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Comics beside Literature: Race and Environment in Twentieth-Century American Fiction

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Twentieth-Century American Fiction

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Abstract

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By Guy Conn

This dissertation participates in the "nonhuman turn" of literary theory by juxtaposing twentieth-century U.S. literary and comics texts within an ecocritical framework that deprivileges anthropocentric reading practices. This project's ecocritical approach is less concerned with recovering wilderness or staving off apocalypse than with how quotidian human engagements with the world require ongoing negotiations between nonhuman agency and capitalist ideologies of ownership and exploitation. In particular, this dissertation explores how the narrative framing of individualist encounters with nature often draw from and reinforce logics of segregation by insulating idealized human/nonhuman relationships from racialized others. As an interdisciplinary project analyzing comics, novels, and short stories as well as film, television, and advertising, it contends that our current methods of regarding narrative mediums often relegate the environment to mere ambience, as something to be filtered out for more important (human) matters. Yet, as *Comics beside Literature* traces that ambience across mediums, it shows how the specific qualities of environments are as necessary to their stories as the nonhuman animals and objects that vitally structure the societies those stories depict.

Through the work of Frederick Law Olmsted, Henry James, and Justin Green, the first chapter examines the ecologically-disastrous aesthetic of green lawns that develops from nineteenth-century theories of environmental health and natural beauty. In response to Aldo Leopold's famous dictum, the second chapter asks: in what ways can we articulate thought as a capacity attributable to mountains? To explore this question, this chapter turns to the collaborative work of Chester Himes and Aline Kominsky-Crumb to consider how ignored voices can persist and even flourish in hostile intellectual environments. The third chapter reads civil-rights-era comics by African-American creators as responding to packaging companies' dissemination of racially-charged disgust for "litter bugs": this disgust enabled consumers to express anxiety over proliferating waste while making only superficial changes—like recycling—to their habits of consumption. The final chapter engages narratives of recreational nature excursions by James Baldwin, ZZ Packer, and Melanie Gillman. In these stories, child protagonists encounter camp and park grounds as distant outposts for the racial segregation and social oppression from which they sought respite.

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This project was first and continuously inspired by the environmental scholarship of Dr. Christina Colvin who read, edited, and offered suggestions on every line of every draft of this dissertation. It was enabled by Jill, who moved to and stayed in Atlanta. It was finally kept on track by Dylan, who inquired into my progress every day as we walked home from school.

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Introduction: Beside

Late last year, I was excited to see ZZ Packer scheduled to read at my university. A few years earlier I had taught her short story collection *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere* (2003), and I was surprised when Packer chose to forgo reading newer work, opting instead for a greatest hit selection from that collection, "Brownies." Serendipitously, I was attempting to write about the brief but interesting references she made to the non-human environment in that story (see the fourth chapter of this project), so rather than enjoy the rich dramatization of Packer's writing, laughing with the packed room at her impeccably-delivered punchlines, I rather sweatily considered how I could hijack the Q&A session. Rather than ask her something of broad topical appeal, I silently mulled how to interrupt the more sensible questions she would receive about the craft of writing, pedagogy, intersectional politics, humor, career pressures, and her current projects. I wanted to raise a very precise question about the one or two times she happened to mention trees in her story, as well as if a theory of racial segregation in Atlanta's built environment could indeed be teased out of her sentences on, respectively, fish and air fresheners. In the context of a seminar room, I would have loved to have heard what Packer thought of my interpretation of her work. But, during her reading before a public audience, I realized that my long-gestating ideas about Packer's writing—considered in relation to James Baldwin, webcomics, short stories as a discrete medium and institutional product, and the recent non-human turn in literary criticism—would at best come across as long-winded and, more likely, make me the pretentious spoil-sport with an agenda indiscernible to anyone else in the room (there's one at every reading). Sensing

the difficulty in conveying all the contingencies of my specific interests, I visualized an outline of my fourth chapter, and I did not ask the question.

This dissertation participates in the "nonhuman turn" of literary theory by juxtaposing twentieth-century literary and comics texts of the United States within an ecocritical framework that seeks to deprivilege anthropocentric reading practices (Grusin). It may come as a surprise that such a pairing of literary and comics texts is met with objections less from conservative attempts to preserve some idealized canon of Western literature (though those objections still do periodically reappear) than from comics fans and scholars.[1] In his influential 2012 monograph *Comics versus Art*, Bart Beaty laments "the literary turn in the study of comics" (18). Beaty argues that the "literary turn" tends to diminish the visual aspects of comics, gentrify the form's cultural cache (by calling them "graphic novels"), evince a "narrativist bias" that sloppily conflates narrative with the literary, and reinscribe the modernist dualism of high-low arts (18-45). In this scenario, the institutions of literature—publishers, review sites, and academic departments—are hegemons that lay claim to a small selection of predominately book-length comics that exhibit literary qualities (such as subtle characterization, densely signifying prose, weighty thematic concerns, deliberate pacing, and distinct authorial style). This privileging of a small selection of comics comes at the expense of the vast majority of genre comics, single panel cartoons, webcomics, newspaper strips, as well as the vast majority of comic books produced outside the United States. While Beaty's concern over the "literary turn" towards comics is convincing in its general representation of the field, it is a bit harder to recognize in

[1] For a recent instance of such conservative objections to comics in literature curriculum, see Watkins.

practice. My interest in Packer, for instance, does not map well onto "literary" interests such as narrative, cognitivist prose, or Packer's place on a spectrum of high, middlebrow, or low art. Instead, my investment in her story has to do with trees, fish, and race, visual components that I learned to look for by reading Melanie Gillman's webcomic *As the Crow Flies*. As is often the case with oppositional definitions, the contrasting term—in this case, literature—becomes a rather flimsy straw man.[2]

In *Touching Feeling*, Eve Sedgwick offers a promising array of alternative reading positions that can help orient the diverse forms considered in this dissertation—theory, comics, novels, advertisements, television shows, sponsored films, and short stories—to each other without subsuming their differences to a hierarchy of forms (a hierarchy implied in the phrase "literary comics," for instance, or comics valued for their novelistic qualities).[3] Rather than a critical practice of "*Beneath and behind*" which justifies itself as revealing the hidden truths of texts and society, or "*beyond*" which

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[2] Comics artist Eddie Campbell wrote a similar argument about "the invasion of these literaries" for *The Comics Journal* website. Buried in the 172 comments were two, two influential comics scholars situated, like Beaty, in English departments. In response, Charles Hatfield wrote that "'literature' is, or should be, a much wider, more plastic concept than what we usually mean when we talk about literariness." Jared Garnder replied, "Honestly, I am still not sure what 'literature' is, and I've supposedly been teaching it for 20 years." For more, see Campbell.

[3] Concerns over the critical flattening of medium specificity are not unfamiliar to literary studies. Kathryn Bond Stockton writes of "the usual flow of theory 'down' to fiction [...] fictions in need of theories' explanatory moves" (25). Rather than a unidirectional theoretical model that dictates critical readings of fictional texts, Stockton "show[s] how theory (that strangely reified, ossified term) needs new fictions" (Stockton 25).

promises a new method for getting beyond some intractable problem, Sedgwick conjures a promising criticism of the "*beside*" (8). Sedgwick writes that, "*Beside* permits a spacious antagonism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking" (8). As is the case of the other still very novel-seeming methodologies offered in *Touching Feeling*—reparative and paranoid reading, weak and strong theories—the positive articulation of this spectrum of reading practices remains tantalizingly more performed than posited.[4] Therefore, it is significant that, in a brief sketch on the critical work possible with beside, Sedgwick reiterates *ecology* as the positive expression of beside. In literary theory, she writes, "the ecological attention to space collapses in favor of a temporal emphasis." Spatial disciplines, such as geography, maintain the "advantage of permitting ecological or systems approaches to such issues as identity and performance" (8-9).[5] Reading beside offers "an ecological field whose intensive and defining relationality is internal as much as it is directed toward the norms it may challenge" (9). Perhaps most significantly, prepositionally offering subjects and objects beside each other insists on a heterogeneous verbiage: "Beside comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations" (8).

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[4] According to Robert Azzarello, "In the chapter on the subject, however, Sedgwick's commentary on reparative reading is not nearly as developed as her detailed and exhaustively refined analysis of its paranoid counterpart" (28).

[5] "Although temporal and spatial thinking are never really alternative to each other, I've consistently tried in *Touching Feeling* to push back against an occupational tendency to underattend to the rich dimension of space" (Sedgwick 9).

Beside's capaciousness, then, marks the space wherein intuited relationships can be explored without asserting essentialist histories or predetermined futures that collapse the differences between more-than-one, less-than-infinite adjoining objects into a singular relationship.

In this dissertation, comics often parallel, mimic, withdraw from, are attracted to, and are warped by literature. The fulcrum of these divergent relations is an account of prose and picture narratives that critique enlightenment subjectivity (rational, autonomous, and human) with a textured account of nonhuman agency. The texts considered throughout this dissertation are generally not the type of nature stories (Muir, Thoreau, Dillard) used to illustrate a virtuous environmental consciousness. Instead, by giving equal attention to the nonhuman objects and environments that prop up narratives primarily concerned with human characters, I seek to demonstrate how nonhuman objects and animals should be read as essential narrative components in a much wider range of fictions. Our current methods of regarding narrative tend to equate environments with ambience, something to be filtered out for more important (human) matters. Yet, as that ambience is traced across mediums, we begin to suspect that the specific qualities of environment are as necessary to their stories as the nonhuman animals and objects that vitally structure the societies those stories depict.[6]

In Chapter 1, "'From a Materialistic Toward a Poetic Mood': Lawn Aesthetics in Olmsted, James, and Justin Green," I examine the ecologically disastrous, contemporary

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[6] To say that objects mediate relations is to make the crucial point that unlike herds of animals, human society is massively stabilized by such nonhuman objects as brick walls, barbed wire, wedding rings, ranks, titles, coins, clothing, tattoos, medallions, and diplomas" (Harman, *Immaterialism* 6).

aesthetic of green lawns. Rather than a genealogy of middle class conformism within post-WW II suburban planning, the focus in this chapter is how the allure of grass, in the contemporary U.S. context, develops from 19th-century theories of environmental health and natural beauty. In the 19th century, Frederick Law Olmsted applied his conception of public urban parks to numerous universities, suburbs, private estates, hospitals, and world fairs across the country. For Olmsted, "a rich close perennial turf" is required to meet the physiological needs of the "poetic element of human nature" ignored by industrial labor and the urban environments that provided the working classes little to no access to rural nature or wilderness. I argue that Olmsted popularized a kind of pastoral technology that allowed urban dwellers universal access to a restorative ideal of non-urban nature. Literary modernism frequently explored this odd conception of parks: in particular, modernism explored how parks were designed to contrast with and even counteract the urban environments for which they were invented and often served as icons (after Central Park, every city with aspirations of international renown had to have a major park). Grass *becomes* situated in and arguably representative of this liminal space, a space neither of untamed wilderness nor exciting technological modernism. Barriers such as class were difficult to maintain on park grass, making it a rich site for fictional depictions of romantic relationships that explore social prohibitions. I use Henry James as emblematic of literary modernists' broader interest in park spaces. In his novel *The Wings of the Dove*, James contrasts a wealthy protagonist's (Milly Theale) disgust with park goers who lie in the "shabby grass" of a park with his poorer protagonist's (Kate Croy) attempt to gain approval for her romantic interests by situating them within Arcadian park scenes. Whereas turf and lawns shape space in prose, they often remain abstractions

with minimal narrative treatment. In comics, however, a conception of lawns is always enacted in the detail with which they are drawn. I identify the individuation of blades of grass as a way to depict the world from a child's perspective, a form of seeing that has not yet learned to group blades of grass into the abstract lawns of literature. In Justin Green's pioneering autobiographical comic *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*, we see Brown's adolescent transition to such abstraction interrupted by the increase of his obsessive-compulsive symptoms. Green represents his early struggle with mental health issues through the figures of individuated, talking blades of grass. In this uncanny failure to recognize the flat abstraction of lawns, Green hints at the botanical allure of grass that orients our desire for green turf.

The second chapter, "Towards an Ecology of Mind: Chester Himes and Aline Kominsky-Crumb," invokes Aldo Leopold's famous dictum that stewardship of the earth demands that humans begin "thinking like a mountain." Rather than reduce Leopold's story to a parable of natural balance, I use a resurgence of interest in panpsychism to consider what it would mean to consider Leopold's assertion literally. That is, I raise the question: in what ways can we articulate thought as a capacity attributable to mountains? Leopold can then be read as skeptical of the notion that thinking can be ecological so long as it remains the exclusive purview of individualist, human cognition. This critique of species intelligence—misattributed to individuals—resonates deeply with Chester Himes's critically-ignored fixation with collaborative writing. During a decade's worth of novels, memoirs, introductions, and story treatments, Himes seethed over the rejection of his 1953 effort *Garden Without Flowers*. Himes blamed the industry-wide rejection of the book on the fact that he wrote it with his white partner, Willa Thompson. I argue that

Himes obsessively returned to his rejected collaboration and sexual relationship with Thompson as way of developing the “racio-sexual psychology of inter-racial relations" that he considered a key thematic of his oeuvre. It was through his close relationship with Thompson that Himes was able to write about a theory of gender and race as always imbricated, even when the terms seemed irrelevant to a given subject. Following the work of Hasana Sharp, I argue that both this close collaboration and Himes’s subsequent conceptual revision of his ideas about race and gender were made possible by an ecology of mind, a transindividual theory of knowing wherein thoughts flourish through a healthy relation to other thoughts and bodies. Himes's writing on coauthored texts provides an illuminating theory for the sticky subject of authorship in the literary understanding of comic books. Comic books continue to be neglected by literary studies because of an industrial production method that involves separate writers, pencillers, inkers, letterers, colorists, and cover artists. In fact, comic book companies have used this creative Fordism to claim that, since the ideas are generated between so many individuals, those ideas can only be owned and controlled by the company that has brought the individuals together. In this way, the ecology of mind—a concept that Himes used to critique a racist patriarchy that atomized subjugated groups—was used to diminish the creative voices who often participated in those same groups. To consider how ignored voices can persist and even flourish in such a hostile intellectual environment, I consider the work Aline Kominsky-Crumb produced with her partner Robert Crumb. Kominsky-Crumb and Crumb drew their autobiographical comics together, each artist drawing in very distinct styles. Like Himes, Crumb’s troubling representation of women was to some extent recuperated through a collaboration with a less famous romantic partner. Unlike in prose,

a form that erases the differences between collaborators (Thompson's contributions being forgotten entirely), Kominsky-Crumb’s self-presentation insists on the relationship between self and environment while at the same time withdrawing the self through a curious lack of easily-identifiable affective responses to that environment. By working through the thorny issues in these coauthored works, including the exciting connections between race and gender, the disappointing erasures, and the unexpected resistances that together comprise the work of collaboration, we can sketch the advantages that Sedgwick suggests occur when crafting ecological approaches to identity. Thinking like a mountain is not a singular mode of reasoning under which all others are subsumed: such is the very logic that Leopold, Himes, and Kominsky-Crumb together protest.

My third chapter, “Ghostly Tears for Litterbugs: Respectability and Scapegoating in the Affective Economies of Litter,” considers two civil rights-era comics by African-American comics writers and artists. Both Tom Feelings’s 1960 comic *The Street Where You Live* (published by the NAACP) and Bertram Fitzgerald’s 1976 *Fast Willie Jackson* #1 feature visual narratives that depict issues afflicting African-American neighborhoods as blights of litter, issues symbolically resolved by municipal and individual efforts to clean the streets. Both comics respond to what Heather Rogers ironically calls the “great cultural invention” that is litter (Rogers 143). After World War II, the packaging industry responded to the growing public outrage over the dramatic increase of trash from disposable packaging by creating a seemingly-environmental organization called Keep America Beautiful (KAB). KAB served as the propaganda arm of a national legislative battle to outsource the cost of collecting and dumping disposable packaging onto consumers and local governments. KAB’s wildly successful advertising campaign argued

that litter was primarily an issue of spoiling America's natural beauty—found in both city and wilderness—and that the cause of this problem was "litter bugs." Much like the botanical allure of grass transmuted by suburban developers and lawn care companies into environmentally-disastrous lawns and the generative collaboration between authors co-opted by corporations to attain copyrights, this anti-litter campaign represents an ideal of everyday environmentalism absorbed into the greenwashed interests of capital. In close readings of the KAB-sponsored film *Heritage of Splendor*, as well as its shorter advertisements like the famous "Crying Indian" ad, I argue that litter bears a remarkable affinity to comics because of how it is articulated through sequential images. I demonstrate how KAB's association of litter bugs with subhuman urban dwellers (like rats and pigs) functions as a sequential expression of the racist fear and disgust that drove suburban white flight. The deliberately-crafted visibility of "litter" allowed affluent consumers to express their anxiety over proliferating waste while making only superficial changes (such as recycling) to their own habits of consumption. Both Feelings's and Fitzgerald's comics attempted to remove the racial stigma associated with litter. They challenged the implicit assumption that littered environments were the effect of their residents' filth (litter bugs) rather than a conjunction of the proliferation of disposable packaging with the massive redistribution of federal and state money away from African-American neighborhoods put on conspicuous display by a lack of public garbage bins, waste collection, and street cleaning.

In the final chapter, "'The Screaming Spray Pursued Them': Setting Environmental Racism in James Baldwin, ZZ Packer, and Melanie Gillman," I read narratives of nature excursions to explore how discourses of nature (understood in

multiple senses, including the non-human environment and the supposedly-biological imperatives of non-white "others") were and continue to be used to police the behavior of residents paradoxically considered both alien and native to city and country alike. I give sustained attention to two oft-ignored genres: short stories and webcomics. In so doing, I argue that short stories offer a way to renew critical attention to setting. In particular, I show that setting invokes a capacious sense of place that includes geography, history, and social beliefs, invokes the medium specificity of short narratives, and draws attention to the craft of relating something's somewhere. In James Baldwin's "The Outing" and ZZ Packer's "Brownies," park and wilderness settings economically suggest the environmental racism from which the stories' child protagonists briefly try to escape; these stories also explore how that same racial logic shapes the design and standards of conduct operative in recreational park and wilderness spaces. These children's perspectives provide, to exercise W.E.B. Du Bois's phrase, "strange rendings of nature"; moreover, the children emerge as what Timothy Morton calls "strange strangers" in both the country and the city.[7] I conclude this chapter by considering Melanie Gillman's ongoing webcomic *As the Crow Flies*. Whereas comics tend to simplify the representation of environments in favor of depicting character action, Gillman's work

[7] "Herein the longing of black men must have respect: the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange rendings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view" (Du Bois *The Souls of Black Folk*). See the first chapter, "Strange Rendings of Nature," in Kimberly K. Smith's *African American Environmental Thought: Foundations*. Morton uses the term "strange strangers" throughout his books on ecology to denote perceptions that "[compel] us to let go of the unitary, virile ideas of Nature and the Natural the still endure (Morton 18).

details the multivalent relationships her African-American character develops to her social and physical environments.[8] Gillman's nuanced use of color simultaneously displays both the pleasure to be found in those physical environments, as well as how the environmental-religious discourse of "whitening" imbricates those pleasures with menace. By the end of this dissertation, I hope to convey that a close attention to how race adheres to the kinks and swerves of our evolving understandings of humans' decentered relationship within vibrant nonhuman worlds can be considerably developed through a textured analysis of literature beside comics.

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[8] For Thierry Groensteen, a principle characteristic of comics is their anthropocentrism: "The narrative drawing privileges the character, the agent of the action; it successively accedes to each character the level of protagonist, in the etymological sense of 'he who plays the primary role.' Moreover, the format of the panel often appears calculated to be married to the body of the character represented in the frame, as if the panel constituted its natural habitat, its vital space, delimiting the space of its immediate behavior" (161-162).

Chapter 1: "From a Materialistic Toward a Poetic Mood": Lawn Aesthetics in Olmsted, James, and Justin Green

"Such new landscapes may never be the ones of some idealized green utopia, but they need not be the worst of our historical precedent – sterile, monocultural, soaked in poison […] Influencing the 'objects' all around us may indeed be the easiest way to change ourselves […] Unthinking the lawn is only the beginning, it seems. So we really ought to start now."

–Paul Robbins

Sometimes, science is awesome. Like, for instance, when Dr. Elizabeth A. Kellogg labels a small section of her widely-cited 2001 journal article on the evolutionary history of the grass family with the click-bait title, "Dinosaurs did not eat grasses" (1200). Dinosaur shit tells a different story, however, one in which hippo-mouthed titanosaurs flourished in part because of the dietary inclusion of a diversity of grasses.[9] In addition to the aura of awesomeness lent to any fact pertaining to dinosaurs, the evolving absence of this seemingly ubiquitous micro-component of landscapes serves as a reminder of how radically different nature appears over geologic time, and how we need newly-imagined narratives to account for even the most taken-for-granted natural objects such as a blade or field of grass. What would the world look like without grass? It would certainly look less human, as "[m]ost people on earth rely on grasses, including rice, wheat, and maize, for a major portion of their diet" (Kellogg 1198). Even so, would the

[9] See Nicholas Bakalar, "Dung Fossils Suggest Dinosaurs Ate Grass."

world also look less green, since grasses constitute "ecological dominants, covering approximately 20% of the earth's land surface" (Kellogg 1198)? The latter question—one that colloquially presumes that grass is green—suggests how grass colors our perception of nature and, in turn, ecological systems.

The assumption of the ineluctable verdancy of grass in fact tells a more recent and equally fascinating story as the one told by dinosaur coprolites. Marc Simmons, Director of Research at the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center, has persuasively argued that turfgrasses such as Bermudagrasses, typically a large portion of the suburban lawn, must collectively be thought of as a product of industrial agriculture.[10] In lawn use alone, turfgrass monocultures account for "between 30% and 60% of municipal potable water, over $5.2 billion of fossil fuel derived fertilizers, 800 million gallons of gasoline and $700 million of pesticides" (Simmons et al.). Simmons's influential research has urgent applicability to the water crises in California. Moreover, his work has encouraged the

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[10] Paul Robbins helpfully explicates why lawns are not traditionally thought of as a unified industry: "A central reason for silence on urban ecological dilemmas is the staggering complexity of problems that are aggregated into large processes but built from the disaggregated choices of individuals, each of whom is located within intricate physical and social systems. Millions of decisions governing trash disposal, automobile use, and home maintenance, combine to form the urban environment. Some of these decisions are determined by basic economic principles but many are governed by the apparent vagaries of taste. Some are regulated through management institutions; many are not. Moreover, the very ordinariness of these daily decisions makes them easy to overlook, even as they combine to create large effects. The daunting challenge of urban ecology, therefore, is to understand mundane individual actions, structured in vast cultures and economies, consolidated into human and environmental systems with many parts" (369-370). The "vagaries of taste" will become central to this chapter.

installation of ecologically-sustainable mixtures of native polycultures into lawns, public parks, and pathways, mixtures comprised of grasses such as buffalograss, blue grama, hairy grama, Texas grama, hairy tridens, curly mesquite, and poverty dropseed.[11] While solutions to the problem of lawn monocrops may exist, they are frequently ignored for reasons that Simmons intriguingly articulates in the language of aesthetics. Grass monocultures are expensive, labor intensive, and devastating to the environment with very tangible, local effects. Even so, knowledge of those facts do not significantly affect human behavior or preference for the appearance of uniform, green turf. In fact, it is precisely those individuals both educated enough to know about and be concerned by the ecological effects of high-input lawn care as well as wealthy enough to invest in alternatives to turfgrass monocultures who are also the most likely to continue to participate in the industrial production of lawn monocrops (Robbins 375-6). So why do lawns cause even environmentally sensitive subjects to act against their own ecological well-being? Simmons implies that the incongruity between eco-knowledge and self-defeating lawn care practices resides in the hazy realm of aesthetic apprehension: both the aesthetic appreciation of one's own lawn as well as (and perhaps more importantly) how one imagines others to perceive their lawn. Simmons suggests that, "Perhaps the greatest educational challenge if landscape sustainability is a priority, would be the acceptance of drought or cool-season dormant, brown, turf" (Simmons 1101). If the social sense of lawn aesthetics could be trained to appreciate grass that moves from green

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[11] See for instance, Lina Zeldovich "Grass That Doesn't Need Water Could Keep California Green" and "Trees Atlanta to Plant A Native Grass and Wildflower Meadow on the Eastside Trail || Trees Atlanta."

to blue to brown, people would be better equipped to act rationally in their own as well as the planet's best interest.[12]

Rather, the needs of capital shaped the contemporary industrial production of turfgrasses in the United States. Beginning with the rapid "ecological imperialism" of European grasses concurrent with the first of old world colonialists (incredibly, Simmons writes that grass significantly outpaced U.S. western expansion by Europeans, so that the "English Grass," *Poa pretensis,* which proceeded Appalachian settlers and was "discovered" when they first arrived eventually took the indigenous-sounding name "Kentucky Blue"), cultivated lawns became significant features of the industrial urban spaces of the mid-to-late 19th century. Such lawns were a popular feature of early universities and mental asylums and received significant boons through the recreation movements of the late 19th century, the garden city movement of the early 20th century, and of course the post-World War II federally-funded, white flight from urban centers that created a suburban private home and personal land ownership push. In other words, the story of grass in North America seems to uncannily mirror the major stages of capital

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[12] For Robbins, the vague categories of the social pressures or aesthetic anxieties seem to stand for little more than antinomies of competing discourses of rationality. In this case, judgment is merely a straw man placeholder to explain, or really to dismiss, behavior that does not readily conform to instrumental, scientific logic of personal and planetary well-being. Robbins persuasively links the explanation of "something that appears to happen 'spontaneously,' or is uncritically experienced as something inevitable" to Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony (quot. in Robbins 8). The irrational aesthetic experience of lawns as "as a necessity and a sensible, immediate, daily way of life" seems to neatly cleave to Louis Althusser's material ideological apparatus (quot. in Robbins 15). We will take up this intersection of lawns and ideology in the discussion of Justin Green.

(agrarian, industrial/urban, institutional health care and education, and racist suburban) in United States history.

Environmental studies advocate and scholar Paul Robbins has brilliantly laid the foundation to study a Latourian network of grasses, politics, history, economics, and individuated and collective psychologies that are vaguely alluded to by the term "society." I am interested in crafting an at times concurrent, but often more queer and by no means definitive, genealogy of a green aesthetic of grass. Scientific arguments such Simmons's often offer weak theories of aesthetics: as Robbins points out, Simmons's line of reasoning may too easily dismiss the affective investments in a national aesthetic of green grass that does not readily conform to an instrumental, scientific logic of personal and planetary well-being. Even so, weak theories aren't necessarily a bad thing (see Silvan Tomkins). Rather, a weak theory can invite a genealogical investigation, as practiced by Nietzsche and Foucault, investigations especially valuable for tracing the aleatory manifestations of a lawn aesthetic that pops up in modes and spaces that do not readily cohere to the Platonic idea of contemporary lawns as advertised by True Green lawn care or the front of Scotts' bulk bags of seed. Instead of tiptoeing across the flocculent golf greens of John Updike's post-war suburbia, a traditional starting place for critical accounts of suburban life and space, we can see the political battle for a lawn aesthetic first fought in Frederick Law Olmsted's plan and institutionalization of Central Park. Emotional and social lines drawn by Olmsted's aesthetic of grass resound throughout literary modernism; a reading of these lines shows how a writer like Henry James, not usually positioned in the canon of ecological writers, makes a frequent and fascinating recourse to the nature technics of urban grass spaces. Finally, we will see how

James's critical articulation of Olmsted's lawn aesthetic shapes the depiction of adolescent sexuality in Justin Green's graphic memoir, which substantively shapes the literary tradition of contemporary graphic novels. By using literary texts to trace a lawn aesthetic, we see how historical contingencies and lived experiences accrete a grassy allure that exceeds the dictates of self-interest and peer-reviewed reason.

I. Olmsted and the invention of American lawns

"For however democratic a lawn may be with respect to one's neighbors, with respect to nature it is authoritarian [...] time as we know it doesn't exist in the lawn, since grass never dies or is allowed to flower and set seed. Lawns are nature purged of sex and death. No wonder Americans like them so much." -Michael Pollan

No theorist of the aesthetics of grass has been more influential than Frederick Law Olmsted. Michael Pollan argues that, "If an individual can be said to have invented the American lawn, it is Frederick Law Olmsted" (Pollan). Adam Gopnik rhetorically wonders, "Was there a patch of grass in nineteenth-century America that he [Olmsted] *didn't* design?" (Gopnik 102). Robert Smithson, using quotes from James Thomson's 1728 poem *The Season*, refers to Olmsted as "'the sylvan artist,' [who] yearned for the color *green* as 'Nature's universal robe'" (Smithson 158). Smithson, the leading figure in the late 1960's "land art" movement and best known for his work "Spiral Jetty" in Utah's Great Salt Lake, provides a compelling frame for a consideration of the contemporary controversy that surrounds Olmsted's legacy. As I will show, such a legacy is deeply implicated with the rise of a grassy aesthetic of green-ness that both demarcates and

connects private and public spaces across the diverse climates and soil types that comprise North America.

A quintessential nineteenth-century jack-of-all trades, Olmsted continuously reinvented himself: he became a sailor, scientific farmer, travel writer, abolitionist journalist, magazine editor, manager of a gold mine, conservationist, and director of the U.S. Sanitary Commission (the precursor to the Red Cross) during the Civil War. Even after finding his vocation as a landscape architect—a profession Olmsted invented—his interests and skills wandered over a staggering array of projects. Olmsted provided the template for just about every type of grassy public space: campuses, urban waterways, linear parkways, public events (such as Chicago's 1893 World Fair), and large private estates (especially George Washington Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate). Olmsted also created an influential model for the booming suburban development at the end of the nineteenth century (Chicago's Riverside Park suburbs) along with plans for 40 other residential communities (Nicholson 336). Olmsted used the conceptual division between "nature" and "culture" to describe his work and name his self-created profession "landscape-architect." Olmsted used the term architect rather than, say, gardener, to define his role in constructing a landscape according his theories of how people should relate both to each other and to the natural world.

The public traffic invited by large urban parks has inspired a plethora of critical conversations about the social work of parks. The historical and social context in which large urban parks emerged is essential to understanding Olmsted's role in crafting what we now recognize as such parks' grass green aesthetic. Adam Sweeting convincingly argues that "Central Park and other large nineteenth-century urban parks were works of

literature as much as they were works of architecture" (93). More specifically, Sweeting suggests that "comfortable New Yorkers used their literary connections and the organs of the city's publishing establishment to fashion a new street-scape" (93). New York City and state officials shrewdly mobilized the rapidly expanding print culture industries by assembling a "'Who's who' of metropolitan literary life" to plan and advocate for a large pastoral park (Sweeting 95).[13] Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, and George Bancroft all spent time on the consulting board in charge of key personal and design decisions; other influential literary figures such as Donald Grant Mitchell, George Curtis, Horace Bushnell, Andrew Jackson Downing, and Olmsted were "associated with either the planning or building of Central Park or similar spaces" (Sweeting 93-95).[14] These writers were part of the cohort that followed the Dickensian exemplar of documenting the squalor of urban life in the 1840s and 50s, particularly the dangerous concoction of poor air quality, heavily polluted water supply, and overcrowding. Working classes were seen as immersed in this squalor, and the reformist impulse was often aimed more at refining immigrant culture than providing clean water and air. Saloon culture and drunkenness were especially feared and viewed as indicative of the negative effects of rapid urban population growth. What is unique about these writers is not that they suggested nature could offer a solution to these environmental and cultural issues, but that they followed

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[13] For an interesting discussion of rapidly expanding readership and influence of the New York publishing industry in the mid-nineteenth century, see Ben Reiss's *The Showman and the Slave*.

[14] Sweeting notes that Walt Whitman called for a similar park in in Brooklyn, using "the pages of the *Brooklyn Eagle* to campaign for the construction of Fort Greene Park…that he saw as vital to assuring the economic and spiritual health of the then-still separate city" (101).

Bryant and especially Downing's turn to European models of nature for a means to civilize the unwashed masses.

Traditional literary and ecological histories of U.S. nature consciousness reference the (racialized and gendered) personal autonomy of Jefferson's rural agrarianism or the break from European traditions in Emerson and Thoreau's transcendental relationship to nature. Bryant and Downing, however, make the perhaps more influential claim that European, garden-style nature could inculcate their romanticized notions of European culture into the city's working classes. Bryant favorably compares an Italian Sunday where people "proceed to some of the public walks and gardens and amuse themselves by walking about" to a New York Sunday comprised of a "good deal of gambling and drinking" (Sweeting 100). Downing compared the U.S. unfavorably to England, lamenting the dearth of "public parks open to all classes of people, provided by public cost [and] maintained at public expense," parks that Downing claimed would be "better preachers of temper than temperance societies" and a "refiner of national manners" (Sweeting 102-3). In both writers' classicist paternalism, we can see precisely the kind of moral engineering that Olmsted strenuously rejected, through a series of essays and public addresses, the idea that parks are places devoted to what park patrons or administrators referred to as recreation.[15]

Andrew Ross underlines how these seemingly contradictory democratic impulses—the moralizing/authoritarian and the pluralistic/inclusive—were underlined by exclusionary policies that governed the inception of urban parks in the nineteenth century. Ross argues that:

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[15] Olmsted vigorously rejected "recreation" as a primary purpose for park spaces.

> Most urban parks are soaked in the history of irony. In the nineteenth century, a good deal of urban reform was based on the moral influence of pastoralism, and so the great landscape gardeners like Olmsted were moral engineers. Gardens, parks, and green spaces were considered to be civilizing agents, even when they were designed to evoke "wilderness," which in pre-Romantic times was associated with barbarism. Urban greenery was intended to take the rough edge off the immigrant soul. As with the attempts to cordon off "wilderness" in national parks, the actual inhabitants of these spaces had to be evicted—Native American in Yosemite and African Americans in Central Park. (Ross 22)[16]

Ross's argument intriguingly links up with the ecological critique of Olmsted's park projects. The question of the ecological soundness of Olmsted's parks is particularly unwieldy due to the inclusive way in which ecological concerns and non-human objects

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[16] Ross's allusion to eviction refers to the community of African Americans and immigrants that comprised Seneca Village. The irony is especially bitter that the "democratic development" of Central Park was made possible by the forced removal one of New York's first villages comprised primarily by African American property owners. The decision to purchase the property predates Olmsted's involvement with Central Park and it seems likely the last of the residents of had been violently removed by the time Olmsted was hired as a superintendent in charge of clearing the land. Olmsted was fortunate to receive the job, as his magazine enterprise had just folded, and led to his lucky break to work with an established architect on an open competition to design Central Park. As Olmsted's prestige grew, he gained increasing control over the park location and he favored cheap areas similar to the land purchased for Central Park, i.e. land on the borders of the city, which the city could grow around. It would be interesting to discover whether he considered displacing residents in location decisions. For more on the claim that pastoral parks acted as a kind of civil engineering directed at recent immigrants, see Sarah Phillips Casteel.

will be addressed in this project: putting traditional ecological ideals such as sustainable systems of natural resources and climate change alongside the social ecology of theorists such as Maurice Bookchin and Rob Nixon, who insist that ecological questions cannot be addressed without thinking about the marginalized populations most affected by ecological waste and change. Olmsted's idiosyncratic writing on these issues does not often match the green movement's conception of proper urban planning, a conception that, in turn, does not always match the physical design and ecological benefits of the parks themselves.

The problematic nature of social ecologies expressed through Olmsted's parks and writing are underlined by the critiques made by Charles Whitnall. Whitnall was one of the next generation of landscape architects that shared Olmsted's aspirations for the democratic end results of park spaces but strongly disagreed with Olmsted's design strategies, which roughly correspond to what Olmsted called park-purposes. Whitnall was the chief park planner for Emil Seidel, America's first socialist mayor and a key figure in Milwaukee's so-called "sewer socialist movement" (Platt 781). Sewer socialism eschewed the increasingly dogmatic and punitive strands of U.S. socialism. In contrast, sewer socialists attempted to mitigate class suffering through governmental administrative reform to education and public works with a special focus on the environmental cleanliness and relative openness of the inner city.

Olmsted, who in 1853 described himself as a "Socialist Democrat," would have been sympathetic to the basic impetus of Whitnall's Sewer Socialist park philosophy. In 1909, Whitnall wrote that "Cities are new things comparatively and city dwellers have had their roots only recently wretched from the soil…to live in physical and mental

health it is necessary for them to return frequently to the soil again for invigoration and refreshment. For most people the one opportunity for this comes thru parks" (Platt 780). While this sounds very similar to Olmsted's democratic ambitions for park spaces, Whitnall thought that Olmsted's insistence on large, centralized parks undercut these ambitions in several important ways.[17] First, the construction of Olmsted's large central parks could initially be very destructive of relatively undeveloped land and water formations. In addition to the displaced residents, countless tons of soil needed to be removed or rearranged a considerable cost to accommodate Olmsted's dramatic views and winding walkways. Whitnall objected to this destruction on ecological and aesthetic grounds, neatly anticipating Aldo Leopold's famous land ethic that showed the inseparable imbrication of the aesthetic and the ecological.[18] Whitnall favored small

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[17] My account of Whitnall's critique is largely drawn from Lorn A. Platt's excellent article on Olmsted, Whitnall, and several competing theories of landscape design at the beginning of the twentieth century. I do have some reservations, which I only allude to in the main text, about Platt's rather dogmatic, academic socialist claims (Platt opens the article with phrases like "Whitnall held the contemporary bourgeois association of nature with moral uplift") that Olmsted's parks are "Elite Oases as the Edge" or "Elite-Centered Oases" (771, 773, 782). While the juxtaposition between Whitnall and Olmsted strikes me as fundamentally correct, it also seems a bit too neat, especially as Olmsted was hired to design not one central park for Milwaukee, but rather three of six parks for Milwaukee's new park systems. Olmsted's most recent biographer has pointed out that Olmsted's Milwaukee project was one of a series of park systems that Olmsted later favored for smaller cities (New York Times). Hazel Conway suggests that parkways were Olmsted's original contribution to urban park design, and that most of Olmsted's early ideas for large, central parks came from his visit to England's Birkenhead Park (7).

[18] Leopold claimed that a thing is "right when it tends to maintain the integrity, beauty, and stability of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (262).

parkways distributed throughout the city that corresponded to natural features of the local geography.[19] This utilitarian brand of park planning emphasized the accessibility of parkways, which in turn enhanced the ecological benefits of the parks by widely distributing small pockets of trees, open space, and protected river banks. It also encouraged an aesthetic appreciation of conserving land that had been created through natural processes over the course of thousands of years.

Whereas the moral reformers of his day aimed to control the behaviors of the working class by developing moralizing parks and park-policies, Olmsted's park planning reflects a different set of ambitions. Olmsted's arcadian style of nature, for example, did not cohere with the uses of working people who often needed to use the often central urban space in a more functional manner, such as getting quickly traversing the city. Whitnall critiqued the artificiality of Olmsted's designs, writing that "[i]f your grocer boy continually runs over your lawn, not appreciating your cement walk, arranged in 'artistic curves' at considerable expense, you are apt to resent it. Do you know why he crosses your lawn. Because your walk is a failure. The boy is natural. Your walk is only fashionable" (Platt 783). The primary purpose of juxtaposing Whitnall with Olmsted here is to show Whitnall's critique of Olmsted's designs in terms of accessibility and ecological sanitation. That said, it is also worth noting how Whitnall's critique of the artifice of Olmsted's park designs feeds back into the idea that Olmsted was primarily a genteel moral reformer. Whitnall's dislike of the pastoral artifice of large, centralized

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[19] Especially along the rivers. "It has taken Nature thousands of years to encourage vegetation along these surface drains that have gradually changed the contours, enabling plant life to cover the slopes and prevent erosion" (Platt quoting Whitnall 785).

parks does not simply set up a binary between technology and nature or a gradient of realness when evaluating nature. Rather, it suggests that Olmsted's successful creation of a large pastoral oasis in the city center, an oasis that demonstrates the value of getting away from the city to a rural retreat, sets up a sharp distinction between the two (rural and urban). Rather than the intended effect of making cities into desirable locations to live, the distinction between rural and urban can reinforce negative attitudes toward urban settings, especially in those who have little access to park places.[20] Unlike smaller parks that may instill a sense and pride of place, large parks promote escape. They may even reinforce a need to leave the very places that parks are supposed to make more inhabitable. It is not insignificant that Olmsted's designs for leisurely, winding drives and more green spaces proved to be equally, if not more, popular than when he designed some of the earliest and most affluent suburbs.

Curiously, Olmsted seems to agree with Whitnall's critique, particularly in his later writings and park projects, such as Boston's Emerald Necklace. In a later paper, Olmsted argued that the goals of accessible green spaces and clean air would be better accomplished through "a series of smaller grounds placed as nearly as practicable at

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[20] Noting that a trip to the park may be a substitute for the medical fashions that "good physicians seldom fail to advise" to the wealthy, Olmsted states that park setting that tries to duplicate the effect of an "escape from the city" should be of the "kind which will provide the strongest contrast that can be had to city scenery" (Olmsted 602). This attitude continues to be popular in Japanese culture, as evidenced by the practice of "forest bathing," which has recently been validated by preliminary scientific research into the value of being around significant bodies of plants and trees, even if just in large urban parks.

regular distances around the town" (Olmsted 343).[21] Even after acknowledging their disadvantages to the overall ecological impact of the city, Olmsted continued to advocate, with significant exceptions, for large, Central Park-style parks. A large public park does not ignore issues of accessibility or environmental utility, however. As Olmsted noted, both ends are constantly at odds:

> In a public park for a city, therefore, the purpose of establishing such natural beauty as soil, climate, and topography would otherwise allow to be aimed at, must be greatly sacrificed under the necessity of providing accommodations for the travel and repose of many thousands of men and horses; and on the other hand, the extent of such accommodations must be made less than would otherwise be thought desirable in order that the special object of the park may be secured in a suitable degree. A plan for a park is good, indifferent, or bad, mainly according to the ingenuity, tact, and taste with which these conflicting requirements are reconciled. (Olmsted 312)

Olmsted here neatly encapsulates the fundamental antinomy of the moral reformers' city plans to mitigate the toxic effects of psychologically and physiologically damaging urban space by introducing a kind of rural wild space into the densely populated and technologically-mediated urban environs. As Ross nicely puts it, "a city's population density is what allows large areas of the countryside to remain relatively free of human interference (after all, if everyone went back to nature, there would be no nature left to go

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[21] He continues "such smaller grounds would be more accessible…would involve less…wasteful compromises; and would, on the whole, be less costly" (343). Olmsted developed a whole taxonomy to refer to such park adjacent spaces, such as "places," "place parks," and "parkways."

back to)" (Ross 18). The potential effects of a rural-style park only intensify this issue. If one thinks the pastoral environment will be beneficial to a city and its citizens, it will only be effective to the extent that it retains the crucial rural attributes of being open (that is, unpopulated). At the same time, it can only have the desired effects on urban residents to the extent it is used, in which case the key rural effect is diminished. The comparison to Whitnall is interesting, therefore, insofar as Olmsted entirely agrees with Whitnall on the ecological benefits, cost efficiency, and increased accessibility of these smaller, less intrusive, more distributed "parkways."[22] The purpose of large urban parks, which defines Olmsted's legacy, must operate beside and at times supersede these benefits Whitnall enumerates for parkways. Rather than an arcadian utopia existing outside of, or in resistance to, urban modernity, Olmsted's large parks bear the utilitarian responsibility of the very many. These park designs utilized a technological reproduction of nature-styled space—often destroying the features of the pre-design land—in an attempt to balance the

[22] Olmsted argues that an older preconception that the larger an urban population "the more they would be exposed to epidemic diseases, the feebler, more sickly, and shorter their lives would be; the greater would be the danger of sweeping conflagrations the larger the proportion of mendicants and criminals, and the more formidable, desperate and dangerous the mobs" was proved "entirely fallacious" in large part because of the effects of parkways (Olmsted 125). The "abandonment of the old-fashioned compact way of building towns" in conjunction with "the action of leaves of trees, grass and herbs" led to the dissipation of air toxins that "if not dissipated, renders the air of any locality at first debilitating, after a time sickening, and at last deadly" (Olmsted 126-7).

utilitarian cost of many with the individual need for a relatively tranquil escape from urban life.[23]

This is not to suggest that Olmsted's written accounts of his large parks were without ecological merit. Rather, the ecological underpinning of Olmsted's centralized park texts is an incidental effect of Olmsted's primary park purposes, which does not easily map onto the predominant contemporary modes of consumer-driven ecologies of sustainability.[24] While smaller parkways could better answer the evaluating, sustainability logic of capital, large parks frequently figured as poor economic values because, when "apparently complete, [they] are yet immature, provisional and tentative," failing the standards of "commercial completion" (Olmsted 332). Misattributing a comment about the "'innumerable appearance of gallants' […] sauntering among the trees" of King's Park to Samuel Pepys, Olmsted claimed that it was only then, two hundred years after Pepys's lifetime, that the park trees had fully realized their value (Olmsted 333).[25] Whereas "only curious fragments remain" from the London of two centuries past, the trees "held their own long enough" to influence subsequent "outlines and surface of the park," which in turn influenced future street plantings that further shaped the park: as Olmsted writes, "What had then been done, determines where today shade shall be found,

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[23] Olmsted would later clarify this point, "the problem of a park…is mainly the reconciliation of adequate beauty of nature in scenery with a adequate means of artificial constructions of protecting the conditions of such beauty, and holding it available to the use, in a convenient and orderly way, of those needing it" (Olmsted 346).

