

ARTIST'S SKETCHBOOK BY ART SPIEGELMAN

## Nature vs. Nurture



If you were explaining the page to critters from outer space you might point out the following conventions, going panel by panel:

- Spiegelman sets the scene, in the extreme upper left, i.e. at the very beginning of the first panel, with some text in a small box. This text-box, providing the reader viewer with background rather than with dialogue, is appropriately distinct in shape from the speech balloons.
- The little girl in the first panel is obviously happy. Her happiness is conveyed not only by the text's expressions of motherly love but also by the expression on her face. The father is also smiling.
- In the second panel the well-intentioned, politically correct father takes the doll from the girl. The girl is puzzled (the balloon says "uk" and the smile is gone from her face).
- In the third panel, the father is full of enthusiasm—his mouth is open, with a big smile—and the text conveys his enthusiasm. Additional text, "Skreeee," in different lettering (to indicate it is not human speech) comes out of the fire truck. The father has presumably pushed a button or flicked a switch so that the truck emits a sound. The girl's face and posture show puzzlement.
- The enthusiastic father (still with a big smile) seeks to show the girl how to play. His talk is (how shall we put it?) male talk, loud and aggressive ("Clang! Clang! Clang! Everybody get outa the way!").
- In the fifth panel the father, still teaching his daughter but evidently having a great time, is verging on the maniacal with his toothy grin and his "Vroom! Vroom." A viewer-reader probably thinks, "Hmmm, boys will be boys"—and may also think, seeing this father's childish enthusiasm, "You can't take the boy out of the man."
- The next panel shows the smiling—and complacent—father handing the truck to the girl, whose face conveys uncertainty.
- The bottom row begins with more uncertainty, indicated by a big question mark over the girl's head. She says nothing—there is no speech balloon—but we know that she is puzzled.
- The final panel shows that the girl has covered half of the fire truck with a blanket—instead of thrusting it crazily around and making loud noises—and the father is reduced to silence. His posture—hands thrust into pockets, head slightly turned down—shows that he has given up, his attempt (the "nurture" of the title) to stifle the expression of motherly feelings (the "nature" of the title) and a balloon indicates that he is heaving a sigh of resignation. The sigh is conveyed by enclosing the word "sigh" within elongated dots, indicating he is sighing rather than *saying* "sigh."

If we were to think about the story in terms of the elements of fiction, what might we say? Well, so far as **character** (personality) goes, each of the two figures is relatively simple: The girl is just a girl—at her young age we hardly expect her to be a richly complex figure—and the father is essentially a well-meaning dad who wants his daughter to grow up free from gender stereotypes. Surely that is an admirable ambition. The **plot**—the sequence of happenings—shows his attempt to free her by offering her an alternative, a fire truck instead of a doll. He apparently is rather pleased with his efforts (the seventh panel shows him smiling when his little daughter touches the truck)—but with the final panel, reality breaks in. The girl does not careen around the room shouting "Vroom," as the father did; rather, her maternal instinct manifests itself even toward the fire truck.

But this is not quite the end of the story: At the extreme right side we see the father heaving a sigh, shoulders slumped and hands in pocket: He has been forced to accept reality. Not always a bad thing, really, when you think about it. If we are asked what the **theme** of the story is—i.e., “What does the story *add up to?*” (which is very different from the plot, which is “What *happens* in the story?”)—we can say that the theme concerns (as the title of the story indicates) the conflict between Nature and Nurture, or, to put it a bit differently, biology versus socialization. We most emphatically do not wish to say anything like “Spiegelman shows that human nature is unchangeable.” For one thing, Spiegelman doesn’t “show” us (in the sense of prove or demonstrate) anything. He just drew some pictures and wrote some words; he didn’t offer anything that can be called evidence. Even if the pictures represent something that actually happened in his own family, his graphic report of his experience would not prove that other fathers will have the same experience with their daughters. Spiegelman is entertaining us, not arguing, not even preaching. Still, one feels that Spiegelman’s story—the happenings that he illustrates, the doings of two figures—are plausible. One thing follows from another:

- The father sees his daughter playing with dolls, and
- being a good father, he wishes to free his daughter from stereotypical limited behavior, so
- he gives his daughter a toy that is usually associated with boys, but
- nature will have its way, and the girl turns the fire truck into an object that allows her to express her maternal instinct.
- Heaving a sigh, the father appears to recognize that his efforts have failed.

You have now instructed your Martian visitor in the language of graphic fiction. Yes, you knew it all along, and maybe the Martian did also.

