# "Disputes, Disorders, and Confusion":
# Authorship, Remediation, and Intellectual Property Regulations in the Digital Age

by

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Abstract

In the last two decades, Western media production and consumption have been transformed by the permeation of digital technologies. While not new conventions, remediative techniques such as formal fracturing and intertextuality have become definitive of Digital Age storytelling. The prevalence of these techniques that encourage multimodal reading practices signal an epistemological shift centered on sharing and collaboration. I analyze a subset of contemporary literary works that integrate traditional media forms with Digital Age narrative techniques in ways that challenge individualistic notions of authorship perpetuated by intellectual property regulations. The convergence of feminist methods with legal scholarship, cultural theory, and new media studies guides my inquiries about the evolution of authorship in the Digital Age.

This project examines Digital Age storytelling techniques and synergistic audience engagements in a variety of contemporary literary works. Chapter 1 examines the way that Percival Everett's experimental novel *Erasure* appeals to digital natives by using remediative techniques to investigate historical controversies about racialized masculinity and African American cultural production. In Chapter 2, I analyze Suzan-Lori Parks' play with form and challenge to the conventions of drama in her performance text *Venus* as a means of destabilizing the performance of gendered racism. Chapter 3 explores the citational pleasures of Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie's graphic novel *Lost Girls* that emerge through remediations of public domain children's stories. My reading of *Lost Girls* challenges intellectual property regulations

that devalue remediative creative methods. Finally, Chapter 4 provides a close reading of the reader appeal created by the complex intertextual blending of artifacts in the DC Comics universe in Grant Morrison's *Batman* titles. In addition, I scrutinize work for hire as a complicated model of authorship that sacrifices creators' rights to generate greater income for publishers.

This project explores the growing tension between a public who increasingly validates remediation as a valuable creative method, and private institutions that hold onto outdated definitions of authorship that privilege the monopolization of ideas. Ultimately, this project calls for a more flexible approach to intellectual property that moves away from the privatization of ideas in favor of a more robust public domain.

# Introduction

In 2011, senior entomologist at the California Department of Food and Agriculture Shawn Winterton discovered a new species of insect. Winterton's discovery did not come from observations he made in the field, but rather from browsing Guek Hock Ping's photographs taken on a hiking trip in Malaysia displayed on "Flickr" (Cole), an Internet site that invites users to make photographs available to the public with various levels of intellectual property protection. Winterton, Guek, and entomologist Steve Brooks from the National History Museum in London coauthored a paper from three different continents using Google's online word processor to announce the new insect to the science community (Cole). The identification of the *Semachrysa jade* and its introduction to the world was made possible by online sharing services that facilitated both scientific discovery as well as collaboration between three men in three different time zones. These methods of research, collaboration, and innovation speak to new formulations of knowledge production that have become more commonplace since the widespread use of digital technologies.

New media tools like image-sharing websites and cloud computing services enable the mass circulation and transmission of images and texts, an exemplary component of the Digital Age. Since the early 1990s, the Western world has encountered a transition from analog to digital technologies that has altered knowledge production and social interaction. This project grew from an interest in the way that the movement from analog to digital has affected modes of creative production, and how those changes might inform larger questions about equality,

visibility, and cultural hegemony. I analyze a group of primary texts that engage in creative practices that have come to define Digital Age media such as formal fracturing, intertextual juxtaposition, and cataloguing rather than linear narrativity. What is particular about these texts as a subset of Digital Age works is their remediative qualities, or their efforts to recycle and transform preexisting texts in ways that merge historical knowledges and methods with new media approaches. These works combine old and new in a way that resists narratives of obsolescence that insist that old modes of creative production and consumption will be replaced by new media forms. The texts that I analyze rather suggest synergistic, hybrid modes of reading that embrace the qualities of slipperiness, multiplicity, and possibility offered by texts that are situated in a heavily mediatized world.

This project focuses on creative works that are produced through open source engagements. The term "open source" developed during the late 1990s by members of the free software movement to indicate the practice of allowing for source code to be free and open to any user to incorporate in the development of new programs. Since then, the term has broadened to represent a philosophical approach to information-sharing at large that advocates for free and open access to and distribution of information in service of the greater public good, and it is in the latter sense that I use the term. The chapters that follow analyze a range of open source engagements with works that are in the public domain[1], from open source practices achieved by travelling straightforward legal paths, such as the remediation of preexisting works that have fallen out of copyright protection, to open source approaches enabled through creative legal configurations, such as the appropriation of preexisting works through creative licensing

[1] The public domain is an closed archive of creative works that are legally available to the public for appropriation by virtue of the fact that they not under copyright protection, either because the prescribed period of copyright protection has expired, or the works have been designated as free and open to the public by their creators.

agreements that circumvent intellectual property laws. This project also makes note of remediative engagements that take place in the shadow of the law, drawing attention to the types of innovative and subversive creative works that are silenced by restrictive regulations that devalue open source methods of creative production and narrow the public domain.

Open source exists in stark contrast to the individualistic, free-market ideology that informed the development of the concept of authorship during the Enlightenment. Historically, authorship has been defined by the drives and demands of social practices, new technologies, and economic growth, and the transition into the Digital Age that has affected all of these factors has in turn challenged contemporary conceptions of authorship in a variety of social and institutional realms. This turn suggests two opposing histories of creative production, one built upon legal definitions of authorship driven by the growth of a free market economy and possessive individualism, and the other defined by sharing, collaboration, and open source practices. The combination of increased privatization of ideas in our global economy on the one hand, and a surge in remediative creative modes triggered by the cultural shift from analog to digital on the other, has resulted in a definition of authorship that is under extreme pressure. In the dissertation, I harness the collaborative potential of multiple disciplines, primarily critical literary theory, legal studies, feminist methods, and new media studies, to consider the politics of remediation and the changing conception of authorship in relation to the growth of open source practices in the Digital Age.

## The Impact of Copyright Law on Definitions of Authorship

The building tension between open source and private ownership definitions of authorship has reached a point of crisis wherein cultural values regarding media sharing,

remediation, remix, and collaboration are in conflict with institutional attitudes and regulations that promote the monopolization of ideas. These tensions resonate from ideological shifts that occurred in the eighteen century largely due to economic factors such as the development of printing technologies and subsequent growth in the commodification of writing that fueled a significant change in the way Europeans viewed cultural production. In conjunction with advances in printing technology, the development of the law of copyright was a great source of influence on already shifting perceptions of authorship that bolstered the spirit of possessive individualism that continues to stimulate the growing privatization of ideas.

Those who advocated for increased author's rights through the enactment of perpetual copyright protection of their works generated a variety of metaphors for authorship as a rhetorical strategy. For example, Daniel Defoe wrote,

> A Book is the Author's Property, 'tis the Child of his Inventions, the Brat of his Brain; if he sells his Property, it then becomes the Right of the Purchaser; if not, 'tis as much his own, as his Wife and Children are his own—But behold in this Christian Nation, these Children of our Heads are seiz'd, captivated, spirited away, and carry'd into Captivity, and there is none to redeem them. (Rose 39, quoting Defoe)

Using the metaphor of paternity, a choice that has notable gender implications, Defoe attempts to create a sense of urgency for the mandate of copyright protection by comparing the relationship between a book and its author with the sacred bond of blood like that between a child and his father (however denigrated by the inference that a man's wife and children are his chattel). Defoe's characterization of the book and its author reflect patriarchal notions about the

ownership of ideas that paralleled male primogeniture and other such restrictive laws and customs regulating the inheritance of real property in eighteenth-century England.

This concept of "literary property," used by both stationers and authors, encouraged a new approach to thinking about literature. In *Letter from an Author to a Member of Parliament*, one writer implores,

> There must be a fixed Property in this, as well as in other Cases, otherwise Learning will soon be lost, the Land of Knowledge will be left desolate; and the laying all Copies open, will have as terrible Effects in Point of Learning, as the not introducing Property would have had upon Land, by discouraging Industry and Improvement, and laying Grounds for endless Disputes, Disorders, and Confusion. (Rose 57)

While not drawing from the language of paternity as Defoe did, this appeal delivers a similar sense of urgency by pairing the real estate metaphor with words such as "must," "desolate," and "terrible" to warn of the dire consequences that will result from denying legal protection to authors of literary works (Rose 57). This author's behest to Parliament highlights the competing stakes of the literary property debate that became crucial to the development of copyright law in both England and America: ensuring that artists and writers have an incentive to produce innovative works that will enhance learning and knowledge production, and at the same time, making certain that public welfare is not inhibited by the monopoly created by giving authors special legal privileges. These competing notions, in fact, form the foundation of copyright as outlined in Article I, Section 8, Clause 8 of the *United States Constitution*: "To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries." The Copyright Clause attempts to

find balance between the two issues, recognizing the benefit that economic incentive can create for the process of invention, but also taking care to specify that the exclusive right to these inventions cannot be perpetual, thus acknowledging the importance of the public domain. However, the law has come to value the growth of the private sphere over the public domain from year to year, gradually yet steadily increasing creators' monopoly power over their works.

The first copyright statute in Britain[2] generated a number of benefits for authors of literary works in a roundabout fashion, unintentionally paving the way for a model of legal ownership of literary works that privileged private over public interests. The Statute of Anne of 1710 was "An act for the encouragement of learning, by vesting the copies of printed books in the authors or purchasers of such copies, during the times therein mentioned." Article I of the law reads:

> Whereas printers, booksellers, and other persons have of late frequently taken the liberty of printing, reprinting, and publishing, or causing to be printed, reprinted, and published, books and other writings, without the consent of the authors or proprietors of such books and writings, to their very great detriment, and too often to the ruin of them and their families: for preventing therefore such practices for the future, and for the encouragement of learned men to compose and write useful books. (8 Anne, c.19)

As one can see from the wording of the first provision of the statute, its purpose was not to settle ongoing questions about literary property, but rather to create a method of redress for proprietors of books (often publishers and booksellers who had purchased the rights from authors) that were being reprinted by down-market competition without permission. While the law originated as a

[2] Because American law derives from English common law, the laws of Great Britain serve as a helpful resource for exploring the foundations of American intellectual property laws.

tool for booksellers to hold these unauthorized competitors accountable for piracy, it also created benefits for authors in the form of a one-time renewable, fourteen-year period of copyright protection for their works (8 Anne, c.19, Art. II, XI), as well as legal standing to file an action in court to assert proprietary rights over their works (Rose 49). This was a first step towards defining legal benefits that accrued to authors of literary works, a foundational block in the private ownership approach to creative production.

This articulation of legal rights for authors triggered a line of cases that raised questions about the nature of authorship. The first case to arise under the Statute was *Burnet v. Chetwood* (1720) in which the court decided that the translation of a text into another language was an independent work, and thus not an unauthorized copying of the original work in violation of the statute (2 Mer. 441). While the court in *Burnet* took a fairly narrow approach to what constituted an unauthorized copy of a work, author's rights began to broaden as innovation in printing technologies led to the greater commodification of texts. The cases of *Tonson v. Collins* (1762) (with esteemed advocate William Blackstone, whose *Commentaries in the Laws of England* were foundational to the development of both English and law, arguing in favor of the expansion of author's rights) and *Millar v. Taylor* (1769) both involved instances of competing works being reprinted by publishers who had never acquired ownership of the works, but the reprinting occurred *after* the copyright protection periods granted by the Statute of Anne had expired. These cases raised an inquiry that dominated the literary property debates in the mid 1700s: does an author have a natural right to own his/her creation that entitles the author to a perpetual copyright based in common law, or do ideas constitute a form of property such that copyright, like patents, confer only a limited privilege to authors/creators (Rose 91)? This inquiry narrowly focused the conversation about literary property to the subjects of author and text, subordinating

the roles played by booksellers, printers, and publishers. Rose locates this as the moment in which "the proprietary author and the literary work…are bound to each other. To assert one is to imply the other, and together, like the twin suns of a binary star locked in orbit, they define the center of the modern literary system" (91). In *Millar*, Lord Mansfield of the King's Bench and the majority held in favor of a common-law right to ownership over an author's creation, creating perpetual copyright for authors, effectively eliminating the public domain (98 Eng. Rep. 201).

But the debate over literary property was yet to be settled in the United Kingdom, leading to a perception of authorship that was constantly in flux. The actions of a determined bookseller, Alexander Donaldson, who brashly opened a shop in London and sold low-priced reprints of works whose copyright terms had expired (despite the court's holding in *Millar*), generated a number of lawsuits (Rose 92-93). One such suit, *Donaldson v. Beckett*, settled the question of literary property once and for all, overturning *Millar* in rejection of common law perpetual copyright. The court held in favor of a statutory copyright with a limited term of protection, claiming that knowledge "has no value or use for the solitary owner: to be enjoyed it must be communicated," and is not something "to be bound in such cobweb chains" (1 Eng. Rep. 837). The court described perpetual copyright as "selfish" and deserving of "reprobation" (1 Eng. Rep. 837), a significant departure from the rhetoric of authorial control[3] that was central to the holding of *Millar*. The contrast between the reasoning behind the courts' holdings in *Millar* and *Donaldson* reiterate the competing interests between author's rights and the public interests that were at stake in the debates over literary property.

[3] In *Millar*, Lord Mansfield expressed concern about the consequences of denying authors perpetual copyright protection over their works: "He is no more master of the use of his own name. He has no control over the correctness of his own work. He can not prevent additions. He can not retract errors. He can not amend, or cancel a faulty edition" (Rose 80, citing *Millar*).

While *Donaldson* marks a momentary restraint on author's rights in this line of jurisprudence, the privileges and benefits afforded to authors under the law have been ever-expanding since this landmark decision, and thus the public domain has become more restricted over time. In Chapter 3, I examine more fully the importance of the existence of a robust public domain in my analysis of the innovative intertextual dialogues that emerge from Melinda Gebbie and Alan Moore's remediation of works that are in the public domain in their graphic novel *Lost Girls*. There, I consider the implications of the increasing expansion of author's rights, most markedly apparent in the growth of the copyright protection period. Delineated in the first copyright law, the Statute of Anne, as 14 years (one-time renewable), the period of protection today in both Europe and the United States is the life of the author plus 70 years. In the U.S., the recent increase from a 50-year period of exclusive ownership to 70 years was the result of the enactment of the Sony Bono Copyright Term Extension Act (1998), a legislative act that demonstrates the trend towards increased monopoly power over intellectual property at the expense of the growth of the public domain. Correspondingly, the U.S. Supreme Court recently issued a decision in the case of *Golan v. Holder* that allowed copyright protection to be restored for a number of works that had previously been placed in the public domain.[4]

[4] In *Golan*, the petitioner challenged Section 514 of the Uruguay Round Agreements Act, a law enacted by Congress in order to comply with the international copyright standards of the Berne Convention. The petitioner claimed that the primary effect of the statute, removing foreign works from the public domain and placing them back into copyright protection, is a violation of Congress' power under the Copyright Clause. Relying heavily upon *Eldred v. Ashcroft* (2003), in which the Court upheld the power of Congress to extend existing copyright terms under the Copyright Term Extension Act, the Court held that Section 514 does not violation the Constitutional Copyright Clause. While the Court justifies its decision as upholding Congress' intention to act in the best interests of the American public by making efforts to comply with the dominant system of international copyright protection (861), Justice Breyer's dissenting opinion (joined by Justice Alito) expresses great concern for the harm to the public produced by the majority's holding. Breyer, citing the purpose of copyright to "promote progress" as outlined in the Copyright Clause of the Constitution, claims that the effects of Section 514 diminishes incentives to produce new works (900). He elaborates: "By definition, it bestows monetary rewards only on owners of old works—works that have already been created and already are in the American public domain. At the same time, the statute inhibits the dissemination of those works, foreign works published abroad after 1923, of which there are many millions, including films, works of art, innumerable photographs, and, of course, books—books that (in the absence of the

As author's rights have expanded, the rhetoric surrounding "originality" as the ultimate measure of artistic value has became more pervasive. This praise for "original" works overlooked the methods of creative production that involved building upon the ideas and language of past texts that were commonplace in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and continues to influence expectations for and regulations regarding creative works. Scholars, critics, and artists of many time periods and a variety of fields demystify originality and claim that building upon prior texts is both a commonplace and necessary element of creative production.[5] The chapters ahead examine genres and specific texts that thrive upon the readerly pleasures created by integrating ideas, characters, storylines, and images from preexisting texts, such as Grant Morrison's development of the world of the Batman. Morrison cultivates his particular presentation of this iconic figure through references to the strange science fiction elements of 1960s Batman comics and the sophistication of the Bruce Wayne character that has been overlooked since Frank Miller's brooding and psychopathic Dark Knight of the late 1980s. Yet Morrison's intellectually stimulating contributions to the *Batman* series come at the expense of the work for hire system, which strips Morrison of the copyrights to the issues he has authored and places them in the hands of his employer company, DC Comics. Unless alternative structures of ownership such as those developed through creative licensing arrangements are in place, works based on upon preexisting works are given little weight in the eyes of the law. These works are labeled with the pejorative descriptor "derivative," and only the copyright

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statute) would assume their rightful places in computer-accessible databases, spreading knowledge throughout the world" (900).

[5] Prominent literary theorists Northrop Frye and Roland Barthes, for example, made assertions decades ago about the inevitable use of adaptation in writing. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Northrop Frye observes that modern literature is "elaborately disguised by a law of copyright pretending that every work of art is an invention distinctive enough to be patented" (96-97). Barthes claims, "the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them ("Death of the Author" 146). Similarly, contemporary scholar Rose observes, "authors do not really create in any literal sense, but rather produce texts through complex processes of adaptation and transformation" (8).

holder has the exclusive right to produce derivative works based upon the copyrighted work (17 U.S.C. Sec. 101, 106(2)).[6] The basis for the legal treatment of remediative creative practices derives from the language of originality that appears in the discourse about literary property that was central to copyright litigation in 18th-century England. In a 1735 letter to Parliament advocating for an extension of the renewable 14-year period of copyright protection, booksellers urged,

> The Field of Knowledge is large enough for all the World to find Ground in it to plant and improve. Let every Body do it; let them be encouraged and protected in so doing; let them write and print on the same Subject: But let them not lazily borrow that individual Work, which is the Produce of another's Labours, to make a Gain to themselves, to a deserving Author's Detriment or Ruin. (Rose 57, quoting *Letter from an Author to a Member of Parliament*)

While the letter refers to the acts of unauthorized booksellers reprinting books outright, the choice of the word "lazily" associated with the practice of appropriating text from preexisting works began to trickle down to all types of practices associated with borrowing from other texts, even if those appropriations resulted in productive transformations. As writing became more commodified, the demand for "new" ideas grew, and the language of "genius" and "originality" began to dominate expectations for literary works.

In fact, the increase in demand for "original" works influenced the perception of the very process of writing. Edward Young, in his *Conjectures in Original Composition* (1759), claims that original composition "rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius" (Rose 119, quoting Young), characterizing original writing as an organic, almost spiritual, activity that emerges from

[6] Thus, if an author creates a work based upon a preexisting work without receiving permission from the copyright holder of the preexisting text, he/she can potentially be held liable for copyright infringement.

a place of genius implanted deep within an individual. In turn, writing that incorporated preexisting texts was described by Young and other writers of the time such as Samuel Johnson and Henry Fielding as "imitative"[7] and "mechanical" (Rose 118-19), bringing to mind the rote nature of manufacturing processes that require little creative input. These treatises about the model of the solitary genius by prominent thinkers of the time strengthened the notion that in order for a work to be considered valuable, it must demonstrate some measure of originality.

Just as the treatment of "derivative works" in the current U.S. Copyright Act reflects the discourse of originality from 18th-century England, so does modern case law with regard to what types of works warrant copyright protection. In the landmark case of *Feist Publications, Inc., v. Rural Telephone Service Co.* (1991), the U.S. Supreme Court held that the arrangement of telephone numbers in the Rural Telephone Service Company phonebook was not original enough to qualify the phonebook for copyright protection, claiming "The *sine qua non* of copyright is originality" (345) and locating the requirement of originality in the Copyright Clause of the Constitution (346). The Court drew upon legal precedent from the nineteenth century, focusing on the opinion's definitions of "authors" and "writings" in relation to originality. Quoting *The Trade-mark Cases* of 1879, the Court asserts, "While the word *writings* may be liberally construed, …it is only such as are *original*, and are founded in the creative powers of the mind. The writings which are to be protected are *the fruits of intellectual labor*" (346). Citing *Burrow-Giles Lithographic Co.* v. *Sarony* (1884), the Court defined "author" as "he to whom anything owes its origin; originator; maker" (346). These explanations reiterate the focus on the author and the text in legal discourse about authorship, leaving little room for the possibility of

[7] The language of "imitation" has come to mark the creative processes of several unprivileged groups, such as African Americans, who have been criticized for purportedly appropriating the works of prominent white, male authors as opposed to developing "original" ideas. Chapter 1 of the dissertation explores the racialized history of adaptation and the tradition of "signifying," a creative practice that embraces mimicry as a valid creative form that resists racial oppression through play with standard vernacular and archetypes.

collaborative authorship or for the consideration of the text as a product of multiple contributors (from colleagues who provide ideas for a work, to publishers and printers of books, to producers and crew for films). The legal treatment of creative work envisions an author removed from the world, divorced of the material realities of creative production.

While scholars such as Rose, Martha Woodmansee, and Peter Jaszi draw productive connections between the modern conception of authorship and the configuration of authorship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that was heavily influenced by the development of copyright law, resistance to the idea of the author as "original genius" must not be overlooked. In particular, poststructuralist challenges to the notion of authors as creators of unique, divinely-inspired texts (epitomized by the writings of Roland Barthes and Michael Foucault) have paved the way for an alternate history of creative production that subverts dominant conceptions of authorship. In many ways, the anti-authorial theories advanced by Barthes and Foucault foreshadow the decentralization of the author in digital culture. While certainly a treatise on textual interpretation, Barthes' "The Death of the Author" also speaks to the mediated nature of language. Barthes claims,

> Thus is reveled the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin bit in its destination. (148)

Barthes' perception of writings as constituted of multiple layers that are conversant with other writings confronts the idea that authors have the power to generate original, unmediated thought.

In addition, contrary to legal discourse about authorship, Barthes decentralizes the author in this conversation, focusing instead on the role of readers to place the content of a piece of writing in the context of their own experiences and understandings. This paves the way for increased attention to the role of media consumers (and even, perhaps, contributes to the blurring line between creators and consumers that has become a hallmark of digital culture).[8]

While different in approach, Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" similarly critiques the mystification of the individual author and speaks to the constructed nature of authorship. Foucault points specifically to the linkage between the author and juridical systems as a characteristic of the "author function," observing, "Texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors…to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that their discourses could be transgressive" (244). Foucault's reflection addresses the definition of authorship that evolved in conjunction with copyright case law. In this view, the conversations in and out of the law about authorship continually build upon one another to strengthen the vision of the individualistic author that emerged. This idea of the individual author, then, exists as a function of the need to place blame when writers' actions fall outside of dominant expectations about authorial practices and behaviors. Thus, the strengthening of this single vision of the individual author also serves to discipline those whose creative practices and behaviors subvert dominant definitions of authorship. Foucault instead urges readers to think about "a form of culture in which fiction would not be limited by the figure of the author" (391). And while he has much doubt in the possibility of such a world in which "fiction would be put at

[8] Audience participation is central to remediative works. This is explored in greater detail in Chapter 3, which explores the nostalgic, citational pleasures of Gebbie and Moore's graphic novel *Lost Girls*. The pleasure in reading this text does not derive from suspenseful plot or deep character development, but rather from the reader's recognition of the shimmers and flashes from popular children's stories that are embedded and transformed in *Lost Girls.*

the disposal of everyone and would develop without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure" (391), the openness of access and the blurring of the lines between producers and consumers of media encouraged by the Internet has certainly gotten Western culture closer to this vision than ever before. Yet the system of constraint still exists in the body of legal regulation that continues to operate based upon definitions of authorship that formed centuries ago.

## Defining and Historicizing Remediation

The poststructuralist move away from the individual author is one element of a growing movement towards embracing the connectivity of language that has increasingly dominated methods of cultural production. From the rep & rev stylings of jazz music, to the use of intertextuality and allusion in literary works, to the collage elements of pop art, to sampling and remix in hip hop music, to the remediation of familiar images into Internet memes, creators have been challenging the idea of the author as an "original genius" for decades. In his book *Owning Culture*, Kembrew McLeod claims, "the idea that artistic works are the product of an original authorial genius flies in the face of the way cultural texts have always been produced," citing a variety of examples to prove his point, including the tradition of classical composers borrowing from European folk songs (23-24). These works mark additional entries in the movement towards greater opportunities for open source creative production that has gained steam since the early 1990s.

While it has long been acknowledged that adaptation has played a key role in the process of creative invention, for this project I focus on the last couple of decades as a period that has undergone a particular kind of shift with respect to intertextual practices. This is primarily due

to changes in media production and consumption that have come about because of the widespread use of digital technologies and the resulting cognitive transformations that have taken place in everyday media users. I locate remediation as a fruitful area for exploring the effects of digital technologies and new media on cultural production because remediation has emerged as a practice that epitomizes productive modes in the Digital Age. While the term "remediation" has appeared in a number of contexts, most prominently in the environmental field with respect to the restorations required by law for land development projects that cause pollution to soil and water, Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin brought the term to the actual study of media technologies in their 1999 text *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Bolter and Grusin's work builds on Marshall McLuhan's early insights about the connectivity between old and new media forms to investigate the ways that new media forms define themselves through the process of borrowing from old media forms. My use of the term "remediation" developed from Bolter and Grusin's work, particularly their emphasis on the dialectical relationship between new and old media forms, but I depart from their theories in a few ways. First, while Bolter and Grusin devote only a small section in their book to a subset of remediative works that "refashion" within an individual medium, they are more interested in formal transformations that involve the remediation of one media form by another, such as a digitized collection of physical portraits (45). In contrast, I am invested in remediation as a means of transformation to both form and content. Thus, a remediated object of study in this project includes both the transformation of an illustrated children's stories into a graphic novel in Gebbie and Moore's *Lost Girls,* as well as Percival Everett's play with themes of racial protest as constructed by Richard Wright's *Native* Son in his 2001 novel *Erasure*. In addition, Bolster and Grusin focus on the "double logic of remediation," wherein users are driven to access "the real" through either

immediacy, the seamless connection to mediated forms that make users forget that their experiences are mediated, or hypermediacy, wherein old media forms remain visible to constantly remind users that their experiences are mediated. My conception of remediation is not driven by the need for seamlessness or authenticity, it is precisely about referentiality, the dialogue that forms between the source text and the remediated text, and the pleasures that emerge when a reader recognizes the merger between texts. Finally, Bolter and Grusin adopt the term remediation "to express the way in which one medium is seen by our culture as reforming or improving upon another" (59). My project is not concerned with promises of improvement, but rather with overlaps and comparisons. Often the authors of the primary texts explored in this dissertation remediate preexisting texts in an effort to merge temporalities, to reflect on the past through the connection between old and new. Yet they hesitate to draw conclusions or present a coherent political stance, often leading to the resolution that no progress has been made at all, or that old oppressions simply reappear in new forms. Thus, these texts are not interested in improvement, but rather cyclical remix, and at the same time they are not entirely unprogressive as there are political stakes to the formal challenges that they advance.

The prominence of remediative texts such as *Lost Girls* and *Erasure* in the Digital Age is largely due to the way that the Internet encourages sharing and connectivity. Sharing has become a key attribute and function of the Internet. What the Internet had to offer in its rudimentary stages to the few who had access was opportunities to connect to others through email and bulletin boards, which allowed for quick sharing of information regardless of geographic location. Through increased opportunities for access to the Internet[9] due to free

[9] While the use of the Internet and other digital technologies has become vastly more widespread since their introduction to the general public of developed countries in the early 1990s because of increased opportunities for access, there remains a digital divide based upon factors such as economic inequality and geographical location.

access at schools and libraries, as well as mobile Internet service for phones and tablets, sharing and connectivity have turned into a way of life for everyday people in the Western world.[10] Email has developed into a commonly used mechanism for the quick and efficient sharing of documents, images, music files, and other types of information. Comments and ideas are constantly exchanged between familiar contacts and strangers alike through the quoting and commenting functions on blogs, social networking sites, and message boards. The bulletin boards of latter day have evolved into message and discussion boards on thousands of topics that encourage the sharing of information, each piece becoming a building block towards reaching the answer to a common question, problem, or goal. Peer-to-peer file sharing software enables the transmission of files without a central server, expanding possibilities for sharing documents, photos, films, music, and other media. Social networking sites allow users to share information to massive networks of friends, family, and colleagues, leading to the rapid-fire spread of information such as personal narratives, news articles and phenomena, memes, and videos to a multitude of users (to the extent that it might be more likely for a person to learn about breaking news on a site like Facebook rather than on a local news channel or radio station). In addition, the peer-to-peer sharing mentality has generated open source sites that encourage collaborative creation, sharing, and sampling of information and creative work through unique licensing

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This digital divide enhances the already-existing gap between those with privilege and those without in terms of access to knowledge and resources.

[10] None of this is to suggest that the Internet creates a utopic space that magically brings all people of all identities together in a space of equal participation. The problems that exist in the real world are often replicated and even enhanced in virtual space. In her groundbreaking work *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*, Lisa Nakamura demonstrates this point as it relates to representations of race on the Internet, arguing "since the nature of digital media is to be transcodable, instantly transmittable, and infinitely reproducible, racial imagery flows in torrents up and down the networks that many people use everyday (194). This project acknowledges the social justices that remain unsolved despite the Internet's often-touted potential for social reform, but rather focuses on the growing pervasiveness of digital technologies and the consequences of such a shift vis-à-vis definitions of authorship and perceptions about the ownership of ideas.

structures, such as the aforementioned Flickr, as well as HitRECord, Wikipedia, and CommentPress.

In these new means of digital interaction that encourage sharing at multiple levels, collaborative and remediative practices becomes an essential element of communication, contribution, and creativity.[11] Building upon preexisting words, ideas, images, and sounds is a central feature of relationships that are developed in digital communities. For example, users at HitRECord, an online, open-source media production company, grant the company the non-exclusive right to monetize creations, and share profits with the company. Anyone can sign up to be a user and contribute a variety of content (photographs, video, music, literature, performances, and so on), and their creations are called "RECords" ("Getting Started on HitRECord"). These RECords become "resources" for other users to remix as they like ("Getting Started on HitRECord"). The company has produced several collaborative works (such as the album *Move on the Sun*, released in December 2012, short films that have premiered at Sundance Film Festival, and literary anthologies such as *The Tiny Book of Tiny Stories: Volumes 1 and 2*) and given thousands of dollars in proceeds to contributors[12]. HitRECord embraces what writer Jonathan Lethem calls the "ecstasy of influence" generated by the proliferation of open source texts and media available within the commons created by the site. The work of this company, reliant upon the creativity sparked by remediation and remix, exemplifies the kinds of engagements that have emerged in the shift from analog to digital.

[11] In fact, the code used to build the Internet was free and open, and its development is a result of the sharing of ideas of multiple contributors. Lawrence Lessig notes that one of the world's most powerful technological tools was "built outside the proprietary model," noting, "For the property obsessed, or those who believe that progress comes only from strong and powerful property rights, pause on this point and read it again: The most important space for innovation in our time was built upon a platform that was free" (2001, 56-57). The building of the Internet is a noteworthy example of the creative potential made possible by an expansion of the public commons.

[12] For example, a media package entitled *RECollection Vol. 1* generated a profit of over $40,000 between October 2011 to June 2012, 50% of which was shared with the anthology's contributors ("RECollection Vol. 1 Profit Proposals").

HitRECord's existence and ability to move forward is dependent upon a complex licensing agreement that incorporates a high degree of trust in its founder, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, or "Joe," to (1) propose plans for profit-sharing that are agreeable to contributors, and (2) ultimately make the final decision about an equitable division of profits ("The HitRECord Accord"). The site acknowledges the novelty of this business plan. The HitRECord Accord (Terms of Service) incorporates an FAQ, the last question of which is "Wow. Seems like you're asking me to put a lot of trust in Joe!" The company responds, "Definitely. HitRECord.org is an honest and open company with our contributors. We believe that your trust will be cemented with each and every monetized production." I mention this to demonstrate the outside-of-the-box thinking required to develop a system of intellectual regulation that both outright contradicts the Copyright Act and relies upon subjective decision-making (rather than a concrete profit distribution formula) for the sharing of profits. Though risk HitRECord has yet to encounter legal action from a contributor, "trust" is not an easy quantifiable legal term that can be simply decided in a lawsuit. Yet the company is so invested in the spirit of remediation and sharing that have become ingrained in the every practices of digital natives that the risk is justifiable.

Emerging business models like that of HitRECord and the proliferation of consumer practices that so heavily involve remediation and collaboration beg the question: If authorship is culturally constructed (as can be seen from the various social, economic, and political factors that contributed to the development of the notion of the author as a solitary genius), then what defines authorship in the Digital Age? These authorship practices are all part of the open source history of creative production that is often hidden in the shadow of the private ownership model that developed through copyright laws and the rise of the free market economy. The fact that authorship was previously defined in a way that incorporated the practices of textual allusion and

appropriation, as well as collaborative efforts between artists and texts, contributes to the legitimacy of this model of authorship despite what those who stand to gain from present-day legal definitions of authorship might insist to the contrary. So while the unique combination of advances in printing technology, increased commodification of the written word, and the development of the notion of "literary property" set the stage for a reconceptualization of the author in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, similar factors have contributed to the rising tension between the public and the private with respect to authorship in the Digital Age. In many ways, The Internet and the proliferation of digital media has created a new cultural commons, yet our current model of legal regulation stifles the potential for creative productivity enabled in this space. Innovation is increasingly more reliant on the acknowledgment that all creations are adaptations, dependent instead upon transformative remediations that draw striking connections between disparate preexisting works. Fractured retellings of preexisting stories is the thread that runs through the primary texts that are the objects of study for this dissertation, from Suzan-Lori Parks' integration of Sarah Baartman's autopsy report into footnotes that interrupt the narrative of the play *Venus*, to Everett's ghetto fiction adaptation of Richard Wright's *Native Son* as a smaller book encapsulated within the pages of his novel *Erasure.* While works like *Venus* and *Erasure* have been manufactured, distributed, and staged through conventional channels of publication and performance, the increasing popularity of forms of digital publication that often do not generate income (fan fiction, personal blogs, youtube films, short film web series, webcomics) demonstrates that incentives for production in the Digital Age might be changing. Yet the regulation of these intellectual property forms continues to fall under a set of laws that privilege the monopolization and privatization of ideas over the enhancement of the public domain.

In recent years, a number of feminist legal scholars have articulated a need to redefine intellectual property regulations, to move away from an androcentric model of private ownership into a greater valuation of the public sphere, including the cultivation of a public domain that is conceptually revitalized as a vibrant and robust source for the free flow of ideas.[13] My project is deeply informed by these critics' emphasis on the need for legal reform.[14] My argument is connected to this body of scholarship, but takes a different direction, focusing on (1) the tension between the public and the private in two contrasting histories of creative production, and (2) the effects of digital technology on existing forms of storytelling. I offer a new perspective on the changing politics of remediation and the public domain by utilizing legal studies, feminist approaches, new media studies, and critical literary theory to analyze how the permeation of digital technologies has affected definitions of authorship and the production and consumption of literary works.

The literary texts that are the primary objects of study in this project all present epistemological challenges through their formal slipperiness. By embracing past artistic influences and mingling old and new knowledges through the combination of traditional and experimental forms, these primary texts invite synergistic and multimodal reading practices that blend close and hyper reading, a process that encourages patient, exploratory reading rather than

[13] See, for example, Ann Bartow, "Fair Use and the Fairer Sex: Gender, Feminism, and Copyright Law," 14 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 551 (2006); Dan Burk, "Copyright and Feminism in Digital Media," 14 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 519 (2006); Emily Chaloner, "A Story of Her Own: A Feminist Critique of Copyright Law," 6 ISJLP 221 (2010); Rosemary J. Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law,* Durham: Duke Univ. Press (1998); Carys J. Craig, "Reconstructing the Author-Self: Some Feminist Lessons for Copyright Law," 15 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 207 (2007); K.J.Greene, "Intellectual Property at the Intersection of Race and Gender," 16 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 365 (2008); Debora Halbert, "Feminist Interpretations of Intellectual Property," 14 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 431 (2006); Malla Pollack, "Towards a Feminist Theory of the Public Domain, or Rejecting the Gendered Scope of United States Copyrightable and Patentable Subject Matter," 12 Wm. & Mary J. of Women & L. 603 (2006); and Rebecca Tushnet, "My Fair Laws: Sex, Gender, and Fair Use in Copyright," 15 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 273 (2007).

[14] I explore these arguments more fully in Chapter 3 with respect to Gebbie and Moore's remediation of public domain works in *Lost Girls*.

textual engagements driven by a need for linearity, straightforward drama and suspense, and neatly-wrapped conclusions. In the first chapter, "Scenes of Convergence, Scenes of *Erasure*," I read Everett's 2001 experimental novel *Erasure* as a remediation of pre-World War II African American literature and debates about African American literature that highlights restrictive expectations for African American cultural production and gender performance that still linger in the present day. An examination of the racialized history of remediation reveals that Everett's use of this tool places him in a tradition of black writing that draws on preexisting narratives to generate new creative works as a means of resisting white hegemony. The chapter resolves with a discussion about the benefits and difficulties presented by Everett's play with form. While the multiple narrative strands that rarely resolve might create readerly pleasure for digital natives who are accustomed to formal fracturing and contradictory narrative layers, *Erasure* presents a challenge to readers expecting a linear storyline and coherent political discourse.

The second chapter, "Remediative Theatre and The Problem with Text in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*," is an examination of the way that playwright Suzan-Lori Parks' unique style of remediation produces a performative text that confronts textual dominance and challenges the dramatic model of representation. While the subject matter of *Venus* raises questions about the politics of race and sexuality in its disjointed, fictional take on the exhibition of Sarah Baartman, her rejection of dramatic conventions through the both the embodiment and isolation of text is in itself political in the act of denying established modes of representation. Parks' experimentation with form makes possible a performance happening characterized by instability, a quality which has the potential to disorient and frustrate audiences, and at the same time challenge the performativity of racism through the act of rejecting conventional formations and presentations of knowledge.

"Shadows, Twisters, and Looking Glasses: Getting Lost in the Remediative Pleasures of *Lost Girls*" examines Melinda Gebbie and Alan Moore's 2006 graphic novel *Lost Girls*, a work that is marketed towards sophisticated, literary readers that are compelled by referentiality and intertextual connectivity. This bewildering text produces opportunities for readerly pleasure through the use of fantasy, citational practices, and remediation that links Gebbie and Moore to late nineteenth and early twentieth century writers and artists who were excited by the friction of rebellious aesthetics. My reading of *Lost Girls* contributes to a larger argument about the ways that intellectual property regulations have suppressed subversive remediations. Building on feminist approaches that forefront the creative value of derivative works, my analysis of the complex and innovative tensions that emerge through Gebbie and Moore's remediations of public domain children's stories supports the call for intellectual property reform that allows space for methods of creative production that rely on remix, remediation, and collaboration.

Finally, "The Dark Knight Under Revision: 'The Ecstasy of Influence' and Work for Hire" also surveys the potential benefits of a legal system that embraces open source creative practices. This chapter traces "the ecstasy of influence," or the spirit of embracing and building upon the work of creative predecessors rather than resisting their influence, that is crucial to the success of mainstream superhero comics. I delve into a range of Batman titles, in particular the work of Grant Morrison, to explore how artists and writers have recycled and remediated Batman and his cohort of comrades and villains in ways that appeal to long-term readers who have deep familiarity with Batman and the DC universe. I also examine the complicated authorship model created by DC's utilization of the work for hire system, a legal arrangement that creates ease for companies to profit from satisfying readers' desires for fully realized genre universes, while simultaneously stripping writers and artists of any ownership rights that would

seem to follow from their creative contributions. Ultimately, these chapters demonstrate how literary works created through open source modes of production, while certainly slippery, complex, and difficult to manage, can be exhilarating in their intertextual juxtapositions and defiance of linearity.

## Chapter 1

### Scenes of Convergence, Scenes of *Erasure*

> He lifted her and laid her on the bed. Something urged him to leave at once, but he leaned over her, excited, looking at her face in the dim light, not wanting to take his hands from her breasts. She tossed and mumbled sleepily. He tightened his fingers on her breasts, kissing her again, feeling her move toward him. He was only aware of her body now, his lips trembled. Then he stiffened. The door behind him had creaked. (Wright 84-5)

Over 60 years later, this excerpt from Richard Wright's 1940 novel *Native Son* appears again in the literary world, disguised by exaggerated dialect and content, as well as a shift in perspective:

> I open the door of the pool house and put Penelope on one of them lounge chairs. I watches her body sink down into the cushion. I'm lookin at her and my feelins is all tied up in knots…. Damn, she be fine as shit. Her shirt be open just a little but and I can see her tittie almost. She look good, awright. I put my hand down there and touch that tittie. Just like fuckin silk. I squeezes her little nipple and she moan and I don't think she know it me. Then I hear this tappin sound. I looks up and see somebody comin. (Everett 107-108)

This adaptation of *Native Son* appears in Percival Everett's 2001 novel *Erasure* in the form of a fictional book within the book that constitutes nearly 70 pages of the 265-page novel. The fictional creator of the adaptation (boldly entitled *Fuck*) is Everett's protagonist, Monk, an

African American who denies the existence of race though he is constantly haunted by it. Monk pens *Fuck* as a protest against commercially successful novels that are praised for their supposed ability to capture the "raw experience" of black urban life. In comparing the above excerpts, one can see how Everett takes Wright's words and twists them, adding on layers of satire with the use of eye dialect[15] and an exaggerated black vernacular. So, Wright's "He tightened his fingers on her breasts" (85) becomes Everett's "I put my hand down there and touch that tittie" (107-08). Everett transforms Wright's story, a narrative characterized by its removed, formal tone, into a farce. While *Native Son*'s Bigger Thomas comes to symbolize how African Americans have been dehumanized by a white supremacist nation, *Fuck*'s counterpart Go Jenkins is a blatant, absurd, and darkly humorous projection of every negative stereotype that has been pinned on black men, from a supposed lack of morals to an alleged inability to ascribe to white American standards of cleanliness.[16] Go Jenkins fucks and fights his way through life, defining his masculinity and self worth by the number of children he can produce with different mothers. For readers familiar with *Native Son*, an additional narrative layer emerges through this dialogue that forms between *Native Son* and *Fuck*. It is in this space that Everett demonstrates a shift from the direct, overt acts of racism characteristic of the mid-twentieth century when *Native Son* was written, to the more nuanced, systematic forms of racism that exist today.

