging my creativity!”

“South Park: Starvin’ Marvin”: Rude, surreal, raw humor... They’ll put down poor families like their friend Kenny’s and have glee in it. “His dad’s an alcoholic! At least mine isn’t!” On top of that, they’ve “adopted” a starvin’ “Ethiopian” for a cool digital watch. Once they got “it”, he became a sort of neat bizarre possession! It’s all horribly wrong, but the kids don’t care. They’re all in wide-eyed excitement for having such a cool skinny pet! “South Park” is like a warped version of “Peanuts”... The town wants a non-offensive Christmas - a compromised Christmas with no Santa, no Christmas trees, no baby Jesus, no mistletoe, no joy.

“South Park”: I think the brilliant aspect of “South Park” is in its extreme insensitivity. The town asylum is just

a fact of life. Carrying around a gun at a public event is overlooked while carrying a camera is forbidden. Cheating on a test isn't important; Kathie Lee Gifford *is*. A school play on how the town was formed is banned for being too real in showing the children dressed as pioneers arriving at slaughtering the other children costumed as Indians.

South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut: A town chorus of farters... Children in awe of the "harsh" language they had picked up from watching a movie. What power and education!

"South Park": About girls breaking up with you: "You're just going to have to face facts. It's over!"... "I'm really happy that something could make me this sad. It makes me feel alive. It makes me feel human. I guess what I'm feeling now is a beautiful sadness." What amazing wisdom from a bunch of sophomoric kids.

South Park: Second Season: Regarding Matt Stone and Trey Parker: "They've gone from obscurity to total maximum exposure through their show. Yet they've remained grounded"... Their animation studio and headquarters is in Colorado, in a simpler life away from Hollywood... "We were always sell-outs. So we needed to get to Hollywood and sell out immediately."

-Charles M. Schulz/ "Peanuts"

Notes from *Schulz and Peanuts* by David Michaelis: He was born on November 26, 1922... "Schulz sometimes used *Peanuts* to allegorize and make sense of his secret life"... "One man's expression of longing and fear"... "These are all my lives (in the characters in my comic strip *Peanuts*)"... "In his work, indifference would be the dominant response to love. When his characters attempt to love, they are met not just by rejection but by ongoing cold, even brutal, indifference, manifested either as insensitivity or as deeply fatalistic acceptance"... "He had never outgrown his childhood nickname, Sparky, or his awkwardness with girls. He knew nothing about the arts of love and had never had a sweetheart - only distant crushes and movie dreams. His mother was the only female who matter. And now she would never come back, would never know him as he grew older"... "To Sparky, always a picky eater, these were 'strange foods'"... "Dena prepared her son for the defeat that an indifferent world would impose on his ambitions"... "Whenever he displayed aggressiveness, vitality, independence, spontaneity - those qualities that, in other words, brought out his enterprising male spirit - Dena under cut him. She may have wanted, first and foremost, to protect Sparky, lest those qualities destroy him"... "Charles Schulz was gripped by the lifelong fear of being a bore... But it was *he* who had been bored; his uneducated relatives bored him, just as his parents' semi-literacy frightened him"... "That kid isn't going to be worth five cents when he grows up. All he wants to do is scribble"... "Cartooning gave him something that nothing else could: proof of his power"... "The prettier the girl, the more petrified he became"... "Segar had created Popeye, a character whom people loved, not because he was a salty old sailor man with anchors tattooed on his arms, but because Popeye summed up in a single quality what an American man had to be to survive in the 1930s: a fighter"... "He had come into the army a virgin and would remain celibate, his code of conduct uncorrupted by the surrounding culture of gross bravado"... "In Germany, Schulz knew full well that his unit was lined up to storm the world's most suicidally intransigent nation - Japan. It was, he later said, 'one of the most dreaded things'"... "But the atom bombs brought Japan to surrender, forever changing the course of his life and of all those scheduled for Operation Coronet"... "A nothing young man from St. Paul"... "To be a cartoonist is to speak, not only to draw"... "Pretty faces make me nervous"... "He wanted to get married"... "He was very moral. The idea of having sex outside of marriage was anathema to him. At the same time, he was probably a very sexual person"... "Shyness is the overtly self-conscious thinking that you are the only person in the world; that how you look and what you do is of any importance"... "Money, in any case, was the least of his concerns. He was unmarried, living with his father - Carl paid the rent - and his expenses were relatively small"... "What Schulz felt about Frieda's condition we do not know, but he often puzzled over his own characters' dwarflike proportions"... "*Frieda had one magic quality that reached deep into Peanuts: she was an adult in a child-shaped body... Frieda, present at the creation of Peanuts, helped to forge Schulz's greatest instrument: his characters' union of constrained size with irreducible strength*"... "Kids finally sold. So I just kept on drawing kids"... "His baptism imparted a new sense of wholeness. His work improved; he was conscious of a purpose and, as never before, of a sense of identity"... "Sparky took her on a date and he had found a flaw in his princess"... "His hypersensitivity only made matters worse. Even at the best of times he had a genius for being uncomfortable with others"... "Some people were uncomfortable with him because he was uncomfortable with himself"... "He wanted to be liked by everyone"... "That's the way it goes. Another rejection"... "He had made a decision to serve Christ. He had this talent. He wanted his life to be significant. Perhaps this was a way"... "He jokingly called himself the 'world's most unknown cartoonist'"... "Every day on every comics page, every cartoonist had to fight for his share of attention"... "It came to him that the less he drew, the more he caught the eye. He would 'fight back by using white space, for on a page jammed with comic strips, a small feature with lots of white space attracted attention"... "Donna Johnson and her alone the role of Charles Schulz's 'first disappoint in love' - the Little Red-Haired Girl who continually left Charlie Brown an abandoned, lovesick calf"... "That the dismissive young lady who had left Sparky Schulz to pull indecently profitable yearnings out of his would for half a century had received her comeuppance as the 'Red-Haired Girl who Missed Out on \$30 Million a Year by Jilting 'Peanuts' Creator'"... "You never do get over your first love"... "I loved that little girl but her mother convinced her I would never amount to anything"... "He never stopped insisting that the title *Peanuts* was 'the worst title ever thought of for a comic strip'"... "He was ready for marriage"... "On their first dates, Sparky found that, as with Judy, he could relax. Joyce did all the talking. She had an acute sense of the ridiculous"... "He may not have aroused her passions as Bill Lewis had, but

neither was he running away from her, or running around with other women”... “I really loved Sparky, even though he was homely”... “Charles Schulz did not need to be happy – he needed to be loved”... “He continually felt divided between professional and domestic obligation”... “Charlie Brown reminded people, as no other cartoon character had, of what it was to be vulnerable, to be small and alone in the universe, to be human – both little and big at the same time”... “Before Lucy, *Peanuts* had been relatively quiet”... “Loneliness gave him his first lessons in the elations and regrets of the artist; his mother’s early death and the world’s incapacity to notice his pain taught him the rest”... “To his intense surprise, *Peanuts* showed signs of taking off”... “When Charlie Brown first confessed, ‘I don’t feel the way I’m supposed to feel,’ he spoke for Eisenhower’s America, especially for that generation of solemn, cynical college students, who read Charlie Brown’s utterances as existential statements about the human condition”... “Even in this happy-ending nation, Schulz’s strip rarely ends happily”... “Many of the profession’s Old Guard of Cartooning could not at first see *Peanuts* as anything but an oddity. It didn’t have any gags in it”... “He continually wrestled ‘with something dark and unloving. Melancholy is the best word to describe it’”... “From his father, Sparky had learned that building a business meant catering to the customer, one nickel at a time”... “First and foremost a professional, never an artist only”... “The award was the happiest and the loneliest triumph of his life”... “Schulz presented himself to a suddenly interested world as a ‘nothing young man from St. Paul’ who had ‘parlayed his own frustrations and disappointments into wealth and fame’”... “All this might never have come to pass if Schulz hadn’t been such a miserable failure”... “Fredric Wetham warned parents that comic books, ‘the marijuana of the nursery,’ would lead their innocent children into a life of degradation and crime”... “This uneasiness at being away from home has been diagnosed as a fear of being out of control”... “The Schulzes held a unique place in the congregation. ‘You might say that God owns a one-tenth share of the comic strip ‘Peanuts’”... “Nobody liked it, but nobody would say anything: nobody would cross Sparky, and that’s not good for a small church”... “*Peanuts* has gone public. The merchandisers have moved in and converted what was once the private preserve of the cultural in-group into a firmly established, national fad”... “Readers of his generation almost always thanked him for having ‘given us so many happy moments in a worry-torn world’”... “Linus’s ability to raise clear, hard issues had become one of the sources of the strip’s power. Linus’s conversations with Charlie Brown demonstrated that pain, voiced through humor as loneliness, disappointment, rage, had a proper place in the daily culture of comics”... “Now began an era of Schulz’s life in which everything he thought of was applied by other talents to successive media, from records to stage and screen and television, onward to ever more goods and services. ‘It’s nice to be able to get double action from things’”... “Schulz loathed the hyena hilarity of canned merriment and rightly judged that an audience would not have to be told when and where to laugh; Mendelson countered that all comedy shows used such tracks”... “*Christmas Time Is Here*” elicited the unarticulated emotions lying below the holiday’s joyful surface”... “The meaning behind the Christmas holiday was being lost. So Sparky insisted that the season’s true meaning could be found in the Gospel according to St. Luke, and they agreed that the show would somehow work in the Nativity story”... “Network broadcasting in the early 1960s was driven by a single, impossible mission: to please everyone and offend no one”... “In the world of national entertainment was concerned, religion – or, more exactly, religious differences – did not exist”... “I don’t think God wants to be worshipped. I think the only pure worship of God is by loving one another”... “I find it very difficult to know how to pray sometimes”... “He was not, as he understood the term, religious. Ceremony bored him”... “He identified a ‘frightening trend: people who regard Christianity and Americanism as being virtually the same thing’”... “In the screening room at the network headquarters in New York, two CBS vice presidents watched the Charlie Brown Christmas Special in silence. Neither of them laughed once. ‘Well, you gave it a good try. It seems a little flat. Too slow, and the script is too innocent. The Bible thing scares me. The animation was crude, - couldn’t it be jazzed up a bit? The voice talent was unprofessional – they should have used adults. The music didn’t fit – who ever heard of a jazz score on an animated special? And where were the laughs?’”... “His father’s funeral came and went; Charles never showed up”... “His answer to his father’s death was to resume the daily routine of drawing his comic strip. The methodical creation of six daily strips and a Sunday page oriented him, channeled his anxieties”... “Their minimally ambitious social life”... “Sparky was a disciplinarian with the kids. He couldn’t cope with things that weren’t positive. He didn’t like confrontation”... “At the marriage’s outset, Schulz had been Charlie Brown to Joyce’s Lucy, but as time went on, he was even more Schroeder, immersed in his art, aloof, withholding”... “For Schroeder, ambition trumps dependence. If he turns out to be a first-class composer, the music will justify his isolation, and he will be able to hold the whole world at bay. And there is no difference here; he *knows* he will be a great composer, as Sparky knew he had it in him to be a great cartoonist”... “Unable to draw Schroeder’s attention from the disciplines of art”... “He was deeply ambivalent about his relationship with the reader. One the one hand, ‘I draw my comic strip for myself. I don’t do it to bring joy to the world. That’s insane’; on the other, ‘I would be satisfied if they wrote on my tombstone, ‘He made people happy.’ Either way, he knew that if he got too close to his audience, he would be destroyed”... “Repetition itself gave him comfort. The process of going in every day, sequestering himself in the studio, and regaining contact with the energy and force of his imagination made him feel real and alive”... “In his own transformation from ordinary citizen to extraordinary cartoonist, he followed the Clark-Kent-to-Superman routine of freeing himself from his specs”... “When I sit behind the drawing board I feel that I am in command”... “When sitting down to work, ‘he changes. He becomes integrated, intense, concentrated. His right hand never makes a wasted motion”... “A professional cartoonist has to have the ability to take a blank sheet of paper and out of absolutely nothing come up with an idea within five or ten minutes. If you can’t deliberately do that, then you’re never going to make it. You just have to be able to do it cold bloodedly”... “A woman friend who knew him then later reflected that he preferred to think of himself as unattractive

because if he *were* attractive, ‘maybe the girls would fall for him and then he’d be in a dangerous situation’... “He worries all the time”... “Most of the cartoonists that I know are kind of depress, or they’re melancholy. I think a lot of us are very melancholy. But from that feeling comes humor”... “Attacks of panic came more frequently now”... “Happiness is sleeping in your own bed”... “29 Years of Being 8 Years Old” or “Don’t Grow Up”... “I don’t want to go to a psychiatrist because it will take away my talent”... “The unprecedented success of *Peanuts* as a brand (with gross earnings of \$20 million by 1967, \$50 million by 1969,, and \$150 million by 1971)”... “I’m torn between being the best artistically and being the Number One strip commercially”... “Snoopy’s stardom grew out of Schulz’s ability to create an intimate bond by letting the reader in on the dog’s continual awakening to his most human thoughts. The basis for this bond was trust”... “Snoopy’s fantasy universe”... “*What would it be like to feel happy?*”... “Try as he might, Sparky could not elicit from Joyce the love he wanted, nor could he make her feel loved or desired”... “The real reason they wanted to sell their house: ‘Sparky and I were not getting along’”... “Even my mother noted his complete lack of tenderness. ‘The Germans are not an affectionate race’”... “He got a little better as he got older but not much”... “Snoopy’s dream world more and more dominated the strip”... “Eternally lonesome man wondering whether he had been loved”... “His limitations oppressed him, and he found himself newly demoralized in his old search for true love, insight, understanding. Should he just stay home and settle for what little he got there – and what little he gave – or did he dare to go out into the world, risking rejection and failure and hurt? And if he did find someone who made him feel handsome and funny and understood, what then?”... “Sparky was big on anyone who stroked his ego, especially cute young women”... “They concealed a lack of commonality. Sparky was not interested in – indeed, was fearful of – two of Joyce’s passions: riding and travel. Joyce had never been a devotee of the comics”... “Janell would never be quite sure how to explain their relationship. ‘We never had an affair but something much more touching. I always called it an affair of the heart’”... “You want the fame and fortune, but not some of the things that go with it. The only way he knew how to handle it was by withdrawing. He preferred to be incognito”... His oldest adopted daughter had an abortion in Japan at age 18... “Joyce wanted a *man* – a romantic man, but Sparky was not the man she wanted him to be”... “He consciously welcomed romantic agony as artistically useful. For people of his work capacity – especially his capacity to harness doubt (especially self-doubt), anxiety, frustration, and the dark night of the soul – misery is a strategy”... “Peggy Fleming was a ‘shy Bambi-like teenager’, combined with the green mini-dress and all that it revealed as she twirled curvaceously on the flat cold whiteness. She was the American Girl Next Door, and she gave men of Sparky’s generation an invitation for the first time outside the pages of *Playboy* magazine to look without restriction at a young sportswoman’s legs, knees, thighs – ‘more thigh than any pre-sixties girl-watcher could ever have hope to see in public’. Sparky was not alone in his crush”... “Tracey dreamed of marrying a professor, with summers off to read and write together”... “Skating between two pretty girl. If I’m asleep, please don’t wake me”... “They loved to tease each other”... “But the central trend of all this byplay was Tracey pulling Sparky out of a funk. She recognized that he needed someone to buoy him up out of self-preoccupation and melancholy”... “He just needed somebody who didn’t make him feel alone”... “He conducted the secret romance in the presence of the one person whom he already trusted. Charlie Brown stood in for him in the unfolding private realm to which he had admitted Tracey. Now he wanted to let that most faithful of his companions, the daily reader of *Peanuts*, into his new magic”... “I do not want to be the woman who ruined the innocence of the *Peanuts* characters”... “He loved an ideal,” said Tracy, “I matched the ideal”... “He was in love with her and, having revealed himself, hoped that she too would catch fire”... “He glossed over her stories, resuming his worshipful rhetoric”... “She had worried that he loved her – needed her – more than she loved and needed him”... “He had no feeling for kids. He didn’t see the wonder they had”... “When Tracey was honest with herself, she saw that she was living their affair in three dimensions and he was not”... “He sentimentalized her to the point of invisibility. She later described them as ‘wonderful, romantic, flowery words’”... “Sparky, I can’t fulfill that need you have for someone to be there holding your hand”... He communicated his secret life through his comic strip... “‘I wonder if it’s possible to be in love with two different girls at the same time.’ Two days later, Charlie Brown discovers that ‘being in love with two different girls can make you do strange things’”... “He asked Tracey to marry him. The intensity of his feelings – or his desperation – may be measured by another meeting he had arranged with Donna Johnson Wold a month earlier... ‘Just talk to her and see if there was a spark in her eye’”... “She burst into tears at how desperate – but how unimaginatively, out-of-touch desperate – he was to marry her. It was a pleas as much as a proposal”... “She had no illusions about Sparky now. She adored him, but that was not enough. He raised enormous conditions for being loved, and she knew that nothing that she could do would ever be enough – the endlessness of longing in romance would turn into endlessness of demand once enclosed in marriage. In the end, his nourishment would always come from his creation first, such nourishment as it was – because there he need not have, would not have, real people as partners”... “But he still called Tracey several times (giving her an impression of ‘fishing’) and Donna also”... “Meredith, at a rebellious remove from family conventions, saw that Sparky had emotionally starved Joyce: ‘The difference between Ed and my dad was that Ed stroked my mother emotionally; and my dad had not learned that women need that first. How would he?’”... “Some of the best work he ever did was when his own personal life was in turmoil. He would withdraw from that world and go into the other world and be more creative than ever”... “‘You and I have the same problem: we don’t fit in.’ They fitted with each other”... “We both felt that we didn’t belong anywhere in our families”... “Lucy had been the strip’s channel to the adult word: a matron brilliantly disguised as a little girl”... “In small but important ways, the central *Peanuts* characters had become rather dull and adult”... “His ability to transmute raw joy and pain as well as unassimilable events and moods from his own life into line”... “As Schulz spoke about his wives, Doolittle saw the transition from Joyce to Jeannie as ‘out of the

depressing fire and into an exciting, anxiety-producing frying pan”... He was agoraphobic. “When his dread of travel intensified to the point where he was ‘forced to give up many wonderful opportunities,’ he felt ashamed and strove, as he put it, to be ‘more mature’”... “*Peanuts* was now so many things to so many people – an ‘ongoing parable of contemporary American existence,’ a ‘distillation of modern childhood,’ a ‘comic opera,’ a ‘personal work,’ and at the same time a ‘universal language’”... “Versatility is the key (to the *Peanuts* merchandising)”... “He read his rivals’ strips ‘the way all cartoonists do, looking to see if they won, if they beat everyone else that day’”... “*Garfield* let loose the insecurities that lay behind Schulz’s competitiveness”... “In 1977, as negotiations deadlocked, Payette made clandestine arrangements for the veteran backup cartoonist Alfred J. Plastino to draw several months of *Peanuts* Sunday strips and dailies against the day that Schulz refused to sign a new contract”... “Word of their existence circulated for years at United Media, hovering between rumor and urban legend”... “Of all the themes of his life that remained unresolved, none gave him greater personal difficulty or more long-lasting professional success than loneliness – ‘aloneness’”... “It kept recurring, no matter how well loved he was, no matter how often he attempted a fresh start”... “Sparky fell in love with every girl”... “Jeannie, who understood his need to have crushes quite often – because they kept him young”... “Schulz used to be years ahead of other cartoonists. He did things we now take for granted: reading the thoughts of an animal, for example”... “He was the first minimalist of the comics page”... “When Charlie Francis Brown, after years of alternating alcoholism and sobriety, closeting his homosexuality, and other struggles, succumbed to cancer, Sparky noted the date”... “But every friendship with a snowman is doomed”... “His greatest accomplishment, he said, was ‘making the most out of what limited talent I have’”... “Drawing had been the one area in which the son was free to play, to feel, to be a child, and to be creative; *Peanuts* had preserved that sacred grove for fifty years. And now it was to be cut down”... “As the cancer broke him down, all restraint on his emotions collapsed, too... Shining tears spilled down his face”... “Millions of fans felt that they were losing something precious and personal”... “It is amazing that they think that what I do was that good. I just did the best I could do”... “He still wanted to meet the kids who had bullied him face-to-face and get even”... “He had no control over his death. He didn’t accept it graciously. He wasn’t ready”... “The strip had allowed him an illusion of eternity. Comics never end, no story is ever finished, four more blank panels await the next installment. When finally he fell ill, the fantasy was irrevocably broken, and he discovered that he was a creature of time, ordinary after all”... “Charles M. Schulz had died in his sleep of complications of colon cancer, just hours before the final *Peanuts* strip appeared around the world. To the very end, his life had been inseparable from his art. In the moment of ceasing to be a cartoonist, he ceased to be.”

“A Charlie Brown Christmas”: by Charles M. Schulz. I used to read “Peanuts” every day when I was eight through eighteen years old. I’d always anxiously get the newspaper and flip to the Comics section to read my favorite, “Peanuts”. It was part of my upbringing as a merciful dose of humor to help me through the day. I empathized with the characters. I loved them like friends. The bittersweet hilarity that Schulz put into the comic strip literally got me through the pain of school... There is such a melancholy mixed in with the innocence of the “Peanuts” characters during Christmas. It’s comic strip pathos. Charlie Brown is always depressed. “I know no one likes me.” He was just an sensitive victim who received the cruelty of his peers and of life in general. Meanwhile, Snoopy is always playing. What a hilarious contrast the two of them were together... Psychiatric Help: 5 Cents... The Christmas festival dancing children is the best dancing I’ve ever seen!! What crazy moves!