## WILL EISNER

*Born in Brooklyn, New York, Will Eisner (1917–2005) drew cartoons for his high school newspaper, and after graduation studied for a year at the Art Students League of New York. He was soon publishing cartoons and comic strips, and he became an important figure in establishing the graphic novel (“sequential art”) as a form of fiction. He taught at the School of Visual Arts in New York, and he published two highly informative books derived from his lectures, Comics and Sequential Art (1985) and Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative (1996). In Comics and Sequential Art Eisner includes a chapter titled “Expressive Anatomy.” Among the illustrations in this chapter is “Hamlet on a Rooftop,” first published in June 1981. Eisner prefaces the Hamlet drawings with the following remark, and then offers a running commentary on the pictures.*

### Hamlet on a Rooftop

#### The Body and the Face

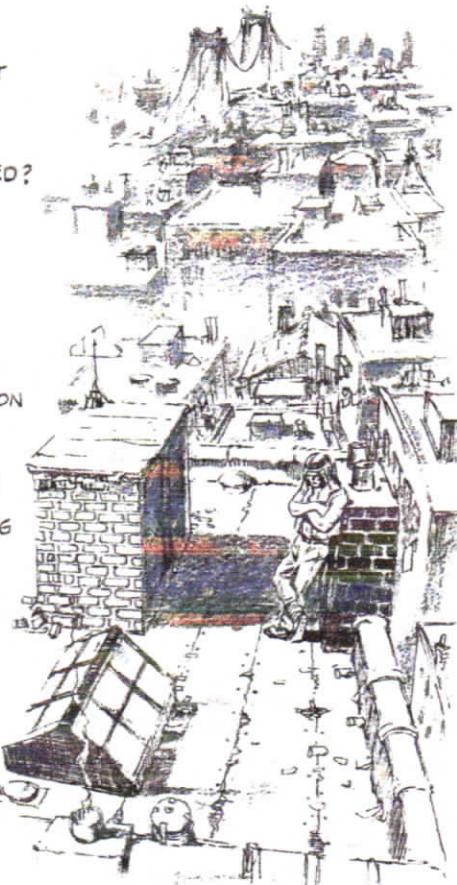
The employment of body posture and facial expression (both having equal attention) is a major undertaking and an area of frequent failure. Properly and skillfully done, it can carry the narrative without resorting to unnecessary props or scenery. The use of expressive anatomy in the absence of words is less demanding because the latitude for the art is wider. Where the words have a depth of meaning and nuance, the task is more difficult.

This represents an example of a classic situation — that of author vs. artist. The artist must decide at the outset what his 'input' shall be; to slavishly make visual that which is in the author's mind or to embark on the raft of the author's words onto a visual sea of his own charting.

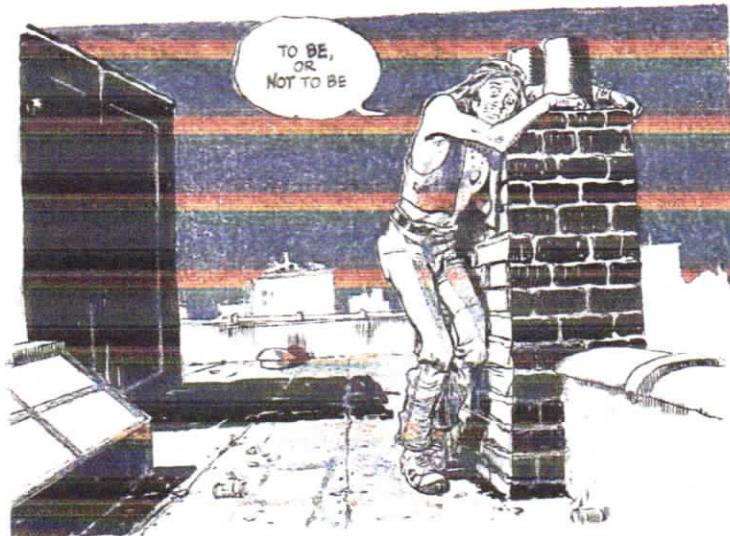
# HAMLET ON A ROOFTOP

HIS FATHER IS DEAD,  
MYSTERIOUSLY!  
HIS MOTHER,  
WITHIN BUT A MONTH,  
MARRIES HIS UNCLE!  
SO SOON? SO SOON?  
CAN THERE BE  
ANYTHING OTHER  
THAN SOMETHING  
ROTTEN HERE?  
CAN IT BE  
ANYTHING BUT  
MURDER!?  
WELL, THEN, IF  
MURDER IT BE  
ALL HE VALUES,  
INDEED,  
HIS MANHOOD  
CRIES OUT  
FOR RETRIBUTION  
... VENGEANCE ..  
TO HONOR  
THE FILIAL DUTY  
HIS FATHER'S  
VOICE DEMANDS  
IN THE HOT  
CAULDRON  
OF HIS MIND!  
AYE,  
TO PUNISH THEM,  
TO  
MURDER  
HIS MOTHER  
AND UNCLE...  
AS THEY  
LAY  
IN VIOLATION  
OF HIS CODE!!!  
... OR PERHAPS  
SOMETHING MORE  
UNSPEAKABLE  
WITHIN HIM.

