MÉMOIRE DE MASTER 2

Orientalism in Marvel's *Moon Knight* (1975-2022), from Comics to Disney+

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Master English Studies Online
Parcours : Recherche



Année universitaire 2025-2026

Abstract

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This dissertation studies the evolution of Orientalist representation in Marvel's *Moon Knight* from its comic-book debut in 1975 to the Disney+ miniseries released in 2022. Drawing on Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's concept of polycentric multiculturalism, it examines how Egypt and the broader Middle East are represented across the comics written first by Douglas Moench and later by authors such as Jeff Lemire. The analysis shows that Douglas Moench's *Moon Knight* in the early 1980s frequently relies on Orientalist conventions, including exoticized settings, reductive Arab figures, and stylized Egyptian imagery, whereas the comic-book iterations of the 2010s begin to revise these patterns within a publishing landscape shaped by the late 1990s publication of Joe Sacco's influential postcolonial graphic novel *Palestine*. The most substantial corrective occurs, however, off the comic-book page in the 2022 Disney+ miniseries *Moon Knight*, which, in the context of Disney's diversity and inclusion policy, grants Egypt greater visual and narrative centrality and foregrounds Arab voices and contemporary Cairene life. Yet the miniseries remains marked by residual Orientalist tropes and raises the question of whether an adaptation of an Orientalist comic can ever be fully de-Westernized. Rather than wholly escaping these visual and textual stereotypes, the miniseries aligns with polycentric multiculturalism, significantly reworks earlier misrepresentations, and points toward a tentative postcolonial, Egyptian-centered fantastical mode emerging today in the art and literature of both the Middle East and the West.

Keywords: Orientalism, polycentric multiculturalism, adaptation, comics, Disney, Moon Knight, Marvel, Egypt, Middle East, Arab representation

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L'Orientalisme dans *Moon Knight* (Marvel, 1975-2022), du comic book à Disney+

Ce mémoire étudie l'évolution des représentations orientalistes dans *Moon Knight* de l'univers Marvel, depuis ses débuts en 1975 dans le comic book américain jusqu'à la mini-série Disney+ sortie en 2022. S'appuyant sur *Orientalism* d'Edward Said et sur le multiculturalisme polycentrique théorisé par Ella Shohat et Robert Stam, il examine la manière dont l'Égypte et le Moyen-Orient sont représentés dans les comics d'abord écrits par Douglas Moench, puis par des auteurs tels que Jeff Lemire. Cette analyse montre que le *Moon Knight* de Douglas Moench du début des années 1980 repose fréquemment sur des conventions orientalistes, notamment des décors exoticisés, des figures arabes réductrices et une iconographie égyptienne stylisée, tandis que les itérations du comic des années 2010 commencent à réviser ces schémas au sein d'un paysage éditorial marqué par la publication, à la fin des années 1990, de *Palestine*, l'influent roman graphique postcolonial de Joe Sacco. Les corrections les plus significatives surviennent toutefois non pas dans les comics, mais dans la mini-série Disney+ *Moon Knight* de 2022, qui, dans le cadre de la politique de diversité et d'inclusion de Disney, place l'Égypte au cœur de son récit et de son imagerie, tout en valorisant les voix arabes et la vie cairote contemporaine. Pourtant, la mini-série reste marquée par des tropes orientalistes résiduels et soulève ainsi la question de l'adaptabilité d'un comic orientaliste en une œuvre pleinement désoccidentalisée. Plutôt que d'échapper entièrement à ces stéréotypes visuels et textuels, la mini-série s'inscrit dans un multiculturalisme polycentrique, retravaille en profondeur des représentations antérieures biaisées et amorce ainsi un mode d'expression fantastique et postcolonial centré sur l'Égypte, qui semble émerger aujourd'hui dans l'art et la littérature du Moyen-Orient et de l'Occident.

Mots-clés : Orientalisme, multiculturalisme polycentrique, adaptation, comics, Disney, Moon Knight, Marvel, Égypte, Moyen-Orient, représentation du monde arabe

Acknowledgments

My deepest thanks first go to my supervisor. While Moon Knight may seem hard-pressed to fight crime without the aid of Khonshu, the moon god in ancient Egypt, I do not think I would have completed this first foray into academic scholarship without the tremendous support, guidance, and insight of Professor Emmanuelle Delanoë-Brun, who was, to me, the closest thing to a modern Seshat, goddess of writing and knowledge.

I also wish to express my profound thanks to Dr. Philippe Mainterot for helping me navigate the daunting burial chambers and pyramids of the Valley of the Kings; to Dr. Zeineb Touati for guiding me through various Arab customs and Arabic dialects; and to Bruno Godivier, Director of the Robert Tatin Museum, for providing architectural details about what I like to call Moon Knight's "French playground" in Cossé-le-Vivien.

My deepest gratitude goes to the professors of the Master English Online Studies program, who helped me hone my academic skills, especially Professor Isabelle Gadoin. You have made this Master's program at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3 the only opportunity for teachers like me to resume their studies.

To my talented fellow students in the Master English Studies Online program, with whom we created a rich and highly stimulating world of our own through the organization of the "Mastériales Days" in January 2026: never again will Elvis Presley cross paths with Hokusai, Keir Starmer, and Oscar Wilde against the backdrop of the Jacobite rebellion.

My special thanks go to all my colleagues in the Department of Information and Communication at Nantes Université, and especially to Dr. Olivier Ertzscheid for his moral support and for introducing me to the inescapable Zotero software, and to Dr. Marc Jahjah for his sharp observations on contemporary forms of Orientalism and anti-Orientalism.

Finally, I am truly beholden to Professor Jean-Paul Gabilliet who, on a rainy day in March 2025, responded to my unwavering motivation by encouraging me to enroll in a Master 2 program and to go all the way to a PhD. Dreams can indeed come true, even after forty.

To Nathan, who still wonders why his father takes such mysterious pleasure in spending long weekends writing about men in spandex cavorting about, while he himself is still grappling with the bac de français.

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Foreword

In this Master's dissertation, I refer to *Moon Knight* issues without specifying a volume unless the material discussed does not belong to Douglas Moench's (hereafter Doug Moench) *Moon Knight* (vol. 1) (1980-1984); in such cases, the relevant volume is indicated in order to avoid ambiguity across the character's multiple series and relaunches. Likewise, individual issues are cited using the hash symbol (e.g., *MK* #1) rather than the abbreviation "no." or the symbol "n°," a convention adopted throughout for consistency and readability.

For ease of reference, the following list of Moon Knight-starring titles scripted by Doug Moench provides a chronological overview of the corpus discussed in this dissertation:

1975–1976: *Werewolf by Night* #32–33.

1976: *Marvel Spotlight* #28–29.

1978-1980: *The Hulk!* #11-15, 17-18, 20.

1980: *Marvel Preview* #21.

1980-1984: *Moon Knight* #1-38.

1998: *Moon Knight* (vol. 3) #1-4.

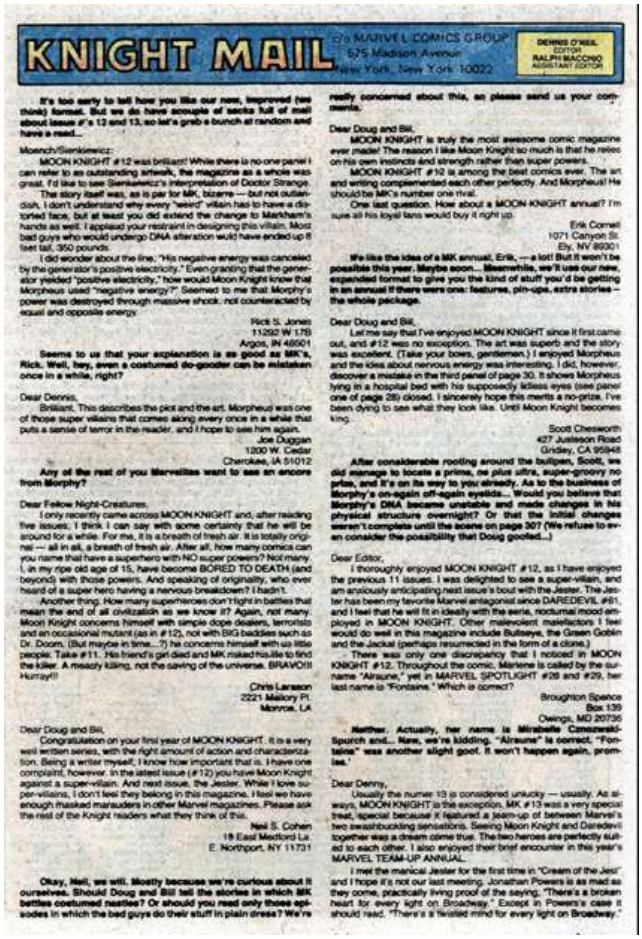
1999: *Moon Knight* (vol. 4) #1-4.

The timeline below highlights the landmark narrative and editorial milestones referred throughout this dissertation:



Figure 1: Selected Milestones in Doug Moench's *Moon Knight* (Sébastien Jacotin, 2025)

Marvel comics have traditionally included “letter columns” at the end of each issue, where readers can respond to recent storylines and editorial choices. Some contributors later entered the industry as writers, including Doug Moench. In *Moon Knight*, this section appears under the title “Knight Mail.” Unless otherwise indicated, all reader quotations cited in this dissertation are drawn from these letter columns. Fig. 2 reproduces a “Knight Mail” page from *MK* #16 (1982).



KNIGHT MAIL

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP
575 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10022

DENNIS O'NEIL, EDITOR
RALPH MACCHIO, ASSISTANT EDITOR

It's too early to tell how you like our new, improved (we think) format. But we do have accouple of sacks full of mail about issues #'s 12 and 13, so let's grab a bunch at random and have a read...

Moench/Sienkiewicz:

MOON KNIGHT #12 was brilliant! While there is no one panel I can refer to as outstanding artwork, the magazine as a whole was great. I'd like to see Sienkiewicz's interpretation of Doctor Strange.

The story itself was, as is par for MK, bizarre — but not outlandish. I don't understand why every "weird" villain has to have a distorted face, but at least you did extend the change to Markham's hands as well. I applaud your restraint in designing this villain. Most bad guys who would undergo DNA alteration would have ended up 8 feet tall, 350 pounds.

I did wonder about the line, "His negative energy was canceled by the generator's positive electricity." Even granting that the generator yielded "positive electricity," how would Moon Knight know that Morpheus used "negative energy?" Seemed to me that Morphy's power was destroyed through massive shock: not counteracted by equal and opposite energy.

Rick S. Jones
11292 W 17th
Argos, IN 46501

Seems to us that your explanation is as good as MK's, Rick. Well, hey, even a costumed do-gooder can be mistaken once in a while, right?

Dear Dennis,

Brilliant. This describes the plot and the art. Morpheus was one of those super villains that comes along every once in a while that puts a sense of terror in the reader, and I hope to see him again.

Joe Duggan
1200 W. Cedar
Cherokee, IA 51012

Any of the rest of you literatties want to see an encore from Morphy?

Dear Fellow Night-Creatures:

I only recently came across MOON KNIGHT and, after reading five issues, I think I can say with some certainty that he will be around for a while. For me, it is a breath of fresh air. It is totally original — all in all, a breath of fresh air. After all, how many comics can you name that have a superhero with NO super powers? Not many. I, in my ripe old age of 15, have become BORED TO DEATH (and beyond) with those powers. And speaking of originality, who ever heard of a super hero having a nervous breakdown? I hadn't.

Another thing. How many superheroes don't fight in battles that mean the end of all civilization as we know it? Again, not many. Moon Knight concerns himself with simple dope dealers, terrorists and an occasional mutant (as in #12), not with BIG baddies such as Dr. Doom. (But maybe in time...?) he concerns himself with us little people. Take #11. His friend's girl died and MK risked his life to find the killer. A measly killing, not the saving of the universe. BRAVO!!! Hurray!!!

Chris Larason
2221 Mallory Pl.
Monroe, LA

Dear Doug and Bill,

Congratulation on your first year of MOON KNIGHT. It is a very well written series, with the right amount of action and characterization. Being a writer myself, I know how important that is. I have one complaint, however. In the latest issue (#12) you have Moon Knight against a super-villain. And next issue, the Jester. While I love super-villains, I don't feel they belong in this magazine. I feel we have enough masked marauders in other Marvel magazines. Please ask the rest of the Knight readers what they think of this.

Neil S. Cohen
19 East Medford La.
E. Northport, NY 11731

Okay, Neil, we will. Mostly because we're curious about it ourselves. Should Doug and Bill tell the stories in which MK battles costumed nasties? Or should you read only those episodes in which the bad guys do their stuff in plain dress? We're really concerned about this, so please send us your comments.

Dear Doug and Bill,

MOON KNIGHT is truly the most awesome comic magazine ever made! The reason I like Moon Knight so much is that he relies on his own instincts and strength rather than super powers.

MOON KNIGHT #12 is among the best comics ever. The art and writing complemented each other perfectly. And Morpheus! He should be MK's number one rival.

One last question. How about a MOON KNIGHT annual? I'm sure all his loyal fans would buy it right up.

Erik Cornell
1071 Canyon St.
Ely, NV 89301

We like the idea of a MK annual, Erik, — a lot! But it won't be possible this year. Maybe soon... Meanwhile, we'll use our new, expanded format to give you the kind of stuff you'd be getting in an annual if there were one: features, pin-ups, extra stories — the whole package.

Dear Doug and Bill,

Let me say that I've enjoyed MOON KNIGHT since it first came out, and #12 was no exception. The art was superb and the story was excellent. (Take your bows, gentlemen.) I enjoyed Morpheus and the idea about nervous energy was interesting. I did, however, discover a mistake in the third panel of page 30. It shows Morpheus lying in a hospital bed with his supposedly lidless eyes (see panel one of page 28) closed. I sincerely hope this merits a no-prize. I've been dying to see what they look like. Until Moon Knight becomes king.

Scott Chesworth
427 Justeson Road
Gridley, CA 95948

After considerable rooting around the bullpen, Scott, we did manage to locate a prime, ne plus ultra, super-groovy no prize, and it's on its way to you already. As to the business of Morphy's on-again off-again eyelids... Would you believe that Morphy's DNA became unstable and made changes in his physical structure overnight? Or that the initial changes weren't complete until the scene on page 30? (We refuse to even consider the possibility that Doug goofed...)

Dear Editor,

I thoroughly enjoyed MOON KNIGHT #12, as I have enjoyed the previous 11 issues. I was delighted to see a super-villain, and am anxiously anticipating next issue's bout with the Jester. The Jester has been my favorite Marvel antagonist since DAREDEVIL #81, and I feel that he will fit in ideally with the eerie, nocturnal mood employed in MOON KNIGHT. Other malevolent malefactors I feel would do well in this magazine include Bullseye, the Green Goblin and the Jackal (perhaps resurrected in the form of a clone.)

There was only one discrepancy that I noticed in MOON KNIGHT #12. Throughout the comic, Marlene is called by the surname "Alraune," yet in MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #28 and #29, her last name is "Fontaine." Which is correct?

Broughton Spence
Box 139
Owings, MD 20736

Neither. Actually, her name is Mirabelle Czmowski-Spurch and... Now, we're kidding. "Alraune" is correct, "Fontaine" was another slight goof. It won't happen again, promise.

Dear Denny,

Usually the number 13 is considered unlucky — usually. As always, MOON KNIGHT is the exception. MK #13 was a very special treat, special because it featured a team-up of between Marvel's two swashbuckling sensations. Seeing Moon Knight and Daredevil together was a dream come true. The two heroes are perfectly suited to each other. I also enjoyed their brief encounter in this year's MARVEL TEAM-UP ANNUAL.

I met the manical Jester for the first time in "Cream of the Jest" and I hope it's not our last meeting. Jonathan Powers is as mad as they come, practically living proof of the saying, "There's a broken heart for every light on Broadway." Except in Powers's case it should read, "There's a twisted mind for every light on Broadway."

Figure 2: Final page of *Moon Knight* #16 (Marvel Comics, 1982)

I use “Arab” primarily as a shorthand for Arabic-speaking people and settings as they are represented in *Moon Knight*, including Egypt and Sudan. When Israel is included, I use “Middle East” and “Middle Eastern” instead. I use the terms “Orient” and “Oriental” only in quotation marks and only in Edward Said’s analytic sense, as developed in *Orientalism* (1978) to refer to categories produced by Western representational practices rather than to neutral geographic designations. In this dissertation, “Orientalism” refers to this Western discourse that constructs, stereotypes, and often patronizes the “Orient,” especially Arab and Middle Eastern cultures. Finally, I use “Eastern” as a deliberately broad shorthand for East and Southeast Asian settings.

Introduction

Admittedly, if asked to name three or four popular Marvel characters, Moon Knight would probably not come to mind, despite the much-publicized release of the Disney+ miniseries in 2022. Next to Spider-Man and the Hulk, both introduced in 1962 and boasting thousands of appearances, Moon Knight pales in comparison. Yet he celebrated his fiftieth anniversary in 2025 after several hundred appearances, suggesting sustained popularity, since his debut in 1975. Recently, Comic Book Resources (CBR), an online comic-book media outlet, published poll results that, while hardly academic,[1] serve as a useful barometer of fan reception and suggest continued interest among Marvel readers. Across four polls conducted between 2011 and 2023, Moon Knight ranked 37th, 24th, 31st, and 27th among Marvel superheroes, at times outranking seemingly more mediatized characters (Figs. 3-5), such as Reed Richards, Sue Storm, and Johnny Storm of the Fantastic Four,[2] Venom,[3] and even Miles Morales[4] who has headlined two award-winning, box-office hit animated films.



Figure 3: Cover of *Fantastic Four* #3 (Marvel Comics, 1961)



Figure 4: Cover of *The Amazing Spider-Man* #316 featuring Venom (Marvel Comics, 1989)



Figure 5: Poster of *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* featuring M. Morales (Sony Picture, 2023)

[1] For my compilation of the CBR polls (2011-2023), see Appendix A. CBR regularly polls comic book readers about their "favorite" character.

[2] The Fantastic Four is the first superhero team created by writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby, debuting in 1961, preceding the X-Men or the Avengers, both introduced in 1963. The team comprises Reed Richards (Mister Fantastic, whose body can stretch at will), Sue Storm (Invisible Woman, who can turn invisible and project force shields), Johnny Storm (Human Torch, who can ignite his body and fly), and Ben Grimm (The Thing, who possesses super-strength and a rock-like body that render him nearly indestructible. The team has been reimagined in multiple screen adaptations, most recently in *The Fantastic Four: First Steps* (Matt Shakman, 2025), with Pedro Pascal cast as Reed Richards.

[3] Among Spider-Man's most recognizable antagonists, Venom is an extraterrestrial symbiote hosted by Eddie Brock. When Brock allows Venom to manifest, he appears as a large, muscular black creature with a long tongue and sharp teeth. Created by David Michelinie and Todd MacFarlane in 1986, he has since become a durable fixture of popular culture and is portrayed by Tom Hardy in a Sony's film trilogy (2018-2024).

[4] Miles Morales's creation marked a landmark in comic book history in 2011 as the first Spider-Man iteration with African-American and Puerto-Rican heritage. The character's reach has expanded well beyond comics, particularly through the animated features *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (Bob Persichetti, 2018) and *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* (Joaquim Dos Santos, 2023), both widely recognized for their critical success.

When Moon Knight first appeared in 1975, Marvel Comics was already a publishing behemoth. Founded by Martin Goodman in 1939 as Timely Comics, the company rebranded as Atlas Comics in 1951, and became Marvel Comics in 1961, during the Silver Age (Fig. 6) of comic books,[5] a period that revived interest in superhero storytelling.[6] By the early 1970s, Marvel had developed an extensive character catalogue, and *The Amazing Spider-Man* had surpassed DC Comics' *Superman* as the industry's top-selling title.[7] However, the superhero archetype was shifting as the 1960s counterculture, with its "youthful optimism and openness,"[8] waned. The 1970s brought a widely perceived crime wave[9] and political crises—particularly the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal—alongside the emergence of the antihero in comics: a figure shaped by insecurity, disillusionment, mistrust, and anxiety. The antihero likewise dominated 1970s cinema, where the urban vigilante offered a pointed expression of American unease. For example, films such as *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974) and *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976) depict ordinary citizens dispensing extralegal justice in crime-ridden cities. Moon Knight is a clear product of that moment, and the character may also reflect a concurrent geopolitical reorientation.



Figure 6: Comic Book Ages (Sébastien Jacotin, 2025)

[5] The comic book age classification is "a legacy of the fan culture that nurtured comic book scholarship while the academy remained largely uninterested in mass culture," Benjamin Woo, "An Age-Old Problem: Problematics of Comic-Book Historiography," *International Journal of Comic Art* 10, no. 1 (2008): 269.
[6] The Comics Code's restrictions on crime and horror comics helped enable the revival of the superhero genre.
[7] https://www.comichron.com/titlespotlights/amazingspiderman.html.
[8] Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (Oxford University Press, 2006), back cover.
[9] "National Crime Survey data […] indicates that violent crime increased during the 1970's," https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/violent-crime-trends-0.

Unlike contemporaneous antiheroes such as Daredevil[10] and the Punisher[11] (Fig. 7), Marc Spector, alias Moon Knight, is distinguished by a singular relationship to Egypt, the Middle East and, more broadly, what Edward Said terms the Orient, "a phrase used to designate not only a vast portion of the earth but a people, a landscape, even a spirit which we have feared and yet found dangerously attractive."[12] Spector's allegiance to Khonshu, the ancient Egyptian moon god, substantively anchors this connection. In this sense, he is, structurally, an international character mediated through Middle Eastern settings, mythologies, and cultural signifiers. The Egyptian mythology elements in Moon Knight's early narratives also invite comparison with shifting relations between Egypt, Israel, and the USA in the wake of the 1979 Camp David Accords. Under Egyptian Presidents Anwar Sadat and, after 1981, under Hosni Mubarak, Egypt shifted decisively into the American orbit and normalized its relations with Israel, which the USA had supported as a key regional ally since 1948. Cognizant of the Middle Eastern context—having done "research [on] Judaism and stuff about the Mideast and Mossad"[13]—*Moon Knight*'s author Doug Moench was aware that his 1980s comic book "Orient" appeared less politically "antagonistic" than in earlier decades, when Egypt's relations with the USA were more strained. In other words, Egypt could be reused as a narrative backdrop with less risk of being framed as an explicit geopolitical adversary, and circulate as comparatively "safe" popular-culture material.

This "Orient," in *Moon Knight*, is also much more than a matter of geography or motifs: it is a matter of identity. In early superhero comics, minority affiliations were often alluded to rather than stated as explicit identity markers. For example, Superman, created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, is frequently discussed in this light, given the creators' Jewish backgrounds and the character's long-standing association with immigrant-coded origin narratives. More recent comics, meanwhile, have made religious identity explicit, as in *Ms. Marvel*'s Kamala Khan (Fig. 8), a Pakistani-American Muslim teenager co-created by Sana Amanat, the U.S.-

[10] Created in 1964 by Stan Lee and Bill Everett, Daredevil became especially influential during Frank Miller's early-1980s run, which introduced a darker, neo-noir tone and martial-arts influences. Blinded as a child by radioactive chemicals that heightened his other senses, Matt Murdock has been adapted onscreen in *Daredevil* (Mark Steven Johnson, 2003), starring Ben Affleck, and in an ongoing Netflix/Marvel Television series *Daredevil*, starring Charlie Cox.

[11] Frank Castle/the Punisher was created in 1974 by Gerry Conway, John Romita Sr., and Ross Andru. A street-level vigilante shaped by the murder of his family, Castle wages a violent campaign against organized crime and often appears in narratives adjacent to those of Daredevil and Moon Knight. Screen adaptations include eponymous films starring Dolph Lundgren (Mark Goldblatt, 1989), Thomas Jane (Jonathan Hensleigh, 2004), and the Netflix/Marvel Television portrayal by Jon Bernthal.

[12] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon books, 1978), front flap of dust jacket.

[13] Brian Cronin, "Comic Book Legends Revealed #553," *CBR*, December 11, 2015, https://www.cbr.com/comic-book-legends-revealed-553/.

born daughter of Pakistani immigrants. Positioned between a New York-based vigilante, the son of a Jewish rabbi, and an avatar of an Egyptian god, the ostensibly "American" Moon Knight is rooted in Middle Eastern affiliations in ways that few superheroes are. This composite identity renders him a particularly ambivalent superhero and a compelling object of analysis.



Figure 7: Cover of *Daredevil* #183 featuring The Punisher (Marvel Comics, 1982)

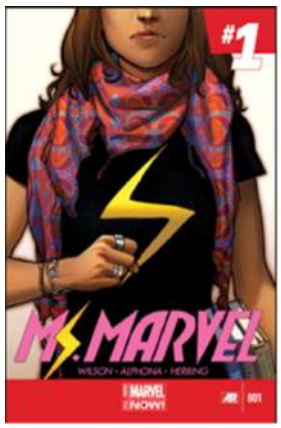


Figure 8: Cover of Ms. Marvel #1 featuring Kamal Khan (Marvel Comics, 2014)



Figure 9: Cover of *Marvel Premiere* #7 (featuring Wong (in green) and Doctor Strange (far right) (Marvel Comics, 1973)



Figure 10: Cover of Shazam #25 featuring the Egyptian goddess Isis (DC, 1976)

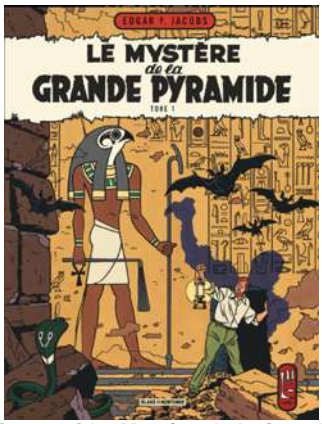


Figure 11: Cover of *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide* (Éditions du Lombard, 1950)

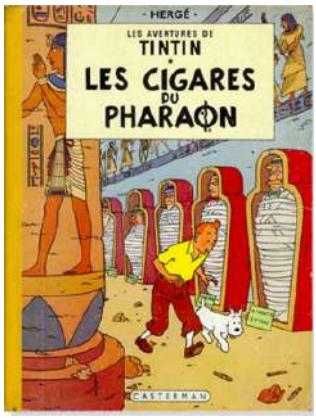


Figure 12: *Les Cigares du Pharaon* - colorized version (Casterman, 1955)

Alongside other superheroes mobilizing "Oriental" motifs like Doctor Strange and his fellow sorcerer Wong (Fig. 9),[14] Moon Knight is also the product of a long-standing passion: Egyptomania*.[15] Since Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, and especially after the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in the early 1920s, Egyptomania has captivated American imaginations across Western arts and entertainment. Cinema helped popularize this fascination (notably with *The Mummy* [1932] directed by Karl Freund and starring Boris Karloff), and comics proved particularly receptive given their graphic and narrative plasticity. Superhero comics abound with characters who acquired powers from Egyptian deities, in Arab countries, or through "Oriental" artefacts. Shazam (Fig. 10), who first appeared in 1940,[16] is a relevant example, since his origins combine these elements. Across the Atlantic, the same fascination captured *bande dessinée* authors such as Hergé with *Les Cigares du Pharaon* (1934) and Edgar P. Jacobs with *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide* (1950): both drew on Egyptian iconography (Fig. 11) and on popular tropes and motifs such as the mummy (Fig. 12). Although the intensity and forms of Egyptomania have shifted over time, Egyptian motifs remain recurrent in popular culture and have often been marketed as value-adding elements within entertainment franchises, contributing to their commercial appeal. Doctor Strange, for example, gained prominence in the mid-1960s counterculture context, when audiences drawn to psychedelic and occult aesthetics turned to the "Master of Mystic Arts," in part for his "relationship to Egyptian mythology."[17] Letter columns in Marvel publications from the 1970s onward likewise suggest an appetite for further use of the "Egyptian angle,"[18] with some readers explicitly encouraging Marvel to develop this material more extensively.[19]

Moon Knight's cultural footprint extends beyond the printed page and its dozen ongoing series. The character boasts numerous appearances across other Marvel titles, video games, and

[14] Doctor Strange first appeared in 1963 and was created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. A neurosurgeon turned sorcerer after a career-ending accident, Stephen Strange anchors Marvel's mystic corner, with narratives shaped by occultism, alternate dimensions, and Westernized "Eastern" spiritual motifs. A key figure in these stories is Wong, Strange's long-time Asian ally and assistant, who is variously portrayed as servant, companion, disciple, or fellow sorcerer depending on the iteration. In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Doctor Strange is portrayed by Benedict Cumberbatch and Wong by Benedict Wong.

[15] All words followed by an asterisk (*) are explained further in the glossary p. 141-142.

[16] Shazam (originally Captain Marvel) was created by C. C. Beck and Bill Parker. Billy Batson transforms by speaking "Shazam," drawing powers from a composite of mythic figures (including an Egyptian deity), and the character was adapted for the DC Extended Universe in *Shazam!* (David F. Sandberg, 2019), starring Zachary Levi.

[17] Mike Benton, *Superhero Comics of the Silver Age: The Illustrated History* (Taylor Publishing Company, 1991), 63.

[18] *Moon Knight* (vol. 8) #11 (Marvel Comics, February 2017).

[19] Some letter columns asked for more Egyptian magic in *Supernatural Thrillers* #5-15 (Marvel Comics, 1973-1975).

a live-action miniseries. Like many characters from the Marvel galaxy, he circulates through toys, action figures, trading cards and an extensive range of merchandising. He also appears in global contexts, including the Moon Knight pub in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Fig. 13); the "Gods and Superheroes" exhibition at the Egyptian museum in Turin, Italy (Fig. 15); or the Google reviews of the Khonsu temple in Luxor, Egypt (Fig. 14)[20] that make overt references to the antihero. That Moon Knight has become an emblem for nightlife venues is unsurprising given the character's nocturnal aesthetics. More striking, however, is his "artification" through a staged dialogue with Egyptian art pieces in the "Divinità e Super Eroi" guided tour at the Museo Egizio in Turin, which ran from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. The initiative aimed both to promote the *Moon Knight* miniseries,[21] starring Oscar Isaac and Ethan Hawke, which premiered on 30 March 2022 on the Disney+ streaming platform, and to broaden the museum's audience. To that end, the teaser posted by the museum on YouTube clearly mobilizes the codes and conventions of the horror genre (chiaroscuro lighting, gloomy atmosphere) while showcasing its collection of Egyptian art, which is a combination that echoes the aesthetic palette of the *Moon Knight* miniseries. In 2022, Moon Knight also circulated widely on social media through a fan-made meme featuring a feud with Marvel's Dracula (Fig. 16), illustrating how the character's traditionally serious tone can be reworked through participatory online culture.

A comprehensive analysis of every iteration of this multi-authored character would exceed the scope of a Master's dissertation. This project therefore focuses primarily on *Moon Knight* issues written by Doug Moench, who co-created the character in 1975, established many of the series' foundational features, and shaped subsequent development of the character. Of course, there were other founding fathers: Don Perlin served as co-creator and primary artist in 1975, and Bill Sienkiewicz's distinctive style defined the series' visual identity from 1979 to 1983. Yet, if one were to single out a primary authorial influence, Moench remains the key architect of Moon Knight's early identity. Later iterations do not consistently align with his own conception of the character. CBR, for example, claims that "Moon Knight's characterization changes drastically" and that Moench's "iconic version of the character has never been replicated since."[22] Moench himself expresses a comparable sense of dispossession when

[20] For more reviews, see Appendix B.
[21] *Moon Knight* is a six-episode television miniseries created by Jeremy Slater, and directed by a team led by Mohamed Diab.
[22] Jordan Iacobucci, "10 Best Moon Knight Starting Points For First-Time Marvel Fans," *CBR*, November 21, 2025, https://www.cbr.com/moon-knight-comics-starting-points-for-first-time-marvel-fans/.

reflecting on later continuations authored by "people who seemed cold and very possibly unworthy of trust."[23]



Figure 13: The Moon Knight Pub (https://www.instagram.com/moon_knight_eateryandpub/, posted 24/05/2023)

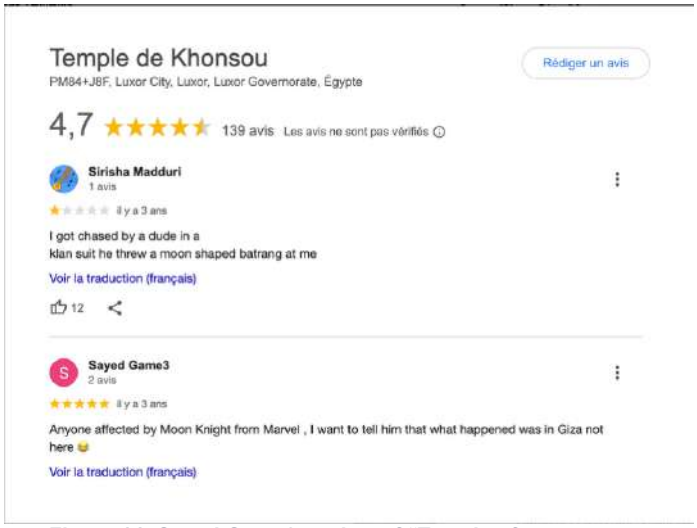


Figure 14: Sayed Game3, review of "Temple of Khonsu" (Luxor City, Egypt), Google Maps, posted 10/09/2025



Figure 15: Screenshot from the Divinità e super eroi promotional video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhAra_xq6Dw)



Figure 16: Moon Knight meme (Mark Bright, Josef Rubinstein, Ken Feduniewicz)

[23] Bob Greenberger, "Writer: Doug Moench," *Comics Interview #11*, 1984, 16–17.

This dissertation also brackets Spector's multiple personae (Fig. 17), introduced by Moench in 1976 through the addition of cab driver Jake Lockley and millionaire Steven Grant. In later runs*, such as Jeff Lemire's (2016-2018), these personae are reframed as dissociative identity disorder (DID*) and made central to the narrative. This development follows Warren Ellis's expansion of the set of identities in *Moon Knight* (vol. 7, 2014) by introducing Mr. Knight, a police-aligned detective figure who recurs in subsequent iterations, including the 2022 Disney+ miniseries. Moench, in contrast, maintained that the alter egos functioned primarily as deliberate disguises that facilitated information gathering in Spector's vigilante activities.[24] While the comics occasionally suggest greater psychological ambiguity than Moench acknowledged, his early stories rarely treat these identities as internally conflicting or as a primary driver of plot. More to the point, these personae are largely extraneous to Moench's construction of *Moon Knight*'s "Orient," whereas Khonshu and the series' Egyptian figures are directly implicated.



Figure 17: Montage of *Moon Knight* panels showing, in anticlockwise order from the top left, Marc Spector, Steven Grant, Jake Lockley, Moon Knight, and Mr. Knight (Marvel Comics, 2014, 2017)

[24] Doug Moench, "Podbean, Episode 466: A Conversation with Doug Moench," March 21, 2017, Podbean, https://comicshenanigans.podbean.com/e/episode-466-a-conversation-with-doug-moench/.

Moench returned to Moon Knight for two additional runs*, *Moon Knight* (vol. 3, *The Resurrection War*) in 1998, and *Moon Knight* (vol. 4, *High Strangers*) in 1999, though he "wasn't thrilled"[25] that his creativity had been constrained by narrative alterations (such as the death of the titular hero) introduced in the interim by other authors.[26] These late miniseries diverge markedly in genre emphasis: the first revisits and further develops Egyptian mysticism, and the second deals with extraterrestrial motifs. The extraterrestrial trope is seldom taken up by further writers. Egyptian mysticism, in contrast, remains central in *Moon Knight* narratives and represents a significant part of Moench's legacy. His *Moon Knight* is dramatic and superheroic at times, James Bond-like or noirish at others. But the canonical inheritance he leaves is leavened with Egyptian mythology. Moench's Egypt, however, is not neutral: it is frequently fantasized and exoticized and, as such, aligns clearly with Edward Said's Orientalism*—a Eurocentric* discourse that constructs and manages an imagined "Orient." Moench's "Orient" is "'presentational' and 'reconstructive,' […] its places are empty or lifeless," and thus have "to be made to speak, then, finally, they [can] be dislodged from their context."[27] Just as the composer Giuseppe Verdi reframed ancient Egypt for the operatic stage in *Aida* (1871), Moench offers his own "translation" of ancient Egypt. His later returns in 1998 and 1999 do little to displace these representational and Eurocentric habits. Although a self-proclaimed "hippie"[28]—a countercultural identity often associated with anti-racism positions—Moench remains a man of his time[29] and as such, his Orientalism and Eurocentrism abound in his work. Yet it is crucial to point out that they are, as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam stress, "in no way equatable" to racism, for the simple reason that there is no pattern of "stigmatizing of difference in order to justify unfair advantage or the abuse of power."[30] Rather, when Moon Knight confronts "Oriental" antagonists, his advantage typically derives from narrative devices such as his allegiance to an Egyptian god, not from an explicit assertion of innate Western superiority over racialized physical and mental traits.

Alternatively, several 2010s iterations of *Moon Knight*, especially Jeff Lemire's, move toward a more culturally specific engagement with ancient Egyptian material, albeit unevenly, and grant Egyptian entities greater narrative agency*, that is, the capacity to initiate actions and

[25] Chris Arrant and Jess Harrold, *Big Shots Spotlight* (Marvel Comics, 2011), 8–10.
[26] Moench refers to narrative alterations introduced in *Marc Spector: Moon Knight* (Marvel Comics, 1989-1994).
[27] Edward Wadie Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage, 1994), 141.
[28] Moench, "Podbean, Episode 466: A Conversation with Doug Moench," *op. cit*.
[29] Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes Tenth Anniversary Book* (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1995), 202.
[30] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism Multiculturalism and the Media* (1994; Second Edition, Routledge, 2014), 22.

shape the course of events. Yet contemporary Arabs still do not receive comparable agency. Even so, this development also parallels a broader shift in Anglophone comics toward representing historical and contemporary Middle Eastern subjects as speaking agents rather than background figures. Joe Sacco's journalistic graphic narrative *Palestine* (1993-1995), for example, foregrounds Palestinian accounts (Fig. 18) and counteracts earlier modes of othering by presenting the hardship of everyday life in Gaza in the 1990s. In doing so, it complicates Gayatri Spivak's well-known claim that "the subaltern cannot speak, [31] namely that marginalized colonial subjects are structurally excluded from dominant systems of representation. Although *Palestine* is authored by a Maltese-American outsider, it nonetheless centers Palestinian voices and frames them as fully-narrating subjects.

Likewise, the *Moon Knight* Disney+ miniseries (2022) aims to further represent Egypt and Egyptians even more attentively as part of the "Reimagine Tomorrow" initiative, a Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI*) strategy launched by the Walt Disney Company in 2021 aiming to amplify underrepresented voices in Disney productions. The series not only foregrounds Egyptian creative participation in key roles, but also offers a more grounded rendering of Egyptian settings, even though production constraints prevented on-location shooting. The series' director Mohammed Diab has described the project as an opportunity "to present Egypt's ancient heritage and modern culture in a fresh and authentic way."[32] Against this backdrop, this dissertation examines that representational shift: what versions of the Middle East *Moon Knight* constructs, how those versions are narrated visually and textually, and what they suggest about the character's voice in the late twentieth century and in the 2022 adaptation.

Situated at the intersection of postcolonial and cultural studies, this dissertation uses Edward Said's Orientalism* and Shohat and Stam's concept of polycentrism*—a framework where "the world has many dynamic cultural locations, many possible vantage points"[33]—to illuminate the various *Moon Knight* iterations. While cinema and literature have been extensively studied through the lens of the Western gaze, comics have often been treated as a "low" cultural form and marginalized within academic hierarchies. Jean-Paul Gabilliet, for instance, argues that comics have mostly been regarded as a "media subalterne,"[34] historically placed at the bottom of U.S. cultural hierarchies. In 2016, Dominic Davies similarly frames

[31] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice," *Wedge 7/8*, 1985, 129.
[32] *Moon Knight Production Brief*, Brief (Disney Media and Entertainment Distribution, 2022), 4.
[33] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 48.
[34] Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Des Comics et Des Hommes : Histoire Culturelle Des Comic Books Aux États-Unis* (Éditions du Temps, 2006), 9.



Figure 18: Panels from *Palestine* #1 depicting an elderly Palestinian recounting his displacement in 1948 and his later return with his family to his destroyed village (Fantagraphics, 1993)

comics as a "low cultural form" long perceived as morally and aesthetically inferior to "high" culture and "not worthy of critical attention."[35] In France, although Vincent Marie's 2010 dissertation ("Les mystères de l'Égypte ancienne dans la bande dessinée," Université Paul Valéry) addresses Egyptian themes in Franco-Belgian bandes dessinées, U.S. comics remain comparatively overlooked.[36] Yet comics can also function as a medium of critical imagination: Edward Said remarks in his preface to Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1993) that comics helped him "think and imagine and see differently."[37] Incidentally, *Palestine*, along with Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986), which recounts the experiences of a Polish Jewish Holocaust survivor, helped sequential art begin to gain academic legitimacy. Still, scholarship has addressed some Marvel representations of the Middle East since Jack G. Shaheen claimed, in 1994, that "academics, critics and image-makers have […] not been critical of the pervasive portraits"[38] of Arab antagonists in comics. For example, he discusses *Moon Knight* briefly within broader analyses of Arab stereotyping in popular culture[39] but such treatments are limited in corpus and rarely focus on Moench's foundational period.