-R. Crumb (Robert Crumb)/ Crumb

Notes from *The R. Crumb Handbook*: What I find so pleasurable about reading R. Crumb and Harvey Pekar’s autobiographical graphic novels is it feels like my own brazenly honest and personal journal writings drawn out as a comic book. It makes me realize the possibilities for my writings to *become*... “Part of becoming a collector was religiously visiting secondhand stores like the Salvation Army”... “My vision of the world was very much influenced by my older brother Charles, who lived mostly in the world of imagination and fantasy”... “All my natural compulsions are perverted and twisted. Instead of going out and challenging myself against other males, all those impulses are channeled into sex. That’s why I want to ravage big women: that’s how I get out all my aggressions, and fortunately I’ve found lots of women who like that! Oh thank the gods! Thank the forces that rule our destinies!”... “Howdy Doody was an alien being, and the way the puppets moved was bizarre and dreamlike. Clarabell Clown was scary. My wife Aline tells of a ‘coming-of-age’ moment in her life when she was eight years old and got to be a guest in the ‘Peanut Gallery’ on *The Howdy Doody Show*. She saw the world the adults were trying to present to children, and the reality behind the scenes, were two different things, Buffalo Bob, the adult star of *The Howdy Doody Show*, off camera, was mean and scowling, but, as soon as the camera was on, he was all smiles, “Hey kids! What time is it? It’s *Howdy Doody Time!*” Everybody off camera was sleazy and stressed out. You had this uneasy feeling as a kid that something was going on that they were not showing you – something that was ugly. Adults were hiding something from us. And that’s such a fascinating thing, the adult interpretation of the kid’s world. A world artificially sweetened for kids, full of things kids were supposed to like and want. We sat in front of the television on Saturday mornings and looked at kids’ stuff. The shows tried to tell kids that life could be fun and exciting, but the unconscious message was that the adult world is strange, twisted, perverse, threatening, sinister. I think my brother Charles was hyper sensitive to this, and because his imagination was so active it was sometimes crippling for him”... “The style of those *Our Gang* comedies was so charming that I started acting and talking like Jackie Cooper and Alfalfa. They had these cute kid, artificial mannerisms. It must have been embarrassing for people to hear me talk like that. I made myself a kind of Jackie Cooper hat by trimming down the brim on a kid’s cowboy hat. I walk around wearing that hat for a while”...

“All the media at that time presented an image of a happy consumer America. Family life with all modern conveniences was pushed aggressively everywhere, creating a contradiction that was very stressful and very confusing. The illusion was the opposite of the sordid reality of everyday life, with stressed parents fighting each other, and worrying about paying the bills. There’s a fantasy world created by the media. When we actually try to live it, we don’t know why it’s not working. The promise can never be fulfilled. It’s just a sales pitch”... “And here I am today, excommunicated”... “You just can’t be too goddam sensitive in this world. I was too fucking *s-e-n-s-i-t-i-v-e*!”... “Wayne Parker, a guy I knew in the tenth grade, bragged about how he had personally dragged two little black girls out of the school by their hair. Wayne was a very popular guy. All the girls liked him. He had a beautiful girlfriend, the magnificent Dolly Hensley. Oh, the injustice!”... “Charles could have become a psychopathic criminal, because he was kind of going in that direction, but he was saved from that fate by his cultural interests. I, myself, was evolving into a bitter social reject”... “Then my sexuality began to kick in. Oh my God, was that painful! I was consumed with lust. I watched *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle* starring Irish McCalla on a hard-to-tune-in TV station I the summer of 1956. I couldn’t wait to go to bed at night and fantasize about me and Sheena!”... “I dreamed of strong women. My sexuality has been rather quirky ever since, in a state of arrested development, and it makes me want to have my way with big, strong, powerful women. I don’t know why, I just do”... “My mother was completely crazy”... “I had no plans to go to college and no prospects. I didn’t know what the hell I was going to do”... “At the age of twenty-one, I started asking myself, ‘Is this it? Is this my life now, until I grow old, and retire? I go to work at American Greetings, have a drink with the boys after work, go home to the wife, have an unsatisfying relationship, have a couple of kids, buy a house in Garfield Heights... Oh my God... Is this my life?’ That’s why I ran away from home in January of 1967 to join the hippies. That seemed like a much more exciting prospect. I became good at running away! That was one of my main talents when I was young”... “In the Army of the Stoned”... “I was a young punk, I admit it. I was trying to run away from my marriage, my job, and a value system that was, for me, unbearable”... “I returned to my job in the Hi-brow department at American Greetings. Almost everybody who worked there was depressed and alcoholic”... “Dana and I began experimenting with LSD, which was not yet illegal in 1965. I took LSD as a sort of substitute for committing suicide”... “The Beat literature gave me an alternate point of view about living in America that we were not getting from our parents, from school, from television, or *Life* magazine”... “When I was young, drawing comic books had no sex appeal whatsoever. All silly assed poetry attracted women more than drawing comics. There was just nothing romantic about being a cartoonist. I knew a couple of well meaning girls who urged me to forget about comics and pick up some paints and canvas and take up oil painting”... “I took some bad acid in November of 1965, and the after effect left me crazy and helpless for six months. My mind would drift into a place that was very electrical and crackly, filled with harsh, abrasive, low grade, cartoony, tawdry carnival visions”... “Most of my popular characters all suddenly appeared in the drawings in my sketchbook in this period, every 1966. Amazing!”... “Dana was eight months pregnant with our son, Jesse, and we were living on welfare”... “I was only twenty-five years old when all this happened. It was a case of ‘too much too soon,’ I think”... “I didn’t want to turn into a greeting card artist for the counter-culture! I didn’t want to do ‘shtick’ – the thing Lenny Bruce warned against. That’s when I started to let out all my perverse sex fantasies”... “From 1968 to 1973 I worked like a dog! I did so many comics! Man, I was prolific!”... “As my fame grew, my work got darker and darker”... “It’s probably better not to have that kind of success when you’re young. If it happens when you’re older, you’re likely to be better able to cope with it”... “Bukowski had observed that successful artists and writers get spoiled by all the lavish attention, especially from rich people, bourgeois people, and then they don’t have anything to say any more. They get bought off, basically. The last thing I want to be is someone who is constantly being gawked at, and trotted out like some fucking celebrity. Horrible! Sure, I always wanted to get recognition for my work, but I prefer to be the anonymous observer on the sidelines. I never had any desire to be ‘America’s Best Loved Underground Cartoonist.’ That was supposed to be a joke, not my life”... “The film industry is a filthy, rotten business, and I don’t want anything more to do with it”... “Before anybody had heard of me, I used to wander aimlessly up and down a five block stretch of Haight Street, ogling all the beautiful young hippie girls, full of self-pity. Then, in 1968, when *Zap Comix* came out, my life changed completely. I started getting phone calls and people coming to the door wanting to get high with me. Oh, how my pathetic ego ate it p! I was the center of a kind of attention I’d never experienced before. I found I had a lot less time on my hands. Practically overnight I went from being ignored to being pestered all the time”... “All the people who work in the commercial culture are part of a conspiracy against the average man to get his money. They are not concerned with what effect their product might ultimately have, physically or spiritually”... “Industrial civilization figured out how to manufacture popular culture and sell it back to the people. You have to marvel at the ingenuity of it! The problem is that the longer this buying and selling goes on, the more hollow and bankrupt the culture becomes. It loses fertility, like worn out, ravaged farmland”... “Ralph Bakshi, the director of the *Fritz the Cat* film, was a guy who really wanted to become the hip Walt Disney. He really wanted to do this thing, make the first X-Rated, full-length animated cartoon. But when it came down to vision and content, he just didn’t have any original ideas. As soon as he strayed away from my story, Bakshi’s movie fell apart. Ultimately, he was just another one of those media jockeys trying to cash in on the hippy culture without actually being a part of it”... “Aline and I saw *American Splendor* in New York, and she told me afterward that if I was like the actor had portrayed me in the movie, she never would have married me. She hated his rendition of me”... “Life has gotten altogether too complicated... I’m bogged down in a mire of economic entanglements, legal obligations, business ties... endless bullshit! I never wanted a life like this... I wanted a simple, down-to-earth existence... It’s my karma for wanting to be famous, I suppose...”... “And remember: It’s only lines on

paper, folk!!”... “The pleasure is ours, folks! We really like drawing dirty cartoons! It helps us get rid of pent-up anxieties and repressions and all that kinda stuff... We hope you enjoy lookin’ at ‘em as much as we enjoy drawin’ em!!”... “Hey, me, I love it, but it’s way too negative and uncommercial! So, what else ya got?”... “Buck Henry, a comedy writer and sometimes *Saturday Night Live* performer, gave us an audience of forty-five minutes and said he’d read our script. WE dropped it off at his house in the Hollywood Hills. “Look guys,” Buck Henry said to us as we were leaving, “*Before you go I want to show you something!*” He opened his garage door and in one corner were hundreds of movie scripts thrown in a random heap about four feet high. “*And that’s just the last few months,*” he said. “*Are any of them any good?*” I asked. “*Hey, you wanna read some a’ them? Go ahead, take some!*” he urged me. Terry and I called him two days later. He had read our script”... “But I’m a slave to immortality. I wanted it from the very beginning. I just didn’t know what I was getting myself into”... “All my life I’ve been a slave to that butt. Yes, the motion of a big, round, human female butt while she’s walking has the same effect that the blossom has on the bee. To see is to desire! It’s primal. It’s an animal reflex”... “The truth is, my sexuality is very quirky and eccentric. Out of all the women I’ve been intimate with, only a few were truly exciting partners”... “When the circumstances are right, when the chemistry works, then sex is the most profoundly thrilling experience imaginable. But, you can’t have that on a routine basis. At least, I can’t. It’s just the nature of the game! Deprivation enhances the desired object – every desired object! If heaven meant having everything you desired in life, whenever you wanted it, eventually it would become meaningless. And then what? Where do you go from there? What do we really want? What is this yearning, this ‘fire in our bellies?’”... “When my daughter Sophie was born in 1981, I changed. I became more conservative. I believe in law, order, stability! You gotta have it for the protection of the children!”... “Dad, how do trees poop?”... “Vulture Goddess”... “He yearned for a life of quiet study, high above this veil of tribulations and tears”... “Draw or die!”... R. Crumb’s Depression Graph: “Parents fighting, first awareness of feeling depressed”... “Shock of puberty, social alienation, sexual obsession”... “Late Adolescence: profound alienation, self-pity, thoughts of suicide”... “But these days we’re locked into a process of compulsory innovation where every artist must be a rebel to get any sort of recognition. To be merely at the top of your craft just isn’t enough”... “What people respond to more than anything else are stories. Strong, simple narratives. It was through my brother Charles’ relentless criticism that I learned how to be a coherent storyteller. Charles was a highly narrative conscious cartoonist, whereas I was more pictorial”... “It was very intimidating for me. I always felt like such a second-rate artist compared to him”... “The best comics combine both powerful images and strong narrative. Most cartoonists are stronger in one or the other. Many artists with technical ability are good image makers, basically illustrators. Other artists have minimal art skills, but are good story tellers, with an understanding of plot structure, character development and dialogue. It’s rare to find in one artist both of these elements combined with equal strength. If you look at a comic page drawn by Jack Davis or at Wally Woods’ science fiction stuff, who cares about the narrative? But the artwork is wonderful, a true pleasure to the eye. What technique! With Charles Schulz or Jules Feiffer, it’s quite the opposite. The story’s great, but the artwork’s not much to look at. In comics there’s always this dichotomy”... “Most cartoonists have about a ten year run of inspiration and creativity. After that they begin to burn out from the relentless churning out comics on a regular basis. They are totally locked into their contract, their standard of living, their family responsibilities. They’re forced to keep producing, like it or not”... “I was lucky to be part of the ‘underground comix’ thing in which cartoonists were completely free to express themselves. To function on those terms means putting everything out in the open – no need to hold anything back – total liberation from censorship, including the inner censor! A lot of my satire is considered by some to be ‘too hard.’ My ‘negro’ characters are not about black people, but are more about pushing these ‘uncool’ stereotypes in readers’ faces, so suddenly they have to deal with a very tacky part of our human nature. Yeah, it’s tough. Maybe it’s too much for the, I dunno. Even Kurtzman was shocked. Who did I think I was appealing to? I don’t know. I was just being a punk, putting down on paper all these messy parts of the culture we internalize and keep quiet about. I admit I’m occasionally embarrassed when I look at some of that work now”... “The fine art world and the commercial art industry are both all about money. It’s hard to say which is more contemptible: the fine art world with its double talk and pretensions to the cultural high ground, or the world of commercial art trying to sell to the largest mass market it can reach. A serious artist really shouldn’t be too deeply involved in either of these worlds. It’s best to be on the fringe of them. In general, if you want to be a success and make the big money, you have to play the game. It’s no different in the fine art world, it’s just a slightly different game. Essentially, you’re marketing an illusion. It’s much easier to lie to humans and trick them than to tell them the truth. They’d much rather be bamboozled than be told the truth, because they way to trick them is to flatter them and tell them what they want to hear, to reinforce their existing illusions. They don’t *want* to know the truth. Truth is a bring-down, a bummer, or it’s just too complicated, too much mental work to grasp”... “Curators and gallery people are not oriented toward cartoons, comics, or commercial art. That world is quite alien to them”... I think for the most part that museum people are buying into my work because of this critical acclaim”... “If your statement is too straightforward, easily grasped, then it’s not ‘fine art,’ or what?”... “My generation comes from a world that has been molded by crass TV programs, movies, comic books, popular music, advertisements and commercials. My brain is a huge garbage dump of all this stuff and it is this, mainly, that my work comes out of, for better or worse. I hope that whatever synthesis I make of all this crap contains something worthwhile, that’s it’s something other than just more smarmy entertainment – or at least, that it’s genuinely high quality entertainment. I also hope that perhaps it’s revealing of something, maybe. On the other hand, I want to avoid becoming pretentious in the eagerness to give my work deep meanings!”... “The way I see it, we are all just so much chopped liver. We have this great gift of human intelligence to help us pick our way through this treacherous tangle,

but unfortunately we don't seem to value it very much. Most of us are not brought up in environments that encourage us to appreciate and cultivate our intelligence. To me, human society appears mostly to be a living nightmare of ignorant, depraved behavior. Were all depraved, me included. I can't help it if my work reflects this sordid view of the world. Also, I feel that I have to counteract all the lame, hero-worshipping crap that is dished out by the mass-media in a never-ending deluge"... "The Litany of Hate: I'm such a negative person, and always have been. Was I born this way? I don't know. I am constantly disgusted by reality, horrified and afraid. I cling desperately to the few things that give me some solace, that make me feel good. I hate most of humanity. Though I might be very fond of particular individuals, humanity in general fills me with contempt and despair. I hate most of what passes for civilization. I hate the modern world. For one thing there are just too goddamn many people"... "I despise modern popular music. Words cannot express how much it gets on my nerves – the false, pretentious, smug assertiveness of it. I hate business, having to deal with money. Money is one of the most hateful inventions of the human race... I hate the mass media, and how passively people suck up to it. I hate having to get up in the morning and face another day of this insanity. I hate having to eat, shit, maintain the body – I hate my body"... "How I hate the courting ritual! I was always repelled by my own sex drive, which in my youth, never left me alone. I was constantly driven by frustrated desires to do bizarre and unacceptable things with and to women. My soul was in constant conflict about it. I never was able to resolve it. Old age is the only relief"... "I hate all the vacuous, false, banal conversation that goes on among people. Sometimes I feel suffocated. I want to flee from it"... "As a matter of survival I've created this anti-hero alter-ego, a guy in an ill-fitting suit – part humunculus and part clown. Yep, that's me alright... I could never relate to heroes. I had no interest in drawing heroic characters. It's not my thing, man. I'm more inclined toward the sordid underbelly of life. I find it more interesting to draw grotesque, lurid, or absurd pictures, and I especially enjoy depicting my fevered sexual obsessions. Some people don't like to see this perverse sexual stuff; ugly weird little guys doing bizarre, twisted things to beautiful buxom women. This part of my work repels a lot of people. But as fate would have it, I became famous anyways. It's a curious thing. And then I got to live out my fantasies in real life! I was 'lucky.' As my fellow underground cartoonist, Jay Lynch, once put it, '*You get what you draw!*', and it is true. I've gotten everything I've ever drawn. The good and the bad. It's a kind of concentrated focus, I guess, that makes it work that way"... "My work has a strong negative element. I have my own inner demons to deal with. Drawing is a way for me to articulate things inside myself that I can't otherwise grasp. What I don't want to do, what I dread more than anything, is to leave a legacy of crap. I don't want my work to be tossed in the dustbin of history, and become more of the second rate, mediocre junk that future connoisseurs will have to move out of the way so they can get at the good stuff"... "As a person, I was weak and helpless in the real world. To be so narrowly focused is dangerous to one's mental health and can kill you. If you have no ability to 'take care of business' you might find that you'll have trouble surviving in this world. It's a jungle out there! But, since I'd rather be dead than mediocre, my motto is: *Every Drawing a Masterpiece!*"

I mostly learned about this brilliantly disturbed artist from reading his collected graphic novels and from watching the documentary Crumb, which single-handedly articulates what drives an artist... his obsessions, his depression, and his fantasies. It's all there, naked and bare. The movie also offered Crumb a chance to explain and explore the depths of his own work through his own personal narration. Here's some of his quotes: "When I was 17, I realized I wanted to be a great artist - that would be my revenge (on everyone who teased me when I was in high school)"... "Crumb's material comes out of a deep sense of the absurdity of American life" (much like my own art)... "I'm sure Picasso masturbated to his own work"... "Not everything is for everybody"... "Too much passion... too much animal. I went into seizures"... I'm taking a great chance revealing myself through my art... life is absurd; therefore, comics are the perfect medium... "A lot of anger, a lot of rage..."

Crumb: I was immersed by the Crumbs' world of obsessions, fantasies, anger, and cartoons. He has to draw so he won't get depressed... Animalistic and passionate urges... He has to express himself no matter how disturbing or horrific his work (which **is** his life) can be on others. Extraordinary.

From "The R. Crumb Coffee Table Art Book": "I abandoned the church in favor of intellectualism"... "In my early teens, I'd been traumatized by my failed attempt to participate in the vicious world of teenagers. I was just crushed. I retreated to my room. I stayed home and got more into my art. I felt so painfully isolated that I vowed I would get revenge on the world by becoming a famous cartoonist! I was very determined"... "I remember it well. I had been deeply depressed and didn't know what I was going to do with my life"... "Crumb was a pretty quiet, retiring guy... Then people started to like his artwork and Crumb started to come out of his shell socially and started hanging around with a bohemian crowd"... "At first, being married was nice, but after six months, I began to feel very restless, very trapped"... "I don't want to be just an entertainer - I want to tell the truth"... Amen.

Crumb and I are both obsessive music collectors. As I read through his retrospective book, I listened to the sad, beautifully simple 20's and 30's black music off the Crumb soundtrack over and over.

Read that R. Crumb considered himself a "desperate, pathetic character" for marrying the first girl that came along since he never thought anyone would. My empathy with Crumb... I've had enough girls reject me for Loneliness to be spelled with a capital letter. I've been with enough angst of love to treasure anyone who would love me back.

With the atmosphere of Frank Zappa playing, I ventured into the outrageous world of R. Crumb's

comic book imagination. He turned sex into something so perverted and graphic, yet the shock of reading his work was creatively inspiring since he went to such extremes. I would never have imagined of an overgrown baby with woman's breasts feeding on Mr. Natural's cum... A plumber who tries to commit suicide by flushing himself down a toilet... A pervert hiding in a woman's vagina....

