Research Article *Correspondences* 13, no. 1 (2025): 159–192

The Working-Class Magus:
Class, Politics, and Occult Power in *John Constantine: Hellblazer*

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Abstract

First published in 1988 by DC Comics, *John Constantine: Hellblazer* has been one of the most successful contemporary serial comics titles to have arisen out of the "British Invasion" of 1980s US comics. The titular character of the series, John Constantine, is a British working-class magician and occult detective who is depicted as one of the world's most powerful occultists. A marked departure from previous depictions of occultism and magic in US comics, *Hellblazer's* tales of occult wars, demons, non-human entities, and social realism are set in a gritty, realist world whose elements of gothic horror, noir, and nightmarish imagery provide a stark social and political commentary on class divisions in contemporary Britain, resulting from the fallout resulting from the neoliberal economic programmes of successive Conservative and "New Labour" governments.

In this article, I examine how esoteric ideas and occultism expressed in *Hellblazer* intersect with politics, class, and power from a UK perspective: from the political and class backgrounds of the character's creator Alan Moore and writers such as Jamie Delano, and the series' depictions of British class politics, to the ways occult practices of various practitioners in the series take on the dimensions of social class. I also examine the influence of *Hellblazer* and the magical persona and politics of Constantine on the contemporaneous UK occultural milieu, from its impact upon creator Alan Moore to its role as a magical inspiration for contemporary UK magicians.

Keywords: John Constantine; Hellblazer; magic; comics; Alan Moore

Introduction

John Constantine: Hellblazer has been one of the most successful contemporary serial comics titles to have arisen out of the "British Invasion" of the 1980s US comics industry.[1] Created by writer Alan Moore, John Constantine first appeared in the pages of *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* in 1985 before getting his own stand-alone serial, *Hellblazer*, in 1988. A departure from previous depictions of occultism and magic in mainstream comics, *Hellblazer*'s tales of magic, occult wars, and encounters with supernatural entities were set in a gritty, social realist world that combined elements of gothic horror and literary noir with stark social and political commentary on class divisions in contemporary Britain.

At the heart of *Hellblazer* is John Constantine, a British working-class magician and occult detective considered to be one of the world's most powerful magicians. Described as a "fusion of counterculture and leftist politics,"[2] and a "drunken, foul-mouthed populist with angry socialist views and union sympathies,"[3] Constantine's anti-authoritarian persona made him mainstream comics' occultural spokesperson for exploring the imposed horrors of the neoliberal economic programs of successive Conservative and "New Labour" governments of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

1. The "British Invasion" refers to a group of British comics writers (such as Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison, Warren Ellis, Grant Ennis, Jamie Delano, and Peter Milligan) and artists (such as Dave Gibbons, Brendan McCarthy, Glenn Fabry, Steve Dillon, and Philip Bond) who were brought in to work for US mainstream comics, in particular DC comics and their subsidiary imprint Vertigo, from the mid-1980s to the 1990s. Gaining their reputation in revitalising legacy characters such as Swamp Thing, Animal Man, Black Orchid, and The Doom Patrol, as well as original works such as *Watchmen, Hellblaze*r, and *The Invisibles*, their work broke away from mainstream superhero comics in their covering of adult themes, as well as experimenting with the medium's form and content, through incorporating ideas from neorealism, the historical avant garde, and modernist literature. For more background information see Greg Carpenter, *The British Invasion: Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman, Grant Morrison, and the Invention of the Comic Book Writer*; Ben Little, "2000 AD: Understanding the "British Invasion" of American Comics"; Chris Murray, "Signals from Airstrip One: The British Invasion of Mainstream American Comics."

2. Ken Chen, "The Devil You Know."

3. Marc DiPaolo, *War, Politics and Superheroes*, 174.

In this article, I examine the ways that contemporary esoteric currents and UK class politics intersect and inform each other within *Hellblazer's* narratives. The article begins with an overview of Constantine's initial development from *Swamp Thing* to *Hellblazer*, alongside an examination of *Hellblazer*'s narrative themes and depictions of social realism within the sociopolitical context of late twentieth-century British society. There are three reasons for giving such an analysis at the beginning of a paper on occulture and comics. The first is to highlight how occultural aspects of horror and the gothic are politicised within *Hellblazer's* diegetic world. The second is to show how Constantine's personal ethics and worldview as a magician are informed by his working-class background as well as a formative left-anarchist political ideology. The third is to show that *Hellblazer's* aesthetic representations of magic and occultism take on the dimensions of social class in the way that the magical practices and worldviews of the series' characters are informed by their sociopolitical and ideological standpoints.

Despite not possessing an explicit, didactic programme of esoteric praxis, I argue that—through his class politics, as well as his material and cynical worldview on magic and society—Constantine embodies aspects of chaos magical practice, as well as continuing the tradition of communitarian-based practitioners of popular magic, or "cunning folk." From here, the paper then looks at recent academic literature on comics and religion that argues for comics' ability to function as mystical texts that can transmit an array of religious, spiritual, and occult concepts, before I examine Constantine's influence as a magical persona or "tulpa" on contemporary occulture. Constantine's anti-authoritarian and iconoclastic mannerisms alongside his aura of working-class "menace," I argue, have had a profound effect upon the magical life of creator Alan Moore, while also making him an attractive entity for magicians in developing an ethical approach to magic.

Hellblazer's Working-Class Views and Inhuman Horrors

John Constantine was initially developed in 1985 by comics writer Alan Moore with artists Stephen Bissette and John Totleben, during their time working on

the DC Comics title *The Saga of the Swamp Thing*. Having made a name for himself as the creator of *Miracleman* (1982–1989) and *V for Vendetta* (1982–1989), Moore was at the forefront of the "British Invasion" of British writers and artists during this period who were headhunted from the UK to work for US comics publishers DC and Marvel. Moore envisaged Constantine as a "wide-boy occultist"—part Houdini, part con man, and part occult detective—drawing heavily from the literary history of the "occult detective" genre with characters such as Dr. Martin Hesselius, Richard Occult, Dr. Terrence Thirteen, Mandrake the Magician, the Spectre, Zatanna, Mister E, Baron Winters, and Dr. Steven Strange.[4]

But from the beginning, Constantine was presented as wholly different from previous representations of the archetype. In an interview with William Christensen and Mark Siefert, Moore described how the majority of literary occult detectives would come from middle- or upper-class backgrounds. In comparison, Moore wanted Constantine to be less refined and more working class in his roots and character:

> I have an idea that most of the mystics in comics are generally older people, very austere, very proper, very middle class in a lot of ways. They are not at all functional on the street. It struck me that it might be interesting for once to do an almost blue-collar warlock. Somebody who was streetwise, working class, and from a different background than the standard run of comic book mystics. Constantine started to grow out of that.[5]

This desire to make Constantine British and working class in origin was inspired by Moore's own identification with a British working-class background, which informed his worldview and anarchist politics.[6] Moore's initial script treatment of Constantine would also emphasise his distinctive likeness to UK musician

4. For more background information on the genre of the literary "occult detective" see Tony Simmons, "The Sum of His Parts"; Marilena Parlati, "Ghostly Traces, Occult Clues: Tales of Detection in Victorian and Edwardian Fiction."

