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## SECTION I: *Ghost World, Girls, and Adolescence*

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Daniel Clowes On . . .

Why He Makes Comics I’d say that someone who draws comics for a living is very likely . . . in search of some form of control over something. I draw comics, it often seems, to relieve my anxiety over living in a world that seems dangerously chaotic and random, so it would only make sense that the characters that seem the most interesting to me are those with the same sort of issues. Having the power to erase human beings from your comics (or perhaps to cover them with Wite-Out) is not so dissimilar to wiping them out with a ray gun. ¹

Artistic Honesty I’m trying to be as honest as I can in my work and trying to find a way to communicate the unspeakable things that go on in my inner life. Things that I couldn’t quite articulate in a sentence, I’m trying to express through these created worlds and characters interacting with each other, and explore the various things that I find interesting, or exciting or anxiety provoking, or that engender some kind of emotion in me. ²

The Inner Lives of Children and Adolescents I guess it always struck me that young characters, teenagers, and children are never given their due in terms of the complexity that lies within them. I remember having very complicated thoughts when I was a kid and trying to piece things together that were very mysterious and had a hugeness about them. ³

¹ Interview by Jason Chen. details.com, 10/12/2011.
² Interview by Ariel Lewis. thevarsity.ca, 10/16/2011.
³ Lewis. thevarsity.ca.
Late- and Post-Adolescence / Nature versus Nurture

I see a lot of possibilities in that age [18–21]. You have a window of opportunity when you leave your childhood behind and have this chance to become what you always wanted to be. For me, that was a time when I could have gone many different ways. I was in flux and deciding what kind of person I would become. There’s something interesting about the vision of what that will be and the reality of making that happen, and how you really are what you are. Unless you’re “in character,” it’s impossible to get around that. I can see it in my son. He’s three years old and has such a clear personality. I don’t think it has anything to do with our influence. All we can do is inflect it somehow, but he already is his own person.

Likable Characters

I have a very low tolerance for the falsely likable characters of most movies and fiction. Like villains, disagreeable characters give you so much more than the amiable ciphers one is usually asked to identify with. But I think it’s essential, over the course of each story, for the author (i.e., me) to find a way to fully embrace and understand his protagonist’s humanity and, in the final reckoning, to find a way to love and forgive this misguided monster.

Nihilism, Misanthropy, and Humor

People who see nihilism [in my work] are unable to see beneath the surface. I don’t see how someone could be nihilistic and put the amount of effort into their artwork that I do.

I would hope that if you really read the work carefully, [misanthropy] wouldn’t be all you took away from it. Because certainly that’s not my intention. And I often don’t see the parts that people find especially grim and depressing. I usually find whatever I’m doing to be funny. And often I’m surprised when people say, “I was so depressed for two weeks after reading that comic.” Not me.

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5 Interview by Brian Hieggelke. lit.newcity.com, 10/12/2011.
7 Interview by Hillary Chute. timeout.com/newyork, 4/26/2010.
**Drawing Eyes** That’s always the last thing I do on a drawing. I leave the eyes blank. And people have come over and seen my work on the drawing board and found it very disconcerting and very weird that there are these faces with no eyes. But [the eyes are] the key to the drawing . . . and . . . have to show some humanity behind them — even if they’re very simple circles. That’s how you can tell if a character is alive or not. It’s not something you can consciously do.⁸

**Awkwardness** I find awkwardness to be dramatically interesting, I guess. . . . I’ve often had experiences just making a doctor’s appointment on the phone and it has this great dramatic import for me, so that’s something that I’ve always gravitated towards as good material. I know a lot of people who don’t respond to that in their daily lives and find it just odd that anyone would have found these little awkward moments interesting.⁹

**Suspense and Manipulation** I mean, I can like the idea of it, but suspense is always done in a way that’s manipulative of the audience; and I don’t like to manipulate the audience unless it’s in a very sadistic way where they’re not rewarded [laughs] at the end. So I try to avoid that. . . . I try to have some kind of a balance; I want there to be some momentum that keeps people reading. And I don’t want somebody just to pick up one of my books, start anywhere and then read a few pages and put it down and not feel compelled to move on. But I don’t want to have that feeling of audience manipulation where they’re on the edge of their seat waiting for what they know will happen.¹⁰