YET...  
CAN HE FIND  
IN HIMSELF  
THE CAPACITY  
TO COMMIT  
SO UNNATURAL  
AN ACT  
AND IN DOING IT  
FORFEIT  
THE LOVE OF  
OPHELIA,  
HIS BETROTHED?  
WAIT...  
HOLD STILL  
FOR A  
MOMENT,  
CLING  
BRIEFLY  
TO  
A PASSING  
RAFT OF REASON  
BEFORE  
IT LEAVES  
THE BRAIN,  
BEFORE  
SURRENDERING  
TO THE  
SWIFT RIVER  
OF HIS  
PASSION,  
AND SO  
TO BE  
CARRIED  
OUT  
INTO THE  
TURGID  
SEA  
OF VIOLENCE  
FROM  
WHICH  
THERE IS  
NO RETURN.



In this experiment, Shakespeare's words are intact. The soliloquy is broken up into balloons at the artist's discretion. The intent here is to permit a meaningful fusing of word, imagery and timing. The result should provide the reader with necessary pauses.



The artist here functions as actor and in the process gives his own meaning to the lines.

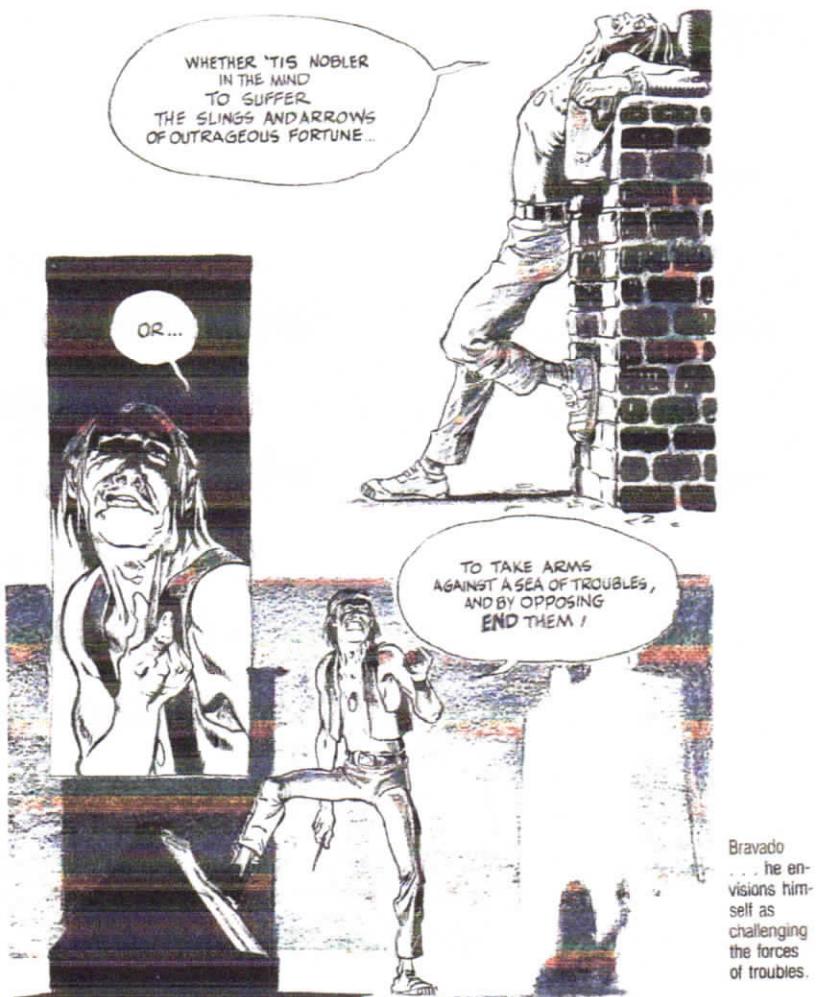


Furniture employed in intimate involvement with the actor gives the 'background' story value because it is part of the action.

A gesture signifying contemplation.

Submission . . . to a "heavy" thought.

Here, the postures are more than a classical portrayal of emotions. This man is not the Danish Prince Hamlet! His gestures and postures are derivative of his special background. The question of how he would deliver the standard gesture for self-doubt and internal agony is the artist's real challenge!