5. William A. Christensen and Mark Seifert, "The Unexplored Medium: Alan Moore speaks on what makes working as a comic writer so appealing."

6. See Margaret Killjoy, *Mythmakers & Lawbreakers: Anarchist Writers on Fiction,* 41–58; Heidi McDonald, "A FOR ALAN, Pt. 1: The Alan Moore Interview"; Dez Vylenz, *The Mindscape of Alan Moore.*

Sting from British band the Police,[7] in particular his performances in films such as *Quadrophenia* (1979) and its representation of working-class Mod subcultures.[8] The result was the formulation of Constantine's defining stylistic motifs: his spiky blond hair, light brown mac raincoat and suit, "Silk Cut" brand cigarettes, his demotic working-class British accent (a mix of Estuary English and Liverpudlian), and a character that hinted at a "faint air of menace,"[9] combined with a casual disregard for the niceties and conventions of other occult detectives.

The popularity of Constantine's appearances in *Swamp Thing* led to him being given his own series, *Hellblazer*, in September 1987. Due to prior writing commitments, Moore turned down the offer to write the early issues, recommending the position to his friend and fellow working-class writer Jamie Delano. While it was Moore who created John Constantine as a character, it would be Delano who would go on to develop *Hellblazer* and Constantine's textural universe. Readers are introduced to his bleak working-class roots and family in Liverpool, his occult development via the anarchist punk scene of the late '70s as a member of the band Mucous Membrane, and the infamous "Newcastle" episode in 1978, when a botched exorcism sends a young girl to Hell and damns Constantine, consigning him to two years as a patient at the Ravenscar mental asylum.

While Constantine is no stranger to astral realms, cosmic forces, or venturing into Hell to battle demons, his world in *Hellblazer* is far removed from that of mainstream superhero comics. The majority of the series takes place in a social realist milieu associated with working-class culture and communities: council housing estates, grotty bedsits, shabby seaside towns, football terraces, the pub, the corner shop, and the "greasy spoon" cafe. Outside of his family and close friend Chas, Constantine's social network includes people from working-class and

7. Christensen and Seifert, "The Unexplored Medium."

8. For more background on Mod and working-class subcultures, see Dick Hebdige, *Subculture; The Meaning of Style*; Ian Penman, "Even If You Have to Starve." An image/aesthetic comparison between Sting/Constantine can be found at https://www.vulture.com/2014/10/secret-history-of-john-constantine.html.

9. Elisabeth Sandifer, "Declare Yourself A Magician (The Last War in Albion Part 62: John Constantine)."

minoritarian communities, including anarchist punks and New Age travellers, the homeless, sex workers, and substance abusers. Yet despite the constrained conditions of their social situation, argues Marc DiPaolo, *Hellblazer* portrays everyday working-class people as being "beautiful on the inside, and more worthy of love and respect than any solicitor, clergyman, or prime minister."[10]

For British magicians such as Ian "Cat" Vincent and Anthony Nine, what first drew them to Constantine was that the world depicted in *Hellblazer* resembled their own working-class backgrounds and the areas where they grew up (North Kent for Vincent, Newcastle for Nine). "What attracted me to Hellblazer was purely the fact that he was working class," argues Vincent:

> It was that simple. Up until that point, every occult detective figure in pop culture was middle or very upper class, going all the way back to John Silence. Steven (Dr) Strange is a multi-millionaire surgeon! And then you get John who was so refreshing to see — A lad from the nasty end of town who's cheeky and who doesn't give a toss about the formalities or niceties of ritual magic.[11]

Hellblazer's neorealist representations of contemporary Britain and magic also had an impact on occultist and writer Nine during his formative years in learning magic:

> I had never seen where I was from being mythologized in that way or in that sort of context. Geordie representation in the 80s was like the comedy sidekick or a London TV script writer's idea of what dim, amiable salt-of-the-earth working class people must be like. If Newcastle was ever mentioned in anything at all, it was always in this "know your place" sort of way . . . Constantine provided a template of someone from the same sort of background as me who moved in the same sort of world I knew, but who had through his own cunning and wits, learned how to make grimoire magic work in a way that also enabled him to move in the same world as *Swamp Thing*, *The Sandman's* Morpheus, etc. For someone who grew up in the north under Thatcher and was just about to leave school into a blighted terrain of dole lines and recession, and had already started fucking around with magic, it was like a lighthouse of possibility.[12]

10. Marc DiPaolo, *War, Politics and Superheroes,* 174.
11. Cat Vincent, online interview, 7 December 2023.
12. Anthony Nine, E-mail interview, 3 January 2024.

Nine's comment about growing up in the North of England under the government of then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher points to *Hellblazer's* other core narrative theme: a stringent left-wing political commentary on British society during the 1980s and '90s. The sociopolitical landscape of the UK during *Hellblazer*'s inception in 1987 was that of a hard shift to the political right, fuelled by the dominance of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. While in office, Thatcher would impose a socioeconomic program of neoliberal accumulation that included free-market liberalisation and deregulation, the rolling back of state intervention, the privatisation of state assets, the commodification of the public sector, and reduced taxation for the capitalist classes.[13]

This programme, argues Stuart Hall, sought to break "the power the working class had come to exercise in society, via the trade unions, in economic and political life."[14] The "creative destruction" at the heart of Thatcher's neoliberal policies resulted in a "huge success from the standpoint of the upper classes" with "restored class power to the ruling elites."[15] Meanwhile, newly established cultural values and practices would valorise petit bourgeois individualism, material and personal aspiration, and entrepreneurialism, embodied as part of an emergent "enterprise culture."[16]

For the working class, however, this led to the dismantling of essential services provided by the state, the selling off of nationalised industries associated with working-class labour (heavy industries, mining, manufacturing), and the withering of working-class communities connected to such industries. This situation is exemplified in Grant Morrison's two-part story "Early Warning" and "How I Learned to Love the Bomb" (*Hellblazer* #25–26, 1990), as the Northern town of Thorndyke is desperate to keep the jobs provided by the local military

13. Bob Jessop, "From Thatcherism to New Labour: Neoliberalism, Workfarism, and Labour Market Regulation," 139–40.
14. Stuart Hall, "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists," 39.
15. David Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," 152.
16. See Paul Heelas & P. Morris, eds., *The Values of the Enterprise Culture: The Moral Debate.*

base and nuclear power plant after the closure of the local mine: "Once upon a time, souls were traded for immortality or riches. Now we are bought and sold with the promise of jobs," opines the local priest. "The human spirit is devalued currently. How the Devil must be laughing."[17]

Delano and subsequent writers used *Hellblazer's* narration box alongside the generic motifs of literary noir to present Constantine's inner monologue as a running commentary on the realities of contemporary Britain during the 1980s and '90s. Through the occult eyes of Constantine, Britain is portrayed as a gothic hellhole—a grim place that, under the veneer of economic progress and aspiration, is steeped in cultural darkness, complete with visions of squalor and deprivation, nuclear armageddon, religious fundamentalism, neofascism, political violence, and repression by the state toward minoritarian groups.