More broadly, the Marvel characters most consistently associated with the "Orient" in scholarship tend to be linked to the Far East, especially China and Japan, regions that occupy a more marginal position within Said's framework, which focuses primarily on Western constructions of the Middle East. This emphasis helps explain why critics such as Douglas Wolk[40] have focused on figures such as Iron Fist[41] and Shang-Chi[42] (Fig. 19), both of whom Moench wrote at various points, through the lens of "Yellow Peril" stereotypes, a term that gained common currency in the late 19th century "to denote the pernicious influence of East Asian immigrants and imports (for example, absinthe and opium) in the West."[43] Since the

[35] Andrew Ffrench, "Can Comics Be 'Academic' Asks Oxford University Network," *Oxford Mail*, July 14, 2016, https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/14618938.can-comics-academic-asks-oxford-university-network/.
[36] Vincent Marie, "Les mystères de l'Egypte ancienne dans la bande dessinée: essai d'anthropologie iconographique" (Thèse de doctorat, Université Paul Valéry, 2010).
[37] Joe Sacco and Edward Said, *Palestine* (Fantagraphics Books, 2011), 2.
[38] Jack G. Shaheen, "Arab Images in American Comic Books," *Journal of Popular Culture* 28, no. 1 (1994): 132.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] Douglas Wolk, *All of the Marvels: An Amazing Voyage into Marvel's Universe and 27,000 Superhero Comics* (Profile Books, 2021), 118–30.
[41] Danny Rand, a.k.a Iron Fist, gains his power through training in the fictional city of K'un-Lun, combining superhero conventions with martial-arts tropes and a mythicized "Asian" spiritual geography. Created in 1974 by Roy Thomas and Gil Kane, he was adapted by Netflix in 2017, starring Finn Jones.
[42] Shang-Chi first appeared in 1973 and was created by Steve Englehart and Jim Starlin. Emerging from Marvel's 1970s martial-arts cycle, he is defined by kung fu expertise and stylized "Asian" signifiers. He was adapted in the MCU in *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (Destin Daniel Cretton, 2021), with Simu Liu in the title role.
[43] Kate Hext, "Minnelli's Yellows: Illusion, Delusion, and Impressionism on Film," *Wide Screen* 3, no. 1 (2011): 7.

launch of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) with *Iron Man* (2008), scholarly interest has also increasingly turned to the treatment of Eastern and Middle Eastern characters in Marvel film and television. Doctor Strange's ally Wong and Iron Man's adversary the Mandarin (Fig. 20),[44] for example, have both been discussed through the lens of Orientalism*. *Iron Man* (2008) itself remains marked by Orientalist stereotypes, particularly in the sequence depicting Tony Stark's first transformation into Iron Man. Whereas the comics originally situate this origin in Vietnam, where Asian characters are often rendered through overt stereotype, the film relocates it to an Afghanistan populated largely by Taliban-like Arab terrorists. Dina AlAwadhi accordingly underscores the difficulty Marvel adaptations have in shedding the deep-rooted Occidental gaze of Silver Age comics, despite the more progressive aspirations associated with Disney-owned Marvel.[45] What remains comparatively underexamined, however, is how Orientalism structures *Moon Knight*, and how those structures shift across later iterations leading up to the 2022 Disney+ adaptation.

This dissertation proceeds in three stages. First, it explores *Moon Knight*'s horror-genre origins in the mid-1970s and its transition toward genre hybridity, a shift that ultimately enables the series to incorporate Egyptian and "mummy story" motifs with particular flexibility. Second, it argues that these motifs function not only as aesthetic backdrop but as a mechanism through which a Western narrative voice overlays and manages "Oriental" cultural material, and as a legibly Orientalist* stance that shapes geography, art, language, and representations of people. Rather than standing apart from the comic-book ethos of the early 1980s, Moench, as Said puts it, "not only creates but also maintains […] a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different […] world."[46] Third, it analyses later Moench-influenced *Moon Knight* iterations that attempt to grant greater agency* to Egyptian characters and settings, and at times appear to reverse the "Oriental" gaze through Khonshu, who becomes the story's principal voice. This movement culminates in the Disney+ miniseries (2022), whose representational strategies strongly resonate with Shohat and Stam's "polycentrism*."

[44] Created in 1963 by Stan Lee, Larry Lieber, Don Heck, and Jack Kirby, Tony Stark/Iron Man is a billionaire weapons manufacturer who becomes a technologically-enhanced superhero after a near-fatal injury. One of his adversaries is the Mandarin, originally introduced as a Chinese mastermind whose characterization drew heavily on Yellow Peril stereotypes. In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Tony Stark and the Mandarin are respectively portrayed by Robert Downey Jr. and Ben Kingsley.
[45] Dina AlAwadhi, "The Evolution of the Occidental Gaze in the Marvel Cinematic Universe," paper presented at Comics in Community, 2021.
[46] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 12.

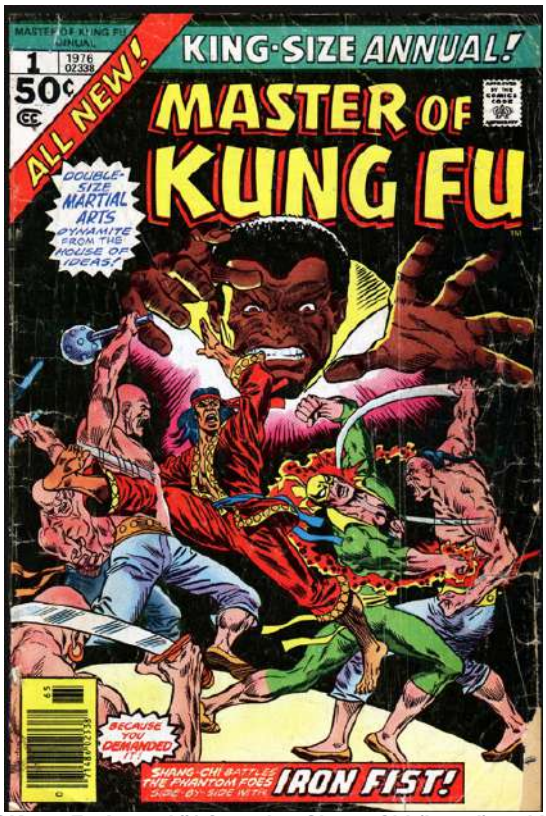


Figure 19: Cover of *Master of Kung-Fu Annual* #1 featuring Shang-Chi (in red) and Iron Fist (in yellow and green) (Marvel Comics, 1976)



Figure 20: Panel from *Tales of Suspense* #50 featuring the Mandarin and Iron Man (Marvel Comics, 1964)

Chapter I – The Mummy with a Thousand Faces

"One could recount for the nth time the story of Roland the Paladin, but the public already knew what happened to the hero. New additions and romantic embellishments were not lacking, but neither would they have impaired the substance of the myth being narrated. A similar situation existed in the plastic arts and the paintings of Gothic cathedrals or of Counter-Reformation and Renaissance churches. What had already happened was often narrated in moving and dramatic ways."[47] – Umberto Eco

[47] Umberto Eco, "The Myth of Superman," trans. Natalie Chilton, *Diacritics* 2, no. 1 (1972): 16.

Although Moon Knight is now strongly associated with ancient Egypt and dissociative identity disorder, the character debuted in a horror story set in a gloomy urban environment, far from the Egyptian Valley of the Kings. Spector's mental health was initially presented as stable, just as his determination to do whatever was necessary to achieve his financial aims was unwavering. As *Moon Knight*'s early success grew, Moench was able to steer the character through multiple genres that would ultimately converge in a mummy-tale mode suffused with ancient Egyptian mysticism, transforming Moon Knight into a protean mummy figure. Therefore, while the name "Moon Knight" may conjure, for some novice readers, an Arthurian warrior or even a lunar hero, Marvel's Moon Knight is neither. While "Marvel" may also evoke altruistic super-powered protagonists, Moon Knight, likewise, resists that expectation. This, consequently, raises a basic question: who, exactly, is Moon Knight?

1) The Horror and Pulp Origins

Moon Knight begins with Marc Spector**,** the son of a Jewish rabbi and a "coldhearted mercenary who [does] just about anything for a price and without emotion."[48] On a mission in Egypt, he works alongside fellow mercenary Raoul Bushman and French helicopter pilot Jean-Paul Duchamp, only to witness Bushman's ruthless murder of archaeologist Peter Alraune. Judging Spector "too weak," Bushman assaults him and abandons him in the desert. Spector is later found by Alraune's daughter and assistant, Marlene, who takes him to the tomb of pharaoh Seti I for shelter. There, at the foot of a statue of Egyptian moon god Khonshu, Spector mysteriously returns to life, to Marlene's astonishment (Fig. 21). He subsequently assumes Khonshu's mantle and becomes "the moon's knight of vengeance," framing his violent crime-fighting as atonement for his mercenary past. This origin story was published in the first *Moon Knight* ongoing title in 1980. It was the first time Moench explicitly linked Khonshu to Spector and embedded Moon Knight's origins in a clearly articulated Egyptian context. Yet Moench had created the character five years before that landmark story. The 1980 origin, *ipso facto*, functions as a retrospective prequel, repositioning Moon Knight's Egyptian affiliation as foundational to earlier-published stories that were, however, written in a markedly different generic register.[49]

[48] *Moon Knight* #18 (Marvel Comics, April 1982).
[49] For a fuller description of the Moon Knight character, see Appendix C.



Figure 21: Panels from *Moon Knight* #1 featuring Moon Knight's origin story (Marvel Comics, 1980)

a. An Ambiguous Horror Figure

The character "Moon Knight" is the brainchild of comic book writer Douglas Moench and artist Don Perlin, who introduced him in *Werewolf by Night* #32 (1975). *Werewolf by Night* (Fig. 22) is a horror title centered on Jack Russell, who is struggling against his own dual nature as a lycanthrope. In this very first adventure, Moon Knight's alter ego, Marc Spector, is a ruthless and money-obsessed mercenary, hired by the Mafia-like "Committee" to capture the Werewolf with the help of longtime friend Jean-Paul "Frenchie" Duchamp. As Moench later explained, because "the werewolf only comes out at night,"[50] he based the character on the moon, whose phases trigger the Werewolf's transformations; hence the name Moon Knight.

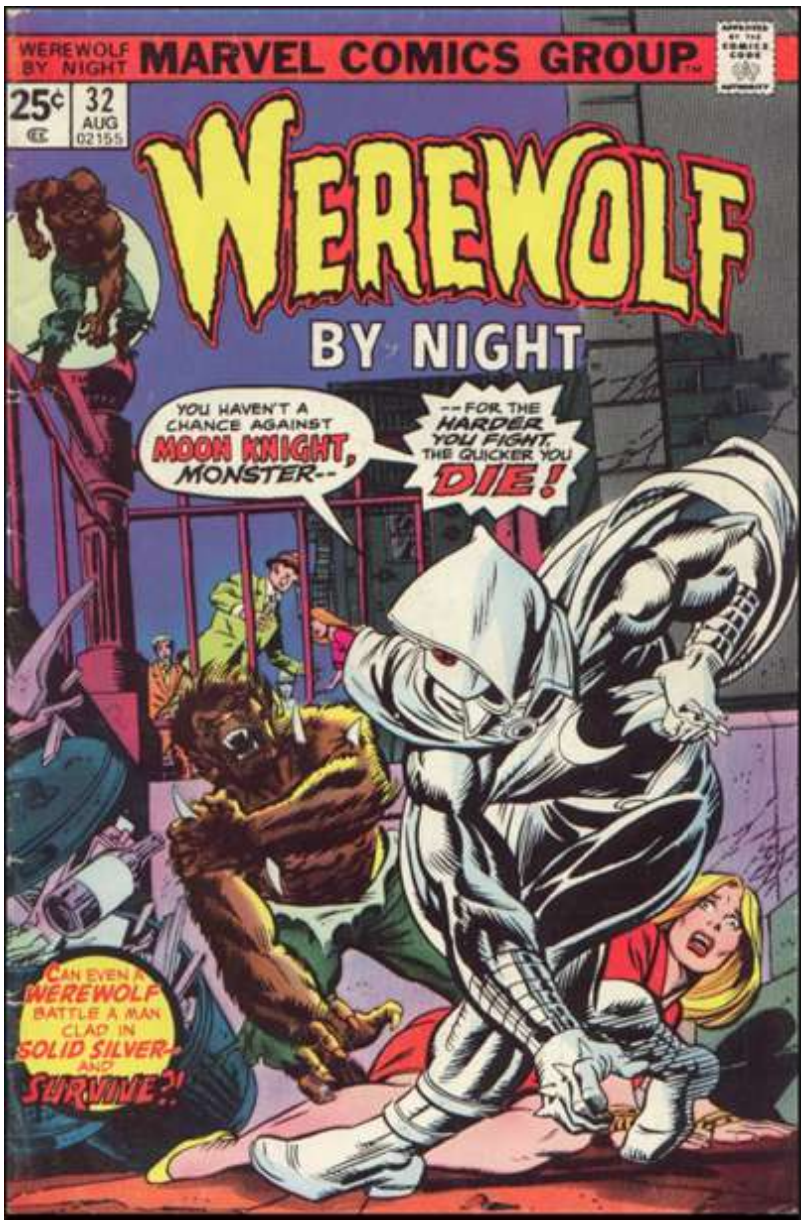


Figure 22: Cover of *Werewolf by Night* #32 featuring the first appearance of Moon Knight (Marvel Comics, 1975)

[50] Doug Moench, "Into the Knight - The Moon Knight Podcast - Retrospective: Doug Moench Interview," June 2019, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4yLD1bSMJw.

The series emerged during the 1970s resurgence of horror comics, a revival shaped in part by publishers' increasing willingness to test the boundaries of the Comics Code Authority (CCA*). The CCA was created in 1954 amid a moral panic following Frederic Wertham's bestseller *Seduction of the Innocent: The Influence of Comic Books on Today's Youth* (1954), which establishes a strong link between comic books—rife with horror, violence, drugs, and obscenity—and juvenile delinquency. Wertham argues that comic books weaken the moral values of America where "about a quarter of the 80 million comic books that readers buy each month [are] known as horror comics."[51] Public anxiety intensified: parents, politicians and religious leaders—concerned about the impact of gruesome and barbaric acts depicted in these widely-distributed books on their children—called for restrictions. Some cities went to such lengths as to organize public burnings of comic books to protest against the danger of horror imagery.[52] These pressures culminated in a U.S. Senate investigation into "the impact upon adolescents" of horror comics, led by the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency. Loosely modelled after the Hays Code[53] in cinema (much stricter as Hollywood films targeted a wider audience), this led to the creation of the CCA, "a self-censoring agency meant to assure parents and politicians that comics would be nothing but clean, wholesome, and respectful fun for children." [54] The effects were substantial: horror comics nearly disappeared. More significantly, partly because this "lurid" genre receded, superheroes regained their central position in the Silver Age with titles like *The Fantastic Four* (1961) and *The Amazing Spider-Man* (1963).[55] To achieve its goal, the Code stated that:

> "If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity […] In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal (sic) punished for his misdeeds […] No comic magazine shall use the words "horror" or "terror" in its title. All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted. All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated. Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly, nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader. Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with

[51] "The Press: Horror on the Newsstands," *Time*, September 27, 1954, https://time.com/archive/6885040/the-press-horror-on-the-newsstands/.
[52] PS Artbooks, "The Comic Book Burnings of the 1940s: A Cultural Firestorm," *PS Artbooks*, December 20, 2024, https://www.psartbooks.com/post/the-comic-book-burnings-of-the-1940s-a-cultural-firestorm.
[53] The Motion Picture Production Code was a set of industry guidelines for the self-censorship of content that was applied to most motion pictures released by major studios in the USA from 1934 to 1968.
[54] Jeffrey A. Brown, *Super Bodies: Comic Book Illustration, Artistic Styles, and Narrative Impact* (University of Texas Press, 2023), 41.
[55] Olivier Caïra, "Cinéma, Comics et Jeux Vidéo : Panorama Des Formes d'autorégulation Au XXe Siècle," *Transatlantica*, 2025, 18.

> walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolfism are prohibited."[56]

Since the Code explicitly prohibited "werewolfism," the Moon Knight-starring *Werewolf by Night* title did not exactly qualify as Code-compliant. How, then, did horror titles return to print? A key turning point came in 1971, when Marvel published *The Amazing Spider-Man* #96-98 without the Code seal after the CCA* objected to clear depiction of drug use. The issues sold strongly and were praised for engaging a public-health concern, demonstrating that Code approval was no longer strictly necessary to avoid backlash. By 1971, the cultural and market context had shifted: comics circulated in a more fragile commercial environment than in the 1950s, and a generation that had grown up with horror comics now formed part of the adult readership. In this context, the CCA was subsequently pressured to relax its standards. Comic book writer Gerry Conway quickly recognized the narrative potentialities opened by this shift, describing horror comics as "a new whole avenue, a whole new set of rules you could break and stick with."[57] This expanded latitude helped enable, for instance, greater moral ambiguity.

Moench acknowledged that Moon Knight was initially conceived as a villain,[58] "a bad guy" [59] to pit against the Werewolf, who is also a villain. Moench was attached to "the antihero concept,"[60] hence the ambivalence of Spector who, although he "started out as a mercenary and did do things just for money, […] he also wanted to atone."[61] Like The Punisher, Moon Knight belongs to this antihero trend that emerged in late-1970s mainstream comics, as publishers increasingly reintroduced the kind of "lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations" the Code had sought to suppress, now its authority was waning,. Kent Worcester defines the antihero as "one who makes his own rules and follows his own conscience, [for whom] a terrible injustice inspires an unending spree of violence."[62] Moon Knight, as seen in Fig. 23, offers a clear example of this pattern: in *Werewolf by Night* #32, he declares he would "rather kill this hairy monster than let those cops cut [him] off from [his] bread," signaling a money-oriented and

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[56] Comics Magazine Association of America, *Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America* (1954), https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Comic_book_code_of_1954.
[57] Jarrod Buttery, "Ready for the Spotlight," *Back Issue #71*, 2014, 6–7.
[58] Moon Knight's name was supposed to be "Moonblood" initially, clearly evoking a horror title motif. Doug Moench, "Comic Geek Speak Episode 57: A Conversation with Doug Moench," 2015, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjYVEbkfvTs&t=4589s.
[59] *Arrant and Harrold, op. cit.*
[60] *Ibid*.
[61] *Ibid*.
[62] Kent Worcester, "The Punisher and the Politics of Retributive Justice," *Law Text Culture* 16, no. 1 (2012): 335.

law-defying antihero who "follows his own conscience" rather than institutional legitimacy. This ambivalence is also legible in the costume design: he wears an immaculate white cloak over a jet-black suit marked by a white crescent moon on the torso; his specter-like mask resembles a shroud; and he carries a cestus "worn by gladiators in the arena,"[63] covered in spikes, their silver "hell on a werewolf."[64]

The antihero persona that appeared in the entertainment industry reflects the cultural disillusionment of the 1970s: the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal undermined public confidence in political authority and moral legitimacy, and vigilante figures increasingly appeared as ruthless, traumatized, and morally ambivalent. At the same time, perceptions of governmental incapacity amid rising crime contributed to the popularity of Hollywood films centered on extralegal urban vigilantism. A paradigmatic example is *Death Wish* (1974), in which Charles Bronson plays Paul Kersey, an architect who becomes a vigilante after his wife is killed and his daughter is raped during a home invasion. In this context, the optimism often associated with the 1960s gave way to cynicism, and superhero narratives foregrounded darker, more ethically compromised protagonists. The antihero template later intensified in the 1980s and early 1990s, and became widespread in popular culture, visible in figures such as Spawn[65] and Batman. Although Batman debuted in 1939, the "dark" iteration now most familiar to audiences crystallized through late-twentieth-century antiheroic reinventions, especially Frank Miller's noirish and gloomy *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), which portrays an aging Bruce Wayne who returns to vigilantism amid political crisis and conflict with Superman. In Fig. 24, Batman makes his own rules: he "[is] the law," criminalizing every citizen who does not adhere to his own system of values. Equally dark and dismal, *Watchmen* (1986) is arguably the archetype of antihero mode. Set in an alternate 1985 in which Nixon remains in office after winning the Vietnam War, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's title follows unprincipled superheroes as they investigate the murder of one their own, the Comedian. A Vietnam flashback (Fig. 25), where he embarked on "a killing spree of violence," underscores the Comedian's moral vacancy: he appears remorseless after killing a Vietnamese woman who carries his child.

[63] *Werewolf By Night* #32 (Marvel Comics, August 1975).
[64] *Ibid*.
[65] Created by Todd McFarlane, Spawn debuted in 1992 in *Spawn* #1 (Image Comics). A murdered assassin resurrected through a demonic pact, Al Simmons is written as a quintessential antihero: violent, morally compromised, and driven by a tenuous sense of justice. The character was adapted onscreen in *Spawn* (Mark Dippé, 1997) and in an HBO animated series (1997–1999).



Figure 23: Panel from *Werewolf by Night* #32 (Marvel Comics, 1975)



Figure 24: Panel from *The Dark Knight Returns* #4 (DC, 1986)

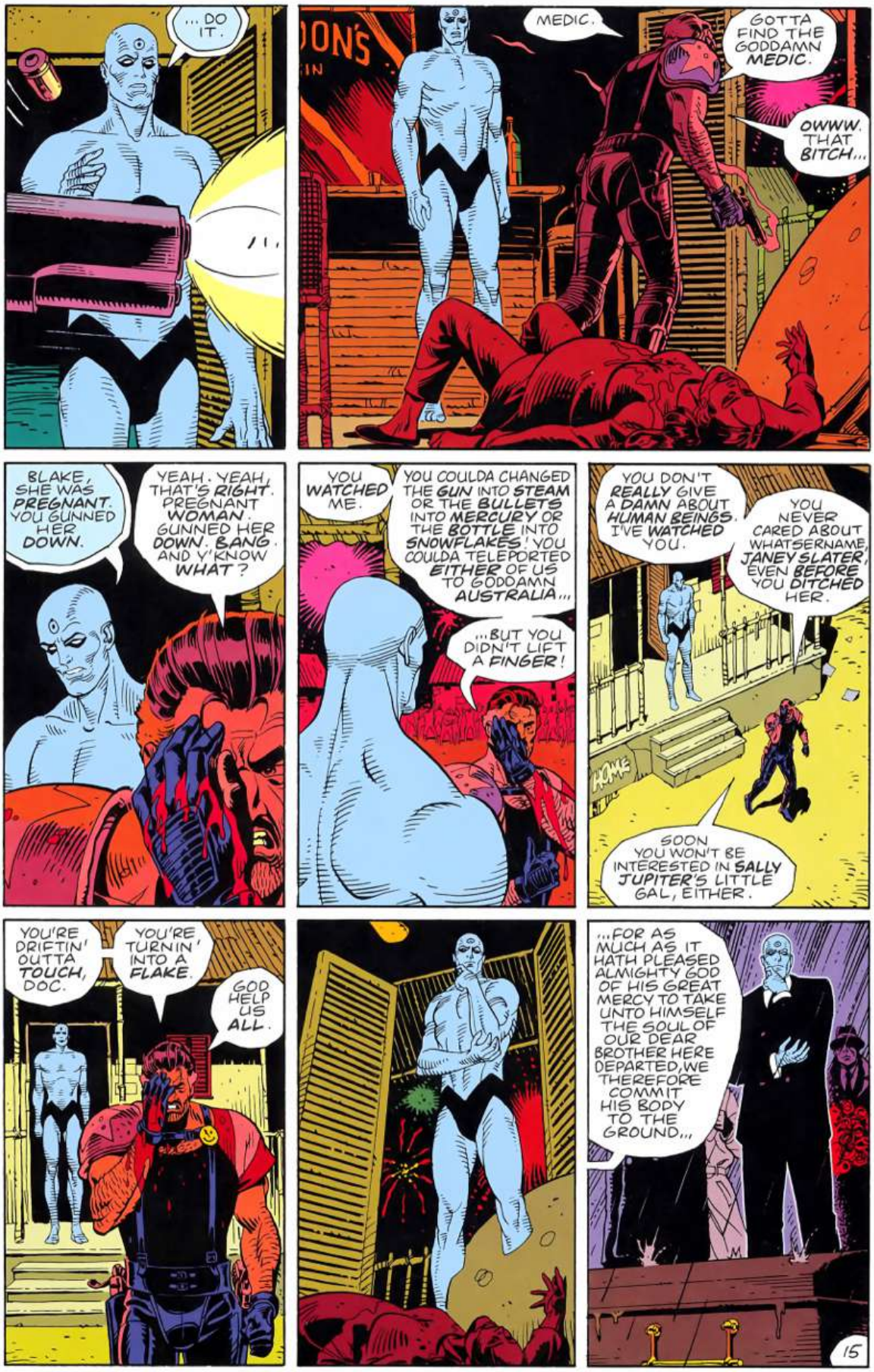


Figure 25: Panels from *Watchmen* #2 (DC, 1986)

Both titles, subsequently, influenced major screen adaptations from the 1990s to the 2010s.[66] As pop-culture scholar Henry Jenkins notes, such later "revisionary" superhero narratives "re-examined their core myths, questioning the virtue and value of their protagonists, blurring the lines between good guys and bad guys, revisiting and recontextualizing past events."[67] In this sense, contemporary superhero cinema's appetite for darker tonalities is difficult to separate from the revisionary turn in comics, consolidated by *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* and prefigured by *Moon Knight* and other early-1980s antiheroes. In short, these narratives challenged "long-standing constructions of violence and sexuality"[68] and foregrounded social anxieties, not least the figure of the anxiety-ridden virile male at a time of rising attention drawn to a "crisis of masculinity,"[69] through darker, horror-adjacent motifs once frowned upon by the CCA*. Notably, both *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen* were published without CCA approval, signaling the Code's effective collapse by the late 1980s.

Moon Knight, however, is not a typical textbook superhero: he has little to do with the traditional Marvel superheroes "getting splashed with chemicals, bitten by a radioactive spider or whatever."[70] *Moon Knight* hardly features major superheroes guest stars[71] and, when such appearances do occur, most of them are written by authors other than Moench. In point of fact, there are no "big baddies either,"[72] as he "concerns himself with us little people,"[73] as a reader points out in letter columns. Few Marvel superheroes wear a costume without superpower, and the effect worked wonders among the fan community who saw the rarity of having "a superhero with no super powers" as "a totally original […] breath of fresh air."[74] Moench repeatedly stressed that he "was trying very hard [for it] not to be like all the other Marvel comics";[75] penciller Sienkiewicz likewise described Moon Knight as "a unique character";[76] and editor Denny O'Neil wanted the title to continue "exploring the limits"[77] of the medium by testing

[66] Such as Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989), Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy (2005-2012) and Zack Snyder's *Watchmen* (2009).
[67] Henry Jenkins, "Just Men in Capes?," *Pop Junctions!*, March 14, 2017, https://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/just_men_in_capes.html.
[68] *Ibid*.
[69] Roger Horrocks, *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies And Realities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).
[70] Arrant and Harrold, *op. cit.*, 8.
[71] Moench includes Daredevil in *Moon Knight* #13 and little-known Brother Voodoo in *Moon Knight* #21 only.
[72] *Moon Knight* #16 (Marvel Comics, February 1982).
[73] *Ibid*.
[74] *Ibid*.
[75] Moench, "Comic Geek Speak Episode 57: A Conversation with Doug Moench," *op. cit*.
[76] Sienkiewicz on Moon Knight's singularity: "We've got a unique character here and just to make him another widget in the Marvel machine would be a shame." Michael Catron, "A New Phase for Moon Knight," *Amazing Heroes #6*, 1981, 33.
[77] *Moon Knight* #26 (Marvel Comics, December 1982).

genre and form: "what kind of adventures can our hero have and still be his own unique self. Can we do fantasy? Science fiction? Humor? […] How many liberties can we take with the traditional comic book format?" he asked in *MK* #26 (1982) in which he discussed the character. Several factors allowed this experimentation with narrative and visual form. First, the new, more cost-effective direct-market format[78] gave Moench additional "panel space," as *Moon Knight* was positioned early within the specialized comic-shop distribution system rather than the traditional newsstand market. Second, the CCA's* decline meant more creative opportunities. Third, as Moench had "the reputation of being one of the more adult-oriented writers doing stories which try to say something beyond the usual slam-bang,"[79] Marvel could target a more mature audience to enlarge its readership and to move beyond child-oriented comics. In *The Hulk!*,[80] *The Comics Journal* described Moon Knight's adventures as "highly moody and suspenseful," "close to that of a police procedural novel—even if the detective does wear a flowing white cape."[81] This proximity to detective and pulp conventions was not incidental. Although *Moon Knight* repeatedly seeks to differentiate himself within the Marvel universe, his narratives draw on recognizable lineages of noir, vigilantism, and detective fiction associated with figures such as Batman and The Shadow.

b. Out of Batman's Shadow

The ambivalence established in Moon Knight's first two appearances was compelling enough to prompt readers to request more in the letter columns of *Werewolf by Night* #36-38. Marvel responded in 1976 with two landmark issues of *Marvel Spotlight*, which introduce Spector's on-and-off girlfriend, Marlene Fontaine,[82] and, more importantly, Moon Knight's multiple identities. From that point onward, the antihero is articulated through three personas: cab driver Jake Lockley, millionaire and art collector Steven Grant, and former mercenary Marc Spector (Fig. 26). Moench explains that this multiplication of identities was part of an effort to reconcile a "totally realistic" approach[83] with the implausibility of a costumed vigilante, inevitably making his character "a little schizoid" in the process.[84] Visually, the penciller uses

[78] Direct sales meant that comics were sold through specialty comic shops, and other outlets serviced by direct-sales distributors, and by subscription. Up until this point, comics were distributed only in newsstand kiosks and grocery stores. For more on the direct market, see p. 40.
[79] Greenberger, *op. cit.,* 18.
[80] Also named *The Hulk! Magazine*, it featured Hulk and Moon Knight stories from 1978 to 1980.
[81] Pierce Askegren, "Moon Knight: A Different Vision," *The Comics Journal #54*, 1980, 37.
[82] Marlene Fontaine is later renamed Marlene Alraune, beginning with *Moon Knight* #1 (1980).
[83] Catron, *op. cit.*, 30.
[84] *Marvel Vision* #16, (Marvel Comics, 1997), 30-31.

a few tricks to make sure that this three-in-one identity is still legible for the readers. Sienkiewicz explained that "there were certain cues that were easy to follow to distinguish the characters: the cabbie's cap and the jacket he wore as Jake Lockley, the tuxedo for Steven Grant."[85] With Marc Spector, he "tried to make him more of a Clint Eastwood type, whereas Steven Grant was a little bit more of a George Hamilton or James Bond."[86]

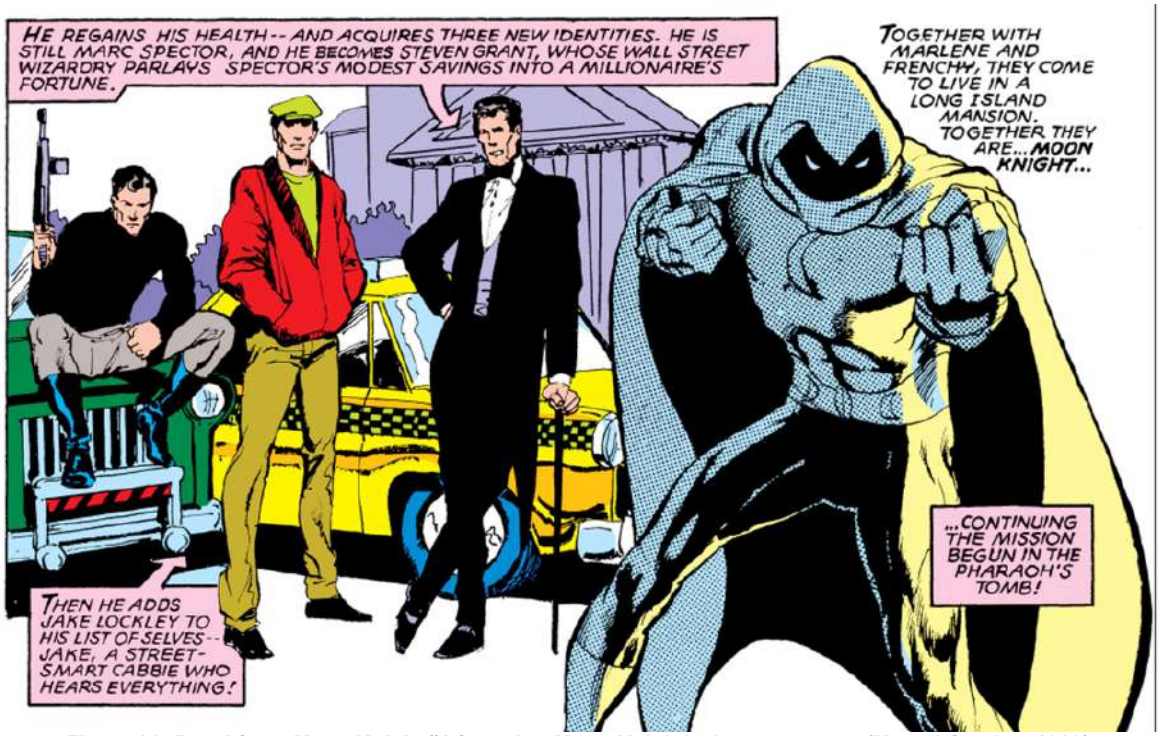


Figure 26: Panel from *Moon Knight* #1 featuring Moon Knight's three personae (Marvel Comics, 1980)



Figure 27: Panel from *Moon Knight* #6 (Marvel comics, 1981)

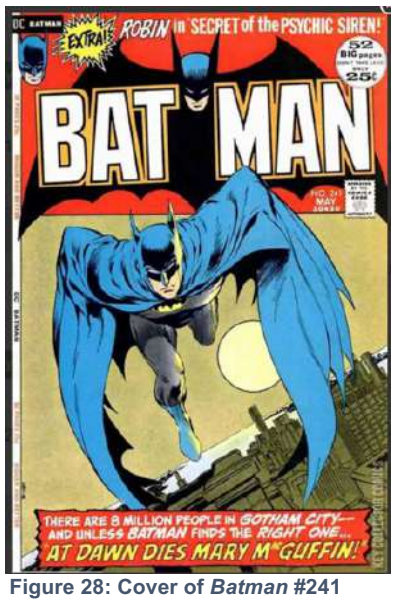


Figure 28: Cover of *Batman* #241 (DC, 1972)



Figure 29: Cover of *The Shadow Magazine* (Street and Smith,1939)

[85] Arrant and Harrold, *op. cit*.
[86] *Ibid*.

At the same time, from the outset in 1975, Moon Knight's "identity" was frequently dismissed as a copy of another world-famous caped crusader. It is, in truth, difficult to accept that co-creators Moench and Perlin did not have Batman in mind when establishing the core premise of a nocturnal street-level vigilante figure within Marvel, particularly in light of the striking visual similarities that link the Dark Knight to Moon Knight (chest symbol, similar cloak, crescent darts, naturalistic anatomy). This graphic template persists and amplifies (noirish and chiaroscuro modelling, dramatic silhouette) through a creative handoff when Bill Sienkiewicz becomes the principal penciller in *The Hulk!* #13 (1979), a transition that leads directly into the *Moon Knight* ongoing solo series (1980).

Beyond iconography, the parallels extend into narrative function. Like Batman, Moon Knight is framed as a detective and as an Olympic-level athlete trained in multiple combat techniques; he also lacks superpowers, although Moench often hints at the moon influence on his abilities. Both figures are, moreover, millionaires, Batman under the public guise of Bruce Wayne, Moon Knight under that of Steven Grant. Visually, Bill Sienkiewicz has never concealed his admiration for long-time Batman artist Neal Adams, whom he "tried to copy,"[87] and whose influence is clearly perceptible in *Moon Knight* (Figs 27-28). More recently, Moench himself expressed uncertainty as to whether Batman shaped his approach in any direct way.[88] Yet, whether consciously acknowledged or not, the series clearly draws on Batman's immense cultural reach, which, by the 1970s, had already transcended the confines of the comic-book medium, as the 1966 eponymous live-action television series (1966) starring Adam West demonstrates. Borrowing from that mythos and riding the coattails of one of the most lucrative superheroes was, to all intents and purposes, a reliable way to secure attention and sell titles.

Simultaneously**,** the Batman comparison can seem absurd, since both Batman and Moon Knight are compared, in *The Comics Journal* (1980),[89] to The Shadow (Fig. 29),[90] the titular hero of the hugely popular pulp magazines of the 1930s (cheap fiction publications printed on wood-pulp paper in the inter-war decades). Those periodicals circulated a repertoire of

[87] Bill Sienkiewicz, "And Then Something Happened. An Interview with Bill Sienkiewicz," January 14, 2008, Sequential Tart, http://www.sequentialtart.com/article.php?id=821.
[88] "I don't know if Batman was in the back of my mind but I don't recall it at all." Moench, "Comic Geek Speak Episode 57: A Conversation with Doug Moench," *op. cit*.
[89] Askegren, *op. cit*.
[90] Created by Walter B. Gibson, *The Shadow* is a 1930s American pulp vigilante who operates through disguise, intimidation, and a private war on urban crime, aided by the quasi-supernatural ability to "cloud men's minds." He helped shape later masked-hero templates and spawned major radio, comics, and film adaptations, notably *The Shadow* (Russel Mulcahy, 1994) starring Alec Baldwin.

costumed and masked crime-fighters (The Spider, Doc Savage, and The Shadow) whose motifs are widely understood to have fed into later superhero constructions, including Batman and, by extension, Moon Knight. In this sense, Moon Knight can read as yet another "Shadow-derived character."[91] More broadly, he also exemplifies what Joseph Campbell theorizes as the recurring grammar of the "Hero with a Thousand Faces" (1949), i.e. a structural resemblance rather than, in itself, evidence of direct influence. Indeed, Moench's character reads like a palimpsest: the latest layer overlaying Batman within a longer multi-authored genealogy that can be traced back to pulp magazines.

In 1980, however, when the first *Moon Knight* ongoing series begins, the character gradually moves away from Batman's influences. This shift, as seen earlier, is first introduced in *MK* #1, which marks a disjuncture with the horror and detective origins of the hero and provides an in-universe rationale for the name "Moon Knight." In this opening issue, readers learn that Marc Spector, left for dead in the tomb of Pharaoh Seti I while on a mission to Egypt, has been resurrected by Khonshu, the vengeful ancient Egyptian god of the moon. Still mainly grounded in realistic backdrops, Moench adds a layer of Egyptian mysticism and Middle Eastern locations largely absent in The Shadow or Batman titles. Through this new narrative inflection, Moon Knight acquires a more distinct identity, both as a character and as a series.

The Moon Knight material in *The Hulk!* (1978-1980), *Marvel Preview* #21 (1980) and *Moon Knight* (1980-1984), is, in truth, as much Bill Sienkiewicz's achievement as Doug Moench's. Although Moench, by his own account a "control freak,"[92] appears to have retained broad control over narrative content (at least until editor-in-chief Jim Shooter tightened editorial oversight in the early 1980s), the title's success depended on the conjunction of Moench's flair for realism and social commentary, and Sienkiewicz's formally innovative art. A reader's letter captures this reception by praising both *MK*# 26's treatment of child abuse and the near-musical interplay of prose cadence and visual rhythm: "[it] was a cogent, tense, and powerful excursion into violence. Doug's staccato (i.e. short, detached) description and Bill's legato (i.e. smooth and connected) illustrating created an aural loom that weaved a jazzy improvisation, which culminated in a dizzying climax."[93] In short, Moench and Sienkiewicz,[94] each in his own way, propelled Moon Knight toward the center of the Marvel galaxy.

[91] Askegren, *op. cit*.
[92] Moench, "Comic Geek Speak Episode 57: A Conversation with Doug Moench," *op. cit*.
[93] *Moon Knight* #30 (Marvel Comics, April 1983).
[94] Sienkiewicz felt that he "climbed as high as he could with *Moon Knight*". He was "trying to express music, jazz, rhythm visually on paper." *Ibid*.

2) A Growing Popularity

How profitable was *Moon Knight* when it first hit the shelves? And where did the character rank within the Marvel's star-studded universe? Sales figures can offer one telltale indication of popularity, but they rarely tell the whole story on their own. Reception, fan mail, specialist magazines, and the broader comics press, also provide a revealing measure of how quickly the character began to matter.

a. Fan and Media Reception

Marvel Spotlight #28-29 (1976) surpassed expectations. "The two-part story garnered impressive mail response and good sales"[95] even though Don Perlin's "static, simplistic art did little to enhance the air of mystery."[96] *The Hulk!* was equally turning heads in Europe and Japan, where Moon Knight was making a splash despite being only a back-up character in a title initially to the glory of the huge green titan.[97] The character became popular enough that readers reportedly "implored" Marvel "to give the Moon Knight his own comic book,"[98] and some even wondered in 1979 why the *Moon Knight* story was "relegated to the back of"[99] *The Hulk!* as it offered "many subplots."[100]

From early on, then, Moon Knight's appeal was framed less in terms of spectacle than of narrative density, atmosphere, and characterization. Characterization and verisimilitude, indeed, seemed to be Moench's forte in the series. As *The Comic Journal* reported in March 1980, these qualities were instrumental in distinguishing *Moon Knight* from more hackneyed Marvel usual "bag of clichés."[101] Even after several months into the ongoing series, Moench's plots were still being lauded as "exciting, unpredictable, and deliciously complex."[102] Similarly, many readers relished Moench's "expertise in characterization"[103] and realism of the book

[95] *Moon Knight* #15 (Marvel Comics, January 1982).
[96] Askegren, *op. cit*.
[97] To quote Marvel editor Ralph Macchio: "A few weeks later, Marvel's gifted Gail Munn, our lovely lady in charge of overseas promotion, informed us that quite a few European comics publishers wanted to reprint MK's adventures in album format, on high quality paper. And then came the final topper, from Marvel's Far East correspondent, Gene Pelc, who said the Japanese were going to do Moon Knight as a regular live action television show. And on and on it went." *Marvel Preview* #21 (Marvel Comics, May 1980).
[98] *The Hulk!* #20 (Marvel Comics, April 1980).
[99] *The Hulk!* #15 (Marvel Comics, June 1979).
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] Askegren, *op. cit*.
[102] Ed Via, "Originality and Transcendency in the Work of Doug Moench," *The Comics Journal #63*, 1981, 112.
[103] *Moon Knight* #6 (Marvel Comics, April 1981).