[24] See Stacy Alaimo, "Sustainable This, Sustainable That: New Materialisms, Posthumanism, and Unknown Futures."

[25] The editors of Olmsted's park writings attribute the quote to John Evelyn in 1661.

where prospects screened or opened, where millions of men and women are yet to direct their steps" (Olmsted 333). This arboreal temporality is the key to understanding Olmsted as both a pioneering figure of urban ecological discourse and also why Olmsted's contributions to city planning have been criticized as anti-modern, moral reformism.

Despite his characterization as such among many critics, Olmsted's supposed role as a moral engineer insufficiently addresses the scope of his projects. Robert Smithson's 1973 essay, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape," provides an important rejoinder to the pervasive conceptualization of urban parks as moralizing spaces. Notably, Smithson argues that 20th-century considerations of Olmsted, particularly by the time of the nascent ecological movement of the 1960s, were marred by an "Ecological Oedipal Complex." For Smithson, such considerations rendered "[p]enetration of 'Mother Earth'… a projection of the incest taboo onto nature" (163).[26] Smithson suggests that Olmsted's landscapes lend themselves to a more capacious interpretation than either the category of "nature" or "culture" considered in opposition or isolation would suggest. According to this formulation, Olmsted's landscapes are neither nature as they violate deep ecology's sense of a pristine wilderness untouched by man nor a modernist conception of art as indicated by a fantasy of a complete human mastery in the fashioning and contemplation of the art object. If Smithson's dialectical landscapes seem to espouse a cringe-worthy, sitcom moralism (premise: two characters, Nature and Culture, have an initial misunderstanding about their relative purity. Conflict ensues. Resolution: Culture says, "Nature, we ain't so different, you and I." Protagonists hug it out; status quo is restored), it is necessary to point out that Smithson idiosyncratic

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[26] "After all, sex isn't all a series of rapes" (Smithson 163)

conception of dialectic operations. That is, instead of leading to a new, future synthesis of culture and nature, Smithson shows the conceptual instability of the initial terms, undermining any need for a dialectal conflict between the operations of nature and culture. In this way, Smithton's landscape theory might be better thought of in terms of deconstruction than dialectics. Following Smithson, we can conclude that the sprawling expanse of a big urban park refuses the neat certainty of any single meaning, i.e. a modernist consolidation of nature and park patrons brought into a authorially restrictive set of moral relations between people and their environment. Instead, Olmsted's parks enable diverse crowds of people traversing such park spaces to enact a diverse and shifting set attitudes towards nature and recreation, which in turn shifts the conception of what the Olmsted-ian park can be.

The size and style of Olmsted's very specific vision of the dialectical landscape revolves around the concept of the lawn. Olmsted viewed large, grassy pastures as perhaps the only necessary feature of park spaces. In a later article Olmsted would assert "The most essential element of park scenery is turf in broad, unbroken fields, because in this the antithesis of the confined spaces of the town is most marked" (311). Open fields of grass are the negating object Olmsted puts into dialectic play with the modern city's rigorously policed parcels of land and sky. The centrality of unbroken, grassy turf became apparent to Olmsted as he began working with cities and universities on the West Coast that obstinately insisted on grassy scenery even though their climate and soil conditions did not accommodate such turf (Martin 273, 356). Olmsted thought that "wherever a rich close perennial turf cannot be established, parks properly so called ought not to be attempted" (313). This was a significant caveat in Olmsted's claims of the

universality of earlier parks. Again, Olmsted took the somewhat unexpected stance of obstinately maintaining that "properly so called" parks must contain large, pastoral, grassy areas, even though in "the larger part of the civilized world, circumstances are…unfavorable" to that particular kind of "park-like scenery" (313).[27]

These large, grassy plains, through which Olmsted featured rambling paths, arched horizon lines, and dramatic combinations of water and trees, function as a spatial of response to the psychological isolation and sensory overload of burgeoning cityscapes. Olmsted argued that large central parks are "work[s] of art," and the landscape designer is very much the auteur creating those art works. With regards to the parks-as-art formulation, Olmsted insisted that, "There should be nothing in it [the park] absolutely nothing-not a foot of surface nor a spear of grass" that does not implement the landscape artist's rigorous vision of park purposes (155, 157). This suggestion raises the always-contentious question of value: how do we evaluate the worth of a line? This is the

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[27] Unfortunately, many did not take Olmsted's suggestions that the type of green grasses grown on the east coast and rural England were not tenable for much of the rest of the world. Again, Olmsted's urban ideals were transplanted to disastrous effects in the suburbs, where the imitation of Olmsted's grass effects in the U.S. require and estimated "30% and 60% of municipal potable water, over $5.2 billion of fossil fuel derived fertilizers, 800 million gallons of gasoline and $700 million of pesticides" (Simmons et. al). It would be interesting to consider Olmsted's insistence that parks need large grassy areas even though the supposedly universal idea of parks would need to be regionally limited to England and the American Northeast and parts of the South, with Whitman's idea of the leaves of grass, which were also supposedly universal but might be read as more ecologically specific to the same regions Olmsted came to appropriate for grass based parks. See Nicholson and Buell for brief discussions of the similarities between Whitman and Olmsted.

question implied by Whitnall's grocery boy forced to navigate Olmsted's sinuous paths. Olmsted insisted on large, meadowy spaces so that he could leisurely wind the body and draw the eyes around the grassy pastoral space. These lines surely fail the technocratic needs of expedient transportation. They also fail to achieve an ecologically-friendly goal by massively redistributing soil and plant life. That said, we might look to other discourses that value the elegance of lines to fully explore competing systems of "worth" used when discussing parks. In explaining the immersive quality of early comics, Thierry Smolderen points to the centrality of undulating lines to William Hogarth's aesthetic. According to Hogarth, "The eye hath this sort of enjoyment in winding walks, and serpentine rivers, and all sorts of objects, whose forms, as we shall see hereafter, are composed principally of what, I call, the waving and serpentine lines" (Smolderen 6). For Hogarth, the winding line represents variety and chance. Keeping this aesthetic of the line in mind, we might suggest that, rather than locking the grocery boy into an inconvenient path, it allows him the chance to experience a kind of "natural" encounter with space. This encounter is one in which convenience and expedience—the technocratic grid of the modern metropolis—are not the sole logics that guide movement.

Similar to George Simmel's famous essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Olmsted worried that the effects of modern inventions in general and the explosion of urban populations more specifically tended to disrupt social relations, which in turn had a detrimental effect on urban residents' psychological adaptation to the new world. Olmsted alluded to these symptoms—in quotation marks to indicate a broad but tentative diagnosis—as "'vital exhaustion,' 'nervous irritation' and 'constitutional depression'" (Olmsted 345). Olmsted told the guards that patrolled Central Park that "[t]he Park is not

simply a pleasure-ground [...] but a ground [...] *which will be conducive to their* [park patrons'] *better health*" (Olmsted 299). Physicians prescribed park visits for their "tranquilizing influence upon the nerves," and many thousands received the same benefit "without this purpose definitely in view" (Olmsted 299). The park police were to be especially aware of maintaining an environment that facilitated physical and mental healing, especially since, according to Olmsted, "a large majority of all the inhabitants of the city are women and children, sickly and aged or weakly, nervous and delicate persons, and that the Park is adapted to benefit none so much as this who have barely the courage, strength and nerve required for a visit" (Olmsted 299).

Robert Hewitt helpfully contextualizes Olmsted's claims about the "tranquilizing influence" parks have over the apparently ubiquitous sickly, nervous, and delicate urban inhabitants by showing the growing influence of miasma theory on Olmsted's thinking about public spaces and disease. Olmsted's early thinking about the healthy effects of natural settings was influenced in large part by his rural upbringing and Andrew Jackson Downing's work in *The Horticulturalist*, yet Olmsted increasingly came to think within the miasma paradigm as he ran the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. In Hewitt's terms, British physicians and health advocates such as Southwood Smith and Edwin Chadwick "effectively shifted the epistemology of disease etiology away from biological and social processes, placing greater emphasis on the environment as the source of disease." This work would have been especially important to Olmsted at the sanitary commission as he attempted to create treatment spaces. Such treatment spaces would address military medical reports such as "Military Hygiene and Therapeutics" or "Miasmatic Fevers," reports that explained the ill effects of marshlands and how those

effects could be environmentally redressed in well-ventilated, open hospital spaces (Hewittt). Linda Nash argues that this miasmatic conception of the body differs from the discrete and bounded modern body largely determined by consumer, medical discourse. Rather, miasmatic theories of an environment's effects on the body offers a kind of proto-ecological body "characterized by a constant exchange between inside and outside, by fluxes and flows, and by its close dependence on the surrounding environment" (12).

What made Olmsted's parks such an innovative response and articulation of miasma theory was the manner in which he designed space to address the intersecting somatic and psychological (sickly, weakly, nervous) afflictions thought to be endemic to modern cities. American psychologists like George Beard argued that the intensified speed and rapidly changing social fabric of American society was reflected by the rising cases of bad nerves and mental breakdowns, especially among those with more refined sensibilities (Hewitt). A growing awareness of these breakdowns, seen frequently in the increasing urban homeless populations, helped motivate the nineteenth-century's movement for more humane treatment of the mentally ill. As the preeminent landscape designer at the time, Olmsted was called to design some early asylums for the mentally ill. In these designs, Olmsted was influenced by significant psychiatric figures like Thomas Story Kirkebride, founder of the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane (a name later changed to the more snappy American Psychiatric Association) who argued that varied, peaceful, "and pleasant prospects [...that] opened onto pleasure grounds" and could be "view[ed] from every window" would be a key component to alleviating and treating asylum patients (Hewitt quoting Kirkebride). Olmsted, who spent the last five years of his life at a Massachusetts asylum

for which he had originally planned the grounds, seemed to view the city as a place teeming with citizens in different stages of mental collapse.[28] By extension, large parks were built to be the secure refuges, or asylums, not just for the "women and children, sickly and aged or weakly, nervous and delicate persons," but also for the working men whose "intense intellectual activity, which prevails equally in the library, the work shop, and the counting room" causes a "bent condition." "Unbending of the faculties," a goal which Olmsted frequently links to the continued productivity of urban workers, requires a "diversion of the imagination" with the aid of fresh air, sunlight, and general exercise, elements best found in the large urban parks spaces for which Olmsted advocated (Olmsted quot. in Hewitt).[29] As the parks were meant for those particularly vulnerable to mental or physical ailments—Olmsted includes working men, women, children, and delicate persons in the list of the vulnerable—the entire city population seems to have appeared to Olmsted simultaneously as a paragon of democratic strength and intermingling as well as an asylum filled with the physically weak and mentally unstable. More specifically, the mass of somatic and psychologically-vulnerable individuals were

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[28] The McLean Asylum later treated Sylvia Plath, David Foster Wallace, Anne Sexton, and Robert Lowell, suggesting another interesting linkage between Olmsted's landscape designs and American letters.

[29] For instance, with these park conditions and activities "men who have been breaking down frequently recover tone rapidly and are able to retain and [sic] active and controlling business, from which they would have otherwise been forced to retire" (Hewitt quoting Olmsted). Olmsted consistently refers to parks' ability to enhance individual and city wide earning capacities. A town without "country scenery [… is] sapping of health, strength, and means of usefulness and earning capacity" and "deduct[s] much from the wealth-producing and tax-bearing capacity of their people, as well as from the wealth-enjoying capacity" (Olmsted 603, 345).

comprised of those who lived in historically new cityscapes without the realistic option of long, therapeutic periods away from the city.

For Olmsted, the attribute that seemed to make urban residents especially vulnerable to miasmatic psychological and somatic infirmities was their delicate, poetic sensibility. The creation of large pastoral places of ease “secure[s] a combination of elements which shall invite and stimulate the simplest, purest and most primeval action of the poetic element of human nature, and thus tend to remove those who are affected by it to the greatest possible distance from the highly elaborate, sophistical, and artificial conditions of their ordinary civilized lives” (153). It is difficult to determine precisely what Olmsted means by “the poetic element of human nature.” It seems unlikely that it is the most civilized part of human beings, since “elaborate, sophistical, and artificial” civilized lives are the symptom afflicting them. It would also make little sense to think of poetic sensibilities as the height of human health, as it is those individuals most affected by the poetic element, presumably the sickly, weak, aged, nervous and delicate referred to above, that are in turn especially affected by the non-poetic difficulties of civilized existence. Yet Olmsted consistently refers to this poetic faculty, specifically as a susceptibility or biological need like food or air, that causes the system to break down as its unique needs are not satiated. Writing almost thirty years later, Olmsted suggests that the “physiological process” by which parks remedy city residents “operates in the main by inducing a change of mental bents or moods; that the inducement of such change comes primarily through a subtle action of the remedy which sets a movement going of a man’s imagination and that the resulting changes of mood are more or less in a direction from a materialistic towards a poetic mood” (603-604). There is a dissonance between

Olmsted's invocation of the physiological processes bodies undergo in parks (which Olmsted does not claim to scientifically explain) and the opposition between the materialistic and poetic moods. Both moods operate under the umbrella of physiological process, so it is not an opposition between ephemeral aesthetic (poetic) and actual survival (materialistic) moods. Instead, it seems to be Olmsted's recognition that the poetic faculty is a kind of acute vulnerability to one's milieu. Such vulnerability seems no less a type of physiological material operation than the modern consumer and dogmatic scientific paradigms that increasingly subsumed what was thought of as material or factual desires and explanations.

According to Olmsted, "A park is a work of art, designed to produce certain effects upon the mind of men" (155). Parks are not art objects primarily meant for class distinguishing aesthetic appreciation; rather, for Olmsted, parks represented a fluid location for messy and sometimes contradictory intersections of meaning and activity. Parks were a kind of technology that celebrated the technical achievements of modern cities while at the same time trying to alleviate the harshest conditions for some of the most vulnerable victims of those cities. Parks offered physiological and psychological ease while stimulating urban citizens' imagination and creative engagement with their surroundings in a way that Olmsted felt was stifled by city streets and increasingly mechanized employment. Large parks offered clean air and sometimes clean water for cities that were just starting to see how much condensed human habitation could affect those elements. Finally, Olmsted's art created a democratic space where a diverse array of peoples could ideally, if not in actuality, interact in ways otherwise excluded from the increasingly set divisions of class, race, gender, and nationality. Because the park was a

space where each individual could be restored and seen in their best possible light, as belonging to both the modern city and rural nature, it allowed for a kind of aleatory experience of others that was carefully policed in other parts of the city. For Olmsted, the intersecting flourishings of these odd encounters, a sense that one did not have to choose between old and new, city or country, body or mind, but that one could have both, constituted the art of the park.

Olmsted places grass at the heart of this complex network of aesthetics, urban planning, medico-scientific discourse, ecology, moral engineering, and floriculture. By naming "rich close perennial turf" as a prerequisite for large parks and their attendant mental, aesthetic, and social benefits, Olmsted recalls Jane Bennett's description of nonhuman objects that manifest emergent properties within heterogeneous assemblages. Bennett's idiosyncratic account of "distributed agency" attempts to balance an account of the contributions of nonhuman actants in complex events such as a power blackout. Further, she does not reduce those objects to a set of affective conduits or abstract geometric planes a la Deleuze or Massumi. In other words, grass remains a frictive vector that incites what Olmsted called the "poetic mood" in urban populations. That said, this affective capacity of lawns is only enabled through the assemblage of modern cities and their contrasting (but eventually constitutive) relationship to large pastoral areas popularized through Olmsted's park designs. If the grammar and logic of the relationship between grass and park effects reads as wonky, perhaps this kind of emergent agency suggests "a melting of cause and effect" (Bennett 32). In other words, grass does not *cause* the poetic response articulated by Olmsted; rather, grassy meadows are *necessary* for the parks that enabled this response.

The effects of grass, then, have a history. Human response to grassy turf is not simply a pre-urban response to rich grazing grounds; that is, grass is not reducible to this history alone. Additionally, grass is not merely the natural object onto which the authors discussed in this chapter projected social effects (although grass is this as well). Rather, grass allows the very possibility of writing and reading Olmsted's gently undulating lines. Grass is also the principle element that colors the art object of the park. To get a sense of the queer human and nonhuman networks enabled by and effecting the potentiality of "rich close perennial turf," we turn to an unexpected source of ecological theory: Henry James.

II. Henry James: stomachs in the grass, burrowing

Before the prevalence of suburban lawns, the American pastoral aesthetic of green grass developed in relation—and often in contradistinction—to urban cityscapes. This aesthetic was concurrently reflected in and theorized by turn-of-the-century literary culture. Consequently, modernist fiction is lousy with urban parks. Phoenix Park is a key setting and symbol in each of James Joyce's major works (with particular significance to *Finnegans Wake)*. In Regent's Park, Clarrisa glimpses the urban poor, and Septimus finds a place in which to enjoy nature while dealing with post-traumatic stress in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. Alan Filreis's important work recovered a "once-ubiquitous leftist lyric sub genre, used exclusively by leftist poets: depression park poems" (225). Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams both wrote long poems responding to the depression park poems. "Owl's Clover" is vital for understanding Stevens's stance on political poetry, and in "Sunday in the Park," Williams juxtaposes a working class outing

with a confrontation between himself and the struggling working-class poet Marcia Nardi. Jean Toomer's "Avery" (from *Cane*) shows the permissive policing of park spaces especially with regard to sexuality. In *Another Country*, James Baldwin contrasts Cass's perception of Central Park, "only the trees and the lights and the grass and the twisting road," with the views of African-American Ida Scott who tells Cass "I bet you think we're in a goddam park. You don't know we're in one of the world's great jungles. You don't know behind them damn dainty trees and shit, people are screwing and sucking and fixing and dying" (348). Lily Bart's last conversation and actions are precipitated by a random, cross-class encounter in Bryant Park in Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth*. A similar dramatization of random, cross-class encounters occurs on a Central Park bench in Edward Albee's play *The Zoo Story*. Throughout this cursory list of parks in modernist literature, parks provide an important spatialization for the modernist representation of pastoral romance and cross-class encounters. Considering the ubiquity of urban parks in modernist novels, plays, and poetry, as well as the persistence of that importance across first-wave European modernism (Joyce, Woolf) through the second-wave American Modernism that persisted into the 50s (*The Zoo Story*, for instance, premiered in Germany in 1959 on a double bill with Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*), it is surprising that there has been no systematic scholarly analysis of the importance of urban parks to modernist accounts of the city.

The reason for this neglect has to do with the awkward compatibility of large urban parks with the predominant scholarly approaches to literary modernism. Eco-criticism, for instance, may see urban parks as either too urban, outside of the paradigm of Jeffersonian agrarianism and Thoreau's wilderness tradition, or not urban enough. The

latter anxiety is clearly exhibited with Lawrence Buell's dismissal of Olmsted's urban ecological bona fides as the work of a "gentleman-authoritarian" too dependent (along with Whitman) on "pastoral rhetorics" (100-1). Conversely, the fetishization of technology and the notion of the modern as a rupture from the past, a reading prevalent in the *Modernism/Modernity* strand of scholarship, has not addressed large urban parks, presumably because parks do not present themselves as technological objects. Even when parks do present themselves as technological objects, critics read parks as a modern technology linked to a rural (and therefore politically conservative) past and dismiss them on grounds similar to those of Buell and Ross. While important concerns are raised in both critiques of Olmsted's large, pastoral parks, these critiques, or more often dismissals, of park spaces as interesting objects for scholarly attention—particularly to the extent that urban parks have captured and shaped the imagined worlds of literary modernists—presume common-sense notions of park purposes. As the preceding section demonstrates, however, large pastoral parks have a specific historical genealogy which shows unexpected arguments and unrealized possibilities of what parks represent and how they can be used. There was no inherent reason for parks to take on the large, pastoral contours that are now expected in most major U.S. cities. Olmsted had to fight and shape popular expectations for those parks through his connections with the New York media industry. Even after the basic contours of the rural-styled, urban park became the predominant manner of building parks, Olmsted spent the rest of his life thinking and rethinking why that particular style was worth the tax payer investment, even though the large rural park was inefficient for many of the reasons people agreed to pay for them: sporting recreation, ecological relief, a refuge for the city's most vulnerable, and so forth.

Only after the historically contingent and widely argued divergence of opinion on the role and place of parks becomes apparent can the following question be asked: what about the discourse and spatiality of urban parks did modernists find so useful in articulating their vision of modern cities and the social relations therein? Of particular interest here is how grass in particular *becomes* situated in and arguably representative of this liminal space, a space neither of untamed wilderness nor exciting technological modernism. Not quite nature and dense in cultural signification, we will track lawn spaces as a kind of naturalizing technology for the cases of romantic relations that test social borders and boundaries. In particular, we will focus on the relations that attempt to publicize respectability while at the same time insinuating and allowing sexual closeness that would not be permitted in other public spaces and that often did not have clearly demarcated locations for exploration within the bourgeois household.

While parks and gardens feature prominently in many of Henry James's novels, urban parks take on more explicit agential roles as active mediators (rather than passive backdrops for human actions) in a pair of large, unwieldy novels James wrote in 1886: *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima*. It is no coincidence that James implicitly takes up the question of parks in his two most overtly political novels. Both novels feature poor, working class protagonists embroiled in the political conflicts of the day. Both novels feature a major expository scene towards their conclusions wherein their protagonists spend several hours in parks with their potential romantic partners, flirting and arguing about the novels' central political issues: the women's movement in *The Bostonians*, and the violent socialist revolution in the *The Princess Casamassima*.

The Bostonians places a crucial dialogue between two ideologically-opposed, potential romantic partners in Central Park. The pair

> visit[ed] the animals in the little zoological garden which forms one of the attractions of the Central Park; they observed the swans in the ornamental water, and they even considered the question of taking a boat for half an hour…after having threaded the devious ways of the Ramble, lost themselves in the Maze, and admired all the statues and busts of great men with which grounds are decorated, they contented themselves with resting on a sequestered bench, where, however there was a pretty glimpse of the distance. (253-4)

James describes the atmosphere of Central Park as “bristl[ing] with the raw delicacy of April… *in spite* of its rockwork grottoes and tunnels, its pavilions and statues, its too numerous paths and pavements, lakes too big for the landscape and bridges too big for the lakes” (252). James depicts Central Park as overstuffed with monuments and amusements (developments which Olmsted deplored), unlike the muted effects of Hyde Park in *The Princess Casamassima*. The rural style of the park is incommensurate with its constitutive elements: the Ramble is devious, the paths *too* numerous, the lakes *too* big and the bridges even larger. Intriguingly, these grotesquely disproportionate elements intensify the pastoral technology of the park space. James clearly represents Verena Tarrant, a rising star in the movement for women's political autonomy, as poorly matched with Basil Ransom, a poor southern lawyer who believes that society's ills stem from feminized men and women in the political realm. Ransom and Tarrant's engagement in and with Central Park displays another unsightly asymmetry simulating an idealized nature, quite like the too-large lakes and too-numerous paths. While they visit the park,

each of their statements espouses irreconcilable political views that in turn instill and cement a sexual bond that drive the tragic concluding events of the novel.

On the surface, the "ornamental water and landscape-gardening" of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens function in *The Princess Casamassima* very much like the accessible and spiritually-restorative natural retreats Olmsted argued for when he defended his Greensward plan (530). Hyacinth Robinson, a kind of terrorist flaneur that has been reluctantly co-opted as an agent of revolutionary socialism, thinks that his afternoon in the park has a "luxury of the balmy holiday…It seemed a pause in something bitter that was happening to him, making it stop awhile or pushing it off to a distance" (531). When his socially conservative companion, Millicent Henning, asks why he is finally able to convincingly explain his worldview, Hyacinth replies that:

> I don't know why I tell you to-day, sitting here in a charming place, in balmy air, amid pleasing suggestion, without any reason or practical end. The story is hideous, and I have held my tongue for so long! It would have been an effort, an impossible effort, at any time, to do otherwise. Somehow, to-day it hasn't been an effort; and indeed I have spoken just *because* the air is sweet, and the place ornamental, and the day a holiday, and your company exhilarating. (528)

In his Preface to the New York edition of *The Princess Casamassima*, James suggested that the first year he spent walking the streets of London constituted the origin of the novel. Quintessential flaneurs, Hyacinth and Millicent both represent characters with no formal education yet who have developed a remarkable knowledge of civilization solely by walking the streets of London. It is Hyacinth’s type of delicate sensibilities that Olmsted likely had in mind when he wrote that parks are for “those who are affected by it

to the greatest possible distance from the highly elaborate, sophistical and artificial conditions of their ordinary civilized lives." It is only outside of the dirty, expensive, and exclusionary streetscape that Hyacinth and Millicent are able to together express the knowledge that they have formed in those same streets.

But there's something a bit *too* perfect in this scene. "'Let us get on the grass,' Hyacinth continued; 'it is innocent and pastoral to feel it under one's feet,'" to which Millicent indirectly replies, "Well, there's nothing so pretty as nature" (525). The "intensely green and browsable" lawns of Hyde Park are at odds with the browned grasses encountered previous to this point in the novel. In an earlier episode, the princess's companion, Madame Grandoni, meets the princess's estranged husband in a park "where the grass was already brown" (255). Later, Hyacinth and his revolutionary companion and rival for the princess's affection Muniment wandered through and "lay on the brown, crushed grass" of Greenwich Park, during which tense conversation Muniment occupied himself by "chewing a long blade of dry grass" (439, 442).

At its most banal level, the novel claims that the grass is green unless it is brown. Similarly to Olmsted's attention to the artistic valuation of winding lines in park spaces, James's landscape aestheticism shows keen attention to the color composition of the park's lawns. James is justifiably celebrated for his attention to the furnishings and knickknacks that populate domestic interiors, and here we can see a similar attention to the subtle significations park places. Brown grass most clearly indicates the season, but it also figures the upkeep of a particular park and how often the lawns have been trodden. Each of these differences implies the class-inflected details that color park experiences: use of the park when grass is brown suggests the poverty of being in London in the "off-

season," while those with the resources to do so seek the park's refuge during more temperate climates. These details also suggest the frequency with which the public takes recourse to parks, presumably because the users can only experience the rejuvenating aspects of nature in local, exhibition-like displays of parks that represent a natural ideal best suited to the spring and fall seasons of blooming and flowering (that is, seasons that show the full color, with their attendant planting and harvesting implications, of pastoral scenes). Such implications are superseded by Millicent's exaggerated, almost uncanny, and slightly ridiculous exclamation that "there's nothing so pretty as nature."

James routes Hyacinth's binaristic logic of civilization or its discontents through the botanical aesthetics of grass coloration: "The Princess wished to destroy society and Millicent wished to uphold it" (524). As the upholder of prevailing class attitudes, Millicent mistakes the aestheticized garden spaces of the park for pretty nature. Representing the "beauty of the conventional" (524), she explicitly naturalizes a public display of fashion and bourgeois values. While Hyacinth is bothered by the superficial nature of those claims, he nevertheless believes them—mistakenly, it turns out—to be achievable in the person of Millicent. Both parties displace their secrets onto the nature of the park, thereby ironizing Hyacinth's concealment of (or, at least, his confusion over) the division he perceives between the traditions of Millicent, his aristocratic father, and his impoverished, imprisoned mother. If the browned park grass that appears earlier in the novel indicates a kind of critique of socialist realism, however, such a critique remains allusive in the absent but desired body of the Princess. The realistically-browned grass of the parks appears between the triangulated desire for the Princess felt by Grandoni and the Prince and Hyacinth and Muniment. It seems strikingly Jamesian that

the naturalistic settings of the brown-grassed parks create a pronounced sense of realism just as the characters become completely preoccupied with their shared desire and contested symbolic battle over an absent third party.

While the park in *The Princess Casamassima* retains many of the features associated with a pastoral, rural nature (such as free and open communion with the environment and fellow park-goers), the urban park in *The Bostonians* emphasizes the unnatural conglomeration of incommensurate elements associated with more negative depictions of modern city spaces and their corresponding social relations. It was not until James's 1902 novel *The Wings of the Dove* that he brought the two senses of park spaces together into one novel and one particular urban park. The positive connotations of the park that relate to the park place of *The Princess Casamassima* are sketched through the spatial relations of Merton Densher and Kate Croy in *The Wings of the Dove*. The socially-charged character of space is especially important to *Wings* as it provides a referential context to query, if not clearly answer, many of the most confounding gaps in the text. Following Olmsted, James depicts grassy park spaces as idealized spatial coordinates for the fusion of collective identity.

James's emphasis on space is something he took from his experience in the theater; as Hazel Hutchinson explains, "the elements of drama which had failed to come alive for him [James] on stage could be diverted to revitalise the novel form" (87). The theatrical elements in his late fiction included "fewer characters, leaner plots, sharper dialogue and more meaningful silence, less authorial comment, more scenes and visual tableaux" (88). *The Wings of Dove* follows this model insofar as it features a lean core of three main characters and half a dozen supporting actors; the variety of settings for the

novel's play-like scenes are rather staggering, however. The novel opens with Kate being barred from the "vulgar little room" on "vulgar little street" she clearly disdains, and Kate often reluctantly re-emerges throughout the novel in similar little rooms owned by her sister and Densher. Milly is introduced in Switzerland, notably in the wrong season; she then flashes back to Boston and New York before arriving in London, again in the wrong season (in London, too, she meets Kate and Densher, the wrong type of people for this American heiress). The three subsequently weave an odd social tapestry in and around parks, museums, bedrooms, hotel rooms, doctors' offices, Aunt Maud's, and the streets and canals of London and Venice. In the palazzo, Milly finally seems to be in the right place at the right time (that is, Venice, for her death), but, significantly, she shares this space with the wrong type of person. If there is something slightly disorienting about the inordinate number of locations in which James rearranges his characters, it is because James relies on a subtle sense of place to contextualize and highlight what is ever so slightly off with each micro-interaction. The claim that place contextualizes action may seem banal (what else would place do, after all?); however, in the case of *The Wings of the Dove,* place often metonymically stands in for an action that is never fully depicted. This is clearest in the case of the courtship between Kate Croy and Merton Densher.

In the preface to the New York Edition of *Wings*, James worries that the novel becomes muddled (James's term) with "supersubtleties, other arch-refinements, of tact and taste, of design and instinct" without a clear or properly placed "pivot" for the storyline, which James in part blames on his not being able to place the novel in serial publication, a first for James (16). James was reassured, however, that the book was held together by the solid "construction 'block'" constituted by the "subjective community" of

Kate and Densher's relationship introduced in the novel's first two books (15, 14). It is especially striking then that no clear account is made for the connection between the novel's romantic leads. As Jonathan Warren points out:

> James provides curiously few other clues to account for the couple's attachment to each other…when we recall that the bulk of the novel's ensuing machinations are devised by Kate in order to make this attachment less tenuous, this elision of the basis for the relationship's appeal seems all the more significant. (113)

There is a notable paucity of detail describing the nascent relationship between Kate and Densher. "The[ir] beginning—to which she [Kate] often went back" is narrated from Kate's perspective (*Wings* 48). There was a party, "a scene…of supreme brilliancy" from which Densher "had affected her as detached…as much more distinct from what surrounded them than anyone else appeared to be" (48). Densher's distinction from his brilliant surroundings is not entirely flattering: James describes him as "unbrushed and rather awkward" and "on the whole …not dreary," a fact that would later factor into Kate's classed idea that they had "a relation that might precisely best be described in the terms of the baker and the housemaid" (48, 50). After the meeting at the party, it was only "a happy hazard six months later" that renewed their contact during a chance encounter on a train (49). After Densher maneuvers to obtain a seat opposite Kate, they resume whatever constituted their initial communication. However, James notes that, "The extraordinary part of the matter was that they were not in the least meeting where they had left off, but ever so much further on, and that these added links added still another between High Street and Notting Hill Gate, and then worked between the latter station and Queen's Road an extension really inordinate" (50). It seems clear that no

communication between Kate and Densher had transpired between the party and the train. On the train where their "subjective community" was ever so much farther on and quickly moving past Queen's Road, Densher "could say almost nothing" because of the surrounding subway patrons (50). But when Densher follows Kate out of the train, that marked "the real beginning—the beginning of everything else; the other time, the time at the party, had been but the beginning of *that*" (50). In response to this recounting of a beginning immediately cast as before the beginning, Warren asks, presumably with some exasperation, "Why then do James, Densher, and Kate direct us to the past for an explanation that is not there?" (Warren 120).

To answer Warren's question, the past of Kate and Densher's subjective community is precisely *there*, though not in the sense of a logically progressing series of events and emotions that Warren's "there" was meant to indicate. Rather, the *there* was the not-so-simple there of the locative spaces themselves: the party, the train, Queen's Road, and so forth. The serendipitous moment of connection between Merton and Kate is not constituted in James novel by love-locked gazes and gushy stomachs; instead, it is constituted by the triangulated, affective binding between two individuals and the places those individuals experience in the same manner, or what might be called a kind of social flaneury. In the preface to the New York Edition of *The Princess Casamassima*, James writes about the educative sense of place and self he received from his first months of walking the streets of London. Kate and Densher experience a similar educative sense of place, but in a spatial sense that they collectively (although not identically) identify as such. The specific spatial cognition of their shared past is nowhere more evocative than in Kate's "odd" recollection of the party at which they met:

> It wasn't, in a word, simply that their eyes had met; other conscious organs, faculties, feelers had met as well, and when Kate afterwards imaged to herself the sharp deep fact she saw it, in the oddest way, as a particular performance. She had observed a ladder against a garden-wall and had trusted herself so to climb it as to be able to see over into the probable garden on the other side. On reaching the top she had found herself face to face with gentleman engaged in a like calculation at the same moment, and the point was that for the rest of the evening they had been perched—they had not climbed down. (49)[30]

This scene of peering into private gardens would be more at home in the numerous and particularly evocative depictions of gardens James had written mere months earlier for *The Ambassadors*. Kate and Densher are both curious about the private, carefully cultivated gardens walled off from them, but when they attempt to steal a glance at these gardens, they instead come face to face—through a kind of mirror or doubling—with someone possessing the same impulse. By way of this moment of failed, natural voyeurism (in James, there is a sexual charge to climbing a wall to sneak a peak at the neighbor's verdant, private oasis), Kate's "other conscious organs" are engaged by the mirrored image of someone with the same impulse. For Kate, her "perched feeling" lingers, "perched" connoting not only elevation, but also precariousness (49).

It is significant, then, that the first actual scene between the garden-curious couple takes place in the urban greensward setting of a large public park. That is, the first dialogue between Kate and Densher happens in neither the work space of the newspaper

[30] James helpfully notes in the following sentence "A simpler expression of all this is doubtless but that they had taken each other in with interest" (49)

room that represented Densher, nor in the vulgar little rooms of Kate's origin. Instead, the reader first sees them talking in a far more ideal setting for aspiring middle class lovers, "under the trees by the lake" (52). Just as Kate thought of her initial meeting with Densher as a "particular performance" perched on a ladder, Aunt Maud tells Densher that, "Your performances in the Park are ridiculous so far as they're meant as consideration for me" (66). Aunt Maud clarifies the latter clause—"as consideration for me"—to mean that Densher need not avoid her house. Even though Maud would financially cut Kate off if she married Densher, Aunt Maud still enjoys Densher's company, and she lets him know that she has no interest in declaring her disapproval of a union between Densher and Kate by banishing Densher from her house. A question remains, however, about the "performances in the Park." Why would Kate avoid openly courting Densher in her Aunt's house only to then openly court Densher in plain sight of Aunt's Maud's windows overlooking the park?

Kate staged her courtship in the park for the same reason that many modernist writers set their working-class love scenes in the park: there was simply no other respectable place for working class lovers to go in a city. Kate and Densher could not go to the "vulgar little room" that her father rented both because of the shabbiness of its furniture as well as the complex intermingling of homosexual shame and identification associated with her father.[31] They were clearly not welcome as romantic partners in Aunt

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[31] In the essay "Is the Rectum Straight?: Identification and Identity in *The Wings of the Dove,*" Eve Sedgwick convincingly suggests ways in which Lionel Croy's same sex desire affects his relationship to his daughter, which in turn condition the odd way in which Kate is perceived as both hypersexual and asexual throughout the novel. See Sedgwick's *Tendencies*.

Maud's where "the language of the [Aunt Maud's] house," the "heavy horrors" of Maud's taste in furnishing and decoration that made the couple "quail before them," made their love appear "painfully cheap" (62-3). Finally, Kate could not accept Merton's invitation back to his private apartment, an invitation that Kate surmises—correctly, as it turns out—also signifies the sexual consummation of their relationship. Such consummation will result not only in Aunt Maud's disinheritance, but also the sexual shame that Kate avoids in her father's presence. Again, spatial configurations stand in for the actions they are supposed to provide the setting for: Densher's demand, "come to me…to my rooms" in Italy, stands in for sex between the couple.[32] While there exists a rich body of James scholarship devoted to the significance of these spaces that Kate found undesirable for staging her performances for Aunt Maud, no clear scholarly explanation has been given as to why Kate and James found the park so desirable for establishing Kate's "subjective community" with Densher.[33] By extensively detailing the

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[32] If "come…to my rooms" seems a bit reticent out of historical and literary context, Iain Softley's 1997 film adaptation does an excellent job highlighting the highly sexually charged nature of the innuendo, especially as it expands to the streets of Venice and London after Kate goes to Densher's room.

[33] Victoria Coulson's "Sticky Realism: Armchair Hermeneutics in Late James" gives an excellent overview of the unsuitability of Lionel and Aunt Maud's residences. Although not explicitly about James, Mica Nava's "Modernity's Disavowal: Women, the City, and the Department Store" provides a clear account of the central role consumer goods and the taste of women shoppers played in demarcating increasingly ambiguous class, national, and racial boundaries. Nava also argues that the Frankfurt school ignored the importance of these products and spaces of the cultural industry, which informs this project of including spaces of urban modernity ignored by Benjamin and Adorno in their assessment of the production of modern subjects. Michael Moon's widely cited essay "Sexuality and Visual Terrorism in *The Wings of the*

oppressive restrictions inhering in every space that makes itself available to Kate, James is able to reveal the welcoming contours of the park space in which Kate and Densher are allowed enjoy and renew their subjective community.

By staging the romance with Densher in the park, Kate and James utilized the Victorian conception of the park as a kind of communal drawing room. This use of parks as a working class drawing room was precisely what the moral reformers had in mind for large public parks. Andrew Jackson Downing wrote that parks would function as "the pleasant drawing-rooms of the whole population" (Sweeting 103). James deployed this collocation in *The American Scene*, referring to the "placed and 'composed' felicity" of New England's landscape that "suggested the furniture of a drawing-room" (*The American Scene* 16). Park spaces' urban simulation of nature allows Kate to express sexual interest without either committing herself to the object of her interest or incurring any social shame for non-normative sexual expression. In the park, Kate responds to Densher's marriage proposal by thinking of her sister Marian's "unnatural marriage" to which she has carefully opposed her own courtship, which is otherwise economically identical to her sister's. The pastoral technology of literary modernism does not take the individual outside of history and civilized experience like a traditional pastoral, but it does seem to allow for a broader range of sexual expression. In effect, urban parks give a kind of roominess of one's own in which working class courtship can approximate the drawing room sanctification of middle class romance.

Dove" covers the sexually charged reputation of Victorian Italy that James utilizes to suggest the sexual promiscuity of his characters, especially to the initiates of Italy's same-sex community.

To extend the technology metaphor, if parks are the pastoral hardware through which a roominess of one's one is produced for working/inter-class recreation and romance in particular, grass is the software that allows individuals to interface with the spatially-articulated expansion of social propriety. A carefully-manicured lawn space suggests nature without wildness: that is, well-maintained grass implies a kind of proper sexual flirtation without the animalistic wildness of actual sex. Such grass protects skin and cloth from the filth of dirt, with which people can be sexually stained, while providing the ground with a furniture like softness (like a carpet or mattress or other soft piece of furniture on—or with—which people like to get it on). Finally, as will become apparent in the odd narrative voice and acute anxiety that surrounds being seen during scenes that take place in the park, tightly manicured grass spaces, especially lawns, crucially produce a scenic visibility. James's characters go to the park not just to look, but to be looked at. In the park, too, they can somewhat control, or at least contextualize, how they are looked at. While verdant lawns may allow or even encourage contact between lovers that sit or lay close to each other—an oddity in public urban spaces—grassy lawns also allow for clear lines of sustained surveillance.

To understand precisely how parks in general, and park lawns more specifically, provide this classed sanctification of sexual expression, consider how Milly Theale, a fabulously wealthy American heiress who entered a love triangle with Kate and Densher, experienced parks. If Kate and Densher enjoyed the relational possibilities opened by the park's natured milieu, Milly experienced the unnatural and unpleasant juxtapositions that account for the urban-ness of urban park places. Milly disconsolately stumbles into Regent's Park after receiving the information that her illness is terminal. Milly had earlier

circled the park in her handsome carriage, a mode of moving through the park that explicitly marks one's class in all three of James's novels here considered.[34] But now, wandering among the “shabby grass” and “smutty sheep,” Milly thinks that here she has found “the real thing” in “[t]heir [the working class’s] box, their great common anxiety, what was it, in this grim breathing-space, but the practical question of life?” (*Wings* 153).[35] The incredibly wealthy Milly desperately wants to recognize a shared essence of humanity with her fellow park patrons: “They could live if they would; that is, like herself, they had been told so.” Yet, that identification is interrupted by the realization that poor occupants of the park could not embark on the same experiment of a life of conspicuous consumption Milly considered, a realization that forces her to modify her reflection to “they would live if they could” (153). Milly’s revision is also James’s; that is, through Milly, he reveals the contingency of his most celebrated injunction, written a year prior for his novel *The Ambassadors*: “live all you can-it’s a mistake not to. It doesn’t so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life” (153).[36]

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[34] In *The Bostonians,* Ransom worries that his walk through the park will compare unfavorably with Verena’s wealth suitor Henry Burrage, “Of course I haven’t a vehicle to drive you in; but we can sit on a bench and talk” (249-50). On multiple occasions Verna reflects that her walk through the park “was very different from her drive yesterday with Mr Burrage, but it was more free, more intense, more full of amusing incident and opportunity” (253). Like Milly, Verena prefers walking through the park, slumming it, because it brings her closer to the real thing.

[35] It’s interesting to note that James reinforces this centrality by conspicuously placing Regent’s Park at center of the map of London inserted into the first pages of *Wings* (19).

[36] Although published after *Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors* was written the year before James began work on *Wings*.