Alongside this sociopolitical darkness, *Hellblazer's* narratives are awash with graphic depictions of horror. Mirroring the "horrality" of contemporaneous body horror films such as David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), *The Fly* (1986), John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982), and Brian Yuzna's *Society* (1989), *Hellblazer* takes a vicious delight in the telling and showing of the destruction of human bodies by forces beyond their control.[18] With Vertigo's remit allowing for adult themes and content, artists such as Mark Buckingham, Steve Dillon, John Ridgeway, and William Simpson intensified the horror and gore, drawing graphic depictions of bloodied bodies being skinned, eviscerated, and torn to shreds, complete with gothic shading and garish colour schemes reminiscent of EC's horror comics from the 1950s.

In one graphic example, the story "'Extreme Prejudice" (*Hellblazer* #6, 1988) has the demon Nergal murdering and mutilating four skinheads before moulding their flesh into a four-bodied chimera named "Ironfist," whom he sends to kill Constantine.[19] Despite the monstrosity and gore, horror in *Hellblazer*—far from

17. Grant Morrison and David Lloyd (artist), "Early Warning," 13.

18. See Philip Brophy, "Horrality—The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Film."

19. An image of Nergal's "Ironfist" can be found at https://randomcrit.com/index.php/2021/01/28/hellblazer-vol-1-original-sins-review-la-magia-es-una-adiccion/.

being a rejected cultural genre—becomes a powerful diagnosis of the inhuman monstrosity of neoliberal capitalism. Unlike some works of classic horror cinema or literature, the horror in *Hellblazer* denies both narrative closure and a return to the desired arrangements of the post-war consensus. Instead, the display of never-ending visceral horror as a political and ontological allegory represents a cultural response to the fate of the working class, the poor, and minoritarian groups under the ongoing conditions of Thatcherism.[20]

Alongside monstrous demons that torture human souls and flesh, *Hellblazer* depicts the upper and capitalist classes that benefit from neoliberalism as similarly diabolic in nature. In Garth Ennis's tale "Royal Blood" (*Hellblazer* #52–55, 1992), Constantine uncovers a plot by shadowy aristocrats to instigate absolute rule by possessing Prince Charles with the demon Calibraxis, while the rich and powerful are depicted as revelling in deviant behaviour such as drugs, S&M, torture, incest, and murder. Meanwhile in Delano's "Going for It" (*Hellblazer* #3, 1988), on the eve of the 1987 UK general election, demons pose as financially upmarket "yuppies" seeking to gentrify a working-class neighbourhood. Embodying Thatcherism's spirit of enterprise culture, the demons capitalise on the upsurge in greed to trade souls as commodities on a stock exchange in Hell, with one demon speculating that Thatcher's re-election represents "a platinum opportunity to corner the UK market."[21] Thatcher herself is portrayed as appropriately demonic, with Dave McKean's front cover depicting her with demonic eyes and vampire teeth alongside the message "VOTING TORY CAN DAMAGE YOUR HEALTH."[22] In one scene, the demons string Constantine upside down and force him to watch Thatcher give a speech on TV during the election returns:

20. For more background on the relationship between horror genres, aesthetics, and capitalism, see Steve Shaviro, "Capitalist Monsters"; David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*; Jon Greenaway, *Capitalism, a Horror Story: Gothic Marxism and the Dark Side of the Radical Imagination*.

21. Jamie Delano and John Ridgeway (artist), "Going for It," 7.

22. An image of the cover can be viewed at http://www.insanerantings.com/hell/gallery/hb3.html.

> THATCHER: I intend to win this election and go on and on. My government will provide the freedom for private enterprise to flourish—to create wealth, so that we can afford to care for the sick and disadvantaged.
>
> CONSTANTINE: Jesus, damned to the "help yourself society"—where the strong help themselves to whatever they want and the weak are left to help themselves. . . .
>
> THATCHER: With our guidance, Britain will be great again, a nation of growth and opportunity — a symbol of strength.
>
> CONSTANTINE: Isn't she marvellous?[23]

Constantine manages to outsmart the yuppie demons, sending them back to Hell (in one panel stating, "I may always've been a peasant—but at least I'm a *clever* peasant!"),[24] but the victory is pyrrhic as Thatcher is shown to have won the 1987 general election with a massive majority. Constantine ends the issue ruefully brooding over the result, "like I said, there's more than one road to hell."[25] While Constantine is able to score a victory against the legions of Hell, he is rendered powerless against the more (in)human and unstoppable horrors of Thatcherism.

Alongside neoliberal policies, Thatcherism in the 1980s and '90s commenced what Bob Jessop calls "a distinctive 'two nations' authoritarian populist hegemonic project" that interpreted UK society as an antagonistic binary between "productive" citizens and "parasitic" subordinate groups undermining the productive work of the nation.[26] This led to a series of moral panics in right-wing media against the perceived "enemy within" British society that included "radical trade unionists, left-wing intellectuals, the bureaucratic welfare state, liberal "permissive" teachers and parents, homosexuals, the HIV positive, immigrants, the unemployed, welfare recipients, criminals."[27] The result was

23. Delano and Ridgeway, "Going for It," 20. An image of the panel can be viewed at https://www.reddit.com/r/comicbooks/comments/mn1jut/excerpt_anyone_else_miss_the_80s_when_writers/.
24. Delano and Ridgeway, "Going for It," 21.
25. Delano and Ridgeway, "Going for It," 24.
26. Jessop, "From Thatcherism to New Labour," 139.
27. Fuchs, "Neoliberalism in Britain: From Thatcherism to Cameronism," 166.

the imposition of a repressive state apparatus that not only criminalised organised working-class power, industrial action, and protest, but also sought to criminalise minoritarian and alternative social groups within British society.[28]