In the fictional world of *Erasure*, Monk's book *Fuck* is an overwhelming commercial success, confirming Monk's suspicions that white (and black) audiences are excited to read a book that they feel gives them access to the "real black experience." Everett shows the irony of

[15] Eye dialect is the use of exaggerated vernacular spellings that emphasize pronunciation and draw attention to a particular character's speech practices, often implying that the character lacks intelligence or speaks in a particular form of English (Bowdre).

[16] "The combination of physicality over intellectual ability, a lack of restraint associated with incomplete socialization, and a predilection for violence has long been associated with African American men" (Patricia Hill Collins 152).

audiences falling in love with a character who embodies a host of negative qualities that whites have pinned on African Americans for decades in order to vilify them and justify their exclusion from dominant culture. Through this larger-than-life adaptation of *Native Son* embedded in the pages of *Erasure*, Everett satirizes audience attraction to *Fuck* and the genre of ghetto fiction that it evokes. This supposed celebration of black literature helps to ease white guilt while simultaneously continuing the oppression of blacks. By reserving the highest accolades for African American literature that focuses exclusively on racial hardships, any other type of literature written by African Americans is devalued and deemed unmarketable. Everett's adaptation of *Native Son* makes this conundrum a central feature of *Erasure*, giving his readers numerous ways to consider the problem facing black writers: how can I achieve success and respect if my book doesn't focus centrally on the struggles of my race?

Everett's remediation of Wright's *Native Son* is one of his many engagements with past literary works and historical moments in *Erasure*. Everett's fascination with the past manifests in his remediation[17] of texts such as *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, his inclusion of imagined conversations between historical figures,[18] and his participation in a larger discourse about social expectations regarding African American literature.[19] For Everett, a crucial component of remediating these works is the interjection of humor and play, evoking the black

[17] The term was popularized by new media studies about a decade ago, and has since been used in multiple disciplines to describe various processes of renovating older media. It is discussed in greater depth beginning on page 31. I do not use the words "remediation" and "adaptation" interchangeably. Adaptation is simply the retelling of existing narratives, while remediation requires some kind of new use of narrative representation in the retelling. While Everett adapts individual pieces of texts in *Erasure*, it is the unique convergence of adaptations and references that makes his work a remediation.

[18] These dramatic dialogues between two historically famous individuals, such as Adolf Hitler and his mentor Dietrich Eckart, and artists Willem de Kooning and Robert Rauschenberg, come in the form of interruptions to the narrative.

[19] Everett is particularly engaged in conversation with scholars and artists such as Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, and Irving Howe who wrote in the mid-twentieth century about mainstream culture's desire to read works by African Americans that described their struggles with harmful prejudice and racialized violence. While writers like Howe found this subject matter to be inevitably central to black artistic expression, many black writers felt that this expectation limited their artwork and narrowly defined what it meant to be black, which perpetuated negative stereotypes. This is explored more fully beginning on page 51.

tradition of signifying. Historically, play with and revision of Standard English by African American cultural traditions and communities has been a creative tool used to lighten the burden of racial oppression, contrary to the dominant culture's reading of this practice as mimetic and lacking in artistic value. Everett's remediation of history through this darkly humorous convergence of texts and voices acts as a means of exposing the limitations of racialized masculinity and black writing, and expressing skepticism about the potential for a post-racial America.

The structure of *Erasure* is complex and intertextual, mostly due to the book's fixation on the past. Understanding the formal fracturing, lack of continuity, embedded narratives, and remix methods that are integral to Everett's formal and rhetorical strategies helps elucidate how Everett's novel encourages multimodal reading as an exploratory approach to complicated issues about race and masculinity. *Erasure* is constructed as a series of journal entries penned by the book's protagonist, Thelonius "Monk" Ellison. Monk is an experimental writer and scholar whose story begins with his arrival in Washington, D.C. to deliver a paper at an academic conference and visit his family. One can see from the central character's name alone that this book is interested in historicizing racial identity. Everett creates his main character's name through the juxtaposition of the names of two African American historical figures, famous jazz musician Thelonius Monk and celebrated writer Ralph Ellison, whose novel *Invisible Man* is remediated in *Erasure*. The name is excessive in its referentiality to Monk's perceived creative ancestors, a constant reminder to Monk of social expectations that he more successfully perform "authentic blackness." The formal framing mechanism of the journal-entry format of *Erasure* also creates opportunities for unique juxtapositions and remediations, allowing Everett to present a range of seemingly disparate narrative segments within the shared space of the novel. The

choppy, structurally ambiguous collection of historical references (such as the allusions present in Monk's name), stories (including forays into Monk's childhood), musings (imagined dialogues between famous artists and political figures), scribblings for future publications (such as ideas for stories), and actual completed works (Monk's conference paper "F/Z: Placing the Experimental Novel" that riffs on Barthes' work *S/Z*,[20] and the aforementioned novel within the novel), are all held together by a single narrative thread that tells of Monk's journey back to his hometown. The fragmented format invites readers to interact with the text and discover lateral connections between the disparate segments.

Despite all of the interruptions, fragments, embedded narratives, and remediations of pre-existing works in *Erasure*, the book is held together by a linear plot, the story of Monk who experiences the death of his sister, witnesses the increasing mental illness of his mother, and struggles as a writer being pressured to produce works of fiction that more authentically depict "the black experience." In an interview with *The Observer*, Everett explains that with *Erasure* he wanted to create a balance between postmodern challenges to linear form and modernist realism that has heavy reader appeal. He explains, "In spite of my concerns fictively, I really hope I create a world that sucks the reader in." *Erasure* belongs to a subset of Digital Age artistic works that aim to integrate traditional media forms, particularly the linear narrative, and media forms that have become more central to the production of knowledge since the widespread use of digital technologies, such as databases. Thus while Everett embraces techniques in his

[20] In applying the system of decoding and deconstruction that Barthes uses in his critical essay *S/Z* to analyze Honore de Balzac's novella *Sarrasine* to *S/Z* itself, Everett suggests an approach to *Erasure* that requires active reader participation in the very process of textual analysis, a reading practice that is advocated by Barthes. This early diversion in the text, wherein Monk's essay evokes Barthes to suggest that a defining feature of the "experimental novel" is a plurality of signification, a text that is constituted of "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" (Barthes, *S/Z* 5), is an obvious nod towards Everett's play with the plurality of meaning in the experimental novel *Erasure*. I explore this connection in greater depth with respect to Barthes' notion of the "writerly text" on page 60.

work that will most likely have more appeal for digital natives who have grown accustomed to the hyper-reading practices that help a reader navigate textual complexities, he still aims to create a story that will resonate with a variety of readers. In the final segment of this essay, I observe how Everett's multidimensional approach compliments the complex substance of *Erasure*, and yet at the same time poses challenges for readers who are invested in conventional, straightforward storytelling. With this in mind, I conclude by reflecting upon *Erasure* in relation to larger questions about the evolution of the novel and the potential extinction of linear storytelling.

## Remediation and Convergence

Understanding the concept of remediation is key to comprehending how Everett's play with form and content helps him illuminate the ways in which African Americans have been continually denied agency and personhood. The term "remediation" has been popularized by new media studies and Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (2000), in which the authors define remediation as "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms" (273). Bolter and Grusin investigate the practice of remediation back through the Renaissance, noting the "double logic of remediation": while U.S. culture has a deep-rooted and longstanding desire to erase all traces of mediation (experiencing media as if they were "real"), the process of multiplying media in order to try to achieve this goal draws attention to the very fact of mediation. Everett's remediation of historical works and dialogues brings traces of past mediation to the forefront. Contrary to the historical trend in African American literature of "successive attempts to create a new narrative space for representing the recurring referent of Afro-American literature, the so-called Black

Experience" (Gates 111), Everett rather embraces past influence as a lens for considering notions of racial progress. From James Baldwin's and Ralph Ellison's attempts to make their voices distinguishable from Richard Wright's, to the Black Arts Movement's aim to revive the African American experience in writing, to black female writers' efforts to carve out their own distinctive spaces, many black writers have attempted to replace the work of their ancestors. But Everett chooses instead to construct his narrative space by looking backwards and explicitly calling on his literary ancestors, by bringing remnants from the past together in one narrative space. Remediating their words and stories allows Everett to connect present-day and historical configurations of authorship.

Astrid Erll is likewise interested in remediation as a site of convergence of historical artifacts. She considers how remediation draws attention to (and creates a meta-commentary about) the process of cultural memory formation. Erll argues in her essay "Remembering Across Time, Space, and Cultures: Premediation, Remediation and the 'Indian Mutiny'" that remediations "open up new ways of remembering … by using new narrative forms of representation (such as unreliability, multiperspectivity, tales within tales etc.)" (126). Erll's work explores how remediations draw upon a genealogy of stories, images, and other media that are relevant to a particular moment in history, and how they thus operate as sites of convergence for those artifacts. In this vein, I read *Erasure* as a remediation that operates as a site of convergence for all of the references, allusions, and adaptations of texts by Everett that, when read together, raise concerns about America's progress in overcoming racist thought, particularly with regard to African American artists and writers. The individual artifacts that Everett incorporates include everything from the historical references embedded in the title character's

name, to the direct adaptations of *Native Son* and *Invisible Man*, to Monk's journal entries about imagined conversations between artists that interrupt the narrative of *Erasure*.

In his remediation of past texts, Everett infuses them with dark humor, contemporary content, exaggerated dialect, and clever juxtapositions of historical fragments, all of which refresh and newly inform cultural memory about the challenges regarding race in the first half of the twentieth century. Everett questions the American public's ability to view those challenges as problems that have been long solved. His focus on the 1940s and 50s in *Erasure* is not happenstance; Everett fixates on a time when racial discrimination and segregation in America was under intense scrutiny. These two decades saw the desegregation of the armed forces (1948), the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), organized acts of civil disobedience under the leadership of such prominent activists as Martin Luther King, Jr., the inception of the Civil Rights movement, and the "spreading [of] African American music and language across the nation … embedding it permanently in the mainstream" (Sundquist 22). Everett's focus on and remediation of artifacts from these decades creates doubt about the possibility of a post-racial America and asks readers to see the close link between the problems facing black Americans today and those of the past.

Everett's darkly humorous retelling of *Native Son* exposes these linkages between past and present forms of oppression. *Native Son*, a book about an African American man's accidental murder of a young white girl and the resulting chaos of attempted escape, violence, despair, and conviction, was extremely popular upon its release. In fact, Wright has often been referred to as "the father of African American literature" based on the success of *Native Son*. It is no coincidence that Everett chose such a book to include in his remediation of historical literary narratives and other artifacts. *Erasure*'s success depends, in part, on readers being familiar with

Wright's canonical work. It is the conversation that forms between *Native Son* and *Fuck* that highlights the historical transition from overt acts of racial segregation as depicted in Wright's novel to present-day forms of racism that are systematic and institutionalized. For example, in Everett's adaptation of *Native Son*, no longer are the Daltons a white, wealthy family who sell overpriced real estate to poor blacks, but rather a wealthy black family with a mansion and expensive sports cars. This reconception of the Daltons explores the intersection of race and class, demonstrating on the one hand the social changes since *Native Son* was written in 1940 that have enabled African Americans to occupy more positions of power in the employment sector, while on the other hand underscoring the hierarchy that continues to operate among African Americans based on wealth. While the Daltons of *Fuck* share the same racial construction as the protagonist of the story, Go Jenkins (the analog to *Native Son*'s Bigger Thomas), their vast difference in socioeconomic status creates a similar type of power differential that exists in *Native Son* between the white Daltons and the African American protagonist, Bigger.

A closer look at the class and race dynamics that emerge in the dialogue that forms between *Native Son* and *Fuck* in Everett's remediation further demonstrates the complex identity intersections that Everett aims to explore. In *Native Son*, Bigger escorts the Dalton's daughter Mary and her boyfriend Jan around town, and Mary asks Bigger to take them to a fried chicken joint to show Mary and Jan what it's like to live in Bigger's shoes. The scene highlights Mary and Jan's racial tourism and their desire to appropriate Bigger's culture to superficially understand what it's like to live Bigger's life by eating the food he eats and speaking the way he speaks. In *Fuck*, Go escorts Penelope Dalton (the "Mary Dalton" of *Fuck*) and her friend Roger around town and, though they are the same race, Penelope and Roger are interested in Go as a

cultural specimen just as Mary and Jan view Bigger as an ethnographic other. Penelope and Roger hope to attain some element of "essential blackness" that they feel distanced from because of their upper class status. Penelope wants to eat fried kitchen and hang out in Go's hood, while Roger attempts to mimic Go's speech: "'This stuff be jammin,' Roger say. He look at me. 'Did I say it right?' he ax" (104). While Go and the Daltons are all perceived as belonging to the same racial category, the Daltons have greater privilege because of their wealth and, thus, distance from purported elements of black culture such as particular foodways, dialects, and behaviors. Everett's remediation of *Native Son* demonstrates that racial oppression still exists, yet in even more complicated and subtle ways.

Everett's decision to change the race of the Daltons may seem to indicate progress for African Americans, but in actuality depicts what Patricia Hill Collins calls "the new racism," a racism even more insidious because of the way that stereotypes about African Americans are "rendered virtually invisible by their ubiquity" (377). Collins claims that the racism of the twenty-first century draws on the racism of the past while using new technology to make images of African Americans more pervasive and accessible.[21] Everett's adaptation of *Native Son* demonstrates that while African Americans have increased visibility in contemporary culture, past racial formations lie just below the surface and any attempt to ignore race just creates further disadvantages for racial minorities. In remediation, all traces of the past are made obvious. Cultural memory is shaped at the site where all of these traces converge. In *Erasure*, readers are asked to remember *Native Son* and instances of racial suffering prior to the civil rights

[21] Collins posits that sexualized images of Black entertainers such as Beyonce Knowles present a contradiction of "sexualized spectacle and Black women's agency" (377) and that mass media allows for such an inundation of these images that "[l]egions of young American men can wonder what it would be like to get Beyonce Knowles…in bed" (384). Similarly, Lisa Nakamura criticizes utopic claims that digital technologies will help cure racial injustice, arguing that real world problems such as racism and sexism are often replicated and even enhanced in virtual space because of the way that "digital media is…transcodable, instantly transmittable, and infinitely reproducible," leading to the free flow of "racial imagery…in torrents up and down the networks that many people use everyday" (194).

movement. *Erasure* collects those and other traces of the past and places them in a contemporary context. Everett revises a collective memory of the past as a time of civil unrest that is but a distant recollection in an effort to show a lack of progress in attaining racial equality.

While the above is a fairly straight, serious reading of the passages from *Fuck*, one can hardly read these passages without seeing the humor that Everett has infused in his retelling of Wright's story. For example, Roger's attempt to sound "authentically black" by appropriating what he perceives to be a black vernacular is so offensive and ridiculous that one cannot help but laugh at his ignorance. This ludicrous moment in which a black man asks another black man how to speak in a way that sounds more "black" parallels the absurdity of a cultural expectation that members of underprivileged races behave in prescribed ways that enable white dominance. Hierarchies that have developed within racial categories are certainly serious matters that have caused harm for real people, but this fictional moment allows for some levity around a burdensome issue. *Fuck* is a playful, satirical text that takes language, plot, and characterizations to outlandish limits to highlight the senselessness of racism and racial stereotypes, to resist hegemonic constructions of race, and to create opportunities for comedic relief from the oppression of institutionalized racism.

"Signifying" and the Racialized History of Adaptation

This type of rhetorical game that Everett plays with language is integral to the way that Everett uses remediation as a tool in his novel to show the stagnancy of social progress for African Americans in the last half century. In remediating past works, he draws on the racialized history of adaptation (referred to more pejoratively as "mimicry" in relation to black expression) to further support his method. He looks at a history of African Americans modifying Standard

English as a way of liberating themselves from its confines, as a tool of resistance, as a means of finding a new way of being in a predominantly white world. By incorporating this history into *Erasure* and using those techniques in his work, Everett shows how mimicry and revision can give people agency, and how these techniques do not necessarily lead to works that are derivative, but rather works that allow opportunities for resistance, creativity, and coping.

Historically, African American literature has been characterized as imitative and derivative of writing by whites, and devalued as a result. Many scholars have refuted this, asserting that there is a quality of play and self-awareness in the act of imitation that qualifies remediative writing practices as legitimate forms of cultural production. As early as 1934, Zora Neale Hurston examines the question of originality and what she calls the black "will to adorn" Standard English in her essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression." Hurston explains that while African American forms of expression may not comply with convention, they "satisf[y] the soul of the creator" (24). She declares, "the American Negro has done wonders to the English language" by modifying conventional language so that, for example, hard words become softer ("aren't" becomes "ain't") and new words are created by combining preexisting "feeble" words (such as "ham-shanked" and "muffle-jawed") (25). She concludes that the "stark, trimmed phrases of the Occident seem too bare for the voluptuous child of the sun, hence the adornment" (25). In response to historical assumptions that African American writing lacked originality, Hurston first questions the very idea of originality ("The most ardent admirer of the great Shakespeare cannot claim first source even for him") (28). She goes on to assert that African Americans innovatively reinterpret the white world for their own uses, pointing to music as a primary example: "[e]veryone is familiar with the Negro's modification of the whites' musical instruments, so that his interpretation has been adopted by the white man himself and

reinterpreted" (Hurston 28). To Hurston, imitation is integral to the very process of cultural production, not something unique to African Americans that warrants diminishment of an entire tradition and history of artistic works.

Moreover, Hurston explains that while "the Negro, the world over, is famous as a mimic," this should not denigrate African Americans as lacking in originality because there is an artistry to being a mimic (28). She claims that blacks do not mimic because they feel inferior to whites, rather they do it "as the mocking-bird[s] [do] it, for the love of it, and not because [they wish] to be like the one[s] imitated" (Hurston 28). Henry Louis Gates, Jr. comments on Hurston's position, "For Hurston, the distinction between originality and imitation is a false distinction, and for the black writer to suffer under the burden of avoiding repetition, revision, or reinterpretation is to succumb to a political argument that reflects a racist subtext" (118). Gates builds on Hurston's theories about the viability of imitation as a creative form, claiming "Free of the white person's gaze, black people created their own unique vernacular structures and relished in the double play that these forms bore to white forms. Repetition and revision are fundamental to black artistic forms, from painting and sculpture to music and language use" (xxiv). Gates' book *The Signifying Monkey* investigates the black tradition of "signifying," a practice that is integral to this play with forms in the history of black art. The concept can be traced to the trickster figure of "the Signifying Monkey" that originated in America prior to Emancipation. The Monkey is said to have tricked his foes through clever wordplay—enemies are fooled because they only see the formal meaning of the Monkey's language. They miss the figurative, contextual meaning of his words that can only be understood by the Monkey's own community. Gates refers to signifying as a figure of the "double-voiced texts" and a metaphor for the intertextuality that characterizes the black literary tradition and the black tradition as a whole

(xxv). While signifying isn't "the exclusive province of black people, … blacks named the term and invented its rituals" (Gates 90). Signifying is central to the art of mimicry that Hurston claims has been historically embraced and developed in African American artistic forms. It is vital to the history that Everett evokes in his remediative work, *Erasure*.

This practice of signifying mainfests in multiple forms such as riffing on Standard English and playing with established archetypes. With respect to modifying language, Gates' quest in writing *The Signifying Monkey* was to explore "the relation of the black vernacular tradition to the Afro-American literary tradition" (xix). Black dialect has been viewed as a failed derivative of Standard English. Gates explains,

> by 1895, dialect had come to connote black innate mental inferiority, the linguistic sign both of human bondage (as origin) and of the continued failure of "improvability" or "progress," two turn-of-the-century keywords. Dialect signified both "black difference" and that the figure of the black in literature existed primarily as object, not subject; and even sympathetic characterizations of the black, such as Uncle Remus by Joel Chandler Harris, were far more related to a racist textual tradition that stemmed from minstrelsy, the plantation novel, and vaudeville than to representations of spoken language. (176)

But some saw black vernacular in its various forms (such as "hipster" talk) as a revision of and exciting play on white language. Jazz musician Mezzerow talks about black vernacular as the "language of action," a secretive kind of language that allows blacks to speak about what they want to speak about without being spied on—their own form of expression: "It was the poetic expression of an immobilized people who, at last, see the day coming when all the action in the world will be open to them, and all things will become possible" (Sundquist, quoting Mezzerrow

140). Mezzerrow speaks of the high-falutin language of the white upper-class and says that black vernacular is more complicated and less artificial---"more down-to-earth, alive with a deep-felt poetic sense and a rich imagery born out of Nature, jammed with the profound wisdom of the streets" (Sundquist, quoting Mezzerrow 141). This echoes Hurston's words about adornment (the "stark, trimmed phrases of the Occident seem too bare for the voluptuous child of the sun, hence the adornment" (25)).

In *Erasure*, Everett constructs the use of black vernacular as a way of belonging in the African American community. The use of this type of remediated language requires membership in a particular speech community defined by race, and any misuse or awkward handling of dialect and phrasing signals inauthenticity. Similar to the way that Roger attempts to copy Go's style of speech in the aforementioned excerpt from *Fuck*, Monk is preoccupied with what he perceives to be an authentically black way of speaking. Monk talks about wanting to desperately "fit in" as a teenager, and his inability to "talk the talk" meant that he "never sounded real" (Everett 166-67). Monk greatly admires his friends, "who could step into scenes and change completely" in a way that "sounded casual, comfortable and, most importantly, cool" with such expressions as "*Solid*" and "*What's happenin'*." (Everett 166-67). Monk's inability to adapt to the language of his peers ("*Talks like he's stuck up? Sounds white?"* (Everett 167)) is heavily tied to the feeling that he cannot perform the racialized identity of his peers, a feeling which intensifies over the course of Monk's life.

From the very beginning of the novel, Everett makes clear that even though Monk doesn't want race to be significant in his daily life, social expectations rooted in institutionalized racism won't allow him to be free of this ideological stronghold. In the first few pages of *Erasure*, Monk reports that he felt he had to engage in certain activities in college, such as

becoming a member of the Black Panther Party, "to prove that [he] was *black* enough" (Everett 2). And the first descriptors Monk writes of himself are highly associated with social constructions of blackness: "I have dark brown skin, curly hair, a broad nose" (Everett 1). He continues, "I have been detained by pasty white policemen in New Hampshire, Arizona and Georgia and so the society in which I live tells me I am black; that is my race" (Everett 1). As he further paints a picture of his life, every detail relates to the ways in which Monk has either abided by expectations of his race or subverted racial stereotypes: he is athletic, but not good at basketball; listens to Charlie Parker, yet also listens to Mahler; graduated with honors from Harvard and is good at math; can't dance; did not grow up in the inner city or the south, and comes from a long line of doctors (Everett 1-2). Everett constructs a character who, no matter how hard he tries to live free of race, constantly defines himself in relation to black stereotypes. Thus in *Erasure*, use of the black vernacular is not constructed as a detriment, but rather as a skill that enables membership into an exclusive club. If it isn't performed properly, one is relegated to a liminal space in which he or she struggles to be visible in any group, dominant or otherwise. Adaptation of normative speech practices thus becomes a tool for oppressed groups to create alternative spaces of possibility, to create their own unique sense of personhood even though they have been rejected by the dominant culture. At the same time, Everett draws attention to and elevates the perceived importance of this black vernacular to satirize the notion of an authentic and unified black way of speaking.

Everett also builds on this tradition of signifying in adapting and playing with established archetypes. A prime example of this is the pseudonym he creates for Monk. *Fuck* is penned under the name Stagg R. Leigh, a nod to black cab driver and pimp Stagger Lee Shelton, who was convicted of murder and died in prison in 1912. This is more than a mere allusion to the

actual Stagger Lee. It calls to mind the archetype of the tough, street-smart, black outlaw that came about as a result of Lee's representation in popular culture. This historical reference is another opportunity for Everett to remediate the past, to breath new life into historical references by placing them in juxtaposition with all of the other artifacts in Everett's collection. Everett alludes to an archetypal figure in order to show that *Fuck* and its author Monk have no interest in depicting real, unique, nuanced lives or situations. He uses allusion to explore racial stereotypes and the exploitive consequences of praising black literature that doesn't allow black characters to step out of rigidly defined boxes.

Everett's take on the Stagger Lee archetype doesn't end with the mere allusion to his name; Monk creates a persona for his pseudonym. This persona offers a narrow perspective on black masculinity, an area that is of great interest to Everett in *Erasure*. Monk gives life to Stagg, imagining what he would wear and say, how he would speak. Monk even envisions what it would be like for Stagg to conduct a public reading of *Fuck*. He pictures the reading as taking place in some sort of public library or Borders bookstore, and invents different combinations of clothing for Stagg. Monk thinks that perhaps Stagg would maybe wear all black, a watch cap, and army boots, or maybe Stagg would don a colorful dashiki and a red fez, or yellow wool pants and a black silk shirt, each of these combinations indicating a different construction of racialized, masculine identity. Later, when Monk pretends to be Stagg, Stagg's costuming reflects Monk's earlier deliberations about the constructed persona: "Stagg Leigh leaves his hotel room, 1369, dressed casually in black shoes, black trousers, black turtleneck sweater, black blazer, black beard, black fedora. Stagg Leigh is black from toe to top of head, from shoulder to shoulder, from now until both ends of time" (Everett 245). Monk projects his insecurities about living up to a socially prescribed vision of the black man onto the Stagg persona, especially with respect to

Monk's anxieties that he's not "black enough." The costumes that Monk envisions for Stagg each represent stereotypes that are so narrowly defined, it is apparent that Everett is again having some fun with culturally prescribed notions of black masculinity.

Everett's playfulness with respect to the Stagger Lee archetype continues on when Monk agrees to meet with a film producer, Wiley Morgenstein, in character as Stagg. Monk carefully considers every detail of Stagg's persona in preparation for the meeting: "He stood in front of the bathroom mirror and practiced frowning, carving a furrow into his forehead, above the bridge of his nose. He shaved off his mustache and made his apologies to its original owner" (Everett 216). He then delights in giving Morgenstein what he wants, dropping false details to add to the "authenticity" of the Stagg persona, responding when the producer asks him why he spent time in prison, "They say I killed a man with the leather awl of a Swiss army knife" (Everett 218). Monk is pleased with his performance, "[t]he qualifier *they say* was a stroke and Stagg smiled to himself, a move that served to underscore the quality of his crime," and so is Morgenstein, who admits, "Here I was about to think you weren't the real thing" (Everett 218). Stagg is a comically exaggerated version of everything that Monk is not.

These black male personas run amok in the pages of *Erasure*, from the "not black enough" Monk, to Go, who is the embodiment of negative black male stereotypes, and to Stagg, a satiric representation of the essential black male. This display of types evokes another literary archetype, Rinehart (from Ellison's *Invisible Man*), a character known for his ability to quickly switch hats and embody a wide variety of types. In Rinehart, Ellison's central figure, the invisible man, sees a promise of possibility. The invisible man first encounters Rinehart when he dons a disguise to avoid a fight with the violent neighborhood vigilante Ras the Destroyer. His white hat and sunglasses become a cover, "They see the hat, not me. There is a magic in it. It

hides me right in front of their eyes…." (Ellison 485), and the disguise makes him invisible. As he walks around the streets of Harlem, several people misrecongize him as Rinehart, and he begins to wonder about this man. Then he comes across a handbill circulated by Rinehart's church that advertises:

> Behold the Invisible / Thy will be done O Lord! / I see all, Know all, Tell all, Cure all. / You shall see the unknown wonders. / --Rev. B.P. Rinehart / Spiritual Technologist. / BEHOLD THE UNSEEN / BEHOLD THE INVISIBLE / YE WHO ARE WEARY COME HOME! (Ellison 495)

The invisible man finds the church and, while there, wonders about Rinehart:

> [C]ould he be all of them: Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend?... He was a broad man, a man of parts who got around… His world was possibility and he knew it. He was years ahead of me and I was a fool. I must have been crazy and blind. The world in which we lived was without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world of fluidity, and Rine the rascal was at home. Perhaps *only* Rine the rascal was at home in it. It was unbelievable, but perhaps only the believable could be believed. Perhaps the truth was always a lie. (Ellison 498)

Rinehart inspires the invisible man to see the world inverted; light is shined on the invisible and the invisible become seen. Stagg embodies a similar possibility for Monk. Monk even exhibits an awareness about the connection between his performance of Stagg and Ellison's invisible man taking on the persona of Rinehart: "Aren't you Rine the runner?" (Everett 216) appears in the text directly before Monk's first public appearance as Stagg, when he meets the film producer. After Monk describes the meeting, he writes, "Behold the Invisible!" (Everett 219). He also

considers, “I wondered how far I should take my Stagg Leigh performance. I might in fact become a Rinehart, walking down the street and finding myself in store windows. I yam what I yam,” referencing the moment in *Invisible Man* when the protagonist leaves behind his attempts at assimilating to white culture and enjoys a hot baked sweet potato from a street vendor (Everett 162). But for both Monk and the invisible man, these figures of possibility, of escape from a type of black masculinity equated with weakness, eventually deflate.

The Rinehart character is a trickster figure much like the signifying monkey, so it is no surprise that Everett has selected Rinehart as one of many voices from the past that come to bear on our understanding of contemporary racial politics. Literary critic Kerry McSweeney discusses the connection between Rinehart and another trickster figure from *Invisible Man*, the invisible man’s grandfather, who advised the invisible man when he was a child to “overcome ‘em with yesses, undermine ‘em with grins, agree ‘em to death and destruction, let ‘em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open” (Ellison 16), advice that embodies the trickster goal of misdirecting white people in order to survive a white-dominated world. McSweeney views the way of life offered by Rinehart as a continuation of the advice of the invisible man’s grandfather to manipulate white people to his benefit. But for the invisible man, just as the ways of life offered by college and the Brotherhood don’t work out, the promise offered by Rinehart also fails. This becomes apparent in the epilogue when the invisible man says, “But what do *I* really want, I’ve asked myself. Certainly not the freedom of a Rinehart” (Ellison 575). Though the invisible man expresses an interest in a world of “infinite possibilities” in his epilogue, McSweeney sees this as different from the world of possibility represented by Rinehart because of the way that the invisible man’s vision of possibility is linked to comedy and storytelling. In Kerry McSweeney’s reading of *Invisible Man*, he stresses the importance of the role of humor in

the book to depict deeply serious subjects, explaining that humor has historically been a useful tool of resistance for oppressed people.

In his remediation of *Invisible Man* that appears throughout the pages of *Erasure*, Everett not only incorporates and revises characters and plot elements from Ellison's book, but also profits from this use of humor as a coping mechanism, as we have already seen in several passages explicated above. McSweeney quotes Ellison from an address he gave at Oklahoma State University in 1970 in which he discussed the diverse American people working to find the tools to deal with each others' different ways of living: "The blacks found the whites peculiar. The whites found the blacks ridiculous. And you know how it goes. Some agency had to be adopted which would allow us to live with one another without destroying one another, and the agency was laughter—was humor…If you can laugh at me, you don't have to kill me. If I can laugh at you, I don't have to kill you" (McSweeney 57, quoting Ellison). Ellison viewed the humor that emerged from black culture as a survival tool to help deal with the absurdity and pain of racial oppression (McSweeney 58). McSweeney articulates that for the invisible man, infinite possibility means that he can tell his story, and tell it humorously, that he can have a knowledge of self and learn from his own mistakes, that he has the ability to laugh at himself (and let the world laugh with him) and move on towards a path of greater enlightenment (121-22). Similarly, *Erasure* offers a look at the reality of our lack of social progress for African Americans during the last half century, but tempers the pain of this reality with humor in the hope that satire and play can offer a means of deconstructing racialized and gendered power structures.

Indeed, gender plays an important role in the way racial hierarchies are explored in *Erasure,* as is already apparent from the discussion above about cultural expectations regarding

the behavior of black men. The mythic black male in his various iterations emerges through the range of black male characters present in *Erasure*. Remediations of the central characters of *Native Son* and *Invisible Man*, as well as black male archetypes like Stagger Lee, help Everett highlight the limitations of racialized masculinity. Everett's take on Wright's Bigger Thomas is the outrageous character Van Go Jenkins, who, as mentioned before, is the embodiment of the worst stereotypes that (primarily white) society has pinned on black men, especially those relating to misogyny and violence. In terms of intimate relationships with women, Go is fueled by the power he feels when he asserts authority over women: "I love Cleona and I hate Cleona," Go says of one of the mothers of his children (Everett 69). Go compensates for the emasculation he feels as a result of racial prejudice by exercising domination over a minority group that is even lower on the scale of privilege: black women.

In her essay "The Anatomy of Lynching," Robyn Wiegman demonstrates through the analysis of the history of lynching and the myth of the black rapist that black masculinity is "contingent...on a negotiation between the various categories of difference that structure U.S. culture" (110). Wiegman's inquiry into the anatomy of lynching relies on an intersectional approach to social identities that acknowledges that not all men have the same rights and privileges because of their masculinity, and that black men may align themselves in different ways with women to either resist or access patriarchal power. Wiegman looks in particular at the practice of castrating accused black rapists as evidence that white men's desire to mark black men with the feminine lack of phallus means that the "threat to white masculine power arises not simply from a perceived racial difference, but from the potential for masculine sameness" (90). Wiegman analyzes the battle royale scene from *Invisible Man*, in which a young black man (the title character) and his high school classmates are put on display for an audience of wealthy

white men and expected to fight each other in a series of contests for the white men's amusement. Before the battle begins, the boys are forced on stage to stare at a naked white woman who dances for the audience before being molested and thrown around by the audience. Wiegman notices that while there is a brief moment in which the invisible man sees the terror in the naked white woman's eyes and wants to identify with her as a victim of these white men's games, he also uses their gender difference to distance himself, to reject and renounce her in an attempt to access male privilege (104-05). This is similar to the way that Go tries to boost his social standing and compensate for his lack of male privilege by belittling and abusing women. Go's actions, particularly his violence and anger, stem from his resentment towards the white man for making him feel so impotent. His lack of agency due to racism and lack of class privilege puts him at odds with social expectations of masculinity. These rules of masculinity influence Go to cope with feelings of fear and powerlessness by exhibiting anger and aggression[22] ("I'm feelin kinda scared and then I feels kinda mad cause I hates feelin scared" (Everett 100)). Once Go's aggression takes over, it is unyielding, and all in his path are hurt, if not killed.

While Monk does not sexually assault women like Go, his intimate relationships with women suffer a similar void of quality. His random sexual trysts with fellow academic Linda Mallory are more opportunities for him to seek power through Linda's unabashed admiration for Monk rather than any chance to make a meaningful connection with another human being. Monk's description of Linda in his journal entries paints a picture of her as desperate, sex-crazed, and utterly in awe of Monk. He thinks,

[22] Collins explains, "In the context of the new racism in which miseducation and unemployment have marginalized and impoverished increasing numbers of young Black men, aggression and claiming the prizes of urban warfare gain in importance. Being tough and having street smarts is an important component of Black masculinity" (151).

> Paying a visit to Linda had been a bad idea and it was still one. I could not simply get dressed and leave, though guilty I must admit that is exactly what I wanted to do. I harbored no ill feelings toward Linda and in fact respected her enough not to pity her. Oddly, her anxieties were coming across as endearingly comic. Even then, when I first considered that awkward thought, I understood my judgment to be mere rationalization, not to have me think better of her, but of myself. (Everett 231)

Monk's motivation for interaction with Linda, much like Go's desires for women, is dominated by his need for power and self-importance in the face of struggles with racism. While Go and Monk differ wildly with respect to their individual struggles, they are both underprivileged because of their race. Their feelings of frustration, while there are certainly other contributing factors such as socioeconomic status and family troubles, are almost entirely based on limitations that pertain to their status as African Americans.

While Monk and Go might both try to bolster their positions in the social hierarchy by exerting power over women, their difference in socioeconomic status places them in diverse categories of representations of black masculinity. "Black men in perpetual pursuit of booty calls may appear to be more authentically 'Black' than Black men who study, and the experiences of poor and working-class Black men may be established as being more authentically Black than those of middle- and upper-middle class African American men" (Collins 152). While the character of Go draws on historical representations of black men as "inherently violent, hyper-heterosexual, and in need of discipline" (Collins 158), Monk is representative of the middle-class white male who is seen as "less manly," subservient, and unable to "defy White male power" (Collins 176). Go, the "authentic" black man, must be

contained and kept apart from white society; "[his] authentic culture can enter White-controlled spaces, but [he] cannot" (Collins 177). Monk, on the other hand, is accepted into those "White-controlled spaces" (though he will never truly "belong" there) because of his perceived assimilation into and lack of threat to white culture. But the consequence for Monk is his rejection by "authentic" blacks because he is viewed as a weak Uncle Tom figure, and thus he does not have a place in either community. In this respect, Everett builds the character of Monk from Ellison's invisible man. Like the invisible man, Monk is keenly aware of how his race culturally positions him, particularly those aspects of himself that do not adhere to racial expectations and stereotypes. Much like Ellison's protagonist, and artists like Ellison himself, Monk wants to be recognized for more than his race, but he can never escape social expectations that are based on his ability to perform "authentic" black masculinity.

At the end of *Erasure*, when Monk attends the prestigious book award ceremony where *Fuck* will take the annual prize, he experiences a convergence of all of the disparate types that Everett has included in the text. As Stagg R. Leigh is called to the stage to accept the book award, Monk makes his way to the podium to reveal himself as the man behind Stagg. As he walks to the podium, Monk sees himself as Stagg Leigh when a mirror is held up to him, he hears the words from the final scene of *Invisible Man* in his head, and he comically acts the part of Go Jenkins when he sees all of the TV cameras at the podium and deliberately chooses one to speak to, proclaiming much like Go did at the end of *Fuck*, "Egads, I'm on television" (Everett 265). He is all at once a multiplicity of voices. This acts as a counterpoint to the longstanding American cultural tradition of substituting one voice or one way of being for an entire race of people, especially African Americans. As one of Monk's colleagues explains as the reason why he wants to give *Fuck* the annual book award, "I learned a lot from reading that book…. I

haven't had a lot of experience with color—black people—and so *Fuck* was a great thing for me" (Everett 261). Everett shows through this fictional world's positive reception for *Fuck* what a danger there is in these simplistic and narrow media representations constituting white people's only "experience with color." Much as Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* attempts to depict a range of black characters in a number of different ways that not only gives a fuller variety of black experience but also parodies dangerous stereotypes, Everett constructs Monk as a character who is comprised of a multitude of voices and identities, much in the way the book *Erasure* is itself a compilation of multiple voices.

Voices from the Past

One effect of Everett remediating texts and voices of historical figures from the past is a challenge to the notion of creative progress through a rejection of the influence of past writers. Monk's struggle with his goals as a writer mirrors and alludes to struggles throughout the history of writers' attempts to erase and differentiate themselves from their predecessors. He reflects:

> In considering my novels, not including the one frightening effort that brought in some money, I find myself sadly a stereotype of the radical, railing against something, calling it tradition, perhaps, claiming to seek out new narrative territory, to knock at the boundaries of the very form that calls me and allows my artistic existence. It is the case, however, that not all radicalism is forward looking, and maybe I have misunderstood my experiments all along, propping up, as if propping up is needed, the artistic traditions that I have pretended to challenge. (Everett 155-56)

Monk questions his stringent attachment to experimentalist fiction and his privileging of certain types of texts over others. Rather than attempting to replace the work of his literary ancestors, Everett constructs his narrative space by explicitly highlighting the ideas of past writers and thinkers. Gates claims that "in general, black authors do not admit to a line of literary descent within their own literary tradition" (120), citing both Wright and Charles Chesnutt as examples of black writers who both felt that they had no "black literary antecedents worth revising" (118). Instead of attempting to exceed his literary ancestors by distinguishing himself from them, Everett builds these writers and histories directly into his novel by remediating their words, dialogues, and stories.

For example, Everett draws upon the debate that occurred between Ralph Ellison and Irving Howe in the early 1960s regarding the constitution of the genre. The debate began with Howe's article "Black Boys and Native Sons," which appeared in *Dissent* magazine in the fall of 1963. In response to James Baldwin's piece "Everybody's Protest Novel" that critiques Wright's *Native Son* as so anger-inflected that it precludes the possibility of depicting African-Americans as unique individuals with a wide range of characteristics and values, Howe responded: "What, then, was the experience of a man with a black skin, what could it be in this country? How could a Negro put pen to paper, how could he so much as think or breathe, without some impulsion to protest, be it harsh or mild, political or private, released or buried?" (Howe). Ellison in turn, responds directly to this portion of Howe's article with outrage: "And to Baldwin's statement that one writes 'out of one thing only—one's own experience' … Howe, appearing suddenly in blackface, replies with a rhetorical sweep of his own: 'What, then, was the experience of a man with a black skin, what *could* it be here in this country?...'" ("The World" 158). Ellison continues, "Evidently Howe feels that unrelieved suffering is the only 'real' Negro experience,

and that the true Negro writer must be ferocious" ("The World" 159). Ellison is frustrated by Howe's characterization of Wright as the only "true" black writer, and wonders why his writing should valued less because he chooses to depict different aspects of the life experiences of African Americans. Ellison, representative of the character Monk in *Erasure*, calls for a body of black writing that is multifaceted and unhinged from the expectation of composing works singularly around the issue of racial oppression.

Another related trace of history that Everett implicitly incorporates in *Erasure* is Zora Neale Hurston's article "What White Publishers Won't Print," published in April 1950 in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Hurston's essay foreshadows the Howe-Ellison debates, observing over a decade prior that white audiences have a resistance to reading works about the "internal life of educated minorities" (Hurston). She locates the root of this problem in the way whites view non-whites as "uncomplicated stereotypes" who are to be perceived as spectacles in the same way that one might apprehend museum exhibits. She describes two black stereotypes present in "The American Negro Exhibit":

> Both of these mechanical toys are built so that their feet eternally shuffle, and their eyes pop and roll. Shuffling feet and those popping, rolling eyes denote the Negro, and no characterization is genuine without this monotony. One is seated on a stump picking away on his banjo and singing and laughing. The other is a most amoral character before a share-cropper's shack mumbling, about injustice. Doing this makes him out to be a Negro 'intellectual.' It is as simple as all that. (Hurston)

The imagery associated with the black intellectual resides heavily with Ellison's indictment ("Howe, suddenly appearing in blackface") of Howe's authority in declaring that the mindset of

black Americans must be steeped in racial protest. Like Ellison, Hurston pleads with readers to realize that "minorities do think, and think about something other than the race problem" (Hurston).