Michael Martin argues that James subtly undermines Milly's egalitarian sentiment that death levels class distinctions (113). Milly's failed moment of interclass identification in Regent's Park inspires her to accept Kate's branding of Milly as a dove. The result is Milly's decision to die in the aristocratic luxury of an Italian palace. But in a novel that James, in the preface, claims to use "windows and balconies [to] extravagance," there's a devastating irony to the fact that Milly's palazzo did not grant her one last grand vista (or if it did, it was not a view that she wanted to see) but rather has the effect of having "turned her face to the wall" (16, 331). Milly's back, which itself becomes an opaque wall, represents a termination of the proliferating views and consciousness's that make up James's subject matter. Milly's wall recalls the wall over which Merton and Kate are figured to have caught each other peering over when they met. In the preface, James calls this shared peering over the wall "a practical *fusion* of consciousness" (11). This fusion of consciousness is the beginning of the "subjective community" that constitutes the center of the novel.[37]

These ideas of class and a turning away from fused consciousness/ subjective community are reflected in James's depiction of park lawns in *The Wings of the Dove*. Reflecting on Milly Theale and the relationship of guardian and dependent, almost employee, that Mrs. Stringham had entered into, the latter reflected:

[37] These are particularly opaque phrases. Another way to interpret them would be to say that James celebrated the "subjective community" but worries about the potential lack of narrative distinctness in fused consciousness, that it's the fused consciousness that "springs the trap" for the good "single throbbing consciousness" of Milly Theale (12).

> It came back of course to the question of money […] the girl couldn't get away from her wealth. She might leave her conscientious companion as freely alone with it as possible and never ask a question, scarce even tolerate a reference; but it was in the fine folds of the helplessly expensive little black frock that she drew over the grass […] She couldn't dress it away, nor walk it away […] She couldn't have lost it if she had tried—that was what it was to be really rich. It had to be *the* thing you were. (James 85-86)

If Milly's frock represents the wealth that Mrs. Stringham, echoing the economic critiques of Michael Martin, sees as the ontological core of Milly's being, what metaphorical function is taken up by James's grass? There seems to be some kind of interface in the rustling contact between cloth and sod. But is the interface threatening—can Milly's wealthy being be stained by nature? Or, is the interface congruent—that the dress is on a lawn rather than, say, mud or shit shows how Milly's wealth has encultured even her "natural" surroundings? In both readings, James sets up grass as a site of differentiation between the wealthy being that Milly has yet to accept and a state of naturalness alienated by that wealth. Grass, in other words, functions both around (to others) and, as I show below, in Milly's consciousness as a productive medium through which to process the conspicuous differences of class—which Olmsted's American appropriation of European style park designs sought to occlude—and the super subtle (i.e. Jamesian) process through which those material differences might affect ontological differences that cannot be collapsed within a universal conception of humanness.

This latter point can be seen in the ways grass serves as a conduit for Milly's epiphanic realization, triggered and mediated through the anxiety over the uncertainty of

her medical diagnosis, that her wealth isolates her from most people and even her own experiences and needs. Milly's foray into "the real thing; the real thing was to be quite away from the pompous roads," brings her "well within the centre and on the stretches of shabby grass" (153). Then, as Milly leaves, "She looked about her again, on her feet, at her scattered, melancholy comrades—some of them so melancholy as to be down on their stomachs in the grass, turned away, ignoring, burrowing; she saw once more, with them, those two faces of the question between which there was so little to choose for inspiration" (155-6). Milly conceptualizes her "scattered, melancholy" and presumably working class "comrades" through an almost Beckett-like stripping away of social mores to a bare life of worm-ish, mole-like burrowing into to the ground. If the anxiety of a terminal disease does not strip away the bullshit to reveal a common humanity, it does strip away the romantic presumption of a shared essence buried in humanism. If Milly's wealth is the wind that allows her dove to soar, her poorer park companions are contrastively figured in squalid act of burrowing.

The ontological inflection of Milly's epiphany is underlined by the verbal form which Kate conversationally gives to Milly's afternoon in the park. While preparing for their visit, Milly thinks that Kate "would never in her life be ill" (a Jamesian "fuck you" if ever there was one) (158). Milly dehumanizes, or more accurately, desubjectifies Kate by taking away her capacity for illness (or, conversely, does Milly mark Kate as within the fantasy of a shared humanity that Milly's illness has promised but ultimately failed to give her access to?). Kate returns this desubjectifying language by repathologizing Milly's illness as a hysterical anxiety disorder— "You mean you've been absurd"—a statement Kate corrects by insisting upon Milly's health— "Learning, you mean, so

easily, that you *are* well?"—an insistence Milly is compelled to echo, as if Kate put the words into her mouth: "Learning, I mean, so easily that I *am* well" (158-9). James's italicized copular verbs are tricky, particularly as they're used in conjunction with a verb that is not accurate in a naturalistic sense. The novel seems to bear out that Milly is not well, which perhaps is all the more reason to insist on her wellness (as in, "You look great!" To a sick friend who very clearly does not look great). But it is not the wellness that is italicized, but the being-or *am*-ness-that presumes wellness.

What kind of being presumes wellness? Milly tells Kate that "'I shan't have to do anything dreadful, or even, in the least, inconvenient. I can do in fact as I like.' It was wonderful for Milly how just to put it so made all its pieces fall at present quite properly into places […] Then she [Kate] grasped the full beauty. 'You can do as you like?'" (159). By linguistically "putting it so" and thereby shaping her and her friend's relationship to Milly's illness, Milly temporarily takes on the role of using language to shape the novel's world and events (a role usually occupied by Kate). But there is a low-key slippage in how the two characters interpret doing "as you like." Kate interprets the ability to do as one likes as a kind of physical ability, or an absence of disease (a particularly ironic thought, given Kate's position in the novel as the most physically and mentally able person who nevertheless cannot simply do as she likes because of her financial situation). Milly, however, realizes in the park that she could live—or freely choose how to utilize her life—because she was not like the people in the park, that is, because she was wealthy. Milly independently comes to Mrs. Stringham's conclusion that extreme wealth was "*the* thing you were." In other words, Milly could do what she wanted because she was well, and she could do what she wanted—was well—because she was rich. Milly's

money—her true being—maintains a spectral presence beyond her physical death. Once she has turned her back to Kate and Densher, her physical being is no longer a part of the triangulated relationship that structurally supports the novel. The ghostly presence of capital allows Milly to remain *the* thing she really was in the novel beyond her physical well-being or even life, an afterlife of which Milly became prescient of in the park. Her turn to the wall—her social death—reenacts the "turn[ing] away" of the park people with "stomachs in the grass."

To reiterate: following Olmsted, James's grassy park spaces provide idealized spatial coordinates for the fusion of collective identity. Significantly, both Kate and Milly acutely perceive the failure of their attempt to control their relations with their fellow park-goers. Kate is acutely aware of "the presumed diagnosis of the stranger" observing her and Densher in the park (52).[38] Kate's acute understanding of how they needed to present themselves [to] "the diffusion of rumor [that] was of course always remarkable in

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[38] Returning to Aunt Maud's statement that Kate and Densher's "performances in the Park are ridiculous so far as they're meant as consideration for me," it is important to note the unintentional irony and/ or shrewd sophistication of the latter proviso "for me." Provisionally accepting the truth of Aunt Maud's proposition, Kate and Densher's performance is only ridiculous so long as they try to impress Kate and Densher's subjective community onto Aunt Maud. As Maud tells Densher, Maud has taken up Kate solely because Maud "found her to my taste," and though Maud likes Densher, his subjective community with Kate is "incompatible" with Maud's taste (66, 67). Private wealth's imposition of taste is precisely the function of Aunt Maud's furniture, which signifies that she "can bite your [Densher's] head off any day" within the semiotic organization of Maud's private home to which Kate in effect allows herself to belong. By moving their courtship from the private walled gardens in which they figuratively met to the public parks of London, Kate and Densher's performances in the park are not *for* Aunt Maud, at least not exclusively.

London" is characteristic of the networked communication of modern cities (52). Kate's cognizance of this anonymous distribution of awareness of her relationship to Densher and anxiety that the scrupulously cultivated signs of that relationship, the carefully chosen arcadian scene "under the trees by the lake," would be misread results in a paranoid consideration of the implication of being seen. "No doubt she had been seen. Of course she had been seen. She had taken no trouble not to be seen, and it was a thing she was clearly incapable of taking. But she had been seen how?—and what *was* there to see" (52-53). This constitutive conscientiousness of publicness, to be seen in and as part of a place, is precisely what Milly wants when she stumbles into the park in order to identify her shared humanity with the working masses. Even so, in "her little lonely acuteness," Milly realizes that "No one in the world could have sufficiently entered into her state; no tie would have been close enough to enable a companion to walk beside her without some disparity" (155, 152). The voice narrating Milly's lonely struggle to connect significantly drops the awareness of others' perspectives that pervades Kate's experience of the park. Milly does not recognize that she has been seen. Instead, she treats the working classes around her as a pathetic backdrop to her own drama, "grimy children and costermongers' carts, which she hoped were slums," in order to emphasize the class difference between them and herself (153). While Milly emphasizes this difference so that the connecting tissue of human mortality will be that much more poignant, she ends up reinforcing the distinction of class she attempts to transcend with her trip into the park, thus beginning her turn towards the wall. Kate realizes that she cannot control how she is seen by those in the park, just as Milly begins to understand that the surrounding park patrons cannot "live" in the same way that she can.

Kate and Milly's failures to enter into an idealized sociality with their fellow park-goers results in shame. Eve Sedgwick argues that James's prose exemplifies a type of personality in which "shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity" (Sedgwick 64). But arguments following Sedgwick's work about Silvan Tomkins' concept of shame are often misapplied for two reasons. The first is that in the broader application of shame, critics often mistake Tomkins's conception of shame for negative emotions more commonly called guilt or embarrassment. For Tomkins, shame is a somatic condition in which the positive affect of interest is not returned or is deemed inappropriate. The result is that interest is diminished, which can physically manifest as a blush or hanged head. The second misunderstanding is an effect of the first, but has much more radical ramifications. For Tomkins, shame is not a negative symptom to be eradicated so that one can achieve a happy, shame-less life. Shame is at the very heart of human sociality. Building on Darwin's observation that humans are the only animals to blush, Tomkins thinks, "The vicarious experience of shame, together with the vicarious experience of distress, is at once a measure of civilization and a condition of civilization" (Tomkins 409). Tomkins argues that shame is the primary affect in both socially conservative practices as well as in revolutionary ideologies, in which "shame is pitted against shame" (412). Shame, in other words, functions as a kind of affective limit to leftist politics. Unlike leftist critiques that articulate the wretched socialites of capital (Marx), power (Foucault), or patriarchy, there is no utopian solution, whether of structural reorganization or absolute negation, to shame. For Tomkins "shared shame [is] a prime instrument for strengthening the sense of mutuality and community" (404)

because shame expresses an innate interest in others, while realizing that interest may not be returned in the same way.[39]

If both Kate and Milly experience shame that their interest may not be returned in the park, what is important is not how or whether they mitigate or remove the shame, since shame is a given, but rather what form of sociality shame produces for each individual. For Milly, the anti-social thesis that her shared mortality does not substantively negate the distances between her and the working class park goers, leads to an affective contempt that, according to Tomkins, splits the object of contempt from the subject (360).[40] James inscribes the inevitable failure of Milly's attempt to identify with the working masses into the sentimental narrative perspective of subject and object. Milly cannot commune with the park and its patrons because she denigrates anything that does not return her interest as an errant object that needs to arranged into the appropriate political/ semiotic order. However, her realization that "they would if they could"—her realization that there are real differences between the people and place around her and herself—portrays a "representational brink" (Martin 112). Even so, Milly ultimately elects to comfortably forget her insight by later dying in the tightly controlled order of interests bought with the palazzo.

Tomkins notes that the very breakdown of communication caused by shame is itself a form of communication. "Shame is both an interruption and further impediment to

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[39] Tomkins argues that "To the extent to which the individual invests his affect in other human beings, in institutions, and in the world around him, he is vulnerable to the vicarious experience of shame" (407).

[40] "A history of learned contempt [disgust] as it appears in philosophy and science, in manners and morals, and in esthetics would be nothing less than the story of civilization" (Tomkins 416).

communication, which is itself communicated" (Tomkins 360). Whereas contempt splits the self from its surroundings, shame removes "the phenomenological distinction between the subject and object" (359). Shame provides the building blocks of sociality out of the impediments to communication, because it is an empathetic recognition that one's interests are frequently not returned by those with interests that the subject in turn cuts short. James's depiction of Kate in the park narratively performs precisely this phenomenological erosion of subject and object. Kate performs in the park for Aunt Maud, Densher, and the presumed diagnosis of passing acquaintances and strangers. While Kate clearly wants something from this performance, she readily acknowledges that how she was seen and the diffusion of rumor from her scene in the park represents a network of interests and contexts that cannot be neatly aligned with the interests accumulating around Kate. If Aunt Maud's drawing room and Milly's palazzo articulate their interests in such a way that violently excludes the interests of others, James placement of Kate in the park spatially configures Kate's remarkable ability to articulate apparently incommensurable interests. Kate's interests are never particularly clear. Lionel Croy is interested in Aunt Maud's fortune. Aunt Maud is interested in a wealthy marriage for Kate. Densher is interested in marrying Kate. Milly wants to marry Densher. These prescribed and conflicting interests answer the how and what of Kate's awareness that "No doubt she had been seen…But she had been seen how?—and what *was* there to see." Kate is particularly concerned with how and what she is seen as because she is seen as so many different means and blocked ends to each character in the novel. But unlike Milly, who has the financial means to materially reinforce her preferred vision of herself (which

is in fact Kate's vision of Milly as the eponymous dove), Kate must remain open to the conflicting interpretations and desires of everyone around her.

Only in the park can the reader and, to a lesser extent, Densher become aware of Kate's shame-full awareness at being the object of so many conflicting interests. The carefully administered, spatial logic of tightly shorn lawns provide a pastoral medium ideal for conveying these performances of intimacy: whether between groups, sexual couples, or and individual and nature. James's remediation of park places as a cultural medium reflects his interest in theatrical performance, with the manicured lawns serving as a stage for characters to be seen. But unlike a theatrical stage, or the stable and often aggressive space of privately owned homes or lavishly rented palazzos, the park space has an unstable relationship between stage and spectator. Milly comes to see, Kate comes to be seen, performances are staged for Aunt Maud, but all only to an extent. Kate and Milly keep trying to make meaning in the park. Kate wants to show Aunt Maud what a lovely and respectable couple she would make with Densher if subsidized by Maud's money. Milly wants to mitigate the random, precarious nature of wellness by tapping into a broader sense of meaning offered by a sense of shared humanity. But Milly ultimately begins her turns towards a wall when she fails to find comfort in the shared humanity that persist pasts her end. She turns into a wall at the realization that, even in her grand palazzo, her precise interests will not be returned by Densher. As the object of so many failed interests, Kate recognizes the fundamental nature that shame, or unreturned interest, plays in empathy and sociality, and the basic plot of the novel is Kate's "scheme" in which everyone's interest (except perhaps Lord Mark) can be met, although in a way that exploited Milly's disease and violated the precepts of heterosexual

monogamous marriage. James uses the liminality of park spaces, and in particular the minorness of grass as a mediator, to convey the betweenness of Kate's performance. Kate's performance was meant as "consideration for" Aunt Maud, but also for Densher, her father, eventually Milly, and for all of the curious park goers that would pass her by. This use and awareness of her surroundings forms a sociable flaneurship that learns from its surroundings but only as the self and surroundings are intricately co-constituted by the interests of others. Kate, in other words, is more adaptable to the anxious failures of her park performances. Kate's ability to "fuse" her consciousness with others, to be the glue for the many "subjective communities" of the novel, results from her special capacity to engage with the communicative aspect of shame, to eroticize the cutting off of one's interest as a potential interest in itself. The grassy park truly is Kate's drawing room, but for James it is a drawing room in which the semiotic content remains open for the use and interpretation of the many that pass through and observe within.

III. Justin Green: Binky talks to the lawn

In a Whitmanian passage on how grassy lawns in the American imagination stretch from the front doors of middle America to all corners of the nation, Michael Pollan argues that "no lawn is an island, at least in America." Lawns stretch across property and state lines until they can be imagined to recolonize the entire geographical area of North America (Pollan). By tracing suburban lawns through a global, mid-19th-century urban park movement—a heretofore under-appreciated eco-technology of literary modernism and in Olmsted the movement's most influential American proponent—we begin to see outlines of the weird yet deeply felt cultural nationalism inherent in the communal value

and personal responsibility to suburban lawns. In ecocritical discourse, following Raymond Williams, the country is most frequently contrasted to the city (if only as a binary to deconstruct); however, the urban popular imagination more frequently sees the post-1945 suburbs with its white, *Leave it to Beaver*, 1950s heteronormativity as antithetical to the political values that organize urban space and the needs of urban populations. In the United States, the antinomy of a communal pastoral space made up of privately-owned, golf-green, suburban, pastoral lawn owes as much to the conflicts over Olmsted and Vaux's Greensward plan as to the desire to perform middle class respectability.[41] Suburban lawns map onto an ideological constellation of universal, private sacrifice for the white, male, public good that is amplified during World War II and most clearly pays off for the shell-shocked, white veterans that would settle and own (through federal subsidies and discriminatory local lending policies) the majority of suburban homes and lawns.

As the values associated with urban lawn spaces moved to the suburbs, concerns regarding mechanisms of control and the passing-on of middle-class values to the next generation were displaced from an unruly working class to another site of genteel anxiety over an expanded, propertied class: teenagers. Analogous to the arguments that pastoral parks would provide a site of virtuous recreation for the working classes, a lawn became an increasingly important technology for child rearing: there, children could safely spend supervised leisure time in physical recreation that burned off suddenly abundant post-war calories. Green grasses and blue skies also became an important salve for the poetic

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[41] In Europe, however, the private hunting and garden estates of the aristocracy preceded the increasing public availability of those same spaces to European populations.

temperament of educated young minds increasingly seen as overstimulated due to a violent, hypersexual culture industry rather than a stimulant-rich urban environment (same worries, different place).

This cultural context in mind, I will focus on the way suburban lawns operate as theatrical space for anxious performances of unruly desire and naturalized self-presentation, performances that develop out of the grassy courtships depicted in Henry James's novels. Suburban lawns offered the weird space of a roominess of one's one: a private space for sexual courtship that also served as a stage where adolescents could publicly perform how they would enact private relations. The final works considered in this chapter present lawns through image and narrative; in so doing, they reveal a fact perhaps less pronounced in James or Olmsted's writings, though a fact that would certainly be apparent to those with a "poetic mood" who wander through Olmsted's parks. That is, these texts show that green lawns, by maintaining the uncountable sea of botanical digits that increasingly look to modern eyes like nature, exude a grassy allure felt in the forms of sexual touch, cultural fixation, and ecological catastrophe.

In 1972, Justin Green published *Binky Brown meets the Holy Virgin Mary*, a comic book "responsible for creating the autobiographical genre of comics that has become the dominant mode of contemporary work" in the graphic novel genre of comics (Chute 17). The following year, Art Spiegelman published his short comic story "Prisoner on Hell Planet," which bore the distinct influence of Green's comic and was later included in Spiegelman's genre-defining *Maus*.[42] In his introduction to *Binky Brown*,

[42] See Rothberg's *Traumatic Realism* for the relationship of "Prisoner on Hell Planet" to *Maus*. See also Witek's *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar*.

Spiegelman compares his "dumbstruck" reaction to seeing the original pages of Green's comic to "the way visitors to the 1917 Armory Show in New York had been when Duchamp's Nude was first Seen Descending a Staircase. Some new way of seeing and thinking were getting born."

With the analogy to the famous Armory Show, Spiegelman invokes the modernist aesthetics of rupture and novelty. Even so, it may be difficult for an uninitiated reader to discern just what was so radical about Green's text, a combination of the cartoony, boundary pushing absurdism of Robert Crumb and his fellow artists' work in *Zap* (beginning in 1968) and the hyper-explicit, sexual neurosis of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969).[43] What makes Brown's work "a new way of seeing and thinking" is the synthetic emphasis of diaristic voyeurism in cartoony abstraction. Whereas cartooning often invites readerly projection through open drawing that broadly caricatures a gender, race, or age, nearly every cartoony detail of *Binky Brown* conveys the most raw aspects of Green's personality: religious shame, crippling OCD, and

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for the importance of Green to the autobiographical tradition Spiegelman utilized. This book also suggests some potential similarities in both authors' interest in the "funny animal" tradition of underground comix, such as *Short Order Comix #1* to which Green and Spiegelman both contributed and Spiegelman famously first created the Nazi cats and Jewish mice that developed into *Maus*.

[43] In his 2009 afterward, Green places *Binky Brown* in the literary pseudo-memoir tradition of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan Trilogy*, and J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (Green 62).

ubiquitous sexual desire. Green uses the comic book tools of abstraction and popular entertainment to explore the deeply personal and particular.[44]

A crude comparison with the aforementioned examples might clarify the groundbreaking combinations of representational techniques in *Binky Brown*. Much of Green's imagery would not have been out of place in an early *Zap* comic. The major difference is that the typical *Zap* cartoonist used cartoonish absurdism to explore his (often grossly sexist and racist) cultural unconscious, utilizing a depersonalized dream logic of druggy surrealism in order to transgress social prohibitions. Brown's art, by contrast, utilized a similar gonzo image-making practice, yet carefully married those images to a sincere, deeply personal expression of the author's personality. If Crumb's project can be (generously) read as an exploration of the cultural unconscious of late 60's America, Green's comic is much more specific to the OCD symptoms of a particular individual.[45] But if *Binky Brown* is more confessional than most 60's comix, it is less individualistic than the psychoanalytic *Portnoy*. Roth's approach exhibits a hyperactive drive activity (pretty much always the sex drive) in which the protagonist neurotically projects a singular concern onto every surrounding object. In emphasizing the overactive projective mechanism, Roth makes a clear distinction between a projecting individual and

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[44] According to underground comix historian Patrick Rosenkranz, "He was not the first or only cartoonist to place himself inside his strips, but he was the first to openly render his personal demons and emotional conflicts within the confines of a comic."

[45] This is the starting point of a number of questions about the author function in memoir comics, the relationship between the protagonist Binky Brown and writer Justin Green, that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

the environments (including other people) that serve as the passive screen for those projections (the candy wrapper, say, into which Portnoy ejaculates). Green's narrative bears a closer resemblance to the proto-ecological body (discussed on pg. 19 of this chapter) of the contemporary memoir tradition. His Obsessive Compulsive Disorder does not allow for clear distinctions between self and other, and as the author suffers from the same OCD symptoms of the protagonist (as discussed in Green's lengthy, autobiographical afterward), the line between self and environment becomes increasingly indecipherable both for the protagonist and the reader. Binky Brown's social and environmental perceptions are seen as not only the painful effects of mental disorder, but also as the sensitive awareness of an aggressive and deeply contradictory set of realities. The difficult work of separating mental illness from Brown's sensitive environmental intuitions becomes a problem as much for the reader as for the character. To summarize: what makes Green's autobiographical comic "a new way of seeing and thinking" is how the confessional intimacy of the writer-protagonist powerfully relates a nuanced, full developed character while at the same time embedding that individuated personality within an environment that both imprints and bears the imprint of that character.

Binky Brown meets The Holy Virgin Mary is perhaps most memorably a comic about dick rays. In a two-panel, half splash page layout (Figure 1.1), Green shows a variety of items transforming into penises (a guitar, weather vane [also known as a weathercock], soda bottle, cowboy boot, chair, and toothbrush).

Figure 1.1 Phallic projection in *Binky Brown*

Source: Green, Justin. *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*. San Francisco: McSweeny's Books, 2009. Print.

The caption reads:

> Get the picture? Now even common objects turn into peckers capable of beaming out the hated and feared rays. Binky went through each day from one crisis to the next - trying to mold the unwieldy living world into a 'safe' mechanical scheme by changing the direction slightly of whatever object happened to be casting a ray. (Green 33)

These "rays" represent Brown's burgeoning adolescent sexual awareness shaped by a Christian dialectic of purity and perversion. For Binky, the figure of the Virgin Mother Mary represents complete purity to which the penis is antonymically defined as impure. This binaristic approach to male desire by way of an immaculate mother figure is not an infrequent trope of Catholic diaspora coming-of-age stories; it is especially reminiscent of Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. What distinguishes Green's narrative is not the dick fixation or the conflicted desires that circulate around the image of Mary, but the rays that connect them. In Figure 1.1, the rays cut across the panel, destabilizing what we might roughly think of as the fundamental ontological block of comic art.[46] Carrying over from the preceding page that presents Brown in a flattened, two-dimensional style, the rays force Green to shift his style of art. If the rays follow a three-dimensional vanishing point, Brown and his world must be flattened into two dimensions so that Brown can control his environment enough to prevent phallic protuberances from pointing to holy sites. Although the most disturbing images come from the Cronenberg-esque body horror of Brown's fingers and feet turning into penises (Figure 1.2), it is the rays, which move between and unsettle the differences between

[46] I'm using the panel as basic unit of comic composition very loosely, here. Hannah Miodrag has convincingly argued against these kinds of "minimal units," whether they be panels, individual words, a single line of eyelashes, or otherwise, instead arguing that meaning is constantly generated and reordered through a relational rescaling of different units of meanings—a particular drawing of spiderman's costume to the entire Marvel universe etc. What I'm trying to do here has less to do with defining panels as minimal units, than to show how Green represents his OCD by first drawing attention to the importance conventionally attached to panels, and then undermining that tradition with lines that pierce and even create new panels. See Miodrag's *Comics and Language: Reimagining Critical Discourse on the Form*.

impure body and virginal world, that constantly threaten to reconfigure the contours of Brown's comic, social, and natural environments.

Figure 1.2 Binky's horror in *Binky Brown*

Source: Green, Justin. *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*. San Francisco: McSweeny's Books, 2009. Print.

What I find so interesting about Brown's dick hands is how they reconfigure the constitutive power of phallic projection. What I am not as interested in here is plopping Green's comic into the fascinating psychoanalytic disagreement over the function and demarcation between projection and introjection.[47] Rather, what's at stake in this chapter is, as Mark Noble nicely puts it, a "recognition that our contemplative practices might emerge from, rather than merely reflect, our attachments to the material world" [Noble]. A recognition, in other words, of what at first appears to be a very slight directional shift in the sociality Green depicts between protagonist and nonhuman world. This representational shift suggests a critique of anthropocentric presuppositions that places

[47] For a useful overview of the literary implications of psychoanalytic introjection and the relation to projection and induction, see Derrida's introduction to Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok's *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*.

human meaning apart from the nonhuman world. Often, we place references to human meaning in the nonhuman world on a spectrum of mistakes that spans the relatively harmless pathetic fallacy of the seminar paper to the complete psychotic break from mental health depicted in *Binky Brown*. While the name of the so-called fallacy varies by discipline, the injunction against imputing human feeling, language, or logic to the nonhuman world remains a constant throughout most human discourse, and shares the presupposition that meaning exists within the exclusive purview of humanity.

Visually, Binky appears to be engaged in textbook (Mulvey, Lacan) phallic projection—a mode of interest that breaks down nonwhite, female, and nonhuman bodies in terms of heteronormative sexual and political desires. Even so, Green reorients the horror of phallic projection, focusing on how projection deforms Binky's body through his relationship to the world, especially as mediated by mental illness. Rather than the imagined unity of phallic hegemony, each of Brown's fingers and feet transforms into separate penises. Brown's horror registers a lack of control of the phallic mechanism (imagined in critical theory as control or unified desire). This lack of control most significantly registers in the projective mechanism itself: the multi-directionality of the rays visually affects the phallic digits much more conspicuously than the objects constituting Brown's environment. Phallic projection in Green's comic is therefore more about how this relationship to the world distorts or makes the human subject than how the human subject distorts, or projects onto, their world. In this way, phallic projection is rerouted through the lens of disability as an uncontrollable hypersensitivity to the surrounding world wherein the line between the self and world is never stable or clearly perceptible.

Figure 1.3 Talking grass in *Binky Brown*

Source: Green, Justin. *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*. San Francisco: McSweeny's Books, 2009. Print.

Disfigured through the reversable "rays" of phallic projection, the disabled body becomes a monstrous index of its environment. In a fascinating and critically unremarked-upon early incident, Green prefigures his obsession with phallic imagery corrupting otherwise pure environments by depicting an encounter with a neighborhood lawn (Figure 1.3). The scene above makes for a strange page of *Binky Brown*, not because of the abnormal behavior (we'll consistently be presented with far more strange

behavior and images), but because these panels are not clearly linked to sexual or religious iconography as nearly every following image will be. In fact, there doesn't seem to be any real reason connecting why the grass speaks to Brown and why he feels compelled to sit on it during a rain storm with the rest of the narrative. The only previous chronological information about young Binky is that he accidentally broke a Virgin Mary statue (much to his Mother's horror); later, he worries that the broken statue was the result of his previously stepping on a crack in the sidewalk (as in the rhyme "don't step on a crack/ or you'll break your mother's back"). Green links both taboos—stepping on a crack and destroying a religious icon—as socially-reinforced superstitions, neither superstition being any less silly or powerful in Brown's mind. What, then, links these social superstitions to a seemingly random encounter with a neighborhood lawn?

At a cursory level, Green sets up a milieu that will become common to post-WWII U.S. fiction: the well-kept suburban veneer whose presentation of ease and individuality conceals a great deal of psychic, economic, and racial labor. By placing the demands of the lawn, to be protected from its natural environment (the rain), after the destruction of the religious statue and Binky's concern with stepping on a sidewalk crack, Brown suggests a continuum of social taboos or obsessive-compulsive neuroses that link trivial personal care (polishing one's religious statues, watering the lawn) with major sociological implications of religious or national order.

The theme of lawns as a site of social anxiety, where the group will of the neighborhood is imposed on the individualism of a property owner, is more explicitly explored in the comics of Carol Tyler. Tyler's graphic memoir *Soldier's Heart* stands with *Maus* at the very pinnacle of autobiographical comics following the tradition of

Binky Brown. Infuriatingly, broad recognition of Tyler's singular talents was delayed by decades, in part because Tyler's autobiographical comics negatively depict Green as abandoning Tyler and their young child.[48] Two of those comics collected in *Late Bloomer*, "Perfect Lawn" (1987) and "Front Yard/ Back Yard" (1988), depict the lawn "crime" of "neighborhood blight. Verdict: guilty as charged" (Tyler 55). In "Perfect Lawn," Tyler segments the lawn according to gendered displays of labor. The front lawn (Figure 1.4) is a masculine space of militarized self-regulation.

Figure 1.4 "There's something wrong with a perfect lawn" in *Late Bloomer*

Source: Tyler, C. *Late Bloomer*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2005. Print.

Harv, the protagonist of this story who closely resembles Tyler's depiction of her own father in *Soldier's Heart*, carefully maintains every aspect of his lawn. Part of his self-assigned responsibilities include monitoring his neighbor's lawn for any "discrepancies"

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[48] For details, see Kim O'Connor, "Penis Rays, Self-Loathing and Psychic Voodoo: Autobiographical Cartoonists on Truth and Lies."

that can be reported by like-minded neighbors. According to Harv, "y'gotta beat back nature or it'll take over" (47).

Figure 1.5 Backyard is a pigsty in *Late Bloomer*

Source: Tyler, C. *Late Bloomer*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2005. Print.

In distinction to Harv's carefully maintained front lawn is his wife Margaret's back yard, which Marv refers to as a "pigsty" (Figure 1.5). The back yard conspicuously displays oft-effaced forms of gendered labor, such as drying laundry. The back yard also features a garden with a rather haphazard selection of flowers, organized by the personal preference for pretty flowering rather than a cohesive presentation of aesthetic taste. Again, a hose left splayed by the laundry basket draws attention to the gendered labor of curating and maintaining the garden, work meticulously obscured in the geometrical perfection of the front yard. This gendered, front yard/back yard dynamic becomes untenable when Harv is rewarded with a home in "paradise," a "planned development of environmental perfection," for his work maintaining his own yard and policing his neighbor's (Tyler 40). Needing to move into paradise quickly, Harv passes on responsibility for his house to his semi-estranged daughter Ginny. While grateful for the housing, Ginny is not able to maintain the front yard/back yard separation by herself, as

her husband recently abandoned her and their young children for another relationship. Ginny's children take over the front yard, littering it with tents, tricycles, inflatable pools, random holes and shovels, and a sign advertising lemonade. This chaos in a property still listed under Harv's ownership causes Harv to be kicked out of paradise. In an EC-type, twist ending, Tyler explicitly connects the paradise community with death as a Harv dies from the stress of leaving paradise, but he is shown finding some peace as a ghost that carefully maintains the grass on his funeral plot.

For Tyler, then, the bane of the perfect lawn is a conspicuous breakdown of the gendered division of labor in a heterosexual, nuclear family. A disorganized lawn publicly signifies something awry with the private sphere of the home. In particular, the lawn indexes the conventional roles of a mother/housekeeper, which is the unpaid maintenance of house and children. By this logic, a wild lawn corresponds to out-of-control children. Ginny's children's very public takeover of the front lawn removes Harv from the masculine fantasy of paradise that features total control over nature. But it is also Harv's child, Ginny, who precipitated this fall. Harv's failure to properly pass along family values to Ginny—they were estranged for 10 years after Ginny decided to marry a bohemian artist (clearly a Green surrogate) rather than join Harv's lawn care business—ultimately keeps him out of paradise. Tyler uses Harv's tortured logic of suburban paradise to clarify the lawn as a conspicuous signifier of the suburban heteronormative family. A well-kept lawn signifies control over nature, but it is also exemplary of a very particular type of natural family. The presentation ostentatiously displays the economically-rewarded labor of a man who can afford a house with a lawn and scrupulously effaces a female partner's private labor of maintaining that home and raising

children (not to mention the effacement of the federal, economic, and neighborhood policies that excluded non-white members). This display trades on the populist fantasy of Olmsted's pastoral spaces—a fantasy that gives any citizen access to the national lawn that is continuous and without explicit borders of membership—but the privatization of maintaining, daily and across generations, that space exacts a formidable social and psychological toll.

In *Binky Brown*, grass can be seen hailing Binky from an ideology clearly articulated in Tyler's work, an ideology that implicates even small children in the rigorous maintenance and exclusions required to sustain a burgeoning middle-class ideal of suburban life. In Althusser's "little theoretical theater" of hailing, a subject concedes membership—is interpolated—into an ideological order when they respond to an address or "hail" by a functionary of an Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser 190-191). Althusser famously gives the example of a police officer hailing an individual as a "bad sort." By responding to the address, the respondent consents to the logic that defines her as either a criminal or a non-criminal. Regardless of assignation, she tacitly acknowledges that she is subject to the disciplinary discourse of criminality (191). What's fascinating and unique about *Binky Brown* is how the blades of grass become the hailing functionaries of a complex ideological chain that includes and puts into conflict the private sphere role and labor of Binky's mother and a broader sense of social order in a neighborhood of private homes. In this early series of panels, the volatile order of the home and neighborhood is made legible through the natural objects found in and constituting a lawn. But the grass not only voices the repressive neighborhood order, a la

"Perfect Lawn," but also communicates its own grassy messages that are not necessarily aligned with the Ideological State Apparatus of the nuclear family.

In this case, Brown's recognition of individual leaves of grass destabilizes the fetishized object that is the lawn's ability to convey its more broadly accepted social meaning. For the lawn, individuated leaves of grass function like Heidegger's famous broken hammer, drawing Binky's attention to a collective of grasses whose being exceeds the self-evident meaning and function of suburban lawns.[49] This superfluous being (exceeding the idea of a homogeneous lawn) of millions of separate organisms has sustained the unique fascination of comic book and animated artists. In Vehlmann and Kerascoët's comic *A Beautiful Darkness*, Studio Ghibli's *The Secret World of Arrietty,* and Walt Disney's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids,* the shrinking of children to insect size is primarily visually indicated by the corresponding size and separation of individual blades of grass. This visual separation of blades of grass necessitates a massive rescaling of perception, and it physically transposes children into the natural back yard environs at a level of immersion normally only entered upon through imagination. Comics focusing on the intimate bonds between parent and child, such as Joe Chiapetta's *Silly Daddy* and Tom Hart's *Rosalie Lighting*, draw individualized blades of grass in order to portray a child's closer-to-the-ground perspective and a parent imaginatively engaging with such a perspective. The pre-abstract, wildly empirical, and somewhat animalistic tendency to engage with the micro-components (grass) of abstract units (lawns) becomes closely linked to visual art's

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[49] For a succinct summary of the implications of Heidegger's tool-being, see Harman, *The Quadruple Object*.

attempt to represent pre-adult perspectives of the world. As Stan Brakhage famously mused in relation to his non-representational film experiments, "How many colors are in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of 'Green'?" (Brakhage 12). Binky's early perception of grasses rather than lawns, missing as it were the forest for the trees, foregrounds a pre-pubescent child's perspective of the world that is colored by a growing anxiety of sexual realities and adult responsibilities incumbent on maintaining that world. This anxiety, which allows the young Binky a glimpse into the adult world, will impose a childlike fixation with pre-conceptual, agential objects into his post-adolescent consciousness. The intrusion of the vibrant life of things into Binky's adolescent engagement with the world transforms the childlike wonder of the back yard into a horrified perception of a nonhuman world with scales and tendencies outside of human comprehension.

A generative tension between the ecologically-devastating reification of the lawn concept and Binky's too-close reading of grassy components, including the attendant labor and social prohibitions that maintain the lawn, sets up oppositional logics of child-adult, religious purity-sexual maturity, and public-private, which are binaristic worlds that Binky proves incapable of progressing beyond. Comics are a perfect medium for representing such contradictions, particularly as these oppositions seem to only accrue and intensify in Binky rather than allowing one aspect to dominate or be reconciled with the other. Unlike the theater of hailing which, as Althusser points out, distorts our understanding of interpellation by inaccurately unfolding its process into discrete temporal steps, comics "can be processed one panel after the other, as a planar, diachronic form; or perceived as a totality, a tabular, synchronic unity" (Bukatman 99). In

Figure 1.3, Binky's perception of a coherent lawn (in the first and last panel) and individual grasses (panels two and three) develop over sequential panels—a diachronic sequence—yet also coexist as a representation of that same reality in the synchronic design of the total page. In the antagonism between a childish fascination with grass's botanical allure and the prosaic abstraction that exploits such an unruly pleasure by disciplining it into the exploitative commodity of a lawn, Green landed upon the perfect object to introduce the manner in which he would use the formal structures of comics to explore the painful contradictions of mental illness.

Recall (and how can we really forget) that this is a comic about dick rays. As argued above, the rays are a visual metaphor for a relationship between Binky and his environment that should not be characterized as projective—the world being only a repository for Binky's interests or understanding—or environmentally determinate—wherein Binky would only be the materialization of his human and nonhuman milieu. The rays visualize a constant negotiation between individual and environment, a negotiation presented in these early panels as between the botanical allure of individual blades of grass and the totalizing concept of the lawn that completely effaces grass in its particularity. The dick ray continuously oscillates between individual and environment, conspicuously drawing the reader's attention to this relational refashioning of self and world.

The grass images in Figure 1.3 reroute the reader's eye against the Western reading order (left to right, top to bottom) and against the comic boundaries of the panel much like the phallic transmutations in Figure 1.1. The first panel of Figure 1.3 moves from Binky in the lower right corner to the storm clouds in the upper left. In this panel, rays

already appear—perhaps indications of the sun streaming through the clouds, the clouds blocking the sunlight, a visual expression of the thunder, or early drops of rain—and connect Binky to his suburban environment. This visual direction is flipped in the next panel, moving from the lower left to the upper right. In this panel, Binky's head has replaced the clouds. He becomes an almost God-like figure, an image reinforced by the rays, here depicted as light emitted by the holy figures in Christian paintings. These thin, jagged emanations from Binky's head are doubled in the speaking grass and, most intriguingly, in the individuated tails of the grasses' speech bubble. Green's ingenious use of a multi-pronged speech bubble to indicate multiple speakers (each blade of grass) of shared articulation (the expression of the collected lawn), distorts both the directionality of speech attribution in a comics strip and, in consequence, the idea of what kind of object can communicate. The novelty of seeing more than one, thin triangle indicating multiple speakers for a single speech bubble is mirrored by the grasses, which look like the tail ends of speech bubbles coming from below that panel. The grasses, then, could be read as indicating articulations from the soil below. Both the blades of grass and the grassy tails of the speech bubble resemble the proliferation of phallic shapes that will soon overwhelm Binky. The lawn, for Binky, appears as a sea of dicks calling for his rear: "Sit on us so we won't get wet." As the constellation of grass, sky lines, and speech balloon take phallic shape, these lines seem to always point to and emanate from Binky's mouth.

By the third panel of Figure 1.3, it has begun to rain. One line of rain seems to directly connect the eye line between Binky and the largest blade of grass. The rain visualizes the allure between Binky and the lawn, drawing Binky's face closer to the

grass. The directionality of the rain cuts across the lines of the telephone wires and house behind Binky and the sidewalk in front of him. These man-made lines should direct Binky's gaze and action: walk along the sidewalk to shelter, call along the telephone lines to speak with other people rather than grass. But rain and its attendant effect of wet-ness (neither Binky nor the grass wants to get wet) push the world of healthy human perception behind Binky and, like the dick rays, put Binky into an anxious engagement with an impossibly complex empirical field that overwhelms the logic that understands the nonhuman world as a passive backdrop. By the fourth panel (and continued into the rest of the page), the rain lines have washed away much of the detail of the scene. These phallic rays have planted Binky in a conversation with the front yard. The phallic ordering in *Binky Brown* moves towards an overwhelming sensory chaos: the swirling lines pointing our attention in every direction, past panel breaks, and against the natural progression of the page. Binky's mental illness is marked as much by the exhaustion of an attention that is pulled in an overwhelming number of directions, unable to discriminate between important sensory data and less important background information, as it is by the hallucinatory transformation of Green's body and environment into an endless repetition of reproductive organs. Green formally reenacts this experience by jerking the reader's eye across the page, disrupting any neat distinction between human and environment, subject and background.

Binky's increasing inability to distinguish between important, agential subjects and passive backgrounds enabled him to intuit the subtle but persistent nonhuman hail of grass that has danced at the periphery of so much U.S. culture. Grass, if it is represented at all, is almost always just sort of there, unimportant, or at best a very, very minor

decoration for the rich theater of human experience. But then the frame shifts a little bit, and oh my god, turfgrass monocultures are the largest irrigated crops in the U.S. and we're wasting all this rare water and oil, poisoning our homes and cities, killing off all these birds and butterflies, spending billions of dollars… Clearly lawns are a hugely profitable commodity market for which our society is willing to dedicate an overwhelming amount of resources. But what are we buying and selling? Grass? That's just an unimportant, very minor decoration of our homes and cities, until we shift the frame a little bit, and, oh my god… So that circuitous logic spins. Perhaps this is belaboring a small point. Maybe botanical grass and lawns are simply two very different categories of object. Lawns are important sites of ecological intervention because they are human made and maintained objects that are quickly poisoning the land and draining it of resources. Lawns are important because they are us, they are human. Grass, especially decorative rather than food grasses and on the scale of the individual blade, is not an object that warrants lengthy attention, particularly by the cultural branch of the university (don't tell Whitman). What conceptual work, I wonder, bridges the gap between the meaningless blade of grass, whose temporal development colloquially indicates the most dull objects of human attention ("this is as boring as watching the grass grow") and this sublime flowering of an unbroken sea of green that we've somehow extended from frigid Maine to the deserts of California? To understand our affective attachment to grass is to query the gap between the beauty of lawns and boredom with grass. Binky's perception that shifts between, and cannot reconcile, the lawn with the grasses that comprise it, is reminiscent of Kant's theory of aesthetic experience. The viewer sees an object and scrolls through concepts that match the object. The viewer can

never settle on a single concept, and the beautiful or sublime is the experience of that constant moving between and never settling on concepts, between the grass and the lawn. It sounds a lot like moving back and forth between the panels of a comic, actually. An aesthetic investigation into our affective attachments to lawns is not just a question of why we find green lawns pretty; rather it's a sensitivity to the subtle botanical allure of grass that exists somewhere between blades of grass and the lawn. It can best be detected, as it were, in liminal spaces such as those between dinosaur shit and dick rays.

In the texts considered above, grass makes a difference: whether a minor difference, such as indicating the seasons and classes in James's parks, or a major one, as in Olmsted's claim that his park style could not be exported to regions that did not naturally sustain large, pastoral areas. Hyacinth claimed he needed a lawn to fully express himself, and Milly could not share her essential humanity with poorer park goers that she conceived of as burrowing into shabby grass. Carol Tyler reads a generational change in family structures through her family's and neighbor's lawns, and Justin Green first expressed his anxious awareness of phallic disorder and mental illness through a conversation with a patch of grass. Lawns, then, are a feature of U.S. fictions as much as they are a feature of cities and suburbs. A grassy hail to us lawn people can be faintly perceived in all three.