Read that R. Crumb considered himself a "desperate, pathetic character" for marrying the first girl that came along since he never thought anyone would. My empathy with Crumb... I've had enough girls reject me for Loneliness to be spelled with a capital letter. I've been with enough angst of love to treasure anyone who would love me back. Crumb: Love that old-time soundtrack... Crumb sitting alone in his room listening to his old records... "Taking the courage to take a chance"... "The only voice he had was his pen"... "My mother thought he was a retard when she first met him. He wouldn't talk at all to those he didn't feel comfortable with"... "God, where are they now? Middle-age housewives? God, what a thought!"... "Expressing their connection to eternity"... "So Charles, read any good books lately?"... "(I re-read my books because) I do that because there's nothing else to do"... These are guys are detached from modern life. They'd rather live in comics, old music, or their own personal sex fantasy worlds. They are human beings that don't fit into the real world... "A clustered environment with his books"... "Charles was actually much funnier and better than I was"... "My sexual desires are completely dead"... "I have this sexual attraction to cute cartoon characters"... "I was a handsome chap in high school. But there was something wrong about my personality"... "He was a dreamboat, but he was also a bully"... "I'm on heavy tranquilizers. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to stand living here with mother"... "I was trying to be a normal teenager"... "I decided to reject conformity when society rejected me"... "Girls didn't want to pose for me. Of course, all of that changed once I became famous"... "Lusting, depraved voice of society"... "He made it okay for me to have a butt"... "I don't think so. I don't believe in giving autographs"... "France is only slightly less evil than America"... "These are my people"... "I just come down here to draw people"... "Crumb, what's the matter with you? Don't you like girls? Grow your hair long so women will like you"... "Stream of consciousness comic strips"... "This whole thing was a horror show. Yet to her she thought it was cute"... "The underground comix would print anything"... "What he was doing was far more innovative of anything we had even thought of"... "I started drawing the dark side of my mind"... "This is just Crumb producing pornography. This is coming out of an arrested juvenile development"... Crumb's drawings are all around him as he walks down San Francisco... "Words fail me... pictures aren't much better"... "A lot of rage, a lot of anger"... "Two recluses living in the same house"... "This crazy country"... "I can't exist in relation to other people"... "Someone tried to give me an enema when I was younger"... He's selling a suitcase of his sketchbook of notebooks for a house in France... "You really hated women"... "I get into certain types of women's legs"... "I can have an orgasm playing with someone's foot"... R. Crumb's constant nervous, sad laughter... "Robert isn't orientated much with regular sex. He likes piggy-back rides"... "He says he masturbates to his own comics"... "I'm sure some artists do masturbate to their own work"... "He is endowed with one of the biggest penises in the world"... "Do you think I'm sadistic"... "he used to act like he was passively the victim. Or he was the victim of circumstance"... "He was really trying to get away with whatever he could get away with"... "I don't think I've ever been in love"... "The only person I've been in love with has been Sophie, my darling daughter"... Aline: "Nobody bought my book... They're about me"... "Robert and I looked like immigrants that just got off the boat"... "The importance of black"... "I inherited the cuteness factor by working at American Greetings"... "Exaggerate the defiance in her face. What do you want to express in her face?"... "This is the kind of guys that read my work: single rejected guys"... Using photo references to use as backgrounds of his drawings... "In the 50's, they wanted this dull lifestyle. It all had this creepy, grotesque feel to it"... "A smiling disease... it's a sign of deep depression"... "He had a hard-ass idea of life"... "All of his sons become weepy, nerdy sons"... "I have this unconscious desire to being punished. I was brought up by a sadistic bully"... "My mother was an amphetamine addict to keep her weight down. She used to act so crazy"... "My father stopped talking to me after he saw what I was doing in the late 70's"... "This is just too weird, this is too disturbing"... "She had a second smaller brain in her butt"... "This is the part where I get really excited"... "Doing things with a headless woman"... "I think it's irresponsible about having dangerous sexual fantasies exposed to the public"... "He depicts his id in its purest sense. He gets it out in his artwork"... "I would be more well loved if I didn't let out all this darkness that's within me"... "I hope that revealing that truth about myself is helpful to other people"... "You've got to protect children from certain harsh realities of life. Some things are not for everyone"... "I didn't really know what I was doing in the late 60's. It just freed me up inside"... "Nigger hearts just came into my mind"... Crumb with a disgusted, depressed, mournful expression on his face... "I'm too scared to kill myself"... "I can't live in it"... This movie is just *a lot* to take in. It just keeps eating away at you. Too many harsh realities and disturbing aspects of life presented in two short hours... "Van Gogh shooting himself in a corn field"... "Stylized van Gogh painting"... "It was like something was released from deep inside of you"... "It was so violent for me that I had a fucking seizure!"... "He was pretty far gone at this point"... "This was the end of his comic period"... "It got stranger and stranger"... "It had to do with his increasing alienation of the world, his isolation"... This is a portrait of artistic insanity... "I definitely needed some kind of external stimulation"... "You were particularly interested in Asian women"... "I started molesting women when I was 18"... "It's too much passion, too much animal"... "Her ass pops out like a ripe peach"... "I wanted to bash your face in"... "He still has all this anger and resentment within him"... "I still have a certain degree of narcissism"... "When one's narcissism is wounded, you want to strike back at the person who wounded them"... Max Crumb is a beggar on the street... "Remember mother I am under the influence of medication"... "I started taking medication when I first tried committing suicide"... "Jesus Christ"... "Why not have a lobotomy?"... "Grim. It's

grim"... "Charles had a sexual attraction on the boy who played Jim Hawkins in 'Treasure Island'. I get this has caused him a lot of torment in his life"... "Everything has to be black and white. Everything has to be old-fashioned!"... "The old man can't show affection"... "A Short History of America"... These are extremely dysfunctional human beings... "Do you think those guys are going to be sensitive to my record collection? A bunch of jocks?"... "What do I care about my family?"... "We're probably Max's closest human relationship in the world"... "I've had so many years of my life wasted with the bullshit of these Hollywood people"... "It would always take the wind out of my sails"... "Extremely separated from the rest of the world"... "Charles committed suicide a year after conducting interviews for this film... For Charles"... I think what scared me the most when I first watched this movie as a young art student was how these Crumb brothers could be a scary future version of myself if I didn't keep my depression in check. I was going through a lot of angst and depression while as an art student and didn't fully know what I was going to do for my future. Here were two Crumb brothers, Charles and Max, who didn't know either... and look what happened to them. One became a crushingly sad recluse on medication living with his mother who eventually committed suicide. The other became a talented artist - but also a sex offender and street bum. I was absolutely frightened and disturbed by these portraits of creative people who loved comics. Yet they turned into grim, living distortions of humanity. They didn't fit into the larger world around them because they enjoyed living in the little comic book fantasy worlds they had created for themselves. I felt a great deal of empathy for them. And yet here they were living doomed lives. When I first saw this movie, I was freaked out of my sometimes agoraphobic mind because I didn't want to end up like that. I was on that course though. I was also this reclusive artist type who stayed indoors more than going outside. I took anti-depressants to stay "sane". This movie felt like a portrait of the future me if I didn't wise up and mature out of my borderline agoraphobic state. This was like witnessing my alternate reality self in this lost soul, this failed artist. I sincerely felt some days that I was heading in that lost, scary direction. It's no wonder I found myself working obsessively throughout my remaining days in art school.

Crumb: I was immersed by the Crumbs' world of obsessions, fantasies, anger, and cartoons... Sexually aroused at four years old... He has to draw so he won't get depressed... Animalistic and passionate urges... He has to express himself no matter how disturbing or horrific his work (which **is** his life) can be on others.

Crumb: "The only voice he had was his pen"... "Some people are attracted to retards or cripples"... "Where are these girls I once had crushes on 30 years ago in high school? Middle-aged housewives? God, what a thought!"... "I'm reading all these books again because there's nothing else to do"... "You admired me because I was so detached from the human race"... "I'd be completely worthless if I wasn't creating comics"... "There's still a sibling rivalry between us brothers. I still want Charles' approval"... "I have no sexual desires any more"... The dreamboat bully... "You were even more afraid of women than I was in high school"... "I felt cruelly misunderstood because I was so talented and sensitive"... "I didn't have this pressure to be normal anymore"... Janis Joplin to R. Crumb: "What's wrong, Robert? Don't you like women?"... "I said, 'Fuck it' to fame and started doing the dark side of my work"... "An arrested adolescent vision"... A collage of just watching and drawing people... "I'm a quiet, well-behaved citizen"... A suitcase of sketchbooks to pay for a house in France... "He is endowed with one of the largest penis' in the world"... "That whole relationship was chaos"... Losers "R" Us... "Too much smiling was a sign of severe depression"... "Her brain was in the butt"... "It's an acknowledgment that these sexual fantasies actually do exist in Homo sapiens"... "He depicts his id in its darkest nature"... "I would probably be more loved if I didn't release my darkest truths about myself. Yet I had to do it"... "Not everything is for children. Not everything is for everybody"... "The LSD liberated me so I didn't think about what my work was about"... "It's a beautiful world"... I'd quote this entire movie... "She's in therapy now"... "Stylized van Gogh in raw nature"... "I had an artistic experience that was so extreme I had a fuckin' seizure"... "He was pretty far gone at that point"... "It had nothing to do with the outside world - his work was all internal"... "I definitely needed some sort of external simulation"... "I started molesting women at age 18"... "The medication is the only thing that's getting me through all this"... "Why? Why not have a lobotomy?"... "He has a hard time of receiving affection from the 'old man'"... "I have no patience for Hollywood bullshit."

Crumb: Single-handedly articulates what drives an artist... His obsessions, his depression, his fantasies. It's all here, naked and bare... "I have this sexual attraction to cartoon characters"... This movie offers the artist a chance to explain and explore the depths of his own work through his own personal narration... "When I was 17, I realized I wanted to be a great artist - that would be my revenge (on everyone who teased me when I was in high school)"... "Crumb's material comes out of a deep sense of the absurdity of American life" (much like my own art)... "I'm sure Picasso masturbated to his own work"... "Not everything is for everybody"... "Too much passion... too much animal. I went into seizures."

Crumb: I'm taking a great chance revealing myself through my art... "I couldn't wait to go to bed to have fantasies of myself with Sheena"... life is absurd; therefore, *comics* are the perfect medium... "A lot of anger, a lot of rage..."... A *dangerous* sense of humor... all the characters died when the movie *ended*.

Crumb: Unused Scenes: "It's a very black view of the world"... "I considered committing suicide that summer of high school"... "What great legs she had"... "This guy wrote to her that he planned to kill himself and wanted to know if she wanted his skin for her office"... "Mad magazine completely changed my outlook"... R. Crumb massive archives and collections of old magazines and records... "It was beautiful and ugly to me at the same time"... He laughs at all the despair in the world. It's his coping mechanism... "Grim"... "I found an ideal place to commit suicide"... "I didn't like what everyone else liked."

Confessions of Robert Crumb: This is the *other* "Crumb" documentary... "We're underground cartoonists"... "He turns

the comic strip into a confessional"... "Maybe there's something with me"... "I didn't turn out normal"... "Self-hatred is a strong motivating force in my work, not to mention my sex drive"... "I like American women in top physical condition"... "I'm telling the truth about myself, take it or leave it"... "Despite all the women's lib, most women are still are drawn to the powerful and dominant alpha male type"... "I remember getting beat up by a girl in the third grade"... "All us kids were rejected by the army"... "I swear to God I'll never get married"... "Tickling can produce tears"... "We lost ourselves in comics"... "My sexual libido awoken with a demonic intensity"... "This forward pelvic effect – 'the bean effect' = The Perfect Female Body"... "This round and muscular rear end. Marvelous!"... "In the 8th grade, all I did all day was stare at girls' legs"... "Self-pity"... "I got heavy into collecting stuff"... "I became obsessed with the past"... "Modern America seemed bankrupt"... "I got more and more into old music. It seemed more raw and authentic. It probably came about because I was social outcast"... "He confesses to secret sins in his dairy"... "At this time, I was a lonely, maladjusted weirdo"... "Then I met a fat, alienated, lonely girl. And then the next thing I knew, I was married"... "She was as desperate as I was. The only thing we had in common was our desperation"... "In 1966, my head was just spinning with visions of electric, animated craziness. I managed to get some of it down on paper"... "I was too uptight to be a full-on hippie"... "What I learned from S. Clay Wilson was the *absolute* freedom to draw whatever comes into your mind"... "It was very cathartic to get all this craziness out of my subconscious"... "There was all these women who found us interesting. It was a feast to a starving man"... "They felt that they were underground cartoonist heroes"... "I found that the music business was far worse than the cartoonist business"... "I spent most of my life being a non-entity. Suddenly, there were all these people who wanted to talk to me"... "I became more cynical and nastier because so many people acted like they loved me so much. That's when my work became darker. Let's see if they like me now!"... "Every subculture has its conventions"... "It's all modern and alienating"... "Yet somehow, I kept working and making"... "My wife and girlfriends squandered all my money"... "I became regulated as just another guy from the 60s"... "I had a breakdown. I couldn't cope with anything"... "I enjoy doing all these cross-hatching lines"... "It was real exhausting after our baby was born. I was breast-feeding and getting no sleep. I resented Robert"... "A documentary-style comic book"... "It's hard to keep that kind of concentration in the modern world"... "It's just one damn thing after another"... "But I've settled down now. Learned to accept my responsibilities, more or less"... "Yes, we have it good here."

"I didn't see Robert Crumb for twenty-five years until the night of the 1990 Academy Awards. *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* had been nominated for four awards and my wife, being one of the nominees, dragged me along to the ceremony. We lost on all fronts, and while the other awards were being doled out, we escaped to the bar. All the losers were there and, as I pushed my way through the tuxedoed crush, there stood Bob... wearing a baggy tux and porkpie hat, looking eternally out of place. Everybody had a drink in their hand. Bob had his sketchbook. He was scratching away for some magazine – just like the last time I had seen him. It was as if nothing had changed in all those years. But things had. He had a mustache." –Terry Gilliam's remembrances on R. Crumb.

"Crumb is filled with more neuroses than all the patients crowded in the waiting room of some high-priced Fifth Avenue analyst. He's a walking mental institution. In the movie *Crumb* you realize how close genius and self-destruction really are, how madness and brilliance meet, touch, bond. Art is what brings back genius from the edge. In the film, we saw Crumb's brother suffer anxiety and madness unmitigated by the kind of coherent vision Crumb employs in his brilliant comics. The demons pounded on both Crumb brothers, but only Robert was able to fight back successfully with his pen." –Comments by Al Goldstein on R. Crumb.

"I would say what made it so popular in those days was that it spoke for a lot of people's visions that they had inside their heads, about life and a lot of people who took LSD and got stoned a lot. A lot of times they would see things in my cartoons that fit that vision, so it caught a lot of people's imaginations and that's what made it popular. Now it doesn't quite gel with the popular imagination quite as much. It's a little bit offbeat or something"... "I don't know that popularity and quality necessarily have anything to do with one another. In fact, I had problems back then with popularity really going to my head and making me very self-conscious about my work and causing me a lot of problems"... "I've allowed my own imagination to completely cut loose and express exactly what was inside of me. That's what I really like about my work"... "I love music. It's probably actually a more passionate interest for me than comics"... "One of my main reasons to go on living is I still think I haven't done my best work"... "I had a grim family household while growing up, but we kids could always retreat into the wonderful, wacky world of comic books"... "I used to think I was the most miserable person on the face of the earth in my adolescence; thought about committing suicide a lot. It was from an acute feeling of alienation"... "My art is the result of some overwhelming need to compensate for social rejection. When I was in my teens, I used to walk around with this bitter feeling, thinking that some day they'd all be sorry. I'd show them, I'd become a great artist and go down in history and the rest of these bums will just die like dogs. That's way my way of getting revenge on society, instead of becoming a criminal"... "My brother is totally isolated, he just reads and writes in his room all day and never goes out"... "If you're an outsider and you're perceptive, you can see the picture in broader perspective. Also, from the anger an hurt of being an outsider you develop a critical view of things. There's something wrong with it because it rejects you"... "This is what you were brought up and raised to do: find yourself on e of these fucking jobs, get a nice house in the suburbs, have a family. 'Is that it? There's got to be something else'"... "Everything got so crazy in my life. With the wife and the girlfriends and the money and the craziness, I ground to a halt. Just too drained. Too much craziness around me. I had to deal with it and I just hadn't been dealing with it"... "Being famous can make you want to commit suicide"... "I think I really need two weeks by myself, just alone. And I came back here and by the time Aline got back with Sophie I felt 1,000 percent

better. I spent two weeks of doing nothing but sitting in this fucking studio by myself"... "So I'm free to pursue my own vision if I have the time to do it. If I don't work for a few days, I start feeling miserable. And if that goes on for weeks, I get suicidal. I start going crazy"... "The Catch-22 is that it's hard to be a dreamer and an artist and then at the same time be a tough guy who knows how to deal with aggressive business people and that stuff"... "Michaelangelo does nothing for me. Nothing. All that graceful muscle tone does nothing for me. Brueghel just hits me where I live. I remember when I first saw *Mad*, it was just a revelation because it reflected the world I was living in so well. It was like this wacky, zany reflection, an exact reflection of the real world, with the seaminess and grunginess that the real world has. The real world is not clean and sleek and perfect. It was my world, my time, and the place that I lived in – it just hit me like a bolt"... "Music is such an immediate experience"... "Once you've lost ties with any indigenous culture, it's very hard to make good music, I think. Then it becomes contrived and professionalized and over-produced and everything like that. You go to places where indigenous cultures are still going strong and you'll hear little groups, the most common peasants, do some absolutely beautiful music that's deeply moving. It's very simple, but they're putting so much of themselves into it without any contrivance or self-consciousness at all, or any attempt to get chart-action"... "The average person will say, 'I can't sing, I can't do that.' If they don't sound like Bruce Springsteen, they think they can't do it. The professionalization has intimidated them from expressing anything themselves, so they just live in a constant state of distraction, being fed entertainment, all from a professional source, which is set up to make a lot of money for the people involved in it"... "Almost entirely autobiographical. Some of his best writing is in these letters he writes to people. Real offhand, talking about his life. It's so great, so rich. Since I'm part of the modern American phenomenon myself, I'm attracted to autobiographical and diary writing much more than I am to novels or fiction. There's too much bullshit in those things"... "Artists who will actually allow their subconscious to have some type of play in their work are rare"... "But there's a certain keenness of concentration that I had when I was 19 through 25 that I don't have any more. The complete, total focus on whatever it was I was doing, without distractions. Complete, clear, no interference, no static of any kind coming through your mind. Part of it was not having any responsibilities then. And now I'm 43 and life is really complicated. It has something to do with that. And it's also a physical thing"... "If I don't draw for a few days I get really depressed. Life becomes completely meaningless. I'm so tied up with the drawing thing. I'm nothing if I'm not drawing. Art is my life"... "As you get older, just the accumulation of your life becomes an inspiration. It's therapy. Make sense of it all. Probe it and understand it"... "I would judge and condemn work on whether it was interesting or boring, whether it was honest and truthful and real, or whether it was just somebody attempting to pander to some market they think is out there, or trying to imitate something they've seen"... "The honesty and the depth of perception of the subject is what makes the work good"... "The more you can let that subconscious loose in your work, the more interesting it makes the work. One of the keys to expressing yourself in your art is to try to break through self-restraint, to see if you can get past that socialized part of your mind, the superego or whatever you call it"... "I know from my own work I *have* to let that stuff out, it can't stay inside of me: all the craziness, the sexual stuff, the hostility toward women, the anger toward authority. I've actually worked a lot of that out of my system in my work. That's what makes underground commix different from mainstream comics: It's more of an artistic motivation than commercial motivation. You're taking this chance by doing something more personal. It's a very personal expression, my work and other interesting underground-comix work. It's not that entertaining to the masses, but maybe some people can get something out of it"... "Rape fantasy is like the second most popular fantasy in adult sex. But women can't go out and say, 'I want to be raped.' That's a very complicated thing that a lot of people don't understand. You can't expect women to applaud fantasies that show that. Although they may go home and secretly masturbate thinking about it, they can't publicly admit to that because it's dangerous for them to do so"... "That happened in my teens. I was a social outcast. I had no way of acting out my sexual energy as a teenager, so I just developed this habitual fantasizing and masturbatory behavior pattern. I'm sure it's very common. Millions of men in America are like that. A lot of them read comic books"... -Notes from *The Comics Journal Library*: R. Crumb.

"The physical act of getting the time and the concentration and the clearing away of all the nonsense to sit down and do it. That's the hardest part of all. I have a backlog of ideas, encyclopedias of ideas. That's never a problem"... "I don't think there's a big market for cartoonists who are doing personal confessions and personal stories, but I enjoy that kind of stuff. I like stuff where people get real personal and reveal themselves. I feel less lonely in the world that way"... "I thought *my* perversions were weird – God, that guy is *really* out there. But it made me happy that somebody is even more twisted and weird than me. Way more, he's way out there"... "What do you mean, 'elitist'? What does that mean? That I should turn on the TV and watch *Who's the Boss?* or what? I'm elitist because I choose not to"... "I wallow plenty but it's my own wallowing and I'm very smug and satisfied that I've chosen my own defined little world that I wallow in. I think I have more fun because I've created it myself. It's a much richer and interesting world that I wallow in"... "There are a lot of critics who say, 'God, it's so creepy and depressing! Ugghh...' Three-quarters of the people in America come from a situation worse than this!" It's not that different from things that most people have some experience with; not everybody has some Ozzie and Harriet, Golden Boy, well-adjusted background. Come on! But part of the thing is you just never see that on film. The reality, the sordidness of everyday reality is rarely ever shown. People are so used to being spoon-fed some sugary nonsense about reality that always has some fucking romantic happy-ending crap. But show them something real? Unadulterated reality: "Huhhhh! Oh my God! How horrible!" Then a lot of critics use me or my family situation as a scapegoat: "Look at the weirdness of the Crumb Family Circus!"... "That's another thing the critics don't like: To show bitterness. It's unattractive, *very* unattractive. I mean, to be what they call a *nerd*, to be a nerdy type of guy and then on top of that be angry and bitter is

extremely unattractive. As a nerd you're supposed to compensate for your nerdiness by being at least comical and entertaining ; the comic relief in life. You're not supposed to be bitter and angry, wanting to go off in a corner and die or something. Go walk off an end of a pier. People don't want to see that... Jerks, bastards...." -Notes from *The Comics Journal Library*: R. Crumb.