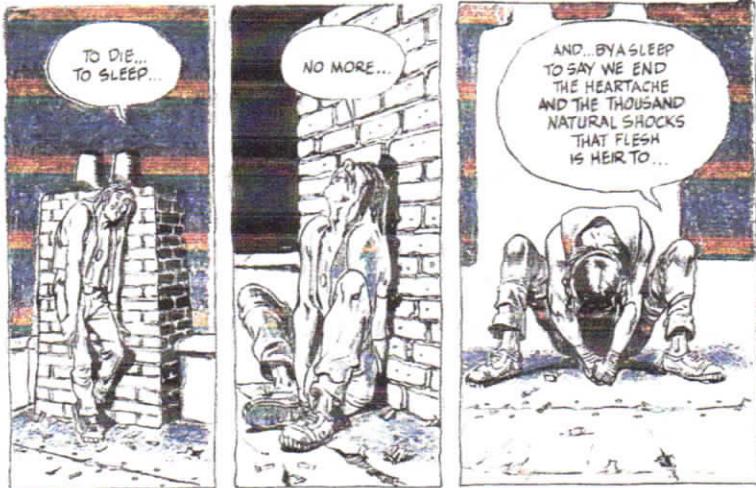


Bravado  
... he envisions himself as challenging the forces of troubles.

Exhaustion —  
beaten by the  
enormity of his  
problems

Seeking comfort  
he lets his body  
slide down along  
the wall

Retreat . . . into  
his refuge . . .  
sleep



The  
language of  
posture is  
universal  
and inter-  
changeable  
— the  
application  
is not.

Withdraw-  
ing into  
sleep or  
oblivion, he  
assumes an  
almost fetal  
posture.

Terror . . . in the realization of his options



Awake again to the thoughts that will not leave him!

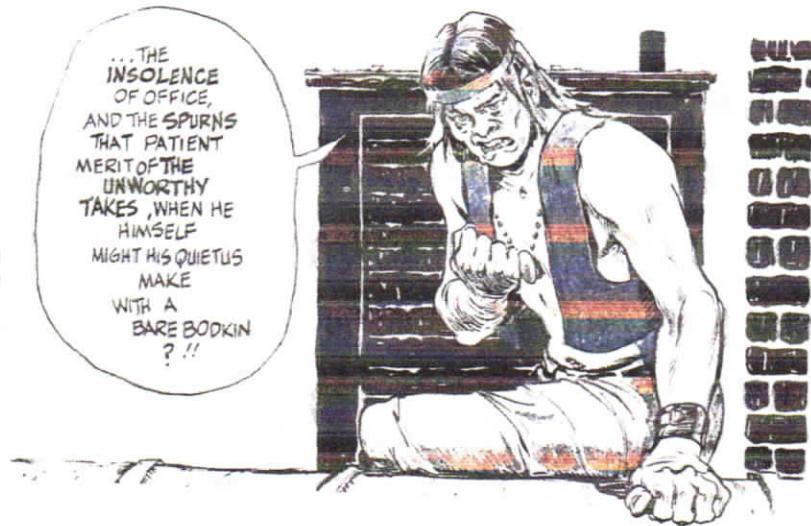


Candor . . . addressing the unseen manipulator of his fate

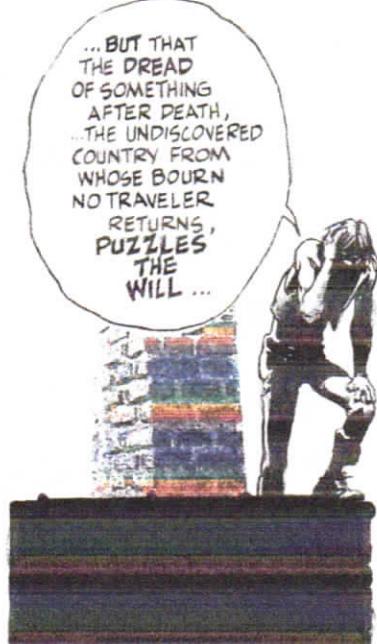
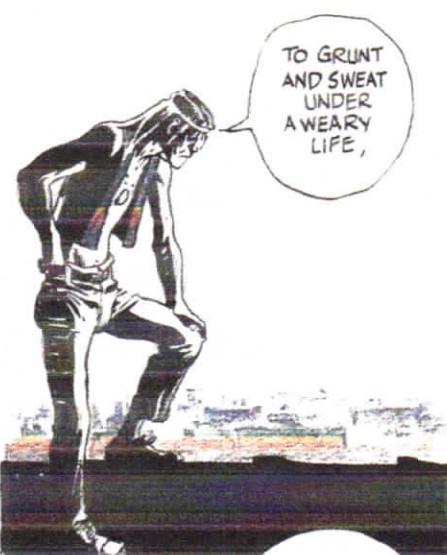
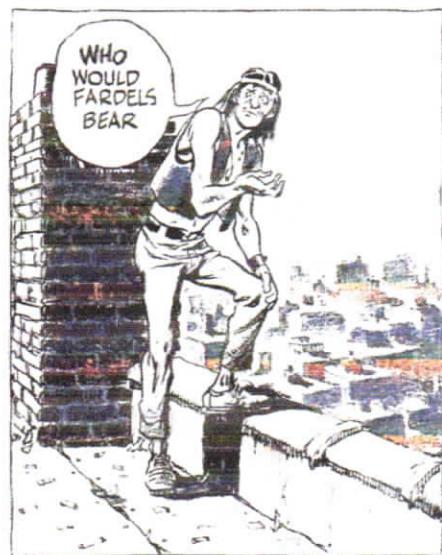
Anger . . . now he builds his resolution