Chapter 2: Towards an Ecology of Mind: Chester Himes and Aline Kominsky-Crumb

"Nowadays we're used to wondering what a poem says about race or gender, even if the poem makes no explicit mention of race or gender. We will soon be accustomed to wondering what any text says about the environment even if no animals or trees or mountains appear in it."

–Timothy Morton

"I can understand these ignorant black men marrying broken-down white women because they are under the delusion that there is some superiority in the white skin that has suppressed and bossed it over them all their lives. But I can't understand an intelligent race-conscious man doing it. Especially a man who is bellyaching about race rights."

–Claude McKay

Perhaps even more famously than his Land Ethic, Aldo Leopold urged his readers to think like a mountain. In a remarkable passage on the "deep chesty bawl" of wolves, Leopold gives the reader what Ian Bogost calls a Latourian litany of objects affected by the wolves' howl (137).[50]

Every living thing (and perhaps many a dead one as well) pays heed to that call. To the deer it is a reminder of the way of all flesh, to the pine a forecast of

[50] For Bogost's Latour Litanizer, visit http://www.bogost.com/blog/latour_litanizer.shtml

> midnight scuffles and of blood upon the snow, to the coyote a promise of gleanings to come, to the cowman a threat of red ink at the bank, to the hunter a challenge of fang against bullet. Yet behind these obvious and immediate hopes and fears there lies a deeper meaning, known only to the mountain itself. Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf. Those unable to decipher the hidden meaning know nevertheless that it is there, for it is spelt in all wolf country, and distinguishes that country from all other land. (137)

Like the snow falling at the end of Joyce's *Dubliners*, the howl of the wolves falls upon all the living and the dead. It affects deer, pine trees, snow, scavengers like the coyote, hunters and their bullets, and the entire topography of the land itself: the mountain. The gist of Leopold's parable is that hunters and cowmen indiscriminately killed any wolf they happened upon in order to protect their deer and cattle. Then, when all of the predators disappeared, the deer would proliferate and eviscerate the local flora until the land could not sustain either the deer or the cattle the ranchers had initially tried to protect. Leopold claims to learn this basic lesson of ecology by staring not only into the dying eyes of a wolf, but also, like Hawthorne's Ernest, into the Great Stone Face of a mountain.[51] This story offers a potentially too-obvious implication, however: too obvious in that it is taken from the title of the *Almanac* section, less obvious in that it makes literal an apparent metaphor and challenges the neurotypical ontology of what constitutes a thought. Leopold implies that we literally need to think like a mountain, that we need to think in such a way that can attribute thought to the Appalachians.

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[51] "I have watched the face of many a newly wolf less mountain" (Leopold 139).

It is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on Leopold's articulation of the thinking mountain. He suggests, "No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions [...] In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial" (246). To imagine that thinking like a mountain is simply a parable of resource sustainability is too trivial; to imagine that the practice of thinking can remain the same when it is attributed to a mountain misses the point. Notice the rich verbiage of the block quote above: the living and the dead pay heed, the deer are "reminded," the pine forecasts, the snow is put upon, the coyote gleans, the hunter challenges fang with bullet, and the mountain knows. Paying heed, reminding, forecasting, gleaning, challenging, and knowing are all analogous to thinking. All of these thought-analogous practices are inter-implicated with the interpretive acts of the mountain. "Even without sight or sound of the world, it [the hidden meaning known by the mountain] is implicit in a hundred small events: the midnight whinny of a pack horse, the rattle of rolling rocks, the bound of a fleeing deer, the way shadows lie under spruces" (138). The mountain can know, listen, and affectively respond to the wolf's language in part because the howl can be apprehended without sight or sound: the meaning of the wolves' howl is written into the small events of the mountain.[52] Leopold uses a supple language to describe human thinking, one similar to the language he uses in his description of the mountain. Humans have to change not just their thinking, but also "our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections,

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[52] On the affective reaction of the mountain, which Leopold seems to think of as analogous to thinking, Leopold writes that "I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer. And perhaps with better cause" (140).

and convictions" if we want to substantively change our relationship to the land. In other words, if we want to change our thinking about the land, we have to change not simply the content of our thoughts, but the very ontological foundation of what it is to think. Thinking, then, cannot simply be a question of electrical activity in a given cortex: it must be embedded in the "hundred small events" of the land. What's radical about Leopold's challenge to think like a mountain is not that we think in a manner analogous to a mountain, or that we think in a temporality that exceeds our own immediate demands for leisure or even survival. What's radical about Leopold's demand is that we cannot think like a mountain until we are able to intellectually engage with a mountain's capacity of thought.

This capacity is a core concern of Object Oriented Ontology, which generally tells its origin story by referring to a contemporary group of thinkers often referred to as Speculative Realists.[53] The oft-cited core of Speculative Realism is articulated in Quentin Meillasoux's critical definition of correlationism. In a kind of radical Kantianism, the correlationst cycle maintains that "Not only does it become necessary to insist that we never grasp an object 'in itself,' in isolation from its relation to the subject, but it also becomes necessary to maintain that we can never grasp a subject that would not always-

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[53] The most widely read proponents of Object Oriented Ontology are Graham Harman, Ian Bogost, Timothy Morton, and Levi Bryant. While these four scholars generate different genealogies for OOO based on their respective interests and disciplines, they all note the historical importance to triple O of the roughly contemporary philosophy of Speculative Realism, which was also first articulated by another group of four white men (which will shortly become significant), Harman, Meillasoux, Ray Brassier, and Ian Hamilton Grant. Many in the latter group have expressed discomfort in the grouping, and tend to emphasize the differences in their thought, particularly in the popular wake of OOO.

already be related to an object" (5). Thought, then, can only ever be in the relation between a subject and object, and cannot be definitively attributed to either an object or subject. While the relational theory of truth has historically (and in this dissertation) been useful to critique entrenched hierarchies of power that masquerade as relationships of truth existing outside of history, correlationism also tends to put the thinking, human subject at the center of all relationships. This type of anthropocentrism has had disastrous effects on the ecological vitality of our planet.

Meillasoux argues that the scientifically-verifiable remnants of a past that predates human existence, "arche-fossils," force humans to confront an "ancestral" reality that came before human beings or life itself (10). The ancestral forces the question of "how are we to think the meaning of a discourse which construes the relation to the world - that of thinking and/or living - as a fact inscribed in a temporality within which this relation is just one event among others, inscribed in an order of succession in which it is merely a stage, rather than an origin?" (10).[54] Meillasoux goes on, suggesting, "To think ancestrality is to think a world without thought"; for him, the ancestral "referent, taken literally, is *unthinkable*" (emphasis original 28, 15). Empirical evidence of the time before and after thinking and life makes a unique demand on theories of human thinking: to provide a genealogy of thought the pre and post-exists humans. In other words, the proposition that we cannot apprehend a truth outside of thinking breaks down when the truth we're trying to apprehend establishes a clear before and after to the act of thinking

[54] Ray Brassier, Meillasoux's translator, makes a similar set of claims about the other end of the temporal scale; for instance, that knowledge of an impending solar apocalypse and the eventual disintegration of all matter forces us think of a time after thought, life, and even matter.

itself.[55] Within a paradigm of thinking that states that thinking subject and thought of object must always be linked, how can we think thoughts that correlate with objects that establish a threshold of being beyond thinking? The logic of the proposition that we cannot apprehend a truth outside of thinking breaks down when the truth we're trying apprehend established a clear before and/ after to the act of thinking. The arche-fossil therefore insists on a temporal spectrum for human thought, rather than a Kantian a priori. And this discursive shift from categorical presupposition to temporal contingency offers a unique malleability in terms of how the humble literary critic might play with what and where thinking is, what thought can do, and what is capable of thinking.

Graham Harman, the central thinker of triple O, claims that despite Meillasoux's criticism of correlationsim, "his aim is not to abolish it, but to radicalize it from within, thereby pursuing a form of absolute knowledge" (136). Harman distinguishes his own project as one that that wants if not to abolish correlationism (which is impossible), at least to critique the special ontological status it confers on its human subjects:

> Normally there seems to be an unbridgeable gulf between human beings and inanimate objects such as rocks or flames. Humans are not just physically located in the world, and do not just inflict and receive blows. Instead, we also have some explicit awareness of our predicament in the world. This seems to give humans a special ontological status as a tear in the fabric of the world, a flaw in the cosmic jewel. Somehow, through some sort of tragedy or magic spell, human thought rises above the mere exchange of physical blows in such a way that other entities become present to it. (Harman 149)

[55] Meillasoux also gives example of the radioactive decay of an isotope or the light from a distant star.

The human attribute that rises above mere physical blows is complex, self-aware thought, a species-defining quality that seems to give humans an explicit awareness our mental mode of apprehending the world. The "tragedy" or "flaw in the cosmic jewel" of human thought arises when this apprehension doubly isolates us from other beings. No other class of being seems to be aware of itself and its surroundings in the same cognitive register. What's more, the purportedly advanced cognitive capacities that separate humans from the rest of the universe cannot understand how (or if) other objects comprehendingly engage their environments. Harman disrupts the tragic theory of mind that simultaneously posits humans' rupture from and unique access to nature.[56] Human thought, in this correlationist story, gives us unique access to the world, which in turn tragically isolates us (makes us different) from the earthquakes, magnolias, and smoke stacks that comprise the physical world that our unique understanding distinguishes us from.

Whereas Meillasoux attempts to fix human understanding of the world through mathematic principles, Harman wants to show the mind/world correlation to be highly contingent. Harman aims to democratize the mind/world correlation by opening up what counts as a mind and a world, as well as by inquiring into the nature of the relation. Too often the mind in the mind/world correlate resembles the juridical concept of Enlightenment rationality developed by white, European men who endowed "human" rights on a remarkably small percentage of the species. Conversely, the world, which as Neil Shubin frequently points out is filled with evolutionary cousins and ancestors, is

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[56] Morton points out the importance of Hegel's "beautiful soul" dialectic for thinking of a gap between man and nature and the coconstituitive desire to bridge that gap in *Ecology Without Nature* 117-119.

viewed as mindless matter. Broadly for the Speculative Realists, the more that correlationism denies the specificity of subject and object and conceptualizes the world as given to human thought, the more defined the related parties become: to be a thinker is to be an educated, modern, European subject whereas the world equates to matter open for human interpretation (and by extension, manipulation).

One of the implications of Harman's philosophy is an urgent need to represent and engage with a radically expanded plurality of minds. This expansion includes both a dramatic increase in what we think of as capable of thinking, and a corresponding diminishment the power we currently attribute to thought. If the capacity and experience of thought is not a transcendent feature of humans, but can be attributed to rocks, tables, solar systems, and amoeba, then thinking, while vitally recontextualized as imminent to a broad non-human materialism, loses the contrastive properties we usually use to characterize thought—namely language, self-awareness, and (perhaps) a complex, living brain. On the other hand, there is something incredibly generative, generous even, about a speculative philosophy that puts these terms, and in particular the relationality between these layers of thought-ness, into a field of contested inquiry. How do we get from a thought to a bounded book and, more to the point here, how do a reader's implicit theories of an atomized thinking subject inform how we approach a text?

In this chapter, I argue that Chester Himes's collaboration with Willa Thompson crafts a unique, intersectional theory of (co)authorship that can help us understand a similarly vexed critical conception of multi-authored comic texts. In turn, those comic texts, particularly the collaboration between Aline Kominsky-Crumb and Robert Crumb, let us consider whether marginalized ideas can flourish in a hostile environment

predicated on their exclusion. Himes and Kominsky-Crumb's work on the nature of collaborative authorship critiques the implicit racial and gendered assumptions of Enlightenment subjectivity that undergirds romantic notions of the author as a text's thinking subject. Read together, their critiques generate unique connections between ideas, mind, and language that create uniquely ecological modes of relationality (for both authors and readers) towards literature and comics.

A member of the African-American, protest novel tradition of the 1940s and 50s, whose cohort more famously includes Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, Chester Himes has proved to be particularly compelling to scholars investigating the dwindling energies of the protest tradition or as a possible bridge (or rupture) between the protest novel and the Black Arts movement of the 1960s. Key to understanding Himes's role in that cultural lineage is a career spanning fixation on interracial sex, especially the, to Himes's mind, inextricable categories of black masculinity and white femininity. More particularly, Himes's bizarrely neglected 1957 novel *Garden Without Flowers* is crucial for understanding the urgency of Himes' exploration of inter-implicated categories of gender and race, while historically grounding his much vaunted transition into absurdist genre fiction.

In 1953, Chester Himes wrote of his current literary efforts that "I have worked harder on this novel than on anything I have attempted during my lifetime" (Fabre, "Case" 2). In a letter the following year to his friend Carl Van Vechten, Himes summarized the novel as follows:

> [It] is about an unhappily married woman, an American-Bostonian-Smith college girl married to a French avocat for fifteen years—who has a torrid but unfulfilled love affair with a young Swiss skier during a brief vacation in Grindelwald, breaks her leg and is hospitalized for several months, suffers a nervous breakdown and goes through several stages of insanity in which Death, a figure dressed in a black ski suit, a skull with luminous eyes for a head, visits her at night and talks to her. It is rather a long novel, over six hundred pages and there are no censorable scenes in it whatsoever. (ibid)

By 1962 Himes would reflect that "I always think it was a beautiful book of its kind, and I still believe it should have made a fortune—it was like the Caldwell women's books, only better." (Himes and Williams 26).[57] The novel, which Himes referred to as *The Golden Chalice* in his memoirs and *The Silver Altar* in his letters, was published in 1957 as *Garden Without Flowers*. Critically ignored and commercially disastrous, *Garden Without Flowers* continues to escape scholarly attention.[58] This fascinating text was explicitly mentioned in two of Himes's novels, was central to both of his memoirs, and Himes remained enthusiastic about this work for the remainder of his life. So why have the primary and secondary bibliographies of Himes's works failed to account for this book? The answer to that question begins with the uncertainty surrounding Himes's

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[57] Here, Himes is referring to Taylor Caldwell. *Dynasty of Death* (1938) was the first of more than forty novels that Taylor wrote and published, many of which would become best-sellers.

[58] Himes noted that "I got broke with that book" (Himes, Williams 27).

contribution to it. Significantly, Himes's contribution was erased from the physical book when it was published solely under his co-author's maiden name, Willa Thompson.[59]

One omission of *Garden Without Flowers* from Himes scholarship is *Chester Himes: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography*. Michel Fabre, one of the book's compilers owned a copy of *Garden Without Flowers* with a notation about Himes's contribution penciled onto the novel's cover page. Fabre justifies the exclusion of the book in an unpublished article entitled "A Case of Authorship: Chester Himes as Ghost Writer of *Garden Without Flowers*, by Willa Thompson." Fabre's essay concludes that *Garden Without Flowers* should not be included in a bibliography of Himes's works, though he importantly notes this only pertains to the novel in "its published form." (Fabre 10). Fabre argues that:

> There is no doubt that, without the support and help of Chester Himes, Willa Thompson could not, at the time, have summoned up the energy, self-confidence and drive to complete the writing of her story. And this goes without mentioning the literary techniques and craft she benefited from through Himes' close collaboration in 1953. But one mostly finds Thompson's original story in the novel; and later she took out most of the sections which distinctly reflected

[59] In *My Life of Absurdity,* Himes assigns her the pseudonym of Mrs. Alva Trent Van Olden Barneveldt. She often appears in Himes scholarship as Willa Thompson Trierweiler, her married name when she first met Himes. I will refer to her by Willa Thompson, the name she used to publish *Garden Without Flowers*.

> Himes'[s] interest in psycho-social analysis as well [as] his conception of writing. (Fabre 10)[60]

While a more complete record of Himes's contributions to the novel exists in the manuscript of *The Silver Altar*, the choice to exclude the novel from Himes's published oeuvre has contributed to the complete absence of scholarship on both the novel and Himes's contribution.[61] It may indeed be difficult to see how *Garden Without Flowers* reflects Himes's distinct interest and, to a lesser degree, style of writing. And yet, considering the significant allusions to the novel in at least four of Himes's publications, an analysis of the difficulties of finding a place for this novel and its white female protagonist in critical accounts of Himes's career and literary development affords a unique opportunity to explore the limitations and unfulfilled potentialities of Himes's stylistic and thematic preoccupations. *Garden Without Flowers* expands the critical sense of what was considered distinctive about Chester Himes's writing by vitally adding to the understanding of his evolving conception of the relationship between race and gender. Additionally, *Garden Without Flowers* offers insight into Himes's vexed relationship with the publishing industry in the 1950s.

In a series of 1950s novels, *The End of a Primitive* (1955), *A Case of Rape* (1963), and *Garden Without Flowers* (1957), Himes explicitly examines the convergence

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[60] Ibid. James Sallis makes a similar argument in *Chester Himes: A Life*. The manuscript "was finally published years later by Beacon Press, retitled *Garden Without Flowers*, in a shorter version with, apparently, all Himes's emendations excised" (204). The evidence supporting that significant "apparently" is a "Conversation with Lesley Himes" (348).

[61] *The Silver Altar* is held at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

of what Judith Butler has called the "proverbial commas (gender, sexuality, race, class) that usually mean we have not yet figured out how to think the relations we seek to mark" (Butler 267).[62] Writing to Bill Targ, Himes argued that *The End of a Primitive* was "the best book written yet on the racio-sexual psychology of inter-racial relations (not only, by any means, just in the U.S) […] The story in this book is as implicit a part of inter-racial relations in every country of this world as paternalism" (Himes to Bill Targ).[63] Himes believed the "racio-sexual psychology of inter-racial relations" was "a forerunner of a type of book that will someday take its place among the classics" (Ibid). The type of book Himes has in mind is a hybrid of the race and gender-conscious novels that proliferated in the United States after the Second World War. While these novels played on the liberal indignation and sympathies of a highly educated, middle-class readership, they carefully segregated issues of race, gender, and poverty.[64] The need for new literary and theoretical models became increasingly apparent as Himes grouped the "racio-sexual" and "inter-

[62] While not published until the 60's in France and 80's in the U.S., *A Case of Rape* was written in 1956-57.

[63] This letter was not dated. It was likely written in 1954 while Himes was working on *The End of a Primitive*. This letter, along with the correspondence between Himes and Thompson are in Lawrence Jackson's private collection. I am indebted and extremely grateful to Professor Jackson for introducing me to Himes's work, opening up his own extensive collection of materials on Himes, and for the generous comments he made on earlier versions of this essay.

[64] The assimilation of succeeding waves of outsiders (Italians, Irish, etc.) had long been the ideal of liberal America, and it was easy to sustain this narrative so long as the respective groups bidding for inclusion waited their turn. Taken individually, any post-Jim Crow marginalized group could be given the same formula with pleasant narrative results: work hard, wait your turn, keep a stiff upper lip, make money, and your offspring will be included in mainstream American society.

racial" together. Without the atomizing assurances particularized by identity narratives that the situation of women *or* African Americans *or* the impoverished would improve, the far less pleasant conclusion that most of these marginalized groups would be indefinitely excluded from the economic and political benefits of a shrinking middle-class affluence became undeniable. The inseverable linkages between race and gender became for Himes, especially in the 1950s, increasingly pressing as the publishing industry's rejection of his work on racio-sexual themes increased his urgency to radically theorize and rewrite those relations, which were then more likely to be rejected. Himes repeatedly dramatized this problem as the literary institutional rejection of inter-race co-authorship, that linked sexual with intellectual miscegenation.

As a rejected novel, *A Case of Rape* illustrates this Himes's strategy of braiding messy and proliferating conjunctions of race and gender. Valuable both as a rejected manuscript as well as a compelling work in itself, *Case of Rape* allows a uniquely explicit glance into Himes's inclusive vision for this hybrid genre of protest and psychological fictions on racio-sexual, inter-racial relations. Written in 1956 through 1957 as Thompson and Himes struggled to find a publisher for *Garden Without Flowers*, *A Case of Rape* portrays the limitations of a racial analysis that does not account for gender, particularly with the character of Roger Garrison, a thinly disguised fictionalization of Richard Wright.[65] Garrison attempts to clear the names of a group of black men that are unjustly accused and convicted of raping and killing a white woman. He succeeds in

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[65] Dr. Lawrence Jackson points out that Thompson found a publisher pretty early in '56. For a more thorough discussion of Himes's "abandonment of 'protest' fiction's ethical and epistemological certainty," see Eburne, "The Transatlantic Mysteries of Paris: Chester Himes, Surrealism, and the Série Noire."

establishing the conclusion that he set out to prove, that the "verdict of guilty arrived at by a French court in Paris did not in reality constitute a conviction of four Negro men of the crime of rape, but presented a political conclusion by the French Republic, identical to that prevailing in the American South, that all Negro men were potential rapists" (Himes, *A Case* 30). Garrison's investigation is ultimately deemed a failure, though, because it is indifferent to both the accused's guilt or innocence and the plight of the dead woman.[66] The ideological structuration of guilt and innocence cannot be determined solely by race; it must take into account the "inverted racism" of patriarchy. What Garrison does not recognize is that "[t]he burden of racial prejudice in the United States is borne by the white woman and Negro man." (Himes, *A Case* 86). White women, then, are "as much a casualty of racism" as black men "—an inverted sort of racism that perpetuates the dominance of men" (Himes, *A Case* 83).

Inverted racism explains the racio-sexual, inter-racial feedback mechanism that Himes later termed absurdity, wherein "racism express[es] the absurdity of the racists, but it generates absurdity in the victims. And the absurdity of the victims intensifies the absurdity of the racists, ad infinitum" (Himes, *My Life* 1). Racism is absurd because it can be inverted, reversed, subverted, turned around or upside down and it will still function--in fact it will flourish--the more its subjects and objects are misapplied and confused. For Himes, the key to understanding these proliferating webs of racio-sexual, inter-racial relations is a detailed psychological investigation into violent, sexual relations between

[66] "Roger made a number of appalling errors in both outlook and execution of his investigation […] His major error consisted of his indifference to the fact of the defendants' guilt or innocence, on the premise that it did not matter" (Himes, *A Case* 67-8).

white women and black men. The key piece of evidence that eludes Garrison was why Elizabeth Brissaud, the white woman the men were accused of raping and killing, would visit a black man, Scott Hamilton--a Himes avatar--in the first place. Significantly, Himes closely models his exposition of inverted racism on his experience co-authoring *Garden Without Flowers* with Thompson. Brissaud's visit to Hamilton is predicated on the fact that her publisher threatens to terminate her book contract when they discover that her African American lover had helped her write her novel. Garrison agrees to sign an affidavit that falsely states he had no part in writing the novel. In this meeting, Brissaud came to Hamilton in order to:

> Lose herself in the soft dark night of his love. To her he was not only escape, but a dark void of peace beyond escape, free from all the anxieties and hurts and demands of her race and culture. A dark void without thought, that had no past or future, no pretensions or necessities. Hidden in his beautiful, impenetrable night from all the despair and indignities of life, where women were the second sex, and the pride in race they fed on. (Himes, *A Case* 85)

This passage closely resembles Himes's description of the early stages of his relationship with Willa Thompson in *The Quality of Hurt*.

> I found myself in her arms instead of she in mine. We fused together in the hot passionate dark and became one, and the world didn't matter anymore. That was the moment we overcame our loneliness and shed our regrets and grew strong together [...] the two of us one now against the world, needing no one [...] what mattered to her was she had lost herself in the darkness of my race. She had hid from all her hurts and humiliations. In a strange and curious way, by becoming

> my mistress, the mistress of a man who'd never been entirely free, she had freed herself. That is a curious thing about race relations. We can free the white man's women, and they can find freedom in us, but we cannot free ourselves. (Himes, *The Quality 219)*[67]

This regenerative fusion and confusion, "I found myself in her arms instead of she in mine," between a white woman and black man is uncharacteristic of Himes's fiction, which more frequently details the pain, isolation, and violence of African American sociality. Himes not only highlights the omission of gender as the tragic flaw in Garrison's considerations of race, but he clearly revises some of his own earlier assumptions of the dynamics of interracial, sexual relations. To understand the exciting particularity of this moment in Himes's thinking together race and gender, a clear idea of Himes's earlier pessimism towards the subject is needed.

The importance of violence in Himes's thinking about the "racio-sexual psychology of inter-racial relations" is articulated in *The End of a Primitiv*e. Jesse Robinson muses on his murder of Kriss Cummings:

> Proof beyond all doubt. Jesse Robinson joins the human race. Good article for the Post: He Joined the Human Race. All the good solid American Post readers will know exactly what you mean: were a nigger but killed a white woman and became a human being. Knew they'd keep fucking around with us until they made us human […] Be in all the newspapers: BLACK MAN KILLS WHITE WOMAN. Not only natural, plausible, logical, inevitable, psychiatrically

[67] See also the similarity of the quote from *A Case of Rape* to the block quote on page 21-2 of this chapter from *The Quality of Hurt*.

> compulsive and sociologically conclusive behavior of a human being—and all the rest of the shit the social scientists think up—but mathematically accurate and politically correct as well. Black son of a bitch has got to have some means of joining the human race. (Himes, *The End* 205-6)

Himes uses his conception of inverted racism to explicitly emphasize the gendered component of W.E.B. Du Bois's claim that "only murder makes men. The slave pleaded; he was humble; he protected the women of the South, and the world ignored him. The slave killed white men; and behold, he was a man!" (DuBois 110). DuBois utilizes violence to expose the performative contradiction of the ostensibly universal category of enlightenment humanism. Humanism vigilantly polices and enforces universal rationality, itself a thinly veiled white masculinity, through the terrifying use of violence, to which affectless rationality, the privileged marker of the human, is definitionally opposed. Himes's work emphasizes the gendered dynamic that prominently figures in racial exclusions to human-ness, a dynamic that is implicitly reinscribed into the heroic and often masculine bids for inclusion into rights-based conceptions of humanity.[68] While Himes agrees with DuBois's ideological critique of the violence underwriting enlightenment humanism, his fiction worries about the potential implications of the

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[68] These critiques of enlightenment humanism are amplified in what Frank Wilderson calls the "Afro-Pessimist [claim] that Blackness is both that outside which makes it possible for White and non-white (i.e, Asians and Latinos) positions to exist and, simultaneously, contest existence. As such, not only is Blackness (slaveness) outside the terrain of the White (the master) but it is outside the terrain of the subaltern" (16). For the Afro-Pessimist, then, Blackness is structurally incompatible with any claim to be "human."

expropriation and valorization of violence necessary to be viewed as human or feared as a man. While the motivation may have been the same, the object of violence was never as simple for Himes as the slave killing the slaver. Since racist patriarchy makes for a diffuse and elusive target, the violence in Himes's fiction that attempts to redress racist hurts is directed at more readily accessible objects.[69] These objects of violence are often the women romantically involved with Himes's protagonists. In his memoir, Himes said that it was this harrowing realization of the slippery valences of racially-motivated violence that compelled him to leave the United States:

> Another [reason] is that I came very close to killing the white woman, Vandi Haygood, with whom I had lived; and I was both shocked and frightened. I suppose murder, and more, given America's sex and racism syndrome, when the potential murderer is a black male and his potential victim a white female. I had always believed that to defend my life or my honor I would kill a white man without a second thought. But when I discovered that this applied to white women too, I was profoundly shaken. Because by then, white women were all I had left. (Himes, *The Quality* 4)

Racially-motivated violence, if not entirely justified, is in some ways acceptable to Himes within a patriarchal system in which men maim and kill other men in order to be considered human. Central to Himes's work in the 50s, though, is the realization that this racism easily and often inverts, and the masculine posturing of retributive violence is

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[69] For an early instance of Himes's insistence on a militant response to racial injustice, see his 1944 *Crises* article "Negro Martyrs Are Needed." We can see Himes directly returning to the question of violent retribution for racial injustice with the manuscript of his late novel *Plan B*.

often "misapplied" to and between black men and white women. For this reason, Himes gloomily concludes that "The final answer of any black to a white woman with whom he lives in a white society is violence," a conclusion that by in large plays out throughout Himes's work: from Bob Jones and Madge Perkins in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), Lee Gordon and Jackie Forks in *The Lonely Crusade* (1947), through the light skinned women like Mrs. Taylor of *The Third Generation* (1954) and Imabelle in *A Rage in Harlem* (1957), and finally the white woman, Haygood and Marlene Behrens, in Himes's memoirs.[70]

In this larger context of Himes's work, the potentially healing desire and productive co-author relationship between Garrison and Brissaud and Himes and Thompson represents an additive and uniquely reparative moment of possibility to "the racio-sexual psychology of inter-racial relations." Himes writes that Thompson:

> Just wanted to lose her identity in the soft exquisite darkness of sensuality, which was all I had become to her. No thought, no past, no needs, no future. Just to be free from all anxieties and despair, and the pride and responsibility that spawned them. She had already thrown away everything that mattered to a woman of her class and race, and it seemed to me as though all she wanted was to creep underneath my black skin, where she could hide. When I was with her, thousands of thoughts passed through my mind; thoughts about everything under the sun.

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[70] For instance, see *The Quality of Hurt*, page 137. See also Gary Storhoff's "Slaying the Fathers: The Autobiography of Chester Himes" (244-5) for the white trap of interracial gender violence and Himes's evasive statements about his culpability for such actions.

> With the possible exception perhaps that I seldom thought of being oppressed because I was black, perhaps never. (Himes, *The Quality* 300-1)[71]

The payoff to this long and oft-reiterated passage is Himes's experience of "thousands of thoughts […] about everything under the sun." This freedom of thought was concurrent with the relief from the traumatic fixation on oppressive blackness. These thoughts were uniquely enabled by Himes and Thompson's "strange and curious" relations insofar as their healing co-assemblage was not simply psychological or sexual: it was also routed through their co-authorship of a book (Himes, *The Quality* 219). Himes makes this clear when describing his relationship to Thompson after their work on *Garden Without Flowers* had subsided: "Since our fiasco with *The Golden Chalice* I no longer needed Alva to inspire my work. Before I had needed to make love to her in order to work on her book. But now, that I had begun to work on my own book, the sex act was enough in itself. Any woman would have done" (Himes, *The Quality* 300). Himes's brutal description of his changing attitude towards Thompson after the completion of their book ends with a sexual exchangeability that neatly mirrors the fragile exchanges of empathetic identification.[72] But it also evokes the conditions of a truly reparative empathy, a healing recognition that shares hurts by recognizing their shared source and

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[71] Himes wrote that his best times with Thompson "had been exquisitely happy and satisfying, and for a short time I had become completely free of [....] my fellow countrymen's obsession with the 'Negro problem'" (Himes, *The Quality* 243).

[72] As theorized by Sadiya Hartman, empathetic displacement-the desire here to lose one's identity in the other-can function as a form of symbolic violence, effacing the suffering of an often marginalized other in order to enjoy one's righteous indignation while contemplating the subject's problems at the expense of the object of empathy.

different quality of experiences.[73] In *My Life of Absurdity,* Himes nostalgically recalled the exciting inspiration, thoughts, and ideas that were inspired in his time with Thompson. Himes and Thompson achieved their non-violent, healing bond by co-writing a book, which "in the end, became the tie that bound us" (Himes, *The Quality* 237).

If co-authorship was the special tie that bound them, then perhaps it was co-authorship that enabled Himes to experience a new range and unique freedom of thoughts. One of the insidious effects of the author function is the unnatural attribution of thought to a single source. Modernist experiments with stream of consciousness by James, Joyce, Stein, Woolf), attempted to mimic the process of human thought in western languages and successfully began to feel like thinking. To read an author is to think with or even experience the thoughts of that author.

If the author function has reinforced a Western conception of thought as attributable to single mind or a single person, Himes's suggestion that co-authorship

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[73] For more on reparative relationships see Eve Sedgwick's essay in *Touching Feeling* (123-152). Reparative interpretive practices imbue objects and difference and with positive affect so that that affective investment is available when an individual needs it. Sedgwick contrasts this to paranoid reading, which collapses different objects into a totalizing interpretive mechanism. It should be noted that the paranoid and reparative positions are not opposites, they are simply different interpretive modes of relationality that a subject often moves between in their relation to objects. Whereas as Himes and Thompson can tend towards the paranoid in their writings to each other, they seem to reserve a special, reparative position for *Garden Without Flowers*. Michael Moon has pointed me to Sedgwick's beautiful artwork, reproduced in *The Weather in Proust* (114-115), that seems to perfectly encapsulate the triangulated love between Himes, Thompson, and the here re-paired *Garden Without Flowers*. The inscription on the artwork, borrowed from Proust, is "The most exclusive love for a person is always a love for something else."

enabled a new freedom of thoughts requires a more explicit engagement with the problem multi-authored texts are so often ignored in literary scholarship. What might Himes's suggestion say about literary methodologies that limit the location of thoughts to a single, mentally-able, human being? Hasana Sharp helps us approach this question: she argues that Spinoza offers a materialist theory of ideas. According to Sharp, "[i]deas and minds, for Spinoza, belong to any and all existent beings, be they rocks, cars, birds, or chewing gum. The critique of ideology, therefore, entails more than an examination of human imagination and regimes of signification" (63). The different capacities that humans and rocks have for thought are therefore differences of degree, not kind; this claim echoes Harman's critique of philosophies that treat thought as a tragic tear between human beings and their natural ("natural," in this sense, largely indicating a lack of any capacity of thought) environment.[74] Sharp further argues that materialist investigations into the determinants for human meaning and signification tend to treat our thoughts as immaterial. For Spinoza, however, "our ideas are no less natural than our bodies. Being parts of nature, our ideas encounter resistance and assistance to their thriving from nonhuman as well as human sources" (Sharp 63). One of the key factors that undermines the materiality of thought in critical theory is the language of denaturalization in ideology critique. Denaturalization examines concepts such as economically determined social relations, or primitivist views of non-white populations, which have become the common sense, or "naturalized," norms that guide the suppressive logic of the ruling classes.

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[74] For more on the recent interest in panpsychism by philosophers and critical theorists in the non-human turn, see Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*, especially chapter 4, "Panpsychism and/or Eliminativism."

Ideology critique attempts to denaturalize claims about the naturalness of certain forms of social relations, showing them to in fact be historically-contingent logics used by the powerful to justify their power and wealth at the expense of other groups. Sharp suggests that, instead of denaturalizing the assumptions of power, ideology critique can be reinvigorated by renaturalizing ideas. She writes, "[t]he renaturalization of ideology begins with the affirmation that we are in thought, rather than its authors" (Sharp 76).[75] If we are in, rather than the authors of thought, any accounting for "[t]he transindividual character of knowledge" has to account for a broader ecosystem of ideas (Sharp 71).[76] As such, an idea, mind, or author cannot be meaningfully critiqued without thinking about the channels through which the ideas flowed. A mind doesn't hold an idea because it originated the idea; further, an idea cannot be removed from circulation because it is proven to be untrue. Rather, for Sharp, "[t]he ideas that most occupy the mind are not necessarily the truest ideas but the ideas with the most life support, as it were, from fellow ideas" (Sharp 71).[77]

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[75] On the method of renaturalization as a form of ideology critique: "The project of ideology critique, from a renaturalist perspective, is not content to recognize pernicious or damaging ideas and affects circulating in one's environment. It requires an ongoing practice of sustenance and attention to new insights, promising ideas, and counter hypotheses, seeking amenable ambient forces that might allow them to take root and become adequate for increasingly many thinking powers" (Sharp 74).

[76] "The transindividual character of knowledge is neither accidental nor optional. It is an ontological fact, belonging to the nature of minds, along with the bodies of which they are ideas" (Sharp 68).

[77] Again, "Favorable ideas are those that enable a mind better to understand the conditions of its power and activity and thus to aid its perseverance" (Sharp 74).

In the intensity and weirdness of these passages where Himes and Thompson desire to "hide" in each other's identity, we can see a mutual gathering and bestowing of life support for the ideas they shared through writing. What does it even mean to hide in another's identity? Isn't identity something precisely that can't be shared, that is lived and embodied by trying to force the accidents of birth and genetics into rigid social categories that crudely and punitively separate those bodies in terms of race, sex, and gender? Through Sharp, though, we can see that Himes is not, in fact, attempting to escape his identity. There's no post-race for Himes; there's no Ellisonian transcendence of social categories in Himes's work. The good guys aren't good, and they end up dead or in jail by the end of his novels. There's no slipping the yolk, it's just yolk (race) and yolk (gender) and yolk (nationality). That's the joke.[78] But the intense relationship of sex, co-authorship, and social ostracization Himes shared with Thompson seemed to push Himes towards a complex theory of identity wherein racism could be inverted into sexism and vice versa. The U.S. racism at the center of Himes work could not simply be turned inside out by ideology critique. Instead, the power of the collaboration with Thompson allowed, if only momentarily, a relation of thoughts and identity that diminished the

[78] I'm here riffing off Ralph Ellison's famous essay "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" This essay is widely cited for Ellison's odd optimism on the fluidity of race, or a kind of interstitial position of racial identity. It's instructive to note that Himes's joke or absurdism are similar to Ellison's in that both reject racist and authentic essentialist theories of blackness. Himes's position though, is not one of the in between, or transcendent outside (the invisible man smoking joints and listening to records in a cellar), but an immanent position that is thoroughly grounded in his own racially inflected hurts in a way that often isolates him from others, but here provides a connection to Thompson's suffering.

psychological toll of racism, which in turn allowed other thoughts and ideas a space to flourish. With Willa, Himes was thinking like a mountain.

Himes initially described *Garden Without Flowers* as "Alva's autobiographical novel of her love affair and nervous breakdown in Switzerland," but the sustained, mutual literary labor turned Alva's autobiography into "our book" and, in *My Life of Absurdity,* "our autobiography."[79] Himes wrote that "Alva would write the first draft downstairs in the little sitting room, and I would rework it into chapters above in the kitchen. We both worked at the same time" (*The Quality* 264). This autobiographical blending was deeply dialogic, generating difference in Himes's conception of writing and the constitutive relation between race and gender prejudice. Reading and writing Willa's life, Himes:

> Became convinced that a nice, healthy, wholesome, innocent, and rich American white girl is as vulnerable on the Continent of Europe as a American black girl in the white South. No wonder the Americans grew up with a tradition of violence; it was their only defense against the Machiavellianism of their own European traditions. Her story enthralled me, fascinated me, and I employed all my ability and resources to shape it into a novel. Yet at the same time it hurt me. As a little boy I had seen a young student in Mississippi run over and crushed by the heavy wheels of a wagon filled with fellow students that was being drawn by other students at the beginning of the term. Her book hurt me as I had been hurt then, watching the blood spurt from the girl's mouth and nose. I didn't want to pity her; but I did. (*The Quality* 264-5)

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[79] Himes, *The Quality of Hurt*, 263, 265, 271, 275, 350 and *My Life of Absurdity*, 8.

In Himes's loosely autobiographical bildungsroman *The Third Generation* (1954), the incident of the student crushed by the wagon becomes one of the novel's foundational traumas, which Charles Taylor (the Himes character) uses to frame his later experiences. We can see a similar interpretive rubric deployed in his memoir. Himes uses Thompson's fictionalized life story to rework his own racially-inflected hurts. In other words, Himes utilizes a kind of self-referential pastiche to qualify his hurt: he lifts the act of witnessing the crushed student from its original context in the Jim Crow south and recontextualizes the experience within the tradition of affluent Europe. This has the dual of effect of individualizing Himes's experience in order to challenge a racially indexed conception of his life and work while also universalizing the anecdote so that it can be read alongside Thompson's life as an American woman trapped in patriarchal European traditions.[80]

Himes's assemblage of autobiographical identities is historically unique in that he maintains the schizoid character of his socio-psychological analysis while fusing together the writerly identities of "our biography" (*My Life* 10). Whereas the psychoanalytic conventions and modernist aesthetics of the early 20th-century would conflate Himes's and Thompson's literary labors into the shared structures of human psychology and the universal applicability of art, Himes's ecology of ideas carefully maintains the

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[80] For more on the indexical approach to African American literature, see Kenneth Warren's *What Was African American Literature*. In their correspondence, Thompson mentioned seeing some passages from *Garden Without Flowers* appear in other works, a practice Himes used not infrequently. While recycling anecdotes can be seen merely as practice of a working writer desperately trying get new works into print, it's interesting to consider the possibility that Himes was intentionally remixing his own work in order to draw out the anecdotes' unexpected resonances.

differences between Thompson and Himes's experiences while forging a supple critical lexicon connecting the shared problems of women and minorities living in a racist, patriarchal society. By juxtaposing the memory of the girl crushed by the wagon and Thompson's struggle with a European social system (one that ignored her husband's infidelities and a legal system that would not let Thompson or her daughters leave that system), Himes signaled both how deeply Thompson's hurts resonated with his own and how his particularized experiences provide an inverted sense of Thompson's embodied experience of gendered abuse. While Himes juxtaposes incidents, he does not subsume the specifics of one in the broad social determinants of the other. This has the effect of keeping an element of the connection's opacity in play, leaving the reader to puzzle over how exactly the tragedies of the crushed girl, traumatized boy, and repressed woman fit together.

Himes's fixation with the taboos against racial and gendered mixing was not just theoretical. In fact, his fixation was largely driven by the rejection of *Garden Without Flowers* by editors for being "not convincingly feminine, although it was a first-person woman's story" (*The Quality* 268). *Garden Without Flowers* was Himes's second attempt at a potentially lucrative genre of commercial fiction, and he thought of the book as an assured best seller.[81] Himes became increasingly frustrated with the growing pile of rejections of the manuscript and was convinced that the rejections were more a reflection on Himes's relationship with Thompson than on the novel they had written together:

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[81] Himes thought of *The Third Generation* as his first highly generic and potentially lucrative bid for a wide audience.

> My publisher, Victor Weybright (my Jewish publishers at World could not stomach the fact I had written this book with this woman and refused it), was in London, and when he found out (I don't know how) that I was living with this woman, he didn't speak to me or answer my letters until I saw him this summer in New York. I tried to submit the book only in her name [Willa Thompson], but word got out in the industry that I had worked on it, and no one would touch it. I got broke with that book [...] I took the $1,000 and sent Willa back to Boston to try to sell the book in her name. But Houghton Mifflin knew about me. Then I came back to New York to try to get Kenneth Littauer to sell the book. In fact, everybody was enthusiastic about the damn book, but they all wished I hadn't written it. (Himes and Williams 26-7)

Himes's suspicions that *Garden Without Flowers* was being rejected on racial grounds led him to invent increasingly elaborate narratives that allowed him to distance himself from the writing while selling the books to publishers. He wrote to Thompson on June 7th, 1955, that he had managed to procure a meeting with the editor at Harper's and had presented himself as a disinterested benefactor, allowing him to praise the novel as "a very moving and delightful unpretentious love story [...that] a really excellent publisher would be more apt to appreciate." He also implied he had met Thompson by chance and only "corresponded intermittently" with her over the past few years (Himes to Willia Thompson, 7 June 1955). Himes then spent the remainder of the letter coaching Thompson on how to corroborate the history he had invented for both of them and how to talk about the novel as if she had written it on her own.