"The work in this book was all done when I was 26-27 years old - still a punk, but I already felt like I was an old man... a veteran, a venerable elder of the thriving underground comix scene, the counter-culture revolutionary youth movement scene... Fame was old hat... I was now used to the phone ringing every five minutes. The thrill was gone. It was tiresome, having to listen to yet another fast-talking wheeler-dealer, having to talk to another journalist, another fanboy. Man, I was old!"... "My wife Dana got herself a new boyfriend, Paul, who soon moved in with her in the big house. So then we each had our own domain on the place. Hell, we were liberal, we were hip... the avant garde! Why couldn't we all still live together in harmony, in an 'open' situation?"... "My girlfriend(s) would come up, stay for a few days in the cabin..." "I admit I was pretty much an irresponsible bum when it came to parental duties. Dana carried most of the burden, by far. That had a lot to do with her anger towards me. I was off running around with hippy floozies, while she got stuck with all the work"..."Still managed to be amazingly prolific in this period"..."I felt it was my sole responsibility to keep these several little underground comix companies in business... Isn't that what they call 'co-dependency' now?"..."Plus, it was getting harder and harder to concentrate. There was always this crowd of people hanging around, and the phone was always ringing. The pure, white-hot inspiration of '66-'67 was getting lost in the shuffle... of well"..."I was seriously contemplating getting out of this business in the mid seventies. But then I'm completely useless for any other kind of work. I have to draw comics or die!"..."I enjoy the complete artistic freedom. I've had my own way for so long now, I can't stand to be told what to draw. I really balk at doing any commercial job in which I have to draw someone else's idea, or change something I did because some art director didn't like it... Man, I hate that! I'm very spoiled... a real prima donna, that's me. In the 'underground' I draw exactly whatever the hell I want and they publish it, no questions asked. Who needs big time!? They can keep their filthy money!" -Notes from R. Crumb's introduction to *The Complete Crumb Comics Vol. 7*.

"I Remember the Sixties": "And that reminds me of one of my fondest memories of the sixties: you could always see a lot of **leg** everywhere you went! On the other hand maybe it wasn't good because I was always in a state of frustrated excitement, being young and not too much in control of my emotions"... "I always got bored at rock concerts. I'd leave feeling vaguely depressed"... "A lot of these middle-class 'drop-outs' began living in their own LSD-inspired fairy-tale land, like the girl on Haight Street who was known only as 'Gingerbread Princess'. But it couldn't last... They were like helpless little lambs and the hungry wolves were moving in... By 1969 a demon called paranoia stalked the Haight... The drugs got harder and people were carrying guns... Rip-offs, murderers, rape, commercialization and other plagues descended on the neighborhood... it was a grim fuckin' spectacle. It was around 1969 and '70 that the big wheel was spinning too fast and people started flying apart in all directions. The 'scene' was disintegrating rapidly! It wasn't so obvious then that we were riding on the crest of a wave... We thought we'd never come down! But the wave finally crashed on the beach"... Zombies for Jesus... Naturally, I woke up on the fourth day of this drug experience in the deepest, blackest pit of despair and emptiness... Wish I'd known then what I know now about vitamins!"..."I approached the centaurs... They all had perfect young, beautiful faces... Sweet and innocent... Eternal seventeen-year-olds"... Woody Allen shtick.

"George 'Murky' Murkoid goes through life with only the feeblest notion of what he's doing or why... His feelings and desires are a constant source of bewilderment and confusion... To him life is anything but simple! ...Been watching this damn T.V. for hours... My eyeballs are falling out... Have a slight head-ache... All the shows are terrible... The commercials are an abrasive on the nerves... Still I'm immobilized... Can't move... Want to get up and turn the stupid fucking thing off but... somehow my will is paralyzed... William Burroughs says we're living in 'the ruins of a gutted planet...' Is there anything worth doing other than seeking after the pleasures of the **flesh**? But of course it's not that simple... Nothing's sever that simple... I've been around long enough to know that you don't take your pleasures without paying the price, like it or not.... Call it 'dues', call it 'karma'... same thing. Oh I've paid dearly for every cheap thrill and I'd do it again probably... Christ I wish she'd get here already. This eternal waiting makes me a nervous wreck!... I gotta work out some of this pent up tension... George, you monster... I know this is nutty but I can't stop myself... I'm such a fool..." -From *The Complete Crumb Comics Vol. 14*.

"Uncle Bob's Mid-Life Crisis": "I don't know... I don't feel much like getting up... Don't care if I never get up... A thing like this is guaranteed to make someone like me so acutely self-conscious that I'll never be able to draw another cartoon as long as I live!!... Well that's just fine but who's gonna support this family then? I'm perfectly willing to go out and find a job and you can stay home and take care of the baby and do the housework... Money... Christ in heaven... every time I think about money I start getting a bad case of nerves... Self-pity... she's right... that's always been one of my favorite pass-times... now I'm getting old... something else I can feel sorry for myself about... It's like the direction of my whole life up to now has brought me to this point and... now it all seems... I don't know... what should I do now? I have no idea what I should do next!... I used to be so **cocksure** of what I wanted, where I was going... I had **contempt** for people who seemed lost, aimless, without direction... Success has had a lot to do with it... I've arrived... I have it made... I'm a well-known artist... I have a nice wife, a nice kid... Nice place to live... friends... I'm socially accepted... get invited to lots of parties, everything... That's just it... I've gone soft... I have it too good... That's the trouble... everything's too easy now... I don't have to struggle anymore... I'm turning to mush inside... I used to be tough... I was motivated by fear... Now all I want is fun fun fun, that's my trouble... Who wants

to struggle? Who wants to suffer? I've created a sweet little world around myself and now here I sit... I'm in a vacuum... my own little *ivory tower*... I've done a good job on myself alright... I'm a smart cookie... Yep... It's a beautiful day here as usual... This town is so *utopian*, it's truly amazing... No poor people, no crime, no angry-looking negroes or third-world oppressed... You'd think this was heaven if you just got off the boat here... It's so *boring*, though... I've seen her before... She works at Kinko's Kopies... Dear Jeeziz, what a spectacular rump she's got!!... Meditation really works... I used to do it a few years ago and it really did improve my mental state... I did it every morning for about a year... It's amazing to think of that now... Where'd my self-discipline go?? Hmm... I remember... I stopped after the baby came... The mind is always frantically searching for some distraction, and it has no trouble in finding them... Crumb! What are you doing??? You are such a pervert weirdo! Giggle *tee hee shriek!*... You have to let me do these things to you... I have to get my creative energies flowing... "How's your mid-life crisis today, Bob?" –"Oh, I'm nursing it along"... In the middle of the night I suddenly realized what an overblown opinion I've had of myself since I got famous... I've been going around thinking I was absolutely hot shit!... I mean, pride in your work is one thing, but the kind of inflated ego I've been strutting around with is... well... just so much excess baggage, that's all. How'd I get such a monstrous over-blown idea of myself? Everyone in my family is like that... We all think we're something special... I guess it's a defense mechanism we all developed from being weird social outcasts in adolescence... maybe... I dunno... Then there's that crazy book, the 'R. Crumb Checklist'... The straw that broke the camel's back... I haven't the faintest idea what I'm going to do once I get in there... I'm scared... lost... confused... the R. Crumb who drew all those comics is a total stranger to me... I give up... all I ever think about is sex and collecting old records... My over-heated imagination is hard to get under control... A young sweetie like that can do wonders for your ego... I can see why any guy would do that if he had the chance... The wife's not too sympathetic... She doesn't like me when I show weakness, uncertainty... She gets irritated at me... Acts annoyed... bitchy... Of course, women are different... They operate on a different clock... They go through their crisis once a month... Are you gonna dump me now for some newer model that will be nicer to you than I am?... I don't expect romance every day... we get along... I have my job to do... Suicide is out of the question... Running away is out of the question... Still, I must *do something*... the pressure is suffocating... My head feels about to burst." –From *The Complete Crumb Comics Vol. 14*.

"So, why am I having a 'crisis'?? What's wrong with me? On the surface everything appears to be fine... couldn't be rosier... Who has a better life than me?? Nobody! Who has it easier? Softer? I can't think of a living soul I'd trade places with... That's just it... I've gone soft... I have it too good... that's the trouble... everything's too easy now... I don't have to struggle anymore... I'm turning to mush inside... I used to be tough... I was motivated by fear... Now all I want is fun fun fun, that's my trouble... Who wants to struggle? Who wants to suffer? I've created a sweet little world around myself and now here I sit... I'm in a vacuum... my own little ivory tower... I've done a good job on myself alright... I'm no less gullible than any other schmuck walking the streets, even though I like to think I possess some superior quality of awareness or some such bullshit!!... How'd I get such a monstrous over-blown idea of myself? Everyone in my family is like that... We all think we're something special... I guess it's a defense mechanism we all developed from being weird social outcasts in adolescence"... "You're alright... You're tolerable... I coulda done worse... You're still not as obnoxious as my first husband... I don't expect perfect romance everyday... We get along... I have my job to do – taking care of the Soph, and you." –Notes from R. Crumb's introduction to *The Complete Crumb Comics Vol. 14*.

"This sad state of affairs took a toll on his mental state as well, to the point that he once stepped out onto a window ledge during a visit to Paris and contemplated suicide while his wife was out and about with friends and his daughter played with Barbies, in the next room. After a long period of contemplation he stepped back inside and resumed playing with little Sophie again. When I asked him what changed his mind, he just shrugged and said, "Ash, I chickened out." Of course there was always the obvious to consider as well – namely, his family – but then that begs the question of what he was doing out on that ledge to begin with. Sadly, such self-destructive impulses seem to go hand-in-hand with what makes someone a powerful artist in the first place. The same hyper-sensitivity that can inspire someone to produce such powerful, evocative work can also be overwhelming at times. It's 'sensory overload' – the result of feeling TOO much!" –From the introduction to *The Complete Crumb Comics: Vol. 15*.

"By the spring of 1986 I was in a state of profound suicidal depression. I seriously contemplated ending it all. I felt like I had been run over by a steam-roller. All was pain – psychic pain. My neurotic compulsion to be loved by all of humanity had caused me to waste huge amounts of my time and life energy on tedious nonsense that was of no real value or interest to me. Of course, everything is a learning experience"... "Girls and women loved him. Traveling with him, I was amazed, watching him charm the pants off of various ladies. You couldn't help but like him, loveable con-man that he was. I think he liked and respect me, even if he was bewildered by my introverted personality... I told hi, yeah, it's true, I hate my body. I think of it only in terms of maintenance. I tried to explain how I got to be that way from early childhood experiences; my crazy mother, the strict Catholic school sisters, etcetera"... "We operated in different world, different ballgames altogether. The man of action and the brooding introvert." –Notes from R. Crumb's introduction to *The Complete Crumb Comics Vol. 16*.

"What was I doing hanging around at the O'Farrell Theatre, you might ask. Yes, there were beautiful, sexy women, but watching them do their stage acts honestly didn't work for me. Actually, for me their routines were disturbing, troubling, brining into vivid focus the grotesque absurdity of human sexuality. I couldn't imagine how anyone could be aroused by the gyrations those women went through on stage, or the lap dancing, or any of it. Still, I

was fascinated by the whole scene there"... "One day circa 1987 the Mitchell Brothers proposed to me and Terry that we put together a film script based on my "Whiteman Meets Bigfoot" story from 1971. They said they'd put five million dollars to produce it as an X-rated full-length feature with live actors, with Terry as director. They talked big, seemed completely confident. Terry was all jazzed up about this idea, as he was just then trying to get his big career as a movie director off the ground. My main interest, foolish creature that I am, was in the casting search for the giant girl to play the role of the female sasquatch character. Yeah, I'm hopeless. And so I set to work. I did some model drawings of big, sexy (in my eyes), furry females, and started writing the script.

I hadn't a clue about writing a film script. It was all new to me. I churned out pages and pages of dialogue, lengthy speeches and descriptions of the action. I could see it all in my head, my movie! It was gonna be great! The first twenty pages wouldn't make a five-hour-long epic. I just didn't realize... until I showed what I'd written to Terry. He just tore it to pieces. He was unmerciful. My ego felt injured. I wasn't used to this. I'd always worked alone (except for my collaborations with Pekar and Aline - easy, nothing to it). I had my fans in the comics world. They loved my stuff. This was a new ball game, and a rough one, and Terry knew a lot more about it than I did. I had a lot to learn to learn. He sent me home to rewrite, back to page one. Pare it down, think of the timing, he told me, keep the dialogue short and to the point. Condense the action. You've got an hour and a half to tell the whole story, start to finish. I rewrote the rewrote. More criticism. Pare it down more, Terry said, too much 'exposition'. I rewrote some more. I was learning the art of script-writing from the ground up. It was a lot of work.

Then suddenly the Mitchell Brothers backed out, pulled the rug out from under us. When they got a look at some of the script and my model drawings they realized instantly that our bigfoot movie was not the kind of thing that Mr. Pornoviegoer wanted to see. It was way too quirky, the sex element far too eccentric, comical, satirical. Terry was plunged into a state of depression over this turn of events. I was ready to throw in the towel. The hell with it, back to drawing comics, but Terry said, no, no, come on, let's finish the script. And then we'll take it down to Hollywood and pitch it. He already had connections down there, and my name might open a few doors. Okay, okay...

I spent months of labor on that script, working closely with Terry. He had a lot of good ideas. He couldn't write dialogue, but he knew a lot more about the mechanics of it than I did. Together we hammered the thing into some kind of shape, tight, dense with elements but plenty of comedy. Our title for it was 'Sassy', the affectionate nickname of the female sasquatch. WE thought we had a pretty darn good film script there. WE flew down to L.A., got a bunch of appointments pretty quickly. Hey, this is gonna be a cinch, I thought. WE took meetings. They all loved us and our script. They thought Terry and I were a great tea, but then they never got back to us, wouldn't return our calls. It was bewildering... Kafkaesque. I never could decipher their behavior down there. It's highly codified. You gotta be an insider. I went back to making comics... simple, straightforward, pen and ink and paper, that's it. I'm out of the film industry! Well, in fact, Terry and I did try our hand at a couple more scripts. I became somewhat adept at it. I would've made a good dialogue writer for T.V. sitcoms. But I tall came to naught. Zero. Dead in the water. Terry, in desperation, turned the cameras on me, and made the 'Crumb' documentary, and went on from there to become a moderately successful director. Me, at first I was a tad bitter. The undertaking had been a colossal waste of time... all that work for nothing! More nonsense that I'd gotten myself suckered into... when will I learn my lesson and stay at the drawing board where I belong???

It wasn't until years later, re-reading those comic stories I'd done in the script-writing period, that I discovered how that experience had sharpened my story-telling skills, that I'd gotten a few good comic book stories out of it. That made it all worth it, I guess." -R. Crumb, April '05. -Intro from *The Complete Crumb Comics: Vol. 17*.

Notes from *R. Crumb's America* by Robert Crumb: "City of the Future: Let's look at some of the things we're going to get in the years to come! You won't have to shit anymore! Bowels will be removed at birth and a sanitizing disposal unit installed"... "Buildings, cars will be soft plastic. Streets will be soft plastic. Accidents will be a thing of the past. Nobody will get hurt anymore! No more heat and cold, night and day. Cities will have room temperature all the time. Lighting will be soft, diffused. Warm snow for Christmas!! Everyone will be tuned in to everything that's happening all the time! No-one will be left out. We'll all be normal! Nobody will work! All production, distribution and maintenance will be done by computerized robots. People can spend all of their time playing, eating, and watching TV! ...Or, they can fuck!! Special fucking androids will be available to everyone! Social problems will disappear. Risk of involvement with the opposite sex will be eliminated! The androids will be put to other good uses. Sadists can torture them, cut them up, tear them to pieces! Men can build their own armies, fight their own wars, have mass executions. Concentration camps, if you please! All with androids, who won't mind a bit! In fact, you will have the whole spectrum of experience at your finger tips. Fantasy machines will manufacture any world you ask for in a matter of seconds! Be a locomotive engineer! Be a secret agent! Be a whore! Be Jesus Christ! Create your own masterpieces! Blow up the world!!... Yes, everything will be beautiful, but we'll still have to regulate population growth. So when you're 65 they'll come looking for you with a pie... not just an ordinary pie!! A cyanide pie!! What a way to go!!"

-Harvey Pekar/ "American Splendor"

American Splendor: "Look at me. I'm all grown up and going nowhere"... "I think we should just skip the whole courtship thing and just get married"... "She thinks I'm a social embarrassment"... "I've got to get out of here before I kill myself"... He's a super hero film clerk at a Cleveland Hospital... "Don't compromise yourself for women"... "I've got a compulsive obsessive quality to me about collecting jazz records. I'm like a junkie"... "Bob works at the

American Greeting Card Company in town"... Writing a story *within* the comic book panels... "I tried writing some stuff about real life. There's no idealized stuff in it. This is the real stuff"... "You've made yourself into a comic book hero"... "You've cured me, man, by drawing my writings and life as a comic book!"... "I'm desperately lonely and horny as hell"... "I do get lots of recognition for my writing, but it's not like I can make a living on it like Crumb. I can't quit my day job"... "You might try believing in someone other than yourself. You might feel better"... "How do you cope with loneliness? You watch TV. You write with your stick figures"... "*You're famous*. I just got a diploma, and became a house wife and mother"... "I help teach prison inmates to make art out of their suffocating, monotonous routines"... "I think you and I have a lot in common. You should meet me! I'm a *great* guy!"... "Wow. You've a sick woman"... "Despite all your problems, I think you're a real great person"... "That *yuppie food* did me in"... Camel Tea... "Harvey tends to push the negative"... "He doesn't think that flowers and sunshine sells. Harvey believes misery loves company." - "My perspective is gloom and doom"... This film was very empowering. He's desperate for love - any love! But that's what makes him *real*. "I tend to marry fast because I'll have any woman who'll have me"... "Delusions of Grandeur"... "Comics about his pains and pleasures"... "I was brought on the Letterman show just for laughs"... "A Genuine Nerd"... Harvey's got anti-charisma. And most of the characters are unattractive, yet humorous in their misery and suffering... "I want to do something important to me. Something that matters!"... "I was starting to lose it, between the lump and the loneliness"... "I'm not strong enough"... "You'll document the entire cancer experience as a comic book and remove yourself from the entire experience"... "Time passes strangely"... "If I were to die, would my character keep going on - or just fade away?"... "I like reading comics backwards"... "Don't think this is a happy ending. Every day is a major struggle. My life is total chaos. My wife still hardly ever works"... "I met Crumb in 1962 when he moved from Philadelphia to an apartment around the corner from me in Cleveland. Our mutual love of jazz was the initial basis of our friendship, but I became increasingly interested in his comic book work over the years, which demonstrated to me that comics were as good an art form as any that existed, and could be used to cover a much wider variety of subject matter than was generally done in the 1960s. (They continue to be underutilized today.)"

"Yeah, Harvey is an ego-maniac; a classic case... a driven, compulsive, mad Jew"... "But how else could he have gotten all those comics published, with almost no money; in total isolation from any comic - publishing "scene" such as exists out here in California, or in New York; constantly brow-beating artists to illustrate his stories; handling the distribution himself... only an ego-maniac would persist in the face of such odds"... "It's a sad fact that you can't sell "adult" comic books to American adults. Comic books are for kids. Adolescent male power fantasies, that's what most comic books contain; escape fantasies for pimply-faced young boys"... "While Pekar's work is highly respect in certain intellectual circles, it's definitely not commercial"... "Pekar has proven once and for all that even the most seemingly dreary and monotonous of lives is filled with poignancy and heroic struggle"... "There is drama in the most ordinary and routine of days, but it's a subtle thing that gets lost in the shuffle"... "Usually he writes his story ideas soon after the event, while the nuances of it are still fresh in his mind. He always has a large backlog of these stories, which he can choose from to compose each new issue of American Splendor." -R. Crumb's introduction for "American Splendor".