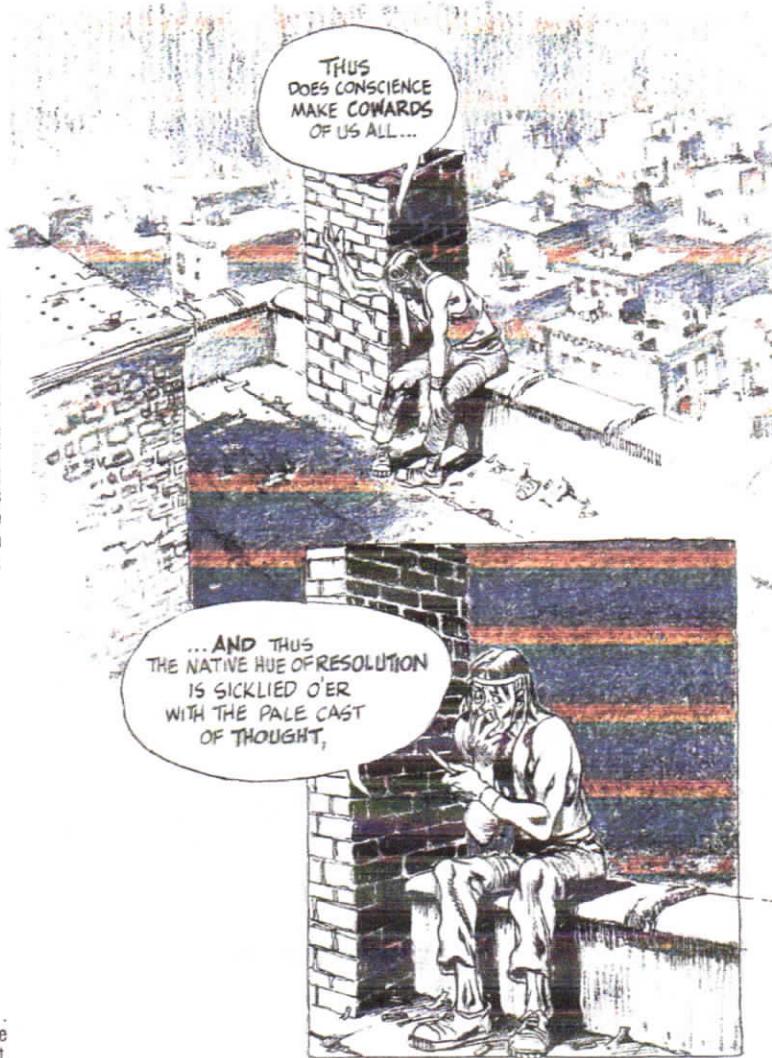
Arguing . . . he begins to make a case to buttress growing resolve.