Echoes of both Ellison's and Hurston's perspectives reverberate throughout Everett's body of work,[23] particularly *Erasure*. This debate about what constitutes "African American literature" and the concerns about defining it too narrowly are remediated in *Erasure* primarily through the voice of Monk. The voices from the past appear most prominently in Monk's reaction to the wild popularity of his farcical novel *Fuck*. The fictional audiences in *Erasure* love *Fuck* because they feel it authentically depicts Black life, but Monk has deliberately racialized language, tone, and content in an exaggerated fashion to parody popular works of ghetto fiction that tout themselves to be real, gritty portrayals of Black urban life. Monk thought because the work was so outrageous that readers would realize it was a parody and, as a result, scrutinize these types of works as racist and exploitive. This is emphasized by Monk's disgust when he learns early in *Erasure* about a novel entitled *We's Lives in Da Ghetto*, which follows the life of fifteen-year-old Sharonda who is pregnant with her third child by a third father and becomes a prostitute to fund performance classes for a hopeful career on Broadway (Everett 39). The fictionalized tale is written by the character Juanita Mae Jenkins, an educated, privileged woman who admits that she never lived in the ghetto, and that the book derives from an experience of visiting relatives in Harlem for a few days when she was twelve years of age (Everett 53). Monk is haunted by *We's Lives in Da Ghetto* throughout *Erasure*, as he sees praise for the book at every turn, in the form of book reviews, Jenkins' appearance on the cover of

[23] Everett spoke on this very subject in a 2003 interview with *The Observer*: "Once, to be a writer or a musician, you needed to learn your craft and have a certain talent, and then you needed to prove yourself and improve your craft each time you created something. That's gone now. It's been replaced by other impulses like this bogus notion of authenticity that bedevils music and fiction made by black people." He continued, "I have nothing against ghetto novels or rural Southern novels…except that they are the only representations out there."

Time Magazine and on an Oprah Winfrey-style talk show, and his own agent's pleas to Monk to write "true, gritty real stories about black life" (Everett 2). To Monk, Jenkins' book evokes dangerously stereotypical images of African Americans, "this book was a real slap in the face. It was like strolling through an antique mall, feeling good, like the sunny day and then turning the corner to find a display of watermelon-eating, banjo-playing darkie carvings and a pyramid of Mammy cookie jars" (Everett 29). Monk considers works like Jenkins' book when thinking about his own approach to writing: "I didn't write as an act of testimony or social indignation … and I did not write out of a so-called family tradition of oral storytelling. I never tried to set anybody free, never tried to paint the next real and true picture of the lives of *my* people" (Everett 212). One can hear Hurston's plea in Monk's words: "minorities do think, and think about something other than the race problem," a view held in common by writers of varying political ideologies, from the conservative Hurston, to the more radical Baldwin.

It is Monk's hatred for Jenkins' book that fuels his writing of *Fuck*: "I'm sick of the shit that's published. I'm sick of it. This is an expression of my being sick of it" (Everett 132). The irony, of course, is that Monk's efforts to satirize Jenkins' book (and others like it that fall in the increasingly popular genre of ghetto fiction) by self-consciously amplifying dialect and sensationalizing language is exactly what earns *Fuck* the most commercial and critical success. The fictional *New York Times* review claims, "The characters are so well drawn that often one forgets that *Fuck* is a novel. It is more like the evening news. The ghetto comes to life in these pages and for this glimpse of hood existence we owe the author a tremendous debt" (Everett 260). Everett emphasizes how difficult it is for readers to see *Fuck* as a humorous, parodic text because of the cultural desire for "black literary sobriety." Satirist Paul Beatty uses this term to address this historical value of black writing that deals with serious issues such as racial

oppression, poverty, and life in the ghetto, as opposed to humorous or joyful works by African American authors. In his essay "Black Humor," Beatty gives an account of his experience reading Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in the summer before ninth grade:

> I read another paragraph, growing more oppressed with each maudlin passage. My lips thickened. My burr-headed Afro took on the texture of a dried-out firethorn bush. My love for the sciences, the Los Angeles Kings and scuba diving disappeared. My dog, Butch, growled at me. I suppressed my craving for a Taco Bell Bellbeefer (remember those?) because I feared the restaurant wouldn't serve me. My eyes started to water and the words to "Roll, Jordan, Roll," a Negro spiritual I'd never heard before, rumbled out of my mouth in a sonorous baritone. I didn't know I could sing. I tossed the book into the kitchen trash. I already knew why the caged bird sang - my family was impoverished every other week while waiting for my mother's paydays - but after three pages of that book, I knew why they put a mirror in the parakeet's cage: so he could wallow in his own misery.

The suffering in Angelou's book is contagious as Beatty reads the story, and he feels unable to escape the signifiers of racism. Beatty explains, "The defining characteristic of the African-American writer is sobriety - unless it's the black literature you buy from the book peddler standing on the corner next to the black-velvet-painting dealer, next to the burrito truck: then the prevailing theme is the ménage à trios," locating America's valuation of black literature in works that are either pornographic or give accounts of the hardships of racial oppression. Beatty, like his historical predecessors Ellison, Hurston, and Baldwin, is desperate for a broader cultural conception of black writing. Beatty searched in unconventional places for a greater range of works written by African-American authors, and his journey to "black literary insobriety" finally

led him to the works of Darius James, George Schuyler, and Fran Ross, which helped him "laugh at [him]self in the mirror" rather than "wallow in his own misery."

While deeply disconcerting in its potential to be read by audiences as a realistic representation of the "authentic black experience," Monk's book *Fuck* registers as the type of work that can inspire humor as a source of relief from and tool of resistance against a history of oppression. For example, Go is invited to appear on a Jerry Springer-type television talk show called "The Snookie Cane Show", and before he walks out onto the stage, he is sent to hair and makeup where Vaseline is spread over Go's face so he will "shine like a proper TV nigger" (Everett 112). Once he struts out onto the stage, Go sees his "fo' babies sittin on they fo' mamas' laps" and a booing audience (Everett 113). Go is confronted by the show's host and the four women who he impregnated about his lack of child support payments. The scene, while disturbing in its evocation of minstrelsy, is such an excessive portrayal of sensationalistic black male and female stereotypes that one cannot help but appreciate Monk's use of satire and humor in his portrayal of "life in the ghetto." Under the veneer of the satire, *Fuck* undeniably offers a harsh look at the reality of racial inequality in America, but tempers the pain of this reality with humor in the hope that satire and play can offer a means of deconstructing racialized and gendered power structures.

Beatty's search for humor in black literature rather than the ever-present somberness of the books one finds in the "African-American literature" section of conventional book stores comes from the same place as Everett's desire to incorporate humor and play into *Erasure*. Both men see a need for humor to find a new way of considering realities that differ from the hegemonic norm. And both see a need for literature that features black characters who step outside of cultural expectations about what black characters can be. In his essay "Many

Thousands Gone," James Baldwin claims that what the world knows of African Americans comes from statistics and stereotypes, and that when a black individual acts in a way that transgresses these stereotypes, "he stands in the greatest danger" because the dominant culture is "panic-stricken and we feel ourselves betrayed" (25). Everett is careful to represent a range of characters in *Erasure* in order to explore and challenge racial stereotypes despite the dangers of transgression. Everett's remediation of *Invisible Man*, a book that portrays a wide variety of black characters with nuanced personalities, is no surprise given Ellison's frustration with the way blacks were so narrowly depicted in popular media. From the elderly black couple that is evicted, to the nurturing Mary Rambo, to the cartman who sells yams in the city, to the misunderstood Tod Clifton, to the phony Mr. Bledsoe, Ellison uses an array of dialects and styles of characterization that not only provides a full variety of black experience but also parodies harmful stereotypes.

Of Ellison's attention to individual characters rather than types, William Barrett explains that while social protest was certainly an aspect of *Invisible Man*, it differed from the seminal work of protest fiction *Native Son* because the novel "grappl[ed] with the whole inner problem of the Negro as a human person, rather than as a mere social abstraction symbolizing an exploited class, and with a hero immensely more complex" than Wright's protagonist (McSweeney, quoting Barrett 16). It is, in fact, difficult to boil down the protagonist of *Invisible Man* to a central characteristic. He pinballs back and forth in the narrative from a scared child with the hope of education and success in his eyes, to a young man who feels betrayed by his hopes, to a man newly motivated by the promise of community, to a man jaded by the realities of racism. Like Monk, the invisible man has difficulty sorting through external pressures to act a certain way because of his race. He consciously avoids traditional markers of his race despite the

comforts those things, such as southern foodways, afford him ("[w]hat a group of people we were, I thought. Why, you could cause us the greatest humiliation simply by confronting us with something we liked") (Ellison 264). He lives his life based on what others, particularly white authority figures, desire of him: "All my life I had been looking for something, and everywhere I turned someone tried to tell me what it was…. I was looking for myself and asking everyone except myself questions which I, and only I, could answer" (Ellison 15). Though the invisible man lives in an historically transitional moment, one in which he purportedly has the tools to "rise above" the expectations of his race, the world around him is not yet prepared for such a presence. The people he encounters appear to give him opportunities to showcase his talents that will build his visibility in the public sphere, such as the Brotherhood's efforts to make the invisible man a figurehead for the organization who could rally the people, but these groups' selfish, racist motives always rise to the surface, leaving the protagonist feeling lost and misguided. The invisible man only feels at peace with himself when he comes to understand that he is invisible, that his true identity will never be seen by the world because he is black. One can see how Ellison's invisible man provides a foundation for Everett's Monk. Like the invisible man, Monk is keenly aware of how his race culturally positions him, particularly those aspects of himself that do not adhere to racial expectations and stereotypes. And like the invisible man, Monk is a complex protagonist who defies simple stereotypes.

Beyond the multiplicity present at the level of the protagonist's psychological construction, one can see how *Erasure* is also multi-vocal with respect to all of the traces from the past that populate the book. In addition, the formal elements of the book, from the choppy structure to the play with genre, make it a complex, metafictional work similar to its groundbreaking forbearers *Invisible Man* and Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*. Much like

*Erasure*, *Mumbo Jumbo* is a double-voiced text that echoes the work of past black authors. Gates observes that Reed draws on past works in a satirical fashion as means of breaking up stereotypes, "fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatisms, oppressive fashions, and all other things that impede free movement…of society" (112, quoting Northrop Frye). Gates uses *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Invisible Man* as examples of works that demonstrate how "authors produce meaning in part by revising formal patterns of representation in their fictions" in a way that "simultaneously involves a position or a critiquing both of received literary conventions and of the subject matter represented in canonical texts of the tradition" (113). We have seen through Everett's play with genre, as well as his handling of subjects such as racialized masculinity and black stereotypes, for example, that *Erasure* clearly falls in line with the body of works that Gates describes. But it is the way that *Erasure* differs from these texts that make it all the more relevant to this project.

Digital Natives and "Writerly Engagements"

*Erasure* differs from *Invisible Man* and *Mumbo Jumbo* in the way that it is written for a decentered, global population that has been heavily influenced and shaped by the development of digital technologies. In the past decade or so, the shift from analog to digital (or from atoms to bits, as MIT Media Lab founder Nicholas Negroponte describes it) has affected everything from the way we communicate with each other (email, social networking websites, text messaging) to the mechanisms of cultural production (digital media production, the use of virtual spaces like Youtube to share digital film and music). It's fairly easy to understand the shift from analog to digital if we think about the rise of digital photography, for example. Fifteen years ago, if you wanted to take a photograph, you took a role of film, loaded it into your camera, snapped the

photos, developed the film with photochemicals, and made prints from the film onto photographic paper. For digital photography, there is no need for a physical roll of film. A digital camera captures the light that bounces off of the object you are photographing and records it into pixelated values that is recognized by computers (a long sequence of 1s and 0s that represent the tiny colored dots that comprise the image), and that image can then be transmitted digitally for a variety of uses. But how exactly does the move from analog to digital inform perspectives about texts produced in the Digital Age? Certainly there has been innovation with respect to the actual digitizing of texts that are being read via various interfaces, such as on computer screens or digital readers like the Kindle or the IPad. But I aim to look at how texts can be understood as "digital" in more subtle and abstract ways, in particular, ways that texts reflect Digital Age shifts in cognition and modes of reading.

At the conclusion of *Erasure*, just when one anticipates that all of the loose ends that have resulted from the choppy format of the journal entry format and the crowding of disparate voices from the past might somehow tie together, Everett leaves the reader with three final words: *hypotheses non fingo*, or "I do not form a hypothesis." The novel's final sentiment suggests a way of reading this text that is influenced by Everett's status as a writer of the Digital Age, an approach to reading that is driven not by the need for a tidy resolution, but rather an investment in the multi-modal exploration of complex ideas. *Erasure* reflects both the creative transformations that have taken place since the onset of the digital age, such as the proliferation of narrative techniques such as remix, remediation, and fragmentation, as well as the cognitive transformations that have led to a shift in the ways that media are constructed and consumed. This transition is largely characterized by the movement away from close reading in favor of more surface forms of reading that allow for the consumption of greater quantities of texts. In

this final section of the chapter, I consider the shift in reading and writing practices in the Digital Age, and explore the ways that Everett's novel engages multiple reading modes to encourage an exploratory approach to complicated issues about race and masculinity.

Everett's fragmentary style of writing invites readers to utilize hybrid, synergistic reading practices, wherein readers who are accustomed to disjointed reading experiences can use both close and hyper reading to investigate the various trajectories that are presented in a story without being off-put by the lack of continuity or cohesive meaning. Postmodern literary critic Katherine Hayles describes one method of "hyper reading" as "juxtaposing," citing the example of having multiple windows open when browsing the Internet and reading across the various texts on the screen (61). Hayles asserts that this type of reading is typically used for scanning multiple texts for purposes of efficiency in a culture characterized by the overflow of information and attention deficit. She claims that digital technologies have created greater "distracted forms of reading" caused by innovations such as hyperlinks and short forms of writing like tweets (63). These digital forms lead to "small habitual actions such as clicking and navigating that increase the cognitive load" which causes readers to abandon deep and close reading of texts in favor of an approach that values quantity over quality (Hayles 63). Hayles asserts that these reading practices stimulate the brain differently than typical print reading, and create a transformation of neural function characterized by greater plasticity and flexibility, while at the same time they lead to a lessened capacity to comprehend complex theorems and principles. Many fear that the increase in hyper reading and resulting shift in neural capacities will lead to the extinction of close reading, a method of reading that has become foundational to our processes of deep analysis that help us make meaning of complicated texts and theories. Hayles proposes that one way to move forward without losing the valuable methods from our past is to create synergies

between past and present reading practices (75).[24] This is the type of reading that *Erasure* requires, an approach to the text that allows for movement between deep and surface reading, that is exploratory rather than in search of a neatly wrapped conclusion, a reading practice characterized by *hypotheses non fingo*.

There are several aspects of *Erasure* that welcome opportunities for multimodal reading that may resonate with digital natives. One is Everett's use of remix techniques that is explored above. Cut-up and reassemble techniques, while not new to the literary world, have become a hallmark of Digital Age works, as the ability to access, reproduce, and publish media has become even more simple and affordable. The payoff for readers of *Erasure* who embrace remix modes of creative production and excitedly engage with the novel's intertextual dialogues is a complex exploration of contemporary American race relations. For example, in the case of *Fuck*, Everett's retelling of Wright's *Native Son*, it is impossible for readers to see the dialogue that forms between the texts about the ways that racism against African Americans has transformed without having prior knowledge about *Native Son*. Because *Fuck* is so deeply linked to *Native Son*, the benefits of such an intricate remediation of Wright's work would be lost on a person who is unfamiliar with the story of Bigger Thomas. In this way, *Erasure* has the potential to alienate readers who might already be turned off by the textual complexities that are explored above. While *Erasure* offers what digital natives might consider to be exciting exploratory interactions with the text, to others these invitations will be lost in a story that is frustratingly inaccessible.

[24] She offers as an example the pedagogical strategies of Professor Alan Liu from University of California, Santa Barbara, who encourages his students to use digital media to analyze literary texts through activities such as adapting William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet* to the Facebook model (75-76). Scholars like Liu push against the threat of obsolescence of close reading techniques by creating hybrid models of reading that give digital natives access to texts through familiar hyper reading-oriented interfaces and then require them to more deeply read the texts to understand finer points such as character development and themes.

Another aspect of *Erasure* that invites synergistic reading modes is the novel's fragmented form. Combining hyper and close reading practices when approaching these fragments allows readers to interact with the text in an exploratory fashion, remaining open to divergences and inconclusiveness. This sometimes disorienting fragmentation can be observed in the very first chapter, as Everett begins by placing readers in the middle of a complex line of inquiry about cultural assimilation and the performance of racial authenticity, and then quickly veers down a divergent path. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the book opens with a seemingly straightforward story about Monk's reflection on the social construction of race, constructing the central character as a man who has spent most of his life fighting against social expectations that he more closely adhere to African American stereotypes. But just when a central theme of the novel seems established, the narrative takes a sharp turn:

> Saws cut wood. They either rip with the grain or cut across it. A ripsaw will slice smoothly along the grain, but chew up the wood if it goes against the grain. It is all in the geometry of the teeth, the shape, size and set of them, how they can lean away from the blade. Crosscut teeth are typically smaller than rip teeth. The large teeth of the ripsaws shave material away quickly and there are deep gaps between them which allow shavings to fall away, keeping the saw from binding. Crosscut teeth make a wider path, are raked back and beveled to points. The points allow the crosscut saw to score and cleave the grain cleanly. (Everett 2-3)

Upon reflection, after having read the novel in its entirety, one can see how this discussion of going with or against the wood gain relates to the issues discussed in the prior section about the consequences of racial performances that either cooperate with cultural expectations or cut against them. But upon first encounter, this segment of the chapter feels out of place and

unrelated; it more closely resembles an excerpt from a woodworking manual than a metaphor about cultural belonging.

The section that follows returns us to the linear narrative strand that runs throughout *Erasure*, advancing the plot by presenting Monk as an experimental writer and scholar whose story begins with his arrival in Washington, D.C. to deliver a paper at an academic conference and visit his family. But just a few pages later, there is another interruption, this time Monk's reflections about fishing. He explains, "I fish this hole, then that riffle, under the undercut bank, that outside bench, each spot looking sweeter and more promising than the last, until I'm miles away from where I started" (Everett 7). These digressions from the central narrative are justified through the formal framing of *Erasure* as a series of journal entries penned by the protagonist, as expressed in the opening line of the novel, "My journal is a private affair, but as I cannot know the time of my coming death, and since I am not disposed, however unfortunately, to the serous consideration of self-termination, I am afraid that others will see these pages" (Everett 1). But Everett uses the journal format as more than a method of highlighting the passage of time (the entries in *Erasure* are not dated), exploring the stream of consciousness interiority of the central character, or adding a greater sense of realism to the story. Instead, this format presents an opportunity for Everett to place a range of seemingly disparate narrative segments on the table and urge readers to make lateral connections between the segments that have the potential to enrich the reading experience.

Another example of textual discontinuity is the series of imagined conversations between public figures that pop up throughout the text, such as the following exchange between German painters Paul Klee and Käthe Kollwitz about the violence and grief that result from absurd expressions of hostility towards homosexuality:

*Klee: What are you thinking about?*

*Kollwitz: Why is it that bloody-minded men are such prudes? Why are they so hostile to sexuality and images of the body?*

*Klee: You're referring to mustache boy.*

*...*

*Kollwitz: I lost my son in the first war and I fear I will lose my grandson in this one. All because of a man who is afraid of his pee-pee.*

*Klee: And other people's pee-pees.* (Everett 49)

While this satirical dialogue connects the violence against homosexuals committed during the Holocaust with the larger theme of targeted minority groups that is central to *Erasure*, it also provides insight about Monk's conflicted attitude towards his gay brother, Bill. These fragments interrupt the flow of the story and thus may seem to clutter the pages or cause distraction, while at the same time they present readers the challenge of bouncing around between an array of textual fragments as a way of exploring themes from multiple perspectives.

Fragmentation also occurs due to the various linguistic modes that Everett occupies, including his use of academic diction to express Monk's scholarly work, his play with African American vernacular, his remediation of canonical African American literary works, and the shifts in language employed in nested narratives. The multitude of linguistic modes gives the text a poly-vocal quality that is most readily apparent when the voices express contradictory messages. While often the fragments that diverge from the main narrative support the central story (as in the example of the excerpt about wood), at times these bits of text and embedded narratives challenge the principle narrative, creating a fractured and contradictory political discourse. For example, while it is obvious when one reads *Fuck* in the context of *Erasure* that

this crude, over-the-top, and confrontational piece of writing is meant to critique Western culture's celebration of an arguably exploitive subgenre of African American literature, *Fuck* is at the same time undeniably entertaining and compelling. One can't help but laugh, for example, at the ridiculousness of this exchange:

> "Yo mama look like J. Edgar Hoover," Yellow say.
>
> "What he look like?" I ax.
>
> "You mama," Yellow say.
>
> "Fuck you," I say.
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> "Fuck you," Yellow say.
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> "Fuck you," I say.
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> "Fuck you," Yellow say.
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> "Fuck you," I say.
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> "Fuck you," Yellow say.
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> "Fuck you," I say.
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> "Fuck you," Yellow say.
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> "Fuck you," I say.
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> "Fuck you," Yellow say. (Everett 75-7)

*Fuck* is fast-paced, darkly humorous, and sensationalistic. Particularly in contrast to the academic tone employed in another embedded narrative within *Erasure*, an excerpt from Monk's experimentalist novel *F/Z* (a novel that, as Monk explains to his sister, "treats this critical text by Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, exactly as it treats its so-called subject text which is Balzac's *Sarrasine*" (Everett 6)), *Fuck* is considerably more accessible and entertaining.

And yet, while the excerpt from *F/Z* employs specialized and tedious language in comparison to *Fuck*, it offers another useful key to reading *Erasure* that is on par with the spirit of the novel's closing words, "*hypotheses non fingo*." Monk's academic essay, building upon the work of Roland Barthes, suggests that an experimental novel is one that comprises "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" (Barthes, *S/Z* 5). Applying this definition to the experimental novel *Erasure* signals readers to approach this work with openness and an exploratory curiosity that is resistant to singular, unified meaning. Of course, a reader's ability to see the linkage between Barthes' concept of the "writerly text" and her willingness to engage in the suggested active participation with the text relies upon the reader's familiarity with *S/Z* and Barthes' complex theories of textuality (much in the way that aspects of Everett's exploration of systematic forms of racial oppression depend on readers' knowledge of the preexisting texts that he remediates, particularly *Native Son*). This is another instance in which a digital native might be more interested in following the twists and turns of this text than a traditional reader, to seek out explanations for these divergent pieces within the story much in the way that a person might click on hyperlinks in a blog entry to more fully understand the concepts explored or to backtrack to a prior story for further background and explanation. In this way, a synergistic reading mode that combines close and hyper reading is a writerly practice that allows for multiple points of access to a text, bookmarking of fragments that one can return to later and

read more deeply, and reading across textual fragments to make meaningful connections that can vary with each encounter of the text (as Barthes stresses the importance of rereading (*S/Z* 15-16)). The digital native, with this combination of old and new tools for media consumption, can embrace what a writerly text has to offer.

In this respect, *Erasure* might be inaccessible and confusing for those who are more interested in consuming what Barthes calls a "readerly text," or a text that is so structured that it requires little reader engagement or participation (*S/Z* 4). But for those who are accustomed to interacting with digital media, the text opens itself up to a range of possibilities, as multimodal reading allows the reader to interact with the plurality of signifiers within the text. And as noted before, the formal structure of *Erasure* that invites multimodal reading is well suited for the substance of *Erasure*. Just as the form of the novel is fractured and complex, the content is similarly messy, as Everett introduces a range of complicated political issues that defy easy explanation. An example of this is the way in which *Erasure* raises questions about the value of ghetto fiction as a subgenre of African American literature by exploring an array of conflicting perspectives. The competing perspectives about ghetto fiction presented in the novel can be dizzying. With the seductively compelling work of ghetto fiction *Fuck* on the one hand, and Monk's intense hatred of works in the genre of ghetto fiction that present a narrow account of African American existence on the other, readers might be left wondering about Everett's ultimate message.

While this inconsistency may cause readers to characterize Everett's novel as frustratingly inconclusive, indecisive, and inconsistent, there is something to be gained in Everett's hesitancy to advance a unified position about the genre of ghetto fiction. His reluctance to take a particular position on the issue reflects the nuances in contemporary

discourse between writers, scholars, and an array of people outside of the academic community about ghetto fiction. Collins discusses the danger in the marketability of thug life and "rebellious Black masculinity," claiming, "[m]ass marketing of thug life to African American youth diverts attention away from social policies that deny Black youth education and jobs" (Collins 159). In African American author Nick Chiles' 2006 New York Times editorial "Their Eyes Were Reading Smut," he wonders, "Is street fiction some passing fad, or does it represent our future?" He continues, "It's depressing that this noble profession, one that I aspired to as a child from the moment I first cracked open James Baldwin and Gabriel García Márquez about 30 years ago, has been reduced by the greed of the publishing industry and the ways of the American marketplace to a tasteless collection of pornography." It is Chiles' contention that ghetto fiction represents a direct confrontation to an esteemed history of black writing, and that these works have no redeeming qualities, that they are merely a product of writers producing works that will be commercially successful with no thought given to the art of writing. Francine Fialkoff, the 2006 editor of Library Journal, takes contention with Chiles' perspective, claiming, "Mr. Chiles, you may have a problem with street lit. In the library world, we don't." She explains, "As far as I can tell, street lit isn't any more prurient or violent than most popular fiction currently on display." Fialkoff represents another side of the debate that applauds ghetto fiction for reaching a group of readers that might not otherwise pick up books. She claims that these works achieve the aim of literature: in the words of Book Review Editor Barbara Hoffert, "It shows us that writing really matters." Thus Everett's efforts to throw readers off balance by luring them with his compelling nested narrative *Fuck* and then presenting a similarly persuasive (yet contrasting) argument delivered by Monk about the dangers of a genre that relies so fully on negative stereotypes highlights the nuanced issues regarding a genre in contention.

The above is just one example of the way that *Erasure* refuses to advance neat and tidy viewpoints in his novel. In this respect, *Erasure* is written for a culture that does not have a coherent core. While the novel gestures at significant political issues, such as the problem with social expectations about how black males are supposed to act, and the issue of defining what constitutes African American literature, it provides no unified perspective. Rather, the book has a quality of openness that allows a reader to explore feelings of levity through humor, contrasting with anger or outrage at acts of institutionalized racism, contrasting yet again with confusion about whether ghetto fiction reinforces black stereotypes or provides much-needed "black literary insobriety." This text is situated in the ephemeral.

In fact, Everett's resistance to closed, readerly texts reflects the one message that is consistently suggested throughout *Erasure*: having an openness to possibilities, whether in developing an exploratory curiosity about the media that we consume, or cultivating an expansive vision for the future of African American literature, is a way to resist the erasure of social and political personhood for underprivileged groups that is caused by cultural hegemony. Including a multitude of disconnected signifiers that vary in meaning and can be arranged and rearranged to create different outcomes in a text creates greater flexibility in the process of knowledge production and dissemination. This lies in contrast to rigorously structured stories with fixed outcomes and narrow cultural content that reflects the interests of only groups at the top of the social hierarchy. *Erasure* advances this principle, for example, in its representation of cultural norms regarding black masculinity explored above. Remediations of the central characters of *Native Son* and *Invisible Man* help Everett demonstrate the injustice of restrictive cultural expectations about what it means to be a black man living in America. These nuanced character explorations that create concern about the ways that black males have been and

continue to be socially constructed in a patriarchal white society mirror the complex formal and rhetorical strategies in Erasure: both aiming for movement and flexibility (as opposed to narrow, constrictive expectations) that allow for greater openness with respect to reading practices, meaning making, and cultural personhood. This is another aspect of the text in which form mirrors content, both gesturing towards a plurality of signification that allows for greater possibilities in the production of media and knowledge.

## The Persistence of Narrative

Works of literary fiction and other media are increasingly influenced by Digital Age technologies, as are human cognitive function and methods of media consumption. This has led to a fear that linear narratives will become extinct. For example, new media scholar Lev Manovich asserts that databases and other similar new media forms are so pervasive that they will replace narratives (Hayles 175-76). Yet even though Manovich finds databases to be extremely powerful in new media, he notes that the desire to "tell a story" keeps narratives from being overcome by these and other forms that are so pervasive in the Digital Age (Hayles 176). Certainly the future of the novel remains uncertain as these new forms become more widespread. Writers and readers alike continue to develop new methods for creating and consuming media, methods that lead to multimodal texts like *Erasure* that encourage synergistic, exploratory, open-ended engagements with complicated issues. But despite concerns that the changes in media production that have come as a result of the permeation of digital technologies will somehow lead to the end of linear storytelling that has been foundational to the Modern world, the need to tell a story persists.

Despite the ephemeral quality of the text, at the core of *Erasure* is a question about how close we really are to a post-race society. In the face of a time when color blindness has become an increasingly popular approach to negotiating racial difference, *Erasure* draws on racial constructions from the past to show readers that there is a discrepancy between cultural perception and reality when it comes to social progress for African Americans. Monk himself wishes to go about life as though race doesn't exist, but he is haunted by the middle-class black male stereotype that he has been stripped of his blackness because of his willingness to assimilate to white ways of being. Monk's desire to be recognized for more than his race becomes interpreted as a readiness to cast race aside in order to achieve greater social mobility in white-dominated culture. Color blindness was in fact introduced as a strategy to greater integrate people of color into the dominant culture by ignoring racial difference, but instead has resulted in a neglect of the privileges that whites have over other races. While the aim of color blindness might be to treat all individuals the same regardless of race, it only serves to further exclude people of color in both the literary world and the world at large. As Toni Morrison explains,

> in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse. Evasion has fostered another, substitute language in which the issues are encoded, foreclosing open debate. The situation is aggravated by the tremor that breaks into discourse on race. It is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body.

Color blindness can only have positive potential in a post-race world in which race no longer has relevance on both an individual and institutional level. Everett knows the issues are not straightforward, and his remediative novel reflects the complexities of current racial politics. While Everett does not deliver a cohesive, unified message in *Erasure*, this novel does the important work of pushing against the erasure of race by creating a space for conversation and thoughtfulness regarding important issues such as racialized masculinity and cultural attitudes towards creative works produced by black artists. Everett brings color into the light through humor and history; he gives visibility to racial discrimination that has transformed but certainly has yet to be eradicated. The chapter that follows examines a similarly fractured work that carves out new epistemological pathways for thinking about historical constructions of race and racism that resonate in contemporary American political and social structures.

## Chapter 2

### Remediative Theatre and The Problem with Text in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*

Karen Jürs-Munby's Introduction to Hans-Theis Lehmann's groundbreaking work *Postdramatic Theatre* observes that emergent trends in contemporary performance have led to "a theatre that cannot be taken in 'at once', that is not easily 'surveyable', and thus a theatre that does not make the world 'manageable' for us—fundamentally because the world we live in, globalized and multiple mediatized as it is, *is* less 'surveyable' and manageable than ever" (Lehmann 11). The work of playwright Suzan-Lori Parks responds to the weight of the overcrowding of information through performance texts that challenge the dramatic model of representation by confronting textual dominance and narrative linearity. In this essay, I closely examine Parks' 1996 play *Venus*, in which she remediates historical accounts of the life of Sara Baartman, an African tribeswoman who was exhibited at European freak shows as the "Venus Hottentot" in the early nineteenth century. Parks plays with the notion of text as determinative in dramatic works through both rhythmic "repetition and revision" of words and phrases, as well as isolation of excerpts from historical legal and medical documents that purported to convey empirical truths about Baartman's life. Parks patches together temporalities, juxtaposing multiple historical moments within single lines of dialogue. These formal rejections of established theatrical conventions create a sense of instability that mirror the unmanageability and strange juxtapositions of our increasingly mediatized world. I explore both the limits of

Parks' remediation, particularly confusion about how to physicalize this performative text, and the liberating potential for such a work to destabilize the performativity of racism.

While there are traces of dramatic theatrical conventions in *Venus*, such as dramatis personae, stage directions, and the relaying of a story, Parks' play with text and remediation of historical documents challenge the expectations of theatregoers who are accustomed to narrative wholeness, coherent meaning, and the representation of a plot-driven story that contains elements of suspense and resolution. In many ways Parks' experiments with form resemble features of "postdramatic theatre," a term coined by Lehmann to describe contemporary performance practices that are focused on presence and gesture as an alternative to representation and illusion, and that deemphasize the role of the text by giving performance scripts equal weight in relation to other elements of performance such as gesture, music, and visual composition (Lehmann 46). Parks, however, challenges textual dominance by going straight to the text itself.[25] In *Venus*, text is embodied through the use of minimal and open stage directions, "spells," and rhythmic repetition of words and phrases. In addition, Parks isolates text through her "Rep & Rev" technique as well as her inclusion of excerpts from historical documents as "historical extracts" and "footnotes." The result is a performance text with multiple possibilities for performance, as well as a destabilizing effect that has the potential to both turn away performers and audiences who have difficulty accessing *Venus* and, in turn, ignite a spark in "active witnesses who reflect on their own meaning-making and who are also willing to tolerate gaps and suspend the assignment of meaning" (Lehmann 6).

In many ways in alignment with the aims of postdramatic theatre, Parks' unique brand of textual play and remediation confront the problem with text as determinative of performance;

[25] Text was crucial to Richard Foreman's 1996 production of *Venus*, as the walls of the stage were covered in words (Johung 47, citing Brantley), exploding text onto the demarcated boundaries of the performance space, and thus enveloping the performance in textual history.

and through this textual experimentation Parks also confronts the problem with text as determinative of truth. Her challenge to the dominance of text in performance by extension evinces skepticism about the efficacy of historiographical methods and the ability of text to deliver empirical truths.[26] Performance scholars Alice Rayner and Harry Elam, Jr. claim that Parks "posits history as a site of contemporary resistance as she appropriates and critiques historical narrative-not only to challenge and re-write history, but to right history" (449). [27] While Parks' titular character is based on the historical figure Sarah Baartman, and she is certainly interested in the historical events surrounding Baartman's experiences, Parks does not aim to reveal "the truth" about Baartman or create a dramatic illusion that synthesizes historical fragments and present-day reflections into a linear narrative that paints a cohesive picture of Baartman as a historical subject. Thus, Parks' project is not about "righting" history or attempting to present a unified alternate history for Baartman, but rather about destabilizing notions of historical truth by playing with language and the boundaries of performance.

Embodied Text

By crafting a script that is sparse in stage directions and alive with physicalized language, Parks relinquishes textual control and develops a performative text that is open to multiple possibilities of performance. This is one of many instances in which "form and content are interdependent" for Parks ("Elements of Style" 7), as the multiple possibilities for performance

[26] Parks promotes the kind of radical epistemology advanced by ethnographer Dwight Conquergood, who argues that Western approaches to knowledge formation are limited because ways of gaining knowledge through experiential, hands-on methods grounded in practice have long been subjugated to ways of knowing achieved by empirical observations that are recorded in writing. Conquergood asserts, "[d]ominant epistemologies that link knowing with seeing are not attuned to meanings that are masked, camouflaged, indirect, embedded or hidden in context" (146), and calls for participatory experiences rooted in presence and vulnerability as a means of gaining cultural understanding.

[27] Rayner and Elam's observations focus on Parks' play *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, a work that addresses the limits of historiography much like *Venus*. Thus, their observations translate easily to an analysis of *Venus*.

mirror multiple possibilities for reading Baartman as a historical subject rather than a narrow vision based on narrow preconceptions. One notable difference between *Venus* and typical dramatic works is that Parks uses little stage direction in the textual aspect of the play. At times, she opens a scene with an explanation, such as the notes that precede Scene 29: "A play on a stage. The Baron Docteur is the only person in the audience. Perhaps he sits in a chair…" (*Venus* 25). Even though Parks sets up the scene, she incorporates the language of suggestion through the use of the word "perhaps," acknowledging that her voice is one of many in the decision-making of how *Venus* will be performed. Parks also demonstrates her willingness to step aside and allow others to contribute to the performance of *Venus* in the notes that precede the play. Parks explains that a "spell" is an elongated "rest" indicated by the "repetition of figures' names with no dialogue," and that it is up to directors to "fill this moment as they best see fit." Thus "Scene 19: A Scene of Love (?)" carves out a space of liberation from the script, as the entire scene is comprised of a "spell" between two characters:

> Venus
>
> The Baron Docteur
>
> Venus
>
> The Baron Docteur
>
> Venus
>
> The Baron Docteur
>
> Venus
>
> The Baron Docteur
>
> Venus (Parks, *Venus* 80)

The performance text takes a back seat as directors must decide whether this is a silent scene, if the actors relate solely through gesture, if the exchange will be scripted or rather reliant upon actors reacting in the present moment of the performance, if the scene calls for invention of lines, and if the scene should be performed the same way each night of a multiple-night run. Parks surrenders control of these decisions, allowing for a range of possible embodiments of this exchange.

Parks' interest in avoiding directing the action of *Venus* through a "pissy set of parentheses" ("Elements of Style" 15) lends a certain slipperiness to her work. Performance scholar William Worthen explains, "the material properties of a dramatic text—typography, layout, page and cover design—matter to the ways specific groups of readers (actors, directors, audiences, reviewers) understand its potentialities of performance" (214). Rather than dictating every actors' place on stage, the inflection of each line, and the physical layout of material objects on the stage, there is an openness to *Venus* that creates space for the contributions of directors, dramaturgs, performers, and readers/audiences to consider various "potentialities of performance." In her resistance to expressing a single vision for *Venus*, Parks likewise resists the temptation to pin Bartman down as a historical subject. What was Baartman's life like as a colonized woman in what is now South Africa before she traveled to England? How did Baartman feel living as an African woman of color in a white, European world, particularly when her source of income derived from her perceived difference? What kinds of physical and emotional hardships did Baartman endure from a job that required her to stand nearly nude for at least 12 hours per day, 6 days a week on display for a public that had little regard for her thoughts or feelings? Did Baartman prefer her entrepreneurial life in Europe over her colonial life in Cape Town? Did Baartman freely consent to her public exhibition fully understanding of

the way she profited from breaching cultural norms of decency, or was Baartman so manipulated and exploited by those who were higher up in the social hierarchy that she became incapable of exercising free will? In the same way that Parks is not interested in producing a dramatic text that dictates every element of a performance, she likewise does not feel compelled to answer all of these questions about Baartman in *Venus*. For her, the importance lies in the unanswered. Sociologist Zine Magubane criticizes the outpouring of scholarly and artistic attempts to narrativize Baartman's life that promote the idea of a "single ideology, central icon, or core image about blackness and sexuality in the nineteenth century" because these ideas are always constantly in a state of flux and development (55). Parks opposes this narrowness by producing a performance text that is defined by fluidity and resistance to singular interpretation.

And yet while *Venus* is slippery in its resistance to unified meaning, it is somewhat grounded by its physicality. The very act of including the convention of a "spell" in her play indicates that Parks is not just interested in what happens on the page, but also in what happens in the performance space. The "spell" implies gesture and action, a connection between performers that goes beyond the mere exchange of words. For Parks, it is not only the silences that are embodied, but text is also imbued with action. Parks explains, "[l]anguage is a physical act. It's something which involves your entire body—not just your head" ("Elements of Style" 11). She plays with orthography and dialect as a way of physicalizing language, omitting letters and punctuation, spelling words phonetically, and blending words together as a way of calling attention to the languageness of language. These disruptions in standard vernacular require a thoughtfulness about language that would otherwise be overlooked or taken for granted. For example, the Chorus implores to the audience as they look upon Venus for the first time: "Turn uhway. Don't look. Cover yr face. Cover yr eyes" (Parks, *Venus* 6). Parks explains, "Look at

the difference between "the" and "thuh." The "uh" requires the actor to employ a different physical, emotional, vocal attack" ("Elements of Style" 12). Text in a dramatic script is no longer a mere line of dialog to be spoken, but a communication that requires thoughtful movements of facial musculature, deliberate intonation, and gestures that accentuate the delivery of speech.

Parks also creates a language of action through verbal patterns. She develops a sense of rhythm and ritual in *Venus* through her use of repetition and revision, or "Rep & Rev." Parks explains in her "Elements of Style" that "Rep & Rev," a concept derived from jazz music, is the practice of writing a phrase once and then repeating it, but each time with a slight alteration (8-9). In Scene 27, when Venus' showman presents Venus and the other members of her troupe of "freaks" to the audience, she heralds them as "[t]he 9 lowest links in Gods Great Chain of Being" (Parks, *Venus* 31), referring to the concept developed by early Greek philosophers that hierarchized all matter in the universe, assigning everything and everyone to a "proper place" in the chain. Throughout this scene, the word "chain" is repeated in different styles and contexts by a variety of characters on the stage with such frequency that it becomes a refrain, a dynamic word that is continually emphasized and reemphasized to the audience. The first few times it appears, the word seems fairly innocuous, symbolic of a distant time in the past when direct forms of racism were accepted, prevalent, and unhidden. But as "chain" is repeated again and again, the picture of racial hierarchy becomes increasingly unsettling, the word "chain" calling up images such as the chain links on shackles used to confine slaves, and the chain gangs of the post-bellum American South that targeted "free" African Americans. Hearing the word "chain" repeatedly might also call attention to the fact that one need not be in chains to be enslaved. Each repetition of the word "chain" cuts deeper as Parks plants a seed about the way that past

actions impact contemporary race relations. In this way, Rep & Rev contributes to what Parks calls a "drama of accumulation," as opposed to a drama comprised of building elements that all lead to one central climax ("Elements of Style" 9). At times, *Venus* resembles more of a database than it does a linear narrative, a work that gains significance from its patterns rather than a single narrative arc.