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Comics and Film  When I’m
doing comics, I don’t think
in terms of cinematic flow.
Great comics have their
own rhythm — that’s what
they’re all about. It’s the
beat to the storytelling that
makes them come alive.11

Telling a story through moving visuals in a movie and telling a story through still
visuals are so unbelievably different. . . . It’s very confusing to try to take a still im-
age from a comic and put motion to it and bring it to life.12

There are certain things in comics that you can’t do in any other medium: for in-
stance, in Mister Wonderful, the narration overlaps the events as they’re going on.
That would be difficult in film; you could blot speech out with a voiceover, but it
wouldn’t have the same effect. That’s always of interest, to see what new things you
can do in comics form.13

“Graphic Novel”  I don’t think it’s a good
term. I think it’s pretentious. I don’t like the
term “graphic.” It has connotations, I think,
that don’t apply to what’s being done. Most
of the main graphic novels, like Maus and
Fun Home and Persepolis, are not novels at
all. They’re non-fiction. . . . Somebody who
actually cares about the English language
will see what it applies to and think, “These
people are stupid, using a really imprecise
term.” But that being said . . . I’m tired of talking about the term for this thing.
People just sort of accept it now, and I’m just perfectly happy to use it.”

I’m a cartoonist. . . .15

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11 Interview by Mike Sacks. mcsweeneys.net, c. 2009.
14 Interview by Tristan LaPointe. maisonneuve.org, 9/16/2011.
An Introduction to The Daniel Clowes Reader

The comics in this collection reflect the remarkable breadth of Clowes’s career. The cartoonist is equally accomplished in the long form graphic novel, graphic short story, single-page comic, and newspaper comic-strip format — and, as Modern Cartoonist shows, he’s a formidable prose writer and comics theorist. All of The Reader’s stories first appeared between 1990 and 2008, but the collection centers on the 1990s, the decade in which Ghost World was serialized (from 1993-1997) and published as a graphic novel (in 1997). This era is crucial both to Clowes’s history and the development of American cartooning. Comics like “Art School Confidential,” “Caricature,” “Blue Italian Shit,” and especially Ghost World established Clowes’s reputation, helped to legitimize comics as a serious medium, and laid the groundwork for the post-2000 “graphic novel revolution.”

The Reader’s three sections draw attention to themes that recur during this important period: Section I focuses on representations of female adolescence and coming of age; Section II examines male adolescence and post-adolescence; and Section III looks at Clowes’s depictions of the creative process and reader reception. Collectively, these comics show Clowes to be an uncompromising cultural critic and an empathetic storyteller.

Stories about Growing Up

Much of Clowes’s work in the 1990s draws inspiration from childhood and adolescence. Like most adults, he has a complicated relationship to his past. While he “would never want to relive” it, these stories illustrate his investment in un-
nderstanding the dynamics of his formative years. These comics convey an ambivalence toward the past and past selves that adults and teenagers find compelling. Readers respond to the unusual candor and humor of Clowes’s narratives, praising their ability to capture the rhythms of teenage speech and the wandering, uncertain plots of adolescent life. Reviewers have compared *Ghost World* to J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* and other seminal fictions about adolescence. Like Salinger, Clowes, who once described his teenage self as “the perfect alienated Holden Caulfield type,” taps into the teenage anxiety prevalent in post-war twentieth-century America.

Female readers, in particular, have marveled at Clowes’s realistic portrayal of *Ghost World*’s heroines Enid and Rebecca. Asked repeatedly how, as a man, he was able to write such “convincing teenage girl dialogue,” the cartoonist has said that for inspiration he looked to girls he had known in art school:

> I knew a lot of girls who were very similar to those girls, who kind of acted like them. And I realized that girls were not being depicted as I had known them, which was a lot more sort of like boys. Sort of like sexually aggressive, and just . . . swearing and obnoxious. You don’t see that. Girls are always sort of sweeter, these dumb, kind of catty valley-girl types, like in *Clueless*.