As Himes and Thompson grew romantically apart, their shared manuscript constituted more and more of their relationship. Thompson's letters to Himes, which came after he sent her to America to sell *Garden Without Flowers* and to ease their drifting apart, afford a glimpse into not only how the co-authors used the manuscript to romanticize their past, but also how they negotiated their sexual jealousy and professional anxieties:

> You have told me not to let myself get hurt. I can never read one line of that book [*Garden Without Flowers*] again. [...] Perhaps we put whatever God was in us, into the Silver Altar. Now there is no more God within us, but our sins will be forgiven because of the desire and the actual act of creating, something you, especially, believed deeply in. At all times. But the dream behind the creation is 'in Stücke', little pieces, broken, sharp little pieces, that hurt like hell. (Thompson to Himes, 8/9 May 1955)[82]

Significantly, Thompson's account of "the dream behind the creation" of the novel matches Himes's ambitions for the novel as well as the seedy underside of their work together. *Garden Without Flowers* holds the promise of a best seller and a new type of literary classic, but it is also a nexus of jealousy, power, and paranoia. Thompson accused Himes of infidelity in numerous letters and threatened to burn the manuscript. Himes was paranoid that the novel could not be published because of his sexual involvement with his co-writer. Both authors were concerned the other would steal words, credit, or money for

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[82] Thompson mentions "the God within" several times throughout the letter. In *My Life of Absurdity*, Himes intriguingly alludes to a novel he outlined in 1964, called the *The God in Me*. From Himes's brief synopsis of the novel, it sounds like yet another retelling of his romance with Thompson (283-284).

the novel. But the book finally stands as a document, in Himes's novels and Thompson's letters, of a set of deeply shared and ultimately disappointed potentialities that conceptualized the successful publication of a shared novel as a social legitimation of their relationship, one that would in turn represent a moment of healing for the violence enacted upon them by a racist, patriarchal society. Thompson's use of a spiritual register, the "God within," to refer to "the actual act of creating" significantly elides a reference to the book as a child of miscegenation, a parental conceptualization suggested by Himes's depiction of the co-author's sexual and authorial relations as essentially related. Thompson's letter reiterates how much of their relationship "has gone in[to]" *Garden Without Flowers* and the potential for divine redemption maintained by the possibility of selling a book to a society that would not accept their relationship. Explaining her desire to have her letters destroyed, Thompson writes that "I would not like to have very intense sincere emotions that I have poured out to you, my love in words, used in another book. It didn't matter in the SA [*Silver Altar*], we were hard up for dialogue [...] I know each line that was lifted, also each line of yours. We lived so very intimately together" (ibid). Yet painful as the deterioration of their relationship was, Thompson accuses Himes of several infidelities in the letter, she holds onto something redemptive in the work that they created together. "Once I told you in Eng. That I didn't want to work on the book (after one of many slight misunderstandings) if anything happened to us because of it. It wasn't worth that much to me. But maybe it is worth very much, after all. Because of creation, God forgives one for one's sins" (ibid).

Garden Without Flowers was finally published by the small, progressive Beacon Press, which released works by James Baldwin, Mary Daly and Herbert Marcuse,

virtually assuring a dramatically smaller run than the popular success envisioned by Thompson and Himes. By this time Himes's paranoia about the novel extended to Thompson, and although she spent every letter reassuring him of his claim to the novel, Himes insisted that the meager advance on the novel was paid to Robert Manley, Thompson's lawyer, to be divided evenly between the two writers. This legal agreement and Himes's persistent threats of legal action over royalties and any form of payment to Thompson that did not go through Manley seem to have caused considerable embarrassment to Thompson. Thompson was signed by Thomas Bledsoe as a promising new literary talent only to discover that the book he had been sold was half-written by a known, unsuccessful, and litigious writer. Bledsoe argued that this fact put Thompson in Beacon's debt for the considerable trouble it caused them. Beldsoe's successor became so incensed by the Himes imbroglio that he wrote Thompson, "Tell me what to tell Himes [...] I hate him. He spoils my feeling for all negroes for some reason"[83] (Bledsoe).

The novel was a failure, losing money for Beacon, and Himes was not able to find a European publisher or, as he had hoped, sell the story as a movie or play. In his preface to *The End of a Primitive* Himes wrote that:

> I wrote *The End of a Primitive* in 1953 and 1954 while living with an American white woman in Majorca who had a husband and four daughters far away in Central Europe. I began to write it as a reaction to the American editorial

[83] Beacon Press initially displayed an enthusiasm for Thompson as a fresh new literary talent, signing her to a multi-book deal. Beacon kept Thompson's other books, *When Spring Comes* and *Paris Without Love*, under contract and review between 1957 and 1958. After the negligible sales of *Garden Without Flowers* and the bitterness of the Himes affair, Beacon ultimately decided not to publish either book.

> rejections of the book I had coauthored with this white woman. American editors, knowing I was the coauthor of the book, *The Golden Chalice*, rejected it with such hypocrisy and malice I became furious. They would not publish a book that might have become a bestseller because I coauthored it with an American white woman while living with her and enjoying her sexually, so I decided to write a book about an American black living with a white woman under similar circumstance in New York which would be an affront and challenge to all white American editors.
>
> But strangely enough I was cleansed of envy and hate by writing about white Americans with satire and scorn. And the catharsis was all the more effective because at the same time, I was enjoying the white woman sexually. (*The End* 11)

What does Himes want to achieve with reference to *Garden Without Flowers* in the preface of *The End of a Primitive*? Clearly Himes is angry at the white publishing industry's rejection of his book, and he receives some satisfaction airing his grievances with "all white American editors," but does his provocation only aim to achieve catharsis? While it would be a mistake to downplay the anger of this passage, it would be no better to overlook the preface's energetic hilarity. Once published, this preface sets up an odd aporia. The preface to *The End of a Primitive* is far more sexually detailed in its discussion of interracial relationships than anything that appears in *Garden Without Flowers*. Himes reasons that *Garden Without Flowers* cannot be published because the co-authorship of a novel by a black man and white woman implies a certain kind of sexual relationship. Yet the publication of Himes's accusation, couched as it is in explicit

language of his enjoyment of a white woman, seems to perfomatively undermine his claim that such relationships will not be considered by white publishers for publication, since they agree to publish the details of such a relationship, both in terms of authorial and sexual relations.

Why does Himes consider this gambit important enough to repeat it in *A Case of Rape*, then *The Quality of Hurt*, and again in *My Life of Absurdity*? The answer, in each instance, is that *Garden Without Flowers* allows Himes to explore the imbrication of race and gender within the enabling ecosystem of ideas materialized in and figured through his co-authorship with Thompson. While Himes could publish representations of desire and abuse between white women and African American men, those explicit transgressions of miscegenation taboos reinforced the pornographic preconceptions of dominance and submission, master and slave driving U.S. conceptions of racial and sexual difference. Those preconceptions in turn fed the violence that Himes thought must be the final answer between interracial lovers. Co-authoring a novel with Willa Thompson afforded Himes a unique perspective on the inverted effects of racial prejudice on white women. By detailing the invertability of racism, Himes marks a category of relations wherein any attempt to address race without gender or gender without race is absurd.

Comic book connoisseurs love Jack Kirby. One of comics most prolific artists, Kirby co-created the Marvel Universe, beginning with the co-creation of the Captain America character with writer Joe Simon in 1941. Then, with editor Stan Lee in the ’60s, he co-created such famous heroes as the Fantastic Four, the Incredible Hulk, the X-Men,

Iron Man, Thor, Black Panther, and possibly Spider-Man.[84] Despite this history of co-creation across the Marvel Universe, it is Stan Lee who widely receives credit for its inception. The central tension driving this disparity is the role of authorship in the industrial assemblage of superhero comics. According to Kirby, "If you don't fill in the balloons, they don't give you any credit for writing" (qtd. in Beaty and Woo 50).

In the only academic monograph on Kirby, Charles Hatfield, after deftly sidestepping this issue earlier in the book by arguing that Kirby's blend of staging, drawing, and scenario writing evinces a "narrative art" unique to the authorial art-work of comic artists, returns to the question of the Lee-Kirby relationship in a section on "The Trouble with Authorship." Hatfield notes that Marvel's corporate structure create the "*enabling* conditions" (Hatfield's emphasis) of the Lee-Kirby collaboration, "mak[ing] impossible any simple assignment of creative credit to Kirby's or anyone else's single authorship" (81). Hatfield calls Kirby-Lee "a collaborative process that was, perhaps, not truly collaborative (in the sense of knowingly sharing work)" (87).[85] Hatfield's judiciously concludes that:

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[84] For more on Kirby's claim as the creator of Spider-Man, see Howe, Sean. *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*. First Edition. Harper Perennial, 2013. Print. pg 262

[85] Hatfield more or less seems to credit Kirby as the creative force behind this Marvel renaissance, it is a monograph on Kirby after all. But the thorough, if at times subtly depreciating, creative and administrative attribution assigned to Lee is suggestive. Hatfield calls Lee variously the plotter, editor, "nominal 'writer'" (91), scripter, and especially promoter of these works. In the context of Barthes comments on authorship and hyper-text, an argument could generously be made, then, that Lee is the modern "author" par excellence, as he's equally if not more engaged in media interviews, campus visits, celebrity associations,

> What all this means is that the notion of *authorship*, in the elevated Romantic sense of undiluted individual creation, is almost impossible to apply to the earliest of the Marvel superhero comics. This does not mean there were no authors, just that authorship was multiple and the traces of individual contributions are so mingled and confused that readers will be forever chasing the question. (93)

Even in this nuanced case for shared authorship, their collaboration "was a relay, not a duet" (98), which Hatfield uses to clarify that their collaboration was asymmetrical and often worked from the contested aesthetics, meanings, and at times even unsynced story lines that were forced onto and puzzled over as a one "unified" page.

How do these debates in comics journalism and criticism distort when they come into contact with literary institutions that insist on the primacy of a particular kind of author? Literary scholarship on comics has largely sidestepped the issue of multiple, non-discursive authors by focusing on single-authored texts (a comic written, drawn, inked, colored, and lettered by one person) such as Art Spiegleman's *Maus*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis,* and Allison Bechdel's *Fun Home*. British invasion writers like Alan Moore or Neil Gaiman whose frequent recourse to literary allusions and structures, text-heavy narratives, success or prestige in more classically-defined literary fields (children's literature, novels), and marketing as superstar authors of collaborative texts, also mark this group for easier integration into traditional paradigms of literary scholarship.[86] The

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Hollywood pitches, with the hyper-text, the discussion around the text, as he is with the scenarios of and word balloons of the comic texts.

[86] Beaty and Woo provide statistical data to show creators as the subject of scholarly writing to the exclusion of almost all other comic texts. See especially Beaty and Woo 7-8.

case of Kirby is especially interesting in this regard because even in a rigorously scholarly monograph such as Hatfield's, Kirby serves as a kind of Trojan horse to undermine any kind Romantic sense of an author or auteur, all the while winking at the knowing audience about the identity of the auteur who can't be named as such, Kirby. This is why Kirby, rather than equally unjustly treated creators such as Siegel and Shuster, the creators of Superman, who probably have a better claim on legal and literary definitions of authoring their creation, are now the paradigm curatorial projects on comic authors.[87] In other words, in order to make a claim for Kirby's authorship, one must attack the logocentrism of the author, and the related dismissal of books and authors of picture books. In effect, this critique does not do away with the author (yet again), but expands whom an author is and what it is they can do.

A recent issue of the *Journal of Modern Literature* illustrates the odd force this literary insistence on authorial authority still holds on literary scholarship.[88] *JML* hosted a cluster of articles on comic books organized by the theme of literary "modernism's wretched Other" (Ayers 111). Intriguingly, the three longer articles comprising this cluster each use competing theories of authorship to thematically connect canonical modernist texts with comic books; at the same time, they emphasize the differences between the creative practices of the two genres so as to offer comics as useful theoretical tools for reinvigorating stale cannons and critical methodologies. For Andrew Hoberek,

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[87] For more on Siegel and Shuster and the long legal dispute over Superman Ian Gordon's chapter "Production, Authorship, and Ownership."

[88] According to Christy Mag Uidhir, "*What it is to author a comic* should have everything to do with *what it is to be a comic*" (Uidhir 49, italics in original). See Uidhir, "Comics and Collective Authorship."

David Ball, and Jackson Ayers, politically dubious models of modernist authorship are negatively defined against the "transindividualistic vehicle[s] for representing the world" such as film, radio, newspapers, and early comic books that celebrate and are supported by the welfare state and intellectual commons (Hoberek 123). But the authorial dialectic between the individual works of Faulkner and Pound and the transindividual works of Simon and Shuster are tragically resolved by corporate authorship, a collective labor owned by a single creative agent. Ayers's reading of corporate authorship provides an important check for theories of writing and mind that celebrate collaborative writing as an end in itself. Stan Lee's claim that, "A lot of people put something together, and nobody knows who really created it," may look like a positive account of transindividualistic, multi-mind creativity (qtd. in Howe 431). However, it carefully conceals the corporate interests that widely distribute labor credit in order to retain legal and financial control.

Perhaps the way for these essays to open a theoretical and political path past the tired methodologies and corporately advantageous notions of authorship is not to set up oppositions between canonical literary modernists like Joyce, Pound, Faulkner and comics, but rather to put Simon and Shuster, Kirby and Lee, Moore and O'Neill into conversation with prose collaborators such as Himes and Thompson. Himes, who discussed with Pablo Picasso the possibility of their creating a comic together, was similarly ostracized from his literary labor because of his collaborative work with Thompson. As a reaction, Himes extensively theorized the political potential and limitations of co-authorship. Considering the transindividual work of comic production in

relation to Himes's writing with Thompson and on the subject of co-authorship will uniquely enable both texts to interrogate the individualist presumptions of authorship.

Himes's writing on co-authorship is particularly generative in relation to Aline Kominsky-Crumb's collaborative work with Robert Crumb. In both cases, relatively well-known male writers collaborate with their female partners. These collaborations require significant stylistic shifts to incorporate or wholesale adopt female perspectives, interrogating the gendered assumptions of the work that first made the male authors famous. This change in style leads to difficulty publishing or angry fan responses to the collaborative work, suggesting how audiences demand and publishers cater to narrowly defined categories of racial and gendered authenticity reiterated throughout these authors' ostensibly iconoclastic oeuvres. Kominsky-Crumb shares with Himes a sense of the generatively messy and proliferating conjunctions allowed in collaborative work, while still maintaining a distinct visual identity.

Robert Crumb is the creator most associated with the underground comix movement of the 1960s. Responding to the comic book industry's broad accessions to the censorious comics code in the 1950s—a restriction on any depiction of violence, sexuality, or moral ambiguity in comic books—Crumb's comics abandoned traditional publishers and distribution channels in order to publish work depicting explicit sex, violence, and the violation of a wide range of social taboos. Crumb's remarkable pencil work has led to a great deal of interest in Crumb in the fine art world, an interest no other comic artist enjoys to the same degree (Beaty and Woo 36-38). Literary institutions, however, have not been quick to follow the lead of the fine arts. According to Beaty and Woo:

> The interpretive strategies that are dominant in humanistic studies of culture are confounded by the deeply troubling content of much of Crumb's work […] The content of much of his oeuvre proves intensely troubling: Crumb isn't simply not-feminist but his work is antifeminist to the point that it has been widely condemned for its misogyny. Themes of sexualized violence run rampant within Crumb's comics, where rape and incest are commonly foregrounded. (Beaty and Woo 30-32).

Crumb's work threatens to overwhelm readers with disturbing images and the need to figure out how and why Crumb exercises such imagery; as a result, the difficulty of engaging Crumb's work cannot be overstated. In explaining the case of why Crumb is not taken up by "humanistic studies," Woo and Beaty deemphasize the work Hillary Chute has done on *Drawn Together,* the comic the husband and wife team collaborated on from the late '70s through the '00s. While Chute's scholarship focuses on Aline Kominsky-Crumb, her long, excellent monograph chapter on Kominsky makes several extended references to Crumb as well as to *Drawn Together*. Additionally, Chute featured Crumb in and on the cover of a special comics issue of *Critical Inquiry*, probably the most visible instance of the formation of a comics canon in literature departments. Chute's laudatory writing on Kominsky-Crumb claims that she is a "pioneering—if underrecognized—figure in the broad world of feminist visual culture" as well as the "'godmother' or at least the central pioneer of women's comics autobiography" (Chute 30, 34). Critical responses to the sexuality depicted in Kominsky's work represent "possibly *the* defining example of this double standard at work" in comparison to reactions to her husband's offensive work (Chute 31).

Drawn Together is a collected book of comics written by Robert and Aline. What makes these comics particularly interesting in the context of coauthorship and an ecology of mind, however, is their uniquely collaborative process of drawing, wherein each spouse draws themselves (see Figure 2.1). The extreme contrast between Robert's superlative draftsmanship, rooted in a deep knowledge of comic tradition, and Kominsky's deliberatively simplified drawings. Rooted in a fine arts background self-consciously plays with reader preconceptions of bad drawing/ outsider art, or, more accurately, bad cartooning (such as violating continuity by changing outfits or body types between panels). Kominsky-Crumb's stylistic challenges to reader expectations have drawn vitriolic response from a section of Robert's fan base.[89]

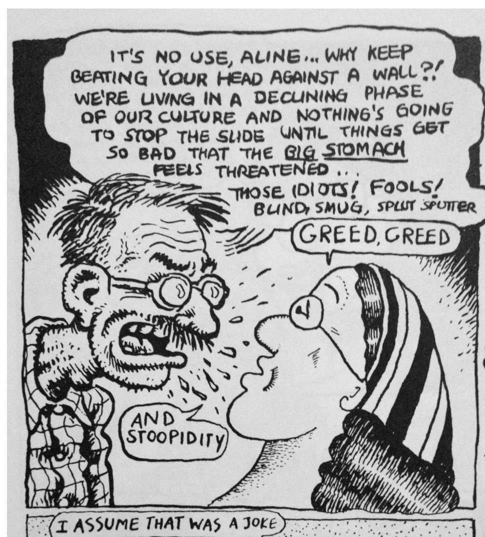

Figure 2.1 Robert and Aline in *Drawn Together*

Source: Crumb, Aline and Robert Crumb. *Drawn Together*. New York: Liverwright Publishing Corporation, 2012. Print.

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[89] I saw it on some Internet commentary after some article came out about our book. It called me a 'talentless parasite.'" (O'Connor) Kominsky-Crumb also recounts this comment in the preface of *Drawn Together*.

At a narrative level, this comic book collaboration contains troubling content comparable to that of Crumb's solo books. But Chute argues that those that see Crumb "doing the work of objectification is gendered and misguided, denying Kominsky-Crumb agency even in her own public act of self-representation" (Chute 51). While I agree with Chute that Kominsky-Crumb maintains the more compelling, even commanding presence in the book, there's something disconcerting about how neatly Kominsky's "self-representation" conforms to the real and representational fetishes Beaty and Woo claim are "widely condemned for its misogyny."[90] Trying to make sense of the jarring juxtapositions between the frequently violent sex, the loving marriage, and Kominsky's feminist self-portrayal, Joseph Witek makes a strong distinction between the "narrative ethos" of caricature in the comic illustrations and the separate traditions of cartooning. He insists that *Dirty Laundry* must be the former, "allow[ing] the couple's volatile interactions to become visual slapstick; [because] in the naturalistic mode their passion would be simply terrifying" (Witek 30). Witek attempts to categorically explain away that the depicted relationship can, at times, be pretty terrifying. And the couple seems to get off on drawing and engaging in those frightening behaviors.[91]

The lines that separate exploitation and empowering self-representation in *Drawn Together* remain difficult to draw. Crumb now serves as a litmus test in the comics

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[90] In an interview with *The Comics Journal*, Kominsky-Crumb discussed other ways Crumb's comics affected her real life (dressing like the characters he drew) and aesthetic (naming her comic avatar "Bunch" after a Crumb character that shared her name before she met Crumb).

[91] In the words of Silvan Tomkins, "If you like to be sucked or bitten and I like to suck or bite you, we may enjoy each other" (Tomkins 227).

community: that is, "Crumb" functions as code word that delineates a contested field of issues that span the politics of representation and questions of aesthetics. To defend, criticize, or altogether ignore Crumb is to draw often confusing lines across Crumb's influential aesthetic,[92] his role in the "great man" histories of the comics canon,[93] and his often outrageous public persona.[94] By focusing on Crumb's more politically defensible work as I do here—namely his long collaboration with and promotion of his fiercely feminist partner—I worry that I provide ideological cover for works and a public persona often viewed as misogynist and racist. The same worry applies to Himes, who "confesses" in his memoir to domestic abuse and often writes in troubling ways about sexual assault. Do Himes's and Crumb's collaborations with Thompson and Kominsky-Crumb, respectively, suggest a feminist valence to their work, a change in the trajectory of their career made possible through a mind-expanding collaboration? Or, is this simply the disingenuous tokenism that politicians use to provide cover for defunding and outlawing women's health services in the vein of, "I don't hate women: I have a mother, wife, and daughter"? By using the critical apparatus of an ecology of ideas, how can we write about the flourishing of an artist like Kominsky-Crumb without a) once again

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[92] Big feet, detailed pencil work, cartoony figures, dense cross-hatching.

[93] Specifically, Crumb's pairing of shocking content with classic cartooning aesthetics, which serves as an important conceptual link between funny animal comics, EC, and classic newspaper strips and both the post 60s underground comix and the "literary" autobiographical schools of comics.

[94] See Kim O'Connor's "r. crumb is a sexual predator." O'Connor's argument is especially compelling in the implication of Gary Groth, Crumb's publisher and the editor/ publisher of the most influential journal of independent comics criticism *The Comics Journal*, with "whitewash[ing]" Crumb's statements on nonconsensual sexual contact.

valorizing the sexist milieu of underground comix in which her ideas flourished, or b) treating Kominsky-Crumb as an isolated genius (the great man theory of art accommodating token women and minorities) that succeeded in a vacuum of enabling influences?[95] The spinning wheels of normative binaries—misogynist/ feminist and hegemony/ resistance—prove to be particularly unhelpful. Both poles resonate in these works, and it is this both-ness that I think Crumb-Kominsky-Crumb and Himes-Thompson assist by articulating and insisting on a critical vocabulary that maintains their messy and proliferating conjunctions.

A slew of famous collaborations between superstar fine artists and their partners exist, collaborations for which the male stars take most of the credit (Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner). Some more equitable collaborations exist, like those between children's story artists (Leo and Diane Dillon, Mary and Lee Blair).[96] When it comes to the relatively equitable success of coauthors/ illustrators in children's art (animation, picture books), shared attribution of acclaim is due in part to the fact that collaboration is the norm in these commercial forms. Ironically, the academic and popular criticism that has so vigorously worked to recognize corporately-

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[95] B) offers a meaningful alternative explanation to pursue, as Kominsky-Crumb was initially a part of the Wimmen's Comix collective and after breaking with that group published a comic with Diane Noomin, and then encouraged the next generation of artists with her editorial work on *Weirdo*.

[96] The Dillons represent an interesting bridge case between Himes-Thompson and Kominsky-Crumb. An interracial couple that began collaborating just slightly after Himes-Thompson, the Dillon's acclaimed illustration career was a rare collaboration where both partners shared the drawing, rather than dividing the labor of writing and drawing. The failing *New York Times* described their illustration work as "a seamless amalgam of both their hands" (Fox).

glossed art (as with Kirby's work) has ignored or downplayed the contributions of women coauthors such as Thompson and Kominsky-Crumb. At the same time, this criticism seeks to recuperate or recover the reputations of previously-ignored writers such as Himes or Crumb. This tendency to efface the work of women coauthors has proved particularly problematic for film scholarship: auteur theory played up the genius of directors like Peter Bogdanovich at the expense of his partner Polly Platt, for example, and it marginalized the collaborative work of Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville.

The feminist reconsideration of the collaboration between Godard and Miéville is particularly helpful to figuring out how to account for Kominsky-Crumb's collaborative work with Robert Crumb without falling into the traps described above. Godard's "aggressive challenge to authorship" was triggered by the same May of 1968 events that inspired Foucault and Barthes's paradigm-shifting essays on authorship (White 11). In his monograph on Godard's collaboration with Miéville, Jerry White notes that "there is little question that part of the story of Godard's collaboration with Miéville is the story of him becoming more interesting when it comes to representations of gender" (16). White cites Laura Mulvey's essays on Godard's evolution towards gender; his study traces the evolution of [Godard's] political "triads." In the 1960s, the triad was "'cinema, the woman's body, consumer society'; in the 1970s, it was '[t]he cinema, the body, the factory'; in the 1980s, it becomes 'cinema, the woman's body, 'nature'" (Mulvey quot. in White 16). While working through these vectors of representation, Godard and Miéville engage in a "[d]isruption of realist form via unconventional sound-image relationships" to disrupt the heteronormative gaze at the heart of classic Hollywood's cinematography and framing (White 18). Since movies seem otherwise inadequate to show woman as

subjects (rather than always and only objects of desire), Miéville and Godard's separation of sound and image "enunciates a commitment to difference, very much including sexual difference" that is otherwise difficult (or impossible) to achieve through diegetic tinkering within the confines of forms that uniformly reject any but heterosexual, male desire (White 18).

Mulvey's insistence that Godard's theory of gender is always triangulated with other vectors of meaning, and White's emphases on the how gender can be differentially enunciated through the formal terms of sight and sound, are reminiscent of the oft-conjoined registers of race and gender Himes articulates in his absurdist literature on inverted racism. It was Camus, of course, that Himes turned to for his definition of racial absurdity. Camus suggests, according to James Wood, that "in an effort to outwit the absurd, we might live various roles: as writer, as conqueror, as seducer, as actor" (Wood, Kindle Location 243). Kominky-Crumb also invokes absurdity when she describes the life she co-authored with Robert: "[O]ur relationship is based on a mutual acceptance of the cosmic absurdity and tragedy of life, and we have no false sentimental illusions that conflict with openly drawing our weirdest thoughts about ourselves and our little lives" (qtd. in Witek 41). In co-authoring, Himes and Kominsky-Crumb lived the various, contradictory roles that, for Camus, marked the absurd. Something uniquely enabling about each artist's relationship with a coauthor inspired them to continue exploring otherwise painful aspects of their life through their work. Their collaborations with writers that, in some ways, appeared to deeply challenge their identities, inspired a search for and cultivation of an ecosystem of ideas that gives space for a diverse range of work and identities, however absurd.

It is important to keep in mind that Himes's absurdist theory of inverted racism was largely a failure, a historical missed opportunity. *Garden Without Flowers* could not be published under both of the authors' names, and the book itself sold poorly. Further, most of the writing about the collaboration of the book comes from Himes—with the exception of the rather paranoid correspondence between Himes and Thompson—wherein the authors tried to publish their work together and at the same time navigate the end of their romantic relationship. For Himes, inverted racism, or the recognition of a mutual source of suffering between black men and white women, was an important conceptual breakthrough. Perhaps he found their shared suffering particularly painful; perhaps he found his relationship with Thompson simply generated more words. Regardless, Himes fetishistically returned to the generative possibilities of their work together. Despite the centrality of Thompson's contributions, commentary on the process of the pair's coauthorship remains predominately within Himes's fiction and memoirs, and it reads as one person's idealization rather than the shared work of coauthors. Moreover, Himes's contemporaries largely ignored these fictions, and his collaboration with Thompson continues to be ignored by scholars (perhaps willfully given the recent uptick of critical interest in Himes and the traumatic recurrence of Himes's references to he and Thompson's collaboration).

In contrast, *Drawn Together* shows a collaboration that stretches over thirty-six years. The low number of sales necessary to define an independent comic book as a success contributed in part to the length of this collaboration; further, Robert's success supported the pair's lifestyle together and provided Kominsky-Crumb a platform in which her own style could endure. Far from casting aspersions onto Himes and

Thompson's collaboration, I intend to highlight the Crumbs' relative success to make clear how each partner contributed extensively to the work of *Drawn Together*. Unlike the uncertain contributions of each coauthor in the Himes-Thompson partnership—most distinctions being effaced through revisions, editing, and the impersonal quality of printed words—Kominsky-Crumb repeatedly insists on difference in her markedly unique contributions to the Crumbs' work together.

Figure 2.2 (left) Kominsky-Crumb's shifting outfits in *Drawn Together*;

Figure 2.3 (right) Kominsky-Crumb's changing faces in *Drawn Together*

Source: Crumb, Aline and Robert Crumb. *Drawn Together*. New York: Liverwright Publishing Corporation, 2012. Print.

Kominsky-Crumb's work in *Drawn Together* refuses to be fully integrated into the style or politics of Crumb's underground comix. As shown in Figures 2.2 and 2.3 (taken from a single, two-page spread), it's nearly impossible to sort Kominsky-Crumb's self-representation into a single aesthetic style from panel to panel, much less across thirty-

plus years of work. “What about continuity?” Robert asks in Figure 2.3 (197). In Kominsky-Crumb’s *Drawn Together* art, there is very little. While her varied style of self-representation may frustrate narrative-minded readers (a hallmark of comix), it’s nevertheless delightful to see Kominsky-Crumb continuously refashion herself in juxtaposition to Crumb’s character and background illustrations.

The juxtaposition between figure and background may well represent Kominsky-Crumb’s unique contribution to the form. In all of her various self-presentations, she works as a naïve or outsider artist, defined as outside the norms of mass and artistic culture. A niche for art brut, or “raw art,” existed in the underground, most notably in the work of Rory Hayes. Even so, outsider work was often celebrated for the totality of its vision: crude figures, detailed, often psychedelic backgrounds, and odd narrative patterns. These features were central to Kominsky-Crumb’s solo work, including *The Bunch’s Power Pak Comics* number 2 (Figure 2.4). Here, a more complete representation of Kominsky-Crumb’s aesthetic emerges: she balances her crude character drawings with dense, geometrical backgrounds, whimsical cats, and a more coherent and emotionally complex narrative than that found in Kominsky-Crumb’s work with Robert. In contradistinction to this fully fleshed-out outsider aesthetic, Kominsky-Crumb becomes a “visual alien” in her own (co)autobiography when juxtaposed against Crumb’s detailed, consistent, and somewhat realistic backgrounds.[97] Such visual alienation becomes

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[97] Jeet Heer defines visual aliens as “characters who are drawn in an incongruous style (either in relation to the background or other characters). Cerebus is a classic visual alien; so are the pretty girls in McManus’ *Bringing Up Father* and Sterrett’s *Polly and Her Pals*, who have a glamorous look that sets them apart from the other characters, who tend to be more cartoony and grotesque. Racial stereotypes are often visual

perceptible in the stylistic contrast between Figures 2.2 and 2.3. Significantly, in the first panel of Figure 2.3, Kominsky-Crumb simply copies a picture of her face against the backdrop of Crumb's record collection. With this collage effect, Crumb himself becomes a part of the collection, a background or milieu in which Kominsky-Crumb is juxtaposed, a completely separate element pasted atop an otherwise unrelated element. Likewise, in the second panel of Figure 2.3, Kominsky-Crumb's face appears as flat and two-dimensional—an aesthetic that is perhaps most representative of her decades-long self-presentation in these comics—against the background of Crumb drawing. In this context, Kominsky-Crumb draws not so much as an outsider writ-large; instead, her drawing presents her as "outside" of this particular mode of representation, outside of the fiction she both inhabits and authors.

Figure 2.4 Kominsky-Crumb's flat style in *The Bunch's Power Pak Comics*

Source: Kominsky, Aline. *The Bunch's Power Pak Comics*. Princeton, Wis.: Kitchen Sink Enterprises, 1979. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library. Print.

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aliens, drawn on a different register from other characters: compare Ebony White to the Spirit or Ellen Dolan."

There are real stakes in this foreignness, as it is within her own life story that Kominsky-Crumb has become alien. What strikes me as particularly alien about Kominsky's presence in these comix is not so much the raw, simplified art style she has adopted. To return to Figure 2.1, we might ask: what emotion does Robert display? Side vein popping, eyebrows pointed up in a V-shape, brow furrowed, lip curled back and up, posture leaning over Aline Kominsky-Crumb: these details clearly show a state of agitated anger. To contrast, what is Aline feeling in Figure 2.1? In Figure 2.2? In Figure 2.3? I'm not sure. More often than not in *Drawn Together*, Aline's expression is opaque. This is not necessarily characteristic of the outsider style, which is in fact often termed "crude" because of its overwrought emotions. Moreover, emotions can easily be displayed through austere lines or in a flat style. In short, Kominsky-Crumb can clearly evoke feeling visually (see the worry/distress in Figure 2.4). In fact, it's arguably more difficult to consistently maintain such irony in faces drawn in such a variety of styles (Figures 2.2 and 2.3). A key question emerges, then: why does Aline Kominsky-Crumb remain so conspicuously stone-faced in much of *Drawn Together*?

Kominsky-Crumb's lack of facial affect participates in what Katherine Behar has compelling termed the "botox ethics" of Objected-Oriented Feminism. Behar argues that the nonhuman turn (OOO, new materialism, Actor-Network Theory, ecology of ideas, and so forth) undermines its own interest in nonhuman objects by an overwhelming interest in a small subset of objects that are "lively" or "informatic" (Behar 125). In this version of ecocritical theory, rather than critiquing the anthropocentricism that claims thinking subjects as worthy of attention, "Objects represent this change from a subject that thinks, and therefore *is*, to an informatics self that *is* in connection" (126, emphasis

original). In other words, the human self has not been displaced from the center of critical theory, but has rather been replaced by the "networked individual" of neoliberalism, which itself has already displaced the individual in favor of data points in massively compiled units of information (Behar 126). Even though Object-Oriented Ontology explicitly rejects the vivo-centrism of informatic-objects that "make a difference" or influence other objects, writers influenced by this school of thought nevertheless tend towards such objects. After all, simply pointing at lifeless objects and asserting their being without making reference to any articulable affect those objects have on the world would not widely be considered a compelling argument (thus the problem of thinking like a mountain).

Behar draws on a tradition of performative feminist body artists who stymy such explications between objects and vitality. These artists paint or surgically enhance their bodies to draw attention to the eroticized female body and the way art history premediates the female form as a sculptable and possessable object. In contrast to these always available, possessable forms, the artists of Behar's interest reconstruct their bodies to exhibit a "newfound inhospitality" in which the self is represented as lifeless. In this way, the artists resist anthropomorphism as well as the neo-liberalism that lingers in critiques of anthropomorphic philosophies. Behar quotes Catherine Malabou's work on plasticity: "Self-fashioning implies at once the elaboration of a form, a face, a figure, and the effacement of another form, another face, another figure" (Malabou qtd. in Behar 130). The feminist act of self-fashioning is the product of "placing the body-self-object in the artwork as a 'preloaded' culturally determined signifier" (Behar 132). The body artists of Behar's study maintain a commitment to immanence, using what is at hand

rather than pursing an ideal beyond where they are. Yet, creating the space of oneself by using tools of the environment does not entail identifying oneself as thoroughly networked being. As Rebekah Sheldon reminds us, the insistence on an idealist, networked self rather than a situated immanence can be seen in misunderstood applications of Haraway's cyborg figure. Sheldon suggests that, "Haraway is careful to remind us that the promise of the cyborg lies not in some abstract liberation or original plenitude but in the encroaching formation it allows us to see. It is premised by the supposition that if we want to do social justice work, we can't wish away our episteme; we must instead meet it head on and inside of its logic" (Sheldon).[98] Occupying readymade forms in order to allow others to recognize preexisting social object relations does not necessitate an "other directed" self-presentation that requires an endlessly flexible subjectivity (Behar 138). Instead, Behar looks at Botox as an everyday form of bodily sculpting that removes the signifying lines from the face, the center of our communicative apparatus. "The face records and communicates its archive of experience, which Botox erases and censors. The face expresses, Botox represses […] In its roles as an inhibitor, Botox represses the outering, the other-directness of the informatic self that is in connection" (Behar 136). These acts of self-fashioning draw from and make visible both the enabling and the toxic aspects of their environment.

It may be somewhat counterintuitive to consider Kominsky-Crumb as not other-directed: she typically presents herself as the physical, hyper-social, often petty foil to

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[98] Or as Behar puts it, "Donna Haraway argues that 'feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges'* […] objected oriented ontologies should be limited to—or delimited by—the personal viewpoint I have when the object I am is 'quite simply situated' in being only me" (Behar 127).

Crumb's abstract, anti-social, introspection.[99] Yet, Kominsky-Crumb is the "visual alien" within her own co-memoir. *Drawn Together* is, in many ways, Robert's world; so, too, is a wide swath of alternative comics history and criticism. It would also be disingenuous to say that Kominsky-Crumb does anything but flourish in that apparently inhospitable world, to the point where it also becomes Kominsky-Crumb's world. That's the thing about ecology: to be is to be a part of, which also means that to be is to make the thing that one is a part of and makes oneself. Unlike the dull fictions of critical theory, a consideration of ecology means that good or bad paradigms are not suddenly negated by a new or opposing presence; rather, there occurs only subtle adjustments according to the relatively incremental flourishing or diminishment of one's being. Rather than resisting or enabling, Komisnky-Crumb's collaboration with Crumb is an act of bricolage. She takes and inhabits the bits of Crumb's aesthetic world that work; she also insists, through the expressive lines that compose an emotionally inexpressive face, on difference. Behar concludes that, as regards this anti-social difference, "What we are left with when we stop communicating is ourselves, the missing 'me' that, as object, provides our only ontological orientation" (139). Kominsky-Crumb's powerful feminist revision of underground comix occupies Crumb's Bunch character with a missing me. Further, Komnisky-Crumb's insistence on conspicuous, irreducible difference, in both her art brut style and affectless face that refuses to communicate any single expression of gender, proves a substantive hurdle for corporate collaborations that attempt to collapse the differences between individual collaborators in order to profit from a singular style (ala Marvel). Unlike Himes and Thompson's collaboration, Kominsky-Crumb and Crumb

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[99] See, for instance, *Drawn Together* pp. 203.

drew clean lines of difference. By non-dialectically refusing to resolve the tensions between their art worlds—that is, the Crumbs' ability to exist alongside rather than communicate through each other—the demarcated labors of the Crumbs show why they were so strongly drawn together.

Chapter 3: Ghostly Tears for Litterbugs:

Respectability and Scapegoating in the Affective Economies of Litter

Figure 3.1 (left) Littered streets in *Fast Willie Jackson*;

Figure 3.2 (right) Clean streets in *Fast Willie Jackson*

Source: Fitzgerald, Bertram A., and Gus Lemoine. *Fast Willie Jackson*. No. 1. New York, N.Y.: Fitzgerald Periodicals, Incorporated, Oct. 1976. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library. Print.

What are we seeing here? The images above are the first and last pages of the first story in the first issue of the 1976 comic *Fast Willie Jackson*. The first panel is littered with diegetic and formal tensions. A burly, white police officer, baton raised with a suggestion of violence, points to a sidewalk covered with trash. Officer Flagg, or "the man" as he's referred to on the page introducing the comic's principle characters, singles

out a young African American man, the eponymous Willie, as responsible for the mess. Flagg threatens Willie with arrest for the legal violation of "littering," a conflict reinforced by formal incongruities of the panel. Black faces are superimposed on the lily-white character art of *Archie* comics, and trash clutters the clean lines and monochromatic design space (a chunk of green for lawns, a patch of gray for streets) typical of the kids' comics.[100] While the black characters in otherwise white genres of comics would have been quickly legible to comics readers first seeing *Fast Willie* on newsstands through ham-fisted attempts by the likes of Marvel comics to add African-American sidekicks to more established superheroes (as in 1969's *The Falcon*) or cash in on blacksploitation films (such as 1972's *Luke Cage*), it is the presence of litter that may have more fundamentally undermined *Fast Willie*'s *Archie*-vibe. As would become apparent in the wave of revisionist superhero tales set in gritty city spaces, clutter, trash, and filth signify an adult-oriented "realism" at odds with the clean lines, humor, and bedrooms of children in teen-romance stories. Not surprisingly, form dictates narrative: since Officer Flagg is a hapless authority figure in an *Archie*-adjacent universe (*not* the terrifying, militarized gang force of the 1970s NYPD), hijinks ensue.

Dee Dee Wilson wants one of the "cool dudes" in the first panel to buy her a soda. Willie: "Oh heck, Dee Dee, I just thought you were into women's lib." Dee follows up with, "I'm not **that** liberated! Huhmp!" Cue the Norman Lear laugh track. In the *Fast Willie*-verse, the characters' politics are all similarly myopic, like when Jabar, the comic's voice of black power, yells to Dee that "you're **prejudiced…Just like all girls!**"

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[100] *Fast Willie Jackson* was drawn by prolific *Archie* artist Gus Lemoine after his idea to introduce ethnically diverse characters into the *Archie* books was rejected by publishers (Foster 210-11).

The joke is visual, again playing on the incongruity of style and substance: men in dashikis still patronizingly dismiss women, women in bell bottoms and afros still want to be provided for by men. In spite of race and politics, they're still *Archie* characters, a point I'll return to. In the soda shop, standing in front of a "No Credit" sign, neighborhood café owner José says no sodas until he sees that the teenagers have money. Willy wonders why José doesn't trust them. José declares, "Oh, no! It's nothing like that! It's just that I like numbers! When I was in the army I was a number." No time to parse what José's "like that" signifies, to contemplate his transformation into a number by the military, or to follow up on how favorable loans to veterans enabled him to purchase a business in a predominantly black neighborhood. Willie wants to show off his five dollar bill, but he pulls up only pocket lining. Willie wonders where the precious money went. He realizes: "The gum wrapper on the sidewalk!"

This discovery brings us to the final page in the story (Figure 3.2). Officer Flagg treats the gang picking up litter with the same paranoid, official gaze that he used when Willie dropped the gum wrapper/ fiver. Willie translates the hijinks described above into the officious language of order, declaring, "We're just trying to keep the city clean!" Sure enough, in the last panel one of the formal tensions between art style and content has been resolved: the street is shown as entirely cleared of litter. The real tensions of police abuse, poverty, and sexism have been resolved into uncluttered unreality where everything goes where it belongs. In this case, litter on the sidewalk becomes trash in the conveniently located receptacle on the corner.

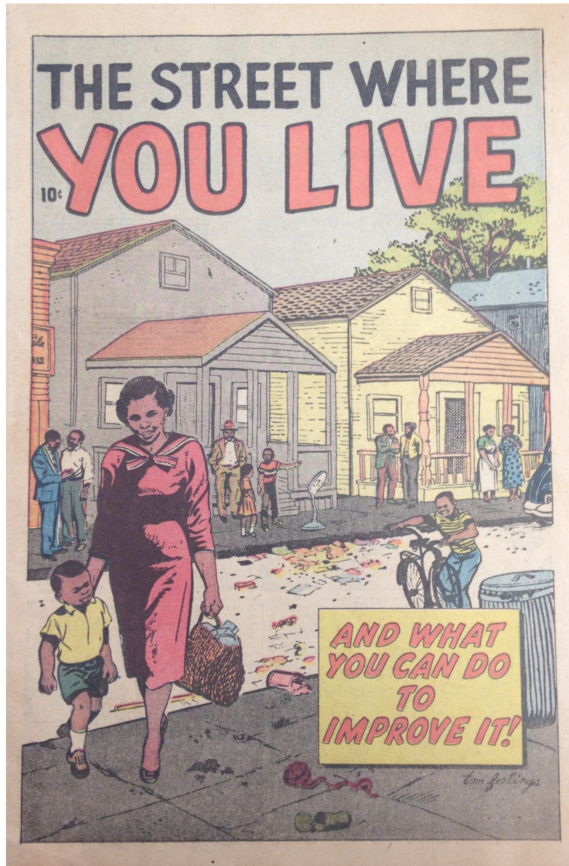

Figure 3.3 (left) Littered neighborhood in *The Street Where You Live*;

Figure 3.4 (top right) Pointing to litter in *The Street Where You Live*;

Figure 3.5 (bottom right) Cleaned up streets in *The Street Where You Live*

Source: Feelings, Tom. *The Street Where You Live: And What You Can Do to Improve It!* New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1960. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library. Print.

Compare this movement from litter'd to clean streets to a similar transition found in an educational comic drawn by Tom Feelings for the NAACP in the 1960s.[101] Along

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[101] Comics historian Tom Christopher has a short biography of Feelings on his website, situating Feelings comic book work within his larger career as an acclaimed illustrator and children's book author. For an idea of the production and circulation of educational comics within the Civil Rights movement, see Andrew

with the NAACP's 1964 comic *Your Future Rests in Your Hands*, Feelings' *The Street Where You Live* was created to disseminate information on voter registration embedded in a narrative that illustrates the need and potential benefit of voting. Sadly, the pedantic ends of the comic curtail much in the way of hijinks. Mainly, an earnest-looking Block Leader named Sam Carter convinces a group of neighborhood men that are outraged-apparently because children skin their knees almost daily on broken sidewalks and accumulated detritus-that they can change their neighborhood by collectively registering and voting. The rest of the comic is by and large dedicated to Sam teaching seminars and reporting back to NAACP board meetings. The problem—litter filled streets (Figures 1 and 3)—and the resolution (Figures 2 and 5) of both comics are remarkably similar. But the source of the dramatic conflict has significantly changed. According to Carter, even if the neighborhood cannot elect their own candidate, they can command an audience from a representative once their collective voice is heard from the polls. Sure enough, City Commissioner candidate Jeff Thompson comes to the neighborhood to ask for their vote and is surprised not so much by the squalor as by the dissatisfaction the community expresses. As seen in Figure 4, the father of the child hurt by the street refuse in the comics first panel confronts the politician, "Look at that litter there," the father demands in the next panel, "look at the holes in the pavement--would **you** want to live on a street like this Mr. Thompson?"