"because far from being a fantasy character, MK needs that feeling of reality, and MK's abilities must be kept within the realm of human capability."[104]

Bill Sienkiewicz's arrival rapidly amplified favorable fan and media reaction. Many Moon Knight specialists today refer to him as "the defining MK artist"[105] even if, as seen earlier, critics noted that his "art very closely mimics Neal Adams' work."[106] Readers, for their part, although aware of the Neal Adams influence, praised Sienkiewicz's "genius," describing the art as "fabulous," "magnificent," "incredible," and "perfect."[107] Within months, comic book magazines were also waxing enthusiastic about the young artist. Comic book artist Alan Weiss even paired "crazy Bill Sienkiewicz" with *The Dark Knight Returns* author Frank Miller as part of a generation defined by risk and stylistic reinvention.[108]

In that context, calling *Moon Knight* "popular" can feel like an understatement. Contrary to common Marvel editorial practice, editors even had to remove fans' addresses from an "avalanche of rave mail"[109] to save space in the letter columns, prompting the editors to call *Moon Knight* "a smash hit."[110] Still, the obvious question remains: did that popularity translate into sales?

b. Sales and Commercial Performances

After Moon Knight's early appearances in *Marvel Spotlight* #28-20 (1976), the character was elevated quickly from marginal figure to a character worthy of sustained attention, and Moench soon saw his creation circulate beyond his control. The character gained status and visibility through guest appearances alongside flagship heroes (Figs. 30-31): The Hulk[111] in *The Defenders* #47–51 (1977), and Spider-Man in *The Spectacular Spider-Man* #22–23 (1978). The success proved consistent enough that Moench was entrusted with the first *Moon Knight* ongoing series in 1980 (Fig. 32).

[104] *The Hulk!* #15 (Marvel Comics, June 1979).
[105] Scott Weatherly, *Waxing and Waning: Essays on Moon Knight* (Sequart Organization, 2023), 64.
[106] Marylin Berthke, "Derivative but Distinctive," *The Comics Journal #63*, 1981, 121–22.
[107] *The Hulk!* #15 (Marvel Comics, June 1979).
[108] Dwight Jon Zimmerman, "Writer/Artist: Alan Weiss," *Comics Interview #34*, 1986, 25.
[109] *Moon Knight* #15 (Marvel Comics, January 1982).
[110] *Ibid*.
[111] The Hulk is Marvel's scientist-turned-monster antihero: he debuted in *The Incredible Hulk* #1 (1962), created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, with Bruce Banner transformed by gamma bomb exposure. The two most iconic screen iterations are the 1978–82 series (with Lou Ferrigno as the Hulk) and Mark Ruffalo's MCU Hulk, beginning with *The Avengers* (2012) and recurring in later ensemble films.

The 1980s also marked a transition in the way comic books were sold. *Moon Knight*, like the jungle-adventure title *Ka-Zar*[112] and the disco-themed *Dazzler*,[113] became part of Marvel's experimentation with the direct market. This initiative was grounded in a profit-maximization strategy: selling to specialty comic shops on a non-returnable basis, rather than through newsstands and grocery stores, where unsold copies had traditionally been returnable for credit.[114]



Figure 30: Cover of *The Defenders* #49 (Marvel Comics, 1977)



Figure 31: Cover of *Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man* #22 (Marvel Comics, 1978)



Figure 32: Cover of *Moon Knight* #1 (Marvel Comics, 1980



Figure 33: Panel from *Cerebus the Aardvark* #31 showing Moon Roach's Artemis persona (Aardvark-Vanaheim, 1981)

[112] Ka-Zar first appeared in Marvel's Silver Age in *X-Men* #10 (1965), created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, although the name derives from an earlier pulp-jungle character later reworked by Marvel. As Kevin Plunder, Ka-Zar is a jungle adventurer modeled on Tarzan-like archetypes, whose stories center on the Savage Land, a prehistoric wilderness hidden in Antarctica.

[113] Created by Tom DeFalco, John Romita Jr., Louise Simonson, and Roger Stern, Dazzler debuted in *Uncanny X-Men* #130 (1980). A mutant singer-performer whose powers convert sound into light and energy, Alison Blaire occupies a distinctive space at the intersection of superhero fiction and the music industry. She has also been read as an icon of LGBT representation.

[114] This initiative quickly gained ground among publishers and has become the principal distribution model today.

The direct sales results were "very strong"[115] and "this kind of numbers," as Marvel writer Mike Friedric explains, was what Marvel needed "to keep a comic alive and earn the kind of profit that [they] expect out of single titles."[116] As soon as the title was launched, *Moon Knight* sold "fairly well"[117] according to comics-sales blogger R.S. Martin with 156,323 copies between spring 1980 and winter 1980–1981, making it the 17th best-selling comic book in that period, even though *MK* #1[118] was only released in November 1980, well after spring 1980. This timing makes the performance more impressive than the description "fairly well" suggests. In 1981–1982, sales dipped slightly to 87,700 copies, but the title still placed a respectable 32nd among the 50 best-selling comic books.[119] At long last, seasoned writer Moench started amassing a small fortune from his jet-and-silver hero title which was, as he was told, "the most profitable book for a time, because the sales were 100 percent."[120]

Tangentially, another sign of Moon Knight's cultural visibility lies in the *Cerebus the Aardvark* #30-33 (1981) best-selling pastiche, which introduces "Moon Roach," a parody of *Moon Knight*. Keen to preserve mythological signifiers, the author Dave Sim gave Moon Roach the alias "Artemis,"[121] an overt lunar allusion that echoes Khonshu (Fig. 33). Satirizing *Moon Knight* meant, in this case, underscoring some of the series' most salient motifs and themes, here Spector's obsession with his Egyptian moon god. As Peter Coogan argues in *Superhero, the Secret Origin of a Genre*, successful parody is often evidence "that a genre has been fully established in the minds of the producers and consumers."[122] By the early 1980s, the *Moon Knight* formula was then clearly established. The remaining question is what this success suggests about the nature of the genre(s) to which Moench's series belonged. As the following part contends, *Moon Knight*'s genre variety, which transcends the pulp and horror genres that made it legible in the first place, also makes it more than a mere superhero story.

[115] Michael Catron, "Moon Knight, Ka-Zar Go All-Direct," *Amazing Heroes #3*, 1981, 13.
[116] *Ibid*., 14.
[117] R. S. Martin, "Comics Sales 1980-1981," *R. S. Martin*, January 5, 2023, https://rsmwriter.blogspot.com/2023/01/comics-sales-1980-1981.html.
[118] Moench: "#1 smashed all previous records." *Moon Knight* #15 (January 1982), Marvel Comics.
[119] R. S. Martin, "Comics Sales 1982-1983," *R. S. Martin*, January 7, 2023, https://rsmwriter.blogspot.com/2023/01/comics-sales-1982-1983.html.
[120] Arrant and Harrold, *op. cit*.
[121] Artemis was the personification of the Moon in ancient Greek mythology.
[122] Peter Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (MonkeyBrian Books, 2006), 27.

3) Genre Hybridity

While Moench and Sienkiewicz contributed significantly to *Moon Knight*'s popularity by cultivating genre hybridity, their narrative experimentation also facilitated the emergence of a key narrative building block* of the *Moon Knight* structure: the figure of the mummy. At first glance, *Moon Knight* does not strike readers as an umpteenth mummy story. Yet Moench subtly borrowed from the popular monster mythos to shape an original reworking of his increasingly Egyptianized antihero.

a. A Genre-Busting Comic Book

According to Coogan's definition,[123] *Moon Knight* clearly belongs to the superhero genre. He identifies three defining components of the superheroes: the mission, or what makes them heroic (Moon Knight fights crime for redemption); the identity, which usually "comprises the codename and the costume" (Moon Knight takes on Khonshu's aspect); and the powers, which make their heroism super. However, some superheroes exist who do not fully demonstrate these three elements: like Moon Knight, "Batman [is] a superhero without powers." Chris McCubbin, editor-in-chief of *Amazing Heroes*, describes the superhero story as "the genre where all other genres meet."[124] Artistically, it functions as a "container" genre where the writers can exercise abundant creativity: they are "free to mix and match whatever genres [they] might wish." McGubbin offers a particular eye-opening example with a story in which "a wizard [hires] a hard-boiled detective to find out whether a vampire is organizing Martians to invade the Earth."[125]

In industrial terms, Henry Jenkins and Rick Altman have explained the stakes and rationale behind the plastic and adaptable superhero genre that "absorbs, reworks, accommodates elements of other genres," its obvious goal being "to gain access to the market place."[126] For publishers, much like Hollywood studios, "it never hurts to maximize opportunities for success by building an interlaced, multi-generic plot offering every possible chance for positive audience response."[127] Moon Knight is no exception and from his first appearance through the end of volume 1 (1984), Moench's *Moon Knight*, as a whole, has no

[123] *Ibid.*, 30–33.
[124] Chris McCubbin, "Editorial," *Amazing Heroes #166*, June 1, 1989, 3.
[125] *Ibid*.
[126] Jenkins, "Just Men in Capes?," *op. cit.*
[127] Rick Altman, *Film Genre* (BFI Publishing, 1999), 139.

stable generic affiliation. *Moon Knight*'s paratexts*, in particular Sienkiewicz's covers, mainly provide a particularly clear index of genres, subgenres, and minor modes that permeate Moench's narratives. While they situate the Crescent Warrior mostly in an urban, neo-noir environment,[128] they nonetheless accommodate elements of other genres (textually and visually), including adventure,[129] detective, ghost, romance, and horror, within a realistic[130] style. Panels and covers overleaf are significant examples.

The first two figures evoke a film-noir register: Fig. 34 depicts Moon Knight in extremis, at the mercy of Scarlet Fasinera, a conventionally "noir" *femme fatale* shown with a handgun and a cigarette holder. The composition is reminiscent of canonical screen *femmes fatales* such as Ava Gardner in *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946) and Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946). Fig. 35 emphasizes gritty black-and-white urban imagery that borrows from German expressionist architecture, characterized by great heights and sharp angles, as in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). In contrast, Fig. 39 shifts toward a gothic mood signaled by the presence of gargoyles and a medieval castle in a ghost-like atmosphere. Interestingly, Moench and Sienkiewicz frequently included Egyptian motifs and references that orient the narrative toward an Egyptian mystic register, sometimes even before the origin story disclosed in *MK* #1 reveals the Egyptian origin of Moench's hero. Fig. 36, for example, stages Spector and Marlene kissing in an intimate romance-coded moment under the conspicuous scrutiny of the Egyptian god statue, Khonshu. Fig. 37 abounds with detective-genre dialogue ("Two more murders – But I think I've finally got the key to this puzzle"; "Don't want them messing around before you find something") while positioning an Egyptian statue reminiscent of a Tutankhamun-like bust at the center of the page. The reference to Luxor in the final panel further reinforces this Egyptian setting. Finally, Fig. 38 is the most significant example of this Egyptian mystic register: it promises an adventure story through its tagline ("a return to the mysteries of the beginning") and its "Oriental" iconography (desert, Khonshu, a pyramid, a sword, and an Arab figure).

[128] "It was moody, gothic, and the villains were mostly psychotic." Catron, "A New Phase for Moon Knight," *op. cit.*, 29.
[129] Moench capitalized on the adventure-oriented *Raiders of the Lost Ark*: "Since Marc Spector was who he was before he became Moon Knight and the other two, I felt we were slighting Marc Spector. So I wanted to do a series of Marc Spector stories […] Then, of course, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* came out and it made soldier-of-fortune-adventure fashionable again." *Ibid.*, 30.
[130] Moench: "I still want to keep that sense of realism, the feeling that this is at least possible." *Ibid*., 31.



Figure 34: Comparison between the cover of *Moon Knight* #14 (Marvel Comics, 1981) and the poster of *Gilda* (Columbia Pictures, 1946)



Figure 35: Comparison between the cover of *Moon Knight* #23 (Marvel Comics, 1982) and a screenshot from *Metropolis* (UFA, 1927)



Figure 36: Panels from *Moon Knight* #10 (Marvel Comics, 1981)



Figure 37: Panels from *The Hulk* #11 (Marvel Comics, 1978)

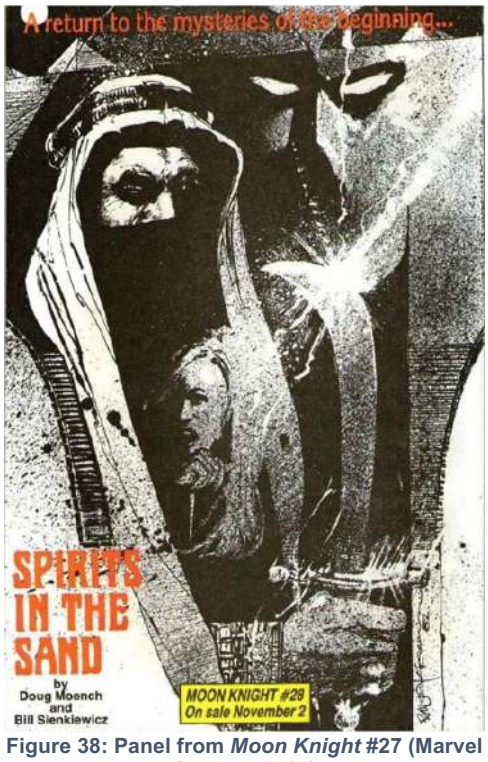


Figure 38: Panel from *Moon Knight* #27 (Marvel Comics, 1983)

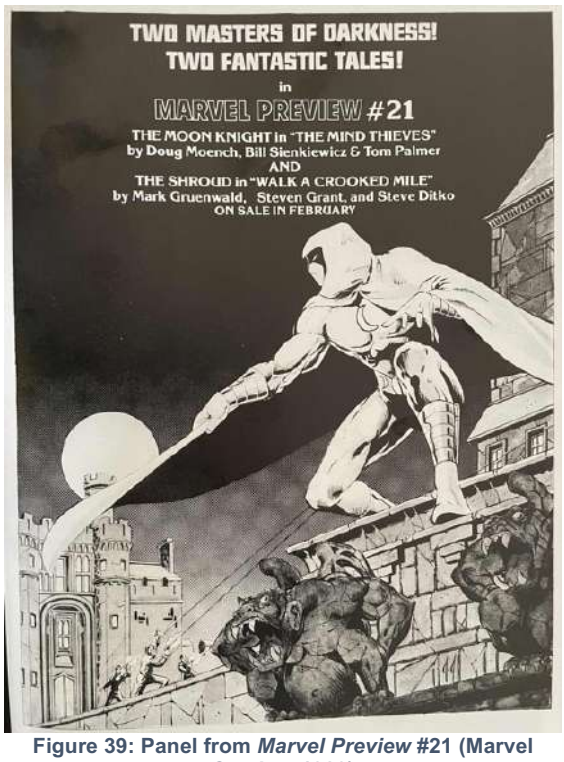


Figure 39: Panel from *Marvel Preview* #21 (Marvel Comics, 1980)

Moench would later push this hybridity impulse further in *Aztec Ace* (1984), which reads in retrospect like a culmination of his genre-mixing ambitions. Indeed, the synopsis alone reads like a hodgepodge of generic elements: *Aztec Ace* is about Ace, a 23rd century time-traveler (science-fiction), "whose goal is to save the timestream from unravelling through various intricate adventures (action and adventure)."[131] Assisted by a disembodied head (horror story) and his sexy, adventurous girlfriend from 1940 (pulp and romance), he regularly travels from "Aztec Mexico" to ancient Egypt (period piece). In many respects, *Moon Knight* can look like an embryonic form of *Aztec Ace*, which Moench, himself, qualifies as "the ultimate period piece." *Aztec Ace* allowed him to "do a Forties hardboiled private-eye story, […] a mummy story in ancient Egypt. The Napoleonic Wars. [His] version of *Last of the Mohicans*. The incredible Aztec empire, of course. A story on the Kennedy assassination. Ancient China and Japan. Spaceships and rayguns. And [he] even added a fantasy aspect, or at least science-fantasy."[132]

However, while Moench's *Moon Knight* does look like a crossbreed,[133] one of the core sets of defining motifs across all *Moon Knight* series, from 1975 to the present, is inextricably linked to Moench's pervasive Egyptomania*. Indeed, subsequent *Moon Knight* runs* do not consistently retain the detective or horror generic elements of Moench's early stories, nor do they all sustain a noir or horror atmosphere. However, almost all later iterations do engage, to some degree, with an ancient Egyptian mystic register, mobilizing a relatively stable set of recurring motifs.[134] Moench is the first to draw on this reservoir of Egyptomania in the ongoing 1980 series *Moon Knight*, featuring the resurrection of Marc Spector by Khonshu in the tomb of Seti I. Together with the various episodes focused on his dissociative identity disorder (DID*), this origin story forms a core canon of *Moon Knight*.

b. Capitalizing on Egyptomania

Egyptomania* itself was hardly new in the 1970s. What was new, however, was the specific wave of "Tutmania" generated by the blockbuster *Treasures of Tutankhamun* touring exhibition, which traveled to six major American museums between 1976 and 1979 and

[131] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aztec_Ace.
[132] Bob Greenberger, "First Look: Aztec Ace," *Comics Interview #10*, 1984, 9.
[133] Rick Altman borrows that term from the biologist Linnaeus. Altman, *op. cit.*, 16.
[134] For more on the Egyptomania-infused genre, see p. 49-58.

attracted eight million visitors.[135] This period saw a marked peak in the circulation of Egyptian imagery in American popular culture. Steve Martin's "*King tut*" sketch on *Saturday Night Live* in April 1978[136] is emblematic of this Egyptomaniac craze, as he ironizes about the "national disgrace the way we have commercialized it with trinkets and toys, t-shirts and posters." Publishers, likewise, commercialized this trend through comics.

Earlier in his life, Doug Moench had grown up in Chicago where the Field Museum and the Oriental Institute both housed extensive Egyptian collections and collaborated on the local iteration of the *Treasures of Tutankhamun* show, offering courses and public lectures on ancient Egyptian art and history. His childhood was also marked by a fascination for "Monster movies"[137] that referred directly to "Universal Monsters" movies (1913-1956) and Hammer film productions (mid-1950s-1970s) such as *The Mummy* (Terence Fisher, 1959) (Fig. 40). Therefore, these museums, together with Moench's longstanding interest for horror cinema, provided a dense field of Egyptological* and Egyptophile* reference points from which *Moon Knight* could draw.

In a broader media context, *Moon Knight* emerges at the cusp of a renewed cycle of "desert adventure" and "supernatural horror" cinema centered on Egyptian antiquity, exemplified by *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* (Seth Holt, 1972), *The Curse of King Tut's Tomb* (Philip Leacock, 1980), *The Awakening* (Mike Newell,1980) starring Charlton Heston, and, shortly afterwards, *Sphinx* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1981) and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) starring Harrison Ford. The mummy motif is central in several of them (Figs. 40-42). When editor-in-chief Jim Shooter asked Moench and the editorial team to come up with a clear origin story to the character[138] in the late 1970s, Moench could draw readily on long-standing personal interests, as he later recalled:

> "None of it was foreseen. So, you have to sort of be quick on your feet and adapt, fudge things without outright violation of continuity or anything…. I have to this day a fascination with ancient Egypt and I have a bunch of museum replicas of the gods. I have Seth, Anubis, and Thot and all those guys and they're beautiful, they're hand-painted. And I think that goes back to my childhood when I was taken to two places in Chicago. There's the Oriental Institute on the South side and the Field Museum of Natural History and they both had great Egyptian stuff like mummies, and they're just unbelievable gorgeous stuff. And I loved the Boris

[135] Peter Green, *Classical Bearings: Interpreting Ancient History and Culture* (University of California Press, 1998), 77.
[136] Steve Martin, "King Tut - SNL," 2013, Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYbavuReVF4.
[137] Moench, "Comic Geek Speak Episode 57: A Conversation with Doug Moench," *op. cit*.
[138] "But since then we've revised the origin because Shooter [Marvel Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter] didn't like that origin." Catron, "A New Phase for Moon Knight," *op. cit.*, 30.

> Karloff mummy movie on Shock Theater[139]. So yeah, something about ancient Egypt caught me from a number of different directions when I was impressionable."[140]

Being "quick on your feet" meant retrofitting the new Egyptian origin to earlier Moon Knight appearances. Put simply, the 1980 origin story had to remain consistent with preexisting stories and account for the rationale of the "Moon Knight" name. In early Moon Knight appearances, Moench's Egyptophilia* is already manifest in episodes that predate the 1980s *Moon Knight* series, even though the character's resurrection in Egypt had not yet been established diegetically. A few examples include Fig. 37 seen p. 45, and *The Hulk!* #13 (1979) where Moon Knight has to retrieve a little Horus statuette. *MK* #1 (1980) functions as a retroactive continuity (or retcon*), that is the revision of previously established fictional continuity, (often by adding, altering, or reinterpreting past events) in order to accommodate new narrative developments. Here, it reveals Spector's origin for the first time and implicitly reorders prior appearances so that all stories published between 1975 and 1980 are now situated after the events in Egypt occurring in this issue. Moench thus uses a familiar diegetic strategy to construct a coherent story. Now that the loop has come full circle after *MK* #1, Doug Moench can push his hero's link with his Egyptomania* a bit further, and from here on subtly weave him into a very different mummy story.



Figure 40: Poster of *The Mummy* (Hammer Film Productions, 1959)



Figure 41: Poster of *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* (Hammer Film Productions, 1972)



Figure 42: Poster of *The Awakening* (Columbia, 1980)

[139] Universal horror films that were broadcast on American television between 1957 and 1959.
[140] Moench, "Comic Geek Speak Episode 57: A Conversation with Doug Moench," *op. cit*.

c. A New Mummy Story

After Bonaparte's Egyptian campaign helped popularize Egyptology* among Western audiences in the early nineteenth century, Egyptian antiquity and occult motifs were widely reworked by British and American writers, including Edgar Allan Poe, Louisa May Alcott, Arthur Conan Doyle, Bram Stoker, and Agatha Christie,[141] who all embraced the mystic mummy trope. In comics, Egypt-themed imagery appears early: the first comic strip featuring ancient Egypt, *Krazy Kat* (Fig. 43), was published in 1919. Pulp fiction followed suit: *The Shadow* featured a mummy story in the same year as Hergé's *Les Cigares du Pharaon* (1934), which is testament to Egyptomania* being a worldwide phenomenon.

Comic books gradually "Egyptianized" their way to popularity from the very beginning. Ancient Egypt proved instrumental to popular narrative creation, transforming the "romantic mummy" from the 19th century (e.g., Théophile Gautier's *Le Roman de la Momie* [1858] and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Ring of Thoth* [1890]) into the "menacing mummy" of the 1930s. This shift was shaped first and foremost by the legacy of mummy-unwrapping practices in the USA, which initially objectified the mummy as an archaeological specimen before rehumanizing it through narratives of sexualization, curse, and revenge.[142] The transformation was later reinforced by films such as Karl Freund's *The Mummy* (1932) and, more broadly, by the Universal Monsters cycle (1913-1956). Ultimately, it was further fueled by widely circulating "mummy's curse" narratives surrounding Howard Carter's 1922 opening of the tomb of Tutankhamun, such as the death of Lord Carnarvon (the expedition's patron), the following year, which was interpreted as supernatural retribution. The same period coincided with the rise of major superheroes such as Superman and Batman (1938-1939). A case in point is *Whiz Comics* #1 (1940) and, similarly Egypt-inflected *Flash Comics* #1 (1940), which introduce, respectively, "Ibis the Invincible" (Fig. 44), and Carter Hall/Hawkman (Fig. 45), the reincarnation of the ancient Egyptian prince Khufu. The echoes with Moon Knight, as Khonshu's "reincarnation", and through recurrent motifs such as the golden dagger, are at least amusing coincidences, if not overt influences (Fig. 46).

[141] Edgar Allan Poe, *Some Words with a Mummy* (1845), Louisa May Alcott, *The Mummy's Curse* (1868), Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Ring of Thoth* (1890), Bram Stoker, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), Agatha Christie, *The Adventure of the Egyptian Tomb* (1923).
[142] Charles Vanthournout, "Crise Éthique : L'exploitation Des Momies Au Service de l'industrialisation Américaine," *Cahiers de Conflits*, no. 10 (March 2025): 6.

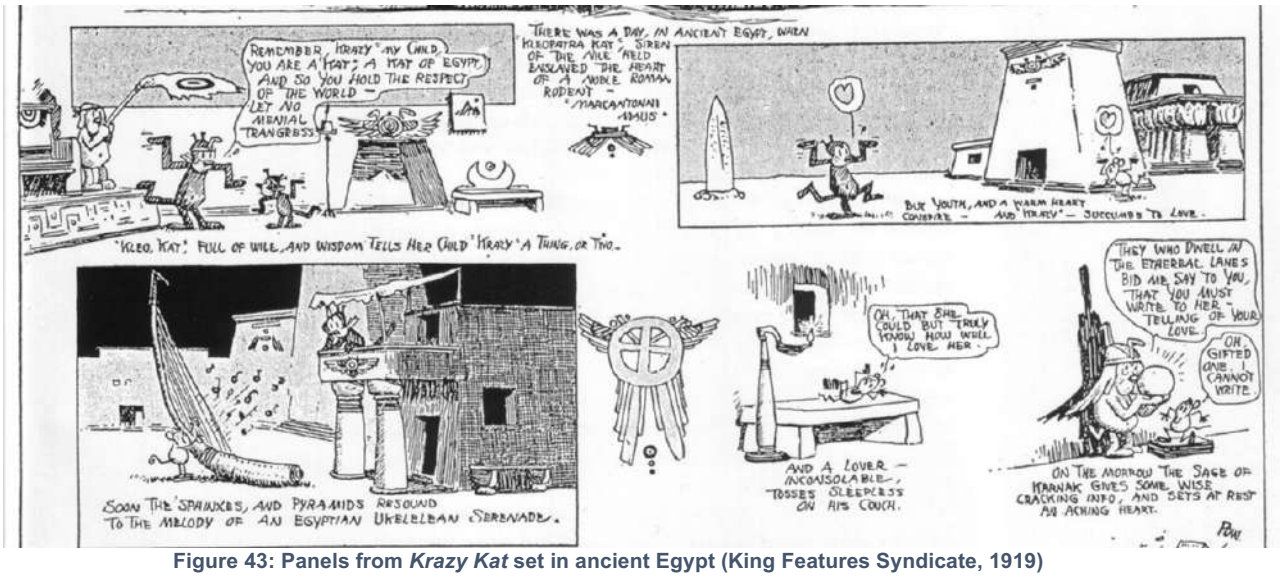


Figure 43: Panels from *Krazy Kat* set in ancient Egypt (King Features Syndicate, 1919)



Figure 44: Panels from *Whiz Comics* #1 (Fawcett, 1940)



Figure 45: Panels from Flash Comics #1 (DC Comics, 1940)



Figure 46: Comparison of origins between Hawkman (left) and Moon Knight (*Flash Comics* #1, DC Comics, 1940 and *Moon Knight* #1, Marvel Comics, 1980)



Figure 47: Panels from *Captain America Comics* #25 (Timely Comics, 1943)



Figure 48: Panel from *Uncanny X-Men* #54 featuring The Living Pharaoh (Marvel Comics, 1969)

Marvel joined the Egyptian bandwagon as early as 1943 with *Captain America Comics* #25 (Fig. 47 shows a scary mummy) and regularly foregrounded Egyptian figures and motifs thereafter like *The Living Pharaoh* (Fig. 48 features sarcophagi, hieroglyphs, statues) in *Uncanny X-Men* #54 (1969). Yet Marvel waited decades before launching its first ongoing mummy character, N'Kantu, The Living Mummy (Fig. 49) in *Supernatural Thrillers* #5 (1973), a move that testified to the audience's continued appetite for mummy stories whose generic blueprint comprises a reservoir of ancient Egypt motifs such as scarabs, pyramids, hieroglyphs, tombs, sarcophagi, Egyptian gods and priests/priestesses, amulets, desert, the Nile, and, of course, mummies) that "audiences systematically recognize and interpret accordingly."[143] More importantly, this more explicit horrific mummy template, endowed with all the trappings of the horror-movie mummy, became increasingly visible in comics due to the CCA's* waning influence.[144] *Supernatural Thrillers* lasted fifteen issues until 1975;[145] Marvel Comics was taking very little financial risk: the mummy stories were an infallible attraction and were known, even to the fans, "to make money just on the title of the book."[146] Whenever sales of a Marvel series declined, a regenrification into mummy-adjacent narratives often renewed interest.



Figure 49: Panels from *Supernatural Thrillers* #5 featuring The Living Mummy (Marvel Comics, 1973)



Figure 50: Panel from *Eerie* #35 (Warren Publishing, 1971)

[143] Altman, *op. cit.*, 16.
[144] For more on the CCA, see p. 28-29.
[145] Tony Isabella, who would later author *Moon Knight* #34 and #35, scripted several of these stories.
[146] *Supernatural Thrillers* #9 (Marvel Comics, October 1974).

From the readers' perspective, there was little evidence of fatigue with this "Egyptian mysticism."[147] Letter columns show fans urging Marvel to "delve" further into the "wealth of untouched material surrounding Egypt and its legends" [148] even though some expressed skepticism about "what new things [Marvel] can possibly do with a mummy. Warren Publishing had the same problem with their mummy strip."[149] Indeed, Warren had successfully released mummy stories in the 1960s and early 1970s, and that was incidentally Moench's *coup d'essai* with "I am dead, Egypt, dead" (Fig. 50) in *Eerie* #35 (1971), where his fascination for ancient Egyptian iconography is already clearly visible.

In my reading, Moench does manage to rework these traditional mummy stories into the fan's "new things" formulation, reshaping the template into a modern costumed-vigilante story. As Fig. 51 shows, "*Khonsou*[150] *is usually depicted as a mummiform child with a crescent moon on his head"*[151] in ancient Egyptian art. Yet this canonical body is erased from the *Moon Knight* Moench-scripted panels, as is the traditional horrific mummy. The Khonshu statue, while still representing "a figure of terror"[152] in the comic, operates as a prime example of a regenrification (Fig. 21, p. 26, Fig. 78, p. 86): bandages are replaced by a white cape, the eerie gait by a noble bearing, and the figure now holds a weapon. As evidenced in letter columns, the move was a successful one: the statue retained its magnetic pull for the fans, who urged the author to "keep the mystery" surrounding Khonshu."[153] By extension, Moon Knight becomes the "embodiment" of the god, taking on Khonshu's aspect for vigilantism. He can also evolve, as seen earlier, in a horror or gothic environment that recalls the mummy story's atmosphere. Lastly, he is often described as a ghost by scared criminals,[154] thereby sharing with the mummy a frightening countenance. Mutatis mutandis, "the macabre Moon Knight," as he is called in early stories,[155] functions as a contemporary analogue to the mummy figure—shifted from the tomb to the urban nightscape, and from a horror monster to a vengeful superhero. Moench, however, does not exhaust the mummy motif's narrative possibilities. Rather, he establishes a set of cues that later writers will develop more fully.

[147] *Supernatural Thrillers* #13 (Marvel Comics, June 1975).
[148] *Supernatural Thrillers* #11 (Marvel Comics, February 1975), #13 (Marvel Comics, June 1975).
[149] *Supernatural Thrillers* #9 (Marvel Comics, October 1974).
[150] "Khonsou" is the traditional spelling whereas "Khonshu" refers to the moon god in Marvel Comics. For more, see p. 86.
[151] This is from a conversation I had with Philippe Mainterot, who is Associate Professor in Art History and Archeology of Antiquity (November 2025).
[152] *Moon Knight* #1 (Marvel Comics, November 1980).
[153] *Moon Knight* #33 (Marvel Comics, September 1983).
[154] *Moon Knight* #5 (Marvel Comics, March 1981) and *Moon Knight* #19 (Marvel Comics, May 1982).
[155] Moon is sometimes qualified as "macabre" like in *The Hulk!* #15 (Marvel Comics, June 1979).



Figure 51: Extract from a stele dedicated to Khonsu whose body is mummified (Egyptian Museum of Turin)

The classic "mummy story" component of *Moon Knight*, introduced by Moench with Khonshu, is fully developed in *MK* #21 (1982)[156] and *MK* #36 (1984), both scripted by Alan Zelenetz. Here, the "mummy story" foundation expands considerably. Rick Altman, in *Film Genre,* likens such editorial decisions to a "predictable" generic evolution and to "railroad tracks" that ensure that "genres will be free only to shuttle back and forth between experimentation and reflexivity."[157] Extending the railroad metaphor, Zelenetz again takes control of the *Moon Knight* locomotive in *Moon Knight* (vol. 2) #1 (1985), and steers it onto a well-established generic track, producing one of the most Egyptomaniac* episodes in *Moon Knight* publication history (Moon Knight now bears an ankh on his chest, uses scarab-shaped darts, encounters Egyptian priests, confronts Anubis, and is even mummified). Zelenetz escalates these elements and assembles the full repertoire of ancient Egypt and mummy motifs in an issue that largely sheds Moench's other strengths (characterization, realism, genre hybridity). The mummy, incidentally, remains one of the most visible elements of Moench's legacy: nearly all subsequent *Moon Knight* iterations, including the 2022 Disney+ miniseries, draw on it extensively (Fig. 52).



Figure 52: The mummy figure as it appears, in anticlockwise order from the top left, in *Moon Knight* (vol. 2) #1, *Moon Knight* (vol. 3) #2, *Moon Knight* #188, and *Moon Knight* (vol. 8) #2 (Marvel Comics, 1985-2018)

[156] Named "*Tales of Khonshu: Murder by Moonlight*."
[157] Altman, *op. cit.*, 21–22.

To substantiate claims about the prominence of a particular set of motifs within a comic, the "degré de fréquence iconique" (iconicity rate*) metric, developed by Alain Chante in "*Images de l'armée dans la bande dessinée pour enfants et pour adolescents : recherches épistémologiques*" (1982) and used by Vincent Marie in his dissertation on ancient Egypt in Franco-Belgian bandes dessinées,[158] proves illuminating. In order to quantify this prominence, Chante proposes to calculate the number of panels in which at least one such motif is depicted, multiply that number by 100, and divide the result by the total number of panels in the comic. Applied to Zelenetz's *Moon Knight* (vol. 2) #1, the iconicity rate for Egyptian motifs (pyramid, mummy, desert, etc.) is 61.2%: more than four times higher than 13.6% measured in Moench's *Moon Knight* (vol. 3) #2 (1998), which also draws on the conventions of the mummy story (Fig. 52);[159] about twice the 29.9% in *MK* #1;[160] and even higher than the 50% recorded in Moench's most Egyptophile* issue: *MK* #28 (1983).

A particularly fitting label for Zelenetz's *Moon Knight* (vol. 2) #1, as it is saturated with Egyptian mythic material, is to be found in Marie's notion of "une histoire à l'égyptienne,"[161] which he identifies as a "construction artistique d'une Egypte légendaire et fantasmée des temps présents où l'imaginaire iconographique et littéraire tient une place importante." In the mid-1980s, Zelenetz's Egypt-centered fantasy adventure also resonated with popular archaeology-themed blockbusters, exemplified by *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). The film's Egyptian sequences, including Cairo and the excavation at Tanis, where the "staff of Ra" is used to locate the Ark, helped popularize a commercially successful generic framework in which ancient Egypt functions as a site of mystery, spectacle, and narrative propulsion. It is precisely this "histoire à l'égyptienne" framework that Marvel could readily capitalize on.[162] More recently, author Jeff Lemire similarly saturates *Moon Knight* (vol. 8) #3 (2016) with Egyptian motifs, yielding an iconicity rate* of 58.3%, with the mummy occupying a central position.

By comparison, although still classifiable as an "histoire à l'égyptienne," the action-movie-inspired *Marc Spector: Moon Knight* run* (1989-1994), written by Chuck Dixon, frequently sidelines the mummy trope and downplays several generic elements central to *Moon Knight* vols. 1, 2, and 3. The iconicity rate* for Egyptian motifs in *Marc Spector: Moon Knight*

[158] Marie, *op. cit.*, 15.
[159] For more on Moench's *Moon Knight* (vol. 3, 1998), see p. 101-104.
[160] For an excerpt of my spreadsheet table using this methodology, see Appendix D.
[161] Marie, *op. cit.*, 16.
[162] Moench and Zelenetz also align their stories with the archaeological-adventure formula popularized by the *Indiana Jones* franchise, for instance through Inca motifs (*Moon Knight* #17) and Maya motifs (*Moon Knight* [vol. 2] #2).

#1 is only 6%, far below the rates found in Zelenetz's, Lemire's, and Moench's issues. This repositioning coincides, first, with the success of 1980s Hollywood action cinema, on which Marvel drew. As with The Punisher, Spector's past as a mercenary provides material that also places him "in relation to stories about Vietnam vets such as Rambo,"[163] whose 1980s films were major box-office successes. Second, *Marc Spector: Moon Knight* reactivates Batman-like elements in a context shaped by two box-office benchmarks, that are Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) and its sequel *Batman Returns* (1992). At times, the run's graphic depiction of Spector closely echoes Michael Keaton's screen Batman. Fig. 53 offers a particularly explicit instance of this resemblance. Both works strikingly build their compositions through a forceful contrast between large fields of black and small, carefully lit areas of color, especially around the face and hand. Black thus operates not simply as shadow but as a dominant visual structure, enclosing the character in a state of psychological torment, with Spector's tortured past as a mercenary echoing Batman's traumatic loss of his parents.

In sum, Moench's most durable bequest to Moon Knight is a repertoire of Egyptian motifs and images that has persisted, albeit unevenly, across subsequent iterations for more than fifty years. An emblematic example of this legacy is Gene Colan and Chris Ivy's amusing 1992 interior cover for *Marc Spector: Moon Knight Special* #1, which reprises the iconic titling formula of a 1960s *Daredevil* cover while also borrowing the iconic Spider-Man rescue composition from *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (1962). The *Moon Knight* cover prominently features "an histoire à l'égyptienne" titled "Danger on the Desert Sand," complete with an Egyptian queen set against a pyramid and an Abu Simbel-like temple adorned with figures of Ramesses II (Fig. 54). In Moench's *Moon Knight*, this rich Egyptian repertoire facilitates the circulation of clichés and stereotypes about the Middle East. In Said's terms, Moench's iconography and narrative are not only "Oriental"; they are better understood as Orientalist*.



Figure 53: Comparison between panels from *Marc Spector: Moon Knight* #32 (Marvel Comics, 1991) and a screenshot from Batman Returns (Warner Bros., 1992)

[163] Worcester, *op. cit.*, 338.



Figure 54: Visual borrowings in an interior splash page of *Marc Spector: Moon Knight Special* #1 (top, Marvel Comics, 1992) from the covers of *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (bottom left, Marvel Comics, 1962) and *Daredevil* #9 (bottom right, Marvel Comics, 1965)

Chapter II – Orientalism in Doug Moench's *Moon Knight*

"Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation: as early as Aeschylus's play The Persians the Orient is transformed from a very far distant and often threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar (in Aeschylus's case, grieving Asiatic women)."[164] – Edward Said

[164] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 20.

Some of the series' most recognizable scenes, especially those centered on transformation and rebirth, or structured around water, are not primarily legible through Egyptian myths but through Christian, Greek, and, more broadly, Western allegorical frameworks. In these moments, despite Moench's clear Egyptophilia*, Egypt supplies atmosphere and setting rather than the dominant symbolic grammar. As *Moon Knight* unfolds between 1980 and 1983, this Eurocentric* coding hardens into a more explicit Orientalism* in Moench's treatment of Western and Middle Eastern people, art, geography, and language. The resulting asymmetry becomes increasingly pronounced: Egypt and the Middle East serve as mystique-infused narrative occasions, while interpretive authority and agency* remain centered on Spector, who, apart from Khonshu, seems to possess little knowledge of either modern or, more surprisingly, ancient Egypt. Read in this way, *Moon Knight*'s early evolution is not so much the gradual enrichment of an Egyptophile mythology as the overt consolidation of an Orientalist one.