Readers often praise *Ghost World* as an “authentic,” “honest,” and “poignant” antidote to formulaic depictions of young women. Clowes’s affectionate-yet-unflinching portrayal of the girls’ bond, they argue, is free from the idealization and condescension that plagues many fictional female friendships, especially those written by men. One critic simply refers to the girls’ relationship as “the most realistic teen friendship ever.”

The success of *Ghost World* and its 2001 movie adaptation have made Enid and Rebecca Clowes’s most famous characters. But as he worked on the graphic novel, the cartoonist was also documenting male adolescence and its discontents. “Like a

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2 Groth. p. 65.
3 From Clowes’s introduction to *Ghost World: Special Edition*, which is reprinted in *The Daniel Clowes Reader*.
5 Clowes noted that he receives “letters from people all the time saying . . . *[Ghost World]* is a very accurate depiction of female friendship’ and ‘I really relate to these characters. I’ve never got anything less than that from any female reader, which is very gratifying. But a lot of men are creeped out by it: ‘How do you know what this is like; what do you think you’re doing?’” (Interview by Dave Howard. *Don’t Touch Me* #6 (Spring 1997). *Conversations*. p. 65.)
7 Written by Clowes and director Terry Zwigoff, the *Ghost World* movie was released in the summer of 2001. Starring Thora Birch as Enid and Scarlet Johansson as Rebecca, it was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay.
Weed, Joe” narrates a lonely summer in the life of thirteen-year-old Rodger Young, whose last name suggests he may represent young men who came of age in the ’70s. Set in 1979, “Blue Italian Shit” follows Rodger at eighteen; he’s on his own and moving into adulthood by way of post-adolescence, a liminal stage that, in Clowes’s work, brings with it its own set of expectations and disappointments.

Rather than relying on familiar gender stereotypes, Clowes’s stories about adolescence dramatize challenges shared by teenage boys and girls alike, especially the struggle to create an authentic identity. The narratives play out the never-ending dialectic between conformity and rebellion that rattles our teen brains as we try on new personas, hoping to figure out who we are and who we wish to become. Like Enid, Rodger desperately wants to reinvent himself (as Clowes did when he arrived in New York City for art school). As “Blue Italian Shit” begins, a dejected Rodger walks down a dirty New York street, introducing himself to readers as an eighteen-year-old virgin. Given this opening, we may expect the narrative to follow a common rite-of-passage plot: boy leaves adolescence, enters adulthood via sex. But Clowes rarely gives us the formulas we expect.

“The Party” portrays post-adolescence as a stage that goes on for so long it effectively erases adulthood, the ostensible end-point of our development. The story’s male and female partiers may be twenty-somethings, but their world evokes the atmosphere of never-ending, aimless youth. These figures engage in unconvincing performances of unstable identities. In a barely furnished room, a “creep” listens to a schlocky LP from the ’70s, believing (as some hipsters do) that liking something uncool will instantly make him cool. The cartoonist shows, however, that those who adopt an ironic pose toward pop culture inevitably become poseurs. Yet Clowes wants us to look beyond our knee-jerk judgments about other people. What anxiety, he prompts us to ask, lies behind the hipster’s kitschy façade — and what anxiety underlies the narrator’s anti-hipster hostility? Is it fear of adulthood that leads these characters to retreat into the reassuring nostalgia of a personal or cultural past?

Like Ghost World, “Blue Italian Shit,” and “The Party,” many of Clowes’s short stories reject a goal-oriented narrative in which characters, having undergone a dramatic change, arrive at a new identity or sense of maturity. “I don’t think that
people change very much,” Clowes observed. “That whole notion of a character arc is sort of false.” His stories expose the standard coming-of-age narrative as a cultural and literary lie. The truth is less spectacular: our personal narratives rarely contain the kind of life-altering epiphanies that we have been told to expect. Believing that such moments exist, we anxiously, and mistakenly, await a time when we will be fundamentally different.

Countering this belief, Clowes’s episodic narratives de-emphasize plot and epiphany in favor of the minor events that make up daily life. The cartoonist finds the awkwardness of mundane existence “dramatically interesting.” “I’ve felt extremely awkward my entire life,” Clowes noted, “and I’ve always sort of made dramatic moments . . . out of the tiniest little things that to most people wouldn’t be tension-filled at all.” His stories frequently rely on scenes of understated distress — a weird encounter on a subway, a strained conversation in a convenience store, an unrecognized gesture of friendship.

