# David Hare, Surrealism, and the Comics

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The history of the comic book in the United States has been closely allied with mass culture debates ranging from Clement Greenberg's 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" to Fredric Wertham's attack on the comic book industry in his now infamous 1954 book, *Seduction of the Innocent.* An alternative history can be constructed, however, by linking the comics to the expatriate Surrealist community in New York in the thirties and early forties with its focus on fantasy, dark humor, the poetics and ethics of evil, transgressive and carnivalesque body images, and restless desire. Surrealist artists are well known for their fascination with black humor, pulp fiction, and crime novels—in particular the popular series *Fantômas.* Indeed, the image of the scoundrel in elegant attire holding a bloody dagger, featured in the writings of the Surrealist Robert Desnos (Color Plate 10), epitomized this darkling humor (Desnos 377-79).[1] Pictures of Fantômas and articles on the pulp market peppered the pages of Surrealist magazines in Europe and America, from *Documents* in France (1929-1930) to *VVV* and *View* in New York in the early forties. By moving the discussion of the comics away from a Greenbergian or Frankfurt school discourse on mass culture to the debates surrounding Surrealism, other issues come to the fore. The comics become a site for the exploration of mystery, the imagination, criminality, and freedom.

The comic book industry originated in the United States in the late thirties and early forties on the heels of a booming pulp fiction market. It soon became a haven for marginalized groups including women and members of ethnic and religious minorities who were excluded from mainstream publishing (Hajdu 5). A thriving subculture that swayed from conventional American values, the comics were critiqued by right wing forces in the late thirties and early forties long before Wertham's book and the scandal it provoked. The Catholic Church, for example, had placed *Sensation Comics*, which featured Wonder Woman, on their list of forbidden books in 1942 (Hajdu 75). The Surrealists fit squarely into this phenomenon. Champions of the alternative, they characterized this new fiction as a jailbreak from the mundane. The pulps, for example, help one to "escape from the 'low

dark prison' of segmented existence," argued Robert Allerton Parker in the Surrealist periodical, *VVV,* in 1943 (62). Rather than falling sway to the monotony of a machine dominated world, as followers of Adorno would have it, Parker stresses the reader's emancipation "from the boredom of life imposed by the dictatorship of the Machine" (62).

Given this framework it is not surprising that artists and writers in the Surrealist orb in New York were drawn to American comics. The sculptor David Hare (1917-1992) is a case in point**.** As the editor of the Surrealist magazine *VVV,* published in New York from 1942-1944, he was a key spokesman for Surrealism in the United States. What is less well known is that he championed the comics in a 1946 essay where he singled out their admirable fantasy, liberating spark of the imagination, and potential for freedom. His essay, however, is notable not just for praising newspaper comic strips—a love of George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* after all was widespread among artists—but for expressing his interest in the violent and, in Hare's words, "vulgar" comic books of the early forties.

Hare is pivotal in many respects. Central to the surrealist movement in America, he was at the same time a transnational figure who could mediate France and America, Surrealism and Existentialism, and pre- and postwar culture.[2] As a sculptor, he straddled both Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism in his practice. Friends with Giacometti and Sartre, and married to the French painter Jacqueline Lamba, he resided alternately in New York and Paris. Having met Sartre in the mid-forties, the two formed a collaborative relationship. Sartre wrote an essay on Hare in 1947, and Hare helped collect articles for Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir's journal, *Les Temps Modernes.* It was, in fact, for their 1946 issue dedicated to America and American writers that Hare published his own essay on the comics which, in effect, provides insight to the cultural position of these flamboyant books both in the United States and abroad.[3] This article may in turn have led Sartre to single out a quality of black humor in Hare's work, calling them "purificatory figures" that "inscribe horror, sacredness, desire on stone and thus inscribing these passions deliver us from them. Comedy also delivers us from our passions by showing them to us from the outside: could it be this intimate relationship to the comic which confers to Hare's sculptures their unseizable, darkling humor?" (Sartre n.p.).[4]