1) Middle Eastern motifs, Western allegories

a. Braiding a mythical scene

Water is a recurring motif in *Moon Knight*, appearing in several stories and serving the neo-noir aesthetic that Moench and Sienkiewicz wanted to create, sometimes via a rain-soaked cityscape. This atmosphere enabled Sienkiewicz to show his visual flair and detach himself from Neal Adams. A touchstone instance is Moon Knight's plunge from his helicopter into the Grant Mansion pool. The sequence was first authored by Moench in *Marvel Spotlight* #28 (Fig. 58, p. 64) in 1976 and repeatedly reinterpreted by later writers. These carefully staged panels (Figs. 55-57) have become an anchoring point in *Moon Knight*'s mythos, resurfacing well beyond the character's debut era. This network of scenes forms a repetitive and potentially endless narrative pattern, one that is intrinsic to the mythology of the superhero genre and to what Umberto Eco calls an "oneiric climate" in *The Myth of Superman*.[165] Here, Moench, followed by his successors, picks up the thread of the pool sequence "again and again, as if he had forgotten to say something and wanted to add details to what had already been said."[166]

[165] Eco, *op. cit.*, 17.
[166] *Ibid*.

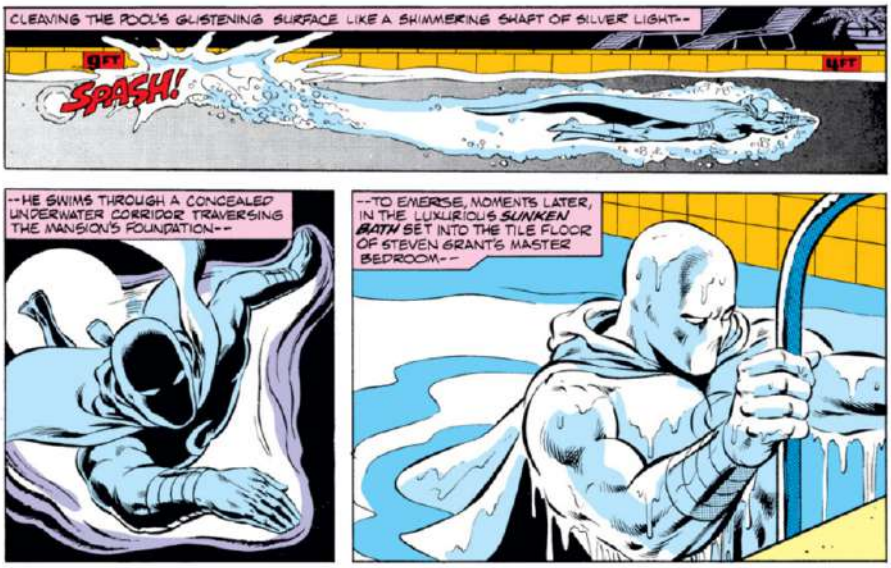


Figure 55: Panels from *The Amazing Spider-Man* #220 (Marvel Comics, 1981)

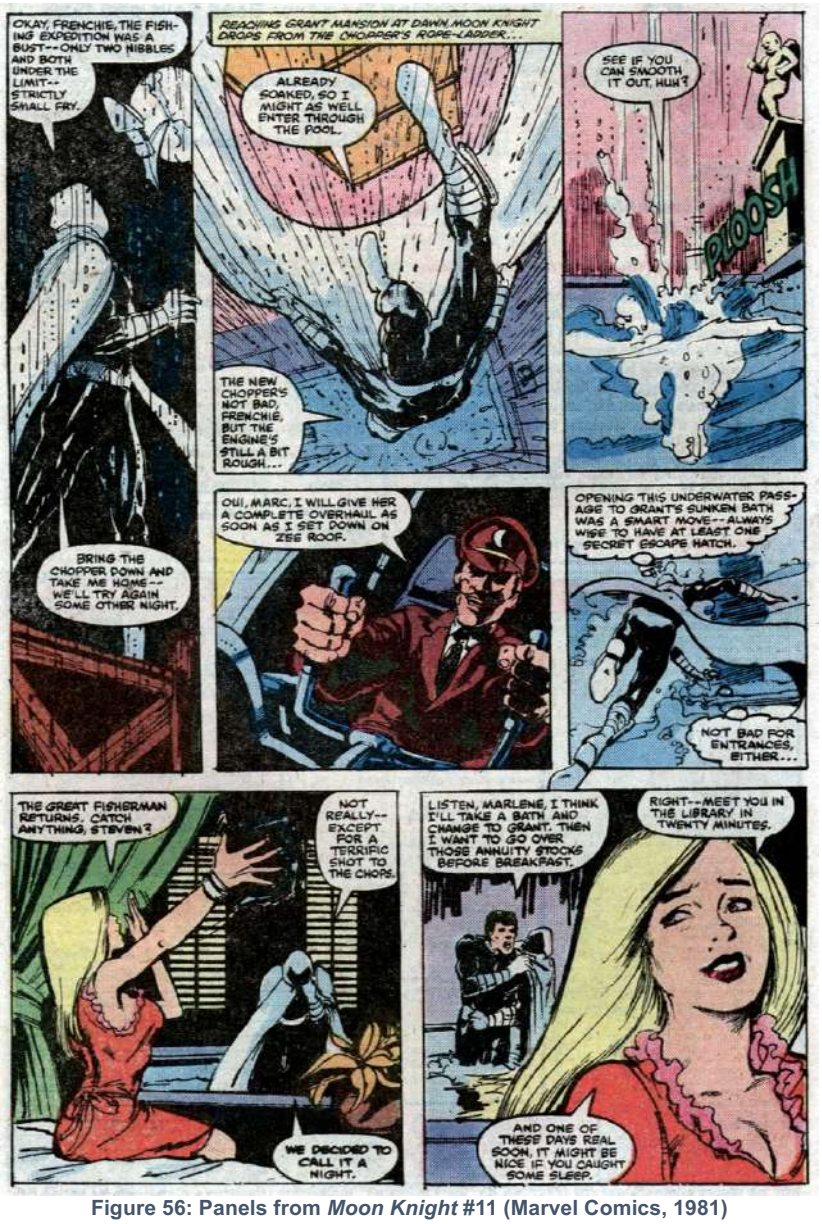


Figure 56: Panels from *Moon Knight* #11 (Marvel Comics, 1981)



Figure 57: Panels from *The Hulk!* #12 (Marvel Comics, 1978)

Thierry Groensteen's "spatio-topical framework" in *Système de la bande dessinée* proves to be an effective tool for conducting a semiotic analysis of these series of panels. His coinage of the word "tressage" (*braiding**) helps to shed light on the mechanics of these key scenes, which operate as a very meaningful networked system:

> "Au sein du réseau, chaque vignette est dotée, par la mise en page, de coordonnées spatio-topiques qui lui attribuent un site. Ses coordonnées temporelles (ou chrono-topiques) lui sont conférées par sa place dans le découpage. Le tressage, lui, surdétermine la vignette en la dotant de coordonnées que l'on pourrait qualifier d'hyper-topiques, indiquant son appartenance à une ou plusieurs série(s) remarquable(s), et la place qu'elle y occupe."[167]

In the canonical Grant Mansion sequence, Moon Knight descends[168] from his helicopter in the upper panel, i.e. with "hyper-topical coordinates" that recur whenever he returns home. He then traces a downward trajectory across the page. The moment in which he dives into the water and passes through the "conduit"[169] appears in a lower panel as a liminal position visually in line with the middle strip that connects the top (Moon Knight) and the bottom (Marc Spector) strips. This is the momentous stage during which Moon Knight sheds his "ghost-looking"[170] costume and becomes Marc Spector again. Finally, he emerges from the pool into an interior room, where Marlène Fontaine[171] welcomes him. Here, the words "Fontaine," "surface," "pool," "submerged," "sunken bath," "concealed underwater corridor," "underwater passage," "secret escape hatch," "entrance" in the speech balloons clearly evoke the idea of transition and process while extending the water semantic field. Read together, the Grant Mansion episodes combined with other water scenes form what Groensteen terms "lieux" (places), that is to say braided* nodes that resonate through recurrence:

> "Lorsqu'elle s'articule à quelques-unes de ses semblables par une relation qui ressortit au tressage, la vignette s'enrichit de résonances qui ont pour effet de transcender la fonctionnalité du site qu'elle occupe, pour lui conférer la qualité de lieu. Un lieu n'est-il pas un espace habité, que l'on peut traverser, visiter, investir, un endroit où se font et se défont les relations ? Si tous les termes d'une séquence, et par conséquent toutes les unités du réseau, constituent des sites, c'est

[167] Thierry Groensteen, *Système de La Bande Dessinée* (Presses universitaires de France, 1999), 177.
[168] Moon Knight today is described as Khonshu's avatar. Interestingly, *avatar* derives from the Sanskrit *avatara* ("descent") and refers, broadly, to a deity manifestation on earth in animal or human form. The sequence abides by the etymology of the word.
[169] I borrow the term "conduit" from the *Marvel Encyclopedia*. The word can also denote, particularly in paranormal discourse, a medium or object through which communication with a spirit is said to occur, a resonance that fits the name "Spector".
[170] Moon Knight is compared to a ghost in *Moon Knight* #19 (May 1982), #25 (November 1982), and #28 (February 1983).
[171] Marlène Fontaine becomes Marlène Alraune in *Moon Knight* #1. The onomastic choice is a significant tell.

l'appartenance, de surcroît, de telles de ces unités à une ou plusieurs série(s) remarquable(s), qui les définit comme lieux. Un lieu est donc un site activé, surdéterminé, un site où une série croise (ou se superpose à) une séquence."[172]



Figure 58: First iteration of the pool sequence. Panels from *Marvel Spotlight* #28 (Marvel Comics, 1976)

[172] Groensteen, *op. cit.*, 177.

Because of their interconnectedness, these "lieux"/panels in Groensteen's parlance acquire a resonance. But what kind of resonance do they produce?

b. Water: A Christian Symbol for an Egyptian God

First, it is evident that the water semantic field combined with the "transformation" of a man invite a distinctly Christian reading. In the Bible's *Ezekiel* 36:25–27, for example, God promises Israel to remove the spiritual pollution of idolatry and give "a new spirit" through "clean water."[173] It plainly resonates with those Groensteen's lieux that foreground Moon Knight's "transformation" into Spector. Second, *Moon Knight*'s editor Denny O'Neil provides yet another clue as to that resonance while elaborating on the origin of Moon Knight that he associates to "the resurrection myth" when "the hero dies, or descends into a netherworld, or is swallowed by some kind of beast, and then returns changed, better."[174] Denny O'Neil's observation clearly echoes the journeys to the underworld from Greek mythology. Joseph Campbell strongly associates these "katabasis/anabasis"[175] "rites of passage"[176] to the Greek descent/ascent episodes of his *Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Superhero comics, that align with Campbell's Monomyth, often mobilize baptismal and resurrection imagery, and *Moon Knight* makes this symbolism clearly explicit. Each plunge enables a moral reset for Spector, who is ritually absolved of the violence enacted as Moon Knight and restored, however briefly, to a more human scale. Other water scenes across *Moon Knight* adventures amplify this baptized-rebirth poetics. In *MK* #10, for example, the hero reemerges "washed-up" (Figs. 59-60). Similarly, Fig. 61 from *MK* #23, shows the hero, in a clear religious metaphor, struggling his way up to reawaken from a "dream" or, in Eco's terms, from an "oneiric climate." This grammar can even be reversible in later runs*: in *Marc Spector: Moon Knight* #28, J. M. DeMatteis inverts the directionality (Fig. 62). In this issue, Spector follows an upward trajectory, rises to the surface to become Moon Knight anew while the cover art foregrounds "Lazarus," an overt biblical anabasis.

[173] *Ezekiel* 36:25–27 (KJV).
[174] *Moon Knight* #38 (Marvel Comics, July 1984).
[175] A katabasis or catabasis is a journey to the underworld. Its original sense is usually associated with Greek mythology and classical mythology more broadly, where the protagonist visits the Greek underworld, also known as Hades. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katabasis.
[176] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949; Princeton University Press, 2004), 28.



Figure 59: Panels from *Moon Knight* #10 (Marvel Comics, 1981)



Figure 60: Panels from *Moon Knight* #10 (Marvel Comics, 1981)



Figure 61: Panels from *Moon Knight* #23 (Marvel Comics, 1982).



Figure 62: Panels from *Marc Spector: Moon Knight* #28 (Marvel Comics, 1991)

This Western culture coding resonates strongly in Moench's *Moon Knight*, even though his adventures are overtly anchored to an Egyptian origin in the very first issue. Unsurprisingly, Shakespearean intertext further anchors the series in a traditional Western literary canon. In Fig. 63, Spector reenacts the well-known *Hamlet* moment: Khonshu, though "Oriental" in figure, is read through "European" Yorick. Taken together, all these panels suggest that the *Moon Knight* narrative is fully steeped in Western and Christian tropes. However, after the Khonshu/Seti I sequence in *MK* #1, one might expect Moench to reorient the allegorical frame more decisively away from Western culture norms. The lexical markers that had already proven so effective ("surface," "underwater passage," "secret escape hatch," "corridor," "entrance") are equally applicable to Egyptian tombs and burial chambers, and could have been readily "reattached" to an ancient Egypt reinterpretation. Water, too, readily evokes Nile imagery, and narratives of descent and return are central to Egyptian funerary texts such as the *Amduat*, which is "associated with imagery of continual death and rebirth."[177] Likewise, Mesopotamian traditions offer comparable descent narratives, such as "the Sumerian myth of the goddess *Inanna*'s descent to the nether world,"[178] one of many myths discussed by Campbell that could have served as a further intertext in a narrative frequently set in the Middle East.

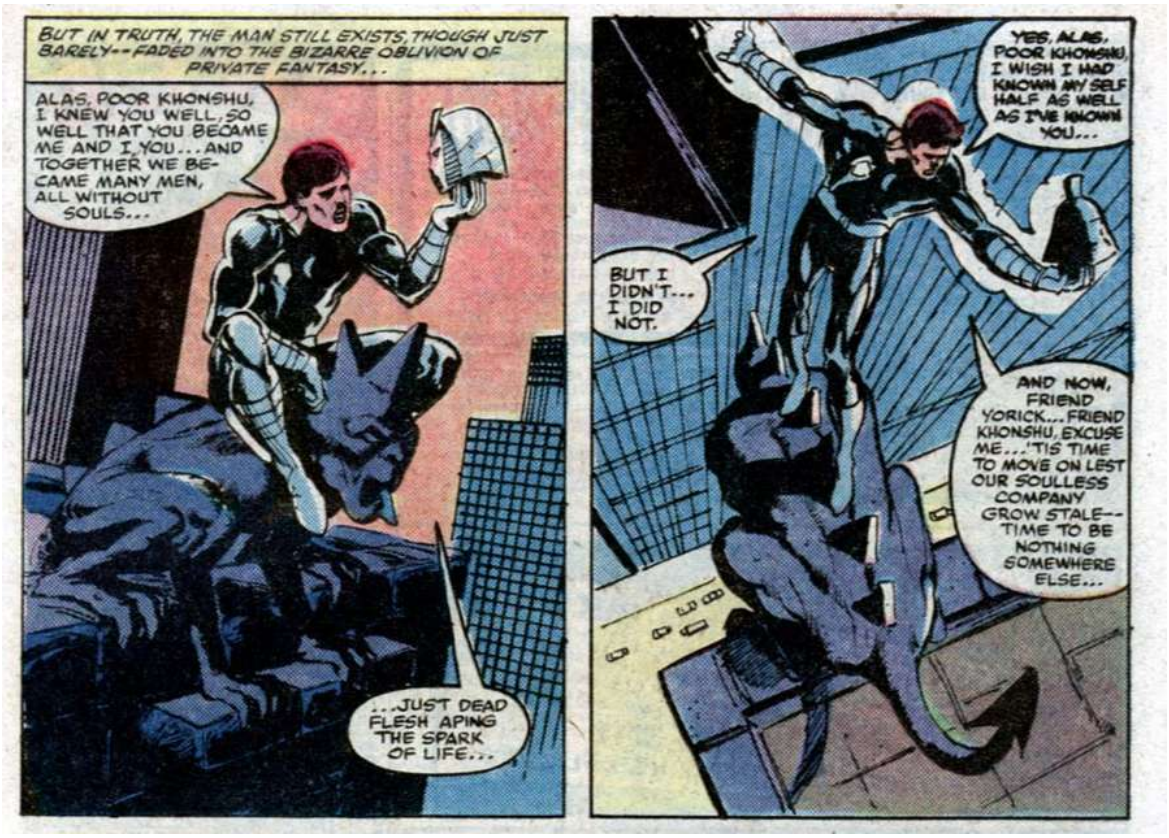


Figure 63: Panels from *Moon Knight* #10 (Marvel Comics, 1981)

[177] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amduat/.
[178] Campbell, *op. cit.*, 96.

c. Shohat and Stam's Eurocentrism

Moench's *Moon Knight* offers little comparable Egyptian symbolic coding. Beyond the Khonshu statue and a pharaonic tomb setting, the narrative mobilizes neither Egyptian deities (e.g., Isis and Osiris) nor Nile imagery, pharaonic figures (e.g., Tutankhamun and Ramesses), or ancient myth as meaningful agents. It likewise provides scant contemporary, historical, or civilizational context for Egypt, whose current dominant religion, Islam, is entirely absent. Instead, Spector appropriates the Khonshu statue and recontextualizes it within Western symbolic systems. The result is a telling disjuncture between setting and signification while an alternative symbolic system was both available and narratively convenient. Egypt looks like a mere aesthetic backdrop conducive to glorifying Spector's exploits. The artefacts' narrative role is jarringly nonexistent. Fig. 65 reduces Egypt to mystique and props (statues, pottery, artefacts, temples[179]) whereas Moench, a Western author, centers an American protagonist endowed with agency* ("I've got to become the avenger of death"), and the interpretive frame ("Then it's a sign") in Fig. 64.



Figure 64: Panels from *Moon Knight* #10 (Marvel Comics, 1981)



Figure 65: Panels from *Moon Knight* #28 (Marvel Comics, 1983)

[179] For more on the representation on Egyptian art, see p. 82-89.

Most comic book writers of the era are keen on using Christian subtexts,[180] even when they are confirmed and self-proclaimed Egyptophiles* like Moench. The fact that they largely draw on Western culture rather than on non-European code suggests, in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's sense, a structural "Eurocentric* discourse [that] projects a linear historical trajectory leading from classical Greece (constructed as "pure," "Western," and "democratic") to imperial Rome and then to the metropolitan capitals of Europe and the US." More to the point, "Eurocentrism appropriates the cultural and material production of non-Europeans while denying both their achievements and its own appropriation, thus consolidating its sense of self and glorifying its own cultural anthropophagy."[181] The comic books "thus reproduce the colonialist mechanism by which the orient, rendered as devoid of any active historical or narrative role, becomes […] the object of study and spectacle. Any possibility of representing dialogic interaction is excluded from the outset."[182] It is not that surprising, as Donald Palumbo explains in his "cultural history tour" that "the numerous references to popular culture and mythology, the most frequent allusions in Marvel Comics are to Shakespeare, then to the Bible, then to fantasy literature and a few western classics, and then to historical situations […] For Marvel Comics has, in this respect, accomplished through inevitable circumstance what Joyce has attempted by design: to hold a mirror to western culture."[183] Sienkiewicz would later concur in admitting that "what's happening now … is we're taking the way we view the world and bringing that to the medium."[184]

In conclusion, through the recursive staging of immersion and emergence, Moench and subsequent authors weave a networked braiding* of Christian purification and return. These scenes aim first at allegorizing the serial logic of the superhero, whose "mythological character […] must necessarily become immobilized in an emblematic and fixed nature which renders him easily recognizable even as he undergoes perpetual variation."[185] Second, they activate a Christian and Greek symbolic economy. Read through Shohat and Stam's framework, the persistence of western coding in *Moon Knight* stories testifies to a Eurocentric* lens even when non-European materials are ostensibly foregrounded. This bias extends beyond those scenes: what does Moench's *Moon Knight* say about Egypt, or more broadly, about the "Orient?"

[180] "If the writers at Marvel allude to something once, they will invariably reinforce the lesson by alluding to it again. A few examples of their many references to the Bible illustrate this." Donald Palumbo, "Mighty Marvel's Cultural History Tour," *Amazing Heroes #4*, 1981, 40.
[181] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 1–3.
[182] *Ibid*., 148.
[183] Palumbo, *op. cit.*, 48.
[184] Dwight Jon Zimmerman, "Artist: Bill Sienkiewicz," *Comics Interview #34*, 1986, 44.
[185] Eco, *op. cit.*

Seemingly, the Eurocentric default also lays the groundwork for a further slippage: the reconfiguration of the "Orient" through an Orientalist gaze. The next part traces how this tendency hardens into Saidian Orientalism* through Moench's representations of people, places, art and his use of language. All of these show clear asymmetries of knowledge and power.

2) Orientalist Representations (1975-1983)

Moench was not immune to critiques that accused him of reproducing Asian stereotypes prior to his work on *Moon Knight*. In the letter columns of his acclaimed *Master of Kung Fu* run* (1974–1983) starring Shang-Chi, the reader Bill Wu "didn't hesitate to call out racist caricatures, coloring, and plot devices."[186] Yet Wu's correspondence with Moench continued over the years, and the two ultimately became friends. Moench rejected the criticism, arguing publicly that the unusual yellow tint sometimes applied to Asian characters resulted from the inking process. He also maintained that he opposed editor Roy Thomas's inclusion of Fu Manchu, a "Yellow Peril" character he described as "totally racist."[187] This anti-racist stance recurs throughout *Moon Knight*. Spector, for instance, offers moral and financial support to his African-American friend Gena Landers, a self-reliant single mother who owns a New York diner, and several issues depict Spector in a protective, caregiving role toward her two sons. Gena and her sons are also among the few people Spector trusts enough to reveal his vigilante identity to. Significantly, Moench's most explicit denunciation of racism appears in *MK* #15 (1982), where the "villain" Xenos seeks to expel immigrants and minorities from the United States by mobilizing an "army of rats." Moench critiques this xenophobic program through narrative and visual strategies: the villain's outsized rat costume (as if assembled by a taxidermist) and his defeat by a simple mousetrap undercut the authority of his rhetoric, which relies on bigoted commonplaces about "foreign devils" who use "their shoddy tactics […] to put Americans out of jobs, [causing] the crime problem [to] increase, [and] extinguish the light of America."

This issue clearly resonated with *Moon Knight* readers, whose letters reveal strong emotional reactions and a marked sense of political and social investment. In *MK* #19 (1982), for example, one reader laments that "xenophobia has always been an unfortunate part of our American society," adding that he left police work because "some one-third to one-half of the

[186] Wolk, *op. cit.*, 120.
[187] Moench, "Podbean, Episode 466: A Conversation with Doug Moench," *op.cit*.

police officers [he] worked with […] resemble" the character Xenos. Another denounces Xenos's "frightening […] twisted hate for anyone different from himself," while stressing that the issue, appearing "immediately after the assassination of Anwar Sadat," felt "disturbingly relevant." She goes on to wish that there were more "Moon Knights in our world to protect us from all" the Xenoses. A third reader, however, offers "one major criticism" of Moench: "why is it that liberals, such as [him], are so quick to condemn violence of the right (such as in South Africa) but so unwilling to see it when it is committed by the left (e.g. the Kennedy assassinations, the communist slaughter in Cambodia, Vietnam, Afghanistan, etc.)?" Although this rhetorical question is debatable, especially given the communist fanatics who appear in Moench's *Master of Kung Fu*, another possible answer lies in Moench's hippie years.

Moench's self-described "hippie" youth may help contextualize his *Moon Knight* anti-racist commitments. The hippie movement, closely associated with the broader left-leaning counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, often articulated anti-war and anti-racist positions. Yet these "hippie" universalist commitments were strained by the intensification of the Arab–Israeli conflict after the Six-Day War in 1967, and solidarity with one minoritized group (whether Jews or Arabs) could be construed as a betrayal of, antagonism or even overt prejudice toward another. In *Moon Knight*, Moench ventriloquizes the U.S. geopolitical position through Spector:[188] Israel figures as a political ally and a culturally close point of reference. This tension helps clarify how *Moon Knight* can combine an explicit critique of racism with representational stereotypes. In other words, antiracist politics did not necessarily preclude Orientalist imagery. Moreover, both Moench and Sienkiewicz appear to have been nonreligious, which suggests that confessional affiliation is unlikely to have structured *Moon Knight*'s text and image. As Shohat and Stam have noted, "it is quite possible to be antiracist at both a conscious and a practical level, and still be Eurocentric*."[189] Moench's Orientalism*, diffused across the following examples, is a case in point.

a. People

In *Arab Images in American Comic Books* (1994), Jack Shaheen opens by citing a CCA* provision: "Stereotyped images and activities will not be used to degrade specific national, ethnic, cultural, or socio-economic groups." He then surveys 215 comics that depict Arabs in

[188] Spector's Jewish identity, although implicit in *Moon Knight*, is explicitly confirmed in *Moon Knight* #37 (May 1984), written by Zelenetz.
[189] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 4.

various roles, including Moench's *MK* #28 (1983) and Zelenetz's *Moon Knight* (vol. 2) #1 (1985). However, what Shaheen does not specify is that the "stereotyped images" clause belongs to the 1989 CCA revision issued as a "reaffirmation of [the] commitment to providing decent and wholesome comic books for children,"[190] and, therefore, postdates the early-1980s issues under discussion. The 1971 revision in force at the time instead stipulated that "ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible,"[191] a broader injunction that nonetheless supplies a comparable moral framework. The American Psychological Association Dictionary defines stereotypes as generalizations that "simplify and expedite perceptions and judgments," but are often exaggerated and negative.[192] In this sense, the term "stereotype" overlaps with the CCA's prohibition on "ridicule or attack," insofar as both target negative representations. As discussed earlier, the CCA's authority was uneven by the 1980s, with many publishers increasingly treating its recommendations as optional. This loose enforcement may help explain why Moench, throughout *Moon Knight*, can draw with relative freedom on longstanding stereotypes that caricature Arab or Eastern characters. In light of the context discussed earlier, these representations, however, seem less attributable to fear of alterity or limited cultural knowledge than to shared comics-and-cinema conventions and commercial incentives. The following contextual evidence supports this interpretation.

In his analysis of *MK* #28 (1983), Shaheen describes Jellim Yussaf, the "uncouth, malicious" Arab antagonist as "dark-haired, bearded, with brutish features and permanently squinting eyes (very much resembling archaic "Oriental" villains), wrapped in robes and brandishing a crooked dagger."[193] Notably, this description does not comment on the color-coding of his costume—black and red—an aesthetic that recalls the scimitar-wielding Cairo opponent in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). The similarities extend beyond dress: both figures are armed with stereotypical "Arab" weapons and staged as interchangeable threats within a familiar rescue scenario (Fig. 66). As Indiana Jones protects Marion in Cairo, Moon Knight confronts an "ugly Arab male" holding Marlene captive, a "beautiful Western wom[a]n."[194] Unsurprisingly, in both cases, Said's "sadistic, treacherous, low"[195] Arab is decisively defeated, reaffirming the hero's dominance over a racialized villain figure. Jellim Yussaf is, in this regard,

[190] Comics Magazine Association of America, *Comics Code Revision of 1989* (1989), https://cbldf.org/comics-code-revision-of-1989/.
[191] Comics Magazine Association of America, *Comics Code Revision of 1971* (1971), https://cbldf.org/comics-code-revision-of-1971/.
[192] https://dictionary.apa.org/stereotype.
[193] Shaheen, "Arab Images in American Comic Books," *op. cit.,* 131.
[194] *Ibid*.
[195] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 286.

a close analogue to the antagonist, Kareesh-Bek, in *MK* #18, although the latter leans toward the "terroristic" Arab type, whereas the former aligns more closely with Said's "venal lecher."[196] Likewise, Kareesh-Bek (Fig. 67 and 73) appears as a thin, wiry Arab in ragged desert-like clothing with a headscarf. His sadism and bloodlust are, in his case, visually indexed through acid vials and knives. Both figures clearly echo Said's claim that: "if the Arab occupies space enough for attention, it is as a negative value. He is seen as the disrupter of […] the West's existence."[197]

Another panel is problematic in *MK* #28. For a writer such as Moench often praised for realism, the image (Fig. 68) reads as curiously disconnected from contemporary Egypt. A young boy in a jellaba is shown riding a donkey laden with water jars through an unusually pastoral landscape. The issue is less any single detail than their cumulative effect: traditional dress, distinctive greenery, a pebbled path, and animal transport combine into an idealized Arcadian tableau that frames the "Egyptian boy" through an archaizing register. This sits uneasily with the scene's purported setting near the Sudanese border, in the vicinity of an airport and hotel, which are markers of modern tourist or transport infrastructures, rather than an untouched rural idyll.

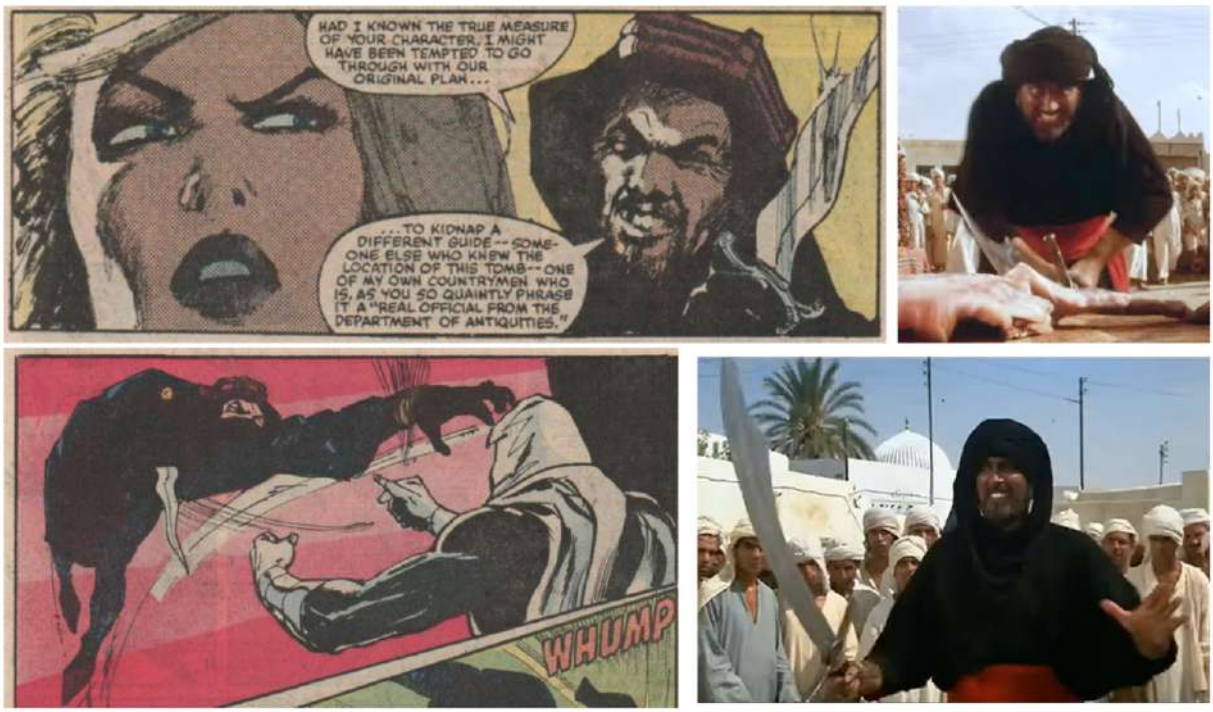


Figure 66: Comparison between Jellim Yussaf from *Moon Knight* #28 (Marvell Comics, 1983) and the Arab swordsman in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Lucasfilm Ltd., 1981)

[196] *Ibid*., 108.
[197] *Ibid*., 285.



Figure 67: Panel from *Moon Knight* #18 featuring Kareesh-Bek (Marvel Comics, 1982)



Figure 68: Panel from *Moon Knight* #28 (Marvel Comics, 1983)

As *Encyclopaedia Britannica* notes, from the early 1980s onward, Egyptian urban clothing styles, amid a renewed adoption of the hijab, "differ only marginally from those found in many European cities,"[198] suggesting that the panel's visual cues rely less on local specificity than on

[198] Arthur Eduard Goldschmidt, "Daily Life and Social Customs in Egypt," in *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/place/Egypt/Daily-life-and-social-customs.

a familiar, romanticized iconography. Read in this light, the scene aligns with Moench's broader tendency to aestheticize Egypt as a timeless and "Oriental" elsewhere.

Moench's quoted misrepresentations, together with Sienkiewicz's classic training in academic painting,[199] help explain the recurrence of familiar Orientalist iconography. The comic-book Arab woman, according to Shaheen, is "doomed to one of two illustrations, either a scantily-clad and salivated-upon belly dancer, or a faceless housewife."[200] *MK* #1 compresses these two figures into a single panel whose staging recalls nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-century harem painting: the saturated warm colors (orange, yellow, purple), the choreographed dance, and the exhibition of the female body. Orientalist works (Fig. 69) such as Giulio Rosati's *The Harem Dance* (n.d.) and Fabio Fabbi's *Scene in a Harem* (1910) offer a suggestive visual genealogy here, even if the connection cannot be demonstrated as direct influence. At the same time, the tableau reveals another Orientalist bias: instead of reproducing a plausible scene from the "Orient," the hairstyles and bikinis of the three Arab women are clearly reminiscent of Western pin-up imagery, which also points to a universality to the male exploitation and objectification of the female body. Even so, Moench reframes this imagery. Rather than presenting the scene primarily as spectacle, the narrative positions the women as coerced. Egyptian soldiers' wives, forced to perform for Bushman and his mercenaries, are rendered visually faceless and voiceless, and structurally powerless. Read in context (especially after the slaughter of Egyptian soldiers), the panel (Fig. 69, top) aims less at erotic invitation than at producing moral outrage and reader sympathy. This difference in narrative function, however, does not fully resolve the representational problem: can a text mobilize a stereotyped image to critique it without also re-circulating the stereotype's visual economy?

In *MK* #18–20 (1982), the series returns to a related configuration through the dictator Nimrod Strange and his three female bodyguards ("one white, one black, and one Asian"), a setup that again places female bodies within an authoritarian male regime. Although the scenario is "modernized," it remains staged within the masculine "palatial command center" (Fig. 70). The underlying structure remains recognizable: an enclosed, quasi-harem arrangement, anchored in sexualized display (the bodyguards train in bikinis) and under Strange's uncontested scrutiny. Even when Moench satirizes Strange's megalomania through

[199] "About Bill Sienkiewicz," *Bill Sienkiewicz Art*, n.d., https://billsienkiewiczart.com/pages/about.
[200] Shaheen, "Arab Images in American Comic Books," *op. cit.*, 129.

the rhetoric of a "third-world army" comically reduced to a barely depicted, meagre force, the erotic imagery continues to solicit reader attention through the very tropes it purports to expose.

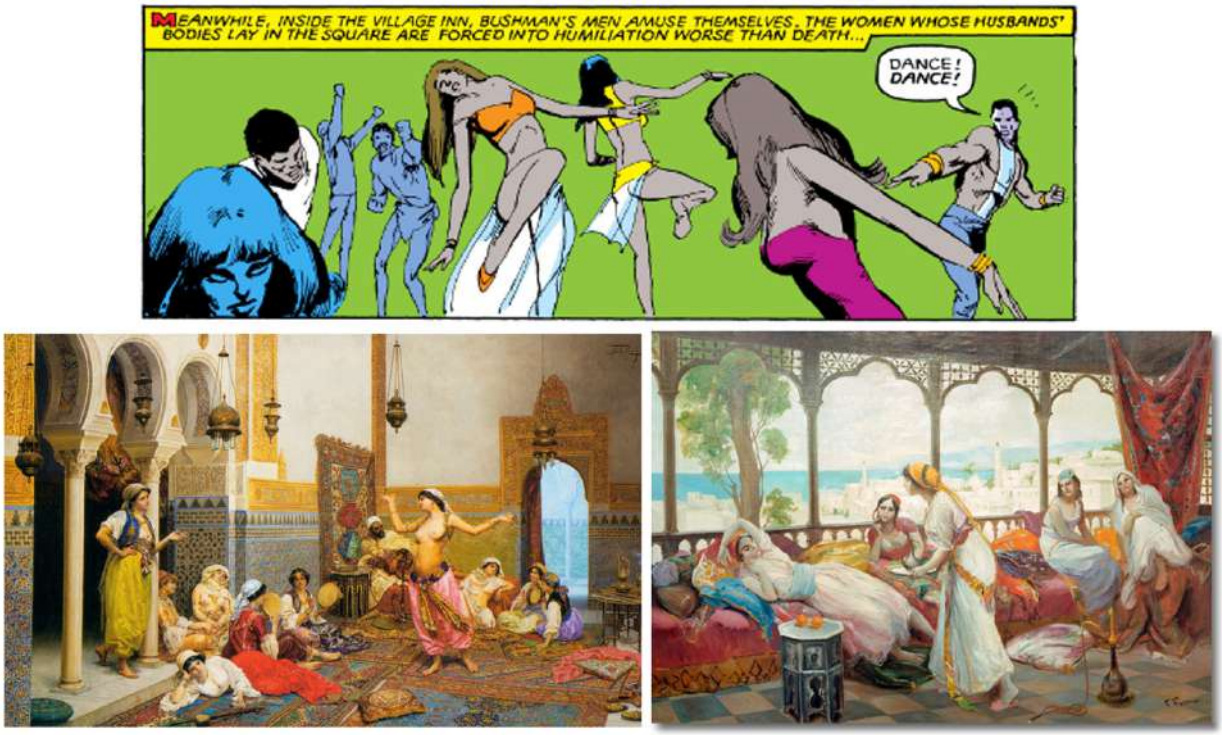


Figure 69: Comparison between a panel from *Moon Knight* #1 (Marvel Comics, 1980) at the top, and *The Harem Dance* at the bottom left (Rosati, n.d) and *Scene in a Harem* (Fabbi, 1910) at the bottom right.

This dynamic can be read through Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze in which "woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotiv of erotic spectacle, […] she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire."[201] Here, that scopophilic logic is further intensified by the scene's reliance on those "Oriental" motifs. The sequence also aligns with contemporaneous film marketing, including *James Bond* posters that monetize similar arrangements of eroticized bodies around a dominant male protagonist. Fig. 71 clearly shows the similar strategies of female eroticization in *James Bond* film posters and the *Moon Knight* panel in which Strange stands over his three "Bond-girl" bodyguards.

Clearer empathy is extended to Middle Eastern Jewish characters. In *MK* #18, after the assassination of friend and Mossad agent Benjamin Abramov, Spector travels to Jerusalem to prevent the massacre of a synagogue congregation and to comfort Abramov's wife, Ana. As the narration puts it, Abramov's death leaves Spector feeling that his "soul was […] slain [and his] love […] now vengeance"[202] when Abramov was shot. Formally, the sequence (Fig. 72) relies

[201] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 11.
[202] *Moon Knight* #17 (Marvel Comics, March 1982).



Figure 70: Panel from *Moon Knight* #18 (Marvel Comics, 1982)



Figure 71: Comparison between a panel from *Moon Knight* #18 (Marvel Comics, 1982) and film posters from *Live and Let Die* and *Thunderball* (Eon Productions, 1973, 1965)

on a two-tier alternation: panels depicting the synagogue bloodbath are cross-cut with panels of Spector's interior monologue, staging an epiphany in which Jerusalem prompts him to "muse on the changes which have occurred in his heart," and to feel "more emotion than he has ever known." The episode is also notable for its relative absence of caricature: it integrates appropriate liturgical vocabulary (Sabbath, Lekha Dodi, Havdalah) alongside recognizably Jewish iconographic cues (the Star of David), and frames Spector's grief through "the heart-rending walls of all the ghosts of Jerusalem" and "the murder of his [Jewish] friend." In *MK* #19, Spector assumes the cover identity of Israeli secret agent Yitzak Topol; the disguise (glasses and a fake moustache) barely masks his distinctive features, and the "Jewish" persona is presented as compatible and continuous with Spector's already glamorized appearance. Moench's intention to bring a respectful and fair representation of the Jewish culture and people was later acknowledged in the letter columns by a Jewish reader who "greatly enjoyed the Israeli atmosphere and Hebrew customs that pervaded the saga."[203] Across the series, Spector is repeatedly positioned as an ally and friend of Israelis who, as Said notes, often appear in Western media "as the champion of Westernism and modernity and democracy."[204]

In contrast, the figures cast as adversaries to this "Westernism" are other "Eastern" characters. In *MK* #18, one such opponent is Sumaro (Fig. 73): his design compiles readily legible East Asian signifiers (stylized hair, exaggerated "Asian" facial traits, a sumo-like loincloth, and a Southeast conical hat), elements that function less as characterization than as a shorthand of recognizable clichés. Despite his massive frame, he is ultimately defeated by two Jewish characters, Ana Abramov and Spector/Moon Knight, aligned, in different ways, with Westernism. The second slayer, Kareesh-Bek, whom I described above, is likewise in line with Middle Eastern stereotypes: an "Arab who is subservient" to Nimrod Strange and who appears "obscure and strangely to be feared."[205] Jews and Arabs, as Semitic peoples, share long, entangled histories and have both been subjected to Orientalist misrepresentations. Yet the geopolitical and media landscape shifts decisively after the establishment of Israel in 1948 and subsequent U.S-Israeli alignment. In Said's formulation, "by a concatenation of events and circumstances the Semitic myth bifurcated in the Zionist movement; one Semite went the way of Orientalism*, the other, the Arab, was forced to go the way of the Oriental."[206] Moench's

[203] *Moon Knight* #24 (Marvel Comics, October 1982).
[204] Edward Said, "Arabs and Jews," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no. 2 (1974): 6.
[205] *Ibid*.
[206] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 307.

contrast between Western-coded Jewish/Israeli figures (Spector, Ana Abramov, Mossad agents) and antagonistic Arab and Asian characters closely tracks that representational logic.