Given its adult protagonist, Clowes’s “Black Nylon” might seem worlds away from the themes of childhood or adolescence. Yet, as a superhero story, it belongs to a genre long associated with boys; and, based on Freudian principles, it probes the hero’s troubled boyhood. “Black Nylon”’s less-than-super superhero frantically seeks, but never finds, an epiphany that will allow him to move beyond his childhood self. The predicaments of the minor boy characters (most of whom appear only briefly) represent intrusions of the past into the hero’s present: the story’s unnamed boys are avatars of the unnamed hero. In the panel on the right, the protagonist identifies with a ghostly boy who’s bullied on the street. The external world is a magic screen onto which the hero projects his psychic history.

Even when fully grown, Clowes implies, we are haunted by our younger selves. The coming-of-age moment we look for never comes: “I think whatever your identity is when you’re ten years old is pretty much the identity you’ll have throughout the rest of your life. You figure out different ways and strategies to make it palatable.” Whether adult super-beings or awkward teens, Clowes’s characters pursue a modest goal: they hope to put the past behind them and make the present a little more livable.

10 Interview in Designer Magazine (December 2002). p. 13.
Genre, Art, and Style

Stories like *Ghost World* and “Blue Italian Shit” demonstrate Clowes’s sophisticated take on the “coming-of-age” narrative. He knows the genre’s conventions but frequently reworks or ignores them — in fact, both of these comics could be read as rejections of the genre’s guiding principles. Few artists have employed, investigated, and parodied as many narrative genres as Clowes. *Ghost World* represents the literary graphic novel, a long, fictional comic that focuses on the daily lives and dramas of realistic characters. “Blue Italian Shit” and “Like a Weed, Joe” fit into “slice of life” fiction and character sketch, while *Modern Cartoonist*, which discusses cartooning at the end of the twentieth century, is an illustrated prose manifesto. “Introduction,” which chronicles Clowes’s history as a comics reader and creator, is autobiography, while “Daniel G. Clowes™ in Just Another Day . . .” could be called “anti-autobiography”; it mocks conventions of the autobiographical comic, a popular early 1990s alternative comics genre. Though Clowes’s body of work is too varied to be defined by a single term, we wouldn’t be too far off if we called it all “comedy.” “I don’t think I’ve ever done anything,” the cartoonist observed, “that I didn’t think was very funny on some level.”¹¹

Throughout his stories, Clowes simultaneously works with, against, and across genre expectations. “Art School Confidential”’s narrative frame allows us to read it as either fiction (a faux-undercover-cop tale) or autobiography (a retelling of Clowes’s art-school years). It also resembles a non-narrative essay, in part because the progression from panel to panel frequently has nothing to do with movement in fictional time, as it would in a conventional narrative comic. Both “Ugly Girls” and the talking-head rant “Buddy Bradley in ‘Who Would You . . .” contain narrative elements, yet we might describe them as graphic essays in cultural criticism, since they emphasize social analysis over character development.

Clowes’s comics illustrate that, despite how it’s often presented, genre is an unstable concept. When applying a standard label to a story (e.g., “western,” “romantic comedy,” “thriller”), we are not always stating a fact. By focusing on certain elements at the expense of others, we may be forcing a narrative into a category it transcends. “Black Nylon,” for example, could narrowly be classified as a superhero story. Yet it’s also anti-superhero satire and postmodern detective fiction. We could also call it “anti-genre,” a story so strange that it evades classification. Which of these categories, if any, is accurate, let alone “correct?”

Several of the collection’s comics fall into the genre of the “meta-comic” (a comic about comics) or “meta-art” (art about art). Clowes is perhaps the most self-

reflexive contemporary North American cartoonist, populating narratives like “Art School Confidential,” “Wallace Wood,” and “Justin M. Damiano” with cartoonists, artists, readers, and critics. Section III includes the meta-comics “You” and “King Ego,” which interrogate the “artistic triangle,” a complex and ever-shifting relationship between an artist, audience, and a work of art. Two intimately related images of solitude resurface throughout the artist’s work — a cartoonist creating a comic and a reader reading a comic.