"For a long time I collected records in a rational way. I only bought records that I enjoyed listening to, and / or that had a great deal of historical significance. Then, for some reason, I got obsessive about it. I started buying records I knew I'd seldom if ever listen to just for their collector's value. It got worse and worse. I started getting all these auction lists and spending fantastic amounts of money on out-of-print L.P.s. I was spending all of my money on records I just filed away without listening to. I had to think twice about buying a hamburger or going to a movie... No matter how many records I get I'm never satisfied; I gotta get more. I've tried to quit but I can't. What am I gonna do? This is like being a junky!!... Life is about women, gigs, an' being' creative... I hate t' admit it, but workin' sort of helps me keep from goin' nuts. When yer alone alla time, like I am some weekends, y' start concnentratin' on yer problems an' thinkin' yer the only person in the world. But workin' with people helps ya put yerself an' yer problems in perspective. Still, it's a shit job an' a lotta times I feel trapped here... A buddy once called him a working class intellectual... In his late teens and early twenties Herschel had been unemployed a few times for months at a time and the desperation and feelings of uselessness that he'd suffered when he couldn't get a job were nearly traumatic... Since he has no reputation as a writer in political and historical article fields, he must buck an establishment of college professors and "name" journalists, who editors favor because of their reputations. 'Mother fuckers! This is better than anything they've printed in six months. They turn me down because they never heard of me. Assholes, I wonder if they even read it!... Most people that know him do like him and find him interesting and entertaining. But his lifestyle is so different from theirs that his relationship with them is superficial. He doesn't fit into any category. He's uneasy around academics, feeling that they think he's crude. He doesn't even fall into the hippy or junky or wino categories. He's had an especially difficult time forming a lasting relationship with a woman since the breakup of his marriage several years ago. Sometimes he thinks if he could find the right one they could groove on each other and forget about the rest of the world. He digs intelligent women that he can rap to about stuff like politics and music, but they don't want to go out with him because they think he's too eccentric and low class. They prefer doctors and college professors"... "There's no point in your going out together if you don't spend any time with each other"... "I know, I know, I'm an atrocious person. But, that's what desperation will turn ya into"... "Don't get emotionally involved"... "Yeah, I know. It was sordid, it was disgusting. I got involved with Carla because I was goin' crazy from loneliness, so I traded one kinda bad for another, knowing pretty much what I was doing, but doing it anyway. If I had it to do over again under the same

circumstances, I probably would"... "So I sublimated by writing this story... That's about what I can do when things bother me – write stories about them"... "The only way to get more friends is to get more recognition for my comic book writing. I gotta reach people through my stories"... "God, these guys can't make any money unless they write commercial crap"... "I'm middle aged. I've been married twice, but I've gotten divorced both times. Now I'm single and in a lotta ways I'm living like I did twenty-three years ago. I dunno, I guess my life is more cyclical than most peoples'. Don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining. I could be doing better, but things could be way worse too. All things considered, I'm in pretty good shape. At least I've got a steady job. It's going on two years since I broke up with my last wife. That wasn't too hard t' take. When I realized how little I meant t' her it didn't even seem like there was a marriage; it was like splittin' with a girlfriend"... "But I was so happy during my second marriage, so happy that I didn't even mind going to work much. I had what I wanted, a steady, tolerable job, a woman I loved that I thought loved me, I lived in a nice apartment in a mellow, interesting neighborhood, I had a creative outlet and it all added up to make me feel great!"... "People have been asking for a long time where they stand in the cosmos; wondering if it matters whether they take one course or another when they're gonna die in a few decades anyway. But stuff like that doesn't upset most people for too long. They can't conceive of nonexistence because for as long as they remember they've existed. So, absurd as it really might be to believe it, we really think we're very important, regardless of how insignificant or short lived we are. After all, we're the only ones living in our heads and in our skins"... "It's good to work toward goals, do something constructive, just to keep from bein' bored. Never mind what it'll mean in the twenty fifth century"... "I'm starting to accept the fact that there are better things to do than covet the friendship of people who don't understand me, don't accept me and bore me anyway. What do we need with each other? I've known it was pretty futile for a long time to run after people who didn't have any use for me and vice versa, and it was humiliating to do it, but I'd get so lonely I figured I had to. But as time goes on I'm getting increasingly inured to loneliness. I mean I can always read. I read all the time now. I'd much rather find out what George Eliot or Chekhov or Flaubert has t' say than most of the people I'm acquainted with. Whether books'll be the same comfort to me if and when I get to be sixty-five and friendless that they are now, I don't know. God, I'm tryin' t' do the best I can but I dunno, I dunno"... "I'm not in love with my work gig, but it's a stabilizing element in my life. I have almost nothing to do with my family and I have very few friends. Working and dealing with people at work, many of whom I like, prevents me from getting too lonely and helps me keep the right perspective on things; it tends to stop me from exaggerating my problems." – Dialogue from "American Splendor" by Harvey Pekar. This is raw, honest, introspective, confessional, passionate, autobiographical comic book work. This is a man's life in comic book print. It's the hardcore truth in personal detail.

"As I got into comics I saw clearly what could be done with them. It was wonderful! Here's this field with such potential and yet, so little has been done with it. I thought, 'God, what a great opportunity for me!' This was kind of a slow process, and finally, I hooked up with some illustrators and I got the thing going"... "Well, technically I was losing money, but prior to publishing my comic book I was buying all these records and spending every extra penny I had on record collecting. I had to quit that to put out the comic book. I didn't spend as much money on the comic overall as I did on record collecting, and I really enjoyed what I was doing. It's somewhat hard for me to understand how people who are interested in being artists at one point in their lives will quit because they're not making money at it. I mean, it seems to me that's like cutting off your nose to spite your face. You don't make any *more* money by stopping the writing or painting or whatever you're doing. You're sacrificing a lot of pleasure"... "I was losing money, but I wasn't being cheated. I went into it with my eyes pretty wide open. When I started, I was pretty old, relatively speaking. I was 32 years old, and I had done a lot of reading, and I was familiar with the biographies of a lot of experimental artists; great people who had not made any money to speak of. Van Gogh's an outstanding example [of someone] who didn't sell anything in his lifetime. I never considered giving up my job. Some people give up their day job, they go into the arts, they can't make a living at it, so they quit. To me, that's like throwing out the baby with the bath. I just try to keep my job and have that support the stuff I really enjoy doing." –From a 1994 "Hero" magazine interview with Harvey Pekar.

"What I've found, though, is that to make a commercial success as a writer, or politician, you've got to appeal to a low-common-denominator audience, and the best way to do that is to be one of them so you'll know exactly what they want. You won't think you're selling out." –From "Selling Out".

"America, how can you treat your creative artists with such callous indifference?" –From "Andy Statman".

"But my books don't sell well enough for me to earn a living as a writer. Comics fns aren't interested in them because they're about the real world – working at a flunky job, trying to keep an old car running through Cleveland's arctic winter. They're into fantasy, escapism... plus my no-punch-line, no-happy-ending stories upset them. They want stuff that's neatly resolved at the end, even though life's not life that. Consequently, for the past 30 years, I've had to make a living as a file clerk at Cleveland's V.A. hospital – that'll keep ya humble!"... "I've been contacted from time to time by moviemakers about doing an American Splendor film, beginning in 1979 with Jonathan Demme in his pre-cannibalism days. And I've signed a coupla options, but they've expired. At one time I didn't care about that stuff, because comics are quite similar. Comics use still instead of moving pictures, and written instead of spoken words. I don't have any hope of Hollywood doing a descent film based on my work. Movies cost so much to make that they're mostly produced according to formulas and aimed at a lowest-common-denominator audience. The Hollywood filmmakers know what that audience wants, because it's what they want – they're not selling out – they like garbage. Forrest Gump had to be done by people who thought a screenplay full of the contrived devices and feeble sentimentality they used was clever, maybe even profound"... "That's real important: to get a movie financed, it's

important to hook it up with a prominent actor"... "He doesn't discover an universal truths"... -From "An Almost All-Expense-Paid Vacation".

"Push outta bed... get into the dumb routine... get involved in boring work. That way you don't think about death, at least. Get tired... go home an' read a book (yet s'posed t' review), nod off at 7:30 with yer clothes on. The lucky ones think it means something. Wish I did... Work to live to die"... "Can't stay in the womb, in Cleveland"... "It terrifies him to get up in the morning to face the day. Ev'rything seems so chaotic t' me that I gotta grab on to a solid thought. But my only solid thoughts, the only ones I believe in, are thoughts of failure. That's not rational, but that's the way I think - failure is a sure thing"... "I was really happy to see how patient you were with me at Writers and Readers. Normally you get antsy when you have to wait over two minutes"... "Do I really mean all that?"... "The signing didn't go so hot. The people who came were nice, but there weren't many of them. I'm so sick a' doing signings where hardly anyone comes... The store owner buys all these books and they don't sell and the same few people stay for the whole time making small talk... It makes me feel bad for them. It's so melancholy." -From American Splendor Special: A Step Out of the Nest".

"I don't try to rank the various art forms in any order, and comics are the thing I do best and like to do the most. But I'll tell you what, you can make a lot more money in movies than you can in comics"... "I was having panic attacks every morning"... "The shooting for the American Splendor movie was completed. Then I really hit rock bottom. I had nowhere to go in the morning, my life had no shape or direction. I got way more depressed... I had to be hospitalized for 'major depression'"... "I wrote some stories about my working-class life in storyboard form with panels, stick figures, word and thought balloons, captions, and instructions to the artists"... "So what if I lose a couple thousand a year? At least I'll finally be doin' somethin' creative"... "I've put out some of my best books recently, like 'Trans-Atlantic Comics', but nobody reads them"... "If you're of the misery-loves-company persuasion, chances are you'll find it comforting"... "People will forget!"... "Just work, work, work and hope something will come of it." -From American Splendor: Our Movie Year".

"Our next guest tonight works as a file clerk in a Cleveland Hospital. He also writes comic books, which deal with his everyday pains and pleasures. Please say hello to Harvey Pekar!" Harvey Pekar revels in disclosing his inner dilemmas and deficiencies. He doesn't care how unflattering they make him. It's all out in the open. He's not trying to impress anyone. He's expressing the truth about himself. I've been writing the truth about myself in my journals for over a decade, and now I realize it would be great source material for an autobiographical time-based artwork. That is why I find reading *American Splendor* so liberating. Harvey Pekar is my creative savior. The key trick or element to doing such an autobiographical work is to reveal and express something interesting or hidden that would captivate an audience's interest. Something fantastic or truthful has to happen. And that can be exploiting the monotony of a daily routine through a personal expression of one's life. It can be through exploring one's neurosis and weaknesses where one's insecurities and broken dreams are laid out for the world to see or even empathize with. That is what makes it art, at least to me. His car breaking down can be fascinating to read about in picture form because we're seeing life from a different and artistic point-of-view... "That's it? One guy? I've always done lousy at signings, but never this bad!"... "If Doubleday hadn't given my work 'legitimacy' by publishing it, there's a good chance you wouldn't wanna run anything about me. Let's face it, what does your yuppie audience care about me?"... "God, what if I lose my voice for months like I did in '77. What a strain that'd put on the marriage"... "Shit - I'm depressed. Why? Things're goin' along o.k... Maybe it's because I'm gettin' all these rejections from magazines"... "He knows he's a terrible driver with a rotten sense of direction. He's extremely nervous, expecting to blunder... and he does"... "Whatsa matter with me that every time I get a new idea I go crazy to put it down on paper right away. I'm so scared of forgetting anything"... "You did give me a lot of grief; running all over the place; rude to that guy, brooding at dinner"... "Lost and found and lost and found and..."... "I was considered to be different"... "Here he is, coming home to her in a good mood because he's picked up some good records on his way back from the job for next to nothing"... "Our man is so obsessive, so compulsive that losing track of anything makes him panic and think he's lost control of his life"... "Did I feel lousy! My relationship with my girlfriend was poorly defined, my buddy visits me and I don't plan for us to do anything on Saturday night. I knew that he did mind being left alone but I'd gotten myself into a position where if I pleased her I abandoned him. I knew he's let me off the hook for it, but how could I have been so stupid! At any rate I was gonna alienate everyone I knew"... "Colin is out there living his life, trying to deal with it and understand it. This is what he writes about and what he has to say should be of interest to many people. I say *should be* because actually there are a bunch of folks out there who think if you're not a president or a general you're not worth reading about. Q. How can a democracy function in a nation full of people who believe that their lives and their neighbor's lives are insignificant? A. In such a situation democracy functions imperfectly at best. Colin realizes, though, that he has something to say, that his observations are useful, that they may be comforting or enlightening to some readers. So check this book out; see whatya think." -Notes from *The New American Splendor Anthology* by Harvey Pekar.

"He reports the truth of life in Cleveland as he sees it, hears it, feels it in his manic-depressive nervous system. There's nobody else to do it. Who would want to? There's no money in it. There's no money in telling the truth. People want escape. They want myths. This slice-of-life stuff, with no spices added, no glamour, no heroes, it's only going to reach a small, select audience, no matter how eloquent or 'poetic' it is done. And just who are they, this small, select audience? We don't know. They can't be nailed down. They can't be market-researched or 'targeted'... it's an odd scattering of individuals. Some are comic-readers, some not. They're to be found among the 'working classes' as well as among the 'cake-eaters'. But, you know, a population raised on mass media, spoon-fed a constant diet of sensational,

formalized storytelling, they're gonna be impatient with Pekar's comics... where's the chase scene? The punch line? When is somebody going to, you know, explode with rage, lash out, commit murder 'n' mayhem? And then somebody comes in and saves the day.... And where's the love interest? Boy meets girl? Something! But all you get from Pekar is... real life.

That's not to say there isn't entertainment here. Harvey is a great story teller... he brings this mundane work-a-day world to life, gives us its poignant moments, its humor, absurdity, irony... and mostly, it's absolute truth. There is no exaggeration in these stories. What you read is what really happened." -Notes from R. Crumb's introduction to *American Splendor Presents Bob & Harv's Comics* by Harvey Pekar.

"That woman from that big publisher never got back t' me. Guess she wasn't serious; probably wanted a free book or was too lazy t' look for my stuff on the stands or sum'n'. But what if she'd been serious? What if they'd have published my stuff and it'd sold well and I'd have made enough to support myself as a writer? How important is that to me? It'd be nice not to have to get up ev'ry morning and go to work to be able to read or work on stories and articles whenever I felt like it. But then I'd sort of be out of the struggle, sort of in an ivory tower watching the mainstream of life go by rather than participating in it... I'd be alienated but I wouldn't think I had the right to feel bad about it. I mean, I'd be a well-paid, famous author. What right would I have to complain about anything? Maybe my writing would suffer. I've got a pretty unique viewpoint now... I'm a writer but in a lotta ways I've got a working man's outlook on life. I'd have to as long as I've worked at regular day jobs. Still maybe I'm making too much of this. As long as I'm alive I'll be finding interesting things to write about, meeting interesting people... If I lived a different life I could still write about it. But would it be as interesting a life? Maybe it'd be too bland. But then, knowin' myself, I could always find something to get shook up over and write about... Ah, fresh bread!" -Notes from *American Splendor Presents Bob & Harv's Comics* by Harvey Pekar.

"Yeah, I know what I'm letting myself in for when I come down on him so hard. It doesn't look good to knock someone in the same racket. You could charge me with being jealous, or with being an egomaniac. Like, 'Oh man, you're not the only guy who thinks he's hot stuff - everybody's out there blowing his own horn. He's getting the bread and exposure, you're not. Tough! Maybe he deserves it.' All I can say is, look at his work and look at mine and look at someone else's and make up your own mind what they're worth to you. There are as many sets of standards as there are people. If an artist is in the right place at the right time and is hooked up with the right audience maybe he gets fame and fortune. If not - too bad. It's a crap-shoot, virtue and excellence don't automatically get rewarded, especially when people can't agree on what they are. After dealing with these people at the voice I was particularly mad - not that I hadn't worked with irresponsible, inconsiderate people before, some far worse than anyone on the Voice, but it seemed so stupid from any angle I looked at it - aesthetic, economic - for them to have given me the cold shoulder. I used to get furious thinking of those mealy-mouthed clowns, the art director and the editor-in-chief... and exposure in the Voice couldn't helped me so much! Time passed and occasionally someone would try to get me involved in one project or another. Once in a while I'd go along with them, maybe even invest time and money, and then everything would come a cropper. I was even contacted by a few movie producers fishing around for material! Most of these jerks had been hipped to me by the Voice article. No other piece of publicity stirred any significant interest in my work. There was something about me in *Oui* and nobody even mentioned it. So now it's September of 1982. My seventh book has come out a couple months ago. It's one of my best but I'm getting very little response to it. Sales are way off, partly because I've lost two distributors and partly because the economy's in such bad shape. I gotta get ridda some a' these books! I need publicity. Where am I gonna go? All the other periodicals are blind to my work. The Voice has about ten percent vision in one eye for it. What can I do? 'In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king!' I call my contacts at the Voice, the senior editor and his wife who wrote the famous article about me, for advice. The editor sounds annoyed. He doesn't want to pilot an article about me through. He's got other things to think about. I can't blame him. I never did anything for him, and I'm not in a position to do anything. It finally occurred t' me that he mighta taken alotta interest in his wife's writing about me because he was concerned about promoting her, not because he cared about me! So he tells me to send a copy of my latest book to the book department for review. In other words, to go through channels. That's almost impossible for someone in my position to do successfully, though. His wife says she'll talk to the assistant book editor about me, so there's a sum ray of hope. I write to the assistant book editor to ask for a review. Amazingly she answers my letter - only a month later! Her answer is very encouraging. She says she'll get someone to review my book. She even asks me to write for the Voice and keep in touch. But I'm not optimistic yet. I've been flattered before. I write back to her courteously, enclose a copy of a literary article I'd written to give her an example of how I write essays and criticism. Then I wait. No reply. After a few weeks I write to see if she's gotten anyone to review my book. Still no reply. After a couple more weeks I call the senior editor to find out how to get to this woman. He says: 'Don't call her. She's known for not answering phone calls. You might send her a note, though.' What he said led me to believe that she probably liked my work but wasn't going to do anything for me, and she didn't. I was enraged, even though I initially didn't think there was much chance of the Voice doing anything for me. Why hadn't this woman ignored my first letter instead of answering it and giving rise to some false hope I couldn't completely suppress? I think I know the answer. She had good intentions, but good intentions come cheap. It's easy to make promises, give assurances. Her execution was lousy, though. A person with good intentions who promises thing sand is too lazy to come through is often more harmful than a malicious person. A malicious person is easier to spot. You can be on your guard against him. Plus he's interested enough in you to try to hurt you. If you convert him maybe you'll have a friend.... But people like the assistant book editor who, I should point out, very often hold positions of

power, don't even care enough about you to want to hurt you. That's why they're shocked when you get angry at them. They promise you things because they want to seem agreeable. They don't keep their promises because it's too much trouble. They keep on breaking their words because they're so seldom penalized for it. It's accepted behavior in our society, like being fashionably late for dinner. I'm sure the Voice has treated many people as inconsiderately as it has me.... I was gonna write this jive woman a nasty letter, but a guy at work talked me out of it... 'Wadda you wanna do that for? They'll just laugh at you... They'll think you're a crank... They don't care about you...' So I sublimated by writing this story... That's about what I can do when things bother me - write stories about them...." -From *The Complete Crumb Comics Vol. 14*.

Notes from *Best of American Splendor* by Harvey Pekar: "Maybe you've read some of my gloomy stories here before. They appeal to people who are miserable and love company"... "What I've found, though, is that to make a commercial success as a writer, or politician, you've got to appeal to a low-common-denominator audience, and the best way to do that is to be one of them so you'll know exactly what they want"... "But my books don't sell well enough for me to earn a living as a writer. Comics fans aren't interested in them because they're about the real world - working at a flunky job, trying to keep an old car running through Cleveland's arctic winter. They're into fantasy, escapism... Plus my no-punch-line, no-happy-ending stories upset them. They want stuff that's neatly resolved at the end, even though life's not like that. Consequently, for the past 30 years, I've had to make a living as a file clerk at Cleveland's V.A. Hospital"... "Lemme get this straight. You think Bernt's script doesn't have the normal Hollywood structure. The hero doesn't, after overcoming myriad difficulties, successfully attain his goal - money, power, a beautiful woman... He doesn't discover any universal truths"... "You work to keep alive to **die**. Y' kid yerself into thinking stuff matters"... "Everything seems so chaotic to me that I gotta grab on to a solid thought. But my only solid thoughts, the only ones I believe in, are thoughts of failure"... "I cling to my depressing visions because I can't stand things being in flux"... "Man, it's great to see people like that who make me feel like an artist. But when I get back to Cleveland, I'll be a file clerk again. You live in the past, present, and future, at the same time. But why is it that I don't take any pleasure from my past achievements - only feel pain about my failures"... "The signing didn't go so hot. The people who came were nice, but there weren't many of them. I'm so sick of doing signings where hardly anyone comes"... "I've done stuff I've been pretty happy with in the past, and it's gone pretty much unnoticed"... "Another thing is that retirement wouldn't be good for me from a psychological standpoint. I'd just be hanging around the house, getting on my wife's nerves all day long. Most of my friends have long since left Cleveland"... "But I'm gonna keep on writing' this. I still need catharsis. Gotta get the demons outta my system"... "Like if I'm just working my eight hours and then going home and writing, and the stuff's getting published and I'm getting paid, but there's no feedback about it and I'm isolated - that can be a drag. Why would I or anyone get anything published if we didn't want it to be read and have an impact on people?"... "Hey, it's not just me that's not getting attention. Look at the wonderful body of work that Frank Stack and Spain Rodriguez have created that's being ignored. Look at Joe Sacco's Palestine. It's only five hundred times better than Maus, but, strangely, Joe didn't even get nominated for a Pulitzer"... "But now, doing all the things I have to do to make money, I work about seventy hours a week myself. And like I said, my social life in Cleveland is so barren, I'd rather work than retire, even if I could afford to retire"... "Diversion is the best strategy I know of. I'll lose the war, but maybe I can win a few skirmishes"... "What do I have to do today? What do I have to worry about?"... "I'm not a dangerous driver, but I'm a pretty confused one, and I'm hyper, so some sometimes I drive over the speed limit. The thing is, everyone drives over the limit from time to time - you can't help it. And if a cop happens to see you, you get a ticket. All you have to do is let your mind wander for a second and you can commit a moving violation"... "I kept writing jazz criticism for a long time because it made me feel like something more than the file clerk I was and am"... "You can be creative writing music criticism; I felt the juices flowing in a part of me I thought I'd never use again"... "I have no use for Oscars or Grammys or any kind of artists' hall of fame. There's a lot of P.R. and politics involved in who gets the award and who doesn't. Great and even influential artists are routinely ignored. On the other hand, some pretty ordinary writers and musicians, who for one reason or another appeal to the lowest common denominator, make fortunes and get all kinds of publicity"... "My troubles get put in perspective when I talk to her"... "To me, each day has a purpose"... "The same old loveland"... "I guess you could say humankind in general often seems kind of absurd to me"... "The early and middle seventies - what a lonely, awful time for me"... "I wanted a wife because I was alone all the time"... "Surviving the second divorce wasn't too bad. I had the comic book going for me, so that gave me more self-esteem"... "We love each other, but we've had some difficult times. I'm hard to live with because I don't like to go out much anymore. I'm depressed a lot."