Figure 72: Panels from *Moon Knight* #18 (Marvel Comics, 1982)

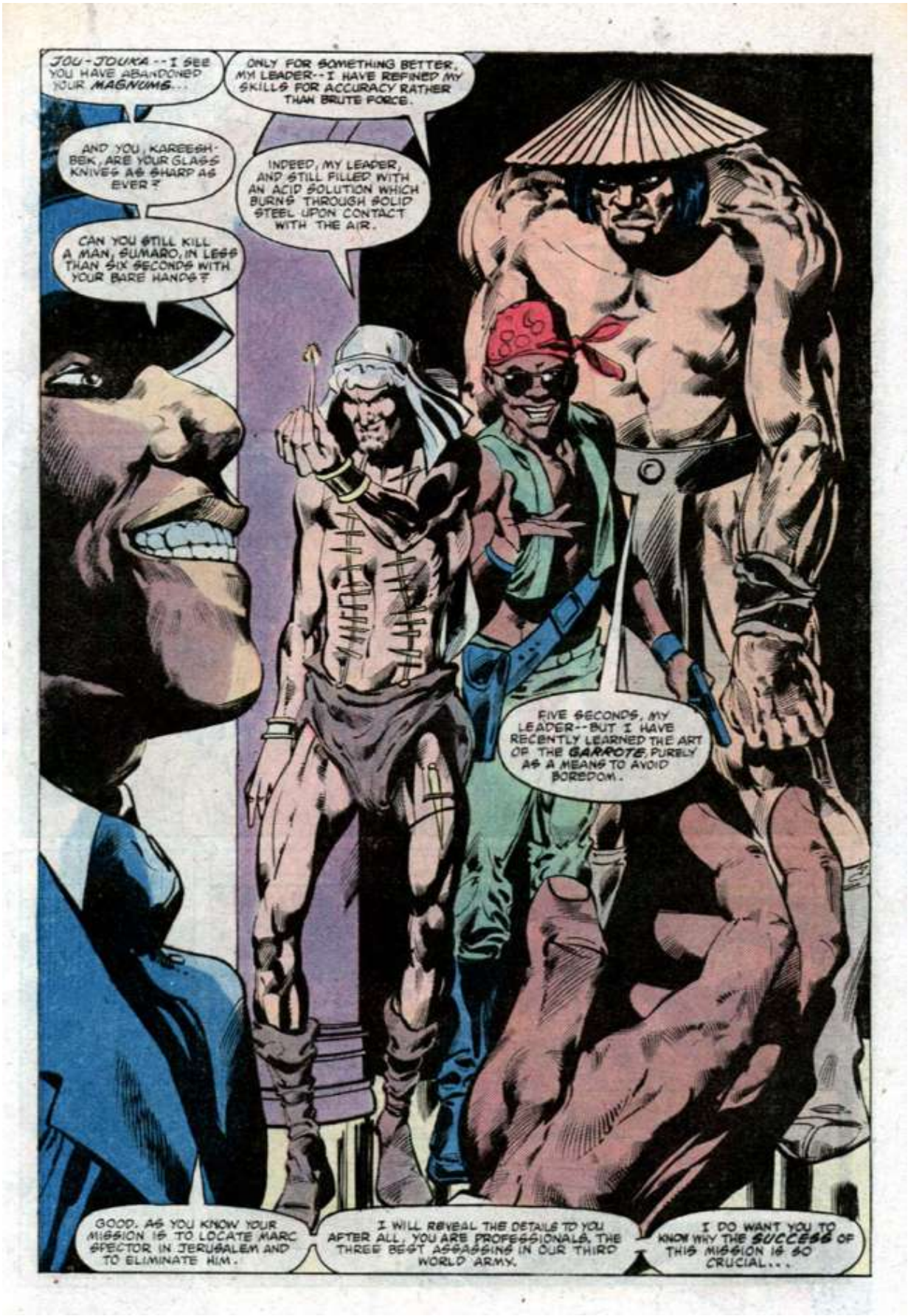


Figure 73: Panel from *Moon Knight* #18 featuring (from left) Nimrod Strange, Jou-Jouka, Kareesh-Bek, and Sumaro (Marvel Comics, 1982)

b. Art

The absence of Middle Eastern coding discussed earlier goes hand in hand with the anonymity of Middle Eastern art and scarcity of literature in *Moon Knight*. To be sure, a few salient elements of Middle Eastern architecture appear here and there along with the statue of Khonshu. By and large, however, the abundance of Western literary and pictorial intertexts contrasts with the near-absence of comparable references from the East. This imbalance reflects what Said identifies as constitutive "of the new American social-science attention to the Orient, [namely,] its singular avoidance of literature."[207] In Moench's *Moon Knight*, there are indeed several nods to Shakespeare and a handful of other western references, such as the American bestseller *Sybil* (1973),[208] invoked in *The Hulk!* #13 as an echo to Spector's multiple identities. In visual terms, *Moon Knight* readers are immersed in Sienkiewicz's German expressionism-inflected neo-noir atmosphere across many issues. Moreover, as seen earlier, panels repeatedly gesture toward Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *James Bond* films. More strikingly, the very first panel of *MK* #1 can also read like a nod to David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Indeed, Fig. 74 shows a clear genealogy between the two works: both images rely on the same high-contrast composition: one figure in bright white is visually "promoted" above a field of darker, more anonymous soldiers. In *Lawrence of Arabia*, the white robes of the European Lawrence become a dominant element in the frame and help mark him as exceptional in relation to the Arab soldiers around him. The *Moon Kni*ght panel does something analogous: Moon Knight looks monumental, as if superimposed as a symbol of Westernism. Here, whiteness suggests purity and superiority rather than mere clothing.

In contrast to these European and American film references, *Moon Knight* offers no clear allusion to Egyptian cinema, even though it was still in its "golden age" in the late 1960s.[209] An obvious Egyptian intertext would have been Shadi Abdel Salam's *The Night of Counting the Years* (1969), released in Egypt as *Al Mumia* ("The Mummy"). Pascal Vernus describes the film as "un episode passionnant de l'archéologie égyptienne, la découverte de la cache aux momies royales,"[210] and its themes and iconography would have lent themselves readily to the tomb sequence in *MK* #1.

[207] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 291.
[208] Written by Flora Rheat Schreiber, *Sybil* is the account of the psychotherapy of Sybil Dorsett that strongly influenced popular understanding of what was then called multiple personality disorder (now dissociative identity disorder).
[209] Noël De Souza, "A Century of Egyptian Cinema," *Official Golden Globes Website*, August 13, 2021, https://goldenglobes.com/articles/century-egyptian-cinema/.
[210] Pascal Vernus and Alain Bouldouyre, *Dictionnaire amoureux de l'Égypte pharaonique* (Plon, 2009), 322.



Figure 74: Comparison between a panel from *Moon Knight* #1 (Marvel Comics, 1980) and a screenshot from *Lawrence of Arabia* (Horizon Pictures, 1962)

The *New York Times* itself characterized the film, upon its American release in 1975, as "fogged with a pretentious mysticism,"[211] a formulation that also resonates with *Moon Knight*'s atmosphere. More importantly, unlike *Moon Knight* where natives rarely speak, Salam's film foregrounds the voices of contemporary, impoverished Egyptian tribes and emphasizes their ambivalent relationships with their ancient artistic heritage.[212] Said reasons that a direct reference to "an Arab poet or novelist" or to "a literary text [that] speaks more or less directly of a living reality" would threaten to "disrupt the various patterns (images, clichés, abstractions) by which the Orient is represented."[213] In this context, Moench, unencumbered by Arab literary reference points, can subsequently produce Orientalist* images and clichés about Middle Eastern people and places discussed here.

It would be tempting to assume that "low-cultural-form" comic book creators were simply unfamiliar with Egyptian culture, were it not for the fact that Egyptophilia* has turned ancient Egypt into one of the most academically-studied objects among ancient civilizations, "from being a land of obscurity to … become a department of [academic] learning."[214] As stated previously, that fascination was embraced by the comic book industry in the early 20th century. Said even notes how such knowledge could be mobilized to justify power, as in UK Prime

[211] Richard Eder, "Egypt's 'Night of Counting Years,'" *The New York Times*, October 23, 1975, https://www.nytimes.com/1975/10/23/archives/egypts-night-of-counting-years.html.
[212] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 154.
[213] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 291.
[214] *Ibid.*, 83.

Minister Balfour's famous claim that "we know the civilization of Egypt better than we know the civilization of any other country. We know it further back; we know it more intimately."[215] Furthermore, that "uneducated" posture is not substantiated by Moench's own background. First, he worked as a reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, a major Pulitzer-winning daily known for investigative and watchdog journalism; he was even nominated for a Chicago Newspaper Guild Award in 1972. Second, as noted earlier, he was no stranger to Egypt-based writings. Third, and more convincingly, he was a consummate Egyptophile*. He even included a realistically rendered version of Chicago's Field Museum, which he deliberately named the "Oriental Institute," in the highly Egyptomaniac* *Thor* #326 in 1982.[216] Yet, upon closer scrutiny of the *Moon Knight* panels featuring works of art, the contrast between Western and Egyptian art is striking.

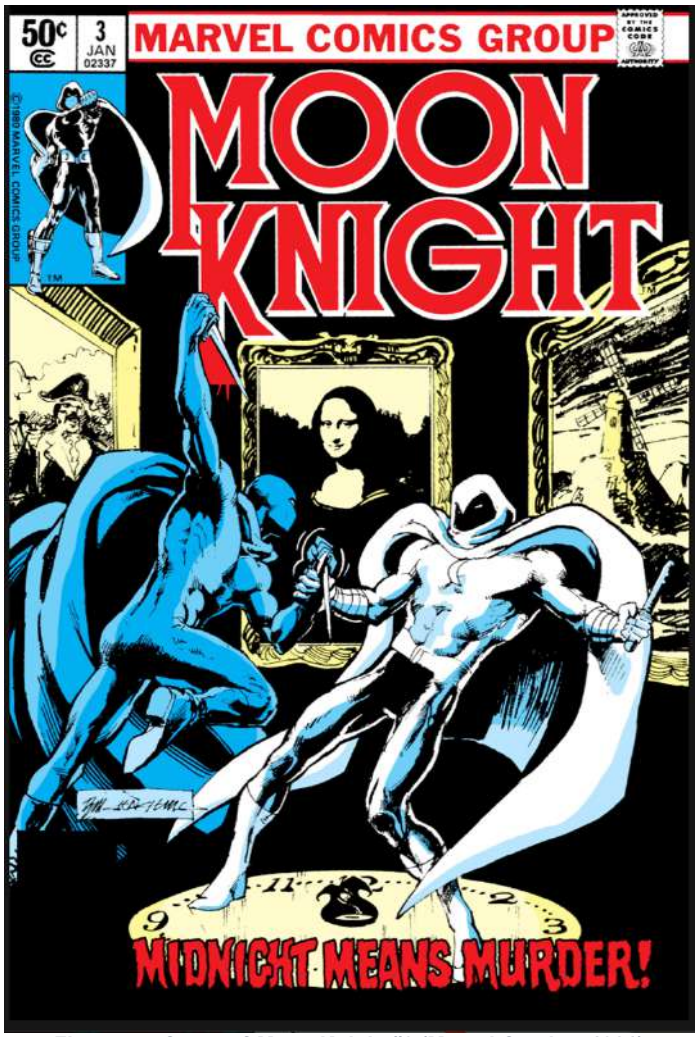


Figure 75: Cover of *Moon Knight* #3 (Marvel Comics, 1981)

[215] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 32.
[216] This is the comic where he introduced the second Scarlet Scarab, whose goal is to protect the priceless ancient artifacts of Egypt. For more on the Scarlet Scarab, see p. 121-122.



Figure 76: Panels from *Moon Knight* #28 (Marvel Comics, 1983)

In spite of Moench's passion for Egyptology*, an Egyptian work of art, through a debasing process of "trinketization," remains a mere "memento" (*MK* #1), an "artifact" or, at best, a "priceless work of Egyptian art" (*MK* #9). In contrast, European works are named and culturally legible: a "Monet oil painting" (*MK* #3), a "Picasso sculpture" (*MK* #7) or a "Muchat" (*MK* #14). *MK* #3's cover (Fig. 75) signals this interest in European painting with particular clarity. In addition to the central *Mona Lisa*, one can recognize a loose rendering of a Monet windmill on the right, and a Howard Pyle-style portrait on the left that recalls the artist's typical portrayal of a pirate. No other *Moon Knight* cover offers a similar showcase for Egyptian art. Precision can even reach fetishistic levels when a character can recognize Venetian marble at a simple glance (*MK* #24). Furthermore, rather than succumbing to Stendhal syndrome (sometimes associated with fainting when exposed to overwhelming artistic beauty), Moon Knight wanders calmly through an Egyptian burial site and refers to it naively as "a place embracing all of Antiquity" (Fig. 76). In Fig. 77, the Egyptian objects in Seti I's tomb remain quiet, nameless, de-Egyptianized, vaguely evocative of ancient Egyptian masterpieces. While the bull-headed god Apis is recognizable, the other figure appears as a hybrid of falcon-headed Horus and ibis-headed Thoth. Tellingly, the layout of this panel even resembles a Euro-American museum display: observers on the left, statues meticulously aligned on the right. Details and references, in sum, are reserved for European and American art.

Khonshu (Fig. 78) is a central figure in *Moon Knight* and therefore deserves closer attention. Surprisingly, the spelling "Khonshu" has no academic recognition and seems to be Moench's invention (barring a typo in the production process). "Khonsu," the ancient Egyptian moon god, has variant spellings such as Khons, Chons, or Khensu.[217] Yet the spelling "Khonshu" appears to have no precedent in scientific literature prior to the character's first appearance in *MK* #1 (1980).

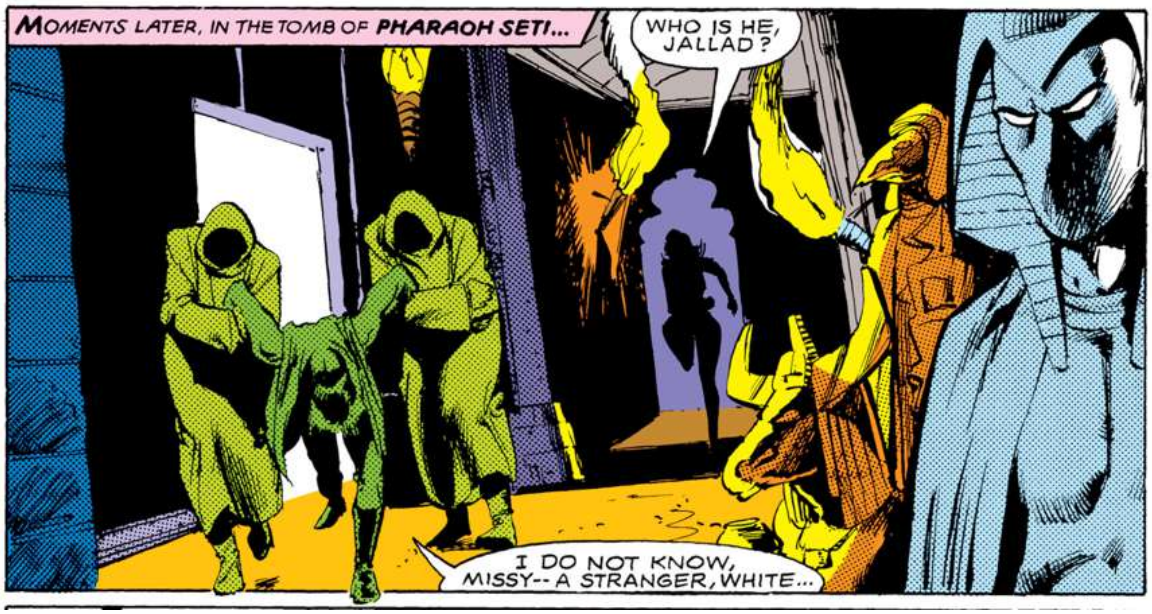


Figure 77: Panel from *Moon Knight* #1 (Marvel Comics, 1980)



Figure 78: Panel from *Moon Knight* #9 featuring Khonshu (Marvel Comics, 1981)

[217] Jonathan Hill, "Khonsu," *Ancient Egypt Online*, 2010, https://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/khonsu/.

As art historian and archaeologist Philippe Mainterot argues, this onomastic divergence parallels Sienkiewicz's visual rendering of the statue of Khonsu in *MK* #1 and *MK* #9:

> "La représentation de Khonsou dans ces deux planches (Figs. 77-78) ne reflète aucune réalité historique et iconographique. En effet, l'auteur a simplement puisé son inspiration dans des accessoires pharaoniques comme le *némès*, coiffe royale striée. Elle est ici combinée à un casque qui rappelle celui de Dark Vador dans *Star Wars*, avec au front ce qui ressemble à un *uraeus* stylisé. Le pagne qu'il porte ressemble de très loin au pagne royal *chendjyt*, avec sa bande de tissu revenant vers l'avant. Il n'y a pas de cape portée par les dieux ou les statues à l'époque pharaonique. L'attitude statique avec le bras le long du corps se retrouve dans la statuaire égyptienne. Le sceptre reprend enfin la double image stylisée de la lune, mais on est plus proche de l'arme traditionnelle chinoise de hache lune à deux extrémités. Par conséquent, nous sommes ici dans une création libre et stéréotypée. Khonsou est habituellement représenté sous les traits d'un enfant momiforme avec un croissant de lune sur la tête. On le trouve également à certaines occasions avec une tête de faucon surmontée du disque lunaire."[218]

Mainterot's point is that Sienkiewicz's "Khonshu" is not consistent with any historical or artistic reality but is instead a stereotyped, hybrid assemblage of Egyptomaniac* visual codes and contemporary pop culture. The timing makes the *Star Wars* influence unsurprising: Sienkiewicz even draws an "*Empire Strikes Back*" marquee in *MK* #1.[219] As for the cape, whether it also nods to Darth Vader or functions primarily as a superhero signifier, the process of turning "highbrow" Egyptian art into comic-book form clearly intersects with the commercial logics Steve Martin satirized in his sketch discussed earlier.[220] The fearsome *uraeus* (upright form of an Egyptian cobra) and the *nemes* headdress may also reflect Moench's input: given his Egyptophilia* and horror-film references, these motifs read as part of his recurrent visual repertoire.

Nowhere in these issues is it explained how Spector transports the Khonshu statue from the tomb of Seti I to his mansion in New York. In all likelihood, he simply "takes" it, which raises the question of how that "taking" ought to be named. Did he request permission from the Egyptian government of the late 1970s? Did he buy it? Borrow it? Steal it? Traditional Egyptology* narratives, subsumed within an Orientalist* lens, have rarely described such acts as theft from a population supposedly uninterested in pharaonic artifacts. If anything, as Elliott

[218] This is from a personal correspondence with Philippe Mainterot (November 2025).
[219] Darth Vader has become such a durable pop-cultural icon that a Darth Vader grotesque was installed on the Gothic Washington National Cathedral in 1986.
[220] See p. 47 for more detail.

Colla argues, this kind of pillaging is reframed as "acts of redemption, not dispossession."[221] Spector's act can be construed as a familiar salvage narrative, a "remedy for bad local government": he rescues objects from "iconoclasts and ignorant peasants" [222] by relocating them in the United States (Europe, in Colla's example), the supposed right place for conservation. By doing so, he also embarks on a spiritual quest to redeem himself, and this redemption hinges on the robbery of an Egyptian artefact whose aspects he decides to take on.

One might object that the artistic liberties taken by Marvel's creators in depictions of Middle Eastern peoples and art do not necessarily reflect Orientalist* stereotyping, and that similar divergences occur just as readily in representations of non-Eastern subjects. In fact, the contrast is very difficult to dismiss. A telling case is *Marvel Preview* #21 (1980), set in the small French town of Cossé-le-Vivien, at the Robert Tatin museum. According to the Director of the museum, Bruno Godivier, many architectural details in this comic align accurately with reality:

> "Les représentations du musée me semblent assez fidèles et parfois particulièrement précises pour certains détails iconographiques. Les emplacements des divers monuments, les proportions des espaces sont assez bien respectés jusqu'à la profondeur du bassin lors de la bagarre de la page 39 qui semble assez juste. Je note également que dans le phylactère de cette même vignette, la Porte du Soleil et la Porte de la Lune sont nommées ainsi que "Tatin's Dragon" à la page 38. Ces quelques éléments tendent à induire que les auteurs sont probablement venus sur place et qu'à minima ils disposaient de photographies du monument ainsi que d'informations assez précises. Les bas-reliefs sur les monuments sont un peu simplifiés et ne permettent pas de retrouver véritablement le langage philosophique et symbolique de Robert Tatin, ce n'était d'ailleurs sans doute pas le propos des auteurs de Marvel.
> Je pense qu'ils cherchaient un décor exotique d'une civilisation indéterminée entre l'antiquité égyptienne, les cultures précolombiens et les "mystères de l'Asie."[223]

A comparison of the real site (Fig. 79) with its drawn counterpart (Fig. 80) supports Godivier's analysis: the latter is clearly modeled on the former. The proportions and placement of each statue and monument are meticulously preserved. Moreover, the motifs are rendered in a similar style, even when some details are inaccurate. Godivier is likewise correct that the "auteurs" seek exotic settings. However, throughout *Moon Knight*, such "exoticism" does not

[221] Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2008), 64.
[222] *Ibid*.
[223] This is from a personal correspondence with Bruno Godivier, Director of the Robert Tatin Museum (November 2025).

appear to entail the same representational rigor when the setting is located in the Middle East as when it is located in the West, including locations that Moench presents as Western.



Figure 79: Panel from *Marvel Preview* #21 (Marvel Comics, 1980)



Figure 80: Photo from https://www.messortiesculture.com/visites-guidees/musee-robert-tatin/musee-robert-tatin

c. Geography

Much like Moench's representations of European and Egyptian art, his treatment of geography also shifts depending on whether a location is coded as "Middle Eastern" or as a "Westernized" Middle Eastern site. Jerusalem, positioned, as noted earlier, as a touchstone of "Westernism," is a key example. Moench introduces Jerusalem (Fig. 81) as "the center of inspiration for the three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam," ostensibly placing them on an equal footing. The descriptive asymmetry is nonetheless telling: Christianity and Judaism are associated with exalted terms ("triumph," "grandeur"), whereas Islam is reduced to "the goal of the prophet's mystic night journey." Even so, Moench punctuates the city through emblematic sites tied to each tradition: the Tower of David (Judaism), the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (Christianity), and the Suq Al-Attarin (Islam). Notably, the latter is rendered in a standardized transliteration rather than older "colonial" French/English spellings ("Souq El Attarine"). Moench even supplies a map panel whose place-names and spatial relations are drawn with unusual care (Fig. 83), and the simplified depiction of the Tower of David remains broadly faithful to its real-world referent (Fig. 82). This attention to geographic detail recalls, albeit to a lesser extent, the New York iconography in *The Hulk!* #18, where the carousel and eagle statue immediately index Central Park (Fig. 84). In this

respect, Jerusalem is granted a representational precision comparable to U.S. locations in Moench's work.

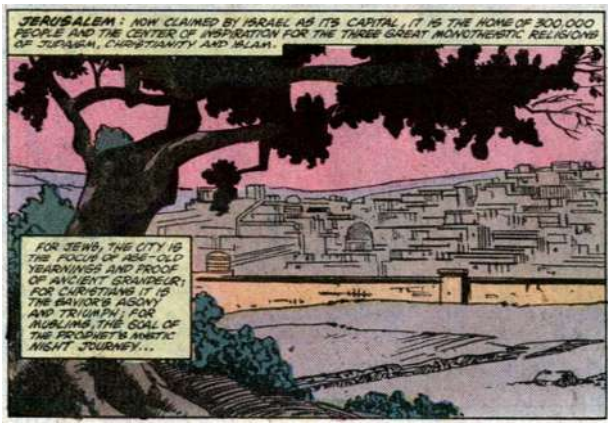


Figure 81: Panel from *Moon Knight* #18 (Marvel Comics, 1982)



Figure 82: Comparison between the Tower of David in Jerusalem (www.tod.org.il/en/corporate-and-private-events) and a panel from *Moon Knight* #18 (Marvel Comics, 1982)

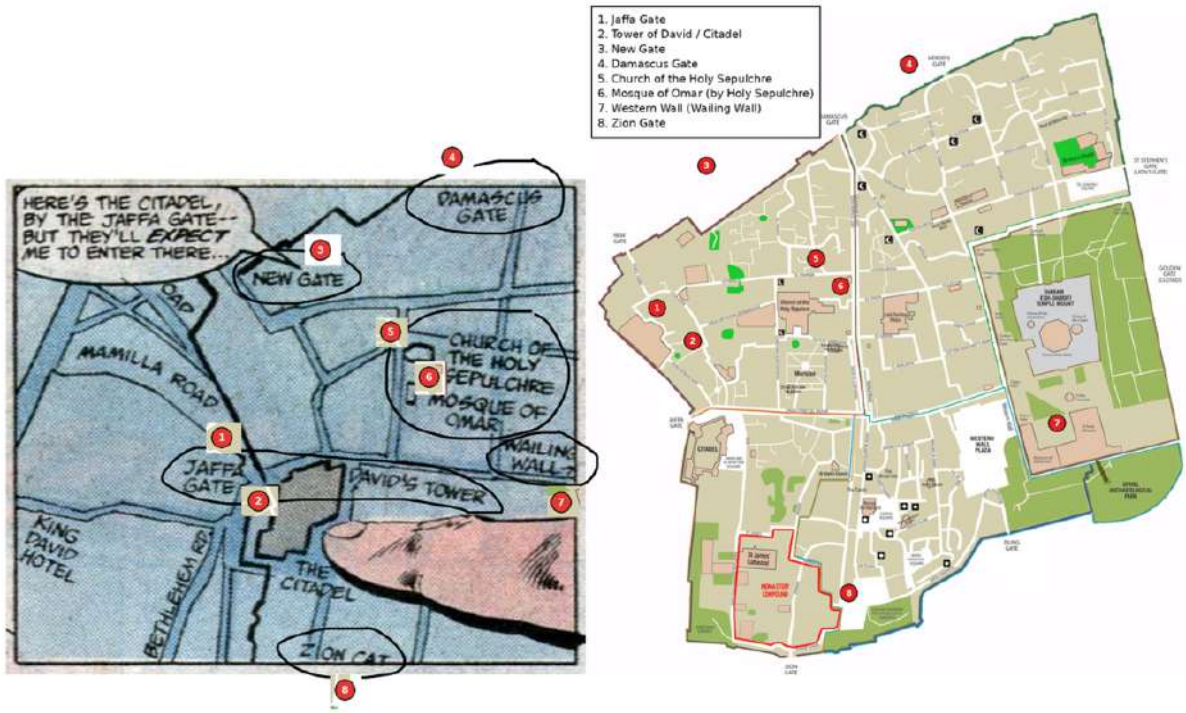


Figure 83: Comparison between a panel from *Moon Knight* #18 (Marvel Comics, 1982) and a map of Jerusalem (Sébastien Jacotin, 2026) showing the very similar geographies



Figure 84: Comparison between panels from *The Hulk!* #18 (Marvel Comics, 1979) and photos of Central Park (nyctoursthenandnow.us/2024/05/15/the-central-park-carousel, www.flickr.com/photos/26816223@N07/3310170932)

By comparison, Egypt and Sudan do not seem to have benefited from the same degree of geographic precision. Moench may have assumed the readers' limited Egyptological* familiarity would allow him to take substantial liberties with "half-imagined, half-known"[224] places, a tendency typical of Orientalist* representation. Early in *MK* #1, for instance, Bushman orders his men to "take Selima [where] an American archeologist found a pharaoh's tomb." Spector pointedly corrects the premise: "no Egyptian tombs have ever been found so far south of Luxor. But anything's possible." Anything is indeed possible here, since Moench relocates Seti I's tomb (KV17) from the Theban necropolis near Luxor to Selima in Sudan, hundreds of kilometers to the south. Moreover, *MK* #28 has Spector return to Seti I's tomb, yet places it elsewhere again, and the visual reference appears to conflate monuments: although the narration identifies the site as Seti I's tomb, the drawn architecture closely resembles Hatshepsut's terraced mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari. As Mainterot observes, "il s'agit d'une construction inspirée du temple funéraire de la reine Hatchepsout à Deir el-Bahari (XVIIIe dynastie), donc antérieure à Séthi 1er. C'est un temple construit en terrasses au pied de la falaise."[225] The

[224] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 63.
[225] Private correspondence with Philippe Mainterot (November 2025).

comparison (Fig. 85), notably the central stairway framed by symmetrical, rectangular structures, supports this identification. The effect is akin to describing Chenonceau while illustrating Chambord: both are Loire Valley châteaux, but the substitution is unmistakable.

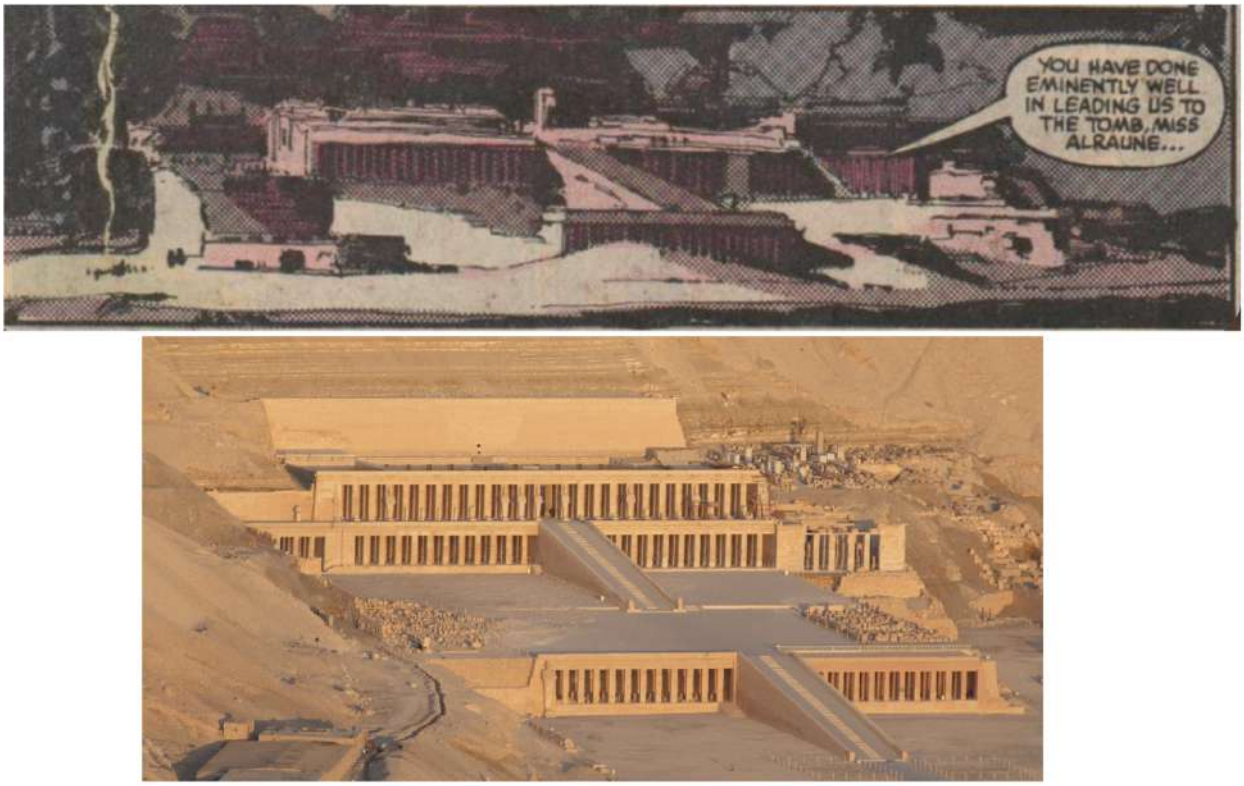


Figure 85: Comparison between a panel from *Moon Knight* #28 (Marvel Comics, 1983) and the Luxor Temple of Hatshepsut (Wouter Hagens, 2010)

Moench's North African settings also show relatively little interest in everyday social life (economy, local routines, or vernacular culture). This absence of familiar referents arguably helps the reader "register" Egypt and Sudan as largely imaginative geographies rather than as fully specified places. Why Moench relocates and recombines Egyptian sites across Egypt and Sudan is difficult to determine with certainty. However, the choice to stage antagonists in Sudan rather than Egypt can be read against the political situation of the early 1980s. After the 1979 Egypt–Israel peace treaty signed by Egyptian President Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Begin, Egypt's relationship with the USA entered a new pacified phase, while the treaty also generated regional backlash and sharpened divisions within the political discourse of Arab countries, including Sudan, which "reevaluated its traditionally close relationship with Egypt."[226] Against that backdrop, Sudan functions, in the comic's symbolic geography, as a more readily "hostile"

[226] Christopher S. Wren, "Sudan Reappraising Close Ties to Egypt," *The New York Times*, December 7, 1979, https://www.nytimes.com/1979/12/07/archives/sudan-reappraising-close-ties-to-egypt-implies-a-curtailment-if.html.

terrain to Westernism. *MK* #28 makes this explicit when Spector adopts his Grant identity rather than his Jewish-sounding surname, Spector, en route to Sudan because, "after Sadat's waltz with Begin," Marlene doubts that "Sudanese customs would welcome [him] with open arms." This "hostile" coding is reinforced by smaller textual and onomastic inconsistencies. Moench uses the now-dated form "the Sudan" (with an article), an older English usage with a faintly anachronistic, quasi-imperial resonance, and even misspells basic toponyms (Selima becomes "Selina" in one panel). Relatedly, ostensibly more demanding Western place names, such as Cossé-le-Vivien, France in *Marvel Preview* #21, are spelled consistently throughout the issue. Taken together, these discrepancies suggest that the precision afforded to Western (or Western-coded) spaces is not extended in the same way to Egypt and Sudan.

d. Languages

Spector's journeys to Egypt and the "Orient" expose him to a multitude of Middle Eastern languages. Whether dead or living, these languages are mediated through an Orientalist* frame. In *MK* #1, for example, Egyptian servants carry a severely dehydrated Spector to the tomb of Seti I for shelter. There, they are joined by their employer, Marlene Alraune, whom they repeatedly address as "Missy," a term that evokes colonial service vocabulary associated with British India. Yet the issue is set in the early 1980s when Egypt is an independent republic. Moench therefore seems to reimport a colonial hierarchy into a different historical setting, rendering Egyptian characters subordinate. Additionally, the servants are verbally constrained: they are granted only a few lexically and grammatically limited utterances ("I do not know, Missy – A stranger, white […] You coming Missy? […] Missy, what? […] But… the storm?"). Onomastics reinforce this Orientalist pattern. Like the earlier Kareesh-Bek, whose given name "Kareesh" appears to have been an invented vaguely Arabic-sounding transliteration, one servant is named "Jallad," an Arabic term meaning executioner, cruel, merciless. Even if Moench selected it for its "authentic" sound, he was also probably aware that this choice coded the Arab character as potentially threatening to Moon Knight, figured here as the pure "white stranger." In this way, the text invites suspicion toward the servants despite their evident assistance in the scene.

Comparable stereotyping appears in the portrayal of Asian and African characters. In *MK* #4, the antagonist is named "Dragon," and his design (Fig. 86) mobilizes familiar East Asian clichés (braided hair, bare chest, nunchaku) while evoking 1970s martial-arts

iconography associated with Bruce Lee. More importantly, unlike his comparatively loquacious "white" counterparts, Dragon is given no dialogue across several multi-panel pages. Moreover, his description ("a long, wickedly leering split of lips and flashing teeth") further marks him as menacing, drawing on traits historically associated in Orientalist* discourse with both Asians and Arabs. Said identifies a comparable mechanism in *The Sheik* (George Melford, 1921), where Ahmed Ben Hassan, played by Italian-born Rudolph Valentino, is similarly debased as he "leers suggestively as he speaks."[227] Further, "Bushman," *Moon Knight*'s most prominent Black African antagonist, is another stereotyped name. The term refers to the indigenous hunter-gatherer communities primarily associated with Namibia and Botswana. More importantly, rather than using the neutral ethnonym "San" or an unrelated "villain" codename, Moench names Moon Knight's archenemy with a term described by Mohammed Adhikari as "the most opprobrious of racial slurs that can be hurled at coloured people."[228] Although Bushman is portrayed as a ruthless and bloodthirsty villain, the use of a historically derogatory colonial label is difficult to justify, unless one assumes Moench was unaware of the term's racial and historical charge. In either case, this designation, which is "belittling Africa,"[229] is symptomatic of a Eurocentric* representational frame.



Figure 86: Panel from *Moon Knight* #4 featuring "Dragon" (Marvel Comics, 1981)



Figure 87: Panel from *Moon Knight* #28 showing Moon Knight speaking Arabic (Marvel Comics, 1982)

[227] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 286.
[228] Mohammed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Ohio University Press, 2005), 28.
[229] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 2.

When names are not stereotyped, they are sometimes fabricated. In *MK* #28, the scientist from the Department of Antiquities who picks up Spector and Marlene at a Sudanese airport is named "Jellim," a name that does not appear to be a commonly attested Arabic given name. Incidentally, the same issue also features highly stylized and decorative hieroglyphs that take substantial liberties with conventional layout and sign order.[230] This strategy is consistent with what Said describes as the modern reconstruction of "the Orient's lost language."[231] In line with readers' appetite for visual spectacle in superhero comics, Moench constructs a dreamlike universe in which hieroglyphs function less as language than as visual signifiers of Egyptian mysticism. In Said's terms, the Orientalist* author can thereby "celebrate his method, and his position, as that of a secular creator, a man who made new worlds as God had once made the old."[232] In contrast, *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide* (1950), despite its own Orientalist imagery, shows greater attention to epigraphic conventions: Edgard P. Jacobs consulted "des ouvrages académiques pour créer un objet paré de véritables hiéroglyphes,"[233] indicating that not all comic-book authors treated ancient Egyptian writing as merely decorative.

Reflecting Said's account of the romantic Orientalist*, Moon Knight himself speaks Arabic (Fig. 87) in this issue to extract information from a non-English-speaking Arab thief about Marlene's whereabouts. As Said suggests, mastery of "an Oriental language" casts the Western subject as "a spiritual hero, a knight-errant bringing back to Europe a sense of the holy mission it had now lost."[234] Through chevrons (< ... >), a traditional visual cue to signal that the character speaks in another language, Moench marks his Western protagonist as linguistically and culturally superior. That competence allows the "knight-errant" of the moon to make good on his promise to be a redemptive vigilante invested with a sacral mission. At the same time, the text's recurrent comparison of Moon Knight to "a spirit" or "a ghost" might have warranted an allusion to "Khonsuemheb and the ghost," an ancient Egyptian tale about a priest of Khonsu and an unnamed man spending the night next to a ghost-inhabited tomb in the Theban Necropolis. Again, Moench does not pursue that intertext and instead foregrounds a Western heroic paradigm.

[230] The different Artificial Intelligence tools I have used were not able to recognize real hieroglyphs while acknowledging clear visual inspiration from them.
[231] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 121.
[232] *Ibid*.
[233] Vanessa Desclaux, "L'Aventure Champollion. Dans Le Secret Des Hiéroglyphes. Promenade Commentée," *Bulletin de La Société Française d'égyptologie*, no. 207 (2022): 34.
[234] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 115.

In conclusion, Moench does not simply dress *Moon Knight* in Egyptian motifs; he subordinates the narrative to a Western symbolic order. In line with Said's Orientalism*, Arab and Asian characters are repeatedly caricatured and discredited; Egyptian art is anonymized or fetishized; Egypt and Sudan are treated as manipulable symbolic backdrops rather than as socially and historically specific places; and Arabic and hieroglyphs function more as signs of exoticism than as meaningful languages. In contrast, Western references are named, contextualized, and rendered with greater specificity. Above all, Western-coded protagonists consistently retain the upper hand over their "Oriental" antagonists. Yet, when Moench left the series, *Moon Knight*, along with its recurring cast of allies and enemies, did not disappear. On the contrary, the character continued to evolve, albeit through broader and sometimes fairer forms of representation. The final chapter of this dissertation examines later *Moon Knight* iterations and shows to what extent they inherit and partially revise Moench's Orientalist model.

Chapter III – From Orientalism to Polycentrism

"Egyptians see that Hollywood always sees them in an Orientalist way. We're always exotic. Women are submissive. Men are bad. So it was very important for me to break that."[235] –Mohammed Diab, lead director of *Moon Knight*, on the representation of Egyptian characters in film

[235] Adam B. Vary, "How 'Moon Knight' Sends Marvel Studios Into the Unknown: 'We're Creating a Whole New Thing,'" *Variety*, March 30, 2022, https://variety.com/2022/tv/news/moon-knight-oscar-isaac-marvel-egypt-dissociative-identity-disorder-1235219568/.