As part of Clowes’s meta-exploration of his craft, he continually adopts new visual personas by moving between art styles, such as the dense hatching of “Ugly Girls,” the old-timey newspaper-strip look of “Man-Child,” the cartoony exaggeration of “Daniel G. Clowes®™ in Just Another Day …,” and the polished line of “Black Nylon”:

Each style implies that a different artist is visually narrating the story: the Clowes of “Ugly Girls” is not the Clowes of “Black Nylon.” To signal that he has adopted a new persona, Clowes often changes the way he signs his name:

12 When readers talk about comics narration, they often refer only to textual narration, overlooking the fact that drawn images in narrative sequence imply a visual narrator. Clowes’s comics frequently have simultaneous textual and visual narrators. While the textual narration is spoken or thought by the protagonist, the visual narrator is embodied in drawings of characters and environments as well as in features such as page layout, panel shapes, balloon types, lettering, and coloring. Like a prose narrator, a comic’s visual narrator establishes the story’s tone and point of view. I discuss these issues in “Narration After Y2K” in The Art of Daniel Clowes: Modern Cartoonist.
Interpreting Clowes

The essays in *The Daniel Clowes Reader* employ distinctive interpretive methods in order to illuminate significant aspects of the cartoonist’s work. Pamela Thurschwell’s “The Ghost Worlds of Modern Adolescence” examines *Ghost World’s* use of temporal, spatial, and spectral metaphors. Drawing on literary criticism and theory (in particular the ideas of Frederic Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Elizabeth Freeman), Thurschwell reveals the ways that capitalism shapes the main characters’ search for an authentic identity in a world that treats adolescents like ghosts. Writing from a different perspective, Adele Melander-Dayton, who read *Ghost World* as a teenager, relates to the comic’s rebellious heroine as one would to a close friend. In “How *Ghost World* Made Me Brave,” she explains the many ways that Enid’s struggles helped her to navigate the dilemmas of high school.

Kaya Oakes’s “Literature at the Xerox Machine” surveys *Ghost World’s* historical contexts: the indie and zine scenes of the 1990s. Oakes articulates the values and practices of pre-Internet countercultures that Clowes and Enid both embrace and reject. Focusing on broad artistic and philosophical contexts, Joshua Glenn’s “Against Groovy” places the cartoonist within what Glenn names “Original Generation X,” a group of artists and thinkers born between 1954-1963 who share the qualities of “anti-boomer ferocity” and “anti-hipsterism,” along with an investment in “apocalyptic fantasy” and “trashy messianism.” In “Clowes’s Romanticism and the Urban Aesthetics of Ugly (1986-1998),” Anne Mallory and I look at how the cartoonist’s Chicago upbringing and love of *Mad* magazine shaped what we call his “late-twentieth-century urban romanticism.”

Several essays center on Clowes’s short stories. In “Decoding ‘Black Nylon,’” I provide interpretive frameworks and scene-by-scene commentary that emphasize issues of genre, psychoanalysis, masculinity, and sexuality. My “Close Reading Clowes’s Dialogue” analyzes a single line from *Ghost World*, showing how it reveals the expansive complexity of the cartoonist’s writing. Scott Saul’s “‘Etc., Etc.:’ The Post-Punk Ballad of Rodger Young” dissects “Blue Italian Shit,” weaving observa-
tions about seemingly minor details — graffiti, names, musical references — into a critical narrative about adolescence, belatedness, and romantic cynicism.

The collection contains a number of interviews that provide insight into the cartoonist’s work. I have included Clowes’s definitive discussion of *Ghost World* (with Joshua Glenn), his most thorough conversation on artistic process (with Darcy Sullivan), and interview excerpts that explore the Rodger Young stories and issues of gender and autobiography. Finally, this volume gathers literary material that illuminates Enid’s peculiar tastes: Russell Edson’s poetry, Ann Roy’s cartoons, and three song lyrics. Reprinted here for the first time, excerpts from Gilmore Tamny’s *Wiglet*, an early 1990s zine, provide a unique opportunity to look at a personal artifact of indie culture.