-From a story about Colin Warneford, an autistic writer/ artist: "Dear Harvey, This may (or may not be) the first letter you've received from someone with autism... (I'm worried you may not write back, so I'm trying to grab your attention early on, here.) In fact, Asperger's syndrome, or 'high-functioning' autism... which I suppose means I've got above average intelligence, rather than the more well-known type of person with autism... who has a low IQ, or learning difficulties... I don't know how much you might know about autism, but since people with the condition can't always 'speak for themselves', the media representation of the condition is very poor*... most people expect someone who can't dress themselves or live independently. *The psychologists have got it all wrong, too... To get to the point, I've always had what you might call a 'mission' (a real obsession) to write autobiographical work and get it before a readership. In fact, since I was at school I've been determined to do so - having a 'communication problem' such as autism, it's no surprise I've been literally bursting to communicate all my life... I've written and drawn comics for

about 12 years now. I'm conscious of the fact that you might get letters all the time from 'no-hopers' & 'would-be' cartoonists - but I'm pretty sure I've at least a new 'angle'... and a damn good reason for doing autobiographical work - I don't have any choice, because I'm just about the only person I can understand, due to my condition. 'Having' autism means a whole different way of thinking, feeling, and perceiving the world - and it's the ignorance of non-autistic 'society' (a pretty baffling and bewildering set-up to anyone with this condition) of our way of thinking that causes us a lot of our difficulties. Many of us believe that if there were NO non-autistic people on the Earth, a lot of our communication and social problems might never arise in the first place (but this ain't gonna happen!). I'm gonna apologize (in advance) for the long length of this letter - I can't write a short one. Can't help myself... I was only diagnosed as having Asperger's syndrome last October... aged 31... (really damn late), so I'd lived, up to that point, in complete bewilderment and frustration, and, though I knew I was 'different', I despaired of ever getting any ANSWERS as to why, and in what way, I was different. Prior to my diagnosis I had written and drawn many comic strips, but had always found something was lacking... a 'theme', I suppose. Something that would tie it all together... help me understand all the disconnected fragments... (my perception of the world is, by nature, fragmented) and get some coherence to it all. Then I got this 'label', and everything started to make sense... My life was, to me, a puzzle to solve. I always liked that line "Every human being has a project" (Jean-Paul Sartre)... I'm beginning to make sense of my world, and at the risk of sounding arrogant, I feel sure it's an interesting journey, and I'm determined to make it a public one. Needless to say, the need to communicate and receive feedback is IMMENSE. There have been a couple of autobiographies published by people with autism, and there are also newsletters published by (and for) people with autism (they've printed some of my work), but, as yet, I don't know if there are (m)any autistic cartoonists? One thing I'm concerned to avoid is any kind of 'super-cripple' perspective - I despised those recent Hollywood movies about 'disabled' people, and all those OSCARS going to actors playing disabled people. I abhor any kind of 'Freak Show'... where the non-disabled or so-called 'normal' people give the 'weirdos' a few moments attention then go home, much relieved they're 'okay'. That sick fascination with abnormality! (ie: Victorian 'society' visiting the 'Elephant Man')... spare me the sheer repugnance of society ogling the 'less fortunate'! I hope to somehow avoid the 'novelty factor' (but it's not going to be easy)... Apart from a sudden impulse (this afternoon) to communicate, I'm not sure what I hop to gain from writing to you, Harvey. A word or two of encouragement? Advice? I guess so... I'm certainly not expecting any help with my day-to-day difficulties. You've got troubles enough, I'd expect. To have autism, it's been said, is to feel like an alien just arrived on planet Earth, lacking a guide-book. The sense of isolation is so intense, it's difficult not to writ, in an attempt to 'make contact', to someone you 'know' through their work (such as you). Imagine having no real understanding of the word 'friend', or no sense whatever of any 'friendship', even if you have daily contact with people who tell you they're your friend... it's only recently I developed any understanding of the concept of 'friendship' at all. I always lacked an awareness of the difference between 'friend', 'stranger', and 'acquaintance', Everyone (and no one) is your friend. You trust everyone, and no one. You're hostile to people who try to be friendly, and friendly towards people you should avoid..... You live in fear, you live in a state of complete bewilderment, and at times you feel so desperate for a sense of connection with SOMEONE (anyone) you'll write to someone you've never met in the hope they'll write back, so you get a sense of having 'reached out'... "Something had a big influence on me: this was the life of Robert Crumb. Basically, I attempted to 'be' Crumb. I saw Crumb, portrayed sitting in a separate room (drawing) and described as a 'quiet, retiring guy..." I'd always been labeled "SHY" (and ordered to 'snap out of it'). I thought if I did what Crumb did... find some kind of 'Bohemian' crowd to join in with, things would start to improve. A social worker had said I'd 'missed out on certain key developmental stages' -- all I had to do was 'get out and socialize'... and I'd soon 'catch up'. He was wrong, but I tried it. People noticed I was 'different', and tried to 'help'... "So... apart from one long-term friend whom I've known since school (and who has Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, which makes him, in some ways, similar to me), my other six friends were all met during this attempt to be 'one of the gang'. But as soon as they tried to 'get to know me' - outside the pub - problems arose... Now I avoid pubs and most overtly 'social' situations... EXTREME ANXIETY as I draw this peaceful man (slumbering alcoholic dreamer). The panic induced in particular by having to draw this and do it right... combined with too much happening too quickly all at once all piles up on top of each other can't cope leaves me in pieces... to calm down takes time... if it can be done at all... my daily teatime anxiety... "I've just given a good example of what I consider 'irrelevant' areas of life - going out, getting pissed, having a 'laugh', forgetting about work (whereas in my mind, my 'work' is never forgotten), playing pool - all 'recreational'/ social areas are irrelevant... although, I've spent most of my life aware I was missing out on something, and wanted to enter into it. Obviously, the feeling of 'missing-out-on-the-fun' was brought intensely to the fore when I saw my professional - 'careers' (social workers, Day Center staff, psychologists) were able to forget all MY troubles and go back to their lives - whereas I'm relentlessly stuck in my own groove, even on a 'night out'... wanting to talk only about my 'pet' subjects ... and if I CAN'T. I suddenly realized that it was 'just a job' to my psychologist... the one who diagnosed me... she even said: "Don't ever believe that people do this kind of job because they want to HELP people." (I must be more naive than I thought.. I'd supposed this was the basic idea behind it!) She said it was: self/ career/ position/ 'ADVANCEMENT' first... 'HELPING' second... I left school and dropped instantly OUT... went on the dole... (nowhere else to go), whereas I watched my 'peers' running frantically here and there, planning their 'future'. I hadn't any plans, didn't know what it was all 'for'... I was just committed to: drawing, thinking, and to one day 'expressing myself'... only dream I had was to be a cartoonist... but a 'career plan'... what's that? Whole idea makes me RETCH!! This was my situation until I claimed for disability living allowance in 1996... People my academic/ intellectual equal (or even, in many cases, my inferior) from my school year have gone on, through University, etc., to

become: social workers, City Planners, Physicists, and so forth... I will admit to ENVY... but my path was different... and indeed it had to be... and I'll 'get there' in the end (where? Who know) MY way... "I wanted to be an opera singer when I was your age, but now I have to do THIS for a living - and I sing in my spare time, as a hobby... You'll really have to widen your horizons, Mr. Warneford!!" - "And maybe (yeah, like Crumb, too) I'll show those bastards!"... "Usually, I just want to be ELSEWHERE, pursuing my interests"... "There's one thing I KNOW was on his mind: How was I going to survive in the 'Big Wide World' (I wonder myself)"... "I was obsessed with those crawled notes... OBSESSED with communication... and curious to know what'd happened to my mother's mind. But me dad soon threw those scraps of paper out.. Too many memories, I suppose"... "I try to blend in, be as much like the people I meet as possible... but WHY should I conform to some 'normal' standard? I've been as flexible as I possibly could. I try to 'fit in', but they won't do the same for me. I've learned some of their ways... but... they don't grasp my ways at all... I just never feel 'natural', relaxed. I think really LIVING is about confrontation... or being able to be confrontational when required. From my angle life... SOCIAL life, is just a constant battle... and I don't want any part in it... I don't understand the drives most people have - they're out of my experience, especially sex drive - or, more accurately, all the so-called rituals, games... needed to be entered into to find yourself in a sexual situation. Although I'm attracted to women, I have no idea what to do about it"... "Too many questions, from too many strangers, coming too fast. I felt trapped and unable to move or escape... fluctuating between feeling completely invisible and completely exposed... or... both at the same time. It wouldn't have been helpful to say: 'I'm someone with Asperger's syndrome or 'mild' autism' - it still wouldn't have stopped me being bombarded by: Noise, emotions, cross-cutting conversations I couldn't follow... It wouldn't have stopped the withdrawal... or the fear... At school age, I got on best with adults. I could talk to them about some science topic I'd read about in the encyclopedias and textbooks I loved... I still have the most trouble with people my own age... especially women... and ALL children & teenagers - they seem to spot instantly that I'm different, vulnerable, an 'easy target'. Local kids still bully me... I've had snowballs thrown at me by ten-year-olds in winter... they seem to realize I won't fight back or shout. It's still dangerous to be me. I was once molested in a Chinese Takeaway... I was 18. I could only stand there and wait for it to finish.... What good are my 'insight' and ability to articulate in writing if I'm still quite defenseless in real life? I think this is the point you have to grasp... I'm not actually 'anti-social' at all. I started out quite unaware of the concept 'social' - without the in-built capacity to learn to BE 'social'... but ANTI-social means, to me, a person capable of being social, but who prefers, for whatever reason, not to be. I'm accused of selfishness and thoughtlessness... but this, too, is inaccurate. I'm egocentric, yes, because I never really left that stage of development... whereas there are people who choose to be 'selfish'. I long (or used to long) to be able to socialize... but I haven't the ability - some 'autistics' aren't really much interested in 'social' stuff, or sex... and maybe they're the fortunate ones."

-Afterword: "I've been in contact with Colin Warneford for a couple of years now and feel awfully pleased that I've been able to work with him. Colin's an outstanding illustrator and fine writer, something you probably realize if you've gotten this far. He's had to pay a lot of dues and, hopefully, getting his work out will, in the long run, make him feel better. In case you're interested, I put together excerpts from several of his letters to create a lot of the text for his story, to which Colin added extra dialogue in some panels, using Geordie, the dialect spoken in and around Newcastle. He's got a really good ear. **'Hoy, Colin, great job like, an' a' hope t' work with ye again soon.'**"

Our Cancer Year by Harvey Pekar and Joyce Brabner: "It took me so long to get the life I wanted: the right job, the right apartment, in the neighborhood that suited me best, a good wife, an artistic outlet. I wonder how much damage 'getting' a house I gonna do to me, how I'm gonna cope with it? Let's face it. I'm a compulsive guy. Any time there's a big change, it messes me up."

Pekar's words are almost identical to the worried voices and feelings inside my own head. It's like reading your kindred spirit's journals in comic book form! This is EMPATHY writing in its finest, rawest, more honest form.

Notes from *The Quitter* by Harvey Pekar: "At the age of ten, I started working for my parents on Saturdays in their store. At first I felt proud to be working at a job at such a young age. It was like I was more grown-up than my peers"... "So, after being what I considered a star in elementary school, I went into the seventh grade, junior high school. There were a lot more kids in my grade, and a lot more competition"... "Another problem I had when I entered Junior High School was girls. Guys were starting to go out with them in the seventh grade, and I was strongly sexually attracted to the, but I was afraid to ask them out... Then part of it was class. A lot of the girls I liked came from richer homes than me, and I felt like they kind of looked down their noses at me... That messed up my confidence for a long time"... "Even at this stage in my life I was deeply depressed and pessimistic"... "As nice as the customers were to us, working at the store really depressed me"... "I was afraid to ask girls out"... "You're making a mountain out of a molehill"... "Underground comics were often written about the bohemian life style. But it didn't have to be that way all the time. Underground comics had already proved that comics could appeal to adults. They were as good an art form as any that existed. Comics are words and pictures - you can do anything with words and pictures. So I thought, why couldn't I write about everyday quotidian subjects in comics? Why couldn't comics be about the lives of working stiffs? We're as interesting and funny as anyone else"... "Look at this. Nothing but super hero crap!"... "I finally got around to writing comic scripts in storyboard form."

Notes from *Harvey Pekar's Cleveland*: "Yeah, I've had plenty of good days"... "I should give her credit for toughening me up in view of some of the troubles I would experience. I learned early that you have to allow for

unpleasantness in your life"... "Actually, the job might've saved my life. I had worked for short stretches as a US civil servant when I was seventeen, and although pay was low, I liked the security and fringe benefits I got there"... "Toby, the self-proclaimed 'Genuine Nerd,' who was a bright guy but said and did strange things. Later, it occurred to me that he was autistic; he sometimes astounded people with his remarks"... "I'd gotten divorced in 1972, and, aside from a date here and there, had had a pretty quiet love life. My isolation was really bugging me"... "But I was losing money on the comic book, and nobody, aside from comics fans and insiders, knew about me"... "Everybody's into SUPERHEROES!"... "In 1980, I did get a call from Jonathan Demme about him making a film based on "American Splendor", but he wasn't well-known either, and the deal went nowhere"... "I started to realize my fear would come true, that once she had her degree she'd view me as a liability and DUMP me. I had made another wrong guess about her. I didn't realize what an upwardly mobile person she wanted to be"... "See, it would've be too much of a problem for her to get a job at a so-so local college or university. Sure there wouldn't be any prestige connected to that, but the main way academics get prestige is publishing articles, and you don't have to be from an Ivy League school to publish articles"... "I just don't think I can get the position I want here"... "At the same time, for reasons connected partly with getting even with my second wife, I had begun building this huge book collection, and was writing literary criticism"... "I'm not the voracious seeker of knowledge I used to be"... "I mean, there have been times when things looked pretty bleak for me. Like all the important stuff in my life had already taken place. But y' know, I really don't wanna give in to that. If you're gonna be alive, you oughta at least make an effort to feel good"... "But he's also studying to be an occupational therapy assistant at a two-year college. It's great that he's still ambitious"... "I really like it when they say they like my complaining because they have the same problems I do, and it's nice to know they're not alone in this world"... "Well, first of all, it's fine to have the energy to take on a lot of work, but don't quit your day job. Even if you're a terrific author/ cartoonist, there's no guarantee anyone will publish your work. And even if they do, chances are they'll pay you little or nothing for your work. To a lot of people, publishing comics is a labor of love. They lose money themselves. I mean, if you really enjoy doing comics, and you think you're creative, by all means keep at it. But it took thirty years and a movie based on my work to make me any money"... "And another thing, you don't live in a media center. If you live in a media center, you have a huge advantage"... "Y' know, life ain't fair, and that's especially true in the arts"... "Well, these days, Cleveland isn't the worst place for me to be. Now everyone's depressed, not just yours' truly!"... "People don't come here to the Midwest to dream - they are here because it's cheap, and they stay because it's cheap."

Notes from *Huntington, West Virginia "On the Fly"* by Harvey Pekar: "I continued and graduated from NYU in 1987 and was working in an animation studio. It was a cutthroat atmosphere. I wasn't comfortable there"... "Meanwhile the sprout business was doing badly. The bank took everything. My mom and dad separated and eventually got divorced. My mom had another breakdown"... "My marriage was not doing well. We were growing apart. Having a child was stressful. The relationship wasn't stimulating enough"... "See if there's anything on TV." - "Why bother?"... "I took a bunch of nightmarish jobs and then got a job at Wal-Mart. I worked there about seven years and then got fired. I'm not feeling too bad about it 'cause the job caused me a lot of stress and strain"... "Now started the 60-to-80-hour workweeks and over-seeing a staff of over 50 people"... "I always heard that running a restaurant was the toughest job in the world and soon learned that was the case. I had lost twenty pounds"... "We got less than half of what we put into it"... "Big Fun is like the safe place on the Monopoly board. The bottom line, Harvey, is I just wanna make people happy"... "In 2003 I was picked up by an agent who booked speaking engagements, many at colleges. These are great gigs. Even after he takes his 30 percent, you often wind up with \$3,000 to \$5,000. The first year I thought I was in heaven, I had so many speaking jobs. Since then things have fallen off. I've been averaging one or two gigs a year. Now that the American Splendor movie isn't around, there's not so much interest in me"... "He said your number was in the book and you said that anyone was welcome to call. So we thought we might call and get acquainted"... "I wanted to write about everyday life."

5-8-04: I've been reading "American Splendor" on my back porch this perfect weekend May Day by myself (even after I called three different sets of friends if they wanted to do anything). I found myself relating too heavily to Harvey's loneliness. We both had long streaks of being without ladies and longing for our exes. We also put our free time into expressing our creativity through introspective, autobiographical art stories.

2-28-07: Eric Homan finally got to meet Harvey Pekar this evening at OSU's Mershon Auditorium for a one hour talk he did with an OSU professor of cartoon art. Then I waited in line for fifteen minutes to meet Harvey, have him sign my trade paperback for "American Splendor", and got my picture taken with him. I knew I was just another "ardent" fan of his and he's met my type thousands of times before. I shook his hand and told him that I found his books to be very cathartic. He didn't really respond. He looked tired and obliged to get his picture taken with me. That was how I expected him to react anyways. Meeting your idols are usually disappointing experiences if you think too much of them. He has no idea who I am or what I've written. I'm just another "Eric... spelled with a 'c'" that he's anonymously met. One young woman asked a question to Harvey how beautifully and honestly he's written about depression. In the way she asked I could sense she's battled depression just as I have and how much his work has helped her. And that was when I realized that Harvey's "American Splendor" books are really therapy. It's plain and simple. They're just disguised as a comic book.

7-12-10: My wife Lisa called me up around 12:20 p.m. this afternoon while I was out Half Price Books

shopping and at Used Kids. "Did you see on the Internet? Harvey Pekar died. He was 70 years old." I didn't really react at the moment. I just shrugged it off. He'd been battling prostate cancer, asthma, high blood pressure, and depression. He also had cancer back in the 90s. It was his time. Yet later on, it fully sunk in that one of my biggest role models on my artwork and journaling was dead. I sarcastically left a phone message with Lisa that if Neil Young died today, I didn't want to know. It would just be too much grief for me to handle. Cleveland lost LeBron James last week. Today they lost Harvey Pekar. *Pekar chronicled his life and times in the acclaimed autobiographical comic-book series, "American Splendor," portraying himself as a rumpled, depressed, obsessive-compulsive "flunky file clerk" engaged in a constant battle with loneliness and anxiety.*

-Chris Ware/ "Building Stories"