Thatcher's repressive police state and 1980s occulture would collide in the *Hellblazer* story arc "The Fear Machine" (*Hellblazer* #14–22, 1989–1990) as Constantine and a group of neopagan "New Age" travellers attempt to stop rogue Freemasons and clandestine police snatch squads from using a psychic weapon to unleash the dragon god Jallakuntilliokan. Defeating the masculine Jallakuntilliokan dragon through a ritual of sex magic to bring forth the power of the divine feminine, "The Fear Machine" is a particularly salient example of *Hellblazer's* weaving of contemporaneous occultural and political issues—where earth mysteries, geomancy, neopagan magic, Cold War remote viewing, and psychic warfare sit alongside police brutality and corruption towards the 1980s "Peace Convoy" of New Age traveller communities, free-party anarchists, and alternative spiritual groups.[29]

During *Hellblazer's* run, several writers would explore a variety of contemporary political issues airing from the social and economic inequality of neoliberalism, from the second war in Iraq ("Pandemonium"), neofascism and religious fundamentalism ("Fear and Loathing," "Highwater"), and colonialism ("Dreamtime," "India"), to the legacy of dirty politics during the UK strikes of the 1980s ("Scab"). While the writer/artist partnerships and subsequent narratives skewed towards a UK-centric view of politics, *Hellblazer* would also go on to explore the ramifications of neoliberal expansion across the American sociocultural landscape. In "Damnation's Flame" (*Hellblazer* #72–

28. See Seamus Milne, *The Enemy Within: The Secret War Against the Miners*; Andrew Taylor, *What about the Workers?,* 198–230; Sue Wise "'New Right' or 'Backlash'? Section 28, Moral Panic and 'Promoting Homosexuality'"; Simon Peplow, *Race and Riots in Thatcher's Britain*.

29. For more background on the occultural and political dimensions of the "The Peace Convoy" and New Age travellers in general, see Christopher Partridge, "The Spiritual and the Revolutionary"; Kevin Hetherington, *New Age Travellers*; David Christopher, "Mean Fields." For background on magical and neopagan political action in the UK in the 1980s, see Shai Ferraro, "Playing The Pipes of PAN: Pagans Against Nukes and the Linking of Wiccan-Derived Paganism with Ecofeminism in Britain, 1980–1990."

75), Constantine is guided by the corpse of John F. Kennedy across a nightmarish vision of Hell depicted as the US, ruled by "Abe Lincoln" aka the Devil himself. Meanwhile, US writer Brian Azzarello's tenure saw him move *Hellblazer* and the socio-political action to the US. Here, Constantine would embark on a noir journey across the nation where, in a similar fashion to his exploration of British social mores, he experiences the US prison-industrial complex, neo-Nazi militia groups, and small-town deprivation driven by the machinations of powerful, corrupt billionaires.

Class-Based Magical Practice in *Hellblazer*

The diegetic world of *Hellblazer* is one where physical reality can be manipulated by an array of practices that are magical in nature. As such, *Hellblazer* contains a multitude of characters across all social strata who are practitioners of magic. But while the majority of characters practise magic that generally conforms with Bernd Christian Otto's semantic model of "ritual," "power," "miracle," and "wish-fulfilment,"[30] their use of and relationship to magic is also contingent on their social standing and class. In *Hellblazer,* magical practitioners from the upper and capitalist classes are shown to use magic not only to consolidate their material position but also to acquire more power by controlling material reality, amplifying their authority, or acquiring knowledge that will give them a competitive advantage.

This worldview is embodied in the character of Lord Calvin Burnham, a real-estate mogul and member of the aristocracy who uses magic to further his material ambitions and consolidate his power at the expense of the lower classes. In the story "Joyride" (*Hellblazer* #234–237, 2007), his use of magic instigates a wave of violence, murder, and mass suicide on the Hunger Hill housing estate, ensuring that his real estate company can profit off its demolition and subsequent redevelopment. Whether through the acquisition of powerful magical tools or his use of magicians from the global South of Africa and India, Lord Burnham's use of occult power is contingent upon class wealth, imperialism, and colonialism.

30. Bernd-Christian Otto, "Magic," 2; Cf. Wouter Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, 102–18.

In comparison, Constantine's magical abilities seem underpowered, almost quotidian in nature. Constantine is shown to be a "jack of all trades" magician who applies various magical systems and techniques—from grimoires, ceremonial magic, and sigilisation to Tantra, divination, and pathworking. But while he is versed in such techniques, he shows little regard for adhering to the formal aspects of ritual magic or even for the agency and power placed on specific (and often expensive) tools and props. While Constantine does practice magic for short-term material gain in a manner that constitutes an ethically grey area (such as getting free flights, winning via gambling, or using sleight of hand to steal an object or money), such practices are often done out of material necessity and are rarely done purely for selfish pleasure or for "power" over people or social groups.

When it comes to his views on practicing magic, Constantine provides several definitions and opinions on what magic is—or, in some cases, isn't. In one scene, he states, "there's no such thing as magic—not real magic anyway. Magic's just when you trick the universe into believing some incredibly outrageous lie."[31] In another moment, Constantine states: "People think magic's a way of transforming reality—but in the end, you find that all that you've really changed is yourself. Which probably explains why every magician I've ever met's a self-absorbed arsehole. Still, first rule of magic: perception is reality."[32] In another scene (while the police are breaking down his door in the middle of the night), he muses, "First rule of magic: when you're right up shit creek—when it's a matter of life an' death—when you really need it to work—it won't."[33]

From the above quotes, Constantine's views on the real nature of magic often go against those who assign lofty aspirations and metaphysical claims to magic's ability to transform nature, or indeed the individual. For Constantine, magic is real, but it is merely a means to an end. Often magic, for Constantine, is a bit of a joke, a con put out to bamboozle the credulous and is therefore not to be taken

31. Paul Jenkins and Sean Phillips (artist), "Sins of the Father," 1.
32. Andy Diggle and Leonardo Manco (artist), "Wheels of Chance, Systems of Control," 3.
33. Garth Ennis and John Higgins (artist), "Son of Man: Part One," 7

seriously. As Constantine argues, "perception is reality"; it is less about adherence to the structure of a particular system or the capital-intensive process of acquiring the right tools or texts. Instead, magic is placed in the realm of everyday spaces and objects, where a paper cup becomes a chalice, a cigarette acts as a wand. What matters is possessing the right attitude and will towards ritual or magical practice.