**Annotating and Indexing Clowes**

Many of the comics in this collection are highly allusive. Having discussed these stories with college students for over a decade, I’ve learned that readers born after 1980 are often baffled by references that older readers consider common knowledge. Moreover, Clowes’s allusions are so wide-ranging that readers of any age might not know that France Gall is a French pop singer or *Crazy Wild* is a small-press erotic adventure novel. Since *Modern Cartoonist* outlines American comic-book history since 1938, its notations offer readers unfamiliar with this history a post-*Action* #1 survey of Clowes’s medium. In addition, the collection contains a *Ghost World* index of themes, objects, allusions, and phrases, along with a glossary of cartooning techniques. I hope that the index and glossary help readers appreciate the complexities of Clowes’s stories and the art of cartooning.
SECTION I:

*Ghost World, Girls, and Adolescence*
In preparation for this little space-filler (unfortunately, my first choice, Donald Rumsfeld, bailed at the last minute) I just got through reading *Ghost World* for the first time since 1997. I tend to go to the extra mile to avoid looking at my own work—I have a daily diary I’ve been keeping for over ten years without ever having once reopened a retired volume, for instance. I guess I’m afraid of demystifying my own sources of inspiration or breeding contempt via familiarity or being crushed by the overwhelming urge to correct every tiny error (including those of my daily existence) into endless perpetuity. This is to say that I can be shockingly ignorant of the content of my own work, and have perceptions that are as malformed and off-base as those of the most disengaged reader. (I recall a particularly embarrassing incident at an early meeting with a financier who was interested in co-funding the *G.W.* movie. He was trying, very commendably, to show his engagement with the material and asked whom I thought would be a good actor to play the part of “Allen Weinstein.” “Who?” I replied, genuinely mystified. After a long pause, he said, “Isn’t this your book?” Needless to say, the deal did not materialize.) Anyway, having just endured the torture of reading the entire book in one sitting, I can say I am somewhat surprised by my response. What I expected to be a sort-of third-person

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1 Donald Rumsfeld was Secretary of Defense for President Gerald Ford in the mid-1970s and held this cabinet position under President George W. Bush from 2001 to 2006.
character piece is actually embarrassingly personal and captures with painful accuracy a very particular emotional state of my late teen-hood. Still more surprising is to learn that I now “relate” not so much to Josh or Rebecca or Enid, but to Enid’s poor father, a character who, at the time of the story’s creation, seemed “real” — that is, truthful to my experience with a certain type of urban, middle-aged dad — but whose inner workings remained an utter mystery.

How did *Ghost World* come to exist in the first place? In 1993, I had just finished the ten-part serial *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron,* only to discover how few people were actually able to keep track of the story all the way to the end. I decided my next longer story would steer away from the complicated multi-character epic and instead I would reduce it all down to the simplest dramatic situation — two characters in a limited self-contained world, with each episode standing on its own. My original notes (“Doric columns, under-populated public plazas, space-aged togas, a *Creation of the Humanoids* atmosphere”) suggest a science-fiction world, but that was quickly abandoned in favor a vaguely suburban, half-Southern California palm-treed American sprawl (with various architectural touches from the Chicago of my youth [specifically Hyde Park, the home of our future president]). Enid Coleslaw was always the protagonist (Rebecca was originally named George, but still female), and the other characters emerged naturally as needed with usually no more than a moment’s thought. The creation of the stories was a pleasant blur, happily free of the usual hand-wringing. I felt as though I knew the characters intimately and that their story could go on forever, though I’m glad I had the sense to keep it short.

A question I’m often asked (second in frequency only to “Why is your dog wearing a muzzle?”) is “How can a (repulsive, old) man write convincing teenage girl dialogue?” The only answer beyond “Thank you” lies in the queasy recognition that I still, on some level, think in the syntaxes of an inarticulate teenager, and that apparently the leap to a female version thereof is not so distant. Enid is based on several young women I knew as a young man, and, most specifically, the stories of my wife, Erika, during her years as a hearse-driving, wacky-clothes-wearing, out-of-step Southern Californian teen in the ’80s. But on another level, Enid (and even more so, Rebecca) are all me, and their situation calls upon the dynamics of several friendships I’ve had over the years, both as an overbearing Enidish dictator and a recessive Rebecca-like acolyte who both admires and resents his/her more charismatic counterpart.