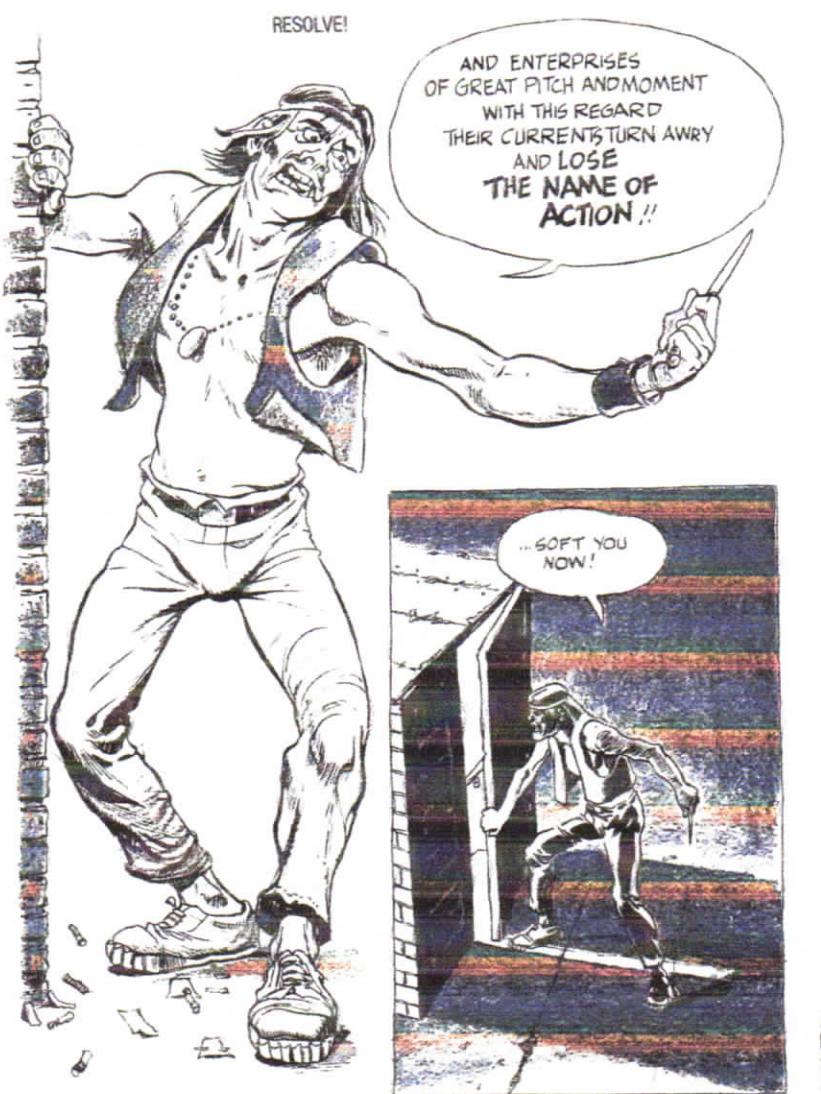
Debating . . . the postures of a courtroom advocate



The use of a long-shot, here is meant to reinforce realism — and in that way try to deal with the problem of putting Shakespeare's language in the mouth of such a man.



Hesitation . . .  
a recurrence  
of doubt



The story was later told that the story (spread). Now let's century job of the artist up again to continue the original



R. CRUM

Robert Den  
Cleveland a  
ground neu  
France. Son  
drawn R. C  
trating seve  
David .  
1968 to Eng

We incl  
a short story



This wedding of Shakespearean language with a modern denizen of the ghetto may not be appropriate but the exercise serves to demonstrate the potential of the medium because the emotional content is so universal.

Thus far we have looked at three graphic works: A one-panel original story with a picture (Carrillo's piece, page 243, about the malevolent calculator that died and two weeks later was discarded), an eight-panel original story (Spiegelman's "Nature vs. Nurture, page 246"), and twenty-six panels, spread over ten pages (pages 249-58, devoted to a soliloquy from *Hamlet*). Now let's examine a contemporary graphic treatment of an early twentieth-century short story, Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist." In one obvious way the job of the illustrator of a classic text is easier than the job of the creator of an entirely original work, but in another way it is also more difficult, because the artist who illustrates a classic is in some sense putting himself or herself up against a classic writer: Reader/viewers will inevitably expect the artist to contribute something to the work, to do more than ride piggy-back on the original author.

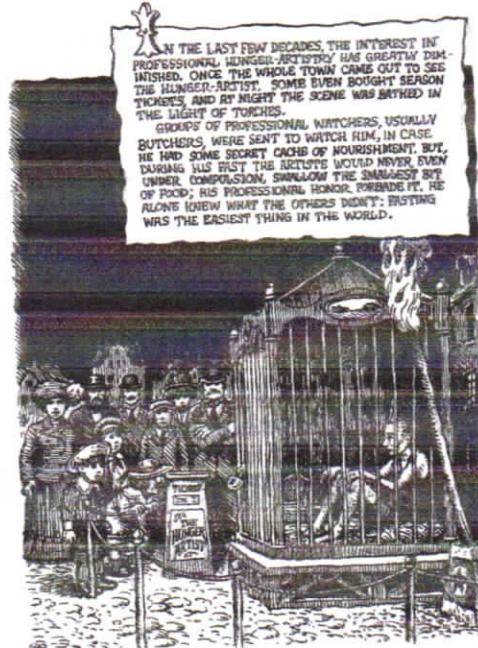
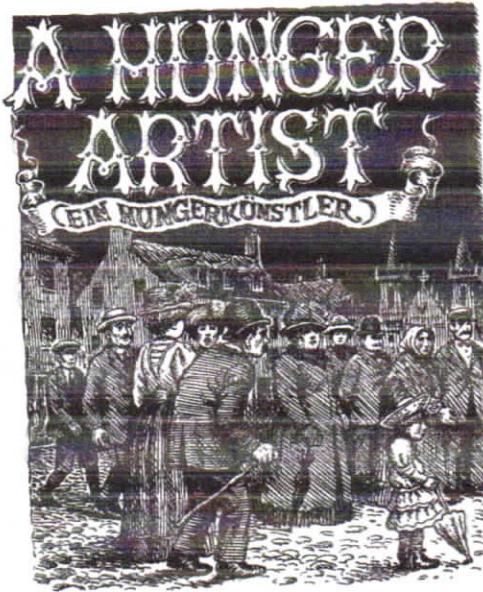
## R. CRUMB AND DAVID ZANE MAIROWITZ