Aydin's master's thesis on *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery*, a portion of which has published on *Creative Loafing* (see works cited). Aydin would use his research to co-create the *March* trilogy with John Lewis and Nate Powell.

Functionally, the results of both comics are the same: the dirty streets are cleaned. But the responsibility for maintaining that cleanliness seems to shift from the local government in *The Street Where You Live* (1960) to the individual in *Fast Willie Jackson* (1976). But that doesn't really answer the question that opened this chapter, namely, what are we seeing in the panels above? Items are strewn across the streets. These include containers of various sorts: cans, bottles, boxes, wrapping paper. Our eyes are drawn to the trash in the scene, the characters literally pointing out these objects in Figures 3.1 through 3.4. We don't pause to reflect on the items individually, as either commodities or objects worthy of our attention, yet the items' odd visual individuation, their drawn resistance to being collected in a heap, makes me reluctant to call the items *trash*. Referring to a specific assemblage of objects encountered on a Baltimore sidewalk (in her initial description, she arranges the names of these items across her page like a poem), Jane Bennett reflects:

> Glove, pollen, rat, [bottle] cap, stick. As I encountered these items, they shimmied back and forth between debris and thing— between, on the one hand, stuff to ignore, except insofar as it betokened human activity (the workman's efforts, the litterer's toss, the rat-poisoner's success), and, on the other hand, stuff that commanded attention in its own right, as existents in excess of their association with human meanings, habits, or projects. In the second moment, stuff exhibited its thing-power: it issued a call, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying. (4)

Bennett describes how each discarded object affects her: she is "repelled" by the dead rat and "dismayed" by the litter. Even so, the assemblage of objects are "not entirely

reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics." Bennett cannot quite conceptually account for these items, yet she feels called by them (5).[102] It feels foolish to nitpick at Bennett's brilliant and beautifully written reflection on the aesthetic shimmy between object and thing, not to mention how assemblages of urban litter exceed even these all-encompassing categories as items not readily identifiable as either object or thing. That said, Bennett's indeterminate network of non-human objects—a network that features objects sliding between a common sense understanding of agential versus passive matter, alluring commodities versus disgusting trash left over from those commodities—is not attentive to the way confusion over litter can in turn reconfigure our understanding of human networks. What is litter? Where did it come from? Who is responsible for clearing it away? Why do we react against seeing trash strewn along sidewalks but not to seeing trash in garbage bins?

Even though I am convinced by Bennett's account of the extra-discursive thing-ness that plays around this detritus, as well as the way vibrant networks of materiality create ambient forces that traditional accounts of agency don't consider, there persists a strong sense in which race underwrites the totality of these panels. The network or sociality between and comprising characters, environment, objects, buildings, and other features makes me reluctant to move beyond or even beside the characters to think about the non-humanistic modes of being and affect that surround the conspicuous piles of litter that remain literally and thematically central to these stories. Indeed, "post-" and "non-"

[102] For more on this "call" by non-human objects refer to my discussion of the Althusserian hailing of grass in Justin Green's *Binky Brown* in chapter 1.

human paradigms of study are often too quick to overlook historically marginalized groups only recently recognized as human.

Litter, then, becomes the fulcrum of a network, one in which the logic of disposability is transmitted between detritus and people. This logic is nicely encapsulated in the pithy anti-littering slogan: “Only Trash Litters.” A complex visual and conceptual network of litter-trash-race-city-responsibility becomes visible, here, necessitating our investigation of how *litter* is differentiated from *trash*, how urban environments become linked to blackness, and how urban litter comes to connote a “trashy” or “dirty” view of urban denizens.

Importantly, in order to understand what we see in *Fast Willie Jackson* and *The Street Where You Live*, we need to understand the odd, minor ecological sin that is litter. As a cultural construction of Keep America Beautiful—a group created by packaging companies responsible for a disproportionate size of the new excess of trash in both the city streets, dumps, trash cans, and parks—“litter” needed to address the problem of a visible garbage explosion while still enabling and even expanding the profitable production of disposable containers. Through Jane Bennett, we might understand how KAB procured these antithetical goals by linking disproportionately strong negative affective connotations with the random wrappers commonly visible on street corners.[103]

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[103] Tomkins describes the difference between strong and weak theories of affect in chapters 20 and 21 of *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, and Eve Sedgwick takes up these theories in *Touching Feeling* (see especially pages 133-145) to elaborate on the paranoid/ reparative reading practices that circulate in a wider “ecology of knowing,” which underwrites much of my argument towards an ecology of mind in chapter 2 of this project (145). For Tomkins, strong versus weak does not make a value-based claim about the

The unnerving but rarely-engaged with problem of industrial-scale waste generated by the empty water bottles and Amazon shipping boxes we throw out every day is, in effect, displaced onto that wrapper on the street corner, and is particularly displaced onto the hated producer of that corner-wrapper: the litter bug. By looking at a couple of the decades-worth of KAB's often brilliant, entertaining, and emotionally-charged public relations campaigns—in particular their advertisements and "public service" movies and articles—I hope to illustrate two theories, one strong and one weak, about litter. The strong claim is that litter is irreducibly a visual category. As we'll see, while KAB's visualizations of litter amount to common sense (we know litter when we see it), the attempts to put litter into chastising verbal language fails to coherently distinguish aesthetic problem of litter of from the eco-social problem of trash. The second claim is more tenuous, but it attempts to address the interests of and problems faced by mid-century African-American comics and their depictions of litter: namely, that KAB utilizes subtle discourses about race to displace the dismay over the overwhelming problem of global trash production onto the immediately visible scapegoat of the wrapper on the corner.

Litter, all things considered, is kind of a trivial subject. In the context of climate change, species extinction, islands of trash, deforestation, pollution of drinking water, honeybee die-off, industrial food production, oil spills, and fracking-induced earthquakes,

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relative merits of any given theory; rather, it simply denotes the scope of a theory. Whereas a strong theory "enables more and more experiences to be accounted for as instances" of a given affect, weak theory "can account only for 'near' phenomena" and is "little better than description of the phenomena which it purports to explain" (Tomkins 519).

why does litter merit ecocritical attention? The answer is suggested by both the images and Bennett's quote from above: in short, litter rankles. As shown via the social, affective, and intellectual investment in grassy lawns during a previous chapter, the seemingly trivial act of maintaining green ornamental aesthetics serves as an interface between people and their environment. Litter, like well-maintained lawns, becomes a way for us to conspicuously display our kinship to the world around us while at the same time policing and judging the environmental role and impact of others. When presented with the object (litter), the act (littering), or the offending party (the litterer or litter-bug)—an oddly hermetic set of terms in which the verb insists on coopting an object and subject—we may well feel dismay. I argue that litter should be seen as a kind of strange reversal or queer extension of commodity fetishism. In the undesirable limbo between store shelf and waste receptacle, trash—such as Willie's gum wrapper—loses the fetishistic quality Marx identified in the commodity, wherein social relations (modes of production, markets, exploited human labor) become mistaken for the attributes of material objects. The gum wrapper thrown to the ground retains the allure of the commodity, but through a strange (but all too common) reversal, once it's no longer an object worth selling and buying, loses its attributes as a material object. If a commodity hides human social relations, litter explicitly highlights sociality. But these relations are not the actual, demystified relations of labor and capital that Marx worked to establish in *Capital*. Rather, litter is defined a very specific social relation, one that penalizes individual litter-bugs and stigmatizes social groups (especially in cities) as dirty or uncivilized, instead of the packaging companies, advertisers, and corporations that produce and profit from a massive increase in the production of material waste that then becomes the responsibility

of individuals and the state. To repeat: litter rankles. This affective association of dismay with litter is rooted in a very specific, mid-twentieth-century, environmental-political context. An attention to this context tells the story of how the relatively trivial act of littering was divorced from the global problem of trash, a differentiation which made litter a powerful circuit for transmitting notions of uncleanliness onto people and the cities in which they live.

In her 2005 book *Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage*, Heather Rogers provides a compelling account of how corporations established the modern conception of litter in order to move the responsibility of waste management from the producers of waste onto consumers and local governments. Through the middle of the twentieth century, the beverage industry was comprised of hundreds of small breweries that circulated drinks through local distributors. Drinks would move through local bottling plants that "delivered their product in thick refillable glass bottles that could be washed and reused twenty times or more"; then, those bottles would be picked up, cleaned, and reused by those plants (Rogers 134). By the 1960s, wartime scarcity of resources (plastic, glass, aluminum) was no longer an issue. Further, beverage manufacturers realized that consumer demand for their products could be exponentially increased with the help of advertisements placed directly on the labels of slightly differentiated, branded "nonreturnable containers" (Coke, Diet Coke, Coke Zero, and so on). With this strategy, beverage manufacturers consolidated markets and drove up sales while also externalizing the cost of government-subsidized resource extraction and disposal of suddenly proliferate waste in the form of many empty Coke containers (132, 137). According to Rogers, "Beverage containers comprised the fastest growing component of solid waste by

the mid-1970s," a point that was not lost on either the burgeoning environmental movement or the local municipalities that bore the cost of disposing and storing the waste (134).

In response to a 1953 ban on throwaway bottles by the Vermont legislature, the then nascent packaging industry teamed up with oil, manufacturing, and beverage companies to create and bountifully subsidize a nonprofit group called Keep America Beautiful (141). Keep America Beautiful, or KAB, "funnel[ed] vast resources into a nationwide, media-savvy campaign to address the rising swells of trash through public education focused on individual bad habits and laws that steered clear of regulating industry" (142). KAB's public relation efforts were constantly reinforcing "its great cultural invention: litter" (143). This public relations campaign pioneered ideas still prevalent across the contemporary political right, including the suggestion that the interests of the environment are opposed to the interests of American business. Any attempt by local governments to address the problem of waste on the supply side (by the late 70s there were over 1,200 legislative bills of this nature proposed) were met with similar propaganda, including claims that these bills would hurt consumers financially (like the 5-cent bottle return program, introduced in 1972), curtail the American right of freedom of beverage selection, and eliminate jobs (in fact, disposable containers allowed companies to close local plants and undermine smaller breweries with lower prices). Moreover, rather than focus on the larger and more destructive totality of waste production on an industrial scale, KAB used the idea of littering to shift the blame for excess, out-of-place waste onto individual consumers, or "litter bugs." Those who litter therefore participated in the abject counterpart of conspicuous consumption: that of

conspicuous casting away. To that end, while working to undermine any legislation that made businesses responsible for their new, excessive production of waste, KAB encouraged strong penalties (including fines and even jail) for individuals who did not actively seek to hide the visual accumulation of that waste, better known as "litter."

The proto-NRA logic of "packages don't litter, people do," was spread via classrooms, poster boards, and screens (144). These images showed waste accumulating on the sides of highways, in national parks, and around city sidewalks. Interestingly, while the claim to America's beauty was firmly rooted in the collective imagining of a pre-civilized past, indicated by KAB's use of pristine national park imagery, the beauty suggested in these campaigns did not discriminate between built and natural environments. To put it more precisely, if the cityscape could not quite match the sublimity of California redwoods and Oklahoma's deserts, then the act of beauty making—often seen in these ads as picking up trash and then planting trees or shrubs on the side of a highway or in the center avenue of a city street—was the same whether it involved finding a trash can to throw away your empties in Chicago or in Yellowstone. Placing the individual as the nexus—that is, the active, legally liable agent—of the United States' so-called beauty and ugliness problem, maintained a kind of limited if persuasive logic.

Far more difficult than shifting blame to the so-called litter bug, however, was KAB's need to remove litter from the context of consumptive and physical waste. That is, KAB had to first divorce "litter" from the industrial production of trash; then, it had to make litter stand in for staggering miles of trash being produced. This gesture is nicely illustrated in Derf Backderf's fictionalized account of his experiences as a garbage

collector. Interspersed in Backderf's narrative are several two-page spreads illustrating the amount of garbage produced by the average American consumer (32-33, shown below), the history of garbage trucks (96-97), the organization and staggering size of landfills (112-113), and the pipes used to leak methane and prevent explosions in covered landfills (158-59). In order to make the case that litter constitutes a major environmental issue, KAB not only needed to efface the final panel in Figure 3.6 that shows a mountain of 7,387 pounds of trash created by the average American consumer, but to continue to encourage consumption—or at least to undermine public will for legislation that would explicitly prohibit or discourage such consumption.

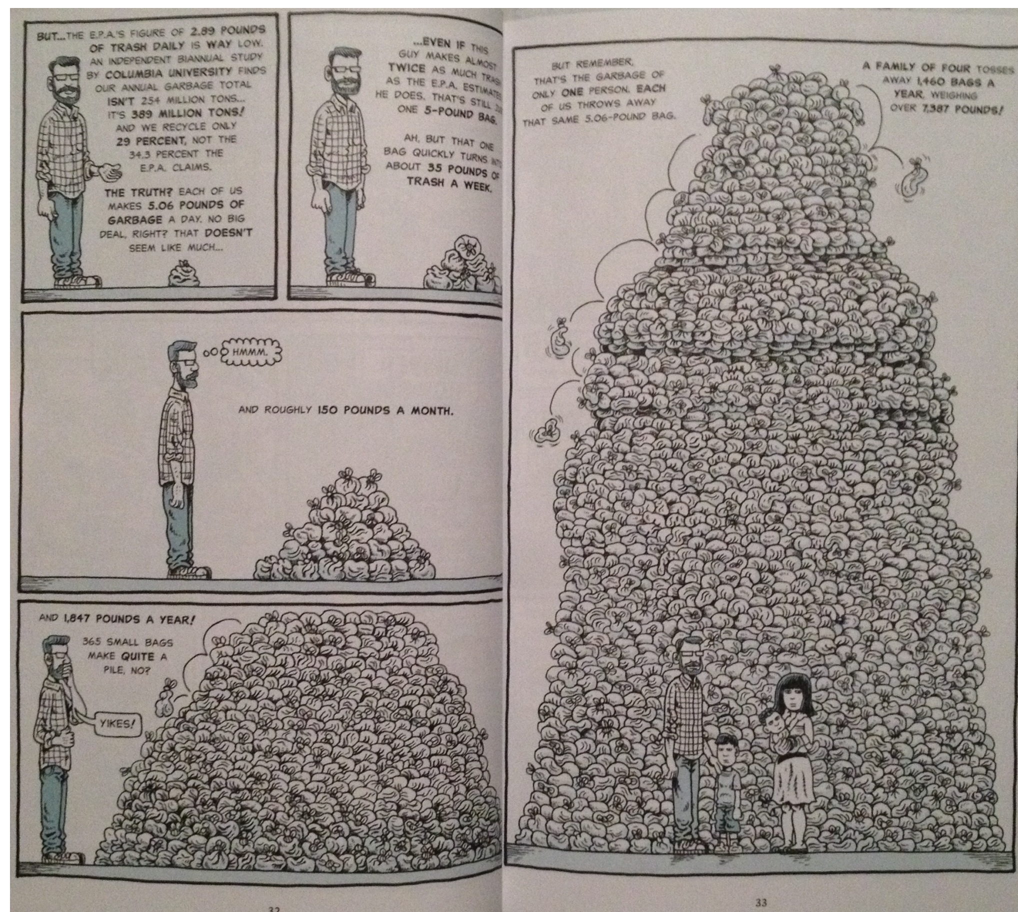

Figure 3.6 Backderf's mountains of trash

Source: Backderf, Derf. *Trashed*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2015. Print.

Even if we concede that Figures 3.1 and 3.3 (from earlier in this chapter) depict a considerable amount of street detritus, neither image contains even as much trash as the five-pound bag in the first panel of Figure 3.6 that the average American goes through in a single day. Further, Figures 3.1 and 3.3 each feature groups of people (five and twelve people, respectively), an indication of, presumably, a much larger number of individuals that pass by these particular locations. We might surmise, then, that the density of litter in these extremely dirty streets accounts for only the smallest fraction of the trash thrown out by these neighborhoods on any given day. Even so, by the time of *Fast Willie Jackson*, we can see how effectively KAB had outsourced the burden of pollution onto the individual by "hammering home the message of each person's responsibility for the destruction of nature, one wrapper at a time" (Rogers 144).

How did KAB train public attention on litter bugs and litter? In 1963, KAB released a series of educational short films that were part of what Elizabeth Royte points to as a "masterful example of corporate greenwash" (Royte 184).[104] With titles like *A Land Betrayed* and *Heritage of Splendor*, these movies contrasted pristine U.S. wilderness with highways, city streets, and recreational areas overrun with trash. In the Ronald Reagan narrated *Heritage of Splendor*, the scenic beauty of the U.S. is situated as "one of our great resources" alongside other commodifiable natural resources such as lumber, minerals, and oil, water, and farmable land.[105] The industries that correspond to

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[104] Royte defines corporate greenwash as propaganda campaigns wherein "polluters pose as friends of the environment but spend more money advertising their green projects than on the projects themselves" (184).

[105] In his introduction to *The Field Guide to Sponsored Films*, Rick Prelinger usefully contextualizes the *Heritage of Splendor* within a once popular and now critically ignored genre of "sponsored films." As the

the extraction of these resources are laid out in the film as paragons of "conservation" for their role in conserving "natural wealth" for the "generations that follow us." Unlike the noble, public-minded exploitation of nature by masters of industry, the film suggests that we, as irresponsible members of the public, understand and, by extension, use the "scenic heritage" of recreational spaces in a "different, more personal way." Five minutes into this Thoreau-vian paean to the beauty of the wild, Reagan opines that, "while we're a responsible people with regard to our tangible resources of forests and minerals, how do we treat this important resource for recreation?" The cheerful music of the first third of the film darkens between the word *minerals* and *how*. Reagan's question is answered visually: an arm stretches out from a car to throw a bag onto the side of the road where it rests among a pile of other refuse presumably discarded in a similar manner (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7 Trash tossed from a car window in *Heritage of Splendor*;

Figure 3.8 Trash alongside the road in *Heritage of Splendor*

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title suggests, these films would directly promote the interests a corporate or civic interests, but due to distribution requirements, particularly those of television, and presumably viewer expectations (these films were meant to entertain and inform in a way that doesn't exactly resemble a commercial or documentary) these public oriented films needed to "advance[d] corporate goals without dwelling on mission and products" (ix).

Source: *Heritage of Splendor*. Prod. Alfred Higgins Productions. 1963. Film.

After the bag settles, Reagan figures the bag toss with a narrative metaphor: "We go away from home on vacation, and take a holiday from responsibility. We launch a fallout of litter." Over ominous music, the film momentarily drops the narration for a minor-keyed montage of overflowing trashcans and piles of trash spread along fields, fences, and highways. Reagan returns to explain. "The litter problem seems to get worse, sadly and ironically because of scientific advances and new improvements in modern living. Trash only becomes trash after it has first served a useful purpose; it becomes litter only after people thoughtlessly discard it." The montage concludes with a shot of rats combing through a collection of loose trash, an image that begins to connect disease and pestilence to litter. KAB will further cultivate this connection in order to distinguish litter, figured as a public health crisis, from trash. After a few seconds on the rats, the film jarringly shifts the music as bright scenes of modern, antiseptic packaging plants are shown over the following narration: "The art of modern packaging has helped to make our outings even more enjoyable." The scene shifts to a bountiful picnic reminiscent of scenes from another major 20th-century, commodities-based, propaganda-machine: the Empire Marketing Board.[106] Over this apparently idyllic scene, Reagan continues: "Almost anything we need is conveniently available. But it is these wonderful packages:

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[106] The EMB was a department of the British government aimed "to consolidate imperialist ideals and an imperial world view, as part of the popular culture of the British people (Constantine 1), by persuading consumers "that their daily purchases were pressing forward the development of a new imperial world" (Constantine 13). I'm thinking of a particular image by FC Harrison of an abundant layout of bottled and boxed goods titled "Making the Empire Christmas Pudding."

cans, bottles, and paper containers…" Then, with another sudden shift to minor key music, and a quick cut to a ditch full of trash, Reagan quickly summarizes the argument: "thoughtlessly discarded which we carelessly convert to litter."

What fascinates me about KAB's discursive productions is how conspicuously incoherent their attempts are at providing a definition of litter. Even so, the litter campaign was incredibly successful in both its explicit (creating public sentiment against litter and litter-bugs) and less obvious ideological (shifting attention away from the massive economic and ecological costs of one-use packaging) goals. Returning to the question that opened this chapter—what do we see when we consider litter in *Fast Willie Jackson* and *The Street Where You Live*?—I am unsure that there exists a simply linguistic response that can provide an adequate response to that question. If we use the definition that KAB invented via documents like *A Heritage of Splendor*, what we see is Willie first convert the "art of modern packaging" into trash, items that "have served a useful purpose" or items that serve a vital human need (such as quick access to chewing gum). This once-useful trash is then doubly converted: first, it becomes trash; then, through "thoughtless discard," it becomes litter. Or, perhaps the wrapper has not been converted at all, and rather exists in a kind of pre-trash limbo: no longer a valuable commodity, but not yet socially-approved-of refuse.

A 1959 article placed in *American Health Reports* by KAB and written by Homer N. Calver does little to clarify precisely what KAB defines as litter. Calver states that, "Litter might be defined as unaccumulated refuse," a capacious definition that, as my partner would likely point out, applies equally to books and papers spread around my laptop as I'm writing as to the Hardees bags, ragged tires, and urine-filled bottles

alongside the side of most highways (Calver 359).[107] Without a clear definition of what litter is, Calver presents a clear argument for what litter *does*. Litter creates pestilence in the form of rats, flies, and mosquitoes, and causes hundreds of thousands of injuries as the cause of slashed tires, pierced boat hulls, and infected abrasions from cuts (Calver 387). The association with illness and avoidable injury allows Calver to identify litter as its own public health crises, one which sets out both symptom and solution.[108] Following

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[107] Calver continues, "so the campaign against litter is in effect a campaign for the accumulation of rubbish at central points from which it may be more economically collected for transportation and disposal." Intrigued by the "scholarly" arm of KAB, I tried to track down Calver's academic affiliations and publications without much luck. The lack of readily accessible information is particularly surprising given that Calver edited the *American Journal of Public Health* and currently has an award and lecture series named after him through that organization. In a book on the sterilization movement, Ian Robert Dowbiggin refers to Calver as "a well-known environmental journalist and population control proponent" (204). Marcel Chotkowski LaFollette cites Calver as an early proponent of making science entertaining to appeal to a popular audience—particularly his use of sound effects in his 1935 radio talk "The March of the Microbes" (145). What interests me about Calvert (other than the references to him as "dashing"), is that in a 1956 paper on "Public Health Awards," his listed credentials begin with his role as secretary of the Public Health Committee of the Paper Cup and Container Institute. This organization was first formed in 1933 to promote the public health benefits of single-use containers and then to address concerns about the environmental costs of those containers (see Dyer, "A Look Back as FPI Celebrates 80 Years"). The Paper Cup and Container Institute connection may suggest why Calver and KAB stressed litter as a public health concern, since that strategy had initially been so successful in promoting the use of single use paper cups (to prevent the spread of disease by sharing cups).

[108] I was initially puzzled by Calver's seemingly random comment that "It is a wry thought that many of the attributes of a higher level of consumption are the very things which are impairing our health and the esthetic quality of our environment" (388). That's not a wry thought, that's the very obvious cause of the

the suggestion of fellow KAB member Justin Andrews that "litter is frequently the surface symptom of a diseased environment," Calver wonders, "Is there an epidemiology of litter?" (388). Referencing the pre-anti-litter-campaign city of San Antonio, Calver concludes that "Litter had become communicable. Lack of civic pride and indifference were deeply entrenched in the public consciousness." In order to combat this problem, Calver suggests, the "'inherited' tendency towards the disease of litter" must be addressed (390, 391). If we are to take Calver seriously, litter is an unaccumulation of refuse, produced by the disease of litter-bugs that may be communicable through individuals in an affected community.

In the motivated absence of a clear definition of litter, Calver parasitically deploys proto-ecological arguments that bear an unnerving resemblance to early chapters of this dissertation. Calver's argument about the unhealthy juxtaposition of humans and unaccumulated refuse, or the contamination of human environments with vermin-attracting garbage, echoes Olmsted's theory of miasmatic transmission of disease: cluttered, unsanitary environments render bodies susceptible to environmental ailment. Calver's suggestion—littering is a transmissible behavior, like a disease—resembles the ecology of ideas that I argued was central to the working relation of Himes and Thompson as well as Kirby and Lee. It's all well and good to perform the expose and

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trash problem that KAB and Calver laboriously avoid identifying as such. But by making litter about the aesthetic and health blights of the close juxtaposition of people to trash, Calver is able to effectively the proper uses of single-use packaging (proper being the immediate and permanent removal after use) from the those too stupid or dirty to be expected to appropriately make use of these "higher level" tools of consumption.

dismiss the ballet of ideology critique in KAB's deliberately misleading propaganda about a litter epidemic. But, what to make of the fact that KAB's logic, the logic that greenwashes mountains of garbage, mirrors, and perhaps even underwrites my own attempt to connect texts by referencing a series of environmental disasters, texts that otherwise don't explicitly address ecological issues? In exploiting the uncertain, affectively-charged nexus of somatic vulnerability and extra-linguistic transmission of behavior, KAB mapped out a successful strategy of making an ecological connotation with an object not previously associated with such concern. KAB, in other words, used and, I would suggest, in some ways *invented*, an affective kind of ecocriticism. Such an ecocriticism is perhaps too close for comfort to say, the gesture of connecting *Wings of the Dove* with our current ecological concerns. If the methods are similar, however, the objects are different, and I want to spend the rest of the chapter exploring the consequences and contradictory logics of litter-discourse as kind of disastrously-misapplied ecocriticism.

To understand how influential KAB's litter campaign continues to be and why it remains problematic, consider a memorable scene from a 2008 episode of the AMC network series *Mad Men* entitled "The Golden Violin." In this episode, the series' protagonist Don Draper celebrates his rapid ascent into the upper middle class by taking his family out to a picnic in a freshly-acquired Coupe de Ville Cadillac. To keep his new class symbol pristine, Don instructs his children to go to the bathroom outside, and he addresses their inquires into the meaning of the new car ("Daddy, are we rich?") by telling them how lucky they are not to have to use an outhouse like he did when he was their age, a subtle redirection of questions of class into a discourse of modernity. With

this background in mind, the episode presents a tableau of middle class aspirations (see Figure 3.9), including an idyllic picnic scene: green lawns, rolling hills, trees, a beautiful white heterosexual couple with a child of each gender, and the Cadillac clearly visible in the reverse shot.[109] But then, *Mad Men* subverts this advertising image with a long shot that stays with the land as the Draper family departs the green lawn. After the camera pans up to show Don finish his beer and throw it into the park, Betty lifts the picnic blanket and leaves behind an impressive heap of cans, paper plates and cups, as well as chip, bread, and plastic grocery bags (Figure 3.11). The lawn is in the foreground of the shot; the trash is left to the side in the medium ground. The litter nevertheless becomes the focus of the shot as the family walks to the car in the background and drives away. In the Draper's absence, audience and shot alike are riven to the spot in outrage over the indecency of litter, left to consider the symbolic detritus of aspirational consumer values now become somebody else's problem.

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[109] Picnics are a recurrent theme of these early KAB materials. In *Heritage of Splendor*, one amusing scene represents litter as "an offence to the laws of decency" by showing the befuddled looks of an older couple as they witness a strange family (that bears a remarkable resemblance to the Draper's) picnicking and tossing cans around their front lawn. The prevalence of this juxtaposition of the outdoors and single item packaging suggests that it is these new technologies of packaging that finally allow us the freedom to more broadly experience the outdoors—that Twinkies and Coke allows us all our little slice of Walden pond. Calver suggests the litter problem could be substantially addressed by ensuring that "future automobiles should have built-in trash receptacles" (390).

Figure 3.9 Picnic bounty in *Mad Men*

Source: "The Gold Violin." *Mad Men*, season 2, episode 7, AMC, 7 Sept. 2008. *Netflix*, https://www.netflix.com/watch/70143398?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C0%2C41f56de9682b48cc8ab59f32ff041c65ce7cf09c%3A7ba8bb58a87a2884f6345ae18656dd8e6ef87fd2.

Figure 3.10 Cleaning up in *Mad Men*

Source: "The Gold Violin." *Mad Men*, season 2, episode 7, AMC, 7 Sept. 2008. *Netflix*, https://www.netflix.com/watch/70143398?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C0%2C41f56de9682b48cc8ab59f32ff041c65ce7cf09c%3A7ba8bb58a87a2884f6345ae18656dd8e6ef87fd2.

Figure 3.11 Leftover packaging in *Mad Men*

Source: "The Gold Violin." *Mad Men*, season 2, episode 7, AMC, 7 Sept. 2008. *Netflix*, https://www.netflix.com/watch/70143398?trackId=13752289&tctx=0%2C0%2C41f56de9682b48cc8ab59f32ff041c65ce7cf09c%3A7ba8bb58a87a2884f6345ae18656dd8e6ef87fd2.

One of the central shows of aught-period prestige TV, *Mad Men* specialized in this kind of pitch-perfect re-creation of 60's advertising imagery; as in the scene described above, the show also frequently held a shot or slightly expanded a frame as a means condemn (and, by extension, revel in) the underlying political exclusions and superficial consumer culture of the period. The entire series finale, for example, offered an extended riff on the "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke" advertisement now widely read as capitalism's cooption of 60's counterculture. I invoke *Mad Men* as a crude bellwether for contemporary sentiment on litter. In so doing, the famous picnic scene reads less like an index of how far 2008 is from 1962; rather, it reads more like an evaluation of the Drapers' 1962 through the moral frame of 1963's *Heritage of Splendor*. The creative team behind *Mad Men* certainly would have been familiar with KAB's campaign, particularly the more famous commercials in the 70s. Even so, the show does

not seem to recognize that its critique only reenacts KAB's meta-advertising campaign, one that limits the scope of environmental critiques of consumerism to the thoughtless gesture of leaving one's trash for someone else to pick up. While the awkward framing of Figure 3.9—paper cups and other bits of waste collected on the picnic blanket—may anticipate an anxiety about what will happen to the family's trash even before it becomes litter, it is important to note that there is nothing inherently distasteful in this image of the family picnicking. Only when the family does not erase the traces of their conspicuous consumption does the audience's faculty for pleasant liberal outrage begin to tingle.

Although the thoughtless remains of American consumption makes for an effective symbol, its critique is rendered toothless when moral outrage itself only exists in the narrow strip between the blanket and the waste bin. I argue that there's very little difference between the Starbucks container on your desk, that same Starbucks container in a proper waste receptacle, or that Starbucks container tossed onto your university's quad. The fetishization and moral outrage focused exclusively on the latter—on the picnic remains left on the lawn and the not the packages as they exist from factory, truck pallet, grocery aisle, pantry, picnic basket, and recycling container—represents a willful, systematically-manufactured social taboo. This taboo displaces the guilt over and knowledge about the social contributions toward miles of waste onto the fairly irrelevant occasional wrapper thrown to the street corner. The critique of the Drapers' consumerism had long since been coopted and, moreover, defined as a petty bourgeois infraction against taste rather than any meaningful way of understanding how one's behavior reinforces a system of waste.

Figure 3.12 No littering sign

Source: Z22. "No littering sign at a highway in Cape Cod, Massachusetts." *Wikimedia Commons*. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported. 10 July 2017. Web.

Figure 3.13 Recycling sign

Source: "RECYCLE SIGNS." *Pinterest*. Web. 26 Mar. 2017.

After the rather incoherent definition of litter provided by *Heritage of Splendor* and Calver, it is remarkable how clearly the network of objects and behaviors that comprise litter appear in the *Mad Men* scene. To take Potter Stuart's "I know it when I see it" adage a bit further, litter is clear in *Mad Men* because litter is a visually-defined, rather than a linguistically-defined, set of behaviors. Anti-litter signs (such as Figure 3.12) don't simply symbolize a prohibited behavior. Rather, they define a prohibition that

is neither clearly characterized nor fixed in language. Litter, then, is irreducibly visual, in finable offense as well as conceptual definition. The "No Littering" sign nevertheless harbors a fundamental ambiguity that Carver's writing intentionally avoids and the montage sequences of *Mad Men* and *Heritage of Splendor* tightly foreclose (*Fast Willie Jackson* and *The Street Where You Live*, we will see below, engages this ambiguity still further). It is easy to imagine correcting the behavior depicted in the sign by simply placing a wastebasket beneath the dropped trash. Importantly, then, the implied prohibition is on neither the objects (where the trash came from) nor the behavior (discarding the packaging). Rather, the prohibition is on the presumed impropriety of the intent and destination of where the trash ends up, a suggestion that the sign, curiously, does not depict. That is, the "No Littering" sign, reflecting the Calver's written definition, depicts a fissioning of what William Viney calls "the temporal structure that divides an object by use [that] is integral to the invention of waste" (*Waste* 104).[110] For Viney, the production of commodities creates a temporal rift in objects between use-time and waste-time, both times defining and providing the possibility for the other.[111] The commodity can be used, wasted, and then recycled (or put into use again), a concept represented by the more temporally-dynamic recycling sign (Figure 3.13). If, then, as I argue, the definition of litter is irreducibly visual and dependent on a cyclical temporality of use-

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[110] Viney is here reading the circulation of waste in Joyce's *Ulysses*, wherein, according to Steven Connor, "the letter [….] is always being transformed into litter" (qtd. in Viney 104).

[111] "Just as use-time has given shape and clarity to the time of waste, so it is that the progress associated with use-time gives clarity to the decline and cessation of this progress, to the dissolution, decay, and waste of things" ("Ruins of the Future" 144).

time-places and waste-time-places, then litter's definition can most lucidly be broken down into in a series of images. Litter, in other words, bears a remarkable affinity to comics.

Consider the *Mad Men* sequence described above in terms of Scott McCloud's famous definition of comics as "[j]uxtaposed pictorial and other images in a deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (20). McCloud's capacious definition, often criticized for either being too discriminating (given that it doesn't include single image cartoons) or not discriminating enough (sequential images could be applied to nearly any visual stimulus), is nevertheless valuable for identifying the fundamentally indeterminate relationship between image and word. This juxtaposition, most thoroughly examined in the medium of and scholarship on comics, becomes critical when thinking through the ambiguous, diagrammatic logic of sequential imagism. To be clear, what I identify as the fundamental indefinability of litter, as well as the subordinate claim that litter is best understood in a diagrammatic series of images, refers exclusively to the widely-disseminated and still-prevalent logic of litter popularized by the KAB. The indefinability of litter is not, therefore, some accidental epistemological deficiency, but rather a deliberate and historically discernable assemblage of text and images (comics) meant to occlude the industry's responsibility for waste creation. This ambiguity is easy to hide in image-text juxtapositions, but it becomes glaring in incoherent textual arguments like Calver's.

Figure 3.14 Johnny Horizon

Source: United States Bureau of Land Management. "Johnny Horizon." Flickr. Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic. 10 July 2017. Web.

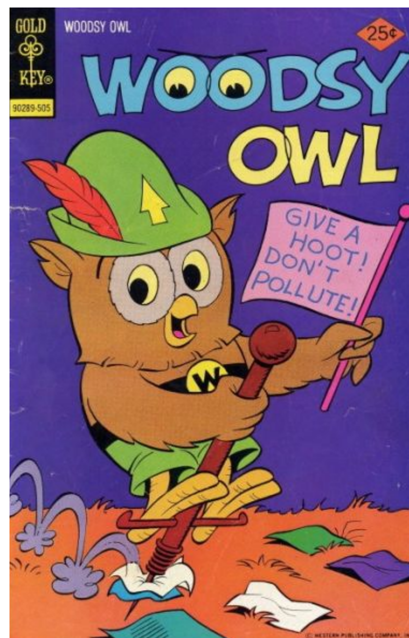

Figure 3.15 Woodsy Owl

Source: *Woodsy Owl*. Vol. 1, No 7, May 1975. Gold Key Comics, Western Comics. Print.

Compellingly, the tendency to portray the sequential (il)logic of litter was reinscribed by the federal government's introduction of comic book characters meant to educate children about the perils of litter. In fact, competing anti-litter mascots were introduced in the early 70s when the United States Forest Service rejected the Bureau of Land Management's Johnny Horizon character (Figure 3.14) as too "strongly masculine, very white, and definitely western" (Fuller-Bennett and Velez 25). Instead of Johnny Horizon, the Forest Service wanted a character that, notably, could "appeal to urban and rural residents" and be adaptable to both popular culture and school pedagogy for children (25). With the catch phrase "Give a hoot! Don't pollute!" Woodsy Owl emerged (Figure 3.15) and subsequently proved popular enough to be adapted into a Gold Key Comics book, an imprint of the popular Western Comics, from 1973-1976.

While the confluence of overlapping private and federally-funded anti-litter campaigns helps us see how the visualized schematic of litter became widely disseminated via commercial and educational mediums, it does not make clear how this particular fetishization of litter was so effective in eliciting dismay. Moreover, how does the dismay that Jane Bennett associates with litter so easily slip into the liberal outrage produced by witnessing the perpetrators and very superficial effects (that is, public blight) of litterbugs in *Mad Men*? To treat these issues, I tentatively suggest that KAB scapegoats litter onto a racialized other. In so doing, KAB both responds to mounting pressures in the 1970s to address a radicalized environmental movement; at the same time, KAB's work shields the industries that produce pollution from environmental critique.

The codification of the dismay that attends litter can be convincingly traced back to KAB's most famous ad campaign: the 1971 "Crying Indian" campaign. Spearheaded by the Burson-Marsteller ad agency which, as Ginger Strand notes, is a "global public relations firm famous for its list of clients with environment-related publicity problems," KAB's latest campaign shifted away from the longer, public service model of "sponsored films" like *Heritage of Splendor* to more conventional short television spots (Strand). Given the conceptual opacity surrounding litter discussed above, it is unsurprising that KAB's most influential statement about litter would be largely wordless. The most famous of the ads from this campaign features Iron Eyes Cody, the most popular Native American Actor from the first half of the 20th century, paddling down a lovely river in a canoe at sunset. Twelve seconds into the fifty seconds of footage, the ad shows the first signs that the river has been tainted: litter flows past the bow of the canoe. At fifteen seconds, the camera pulls back to show a factory: ominous smoke double-exposed underneath Cody's profile very broadly suggests some kind of pollution, a visual gesture that Strand suggests is a concession to the environmental groups that, in the late 60s, were publically charging KAB with corporate greenwashing. At thirty seconds, Cody pulls his canoe onto a shore conspicuously littered with trash, at which point the brief narration begs, "Some people have a deep abiding respect for the natural beauty that was once this country and some people don't." At the word "and," the ad shows an arm throwing a full bag of what appears to be fast food at Cody's feet. Then comes the money shot. Over the final narration—"People start pollution, people can stop it"—the ad cuts to Cody's profile and zooms in to a tight shot of a single tear on Cody's cheek (Figure 3.16).

To explain why the "Crying Indian" ads struck such a deep chord with the nationalist imperialism of the American imagination, Michelle H. Raheja brilliantly argues that we must read the ads within a broader context of Cody's career and private life, one that spans racial passing. That is, Cody's adoption of a native identity made him particularly adept at embodying "an economy of affect whereby the mass-mediated Indian subject inhabits several important roles for a liberal audience—environmental steward, precolonial subject, and spiritual guardian—all as part of a representational field that creates a ghost effect" (Raheja 120). In particular, Cody's 19th-century, Plains Indian attire tapped into a foundational national hypertext of the vanishing Indian that simultaneously rendered the historical Indian's attire hyper-visible while erasing the dire political realities of still-living Native Americans. What makes the "ghostly Indian" particularly suitable to KAB's ends—creating a moral panic about litter to avoid any substantive federal reckoning with the production and ultimate environmental catastrophe of waste—is that this ghosting creates "a platform from which a rhetoric of protest can be simultaneously launched and contained" (107). This ghost effect also "invoke[s] a particularly modernist and nostalgic guilt about the destruction of the natural landscape through pollution" (123). Per the ad, "Some people have a deep abiding respect for the natural beauty that was once this country." As KAB awkwardly articulates, the natural beauty that was once this country is already lost. The loss invokes what Seth Moglen terms a melancholic form of mourning for the injuries of industrial capitalism. In this melancholic mode of protest, the natural beauty of the past can only be a nostalgic remembrance in the absence of a substantive political means of reclaiming that past or redressing the environmental degradation in the future. That is, instead working to redress

the underlying environmental injuries of capitalism, we're left to stoically mourn the past, making the symbolic gesture of individually cleaning up the side of the road the target action rather than any collective address of single-use packaging.

The ghostly erasure of the urgent political present by a nostalgic recasting of the past is affectively doubled by Iron Eyes Cody's famous tear. In his monograph *Why only humans weep: Unravelling the mysteries of tears*, Ad Vingerhoets stresses that tears are an essential tool for transmitting complex cultural signals. Vingerhoets points to a study wherein tears have been digitally removed from crying faces. For participants in those studies, "it is very difficult for them to decode the facial expression as sadness," whereas in opposite studies wherein tears are digitally added to faces, "it was much easier for the study participants to determine that a face was sad, linked with a greater willingness to provide emotional support" (118). Vingerhoets argues that "tears seem very much like 'exclamation marks' that have been placed by our hard-wired unconscious moral system," which underscore the culturally and historically fluid "essential building blocks of our society [that] include empathy, altruism, and a basic sense of justice" (263). That said, what should be understood by the sentimental tears of a ghost? Strand juxtaposes the crocodile tears of Iron Eyes Cody with the "widely published" photo of Three Tribes' Council Chairman George Gillette signing away Native American land for one of the "scores of dams" built during World War Two through the 1970s. In the photo, Gillette plainly displays anguish by weeping into his hand as Interior Secretary Julius Krug signs the documents that give reservation land to the government.[112] The photo is gut

[112] The State Historical Society of North Dakota provides both a reproduction of the image of Gillette weeping as well as a thorough account of the construction of the Garrison Dam on tribal land. See https://www.ndstudies.gov/garrison-dam.

wrenching. Strand notes that "a shocking number of [the dams were located] on tribal land" (Strand). During the war, these hydroelectric plants were often used to power aluminum plants; after the war, this excess aluminum was profitably redirected to create a glut of newly-invented aluminum single-use containers.

The differences in the tears is instructive. As Strand puts it, "Tracing the crying Indian to his real-life counterpart reminds us to focus not just on symptoms, but on the system." Gillette's devastation—turning his face away and covering his face and tears with his hands—suggests an expressive breakdown of communication—what Silvan Tomkins would write about as shame—that marks the devastation of Native American land as mournful and communicates an urgent need for help from the spectator, or at the least rage at the government and industry that seeks to profit off such devastation. Cody, by contrast, turns to the camera, and conspicuously displays a tear that seems to express little more than a fleeting regret for something already past. What's remarkable about the affective economy generated by the "Crying Indian" ad is how it generates a surplus of emotionally-laden imagery—the national sin of the vanishing Indian, the empathetic display of strong emotion in the tear—thoroughly captured by the frankly stupid ends of an anti-litter campaign. Read literally: if you toss your Starbucks cup out of the car window, you'll make a Native American cry. Sure. Yet, with Jane Bennett, the sight of litter fills me with a culturally-conditioned dismay attributable in no small part to this ad, the culmination of KAB's successful cooption of ecological critique into stupid, middle-class hand-wringing over "unaccumulated refuse."

Figure 3.16 "Crying Indian" advertisement

Source: Keep America Beautiful and Ad Council. "If People Can Start It, They Can Stop It." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 30 April 2007. Web. 7 June 2017.