The other primary influence at the time of gestation was the life of my friend Charles Schneider in Los Angeles. While I was stuck inside at the drawing board day and night, he was leading an interesting, aimless, and altogether enviable life as a Hollywood gadabout. Every time I would visit he would introduce me to some

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2 Serialized in *Eightball* and published in 1993 as Clowes’s first graphic novel, *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron* features Clay Loudermilk, who searches for his ex-wife after seeing her in a fetish film.

3 *Creation of the Humanoids* is a 1962 cult classic science-fiction movie directed by Wesley Barry. In a post-apocalyptic world, scientists make synthetic “humanoids” who revolt against the human race.

thrilling low-level development in his decaying Hollywood neighborhood. On one very memorable ten-day visit, it was the world of Angel’s, a small diner in the court of what was in the early ’90s a sleazy pimp-infested motel near Hollywood and Western, around the corner from a Pussycat Theater, which at the time had on its marquee in bold caps as its daily attraction a film titled “ANAL DAWN.” Charles was also my link, for better or worse, to a great many John Ellis types, whom he would befriend briefly for whatever sick shock-value amusement they could provide and move on, hoping to get me to squirm through some uncomfortable lunch (or, memorably, a Satanic mass) along the way.

The first edition of Ghost World, the Book, came out in 1998 to immediate low-level success, and it remains to this day (thanks especially to the movie) a continuing presence in my life. It is the only thing I have been involved with that is ever discussed as its own thing, on its own terms, without mention of a creator — to such an extent, in fact, that I’ve come at times to question my own existence. The girls have gained a life of their own and I must admit some paternal pride, as one would in a daughter who dutifully sends home monthly checks from her successful medical practice, though not without a certain regret that there is no further communication. And yet, despite the cruel distance, there is something in this relationship that perhaps only my unintended doppelganger, Mr. Cohn, could appreciate — a deep and abiding joy and astonishment at what our daughters have become.

D. Clowes
Oakland, California
4/30/08

BOOKS BY DANIEL CLOWES

NOVELS
Like A Velvet Slave
Cast in Iron
Pussey!

SHORT STORIES
Lout Rampage!
Orgy Bound

ANTHOLOGIES
The Manly World of Lloyd Llewellyn
#$@&!
for Erika
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WHY DO YOU HAVE THIS?

WHAT?

I HATE THIS FUCKING MAGAZINE! THESE STUPID GIRLS THINK THEY'RE SO HIP, BUT THEY'RE JUST A BUNCH OF TRENDY STUCK-UP PREP-SCHOOL BITCHES WHO THINK THEY'RE "CUTTING EDGE" BECAUSE THEY KNOW WHO "SONIC YOUTH" IS!

YOU'RE A STUCK-UP PREP-SCHOOL BITCH!

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU BOUGHT THIS!

WAIT! SHH! SHUT UP! THIS IS THAT LAME COMEDIAN I WAS TELLING YOU ABOUT!

HEH, HEH... MY FAMILY... WHAT CAN I SAY? MY FAMILY MAKES THE ADDAMS FAMILY LOOK LIKE THE WALTONS!

HA HA HA

HEH, HEH

OH MAN, THAT'S SO PATHETIC... IT'S NOT EVEN A JOKE.

I KNOW... ISN'T HE GREAT? I LOOK AT HIS SHOES -- IF HE'S SUCH A "WEIRD" HOW COME HE'S WEARING NIKES?

JUST BECAUSE I STILL LIVE WITH MY MOTHER PEOPLE THINK I'M PECKISH... SO WHAT IF SHE'S BEEN DEAD FIFTEEN YEARS!

HA HA HA
...you'd be short too if you had to live in a file cabinet!

I'm not weird. I'm practical... hein hein you should see what I save on rent!

HA HA HA

God, what a loser!

Joey McCobb, ladies and gentlemen!

CLAP CLAP CLAP

Joey McCobb!

I want to do him!

CLAP CLAP CLAP

I bet! Actually he reminds me of that one creep you went out with... that one skinny guy who dressed like he was from the forties...

Shut up!

You always go out with guys like that who have some lame, fake shtick... like Larry the Fairy... what a plop! What would he be going for? A gay tennis player from the twenties?