Hare's appreciation for dark humor, so apparent to Sartre and so close to the comic books he admired, dates to the time before he met Sartre, to his youthful contacts with the Surrealists.[5] Hare had met the Surrealists in New York in 1939 through his cousin the artist Kay Sage, who had married the Surrealist painter, Yves Tanguy, and he was soon enlisted to edit their journal. The title page of *VVV* lists Hare as editor and Breton, Marcel Duchamp, and Max Ernst as editorial advisors, but Hare maintained that it was Breton's journal and that Breton had the last word. Given his youth

and respect for the older artists, Hare modestly characterized his own role as one of production manager, in charge of printing, layout, and limited selection of articles.[6] Even this less prominent role did, however, place him at the center of Surrealist activities in New York and make him privy to an in-depth exposure to the Surrealists' ideas. Indeed, illustrations of his early work peppered the pages of *VVV* and *View* in the forties. It also afforded him the lifelong close friendship of key artists such as Duchamp and Ernst. Later in his life he was somewhat defensive in his continued embrace of Surrealist ideas. He cautiously praised Surrealism, saying in the seventies that it was the first "telescope" he had been given as a young man and that he had "changed the lenses and adjusted the focus to a lesser or greater extent for my own purposes … but I still find it basically more interesting than other telescopes I've come across" (Hare "Condensed Interview").[7] It was his ability to see the early American comic books through a Surrealist lens that is most illuminating here.

As an American, associated with the group of artists soon to be lionized as Abstract Expressionists, his residual connections to Surrealism were seen as problematic. When Clement Greenberg wrote a review on Hare's art for *The Nation* in 1946, he credited Hare with talent and promise. What Greenberg did not like about Hare are now familiar tropes of canonical Greenbergian modernism: no clarity of form or unity of vision. His biggest problem, however, was with Surrealism, which he maintained "never had a style of its own in the plastic sense—and without the infusion of cubism could offer no more than period-revival academicism" ("Art" 177). He felt Hare's sculpture was too close to painterly values but what he particularly singled out was Hare's reliance on what he called "Gothic Surrealism." In a totalizing statement, he labeled Hare's art as "the most intensely Surrealist art I have ever seen" ("Art" 176). For Greenberg this assertion was unabashedly negative, comparable in its criticism to his dismissal of mass cultural representations (comics among them) in his 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." His 1946 review of Hare's exhibition dovetailed with Hare's own treatise on the comics for Sartre, published abroad, which moves in an opposite direction from Greenberg's position. Greenberg was no doubt unaware of how "gothic" Hare would turn out to be in his advocacy of lurid and "kitschy" comic books. But by veering away from Greenberg's formalist language here, and away from other narratives of the "triumph of Abstract Expressionism," we can gain a more layered view of the era, where the broader cultural significance of Hare's relationship to Surrealism with its focus on evil and black humor, is allowed to emerge and where mass culture in the form of the wartime comic book plays a significant role. This new narrative makes room too for a practice that privileges content over formal coherence and allows for the freedom of detail to emerge.

There are aspects of Hare's article that dovetail with Greenberg and

the New York intelligentsia's mistrust of mass culture and mediocrity. Written before Wertham's 1954 scathing book, but after Clement Greenberg's reproachful 1939 article, and in the wake of the Surrealists' infatuation with the pre-World War I crime thriller *Fantômas*, Hare strikes his own pivotal tone of admiration and critique. First, he castigates America's preference for the military and militant over the artistic and the intellectual. He clearly does not want his advocacy of the violent comics to be misconstrued in this regard. Second, he scorns America's mass mentality.  In accord with the mounting criticism of mass culture by the New York intelligentsia in postwar America, Hare points to the Clark Kent character who performs what we might call a masquerade of mediocrity. (Wonder Woman too doubles as the mundane army nurse, Diana Prince.) This façade, in his estimation, accords with the mediocrity of American culture at large, and the middling quality of American exports abroad. Hare, who traveled back and forth to Paris with Lamba at this time, and was soon to reside half the year in each country, speaks from a dual subject position. While nodding to European frustration with the hegemony of American consumer culture, the message, he concludes, is a comforting one to Americans—that their middle class and conformist lifestyle disguises the real superhero of American ingenuity powered by the force of the military. He anticipates here later critics of postwar American society such as David Riesman, author of *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), William H. Whyte Jr., author of *The Organization Man* (1956), and Bernard Rosenberg's 1957 anthology, *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America.*  Hare too decries the American group mentality claiming that in their daily lives the mass of employees dream of becoming supermen like Clark Kent.