Building Stories: Reading 14 booked stories out of order like picking up pieces of someone else's memories to go through, analyze, read, and reflect on. There's a stark honesty to these stories and memories that I find quite refreshing, relatable, and engaging. And I love the ability to read someone else's most private thoughts and learn that I feel the same way, too. For me, that's art. It's about relating to something from the heart of another. I also felt deeply inspired by this book since the subject matter felt like it was ripped from my very own journals. You can also read this 14-book story in any non-linear order and still get the story... Simple things like discovering one's past ex on the Internet can be so full of drama. I also must add the relationship this book has with another favorite graphic novel series, *American Splendor*. Both deal quite candidly and honestly with living and coping with depression, especially with artist types. No wonder I find myself enchanted and deeply empathetic with these tales... This book also inspires me to tell my own tales from my life experiences from my journal entries. Chris Ware makes everyday life events and private emotions feel like high drama. This work informs my own artwork to continue on by taking what's working with this book and express it into my own art. My work just needs more of a narrative to it. I need a story to tell... I really don't want this book to end. It's like being around a really good friend who really and truly *gets* you... "Momma, I don't know how I feel right now. I mean, I don't know how to say it. I'm just not happy or sad, I'm in between"... "I don't care... I just don't *care*... Let it snow.... Let it *bury* me, for all I care..."... "I thought I'd gotten over it... I thought that somehow I'd *fixed* myself, but the hole, the horrible emptiness inside me just won't go *away*... Everything... *everything* makes me feel awful... alone... the hole just keeps getting bigger... How are other people able to do it? Where do they find their 'happiness'? And was I *ever* actually happy? It seems impossible now... *unthinkable*... Maybe when I was a kid... the smell of our house... of dad's old coat... The promise of a long Saturday, of sitting in my room on a cloudy day, drawing"... "I almost had everything... almost had... a family of my own..."... "Maybe it's old-fashioned to even *want* a family... maybe there's a *reason* I'm alone... It's evolution or biology... Am I really so awful? I must be... I *must* be... My dead end job... My dead end life... It's what I deserve"... Capturing everyday moments in life as you raise your little daughter up. Observe the spring flowers on a walk. It's all an artistic event to be expressed... "He was just the kind of non-threatening boy a shy girl like me needed... I'm pretty sure I was the first girl he ever hung out with, actually"... "I told him about Phil and Lucy and my wasted years in art school"... "Y' know, it's no *wonder* he never got married... anyone in their right mind would run screaming"... "Just then for no good reason at all, while staring into my plate of Trader Joe's Tortiglioni Parmagianno, something came loose inside me and floated to the surface... the uncomfortably loud swishing of my prom pantyhose in his father's station wagon, his damp hand in mine, the rear view mirror reflecting the headlights of passing cars into my eyes"... "As a kid, I could sit in front of a mirror and stare at myself for hours, trying to imagine what I'd look like when I grew up"... "Men just don't understand the tremendous anxiety girls feel about their bodies and appearances"... "So why was I so mooney? I mean, I got a boyfriend practically the second I arrived at college"... "I've been home for barely a day and already my mom is driving me crazy"... "A lonely kid with an over-active fantasy life"... "Later, it turned out that she had some pretty bad emotional problems, and she'd fallen in with a different group of girls, anyway. So I didn't let it bother me... At that point I was starting to become acquainted with the unfairness of life"... "I'm really *am* happy... finally. I am happy"... "Why couldn't she just be happy for us?"... "Had I really just signed my life away as a *suburbanite*?"... Cats puking on the floor again... "Sometimes I think I used to be a calmer person when I lived alone... more spiritual... I feel like somehow I was more alive then... taking that creative writing class and writing and drawing in my journal... even if it was mostly terrible... God... have I really given up on myself that much?"... "When was the last time Phil and I had sex, anyway? A while, that's for sure... after Lucy was born"... "And even though he broke my heart and ruined my life for years I have to give him credit for loosening me up a little"... "He was probably right about us... knew it wasn't going to work... So why do I find myself thinking about him sometimes, still?"... "What if we had stayed together? Had our child? I wouldn't have met Phil, had Lucy"... She had an abortion when she was younger. She wonders if she had raised that child s/he would have been in college now... "I guess I was mostly looking for a reason to call Stephanie... ugh... I feel bad how long it's been"... "Having Lucy in kindergarten has given me some of my life back"... "I feel so guilty for just wanting more time to myself"... "Phil first started to worry about losing his job"... "Lucy and I were playing in the yard on one of those early summer Sundays that seem made for childhood... Blue sky, green smells and nothing to worry about other than what I was going to make for lunch"... "*This* was what it was all about... *This* very moment... the joyful reality of my daughter"... "That was when Phil came outside... I could tell from his voice that something was wrong... very wrong"... "She'd always had a knack for knowing when to snap the shutter"... "To quell my fears that as a bad friend I might've had something to do with her 'decision' (to kill herself)"... "I have the best family in the world. It really hit home that morning how profoundly *lucky* I was... how

close I'd come to my own lonely oblivion at one time"... "I looked up Stephanie's old emails... When I'd received them they'd struck me as rambling, oppressive screeds, suffocating for their length and neediness... but now... I was shocked by their lucidity and wit... They showed genuine insights into human character and relationships, a sensitivity to the invisible forces that bind us together and push us apart"... "At least I had the repetitive daily grind of parenthood to distract me"... "Phil, I think I might really need some help"... "Fuck **you**, God!"... "You were always takin' notes in that diary of yours... We thought maybe you'd be famous someday"... "I... yeah... I guess I gave it up... **kids**, y' know? Maybe I'll, uh, get back to it someday, though"... "Had I really been so obvious in my ambition back then? Either way, his mentioning it had heightened the bittersweet nostalgia of the afternoon and put me into a weird funk"... "Would it **kill** you to spend a few minutes with your daughter?"... "I really like Amanda... 'Militantly single'"... "So much for **my** two hours of 'me time'"... "What was I supposed to do? **Duplicate** myself? I could feel everything crowding in on me, the pressure building"... "My God... was I **happy**? Was it **possible**?"... "I sat there, tingling with revelation"... "Just these few hours of solitude had let me do what I wanted... refreshed me... given me the sense of serenity that I'd been missing... So why couldn't Stephanie have found that same solace in her solitude? Why had life ultimately been such torture for her?"... "I thought I'd gotten myself together... but I hadn't"... God is a flower to Branford the Bee. "Around and around, God rushes up to him. And Branford kisses and kisses!"... "Wow, well, now I am officially jealous"... "Why does he have to be so **mean** to me?"... "I try not to say anything stupid or dumb"... "He's such a fucking **asshole**"... "I guess I'll just wear this skirt... After all, it's what I had on when xxxxx (cute guy at work whose name she won't allow herself to say. -ed). What if... we fell in love with each other?"... "Just some memory fragments I pulled from this area's consciousness cloud"... "It wasn't until the pornography paradigm changed that the God-wave was discovered"... "No, I never wanted to have children. To have one's life completely taken over by the needs of another person? I think not"... "I'd pretend I was being swallowed down the gullet of some enormous whale or a fantastic sea serpent"... An old woman drifting through the memories of her selves of her life... "He does magic, but only as a hobby... I don't think he feels there's any future in it"... "Briefly, our knees brushed"... "But in my situation a girl can't afford to be choosy... I suppose he'll even ask me to marry him one of these days"... The stillness of time... "I'm sorry, but I **relish** the time I get alone"... "I guess I just got testy, that's all"... "I just miss you"... "I realize it may be heresy to say this, but sometimes I almost find myself feeling **nostalgic** for the days following 9-11... There was such an air of seriousness, of frugality... of, well, **reality**... But then we all slowly returned to our corners, and, one by one, went back to sleep"... "Still reading about the end of the world, I see"... "A bomb... a bomb has gone off downtown... The Sears Tower has been bombed and people are dying right now and in a few seconds a nuclear fireball will sweep over us"... "I know you're under a lot of stress lately"... "Phil and I discovered our checking account was overdrawn"... "Well, if you think working on Saturday night – and a holiday! – is more important than spending time with your daughter, that's fine... just **great**"... "Trying to close my nose and thoughts to the musty loneliness of mom's sad new life"... "You know, **dad** had an affair"... "The worst part was that she'd been keeping this from me only since dad's death, it all having come to light in a packet of old letters from a teaching assistant of his she'd found in a file marked 'business'"... "It's weird, but if there was anything guaranteed to bring us together faster as a family it was mutual anger at my mother"... "Personally, I think estheticizing the sense of taste is a classist, morally indefensible notion, a function of privilege rather than one of necessity, especially when it comes at such expense"... "I just need to keep my mouth shut, I guess"... "Repetition... **that's** what wears you down... day in, day out... It all runs together"... "Granted, I could probably use an invisible friend myself every once in a while... Maybe that's all 'God' is, really"... "It's certainly very reassuring, the feeling of being looked after... watched over"... "Mom, did Miss Kitty go to the same heaven that your dad went to?"... "After years of not caring and not looking I'd found my first boyfriend, Lance, on the Internet"... "Living in **Australia**? My initial shock gave way to acceptance, and then blithe dismissal... over a decade and a half of curiosity, sated all at once"... "I can't believe he's got his own domain name... what an **ass**"... "His site answered pretty much every question I had... He was still acting, appeared to be successful (minor awards, lots of parts) and offered numerous head shots and stage photos... with one or two glaring omissions... Namely, was he married? And Did he still love me?"... "God, I really miss him sometimes"... "I just got an email from my ex-boyfriend"... "Were Lance and I cosmically linked, somehow?"... "Everything was so much easier when the world was still going to end"... "I liked the idea of maybe making him sweat a little"... "But I had no career... no accomplishments... nothing to show for myself"... "I'd given up on myself, on life, on 'my dreams', just like all the clichés say... How was I going to account for it? Oh God, what was I going to say to him?"... "I can't begin to explain how strange it was to see someone I was once in love with suddenly appear on a stage pretending to be someone else"... "The 20-year-old self buried alive inside me awakened, sat up, and said, 'This is where I belong. This is the man I really love, the man I am to marry. Thank you. Thank you for finding him. And then, gratefully, that me finally laid down, and died'"... "Oh God. You came"... "We stood there, embracing, and then he quietly started to sob"... "How was it?" – "Stupid"... "So I picked it up, and, to my amazement, it was **my** book... someone had published **my** book! And it had **everything** in it... My diaries, the stories from my writing classes, even stuff I didn't know I'd written... everything I'd forgotten, abandoned or thrown out was there... everything... And you know, it wasn't so bad... In fact, it was kind of **good**... interesting"... "Because your dreams are always so **retarded**, mom"... "Oh, you're **young**... You don't know what it's like yet to completely give up on something"... "I'd never seen **her** before," thought the building... "And sinking back into its morose self-reflection"... "Oh well... I've had my fun," it thought"... "So the building, accidentally catching a glimpse of itself in the glint of the windows across the street, sighed"... A building filled with a vacancy... A 98-year-old building tallied its events within itself: 29

marriages, 178 trysts, 14 diaries, 28,224 hugs, 68,418 orgasms, 5 spiritual crises, 11,627 lost childhood memories, 425 begged forgivenesses, 6 suicide notes, 29 broken hearts, 32,931 lies... "I guess with that weird sex dream I woke up from in the middle of the night... I'm just glad I remembered to write it down, otherwise I would have probably forgotten about it... That's one good thing I learned from that creative writing class, at least"... "Anyway, what's even weirder is that now, it *still* seems sort of sexy to me... Maybe this is one of the first signs of going nuts from loneliness"... "I was sort of proud of myself for figuring this out, actually"... "Mom. I'm looking more and more like my mom. Her tired eyes"... "She was clearly desperately lonely"... "Look, obviously you don't even want to be around me"... "Look... obviously you're trying to pick a fight"... "I mean, you can hear almost everything my neighbors are saying when they're yelling at each other"... "I mean, Saturdays are usually pretty depressing for me, anyway... But at least I'm either distracted by being at work or passing time at a bookstore or hanging out with a friend or something... Today offered no such distractions, however, because I had to wait around for the plumber and nothing I could think of to occupy myself at all appealed to me... It was as if all of my failed ambitions were closing in on me as the hours ticked by"... "I had to face it: I'd never be an artist, I'd never be a writer... I'd never be *anything*... My neglected diary stared back at me from the living room, untouched for days"... "I lay there trying to figure out how long it'd been since I'd actually kissed someone... Six Year? *Seven?*"... "God, I did not want to end up like her... alone, my life over"... "Finally, in a last-ditch attempt to pull myself out of my funk, I called pretty much every single friend I had in the world, including increasingly distant acquaintances from school I hadn't talked to in a year or more... Not a single one of them was home, though... They all had 'lives'... Were out 'having fun'"... "It gets lonely sometimes, but that's the way it goes, I guess"... "I started to feel depressed the longer I sat there... I never can think of anything interesting to say... I'm boring... People are nice to me at first and then I disappoint them"... "I was so impressed by his maturity, his kindness"... "Un-Kiss"... "How many years had it been now, anyway? Six? *Seven?* Day after day of hopeless loneliness suddenly brought to an end just because I happened to get invited to a dumb birthday party"... "It felt... *alive*"... "I didn't want the night to end. I wanted to prolong it. And my feelings, as long as I could." So she writes in her diary... "So I wrote, and I wrote... I wrote down everything I could remember about today"... "*I'm* never going to change"... "I go to my dead-end job, I go out with friends, I stay home... It doesn't matter. Everything depresses me"... "And all I'm left with is just the vaguest sense of it all... a general 'jist'. And then even *that* dwindles away... Whole periods of my life are now nothing more than a few isolated, unrelated recollections"... "While I was still in art school, I developed a reputation amongst some of the faculty as a readily available cat/ dog/ house-sitter... I was perfect for the job: single, reliable, well-spoken, and ambitionless"... "Gradually being buried by the trappings of a creeping middle-class prosperity"... "Exhibition announcements from washed-up friends"... "I had no idea what I was going to do with my life... I couldn't afford graduate school and had been so confused by all my classes I wasn't even sure I wanted to be an artist anymore... It would give me time to think"... "Mostly, I just read books... lots of books"... "There were whole stretches of days where I never even left the house at all... Never saw or talked to another human being"... "I imagined them, the dad always busy, disinterested in both his wife and his child... A sports fan who probably slept around on business trips"... "It must've been its own lonely sort of hell"... "But I couldn't get that 'look' he'd given me out of my mind"... She gives head a lot in this book, too... "I didn't see him again for a number of days, but the seed had been planted in my mind"... "Mostly I was just nervous about seeming like a nerd around him"... "What do you mean *I'm* never around anymore? *You're* the one who's never fucking around!"... "I guess I was just avoiding my life, and I was blaming them for it"... "Rather than always being 'the aggressor,' I'd frequently allow him to 'get the better of me,' just so that he didn't ever end up feeling threatened or impotent, or something"... "In fact, I think I knew too much"... "We're... going to have to let you go, I'm afraid"... "So I'm getting fired for doing my job, then"... "It was a lonely, horrible time... Can flowers feel?"... "Her mind gone idle over the overwhelming reality of her loneliness"... "Well, I've gotta write about *something*"... "As if *her* depression was the only *valid* one"... "Seeing her reminded me how emotionally *raw* I used to be"... "After spending all day trying to justify my terrible paintings to my teachers and to myself: 'I guess they're about the intersection of loss and recognition... and the spaces we create to negotiate them'"... Your ex-boyfriend Lance called up your mom a few months ago... "Why did he even *call*, anyway? Did he have a dream about me, like the ones I still had about him?"... "Did he want me back?"... "Why can't I simply *forget* him? Is it because I can only remember the good times when I think about him?"... "Because I preferred being by myself, anyway"... "So the reason someone with a weak heart and one and a half legs would live on the third floor of a walk-up apartment building is that otherwise, I wouldn't ever get any exercise"... "Except for a few weirdoes and fetishists, people with missing limbs aren't generally considered the most sexually attractive members of society, and so I don't need to be fat to complicate matters (even though I *am*)"... "Lance and I met in an art class. I was nineteen, and had pretty much never kissed, let alone hardly ever talked to, a boy before in my life"... "I've had hundreds of orgasms myself, but I'd never felt this... 'filled up'... *whole*... before"... "Suddenly, impossibly, I had a *boyfriend*, a real *boyfriend!* *Me!*"... "Like all relationships, though (I guess) our initial tumult gradually died down... He still slept over, but he didn't seem to want me to touch him, or hug him, as much... As the summer approached and his imminent European backpacking tour with it, our 'lovemaking' had become more of a clinical act of mutual satisfaction, but I didn't complain"... "My once-pounding heart was now an open, gaping ache, a shot-gunned-out wound that wouldn't heal, or close. He'd never told me *why*... He'd never ended it... Just left it, to fade, to dry out"... "He was too much of a coward to break up with a '*cripple*'?"... "I'd gone from being a shy high school kid to someone's intimate partner all in the blink of an eye"... "It was what I'd always wanted"... "It was as if we were married... Me, eighteen years old, and Lance, nearly twice my age... Those

first few weeks were bliss”... “Like most new couples, we slept together (i.e. had sex) virtually every night from the day we first met... I felt as if I’d grown up overnight, as if I’d joined the ‘club of adults’”... “Actually, I’d always been sort of curious about ‘X-rated’ movies, and my newly-blossoming self was ready to try an ever-widening array of things (within reason, of course)”... “(Besides, the whole situation was pretty much completely turning me on, to be honest)”... “‘The 400 Blows?’” – “I know... Isn’t it *hilarious* sounding?”... “It was about two weeks later that I had my first pregnancy scare”... “I felt so strange and confused, having practically just left my own childhood behind and now here I was faced with the insane, unimaginable possibility of becoming a mother myself”... “This whole irregular period thing *is* a bit troublesome... And, unless you object, I’d like to get you on oral contraceptives and see if that improves things”... “You know I really really like you, right?” – “And I really really *really* like you”... “But I did miss the intimacy of the early days of our relationship and wondered when it would return”... “I remember this one time, after being taken to task by a girl for being too ‘tentative and modest’ in my painting”... “Anyway, of course, it was at my parents’ house that all of a sudden when we were in bed playing around that he decided he wanted to enter me again”... “My worst fears had been confirmed: I was pregnant. *Pregnant*”... “You can’t even stand to *touch* me anymore!”... “It was clear somehow that deep down he suspected I’d ‘engineered’ it all, that I was trying to ‘trap’ him the only way I could”... “I had an exam the next day that I wasn’t at all prepared for... a critique at the end of the week”... “...But you know I’ll *always* be here for you, right?”... “I just heard what I wanted to hear”... Symmetry... “A bundle of cells” the size of a quarter... “Then, when they actually turned on the shockingly loud vacuum the pain was so bad that I told them to stop, but the counselor just squeezed my hand and said it was ‘almost over’... I cried until the vacuum finally stopped and the doctor got up abruptly and left without saying a word... The counselor continued to hold my hand and stroke my hair from my forehead as I cried, telling me that it was over... ‘over’”... “And then, amazingly, about a half hour later, I was sent ‘home’”... “I’m all sucked out”... “If anything, I felt even more alienated from him”... “Whatever had bound us together before was now replaced by a descending shroud of shared shame and guilt”... “I’m sorry, but I just had an *abortion* here”... “Hoping to glimpse into the private lives of its inhabitants”... “This nauseated girl who, for most of her life, has been much too eager to be loved (and so has lived it for the greater part alone)”... “I am entirely, 100 percent, horrifyingly, alone.”

4-30-13: Just finished this book, "Building Stories" by Chris Ware. This is one of the best, most intimate graphic novels I've ever read. It's like Harvey Pekar's "American Splendor", except from a woman's perspective. I wrote up 7 pages of notes from it over the past 9 days it took me to read all 14 parts of this epic achievement. Chris Ware was also the keynote artist at CCAD's MIX symposium last year. Highest recommendation! Available at CCAD's Packard Library for faculty and staff checkout.

-Art Spiegelman/ "Maus"

"As soon as time allows, I'd like to have a nice, long depression." -Art Spiegelman.

"Maus I" was a deeply worthwhile reading – a personal statement of a horrifically senseless "shoah" of human (mouse in this case) existence and their love. I do appreciate learning about the horrors of the past; I like to learn and dream about them.

-Terry Moore/ "Strangers in Paradise"

"It's \$2.95 for therapy." –Quote from a *Strangers in Paradise* letter column.

5-15-08: Notes from the Terry Moore talk at the Wexner Center for the Arts: "My unhappiness drove me to make art"... "I'm obsessive compulsive"... "I'm good at drawing, but I had nothing to say"... "I didn't write about characters. I wrote about *people*. Making that distinction was very freeing"... "'Art' is a verb. It is something you do"... "Clever is good, but sex sells"... "You have to be grateful for your career"... "You have to ask yourself the question: 'Would people want to read your book?'"... "Comic book creators are often driven by fear to keep making quality work"... "What are you saying to the world? Are you helping them? Offending them? Are they timeless like matters of the heart?"... "Watch a movie with the sound off. See if it tells a story through the acting and the editing"... *Strangers in Paradise*: A sensitive person's book... "I vent on the page"... "I'm not gay and I'm not a woman. But I wrote about gay issues from the heart."

Paradise Too! #3: "When I was 25 I couldn't write my ideas down fast enough. But at 45 the ideas don't come so easy anymore.. and I wonder why. Is it because I've been drinking too many cokes all these years? Is it the junk food? Maybe the older we get the more our mind fills up with practical thoughts, pushing our imagination aside. (War, famine, politics, divorce, sin, fear, Hollywood, hate, doubt, abortion, civil rights, duty, money). Or maybe I'm just lazy."

-Sergio Aragones

"Being a cartoonist is not just sitting down and drawing. You have to dig down in your imagination and grab stories nursed by your experiences – some read, some heard, some observed, and others, like this one, lived." –Sergio Aragones from *Solo* #11.

-Walt Disney

Walt Disney is another incredible visionary who I greatly admire as a role model.
Salvador Dali described Disney as one of the three great American surrealists for Disney's imaginative freedom of animation mirrors Dali's artistic vision. The two had great respect for each other.
"I believe it is important for every young artist to have at least one hard failure in their life. It builds drive and character... It is in my nature to experiment." -From a Walt Disney retrospective short.
"If you can dream it, you can do it." -Walt Disney.

-Ollie Johnson & Frank Thomas

Frank and Ollie: "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was a breakthrough for '*personality animation*.'"

"All of us are potential villains. In spite of ethics, morals, codes of conduct and a general respect for laws, if we are pushed far enough, pressured beyond our breaking point, our self-preservation system takes over and we are capable of terrible villainy." -Ollie Johnson & Frank Thomas.

-Tex Avery

Tex Avery's Screwball Classics: Opera football... A white ghost turning completely red from blushing.

Tex Avery's Screwball Classics: Animation that made extraordinary use of its creative canvas and medium. The twisted deformations define what animation can accomplish. "Anything is possible in animation." (Digital Imaging can do similar effects for me.)

More Screwball Cartoons, featuring a creative exercise of literally translating slang. In animation, cats and dogs really did rain; the grinning cat has your tongue in its paw, a couple painted the entire town red, and tears do run down a cheek. Animation worked better than Digital Imaging.

-Max Fleisher

Rotoscope animation innovator of taking real-life movement and transforming it into unique forms and movements as in the old Betty Boop animated shorts.

-Jan Svankmajer

Svankmajer is clearly one of the greatest surrealist animators I've ever come to the pleasure of *witnessing* his work. It's like watching one's subconscious mind broken loose from the repressive dam gates.

Scenes from the Surreal: A moth with ear wings... Ears on a hand... The Surrealism Movement as an animated short instead of a painting... Clay flesh... Autopsy of a statue... Limp loaves of Czech penis bread... Jan Svankmajer: "For me, animated film is about magic"... "Both childhood and dreams are the basic constants of my films. I believe every artist derives his work from these two sources because these are his strongest experiences"... "Childhood is never innocent. It's subversive"... "Surrealism is a living organism in me"... "I made this film out of catharsis. That's how my film should be looked upon... and understood".

Alice (1988): Extraordinary use of imagination: swim in your own pool of tears, a key inside a sardine can, a croissant with nails, jam with tacks, a living sock that sews its eye lids shut.

-The Brothers Quay

The Brothers Quay Collection: A house/ world made of paper and print. Dark visions from a stop-motion subconscious dream world.

-Ray Harryhausen

Ray Harryhausen Chronicles: "That giant ape King Kong left a lasting impression on me of what you could do with animation"... "We're going to grow old, but never grow up"... "What can I do with this film? Perhaps I can make fairy tales for children"... "Everything Ray touched was a time-consuming process with little rewards."