Rep & Rev is also used to explore the multiple subject positions of characters in *Venus*. Parks emphasizes that "[c]haracters refigure their words and through a refiguring of language show us that they are experiencing their situation anew" ("Elements of Style" 9). For example, the repetition and revision of a rhyming couplet that expresses Venus' persistent refusal to expose her genitalia to spectators emphasizes differences in ways of speaking and identity formation. The character called The Man's Brother, who encourages Venus to leave her home in Cape Town by promising her riches in England, recites the couplet in the Overture: "She gained fortune and fame by not wearing a scrap / hiding only the privates that lipped in her lap" (Parks, *Venus* 6). This line is repeated by Venus herself at the end of the Overture, but with some revision, "She gained fortune and fame not wearin uh scrap / hidin only thuh privates that lipped in her lap" (Parks, *Venus* 8). Parks uses Rep & Rev to omit words and make slight dialectic changes that evoke a non-standard English vernacular, perhaps in an effort to celebrate, as Rayner and Elam have observed, "the elasticity, power, and poetry of black dialect" (449). Parks challenges English orthography, calling to mind the way that lingo at once repeats and revises accepted systems of writing and offers new possibilities for recording language.

Because Parks plays with text to enhance the physical aspect of language, the two different textual versions of this couplet imply two distinct performances on behalf of the performers playing the roles of The Man's Brother and Venus. Parks uses Rep & Rev to create

distance and distinction between these two characters. The slight variation from one version to the next points to the marginally different (yet significant) subject positions that they occupy, The Man's Brother using a normative mode of delivery, while Venus performs the couplet in a more relaxed, slang, conversational fashion. While these two characters share the commonality of racial difference in the white world they come to inhabit, the power differential that continues to exist between them based on gender and place of origin puts them in drastically different positions in terms of their potential to profit from Venus' body.[28] Parks uses Rep & Rev in this rhyming couplet to explore the flexibility of language in order to highlight the complexities of the intersection of race and gender identities in dynamics of power. Rather than creating equality between all African figures in *Venus*, Parks acknowledges the role that sexual difference plays in the construction of racial hierarchies.

## Textual Isolation

Parks aims to use Rep & Rev "to create a dramatic text that departs from the traditional linear narrative style to look and sound more like a musical score" ("Elements of Style" 9). In addition, Parks challenges linearity by using sampling and remix techniques that are also common devices in the production of music. Though Venus' journey from Cape Town to Europe to tour as a spectacle is a traceable narrative strand in *Venus*, the story is interrupted throughout with Parks' remediations and excerpts from historical documents about Sarah Baartman in the form of "historical extracts" and "footnotes." Parks remediates nineteenth

[28]A closer look at the race and gender dynamics of nineteenth century Cape Town supports this distinction. The character of The Man's Brother is based on Hendrik Cesars, a man born in colonial Cape Town of Free Black status (Crais and Scully 42). Baartman did domestic work in the households of Cesars and his brother Pieter before setting sail for England in 1810 (Crais and Scully 32, 40). Cesars held legal power over Baartman as if she were a slave to him and traveled with her to England, where he acted as Baartman's showman in the early part of her career as a performer (Crais and Scully 47, 73). So while Cesars and Baartman were both people of color living in a predominantly white Europe, Cesars, as a colonial man, had power over this Khoekhoe-born woman.

century historical records that attempted to capture Baartman on paper, such as eyewitness accounts of The Hottentot Venus exhibition, creative works pertaining to Baartman's performances, scientific documents that record observations about Baartman's body, and legal documents that recorded Baartman's trial. Parks' remediative techniques both merge temporalities through juxtaposition of textual fragments from various historical periods, and isolate text through the interruption of historical extracts and footnotes. The effect is a disruption of both text and linear narrativity as central to dramatic performance. By playing with language and the boundaries of performance and historiography, Parks destabilizes notions of historical truth.

For example, in Scene 24, in which Venus' handler exhibits her to the public, barking at the audience to take notice of her "fat ass" (Parks, *Venus* 42) and "BLACKSIDE" (Parks, *Venus* 43), the moment is interrupted by a character called "The Negro Resurrectionist" who performs the text of an 1809 advertising bill:[29]

> Footnote #4:
>
> Historical Extract. Category: Newspaper Advertisements.
>
> AN ADVERTISING BILL:
>
> From Daniel Lyson *Collectanea: A Collection of Advertisements and Paragraphs from the Newspapers Relating to Various Subjects* (London, 1809).

[29] Notice that I claim that The Negro Resurrectionist "performs" the footnote, yet how does one perform a footnote? This is one of the many challenges of Parks' remediative theatre. Does the actor read the footnote from an oversized scroll to emphasize its antiquated origin? Or perhaps the language of the footnote is projected onto a screen behind the stage and read by the actor simultaneous to The Mother-Showman's urging that Venus dance for her audience. The delivery of this unusual footnote, not a standard convention in dramatic theatre, will affect the audience's reception of its content in relation to the narrative it has interrupted. I elaborate more on the challenges of performing Parks' remediative theatre beginning on page 99.

> Parties of 12 and upwards, may be accommodated with a Private exhibition of The Hottentot…between 7 and 8 o'clock in the evening, by giving notice to the Door-Keeper the day previous.
>
> The Hottentot may also be viewed by single parties with no advance notice from 10 in the morning until 10 in the evening. Mondays through Saturdays. No advance notice is necessary.
>
> A Woman will attend (if required). (Parks, *Venus* 44)

The "footnote," a device not common in texts intended to be performed, disrupts the scene of Venus dancing for the audience by layering a past historical moment onto the present, introducing an account of Baartman's performance in London in the early 1800s. Parks gives material weight to this happening by choosing to excerpt a historical document that details how many people were in the parties that observed her at 225 Piccadilly Avenue, what time the performances occurred, what the procedures were for viewing, and who would attend to "The Hottentot." The performance of this excerpt from historical records in the midst of a scene that reconstructs one of Baartman's public displays invites viewers to think critically about the scene that is being produced for them, and to consider the relationship between the present moment in the performance space and a past time when Baartman and other African women were put on display for European audiences. The merging of temporalities triggers questions about audience complicity as they witness a reenactment of exploitation, as well as inquiries about how the past and present are connected in relation to the exoticization of black female bodies.

Parks patches together multiple temporalities in an effort to show the linkage between past and present forms of racism throughout history. This occurs again in Scene 31 when the men who persuade Venus to leave Africa refer to her and other members of her tribe as "Big

Bottomed Girls" (Parks, *Venus* 13). In this scene, there are three different time periods layered together. The first is the present moment of the post-1995 performance space, in which audiences encounter different versions of Venus, such as the portrayal by Adina Porter in Richard Foreman's 1996 production at Yale Repertory Theatre, in which Porter wore an artificially padded bodysuit that included an immense, nude bottom (Johung 48). The second is the world of Sarah Baartman that is brought to the audience's attention as The Man and The Brother refer to Venus as "Saarttjie," the diminutive form of the Dutch name for the real woman who the character is based upon. Finally, the reference to Sarah and her tribemates as "Big Bottomed Girls" is reminiscent of the Queen song "Fat Bottomed Girls" that was popular in the late 1970s. Notice that the first letter of each world in "Big Bottomed Girls" is capitalized, setting up this phrase as a proper noun to be performed as such by The Man as a way of indicating a history of popular media that has fetishized full-figured women, from the song by Queen to the female subjects of R. Crumb's underground comix to contemporary rap songs like Sir-Mix-a-Lot's "Baby Got Back." *Venus* calls audiences to consider the myriad ways that figures like Baartman "have not been put to rest but continue to play behind the scenes of our daily interactions" (Ford 98).

Heidi Holder explains that this "unmoor[ing of] images and sounds from their expected context" is a central aim of Parks' project (19). An admirer of Bertolt Brecht and his use of alienation affect to motivate audiences to become active observers of dramatic works, Parks refuses to let the audience become lulled by the comfort of a seamless plot that follows the arc of building suspense, climax, and resolution. By dropping excerpts from historical documents into the middle of the narrative of the play, Parks jostles the audience, pushing viewers out of their comfort zone by encouraging them to think critically about the juxtaposition of various textual

elements that disrupt the narrative. But while Parks' alienation of various performance elements references Brecht's epic theatre, she pushes the boundaries of dramatic theatre even further by turning away from the need for a singular, cohesive message, and using remediation to bring awareness to the fact that audiences are witnessing a mediated experience. Setting historical information apart as footnotes to the action of the play (while they are at the same time explicitly included in the performance), as in the example of the advertising bill, is just one way Parks attempts to achieve this. Another example of this technique occurs in Scene 13, entitled "Footnote #7," which begins with a reading from the Baron Docteur's notebook: "Footnote #7. Historical Extract. Category: Medical. A DETAILED PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SO-CALLED VENUS HOTTENTOT," and is followed by a translated excerpt from a scientific report about Baartman's body penned by George Cuvier, a prominent French anatomist (Parks, *Venus* 109). Cuvier's records draw comparisons between Baartman and primates, claiming that her ears and lips bore a striking resemblance to those of monkeys, as seen in this excerpt that is incorporated in *Venus*: "Her movements had rapidity and came unexpected calling to mind well, with all respect to her, the movements of a monkey" (Parks 109-110). The historical extract is couched between a fiction-based scene of intimate love between Venus and The Baron Docteur (a character that references Cuvier), and a scene that gestures towards the "scientific" investigations that were being conducted of Baartman. Parks is not interested in arriving at specific conclusions about Baartman's treatment in *Venus*, but rather interweaves historical fragments into her story in ways that create imaginative configurations of past and present, requiring audiences to sit with unraveled narrative strands and consider various trajectories of this complicated historical subject (perhaps not arriving at any conclusions themselves).

Another notable example of these types of alienating interruptions that incorporate historical "evidence" occurs during the play's intermission when The Baron Docteur performs an excerpt from Cuvier's medical documentation of Baartman's physical attributes that were observed by Cuvier upon her death. The Baron Docteur's reading of this exhaustive list occurs during a time when, according to the standards of dramatic theatre, audiences are expected to leave the theatre space and stop paying attention to what is on stage. This emphasizes that Parks' goal is not to simply transmit textual history, but rather to alienate historical language in a way that confronts historiographical methods. Line after line of measurements, anatomical descriptions, and complex medical nomenclature (most of it Latin terminology) is interrupted by readings of love poems by a character called The Bride-to-be, as well as The Baron's own slippages from medical professionalism into a kind of quiet fascination with his subject. The Baron's speech (based closely on observations that Cuvier made in his notes on Baartman (see Fausto-Sterling 37)) draws to a close, "Her shoulders back and chest had grace. / Her charming hands…*uh hehm.* / Where was i?" (Parks, *Venus* 98). Through her integration of medical documents from the past into the fictional relationship between Venus and The Baron, Parks insinuates the human element of scientific observation, questioning the ability of historical documents to convey objective, holistic truth.

In fact, the majority of historical documents that are excerpted and remediated in *Venus* are scientific documents purporting to represent empirical truths about the body and behaviors of Sarah Baartman. Parks' formal experiments that confront textual determinacy reflect onto the content of the performance, questioning the ability of text to capture "the real." A prime example of this appears in the argument over Venus' cause of death in The Overture. The Negro Resurrectionist proclaims: "Exposure iz what killed her, nothing on / and our cold weather. 23

days in a row it rained. / Thuh doctor says she drank too much. It was thuh cold I think" (Parks, *Venus* 3). The Man, later The Baron Docteur counters: "I say: / Perhaps, / she died of drink" (Parks, *Venus* 3). This confusion over Venus' cause of death is itself plucked from records about Baartman's life, just like the anatomical reports included as footnotes and read during intermission. Cuvier reported, upon examining Baartman's body after her death, that the cause of Baartman's death was alcoholism, while others speculated she died of smallpox or pleurisy (Fausto-Sterling 20). And while there were more obituaries written by newspapers about Baartman's death than about any other African woman in the nineteenth century, her date of death was recorded differently by a number of different sources, and her cause of death was never definitively reported (Crais and Scully 138). Historians Crais and Scully note, "[l]ike so much else about Sara, when it comes to a detail that matters to the person, the evidence is lost, or conflicting, as if no one really cared to get it right at the time" (138). This indeterminacy, as well as Cuvier's speculation about Baartman's cause of death, appears in the play through lines of dialogue delivered by The Negro Resurrectionist and The Baron Docteur. Cuvier's scientific records are interwoven with cynicism about the veracity and intentions of Cuvier's scientific opinion. By placing this opinion that Baartman died of her own vice in a new context, the fictionalized world of her play, Parks invites audiences to ponder the role of science and the potential complicity of once-heralded scientists in the process of racial subjugation of non-whites. Parks' play with language, her careful remediation of speculative and conflicting historical documents through the performances of fictional characters, triggers questions about the value of textual representation.

Similarly, Parks scrutinizes the trustworthiness of legal documents through her formal experiments with historical documentation about Baartman's role in an 1810 court case that was

held to determine whether or not Baartman was a slave in post-emancipation England. Parks navigates the issues raised in the 1810 court cause through her remediation of records from the King's Bench inserted into the central section of the play in a series of scenes entitled "Venus Hottentot Before the Law." This series of choppy scenes does not propose a linear alternate history of Baartman's experience at trial, but rather presents a collection of artifacts and testimonies based on the very few records pertaining to the trial. Parks does not attempt to fill in the gaps created by these artifacts, but rather emphasizes the gaps through ruptures constructed by awkward scene breaks and the lack of transitions between historical extracts. The first scene is a remediation of an old ballad, followed by a scene in which The Chorus of the Court summarizes the case and its legal issues, followed by an extremely brief scene that simply defines the legal term "habeas corpus," followed by more fictional accounts of the trial interspersed with scenes that introduce single exhibits, such as Venus' birth certificate and a fertility feather from Venus' headdress. Parks provides the fragments and leaves it up to the audience to navigate the multiple trajectories presented in the fragments, rather than escorting the audience along a singular narrative path.

Parks' remediative theatre encourages a type of meaning-making familiar to users of new media that is akin to the synergy between close reading and hyper-reading of literary texts explored in Chapter 1. The feeling of overcrowding that develops from the constant appearance of historical extracts and other disruptive fragments during the performance, as well as the accumulation of words and phrases due to "the cruelty of its repetitions" (Roach 308), creates confusion. It becomes difficult to know how to prioritize information and how to make sense of the disjointed story. A prime example of this is the performance of excerpts from Cuvier's journal during the intermission of *Venus* mentioned above. The performance continues, though

the audience is free to move about the theatre, go to the restroom, talk to fellow theatregoers, and get refreshments. The Baron Docteur continues on, like a television program that remains on in the background of many American households and businesses, or the advertisements displayed in restroom stalls and placed in the margins of frequently visited websites. The buzzing of the performance that takes place during intermission acknowledges a culture accustomed to media overload; *Venus* is postdramatic with respect to the way that it is a "performance for a media-saturated culture" (Lehmann 10). Witnessing Parks' remediative performance requires an oscillation between deep observation of performance fragments such as the information contained in the footnotes and in short isolated scenes that introduce terminology, and distanced, surface viewing of the performance as a whole. This allows the audience to move in and out of various performance moments to observe patterns and make connections between the artifacts and extracts that Parks has arranged.

The series of scenes that concern the legal issues presented before the King's Bench in 1810 require this hybrid form of engagement. In Baartman's case, which remains an established precedent in common law jurisprudence, a central issue was the applicability of habeas corpus rights asserted by third parties on behalf of non-natives. Abolitionist Zachary Macauley brought the case on behalf of Baartman in order to determine whether or not she was being held against her will by her handler. While Parks does not delve extensively into these legal issues in *Venus*, she does highlight the curious nature of the legal term "habeas corpus" as it relates to Venus' body by isolating the definition of the term in its own brief scene. Scene 20C is nothing more than a "Dictionary Extract" that incorporates the literal meaning of the Latin term "habeas corpus": "you should have the body" (Parks, *Venus* 65). In the historic case before the King's Bench, the legal question pertained to producing Baartman's body for the court in order to

conduct an investigation of her freedom. The isolation of legal terminology in *Venus* prompts reflection upon the ironic connection between the legal requirement that Venus' body be symbolically placed into the hands of the court and the activities of Venus' everyday life that enable her to profit by giving her body over to the public (as well as the Baron Docteur's possession of Venus' body after her death for "scientific" purposes). The question Parks raises by isolating the legal terminology is whether Venus' body was ever under her own control. Viewers can either tolerate the unresolved questions raised in *Venus* or attempt to draw together these various plot points and extracts to draw their own conclusions, yet Parks complicates this even further by introducing elements of the historic trial that suggest Baartman's complicity in her exploitation.

For example, in the court testimony that Parks references in *Venus*, Baartman assured the court that she was, in fact, in control of her body and her actions (Crais and Scully 100). Parks' remediation of the ballad that appears in Appendix A reflect this testimony by assuring viewers that Baartman, free of duress, gave her full consent to show her backside to the curious public, and expressed not only her willingness to participate, but also her enjoyment of the act. Parks complicates Baartman's assertion of agency in her remediation of Baartman's deposition. Scene 20I begins with Venus crawling out of her cage in order to address the court, a move that makes The Chorus of the Court's primary inquiry darkly humorous and poignantly ironic: "Are you here of yr own free will / or are you under some restraint?" (Parks, *Venus* 74-5). Venus' response to the Court's question avoids a direct response to the issue of agency: "I'm here to make a mint" (Parks, *Venus* 75). While it implies that Venus is in control of her own actions because she is driven by a desire for wealth, her follow-up comment, "After all Ive gone through so far / to go home penniless would be disgraceful" (Parks, *Venus* 75), sparks concerns about the

availability of free choices to Venus/Baartman. This line suggests the possibility that a life putting one's body on display for white people in Europe held more promise than a life doing domestic chores in colonial Cape Town. Venus pleads with the Court, "Let me stay…. I came here black. / Give me the chance to leave here white" (Parks 75-6), stressing the power afforded by whiteness. With the multiple contradictory possibilities for interpretation of Venus's actions, Parks leaves us with a complex picture of agency, on the one hand suggesting that Venus is more than a helpless victim who makes conscious choices about her life path, but on the other causing great skepticism about her ability to make free choices under probable duress.

Parks adds another layer to sort through with the introduction of a fertility feather as a piece of evidence in court. Scene 20G is singularly dedicated to the introduction of Exhibit B:

> A feather from the head of the
> so-called Venus H.
> The feathers were said to bring good luck—
> when stroked such feathers cured infertility.
> When ground and ingested these same feathers proved
> a brilliant aphrodisiac. (Parks, *Venus* 70)

Written with curious line breaks and parsing that resemble poetry more than it does prose (signaling a purposeful delivery that moves beyond the simple relaying of scripted lines), the introduction of the feather substantiates for the court that Venus represents customs of a "primitive" culture which lie in stark contrast with the perceived sophistication of the Western court of law. In the scene that precedes, Parks interweaves the following memoir account of the experiences of Charles Mathewes into the fictional courtroom setting:

> He found her surrounded by many persons, some females! One pinched her; one gentleman poked her with his cane; one lady employed her parasol to ascertain that all was, as she called it, 'nattral.' This inhuman baiting the poor creature bore with sullen indifference, except upon some provocation, when she seemed inclined to resent brutality.... On these occasions it took all the authority of the keeper to subdue her resentment. (Altick 269)

Mrs. Mathewes' mundane observations her husband's experience viewing "The Hottentot Venus" are transformed into a sensational fictional story about Mathewes' death that resulted from the shock of seeing Baartman on display. The narrative is integrated in the form of Mathewes' widow giving hearsay evidence to the court about the fate of her deceased husband. Elements from the memoir appear in Mrs. Mathewes' testimony about her husband's professed experience at the show, such as the observation that men and women alike were in attendance, and that they poked Venus' rear end with canes and parasols. Then the testimony diverges from the memoir, as Mrs. Mathewes claims that Venus handed her husband a feather from her headdress, an action that inspired a fight amongst the crowd resulting in 3 men dying, a woman having a miscarriage, and a young boy losing his mind (Parks, *Venus* 69). The widow concludes, "Thuh shock of her killed him, I think, / cause 2 days later he was dead. Ive thrown thuh feather away" (Parks, *Venus* 69). Mathewes' testimonial provides the foundation for a highly embellished story that revolves around the feather, a symbol of ritual and superstition that contrasts with the government-born "truth-gathering" process of the judicial system. In Scene 14, the feather appears again, as Venus puts a feather amulet around the impliedly sterile Baron Docteur's neck, and just a few scenes later, Venus is pregnant. The feather's appearance in an array of disconnected contexts invites consideration of questions explored in these scenes

regarding both harmful stereotypes about the ethnic "other" associated with hyperfertility and savage sexuality, as well as the value of certain epistemological systems over others (law versus other forms of knowledge, such as tribal customs). But just as Parks does not draw a tidy conclusion about Venus' agency, she lets the unsettling questions here linger as well. The play has audiences running around in mental circles. The overcrowding of signifiers and interpretive suggestions gives the sensation that interpretation is not Parks' goal. The textual play, formal fracturing, and remediation of various historical documents rather asks audiences to suspend their need for a neatly-wrapped story with coherent character motivations and unified political messages, and instead relish the ruptures and contradictions.

One benefit of Parks' refusal to provide a linear story with a straightforward interpretation is that it allows her to overcome the trap that Magubane recognizes in writings about and remediations of Baartman:

> I maintain that Baartman represented far more in the European imagination than a collection of body parts. Indeed, closer examination of the furor that ensued in the wake of her exhibition demonstrates that what she represented varied (as ideologies are wont to do) according to the social and political commitments of the interested social actors. Baartman's exhibition provoked varying and contradictory responses. These responses can be better understood if they are analyzed as part and parcel of larger debates over liberty, property, and economic relations, rather than seen as simple manifestations of the universal human fascination with embodied difference. (57)

Indeed, a number of scholars and artists who made Baartman the subject of their research have contributed to "the biological essentialism they purport to deconstruct" by "focus[ing]

obsessively on Baartmann's body and its difference" without considering that European reactions to Baartman could have developed from other sources of social and political tension (Magubane 48). For example, Anne Fausto-Sterling focuses on sex and race as primary categories for constructing human difference in Western science, claiming that her reading of nineteenth-century scientific publications "reveals the insecurity and angst about race and gender experienced by individual researchers and the European culture at large" (20). Artist and curator Debra Singer discusses the notion of "visuality as a colonizing tool" in her essay "Reclaiming Venus: The Presence of Sarah Bartmann in Contemporary Art" (87). Singer's key observation is that Baartman has become a symbol for the practice of subordinating black women by treating them as sexual objects to be displayed. In addition, feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins connects Baartman's work as an exotic dancer to contemporary displays of black female sexuality: "From the display of Sarah Baartman as a sexual 'freak' of nature in the early nineteenth century to Josephine Baker dancing bare-breasted for Parisian society to the animal-skin bikinis worn by 'bootylicious' Destiny's Child to the fascination with Jennifer Lopez's buttocks, women of African descent have been association with an animalistic, 'wild' sexuality" (27). Collins worries that if this host of women from history and present day could be convinced to "perceive themselves solely in terms of the value of their bootys in marketplace relations, then oppression may be complete" (51). The persistent focus on Baartman's body and perceived sexual and racial difference makes Magubane wonder "why *this* woman has been made to function in contemporary academic debates as *the* preeminent example of racial and sexual alterity?" (59). Baartman's symbolic representation as a hypersexual ethnic other prevents those interested in her life from contemplating other historical dynamics that could have contributed to

Baartman's experiences. The continual representation of Baartman in this restricted light distracts from the complexities of nineteenth-century racial politics.

While sexual objectification of the black female body is certainly a topic of interest in *Venus*, Parks explores multiple interpretive and performance possibilities for Venus. Rather than constructing a one-note dramatic character, Venus' representation resists fluidity and singularity. For much of the performance, Venus parades around the stage as The Chorus and audience members gaze at her, but Venus also has opportunities to demonstrate agency and resistance to submission. For example, Venus plays to the desires of the audience by strategically hiding her experience as a colonized woman in Cape Town in order to boost the show's revenue. As The Brother gets the young Venus ("The Girl") ready for her debut, she instructs him "You oughta take me shopping. I need a new dress. / I cant be presented to society in this old thing," demonstrating an awareness of European social norms (Parks, *Venus* 23). Similarly, Venus discusses her show with her new handler, The Mother-Showman, suggesting that they "spruce up" her act: "I could speak for them. / Say a little poem or something…. You could pretend to teach me and I would learn / before their very eyes" (Park, *Venus* 51). While Venus pleads to add new content to her display that will show her intelligence and sophistication, The Mother-Showman responds "Yr a Negro native with a most remarkable spanker. / Thats what they pay for. / Their eyes are hot for yr tot-tot. / Theres the poetry" (Parks, *Venus* 51). Counter to the dominant perception of Baartman as a voiceless, unknowing woman, Parks contemplates a different possibility for performance of Venus as a woman who strategically takes the audiences' desires into account when constructing her public persona as opposed to being forced to act as a "primitive" woman against her will.

*Venus* is probably most notable for the way Parks suggests a possible portrayal of Venus as agentic and potentially complicit in her exhibitionist ventures, a choice that Young criticizes as reductive of the tragedy of Baartman's life (700). Returning to the scenes of Venus' trial, the disconnected representation prompts unanswered questions about whether or not Venus had the free will to consent to her exploitation. Here again, the guiding dynamic of the performance of *Venus* does not revolve around her racial and sexual otherness, but is rather is concerned with notions of liberty, property, and labor power. Magubane explains that this is an issue ripe for discussion with respect to the complexities surrounding Baartman's treatment: "For many, Baartman's captivity encapsulated the conflict between individual freedom and the interests of capital" (Magubane 57). The slavery debates in Europe influenced perceptions of Baartman, as even abolitionists were motivated by economic interests more than humanitarian pursuits. The men who brought suit against Baartman's handlers were members of The African Association for Promoting Discovery of the Interior of Africa, a group that wanted slavery overturned so that free Khoikhoi could more readily participate in the free market economy by selling African staples to British entrepreneurs who in turn marketed them to the growing middle class (Magubane 57-8). The question of Baartman's freedom for the men who brought suit on her behalf, then, was not about the morals of forced exhibition, but rather about whether or not she owned her own labor (Magubane 58).

In assigning Venus the complex emotion of entrepreneurial ambition, Parks integrates this spirit of self-commodification, challenging the simple narrative that characterizes Baartman as a suffering martyr figure. In *Venus*, Parks constructs the title character as an agentic woman who has fantasies about running her own business and rising to great wealth. Venus tells The Mother-Showman "I'll set up shop and show myself. / Be my own Boss make my own mint"

(Parks, *Venus* 55). She often expresses a desire for affluence and compromises herself for the promise of wealth. Yet at other times the power dynamic established in particular scenes discounts Venus' agency, shedding a skeptical light on the concept of "choice." When Venus tells The Baron Docteur that she "like[s] rich," he proposes that she go to Paris with him, where he will house, clothe, feed, and pay her (Parks, *Venus* 87-88). She asks, "Do I have a choice?" and he responds, "Yes. God. Of course" (Parks *Venus,* 87-88). Parks suggests an inquiry about Venus' capability of making unhindered choices and exercising free will given her position in the social hierarchy, but never provides a clear, unified portrait of Venus that helps the audience resolve the question. By providing a range of possible motivations and explanations for Venus' actions and experiences, Parks creates an inconsistency in representation that may be challenging for audience members who wish to access the truth about Baartman, but this slipperiness helps *Venus* avoid the snare of focusing centrally on Venus as an ethnic female other. This helps recover Baartman from her position outside of history that has resulted from the singularity of research about her racial and sexual difference (Magubane 47).

Instability and Political Engagements

Through these ruptures and contradictions, Parks' confrontation of the problem with text as determinative of performance in dramatic theatre becomes a broader challenge to the problem with text outside of the performance space. *Venus* demonstrates the instability of text and its inability to relay "truth," both in the formal experimentation that results in broken narrative and disorientation, and also in the content of the play as it relates to the subjectivity and racist thought embedded in historical documents. Parks scrutinizes historiography and the reliability of empirical texts by remediating scientific and legal accounts of Baartman's body and actions, not

through synthesis with narrative elements of the play, but through isolated moments that alienate language rather than seamlessly embed textual history.

While Parks' employment of postdramatic tools that challenge the conventions of dramatic performance creates a generative instability, it also produces challenges for directors, performers, and audiences that may prevent audiences from being able to access her political engagements. A question that has appeared throughout this chapter that has also puzzled critics like Jennifer Johung is, how exactly does one perform *Venus*? Parks' remediative theatre, with its physicalized language, sparse stage directions, accumulative repetition, historical extracts and footnotes, and perplexing "spells" requires those attempting to access *Venus* to reach outside of dramatic theatre conventions to explore new methods of embodiment and encountering. In reference to the spells, Johung claims,

> the exceptionally unspecific spells and the illegibility of their function within dramatic structure at large remain an interpretative conundrum…. Parks' infamous 'Scene of Love (?)' necessitates an adjustment in the way that readers and producers of Parks's work think about the intersections between the activities of writing and performing, as well as their interactions between the interpretation of the written marks on the page and the embodiment of the corporeal markings of performers onstage. (Johung 41)

As considered above, "Scene of Love (?)" creates more questions than it does answers, both in staging and in witnessing. Directly following the decision of the Court that Venus has not been enslaved, the Negro Resurrectionist announces the "Scene of Love (?)" (how exactly does he perform the question mark?), and the audience witnesses an exchange that is mysteriously scripted through an absence of words. A similar mystery arises in the question of how to

perform the character of Venus: How should she embody lines of dialogue? What is her costuming? Should she wear prosthetic buttocks? If she does wear a prosthetic, should it be obvious or should it discretely blend with the costume to give an appearance of continuity with the actress' real body? And do these choices make directors, costumers, performances, and audiences somehow complicit in a reenactment of Baartman as spectacle?

Another series of questions arises in considering how exactly to make Venus meaningful for audiences. Lehmann claims that what audiences expect from theatre is "a comprehensible fable (story), coherent meaning, cultural self-affirmation" (Lehmann 19). He continues, "[w]holeness, illusion and world representation are inherent in the model 'drama'; conversely, through its very form, dramatic theatre proclaims wholeness as the model of the real. Dramatic theatre ends when these elements are no longer the regulating principle but merely one possible variant of theatrical art" (Lehmann 22). What happens when audiences expecting the wholeness of dramatic theatre instead encounter brokenness in form and meaning? *New York Times* critic Vincent Canby commented upon the difficulty of accessing Parks' plays, claiming that while Parks encourages audiences to be the ultimate deciders of a play's meaning, "That's fine as long as the play is evocative, which it is about half the time. She's also effectively denying her own responsibility when she overwrites, and the ideas become muddled." It seems that viewers who are more accustomed to "the omnipresence of the *media* in everyday life" (Lehmann 22) might have more success engaging with multimodal performance discourses. Yet even when one is able to embrace the deconstructed nature of the text and suspend the need for coherent meaning enough to wade through the disjointed scenes and signifiers, what is one to make of the resulting instability?

There are yet additional areas in which the answers to the questions are not as important to Parks as the act of questioning itself. Parks is more interested in the epistemological engagements that come about in the process of directorial and performative decision-making, as well as audience involvement. *Venus* is about the breaking away from convention and the interrogation of assumptions. This carries through to Parks' particular brand of political theatre. While Parks certainly takes up the gendered politics of race in *Venus*, her most significant political act is the critique of established modes of representation that results from her resistance to conventions of dramatic theatre. This constitutes one of the ways in which Parks' remediative theatre is postdramatic. To Lehmann, political theatre cannot be achieved through mere representation: "That politically oppressed people are shown on stage does not make theatre political…. It is not through the direct thematization of the political that theatre becomes political but through the implicit substance and critical value of its *mode of representation*" (178). Parks does not entirely abandon thematization of political oppression in *Venus*, but she does complicate her representation of oppression by creating a fragmented, continually disrupted narrative with few direct commands to directors and actors about how to perform the play based upon a performance text that defies straightforward performance.

This mode of representation, most dominantly characterized by its rejection of customary modes of theatrical representation, is political in its challenge to established forms of knowledge production, promoting instead a way of reading, viewing, seeing, and knowing that disrupts the norm. The political is thus located "in perception itself, in art as a poetic *interruption* of the law and therefore of politics" (Lehmann 6). Parks' interruption of established conventions used in dramatic representations suggests the potential to interrupt contemporary performances of gendered racism that inherited from overt historical acts of oppression. The formal

experimentation in *Venus* supports a shift in perception that values alternate ways of knowing outside of empirical research and documentation, methods revered for their purported ability to singularly and objectively capture truth. *Venus* highlights the problem with text as a knowledge-gathering tool, exposing its instabilities by overwhelming audience with repetition of words and phrases until they become meaningless, jarring the audience with textual history that is disruptive to narrative sequences, and providing a performance riddled with contradiction that complicates the audience's ability to come to a resolution.

Parks challenges the notion of dominant epistemologies in which all of the tools of oppression used to sustain hegemonic thinking are either hidden or willfully ignored. In *Venus*, all traces are exposed and left bare. The transitions between scenes are awkward and unsettling; the story of *Venus* takes twists and turns with no intention of following a straight path, possibilities for interpretation are scattered and inconsistent, and the multitude of signifiers compete for the audience's attention. Parks has no interest in smoothing the seams of this patchwork performance. In this way, her remediation is about a "logic of hypermediacy" that "acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible," and creates an awareness about the fact that the experience is mediated (Bolter 33-34). While new media scholars Bolter and Grusin claim that the goal of hypermediacy is to "get past the limits of remediation" in order to "achieve the real" (53), the hypermediacy of Venus is not just about alerting spectators to their own presence through disorientation (Lehmann 187), but about taking notice of the constructedness of modes of representation and recognizing the necessity of alternate approaches.

Parks suggests that if modes of representation are constructed, then one can develop alternate methods of knowledge construction that are not inflected with racism, sexism, and other

forms of oppression. Her remediative theatre is ultimately concerned with the melding of old and new, particularly the integration of dramatic and postdramatic forms and the merging of historical moments, as a way of exposing epistemological inconsistencies. In this respect, the performance moves forward, but always with a backward glance.

The backward glance is a constant reminder to readers of the ways that knowledges from the past inform present ways of knowing. The next chapter analyzes a work that relies heavily on the backward glance as a means of creating intertextual pleasures for connoisseur readers who are stimulated by the building of fantasy worlds around iconic literary characters from the past.

Appendix A: A BALLAD, from R. Toole-Scott's *Circus and the Allied Arts*

The storie of the Hottentot ladie and her lawful knight who essaied to release her out of captivitie, and what my lordes the judge did therein.

Oh have you been in London towne,
Its rareities to see:
There is, 'mongst ladies of renowne,
A most renowned she.
In Piccadilly Steet so faire
A mansion she has got,
In golden letters written there,
"VENUS HOTTENTOT".

But you may ask, and well, I ween,
For why she tarries there;
And what, in her is to be seen,
Than other folks more rare.
A rump she has (though strange it be),
Large as a cauldron pot,
And this is why men go to see
This lovely Hottentot.

Now this was shown for many a day,
And eke for many a night;
Till sober folks began to say,
That all could not be right,
Some said, this was with her goodwill:
Some said, that it was not,
And asked why they did use so ill
This ladie HOTTENTOT.

At last a doughty knight stood forth,
Sir Vikar was his name;
A knight of singular good worth,
Of fair and courtly fame.
With him the laws of chivalrie
Were not so much forgot;
But he would try most gallantly
To serve the HOTTENTOT.

He would not fight, but *plead* the cause
Of this most injured she;
And so, appealed to all the laws,
To set the ladie free.
A mighty "Habeas corpus"
He hoped to have got,
Including trump and all, thus
Release the HOTTENTOT.

Thus driving on with might and main
This gallant knight did say,
He wished to send her home again,
To Africa far away.
On that full pure and holy plan,
To soothe her rugged lot:
He swore, in troth, no other man
Should *keep* his HOTTENTOT.
He went unto the Judges grave,
Whose mercies never fail;
And there, in gallant stile, and brave,
Set forth the ladie's tale.
He said, a man of cruel heart,
(whose name is now forgot),
Did she, for pay, the hinder part
Of this fair HOTTENTOT.

That in this land of libertie
Where freedom groweth still,
No one can show another's tail
Against the owner's will.
And wished my lordes to send some one,
To know whether or not
This rare exhibiting was done
To please the HOTTENTOT.

The judges did not hesitate
This piteous tale to hear,
Conceiving her full-bottomed state,
Claimed *their* especial care;
And told the knight that he might do
As he thought best, and what:
E'en visit privately, and view
His ladie HOTTENTOT.

Thus straight two gentleman they set,
(One English and one Dutch)
To learn if she did money get;
And, if she did, how much.

Who, having finished their intent,
And visited the spot,
Did say t'was done with full consent
Of the fair HOTTENTOT.

When speaking free from all alarm,
The whole she does deride:
And says she thinks there is no great harm
In showing her b—kside.
Thus ended this sad tale of woe,
Which raised will, I wot,
The fame, and the revenues too,
OF SARTJEE HOTTENTOT.

And now good people all may go
To see this wondrous sight;
Both high born men, and also low,
And eke the good Sir Knight.
Not only this her state to mind,
Most anxious what she got;
But looking to her latter end,
Delights the HOTTENTOT

Chapter 3

# Shadows, Twisters, and Looking Glasses: Getting Lost in the Remediative Pleasures of *Lost Girls*

Flipping through the pages of Melinda Gebbie and Alan Moore's 2006 graphic novel *Lost Girls,* one can quickly recognize some of the most iconic figures in Western literature. For example, the girl with the blue dress, white pinafore, and long blonde hair is easily identifiable as Lewis Carroll's Alice from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In a series of panels in Chapter 9 of *Lost Girls*, Alice sits by the water with her sister, daydreaming, when she suddenly catches a glimpse of someone in the reflection (Figure 1), a plot element directly uprooted from the pages of Carroll's story. This startling figure is human, but the character's features make him highly reminiscent of Lewis Carroll and illustrator John Tenniel's White Rabbit (Figures 2 and 3). In *Lost Girls*, Gebbie and Moore have selected characters and stories from the public domain that have great cultural currency and resonance and have revised them to tell a new story. The remediation of these popular figures generates pleasurable reading opportunities for a knowing, self-reflexive audience excited to see well-loved characters in new settings. The notion that innovation and sophistication in creative works can be achieved through the retelling and recycling of previously written works challenges dominant perceptions of authorship and intellectual property. In this chapter, I analyze the citational qualities of the fantastical and bewildering graphic novel *Lost Girls*[30] to explore the value of open source creative production,

[30] For the purposes of this chapter, I focus primarily on Book 1 of *Lost Girls.* Book 1 sets the stage for the entire three-volume work by introducing the three central characters, delving into their backstories, and exploring the initial encounters between Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy. Thus, this volume most prominently explores the

and argue for a feminist redefinition of intellectual property laws that empowers creativity and opens up opportunities for subversive remediation and communal ownership models.

Writer Moore is known for his remediative works,[31] particularly *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, his series in collaboration with artist Kevin O'Neill, a crossover comic in which characters from various fictional worlds are extracted from their individual source texts and brought together for a grand adventure. *Lost Girls* is a similar crossover-style adventure about an elderly Alice from Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, who encounters grown-up versions of two other characters from classic children's tales, Dorothy from Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and Wendy from J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. The three women meet up years after their childhood adventures at The Hotel Himmelgarten in Austria on the eve of World War I. The sexual adventures that ensue explode the undercurrents of desire present in the source texts, resulting in a lavishly illustrated, pornographic work that taps into a historical spirit of rebellion present in the works of Carroll, Baum, Barrie, and other late nineteenth and early twentieth century artists referenced in *Lost Girls* who embraced discordant aesthetics that resist conventional conceptions of art and linearity.

Returning to the parallels between Carroll's White Rabbit and Bunny from *Lost Girls*, Gebbie and Moore create a visual and thematic connection between Bunny and the White Rabbit, forming a bridge between the two stories. In terms of his physical appearance, Bunny

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connections between the new narrative and the classic stories in which these characters had their first appearance, a connection that is crucial to understanding the compelling dynamics that emerge in works that remediate characters and stories that have been released into the public domain.

[31] Moore has done a number of works based on preexisting narratives. An adaptation of history, his graphic novel *From Hell*, created with artist Eddie Campbell, explores one of the many theories pertaining to the identity and motives of Jack the Ripper. In the fictional vein, the characters in Moore's masterwork *Watchmen*, created in collaboration with artist Dave Gibbons, are based on a team of heroes called "The Sentinels of Justice" published by Charlton Comics (purchased by DC Comics in 1983). The graphic novel series *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* features prior characters such as Mina Harker (*Dracula*), Captain Nemo (*Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*), Dr. Jekyll (*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*), and Professor Moriarty (from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories).

shares the attire of the White Rabbit down to style of topcoat and the detail of the cross-hatching or plaid-like print on the White Rabbit's jacket and Bunny's pants (Figures 2 and 3). They also both have a portly shape and textured white tufts of hair/fur. Gebbie's visual rendering of Bunny is an obvious index to Carroll's White Rabbit; through this reference, Gebbie gives a knowing nod to the reader who recognizes the moment of connectivity between texts. Gebbie and Moore align Bunny and The White Rabbit through textual, visual, and thematic continuity, as both figures play a significant role in leading Alice past the threshold of the real world into a fantasy world that triggers questions about the stability of her identity. When Alice initially encounters the White Rabbit in *Alice's Adventures*, she posits, "I wonder if I've changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, 'Who in the world am I?'" (Carroll 15). *Lost Girls* likewise engages with questions about a coherent self-identity, but Gebbie and Moore approach Carroll's already radical work and bend it even further, reading in the cracks and fissures of *Alice's Adventures* an invasive sexual encounter that drastically alters Alice's identity, a divergence that intrigues readers who are interested in encountering Alice in new narrative situations.