I think there exists an even subtler and more pernicious aspect to the racialized economies of affect circulating through KAB's ramped up anti-litter campaign. The "ghostly Indian" evokes a nostalgic "respect for the natural beauty that was once this country," an odd, pointedly passive construction that bakes in a lack of political will and a longing for an unspoiled nature. This regret, then, is shaped by a tainted desire. The positive aspect of this desire—the longing for unspoiled nature, for highway margins without urine bottles and McDonald's bags—limits the volatility of the affect generated by the "Crying Indian." This affect is carefully relegated to only one aspect of litter cycle—notably, the waste on the side of the road—as shown in Figures 3.8 and 3.11. Even so, at play in these mini-moral dramas of littering is the more slippery affect of disgust, which, while less explicitly addressed in the KAB ads is, I argue, equally if not more responsible for the dismay we feel at the sight of litter. After all, it's not *my* Starbucks cup that disgusts me on the side of the road. I probably had a reasonable excuse for throwing it there, which I hardly ever do, anyway. It's *your* cup, with *your*

filthy germs that disgust me. Litter from the other indicates a broader pattern of behavior, indicating a larger moral failing on the other's part.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s genealogy of litter suggests this sense of disgust. "Litter" traces back to the 14th-century, meaning "A bed" or, in the 19th-century's technical use of the term, "substratum of materials." The sense in which litter is used in this chapter, "Odds and ends, fragments and leavings lying about, rubbish," can be traced back to the 18th-century. The modern term that corresponds to Roger's claim that litter was KAB's "great cultural invention" is the "litter-bug," first recorded as published in 1947.[113] In the KAB materials discussed earlier, the crime of littering was passed over rather lightly. If someone was seen littering, a quick word from a friend on the distasteful aspects of littering was all that was needed to dissuade them from becoming a litter-bug. Instead of decrying litter-bugs, those earlier ads generated disgust by focusing on the prolonged pestilence that could be attracted by a large amount of litter: rats crawl over litter in *Heritage of Splendor* (Figure 3.17) and Calver remarks that "Rubbish promotes

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[113] In an excellent article on the British anti-litter movement, including the KAB's delightfully Britishized counterpart Keep Britain Tidy, Timothy Cooper discusses Britain's version of the litterbug, the "litter-lout." In a fascinating suggestion that unfortunately I am not able to take up here, Cooper suggests that often working-class litter-lout might use refuse as a form of protest against the upper-class policing of space represented by litter ordinances. "This history of litter reflects the inherent political ideological possibilities of waste. Litter was always potentially oppositional; it could be invoked (or misinterpreted) as an act of rebellion against the rights of property, or as evidence of the environmental failures of capitalist industry" (Cooper 268). This notion of litter as protest becomes especially relevant to this chapter in the frequent conflation of litter with graffiti as crimes against the beauty of cities that somehow reflect moral failings on the part of urban residents.

the breeding of rats, flies, and mosquitoes" (Calver 387). That said, in another famous ad that more aggressively singles out the litter-bug as a social pariah worthy of viewer disgust, KAB explicitly makes the connection between non-human animals and the litter problem.[114] In a 1968 ad, swine wander through an abandoned and very dirty urban landscape (Figure 3.18), and pigs appear, too, on an equally-littered beachfront. Over these images, a narrator finally interjects that "Spreading and living in litter is for, well, certainly not for people." This peculiar reference to "living in litter" in reference to urban dwellers invokes a racist history of discourses of hygiene, what Anne Mcclintock calls "the poetics of cleanliness," used to set "demarcating boundaries between one community and another" (226). Hygienic practices such as bathing or waste disposal are invoked to make socially-legible distinctions between races, classes, and genders. A lack of proper hygiene is, in the terms of the pig ad, "certainly not for people." In other words, litter lands on the wrong side of a nature-culture spectrum that serves as the driving engine that powers the conceptual labor of many group demarcations.

Figure 3.17 Rats in *Heritage of Splendor*

[114] Strand demonstrates that this marked a shift, in 1967, towards KAB's intentionally more negative approach to the litter propaganda.

Source: *Heritage of Splendor*. Prod. Alfred Higgins Productions. 1963. Film.

Figure 3.18 Pigs in Keep America Beautiful ad

Source: KabmanKAB. "'Pigs' Retro ad from Keep America Beautiful." Online video clip. YouTube. YouTube, 28 September 2007. Web. 7 June 2017.

The litter-dwelling image of rats would have been particularly racially coded following 1957's sensationalized case of Baby Keith. This case featured a New York baby whose muscles where devoured by rats during the night. The event was turned into a rallying cry by community activists such as Jesse Gray who had protesters string together "rubber-rat necklaces" and advocated that community members "[s]ave corpses of real rats caught in their buildings to display at eviction hearings" (Biehler 156). These protests elicited Lyndon Johnson's 1967 proposal for the Rat Extermination Act, which would have substantially addressed urban environmental problems. This large bill was rejected by conservative politicians that felt "rats and riots were symptomatic of undisciplined, racialized urban nature" rather than federally-financed housing segregation and the dramatic redistribution of tax funding from programs that would allow city dwellers basic access to sanitary conditions (Biehler 160). Dawn Day Biehler recounts the cruel, mocking dismissal of the rat issue by Congressmen such as Virginia's James Broyhill who "joked, exaggerating his own drawl: 'The rat smart thing to do is to vote

down this civil rats bill, rat now'" (Biehler 160). After a wave of outrage over the cruelty of these jokes, and rat bites where estimated in the U.S. at about 28,000 a year in the 60s and up to 45,000 a year in 1980, eventually a watered-down version of the law passed (Biehler 154, 165).[115] In addition to the dramatic decrease in funding, this new program focused less on direct intervention into the pest problem and more on education programs on how black communities could inculcate more hygienic environments. These programs were administered by officials that "interpreted rats as indicators that black communities were out of control […and] often asserted that rat problems resulted primarily from blacks' failure to take personal responsibility for proper garbage disposal," all claims that Biehler thoroughly debunks (Biehler 162).

In order, then, to fully theorize the affective charge associated with litter, we have to understand the dismay of litter not just in terms of the "ghostly Indian" who represents a melancholic mourning for a beautiful past already irretrievable, but also through the disgust for a scapegoated other newly-figured as a "litter-bug." I argue that KAB's claim that "spreading and living in litter is for, well, certainly not for people" falls back into a racist hygienic discourse that separates European from African cultures, as well human from non-human nature, according to apparently divergent standards and practices of cleanliness. The overlapping allusion to urban inhabitants as well as the disgust towards unclean, non-human animals like rats and pigs, and particularly within the broader 1960's context of race riots and controversial federal laws about urban rat infestation, indexes an

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[115] Paul Rutherford claims this bill benefited from another environmentally minded ad campaign, wherein a large cutout of a rat was placed in ad with the request to "Cut this out and put it in a bed next to your child" (Rutherford 38).

unwieldy axis of disgust for the overall affective economy of litter. Recall that, in addition to being dismayed by litter, Jane Bennett was "repelled" by a dead rat. To be clear: I argue that the KAB's dismay towards the assemblage of litter is informed not only by the irrecoverable loss of past natural splendor, but towards a racialized disgust with the non-hygienic other. This disgust over the supposedly individual deficiencies of unhygienic behavior, with litter as a primary figure, was then used by elected representatives and officials such as those described above. These representatives blamed the unhealthy effects of environmental racism on the often African-American communities made most vulnerable to their effects by post-Jim Crow segregation and the lack of federally-funded assistance for health crises that could only be mitigated by such large-scale interventions.

It is here, finally, that we can begin to see the intervention into the racist scapegoating of KAB's anti-litter campaign made by *Fast Willie Jackson* and *the Street Where You Live*. So what do we see in those panels? First we see litter, a refuse that lies neither within the use-time of the commodity, nor the waste-time in which the commodity is discarded but with the possibility of being recycled, renewed into a new cycle of use. Outside of the commodity temporality of socially sanctioned utility, these streets, which resonate with the negative aesthetic values of blight, mark not only physical streets but also an entire human community as outside of socially recognized usefulness. Denied the federally subsidized dream of clean suburban living, and the basic municipal services (trash pick-up, clean water) that allows a humane foundation of basic health, litter marks these African American communities as outside of the social security net that attempts to prop up the needy, but still potentially useful, U.S. citizens. Rather

than basic services, such as street cleaning, these neighborhoods are provided with the suspect "education" that the individuals that make up their community are to blame for the squalor that puts them beyond basic governmental and social aid.

It may, at first glance, appear to be curious that in these comics at least putatively about or remarking upon the so-called litter crises, the scape-goat, KAB's infamous social invention, the litter-bug is nowhere to be seen. There is no arm discarding fast food out of a car window or incriminating panels of the children abandoning bottle tops after games of skully. Willy, presumably, has thrown a paper from his pocket, but clearly he's an inexperienced litter-bug because he's throwing down cold, hard cash. This absence of perpetrators, though, does not make for an absence of litter-bugs. These comics function as critiques of the racial scape-goating at the heart of the litter-panic, refusing to place the cultural disgust inculcated by the anti-litter campaigns anywhere but on the trash blighting the environment. But the absence of litter doesn't make for the absence of litter-bugs, since the latter was more aggressively defined by KAB not just as those that toss their gum wrappers into the street, but anyone squalid (poor) enough to (be forced to) live in litter.

So to prove that they're no litter-bugs, both neighborhoods embrace the logic of personal responsibility, "People start pollution, people can stop it." But the different means through which they go about fixing the litter problem is instructive. In 1960, the community in *The Street Where You Live* is organized by an ascendant NAACP. They redirect the public disgust towards litter-dwellers back onto their City Commisioner with a just rage, you think we want to live on street like this, "would **you** want to live on a street like this?" We're the same, commissioner.

By 1976, that community organization is exchanged for sins and solutions placed solely at the feet of the individual. Willie tosses out the gum wrapper/ money, so Willie cleans up the street. The lack of promise in this scenario retroactively suggests a utopian element to the community action of *Street*. By insisting the local government come in and haul away the trash, fix the potholes in which trash collects, and provide pristine park spaces that the neighborhood will want to keep clean; this collective, neighborhood action has perhaps allowed for a genuine slice of middle class American splendor.

But can the NAACP's middle-class, respectability politics be read as anything other than complicit with the melancholic individualism of the KAB ads?[116] Within capitalism's ideology of personal responsibility, the urgent political issues of environmental racism are successfully coopted by corporate greenwashing and the redress of these symptoms have been mistaken for a correction to the system. In this grim scenario, the *Street Where You Live* fully fulfills the American middle class dream, not by eliminating the catastrophic overproduction of consumer goods, but by outsourcing the burden of that waste onto other others, displacing the garbage left over from our consumption onto another, poorer street of not-quite human litter-bugs.

[116] For more on the competing class interests and economic gains of the civil rights movement see Adoph L. Reed Jr.'s "Black Particularity Reconsidered."

Chapter 4: "The Screaming Spray Pursued Them": Setting Environmental Racism in James Baldwin, ZZ Packer, and Melanie Gillman

In the previous chapter, I outlined the historical trajectory of the litter debate in the U.S. context, including the postwar rise of disposable packaging and that industry's ongoing, successful propaganda campaign to outsource the responsibility for disposing said packaging onto individual consumers and local governments. Racialized othering was central to this campaign's strategy. Such othering not only facilitated public feelings of disgust toward criminalized litter-bugs, but also helped white, middle-class consumers preserve a sense of environmental stewardship that followed the virtuous triple R's of trash: reduce, reuse, and recycle. Timothy Cooper suggests that "the litter debate contributed to the formation of many of the characteristic elements of contemporary environmental discourse" (Cooper 253). For Cooper, clean air and recreation movements encouraged the use and exploration of nature spaces: at the same time, however, they insisted on a middle-class standard for how spaces designated as natural should be virtuously used and preserved.[117] When those norms were violated not just by litter, but also activities such as playing loud music and drinking, advocates for recreation reasoned that, "urban dwellers had acquired bad habits as a consequence of being cut off from the country" (256).

If urban inhabitants could no longer be expected to know how to behave in the country, Dawn Day Biehler explores how pestilence and improper waste disposal was often blamed on country folk not knowing how to act in the city. The U.S. Public Health

[117] I discussed this tension in the Olmsted section of chapter 1.

Service "believed that new African-American residents settling in on the North Side [of Milwaukee] and Puerto Ricans on the South Side were unaccustomed to the garbage disposal practices necessary to avoid rat problems in cities, as evidenced by their neighborhoods' heaping trash cans" (Biehler 163). Discourses around litter framed working class, non-white populations as not belonging in cities because they couldn't adapt their country ways; by the same token, anti-litter campaigns presumed working class, non-whites did not belong to the countryside because they could not adapt their "urban" ways to appropriately-bougie park-etiquette. Cooper suggests that "the symbolic power of waste [w]as a challenge to restricted property ownership" (Cooper 256). The propertied class encouraged, and was founded on, universalist claims of Transcendentalism and Romanticism that bestowed a restorative power to nature. Even so, the propertied class's fear, expressed through an anxiety over litter, was that "it would be dangerous to leave the public with the idea that granting access meant they had also obtained rights of possession" (Cooper 256).

Underlying both elements of this city-country binary is an inhospitality towards working class, non-white, immigrant populations.[118] The U.S. Federal Housing Administration's post-WWII redlining practices refused to insure mortgages to homes owned by or even proximate to African Americans; consequently, white families were re-segregated into liminal (neither town nor country) suburban communities (Rothstein). This segregation accelerated the production of modern racist spatial metaphors, such as the "urban jungle," which naturalizes (that is, blames) the abhorrent conditions of poor

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[118] Raymond Williams famously introduced the binaristic city-country paradigm of cultural studies.

African-American communities as the product, rather than the cause of, those regional communities' impoverishment.

As this chapter elaborates, nature (understood in multiple senses, including the non-human environment and the supposedly-biological imperatives of non-white "others") was and continues to be used to police the behavior of residents paradoxically considered both alien and native to city and country alike. In this chapter, I am interested in encounters with nature that arise from recreational trips out of the city and its suburbs. In this specific sense of a recreational outing or vacation, nature is defined as a cure to some affliction arising out of urban residency. In particular, I am interested in stories that concern African-American attempts to access these recreational spaces, attempts that not only contest the logic of segregation that extends to park and camp grounds, but also that provide a means to escape the danger and exhaustion attendant in the constant traversal of violently-policed boundaries within the city. Because the non-human environment depicted in these "outing" stories are already loaded with competing meanings—instrumental recreation, middle-class standards of propriety, medicinal fresh air, sacred versus sexual natures, calm versus city chaos, leisure versus work, communal engagement versus atomizing urban crowds—these stories offer an opportunity to trace such competing meanings which are otherwise often subsumed by romantic discourses in which Nature appears monolithic. Rather than a temporary reprieve from the unequal distribution of resources in racially segregated cities, then, the nature settings in short stories by James Baldwin, ZZ Packer, and Melanie Gillman set the scene for a dawning realization in their respective child protagonists that non-urban environments serve as

distant outposts for the very segregation and social oppression from which they were trying to get out.

In 1951, James Baldwin published “The Outing,” which, according to biographer David Leeming, “is ‘an outgrowth’ of *Crying Holy*, the novel that Baldwin worked on for ten years before revamping it as *Go Tell It on the Mountain*” (qtd. in Frontain 2).[119] Whether it’s because of this eerie similarity to Baldwin’s first novel, a critical preference for novels over short stories (see Harbach’s “MFA vs. NYC”), or the fact that the story was collected alongside anthology hegemons “Going to Meet the Man” and “Sonny’s Blues,” “The Outing” remains curiously absent from the growing scholarship on Baldwin. What has been written points to the almost pastiche rerouting of Baldwin’s thematic interests, including “Baldwin’s continued rewriting” of the biblical story of Jonathan and David and, importantly, his engagement with other major short story writers from the twentieth century (Frontain 6). Charles Scruggs argues that the deeply felt “metaphorical implications” of nature in “The Outing” owe a debt to the deeply-imbued psychological and thematic resonances of Hemingway’s “Big Two-Hearted River” stories (Scruggs 69).[120] Frontain links Baldwin with another touchstone of the twentieth-

[119] Frontain cites: Leeming, David. James Baldwin: A Biography. New York: Holt, 1994.

[120] Relevant to this chapter is Scruggs claim that Baldwin, Wright, and Ellison were responding to Hemingway’s sense of homelessness in the wake of a disappearance of Harlem as site of hopeful modernity in the Harlem Renaissance. In the case of Wright and Baldwin, who claimed it time “to turn our backs forever on the big two-hearted river” (Scruggs quoting Baldwin 64), it was especially important to

century short story tradition, suggesting that, "Like the stories in Joyce's *Dubliners*, 'The Outing' hints at a significance that is never directly articulated" (Frontain 5). Baldwin's story maintains an "unrelenting feeling of expectation" for a Joycean epiphany that, while generally understood to the story's readers, never quite becomes clear to the story's characters (Frontain 4). I would point in particular to the similarity between the scenes at the end of "The Outing" and Joyce's "A Painful Case": Baldwin's David and Joyce's Duffy pause beneath a single park tree to take a moment's respite from the overwhelming feelings of social isolation and mourning that has developed out of the loss of a love interest over socio-moral scruples (Baldwin 52-53; Joyce 100-101). Moreover, I detect in Baldwin's description of the protagonist's adolescent Eros, routed into the religious energy of church rituals, a clear allusion to Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle." Baldwin writes: "The animal, so vividly restless and undiscovered, so tense with power, ready to spring had been already stalked and trapped and offered, a perpetual blood-sacrifice, on the altar of the Lord" (Baldwin 48).[121] The use of a feline predator ready to "spring" is especially reminiscent of James's beast: "The Beast had lurked indeed, and the Beast, at its hour, had sprung; it had sprung in that twilight of the cold April…" (James Kindle Location 248520). Although the opacity of the metaphor in both stories

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underscore "the connection between 'holiday' and 'savagery'" (Scruggs 63) in Hemingway's holidays. "It is the terror of history that shapes 'our time' for Baldwin, a terror that contaminates the pastoral" which can be seen with the conflation of lynching with picnicking in "Going to Meet the Man" (Scruggs 66).

[121] For more on James's influence on Baldwin, see David Adams Leeming, "An Interview with James Baldwin on Henry James."

remains difficult to penetrate, the fear of a "sprung" trap in these narratives portrays a nature felt as perilously close: at every moment, sexual urges (one's nature) threaten to endanger social situations predicated on their suppression.

What interests me, here, is the way Baldwin uses setting to evoke and revise the influential short story writers of the early 20th century. In particular, the relationships between character and nature—whether "nature" means the natural world (the rivers and trees) or biological tendencies (the beast in the jungle)—make a compelling case for reading the short story tradition with a special attention to the connections between human and world that this tradition implicitly values. Researching these meticulously crafted settings has nevertheless proven difficult: that is, very little criticism has been written on literary settings. The idea of a story's setting occupies an unfortunate crossroad between infantilizing pedagogy—setting being something we teach in introduction-to-literature courses or even, god forbid, high school literature classes—and suspiciously apolitical formalism (in response to my requests for good sources to help me think about setting, several colleagues suggested that "some New Critics" probably wrote about it). "Setting" sounds stupid, and perhaps even retrograde, following the rich evocations of space developed through critiques of structuralism (Foucault, Lefebvre, De Certeau), definitions of Orientalism (Said), Marxist critiques of modernism and neo-liberalism (Simmel, Benjamin, Jameson), and articulations of environmental place (Leopold, Cronon, Morton). Setting has been supplanted by terms with more evocative disciplinary connotations, such as place, space, environment, scene, situation, mapping, territory, geologies, milieu, field, zone, mis-en-scène, site, matrix, positionality, dwelling, habitat, and region, terms that in turn help us quickly position ourselves as critics and

readers between the imaginary space of texts and the (perhaps somewhat less) imaginary spaces of the real world.

At the risk of positioning myself as a pedantic formalist, I'd like to retain setting as a key site of ecocritical analysis for three reasons. First, setting maintains a useful capaciousness for thinking about the relationship between people and place. Consider the following literary term glossary entries on setting. For M.H. Abrams, "The overall setting of a narrative or dramatic work is the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs" (Abrams 284). Abrams also offers atmosphere, "the Greek term opsis ('scene,' or 'spectacle')," and mis-en-scène as potential synonyms (Abrams 285). Murfin and Ray gloss setting as "That combination of place, historical time, and social milieu that provides the general background for the characters and plot of a literary work," and also suggests that setting "frequently plays a crucial role in determining the atmosphere of a work" (Murfin and Ray 366). Finally, William Harmon defines setting as:

> The background against which action takes place. The elements making up a *setting* are: 1) the geographical location, its topography, scenery, and such physical arrangements as the location of the windows and doors in a room; 2) the occupations and daily manner of living of the characters; 3) the time or period in which the action takes place—for example, and epoch of history or a season of the year; 4) the general environment of the characters—for example, religious, mental, moral, social, and emotional conditions" (Harmon 442).

Unfortunately, these definitions of literary setting collectively appear to consider everything not "character" to be a stage-like backdrop: this is textbook anthropocentrism.

What is otherwise useful about these definitions is the capaciousness with which geography, history, morality, and emotions all serve to place a story.

This, in turn, sets up the second reason I prefer the term "setting." While roomy enough to encompass many of the spatial terms listed in the previous paragraph, setting links this rich spatial vocabulary with a medium-specific conception of narrative fiction generally and, as I argue in this chapter, short stories in particular. While the relationship between the social and literary production of space are often intertwined and mutually generative (as I argued in my discussion of Olmsted during a previous chapter), discussions of the space of fiction risk flattening the analogic link between prosaic and physical spaces. "Setting" maintains, and even insists, on the historically-situated geography of a story, while at the same time preserving a sense of difference between a place and its representation. That does not make prose or drawn representations any less "real" than their geographical locations. Rather, it pushes back on any sense in which space functions as an under-mediated connection between signifier and signified. Put another way, while critics are often at pains to highlight the levels of artifice that go into the human characters of book—distinguishing narratorial and authorial voices, stressing that a character is not an actual person, and so forth—place is often too simply conflated with its unmediated, real world referent.

This sense of a medium-specific production of space is relevant to the third and final reason setting remains useful: setting insists we think about the craft of cultural production. While "setting" seems to have dropped out of the lexicon of contemporary literary theory, it remains a staple in books about how to write short stories. In her book *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction*, Valerie Shaw spends a chapter directly

referencing various practitioners of the short story discussing the particular importance of setting to their diverse writing practices. Shaw quotes Elizabeth Bowen first, “Nothing can happen nowhere. The locale of the happening always colours the happening, and often, to a degree shapes it” (qtd. in Shaw 150-151). Even in stories that do not intentionally thematize the relationship between humans and their environment (as I believe is the case in at least “The Outing” and probably “Brownies,” treated in this chapter), the tradition of early twentieth century short fiction and the post-WWII program-era implementation of those formal features make short stories a rich site for seeing how writers *set*—to draw on Shaw’s positive articulation of Bowen—the something and someone in relationship to the somewhere (151).

In this chapter, I exercise the term setting to 1) invoke a capacious sense of place that includes geography, history, and social beliefs, 2) suggest a device specific to the medium of short narratives, and 3) draw attention to the craft of relating something’s somewhere. In the context of short stories, setting is most akin to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of territory. As with much of Deleuze and Guattari’s work, this concept can become as difficult to invoke as you want to make it (relative or absolute deterritorialization and reterritorializtion, anyone?). But in a basic sense, Elizabeth Grosz explains that the “constitution of territory is the fabrication of the space in which sensations may emerge” (Grosz 12).[122] Accordingly, sensation does not apprehend a static

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[122] Grosz’s conception of art as a site of territorialization and deterritorialization is relevant to my conception of Baldwin’s simultaneous homage and critique of James, Hemingway, and Joyce’s use of setting to consider the relation between human and non-humans. “Art is not only the movement of territorialization, the movement of joining the body to the chaos of the universe itself according the body’s

and preexisting world; rather, sensation actively shapes and at the same time is shaped by the sensed environment.[123] Setting resembles territory insofar as it makes legible how environments—comprised of vibrantly-sensible subjects—enable literary characters to become sensible of their own diegetic world. The economical style of short fiction makes this distribution of the sensible available for the consideration of the reader.

Baldwin's "The Outing" begins:

> Each summer the church gave an outing. It usually took place on the Fourth of July […] This year they were to take a boat trip up the Hudson as far as Bear Mountain where they would spend the day and return as the moon rose over the wide river. Since on other outings that had merely taken a subway ride as far as Pelham Bay or Van Cortland Park, this year's outing was more than ever a special occasion […] The outing, Father James declared from his pulpit a week before the event, was for the purpose of giving the children of God a day of relaxation; to breathe a purer air and to worship God joyfully beneath the roof of heaven; and there was nothing frivolous about *that*. (emphasis original, 29)

The first thing to notice in this passage is temperature. The outing's date, July 4th, is rife with symbolism: in particular, the racial irony of U.S. Independence Day as well as the

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needs and interests; it is also the converse movement, that of deterritorialization, of cutting through territories, breaking up the systems of enclosure and performance […] through works and events that impact the body" (Grosz 18).

[123] This idea is widely shared by most non-human theory, for instance in Karen Barad's notion of the apparatus, Latour's network created by an assortment of human and nonhuman actors, and, perhaps most influentially, Donna Haraway's notion of being fabricated between beings in the figure of the cyborg or relationships between co-constituting companion species.

relative rarity of a national holiday in which most of the church's congregants could take an entire day away from work.[124] But July is also when the "urban heat island effect" would create the greatest contrast in temperature between the city, the Hudson River, and Bear Mountain Park. Brian Stone explains that "Cities do not cause heat waves – they amplify them. Because of the greater prevalence of mineral-based building materials, such as stone, slate, concrete, and asphalt, cities absorb and retain substantially more heat than rural areas characterized by more vegetative cover" (13). Stone uses the 2003 heat wave that killed tens of thousands in some of Europe's most affluent nations to explore how even slight variations of heat affects the body (4). He also explains that, during unusually hot days, "the divergence between urban and rural temperatures can be much greater, literally tipping the balance between an unpleasantly hot day in one environment and a public health emergency in another" (13). Baldwin thematizes the oppressive atmosphere of a Harlem July. This heat, in the story, moves along the river and into the park trees with the church group, so that getting out of the heat becomes a persistent concern even after the characters leave Harlem.

In thinking about how an oppressive atmosphere moves between city and rural park grounds, Baldwin sketches the historic and racially-specific traversal of this group between urban and pastoral park spaces. A charged atmosphere moves between these spaces because, unlike the hermetic tradition of solitary individuals confronting the wilderness (Muir, Thoreau, Christopher McCandless of *Into the Wild*, Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*, etc.), Baldwin depicts a *group* outing. In escaping the city, the return to nature—

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[124] See, for instance, Frederick Douglass's famous speech "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro."

whether "nature" means wilderness or pastoral parks—is often written as an escape from a claustrophobic relationship between an individual and crowds; individuals wishing to be unencumbered by the expectations of urban society. As sites of recreation, national, state, and urban parks such as Bear Mountain present carefully-landscaped representations of pristine nature to facilitate a rurally-contextualized self-understanding as well as opportunities to romantically engage with others in more natural, uninhibited settings. However, as Victoria W. Wolcott notes, the "potential for romance, and the association of African Americans with dirt and disorder, led to whites' insistence that recreational spaces be racially homogenous" (2). By this logic, the nature of recreational settings can refer as much to the racial exclusions expected of parks as to the birds, trees, and grass landscaped to resemble settings untouched by (non-white) humans.

As discussed in my first chapter, anxious definitions of the purpose and use of parks demonstrate how the transformation of nonhuman nature (such as grass) can naturalize social relations such as racial apartheid. Colin Fisher argues that "this struggle for nature and accompanying white resistance" was frequently violent, leading to such major altercations such as Chicago's 1919 race riot which "left 38 people dead, 537 injured, and 1,000 homeless" (Fisher 64). Among the many horrifying incidents of violent exclusion from unspoiled natures, Fisher recounts the story of a beach scene wherein "a white crowd dunked and nearly drowned a black boy whom they accused of 'polluting the water'" (Fisher 68). This racist "association of African Americans with dirt and disorder" and violent purge of black bodies accused of "polluting" otherwise unsullied spots of green recreation demonstrates the hysterical white communalism that often underwrote the supposedly hermetic encounter with nature. As in the discourse on

litter-free parks, the "pristine" nature encountered in both the self and the non-human world was tied to the racial sanitation of spaces contaminated by non-white others. Baldwin's "The Outing" significantly rerouted the U.S. nature story (seen above in James and Hemingway) through the African-American communal experience of the nonhuman world. For practical reasons of self-defense, the church group in "The Outing" experienced urban and rural nature-recreation spaces as a community rather than individuals returning to some imagined state of nature. That is, African-Americans experiencing violently segregated nature spaces alone would need to at least be aware, if not justifiably afraid, of their violent exclusion from those spaces. This experience suggests that the ideal of pristine nature was always racially mediated and deeply social: it was not the U.S. fantasy of individual actors returning to nature to encounter their most essential natural liberties.

If Baldwin's account lays out an African-American experience that *critiques* pre-social fantasies of being in nature, it also deploys the health-through-recreation rationale that African-African institutions used to stress the importance of getting out of the city and into nature. Fisher cites several *Chicago Tribune* articles that insisted on getting "out, and away from the city—to get close to nature [...] to get far away from the heat [...] where one may find rest for the mind and body with nature's purest food, water, and air" (*Defender* qtd. in Fisher 69).[125] In response to this call for respectable recreation (and in contradistinction to the supposed juvenile delinquency of pool halls and street corners),

[125] Another *Defender* article claimed urban life and labor turned individuals into "automaton[s]," which was best addressed by "renewal" in nature, reflecting the influence of Olmsted's claim that parks preserve the "poetic mood" of individuals that is deadened by urban life (Fisher 70).

African-American organizations and churches "sponsored picnics and other outings" to reap the benefits of "purest" nature (Fisher 71). African-American environmentalism, then, bore a similar structural position to the black Christian church. That is, both organizations deploy the language of the broader religious and environmental coalitions they claimed affiliation with and, at the same time, they critique the way those discourses excluded African-Americans. Therefore, in the opening paragraphs of "The Outing" referenced above, Baldwin's Father James ties "breath[ing] a purer air" together with the "worship God joyfully beneath the roof of heaven" as he speaks from his pulpit a week before the event (Baldwin 29). This insistence on the social, mental, and physical health benefits of pure nature—an insistence that rejects the segregation logic of racial sanitation—is here connected to the practice of worship and the enjoyment of God's creation. As Father James insists, "there was nothing frivolous about *that*."

"The Outing" is a difficult story to summarize. Its many characters include the brothers Jonnie and Roy who, along with their friend David, want to give a birthday present to Sylvia. Because of the flirtatious connotations of the gift (largely an overture from David to Sylvia, which makes Johnnie uncomfortable because of Johnnie's desire for David), they scheme to separate Sylvia from her strict mother, Sister Daniels. Boarding the boat to Bear Mountain, the congregants group together, and Johnnie fights with his hated father. There's a lot of talk of whether the core group of Johnnie, Roy, and David are saved; this talk takes place as the boys privately exchange sexual innuendo about their pubescent bodies and desire for Sylvia. The story climaxes in a frenzied scene of worship on the boat; then, following the climax, the story features a long meander in the park during which Roy and David give the gift to Sylvia. Finally, David wanders the

park alone. Other minor characters include Sister McCandless, known for ostentatiously worshipping on the public transportation en route to the church's various outings, Father James, Brother Elisha (possibly a rival suitor for Sylvia), David's sister Lorraine and his mother "Mrs. Jackson," Johnnie's younger sister Lois, Johnnie's mother and his "youngest, happiest" brother, Deacon Jones, and a girl named Elizabeth.

If one considers only the main group—Johnnie, Roy, and David—the story becomes much more clear, and clearer still if one omits Roy to focus on the under-reciprocated feelings between Johnnie and David. But, if that's the story, why are there numerous and deeply felt scenes beyond these numerous minor characters? Do these scenes merely constitute more setting for the central characters? To get an idea of how rapidly these fragmented scenes cut across each other, consider the series of discrete events covered in just four pages (40-43): Roy jokes that salvation would be "worth it" if it meant intimacy with Sylvia; Gabriel and his wife confront each other over Johnnie's rebellion; Sister Daniels privately lectures Sylvia to pay attention to the Lord rather than boys; Louis sobs to her mother that she wants to go home; Gabriel makes an unsuccessful appeal to get Father James to let him preach; Johnnie and David exchange intimacies on the topmost deck; Roy flirts with a "gawky and dazzled girl named Elizabeth"; the main church service begins.

Setting takes on a particularly important role in organizing this bounty of apparently unrelated encounters that together comprise Baldwin's short story. Not unlike James's use of space in *Wings of the Dove* (discussed in an earlier chapter), Baldwin uses carefully managed social distinctions between spaces to serve as a shorthand for feelings; feelings of belonging and alienation in particular. Within the broader narrative of a

religiously-motivated outing from the city into the country, Baldwin incessantly tinkers with and recontextualizes the escape velocity of "outings" through a variety of outings undertaken by the smaller social groups. These different groupings continuously disperse and reform over the course of the trip.

Importantly, Baldwin returns to the idea of escaping hot, oppressive atmospheres for cleaner, more natural air in order to depict the religious and sexual dynamics of the story. Mrs. Jackson's presence on the trip—as a first-time church attendee—is read as her "getting out" of the city into both the country and a different social group. When Gabriel asks Mrs. Jackson if it is her first time with the church, she responds, "Yes [...] David came home and told me about it and it's been so long since I've been in the country I just decided I'd take me a day off. And Lorraine's not been feeling too strong, I thought the fresh air would do her some good" (34-35). Gabriel responds: "Yes, it will, nothing like God's fresh air to help the feeble" (35). Here, Baldwin begins to distinguish the different character motivations through their contested understandings of nature. Gabriel aggressively questions why Mrs. Jackson's first appearance in church coincides with the boat ride to the park. Mrs. Jackson deflects the insinuation that she is leeching onto a spiritual outing for a vacation by falling back onto her role as a mother, a role from which she never gets a vacation ("it's been so long"). Her role as mother also leads her to seek healthy "fresh air" for her sick child, Lorianne. Gabriel, whose inability to connect with people like Mrs. Jackson leads Father James to refuse him a leadership role in the church, insists that it is "God's fresh air" that will help. The idea of "God's fresh air" is a bit perplexing: it does not clearly contrast the stultifying urban air with rural air. Would the city be considered "God's punishment air"? Baldwin will give considerable weight to

Gabriel's description of God's air as he develops the natural and metaphorical atmospheres of the story.

Together, Johnnie, David, and Roy experience medicinal fresh air on the boat. From "the dirty, broad, and blue-green Hudson […] there floated up to their faces a soft, cool breeze. They were quiet for a long time, standing together, watching the river and the mountains […] The sky was high and blue, with here and there a spittle-like, changing cloud; the sun was orange and beat with anger on their uncovered heads" (39). Later, the temperature on the boat cools, enabling new possibilities for interaction between characters. When Johnnie and David are alone on the top deck, David watches the mountain pass and Johnnie looks at David's face framed by the sky: "Up here the air was sharp and clean. They faced the water, their arms around each other [… Johnnie] shivered suddenly in the sharp, cold air and buried his face in David's shoulder. David looked down at him and tightened his hold. 'Who do you love?' he whispered. 'Who's your boy?' 'You,' he muttered fiercely, 'I love you'" (42-43). The oppressive heat that otherwise followed the church congregants seems to lift, facilitating David and Johnnie's exchange. The coolness of the deck air further contrasts not only with the air of the city, but most pointedly with dense heat of the church service: the boys must escape not only the city heat, but also the heat of the church, to express themselves. "The sun was high and fell everywhere with a copper light. In the city the heat would have been insupportable; and here, as the saints filed into the huge, high room […] the air slowly began to be oppressive" (43). The air of the room struggles to support not only the congregants themselves, but also the additional, heavy burden of the saints.

In contrast to this heat from the church atmosphere, Johnnie's alienation from those proceedings is figured by the "icy wind" of his feelings for David (Baldwin 50). Johnnie's alienation renders neither possibility for a social pairing—his coupling with David or his inclusion in the church—sustainable given the present atmospheric conditions. Herein emerges the other major sense in which Baldwin uses outing: the outing of one's sexual identity. This second sense of "outing" holds equally true for Baldwin as it does for Johnnie. According to Frontain, "As his first published treatment of homosexuality, 'The Outing' is a kind of self-outing on Baldwin's part" (Frontain 7). Jerome De Romanet argues that Baldwin's self-outing, coming as it does in the form of a dense, elliptical short piece of fiction, is simultaneously an act of "camouflaging:"

> Baldwin's oeuvre is also divided, according to the more public—or the more private—aspect of the specific text. Generally, Baldwin reserved the more public voice of spokesman (of the black community as a whole, of writers and artists) for his essays and formal addresses, while he often let his fictional characters discuss the more private issues of sexual politics and preference (De Romanet 8).[126]

De Romanet bases his analysis on an early Baldwin essay on Andrè Gide, wherein Baldwin writes of sexuality, "between nature and man there is a difference, there is indeed, perpetual war" (Balwin qtd. in De Romanet 6). During the church service in the short story, Baldwin puts it thusly: "In them was perpetual and perfectly poised the power

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[126] The division between Baldwin's public writings on race and private "literary" writings on sexuality is further developed in Douglas Field's "Looking for Jimmy Baldwin: Sex, Privacy, and Black Nationalist Fervor."

of revelation against the power of nature" (Baldwin 48). Johnnie's transgressive desire shelters him from the fire of the church, yet only with another harsh element: the "icy wind" (50). Much as the church gets out of the city to escape its oppressive heat, only to find themselves cast "outside" of natural recreational spaces because of the racist discourses of environmental leisure, so too does Johnny feel ostracized by the communal element of the church and its exclusion of homosexual desire. That said, between the natural metaphors of fire, ice, and the atmosphere of the church service, a third figure pervades the story: that of the river, a nature that traces a horizon of perceptibility for the characters.

In his most rhapsodic prose, Baldwin traces the increasingly trance-like collective state of the congregations in terms of atmosphere. He writes: "Now the hall was filled with a rushing wind on which forever rides the Lord" (46). With this wind comes a vision of future annihilation:

> On the open deck sinners stood and watched, beyond them the fiery sun and the deep river, the black-brown-green, unchanging cliffs. That sun, which covered the earth and water now, would one day refuse to shine, the river would cease its rushing and its numberless dead would rise; the cliffs would shiver, crack, fall and where they had been would be nothing but the unleashed wrath of God. (46)

In this vision, the sun becomes both the source of oppressive, spiritual heat and a necessary condition for light and life: the absence of the sun casts the earth into ruin and death. Fire complements the work of the sun: Baldwin describes the music of the service as a "fire [that] splashed the open deck and filled the doors and bathed the sinners standing there; fire filled the great hall and splashed the faces of the saints and wind,

unearthly, moved above their heads" (49). This fire causes an "intolerable heat" from a "fiery furnace" that clouds the perspective of the worshippers (49).

And yet, outside the pressure cooker of the room in which the church service takes place, "the river rushes past under the heavy shadow of the Palisades and the copper sun beat down" (44). The river, often discussed by the congregants in lofty, abstract terms—the "majestic Hudson" or "God's great river," for example—contrasts the wild, inhuman terms of Baldwin's setting (37, 45). "Beneath them the strong indifferent river raged within the channel and the screaming spray pursued them" (41). All around the congregants, then, indifferent inhuman forces seem ready to strike out at those competing for God's clean air.[127]

The divergent experiences of indifferent nature and instrumentalized recreation spaces are clearly contrasted when the party finally arrives at the park. Once in Bear Mountain, David gets his pastoral scene with Sylvia, picking at blades of grass while feeling the cool breeze from the river (Baldwin 54-55). Johnnie, confused over how his relationship with David left him feeling estranged during the sermon and frustrated over David's insistence that they wait for an opportunity to present Sylvia with their gift outside the strict presence of Sister Daniels, has a very different encounter with nature:

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[127] While it's beyond the scope of this argument to fully flesh out, Baldwin often places the boat as a site that mediates the relationship between the human characters and nonhuman elements (especially the wild river) of the story. "In the engine room children watched the motion of the ship's gears as they rose and fell and chanted. The tremendous bolds of steel seemed almost human, imbued with a relentless force that was not human" (41). Later, Johnny's emotional isolation will be exacerbated by the physical distance from David who was taken a rowboat to the middle of a lake in the park, at which point Johnnie is revealed to be afraid of water (57).

> He leaned his forehead against the bark of a tree, shaking and burning as in the teeth of a fever. The bark of the tree was rough and cold and though it offered no other comfort he stood there quietly for a long time, seeing beyond him—but it brought no peace—the high clear sky where the sun in fading glory traveled; and the deep earth covered with vivid banners, grass, flower, thorn and vine, thrusting upward forever the brutal trees […] he turned from the tree as he turned his mind from the abyss which suddenly yawned, that abyss, depthless and terrifying, which he had encountered already in dreams (52-53).

Contra De Romanet, Baldwin provides an encounter with the natural world that is not mired in conflict. The conflicts represented by nature are endemic to motivated abstractions of the non-human world: the city versus the country; segregated white environmentalism; the oppressive atmosphere of the church excluding the personal inclination of its members; one's social expectations versus private nature; David's pastoral romance versus Johnnie's wilderness of despair. Yet, like the "strong indifferent" Hudson that courses below the competing human atmospheres of the ship, the tree, "rough and cold" and offering "no comfort," stands beyond the psychodrama of David and Johnnie's park scene. Baldwin uses a muscular prose of indifference, a language that evokes an existentialist-tinged tradition of wilderness. This style, in turn, textures the imbrication of non-human environments with the contested concepts humans use to police them. These social uses of nature make utopian promises of belonging while implicitly discriminating against any member who threatens the dominant groups' claims to the land. Baldwin's indifferent, comfortless nature, by contrast, makes no such promises. Nature neither accepts nor rejects: it is simply indifferent.

While it does rely on a certain realist tradition of the 20th-century short story—one that renders nature as cruel, masculine, and the backdrop of human activity—there is, of course, nothing real or factual about Baldwin's rough trees or indifferent rivers. As I've argued, the scenery of the story is part of a complicated setting that offers competing discourses of nature. On the one hand, there persists the desire for a cooler, purer air that alternately offers a physiological critique of urban life, a religious critique of sinners, and a social critique of homophobia. Baldwin brings this heavily determined theme of atmospheres—one that personifies nature—into conversation with another discourse of nature, one in which the natural world serves as a backdrop for human activity. This latter version does not offer a possibility for "return" or escape as it conceives of humans as irresolvably different and separate from nature. This "realist" nature offers an alternative to the binaristic, in-or-out movement from man-made to natural atmospheres, but only insofar as it structures an abyss of loneliness: the realization that all promises of pastoral belonging can only be dangled, tantalizing, out of reach. The story ends with Johnnie's head once again in David's shoulder. But, this time, Johnnie "shivered a bit in the night air" (57). The air, no longer in the thematic register of "in" or "out," is simply cold. Whereas before Johnnie found this space with David a cool, clean respite from the atmosphere of Gabriel and the church, "now where there had been peace there was only panic and where there had been safety, danger, like a flower, opened" (57).

Author ZZ Packer published the short story "Brownies" in the November 1999 issue of *Harper's Magazine*. Subsequently republished in *The Best American Short*

Stories and Packer's 2003 short story collection *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*, "Brownies" immediately established Packer as an important new voice in fiction. The story landed her on lists such as *The New Yorker's* 2010 "20 under 40" and prompted creative writing programs from across the country to invite her to speak. During such readings, she still (17 years later, as of this writing) seems to largely read from "Brownies" (a long awaited follow up novel on African-American Civil War stories has yet to appear). In sum, while Packer has written other interesting stories, she has built an impressive reputation based largely on one story nearly two decades old. For readers of the story, it's not very difficult to see why. In "Brownies," Packer has crafted a nearly perfect short story. Her voice is singular, every detail is precise and perfectly timed, and she perceptively weaves together the contemporary concerns of race and disability. These urgent political matters are counterbalanced by the laugh out loud tone maintained throughout the story. In this way, Packer (in "Brownies," at least) belongs to the contemporary lineage of African-American humor/ satirists that includes Fran Ross, Paul Beatty, and Mat Johnson.[128]

"Brownies," narrated from the first-person perspective of Laurel (or "snot" as she's derisively referred to through most of the story), tells the story of a group of African-American girl scouts—the "Brownie" designation generally referring second, third, or in this case, fourth graders—who try to assault a white scout group for using a

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[128] On the tradition of African American satire, Brandon Manning asserts that, "Scholars have long considered African American satire a repository for androcentric perspectives that largely exclude themes and issues pertaining to black women's subjectivity." Manning considers "Brownies" to be "a brief but potentially groundbreaking rejoinder to the androcentric narrative conventions of contemporary African American satire" (Manning 125).

racial epithet.[129] During their assault, however, the African-American Brownies get close enough to the white troop to realize that troop 909 is comprised of "*delayed* learners," calling into question both whether the white troop did actually use an epithet as well as their ability to understand and intentionally use the epithet's meaning (emphasis original Packer 22).