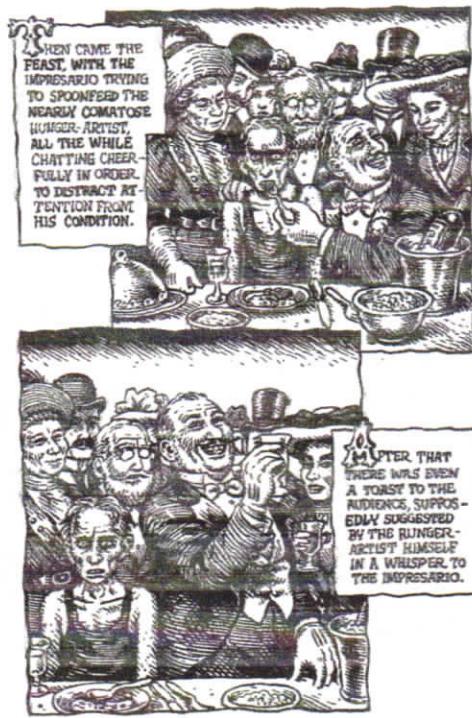
*Robert Dennis Crumb, born in Philadelphia in 1943, worked for a while in Cleveland as a designer of greeting cards, and then began drawing for underground newspapers. In 1967 he moved to San Francisco, but he now lives in France. Some of his work is strongly sexual and highly satiric, but he has also drawn R. Crumb's Kafka (1993), with a text by David Zane Mairowitz, illustrating several works of fiction by the writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924).*

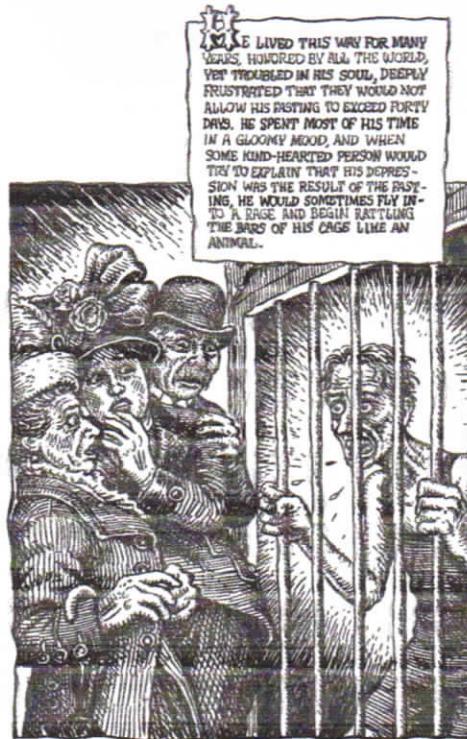
*David Zane Mairowitz, born in New York City in 1943, emigrated in 1968 to England, where he works as a freelance writer.*

We include here the Crumb and Mairowitz version of Kafka's "A Hunger Artist," a short story found on page 438.

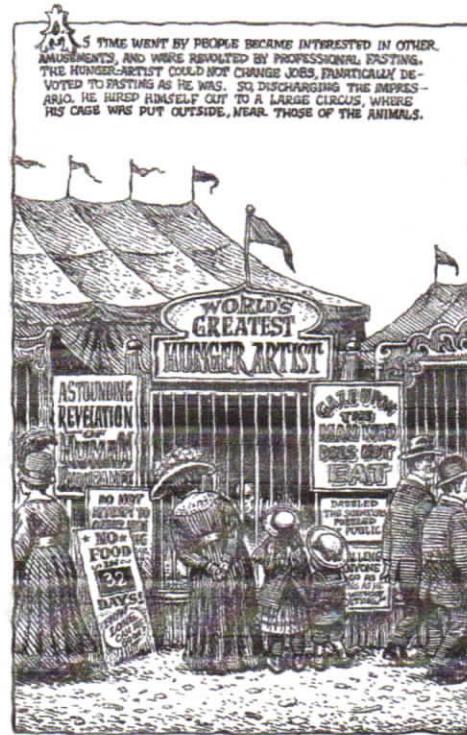
In June 1924, his "phantoms" saw to it — with their usual irony — that while dying of *starvation*, he would be correcting the galley-proofs of an astonishing masterwork called...