Gebbie and Moore literalize the metaphor of the anxious and hurried White Rabbit leading Alice down the rabbit hole into Wonderland by portraying Bunny as a villainous figure, a family acquaintance who molests Alice, leading her to dissociate from her body and split off to form an alternate Alice, much like the alternate Alice that we see on the other side of the looking glass in Carroll's work. When Bunny assaults Alice's body, she focuses on the version of herself that she observes in the looking glass and reaches out to her double's naked body, physically connecting with her (Figure 4). Two Alices are adrift in the watercolor sea framed by the

looking glass, touching each other. Adult Alice recounts her childhood experience with Bunny to grown-up Wendy and Dorothy: "I lay there, staring at the stream, with my reflection staring back at me. One might say I was thoroughly infatuated with myself; this underwater girl amidst the blonde and drifting weed, her face was mine, yet now and then a queer, deep fish would shimmer through it, just as if some dreadful thought had crossed her mind" (Gebbie Book 1, Chp. 9, p. 2). Alice doubles herself as a means of protection and distancing from the negative psychological consequences of sexual abuse, and leaves behind the alternate Alice that is untainted by Bunny's touch, an Alice who will always reside on the other side of the mirror.

One can still recognize the young Alice in Gebbie and Moore's rendition of this journey through the looking glass, as the retelling derives from an already hinted at potential narrative within Carroll's *Alice's Adventures*. The continuity between *Alice's Adventures* and *Lost Girls* grounds readers in these characters' origins while simultaneously urging them to develop new readings that explore the fantasy-scape of sexual imagination. The potential power of *Lost Girls* derives from the way it creates a new story using characters who are in the public domain, and the resulting dialogue that forms between the old and new stories. The identities of the three central figures as iconic children's book characters is crucial to this process; if *Lost Girls* was written about three entirely new characters without the cultural resonance of Alice, Wendy, and Dorothy, there would be no opportunity for these intertextual dialogues.

*Lost Girls* demonstrates the provocative potential in juxtaposing new and old narratives. Having the freedom to adapt and build upon preexisting works is necessary for the creation of innovative intertextual dialogues. In her 2007 essay "Reconstructing the Author-Self: Some Feminist Lessons for Copyright Law," legal scholar Carys Craig pushes for a restructuring of our current intellectual property system that would "embrace marginalized forms of creativity

(especially those that explicitly rely upon prior works for their expression)" (233). Craig is one of many feminist legal scholars[32] who have scrutinized intellectual property regulations as reliant upon an androcentric model that values private ownership over the best interests of the public sphere. Crais heralds the need for a conceptual revitalization of the public domain as a vibrant and robust source for the free flow of ideas. This reading of *Lost Girls* supports the call for an increased valuation of open source modes of creative production that open up possibilities for citational, experimental, and subversive works of art.

## In Need of a Robust Public Domain

In general, current American copyright law protects copyrighted material for the life of the author plus seventy years (17 USC Sec. 302(a)). Writers from various fields have asserted that copyright laws limit creativity and modes of artistic production, expressing concern that these laws prohibit works from entering the public domain for more than a hundred years after their creation. Intellectual property scholar Jessica Litman opens her 2010 article "Real Copyright Reform" by asserting that the copyright act is a "swollen, barnacle-encrusted collection of incomprehensible prose" (3). Litman argues, "copyright reform should simplify the law; should make the copyright system more useful for creators and readers, listeners, and viewers; and should divest intermediaries of excess power and control" (8). Essayist Jonathan

[32] See, for example, Ann Bartow, "Fair Use and the Fairer Sex: Gender, Feminism, and Copyright Law," 14 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 551 (2006); Dan Burk, "Copyright and Feminism in Digital Media," 14 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 519 (2006); Emily Chaloner, "A Story of Her Own: A Feminist Critique of Copyright Law," 6 ISJLP 221 (2010); Rosemary J. Coombe, *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law,* Durham: Duke Univ. Press (1998); K.J.Greene, "Intellectual Property at the Intersection of Race and Gender," 16 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 365 (2008); Debora Halbert, "Feminist Interpretations of Intellectual Property," 14 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 431 (2006); Malla Pollack, "Towards a Feminist Theory of the Public Domain, or Rejecting the Gendered Scope of United States Copyrightable and Patentable Subject Matter," 12 Wm. & Mary J. of Women & L. 603 (2006); and Rebecca Tushnet, "My Fair Laws: Sex, Gender, and Fair Use in Copyright," 15 Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law 273 (2007).

Lethem views copyright as a government-granted monopoly on use, claiming: "Whether the monopolizing beneficiary is a living artist or some artist's heirs or some corporation's shareholders, the loser is the community, including living artists who might make splendid use of a healthy public domain" (35). In his book *The Future of Ideas*, legal academic Lawrence Lessig heralds the importance of free content that is not under the lock and key of copyright protection, citing the open code that was used to develop the internet as an example of how free content is necessary for the development of new content. While artists can sidestep the consequences of copyright infringement by purchasing the rights to a work from the copyright holder or entering into a licensing agreement that gives the adapter the owner's consent to use the work, this is cost prohibitive for most artists. As Lessig stresses, the freedom and open availability of the content is a critical element to how it contributes to the formation of innovative material.

Even beyond issues of affordability and open access, another concern about intellectual property law, and one that has been of particular interest to feminist legal scholars, is its patriarchal origin. The development of copyright laws during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came as a result of a new model of authorship that replaced trends of collaboration and appropriation in the production of creative works. These laws were constructed, as intellectual property scholar Debora Halbert claims, "in the masculine terms of territory and original male genius" ("Feminist Interpretations" 449-50). This shift, largely fueled by authors' desires to monopolize book trade profits (Halbert, "Feminist Interpretations" 448), gave way to the birth of our modern notion of the author as a singular creator of a one-of-a-kind work. Placing "original" works on a pedestal has led the public to look down on artists who imitate preexisting writers, though this practice was once thought to be a worthy method of authorship in the eyes of the law and the public.

It is not only the patriarchal origin of intellectual property law that concerns feminist legal scholars, but also the application of these laws over time to suppress subversive representations of sexuality and gender. Law professor Sonia Katyal cites the example of corporate entities Mattel and DC Comics taking great pains to prevent the public from seeing works of art that depict characters like Barbie and Batman & Robin engaging in same-sex relationships (463-64). Katyal concludes, "propertizing expression benefits some authors and artists, often within the mainstream, sometimes at the cost of chilling other types of artistic expression and commentary, often from 'outsider' groups like women, people of color, and sexual minorities" (465).

Moreover, revising characters' stories by placing them in sexual contexts, particularly in taboo sexual situations that involve non-traditional sexual practices, places a target on the back of artists who might otherwise not even be considered for potential copyright infringement. In the case of *Lost Girls*, Gebbie and Moore raised the eyebrows of the legal counsel for the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital, who held the copyright to Barrie's Peter Pan works until the copyright's expiration in 2007. The Hospital warned the creators of *Lost Girls* that publication of their work might result in infringement of the Hospital's copyright, and Gebbie and Moore eventually reached an agreement with the Hospital that required them to delay publication until the copyright expired (Malvern). Historically, works like *Lost Girls* that contained sexual content were deemed "immoral," and copyright law would not extend protection to works that were labeled as such (Rothman 140). In the nineteenth century, works in both England and the United States were denied copyright protection, such as the case of *Stockdale v. Onwhyn* in 1826, in which copyright was denied to a memoir written by a prostitute not because it contained sexually suggestive language, but merely because it was authored by a prostitute (Rothman 141).

In 1898, a United States District Court denied copyright protection to song in which the adjective "hot" was used to describe a woman (Rothman 141). The court held that the term connoted a "lustful, lewd, lecherous" woman, and found that this immoral content justified the denial of copyright protection to the song (Rothman 141). While the law no longer explicitly bans intellectual property protections for "immoral works," some legal scholars worry that regulations in practice still have the effect of "silenc[ing] transgressive depictions of sexuality, sexual identity, and gender expression" (Katyal 462), particularly because of the latitude given to judges to make decisions about what does and does not fit within subjective criteria for copyright protection and exceptions to copyright infringement.

One specific area that raises concern is the application of the doctrine of fair use, an exception to copyright infringement that is granted when works are used for certain purposes such as "criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching . . . scholarship, or research" (17 U.S.C. Sec. 107). Because courts have a difficult time seeing pornographic works as falling into any of these designated categories, works that incorporate sexual content into their revisions of preexisting works are often held to fall outside of the fair use exception (Rothman 145).[33] In addition, courts tend to conservatively interpret the four factors that are examined on a case-by-case basis to determine if the work falls under the exception. The first, for example, "The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes" (17 U.S.C. Sec. 107) becomes an issue because courts often question whether pornography has any purpose deemed worthy of the exception (Rothman 146).

[33] In *MCA, Inc. v. Wilson*, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals held that defendant Wilson's cabaret song "Cunnilingus Champion of Company C" was substantially similar to the Andrew Sisters' 1941 hit song "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy," constituted copyright infringement, and did not qualify as fair use. The court explained, "We are not prepared to hold that a commercial composer can plagiarize a competitor's copyrighted song, substitute dirty lyrics of his own, perform it for commercial gain, and then escape liability by calling the end result a parody or satire on the mores of society. Such a holding would be an open-ended invitation to musical plagiarism. We conclude that defendants did not make fair use of plaintiff's song" (185).

The law's narrow construction of sex most affects groups such as women, gay, lesbian, transgendered, and queer individuals because of the historical trend in intellectual property law to privilege traditional, procreative sex as acceptable, while female sexual pleasure, unconventional sex, and sex without intimacy have been overlooked or discouraged (Rothman 163).

In both subjective standards for copyright protection that allow room for narrow constructions of sex, and restrictions on the growth of the public domain by such acts as the Copyright Term Extension Act,[34] intellectual property laws have the power to shape cultural attitudes toward sex, authorship, and creative production. Halbert claims that the restrictive regulation of self-expression and limitation of creative possibilities derives from the ever-growing expansion of private property rights that is "detrimental to the free flow of ideas and the ability of a democratic people to exchange ideas and creative work in a meaningful way" (*Resisting* 16). She proposes that in order to create a greater balance in our framework for the ownership and exchange of ideas, which can only be achieved by shifting from a model of private ownership to a greater valuation of the public sphere, the public domain needs to be fundamentally reconceptualized. Halbert notes that the more vibrant our public domain, the stronger the public sphere becomes, and the more likely the public will see that increased privatization of ideas is not in the best interest of the public. She advocates for alternative ways of thinking and acting that value "derivative" works and embrace interaction with works in the public domain as a valid form of cultural production.

[34] The growth of the public domain has been limited even further by the enactment of the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act of 1998 (CTEA), which extended copyright terms in the United States by an additional 20 years. While the Copyright Act of 1976 defined the copyright term as the life of the author plus 50 years (or 75 years for a work of corporate authorship), the CTEA now provides that copyright protection extends to the life of the author plus 70 years (or an even broader expansion for works of corporate authorship of 120 years after creation or 95 years after publication—whichever comes first) (17 U.S.C. Sec. 302-04).

Remediation and Archontic Pleasures

*Lost Girls* is a multilayered, fantastical graphic novel that taps into the open source of the public domain to create opportunities for readerly pleasure through textual and visual remediations of iconic preexisting works. Media studies researcher Abigail Derecho calls this type of literature that builds upon preexisting works "archontic," a term she borrows from Jacques Derrida's "Archive Fever." Building upon Derrida's claim that "The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future" (Derrida 45), Derecho envisions a constantly evolving body of work in which source texts and subsequent works that adapt those source texts have potentially equal weight, an alternative to the hierarchical approach that privileges source texts over what are considered to be derivative works. Archontic works of literature add to a text's ever-expanding archive and invite authors to dig into the works, as Derecho explains, to "select specific items they find useful, make new artifacts using those found objects, and deposit the newly made work back into the source text's archive" (65). The archive becomes defined by these contributions, some prominent and instrumental in how the archive takes shape, and others falling away. *Lost Girls* is archontic in the way that it incorporates elements of preexisting works and uses them to make new stories that fall within a larger system of overlapping archives. In the first book alone, the authors incorporate a range of elements from Alice, Wendy, and Dorothy's source stories: Alice's looking glass, Dorothy's silver slippers and Midwestern American origin, red poppies, the caterpillar, the tornado, Peter Pan, the White Rabbit, escapism, fantasy lands, and even particular language from the stories written by Carroll, Barrie, and Baum most prominently exhibited in the titles of the three individual volumes, the chapter headings, and the title of the work itself (the title *Lost Girls* is a reference to Peter Pan's group of followers, the "Lost Boys").

One of Derecho's key observations about archontic literature is that it has been a "compelling choice of genre for writers who belong to 'cultures of the subordinate,' including women, colonial subjects, and ethnic minorities" (71). This type of writing challenges traditional notions of authorship and creates equality between works by placing them in an archive rather than viewing them in a hierarchy, and stressing the event of writing over the dominance of the origin text. This lies in contrast to the historical treatment of texts inspired by preexisting works, which have often been viewed as lesser works due to the privileging of originality as the most valued characteristic of a creative work that continues to influence Western perspectives on authorship. In fact, American intellectual property laws have a distinct definition for works based on preexisting works, or "derivative works." The Copyright Act defines a "derivative work" as

> …a work based upon one or more preexisting works, such as a translation, musical arrangement, dramatization, fictionalization, motion picture version, sound recording, art reproduction, abridgment, condensation, or any other form in which a work may be recast, transformed, or adapted. A work consisting of editorial revisions, annotations, elaborations, or other modifications, which, as a whole, represent an original work of authorship, is a 'derivative work. (17 U.S.C. §101)

Along with the right to reproduce the work, the owner of a copyright has the exclusive right to prepare derivative works based upon the copyrighted work (17 U.S.C. §106). Thus, if a person creating a derivative work is someone other than the copyright owner of the underlying work, he/she can be held liable for copyright infringement unless he/she has obtained permission from the owner (or the work is considered to be a "fair use" of the underlying work according to 17

U.S.C. §107, an exception that applies to a narrow category of works that satisfy a subjective 4-part test outlined in the statute). The law treats remediative works prepared by someone other than the author of the underlying work as lacking in originality and contrary to the Constitutional vision of copyright law to "promote the Progress of science and useful Arts" (Article 1, Section 8, Clause 8 of the U.S. Constitution). This feeds into the hierarchical divisions between creative works that Derecho resists. The archival model that Derecho proposes instead finds value in the discourse created by the interplay between texts rather than demarcating one as a primary, original text that subordinates all subsequent remediations.

Under Derecho's model, artists creating archontic works have the opportunity to position their own narratives and themes in relation to already established and well-recognized stories in ways that extend characters' life cycles,[35] highlight the interplay between old and new texts, and explore the boundaries and gaps of preexisting works. For example, the constantly growing archive surrounding popular characters such as Alice of Carroll's *Alice's Adventures* suggests that artists and audiences experience pleasure in the circulation of characters and stories in popular culture. Adaptation theorist Linda Hutcheon posits that this pleasure, which fuels the growth of archives built around iconic characters and stories, "comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise" (4). The remediative artist's act of choosing elements from an open archive, revising them, and depositing fresh contributions back into the archive produces a constantly transforming archive that explores the limits of the source text.

[35] With respect to Alice of Carroll's *Alice's Adventures*, a work that has been in the public domain since 1907, scholar of fantasy literature Helen Pilinovsky notes "[t]oday, one may encounter Alice in many forms, for Alice is a more broadly based creature than many other literary characters not dependent upon the vision of one creator alone. This is due in part to the extended life cycle afforded to a character who is in the public domain and present in numerous iterations…" (175).

Because the public domain is an open source space that artists can freely delve into for material without fear of copyright infringement, works that are in the public domain, such as *Alice's Adventures, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and *Peter and Wendy*, inspire extensive archives. The comic book series *Wonderland*, for example, starts where Carroll's books left off, giving an account of what happens in Wonderland after Alice's departure. Its central characters are the White Rabbit and his housemaid, Mary Ann, who must confront the Queen of Hearts when she accuses the White Rabbit of helping Alice escape Wonderland. From *Wonderland,* to the Broadway musical *Wicked*, to the SyFy Network series *Neverland*, there continues to be a market for retellings of these popular children's stories. Works that are in the public domain carry with them an open invitation for artists to play and create intertextual works that are exciting to readers and viewers who are interested in new approaches to old, well-loved stories.[36]

In undergoing this project, Gebbie and Moore remediate three works of children's literature from the public domain by concretizing hidden or suggested narratives that are present in the source texts. As seen in the encounter between Bunny and Alice in *Lost Girls* detailed in the introduction to this chapter, Gebbie and Moore unmoor veiled narrative threads and weave them into alternate accounts of the magical tales that readers have grown to associate with Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy. Lady Alice's story mirrors Alice's journey in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures* as a young lady whose curiosity leads her outside the boundaries of the domestic sphere. While she escapes the confines of her home and the social expectations characteristic of the Victorian upper class, she is constantly interrupted by male figures who distract the headstrong Alice with bewildering and often discouraging comments, as if punishment for her surrender to curiosity (an

[36] While this public commons promises an open space for possibility and potentiality, it is important to remember that it is, in fact, a closed system due to intellectual property regulations that establish a timeline for when works will be released into the public domain. While artists have the opportunity to freely borrow from and play with pubic domain works, they are limited by what is actually available (and increasingly so, as the term of copyright protection has gradually lengthened over time).

agentic behavior that resists Victorian gender norms). This is most evident in Chapter Seven, "A Mad Tea-Party", in which the Hatter, March Hare, and Dormouse yell "No room! No Room!" at Alice as they proceed to have tea at a long table full of empty seats (Carroll 54). The Mad Hatter barrages Alice with insults and nonsensical, unanswerable questions and riddles. When Alice tries to obtain information from the tea party guests, The March Hare dismissively interrupts, "Suppose we change the subject" and yawns (Carroll 58). Alice decides that the rudeness is too much for her to bear and resolves to leave the scene when the Hatter suggests that Alice stop talking altogether (Carroll 60-1).

Gebbie and Moore incorporate the interruptions and silencing of Alice by male characters in *Alice's Adventures* in their take on Alice's experience of sexual maturation. Bunny's nonconsensual touching of Alice displaces her in the same way that Carroll's Alice is thrown off course by the Hatter, the March Hare, the White Rabbit, and other male characters she encounters in Wonderland. As explored earlier in the chapter, the Alice of *Lost Girls* responds to this displacement by doubling herself, a division that happens both in the textual and visual layers of the book. Gebbie's illustration shows two identical images of Alice reflected in the two lenses of Bunny's eyeglasses (Figure 5). This motif of doubling and reflection occurs throughout the chapter: the mirror image of Bunny and Alice appears in the reflective surface of the doorknob as Bunny leads Alice to the parlor, and again in the glass of the grandfather clock, the glass of the chalice that Bunny encourages Alice to drink from, the shiny buttons on Alice's dress, and the fragmented exterior of the decanter (Gebbie Book 1, Chp. 9, p. 3- 4). The continuation of reflective surfaces accentuates the notion of a divided or alternate identity, much

in the way that the magic of the looking glass does in Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*.[37] It also emphasizes the multiplicity of Alice for the reader who holds various past versions of Alice in his/her mind while reading *Lost Girls*. In this experience of sexual dispossession, Gebbie and Moore locate this particular Alice within a greater archive of Alices, making reference to the anxious, hurried White Rabbit, the theme of time represented by the pocket watch, the reflective and doubling surface of the looking glass, and the dreamlike world beyond the looking glass. The Alice of *Lost Girls* is at once familiar and new, and it is the vacillation between these different versions of Alice that creates opportunities for archontic readerly pleasure in *Lost Girls*.

Similarly, Gebbie and Moore's remediations of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* are not driven by plot and character, but rather the nostalgic pleasures produced through intertextual intermingling, textual and visual citationality, and the convergence of historical periods. For Dorothy, the cyclone in Baum's tale that creates an entryway into the world of Oz parallels Dorothy's first experience with self-pleasure and the resulting transformation of her outlook on the world (Figure 6). In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, despite the dark and the horribly howling wind of the cyclone, Dorothy is calm and experiences the cyclone as a gentle rocking. Similarly in *Lost Girls*, after seeing the twister and running to take cover inside her house, Dorothy's fear dissipates. Sexual desire distracts Dorothy from her worries, and as she touches herself, she feels the world shifting: "The feelin' 'tween my legs was getting' faster an' louder, spinnin' tight like a hot twister. I'd got a tornado inside o' me, and outside too…. I could feel somethin' was gonna happen in me, gettin' nearer an' bigger all the time" (Gebbie, Book 1, Chp. 7, p. 4). After Dorothy climaxes, she relaxes against the wall and takes notice of her surroundings. "When I opened my eyes, it was quiet. The twister was gone

[37] In Chapter I of *Through the Looking Glass*, after the glass "melt[s] away" and Alice is able to walk through, she discovers that, though the rooms are quite similar in appearance from what she could see on the other side of the looking glass, everything in this new space is quite different and, in fact, more "alive" (Carroll 111-12).

and I was still there…. Everythin' was all different, with trees in the wrong fields; the barn on its side…. The country where I'd been brung up was gone" (Gebbie, Book 1, Chp. 7, p. 4). The tornado outside of Dorothy has created a change in her physical surroundings, the barn overturned and the sign that once said "NO TRESPASSING" now busted apart and turned on its side so that "NO" reads "OZ" (Figure 7). And the tornado inside of Dorothy, her sexual awakening, has also lead to a grand transformation, the opening of a fantasy-scape that resembles Baum's Oz, a new territory for sexual exploration.

In a similar vein, Gebbie and Moore elevate the flirtatious spirit of Wendy and Peter's first encounter from Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. Barrie's Wendy takes such pride in her domestic duties and adherence to gender norms, yet acts the temptress to the mischievous Peter Pan, giving him kisses and seducing him to stay in the Darling nursery with promises of storytelling. In *Lost Girls*, Gebbie and Moore's depiction of Wendy is dominated by the anxiety created by her ravenous sexual urges that betray her efforts to be a "woman of character." Language of desire jumps off the page in both texts, from Barrie's "Up and down they went, and round and round. Heavenly was Wendy's word" (Barrie 54) to Moore's "then everything in me seemed to burst and there was such joy. Such perfect joy…" (Gebbie, Book 1, Chp. 8, p. 6). Though Wendy has a strong instinct to resist Peter that is triggered by her conservative upbringing, she is overtaken by feelings of ecstasy as Peter teaches her "games," or the joy of sexual exploration (Figure 8).

The juxtaposition of these alternate accounts that derive from careful readings of *Alice's Adventures*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and *Peter and Wendy* with the source texts creates an archontic mode of pleasure that differs from the satisfaction one might receive from reading the source texts. Instead of a readerly investment in plot and character interaction that might drive a

reader of children's books, the target audience for *Lost Girls* comes to the text in search of the exciting moments of overlap that occur between the source texts and *Lost Girls*, such as the transformation of the "NO TRESPASSING" sign and Wendy taking action on her sexual urges. By looking at the source texts through a literal lens and making hidden pleasures explicit, Gebbie and Moore engage in the citational practices that give a wink of recognition to readers invested in the overlapping archives that are investigated and referenced in *Lost Girls*.

The slipperiness of *Alice's Adventures*, *Peter and Wendy*, and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* created by textual openness and playfulness at the site of sexuality is what causes such works to be so prodigiously reimagined and rewritten. On the topic of Barrie's work, feminist literary critic Jacqueline Rose notes,

> The hesitancies of both language and sexuality which have appeared through its history cannot be separated from the very force of its image as purity itself, embodied by the eternal child. *Peter Pan* seems to have operated constantly on this edge, as if liable at any one moment to offer its disturbance to view but choosing instead to turn the other face of innocence…. So beautifully does their escapade express the worst fears of one's imagining, and yet also sets these fears to rest by bringing it all back safely to the ground. (141)

Peter Pan dances along a fine line between sexuality and purity, almost exposing the complexities of desire that are captured on the pages of *Peter and Wendy*, but then retreating.[38]

[38] It is worth noting that misreadings of *Peter and Wendy* that ignore the language of desire present in the story in order to cast Peter Pan as the archetype of the innocent child most likely emerged from audiences who encountered archontic contributions to the growing world of Peter Pan rather than readings of *Peter and Wendy* itself. Peter Pan first appeared in *The Little White Bird* (1902), a novel for adults that was based on Barrie's friendship with Sylvia Llewelyn Davies and her boys that inspired Barrie to create the character of Peter Pan. But the book *Peter and Wendy* that contains the popular story that has come to be known as "Peter Pan" was not actually published until 9 years later, and before its publication came one of many popular stage adaptations in 1904. Literary critic Jacqueline Rose poses that this circuitous birth of the popular story is what has led to its reputation as a story about the innocence of childhood (despite the actual content of *Peter and Wendy*). Rose asserts, "J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*

*Lost Girls* directly confronts this tension by unapologetically painting Peter Pan as a sexually promiscuous imp who exposes the Darling family to the joys of sexual pleasure. It is these brazen pornographic depictions that ironize moralistic expectations about children's literature that have, in fact, led to a host of controversial reactions to *Lost Girls*, including statements by retailers at the time of the book's release that they would not carry *Lost Girls* in their stores (Wolk). The most notable of these is the controversy mentioned above between the book's publisher, Top Shelf Productions, and The Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. Critics like Annalisa Di Liddo rightly suspect that *Lost Girls* would have been left untouched by the hospital if it did not contain such strong sexual imagery and themes relating to Barrie's characters (Di Liddo 135). The irony of this is that Rose's work on *Peter and Wendy*, published over 20 years before *Lost Girls* was released, anticipates the potential "crisis of meaning" that would arise when the work was released into the public domain, the opening up of the "world of free and potentially wild interpretation"(144). Rose's comment suggests that some readers' insistence on reading Peter as innocent begs contrary interpretations that are more consistent with Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, a work that squarely confronts childhood as an awkward time of growth and discovery.

Gebbie and Moore are not invested in realism, but rather in the fantasy they can create with through the "wild interpretation" of these overlapping, open-source archives. In order to engage readers in this type of play, artists must create continuity between the reimagined characters and their source stories. Gebbie and Moore create continuity by adopting enough

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was retold before he had written it, and then rewritten after he told it. By 1911, *Peter Pan* had already become such a universally acclaimed cultural phenomenon that Barrie himself could only intervene back into its history from outside. The paradox is that Barrie's attempt to reclaim *Peter Pan*…failed. *Peter Pan* went on without him. I would go further and suggest that *Peter Pan* could *only* go on without him, because it had come to signify an innocence, or simplicity, which every line of Barrie's 1911 text belies" (67).

characteristics from Carroll, Baum, and Barrie's stories (such as inclusion of characters like the White Rabbit and Peter Pan, and visual cues like Gebbie's stylistic references to Tenniel's illustrations) so that *Lost Girls* is an obvious revision of *Alice's Adventures*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and *Peter and Wendy*. In Will Brooker's research on *Alice* adaptations, he observes that most of the adaptations share particular characteristics with Carroll's books, such as "an *Alice*-like protagonist or protagonists…who is typically polite, articulate, and assertive; a clear transition from the 'real' waking world to a fantasy dream world…rapid shifts in identity, appearance, and location" (152, quoting Carolyn Sigler). The expectation for similarities between the adapted text and the adaptation essentially create rules that, if broken, often lead to fan disloyalty and commercial failure. Brooker explains this in the context of superhero comics and the Batman franchise: "Batman stories, like most mainstream comic book narratives, are underscored with laws, sometimes explicit and sometimes unwritten, of 'continuity'—the names, dates, meetings, events of the superheroes' lives that have to be kept in consistent order to retain a sense of a credible fictional world and avoid the wrath of fans" (154). He goes on to say that certain elements of the story become more significant than others in terms of retaining sameness. Considering continuity helps scholars interested in adaptation and remediation think about what those essential elements of a narrative might be, how those elements came to be considered crucial to the overarching story, why artists who adapt stories make choices to retain and omit certain pieces of the story, and what the consequences of a violation of the laws of continuity might be.

*Lost Girls*, for the most part, obeys those laws of continuity by giving the sense that the Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy of *Lost Girls* are, in fact, adult versions of the characters who appear in *Alice's Adventures*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and *Peter and Wendy*. The altered accounts

of these women's childhoods in *Lost Girls* aren't presented as incongruous with the source stories, but rather as further elaboration upon undercurrents of desire hinted at in the source stories. In addition, Gebbie and Moore capitalize on the crossover element of this work by combining the worlds of three distinct fantasy characters, allowing for overlap between these characters' source stories. For example, opium motifs create a commonality between Alice and Dorothy. In Chapter 4, entitled "Poppies," the beginning two pages are cluttered with red poppy images printed on the walls of the hotel restaurant in which Alice and Dorothy are dining. The poppies immediately call to mind the deadly poppies of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Pages later, after Alice and Dorothy have smoked opium, the drug harvested from a particular type of poppy, Alice manipulates Dorothy's genitalia and has a hallucinatory vision of the Caterpillar in the pink folds of Dorothy's labia and vaginal opening (Figure 9). Dorothy and Alice are thus linked through this visual motif of opium smoke, poppies from Dorothy's origin story, and the hookah-smoking Caterpillar from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The creators of *Lost Girls* seek to not only establish continuity with the stories of Alice, Wendy, and Dorothy that are familiar to readers, but also to broach new connections to create continuity between stories and show a linkage between these three characters as originally conceived and now illustrated in a new historical and geographical context.

The recognizability of these narratives and characters is key to the benefits Gebbie and Moore enjoy by remediating works in the public domain. For example, when Alice hallucinates and sees the image of the Caterpillar during a moment of sexual play with Dorothy, Gebbie and Moore do not give a context for the Caterpillar's appearance. The only clue about the Caterpillar's significance appears in Alice's dialogue: "I…I was just seeing things, that's all. I just remembered a sort of…a sort of ***dream*** I used to have. A sort of game…when I was young"

(Book One, Chp. 4, p. 7). But anyone familiar with contributions to the Alice archive, whether from Carroll's story, the Disney film, or any other of the numerous adaptations, recognizes the Caterpillar as the hookah-smoking creature who sits on top of a mushroom and pushes Alice to question assumptions about her identity ("Who are *you*?" the Caterpillar begs of Alice, and is never satisfied with her attempts at explanation (Carroll 35)). Familiarity with the Caterpillar is key to the strange humor of this new scene that revolves around Alice's bewilderment at her hallucination. Continuity thus gives more than a reassurance to readers that these are the same Alice and Dorothy that they have known from past stories; it brings pleasure to self-conscious readers who enjoy the interplay of heavily stylized images and text in this meta-referential work.

*Lost Girls* is the type of destabilizing, archontic work that Derecho describes. Gebbie and Moore pluck elements from the archives that have grown around Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy, enhance underlying sexual tensions present in the works, and deposit them back in the archive for readers to relish. The most interesting tensions in *Lost Girls* are created by the convergence of citations from the source literature and the historical canon, as well as the mix of modes of interpretation such as the visual conflict between the soft colors and lines of the classic children's book aesthetic used by Gebbie to illustrate pornographic acts. The remediative work that produces these exciting tensions contradicts the patriarchal values of traditional notions of authorship. This work, created through a collaboration of voices, and heavily reliant on the integration of preexisting works, supports feminist approaches to intellectual property that call for less rigid notions of authorship that include collaboration and remediation. Exploring a graphic novel that capitalizes on opportunities offered up by works in the public domain helps articulate the many benefits of moving away from the increasing privatization of expression in favor of the development of a greater body of free and open resources.

Fantasy Spaces and the Limitations of Remediation

Gebbie and Moore have been outspoken about what they hope to achieve with *Lost Girls.* Di Liddo sums up Gebbie and Moore's goal in writing the book as stated in numerous interviews with the artists: "to highlight how sex can be a powerful, imaginative, healing experience, and to break the cultural taboo that makes the idea of childhood as an already sexualized age unacceptable to most societies" (135). In contemplating the nature of the three-volume graphic novel *Lost Girls*, co-creator Alan Moore asked himself, "Why not do a piece of pornography that is every bit as valid and as beautiful as you would expect from any work of art?" (Amacker). Likewise, Gebbie saw a need for a "big beautiful book of sex" that unapologetically explored "all the flavours of sex and how to negotiate sexual relationships and sexual situations" (Santala). Moore unabashedly claims that *Lost Girls* is a pornographic work and feels that the graphic novel has the potential to represent sex in a way that departs from the view of the pornography industry as a "disreputable, seamy, under-the-counter genre with absolutely no standards" (Shindler). When Moore considered the genre of pornography for his book, he saw that pornographic comics often functioned in one of two ways: "I noticed that if comics ever did approach erotica, then it was only either with a veneer of humor or with a veneer of horror. It was all right to use sexual elements in a horror story to make the horror more visceral…. And while both of these are valid, my usual reaction to sex is neither to laugh or scream" (Khoury 154). With *Lost Girls*, Moore wanted to address some of the problems he observed in pornographic works, "That it's mostly ugly, it's mostly boring, it's not inventive—it has no standards" (Khoury 155). The challenge was to tap into the sexual imagination of readers through a balance of artistry and enticement. When Gebbie suggested that she and Moore focus on three classic figures instead of just one, the creators of *Lost Girls* began to envision how

sexually decoding the origin stories of these three girls could provide a thought-provoking commentary on human sexual imagination in particular, but also human imagination in general (Shindler).

In many ways, Gebbie and Moore achieve their goals by using fantasy as a place to explore a range of desires, a notion that becomes apparent through the creation and privileging of the world beyond the mirror and the retelling of once familiar stories. This fantasy space is often visually represented in the story through the motif of doubling, reflections, and shadows, as explored above with respect to Alice's connection with the version of herself that exists on the other side of the looking glass as a means of displacing herself from Bunny's physical violation of her body. Another example of this occurs when Wendy has a mundane conversation with her partner Harold about work and mending, but Wendy and Harold's shadows relay a different narrative. The title of this chapter, "Missing Shadows," refers of course to Peter Pan's search for his missing shadow that leads him to the London home of Wendy Darling in J.M. Barrie's story, but it also points to the shadows on the walls of Harold and Wendy's room that suggest they are engaging in fellatio and intercourse when, in fact, they are actually doing nonsexual, everyday tasks (Figure 10). The shadows seem to act of their own volition, powered by the repressed sexuality of Harold and Wendy. The competing information conveyed by text and image reveal that what Harold and Wendy refuse to do in the real world takes place in the fantasy space created by the shadows. At times the book explicitly reminds us of this power of fantasy: "With candle set to this new task, the shadows swelled like sweet desire, in that each shade would alter shape yet be beside its owner always, unremarked upon, a secret twin, inhabitant of that dark realm beyond the demi-monde's far shore" (Gebbie Book 1, Chp.3, p. 6).

It is in these spaces that Alice, Dorothy, and Wendy "tell the stories of [their] experience," such as Dorothy recalling the tornado, Wendy talking about her first encounter with Peter Pan, and Alice sharing her disturbing memory about Bunny. In the beginning of Chapter 9 of Book 1, as Alice dips her hand into the water of a fountain and touches her reflection, she acknowledges the pain of memory and the confusion that comes with having access to such a vivid fantasy space: "I must say, I've never enjoyed stirring up the past. One's memory is such a curious place. You see, there's the way things seemed, and then there's the way things were…and one is so often the total ***reverse*** of the other" (Gebbie Book 1, Chp. 9, p. 1). Alice's words speak directly to the remediative work that Gebbie and Moore have undertaken, collecting the stories of these childhood characters from the past, as well as their accompanying archives of inspired revisions, re-imaginings, and interpretations, and stirring them up.

The remediative quality that can create such pleasure for readers who enjoy intricate layering and referentiality can be burdensome due to the sheer accumulation of citations in *Lost Girls*. The remediation of narratives and aesthetics from the past can at times make the story feel crowded and overly homogenized, making it difficult to locate a linear narrative or coherent politics. In addition, the comic book medium that brings the compelling marriage of text and image to this work adds additional layers of significance to a story that is already overwhelmed with narrative layers. Finally, the genre of pornography that is key to the artists' aims to represent sex in a way that celebrates human imagination and sexuality can sometimes undermine those goals due to the conventions of the genre.

One of the first bits of text a reader encounters when he/she opens up Book 1 is a quote on the dust jacket from a preexisting work: "We are but older children, dear, who fret to find our bedtime near" (Gebbie, quoting Carroll). Each and every volume and chapter title derives from

these source materials, including headings such as "Neverlands," "Snicker-Snack," and "The Man Behind the Curtain." Quotes, characters, images, and themes from children's tales written by Carroll, Barrie, and Baum have been collected and integrated into the pages of *Lost Girls*. In addition, *Lost Girls* plays to its sophisticated readership by paying tribute to nineteenth century erotic writers including Aubrey Beardsley, Oscar Wilde, Colette, Pierre Louys, and Guillaume Appolinaire by referencing their aesthetics and at times incorporating adaptations of their works (including a parody of Beardsley's *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* in Book 1).

But the referentiality does not stop with the text of *Lost Girls*. The form of the graphic novel is a nod to the phenomena of the Tijuana bible. These miniature, sexually explicit comic books became popular in American in the 1920s through the 1960s for their parodies of popular figures, including Hollywood stars, athletes, politicians, and comic book characters. The eight-page, low production works featured the sexual exploits of characters such as Blondie and Dagwood, Popeye, and Archie. *Lost Girls* implicitly references the Tijuana bible through its pornographic re-imaginings of the adventures of popular fictional characters. Gebbie and Moore also directly allude to the Tijuana bible through their adoption of the eight-page format for the length of each chapter in *Lost Girls* (Di Liddo 144).

In addition, the visual landscape of the graphic novel is like a slideshow of the erotic artwork of prominent Edwardian artists like Beardsley, Alfons Mucha, Egon Schiele, and Franz von Bayros. Many artists that Gebbie imitates arise out of The Aesthetic and Decadent movements, both of which compliment Gebbie's desire to produce art that is sensuous and pleasure-inducing. Gebbie and Moore's decision to overcrowd the pages of *Lost Girls* with allusions to Modernist artists and artistic movements that were deemed to be at the cutting edge compliments their aims. They capture the energy of resistance and rebellion fueled by artists

who embraced aharmonious themes and aesthetics that resisted conventional conceptions of beauty and continuity. This interest in making strange configurations of text and image that challenged the status quo parallels Gebbie and Moore's efforts to bring together disparate texts and genres in a way that resists hegemonic views of sexuality.

The artists' remediation of works from this period appear most often alongside the dominant narrative as stories within the larger story in the form of "The White Book," a text that appears on the nightstand of every guest staying at the Hotel Himmelgarten (which translates to "Heaven's Garden"[39]). The White Book passes through the hands of many characters in *Lost Girls*. It lies on the mantle in front of Alice's looking glass, is read secretly by Wendy's husband Harold when she leaves their hotel room, and is observed by Alice at the water's edge (a replacement for the dry, picture-less texts read by Alice's sister to her in Carroll's story) while Dorothy swims. The content of The White Book mirrors the content of *Lost Girls* in that the stories from The White Book appear alongside the panels that move the narrative forward, offering commentary on the story as it unfolds. For example, when Alice sexually pursues the prudish Wendy Potter for the first time, a series of panels depicting the Seven Deadly Sins appears at each stage of the slow seduction, revealing Wendy's tortured movement through each emotion as she succumbs to Alice's advances, reaches climax, and then ultimately relishes in her experience (Gebbie Book 2, Chp. 12, p. 2-8). The strong, bold women featured in the Seven Deadly Sins series, surrounded by ornate, decadent backgrounds heavily resemble the works of Czech Art Nouveau painter Alphonse Mucha, who celebrated women's sensuality through his portraits of robust, sexually charismatic women. Alongside Gebbie's Mucha-esque portraits is

[39] The irony of the translation of the name of the hotel and the placement of The White Book in every room is best expressed when Dorothy confuses the book for the Bible, calling to mind Gideon's bibles, which are placed in the rooms of many American hotels. (Gebbie Chp. 4, p. 4). When Dorothy opens the book, she comments on the beauty that lies within, and the contents of the book act as a vehicle for Alice to express her desire for Dorothy.

an exchange between Alice and Wendy that emphasizes their opposing views about sexuality (Alice asks Wendy, "if we find something we enjoy it does not hurt us to be greedy now and then. Don't you agree?" to which Wendy responds, "if you will allow me to depart this vice-den unmolested, I'll be on my way. There's some of us, thank Heaven, that still have a sense of decency" (Gebbie Book 2, Chp. 12, p. 3). These images that celebrate women's sexual autonomy in conjunction with the textual dialogue between Alice and Wendy create a sense of scrutiny towards Wendy's puritanical reservations about experiencing sexual pleasure (Figure 11). And in a way, as one reads through these sexually charged scenes, *Lost Girls* becomes The White Book, and vice versa, when we peel back the sleeve of *Lost Girls* to reveal an expanse of white canvas underneath. Gebbie and Moore draw upon the voices of artists from the past through the device of The White Book to encourage readerly pleasure in the mixing and mingling of old and new knowledges assembled in overlapping narratives.

And as if remediative qualities of The White Book weren't enough, with its copious allusions to prominent Edwardian artists and writers, The White Book is itself a reference to the London serial *The Yellow Book*, a publication that gained much attention and notoriety when it was printed from 1894 to 1897. Beardsley was the first art editor for the journal, and came up with the idea for the yellow cover based on French works that were published during this time and wrapped in yellow paper to warn of their bawdy content. There are a number of parallels between *The Yellow Book* and The White Book (and its larger framing text, *Lost Girls*). First, both *The Yellow Book* and *Lost Girls* have a commonality in target audience. The handsome price tag of *The Yellow Book* "ensured a degree of exclusivity and marketed *The Yellow Book* as something distinct and significant" (Sturgis 177). The first edition run of *Lost Girls*, an impressive 12.5-inch x 9-inch, 3-volume work bound in an ornately designed, hard slipcover,

retailed at 75 dollars, guaranteeing an equally exclusive market as the purchasers of *The Yellow Book* in 1894. In addition, *The Yellow Book* and The White Book both contain lascivious content written and drawn in the decadent aesthetic. The White Book, for example, contains a series of illustrations that are easily recognizable as Mucha-inspired with text that riffs on the work of Appolinaire. *The Yellow Book* was considered innovative for its publication of both art and literature by a variety of artists and writers all within the same bound volume, a practice not customary in the late nineteenth century. In fact, the relationship between text and image was hotly debated around the turn of the century, with works like *The Yellow Book* and another of Beardsley's projects *Salome* (written by Oscar Wilde) at the forefront of the conversation. Beardsley's "original and arresting" images demanded so much reader attention that "the drawings had subverted, if not completely reversed, the traditional relationship between author and illustrator" (Sturgis 179). A similar combination of disparate styles of text and image is a key feature of both The White Book and its parent text. Gebbie's illustrations are so striking and complex that they accomplish much more than simply accompanying or reiterating the textual elements of the story, often standing alone, contributing significant content, and at times even competing with the text.