Moench left *Moon Knight* and Marvel regretfully after *MK* #33 in September 1983 and did not return to the character until 1998, with the exception of *Marc Spector: Moon Knight Special* #1 (1992), the first team-up between Moon Knight and Shang-Chi, another of Moench's best-known characters. Apart from the presence of pyramids and mummies (Fig. 88), which further anchor Moench's Egyptophilia* to *Moon Knight*, that story does not stand out, however, as a clear example of Orientalism*. When Moench returned in 1998 to script two consecutive *Moon Knight* titles, comics had entered a context shaped by somewhat more diverse forms of representation, due in no small part to works such as Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, which chronicled Palestinian life in the early 1990s. Moench's *Moon Knight* (vol. 3, 1998) was launched in that context, which may help explain why a sizable portion of the story is set in Egypt. This new volume revisited some of his earlier stereotyped misrepresentations while also, albeit timidly, amplifying the voices of Egyptian protagonists. This partial shift helped pave the way for fairer Middle Eastern representations in several comics of the 2010s. Still, Middle Eastern voices would not be placed on equal footing with Spector's until the release of the decisive Disney+ miniseries in 2022.

1) Evolving Representations

a. New Voices from *Palestine*

Orientalism* encountered a potent counternarrative with Fantagraphics's publication of Joe Sacco's nine issues of *Palestine* between 1993 and 1995. Sacco, a non-Arab Australia-raised Maltese-American who had "heard nothing but the Israeli side most all [his] life,"[236] presents himself as owing no allegiance to dominant Western perspectives.[237] Through his own witnessing and drawings, *Palestine* documents the lives and struggles of Palestinians in the Gaza strip and the West Bank in the early 1990s, a period marked by the First Intifada (1987-1991) and the Gulf War (1990-1991). Although the graphic reportage received the American Book Award in 1996, it was the 2001 single-volume edition, prefaced by Edward Said, that helped secure its wider recognition. Critics repeatedly described the work as a challenge to dominant Western media frames. Dominic Davies, summarizing Edward Said's preface, argues

[236] Sacco and Edward Said, *Palestine*, *op. cit.*, 256.
[237] Joe Sacco, "Joe Sacco Grapples with Human Nature: The Millions Interview," September 14, 2012, The Millions, https://themillions.com/2012/09/joe-sacco-grapples-with-human-nature-the-millions-interview.html.

that Sacco's project seeks to puncture the usual bias that casts Palestinians as villains,[238] while James Hodapp contends that Sacco humanizes the other by rendering Palestinian lives visible in their ordinary, everyday detail.[239] The press, in turn, praised the book for its unusual polyphony, a chorus of Middle Eastern voices "normally excluded by mainstream media coverage."[240] In this sense, the text stages a striking convergence: the "media subalterne" enables the "subaltern" to speak.



Figure 88: Cover of *Marc Spector: Moon Knight Special* #1 featuring Shang-Chi and an army of mummy robots (Marvel Comics, 1992)

[238] Dominic Davies, "Postcolonial Comics: Representing the Subaltern," in *Critical Insights: Postcolonial Literature* (Salem Press, 2018), 13.
[239] James Hodapp, "The Postcolonial Joe Sacco," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 6, no. 4 (2015): 322.
[240] David Thompson, "Eyewitness in Gaza," *The Observer*, January 5, 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2003/jan/05/comics.politics.

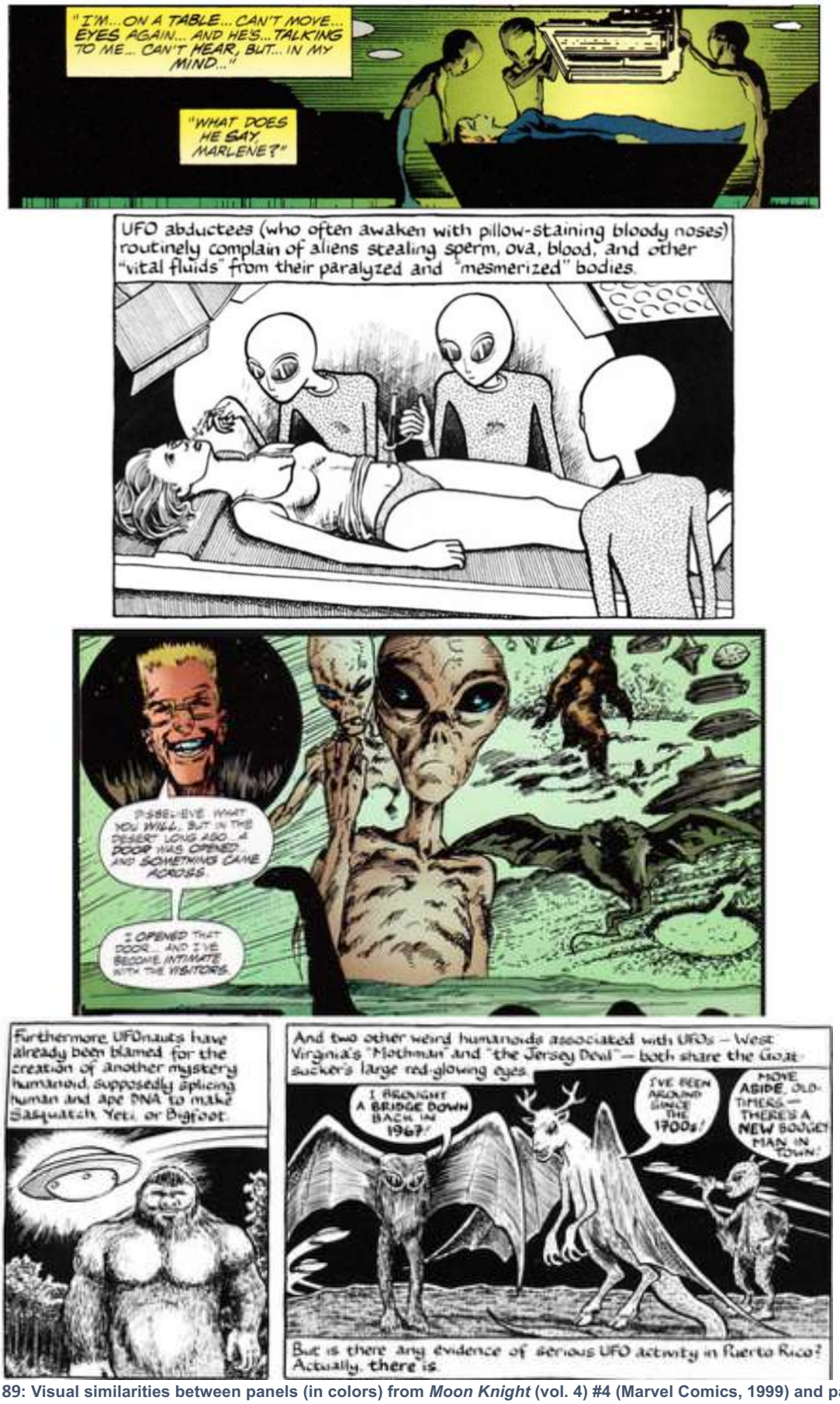


Figure 89: Visual similarities between panels (in colors) from *Moon Knight* (vol. 4) #4 (Marvel Comics, 1999) and panels (in black and white) from *The Goatsucker* (DC Comics, 1997)

Joe Sacco's success soon led to work for DC Comics, where he was hired to illustrate "The Goatsucker" in *The Big Book of the Unexplained* (1997), a story scripted by Moench. *The Goatsucker* recounts the legend of the Chupacabra (goatsucker in Spanish), a reptilian, alien-like creature said to attack animals, especially goats, and drink their blood in Puerto Rico. It is plausible that Moench and Sacco exchanged ideas during the production process and that, even if Moench never acknowledged reading *Palestine*, their collaboration may have prompted his interest in Sacco's work, including its representation of marginalized and oppressed Palestinians. Moench may in turn have recognized that his own depictions of Middle Eastern cultures and Arab characters differed markedly from Sacco's. In any case, the collaboration appears to have left a strong impression on him, since he reworked Sacco's visual elements from *The Goatsucker* in *Moon Knight* (vol. 4, 1999). Fig. 89 suggests this visual continuity, particularly in the scenes featuring a woman scrutinized by an alien presence and in those depicting flying saucers alongside legendary creatures such as Sasquatch and Mothman. The visual similarities between aliens in the two comics are particularly striking: in both cases they are depicted with oval heads and slender bodies. Before *Moon Knight* (vol. 4), Moench briefly returned to the character in *Moon Knight* (vol. 3, 1998), immediately after his collaboration with Sacco. Although this run* retains many features of his earlier work, it nonetheless marks a clear step toward a fairer representation of Egyptian culture, geography, and society.

b. The Case of *Moon Knight* (vol. 3, 1998)

Reconnecting with his Egyptomania*, Moench's return to *Moon Knight* is set in the Valley of the Kings, whose first two pages are saturated with ancient Egyptian artefacts. In addition to the imposing statue of the Egyptian god, Set, which occupies a central position, the introductory splash page (Fig. 91) features familiar motifs such as hieroglyphs, a sarcophagus, and statues of Egyptian gods in a dimly-lit scene reminiscent of the archaeologically-themed *Indiana Jones* films. Consistent with Moench's earlier Egyptophilic* issues, *Moon Knight* (vol. 3) #1 maintains a high iconicity rate* for Egyptian motif (24%). Cairo, moreover, becomes a *lieu*,[241] in Groensteen's sense, serving as the setting in roughly 23% of the panels (25 out of 109) in *Moon Knight* (vol. 3) #3 where the plot unfolds. In this new story, Set functions as a counterpart to the Khonshu statue and foreshadows an inevitable confrontation with Spector. In ancient Egyptian mythology, Set is associated with usurpation and betrayal; here, he is

[241] For more on Groensteen's *lieux*, see p. 63.

described as "the slayer of Osiris, god of darkness and death." In this context, the "dark avatar" emerges as a ready-made antagonist who drives the narrative forward. This marks a significantly deeper engagement into Egyptian mythology as Moench's earlier *Moon Knight* never mentions any Egyptian god other than Khonshu. The second issue of the series even foregrounds the mystical mummy figure on its cover, further cementing the trope in *Moon Knight*'s DNA. Fifteen years after the end of *Moon Knight*, and in contrast to the more modestly Egyptophile and adventure-oriented *Marc Spector: Moon Knight* that immediately preceded it, Moench's interest in Egyptology* appears intact: he restores and enriches much of the mystique of the canon he originally helped establish. The question, however, is whether his signature Orientalism* also returns in this new run*?

Part of the story is set in Cairo and more specifically in the Museum of Antiquities and its surrounding environment. Tellingly, five panels accompanied by off-panel dialogue depict the streets of the city, each marked by a caption identifying it as Cairo (Fig. 90). In each case, however, the captions signal that the action lies elsewhere, inside a building, so that the Egyptian capital serves merely as a frame for the "real" story. Once again, Moench presents the city as an exotic backdrop, a "theatrical stage"[242] affixed to American action occurring outside these frames. In the process, he takes artistic liberties with reality. For example, the museum's architecture, for example, differs markedly from its real-world counterpart. Egyptian geography, people, and animals (for example veiled women, desert landscapes, and camels) are likewise reduced to decorative motifs that anchor the narrative in a fantasized and exotic "Orient." The American archeologists, meanwhile, do not appear any more knowledgeable about Egyptian art than Peter Alraune in *MK* #1. The statue of Set, for example, is still described as "an incredible work of art, unsurpassed by any sculptor in history." Any acknowledgment of an Egyptian artist remains absent. Interestingly, Moench does to Egyptian artists what Egyptian rulers did to certain historical figures: he erases them.[243] Whereas pharaonic power enacted such erasure for religious or political reasons, Moench seems to do so out of limited interest in, or knowledge of the artists behind the works. To be sure, although a few ancient Egyptian sculptors, such as Bek and Thutmose, are known by name and remembered as major artists, most surviving ancient Egyptian artworks do not preserve their makers' names.[244]

[242] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 63.
[243] The process is named "Damnatio Memoriae" in ancient Egypt.
[244] John Baines, "Who Were Artists in Ancient Egypt and What Audiences Did They Address?," Lecture, October 21, 2009, https://www.ias.edu/video/Who-Were-Artists-in-Ancient-Egypt.



Figure 90: Montage of panels from *Moon Knight* (vol. 3) (Marvel Comics, 1998) set in Cairo, Egypt



Figure 91: Panel from *Moon Knight* (vol. 3) #1 featuring the statue of Set (Marvel Comics, 1998)

Despite all this, Moench resumed his *Moon Knight* narratives in a markedly different cultural moment. *Moon Knight* (vol. 3) was launched in a media context more receptive to fairer representations of Arabs. Shaheen's work, including *Arab and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture* (1997),[245] together with the growing press and academic attention to *Palestine,*[246] helped foster a climate more sensitive to misrepresentations of the "Oriental." Americans were thus increasingly exposed both to Arab culture and to the distorting lens through which it had long been viewed. This context may help explain Moench's subsequent narrative choices, which suggest a more balanced and respectful mode of representation. For example, unlike the Khonshu statue, which Spector brings back to the USA, the Set statue remains in Egypt and is said to be going "straight to the Museum of Antiquities" in Cairo. Furthermore, Moench can also appear more attentive to visual realism, as the familiar purple and pink hues of the Cairo sunset are rendered with particular care. Although the hieroglyphs still appear largely stylized in the tomb, the god statues (Fig. 91), though still unnamed, are also far more realistic and recognizable than those in *MK* #1 (Figure 77, p. 86): Apis's horns are no longer rendered with unusual angularity, and the crown-wearing Horus is immediately recognizable to readers familiar with Egyptian statuary. Finally, unlike earlier *Moon Knight* issues, in which Arab antagonists and servants are given only limited or nefarious speech, *Moon Knight* (vol. 3) includes journalists, museum guards, and a policeman who speak Arabic and wear modern Western clothing. More importantly, Moench presents the Egyptian policeman as skeptical of the claim that the ancient god Set murdered the archaeologist, thereby distinguishing him from the Egyptian thief in *MK* #28, who believes in what the narrative presents as backward mystical legends. These minor figures can be read as some of the first non-antagonistic, agentive Egyptian characters in *Moon Knight*, even before Khonshu assumes a central role in later titles.

c. Warren Ellis, Jeff Lemire, and Max Bemis' *Moon Knight* (2014-2018)

The late 2000s and early 2010s saw *Moon Knight* titles that, while retaining elements of Egyptian mysticism, shifted among several modes: a gritty urban-vigilante register in *Moon Knight* (vol. 5, 2006–2009), a more straightforward action mode in *Vengeance of the Moon Knight* (2009–2010), and a psychologically-focused crime narrative in *Moon Knight* (vol. 6,

[245] Jack G. Shaheen, *Arab and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture* (Georgetown Univ Ctr for Muslim, 1997).
[246] Martin Barker, "The Reception of Joe Sacco's Palestine," *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 9, no. 2 (2012): 58–73.

2011). The mummy trope and its associated repertoire of Egyptian motifs return more fully in *Moon Knight* (vol. 7, 2014), written by Warren Ellis and illustrated by Declan Shalvey. This tendency continues in *Moon Knight* (vol. 8, 2016-2018), scripted by Jeff Lemire and Max Bemis. Both volumes draw on Moench's foundational Egyptophilia*, foregrounding a Saidian "Oriental" stage populated by "monsters, devils, heroes" and composed of elements that evoke "a fabulously rich world."[247] Yet, unlike Moench's earlier work on *Moon Knight*, these runs* display greater interest in ancient Egyptian mythology. Moreover, these narratives are often mediated through Khonshu, marking a significant shift in voice from earlier iterations, which were filtered primarily through Spector's personae. Typographically, Khonshu's speech is distinguished not only by inverted balloon colors but also by a bespoke angular lettering style that departs from the default conventions of mainstream American comics. The result (Figs. 92, 95) is not an authentic transcription of ancient Egyptian writing, but a pseudo-hieroglyphic Latin alphabet that visually encodes Egyptian antiquity. This distinction matters: the page does not simply represent Egypt, but partially replaces and "colonizes" the traditional visual vocabulary of Western comics. Khonshu's voice and presence are therefore not merely legible; they become central and stylistically distinct.

On the face of it, *Moon Knight* (vol. 7) #1 marks a significant rupture in perspective from earlier *Moon Knight* narratives and seems to revise aspects of Moench's Orientalism*. As if to compensate for earlier misrepresentations, Warren Ellis inverts the hierarchy of Western domination and places Spector under Khonshu's "chosen agency."[248] In doing so, he mobilizes a colonial and paternalistic lexicon. Spector is framed as a mere puppet, a vehicle acting under Khonshu's command. The term "avatar," introduced by Charlie Huston in *Moon Knight* (vol. 5, 2006), here assumes its full meaning: the material manifestation of a deity. Spector's brain "has been colonized by an ancient consciousness,"[249] leaving him stripped of agency*. Since his resurrection, his actions have never truly been his own, but Khonshu's.[250] Tellingly, Khonshu addresses Spector as his son (Fig. 92), in a manner that recalls the colonizer's benevolent paternalism toward a supposedly childlike subject in need of guidance. In a striking reversal of Said's formula, Spector (the West) now exists for Khonshu (the "Orient") "whose attitude to what they worked on was either paternalistic or candidly condescending."[251] This apparent

[247] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 63.
[248] *Moon Knight* (vol. 7) #1 (Marvel Comics, March 2014).
[249] *Ibid*.
[250] This revelation recalls an earlier precedent: in *West Coast Avengers* #35-41 (Marvel Comics, 1988-1989), Khonshu admits to taking control of Spector's body "to experience this team called Avengers."
[251] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 204.

revision also touches on the Western appropriation of Egyptian art. Khonshu reminds Spector that he "[has] collected items from ancient Egypt,"[252] while Spector seems to have forgotten having acquired the sizeable collection of Egyptian art displayed in a panel (Fig. 93) that assembles an entire repertoire of Egyptomaniac* motifs and signifiers, including mummies, sarcophagi, statuary, and hieroglyphic tablets. If Spector does not remember his "buying most of this," one might infer that he did not truly buy it at all, but rather appropriated it illicitly. The narrative, however, offers a different explanation and thus partly excuses Moench's earlier Orientalist slippages by attributing Spector's misappropriation of Egyptian art to Khonshu's own will. Put simply, Khonshu ensures that Spector gathers the necessary "kind of armor and raiment for fighting the living [and] the dead,"[253] so that his material manifestation through Spector may continue to exist.



Figure 92: Panels from *Moon Knight* (vol.7) #1 (Marvel Comics, 2014)

[252] *Moon Knight* (vol. 7) #3 (Marvel Comics, May 2014).
[253] *Ibid*.



Figure 93: Panel from *Moon Knight* (vol.7) #3 (Marvel Comics, 2014)



Figure 94: Panel from *Moon Knight* (vol. 8) #1 (Marvel Comics, 2016)

Two years later, Jeff Lemire further explores Moon Knight's dissociative identity disorder in *Moon Knight* (vol. 8, 2016-2018), a run* that amplifies the Egyptian mysticism introduced by Moench. His fourteen-issue run also pays homage to Moench's penchant for genre-mixing. Spector's altered perception of reality allows the narrative to play with the various genres (science-fiction, adventure, thriller, noir detective story) Moench drew on when he created the character. Nevertheless, in a clear break with Moench's Orientalism*, Lemire accentuates the symbolic reversal of colonization initiated by Warren Ellis in the previous volume. While Spector's mind continues to be manipulated by Khonshu, the title of Lemire's run, "Welcome to New Egypt," signals a new territorial colonization of New York City. The addition of "New" to "Egypt" is clearly redolent of colonialism and empire, whose conquered territories in the Americas were often renamed after the conquering powers, as in New France, New Spain, and New England. New York itself is a case in point: its former name, New Amsterdam, was imposed by the Dutch Empire, and "New York" was later adopted in honor of James, Duke of York. "New Egypt" follows this colonial onomastic pattern, but inverts it by imagining Egypt as symbolically resettled in New York. Visually, Lemire implants a pyramid, flying Anubis-like warriors, and an Egyptian desert in the middle of the city. The narrative, graphically marked by a profusion of Egyptian motifs, foregrounds not only creatures and mummies but, more importantly, multiple agentive Egyptian deities, including Ammut, Anubis, Seth, and Khonshu, at the heart of the Western metropolis (Fig. 94). These gods are no longer merely represented; their voices are heard alongside Moon Knight's, and they play a pivotal narrative role in saving Spector's life, as he has no choice but to place his fate in their hands. In sum, agency* has changed hands, marking a major shift from Moench's Egyptian mummy tale.

Max Bemis adds a final layer to the symbolic colonization of Spector's body and mind: Khonshu, previously only an occasional narrator through Spector, becomes a voice to be reckoned with. At times, Spector is reduced to "serving" Khonshu and is told he should be "grateful" for it (Fig. 95); in this sense, his voice is shared with, and partially displaced by, Khonshu's. It is this polyphony that dominates Bemis's run*, bringing into view the multiple "vantage points" described by Shohat and Stam, albeit with one significant caveat: Khonshu, while a Middle Eastern entity, is neither contemporary nor real. Bemis also shows greater fidelity to Middle Eastern art and to the pedagogical presentation of Egyptian mythology, as *Moon Knight* #188 (2018) makes clear. Fig. 96, for instance, shows Dr Emmett visiting a museum in order to address the psychiatric conditions affecting both Spector and his enemy, an

incarnation of Ra. During this sequence, which appears to take place in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the panel offers a relatively faithful rendering of well-known artefacts. Where Moench relied on loosely Egyptianizing objects in *Moon Knight* (Fig. 65, p.69), Bemis expands the collection and provides more detailed representations of works such as Anubis on a Chest and the seated statue of Hatshepsut. He even widens the Middle Eastern frame by including an Assyrian lamassu, a hybrid creature with a human head, a lion's body, and wings.



Figure 95: Montage of panels from *Moon Knight* #189 (Marvel comics, 2018)

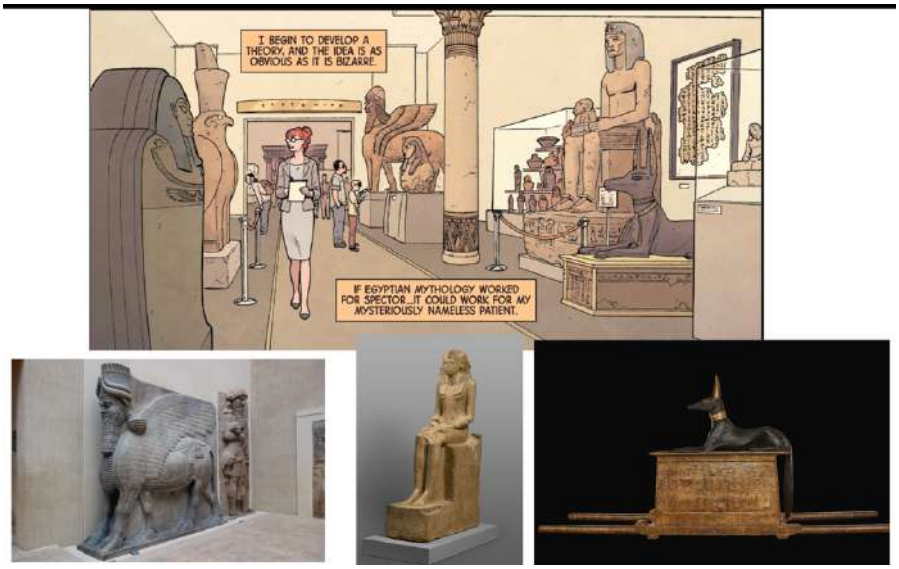


Figure 96: Comparison between a panel (top) from *Moon Knight* #188 (Marvel Comics, 2018) showing works of art and its probable real-world inspirations (bottom from left): lamassu (Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2., statue of Hatshepsut (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544450), and Anubis on a chest (https://gem.eg/en/collection/artefacts/anubis-on-a-chest)

Finally, Bemis seems to align his work with academic discourse in order to lend scientific legitimacy to the story. A panel composed entirely of fictional books such as "Egyptian Art & History" and "Ancient Egyptian Gods" suggests a distinction between Egyptology*, a discipline grounded in the critical study of available evidence, and Egyptophilia* and Egyptomania*[254] that characterized Moench's relation to ancient Egypt, a relation marked by passion and interest but lacking scholarly rigor. In keeping with this more scholarly posture, Bemis offers an extended explanation of the symbolism of Ra and Khonshu against the backdrop of Spector's adventures, while both gods appear visually in the background as graphic forms of contextualization (Fig. 97). The run* also marks the first mention in *Moon Knight* of an Egyptian artist, Imhotep, who, although later deified, remains historically significant as the architect of Djoser's Step Pyramid. Even so, Bemis does not improve on earlier writers in his use of pseudo-hieroglyphs. Although inspired by genuine sign forms, they remain scribbled nonsense, or at best an incoherent pastiche. More importantly, for all his deference to Egyptian history and mythology, Bemis, like earlier *Moon Knight* writers, still foregrounds no contemporary Arab voice or figure comparable to the protagonists of Sacco's *Palestine*. The 2022 *Moon Knight* miniseries will finally address that Orientalist* omission.

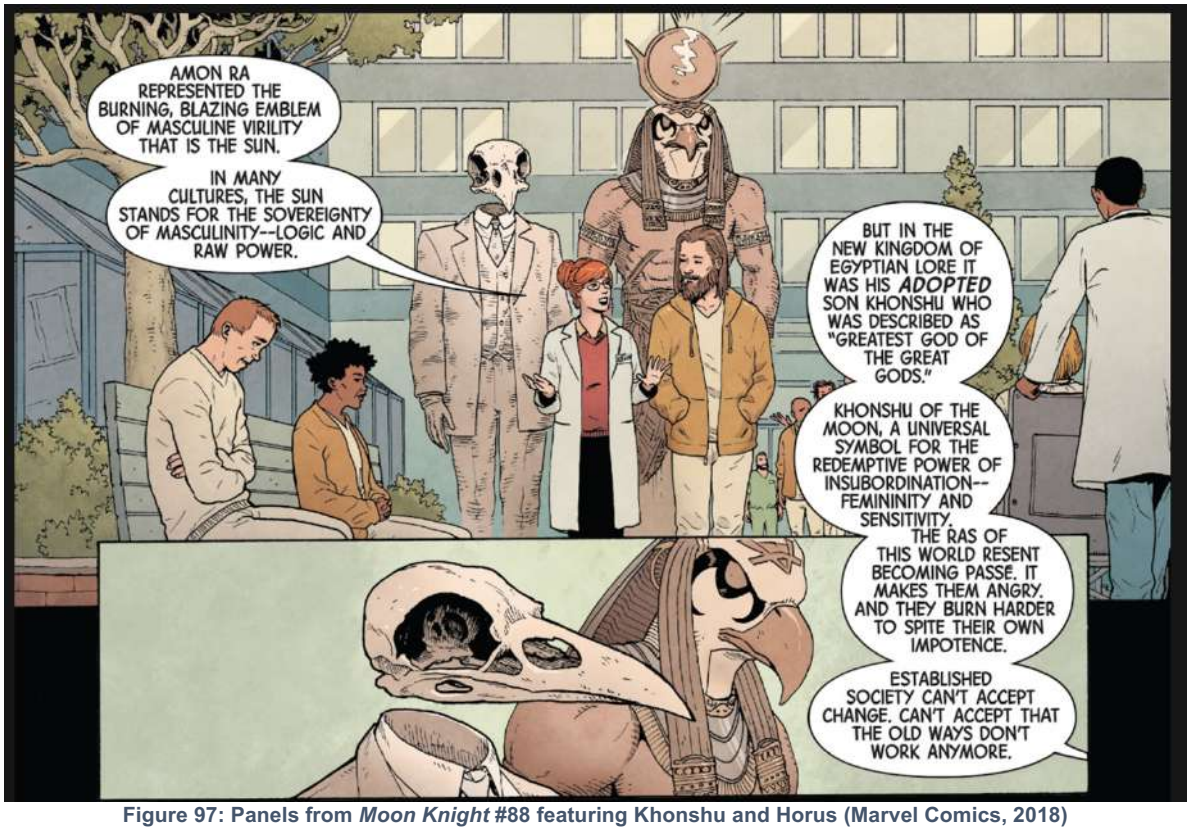


Figure 97: Panels from *Moon Knight* #88 featuring Khonshu and Horus (Marvel Comics, 2018)

[254] Vernus and Bouldouyre, *op. cit.*, 274.

2) The Disney+ Miniseries (2022)

a. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Disney

Before 2020, the Walt Disney Company, to put it mildly, was hardly a byword for inclusivity or fair representation. On the contrary, a substantial pre-2020 body of scholarship criticizes Disney for underrepresentation, for treating whiteness as the default norm, and even for Orientalism* in films such as *Aladdin* (John Musker, Ron Clements, 1992).[255] Twenty-seven years after its animated original, Orientalism was seemingly still alive with its controversial live-action adaptation (*Aladdin*, Guy Ritchie, 2019), starring Will Smith as the Genie. The film, indeed, generated backlash after the production decided to apply brown makeup to white actors for Asian roles.[256] Furthermore, Disney bears, with *Song of the South* (Harve Foster, Wilfred Jakson, 1946), the unenviable distinction of the most "infamously racist film from the so-called golden days of Hollywood."[257] The film has been extensively criticized for its overt racial stereotyping,[258] and was already denounced upon its release as "vicious white supremacy propaganda."[259] Although Walt Disney, then at the height of his animation and live-action production career, was significantly involved in the writing and production of his films, the notoriety of *Song of the South* did not damage his business ventures, as his media empire continued to expand throughout the second half of the twentieth century through box-office successes and the creation of theme parks. More than fifty years later, when the company acquired Marvel Entertainment for four billion dollars in 2009, the first MCU productions did not exactly qualify as paragons of inclusivity and progressivism either. For instance, the Orientalist gaze in *Iron Man 3* (Shane Black, 2013) and *Doctor Strange* (Scott Derrickson, 2016) remains problematic, despite genuine and laudable efforts to revise it.[260] These efforts

[255] Marvin Wingfield and Bushra Karaman, "Arab Stereotypes and American Educators," *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, 1995.
[256] Additionally, a non-Arab actress was cast in the role of Jasmine, the Middle Eastern princess. Jack Shepherd, "Disney Accused of 'browning up' White Actors for Various Asian Roles in Aladdin," *The Independent*, January 7, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/disney-aladdin-brown-up-cast-will-smith-extra-long-a8146361.html.
[257] Jason Sperb, *Disney's Most Notorious Film* (University of Texas Press, 2012), 3.
[258] Disney CEO Robert A. Iger confirmed that the film would not stream on Disney+, even with an "outdated cultural depictions' disclaimer," which underscores the film's overt racism. Tom Grater, "Bob Iger Confirms 'Song of the South' Won't Be Added to Disney+, Even with Disclaimer," *Deadline*, March 11, 2020, https://deadline.com/2020/03/bob-iger-song-of-the-south-disney-disclaimer-1202879464/.
[259] Richard B. Dier, "Song of White Called Propaganda," *The Afro-American* (Baltimore, [Maryland]), November 30, 1946.
[260] AlAwadhi, *op. cit.*

would eventually lead, in 2020, to a corporate shift intended to address past discriminations and to embed Disney within a broader inclusivity policy "long into the future."[261]

This shift occurred in a context shaped by the global resonance of the "Black Lives Matter" movement following the murder of George Floyd, an African American truck driver, on 25 May 2020, which further heightened awareness of violence against minorities. Phase Four of the MCU (January 2021-November 2022) reflects this desire to advance minority representation through films such as *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (Destin Daniel Cretton, 2021) and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (Ryan Coogler, 2022) (Fig. 98),[262] as well as series such as *Ms. Marvel* (Bisha Kanva Ali, 2022), each centered on Asian, African, or Arab minority figures. The Disney Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports from 2019 to 2022 further document this editorial shift under successive CEOs Robert A. Iger and Bob Chapek. In the 2019 CSR report, Iger highlights that, at Disney, "4 of 9 directors are women" and that three of them are "racially/ethnically diverse," while the report devotes one page to "Diversity and Inclusion."[263] One year later, a three-page "Social Equity" section appears for the first time, significantly expanding the company's earlier approach. Another telling indicator of the importance granted to Disney's inclusivity policy is the number of occurrences of the word "inclusion" in the 2020 report, which rises to 41, compared with 14 in 2019. Through the multi-year "Reimagine Tomorrow" program, Disney executives declare that they aim to "champion representation in media and entertainment, advance opportunities for diverse communities, and embrace a diverse and inclusive workplace."[264] Beyond hiring actors and directors from underrepresented backgrounds, this commitment also translates into a fairer and more celebratory representation of minority communities onscreen. After years of controversy over the lack of representation in its productions, Disney's growing awareness, partly shaped by the upheaval surrounding "Black Lives Matter," led it to seek to "amplify underrepresented voices and untold stories and champion a multitude of perspectives."[265] This broader reorientation would materialize in the production of the miniseries *Moon Knight*.

[261] The Walt Disney Company, *2020 Corporate Social Responsibility Report* (2020), 11.
[262] The first Black superhero in American mainstream comic books, Black Panther debuted in 1966 in *Fantastic Four* #52, written by Stan Lee and penciled by Jack Kirby. T'Challa inherits the mantle of the Black Panther from his father, T'Chaka, and rules the fictional, technologically advanced African nation of Wakanda, often figured as a bulwark against Western colonization. Black Panther first appeared onscreen in *Captain America: Civil War* (Anthony Russo, Joe Russo, 2016), with Chadwick Boseman in the role, before receiving a standalone film in *Black Panther* (Ryan Coogler, 2018). After Boseman's death in 2020, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022) foregrounded Letitia Wright's Shuri as his successor.
[263] The Walt Disney Company, *2019 Corporate Social Responsibility Report* (2019), 6.
[264] The Walt Disney Company, *2021 Corporate Social Responsibility Report* (2021), 7.
[265] *Ibid.*, 15.



Figure 98: Promotional poster for *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (Marvel Studios, 2022)

Among the hundreds of characters in Marvel's repertoire, an eventual adaptation of *Moon Knight* was hardly surprising, despite Jeff Lemire's mock claim (Fig. 100), voiced through a metaleptic Steven Grant in *Moon Knight* (vol. 8) #6, that Moon Knight "is a third-rate character at best." The possibility had in fact been imagined as early as 1992 in *Marc Spector: Moon Knight Special* #1 (Fig. 99), where the character's Batman-like traits and desert-adventure setting were already presented as obvious cinematic material. By the time *Moon Knight* was released in 2022, nearly all major Marvel characters from underrepresented groups had already entered the MCU,[266] with *Ms. Marvel* (Fig. 101) debuting on Disney+ only one month later, in June 2022, and She-Hulk, who made her live-action debut in *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (Jessica Gao, 2022)[267] (Fig. 102) shortly thereafter. Above all, *Moon Knight* allowed Marvel to achieve two aims at once: by centering a Jewish-Arab romantic pair in an Arab setting, the series could broaden its audience while minimizing the risk of alienating either community. The choice of two protagonists from these minority groups constitutes a particularly clear instance of Disney's "Reimagine Tomorrow" strategy and aligns, in turn, with what Shohat and Stam call polycentric multiculturalism*, whose "sympathies clearly go to the underrepresented, the marginalized, and the oppressed."[268] This marks a major departure from Moench's *Moon Knight*, in which, as shown earlier, Arab characters are largely deprived of voice. To negotiate

[266] As Appendix B shows, Moon Knight was one of the last prominent minority-associated characters to receive an MCU counterpart.
[267] She-Hulk, the alter ego of Jennifer Walters, was created in 1980 by Stan Lee and John Buscema in *The Savage She-Hulk* #1. In her origin story, Walters, a lawyer and cousin of Bruce Banner, is gravely wounded and saved by an emergency transfusion of Banner's gamma-irradiated blood, which gives her Hulk-like powers while typically allowing her to retain more of her ordinary personality and intellect than Banner does. Tatiana Maslany plays Jennifer Walters/She-Hulk in the MCU adaptation.
[268] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 48.

the delicate task of representation across these two communities, the composition of the miniseries' creative team and cast would prove crucial.



Figure 99: Montage of panels from *Marc Spector: Moon Knight Annual* #1 envisaging "Moon Blight," a movie adaptation of *Moon Knight* (Marvel Comics, 1992)



Figure 100: Panels from *Moon Knight* (vol. 8) #6 (Marvel Comics, 2016)



Figure 101: Promotional poster for *Ms. Marvel* (Marvel Studios, 2022)



Figure 102: Promotional poster for *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (Marvel Studios, 2022)

b. A Multicultural Creative Team

Although Marvel is now synonymous with American blockbusters featuring predominantly American actors and writers, the creative team behind *Moon Knight* includes a notable number of Arab talents, and writers and executive producers are no exception. Granted, Marvel appointed the American Jeremy Slater as head writer and showrunner for the miniseries. However, the writers and executive producers also reflect marked ethnic diversity, including Americans Kevin Feige, Louis D'Esposito, Victoria Alonso, and Grant Curtis, as well as Pakistani-American Sabir Pirzada and Egyptian-American Sarah H Goher. Chief among them is Mohammed Diab, who also serves as an executive producer and lead director of the series, alongside the American directors Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead, who directed episodes 2 and 4 and aimed to include scenes "really recognizable from [Diab's] episodes."[269] As the first Arab director to helm a Marvel project, Diab appeared particularly well-suited to adapt Marvel's "Egyptian" character for the screen, especially given that his filmography addresses "some of the injustices prevalent in Egypt"[270] and foregrounds minority experiences. For example, his award-winning directorial debut, *Cairo 678* (2010), which the *New York Times* described as feminist,[271] focuses on Egyptian women's struggle against sexual harassment in Cairo. As an Egyptian director who grew up in Ismailia, a working-class city 120 miles east of Cairo, he arguably brings the perspective of someone uniquely placed to tell a story set in modern Egypt, which, as he himself argues, has long been "inauthentically […] portrayed throughout Hollywood's history."[272]

Diab, for whom representation "can save lives [and] stop wars,"[273] deplored Hollywood productions such as *Wonder Woman 1984* (Patty Jenkins, 2020) for their Middle Eastern representations, which remain fraught with Orientalist* tropes, including the depiction of Egypt as primitive and desert-bound.[274] For him, fair representation is not only about "showing Egypt the way it is, and how beautiful it really is,"[275] it can also mean adding "the text of a prayer

[269] Rachel Paige, "'Moon Knight': Marc and Steven, Tomb Busters, a Hippo, and More from Episode 4," *Marvel*, April 20, 2022, https://www.marvel.com/articles/comics/declan-shalvey-elsa-charretier-moon-knight-2014-interview.
[270] Mekado Murphy, "New Directors/New Films Video: Mohamed Diab," *The New York Times*, March 31, 2011, https://archive.nytimes.com/artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/31/new-directorsnew-films-video-mohamed-diab/.
[271] *Ibid.*
[272] Nick Setchfield, "Lunar Landing," *SFX Magazine #4*, April 2022, 47.
[273] Tom Ellen, "Into Darkness," *Empire #399*, April 2022, 54.
[274] Setchfield, *op. cit.*, 47.
[275] *Ibid.*

over a shopfront—that someone who is Arab [would] really appreciate."[276] Actor Karim El-Hakim likewise described filming *Moon Knight*'s Cairo scenes in Budapest as a kind of return: "it was like a flashback, it was so realistic—the smells, the smoke, the cars, the tuk-tuks, even down to the food and the types of fruit that were on sale in our marketplace."[277] This commitment to realism was also acknowledged by Arab media outlets, including Al Jazeera,[278] and more broadly by Arab journalists, who enthused over "Cairo look[ing] like the metropolis it is, instead of some offensive reimagining of Agrabah [Aladdin's fictional city]," [279] and praised the depiction of "the real living and breathing contemporary Egypt."[280] In this way, the creative team corrects earlier misrepresentations, such as Moench's pastoralized depiction of the Middle East, as seen in Fig. 68 p. 75. Similarly, the hieroglyphs, stylized and invented in Moench's comics, are grammatically correct and meaningful in the series. For example, Moon Knight's crescent-shaped blade "is embedded with Khonshu's name in hieroglyphs," while his thigh pads bear Khonshu's oath: "Rise and live again as my fist of vengeance, my Moon Knight."[281] Seen in this light, Diab's interviews and direction strongly recall Said's account of writing *Orientalism*:

> "I am an Oriental writing back at the Orientalists, who for long have thrived upon our silence. I am also writing to them, by dismantling the structure of their discipline, showing its […] ideological biases. Finally, I feel myself to be writing for compatriots and colleagues about matters of common concern."[282]

With regards to the cast, the show features numerous actors of Middle Eastern origin in both major and minor roles. This choice may also have been shaped by a desire to reflect more accurately onscreen the U.S. population of Arab ancestry, which increased by 55% between 2000 (1.2 million out of 281 million)[283] and 2022 (2.2 million out of 333 million).[284] Aside from

[276] Ellen, *op. cit.*, 54.
[277] *Moon Knight Production Brief*, *op. cit.*, 10.
[278] Ahmed Twaij, "Moon Knight's Layla: Finally, an Arab Superhero," Arts and Cultures, *Al Jazeera*, May 17, 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/5/17/finally-an-arab-superhero.
[279] Omar Ramadan Santiago, "'Moon Knight' and the Future of Egyptian Representation in Western Media," *Egyptian Streets*, July 2, 2022, https://egyptianstreets.com/2022/07/02/moon-knight-and-the-future-of-egyptian-representation-in-western-media/.
[280] Mahmud El Sayed, "Moon Knight and the Importance of Being Seen," *Interstellar Flight Magazine*, July 11, 2022, https://magazine.interstellarflightpress.com/moon-knight-and-the-importance-of-being-seen-84a3754e6a5f.
[281] *Moon Knight Production Brief*, *op. cit.*,12.
[282] Edward W. Said, "Interview: Edward W. Said," *Diacritics* 6, no. 3 (1976): 47.
[283] Patricia De la Cruz and Angela Brittingham, *Census 2000 Brief: The Arab Population: 2000* (United States Census Bureau, 2003).
[284] United States Census Bureau, "Arab American Heritage Month: April 2024," Press Release, April 2024, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/arab-american-heritage-month.html.

the American actor Ethan Hawke, who plays the antagonist Arthur Harrow, and Oscar Isaac in the title role, the show notably brings actress May Calamawy to prominence as Layla El-Faouly, an Egyptian archeologist and Spector's love interest. While Isaac, who was born in Guatemala, is neither Jewish (like Spector) nor Muslim,[285] Calamawy, who is of Arab descent, was born and raised in Bahrain to an Egyptian father and a Palestinian-Jordanian mother. As a homage to the history and mythology of Egypt, the show also stands out for its portrayal of three gods and five goddesses (or their avatars)[286] from ancient Egypt, played largely by actors of Middle Eastern origin or descent (Fig. 103). The creative team also includes two Egyptian Egyptologists "to advise and ensure historical accuracy [on] the scripts, the characters and the sets."[287] Conversely, Moench depicted only two war-like male gods (Seth and Khonshu), and offered relatively little mythological detail. Moreover, none of the show's non-Arab in these Egyptian roles is American; they are Irish, British, British-Colombian, and French-Japanese. In this respect, the cast provides strong evidence of the show's Arab-centered multiculturalism and stands as the inverse of *Gods of Egypt* (Alex Proyas, 2016), whose overwhelmingly Western cast for the Egyptian pantheon was, understandably, castigated as an instance of Hollywood whitewashing.[288]

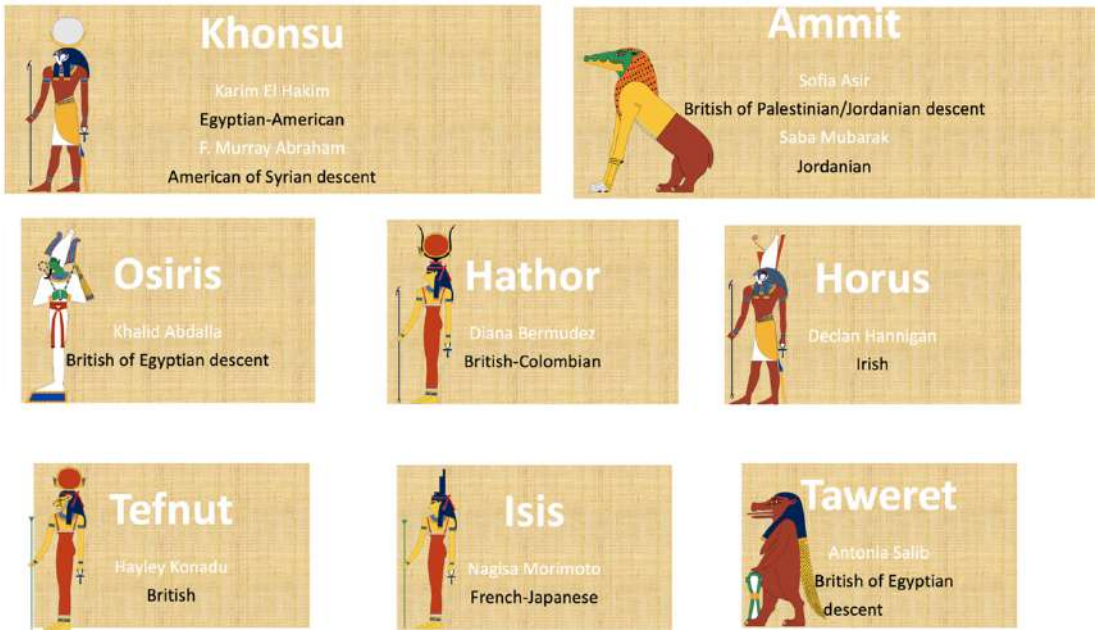


Figure 103: List of actors who portray the gods and goddesses in *Moon Knight* (Sébastien Jacotin with art by Jeff Dahl, 2026)

[285] However, Isaac showed support for the Palestinian cause in 2022 as a member of Artists4Ceasefire, a collective of actors and filmmakers calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the war in Gaza.
[286] Diab also introduces mythological inaccuracies. Contrary to what the series suggests, Ammit is neither a goddess nor one of the Ennead.
[287] *Moon Knight Production Brief*, *op. cit.*, 9.
[288] Benjamin Lee, "Gods of Egypt Posters Spark Anger with 'whitewashed' Cast," *The Guardian*, November 13, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/nov/13/gods-of-egypt-posters-anger-whitewashed-cast-twitter-exodus.