The critical component of this essay is somewhat predictable given the times, but its focus on the comic books is fascinating. Hare's position mediates between a Surrealist engagement with the poetics of evil and a postwar American suspicion of mass culture. Hare divides comic books into three categories:  the first involves crime dramas, the second super heroes, and the third stories of the unfortunate such as Orphan Annie. Hare finds the first group uninteresting due to its respect for law and order, and the third category burdened by its maudlin and moral story lines. Significant for our narrative here, Hare credits the superheroes as the most intriguing.

Hare lists among his favorites: *Wonder Woman, Captain Future, The Blue Beetle, Plastic Man, Jungle Comics,* and *The Torch,* all comics or superheroes that originated between 1939-1941. He praises these works for their staggering imagination and lack of order (Hare, "Comics" 356). In these series the imagination, he maintains, bursts out of its vulgar form in an act of total freedom to produce a sense of irresistible and irrepressible strangeness.  He admires these books for their inventive details, rather than their satisfying plot or structural integrity. He credits the unstructured

form with allowing irrelevant but exciting dips in the plot; one can be swept away in a windstorm that lands the hero in another time zone—an "orage cerebral" –on the author's whim ("Comics" 357). In this regard his writing recalls the words of Parker in 1943, who, in typical Surrealist manner casts the rambling unstructured form of the writing of the pulps in a positive light, as an opening for the flow of unconscious drives (66). Parker deems this practice as participatory and freeing to both the author and the reader. What is interesting here is that both Hare and Parker credit the anti-formal characteristics of the pulps or the comic books with breaking control and emancipating the spectator, to use Rancière's terminology.

Parker saw the "verbomania" of the pulp authors as granting space for seismic eruptions of the unconscious, not unlike the automatic techniques that were so favored by the Surrealists. Automatism, as a means of suspending control, was the aspect of Surrealism that most appealed to the American artists in New York ranging from Hare to Pollock or Rothko. Hare, for example, experimented with dipping shapes in wet plaster to achieve surprising effects. However, unlike his colleagues in the New York School, he characterized automatism in a way that relates more to the darker side of Surrealism. Automatism was, in his estimation, not a conduit to the unconscious, but a crack or hole in rationality: "Outside of what you know is chaos and like a curtain if you go out you are crazy, incurably insane. If you reach through it and pull out little pieces and try to make a coherent work of art," you continually "widen the horizons of mankind" (Hare, "Interview with Hadler" 1975). He practiced a form of automatism not to totally suspend conscious control of the work or to experiment formally, but to reach momentarily to the other side of the curtain, to the other level of reality—to a piece of chaos. Insanity, criminality, and inspiration can be cast as fellow travelers in Hare's Surrealist practice. He rejected what he saw as Freud's substitution of "illness for evil" which stripped evil of its moral and artistic force. Illness, Hare maintained, is not created, but evil is (Hare "Condensed Interview"). "You can't have imagination without a feeling for evil—you see it in Baudelaire, you see it in Meister Eckhart and you see it in religious writers in reverse because they are scared to death of it." Evil, Hare asserted, "is what you really want to do but you don't because you're not allowed to." And he concluded, "One advantage of art is that you can commit murder in art and nobody suffers for it" (Hare, "Interview with Hadler" 1975). This position, I argue, aligned him with the Surrealist camp and made him open to the strange and often violent subject matter of the American comic books. In his continued focus on insanity and the aesthetics and ethics of black humor, Hare distanced himself from the Abstract Expressionist discourse on tragedy and the sublime ubiquitous to the postwar era and furthered the legacy of Surrealism as it had been formulated in the thirties and early forties when he was a youth. His position also provides

an alternate context to understand the appeal of the comics to artists in Hare's generation and beyond.