An example of this is Gebbie's use of the soft colors and lines of the classic children's book aesthetic to illustrate pornographic acts, which creates a heightened sense of irony given that the medium Gebbie and Moore chose for *Lost Girls* is a comic book, a type of work that was historically marketed towards children and young adults (though adults have increasingly become more well-represented in the readership of comics since the Golden Age).[40] The comic book presentation adds additional narrative layers to this complicated text. What the comic book

[40] Gebbie and More push the limits of the popular fiction genre that is often associated with comic books with their high level of textual complexity and methods of production that fall outside of the norm of comics production (in particular the level of time and detail invested by Gebbie in the multimedia artwork).

format offers to Gebbie and Moore is the unique ability to simultaneously convey multiple strands of information by weaving together textual/verbal and visual elements. These two aspects of the work do not converge as one, but remain distinct from each other and, thus, continually form a dialogue with each other in their deliverance of the overall narrative. This interplay between visual and verbal requires the reader/viewer to read "within each strand and between both strands" (Coughlan 835). The comic book form of *Lost Girls* accommodates multiple levels of discourse, from the elaborate backgrounds and wallpapers that evoke decadent aesthetic movements, to the foregrounded images that portray individual characters' actions, to the text bubbles that provide another space for information to be relayed to readers, to the use of color and the shapes of panels that give each of the three central figures different stylistic frames that advance their development.[41] This range of modes available for narrative representation makes possible the simultaneous conveyance of multiple voices present in the work, from allowing the writer and artist to contribute separate narrative layers that conjoin and inform each other, to allowing for an additional levels of play between these narrative layers.

All of these intertextual aspects of *Lost Girls* create additional layers of meaning, making it a challenging work, which at times leads to exciting discoveries about the conversations that form between texts, and at other times feels exhausting due to the overcrowding of disparate voices. The intertextual crowding can create a homogenizing effect that makes it difficult to discern dynamic arcs within the story. In my own experience of reading *Lost Girls*, I have

[41] Di Liddo makes insightful observations about the use of color and panel shape in *Lost Girls* to develop the central characters. "Gebbie's palette changes according to the subject matter of the narrative: colors are thus colder in Lady Alice Fairchild's memories of violation; warmer when Dorothy recalls having sex in farm barns or on the hot flat surfaces of land of her native Kansas; and alternate with rigid black-and-white silhouettes as Wendy evokes the days of her repressed and puritan young age" (142). She notes that for Dorothy, long, horizontally situated, rectangular panels suggest the "boundless flat landscapes of Kansas", while the ovular panels used in Alice's chapters closely resemble the curved boundaries of reflective pools and mirrors (Di Liddo 144). Finally, Di Liddo notes that the claustrophobic, vertical panels used to tell Wendy's story intend to give readers a sense of her stifled Victorian upbringing (144).

become so compelled by the process of making connections between all of the various references in the intricate web woven by Gebbie and Moore that the project of making meaning vis-à-vis individual characters, themes, and sociopolitical engagements becomes lost. While this makes *Lost Girls* a text ripe for analysis on the subject of intertextual connectivity and remediation, the dizzying effect of investigating allusions and following them down their respective rabbit holes can distract from the larger inquiries that purportedly drove Gebbie and Moore to create *Lost Girls* in the first place. The remediative play of *Lost Girls* takes priority over the presentation of a coherent political message.

The illustrations in and of themselves tell a complex story. Over the course of 16 years, Gebbie used layered colored pencils, watercolors, watered-down acrylic paints, and mixed media to create the illustrations in *Lost Girls* by working off of Moore's script for the story (Tantimedh). Gebbie's artwork owes much to the genres of Art Nouveau and Impressionism. She takes great care to construct detailed art deco wallpapers that form intricate, colorful, and often floral backgrounds, "providing the viewer with a direct connection to the sensuousness of nature" (Di Liddo 142). In addition, color is a narrative element of *Lost Girls*, particularly the "pastel coloring and delicate lines … evocative of the rich tradition of the so-called golden age of children's book illustration" (Di Liddo 143). This is an ironic move given that Gebbie pays homage to the classic children's book while also adapting it into a work of pornography. This is one of the moments in the text when the creators bring together disparate elements, here the illustrative style of the children's book and pornographic sex, for a dramatic effect. Gebbie's soft, round lines and often pale color palette make the bodies engaged in explicit sexual acts more abstract, moving them away from the exploitative aesthetics of conventional pornographic comics.

Placing Gebbie's artwork (Figure 12) alongside the drawings of an excerpt from Mashumaro Jyuubaori's manga series *Alice in Sexland* (Figure 13) demonstrates this contrast. The pages of *Alice in Sexland* are bursting with sharp images of disembodied penises and breasts larger than the characters' heads. In the excerpted title page, Alice is held down and invaded by a multitude of erect penises. Her breasts are unnatural and disproportionate. Gebbie's drawing, in contrast, uses soft, round edges and shading to produce a more ethereal sexual engagement. Renowned comic book creator Neil Gaiman remarks of Gebbie's renderings, "She draws real people, with none of the exaggerated bodies of superhero comics or of the hyper-endowed people in the body of pornographic comics from Tom of Finland to Japanese Tentacle Porn. Gebbie's people, the women, and the men, have human bodies, drawn for the most part in gentle crayons." While the characters depicted in Gebbie's drawings certainly lack cellulite and stretch marks, and look more like the airbrushed images in a Dove Beauty advertising campaign than real, everyday bodies, she does make an effort to depict a range of sexual emotions and encounters, from the hard and invasive, to the gentle and sensuous. In this particular scene by Gebbie, the bodies are not hyper-idealized, in contrast with Jyuubaori's exaggerated depiction of sexual aggression. The strange combination of the soft lines and shading with the sexually explicit content makes for a complicated reading experience due to the layering of signifiers that is the driving force behind this text.

The choice of comic book format that combines Gebbie's elaborate imagery with Moore's complex script is well-suited to the building of fantasy worlds. The bodies illustrated by Gebbie are heavily stylized, which detaches the characterizations from lived human experience. McCloud claims that part of the appeal of comics is that the abstract quality of the

images creates greater reader involvement by encouraging the reader to fill up the image with whatever details she desires. McCloud explains,

> when you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face—you see it as a face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon—you see yourself. I believe this is the primary cause of our childhood fascination with cartoons…. The cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled…an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel into another realm. (36)

The more photorealistic the image in a comic book, the more difficult it is for a reader to locate herself within the pages of the text. Thus, while the comic book form limits the artists' ability to present real, nuanced human bodies in their work, it allows readers to escape realism into the abstraction of cartoon-like images and enter into imaginative fantasy spaces where they can contemplate taboo issues with an openness of mind.

For example, in Book 1, when readers are first introduced to Wendy's past, the style of illustration changes, moving away from the soft, muted colored pencils and delicate shading used to display Dorothy's metaphorical twister (her first experience masturbating), and into bolder, thicker outlines with vibrant colors and less lifelike physical features (Gebbie Book 1, Chp. 7, p. 6). While Dorothy appears more photorealistic, with lighter pencil-strokes and greater attention given to individual details and nuanced shading, Wendy looks like a character from a comic strip, simplified and abstracted, more uniform in color (Figures 14a and 14b). This choice of different illustrative styles is strategic on the part of Gebbie and Moore. With respect to cultural standards regarding sexuality, Dorothy's story of self-love is more easily digestible to audiences. While female masturbation is still fairly repressed in contemporary culture, it is certainly more accepted than the child sex and incest depicted in Wendy's story of meeting Peter Pan, an impish

character who teaches sexual games to Wendy and her brothers. By muting the realism of the Darling brothers masturbating each other in the background as they watch Wendy's sexual encounter with Peter, Gebbie and Moore attempt to highlight the fantasy element of this scene. This is in keeping with Moore's professed interest in pornography as a way for readers to participate in fantasies that transgress social norms, such as pedophilia, without acting out on those impulses in real life, using the medium of pornography "as a safety valve and a means to safely explore thoughts and impulses" (Tantimedh). As Moore explains,

> This is not an argument that it's okay to have actual sex with actual children, because one of the reasons why I decided to refer to this as a work of pornography is, yes, it is provocative, and it's kind of defiant, but it is exact. Pornography is 'paintings or drawings about wantons.' Now it doesn't say anything in there about photographs or films or shared files of wantons or children or anything else. I think a line has to be drawn between the sexual imagination and any attempt to materialize that in a photograph or whatever, and that is something that should be and is covered. We have perfectly adequate existing laws regarding coersive sex, whatever the age of the person concerned. Whatever urges there are out there are in our sexual imagination. And it seems to me that is a thing we fail to explore at our peril…. (Tantimedh)

Gebbie and Moore honor fantasy realms and the expansiveness of imagination by creating a cartoonish aesthetic that encourages readers to explore ideas in the imaginary and enjoy the solitary pleasures of books and graphic novels.

One of the drawbacks to using this abstracted style is that as Wendy becomes more cartoonish, she looks more like the idealized, objectified women portrayed in pornographic

works that Gebbie and Moore profess an interest in subverting. In this series of panels, Wendy is a submissive, innocent woman being guided and manipulated by Peter, the male aggressor (Figure 14a). She sits below him as he stands over her, his penis extended towards her. And a few panels later, she is portrayed lying passively in a position of repose, bow-shaped red lips, well-sculpted breasts, flawless pale skin, and perfectly groomed pubescent labia all on display as Peter is the primary actor, taking joy in his ability to further accelerate Wendy's state of ecstasy (Figure 14b). What Gebbie and Moore gain in creating fantasy spaces for exploring the sexual imagination, they simultaneously lose in falling back on patriarchal representations of female pleasure.

As Will Eisner points out, comics often use stereotype to quickly convey meaning through visual images. "The stereotype is a fact of life in the comics medium. It is an accursed necessity—a tool of communication that is an inescapable ingredient in most cartoons" (Eisner 17). The stereotypical, male-centered representations of female sexuality utilized in illustrating Wendy's first encounter with Peter appear throughout *Lost Girls*, and seem to operate as a sort of shorthand for identifying female pleasure that is based on patriarchal notions of female sexuality. For example, when Wendy escapes to the shower to release her sexual frustration due to her lack of sexual contact with her husband, the perfect shape of her breasts and the way that the water and sweat decorate her body create a classic pornographic image of the sexually objectified female body (Figure 15). This is one scene in which the artists' interest in portraying a wide range of sexual perspectives that celebrate female sexuality is undermined. As the pages of the graphic novel become crowded with intertextual references, Gebbie and Moore rely on this shorthand to communicate female pleasure without considering the oppressive implications of such a tool.

With regard to the persistent display of explicit sexual content for the purpose of arousing viewers in *Lost Girls*, critic Xavier Guilbert observes that Gebbie and Moore's adoption of the accumulation principle from pornography, creates a cataloguing effect: "accumulation of couplings in general, but in particular the accumulation of all possible combination [sic], to the point that the whole ends up looking like a rather boring inventory." Similarly, Di Liddo comments on the contrast between the pornographic elements of the story and Gebbie and Moore's intent to create a thoughtful, innovative remediation that expresses the value of sexual healing: "Richness of narrative is thus sacrificed for the sake of purpose: to emphasize that porn can be made ethically and aesthetically viable" (147). Meredith Collins asserts that Gebbie and Moore "naively exaggerat[e] the healing power of sex to the extent that it seems miraculous—thus leading toward … a 'pandering sexual utopia'" (Di Liddo 137, citing Collins). These critics question whether the formal aspects of pornography undermine the goals that Gebbie and Moore try to achieve by choosing the medium of pornography, namely the quest to find a balance between artistry and pornography; show pornographic comics that aren't comedic or violent ("smutty parodies"); confront the divide between lowbrow, formulaic pornography and highbrow erotica;[42] and show how powerful fantasy and sex can be. "In Moore and Gebbie's perspective, repressing sexual drives and fantasies damages the self and dooms society to repeat its mistakes, as the coming of war shows" (Di Liddo 155). But flooding the reader with highly sexual images as means of confronting sexual repression can backfire. In *Lost Girls*, each narrative turn leads to new sexual act, and the inundation of sexual images creates a feeling of desensitization and predictability rather than excitement and the potential for innovation and liberation. While it is apparent that Gebbie and Moore are careful about the pacing of the sexual content, starting out

[42] In an interview with BBC Four for the "Comics Britannia" series, Moore claims that the "the only difference between pornography and erotica is the income bracket of the person reading it."

with more innocent and conventional encounters in Book 1 and working towards a full-blown sexual frenzy by the end of Book 3, the fact remains that there are few pages in *Lost Girls* that are free of nudity and sexual acts. This tireless repetition of sexual content can add to feelings of disorientation and frustration for readers searching for a narrative within a text that at times has the mechanical, distanced quality of a database.

Despite the potential limitations of genre and medium presented by such an elaborate intertextual work, the exciting opportunities for archontic modes of readerly pleasure that arise in *Lost Girls* raise a pressing concern about the exclusionary nature of intellectual property regulations. In their essay "What's Feminist about Open Access? A Relational Approach to Copyright in the Academy," legal theorists Craig, Turcotte, and Coombe identify a disconnect with the expressed aims and the actual effects of contemporary intellectual property law:

> when the law intervenes to manipulate the creation and dissemination of expression for the benefit of society, it must recognize and value the derivative, collaborative and communicative nature of creativity. To the extent that copyright's traditional proprietary structures preclude or obstruct the capacity of citizens to access, engage with and respond to cultural resources-or, more broadly, to experience their cultural landscape-these structures should be challenged, reconfigured or rejected.

Gebbie and Moore's exploration of the gaps and fissures of popular children's stories in an effort to offer possibilities for nostalgic pleasures based upon reader's own experiences of literary fantasy and sexual maturation is dependent on the ability of the artists to directly incorporate elements of the source texts in their work. Gebbie and Moore's decision to dive into the sexual imaginary by embracing works from the public domain helps fortify the conception of the public

domain as rich and significant realm, a stance advocated by a range of scholars, critics, and artists who hope for a disruption of the trend towards privatizing ideas. As new technologies continue to democratize various processes of media production, allowing for greater ease in distributing creative works, as well as more opportunities for collaboration and remix in the creation of artistic works, narrowly envisioned intellectual property regulations grow increasingly outdated and obstructive. Texts like *Lost Girls*, while encountering their own challenges with intertextual intricacy, at the same time demonstrate the complex and exciting tensions offered through the remediation of preexisting works. As intellectual property regulations continue to evolve, greater balance between public and private interests could be greatly improved by taking into account feminist approaches that forefront the creative value of derivative works. The final chapter further considers the compatibility of the artistic practice of remediation in light of intellectual property regulations, with particular attention to the way that the law breaks from rigid, individualistic definitions of authorship to allow corporations to economically benefit from the creativity of the artists who they employee.

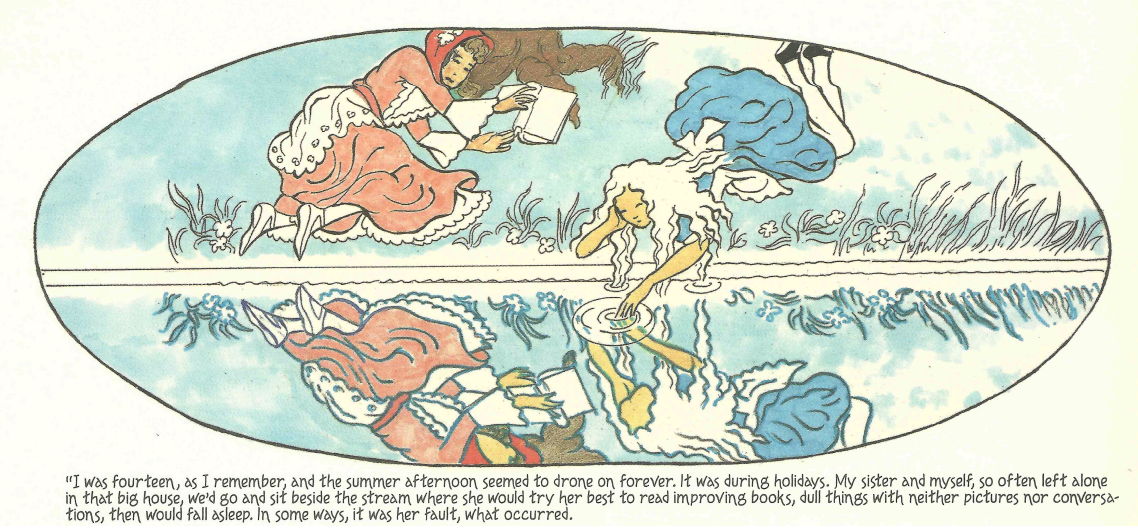


Figure 1: Alice by the water (Gebbie, Book 1, Chap. 9, p. 2).

Figure 2: Gebbie and Moore's "Bunny" (Gebbie, Book 1, Chap. 9, p. 2).

Figure 3: Tenniel's "White Rabbit" (Carroll 7).

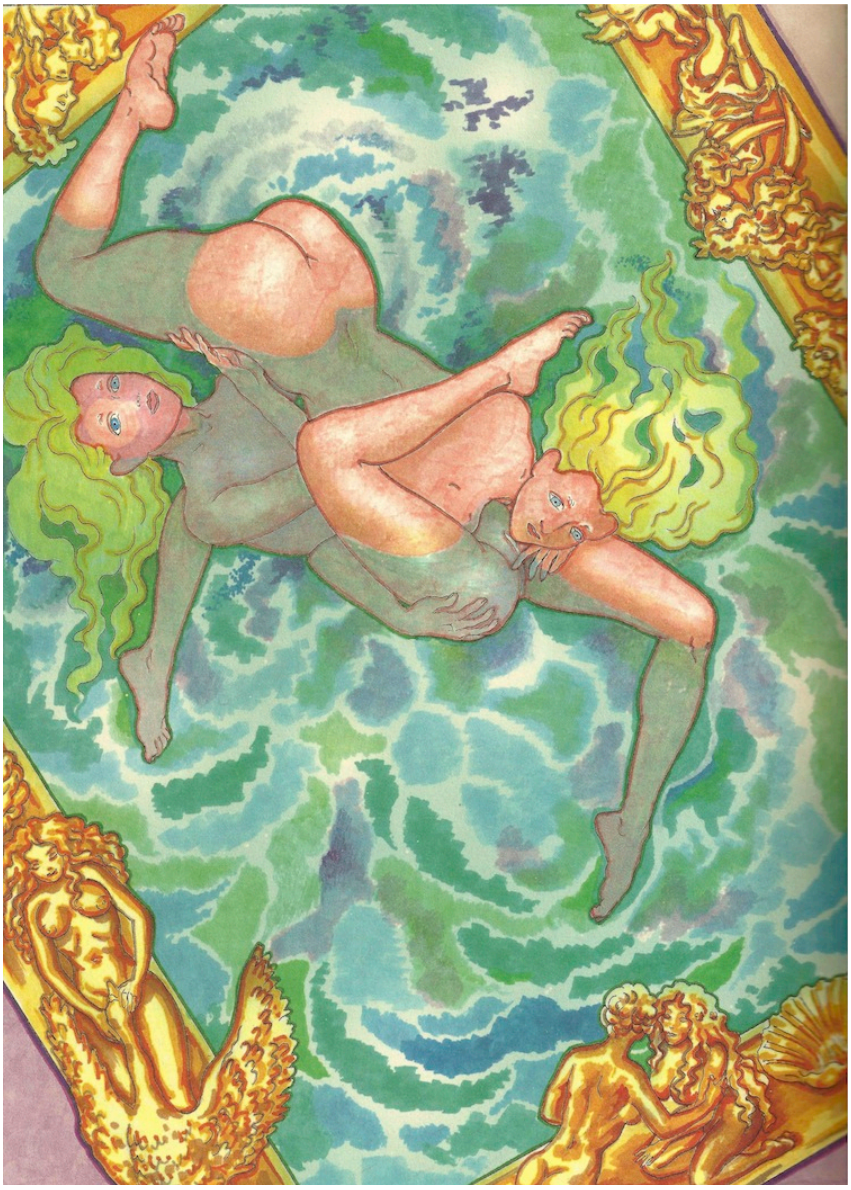

Figure 4: Alice in the watercolor sea (Gebbie, Book 1, Chap. 9, p. 6).

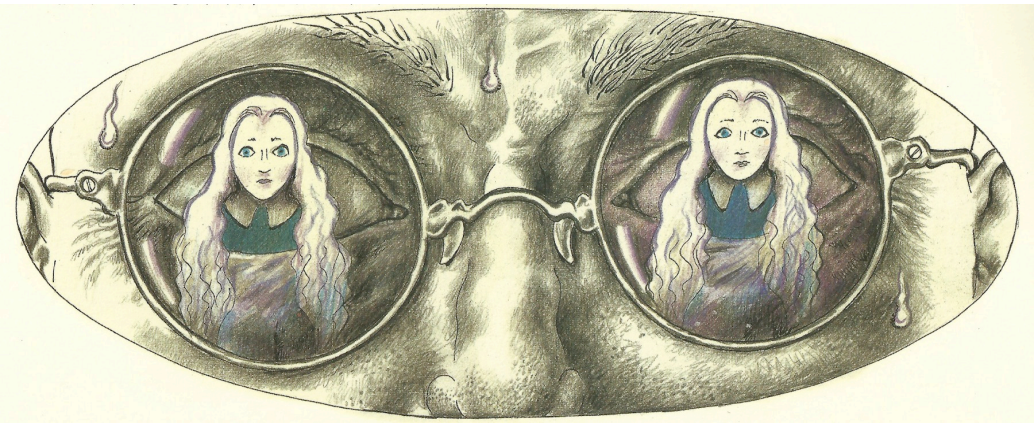

Figure 5: Alice reflected in Bunny's glasses (Gebbie, Book 1, Chp. 9, p. 2).

Figure 6: Dorothy in the twister (Gebbie, Book 1, Chap. 7, p. 6).


Figure 7: Dorothy in Oz (Gebbie, Book 1, Chap. 7, p. 7).

Figure 8:  Peter and Wendy flying (Gebbie, Book 1, Chap. 8, p. 7).

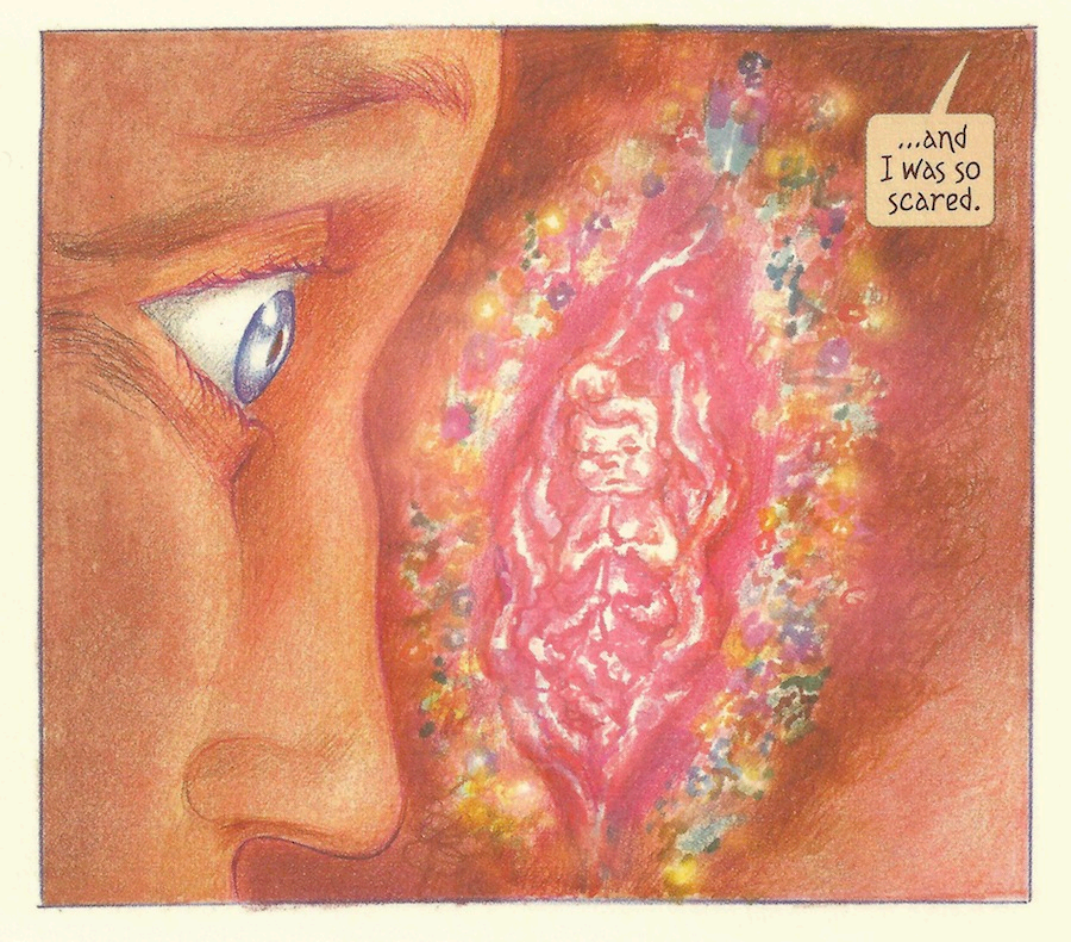


Figure 9:  Alice discovers the Caterpillar (Gebbie, Book 1, Chp. 4, p. 7).


Figure 10: Harold and Wendy in the shadows (Gebbie, Book 1, Chap. 3, p. 8).

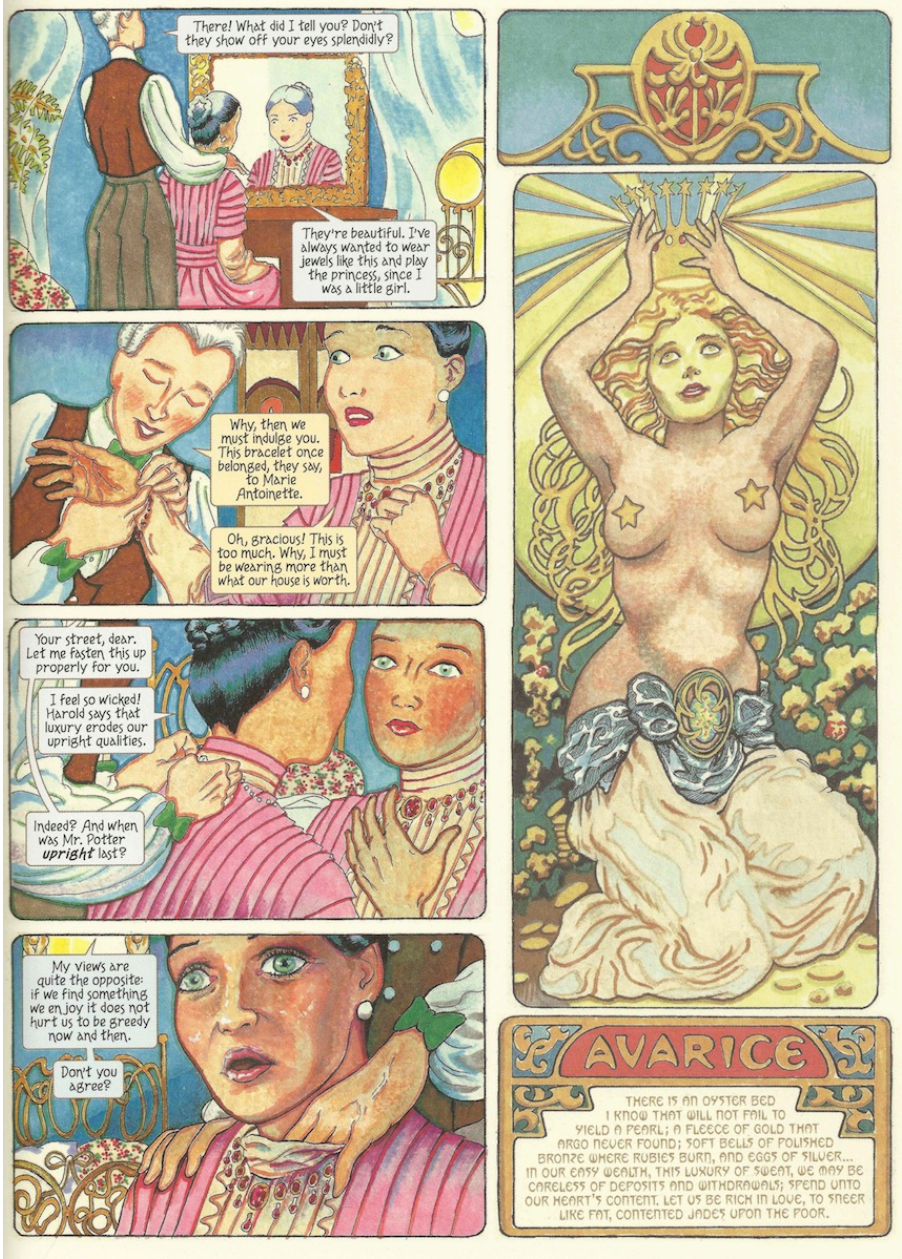


Figure 11: Alice and Wendy alongside Mucha-esque illustrations (Gebbie, Book 2, Chap. 12, p. 3).

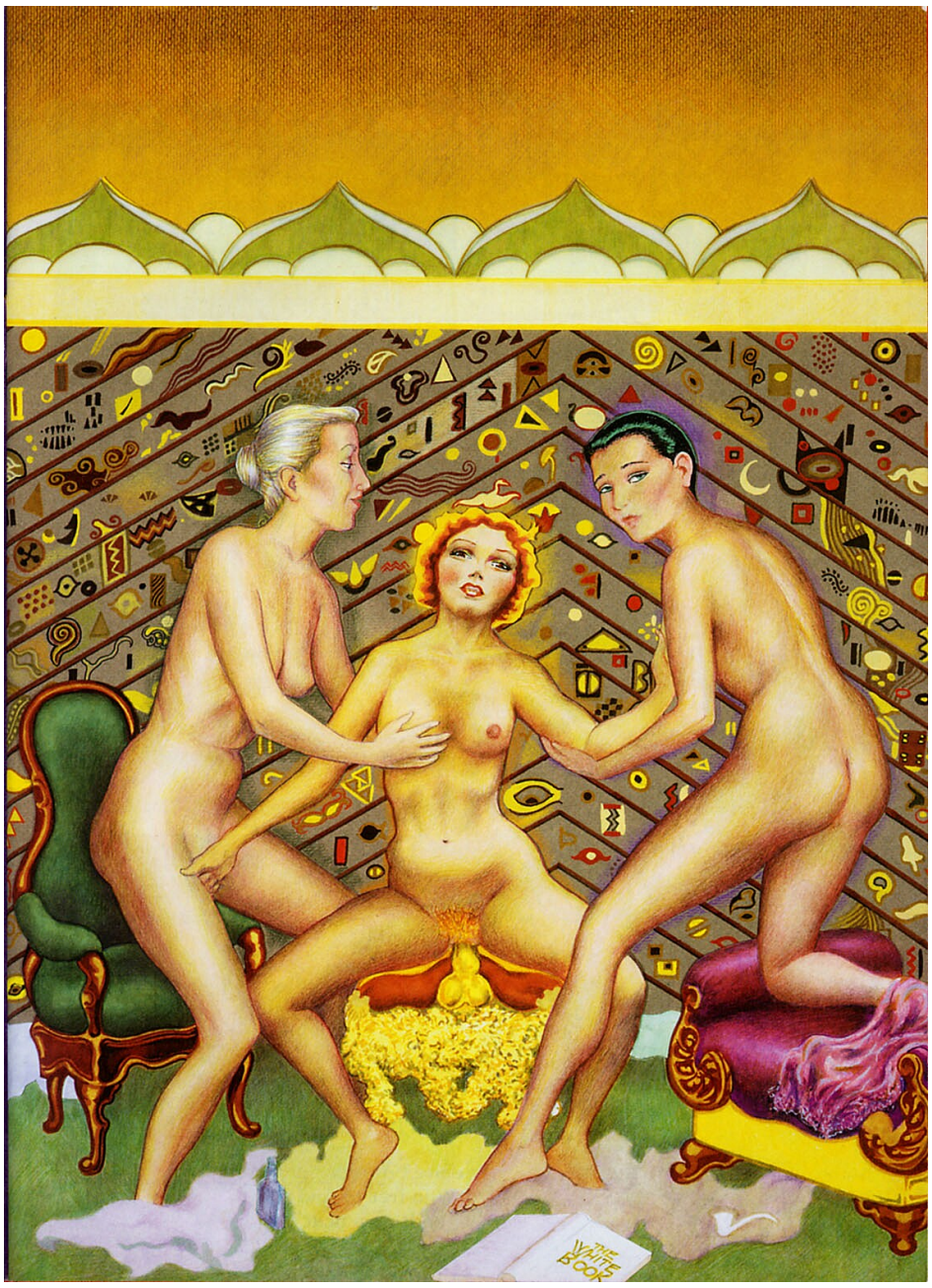


Figure 12:  A sensual engagement (Gebbie, Book 1, back cover).


Figure 13: Excerpt from Jyuubaori's *Alice in Sexland* (title page).

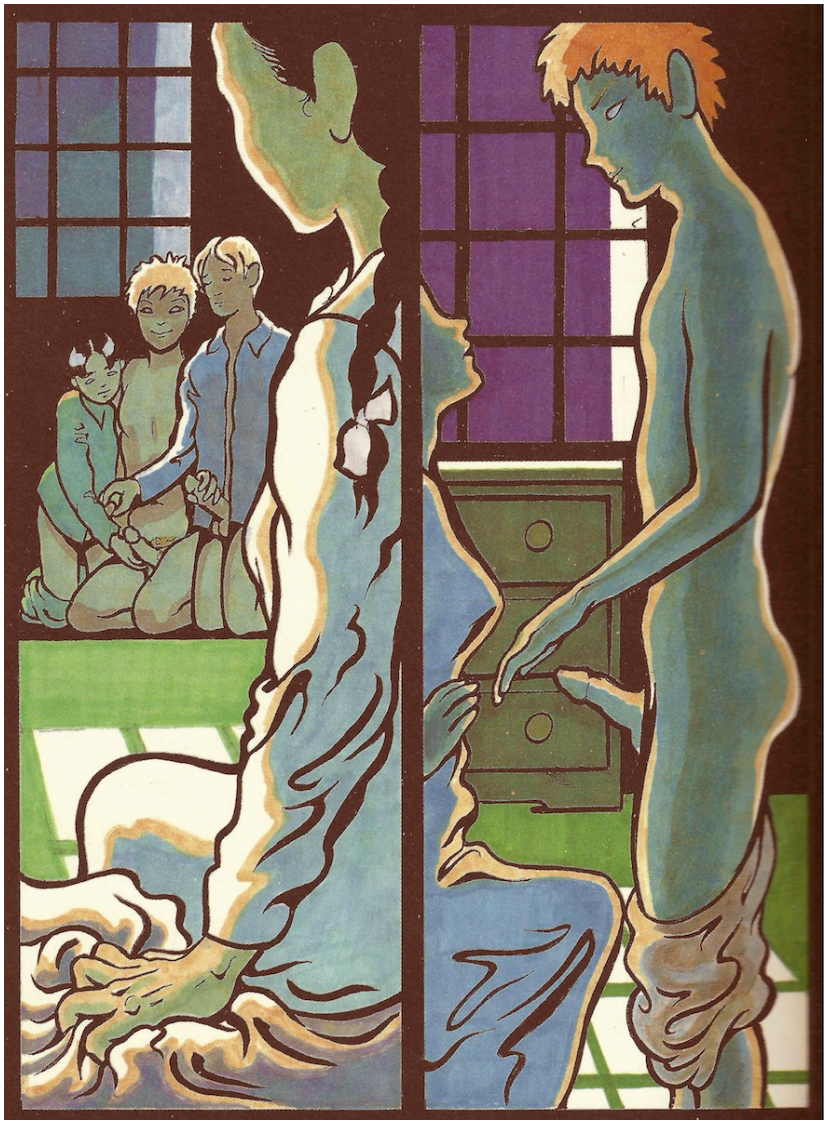

Figure 14a: Peter teaches Wendy fairy games (Gebbie Book 1, Chap. 8, p. 4-5).

Figure 14b: Peter teaches Wendy fairy games, continued (Gebbie Book 1, Chap. 8, p. 4-5).

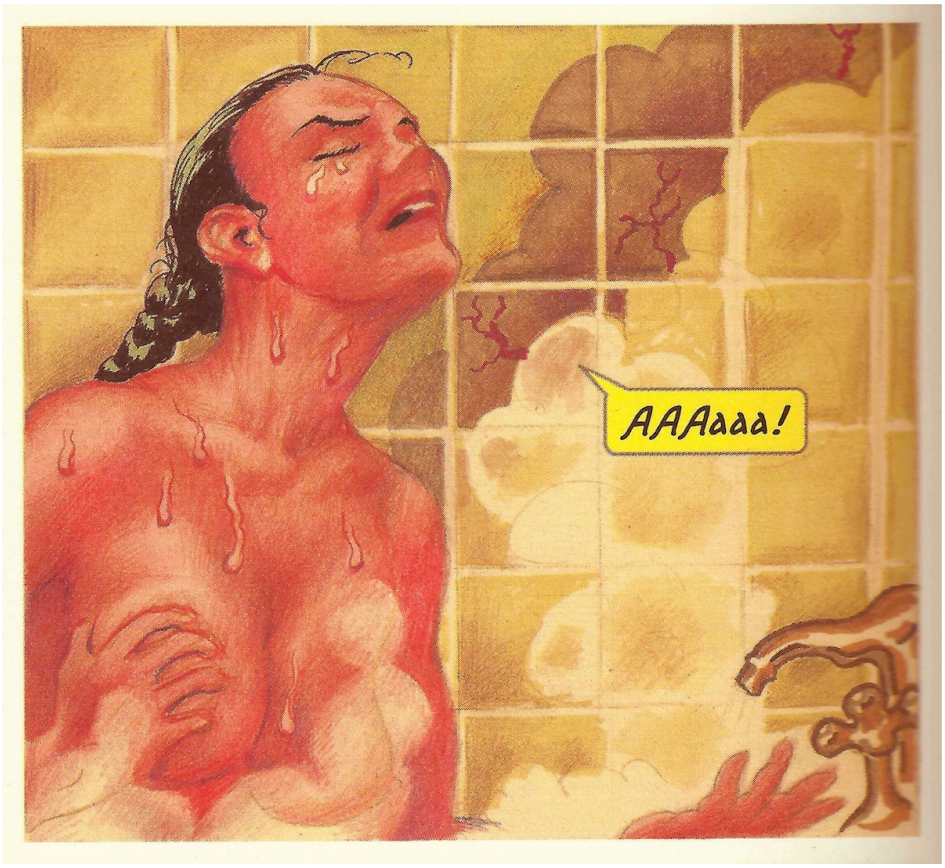


Figure 15:  Wendy's frustration (Gebbie Book 1, Chap. 5, page 6).

Chapter 4

The Dark Knight Under Revision: "The Ecstasy of Influence" and Work for Hire

They are all completely different but they are all instantly recognizable as Batman.
--*Grant Morrison*

***Look*** at you, stretching out your ***shadow*** across the ***world***.
--*Catwoman,* to Batman

On the subject of originality, author Jonathan Lethem asks, "does our appetite for creative vitality require the violence and exasperation of another avant-garde, with its wearisome killing-the-father imperatives, or might we be better off ratifying *the ecstasy of influence*—and deepening our willingness to understand the commonality and timelessness of the methods and motifs available to artists?" (41). The notion of the "ecstasy of influence," itself taken from scholar Richard Dienst, is of course a play on Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence," or the fear that one will create works dominated by the influence of past artists (and thus deemed derivative and weak). Joining an increasingly wide range of cultural studies scholars, Lethem makes a plea for an expansion of the public commons, claiming that the monopoly that has been placed on ideas by progressively more stringent intellectual property laws[43] severely restricts living artists from making a "splendid use of a healthy public domain" (35). Despite the prominence of a definition of authorship that prides originality as the highest measures of artistic success, a definition that has heavily influenced both copyright legislation and judicial opinions, a range of

[43] In general, current American copyright law protects copyrighted material for the life of the author plus seventy years (17 USC Sec. 302(a)). And there is no requirement that the material be registered, so any creative expression that has been recorded in a tangible manner is automatically protected (17 USC Sec. 102), from an article you write for your local newspaper to a doodle you make in the margins of your notebook. A violation of U.S. copyright laws can lead to steep fines and possible payment of legal fees.

artists and writers have engaged in creative processes that embrace creative common spaces and push against the need for constant novelty. One such realm is the world of genre fiction, in which ideas, characters, and stories are recycled and remediated as a means of appealing to fans who have intense familiarity with a particular genre. Remediation, a highly restricted area of copyright law,[44] is a driving force for the creation of readerly pleasure for fans interested in exploring intricate and elaborately built genre universes.