Finally, the creative team draws, in Shohat and Stam's terms, on additional Egyptian "active, generative participants at the very core" of the show. First, the critically-acclaimed film editor Ahmed Hafez, renowned for editing "some of Egypt's biggest office hits of all-time," was already familiar with mummy narratives. He contributed to the editing of "The Pharaoh's Golden Parade," the globally broadcast spectacle of April 2021 that marked the relocation of ancient Egyptian royal mummies from the old Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square to the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Old Cairo."[289] Equally involved in this major cultural celebration, since he composed the music for its accompanying concert, the award-winning composer Hesham Nazih also scored *Moon Knight*, whose soundtrack Diab described as "so Egyptian" and characteristic of Cairo, a "big urban city that never sleeps, with its own music scene, and with plenty in common with the West."[290] The score was performed by a large orchestra and recorded in Vienna and Cairo, incorporating Egyptian folk instruments such as the arghul, the mizmar, and the stringed rebaba. Entrusting the score to an Egyptian composer is particularly noteworthy, since even the Egyptian director of *The Night of Counting the Years* had instead turned to an Italian musician for his technical expertise.[291]

Further attesting to its emphasis on inclusivity and diversity, *Moon Knight* does not confine itself to orchestral music. Diab also takes a strong stance by incorporating mahraganat* artists such as Ahmed Saad, 3enba, Double Zuksh, Hassan Shakosh, and the rapper Wegz. Mahraganat music rose to prominence during the 2011 Egyptian revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak's regime. The genre (whose name means "festival" in Arabic), draws on U.S. hip-hop and is characterized by blunt, explicit lyrics that "challenge the innocence of Arab pop music and, more importantly, societal structures and systems in Egypt."[292] It was significant enough to prompt the Egyptian Musicians' Syndicate to ban mahraganat performers in 2020, and it continues to provoke hostility from the Egyptian government. In this sense, Diab's aim is not simply to distance *Moon Knight*'s soundtrack from the symphonic Orientalism* of many big-budget productions,[293] but also to foreground a popular grassroots music that exceeds

[289] *Moon Knight Production Brief*, *op. cit.*, 26.
[290] Alex Ritman, "How 'Moon Knight' Harnessed the Power of Egypt's Top Creatives — and Even Flew Over a Taxi Driver — to Push for Authenticity and 'Avoid the Orientalist Look,'" *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 6, 2022, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/moon-knight-mohamed-diab-authenticity-egypt-1235124803/.
[291] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 172.
[292] Danny Hajjar, "How Egypt's Mahraganat Music Marvels in Disney's Moon Knight," *The New Arab*, April 26, 2022, https://www.newarab.com/features/how-egypts-mahraganat-music-marvels-disneys-moon-knight.
[293] Such as Maurice Jarre's score for *Lawrence of Arabia* and Klaus Badelt's score for *Queen of the Desert* (Werner Herzog, 2015), which may also be characterized as orientalist symphonic epics.

mainstream, state-vetted Egyptian culture and carries a political message of togetherness, social cohesion, diversity, and inclusivity.

This concern also appears at the level of the script. In episode 3, when Hathor's avatar tells Spector that the pyramid of Giza "is a safe space for [him] to tell [the avatars] if [he] feel[s] exploited by Khonshu," the series reexamines the Khonshu-Spector relationship "with all its toxicity,"[294] and attempts to redefine it through the language of the "safe space," understood as an environment in which discrimination against marginalized groups is not tolerated.

c. Polycentric Multiculturalism

While the show remains "deeply rooted in the original comic books"[295] written by Moench, it also takes significant artistic license in order to develop the Egyptian mythic material far beyond what Moench usually attempted. More importantly, Diab and Slater substantially de-Westernize the original narrative and correct several of Moench's Orientalist* patterns, namely half-imaginary geography, the absence of Middle Eastern languages, the anonymity of Egyptian art, and the dominance of Western-coded allegories.[296] *Moon Knight* on Disney+ no longer frames Marc Spector as Moench's American urban antihero and Steven Grant as an American millionaire art collector whose tastes are largely shaped by Euro-American culture. Instead, it recasts Grant—who gradually realizes that his blackouts stem from sharing a body with Marc Spector, a mercenary bound to Khonshu—as an unassuming British museum gift-shop employee whose fascination with and knowledge of ancient Egypt align him much more closely with the series' Egyptian mythic material. Moreover, the series' main antagonist, Arthur Harrow, who seeks to free Ammit in order to purge the world of half of humanity, bears all the hallmarks of a charismatic and menacing American cult leader and none of the Arab thief, terrorist, manipulator, or Asian antagonist that Moench might have pitted against his hero. The series is also set primarily in London and Cairo, with the United States not mentioned once. Egypt, on the contrary, is given pride of place: it appears as a lived modern cultural setting rather than as a generic exotic backdrop *à la* Moench. Overall, *Moon Knight* celebrates Egyptian culture, history,[297] customs, territory, and people. Shaheen's sorrowful

[294] *Moon Knight Production Brief*, 7.
[295] *Ibid.*, 4.
[296] For a fuller overview of the evolution and correction of Orientalist tropes, see the table in Appendix E.
[297] Among the many references to Egyptian achievements, Steven Grant reminds Layla that "Egyptians invented modern navigation" in episode 3.

remark that Arabs are "hardly ever seen as ordinary people, practicing law, driving taxis, singing lullabies"[298] seems almost outdated here, as the show features precisely an Arab taxi driver, a cheerful ululating woman, and numerous ordinary people going about their business in the vividly-rendered streets of Cairo (Fig. 104). Crucially, the show gives Layla El-Faouly a central heroic role, culminating in her transformation into the Scarlet Scarab, whom Marvel presents as the MCU's first Egyptian superhero.



Figure 104: Montage of screenshots from *Moon Knight* featuring Egyptian people (Marvel Studios, 2022)

[298] Jack Shaheen, "The Media Image of Arabs," *Newsweek*, February 29, 1988, 10.

One of the show's most significant advances lies in its provision of the kind of "positive image" Shohat and Stam describe, one that responds to minority communities who "rightly ask for their fair share of the representational pie in a dominant cinema that trades in heroes and heroines as a simple matter of representational parity."[299] Slater and Diab deliver on this parity through Layla El-Faouly/the Scarlet Scarab, avatar of Tawaret,[300] who, according to actress May Calamawy, serves as the character through whom "the show represents Egypt."[301] As such, Layla marks a watershed in Marvel representation, breaking free from what Alice Walker calls the "prison of image," that is, a set of inherited Western stereotypes.[302] She draws on four earlier Marvel figures whose Orientalist* and sexist features are here reworked or removed (Fig. 105). The first is the archeologist Dr. Abdul Faoul, who becomes the first Scarlet Scarab in *The Invaders* #23 (1977), aiding "the forces of Nazi Germany [in order] to defend this ancient land from the imperialists who have held it in thrall." [303] His son, Mehemet Faoul, the second Scarlet Scarab, was created by Moench in *Thor* #326 in 1982 and, though less overtly nefarious than his father, still emerges "from the modern chaos called the Middle East."[304] Stripped of these nationalist and reactionary elements, Layla also reworks the figure of Leila O'Toole, alias Plasma, the manipulative niece of the Living Pharaoh: her typically Irish surname is de-Westernized and Arabized into El-Faouly, while the Arabic resonance of her first name is retained in the new spelling "Layla."[305] Finally, Marlene Alraune, who in Moench's *Moon Knight* is little more than Spector's love interest, damsel in distress, and the daughter of an American archaeologist, is transformed, through Layla, into a strong-willed Egyptian archaeologist turned superhero who explicitly condemns the colonial looting of Egyptian heritage, insisting, in episode 3, that she does not steal artefacts because "they have already been stolen." In sum, Layla is no longer a subservient, objectified, despotic, or antagonistic woman filtered through Western fantasy. On the contrary, she emerges as an Egyptian, empowered, knowledgeable, and divinely appointed superhero. In that respect, she constitutes

[299] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 198.
[300] The name is officially given to Layla in *Moon Knight, City of the Dead*, a few weeks after the show.
[301] Devan Coggan, "May Calamawy Got Her Moon Knight Audition through Instagram," *Entertainment Weekly*, April 13, 2022, https://ew.com/tv/may-calamawy-moon-knight-audition/.
[302] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.* 198.
[303] *The Invaders* #25 (Marvel Comics, February 1978).
[304] *Thor* #326 (Marvel Comics, December 1982).
[305] "Layla" means "night" in Arabic and recalls love narratives such as *One Thousand and One Nights*. Association des traducteurs littéraires de France, "LEILA – Arabic Literature in European Languages," April 8, 2021, https://atlf.org/leila-arabic-literature-in-european-languages-appel-a-contributions-residence-de-traducteurs/.

a significant answer to Shaheen's observation that "there is never an Arab hero for kids to cheer"[306]

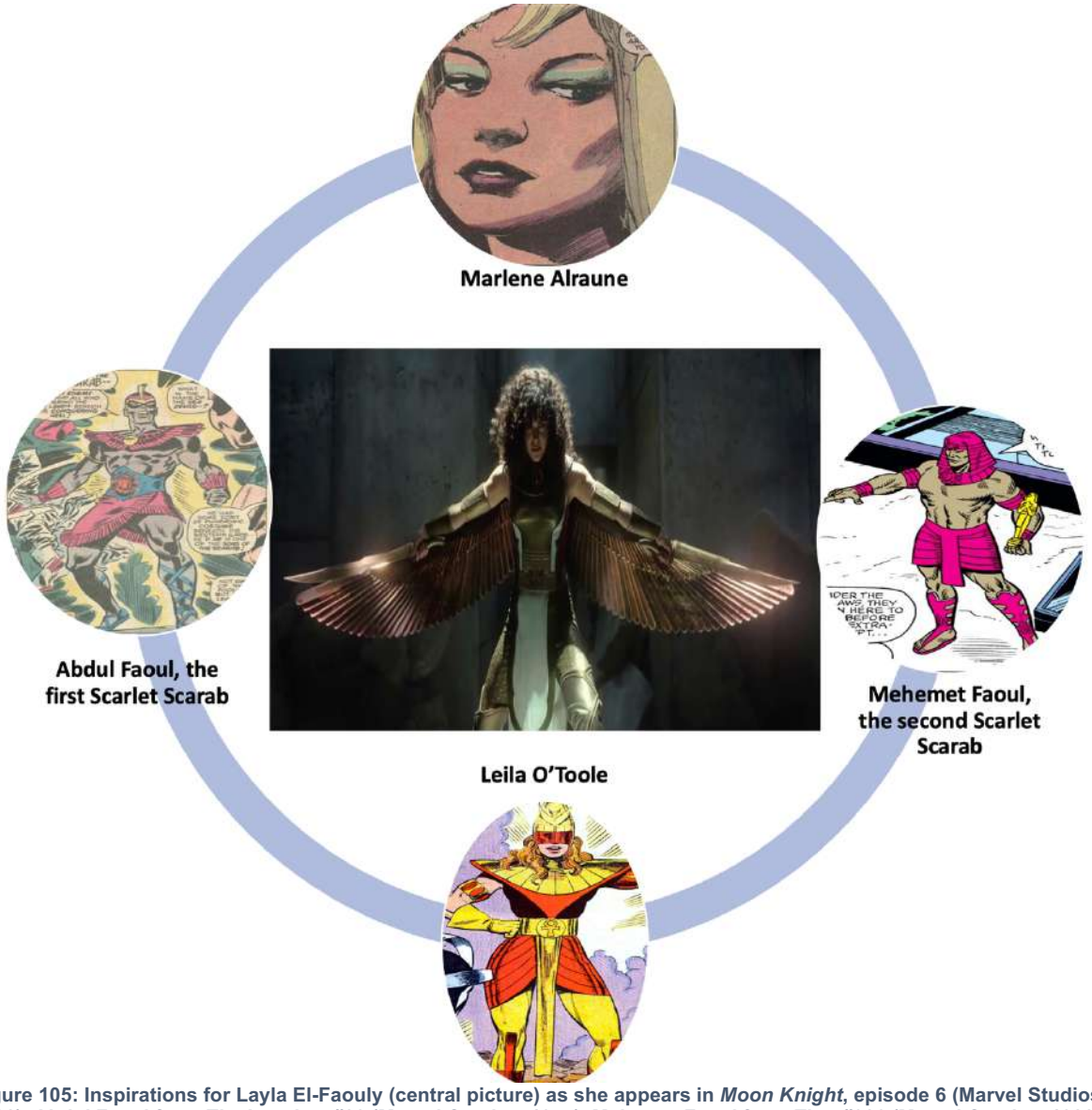


Figure 105: Inspirations for Layla El-Faouly (central picture) as she appears in *Moon Knight*, episode 6 (Marvel Studios, 2022): Abdul Faoul from *The Invaders* #23 (Marvel Comics, 1977), Mehemet Faoul from *Thor* #326 (Marvel Comics, 1982), Marlene Alraune from *Moon Knight* #28 (Marvel Comics, 1983), and Leila O'Toole from *Marvel Comics Presents* #29 (Marvel Comics, 1989)

One of the core principles of Shohat and Stam's polycentric* multiculturalism is the imperative of "empowering the disempowered."[307] While Layla El-Faouly is emphatically a case in point, the show also "empowers" its Arabic-speaking audience. The inclusion in *Moon Knight* of written, visual, and sonic elements intelligible only to Arabic speakers is certainly not intended to exclude Western viewers. However, since only 0.5% of the U.S. population

[306] Jack Shaheen, *The Influence of the Arab Stereotype on American Children*, Brief essay (ADC Research Institute, 1990), 8.
[307] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 48.

speaks Arabic,[308] it is plausible that a large majority of Western viewers are, *de facto*, unable to grasp the puns, allusions, references, and even Easter eggs expressed in Arabic throughout the show. This is precisely what occurs in episode 6, where the Arabic writing on the wall seen in Fig. 106 appears to say "Khonshu lives" (خنشو عايش). To most Western viewers, it may register as just another trivial Arabic graffito; Arab audiences, meanwhile, can access an additional layer of meaning. More than that, the phrase appears in a scene conducted entirely in Egyptian Arabic, in which an Egyptian girl asks Layla whether she is an Egyptian superhero. Taken together, these elements proudly present Egyptian culture as vibrant, contemporary, and fully alive. In this respect, the scene recalls another corrective gesture from the postcolonial Egyptomaniac* film *OSS 117 : Le Caire, nid d'espions* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2006), namely the "Bambino" sequence, in which the secret agent plays the oud (a Middle Eastern lute), and sings a song by the Egyptian-born Dalida before an Egyptian assembly in Cairo. While a non-Arabic speaker may simply be amused by OSS 117's sudden ability to sing in Arabic, an Arabic-speaking viewer will notice that the song is performed in Algerian Arabic rather than Egyptian Arabic, a conflation that betrays the character's paternalistic and colonial prejudice.[309] As with Diab's work, Hazanavicius's attempt to satirize Orientalist* tropes in Western blockbusters may partly escape Western audiences while remaining legible to Arab viewers, whose linguistic competence, long claimed by Orientalists as a mark of "superior knowledge,"[310] is here implicitly revalued.



Figure 106: Screenshot from *Moon Knight*, episode 6 (Marvel Studios, 2022)

[308] According to Pew Research Center, 0.45% of the U.S. population can speak Arabic in 2021. Mohamad Moslimani, "5 Facts about Arabic Speakers in the U.S.," *Pew Research Center*, May 18, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/18/5-facts-about-arabic-speakers-in-the-us/.
[309] The dialect discrepancy was pointed out to me in March 2026 by Zeineb Touati, Associate Professor in Information and Communication at Nantes Université, whose research focuses on women's rights and women's movements in the Maghreb. For example, OSS uses "wach rak" ("what's up?"), a typically Algerian formulation, whereas the Egyptian equivalent, "izzayyak," would have been more appropriate here.
[310] Said, *Orientalism*, *op. cit.*, 47.

Yellow seems to abound in representations of the Orient and in Orientalist imagery. The color saturates much of the Egyptian landscape and, to be sure, the desert, the pyramids, and the sun-drenched scenery readily lend themselves to this chromatic omnipresence. Orientalist painting may also have contributed to this impression of pervading yellow, as Fig. 69 p. 77 suggests: in *The Harem Dance*, Rosati gives yellowish hues to the architecture, clothing, and draperies. Kate Hext similarly argues that "yellow becomes strongly associated, on one hand, with exoticism, aesthetic excess and pleasure, and, on the other, with the frivolous rejection of reality for absinthe-induced revelry and moral degradation, not to mention the threat of racial and sexual otherness,"[311] elements traditionally associated with Orientalism*. At times, Disney+ *Moon Knight* appears to reject this Orientalism, at least metaphorically, and the final scene of episode 2 is arguably the clearest instance of that rejection. The scene begins with a waking Spector gazing at a yellow drape billowing down in a hotel room in Cairo. He then moves toward a set of similarly Western-coded yellow drapes and pulls them aside. What they reveal is an open mashrabiya and, beyond it, an "Oriental" tableau: the rooftops of Cairo, a central mosque, and the pyramids of Giza (Fig. 107).

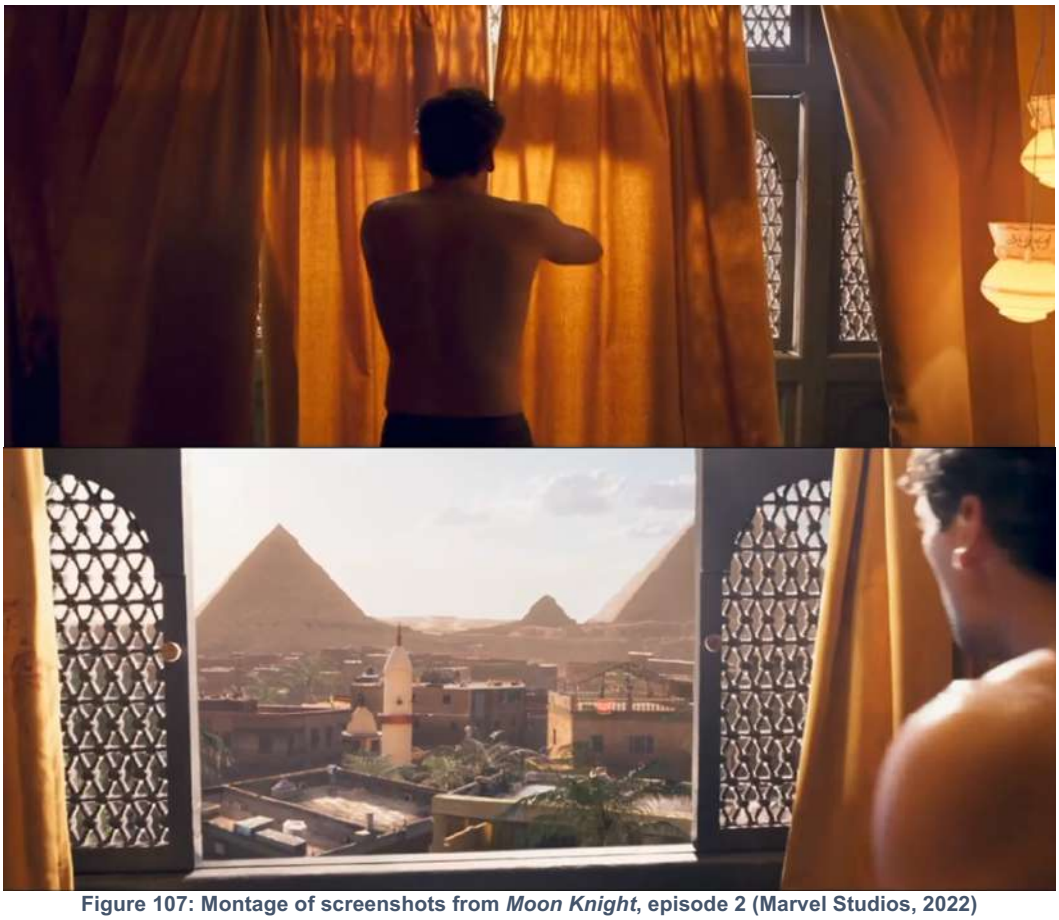


Figure 107: Montage of screenshots from *Moon Knight*, episode 2 (Marvel Studios, 2022)

[311] Hext, *op. cit.*, 4.

From my perspective, by drawing back the yellow drapes, Spector seems to symbolically cast off a Western interpretive screen and replace it with the mashrabiya, here figured as a more authentically local frame of vision. The scene is therefore not merely aesthetic: it seeks to de-Westernize the tableau by removing the filters that had concealed the "lived" and unmediated Orient. Egyptian scenery is no longer treated as an exotic backdrop; it becomes the main focus of the camera: raw, immediate, and freed from the previous ideological reading grid.

This de-Westernization in *Moon Knight* may be read through Will Higbee's concept of "cinema of transvergence*," a mode of cinema that resists convergence toward resolution or consensus and instead "transverges" toward complexity and fragmentation.[312] The term provides a useful framework for understanding postcolonial cinema[313] as "an engaged (politicized) site of resistance which foregrounds the experiences of the alienated, marginal other."[314] As such, it rejects a binary, (neo-)colonial epistemology and points to the transcultural and transformative potential of postcolonial film practices.[315] Even so, *Moon Knight* is not concerned with promoting Arab culture at the expense of American culture, or vice-versa. Nor does it offer a token sympathetic portrayal of the Arab figure "in order to project the United States as an enlightened country," which Evelyn Alsultany identifies as "a new kind of racism"[316] in the post-9/11 era. In the strict sense of the term, the series does not fully qualify as "anti-Orientalist*" since it does not foreground Islam[317] and treads carefully around references to Muslims,[318] preferring instead to portray several Arab characters as members of Harrow's ideologically neutral cult devoted to Ammit.[319] Yet the miniseries clearly aligns with

[312] Will Higbee, "Beyond the (Trans)National: Towards a Cinema of Transvergence in Postcolonial and Diasporic Francophone Cinema(s)," *Studies in French Cinema* 7, no. 2 (2007): 85.
[313] Postcolonial cinema explores how films represent and rework the histories and legacies of colonialism through questions, for example, of identity, space, and language. Sandra Ponzanesi, "On the Waterfront Truth and Fiction in Postcolonial Cinema from the South of Europe," *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 2 (2016): 218.
[314] Higbee, *op. cit.*, 87.
[315] *Ibid.*, 86.
[316] Because that model applies chiefly to representations of Arab or Muslim Americans in contemporary Hollywood productions, rather than to the Egyptian Arab characters in *Moon Knight*. Evelyn Alsultany, Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11 (NYU Press, 2011), 16.
[317] This is the main argument from "anti-Orientalist" scholars. "Anti-Orientalism" is grounded in the rejection of earlier codes and in the proposal of a new, diverse, and heterogeneous representation of the Orient, its culture, and above all its religion, in order to better counter the (neo-)Orientalist discourse. Mohammed Sulaiman, "Orientalism and Anti-Orientalism: Epistemological Approaches to Islam and Violence," in *Contesting the Theological Foundations of Islamism and Violent Extremism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 86.
[318] The miniseries *Ms. Marvel*, released a few weeks later, is less cautious: Islam is named, practiced, and woven into Kamala Khan's daily life, family dynamics, and community setting.
[319] In this sense, the show still hesitates to revise a Eurocentrism that has historically erased what Shohat and Stam name "the Jewish-Muslim hyphen." In the show, this hyphen, conspicuously made available by the loving union formed by Spector, explicitly framed as Jewish, and Layla, who may very well be Muslim (or may very well not be), never materializes. Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 365.

Higbee's cinema of transvergence insofar as it negotiates a position "that is both centre and margin."[320] It is at once a Marvel production (a dominant blockbuster built around an American superhero), and a series that mobilizes diasporic and postcolonial concerns (particularly Middle Eastern representation and minority recognition). In other words, it "proposes a clear understanding of the discontinuity, difference and imbalances of power that exist between various […] film cultures and film industries."[321] This framework aligns closely with polycentric multiculturalism* in its rejection of polarized oppositions and its dismantling of Orientalist* paradigms. Above all, it shows how cinema can recontextualize familiar visual symbols and move audiences beyond binary readings. The finely detailed mashrabiya, the sun-soaked Cairene cityscape, the towering mosque, and the millennia-old pyramids in episode 2 can thus be detached from inherited associations with harem fantasy, eroticism, or mystery. "Such [cultural] differences" once absorbed into a Western gaze, are, as Higbee argues, meant to be exposed, foregrounded, and even celebrated.[322] His formulation also resonates with the final minutes of episode 2, which move from a traditional Egyptian spiritual vocalist to the closing sequence scored with music by the Egyptian mahraganat* singer Ahmed Saad. In this respect, the ending does not simply close the episode; it strikes a meaningful blow against centuries of Orientalist discourse.

d. The Mummy Lives on

Despite the fairer representation and the revision of Orientalist* slippages discussed above, one may still ask whether the miniseries is entirely free of Orientalist tropes. Shohat's taxonomy of Orientalist film therefore offers an effective framework for a tentative answer. Among her seven Orientalist film subgenres, two seem particularly relevant to *Moon Knight*'s narrative and genre. The first includes "films in which ancient Egypt and its mythologized enigmas serve as pretext for contemporary horror-mystery and romance,"[323] a description that plausibly fits *Moon Knight*. Shohat cites the *Mummy* films as typical examples of this category. Although her article, written in 1990, could not take into account *The Mummy* (Stephen Sommers, 1999), the blockbuster clearly belongs in that lineage. Indeed, as former Associated Press reporter Michael Hoffman II argues, "this racist masterpiece, [in which] Arab masses are

[320] Higbee, *op. cit.*, 86.
[321] *Ibid.*, 87.
[322] *Ibid.*, 85.
[323] Ella Shohat, "Gender in Hollywood's Orient," *Middle East Report*, no. 162 (February 1990): 42.

mindless and murderous zombies chant the name Imhotep,"[324] compounds Orientalist clichés. *Moon Knight* features a cult-leading American explorer, Arthur Harrow, whose expedition for a golden scarab—a fetishized archeological artefact common to many Orientalist narratives—recalls the colonial and imperial attitude of *The Mummy*'s heroes. What he shares with Rick and Evelyn is a common expeditionary posture toward Egypt: ancient Egyptian culture appears as something to be deciphered and appropriated by outsiders, thus reproducing "the colonialist topos by which Western "knowledge" of ancient civilizations "rescues" the past from oblivion,"[325] while local Arabs are largely reduced to subordinate roles. The functions of these characters, however, differ significantly: Harrow is framed from the outset as a malevolent and unsympathetic antagonist and is ultimately defeated by a Jew (Spector) and an Arab (Layla). Rick and Evelyn, in contrast, are presented as a glamorous Western couple who outwit Imhotep and depart with an Egyptian treasure that the film treats as a legitimate prize rather than as loot.

A major Orientalist* trope, the figure of the mummy is treated quite differently in the two works. In *The Mummy*, mummification is presented as a cruel and barbaric punishment meted out by ancient Egyptians, with the preserved body destined to reawaken to avenge its long suffering. The function of this scene is to anchor the film in a vision of exoticism closely bound up with sensuality, adventure, and horror. Charles Vanthournout traces the origins of these mummy tropes to the mid-19th century in the USA, where little respect was shown to newly-arrived Egyptian mummies: they were spectacularized through eerie public unwrapping sessions, while their linen cloth was reused by American manufacturers in paper production.[326] This history may help explain why later Hollywood productions often showed similarly scant regard for the artistic, religious, and historical significance of mummification in ancient Egypt, often transforming the mummy into a diabolical figure. In reality, however, "there are no records in archaeology that the ancient Egyptians ever considered such a possibility. The mummified body was for use in the after-life, not for re-use on this earth; it served as the link between the physical self and the ka, the spirit."[327] In practical terms, since the process "involved the removal of vital organs, including the brain and the eyes, […] a revived mummy [would have been] somewhat ineffective."[328] *Moon Knight*, conversely, de-demonizes the Hollywood mummy and turns it into an Egyptian heroic figure. Moon Knight's costume, in

[324] Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Interlink Publishing, 2012), 865.
[325] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 151.
[326] Vanthournout, *op. cit.*, 3.
[327] Richard Freeman, "The Mummy in Context," *European Journal of American Studies* 4, nos. 4–1 (2009): 1.
[328] *Ibid.*

addition to reprising Moench's white cape, noble bearing, and frightening aura, also incorporates visible mummy bandages and hieroglyphs in a manner that celebrates its Egyptian heritage (Fig. 108). Similarly, Mr. Knight's "shoe straps are homage to Egypt and mummies."[329] On this basis, *Moon Knight* seems to transcend the Orientalist tropes traditionally associated with the first film category into which it thematically falls. The comparison with the second category, however, reveals more persistent residues.



Figure 108: Promotional poster for the *Moon Knight* miniseries featuring the hieroglyphs on the right thigh and the bandage-like costume (Marvel Studios, 2022)

[329] *Moon Knight Production Brief*, *op. cit.*, 12.

Shohat's second category, concerning "contemporary Westerners in the Orient,"[330] includes, among other examples, *Indiana Jones* (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, 1981). *Moon Knight*'s various creators have repeatedly drawn on Spielberg's film, from Moench, as discussed earlier, to the Disney+ creative team, who specifically cited the influence of "classic adventure films like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*."[331] While the show avoids such familiar tropes as belly dancers, harems, and camel-riding Bedouins, it does not entirely escape the Orientalist* traps associated with Spielberg's film. In episode 3, as Spector runs across the rooftops of Cairo, he eventually corners a group of three Arab men from whom he seeks information about Harrow's whereabouts. When Harrow's henchmen refuse to cooperate, Spector fights these Arab "villains," who are once again framed as leering and knife-wielding figures (Fig. 109), unmistakably reminiscent of their counterparts in Moench's *Moon Knight* and in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Fig. 66 p. 74). Even though Diab may have sought to de-Westernize the scene by endowing the antagonists with "an Egyptian style of fighting that involves a mix of dancing and dangerous knife attacks,"[332] this persistence of vision remains problematic since there were, in all likelihood, other options for portraying Arab combatants in 2022 without reverting to such a blatant Orientalist convention.



Figure 109: Screenshot from *Moon Knight*, episode 3 featuring one of the Arab "villains" (Marvel Studios, 2022)

Finally, the show's persistent preference for Western verse over Arabic poetry is not a trivial script detail; it is symbolically significant. Poetry is perhaps one of the loftiest and most demanding forms of literary art, and drawing on the Arabic poetic tradition would, at the very

[330] Shohat, *op. cit.*, 42.
[331] *Moon Knight Production Brief*, *op. cit.*, 3.
[332] *Moon Knight Production Brief*, *op. cit.*, 14.

least, have constituted a strong statement in a globally distributed show viewed by millions. Because love and separation are central to Layla and Spector's relationship, episode 2 stages a moving reunion between the two lovers, who recite lines from the French poem "Les Séparés" by their "favorite poet," Marceline Desbordes-Valmore. This demonstrates that, although the show, as seen earlier, broadly fits the model of a "cinema of transvergence*," it does not unfailingly function as a systematic "engaged site of resistance" to the hegemony of Western cultural references. The passage quoted in the episode runs as follows:

> "N'écris pas. Je suis triste, et je voudrais m'éteindre / Les beaux étés sans toi, c'est la nuit sans flambeau."

Like Moench's neglect of Middle Eastern literature, the show passes over Ibn Zaydun's *Nuniyya* (11th century), a thematically similar poem of lovers' separation that Michael Sells describes as the "quintessential Arabic love poem."[333] The following lines from Sells's translation deploy, however, comparable imagery of light and darkness:

> "Our days turned / in losing you and darkened, / while nights with you / glowed."[334]

Once again, art appears to remain largely the preserve of Western culture. The preference is reinforced by the fact that Spector and Layla effortlessly recite the poem in French. While this poetic interlude may delight Marvel fans and poetry enthusiasts alike, it may also register as a frustrating missed opportunity to bring the Orientalist* gaze more decisively to a close.

In conclusion, after noticeable progress toward fairer representation in Moench's *Knight* (vol. 3) in 1998, and even more so in the *Moon Knight* iterations of the 2010s, the 2022 *Moon Knight* miniseries marks the most substantial corrective to the Orientalist* patterns traced throughout this dissertation. Produced within Disney's new DEI* framework, the series moves away from Moench's asymmetrical model by granting Egypt unprecedented visual and narrative centrality. Through Diab's direction, the inclusion of Arab actors, musicians, and consultants, and the elevation of Layla El-Faouly into a fully empowered Egyptian superhero, the show aligns far more closely with Shohat and Stam's polycentric multiculturalism* than with either Moench's 1998 model or the still-Eurocentric* logic of the 2010s *Moon Knight*

[333] Maria Rosa Menocal et al., *The Literature of Al-Andalus* (2000; Cambridge University Press, 2006), 129.
[334] *Ibid.*, 492.

comics. Egypt is no longer merely a mystified backdrop but a lived cultural space, and Arab figures are no longer voiceless accessories to a Western protagonist. Yet this revision remains incomplete. The miniseries still preserves some durable Orientalist residues, notably in its inevitable reliance on the mummy-adventure genre, in the recurrence of familiar Arab combatant stereotypes, and in its continued preference for Western literary prestige over Arabic artistic traditions. *Moon Knight*, therefore, does not wholly escape Orientalism; rather, it reworks and significantly mitigates it. Its importance lies precisely in this tension: the series shows how a global Marvel production can move, if not fully, from Orientalist appropriation toward a more genuine and celebratory representation of Egypt.

Conclusion

Like the moon symbolized by the oft-mentioned character at the center of this dissertation, *Moon Knight*'s prejudiced representations of the Orient pass through distinct phases: emergence, intensification, recession, and revision. Moench introduced Moon Knight, an antihero initially devoid of overt oriental motifs, three years before Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which exposed the centuries-long patronizing Western depictions of the East. Ironically, Moench began to invest his *Moon Knight* narratives with an Orientalist* veneer only in 1980, when he sought to provide the character with an origin story. These representations intensified in the first *Moon Knight* ongoing series between 1980 and 1984, as Moon Knight was pitted against Eastern and Arab antagonists in stories periodically set in the Middle East. Such misrepresentations receded in Moench's *Moon Knight* (vol. 3) in 1998 and even more noticeably under the aegis of authors such as Warren Ellis and Jeff Lemire in the mid-2010s. This corrective handling of Middle Eastern material was particularly necessary some fifteen years after a post-9/11 media discourse that did not merely misrepresent Arabs and Muslims, but also supplied the suspicion and legitimating logic through which their targeting became publicly tolerable, as shown by the fact that "hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims multiplied by 1,600 percent from 2000 to 2001."[335] As imperfect as these later iterations remained in their portrayal of Arabs and the Middle East, they nonetheless helped pave the way for the more inclusive and diverse approach adopted by the *Moon Knight* Disney+ miniseries in 2022.

In line with Shohat and Stam's polycentric multiculturalism*, the *Moon Knight* miniseries functions as a paean to the culture of both modern and ancient Egypt, long underrepresented or mediated through a Western gaze. Celebratory though it is, the series still bears the marked imprint of a Western cinematic tradition inseparable from Marvel productions, thereby revealing its affinity with Higbee's "cinema of transvergence*" as it negotiates a position between center and margin. This helps explain why the MCU's *Moon Knight* is not entirely free of Orientalist* imagery, thus confirming AlAwadhi's claim that "it is almost impossible to translate the comics and create a new narrative unencumbered by the Occidental gaze and its overarching system."[336] On the face of it, it is indeed difficult to disagree with her. In *Moon Knight*, the authors confront a narrative Catch-22: when the character is not fighting crime in New York, he may be projected into the Middle East, where it seems narratively likely that he will face an Arab antagonist who, by definition, is positioned against and apart from the hero with whom readers are meant to identify. Conversely, if Moon Knight is pitted against a

[335] Alsultany, *op. cit.*, 4.
[336] AlAwadhi, *op. cit.*

Western villain, the Middle East and its geography—especially the desert, a recurrent Third World sign produced through topographical reductionism and a "frequent verbal and visual motif in orientalist films"[337] and comics—risk being reduced to an exotic backdrop whose function is merely to aestheticize the American hero and, more broadly, to reaffirm Westernism. In short, the problem lies not so much in the adaptation as in the source material itself. This, in turn, raises the question of whether a comic book firmly anchored in Middle Eastern themes and concerns, centered on Arab superheroes, and still financially viable in today's U.S publishing landscape is possible. In point of fact, several attempts since the 2000s have already begun to provide part of the answer.