-Bruce Bickford

Baby Snakes: Featuring some utterly amazing stop motion clay animation by Bruce Bickford!... Intercontinental Absurdities Presents: Over 2 ½ hours of Baby Snakes Outtakes: The Movie.

-Nick Park/ Peter Lord/ Aardman Animation

Wallace and Gromit: Curse of the Were Rabbit: "May Contain Nuts."

Wallace & Gromit: A Matter of Loaf and Death: Nick Park's brilliance continues. His Wallace and Gromit world is ones of strange, almost Boy Scout-like 1950's innocence. Wallace is always looking on the bright side of life... "It's not every day that you meet the girl of your dreams"... "This is getting ridiculous"... "I suppose you can't be everyone's cup of tea, can you?"... "I've got a bomb in my pants!"... "DO NOT FEED THE CROCODILES"... And the crocodiles eat

the Baker Lite Girl!

-Chuck Jones

Chuck Amuck: The Movie: A great documentary on Chuck Jones... "I think you must learn - if you're in any filmmaking - you must respect the single frame. And there are twenty-four of those per second. If you don't respect that single frame you're in the same boat with a musician who does not respect an eighth note or a sixteenth note or a thirty-second note or whatever. You have to find the smallest unit and you have to love it and believe that one will make a difference. One frame to me will make the difference between whether the thing's funny or not."

Comic Book Superheroes/ Fictional Characters

-Superheroes

"There's a reason why the adventures of Superman rank among the most enduring stories ever told (69 uninterrupted years and counting): *Superheroes speak to the part of us — and we all have it — that hopes, deep down, that we're special.* By tapping into our longing, these tales become legend. The one who can fly. The mad scientist. The one who's invulnerable. The Jekyll-and-Hyde. The one who can teleport. The psychic. The seer. And that's why people flocked to *Heroes*: because it was filled with stories that we already knew, presented in a completely different way." – Exert from an *Entertainment Weekly* DVD review of "Heroes: Season One".

Powers #12: A cop interrogating a female superhero groupie: "Got a thing for the powers?" – "Oh, yeah, ever since I was a little girl. I'm not the only one. There's quite a few, quite a few."

-Catwoman/ Selina Kyle (also see Julie Newmar as Catwoman)

3-16-04: Reactions while reading/ star-gazing at "Catwoman" comics: There is something so unbelievably erotic about seeing a well-developed woman in a cat costume like Catwoman's in full body tights and tail. It's the combination hybrid of the cute/ soft/ cuddly elements of a kitty-cat with the sensuous form of a beautiful nude woman.

The villainous female is an alluring character. Yet in a comic book type costume, she becomes a sensual fantasy in reality (Catwoman being a prime example).

"Catwoman: Her Sister's Keeper" told the shocking secrets of Selina Kyle's beginnings as the Catwoman. The most interesting part of this character was that Catwoman was a hooker. The whole story was very realistic and entertaining with an allegory.

-Batman (also see Frank Miller)

Batman also lived through a traumatic experience that evolved him into a costumed vigilante. Instead of going mad like The Joker, he used his emotional "demons" to fight back against the world's insanity - evil. He felt an urgency to act when the innocent are senselessly murdered, violated, or humiliated.

JLA: Secret Origins: Batman: "To prepare myself for the battle, I developed my mind, mastering science and criminology. I pushed myself to the limits of human endurance, training my body to physical perfection... all the while driven by the pain of my worst memory – the night a criminal stepped from the shadows and tore my world apart. In a heartbeat I had lost the two most important people in my life. It was this loss that changed me forever... the night a grief-stricken boy made a solemn oath he would never forget."

Batman Forever: "I wouldn't fit in at family picnics"... "You like strong women."

-The Joker

"Batman: The Killing Joke": The Joker - the man - was **so sure** of his talent as a comedian; he only got a laugh for how pathetic he was. His need for success was intensified by his overwhelming responsibility of supporting his pregnant wife. Suddenly, one night, his wife died accidentally... no friends to help him comfort his grief - instead strangers laughed at his misfortune... finally, after accidentally falling into a pool of chemicals, his appearance was horribly deformed, forever. The "emergency exit" was to go mad - where he could save himself from all the terrifying thoughts of reality.

Batman also lived through a traumatic experience that evolved him into a costumed vigilante. Instead of going mad like The Joker, he used his emotional "demons" to fight back against the world's insanity - evil. He felt an urgency to act when the innocent are senselessly murdered, violated, or humiliated.

In the end, they forgot their suicidal conflict and shared a long, long laugh together.

-Superman

Look, Up in the Sky! The Amazing Story of Superman: “Superman: a refugee from a distant planet... clothed in a muscle-defining outfit of an acrobat”... “Superman’s Suicide”... “We had a little crush on each other”... Christopher Reeve made Superman look great in tight. He looked like an ideal... an icon... a hero. He had the earnestness and morals that made him incredibly appealing.

Superman, The Movie: Space filmed using microphotography... “It’s suicide... genocide”... “He will defy their gravity”... “Here in this Fortress of Solitude, we will find the knowledge.”

Superman II: “Don’t you know? Terrorists have taken over the Eiffel Tower and are threatening to blow it up and Paris along with it with a hydrogen bomb”... “You are Superman!”... Another fine super hero movie about the theme of superhero duality - having secret life, a secret identity that no one else knows about. How mysterious and alluring!... Eating snow for food and water.

Superman IV: The Quest for Peace: What a shock to rediscover the quality and sincere passion of this movie! Superman has to make a stand. “The earth is my home, too. And I can’t stand idly by and watch us stumble into the madness of possible nuclear destruction” ... “Someone has to be an optimist”... “You’d be perfect for it. You’re young, single, successful”... Because he lives a dual life, he can have two different loves. Lois Lane for Superman, and another woman for Clark Kent.

-The Punisher

The Punisher, Frank Castle, is a human “super hero” who is really quite intriguing to me on a moral level. He has a suicidal, obsessive quest of bringing *real* justice to the world since the free world that we live in is, in truth, corrupt. He has been tempted with money and has actually turned it down. It’s one thing to believe that you wouldn’t take the money, and another when you’re actually tempted in real life. He just continues to live in near poverty. That alone is a fantastic nobility. His entire family has been murdered, so avenging those who commit crime or allow crime to flourish is his main focus and pursuit in life. He is a wake-up call to the world to shape up.

-X-Men (also see Chris Claremont, Stan Lee)

11-20-00: I rewatched “X-Men: Night of the Sentinels”, the 1993 animated series pilot episode, which rushed back memories of how much that show meant to me when I was 16. I felt like a weirdo... an outcast. The comic book was my teenage support book through characters I identified with and stories that impressed my sense of imagination. I remember anxiously waiting for months through the summer for this show to premiere on TV. With all the family problems and teasing at school, the X-Men cartoon and the comics (especially written by Chris Claremont) was what I lived for. I decided not to “kill” the school underclassmen bullies that taunted me on a daily basis, my overbearing and sometimes verbally abusive father, or myself for that matter because I didn’t want to miss seeing the X-Men on TV. How crazy is that? Seeing the show now, I actually found it to be pretty juvenile stuff - though great escapism none-the-less.

5-31-01: X-Men: Night of the Sentinels: This was the premiere episode that I spent months looking forward to seeing in 1992. Looking forward to seeing this animation series was all I had going for me. I kid you not. I was also heavily into comic books during that time period. Comic books meant power and imagination to their readers like me. My fantasy world inside me bloomed and flourished during this time. I admired Gambit’s charms and mysteriousness. I wanted to have his mutant super powers to show off to the girls for once. I adored the whole concept of being a superhero and being around women in tight, sensuous costumes fighting for the right of good. *That* was a future. Also, the X-Men were considered outcasts by society. For a confused outcast like myself at that time, these characters were like my best friends. I belonged with them when no one else quite fit the bill. They had my empathy. When the X-Men cartoon did come on one Saturday morning, I had to tape the episode because my family decided to take everyone to go shopping at the Lima malls that day. I prayed to God that the VCR worked and I got the episode! When I saw this episode, I watched it again and again every day for ten days straight. It was the comic book come alive! It got my heart racing wildly out of control.

-Wolverine (see Chris Claremont’s “Uncanny X-Men” work)

-Mystique

Mystique is the ultimate bisexual creature. She can take the shape of a woman or a man, or even shape her anatomy any way she *imagines*. Mutant sex would be off the charts fuckin’ *incredible*.

-Firestar

Firestar #1 (2010): She can warm a can of soup with her hands. Neat trick. She’s her own personal microwave... “Angela the freak girl!” Firestar is a teenage female mutant that her peers treat like a total outcast that they ridicule mercilessly... “Such a loser!”... “These things you can do... I don’t understand *any* of it. It’s all strange and

unsettling... but you must have a pretty *amazing* life”... “Being a mutant, it comes with a lot of baggage. A *lot*”... “I was almost married. In the end, things didn't work out between us, but there isn't a *day* I don't wish Vance and I were husband and wife. You *can't* know how it'll all pan out”... “...Are you wearing a wig?”... “I don't know what I'm doing either, Cassie. I really don't”... “Angel, most people go through their life never figuring out what to do with it. And those that do, most of them never go for it. You have a *passion* and you're actually *pursuing* it”... “This is *my* new life.”

-Daredevil (also see Frank Miller, Stan Lee)

8-15-95: I read (in passive concentration) “Daredevil: Gang War”, a compelling Frank Miller trade paperback that I got from the library from request. Daredevil is such an intriguing hero to read and see on comic book paper. He's also the more “human” of super-heroes, too, with a startling scarlet costume and mesmerizing villains (Kingpin, Bullseye) and foils (Elektra, Stick, Ben Urich).

Daredevil: From the Frank Miller interview on Daredevil: “Matt's a guy who should have ended up a villain. He came from a terrible childhood. He had the worst love life”... “I introduced Elektra in my first issue I wrote of Daredevil. I thought there was always something stupid about superheroes having normal girls for girlfriends. Why does Superman go out with Lois Lane? Wouldn't he rather be with Wonder Woman who is at least a match for him? Why wouldn't they be operatic about their romances as they are in their combat?”... “It was an exploration of what superhero sex would be like.”

“My read on Daredevil is that – mostly as a mental survival skill thanks to all the personal hells he'd endured – he's the only Marvel hero who lives totally in the moments.

He doesn't worry about what happens next, nor does he allow himself to be haunted unendingly by his past. He's been through enough agony to have confidence that nothing will break him and (more importantly) that no pain lasts forever.

He's the Man Without Fear not just because he'll dive off a skyscraper, but because he genuinely believes that after all he's been through, there's nothing unimaginable left.

Nothing out there that could frighten him that he hasn't already weathered. And he's right.

For a while.” -Mark Waid's pitch to write *Daredevil*.

-Elektra (also see Frank Miller/ “Daredevil”)

Daredevil: From the Frank Miller interview on Elektra: “Freud named a complex after her. I mean, she's got *issues*.”

7-19-96: Once finishing *The Elektra Saga*, I realized that she is one of my favorite characters of fiction.

Elektra's worst enemy was her only love, Matt Murdock - Daredevil. When they encounter each other, they also fight the intimacy of their memories and feelings more than actually physically battling each other.

-Hulk (see Peter David, Stan Lee)

-Spider-Man (also see Stan Lee)

“Am I more interested in the adventure of being Spider-Man than I am in helping people?? Why do I do it? Why don't I give the whole thing up? And yet, I *can't*! I must have been given this great power for a reason! No matter how difficult it is, I must remain as Spider-Man! And I pray that some day the world will understand.” –Peter Parker in *The Amazing Spider-Man #4*.

“With a new, pragmatic world view, I did the mature thing. The gown-up thing: I decided I was Spider-Man. He had trouble with bullies too. They embarrassed him in front of the girls. They called him names. But he put up with it, concealing the secret of his awesome power. He put up with it and put up with it, just like me, he put up with it and put up with it, until—” –From a Frank Miller speech at a Diamond Comics Seminar.

-Dream/ Morpheus/ “The Sandman” (see Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean)

-Death (see Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean)

“When the first living thing existed, I was there waiting. When the last living thing dies, my job will be finished. I'll put the chairs on the tables, turn out the lights, and lock the universe behind me as I leave.” –Death.

12-5-93: I bought “The Death Gallery” also today. To tell the truth, I've been in love with some fictional characters like Death more than most women in real life. Maybe it's the way Neil has handled the character, making her absolutely, completely beautiful physically, mentally, and emotionally. She's simply someone I could talk to. He also wrote that when creating her. He meant to make her irresistible so that the person who would see her when he/ she dies, they would fall head over heels in love with him/ her. Neil succeeded all too well triumphantly. She's to die for indeed.

-Delirium (see Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean)

-Swamp Thing (also see Alan Moore)

6-29-93: I can't really think of anything that big that happened today, so I will tell you about the "Swamp Thing" Agenda. A couple of years ago, a friend, Bill Hess, lent me some comics. One of which was a "Swamp Thing" trade paperback. I looked through it and immediately felt embarrassed and uncomfortable about having that book in my room. You see, it contained a few panels of partial nudity, moody emotional colors, and stark, violent artwork. Back then as a 6th grader, I was uncertain and frightened of such material. Today, I asked Bill if I could buy that book. I wanted it since I have matured and have read that the book was critically acclaimed by being written by one of the finest writers in the comic book business, Alan Moore. I read a bit of it again. Now I feel it's utterly brilliant. What a brushstroke of inspiration and genius Alan Moore and his artistic collaborators are!!!!

7-9-93: I guess on the positive side of things is that I have finally finished the "Swamp Thing" trade paperback. It was superbly written and drawn by such top comic book creators. The British author, Alan Moore, has won numerous prestigious awards including the British Fantasy Award. Alan Moore has really influenced me and my creative writing. He's a major inspiration to me. I feel so full of ideas after having read "Swamp Thing". I hope to keep writing all because of him.

I realized tonight that the relationship between Swamp Thing and Abbey is one of the great unique romances of modern comic book literature. In a time where homosexuality is now widespread and acceptable, here was a relationship where love was bonded between a *humanoid vegetable* and a *human woman*. It is beyond heterosexuality or homosexuality – it was love between a plant and a human! If they can find passion, respect, and friendship with each other, I suppose their love can be real – no matter what type of life form you happen to be.

-Preacher (see Garth Ennis)

-Hellblazer (see Alan Moore)

-Animal Man (see Grant Morrison)

-Doom Patrol (see Grant Morrison)

3-13-05: *Doom Patrol* is an extremely creative book. God, I love this book. It's one of the primary reasons I read comics.

-Miracleman (see Alan Moore)

-Concrete (see Paul Chadwick)

-Magneto (also read Chris Claremont's "God Loves, Man Kills" trade paperback)

12-26-05: I want to have the awesome power of magnetism of the super mutant villain/ anti-hero Magneto to fly or stop speeding cars in my path. I want to unleash my wrath for the greater good.

-Dazzler (also see Chris Claremont's "Uncanny X-Men" work)

I was so infatuated and obsessed with Chris Claremont's run on the "Uncanny X-Men" when I was sixteen years old. The tales that Claremont wrote in the early, mid, and late 80's were a fantasy world populated by outcasts with superpowers. And I loved it so. Dazzler/ Allison Blaire took the form of a high school crush for me. I didn't exactly relate to her personality wise, but I thought she was extremely hot in that spandex blue skintight costume she wore. Reading and collecting those issues were like windows into a life/ fantasy that I wanted to live in. And spending time with Dazzler was all the more blissful with every issue I found with her in it. Since I didn't have a girlfriend when I was in high school, she took the role for me. Allison Blaire was my de facto girlfriend. "So don't go knockin' Dazzler, man! She was my de facto girlfriend when I was 14 years old!"

Dazzler #38: Dazzler on the run and being chased by Wolverine and Colossus! She's a sexy outcast trying to get away... Wolverine never thought Allison was strong enough to be with the X-Men... "Bursts into view as a portable tape deck behind her loudly fills the room with music! But Wolverine and Colossus barely get the chance to hear it... for the throbbing sound waves are swiftly absorbed by Alison Blaire's mutant body to be transduced into light. Brilliantly gleaming, pulsing light. Dazzling light"... "She's changed costumes! A new costume...! Seems to help her control, amplify the *light*"... "Petey, forget how much you like her singin'." Colossus has a crush on her... "Light surging out of his target pounds Wolverine in waves of color"... "The light changes in an instant. No longer pounding waves. Just one thin beam. Sharp as a razor... or adamantium claws."

Dazzler #39: Dazzler is an outcast. A hot young woman, but still an outcast that society fears and distrusts. She's a strong, passionate singer, but she's also fragile and vulnerable inside. "After a good performance... I can hardly contain the glow. Only -- it's also frustrating, knowing how seldom these opportunities come along now... because of the mutant thing"... These Archie Goodwin written and Paul Chadwick penciled issues, Dazzler #38-42, only five until the series ended, are uniquely special and rather sensitive. They're the best representation of Dazzler ever in comics: the outcast musician on the road and on the run. I also adore Dazzler new costume that was introduced in Dazzler #38, the skintight blue neck to toe bodysuit unitard. She always looked so incredibly sexy in it. She looked like a beautiful

gymnast/ 80's aerobics instructor/ acrobat in that dazzling costume. And I liked that she had to wear it to help focus her light powers, too.

6-25-03: I found out today that the X-Man Dazzler, one of my favorite female comic book characters that I had a huge crush on when I was a teenager, was killed off in *Uncanny X-Men* #393. In a way, I was heartbroken.

-Rogue (also see Chris Claremont's "Uncanny X-Men" work)

One of the things that I absolutely loved about Rogue of the "Uncanny X-Men" issues from the 80's and 90's was that she *had* to wear a skintight bodystocking over her entire body because if anyone ever touched her naked flesh, she would absorb their thoughts and powers. So she was basically a default nylon fetishist no matter what. Every costume she wore covered her lovely body from head to toe. She was a perfect specimen of comic book sexiness. I just loved the sleekness of how she looked in those body-hugging costumes. It was like looking at her nude figure, but not. So in a sense, it was PG-rated – *but not!* Rogue was also a terrific emotionally wounded character because she could never touch another person, which meant she could never show love or give physical love. She couldn't even kiss a boy without possibly killing him! These two qualities really made her quite endearing to me as a teenage. Smoking hot body in a bodystocking + emotionally fragile ÷ mutant absorbing power = great X-Men character.

-The Black Cat (also see Peter David/ "Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-man")

-Black Widow (also see Frank Miller/ "Daredevil")

Black Widow: The Coldest War: I always loved Black Widow. She caught my eye and my hormones when I was fourteen by wearing a gray skin-tight body-stocking costume that covered every part of her body except her neck up. She didn't even wear shoes. She was the female nude without being totally nude. She also had ravishing red hair and a scarlet spider on her left breast – like a deadly nipple for her enemies. Oddly in this graphic novel, she's feeling alone and in need of someone to talk to. Geez, do I ever feel empathy for her! She visits her ex-lovers – people she's been close to intimately and emotionally. Only now most of them have married or have girlfriends. She feels like she'd be *intruding*.... She's a world class dancer/ gymnast and a heroic female costumed crime fighter. God, I love her.

-Diamondback

-Spider-Woman (also see Chris Claremont)

(Written after reading an issue of *New Avengers*): I must admit that I really like her. I mean, how can you not with a cool costume like the one that she wears? And she's a pretty interesting and mysterious character to boot. It's pretty sexy fun to just read about her adventures in comic books. Who wouldn't want to hang out with a sexy comic book heroine in the realms of their imagination? It's like being closer to one's greatest wet fantasies.

-Green Arrow

JLA: Secret Origins: Green Arrow: "Going hungry wasn't an option, so I forced myself to master the bow and arrow. After weeks of practice, I was good. No, exceptional. Before you call me conceited, let me assure you that going without for so long humbled me quite nicely. I only took what I needed and was grateful to have it. The experience opened my eyes. When I finally made it home, I decided to use my skills and new attitude where they'd do the most good. I became a sort of urban Robin Hood, a self-appointed champion of the little guy. For a while I had a partner. A good kid, talented, brave, and no stranger to adversity himself. He conquered his personal demons and moved on. So did I. And yeah, I did my time with the League. But ultimately, it was not the group that held my heart. That belonged to those people down there. The ones carrying on their own fights against injustice and a world that would cast them aside. It was a lonely vigil at first, but lucky for me, I met a pretty bird who felt the same way – Black Canary."

-The Phantom Stranger

"Phantom Stranger, enigmatic and all knowing, at one with the cosmos but forever alone."

-Wonder Woman

Wonder Woman: "Beautiful as Aphrodite, wise as Athena, strong as Hercules, and swifter than Mercury!"

-Zatanna

Zatanna (2010) #2: She's always been one of my favorite female characters because of the cute magician's outfit she wears with the black top hat and the fishnet stockings. – "Did you actually wear some of that stuff?" – "Sure. Every single, shiny and revealing item. I *like* dressing up, I like being on stage."

-Conan the Barbarian

Conan the Barbarian: In the age of lust and rage... Lizard on a stick... Riding a horse across an ocean to seek vengeance on those who killed his family... Conan must learn *the riddle of steel*... "What do you see?" – "*Infinity*."

Conan the Destroyer: “The dreaming god”. “Darkos, God of God”... “A bird of smoke.”

-Ariel, The Little Mermaid

Ariel, The Little Mermaid, was a crush of mine when I was a teenager. I thought she was the sweetest mermaid in the world... so innocent and beautiful.