In this chapter, I explore a particular type of genre fiction, mainstream superhero comics, in order to trace a specific manifestation of the ecstasy of influence. The genre of superhero comics is defined by the generation of multi-layered narratives and images that combine old and new in a way that rewards long-term readers for their deep understanding of the mythologies attached to iconic superheroes. In this piece, I read several excerpts from comic books featuring one of the most well recognized superheroes, The Batman, in order to demonstrate the ways in which superhero comics invite fans to engage in active and playful reading practices through the endless recycling and revision of characters, storylines, and images. All superheroes in mainstream comics are open to this type of constant remediation, but the character of Batman is particularly well-suited for continual revision because he lacks superpowers. Batman's powers stem from his physical prowess and intellectual capabilities (as well as, in some part, the financial backing of his parents' estate). *Batman* writer Grant Morrison claims that it is this quality that makes Batman a superhero for the modern age. "Since 9/11 superheroes have

[44] The Copyright Act defines a "derivative work" as "a work based upon one or more preexisting works, such as a translation, musical arrangement, dramatization, fictionalization, motion picture version, sound recording, art reproduction, abridgment, condensation, or any other form in which a work may be recast, transformed, or adapted. A work consisting of editorial revisions, annotations, elaborations, or other modifications, which, as a whole, represent an original work of authorship, is a 'derivative work'" (17 U.S.C. Sec. 101). Because the owner of a copyright has the exclusive right to prepare derivative works based upon the copyrighted work (17 U.S.C. Sec. 106), any person creating a derivative work other than the copyright owner of the underlying work can be held liable for copyright infringement unless he/she has obtained permission from the owner (or the work is considered to be a "fair use" of the underlying work according to 17 U.S.C. Sec. 107, an exception that applies to a narrow category of works that satisfy a subjective 4-part test outlined in the statute).

become gigantic again…. Superheroes like Batman stand out as the last utopian visions of what people can be if they listen to their better natures'" (Harris). While Batman is certainly not a realistic character, he is written in a way that encourages aspiration (and let's face it, fans probably have an easier time aspiring for great physical strength and intelligence, for example, than they do aspiring to be bitten by a radioactive spider that will imbue them with superhuman abilities). Batman's lack of superpowers makes him an easily revisable character because he is a relatable, non-mutant human who provides an inspirational model, which allows writers to conceive of Batman in a wide variety of ways. This relatability leads to a great number of shifting character and personality constructions for Batman, from dark, to family-friendly, to camp, to sinister, to cosmopolitan, that are intended to appeal to an array of readers.

The success of the genre depends on mainstream superhero comic book publishing companies hiring artists and writers who can develop these new twists on familiar characters, striking a balance between the excitement of new readings and the rules of continuity that ground readers in a specific character's history and world. While it is true that to some extent all media producers that seek commercial success must take audience interests into account, comics producers are particularly dependent on audience reception.[45] This has manifested in *Batman* comics in both the way that fans have influenced story outcomes[46] and the way that comic book creators are themselves fans of earlier iterations of these characters and have now come to inherit them. Thus, companies producing superhero comics have an economic incentive to deliver stories that revisit and recycle preexisting storylines, that build upon previously published works

[45] In fact, comics historian Bradford Wright claims that the "preeminent factor shaping comic books has been the commercial motive of publishers to craft a product that appeals to paying audiences" (xv). This is most likely due to the low cost of individual comics units (currently about $3 or £2.25) and the resulting low profit potential.

[46] One extreme example of this is the 1988-89 story arc entitled "A Death in the Family" (*Batman #426-429),* for which fans could make a telephone call to vote on whether or not Robin, then Jason Todd, should die at the end of the issue. With a vote of 5,343 to 5,271, fans determined the death of Jason Todd.

rather than discard them as past influences that might somehow dilute the quality of new works. The playful remediative practices that are so fundamental to these character-driven franchises contribute to a growing culture of participation in which the line between producers and consumers of media is becoming continually blurred. A closer look at the way mainstream superhero comics embrace the ecstasy of influence provides a glimpse of the value added to the process of creative production when artists and writers are encouraged to revisit and remediate preexisting stories, a perspective that supports arguments for the expansion of the public commons.

One way in which companies like DC and Marvel (the two largest publishers in the business of selling comics) capitalize on fans' desires without having to manage the expense, time, and paperwork of securing legal permissions from past creators is their employment of comic book creators under the work for hire structure. This legal arrangement gives publishers ownership over the characters, images, and stories created by comic book writers and artists rather than the individual creators themselves. The work for hire doctrine governs a complicated system of authorship in which the individuals who actually conceptualize and execute the creation of an artistic work (elements so crucial to eighteenth-century definitions of authorship that influenced the establishment of ownership rights through copyright laws) are no longer deemed "authors" for the purpose of copyright protection. Rather, "the employer…for whom the work was prepared is considered the author" (17 U.S.C. Sec. 201(b)), and thus copyright is vested in the employer entity, giving it the exclusive right to reproduce and distribute the work, as well as to prepare derivative works based upon the copyrighted work (17 U.S.C. Sec. 106). In addition to charting sites of resistance to the anxiety of influence in Batman comics, this chapter will also explore the role of corporate authorship in the production of readerly pleasures. I will

examine the ways in which the work for hire system, while creating an easy setup for companies to profit from satisfying readers' desires for fully realized genre universes, strips writers and artists of the ownership rights that should follow from the fruits of their labor under the definition of authorship that our current copyright system was built upon.

## The Ecstasy of Influence and the Public Commons

While legislation and judicial decisions have increasingly gone in the direction of valuing private, corporate interests over the public benefit obtainable through open source creative methods,[47] scholarship from a variety of fields continues to champion the innovative work that has emerged through the tradition of building upon the ideas of others. For example, Lethem, as mentioned above, coined the term "ecstasy of influence" as an alternative to Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence," an encouragement to embrace and build upon the work of our predecessors rather than fight influence[48] in a quest to find some mystic inner vision that will set one's work apart from others. Lethem asserts that we have always lived in a world in which borrowing and transforming others' ideas have been key to the process of creative production. He points to a tradition of recycling and remediation to support his claim:

> As examples accumulate—Igor Stravinsky's music and Daniel Johnston's, Francis Bacon's paintings and Henry Darger's, the novels of the Oulipo group and of Hanna Crafts (the author who pillages Dickens's *Bleak House* to write *The Bondomwoman's Narrative*), as well as cherished texts that become troubling to

[47] Two recent actions that demonstrate a jurisprudential lean towards the expansion of private ownership are the 20-year increase in the period of copyright protection created by the Sony Bono Copyright Term Extension Act of 1998, and the U.S. Supreme Court decision in the case of *Golan v. Holder* (2012) that allowed copyright protection to be restored for a number of works that had previously been placed in the public domain.

[48] Bloom implores, "Poets as poets cannot accept substitutions, and fight to the end to have their initial chance alone" (8). This language of violence and triumph calls to mind the Oedipal drive that Lethem resists in his plea for creative methods that embrace the commonality between artists.

> their admirers after the discover of their 'plagiarized' elements, like Richard Condon's novels or Martin Luther King Jr.'s sermons—it became apparent that appropriation, mimicry, quotation, allusion, and sublimated collaboration consist of a kind of sine qua non of the creative act, cutting across all forms and genres in the realm of cultural production. (29)

Head legal counsel for Google, Daphne Keller, puts it another way: "human culture is always derivative" (135). Despite this history of collaboration and remediation, Americans view current intellectual property laws as natural and inevitable. Lethem explains, "few of us question the contemporary construction of copyright. It is taken as a law, both in the sense of a universally recognizable moral absolute, like the law against murder, and as naturally inherent in our world, like the law of gravity" (33). Legal scholar Lawrence Lessig, an advocate for the value of the public commons, claims that we live in a private ownership culture in which there is "an unwillingness to even account for the role of the commons," elaborating that it is hard for us to see how "free resources, or resources held in common, *sometimes* create more wealth and opportunity for society than those same resources held privately" (86). Both Lethem and Lessig stress the constructed nature and alterability of copyright laws. Lethem poses that "copyright is an ongoing social negotiation, tenuously forged, endlessly revised, and imperfect in its every incarnation" (33). Though they have slightly different visions, Lethem and Lessig both imagine a future in which the public commons expands and more ideas are owned "*between* people" (Lethem 40), rather than by individuals, creating greater creative possibilities for everyone, from fiction writers to computer programmers.

While Lethem and Lessig express hopes for a utopic future in which both producers and consumers of media have more collective ownership of ideas (conveniently divorced from a

conversation about artists' needs to pay their bills), Keller talks about the ways in which digital technologies have already expanded the possibility for a greater commons. She argues that current intellectual property laws need to "move in this direction in order to adapt to technology and the way culture gets made today, in order to serve the collective cultural progress goal that copyright is designed to facilitate" (145). As an example, Keller discusses the ways in which digital recording technology makes the process of sampling music more affordable and accessible (135). She touts the value of sampling and collage, explaining that the art of such projects "lies in the very process of rescuing the fragment from obscurity and showing it to people" (Keller 143). But because sampling/collage and copyright laws aren't compatible, Keller points out that "much of todays' most innovative cultural production takes place in the shadow of the law" (136). Keller's essay shows the ways in which the cultural shift towards collaboration and sharing has already begun to take place and hopes for a legal climate that fosters rather than stifles the creative potential that could arise from such a shift.

Tracing the Ecstasy of Influence in Superhero Comics

Mainstream superhero comics have been enjoying some of the above-mentioned benefits of embracing the ecstasy of influence for decades, in particular the participatory reading opportunities created for audiences, a key feature of genre fiction. Similar to the sampling that takes place in the music industry that Keller cites as an example of an innovative engagement with preexisting materials, writers and artists dredge up old villains or story arcs from the past and remediate them in their contemporary stories. But unlike many musicians who must either pay copyright fees in order to legally sample other musicians' works or risk operating in the "shadow of the law," comic book creators can play within the archive owned by the company

publishing their works without having to obtain copyright permissions from creators of past works. In the case of Batman, for example, the work for hire arrangement vests DC with all of the rights to past and present Batman stories. This allows the company to open up the DC universe for comic book writers and illustrators so that they can borrow from old storylines and create texts that encourage long-term readers to take pleasure in participating in the story by drawing connections between the past and present fragments that have been woven together. This textual remediation and endless recycling creates the potential for increased revenue to DC because of the payoff presented to readers who have been long-term followers of comics series. Editors take into account fan feedback, and comic book writers are often themselves fans who have been invited to take characters into their own hands, determining characters' futures by incorporating their histories.

In the following section, I trace the use of meta-referentiality and remediation in the pages of Batman comics[49] in order to demonstrate the opportunities for writerly and readerly pleasure afforded by a process of media production that thrives on the influence of prior artists and writers. One of the most extraordinary features of this character is how Batman has been represented in so many different ways since his first appearance, while at the same time he remains universally recognizable. The character's recognizability is made possible by the rule of continuity and the close watch of editors in the genre of superhero comics. The multitude of representations can be attributed to the ever-changing sea of writers and artists who have taken on the challenge of working on one of the many Batman series that have developed since

[49] A brief disclaimer: by no means am I suggesting in this essay that I have mastered the history of a character as complex as Batman. I am not a "fangirl," nor do I purport to do the kind of extensive historical work of writers like Les Daniels who have charted the entire history of the superhero. I am a cultural studies critic who has chosen a handful of series from the body of Batman-themed comic books written in the last seven decades that help support my claims about the malleability of the Batman figure and the remediative practices that occur within the DC universe. I am fortunate to have archives such as *The Batman Chronicles* as well as the work of scholars like Daniels at my fingertips in order to chart Batman's many shifts over the years.

*Detective Comics* # 27 (1939). The work for hire relationship between DC and the artists and writers employed by DC lends itself to a continual passing of the torch, as the company hires new creators on a regular basis in the hopes of maintaining an engaged fan base. Much to the delight of fans who want continued encounters with this character, Batman has lived on for over seventy years, moving through various personality constructions, traveling forward and backward in time (and being timeless[50]), and reflecting a range of national ideologies and cultural trends (both dominant and subversive).

1. The Wink

References to the many past versions of and storylines about Batman that trigger an awareness about the larger arc of the Batman mythology create a wink of acknowledgment between creators and their audiences that incentivizes long-term readership. About this meta-referential quality of superhero comics, Umberto Eco explains, "the narrator picks up the strand of the event again and again, as if he had forgotten to say something and wanted to add details to what has already been said" (Klock, quoting Eco 5). This can be seen in the development of Batman's origin. Owing to Batman's popularity and iconicity, many popular culture enthusiasts (and even casual consumers) are familiar with Batman's origin. Those who know of Batman's origin but who have never actually witnessed its first account in *Detective Comics* #33 (November 1939) might be surprised by its simplicity (Figure 16). The first account of Batman's origin is a modest two-page spread that illustrates the caption "Legend: The Batman and how he came to be," beginning with five panels that show Bruce Wayne's parents getting mugged and

[50] Scholar Geoff Klock sums up the strangeness of superhero comic temporality nicely: "events make up a character's history (e.g., Batman began fighting crime in an era when he could refer to World War I as the 'Great War') but also could not logically occur when a reader considers that character's history as a whole (e.g., Batman never seems to age, although he has come in contact with more contemporary situations)" (4). Perhaps readers suspend their disbelief when it comes to the nonlinear temporality of these comics series due to the sheer pleasure of seeing the characters written and rewritten in so many different contexts and styles.

killed when Bruce was a child. There is relatively little detail conveyed in these panels. The drawings are minimalist with solid-colored backgrounds that lack in texture. The story is similarly understated. The family walks home after seeing a movie, but readers aren't told what movie they saw. The identity of the killer is never revealed. And readers see little of Bruce's reaction to the shooting besides tears, and a personal reflection a few days later when Bruce avows to avenge his parent's death by pursuing a life of crime-fighting. The next two panels show Bruce as an adult, learning science and lifting weights, symbolic of what we know today as Batman's best assets, his extreme intelligence and physical strength. The final four panels in the origin story reveal Bruce's wealth (another source of Batman's power) and show him contemplating what kind of disguise he will use to make criminals fearful of him. When a bat flies through the window of his study, Bruce has an epiphany, and the final panel shows him in full Batman regalia, poised for action. In Eco's equation, this is the strand of the event, and in the years that followed the first account of how Batman came to me, many writers have added details to this already existing strand.

For example, fast-forward 47 years to Frank Miller's 1986 rendering of Batman's origin in *The Dark Knight Returns*. The scene of the murder of Bruce's parents itself is cinematically rendered in over 30 frames across four pages by Miller and his creative team, including Klaus Janson and Lynn Varley (for an excerpt, see Figure 17). This depiction delivers a great deal of detail about the action of the murder, with stills of Bruce as he reacts to the gun, is distracted by a bat flying overhead, and gets pushed away by his father as the bullet is discharged (Miller, et al. 14-15). In addition, readers see up-close detail of the movie marquee (revealing that the Wayne family had just finished watching the movie *Zorro*, an in-joke for Batman enthusiasts who know that this is a tribute to the character who inspired Kane's original vision of Batman),

the gun, the bullet, and Bruce's mother's pearls, all rendered as vibrant snapshots in Bruce's memory as he recalls the traumatic event. Also, Miller and his creative team's version of Batman's origin gives readers greater context for understanding how Bruce went from the scared child who witnessed his parent's murder to the iconic superhero. Prior to Bruce's reminiscence of his parent's murder, he recalls his first trip into the bat cave and his tremendous fear of bats, signaling a history of recurring experiences wrestling with the bat figure. And when Bruce remembers the moment when the bat appears to him later as a sign of his alter ego, it aggressively crashes through the window, eyes glowing and mouth agape, with teeth ready sink into flesh (Miller, et al. 18), quite different from the bat in *Detective Comics* #33 that looks more like a toy rubber bat on a string that's being dangled from above. Finally, by juxtaposing images of Batman's beginnings with images of the haggard and mentally decrepit present-day Bruce Wayne of *The Dark Knight Returns*, this version of the origin story is not a mere explanation of how this legend came to be, but rather an account of how this man has been worn down by a long, hard road of crime-fighting in a corrupt metropolis.

The juxtaposition between the first version of Batman's origin and Miller's revision creates an additional meta-level narrative thread that recognizes the crucial role that the origin story plays in the genre of superhero comic book storytelling. A more contemporary version of Batman's origin, comics creator Jason Horn's adaptation of the 1-page, 4-panel Superman origin story featured in Grant Morrison's and Frank Quitely's *All-Star Superman* also plays with the excitement of recognition that is so crucial to fan-driven fiction. This minimalist account of Batman's origin, even more pared down than the sparse *Detective Comics* #33 version, features four panels, each with a very brief caption (Figure 18). The first is "parents taken," which shows Bruce as a child, eyes closed mournfully, kneeling in front of his parents' lifeless arms sitting in

a pool of blood, the rest of their bodies cut off by the frame. The second, captioned "promise made," is a visual reference to one of the panels in the *Detective Comics* #33 origin, in which Bruce, still a child, kneels by his bed, hands clasped as if praying, a tear rolling down his cheek. The third panel shows a bat crashing through the window with the words "inspirational symbol." Finally, the word bubble on the last panel reads "vengeful justice," and features Batman in costume, crouching atop ornate stonework at the peak of one of Gotham's buildings, overlooking the city. In this version, the writer boils down the origin to its most essential elements and attaches clichéd phrases such as "inspirational symbol" and "vengeful justice" that signal a clever familiarity with the conventions of comic book storytelling. By boiling down the origin story to the basic elements that have been so central to the development of so many superheroes (the harm to a loved one that inspires vigilantism, the moment of epiphany that creates a symbolic embodiment of the move from ordinary human to superhero) Horn gives readers the wink of recognition.

2. Transformations and Mutability

The multiple possibilities for Batman's future have, like the many potential ways of expressing Batman's origin,[51] endured great shifts and transformations over the years at the hands of hundreds of different writers and illustrators. For example, Bob Kane's initial vision of Batman was a Zorro-inspired figure who was dark, deadly, and brooding. As a matter of fact, in the early issues Batman has no problem killing villains and their lackeys, a quality that sharply contrasts with the modern Batman who goes to great lengths to preserve the life of his opponents. In Batman's fourth ever appearance, *Detective Comics* #30 (August 1939), as he

[51] Above are just three of many retellings of Batman's origin, some of which go into further detail about how the killing of Bruce's parents have affected his psychological state, others of which focus more on the killer, later named as crime boss Joe Chill (first named in *Batman* #47 (June-July 1948)) and sought out by Batman as a target of revenge.

battles Doctor Death, Batman doesn't hesitate to break the neck of one of Doctor Death's assistants, and it is captioned in violent detail: "There is a sickening snap as the Cossack's neck breaks under the mighty pressure of the Batman's foot" (*The Batman Chronicles: Volume One*, 36). In that first year of Batman's appearance in *Detective Comics* and in his own shoot-off series entitled simply *Batman*, he commits a number of deadly acts. Besides cracking the neck of Doctor Death's assistant, Batman also knocks a crook into a tank of acid (*The Batman Chronicles: Volume One* 9), traps Doctor Death and another assistant in a burning laboratory (*The Batman Chronicles: Volume One* 27), shoots a vampire point-blank with a silver bullet (*The Batman Chronicles: Volume One* 60), forces a villain to fall through an open window to his death (*The Batman Chronicles: Volume One* 97), and blatantly hangs one of Professor Strange's "monsters" by a rope from the Batplane, dispassionately claiming "He's probably better off this way" (*The Batman Chronicles: Volume One* 162). His earlier days of indifference to life changed quickly into Batman's contemporary representation as a hero who adamantly refuses to kill wrongdoers. Kane eventually suggested that Batman have a sidekick to whom the young readers could relate, and the comic book became less violent and more family-friendly. While the addition of Robin helped sales rise, Kane mourned the loss of the "solitary and sinister" Batman he had originally envisioned (Daniels 38).

This shift to a more family-oriented comic book developed even further after the release of *Seduction of the Innocent*, a highly influential text published by psychiatrist Frederic Wertham in 1953. Wertham claimed that comic books morally corrupted children, particularly targeting *Batman* comics for violence and a purportedly inappropriate homosexual relationship between

Batman and Robin.[52] The concern regarding the appropriateness of comics for children led to the development of the Comics Code Authority in 1954, which forced publishers to change their content (particularly anything of a violent or sexual nature) for fear of commercial failure. The editors of the Batman series wanted to ensure that they could produce an economically viable publication during a time when so many comic book series were coming under fire for corrupting children's values. All of the changes to Batman's representation during the Silver Age of comics that took place as a result of censorship left Batman a hollow shell without a core self; writers had changed him so much in an attempt to attract readers while comics industries suffered that, according to Kane, Batman was almost killed off (Daniels 95). Daniels explains,

> By 1964, Batman was in big trouble. Today's fans often look back with affection at the sheer zaniness of the stories from the late 1950s and early 1960s, but the seemingly endless array of stunts designed to prop up the hero had nearly done him in. There was no core character left, just a hollow man being battered from place to place by whatever gimmick could be concocted, and sales were dropping drastically. (95)

That led to Julius Schwartz's hiring as editor of Batman comics and a serious makeover for the lead character. The new version of Batman debuted in *Detective Comics* #327 (May 1964) with the phrase "New Look" announced on the cover. The result was a more realistic depiction of the character by artist Carmine Infantino with less cartoonish style, a sleeker Batmobile, a new logo (the addition of the yellow oval around the bat insignia that came to be iconic), and the revival of old villains (Daniels 99).

[52] Interestingly, a recent study of the materials Wertham used to construct the widely received arguments presented by *Seduction of the Innocent* proposes that Wertham manipulated and misrepresented evidence to justify his conclusion that comic books contributed to juvenile delinquency and immoral behavior (Itzkoff).

One can see even from all of the shifts of representation in the first few decades of Batman's existence that Batman has been imagined in so many different ways that he no longer has to be illustrated in one unified way. This is not only a testament to his flexibility as a character, but also to the flexibility of artists and writers under the supervision of series' editors (Daniels 159). By the time Dennis O'Neil took over as editor in the mid-1980s, Batman had been imagined in such a variety of ways by writers and artists such as Kane, Jerry Robinson, Dick Sprang, and Neal Adams, that O'Neil began to really embrace the variety of representations: "We now say that Batman has two hundred suits hanging in the Batcave…so they don't have to look the same. What this flexibility allows me to do is to give good artists maximum flexibility when dealing with this archetype. Everybody loves to draw Batman, and everybody wants to put their own spin on it" (Daniels 159-60). Editors have learned that playing to fan's desires for ongoing exposure to this beloved character in different settings, styles, and storylines puts money in DC's bank account. Despite inevitable ebbs and flows of fan interest in Batman, this incentive to hire talented artists who could reinvent the character in ways that responded to the changing needs and wants of readers has helped keep Batman in the spotlight for many decades.[53]

3. Contemporary Remediations

One of the most interesting turns for this character occurred in 1986, when Frank Miller brought Batman back to darkness, but stretched the limits even further, making him a paranoid, solipsistic psychopath. Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* has been revered as one of the best

[53] It is important to acknowledge that there are other ways in which artists and writers have prolonged the life of this character outside of the restrictive legal framework of work for hire within DC. From unauthorized fan fiction on websites like fanfiction.net to not-for-profit ventures such as the proposed web series *The Batman Chronicles*, Batman lives on through enthusiasts' own playful engagements with the character's mythology. In the final section of this chapter, I give further consideration to these methods of storytelling that, either in the shadow of the law or through creative uses of the law, remediate the character of Batman without the restriction of work for hire contracts to which DC writers and artists are subject.

American graphic novels,[54] especially with regard to the way that he and artists Janson and Varney altered the world of superhero comics by examining the deep, sinister psychological underpinnings of a character and highlighting the human (and thus destructible and vulnerable) nature of this superhero figure. This mature representation of Batman as a dark antihero dominated subsequent depictions of Batman. Recently, however, writer Grant Morrison has pushed against the tendency to depict Batman as the "savage vigilante" (Boucher) that developed in the aftermath of *The Dark Knight Returns* as writers clung to Miller and his creative team's novel take on the Batman character while missing much of the nuance and complexity in his work. In a recent interview with *The Los Angeles Times*, Morrison explains that he instead sees Batman as more than just a hero who is "singular and sluggish in his motivations" (Boucher). Morrison goes on, "when I really began to think of it, someone who had gone through this life process to be Batman would have much more psychological depth. A man who is that advanced in meditation and martial arts and yoga is not going to be a one-note vigilante crime fighter" (Boucher). What distinguishes Morrison's Batman run is a commitment to creating elaborate narratives that are deeply involved with the multiple possibilities embodied by this character: "Batman can take anything. You can do comedy Batman, you can do gay Batman…it all works. It[sic] something intrinsic to the character" (Boucher). In Morrison's most recent run of the Batman series, which began in 2006 with the Batman #265 *Batman and Son* story arc, he has attempted to infuse Batman with a sophistication that Morrison owes to Bruce's wealth and enormous archive of adventures. The nuance of Morrison's character developments and

[54] The May 5, 2011 auctioning of a splash page from *The Dark Knight Returns* at a Comic Art Auction in New York for an astounding $448,125 (a record for the highest selling piece of original American comic art at public auction) is a testimony to its critical success.

elaborateness of his intertextual webs resist standard portrayals of popular fiction as commercial, unsophisticated, and lacking in narrative complexity.[55]

Morrison's contribution to Batman (that is still ongoing with the release of a new series in January 2011 about the international franchising of Batman entitled *Batman Incorporated*) relies heavily on his unique interpretation of past artists' and writers' approaches to this character. When contemplating his trajectory for the Batman character, Morrison thought heavily about Batman's history:

> [I]t occurred to me that no one had really considered the cumulative effect of all these wild adventures on Bruce Wayne's mind. / So I decided to treat the entire publishing history of Batman as the events in one man's extraordinarily vivid life. This for me was the story that hadn't been told yet: the story of how his life might include the complete trajectory of Batman as a character from the 1930s to the 2000s. (Morrison, *The Black Casebook* 4)

Morrison collapsed 70 years of Batman's adventures into 15 years, paying particular attention to the strange sci-fi years of the 1950s that most readers and writers ignore.[56] He was intrigued by the fact that the Batman series stayed alive during these years and explains, "[t]he long-repressed material, most of it erased from Batman's official history, became for me a rich source of inspiration and allowed me to see the characters from a very different angle" (*The Black Casebook* 5). Morrison most explicitly incorporates Batman's past into his current series by

[55] Ken Gelder's reductive description of popular fiction as having "less to do with discourses of creativity and originality, and more to do with production and sheer hard work" (15) ignores the progressively more blurred line between high and low culture, as well as increased demands by fans of popular fiction for more sophisticated narratives. While the conventions of superhero comics and highbrow literature certainly differ, Morrison plays with generic boundaries by writing complicated narratives that require reader engagement rather than "distracted," "compulsive," "uncritical" modes of reading (Gelder 37, 38).

[56] The content of comic books during these years changed because of the influence of Wertham's book and the creation of the Comics Code Authority in 1954. Wertham's claims about children repeating the violence that they read about in comic books influenced publishers to release more comic books with science-fiction villains which allowed for less realistic crime that was thus less likely to be acted out by humans (Daniels 85).

planting the idea of a journal into the character's history. While a familiar plot device in genre fiction, the construction of "The Black Casebook" as a record that Batman has been keeping all along to preserve his strange experiences is notable with respect to the Batman mythology because the framing device allows Morrison to reintroduce stories that have been largely cast out of the Batman canon due to their bizarre content. Defying popular sentiment that these science fiction tales from the 1950s should remain forgotten, Morrison's engaging remediations set up his well-renowned series *Batman R.I.P.*, a rich, multi-layered story about Batman's encounter with one of his most formidable foes, The Black Glove.

*R.I.P.*, like much of Morrison's work on this character, remediates events and images from the Batman mythology, re-envisioning these elements and connecting them to the new narrative. This remediation of previously written stories creates a link between the past and present that adds yet another narrative layer to this already intricate medium that capitalizes on the magic that happens at the intersection of text and image. When audiences familiar with Batman's mythology[57] read *R.I.P.*, all of these adventures from Batman's past slowly unfold and connect with the present narrative. For example, one might recognize the character of Dr. Hurt from *Batman* #156, "Robin Dies at Dawn," in which Batman volunteers to undergo a NASA experiment and remains in an isolation tank for ten days, where he hallucinates that Robin has died. Dr. Hurt conducted the experiment in the 1963 issue, and reappears in *R.I.P.* equipped with

[57] Readers who are not familiar with the stories from the 1950s that Morrison remediates in *R.I.P.* might miss that layer of the narrative. For readers who are interested in how past works have informed *R.I.P.,* DC published a work that compiles an array of stories that inspired the story arc, aptly titled *The Black Casebook*, which was released shortly after *R.I.P.* The single issue publication structure of superhero comics with limited runs of each issue (and no easily accessible archives) has led to a strong collector culture, but makes it difficult for new readers to become entrenched in the mythology of characters who have been around since the Golden Age. Many comics publishing companies have started reprinting compilations of old series to remedy this, as well as to gain diversified audiences and increase revenue. The perpetual recycling of characters and storylines feeds into DC's profit model, creating new demands that eager fans must fulfill by purchasing additional works.

all of the physiological and psychological data he collected in the experiment regarding the limits of Batman's mental endurance, ready to use that information to destroy Batman at the order of his leader, The Black Glove. Morrison saw the narrative thread of Dr. Hurt's experimentation in the early issue as an opportunity, weaving that thread into the current story as if the two events were always already connected. Morrison and the artists of *R.I.P.* add details to the story of Dr. Hurt placing Batman in isolation that set up Dr. Hurt's appearance in *R.I.P*. While a reader of "Robin Dies at Dawn" understands that the purpose of the information Dr. Hurt gathered about Batman while he was in isolation was to help NASA scientists understand the psychological limits of a man in isolation, *R.I.P.* now shows that the information is rather being used to target Batman's most vulnerable moments in order to kill him. What may have seemed like a well-intentioned experiment with unforeseen negative consequences (at the end of Part 1, Dr. Hurt proclaims, "Batman's a hardy specimen, with an above-average mind—but even a Batman can succumb to stress and shock! I just hope there won't be any after-effects") now has a sinister end (Finger 120). Morrison's remediation of Batman #156 makes these moments from Batman's past determinant of his future impending breakdown. Morrison and the various artists that illustrate *R.I.P.* renovate old texts and images, revitalizing aspects of Batman's history in the service of a new work that highlights the complexity of the Batman figure.

Another preexisting Batman story that plays a crucial role in *R.I.P.* is "Batman – the Superman of Planet X" (1958), in which Batman is transported to another planet and meets his alien counterpart, Tlano, also known as the Batman of Zur-en-Arrh. On Planet X, the elemental constitution of the planet makes Batman virtually indestructible, and his powers rise to the level of Superman's super-human abilities. Morrison reads this story to be, rather than an actual physical trip to another planet, a psychological journey for Batman as he recovers from the mind-

control drugs administered by the villainous Professor Milo in the issue that was released just prior to "Batman – the Superman of Planet X." The phrase "Zur-en-Arhh" features heavily in Morrison's *Batman* run, appearing as graffiti on walls in the issues leading up to the *R.I.P.* story-arc, and acting as a trigger and alternate personality for Batman in *R.I.P.* as his mind begins to disintegrate under the pressure of The Black Glove and his minions. In *R.I.P.*, when Batman first appears as the Batman of Zur-en-Arhh (drawn by Tony Daniel), the garish costume of the 1958 story, complete with red, purple, and yellow coloring, makes a strong introduction, the Batman clenching his fists and screaming, ready to charge into action (Figure 19). The Batman of Zur-en-arrh is an aspect of Bruce Wayne that is designed to take over and fight if Batman is rendered incapable of doing so. This version of Batman acts without the rationale of Bruce Wayne to keep him in check, and thus has come to represent the many qualities that the familiar Batman does not, including a greater willingness to destroy his adversaries. Morrison reintroduces this old psychedelic counterpart, the Batman of Zur-en-arhh, into his contemporary story and transforms him into an element of Batman's psyche. What was once a bizarre encounter with an extraterrestrial is now a storyline that supports Morrison's take on Batman as a complicated, multilayered character who has endured a long history of physical and psychological duress, rather than a "savage," "one-note vigilante crime fighter" as characterized by many in the wake of Miller's *Dark Knight* (Boucher 2011).

One of the formal elements that distinguishes comics from illustrated stories like children's books is that "the images are not illustrative of the text, but comprise a separate narrative thread that moves forward in time in a different way than the prose text, which also moves the reader forward in time" (Chute 769). In the quest for an intricate, multi-layered narrative, Morrison and the *R.I.P.* artists do not neglect the visual layer of the story. While the above are examples of

Morrison remediating textual elements to achieve character complexity, Morrison also works in conjunction with the illustrators of *R.I.P.* to achieve similar character development through visual remediation. The devilish look of the Batman of Zur-en-arrh is a compelling counterpart to the *R.I.P.* cover art by Alex Ross that also renders Batman clenching his fists over his head, but the cool tones and flow of the cape above his fists depicts an angelic, elegiac Batman (Figure 20). The contrast in these two visual representations of Batman mark the vast divergence between the familiar Batman and the Batman of Zur-en-arrh, yet the similarity of poses still binds them together as a single entity. This is yet another way for Morrison and the artists of *R.I.P.* to illustrate the extraordinary construction of this character who can so easily shift, transform, and embody a multitude of possible traits and trajectories.

This repetition and transformation of images is integral to Morrison's strategic recycling of stories written and illustrated by past Batman artists. For example, the cover art for the above-mentioned *Batman* #156 that shows Batman carrying Robin's lifeless body in his arms (Figure 21) is echoed in Morrison's follow-up to *R.I.P.*, *Batman and Son*, when Batman carries the recently shot Joker in his arms away from the scene of the crime (Figure 22). Morrison and the various artists for these series pore over preexisting Batman material and seize images and narrative possibilities to build their own Batman story. Those moments in which readers recognize the linkage between old and new create pleasurable reading experiences because of the heightened complexity and nuanced meaning-making. Aside from the textual and visual elements construing separate (and yet intertwining) narrative layers in comics, there are other formal features distinct to the medium that allow storytellers to play with the linkages between temporality and spatiality, as well as the intervention between text and images, a little differently than other media (such as novels, film, and even cartoons). As graphic narrative scholar Hillary

Chute explains it, "[t]he form's fundamental syntactical operation is the representation of time as space on the page" (769). The empty "gutter" spaces on the page in between each framed image indicates an increment of time that has occurred between the panels. The gutter space moves the narrative forward in time, and requires heavy reader participation to "connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (McCloud 67). This splash image of Batman and The Joker that occupies an entire page is meant to draw the reader's attention and create a moment of pause to consider the page's content. This is in contrast to a page comprised of nine smaller panels with a quarter inch of gutter space in between each image, moving the readers along at a steady pace from frame to frame. The isolated splash image invites readers to pause and take in the image so that they may consider the implications of such a surprising plot point, the Batman's embrace of his most notorious adversary, The Joker. The moment of pause gives long-time Batman readers the opportunity to consider this image in relation to an archive of past visuals in the series. Reading the 2006 image of The Joker in dialogue with the 1963 Robin image encourages readers to draw an unlikely connection between Robin and The Joker. In this light, Batman's mournfulness over the perceived loss of Robin is transferred to The Joker, and now The Joker is less of a villain whose body is being discarded from the scene, and more an essential (almost family-like) figure in Batman's life. Read in conjunction with the 1963 cover, this image freezes a moment of time in which Batman realizes how necessary The Joker is to his continued existence. These kinds of opportunities created by Morrison and his creative team to read texts and images in dialogue with each other welcome greater reader investment and involvement. Comic book creators' efforts to delve into the past and revitalize fragments from preexisting stories encourages fans to actively read and participate in these stories, to draw connections and think deeply about the character's actions and psychologies, their pasts and their

futures. DC capitalizes on this investment, building new story arcs and using marketing strategies that attempt to diversify their readership, from sophisticated readers who are drawn to the meta-narratives present in character-driven franchises, to first generation readers now eager to purchase more texts in a quest to build greater understanding.

Morrison's work stands out due to the way that he and the many artists he collaborates with incorporate the multiple possibilities for representation of Batman into their singular story arc. Like musicians sampling antiquated, forgotten tunes in their contemporary songs, Morrison and his collaborators revitalize often neglected and ignored stories from Batman's past and weaves them into complex story lines, constructing a Batman who is clever, resilient, perseverant, and able to regenerate both mentally and physically after severe attack. In the latest installment of his work on this character, *Batman Incorporated*, Morrison and artists such as Yanick Paquette and Chris Burnham push this even further, showing that not only can Batman represent multiple possibilities, but also that there can be multiple, franchisable Batmans. Morrison and the artists of *Batman Incorporated* extend the possibilities for creative play within the DC universe into their own narrative world, mapping the properties that have always been unique to Batman onto others. In *Batman Incorporated*, Bruce Wayne develops a plan to stop the global criminal organization Leviathan that relies on the concept of sharing, wherein all superheroes deemed worthy in Wayne's eyes (due to their physical prowess, loyalty, intelligence, and other esteemed qualities) are given the opportunity to participate in the performance of Batman and adopt the characteristics that have always been deemed to be the property of one man, and one man only. [58]

[58] There is an irony present in this method of attack against Leviathan that relies so heavily on multiple characters sharing Batman's brand and persona: Thomas Hobbes' political treatise *Leviathan* is considered influential for its stance on originality as a primary measure of artistic success and authenticity. Perhaps this is a subtle endorsement for the collaborative artistic process that makes works like *Batman Incorporated* possible.

In fact, in *Batman Incorporated* # 4, Morrison and artist Chris Burnham take a moment to remind us how unusual it is for Bruce Wayne to allow others to sport the Batman logo. In a flashback to Batman's first encounter with Batwoman, he yells at Batwoman as she rides away on her motorcycle, "***Wait!*** You can't just…***Nobody can wear a Batman costume in Gotham but me!***" Batwoman responds, "Ridiculous! No ***man***, maybe!" (Morrison, et al., *Batman Inc.* #4). By contrast, in the new global era that provides the setting for *Batman Incorporated*, Bruce Wayne realizes that the worldwide ubiquity of this image (outside of the confines of Gotham, and now worn by men and women alike) is a key tactic in fighting a global criminal organization.

The global contagion of the Batman image is all a part of Bruce Wayne's big plan as revealed in *Batman: The Return*, Grant Morrison and David Finch's one-shot issue that immediately precedes the *Batman Incorporated* series. In *Batman: The Return*, Batman gathers his most trusted allies, and explains, "This is the beginning of something new…. Starting today, we fight ideas with ***better*** ideas. The idea of ***crime*** with the idea of ***Batman***. From ***today*** on, Batman will be everywhere it's ***dark***, no place to ***hide***" (Morrison, et al.). Bruce realizes that fighting crime at the global level is going to require something more than his usual tactics. He uses the public's questions about the recent disappearance of Batman to his advantage in this new scheme. In Issue #6 of *Batman Incorporated*, Bruce Wayne responds to a reporter's questions about whether or not Batman is dead by explaining, "Batman has never been more ***alive***. But if the denizens of our ***underworld*** ever thought they knew what they were dealing with, those days are over. No one knows ***who*** Batman is anymore. Or how ***many*** there are" (Morrison, et al.). He continues, "Things are ***different*** now. Thanks to ***Batman Incorporated***, I can tell you ***exactly*** where Batman is. Batman is ***everywhere***" (Morrison, et al., *Batman Inc.* #6).

Both the cover and title page (featured at the end of the issue) are reflective of Wayne's plan to build an army to take on the organization Leviathan (Figure 23). Batman uses misdirection and trickery, having multiple Batman figures in different places at one time to make the public and his villains think that Batman is omnipresent.

In order to achieve the uniformity necessary to trick the world, the new crimefighters that Batman ceremonially anoints as members of his team must convincingly perform the role of Batman. While each character has its own individual flare, there is continuity between characters that leaves no question that each hero is linked to the one and only Batman. For example, one of Batman's first recruits, Jiro in Tokyo (the man behind Japan's superhero Mr. Unknown), is lectured early on about Batman's no gun policy. When Jiro happily accepts Batman's offer to join Batman Inc., Batman is careful to point out that Jiro will not be allowed to rely on one of his old tools: "You used a **gun**. Rule **number one**: No **guns**. My people have to be **better** than that" (Morrison, et al., *Batman Inc.* #2). In addition, Jiro's new costume, featured at the end of Issue #2, is practically identical to Batman's (Figure 24). Finally, after Jiro's induction ceremony, the bat signal, known universally as a summons for the Dark Knight, appears in Tokyo's sky. A news report proclaims: "Mr Bruce Wayne has brought his Batman Incorporated Initiative to Japan! Mr. Unknown is dead! In his place, look out for a ***familiar*** symbol on Tokyo's skyline! Crime beware! Wherever you are, ***Batman*** is watching!" (Morrison, et al., *Batman Inc.* #2). The appearance of the bat logo in unfamiliar skies is just the first step in Batman's global initiative to restore civil order through the dissemination of his image and all that it symbolizes.

Batman's image and persona emerge in numerous forms in this series through variations in costuming, distribution of the logo, and circulation of images and information through various

news media outlets, but despite variations, all representations undoubtedly connect back to Batman. Morrison is fascinated by the suppleness of Batman throughout the character's history. He remarks, "as we all know, all the costumes have been in constant change…. You look at the difference between the costume tights that Adam West wore and the gay disco armor that was in 'Batman Forever' compared to the modern, militaristic thing that Christopher Nolan does. They are all completely different but they are all instantly recognizable as Batman" (Boucher). Morrison concludes, "Batman can take anything" (Boucher). The balance between continuity and malleability has been a key component of Batman's popularity. Morrison puts his observation to work in *Batman Incorporated*, showing at once what a pliable character Batman is, while at the same time asking readers to think about what those essential characteristics that comprise Batman are, as they begin to appear on the bodies of others who have now been charged with the legacy of Batman as members of *Batman Incorporated*.

The cover of *Batman Incorporated* Issue #1 is symbolic of Batman's simultaneous suppleness and iconicity (Figure 25). All of the familiar elements are certainly there…the black and grey color scheme, the cowl with pointy ears, the long and billowy cape, the sharp jawline and stoic stare, and Batman's various tools (this time a glimpse of Batman's utility belt as well as a Batarang poised in his right hand). But at the same time, his shoulders and cape fade out against the background of international flags. This tells a new story of Batman, a story that highlights the performative nature of this superhero and the transferability of the essential, recognizable qualities of this iconic character onto other crimefighters deemed worthy. This cover image foreshadows the possibility that this hollow, almost ghostly shell can be filled up with alternate global identities for the purpose of fighting a global villain.

Another element that unites these diverse fighters is the corporate branding that Bruce Wayne cleverly executes. One aspect of this, the bat logo, is featured front and center on the cover of Issue #1. The new logo is reminiscent of the familiar black and grey bat logo, but with a throwback to the yellow outline that Julius Schwartz included as part of Batman's "new look" in 1964, and lettering that indicates the title of the new series and new direction of this superhero. While the bat logo used to be seen in very few places (Batman's chest, the Batmobile, and occasionally looming in the night sky as a warning of impending trouble for Gotham), the Batman branding now appears throughout these issues. Issue #6 is the first to show the sheer breadth of fighters that Batman has recruited for his project, and many of these Batman Incorporated members are marked with some version of the familiar bat logo (Figure 26). The bat logo also appears in the hands of everyday people, such as Commissioner Gordon when he flashes a version of the logo that he is wearing as a badge on his jacket lapel and asks, "Does the secret badge make *me* Batman too?" (Morrison, et al., *Batman Inc.* #6). Gordon's question implies the power behind the viral nature of this logo, the way it spreads into communities and each person who comes into contact with the logo feels a sense of possession over it and thus feels aligned with Batman. This branding technique gives Bruce Wayne the power to make Batman an omnipresent figure in the world, to visibly mark the fighters working under his direction, and to create communities of support on behalf of everyday people who feel empowered through their contact with the bat icon.