The 2000s and 2010s saw Marvel's main rival, DC Comics, and especially its Vertigo imprint, engage the Middle East more directly and more substantially through works such as *Pride of Baghdad* (Brian K. Vaughan, 2006), *Cairo* (Gwendolyn Willow Wilson, 2007), and *The Sheriff of Babylon* (Tom King, 2015–2017). These works make Baghdad and Cairo central settings, foreground Arab and Iraqi subjectivities, and treat the region through contemporary political and social realities rather than through the familiar Orientalist* repertoire of exoticism and ancient mystique that remained characteristic of Moench, Zelenetz, and Lemire. Yet readers seeking Arab superheroes with whom they might identify still had to turn to publishers outside the U.S. mainstream. In 2004, AK Comics became the first large-scale Egyptian comic-book publisher to address that demand by introducing the first superheroes from the Middle East.[338] Unlike Vertigo's projects, however, these titles, as Fredrik Strömberg observes, "stayed true to all of the conventions of superhero comics, [but] the content only superficially mirrored the Middle Eastern origin."[339] This was partly remedied in 2006 with the launch of *The 99*[340] by Teshkeel Comics, a Kuwaiti comic book publisher that sought to offer Arab children alternative role models. Distributed across the Middle East and North Africa region, as well as in the UK, the USA, Spain, and France, the title enjoyed commercial success until 2013. Although it enlisted high-profile American co-writers such as Fabian Nicieza and Stuart Moore, the series foregrounded young Arab superheroes, each embodying one of the ninety-nine qualities that

[337] Shohat and Stam, *op. cit.*, 148.
[338] Ed O'Loughlin, "Middle East's First Superheroes Out to Change Their World," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 24, 2005, https://www.smh.com.au/world/middle-easts-first-superheroes-out-to-change-their-world-20050924-gdm4ii.html.
[339] Fredrik Strömberg, "Superheroes from the Middle East Adaptation of the Genre?," *Mizan*, October 20, 2016, https://mizanproject.org/pop-post/superheroes-from-the-middle-east/.
[340] Created by the Kuwaiti writer and psychologist Naif Al-Mutawa, *The 99* debuted in 2006 as a comic-book series about ninety-nine superheroes from different parts of the Muslim world. The story revolves around their search for the scattered Noor Stones, relics linked to the medieval House of Wisdom in Baghdad, and foregrounds themes of teamwork and intercultural dialogue.

the Qur'an attributes to God, while grounding its narrative in a pivotal Islamic event, namely the Mongol invasion of Baghdad in 1258. Most importantly, the comic suggests an unprecedented, if toned-down, anti-Orientalist* approach insofar as it shows that "there is not only one way to be Muslim [and] promote[s] cultural understanding and acceptance."[341] Consequently, although "there is no overt mention of religion in the stories,"[342] it renders Islamic ethical concepts diverse, modern, and heroic without reducing them to either religious propaganda or exotic spectacle. Yet, unlike the traditional U.S. comic book emphasis on individual feats, its focus on a collective and interdependent power shared by the ninety-nine children makes the title "closer to the genre of information comics, comics designed to educate, inform, or teach the reader something,"[343] thus moving away from strictly superhero comic conventions. Strömberg therefore concluded, in 2016, that a comic book starring Arab vigilantes, adhering to the conventions of the U.S. superhero or fantasy genre, set in an Arab country, and rooted in Middle Eastern culture could give rise to an entirely new genre that had yet to appear.[344] Since 2016, however, more recent comic books, *Moon Knight* included, have begun to supply some of the building blocks* of precisely such a postcolonial genre.

Tinkering with source material has long been one of Marvel's strengths in narrative creation, especially in its various *What if* titles.[345] Amid Disney's early 2020s commitment to fairer representation, one *Moon Knight* title deserves particular attention in relation to Strömberg's conclusion about the absence of an "Egyptian" genre. In 2021, rather than de-Westernizing the Middle East, Marvel de-Westernized Moon Knight himself in Jed MacKay's *Moon Knight* #1 (vol. 9), which introduced Hunter's Moon, a new "Fist of Khonshu," in the person of Yehya Badr (Fig. 110). A Luxor-born Egyptian doctor who works in a free New York clinic, Badr aims to "correct [Spector], who has strayed" from Khonshu's original purpose, a line that can be read metaphorically as reflecting the broader representational shift encouraged by Disney-Marvel's DEI* framework. Here, this new *Moon Knight* iteration aims to correct Moench's earlier misrepresentations through a further Egyptianization of the character. In addition to the fact that his first and last name mean respectively "Yahweh is merciful" and "full

[341] Camille Agon, "Islamic Superheroes Going Global," *Time*, August 5, 2008, https://time.com/archive/6943982/islamic-superheroes-going-global/.
[342] *Ibid.*
[343] Strömberg, *op. cit.*
[344] *Ibid.*
[345] In a bid to enlarge its diversity, Marvel published *What if…? Dark Moon Knight* in August 2023, this time replacing Spector, the Fist of Khonshu, with Marlene Alraune, the Fist of Ra under the name of Luminary. Nevertheless, the comic does not tread into unchartered territory and its main protagonist, although a female superhero, remains American.

moon" in Arabic, Yehya Badr differs markedly from the stereotypical archeologists or Egyptophiles* found in Marvel, such as Layla El-Faouly, Peter Alraune, Leila O'Toole, and the Living Pharaoh. Yet, although the character appears at first glance to satisfy many of Strömberg's criteria for the emergence of a new genre, Badr remains an Egyptian superhero based in New York, with little voiced concern about Egypt's present social and economic conditions. Moreover, unlike Spector, he has yet to appear significantly in Middle Eastern settings, and, although he has "studied the Quran and the Hadith,"[346] he has abandoned his Muslim faith to devote himself to Khonshu's service.



Figure 110: Cover of *Moon Knight* #3 (vol.9) featuring Hunter's Moon (Marvel Comics, 2021) and panel from *Moon Knight* #1 (vol.9) featuring the first appearance of Yehya Badr (Marvel Comics, 2021)

Despite these earlier experiments, the comic book *El3osba* (Fig. 111) may well be the missing link in Strömberg's projected new genre. Written by John Maher and Maged Refaat and illustrated by Ahmed Rafaat in 2015, *El3osba* centers on a team of six Egyptian superheroes living in modern Cairo and grappling with pressing contemporary issues such as corruption,

[346] *Moon Knight* (vol. 9) #6 (Marvel Comics, December 2021).

exclusion, and inequality in Egypt, while also confronting "Euro-American/Western/Zionist hegemony."[347] The title also "supports feminist issues as social and political concerns"[348] in particularly through Mariam, a fiercely independent and highly educated doctor endowed with superhuman healing powers.[349] Mariam has also received a standalone story, which further emphasizes her autonomous and individuality-centered heroism so characteristic of U.S. superhero comics. Likewise, Horus, the Egyptian god incarnate and El-Walhan, a trained Bedouin mercenary, two figures likely to resonate strongly with Egyptian readers, have each been given spinoffs, allowing the series to reconnect with Egypt's cultural heritage. The independently-published *El3osba* series were distributed internationally in both Arabic and English, attesting to significant demand and interest. These publishing trends reflect a growing awareness among global comic-book publishers of the need for postcolonial comics that address social issues in underrepresented countries and, crucially, feature heroes who remain relatable local figures.

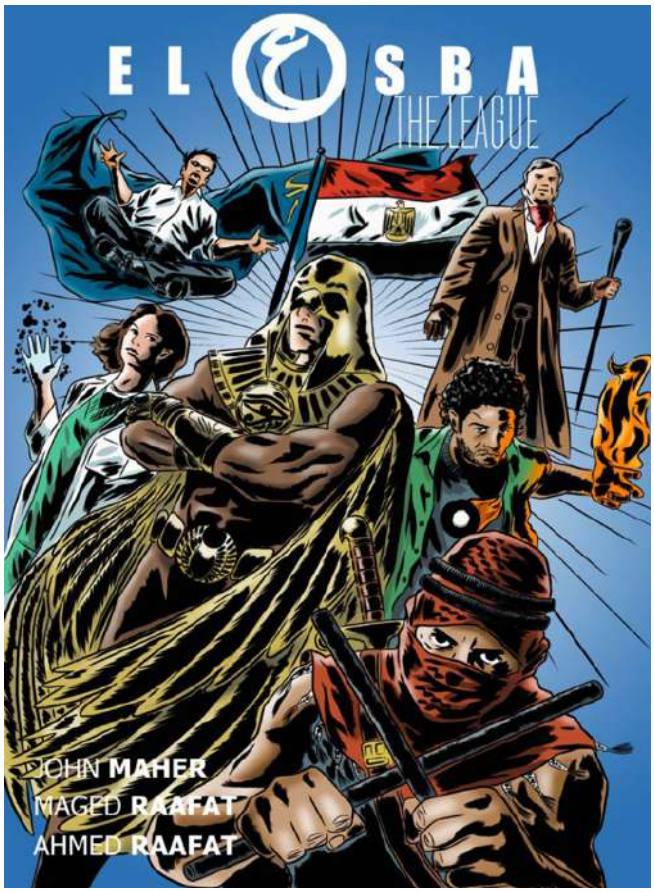


Figure 111: Cover of *El3osba, The League* (English Edition) featuring 6 Egyptian superheroes (Independently published, 2015)

[347] Amany Elnahhas, "Challenging Corruption and Sexism in John Maher and Maged Raafat's El3osba: Between Comics and Facebook Literature," *Cairo Studies in English* 2 (December 2019): 14.
[348] *Ibid.*, 26.
[349] "Independent and educated" are two adjectives that equally match Layla El-Faouly who, in July 2023, officially becomes the Scarlet Scarab as she debuts in Marvel comics in *Moon Knight: City of the Dead* #1.

The introduction of Hunter's Moon through the Egyptian doctor Yehya Badr may certainly help future *Moon Knight* narratives to follow the footsteps of *El3osba* in its postcolonial concerns, even though Disney removed the term "DEI*" from its 2024 annual report for the first time since 2019.[350] Should *Moon Knight* eventually develop into such a postcolonial comic book, it could, together with its postcolonial Disney+ adaptation and *El3osba*, form a burgeoning textual grouping constituting a first step toward the emergence of a new category, if not a new genre. The need to name such a category could then arise, one that would gather the visual, cultural, and mythological signifiers, motifs, and tropes that *Moon Knight* and *El3osba* authors, from Moench and John Maher to Diab, have brought into their narratives. As this dissertation has shown, *Moon Knight* has drawn extensively on genres such as horror, action, and drama. Yet, although Diab has observed that this hybridity "all blends in a very good way,"[351] *Moon Knight* does not yet seem to have reached the stage of generic consolidation that Nicolas Labarre calls "the threshold of genericity."[352] In the absence of a more precise generic term, a story featuring such a motley array of elements as Bedouins, mummies, pyramids, deserts, ancient Egyptian gods, and mysticism is reductively classified on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) under labels such as "superhero," "action," "adventure," and "(supernatural) fantasy" in the case of the *Moon Knight* miniseries, and simply as "superhero" in the Grand Comics Database in the case of Moench's and Lemire's *Moon Knight*, albeit with recurrent keywords such as "mummy" and "Egyptian gods." As it happens, there already exists a comparable (sub)genre that foregrounds minority experience: Afrofuturism, whose most prominent comic-book example remains *Black Panther* and its technologically-advanced nation, Wakanda. It indeed celebrates African and African diasporic cultural achievements. Lisa Yaszek synthesizes its various definitions as follows:

> "Afrofuturism [is] speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th century technoculture […] Afrofuturism is not only a subgenre of science fiction. Instead, it is a larger aesthetic mode that encompasses a diverse range of artists working in different genres and media who are united by their shared interest in projecting black futures derived from Afrodiasporic experiences."[353]

[350] This may be linked to the cultural shifts accompanying the Trump administration's return to power in 2024. The Walt Disney Company, 2024 Sustainability and Social Impact Report (2024), 41.

[351] Dakota Wheeler, "Mohamed Diab on Bringing Multiple Layers of Representation to 'Moon Knight,'" *Discussing Film*, March 29, 2022, https://discussingfilm.net/2022/03/29/mohamed-diab-on-bringing-multiple-layers-of-representation-to-moon-knight/.

[352] Nicolas Labarre, *Understanding Genres in Comics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 129.

[353] Lisa Yaszek, "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future," *Socialism and Democracy* 20, no. 3 (2006): 42.

In a world where Egypt remains the most populous Arab country, with an estimated population of 120 million in 2026,[354] where the Arab region's population is "expected to double over the next 35 years"[355] and where Arabic is "one of the most widely spoken languages in the world,"[356] one may well see the legitimacy, and perhaps even the necessity, of coining a similarly laudatory generic designation for postcolonial works of fiction set in modern or ancient Egypt and committed to fair representation of Arab communities.[357] As Altman reminds us, however, genres do not emerge by decree but through the gradual consolidation of a corpus.[358] That corpus is already taking shape: from Deena Mohamed's webcomic *Qahera* (2013)[359] and graphic novel *Shubeik Lubeik* (2024),[360] Ahmed Khaled Tawfik's *Ma Waraʾ al-Tabiʿa* (1993–2014), adapted by Netflix as *Paranormal* (Amr Salama and Majid Al Ansari, 2020),[361] to Ahmed Mourad's novel *The Blue Elephant* (2012), together with its film adaptation (Marwan Hamed, 2014),[362] a growing body of fiction now foregrounds Egyptian protagonists within adventure, fantasy, and superhero frameworks while reworking those forms from within (Fig. 112). It is therefore not inconceivable that, in the wake of *Moon Knight*'s fiftieth anniversary and on the eve of the twenty-fifth anniversary of 9/11, readers may be witnessing the threshold of a new lunar phase in the character's history: one in which Egypt, the broader Middle East, and their peoples are no longer filtered primarily through Orientalist* mediation, but speak in fuller voices and on their own terms. Should Yehya Badr come to share the mantle of Moon Knight permanently with Marc Spector, that phase may finally begin in earnest. Only then might the long cycle of an Orientalist *Moon Knight* be said to have reached its true end.

[354] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "World Population Prospects 2024," 2024, https://population.un.org/wpp/.
[355] The United Nations Population Fund in Jordan, "Day of 8 Billion," Press Release, November 15, 2022, https://jordan.unfpa.org/en/news/day-8-billion-0.
[356] UNESCO, "World Arabic Language Day," December 18, 2025, https://www.unesco.org/en/world-arabic-language-day.
[357] While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation's aim to propose definitive denominations for a new category or genre, I would nevertheless like to suggest the term "Egyptofantasy."
[358] Altman, *Film Genre*, 17.
[359] Centered on a Muslim Egyptian superheroine who confronts sexism, Islamophobia, and political prejudice, *Qahera* reclaims the superhero form for an explicitly local representation. In this sense, it offers one of the clearest early examples of a postcolonial Arab superhero narrative rooted in contemporary Egyptian concerns.
[360] *Shubeik Lubeik* imagines a Cairo where wishes are bought and sold as regulated commodities. By combining fantasy with everyday urban life, the work foregrounds Egyptian society from within rather than through an exoticizing gaze, making it a major contribution to an emergent postcolonial Egyptian fantastical mode.
[361] *Ma Waraʾ al-Tabiʿa* is a landmark Egyptian horror and supernatural series following Dr Refaat Ismail through encounters with ghosts and uncanny phenomena. Together, the novels and the Netflix adaptation exemplify how horror and mysticism can articulate Egyptian modernity without recourse to Orientalist framing.
[362] *The Blue Elephant* is an Egyptian psychological thriller steeped in supernatural motifs. Set in contemporary Cairo and rooted in local institutions and anxieties, it mobilizes mysticism and horror through Egyptian characters and settings, thereby aligning with the postcolonial corpus outlined in this conclusion.



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Figure 112: Montage of posters and panels of works sharing generic motifs and signifiers with Egyptian protagonists in adventure/fantasy/superhero narratives. Top left: poster of *The Blue Elephant* (ACPD, 2014). Top right: poster of *Paranormal* (Netflix, 2020). Bottom left: panel from *Qahera* (Deena Mohamed, 2013). Bottom right: panel from *Shubeik Lubeik* (Steinkis Editions, 2024)

Glossary

Agency

The capacity of a character or group to act meaningfully within a narrative, rather than being reduced to a passive object of representation.

Anti-Orientalism

A corrective representational stance grounded in the rejection of earlier Orientalist codes and in the construction of new, diverse, and heterogeneous representations of the Orient, its cultures, and above all its religions, in order to counter (neo-)Orientalist discourse more effectively.

Braiding

Thierry Groensteen's term ("tressage") for the network of echoes, recurrences, and visual correspondences linking separate panels or sequences across one or several comic books.

Building block

A recurrent narrative or visual element that serves as a basic compositional unit in a story world.

CCA

The Comics Code Authority, the self-regulatory body established in 1954 to censor and standardize American comic books according to moral guidelines.

Cinema of transvergence

Will Higbee's term for a postcolonial cinema that resists binary oppositions, foregrounds marginalized perspectives, and negotiates between dominant and minoritized cultures.

DEI

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: a framework or policy aimed at improving representation and participation for historically-underrepresented groups.

DID

Dissociative Identity Disorder: a psychiatric diagnosis involving the presence of two or more distinct identity states, used in later *Moon Knight* narratives to frame Marc Spector's multiple personae.

Egyptology / Egyptomania / Egyptophilia

Three related but distinct ways of engaging with ancient Egypt. Egyptology is the scholarly, critical study of ancient Egyptian civilization based on archaeological evidence. Egyptophilia refers more broadly to an admiration for or sustained interest in ancient Egypt, without necessarily implying academic expertise. Egyptomania designates a more excessive, spectacular, or fantasized fascination with Egypt, often expressed through popular culture, and myth rather than through scholarship.

Eurocentrism

A worldview that treats European or Western culture as the implicit norm and central reference point for interpreting history and other societies.

Iconicity Rate

The frequency of recurring motifs in a comic book, such as Egyptian visual signifiers.

Mahraganat

A contemporary Egyptian musical genre, influenced by hip-hop and electronic music, associated with working-class youth culture and often marked by socially-charged lyrics.

Orientalism

Following Edward Said, a Western mode of representing the "Orient" as exotic, backward, irrational, or inferior, in ways that sustain asymmetries of knowledge and power.

Paratext

Material that surrounds and frames a text, such as covers, titles, prefaces, captions, posters, or trailers, shaping how it is read or received.

Polycentrism / Polycentric Multiculturalism

In Shohat and Stam's sense, a multicultural model that rejects a single cultural center and instead values a plurality of perspectives, especially those of marginalized groups.

Retcon

Short for retroactive continuity: a later revision or reinterpretation of previously established fictional continuity.

Run

A distinct period during which a particular writer or artist shapes a comic series, often giving it a specific style and narrative direction.

Corpus

I. Comic books (1975–1984)

1. Moench, Doug, and Perlin, Don. *Werewolf by Night* #32–33, 37. Marvel Comics, 1975–1976.
2. Moench, Doug, and Perlin, Don. *Marvel Spotlight* #28–29, Marvel Comics, 1976.
3. Moench, Doug, Colan, Gene, and Sienkiewicz, Bill. *The Hulk!* #11-15, 17-18, 20, Marvel Comics, 1978-1980.
4. Moench, Doug, and Sienkiewicz, Bill. *Marvel Preview* #21, Marvel Comics, 1980.
5. Moench, Doug, Sienkiewicz, Bill, Zelenetz Alan, and Isabella, Tony, *Moon Knight vol. 1* #1-45, Marvel Comics, 1980-1984.

II. Comic books (1985–2018)

1. Zelenetz, Alan, and Warner, Chris. *Moon Knight vol. 2* #1-6, Marvel Comics, 1985.
2. Various writers and artists. *Marc Spector: Moon Knight* #1-60, Marvel Comics, 1989-1994.
3. Higgins, Michael, Moench, Doug, Nichols, Art, and Severin, Marie. *Marc Spector: Moon Knight Special* #1, Marvel Comics, 1992.
4. Moench, Doug, and Edward, Tommy. *Moon Knight vol. 3* #1-4, Marvel Comics, 1998.
5. Moench, Doug, and Texeira, Mark. *Moon Knight vol. 4* #1-4, Marvel Comics, 1999.
6. Various writers and artists. *Moon Knight vol. 5* #1-30, Marvel Comics, 2006-2009.
7. Hurwitz, Gregg, and Opena, Jerome. *Vengeance of the Moon Knight vol. 1* #1-10, Marvel Comics, 2009-2010.
8. Bendis, Brian Michael, and Maleev, Alex. *Moon Knight vol. 6* #1-12, Marvel Comics, 2011-2012.
9. Various writers and artists. *Moon Knight vol. 7* #1-17, Marvel Comics, 2014-2015.
10. Various writers and artists. *Moon Knight vol. 8* #1-14, #188-200, Marvel Comics, 2016-2018.

III. Disney+ miniseries (2022)

1. *Moon Knight*. Miniseries of six episodes. Created by Jeremy Slater. Marvel Studios, 2022. Streaming on Disney+.

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For reasons of usability, these indexes exclude Doug Moench, Moon Knight, and Khonshu, as all three are discussed so continuously throughout the dissertation that including them would make the indexes less useful.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

The table below aggregates the results of four polls conducted by CBR, a news website primarily devoted to comic-book news, reviews, and related commentary. The polls (2011, 2016, 2019, and 2023) asked CBR readers to rank their "favorite comic book characters" from Marvel.

Sources:

2011 poll: https://www.cbr.com/2011-top-marvel-characters-40-36/

2016 and 2019 polls: https://community.cbr.com/threads/2019-top-50-marvel-characters-discussion.131704/

2023 poll: https://www.cbr.com/2023-top-100-dc-and-marvel-characters-of-all-time-master-list/

60 Most Popular Marvel Characters	2011	2016	2019	2023	Average	Rank			2011	2016	2019	2023	Average	Rank
Spider-Man	1	1	1	1	1,0	1st		Ms. Marvel (Kamala Khan)		27	32	31	30,0	31st
Captain America	2	2	2	2	2,0	2nd		Reed Richards	30	35	34	28	31,8	32nd
Wolverine	4	3	3	3	3,3	3rd		Multiple Man	32				32,0	33rd
Daredevil	6	4	4	5	4,8	4th		Winter Soldier	24	36	36		32,0	34th
Thor	3	7	5	4	4,8	5th		Black Widow	39	30	25	37	32,8	35th
Hulk	5	8	6	7	6,5	6th		Beast	22	33	39	42	34,0	36th
Doom	8	5	8	6	6,8	7th		Thanos	44	26	35		35,0	37th
Iron Man	7	9	7	8	7,8	8th		Miles Morales		48	29	30	35,7	38th
Magneto	12	6	9	11	9,5	9th		Nova (Richard Rider)	35	37			36,0	39th
Cyclops	9	10	11	12	10,5	10th		Luke Cage	27		49		38,0	40th
Thing	11	11	14	10	11,5	11th		Laura Kinney	36		38	41	38,3	41st
Hawkeye	10	14	16	16	14,0	12th		Namor	33	43	44	34	38,5	42nd
Storm	21	13	13	9	14,0	13th		Ghost Rider				39	39,0	43rd
Deadpool	15	12	10	21	14,5	14th		Magic (Illyana Rasputin)		42		36	39,0	44th
Doctor Strange	14	19	12	18	15,8	15th		Venom		40	27	50	39,0	45th
Kitty Pride	19	15	21	13	17,0	16th		Sue Storm	47	39	46	29	40,3	46th
Nightcrawler	13	16	22	17	17,0	17th		Iceman	41		40	40	40,3	47th
Jean Grey	20	20	15	15	17,5	18th		Ant-Man (Scott Lang)	40	41			40,5	48th
She-Hulk	26	18	19	22	21,3	19th		Vision	50	45	33	35	40,8	49th
Ms. Marvel (Carol Danvers)	29	17	23	20	22,3	20th		Loki	45	32	42	46	41,3	50th
Silver Surfer	25	21	20	25	22,8	21st		Colossus	42	46		38	42,0	51st
Rogue	23	29	24	19	23,8	22nd		Psylocke	48	38	44		43,3	52nd
Emma Frost	17	28	28	24	24,3	23rd		Spider-Woman	46		41		43,5	53rd
Scarlet Witch	31	34	18	14	24,3	24th		Falcon				45	45,0	54th
Black Panther	38	22	17	23	25,0	25th		Johnny Storm	43		48	44	45,0	55th
Punisher	18	23	26	33	25,0	26th		Spider-Gwen/Gwen Stacy			43	47	45,0	56th
Nick Fury	28				28,0	27th		Hawkeye (Kate Bishop)		44		48	46,0	57th
Gambit	34	25	30	26	28,8	28th		Rocket Raccoon			50	43	46,5	58th
Iron Fist	16	31	37	32	29,0	29th		Squirrel Girl		47			47,0	59th
MOON KNIGHT	37	24	31	27	29,8	30th		Wasp (Janet Van Dyne)		49	47		48,0	60th

Figure 113: 60 Most Popular Marvel Characters (Sébastien Jacotin, 2025)

Appendix B:

Google Map Reviews for the Khonsu Temple, Luxor, Egypt:

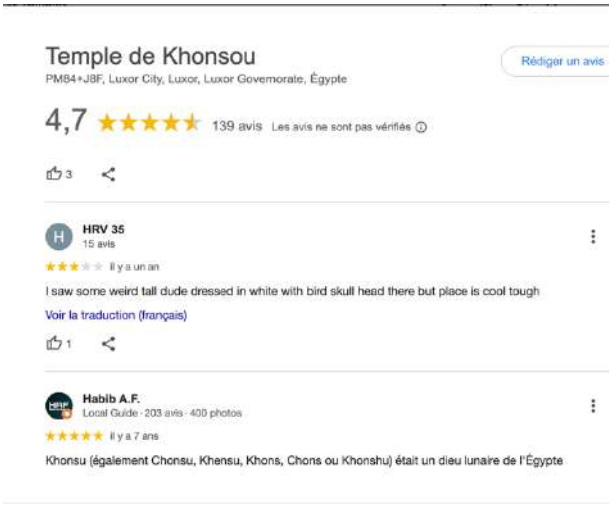


Figure 114: HRV 35, review of "Temple of Khonsu" (Luxor City, Egypt), Google Maps, posted 10/09/2025

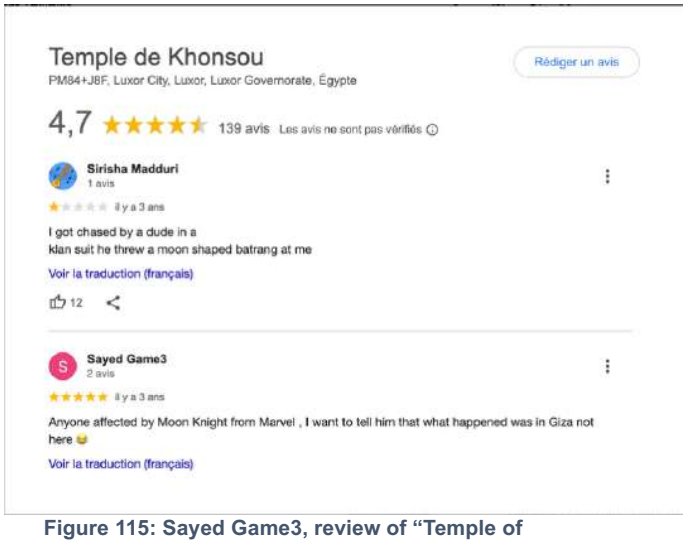


Figure 115: Sayed Game3, review of "Temple of Khonsu" (Luxor City, Egypt), Google Maps, posted 10/09/2025

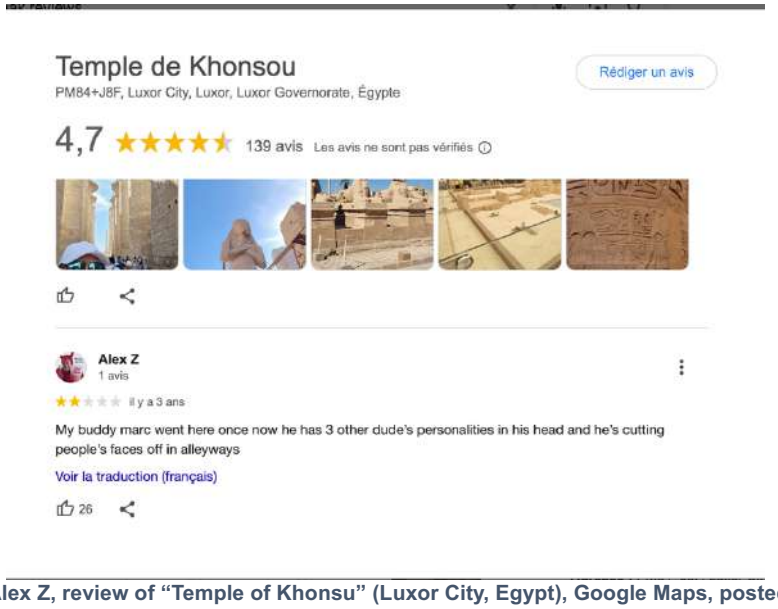


Figure 116: Alex Z, review of "Temple of Khonsu" (Luxor City, Egypt), Google Maps, posted 10/09/2025

Appendix C:



MOON KNIGHT

Real Name: Marc Spector
Occupation: Professional adventurer, mercenary, millionaire, cab driver
Identity: Secret
Legal status: Citizen of the United States with no criminal record
Former aliases: None
Other current aliases: Steven Grant, Jake Lockley
Place of birth: Chicago, Illinois
Marital status: Single
Known relatives: Randall Spector (brother, deceased)
Group affiliation: None
Base of operations: Grant Mansion, Long Island, New York
First appearance: WEREWOLF BY NIGHT #32

Origin: Marc Spector was a mercenary soldier of international reputation, an ex-prize fighter, former marine commando, former C.I.A. liaison, and veteran of three African wars and five South American revolutions. At the peak of his career as a soldier of fortune, Spector worked as second in command to Roald Bushman, a terrorist for hire who had his face tattooed as a death mask. While fighting rebel forces in the Sudan south of the Egyptian border, Spector's trusted aide Frenchie discovered Bushman's plans to raid a nearby archaeological dig for gold treasures. Already believing he had been working for the wrong side, Spector decided to leave Bushman's employ that night. Traveling to the dig, Spector witnessed an attempt on Bushman's life by Dr. Peter Alraune, an angry American archaeologist trying to preserve the treasures of Pharaoh Seti III. Instinctively, Spector thwarted the attempt, and saw Bushman savagely murder his attacker. Sickened, Spector told the archaeologist's daughter Marlene to get to safety, and then confronted Bushman. Bushman bested Spector and left him out in the desert to die. Staggering determinedly through the desert toward civilization, Spector collapsed a short distance from the dig he tried to save. Workers discovered him and brought him to shelter. Spector was suffering from such great heat exhaustion that his heart stopped beating for almost a minute. While Marlene Alraune watched over him, blaming him for her father's death and yet sad that he had died, Spector revived. Touched by his brush with death, he attributed his "rebirth" to the presence of the statue of Khonshu, the Egyptian god of the moon. Spector draped himself in the cloak that the statue had been preserved in and declared himself the moon's knight of vengeance. Spector destroyed Bushman's forces in that part of the world, and then took Marlene and Frenchie back to America.

Months later, Spector employed Frenchie to infiltrate a Los Angeles-based organization called the Committee, for the purpose of investigating its underworld financial dealings. When the Committee became interested in capturing the werewolf Jack Russell, Frenchie, posing as a Committee member, recommended mercenary Marc Spector to do the job. Frenchie presented the Committee with a silver battle suit in the image of the statue of Khonshu for Spector to wear, pretending to create the Moon Knight identity for the occasion. Spector, as Moon Knight, found Russell and brought him to the Committee. Learning the true reason why they wanted him, Spector freed the werewolf and battled the Committee, bringing a temporary halt to their operations. He then adopted the alias of millionaire Steven Grant and parlayed Spector's mercenary monies into a fortune on Wall Street. Spector, Frenchie, and Marlene then bought a mansion on Long Island and established it as a base of operations for Moon Knight's crimefighting career.

Height: 6'2" **Weight:** 225 lbs
Eyes: Dark brown **Hair:** Brown

Powers: Moon Knight has no superhuman powers, but is an Olympic level athlete with extraordinary strength, endurance, agility, and fighting skills. He can lift (press) 450 pounds. Years of mercenary work and commando experience have given him a broad range of hand-to-hand combat techniques.

Weapons: Moon Knight employs high-carbon steel alloy, silver-plated, crescent-shaped, throwing air-foil darts, 5 inches long from tip to tip, and weighing 10 ounces. The convex cutting edge is sharp enough to cut .25-inch aircraft control cable at 30 feet. The weight of each dart is eccentric so that the center of gravity is within the dart's cutting edge, ensuring level, blade-forward flight. This design and Moon Knight's throwing skill enables him to throw a single crescent with 95% accuracy up to 150 feet. Moon Knight stores these darts on his belt in safety-clip pouches.

Moon Knight's stainless-steel alloy truncheon is a multi-purpose weapon, measuring 12 inches and weighing 12 pounds, which he keeps in a spring-loaded, quick-release holster mounted on his left boot. The truncheon converts into a nunchaku (two short sticks connected by a length of chain), and has a retractible grappling hook on one end which can be connected to a length of cable for rappeling down the sides of buildings. Moon Knight can also use the truncheon as a throwing club or a bludgeon. Moon Knight's accuracy at throwing the truncheon is also unusually high.

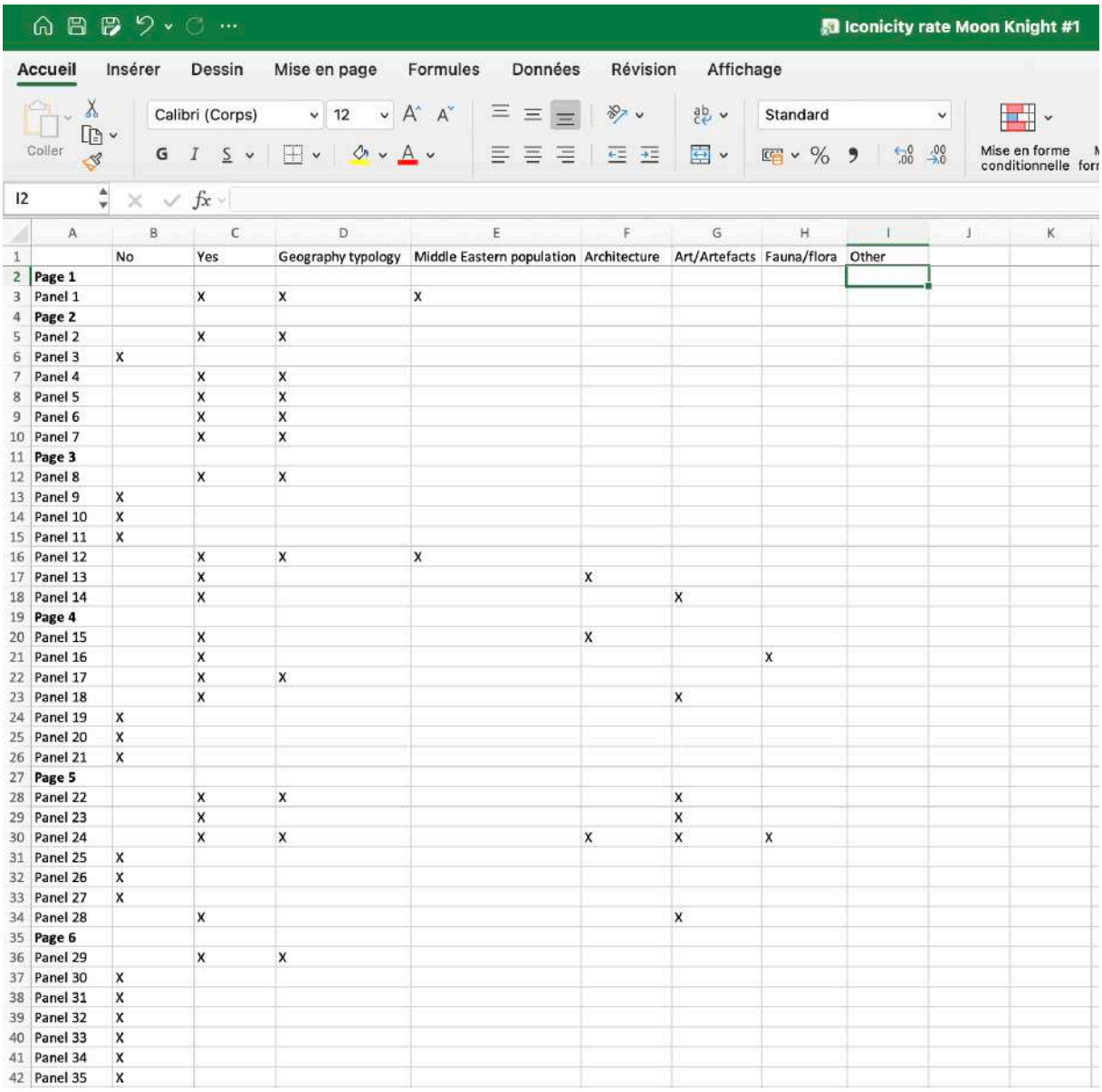
Moon Knight sometimes uses his cape as a makeshift parachute to glide from his copter to the street.

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Figure 117: Panel from *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe* #7 vol. 1 (Marvel Comics, 1983)

Appendix D:

Excerpt from the iconicity-rate spreadsheet table used to quantify the prevalence of motifs associated with the "Orient" in *Moon Knight* #1 (1980). I code one occurrence of the "Middle Eastern population" motif when characters such as Marlene's Arab assistants appear in the panel. I likewise code one occurrence of the "Architecture" motif when built forms, such as a tomb or temple in the Egyptian desert, are depicted.



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1		No	Yes	Geography typology	Middle Eastern population	Architecture	Art/Artefacts	Fauna/flora	Other
2	**Page 1**								
3	Panel 1		X	X	X				
4	**Page 2**								
5	Panel 2		X	X					
6	Panel 3	X							
7	Panel 4		X	X					
8	Panel 5		X	X					
9	Panel 6		X	X					
10	Panel 7		X	X					
11	**Page 3**								
12	Panel 8		X	X					
13	Panel 9	X							
14	Panel 10	X							
15	Panel 11	X							
16	Panel 12		X	X	X				
17	Panel 13		X			X			
18	Panel 14		X				X		
19	**Page 4**								
20	Panel 15		X			X			
21	Panel 16		X					X	
22	Panel 17		X	X					
23	Panel 18		X				X		
24	Panel 19	X							
25	Panel 20	X							
26	Panel 21	X							
27	**Page 5**								
28	Panel 22		X	X			X		
29	Panel 23		X				X		
30	Panel 24		X	X		X	X	X	
31	Panel 25	X							
32	Panel 26	X							
33	Panel 27	X							
34	Panel 28		X				X		
35	**Page 6**								
36	Panel 29		X	X					
37	Panel 30	X							
38	Panel 31	X							
39	Panel 32	X							
40	Panel 33	X							
41	Panel 34	X							
42	Panel 35	X							

Figure 118: Excerpt from the iconicity-rate spreadsheet table (Sébastien Jacotin, 2025)

Appendix E:

Spreadsheet table showing the evolution of orientalist tropes between Moench's *Moon Knight* vol. 1 (1980-1983) and the Disney+ miniseries (2022).

EVOLUTION OF ORIENTALIST TROPES	Moench's Moon Knight vol. 1 (1980-1983)	Moench's Moon Knight vol. 3 (1998)	Disney+ Moon Knight (2022)
Authors	The entire creative team is American, from the editor to the inker.	Ibid.	The creative team is largely Arab.
Moon Knight's costume	The moon is the only motif even remotely associated with ancient Egypt.	Ibid.	Moon, hieroglyphs, and mummy bandages.
Khonshu	Limited to a stylized statue stolen (?) by Spector. Has no voice.	Khonshu speaks. May be read as Spector's hallucination, however.	One of the main protagonists. Depicted with a bird head, though not the traditional falcon.
Marc Spector	Main protagonist. Jewish American antihero. In love with Marlene.	Absent.	In love with an Arab woman.
Steven Grant	American millionaire; Spector's cover identity.	Main protagonist. American millionaire.	Main protagonist. Nebbish British museum employee.
Jake Lockley	American New York cab driver; occasional appearances.	Ibid.	Hispanic. Merciless killer.
Mr. Knight	Absent.	Absent.	Grant's alter ego. Mummy-bandage-like straps on shoes + Khonshu hieroglyphs on suit.
Main antagonist	Many "Oriental" antagonists + Bushman.	American antagonists + the ancient Egyptian god Set.	Only one antagonist: the American Arthur Harrow.
Main settings	The USA: New York, Sudan, Egypt, Israel, and Lebanon.	New York and Cairo.	London, Switzerland while most of the show is set in Cairo and Egypt.
Main female roles	Spector's love interest: Marlene Fontaine/Alraune, daughter of an American archaeologist.	Ibid.	Archeologist and superhero Layla El-Faouly + the goddesses Ammit and Taweret.
Ancient Egypt gods	Khonshu.	Khonshu and Set.	Eight ancient Egyptian gods: three male, five female, mainly played by Arab actors.
Arabic	Only one issue in which Spector speaks Arabic, and it is directly translated into English.	Two issues out of four. Directly translated into English.	Arabic is written, spoken, and sung in several episodes. Spector is said to speak Arabic well.
Hieroglyphs	Stylized and meaningless hieroglyphs.	Ibid.	Tombs and stones contain real hieroglyphs.
Egyptian art	Exotic background. Anonymized, devalued, and stylized.	More faithful visual representation.	Greater attention to artistic accuracy by Egyptologists. Condemnation of Western looting of Egyptian artefacts.
Middle Eastern population	Subservient, backward, and antagonistic.	Modern and neutral, but with limited agency.	A modern and lively Egyptian population, but still violent and barbaric Arab antagonists.

Figure 119: Evolution of Orientalist tropes in *Moon Knight* (Sébastien Jacotin, 2026)