This is fortunate, for in multiple instances Constantine is forced to perform magic under extreme conditions, relying on his belief and self-confidence rather than adhering to rigid ritual formalities. This is evident in "Going for It" when Constantine summons a demon while lacking the appropriate ritual tools to do so ("Half my bloody magick kit is either lost or borrowed and there's no time to prepare myself properly"[34]), yet his ritual still works for as he points out, "all you really need are the right contacts and a bit of nerve."[35]

Although there is no single unifying system in Constantine's use of magic, his attitudes and practices regarding occultism and magic align in several places with those of chaos magic. Emerging in the UK in the late 1970s, chaos magic is a meta-model of magic whose core tenet is that belief itself is a tool rather than the endpoint in magical or ritual practice. For chaos magicians (or chaotes), it is the efficacy of the practices used that matters most, alongside a willingness to use whatever traditions, models, or systems of magic deemed as appropriate. As such, chaos magic is associated with a radical individualism and relativism towards belief systems, embodying what Colin Duggan calls a "perennial iconoclasm," wherein chaotes are open to exploring all avenues of esoteric knowledge through experimentation, play, and creativity, while at the same time disregarding and attacking established traditions, conventions, and institutions associated with magic and mainstream society.[36]

Constantine's magical worldview can be compared to chaos magic in three ways. The first is biographical and associative, in that both Constantine and chaos

34. Delano and Ridgeway, "Going for It," 15.
35. Delano and Ridgeway, "Going for It," 15.
36. Colin Duggan, "Perennialism and Iconoclasm," 97–100.

magic occupy the same shared countercultural origins, namely the anarchist punk and squat scene of mid-to-late 1970s London.[37] Indeed, according to Christian Greer, chaos magic, anarcho-punk, and anarchist discourse (through individuals such as Moore) are components of a wider "chaos discourse"—a sprawling constellation of ideas and subcultural movements in the late twentieth century that agitated for the invoking of ontological and "metaphysical chaos" through the proliferation of underground zines and comics.[38]

The second comparison is how both wilfully use a variety of magical systems and techniques rather than being tied down to any one tradition. For Constantine (and the chaote), it is not the value placed in specific tools, systems, or deities that makes magic work, but rather the level of applied will and belief in their application. The third association is the way in which Constantine embodies the "perennial iconoclasm" inherent in chaos magic through his stringent anti-authoritarianism and blatant disregard for established tradition or dogma. Whether it be an angel or demon, magician or government minister, to Constantine the class hierarchies of British society and the hierarchies of heaven and hell are effectively the same system of power and privilege.

A prime example is found in "R.S.V.P. Part 2" (*Hellblazer* #245, 2008) where Constantine, seeking to sever his links with the occult scene, gives a speech to the magicians of London's Tate Club, whereupon he castigates them for their selfishness and arrogance before burning the club to the ground. Meanwhile, in a scene in "Dangerous Habits," Constantine, dying from terminal lung cancer, expresses his feelings and ire towards hierarchical power and the ruling classes:

37. One of the emergent currents of chaos magic in the UK was the anarchist and squat scene in mid to late '70s London where, as part of the "Stoke Newington Sorcerers" group, members who would go on to develop chaos magic became "entwined in the nascent anarchy of the explosion of 'Punk' fashion" (Frater Choronozon, "Crisis Magicians, Orders, Disorders, Lynx, and Lone Wolves"). See also Jaq D. Hawkins, *The Chaonomicon*, Kindle position 169–99; Peter J. Carroll, *Interview with a Wizard*, 159, 205.

38. See Christian Greer, "Zines," and *Angel-Headed Hipsters: Psychedelic Militancy in Nineteen-Eighties North America*.

> I want you to know that it was always about you. Not the magic or the demons, or anything. Your power's just like magic cos it doesn't exist unless enough people believe in it. In a way that's what I've been fighting all these years. Just belief.
>
> All I ever wanted was for the world to be free of your kind, whether you were here in Parliament on in senate or junta or Hell or Heaven. Maybe that's pointless, then. Maybe the people are too small and scared to be free. Maybe they want you there, shitting all over them. But like a salesman who's only too eager to sew up his market and stitch up his customers, you're happy enough to exploit that. Aw, sod it. Sod you. For whatever it's worth, you were always the enemy.[39]

Aside from correlations between Constantine's magical practice and chaos magic, Anthony Nine and scholar Genevieve Williams also place Constantine within the tradition of "cunning folk," or practitioners of popular magic in the UK and Europe from the eleventh to eighteenth centuries.[40] Cunning folk had knowledge of, and practiced, a myriad of techniques cobbled together from various sources—made available either through supernatural or hereditary powers (e.g., communing with familiars, fairies, ghosts, or angels), from familial knowledge, or via reading acquired books and texts.[41] Through their comparatively elevated education, cunning folk were considered experts who straddled the worlds of learned "high" magic and folk "low" magic, offering "a complete package of magical and medical services" that included love magic, curse placing, treasure finding, locating stolen items or the thieves, protection against or combating witchcraft, healing from various ailments, and fortune telling.[42]

Despite the apparent popularity of common magic and the social importance of cunning folk in early modern Britain until the nineteenth century, contemporary historical research has largely neglected placing them within the

39. Garth Ennis and Will Simpson (artist), "My Way: Dangerous Habits Part 4," 14.

40. Genevieve Williams, "Ghosts, Grimoires, and Dealing with Demons," 224; Anthony Nine, e-mail interview, 3 January 2024.

41. See Owen Davies, *Popular Magic*, VII–VIII; Catherine Rider, "Common Magic."

42. Owen Davies, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, 191.

corresponding sociocultural history.[43] Unlike "high" magic practitioners who wrote and published their ideas on magic and esoteric philosophy, the practices of cunning folk were rarely recorded or written down, transmitted instead through familial oral tradition or through the folk knowledge of the community.[44] As such, the practices of cunning folk and popular magic appear as a marginalised and fragmented tradition. Despite such discontinuities, for Nine, the tradition of the cunning folk and popular magic embodied by Constantine still exists to this day, through both British folk culture and the modern occult revival:

> If there is a tradition of "English Magic" then it's this under-the-counter, shapeshifting impulse, moved by need that wells up in the marginal fissures of a country and culture that doesn't believe in it and is collectively "ghosting it"—so to speak. It's the way in which magic continues to exist at the edges of a host culture that has otherwise tried to eradicate it … Magic never really goes away though. There's never a year when there aren't any magicians born. But in England, it's like a fractured tradition that reinvents itself periodically, not any sort of intact lineage, consistent set of practices or clearly defined belief system. It is as much the Juggler as it is the Magus, and it thrives in disreputable spaces. The fortune teller's booth and the gambling den, the seaside pier and the shebeen, the pub and the betting shop.[45]

In his use of a wide and varied assemblage of magical techniques, Constantine embodies the bricolage approach of the cunning folk. Neither Constantine nor cunning folk are interested in developing complex systems of occult practice aimed at achieving spiritual evolution or attaining divine knowledge, but are instead concerned with more quotidian matters, applying "practical magical solutions" to resolve everyday problems—from the alleviation of ailments to the obtainment of resolutions to social problems.[46] Their remit is to help and look after people in a harsh, occult world teeming with "invisible supernatural entities which constantly influenced the natural world and the lives of men."[47]

43. See Davies, *Popular Magic,* XIII–XIV, and "Cunning-Folk in England and Wales During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries"; Willem de Blécourt, "Witch Doctors."
44. Davies, *Popular Magic,* XIII.
45. Anthony Nine, email interview, 3 January 2024.
46. Davies, *Popular Magic,* XIII.
47. Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits,* 8.