Written half a century after Baldwin's "The Outing," Packer's "Brownies" occupies a very different literary landscape. No longer would writers be able to primarily support themselves through popular short fiction. Instead, Packer is part of the post-World War Two boom of creative writing programs, a boom Mark McGurl terms "The Program Era," in which short story fiction is often written for other writers and broadly supported by academic fellowships and teaching positions. Baldwin and Packer are also writing from other sides of the Civil Rights movement and the movement's great promises and frequent disappointments regarding the redress of racial inequality brought about by slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration. In spite of these significant historical and stylistic differences, there exists a striking sense of continuity in Packer's use of setting in "Brownies." "Brownies" is also a story about a religiously inflected group that tries to get out of the city and into nature for healthy recreation. As in "The Outing," the

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[129] Brownies is also a possible allusion to *The Brownies' Book*, W. E. B. Du Bois and Jessie Redmon Fauset's Harlem Renaissance period, children's spinoff of *The Crisis* magazine. Intriguingly, Du Bois wrote a regular column in the magazine under the title "As the Crow Flies," the title of the final story in this chapter. For more information on *The Brownie's Book* see: Smith, Katharine Capshaw. *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. Print.

encounter with nature provides less of a sense of authentic rejuvenation and more of a reminder of how the Brownies are racially segregated in both the city and the country.

For a camping story, "Brownies" is rather austere in its depictions of the non-human world. Rather than a description of "Camp Crescendo"—the girl scout troops' destination—the story opens with a description of the different Disney and off-brand characters displayed on the girls' sleeping bags and the various class distinctions (the licensed products indicating wealth) that those characters signify. The first extended description of the non-human world comes during a description of the scout leader, Mrs. Margolin. After comparing her to a mother duck and the Brownies to "obedient ducklings,"[130] Laurel, the narrator and one of the Brownies, notes:

> She wore enormous belts that looked like the kind that weightlifters wear, except hers would be cheap metallic gold or rabbit fur or covered with gigantic fake sunflowers, and often these belts would become nature lessons in and of themselves. 'See,' Mrs. Margolin once said to us, pointing to her belt, 'this one's made entirely from the feathers of baby pigeons."
>
> The belt layered with feathers was uncanny enough, but I was more disturbed by the realization that I had never actually *seen* a baby pigeon. I searched weeks for one, in vain—scampering after pigeons whenever I was downtown with my father.

[130] The narrator repeats this association between troop leaders and motherly animals when she describes troop 909's leader as reminding her "of a hog I'd seen on a field trip, where all the little hogs gathered around the mother at feeding time" (Packer 22).

> But nature lessons were not Mrs. Margolin's top priority. She saw the position of troop leader as an evangelical post. (2)

While this mention of non-human animals is brief, Packer quickly reiterates its significance on the next page when detailing the Brownies' insulting name for the white troop: "*Caucasian* Chihuahuas." Laurel notes, in terms reminiscent of never seeing a baby pigeon, that "neither Arnetta nor Octavia could *spell* 'Chihuahua,' had ever *seen* a Chihuahua" (Packer 3). Then, a page later, she explains: "When you lived in the south suburbs of Atlanta, it was easy to forget about whites. Whites were like those baby pigeons: real and existing, but barely thought about" (4).

This tight, multivalent symbol of the unseen pigeon is crammed within compelling, information-rich dialogue on why the Brownies hate the white troop (Troop 909), how the girls interact with their scout leader, and how the social hierarchy and in-jokes carry over from their segregated school. Embedded as it is among easily imparted details about the characters, such insight into how the troop interacts with the non-human world (presumably the point of a camping trip) is perhaps easy to miss. That is, the troops' first encounter with nature comes through their scout leader's clothing, clothing that otherwise often depicts flowers and animal skins (I'm not even sure what to say about the hilarious detail of claiming a belt is made out of pigeon feathers). Jon Mooallem points out that, "in the eye of a great storm of extinction," the proliferation of clothes and other commodities representing animals demonstrates "the lengths to which humankind now has to go to keep some semblance of actual wildlife in the world" (1-2). Even so, "the wild" can only disappear for those before whom it has previously appeared, or for those who at least have some hope of its future appearance. Mrs. Margolin's

belts—conspicuous, eye-level screens (for the fourth graders) that display fur, feathers, and sunflowers—represents less a disappearing wilderness than a nature rendered inaccessible by the girls' racially-determined, socio-economic positions.

The story's weird selection of representative animal life is telling. Pigeons are perhaps the most common representatives of wild, urban animals (that is, not domesticated animals like cats or dogs). Yet, Laurel is "disturbed" not by a lack of pigeons in her life, but by her failure to have seen a baby pigeon. An aptly titled *BBC Earth* article—"Why don't you ever see baby pigeons"—explains not only the evolutionary reasons for the birds' camouflaged nests, but anecdotally suggests how uncanny it can be to urban inhabitants (who stop to think about it) that this most recognizable symbol of urban wildlife seems to appear in the skies and underfoot fully formed, as if without any developmental stages or signs of aging (like the mother and her ducklings, mentioned above). A common, contrasting experience would be suburban robins who frequently make nests on houses or trees just outside a house window. What Laurel misses in not seeing a baby pigeon, then, is the sense of enchantment from seeing life hatch from an egg; she also misses the entangled feelings of ownership and parental responsibility that can arise from watching a bird nurture its young. The story's reference to Chihuahuas is a bit harder to gloss given the long heritage of the breed in Mexico. In Packer's story, the Brownies alliteratively link the breed to the word Caucasian: such "trisyllabic words had gained a sort of exoticism" for the group (Packer 3). By evoking the exotic-sounding dog, the girls might have another status-connoting animal in mind: the purse dog that serves as conspicuous accessory for the wealthy. In the case of both baby pigeon and Chihuahua, the girls link unseen, unspellable animals to the white folks

who are otherwise apparently absent from their neighborhoods and lives. Displayed on Mrs. Margolin's belt, the skins and feathers of absent animals subtlety teach "nature lessons" about boundaries of race, class, and taste.

Laurel's implicit bookish, outsider status within the group is suggested through her admiration of the work of another shy girl (Daphne) who had written a poem "with all the teacher-winning ingredients—trees and oceans, sunsets and moons" (5). What impresses Laurel about the poem, however, is the poem's maudlin conclusion ("You are my father, the veteran/ When you cry in the dark/ It rains and rains and rains in my heart"), which Laurel incessantly repeats, much to the discomfort of Daphne and Laurel's own father (6). Laurel's evaluation of the poem provides an outline for the consciousness that shapes the story; that is, Laurel dismisses depictions of nature—the tradition Baldwin self-consciously wrote within—as academic romanticism, favoring instead a type of family melodrama. Following that pattern of interest, "Brownies" is told with very little direct attention to its non-human environment, and it ends with an ambivalent story about Laurel's father.

The troop ringleaders appear to share Laurel's low level of interest in their shared environment. When the group needs to get away from the adults to plan their revenge on Troop 909 in secret, they feign an interest in nature so as to avoid adult supervision:

> "I handled them." Arnetta sucked on her teeth and proudly grinned. "I told her we was going to gather leaves."
>
> "Gather leaves," Octavia said, nodding respectfully. "That's a good one. Especially since they're so mad-crazy about this camping thing." She looked from ground to sky, sky to ground. Her hair hung down her back in two braids like a

> squaw's. "I mean, I really don't know why it's even called *camping*—all we ever do with Nature is find some twigs and say something like, 'Wow, this fell from a tree.'" (10).

Such lack of regard for the environment is not shared by the entire group, however. Octavia punctuates the speech quoted above by throwing a tomato into a nearby stream, an act that brings "a group of small silver-brown fish" swimming to the surface (11). The story notes how excited Janice, one of the troop members, becomes at the sight of the fish. Laurel narrates: "'Look!' Janice cried. 'Fishes! Fishes!' As she scrambled to the edge of the stream to watch, a covey of insects threw up tantrums from the wheatgrass and nettle, a throng of tiny electric machines, all going at once. Octavia sneaked up behind Janice as if to push her in. Daphne and I exchanged terrified looks" (11).

Earlier, Laurel describes Janice as having "a country accent [that] was laughable, her looks homely, her jumpy acrobatics embarrassing to behold" (8). Octavia, by contrast, has long, lovely hair that corresponds to the white women in shampoo advertisements: "shampoo-commercial hair [...] The sight of Octavia's mane prompted other girls to listen to her reverentially" (5). Even within this small group of fourth graders, then, nature is a site of contested meanings. On the one hand, the provincial Janice and poor, poetic Daphne—both low in the social order of the group—express interest in the non-human environment. Whereas Daphne utilizes nature as the "teacher-winning ingredients" of her writing, Janice's exuberant interest is, by-and-large, indicative of her general lack of awareness of social cues. Arnetta and Octavia frequently make fun of Janice, who in Laurel's eyes is not aware of the slights. Janice's exclamation of "Look [...] Fishes!" is analogous to the institutionally sanctioned enchantment with

nature that Octavia sarcastically dismisses when she mocks the camp's emphasis on nature with, "Wow, this fell from a tree."

Only when the group is brought together by the overlapping fears of an impending fight and a nighttime plunge into "the infinite deep of the woods" do they begin to express more of a shared perspective of the campgrounds:

> We made our way through the darkness by flashlight. The tree branches that had shaded us just hours earlier, along the same path, now looked like arms sprouting menacing hands. The stars sprinkled the sky like spilled salt. They seem fastened to the darkness, high up and holy, their places fixed and definite as we stirred beneath them.
>
> Some, like me, were quiet because we were afraid of the dark; others were talking like crazy for the same reason.
>
> "Wow!" Drema said, looking up. "Why are all the stars out here? I never see stars back on Oneida Street."
>
> "It's a camping trip, that's why," Octavia said. "You're supposed to see stars on camping trips."
>
> Janice said, "This place smells like my mother's air freshener."
>
> "These woods are *pine*," Elise said. "Your mother probably uses *pine* air freshener."
>
> Janice mouthed an exaggerated "Oh," nodding her head as though she just then understood one of the world's great secrets. (19)

Shared anxiety motivates the troop's discussion of their setting. Nature becomes a screen onto which they project their fear. Afraid of the fight, Laurel personifies the trees'

"menacing hands." That menace is articulated through a contrast with the beneficial "shading" the branches had provided earlier. Laurel, it seems, gains a new appreciation for the trees' shade by experiencing a collective fear of being isolated in the woods. The troop finds in the woods a natural resource for indirectly expressing their anxiety without having to explicitly admit their fear.

In both of the long passages quoted above, there emerges an interesting juxtaposition between the descriptions of nature and the somewhat broad terms the girls use to express enthusiasm or indifference. Consider Octavia's "all we ever do with Nature is find some twigs and say something like, 'Wow, this fell from a tree'" against Packer/Laurel's description of a "covey of insects threw up tantrums from the wheatgrass and nettle, a throng of tiny electric machines, all going at once." Consider, too, Laurel/Packer's description of the sky: "The stars sprinkled the sky like spilled salt. They seem fastened to the darkness, high up and holy, their places fixed and definite as we stirred beneath them" against Janice's proclamation that "This place smells like my mother's air freshener." Similar to Baldwin's textured account of character-created atmospheres as well as the non-human river and trees that are not entirely accessible to human feelings, Packer sets more detailed ("wheatgrass and nettle") and poetic (stars "fastened to the darkness, high up and holy") descriptions of nature scenes against the girls' proliferating, banal ("some twigs") attitudes towards nature.

If competing attitudes towards nature help define the girls' differing social positions, then Laurel's thickening descriptions of nature establish not only her marginal place in this group, but also her developing narrative voice. Laurel's initial disinterest in the environmental, "teacher-winning ingredients" of Daphne's poem—an aesthetic

indifference demonstrated in the substitution of Mrs. Margolin's belt in the place of any physical description of Camp Crescendo—parallels Arnetta and Octavia's boredom with the twig and leaf trappings of their camping outing. But when Octavia appears ready to push Janice into the pool for her exuberant interest in the fish, Laurel's description of the fish suggests not only that she is sympathetic to Janice's interest, but also that she is working out a language so that the reader might share in this interest. Later still, when the girls express their anxiety through a discussion of the woods and the sky, Laurel seems to intuit how emotionally charged environments, very much in the spirit of the heavily personified nature in the "The Outing," provide an objective correlative for otherwise hard-to-pin-down feelings. Laurel uses this technique as she concludes her narration of "Brownies" by telling the story of her telling a story. In this instance, she breaks her diegetic silence: "I looked out the window. I could not tell which were thoughts and which were the trees. 'No,' I said, and suddenly knew there was something mean in the world that I could not stop" (27-8). The collapse of interior and exterior spaces here coincides with an epiphany about social vulnerability, told through a literary voice that can express both vulnerability and cruelty. Laurel's concluding narration thus becomes a "teacher-winning" refrain worthy of Daphne's poetry.

There is also an extra-diegetic reason for these textured accounts of interested/detailed portrayal of the nonhuman environment set against disinterested/flat descriptions of nature. Even when we consider Laurel's rich descriptions of social differences and situated interests, Packer leverages such detailed accounts of fish and stars to suggest the limitations of Laurel's perspective. "Brownies" is not populated by a summer-camp-movie taxonomy of sensitive-to-nature aesthetes, arty outsiders, and city-

slicker philistines who can't live without modern amenities. Instead, Packer explores the continued effects of segregation through the Brownies' lack of "basic" familiarity with non-urban/suburban nature (a distinction between urban and suburban is difficult to make given the story's setting in the Atlanta-area environs). Arnetta suggests the reasons for this unfamiliarity:

> "You know," Octavia whispered, "why did *we* have to be stuck at a camp with retarded girls? You know?"
>
> "*You* know why," Arnetta answered. She narrowed her eyes like a cat. "My mama and I were in the mall in Buckhead, and this white lady just kept looking at us. I mean, like we were foreign or something. Like we were from China." (25).

If the outing to Camp Crescendo was an attempt to get away from the social exhaustion of urban life, represented here by racial slights experienced in the (shudder) Buckhead mall scene, the trip clearly failed to offer such respite. In the brief, ecstatic glimpses of the troop's environment, Packer leverages her crackerjack prose against the mundane language her characters use to signal their apprehension of that world. She does so less to directly describe Camp Crescendo and more to suggest the relatively nature-impoverished environments these girls call home. Atlanta's notorious light (and air) pollution blocks the stars; animals are primarily encountered through cheap commodities; the natural world becomes the signifier for rather than the signified of pine-scented hygienic products. Packer therefore circuitously describes Camp Crescendo, first through rare descriptions of the campsite, then, to the extent that the girl's reactions to the camp suggests their home environs, their homes in turn reveal what kind of camp they have

retreated to. That is, they have gone to a camp where they are "stuck" with other socially oppressed, mistreated groups.

In summary, Packer's multivalent descriptions of nature serve a variety of narrative functions. They characterize the social dynamics of the groups. They trace Laurel's developing literary voice. Of particular pertinence to this chapter, however, they provide a rich conception of place that maps a social congruency between the Brownies' camp and home environments. Packer shares Laurel's excited engagement with the nonhuman world; she also suggests the validity of Arnetta's suggestion that such a world is not characterized by rich scenery or biodiversity because it is unwanted land set aside for unwanted peoples. Rather than represent nature as a hybrid of the pastoral (abundance, tranquility, a childhood innocence these girls could look back on nostalgically) and the wilderness (unmediated nature, relying on essentials of survival drawn right from the land), Packer situates these girls within a distant outpost of racial segregation and animus, a choice that consolidates the Brownies' awareness of the inescapable legacies of U.S. racism.

The final text considered in this chapter, Melanie Gillman's *As the Crow Flies*, presents a set of formal difficulties both to the framework of this chapter, and literary and comics scholarship more broadly. By pairing it with my readings of "The Outing" and "Brownies," I will demonstrate the resonance of Gillman's text with both the thematic and formal aspects of the short stories. Gillman (pronoun they/their) provides a useful overview of their story:

> *As the Crow Flies* is a story about a group of queer teens who meet during a week-long Christian youth backpacking trip. The central conflict in the story follows Charlie, a 13-year-old queer Black girl, who's trying to figure out how to keep herself safe in an otherwise nearly all-white camp; and Sydney, a 12-year-old white trans girl, who's working out similar issues regarding personal safety in a transphobic "feminist" space. The camp itself is hiking toward a secret, historic "women-only" shrine hidden somewhere deep in the mountains, where the whole group will get to participate in a mysterious religious cleansing ceremony – 'cuz that doesn't sound ominous AT ALL, right?? (qtd. in Thomas)

While Gillman's description may make obvious their story's thematic similarities to Baldwin and Packer's stories, the formal difficulties in considering Gillman alongside these writers emerge from the fact that, at the time of this writing, *As the Crow Flies* is a webcomic.

In a blog post titled "Where Are the Webcomics' [Reviewers, Scholars, Critics]?" comics historian Jared Gardner juxtaposes the popularity of webcomics with the "haphazard or occasional attention" paid to the form by established review outlets and academic scholarship.[131] Both media studies scholars, who are skeptical of comics typically considered worthy of scholarly attention (especially "literary" graphic memoirs, such as *Maus*, *Fun Home*, and *Persepolis*), and literary scholars that capitalize on the putative popularity of comic books as justification for the study of comics that, while

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[131] For a useful overview, see Karin Kukkonen's "Web Comics" in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*. Kukkonen provides a bibliography of the rather scant current scholarship on webcomics.

rising within the estimation of literary studies, continue to reach only a shrinking niche audience, are relatively silent on the form.

Webcomics seem to address both of the departmental mandates. They achieve popularity, expressed through social media "shares," and their most popular forms are often non-serial gag comics such as *The Oatmeal*, *XKCD*, and *PhD*. Gardner's concern, expressed in his post "In Search of Lost Webcomics," has less to do with the genre or popularity of the form and more to do with the destroyed archives of early cinema ("only about 20-25%" of U.S. films before 1927 survived) and the ephemerality of print culture. Drawing a corollary between webcomics and the original magazine contexts of short stories, poetry, and comics—original contexts that are now an essential component of archival research—Gardner urges that we preserve "commentary, comments, correspondence and, even when possible, ads" that frame our experience of webcomics "as they were originally published, read and engaged with."[132] Such preservation would help maintain the original publishing context of the webcomic and, by extension, what readers of webcomics experience when reading a comic on the web. Indeed, in a discussion of the distinctive features of webcomics, comics scholar Derek Royal defines the informationally-dense clutter characteristic of this browser-embedded medium as constitutive of the form. He writes, "All webcomics are digital comics, but not all digital comics are webcomics […] the title itself, the designation webcomics, the web part of that term is basically what defines a webcomic. A webcomic is one in which you absolutely need a browser designed for the worldwide web in order to consume it"

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[132] See the appendix to this chapter for a brief analysis of the some of the edited drawings and browser ephemera that originally contextualized the web experience of *As the Crow Flies*.

(Royal). Following Royal's definition, the term "digital comics" cover everything from production (nearly every comic is edited, if not natively drawn within, computer software), distribution (most print comics are now also disseminated in downloadable file formats), and reception (many dismiss webcomics as an unknowable mass of flat colors and generic art). The distinction between what is properly a "webcomic" and the much broader term "digital comics" is therefore useful for understanding the inherent instability of the medium, which can only be viewed through a website that is itself perpetually alterable or deleteable by a creator, hosting provider, or web-enabled device used to view the site.

In my analysis of *As the Crow Flies*, I want to consider and preserve a different kind of webcomic ephemerality, one that makes the form additionally inhospitable to critical consideration: the fact that webcomics of this type are not complete. This feature of webcomics is doubly problematic. First, the narrative itself is not complete. As of this writing, Gillman has posted 289 pages of the comic. The first of two print volumes—currently soliciting crowd funding for publication—is projected to be 270 pages long. We can safely assume, then, that the story as it currently stands is only half told.[133] Seriality is, of course, not a new problem for literature, film, or comics studies. Even so, *As the*

[133] Gillman recently clarified that "*As the Crow Flies* in total will end up being around 500 pages by the time it's completely done. But my colored pencil process is so slow, it might be years before we get there! So we decided to divide it into two volumes, rather than make everyone wait a long time for one gigantic brick of a book. The story reaches a natural halfway point where we decided to break up the two volumes, so each volume will still be a good, solid read on its own!" (Carlson)

Crow Flies is not quite a serial narrative. Many "prestige" webcomics that attract the attention of major publishers such as Noelle Stevenson's *Nimona* (later published by HarperCollins) and Jason Shiga's *Demon* (First Second) are tightly-plotted narratives designed to eventually be read as novels. In their original webcomics form, those novels-to-be are distributed at the rate of about two pages per week (not considering the months-long hiatuses some webcomics undergo, the content often only available via the published edition, or the comics' removal from the web upon print publication).[134] Therefore, to write about this kind of webcomic means to write about a novel that is often only partially finished or available, that often has no secondary sources to cite, and that will eventually exist and be judged on the standards of a revised, completed publication. Given that *As the Crow Flies* is in the process of becoming a long-form novel, its future

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[134] *As the Crow Flies* will be published by Iron Circus Comics. Iron Circus's close and frankly more generous relationship (than major publishers) with the webcomic community is worth briefly outlining. Iron Circus was established and run by an African American woman, C. Spike Trotman, in order to self-publish her own long running webcomic *Templar, Arizona*. With the experience gained from crowd-funding her own books, Trotman came to some prominence with a successful 2012 printing of *Smut Peddler* an anthology of "sex-positive, lady-friendly smut" primarily created by and for women. Since then, Trotman has largely published anthologies (including 2013's *The Sleep of Reason*, which included Gillman's first published story. See Carlson) and long-form webcomics by popular creators such as E.K Weaver and Sophie Cambell, with a particular emphasis on female, non-white, and queer voices. Trotman's publishing venue brings the aesthetics and reader-writer relationships of webcomics into the print medium (and that medium's attendant modes of distribution and critical reception). Notably, and unlike the other publishers mentioned above, Iron Circus allows their publications to continue to exist in free-to-access, webcomic form.

form will not be applicable to framework of this chapter, that is, will not be applicable for a study on the relationship between racialized conceptions of nature and setting perceptibility in short stories.

One final impediment challenges my attempt to put Gillman within a genealogy that includes Baldwin and Packer and that traces the ways discourses of nature often exclude women, queer, and non-white voices: *As the Crow Flies* is self-fashioned as young adult fiction. Traditionally, "literary" short fiction is often associated with ambiguity, opacity, and the juxtaposition of precise detail with open-ended meaning. By comparison, young adult fiction has a tendency to explicitly narrativize its key themes and political goals. Such a feature of young adult fiction is clearly taken up in the work of many young comic artists currently working to redress a widespread practice known as "queer baiting." This practice entails, especially within popular mediums such as television shows or movies, the strong insinuation of a character's same-sex attraction; only to have such attraction left narratively underdeveloped in order to avoid alienating conservative audiences (JK Rowling's widely popular work, for instance, is often accused of "queer baiting"). Gillman's straightforward, very positive representation of gay, non-binary, and transsexual characters takes aim at popular media's tendency to queer bait. That is, Gillman does not necessarily target the still-prevalent concern of homophobia (even though that concern is clearly in their text); rather, their work addresses the more specific cultural trope of dangling same-sex desire to gay consumers while ultimately keeping those characters closeted so as to appease cultural bigots (a practice that can resemble, and is often excused as, literary/artistic opacity).

"Comics Not Just For Kids Anymore, Reports 85,000th Mainstream News Story" announces an *Onion* headline, parodying a now common feature of popular and to some extent academic writing that attempts to redress the dismissal of pop culture by treating it as a literary work worthy of adult audiences.[135] Comics are interesting in relationship to literature, not because the two are the same, but because literature and comics placed beside each other facilitate an intersectional reading practice that helps scholars trace a diverse web of differences that together comprise a monolithic discourse, such as "nature." As an all-ages comic, *As the Crow Flies* is very much for kids.[136] As such, its

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[135] This tendency to retroactively collapse the difference between comics and literature has led many comics scholars to express suspicion over the role of English departments in defining the legitimate roles of comic books as texts worthy of academic inquiry. According to Bart Beaty, "The vast majority of comics studies work being done in the English-speaking academy stems from faculty and students trained in literature departments, and it relies on the kind of interpretive close-readings that are still so paramount within those departments. That seems to have had a tremendous impact on the shaping of the canon: it is much easier for a graduate student to convince a committee that the work of Alison Bechdel or Chris Ware is 'sophisticated' enough to be akin to contemporary literary fiction that it would be a credible subject for a dissertation" (qtd. in Jenkins). Beaty expresses similar concern across his field shaping monographs. In the interview with Henry Jenkins, quoted above, he also worries about how literature departments' recent fixation with the novel has shaped the public interest in the "graphic novel" at the expense of any other kind of comics (short stories, gag cartoons, political cartoons, poetry comics, etc. ie the majority of comics).

[136] The major obstructions to considering Gillman in a literary genealogy of environmental racism, that includes Baldwin and Packer, looks remarkably similar to the objections to mixing comic and literary archives. Whether a one-off gag comic or a serial narrative with no narrative conclusion in sight, webcomics are dismissed as too ephemeral to be considered alongside established classics such as Baldwin,

theory of nature as an intersectional site for "racism, homophobia, transphobia, and classism" can be a bit heavy-handed. But hamfisted theories are sometimes the most useful: that is, they can draw clear lines of environmental racism and homophobia generally agreed to exist but often hard to point to directly.

A representative example of the plainspoken manner in which *As the Crow Flies* communicates a theme occurs when the camp leader, Bee, explains the "women's ceremony" that takes place at the end of a hike (Gillman 26).[137] Bee says, "*Purification* has always been a central theme of these expeditions [...] Our lives are uphill battles, and all throughout, our souls are constantly gathering *dirt*—sin, doubt, temptation...But if we strive for goodness, then God sees our efforts and rewards us—by washing away the dirt, and whitening our souls" (Gillman 27).

The last panel of Bee's explanation is broken into two parts. The first section of the panel, roughly 2/3rds of the panel's total size, shows Bee discussing "whitening." The bottom third of the panel is a close up of Charlie's widened eyes with the word "Wait" written on Charlie's forehead. The next page presents Charlie (a queer black girl) over seven panels: she is alternately stunned, irritated, worried, anxious, and sad as she tries to

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prejudices previously directed towards cheaply-printed comic books and newspaper strips meant to be thrown out after use. As young adult fiction, *As the Crow Flies* only occasionally trades subtlety for a clear treatment of its core concerns. This plainspoken style often separates more ambiguous fiction for adults, that requires specialized explanations in journals and classrooms, from the comic books for children that can be immediately grasped and grown out of.

[137] These page numbers refer to the original web version of *As the Crow Flies*.

see if any of the other apparently all-white hikers will react to Bee's explanation.[138] "Whitening? Did she really?" Charlie thinks. "Nobody else seems—maybe I misheard? 'Lightening'? 'Rightening' AAAAHH!! Nothing? Nothing?? Oh God." (28). Charlie's thoughts of "Nothing?" overlay two different panels wherein Charlie looks for and fails to identify any signs of distress among her peers that would suggest Bee's whitening comments had been noticed by Charlie's fellow hikers. On the following page (Figure 4.1), Charlie imagines a range of additional responses she could offer to the situation. She considers outrage: "Speaking as a woman of color, I find that language offensive." She also imagines the more Obama-esque, teachable moment approach: "Metaphors like that have been used to shame people like me for centuries" (Gillman 29). Charlie refrains from these remarks, however: the faces of her fellow campers registering no response to the "whitening" end goal of the trip, she imagines that speaking up would make them respond defensively and further isolate her from the group.

[138] It's later revealed that Penny, Bee's daughter, is half Diné, or a member of Navajo People (Gillman 132).

Figure 4.1 Charlie's imagined rejoinders in *As the Crow Flies*

Source: Gillman, Melanie. *As the Crow Flies*. Web. 1 June 2017.

Scenes that explicitly narrativize the story's theme (see 141-157 for a similar dynamic) challenge the types of criticism that, in Rita Felski's account, seek to "grapple with the oversights, omissions, contradictions, insufficiencies, or evasions in the object one is analyzing" (Felski). Felski's rather narrow conception of critique requires an (ideally historical) object for which critique can provide an updated understanding. In Felski's phrase, "Hindsight becomes insight." Ultimately, critique:

> seeks to wrest from a text a different account than it gives of itself […] If there were no resistance, if the truth were self-evident and available for all to see, the act of critique would be superfluous. Its goal is not the slavish reconstruction of an original or true meaning but a counter-reading that brings previously unfathomed insights to light. (Felski)

As the Crow Flies stymies Felski's mainstays of critique. Its narrative is not only of the contemporary period (so, hindsight is not required), but also weirdly futural: that is, still in process and likely to be completed after this piece of criticism is revised and completed. As young adult fiction, the thesis of Gillman's story is self-evident, making the type of in-depth reading performed earlier in this chapter on Baldwin and Packer "superfluous." Finally, as a member of the newly-minted "program era" of comics MFA programs (as both student and professor), Gillman's narrative has internalized an academic "hermeneutics of suspicion," the notion that theories of truth, realism, or nature are relations of power rendered invisible (and then critically revealed) through visual and linguistic registers. As Louis Menand summarizes, "writing of this kind coming out of creative-writing programs today is the subject matter of literature and ethnic-studies departments tomorrow. Universities have become restaurants that bake their own bread" (Menand).[139] Baked into Gillman's story, then, is the explicit critique of both nature and religious discourses of purity that seek to "whiten" its subjects. Gillman's character directly references the negative effects of these discourses: she calls "whitening" one of a

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[139] The impetus for both Menand and Harbach's long essays on MFA program fiction was Mark McGurl's *The Program Era*. Whether contemporary comic book artists should be considered as part of this larger system of knowledge/ art production deserves further consideration, as comic artists get their training from a variety of programs attached to liberal arts universities, fine art schools, and the more rare comics specific institutions, such as Tom Hart's Sequential Artists Workshop. While the institutional basis for training comic artists is arguably more diverse than the MFA proliferation accounted for in the "program era," it certainly seems reasonable to say that at least some of the more theoretically inclined artists—such as Sarah Horrocks, Sophie Yanow, and Nick Sousanis—would be apt resources for this kind of analysis/ grouping. I'd argue that it makes sense to include Gillman as informed by this paradigm.

series of "offensive" "metaphors [...] used to shame" people of color. Responding to an interview question on why she set the story in a nature-hiking environment, Gillman responded, "I concocted a camp that would allow me to talk about the subjects I wanted to tackle in the story—specifically, the intersections of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and classism you find in Christian spaces and (worse), supposedly feminist ones" (qtd. in Thomas).

Figure 4.2 Touching a white flower in *As the Crow Flies*

Source: Gillman, Melanie. *As the Crow Flies*. Web. 1 June 2017.

Whereas the collected print volumes of *As the Crow Flies* will function as a novel, the webcomic medium is more phenomenologically resonant with the experience of reading short stories. Consider page 222 (Figure 4.2). This image was first posted on March 5, 2015, with page 223 posted March 19, 2015. The most recent "event" in the story is Sydney entrusting Charlie with the information that she identifies as transgender

(this scene ends on 206; it was posted September 21, 2014). Page 217 (February 12, 2015) is a two-panel page: the first panel shows Charlie's perspective of a lovely mountainscape, and the bottom panel, featuring Charlie in medium close-up against a blank background, expressing, as a prayer, her uncertainty over placing god in the landscape: "I want so badly to see you in all this" (Gillman 217).[140] From page 218 (February 16, 2015) through pages 227-228 (a "two-page" spread posted April 26, 2015), Gillman posted an extended wordless sequence that mainly features captivating nature imagery from the mountains, with intercut panels largely detailing the effort of Charlie's hike (boots and sweaty brow, for instance).[141]

Depending on the frequency with which one checked the site, the last updated image (the first image one would see upon opening the website), would be the rather elliptical page of rocks, flowers, a hand, trees, backpack, boots, and dirt. For immediate context (short of rereading the entire comic), other poetic fragments of body and land are visible. In a novel, one may (or may not) race over such details. Importantly, however, as

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[140] In an interview with Ryan Bryant, Gillman said, "I was also interested in exploring how queerness and crises of faith can intertwine and inform each other in some young Christian people—especially those who find themselves in queer-unfriendly religious environments. That's another thing I'd love to have more of in comics—not just stories about queer people, but also about how queer people work through problems that aren't generally considered 'queer-specific', like crises of faith."

[141] On these detailed nature sequences, Gillman notes that, "The slow, quiet pace of *ATCF* probably reflects much more of my adult tastes—and, more importantly, it felt right for a story which has so much to do with the natural beauty of the mountains they're hiking through, and the quiet evolution of Charlie's inner life" (qtd. in Bryant).

a webcomic, readers can be stuck with an image for *weeks*, or even just the impatient moments while one's browser slowly loads the next page. In this very particular context, the setting feels dense with information about the story's past at the same time that it enigmatically gestures toward speculative futures. Flipping through novel pages, it could be easy to miss the white flowers that dot this wordless section (see also the full page panel of Charlie looking at or over the white flower on page 120). Even on this page (Figure 4.2), the flower in the first panel is an abstract, outlined white, and remains easy to gloss over despite its central spot in the panel. It is significant, then, that Charlie does not miss the flowers. In the third panel, Charlie's hand touches a plant, coming tantalizingly close to its flower.

Herein emerges the difference between Charlie, Johnnie, and Laurel. Johnnie leans his head against a tree, "rough and cold and though it offered no other comfort" (Baldwin 52). Laurel sees stars "fastened to the darkness, high up and holy, their places fixed and definite as we stirred beneath them. Some, like me, were quiet because we were afraid of the dark" (Packer 19). Laurel and Johnnie see and then feel, words smoothing the difference between apprehension and experience. Packer and Baldwin create rich textures of imagery, sensation, and sociality by showing how the natural world is both made up of while simultaneously exceeding human meaning. Yet, their textures are ordered causalities: I touched a thing, it offered no comfort; I saw the thing, I was scared. These causal connections are separated from the reader who does not feel the roughness of the tree and is not scared by the darkness of the night. In contrast, in *As the Crow Flies*, the reader can notice the flower and notice Charlie noticing the same flower, without being privy to how Charlie experiences the perceived object.

Stuck for two weeks on a page that simply shows a hand almost touching a flower, a reader with two page-navigating options—last page or first page—might choose the latter. Brought to page one (Figure 4.3), a reader may recall or find for the first time that Gillman's comic is itself named for an act of Charlie noticing. Over three pages, a crow feather, its luminous purples reflecting the purple mountains in the background that are Charlie's destination, falls to the ground next to Charlie who picks the feather up. Taking the black feather to be a sign from god, Charlie takes a moment to pause beneath the crest of the church that hosts the camp, its cross bookended by two white flowers. Once Charlie enters the church, a counselor immediately orders the crow feather be removed, insisting "We've got a camper with a severe bird dander allergy" (Gillman 9).

Figure 4.3 Purple crow feather in *As the Crow Flies*

Source: Gillman, Melanie. *As the Crow Flies*. Web. 1 June 2017.

The pleasure of Charlie's interest in the nonhuman world mirrors the reader's attention to what is perhaps the defining feature of Gillman's work: the remarkable use of colored pencils. Colored pencils are relatively rare in comics. If webcomics often feature generic lines and flat color presets, Gillman responds to the weakness of the medium by

creating a rich natural world through their use of analog tools. While the color and shading can be (and likely are) edited in Photoshop, it is the pure mark-making of the lines themselves that draw the eye into image. The reader can see where the purples cross the greens in the bottom of the photo; the reader can also trace the red and yellow-lined textures of light and dark in the Sandwisp-colored sky. Gillman has created a knotty, dense non-human environment that allows readers to develop a reading of it that may conflict with a character's reading, and vice versa. Unlike the protagonists discussed in the short stories, however, Charlie's engagement with the natural world shows a sustained pleasure in contemplating non-urban nature as well as the corresponding distress that follows her perspective's dismissal by Bee's discriminatory ecofeminism.[142]

The fact that this encounter with the non-human world transpires in the visual language of comics does not make it any more real, natural, or less mediated: it is, after

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[142] It's worth considering the class implications of Charlie's singular aesthetic appreciation of nature. While one of Gillman's stated goals is to explore the "classism" in naturalist discourse, this particular concern will only be developed as a bonus feature, or "stretch goal," of the comics direct (Patreon) or print (Kickstarter) audience funding. On pg. 183, Charlie mentions that her parents are doctors, while Sydney refers to the struggles of being raised by a single mother who works as a waitress. The class-inflected story of Sydney's home life is a teaser for a "bonus comic" if a higher level of fund raising goals are hit. Unlike the African American group consciousness in "Brownies" and "The Outing," Charlie benefits from her parents affluence to explore the more rich natural environments otherwise only available to predominantly white hikers. Comics have a rich history of exploring class conflicts in natural recreation grounds, dating back at least to Richard F. Outcault's July 19, 1896's comic *Hogan's Alley Children Spend a Day in The Country*, publicly available at The Ohio State's online collection: https://cartoons.osu.edu/digital_albums/yellowkid/HoganAlley_Enlarge/D_1603.JPG

all, a very cartoony version of comics signification. Rather, this encounter, visually depicted, generates different kinds of information than does Packer and Baldwin's prose. First, in drawing Charlie's encounter with the flower, Gillman does not clearly convey what Charlie feels either emotionally or haptically. In fact, much is left to the reader's imagination: did Charlie pause over the flower? Or, perhaps, did her fingers merely brush the plant as she passed by? Charlie touches and is touched by the flower; put differently, she enters into an affective relationship with it. Such tantalizing proximity to the flower offers a charged metaphor of same-sex desire. A graceful brush with the Gillman's densely colored, naturally-white flower, both in terms of naturalism and queer feeling, makes the environmental-religious discourse of "whitening"—both its explicit expression in Gillman and its more subtle yet no less palpable role in Baldwin and Packer—that much more jarring.

Appendix to Chapter 4: Looking Algorithmically at Browser Ephemera

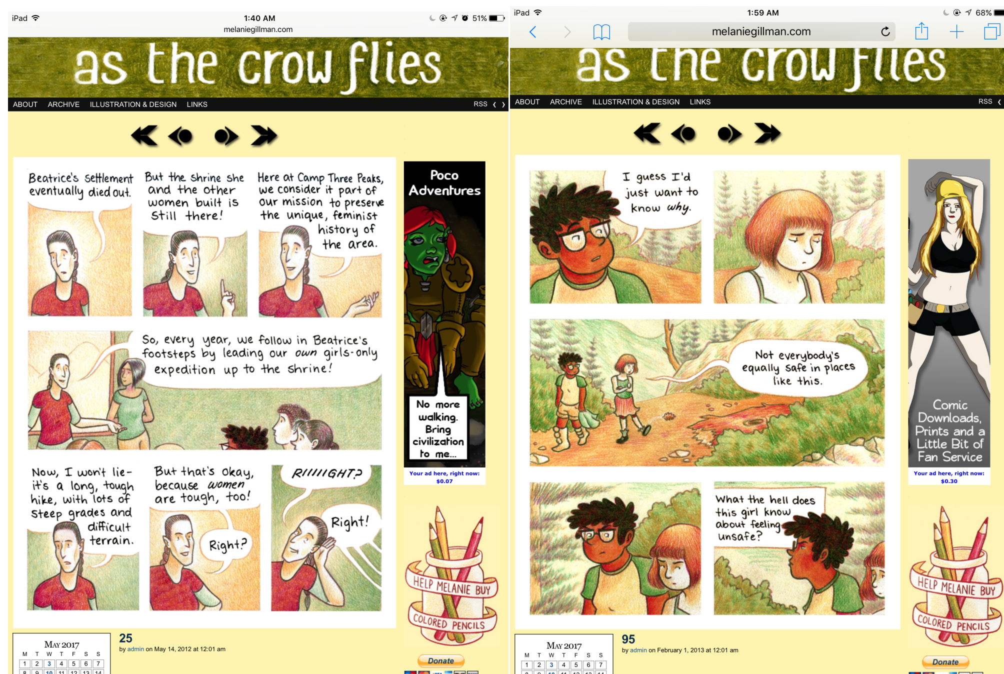

Figure 4.4 (left) Framing Bee from *As the Crow Flies*;

Figure 4.5 (right) Website sidebar

Source: Gillman, Melanie. *As the Crow Flies*. Web. 1 June 2017.

One of the ways I tried to keep track of the sections of *As the Crow Flies* relevant to this chapter was to take screen grabs of interesting pages, a kind of digital underlining of important passages. These images are, unfortunately, not full "screen grabs," or image-based reproductions of the entire webpage, but rather an example of the quick cropping I had to do to read the comic on my iPad (generally, each page displays advertising banners on the bottom of the page in addition to information about the Wordpress site that hosts the comic). When reviewing the roughly two-dozen screen grabs I took, I noticed that my iOS application for organizing photos identified the faces of two new "people" in the captured images. This face-recognition feature, "People," is offered by Apple devices to help users quickly locate photos of people you photograph frequently (so the two drawn faces were placed alongside the friends, family members, and selfies otherwise recognized by the device). Interestingly, when it came to the faces recognized from *As the Crow Flies*, the two characters identified by Apple's programing were not the comics' lead characters, Charlie and Sydney.

The first character Apple identified as "people" is Bee. Considering the images like fig. 4 collected into my computer's photo album, my guess is that the application identified Bee because of how often she is framed in a medium close up. Whereas Sydney and Charlie are often depicted at interesting angles and from varying distances, Bee's face often appears right in the middle of the frame and underneath the blank spaces that comprise her long-winded speech bubbles. With her mouth as the bland focal point of these word-heavy panels, Bee is literally the mouthpiece of pedantic white feminism.

A comic book character who uses words to impose her perspective on the shared visual world of the book—an imposition that often literally blocks out that world with bloated speech bubbles—is akin to a character in a novel marked as unsympathetic because she doesn't like novels or the people who read them. The monotonous blocking and square, frontal perspective of Bee's character suggests the bland, unlikeable adult authority she exhibits throughout the comic. I also wonder if the facial recognition software failed to identify Charlie because she is depicted with a variety of expressions and in a range of backgrounds and frames. As if to further thwart the software's efforts, Gillman has changed the characters' features over the years. As Gillman writes, "Turns out, when you work on the same comic for 5 years, you end up learning a lot about faces and expressions!"[143]

The second face identified by the software was the scantily-clad blonde cartoon in the right, pop-up banner shown in Figure 4.5. This cartoon figure showed up in over a third of my screen grabs. Following Thierry Groensteen who argues for the tightly-networked meaning of each element on the comic page (and the comic as a whole), it is hard not to wonder how this recurrent banner affects the overall visual meaning of the comic. *As the Crow Flies* often has notes from the author at the bottom of the page: information on queer romance and fantasy comics, requests to vote on the comics' nomination for the prestigious Eisner Award, and requests to fund the comic either in its forthcoming print edition or via the Patreon model of monthly payments for which

[143] To see the changes Gillman made to Charlie's face see https://twitter.com/melgillman/status/806198082924933124 The change to the nose is especially interesting in the context of Tahneer Oksman's work on gender and ethnicity in comic presentations of noses.

funders receive additional content like process notes and side stories (an option rendered by the colored pencils in the bottom right corner). How does a sexualized advertisement, inviting the viewer to click on the figure of a heteronormatively desirable figure of a woman for “a little bit of fan service,” affect the otherwise queer-positive, diverse skin tones and body types that Gillman creates, precisely to offer alternative representations to the figure on the advertisement? As I click through the pages, Gillman’s drawings of women change and develop over the pages and years, yet they are consistently juxtaposed with a static image of commodified sexuality in the form of a young, thin, white, and able-bodied woman.

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