Fuck you! At least I don't want to fuck John Ellis!

Ewww! I hate John Ellis!

...oh man, I forgot to tell you about what happened yesterday!

I was sitting at that restaurant I was telling you about. That place "angels"... and in comes John Ellis with this totally normal-looking old guy...
SO OF COURSE THEY SIT DOWN WITH ME AND
JOHN STARTS ACTING LIKE AN ASSHOLE AS
ALWAYS...

HEY ENID... THIS IS MY FRIEND, TOM... TOM,
THIS IS ENID COLESLOW...

THAT'S A VERY INTERESTING NAME...

SHE CLAIMS IT'S HER REAL
NAME. IT IS MY REAL NAME, ASSHOLE! MY
DAD HAD HIS NAME CHANGED LEGALLY!

FROM WHAT THREE-BEAN SALAD?

FUCK YOU, DORK! HIS NAME WAS COHEN
AND HE CHANGED IT WHEN...

COHEN? I ALWAYS KNEW YOU WERE JEWISH!

COHN! AND SO WHAT?

SO NOTHING... HEN, CHECK OUT THESE PICTURES!
I'M GONNA RUN 'EM IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF
MAYHEM WITH AN ARTICLE ABOUT
HIGH-TECH CHILD PORNOGRAPHY...

GROOO! WHO TOOK THESE?

NOBODY! THEY'RE NOT PHOTOS! IT'S
COMPUTER-GENERATED ARTWORK ...
THAT'S WHY I CAN RUN 'EM IN MY
MAGAZINE WITHOUT GETTING ARRESTED!

WELL, WHERE DID YOU GET 'EM?

THEY'RE TOM'S!

TOM'S AN EX CATHOLIC PRIEST!

THIS GUY WAS LIKE THE BIGGEST CREEP IN THE
WORLD, WHICH I SHOULD HAVE FIGURED SINCE
HE WAS HANGING OUT WITH JOHN ELLIS...

...YOU SEE, FOR YEARS I HAVE BEEN A
PRISONER OF MY SEXUAL INCLINATIONS... I
WOULD NEVER, EVER HARM OR USE A CHILD IN AN
INAPPROPRIATE MANNER, AND I NEVER
HAVE...

... BUT...
...but... none of us has any control over our particular desires, and now, thanks to the verisimilitude of these computer-generated images I am able to attain material that indulges my specific fantasies without causing harm or damage to anyone...

[Dialogue]

Hey, Tom, Enid's only eighteen!

F**k you, John!

God, what an asshole...

Who didn't you tell me about that right away?

I was going to, but I know you think I have a crush on John Ellis...

I don't really think that... you don't, do you?

Don't worry!

...so what's the deal with him, is he like a Nazi?

Yeah, I dunno... he says he 'hates every body equally,' but I know he writes fan letters to Nazi murderers and hangs out with KKK guys and stuff...

God, he needs to get laid!

Yeah, well... he asked about you!...

So how's that Rebecca Doppelgänger? Does she still act like a stuck-up bitch all the time?

Doppelmeier...

Even I'm not that desperate!

Oh, yeah! Like you couldn't have any guy in the world if you weren't so pickin' picky... you're a skinny, blond wasp... that's what every guy wants!

I'm not a wasp!

Hey, did I tell you about that Satanist couple that comes into Angel's?

I think so...
They came in yesterday while John was there... I didn't want to tell John about 'em 'cause first of all, I figured he'd embarrass me somehow and also it's like when you tell him about something he gets really into it and he acts like he owns it... it's really annoying...

Like there's nothing in that stupid magazine of his that he learned about for himself... it's all stuff that other people turned him onto...

So how do you know they're Satanists?

...Your room looks twice the size with creative mirrors...

It's obvious...

You really have to see for yourself -- they're amazing...

Oh yeah, so get this... when they left they both had umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun... they're like totally white...

Do you know them? Do they eat here every day?

They're nice people!

I have my own little fantasy...

I like to think they're brother and sister secretly married and living together incestuously...

I sat there and waited until finally John Ellis and the child molester left and I tried to dean them but it's in my book at home... it looks exactly like them...