Despite being a clearly fallible human character with a murky system of ethics, Constantine, in his role as occult detective and problem solver, is overall a compassionate humanist concerned with trying to do good by those within his local community, and helping various members of the public with all manner of problems, be it material or spiritual. And like the cunning folk, the services he provides can range from high-stakes magic (such as driving out a demon or vengeful spirit) to acquiring justice for people through more material measures such as confidence tricks, deception, or bringing in criminal elements. The tradition of cunning folk in *Hellblazer* is not only embodied by Constantine alone, for we are introduced in multiple storylines to a diverse subculture of working-class cunning folk, witches, and psychics who are friends and occasional allies, such as Angie Spatchcock, Nigel Archer, and the child psychic Mercury.

However, while many cunning folk were popular and respected in early modern British society, in order to offer their services they "had to be some sort of outsider,"[48] ensuring that, while they were part of the community, they were not of it. For Constantine, this situation is underscored by the hazardous nature of his role as a magician and occult detective dealing with occult forces, where he is often forced to make hard choices of staggeringly cosmic proportions of life and death. Like the cunning folk, Constantine is often portrayed in *Hellblazer* as a "lone wolf" character with a "sinister" reputation, whose use of magic and willingness to do what is deemed cosmically necessary sets him apart from his friends and the community. "Fucking magic, see?" rues Constantine; "the price is always higher than the prize."[49]

48. Willem de Blécourt, "Witch Doctors," 298.

49. Si Spurrier and Aaron Campbell, "This Sceptred Isle, Part Two," 160.

Comics as Spiritual Texts and the Influence of *Hellblazer* and Constantine in the Occultural Milieu

Despite being a "rejected genre" of popular culture,[50] comics have enjoyed enormous success across all levels of publishing and production—from cross-platform multi-billion-dollar superhero franchises to countercultural and "zine" comix. As a result, comics, according to Kennet Granholm, are "popular cultural products where the occult is most prominent as well as one of the few remaining popular cultural arenas where creators are still relatively free to experiment with unorthodox subject matter."[51] The particular effectiveness of comics in conveying spiritual and occult concepts, argue Hoff Kraemer and A. David Lewis, is due to (a) their accessibility in conveying signs and imagery with text, and (b) the ability to instantiate powerful emotional engagement, resulting in an intense aesthetic response and meaning on the part of the reader, due to (c), the immersive participatory experience associated with comics.[52]

It is this unique ability to transmit occult and spiritual concepts that has led some scholars to argue that comics (in particular superhero comics) are not only ideally suited to representing religious, spiritual, and esoteric concepts, but can function as a "modern mythology"—directing and shaping spiritual and esoteric phenomena as "gnostic or esoterically-encoded mythical, mystical texts."[53] This proposition has been notably, and audaciously, forwarded by Jeffrey Kripal in his book *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal*, where he argues not only for comics' representational relationship with esoteric

50. Jeffrey Kripal, "Can Superhero Comics Really Transmit Esoteric Knowledge?" 179.

51. Kennet Granholm, "Comics and the Occult," 499.

52. Christine Hoff Kraemer and A David Lewis, "Comics/Graphic Novels," 211–12.

53. David M. Odorisio, "A New Gnosis: The Comic Book as Mythical Text," 5. Recent literature on the relationship between comics and their representation of the religious, spiritual, and occult include David M. Odorisio, ed., *A New Gnosis: Comic Books, Comparative Mythology, and Depth Psychology*; A. David Lewis and Christine Hoff Kramer, *Graven Images: Religion in Comic Books & Graphic Novels*; Assaf Gamzou and Ken Koltun-Fromm, eds., *Comics and Sacred Texts: Reimagining Religion and Graphic Narratives*; Chris Linsner Knowles and Joseph Michael, *Our Gods Wear Spandex: The Secret History of Comic Book Heroes*.

ideas and traditions, but that also comics embody a mythological "super-story" in the form of a meaningful and sacred "Meta-myth, a deep, often unconscious narrative that underlies and shapes much of contemporary popular culture."[54]

For Kripal, what is so powerful about the "super-story" and its evolution through comics is its dynamic, participatory nature. Not only do some authors come to the realisation that they are caught in the constructed reality of the "super-story" and that we are being "written" by occult and paranormal forces, but through comics, the writer (and reader) can become an active participant in said "super story," thereby "writing the paranormal writing us."[55]

The use of comics as a tool for esoteric praxis has been most associated with the work of two authors—Grant Morrison and Alan Moore.[56] Moore's best-known titles, such as *V for Vendetta* (1982), *Watchmen* (1986–1987), and *From Hell* (1989–1998), contain overtly political narratives and themes that reflect Moore's anarchist sensibilities, developed through his interest in countercultural art and comics.[57] But Moore was already exploring esoteric and spiritual concepts—from the "holistic ecotheology" in *Swamp Thing* (1984–1987)[58] to Freemasonry, Victorian occultism, and modern esoteric traditions in *From Hell*.[59] This immersion culminated on Moore's 40th birthday in 1993, when he "declared himself completely mad," and came out as a ceremonial magician who worshipped a Roman snake god called Glycon.[60]

As a magician, Moore would synthesise various esoteric traditions with his ideas

54. Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics,* 5.

55. Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, 254.

56. While an analysis of Grant Morrison's relationship with comics and occultism is outside of the scope of this essay, for an analysis see Granholm, "Comics and the Occult," 503–5; Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, 8–16; Megan Goodwin "Conversion to Narrative: Magic as Religious Language in Grant Morrison's Invisibles"; Timothy Bavinka, *Superheroes and Shamanism.*

57. Killjoy, *Mythmakers and Lawbreakers*, 55.

58. Granholm, "The Occult and Comics," 502.

59. Eddie Campbell and Alan Moore, *Alan Moore: A Disease of Language*, 110–12. Emily Taylor Merriman, "London (and the Mind) as Sacred-Desecrated Place in Alan Moore's From Hell."