In addition, the bat logo specific to the *Batman Incorporated* series has also spread throughout our material world. It appears not only on the cover of each issue in this series written by Grant Morrison and illustrated by Paquette and others, but also those tangentially related to this series. One can glimpse down the row of Batman single issues at the local comic

book retailer and see the Batman Inc. logo stamped on a number of titles, from *Detective Comics*, to *The Dark Knight*, to *Catwoman*. This brand is a message from DC to readers that the story contained within the comic relates to the *Batman Incorporated* storyline that is being developed by Morrison and his creative team. For example, a reader might just be interested in Morrison's *Batman Incorporated* title, but once he/she sees the brand included on other series, such as *Catwoman*, or the Batman annual, the reader might also read those titles and become interested in entirely new series. This is yet another tool for DC to generate revenue and diversify readership. The brand is recognizable and symbolic, and DC capitalizes on its copyright structure, inviting other creators to work Morrison and his artists' narrative into their own series about characters who are related to Batman for increased marketability.

As Morrison and his creative team develop this cast of characters to carry the weight of the ever-present Batman branding, he continues his familiar techniques of building upon other writers' storylines from past issues of *Batman*, *Detective Comics*, and other related series. The idea for an international group of superheroes fighting under the inspiration of Batman is not a new one. The "Batmen of All Nations," which first appeared in *Detective Comics* #251 (1955) was comprised of a group of men from around the globe (the Ranger, the Musketeer, the Legionary, the Gaucho, and the Knight and Squire) who wanted to be the Batmen of their respective countries. This group (sans the Ranger), along with Superman and Robin, was later approached in *World's Finest Comics* #89 (1957) by millionaire John Mayhew to form a group of international superheroes called "The Club of Heroes."

Morrison revived the group in *Batman* #667-669, *The Black Glove*, in which The Club of Heroes reunites at Mayhew's island estate only to discover that one of the original members is working with an evil force called "The Black Glove," who reappears in the later story arc

*Batman R.I.P.* (mentioned above). Several members of this international club appear throughout Morrison's run with the Batman series, showing up to assist Batman in *R.I.P.* as he takes on Dr. Hurt, and then again as members of Batman's new group of allies in *Batman Inc.* El Gaucho of Argentina takes a prominent role in the *Batman Inc.* series, working alongside Batman to defeat El Sombrero and Scorpiana, villains who worked under The Black Glove in *R.I.P.* El Guacho even makes reference to the Club of Heroes when he initially resists Batman's offer to join Batman Inc. He explains, "As for 'Batman **Incorporated**,' I'm grateful and **flattered** you came all this way, but **El Gaucho** is his **own man**, Batman. Not an **employee**. We all know what happened when **John Mayhew** tried to buy his own personal **'Club of Heroes,'**…What makes Wayne any **different?**" (Morrison, *et al.*, *Batman Inc.* #3). To which Batman responds, "Wayne is helping me prepare for the fight of my life" (Morrison, *et al.*, *Batman Inc.* #3). El Gaucho, apparently having a change of heart about his involvement with Batman Inc. (though he has not yet submitted to the Batman branding/costuming), as well as Man of Bats, Red Raven, The Knight, and The Squire, all appear on the cover of *Batman Inc* #6, charging behind Batman, ready for battle (Figure 23). Remix expert Paul Miller (a.k.a. DJ Spooky) posits, "creativity becomes more rich…the deeper you dig in the archive" (Miller, *Vimeo*). Morrison's continual recycling and reviving of characters, plots, and images from the past, a defining feature of genre fiction, allows him to create a prolific and multilayered story line with multiple levels of participation available to readers. While one reader may enjoy a single, contained storyline, another may research old comic book issues in order to discover the origin of particular characters and conflicts, while yet another still may be a long-term reader excited to see the reappearance of a character from decades past, jogging his/her memory to consider the connections between past and present.

Work for Hire and Crossing Worlds

While Morrison's intricate, intertextual Batman stories illustrated by a variety of artists who likewise utilize remix techniques to build complex images, create many possibilities for reader enjoyment, the hand of the corporate author is also at play. Mainstream comic book editors shoulder the responsibility of producing works that achieve the delicate balance between character continuity and malleability that fans the flame of interest for a diverse body of readers. Editors profit from their management of multiple titles within a comic's universe by crossing over between characters and worlds to encourage readers to make connections within the genre universe and purchase additional titles to strengthen their understandings of those connections. The company's management and facilitation of connections between disparate comics series is the type of content control that courts cite as a justification for identifying employers as sole authors of works created by "employees" in a work for hire relationship. The current construction of major comic book publishing companies as the exclusive holder of copyrights over characters and storylines derives from the early nature of the industry as a producer of cheap comic books for a mass market rather than an industry that produced individual works of artist self-expression. The work for hire system that still currently acts as a model for mainstream comics publishers was first employed during the Golden Age of comics (roughly the period between the late 1930s to the early 1950s). Working conditions for comic book artists in the early days were not unlike those of the Early Industrial Age in the way that all artists, even those who were in-house staff, were treated as work-for-hire freelance artists, being paid low, per-page rates with no company benefits while the company retained all of the rights to their work (Lopes 101). This continued even after the Golden Age passed. Marvel, for example, stamped the back of each artist's paycheck with a statement that acted as a waiver of the rights to

one's work (Lopes 101). When Congress passed a new copyright act in 1976 to improve the rights of artists, DC and Marvel both took advantage of a loophole in the act that exempted work-for-hire artists from receiving the benefits of the new law, and drafted new contracts for their artists to sign that designated them as work for hire artists (Lopes 102). Both artist uprisings and the increased popularity of independent comics (in which the comic book creators retain the rights to their work) in the 1970s and 1980s helped secure greater benefits for artists, including profit-sharing and increased page rates. For the most part, however, mainstream comic book publishers still hold legal ownership over the content of the comic books they produce.

The concept of work for hire was first codified in American copyright law in The Copyright Act of 1909. In what Peter Jaszi calls a "reverse-twist on individualistic 'authorship'" employed in American law in the service of commerce ("Toward a Theory" 487), the new copyright act stated: "In the interpretation and construction of this title … the word 'author' shall include an employer in the case of works made for hire" (Sec. 26). The idea of vesting copyright in the employer rather than in the artists who labor over the conception and construction of the work seems contradictory to the argument in favor of giving artists the privilege of ownership over the works they create that was so integral to the development of copyright law in the eighteenth century. By the 1972 case of *Picture Music, Inc. v. Bourne Inc.*, the rationale behind this arrangement, which characterized the employer's role as the "motivating factor" behind a work's creation (1216), had become fully concretized.[59] In this case, Ann Ronnell was hired in

[59]The 1976 amendments to the Copyright Act regarding work for hire limited the circumstances under which a commissioned artist would be denied legal ownership of her own work. The new provision defined a work for hire as either (1) "a work prepared by an employee within the scope of his or her employment;" or (2) "a work specially ordered or commissioned for use" for one of nine purposes listed within the act so long as "the parties expressly agree in a written instrument signed by them that the work shall be considered a work made for hire" (17 U.S.C. Sec. 101). Thus, independent contracts and commissioned artists who are not working under an express work for hire contract may retain at least some element of authorship over their works. However the United States Supreme Court, in the case of *Community for Creative Non-Violence v. Reid* (1989), significantly undercut the compromise envisioned by Congress in its enactment of amendments to the work for hire provision. The Court overlooked the

1933 by Walt Disney and Irving Berlin, Inc. to help adapt the popular song "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" from the animated short film "The Three Little Pigs" for wide release. Ronnell worked with an employee of Berlin to rearrange musical themes and lyrics, as well as add her own lyrics. Ronnell sought to renew her copyright in the song 28 years later as a "joint author" of the work, but the Second Circuit Court of Appeals held that she was unable to do so because she was merely an "employee for hire" of Disney and Berlin. The Court found that only Disney (and Berlin, with Disney's permission) had the right to renew the work because "[t]hey controlled the original song, they took the initiative in engaging Miss Ronnell to adapt it, and they had the power to accept, reject, or modify her work" (1216).

With the language of "motivation," "control," "initiative," and "power," the Court casts the employer as a "visionary," while the artist is perceived to be a "mechanic following orders" (Jaszi, "Toward a Theory" 489). This rhetoric is reminiscent of the language used in the eighteenth century to compare "original works" and works created by the incorporation of preexisting texts. Prominent eighteenth-century writers and thinkers characterized writings inspired by preexisting texts as "imitative" and "mechanical" as opposed to "original" writings, which they described as coming from a place of instinct and genius that emerged from deep within the artist (Rose 118-19). The idea that writing practices that involved recycling and adapting prior works were devoid of creativity influenced the crafting of legislation that treated these works as having little value and being unworthy of copyright protection. Similarly, the artist employed in a work for hire arrangement is treated as a mere servant executing the genius of his/her master, casting side the expertise and talent of the artist that inspired the employer to

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dichotomy created between employees and independent contractors/commissioned artists that leads to different treatment of these respective entities under the law, and stated that anyone who can be defined as an agent of an employer (determined by an analysis of the level of control the employer exercises over the worker in question) is considered to be a work for hire employee for the purposes of the statute.

hire the artist in the first place. An example of this corporate control over content that constitutes authorship in the eyes of the law is the spread of the *Batman Incorporated* logo and story across a multitude of freestanding Batman titles that were previously unrelated to Batman's storyline. The web created by DC to increase readership across Batman titles and the expectation that artists and writers working under contract for DC will carry this connectivity to Morrison's *Batman Incorporated* storyline through in their own titles is the type of contribution to the building of the genre universe that courts characterize as authorial on the part of employers.

A more pronounced example of this occurs in the *Planetary* crossover "Night on Earth," a Batman single issue comic that incorporates the various iterations of Batman contained within the history of the DC Universe. *Planetary* made its first appearance in 1998 in a publication of Wildstorm, an independent comic book publisher that was bought out by DC in 1999. This series created by writer Warren Ellis and artist John Cassaday centers around three original superhuman characters who investigate strange phenomena in their mission to uncover the secrets of the world. Shortly after DC purchased Wildstorm, Ellis began writing three independent one-shot issues of *Planetary*, all later collected in a trade entitled *Planetary: Crossing Worlds*. Each issue is a crossover in which the Planetary team encounters preexisting characters from the DC Universe such as Superman, Wonder Woman, and Batman. DC's purchase of Wildstorm allowed Ellis and the many artists of these three issues to delve into the DC Universe and use characters and plot elements from these stories that would have otherwise been inaccessible to him without some sort of legal agreement with DC. The resulting Batman crossover "Night on Earth" is a dynamic story that capitalizes on the boundaries between various versions of Gotham and its antihero, the Batman.

The issue begins with the heads of the Planetary, Elijah Snow, Jakita Wagner, and The

Drummer, landing in their universe's Gotham. They introduce themselves to two of its citizens who work for the local Planetary office, Dick Grayson (most commonly known as Batman's first Robin), and his assistant Jasper, who with white skin, green hair, and a purple suit is easily recognizable to readers as some more human version of the villain known as The Joker. These opening pages raise a red flag alerting readers to the notable absence of Gotham's most famous character, The Batman. The heads of the Planetary have traveled to Gotham to track a mysterious figure, John Black. As the story unfolds, Elijah, Jakita, and The Drummer discover that Black and his parents were mutilated in an experimental concentration camp when Black was a child. The resulting effect on Black is that his brain is now, as Jakita puts it, "locked into the motion of the multiverse" (Ellis). Each time Black panics he creates a force-field that isolates a piece of the world and rewrites it so that everything within that bubble is now operating as a parallel universe to the one that the heads of the Planetary first found themselves in when they landed in Gotham. The medium of comic books, noteworthy for its distinctive formal construction of time and space, provides an ideal canvas for an exploration of time continuum and parallel universes. The pages that follow remediate moments of Batman's history by way of a journey through parallel universes in order to convey the complexity and range of the Batman character.

The first time Black crumbles to the ground in fear and his brain shifts universes, the Planetary has its first run-in with the large, winged dark knight who descends from the sky, himself in pursuit of Black. Each time Black erupts and the universe shifts again, Jakita and her cohort come into contact with a different version of Batman since his original appearance in popular culture in 1939. Batman's 70-year history is collapsed into brief flashes that each symbolized a distinct stylistic representation of this character. The first is the campy, soft-bodied

Batman ’66 with his ‘Bat-Female-Villain-Repellent’ reminiscent of the Shark-Repellent bat spray used by Batman in the film (Figure 27). Next comes Frank Miller’s Dark Knight, who is so large and hulking that he can hardly fit within the comic’s frames, characteristic of the way he is represented in Miller’s story (Figure 28). Next is the 1964 “New Look” Batman with the characteristic yellow and black Batman insignia and deference to the criminal justice system. A final, more futuristic Batman (perhaps one that faithful readers haven’t yet encountered) is able to calm Black, talk to him, and share his own experience of losing his parents and how it has shaped his life. Once Black is no longer in a state of panic, Batman and this parallel universe fades and returns to its original form before Black began shifting worlds. Because Batman is such an iconic character, even partakers of popular culture who aren’t familiar with Batman comics are generally aware of the many ways the character has grown and changed over the years. But having such a sharp juxtaposition of so many varying Batman looks and characterizations in the span of a few pages draws a keen awareness to the very ability of this character to constantly shift and represent the various ideological turns in our culture. The backdrop of the crossover world (in contrast to the everyday Gotham that is commonly featured in Batman comics) serves to emphasize the peculiarity of this quality.

Ellis and Cassaday’s access to these multiple narratives and representations of Batman from the past enables his meta-commentary about the many shifts and iterations of this iconic character. Batman’s 70-year history is collapsed into brief flashes that each symbolize a distinct stylistic representation of this character. Ellis and Cassaday show that despite all of the variants, each character is recognizable as Batman. This story inspires lively reading by creating a collage of a wide variety of Batman representations from across time, each representation separated by mere slivers of white space. The collapsing of time draws attention to the real-world

impossibility of this timeless, ageless character whose fate is determined through a collaboration of editorial control and the creative output of writers and artists.

While the *Planetary/Batman* crossover paints a harmonious picture of maximum creative potential reached through exciting collaborations between narrative worlds, the reality is that the work for hire structure that enabled DC to facilitate this crossover between two worlds without having to secure copyright permissions from individual artists is dismissive of artists' contributions. Allowing corporate authors to receive the legal benefits of ownership over the ideas and images largely generated by their comic book creator employees diminishes the innovative creative work achieved by artists and writers such as Morrison, Ross, Paquette, Ellis, and Cassady. As a matter of fact, several artists' estates have filed suit against comic book companies over the legal rights to characters that have recently gained popularity (and generated profit) due to their appearance in popular films such as *Captain America: The First Avenger*, *Thor*, and the *Iron Man* franchise. The estates of Superman co-creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster have been in legal battles with DC since 2009 over the legal ownership of early Superman stories, a central focus of which is the nature of the employer-employee relationship between DC and the groundbreaking artists. The estate of Jack Kirby, co-creator of such popular characters as The Fantastic Four and Iron Man, just lost a case at the District Court level seeking copyright termination of his characters with Marvel and several studios producing films that feature his characters. The estate has announced intent to appeal the case.

While there is a guarantee of a certain kind of quality (and assurance of revenue) that comes with having the DC or Marvel logo printed onto your work, there are other means of achieving the kind of remediation characteristic of character-driven franchises that are free of the restrictions of work for hire. For example, projects like *The Joker Blogs*, an ongoing web series

spinoff of director Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, and *Nightwing: The Series*, an in-production 3-part miniseries that just reached its funding goal on Kickstarter.com, have become increasingly popular since Warner Bros. (now owner of DC) issued a statement in 2005 assuring that it would only take legal action against fan films that are either commercial or depict inappropriate activity. Though fans now have seemingly increased freedom to produce their own works based on DC characters, they are funded largely through donations and cannot generate revenue, severely limiting the scope of who can actually afford to produce such works.

Outside of the realm of Batman-related works, there are large-scale efforts being made to invite the ecstasy of influence into methods of creative production. One of the most prominent of these that has been gaining steam since its introduction to the public in 2002 is the Creative Commons, "a nonprofit organization that enables the sharing and use of creativity and knowledge through free legal tools." Creative Commons created a licensing system that allows users to designate different levels of copyright ownership over a creation for different uses, including the option of dedicating one's work to the public domain. The use of Creative Commons licenses has spread rapidly since the first licenses were issued free to the public in 2002, with Creative Commons licenses employed by such popular sites as Wikipedia, Google, and Flickr. Not only does this creative use of licensing allow everyday media creators and consumers to easily designate their own works as available for sharing, recycling, and remediating, but as the use of Creative Commons licensing grows so does the public commons, as more and more works are being designated as available to the public for free and legal use.

The increasing desire to find ways to facilitate the production of creative works that create readerly pleasure through the remediation of preexisting works is part and parcel of a recent cultural shift towards greater participation on behalf of media consumers in the production

of knowledge. New media scholar Henry Jenkins claims that we no longer live in a spectator culture, but rather a "participatory culture" in which "audiences are no longer passive spectators, but rather participants who interact with media producers" (3). Paul Miller, a.k.a DJ Spooky, explains that convergent spaces like the World Wide Web are participatory spaces that allow the opportunity for the creation of new kinds of stories (*Brian Lehrer Live*). In the world of comic books, readers actively participate in the storytelling process by creating closure between each individual panel. As McCloud explains it, "every act committed to paper by the comics artist is aided and abetted by a silent accomplice. An equal partner in crime known as the reader" (68). Readers also participate actively when they read images, character representations, and story arcs against each other, making connections between materials that are being juxtaposed in unexpected ways. They have the opportunity to sift through old material and enjoy its revival in the context of new storylines, much in the way listeners of sampled music take pleasure in the combination of new and old scores. In addition, comic book writers are also participatory readers who have inherited the responsibility of bringing these characters to life and continuing a tradition through revising and recycling characters' histories as they envision new paths for them. The increasing public interest in embracing the influence of others as a building block for new ideas and inventions is the backbone of this shift from a spectator to a participatory culture.

In a recent dialog with Miller and David Cheah (General Counsel for Vimeo), Lessig addresses our culture's lack of digital rights with regard to creative works that are the product of collaboration and remixing, claiming, "the only way we are going to be able to get to a place where you have digital rights is if we teach the culture and the law that this is the kind of creativity that should be respected and encouraged" (Miller, *Vimeo*). Lessig believes the most crucial step in this education campaign is to spread this form of expression into every possible

context, from schools, to public performances, to social spaces such as bars. In order for the law to value this form of cultural expression and make room for it in our current intellectual property configuration, "people have got to be able to see this form of expression as a form of expression that defines art in this era" (Miller, *Vimeo*). This form of creative expression has been central to superhero comic books and other works of genre fiction for decades, and it can serve as one piece of the educational campaign to create greater awareness about the value and benefits of remediation, remix, sampling, participatory culture, and a broadening of the public commons. While the sharing and collaboration that is integral to superhero comic book writing and illustration was an unintentional side effect of a corporate structure that sought to privilege comic book companies' profit margins over individual artists' earning potentials, it is now a defining feature of the genre that has developed an extensive fan culture. Hopefully the growing interest in and greater education about the innovative potential of remediation will foster a trend towards open source practices that radically reconceptualize restrictive definitions of authorship.


Figure 16: Excerpt of Batman's origin from *Detective Comics* #33 (Kane 62- 63). Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.

Figure 17: Excerpt of Batman's origin from Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* (Miller, et al. 14). Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.


Figure 18: Jason Horn's take on Batman's origin. Used with permission.


Figure 19: The Batman of Zur-en-arrh, as featured in Grant Morrison and Tony Daniels' *Batman R.I.P.* Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.

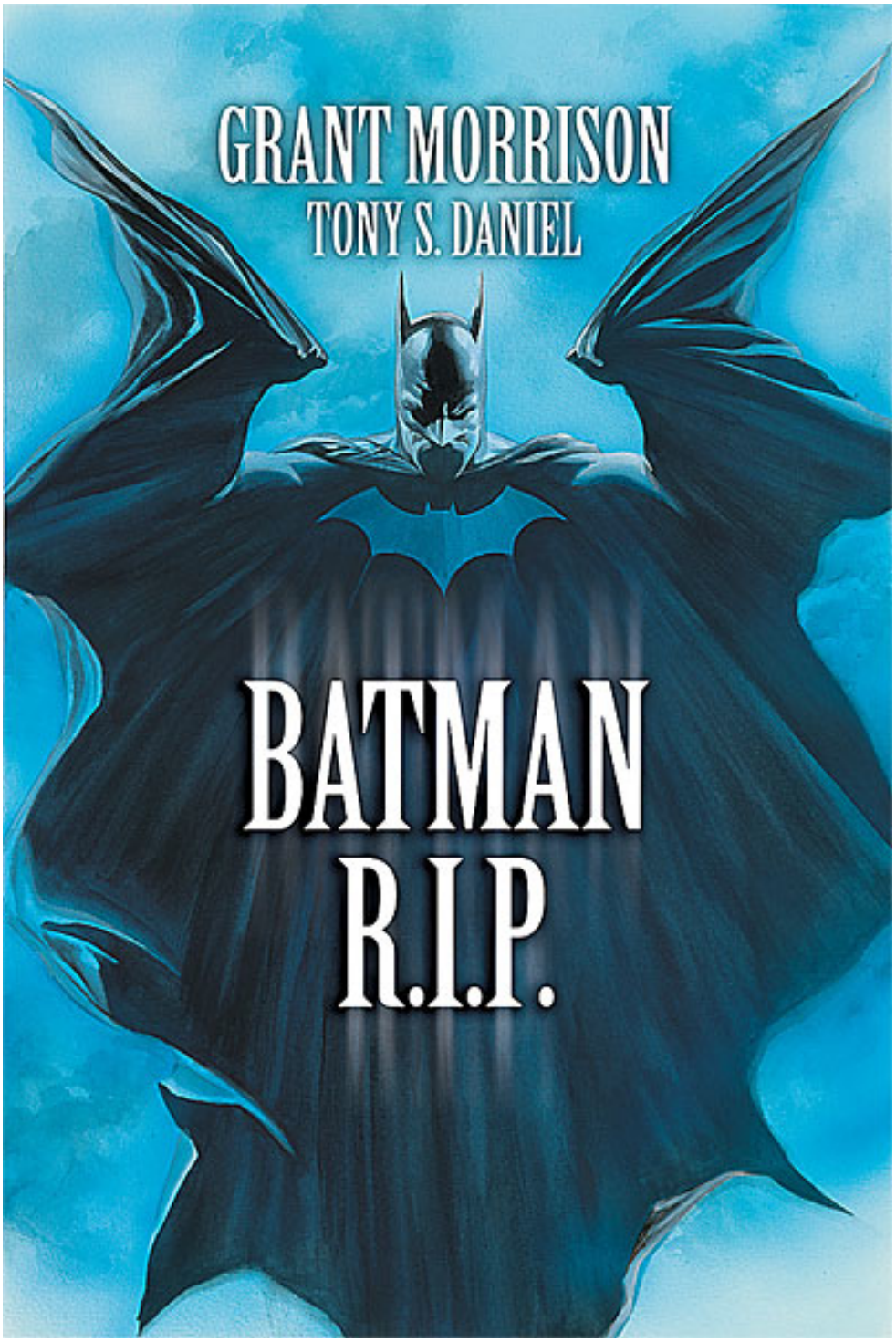


Figure 20: Alex Ross cover art for *Batman R.I.P.* Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.

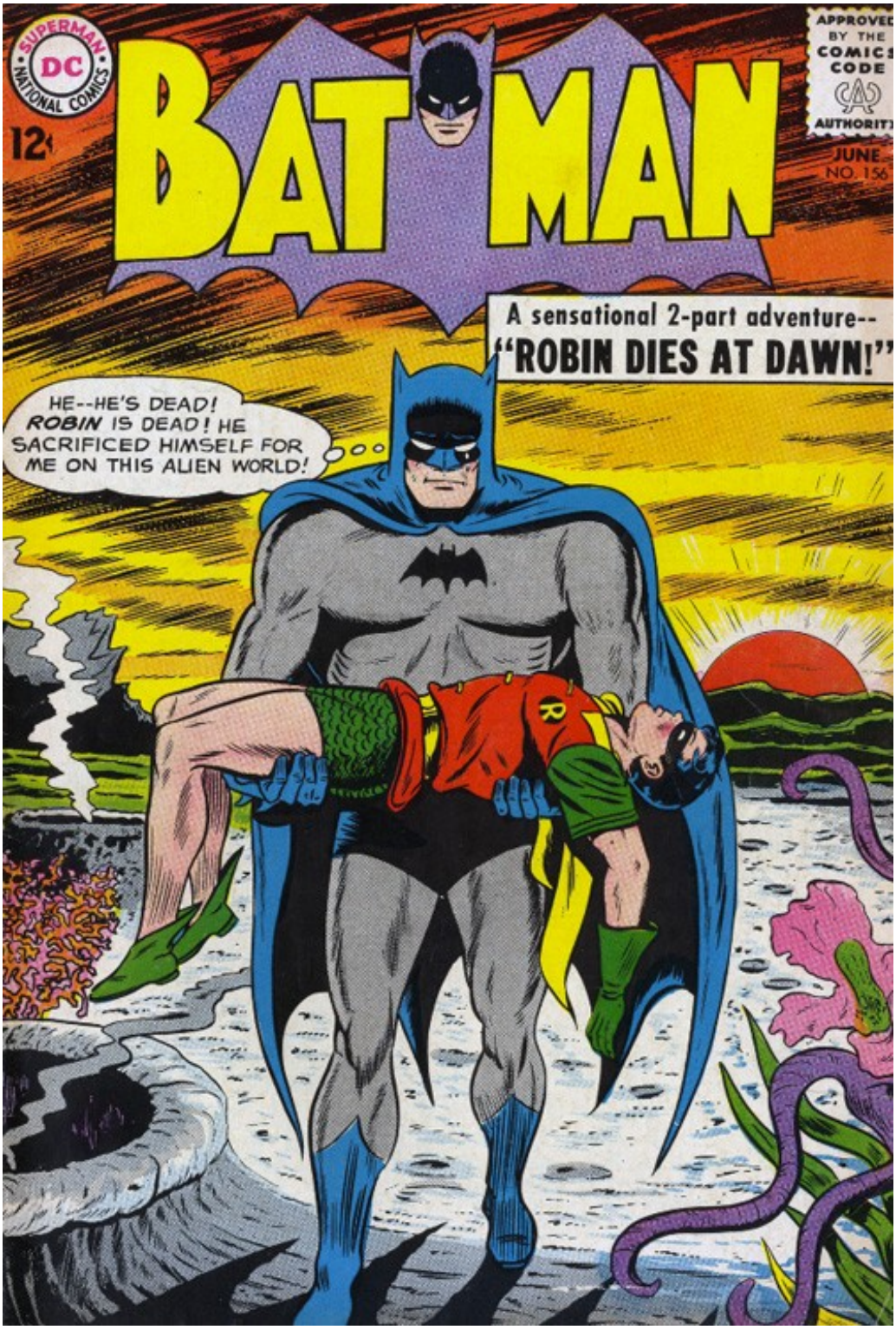


Figure 21: Batman and Robin on the cover of "Robin Dies at Dawn" (Finger). Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.


Figure 22: Batman and The Joker, as featured in Andy Kubert's *Batman and Son* (12). Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.


Figure 23: Cover art for *Batman Incorporated #6*: Batman and his Bat-army (Morrison, et al.). Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.


Figure 24: Jiro and his new batsuit in *Batman Incorporated* #2 (Morrison, et al). Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.

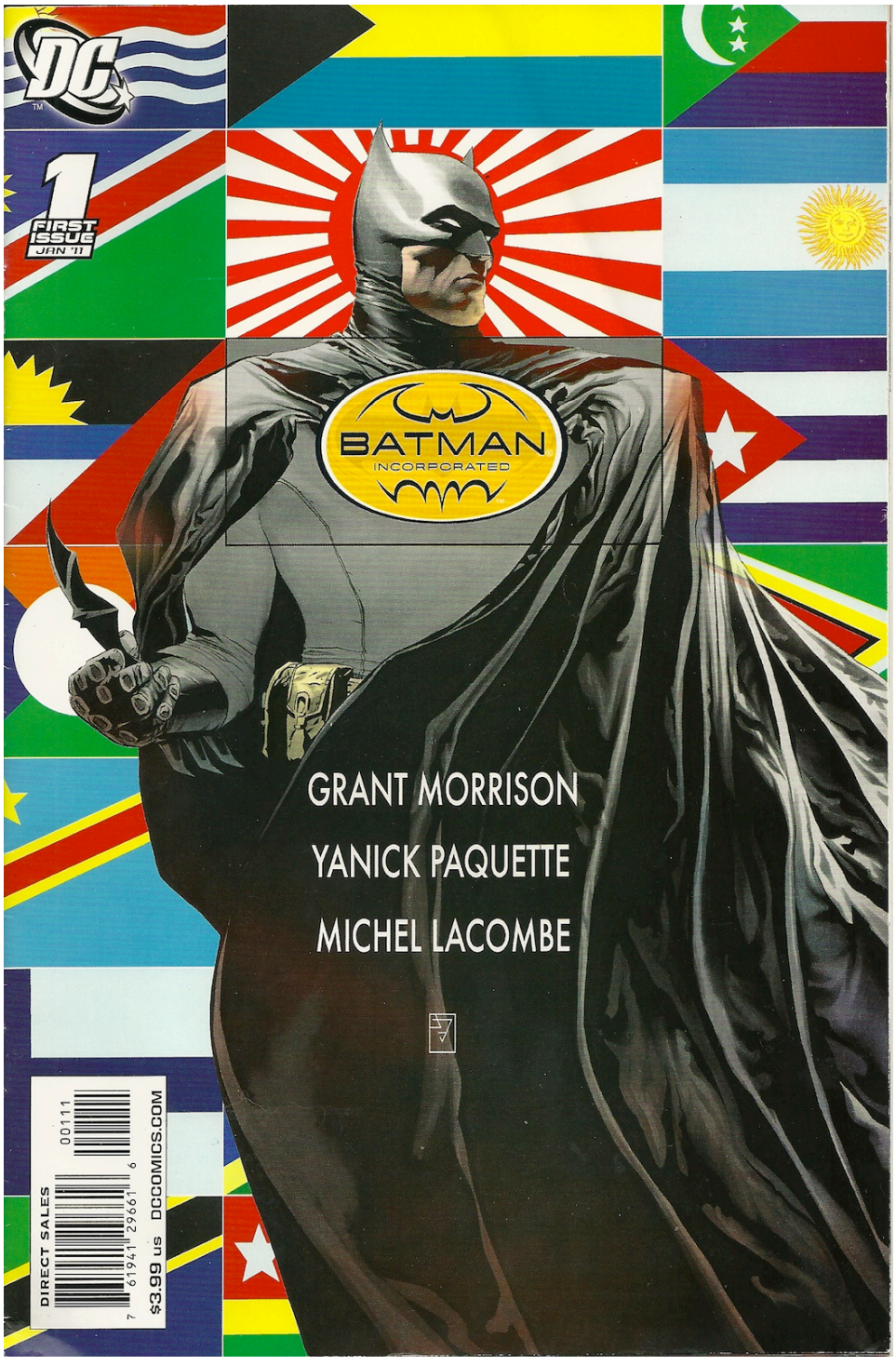


Figure 25: Batman as a global entity on the cover of *Batman Incorporated* #1 (Morrison, et al.). Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.


Figure 26: Batman's new recruits on the title page for *Batman Incorporated #6* (Morrison, et al.). Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.


Figure 27: Batman in the style of Batman ’66 in the *Planetary* crossover “Night on Earth” (Ellis, et al.). Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.

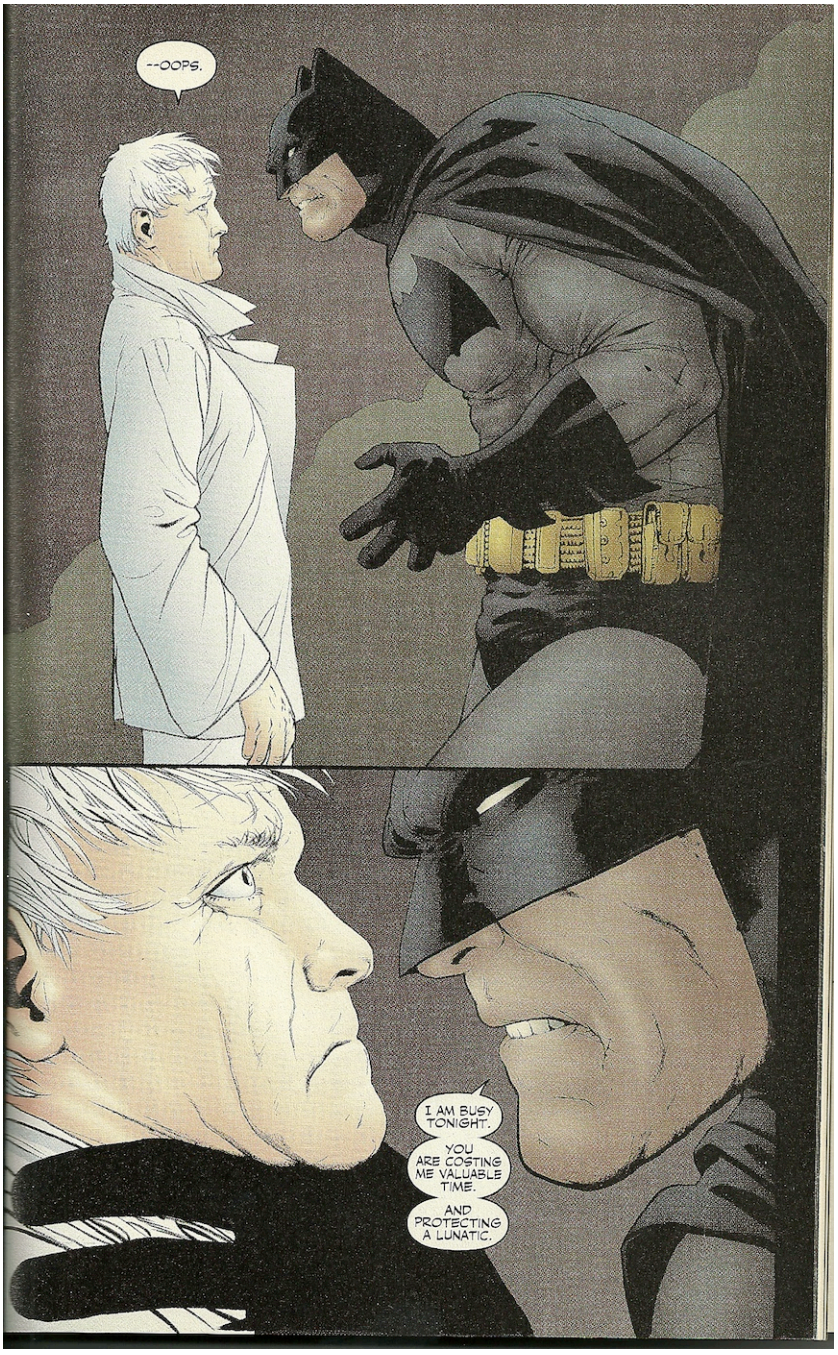


Figure 28: Batman in the style of Frank Miller's Dark Knight in the *Planetary* crossover "Night on Earth" (Ellis, et al.). Used with permission. Ó DC Comics.

# Coda

The narratives I have traced here of the pleasures and insights gained through remediative creative practices provide an important frame for considering the relationship between human agency and technology, as well as the role of the legal system in regulating such practices. Heralded as a visionary for his predictions about the future of electronic technology, Marshall McLuhan is well-known in media theory for his observation that "all technologies are extensions of our physical and nervous systems to increase power and speed" (90) and, "[a]ny extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex" (4). McLuhan's observations become more and more prescient, as digital technologies facilitate quicker connections between humans and increased access to an ever-growing archive of digitized information. No doubt the ease of access to information and communication at the push of a button on a handheld device has led to meaningful transformations of Western society. What remains to be seen is how the law will ultimately regulate the mergers of human agency and technology that have come about in the Digital Age.

One of the underlying themes of renowned legal historian Lawrence Friedman's work is that "law is a creature of society" (588). While there have certainly been instances of lawmaking bodies espousing unpopular viewpoints,[60] legislative and judicial decision-making is heavily influenced by social norms and cultural beliefs, as judges and legislators "live in this society

[60] One of the most notable of these is the United States Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), in which the Court held that Virginia's anti-miscegenation statute violated both the Due Process Clause and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, ultimately rendering all race-based restrictions on marriage unenforceable.

[and] breathe the same air, read the same books, watch the same programs, think the same thoughts, as other members of society" (Friedman 272). If "[a]ny major advance in…technology leaves its mark on the law" (Friedman 548), what mark has the influence of digital technologies left? The legal community's reaction to new technologies has been restrictive rather than accepting, often leaning towards the protection of private interests over potential benefits to the public. The bottom line is that current trends in media production and consumption are at great odds with intellectual property regulations. Lessig believes that in order for the law to legitimate open source creative practices, people must perceive our era as defined by this kind of artistic expression. In many ways American culture has become saturated with open source artistic expression, yet the legal system is slow to reflect the change.

From the literature to popular music to academic scholarship, remediative and open source practices have infused our cultural fabric. The subset of Digital Age literary works explored in this dissertation, for example, remediate preexisting texts in ways that encourage readers to shift between close and distracted modes of reading to discover energizing juxtapositions and instabilities. In the world of popular music, sampling has evolved from an illegal, underground act to a legitimate form of mainstream entertainment. Hip hop artist Macklemore, whose recent song "Thrift Shop"[61] is one of two independent songs in history to reach #1 on the US Billboard Hot 100, built his career and popularity on mixtapes and sampling. Open source has hit the academy as well, with the recent launch of the "MLA Commons" by the Modern Language Association. MLA Commons is a scholarly communication platform and social networking site that allows users to create individual profiles, connect with other users, and post up works in progress for the purpose of receiving feedback through annotation and

[61] While "Thrift Shop" doesn't include any direct beats from other works, the song is actually about the process of repurposing, with the refrain "I wear your granddad's clothes" repeated throughout the chorus. (Cite)

commenting features. MLA is offering the service, conceived by their Director of Scholarly Communication Kathleen Fitzpatrick, in an effort to create a sustainable future for online scholarly work through efforts that connect creative minds and attempt to dissolve stigmas about the nature of digital work. The MLA Commons is one tool in a growing field of digital humanities that is working to devise new pedagogies and research approaches that bridge disciplinary divides, combat feelings of isolation, and build sustainable knowledge communities that can efficiently and imaginatively engage with important research questions.

The flood of open source creative processes that are increasingly valued in a range of fields and continue to proliferate has led to shifting cultural perceptions regarding the grey area between permissible sharing and unlawful appropriation. For example, evidence of public reaction to the federal charges against computer programmer and open source activist Aaron Swartz materialized in a popular internet meme that spread throughout social networking sites following Swartz's passing. The meme features a photograph of Swartz and reads "Organizer, human rights activist and co-founder of Reddit and Demand Progress commits suicide after being prosecuted for downloading 4 million+ academic journals to share with public for free." While the text is factually incorrect (Swartz had not yet been prosecuted for any charges) and the link of causation between Swartz's legal troubles and his death are problematic, the rhetoric is noteworthy. The meme insinuates that Swartz was the victim of an unjust legal system. Its popularity reflects a cultural consensus about the questionable ethics of the lawsuit, and expresses the position that downloading scholarly articles from an online academic database for the purpose of distributing them to the public for free with no potential for personal monetary gain should not be considered criminal activity, especially one punishable by a maximum of 35 years of imprisonment and one million dollars in fines. The public's accusations of prosecutorial

overreach by the Department of Justice and US Attorney Carmen Ortiz is further evidence of the escalating tension between the law and digital media users concerning the definition and boundaries of open source in the Digital Age.

The 1735 *Letter from an Author to a Member of Parliament* excerpted in the Introduction to this dissertation warned of the potential dangers of "the laying all Copies open," and the probable "Disputes, Disorders, and Confusion" that would arise from not recognizing a copyright in creators of literary works (Rose 57). This dissertation certainly does not advocate for the "laying all Copies open," as the elimination of copyright would in turn remove economic incentives for innovation, a necessary enticement for those who make a living through the publication of their creations. My ultimate goal is rather to take issue with the perceived "Disputes, Disorders, and Confusion" that would arise from assigning credibility to creative works that are produced through open source practices and creating a more expansive public commons. In many ways, the prediction that greater textual openness might lead to "Disputes, Disorders, and Confusion" has come true, but largely not for the reasons anticipated, such as exploitation of works held in common. Rather, the disorientation and frustration has arisen from the lack of balance between the promotion of progress through the provision of incentives for authors and inventors and the period of exclusive rights secured for their writings and discoveries as expressed in the Copyright Clause of the Constitution.[62] Friedman claims that "the steps along the way" to legal change influenced by the introduction of new technologies is often "subtle and incremental," and that "[t]he real question is what aspects of society make the legal system run, and how" (589). The dominant narrative of authorship as an individualistic endeavor

[62] As communication scholar Daniel M. Downes points out in his article "New Media Economy: Intellectual Property and Cultural Insurrection," "In the end, copyright protection does not provide incentive to produce. Indeed, it is absurd to think that computer software needs protection for up to a century."

that leads to the entitlement of a century-long monopolization of ideas has fueled the legal system's resistance to change for the benefit of the public. The law could benefit from taking into account the history of creative production that supports remediation, remix, collaboration, and sharing as valid forms of creative production that generate imaginative and resourceful works that enhance public welfare. This project looks towards a future in which the two competing histories of creative production can merge, resulting in a legal approach that embraces artistic influence as an integral part of our past, and opens up possibilities for communal models of ownership that hold promise for future innovations.

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