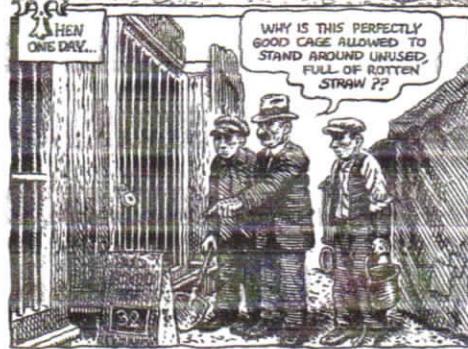
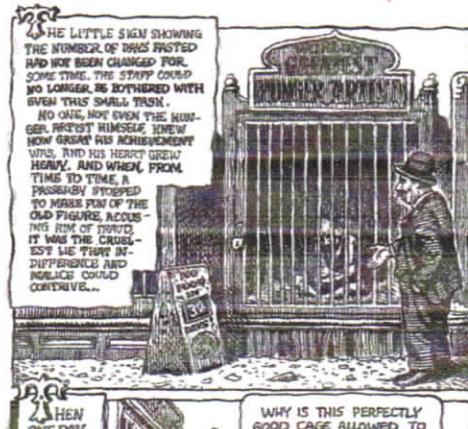


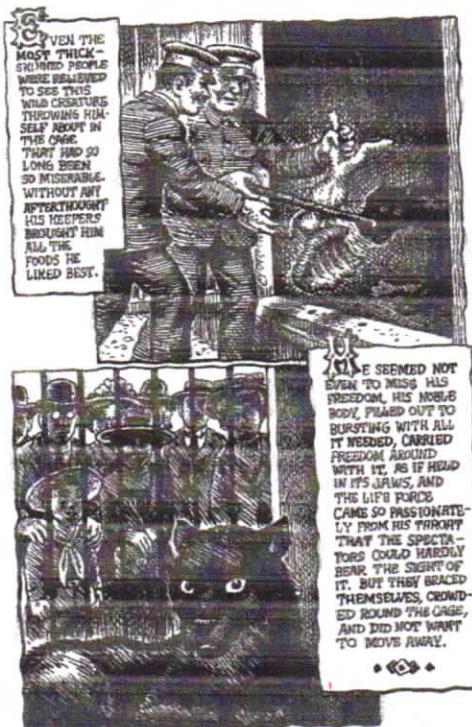
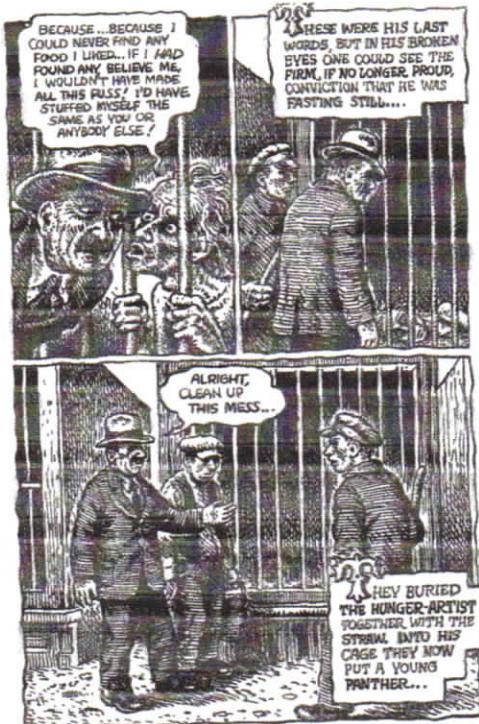


HE LIVED THIS WAY FOR MANY YEARS, HONORED BY ALL THE WORLD, YET TROUBLED IN HIS SOUL, DEEPLY FRUSTRATED THAT THEY WOULD NOT ALLOW HIS FASTING TO EXCEED FORTY DAYS. HE SPENT MOST OF HIS TIME IN A GLOOMY MOOD, AND WHEN SOME KIND-HEARTED PERSON WOULD TRY TO EXPLAIN THAT HIS DEPRESSION WAS THE RESULT OF THE FASTING, HE WOULD SOMETIMES FLY INTO A RAGE AND BEGIN RATTLING THE BARS OF HIS CAGE LIKE AN ANIMAL.



AS TIME WENT BY PEOPLE BECAME INTERESTED IN OTHER AMUSEMENTS, AND WERE REVOLVED BY PROFESSIONAL FASTING. THE HUNGER-ARTIST COULD NOT CHANGE JOBS, MANIACALLY DEVOTED TO FASTING AS HE WAS. SO DISCHARGING THE IMPRESSION, HE HIRED HIMSELF OUT TO A LARGE CIRCUS, WHERE HIS CAGE WAS PUT OUTSIDE, NEAR THOSE OF THE ANIMALS.





Study it

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that will |  
get ideas,

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writing &  
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Plot

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