60. See Jay Babcock, "Magic Is Afoot."

on magic, art, and language through a series of poetry and musical performances as ritual workings, such as *The Birth Caul* (1994) and *Snakes and Ladders* (1999).[61] Meanwhile, Moore's conscious shift to magic began to intersect with his political views; in one interview he declared organised religion to be the spiritual equivalent of fascism, while magic is the spiritual embodiment of anarchism, in the way it "is purely about self-determination, with the magician simply a human being writ large, and in more dramatic terms, standing at the center of his or her own universe."[62]

Moore's esoteric philosophy also began to explicitly inform his comics writing, at one point stating that through comics' hybrid integration of image and text, "you can perhaps convey the essence of the mystical experience in quite a direct and visceral way that might not be as easy to reproduce in any other medium."[63] This is observed in his long-running esoteric work *Promethea* (1995–2005), which, in its exploration of Western esoteric traditions such as Kabbalah, Tarot, and Thelema, sought to act as a didactic vehicle for transmitting spiritual and esoteric ideas to the reader, in the hope of initiating a gnostic shift in their consciousness.[64]

For Moore, the writing and reading of comics become inherently magical acts that, through the medium of imagination, allow us to embark on a "purposeful engagement with the phenomena and possibilities of consciousness."[65] This interaction between consciousness and the ideas that emerge from it are represented by what Moore calls *Ideaspace*—a metaphysical landscape where, in a similar manner to the Jungian collective unconscious, all our ideas, philosophies, and archetypes exist.[66] Because Ideaspace is a psychical landscape that connects and

61. Both these events were subsequently adapted into graphic novels. See Eddie Campbell and Alan Moore, *The Birth Caul* (1999); *Snakes and Ladders* (2001). Both graphic novels were republished in the collected edition, Eddie Campbell and Alan Moore, *A Disease of Language* (2005).

62. Killjoy, *Mythmakers and Lawbreakers*, 55.

63. Steve Moore, "Writing as a Magical Act: An Interview with Alan Moore by Steve Moore," 9.

64. See Wouter Hanegraaff, "Alan Moore's Promethea"; Christine Hoff Kraemer and A. David Lewis, *Graven Images*, 274–91.

65. Sam Proctor, "Alan Moore: The Art of Magic."

66. For a more in-depth discussion on the concept of Ideaspace, see Moore and Campbell, *A Disease of Language*, 127–31.

overlaps with our consciousnesses, ideas and concepts can be discovered by more than one person in any given place or time. And if more than one person engages with Ideaspace through the magical practice of writing and art, then particular ideas can rise out of Ideaspace and take root in our material world and culture.

John Constantine: An Anarchist, Working-Class Tulpa

The practice of transmitting ideas and archetypes from the imaginal world of Ideaspace to the material realm via the writing and reading of comics becomes especially notable when considering the impact of John Constantine and *Hellblazer* on writers, artists, and readers. Writers such as Delano, Peter Milligan, Paul Jenkins, and Brian Azzarello, for example, have all claimed to have physically encountered Constantine during their stints writing on *Hellblazer*.[67] While he took no part in writing *Hellblazer*, the "creation" of Constantine has had a profound effect on Moore's life, even before his coming out as a magician. In his interview with Christensen and Siefert, Moore describes an actual physical encounter with "John Constantine" soon after he started writing him to appear in *Swamp Thing*:

> One day, I was in Westminster in London—this was after we had introduced the character—and I was sitting in a sandwich bar. All of a sudden, up the stairs came John Constantine. He was wearing the trench coat, a short cut—he looked—no, he didn't even look exactly like Sting. He looked exactly like John Constantine. He looked at me, stared me straight in the eyes, smiled, nodded almost conspiratorially, and then just walked off around the corner to the other part of the snack bar. I sat there and thought, should I go around that corner and see if he is really there, or should I just eat my sandwich and leave? I opted for the latter; I thought it was the safest. I'm not making any claims to anything. I'm just saying that it happened.[68]

While it could be dismissed as an uncanny experience of meeting a lookalike, Constantine would reappear to Moore a second time at an undeclared moment

67. See Dejan Ognjanović, "Jamie Delano interview (1)"; Abraham Riesman, "The Secret History and Uncertain Future of Comics Character John Constantine."
68. Christensen and Siefert, "The Unexplored Medium."

during the 1990s, where he appeared out of the darkness, imparting upon Moore the following comment: "I'll tell you the ultimate secret of magic. Any cunt could do it."[69] In a subsequent interview, Moore provided more contextual detail, with Constantine appearing after a ritual working conducted with friends, while also pointing out that Constantine appeared *independently* outside of the ritual invocation itself:

> I'd just stepped out of the room and popped downstairs to make some tea . . . and I was just passing through the kitchen when all of a sudden in the darkness on the left side of my head . . . It's very difficult to describe this, but it was clearly that somebody had struck a match in the darkness, and this lit up the face of John Constantine in the sudden halo of the match flare. And he, in a typically amusing way, told me the ultimate secret of magic, very memorably, in one very short five-word sentence, and then blew the match out and vanished.[70]

From his roots as a concept that impressed himself upon the fictional world of *Swamp Thing* to his growth and popularity in the pages of *Hellblazer*, Constantine's subsequent manifestations before Moore and other writers show him acquiring autonomy outside of the minds of his creators. In this respect, Constantine can be said to have taken on the form of a *tulpa* or "thought-form"—an entity that "begins in the imagination but acquires a tangible reality and sentience."[71] While the tulpa has its roots in Buddhist mysticism, Taoism, and the native pre-Buddhist Bön shamanic tradition, it became syncretised though Theosophical discourses on "thought-forms" before being integrated with online phenomena such as the Slenderman.[72] Taking Moore's ideas on magic and Ideaspace seriously, it is Moore's and others' collective act of writing Constantine that imbues him with what Erik Davis terms an "invasive exteriority,"[73] as he evolves from being a fictional entity to an actualised magical construct, able to impart his will and influence on the material realm.

69. Moore and Campbell, *A Disease of Language*, 90.

70. Moore, quoted in Sandifer, "Declare Yourself a Magician."

71. Natasha L. Mikles and Joseph P. Laycock, "Tracking the Tulpa," 87.

72. Mikkles and Laycock, "Tracking the Tulpa," 93–4. For more on the phenomenon of tulpamancers, see Nathan Thompson, "Meet the 'Tulpamancers'"; For more on the Slenderman phenomenon, see Cat Vincent, "Slenderman: Tracing the Birth and Evolution of a Modern Monster."

73. Erik Davis, *High Weirdness (Kindle Edition)*, Location 5853.

The notion of Constantine—with his anarchistic iconoclasm, working-class menace, and punk attitude to magic—being able to exist as a "thought form" would prove attractive to magicians within the occult milieu of the 1990s and 2000s. Online discussion forums such as the alt.magick Usenet forum would recommend *Hellblazer* for novice magicians while also discussing the use of Constantine as a character model for the practice of magic. Members of the Z(Cluster) online chaos magic community would talk of "becoming" Constantine during psychedelic rituals,[74] while others described manifesting Constantine as a servitor in magical rituals, arguing that he made "an excellent servitor" due to the fact that "energy is resident in characters which evoke emotional response or admiration from those who read the stories."[75]

Meanwhile, Cat Vincent has worked with Constantine as a magical thought-form in several ritual workings since the late 1990s. "He is that easy to summon," notes Vincent; "The only trick, the only safety precaution you need to make when working with John Constantine as a Loa is *never call him your friend*. Then you're fucked."[76] One such notable working was in February 2014, during the theatre adaptation of Robert Anton Wilson's discordian opus *Cosmic Trigger* in Liverpool. After a preview viewing, members of the cast and crew performed a series of impromptu rituals in front of a bust of Carl Jung, which included a working by Vincent to invoke Constantine as "a son of Liverpool" and "a master of the Caper."[77] In his review of the production, Vincent describes the ritual thus:

> Daisy introduced me to the group, and I essayed a short ceremony, calling upon John Constantine's synchronicity-surfing powers and his cunning (and, very specifically, not

74. Riff "riffraff" to zee-list@eskimo.com, 11 Jun 1997, ZD 97 (No. 93). Z(Cluster) archive available from https://www.reddit.com/r/zcluster/comments/2ga1l5/zeequinox_volume_i_19962000_yes_its_encrypted_and/

75. Josh "Culculus" to zee-list@eskimo.com, 13 Jun 1997, ZD 97 (No. 97).

76. Cat Vincent, online interview, 12 Dec 2023.

77. Cat Vincent, "Reviewing: Pulling the Cosmic Trigger." A video of the ritual can be observed at Complexity Ltd, "Cosmic Trigger – The Jung Person's Guide to Liverpool," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBD06b1trAY.

> his friendship) for all assembled there, with a ceremonial offering of a shared flask of single malt and a pack of Silk Cut, Constantine's preferred smoke. Then Daisy spoke: calling on that same current which had called Jung's soul to the Pool Of Life to bring the Cosmic Trigger to be pulled with the fullest effect, and to manifest that same spirit of destiny which had brought her so far . . . but, as she put it, only "just enough!". The knickers were placed with the assistance of a rapidly constructed human pyramid (but of course), and we all cheered.[78]

To Vincent, the workings were successful as not only did a member of the public promptly turn up wearing a football shift with the number "23," but a person in a light brown trench coat resembling Constantine turned up in the audience for a performance of *Cosmic Trigger* two days later.[79]

Conclusion

In this essay, I have analysed how *Hellblazer's* representations of occultism and magic—through the adoption of the generic strategies of horror and noir combined with social realism by Moore, Delano, and others—have generated powerful aesthetic allegories that critique political and social currents in the UK and US during the late twentieth century. Meanwhile, the anti-authoritarianism, cunning, and sarcasm of central protagonist John Constantine embody the intersection of power, class, and magic from a British working-class perspective—his background, culture, and interests informing his contempt for class hierarchies alongside a concern for the socially marginalised. Constantine's approach and attitudes towards magic and occultism make him an attractive persona to conduct magic with, while providing inspiration as an ethical template for working-class magicians."

While *Hellblazer* provided a platform for working-class and left-wing British writers to disseminate contemporary politics from an occult standpoint, in a twenty-first century where Thatcher is long gone and comics have become

78. Vincent, "Pulling the Cosmic Trigger."
79. Vincent, "Pulling the Cosmic Trigger."

part of mainstream culture, there are those who wonder if there is still a place for Constantine's oppositional occult worldview. In issue #7 of Warren Ellis's superhero series *Planetary*, the plot focuses on the funeral and murder investigation of Jack Carter, a conman magician and thinly veiled analogue of Constantine, who is revealed to have faked his own death. Ellis uses the narrative and metaphor of the funeral to critique both Constantine and the worldview of the British Invasion of US comics as a product, and relic, of 1980s politics. "The eighties are long over," Carter announces as he erases his past. "Time to move on. Time to be somebody else."[80] Meanwhile successive adaptations of *Hellblazer* across cinema, TV, animation, and gaming, alongside post-*Hellblazer* reboots of Constantine within mainstream superhero franchises of DC Comics, have seen the excising of the original series' sociopolitical content and working-class elements, replacing Constantine's class consciousness and anti-establishment vitriol with a more commodifiable charm.

But neoliberalism, class consciousness, and Constantine have refused to die. *Hellblazer* was relaunched as a limited series in 2019 under DC Comics' Black Label imprint, which sees Constantine return to a Britain suffering from the continuing impact of neoliberalism and a generation of austerity, while the ghosts of Thatcherism linger on via a resurgence in right-wing populist rhetoric resulting from the Brexit referendum.[81] Described as a "poisonous love letter to the Constantines of the past,"[82] Si Spurrier's run on *Hellblazer* sought to reintegrate horror, occultism, and political commentary. His storylines center on poverty and immigration, street gangs, social gentrification, political fascism, and the cultural fallout of living in both a post-Brexit UK and a post-Trump

80. Warren Ellis, John Cassaday (artist), "To Be in England, in the Summertime," 21.

81. See Fuchs, *Neoliberalism in Britain*; Karine Tournier-Sol, "From UKIP to Brexit: The Right-Wing Populist Surge in the UK"; Marius Guderjan, Hugh Mackay and Gesa Stedman, eds., *Contested Britain: Brexit, Austerity and Agency*.

82. Rich Johnston, "Si Spurrier & Aaron Campbell Return to John Constantine: Hellblazer."

US—where magic, class, and political discourse are closely intertwined.[83] While Constantine and *Hellblazer* had their roots in 1980s politics and occulture, the continuing popularity of Constantine's picaresque charm and working-class magic can still provide inspiration for an oppositional stance to the continuing horrors lurking underneath the socioeconomic inequalities and political violence at the heart of contemporary society.

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83. See Egil Asprem, "The Magical Theory of Politics: Memes, Magic, and the Enchantment of Social Forces in the American Magic War"; Sabina Magliocco, "Witchcraft as Political Resistance, Magical Responses to the 2016 Presidential Election in the United States"; Edwin Coomasaru, "Magical Thinking: Is Brexit an Occult Phenomenon?"; Gary Lachman, *Dark Star Rising: Magick and Power in the Age of Trump*.

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