Hare's sculptures in the mid to late forties, like Giacometti's Surrealist works before them, at times sport menacing attributes such as the skulls and spiky forms in *Fear of the Night* of 1949, or the sharp-toothed orifices in *Young Girl* of 1945. But Surrealism as a state of mind, rather than a repository of images, was key to his work. He valued Surrealism as an attitude of mind or a "complex of inspiration." The Surrealists' fascination with repulsion, abjection, and the irrational, drawing in part from their wartime experiences, encouraged by Georges Bataille's advocacy and abetted by their attraction to violence and criminality, lurks behind Hare's words. Although Hare in the seventies underplayed Bataille's role in New York—he struggled to remember a section of *VVV* that described Bataille's seminal role as dissident Surrealist in Paris (Hare, "Interview with Hadler" 1975)[8]—he remembered well the impact of the Comte de Lautréamont on his thinking in the early forties. In *Chants de Maldoror*, written by Lautréamont in 1868 and lionized by the Surrealists, the book's antihero allies cruelty and genius in language that delighted Hare. Not surprisingly one of Hare's sculptures, *A Cage in His Head*, shared a page in *View* magazine, 1944, with a provocative essay by Lionel Abel on Lautréamont.  Abel's words not only mirror Hare's thinking but also provide a clear map in English to Lautréamont writings from the point of view of American Surrealism. Perhaps of most significance here, evil is characterized as "the progressive, dynamic principle of life, the active force that assures the continuity of creation and keeps the universe going" (Abel 152).

Hare clearly linked evil, criminality, and freedom in a manner that connects to Surrealist concerns. In the early thirties, before coming to New York, Surrealists had investigated the subversive potential of crime drama, pulp fiction, and even the comics. Georges Bataille turned his eye to the popular comic strip, "Les Pieds Nickelés," in an essay for *Documents* in 1930. The popularity of this trio of humorous and unscrupulous ruffians showed, in his estimation, how fragile the social order was—a burst of laughter away from destabilization (Bataille 214-16).[9] The Surrealists exploited the mass appeal of these practices. The French popular detective story, like the comic strips in the newspapers, reached a wide audience and pandered to popular taste. That Desnos read his poem to *Fantômas* on the radio on November 3, 1933, accompanied by the music of Kurt Weill, indicates the Surrealist rebellious desire to use popular culture to reach out to a mass audience.

The debates around Surrealism, politics, and responsibility form a hotly contested arena where Breton and others have been attacked for fleeing France and seeking safety in America. Jonathan Eburne takes a more measured and felicitous position. He periodizes their pursuits and labels their activities in the thirties, after the Surrealists' break with poet Louis

Aragon for supporting Stalinism and advocating revolution, as Noir Surrealism. In describing a shift from the "legitimization of terrorism, to the stylistics of terror," Eburne argues that Surrealists during the noir period strove less "to 'change life' or to 'change the world' than to understand the nature of causality itself . . . [they] attempted to read the cultural universe of the early 1930s in terms of the forces which threatened it: its dark motives, its ritualized patterns of behavior, its terrifying outbursts of violence" (Eburne, "Surrealism Noir" 95). This noir period enables rather than performs the group's political work, he concludes (Eburne, "Surrealism Noir" 110). It was at this time, the "Noir Period," that Breton turned his focus to black humor. He compiled his 1939 *Anthology of Black Humor* (excerpting from forty-five favored authors including Lautréamont) under the cloud of Fascism and saw it censored by the Vichy regime. In the postwar years, for both Surrealists and Existentialists, the book became key to discussions of writing as a political or ethical practice (Eburne, *Surrealism* 245). Breton himself in 1941, shortly before his collaboration with Hare on *VVV,* had called for the employment of black humor as a tool for combating the traumas of the exterior world (Ford, "Interview with André Breton" 2).

Situating Hare's position on evil and black humor within the debates on Surrealism is complicated. He clearly considered evil to be an artistic and moral force in line with Noir Surrealism of the thirties.  He had come to know the group and their writings at the end of the noir period and into the war years when the Surrealists were engaged in studies of myths rather than individual villains in an attempt to understand violence.[10]  Hare, like other New York artists soon to be associated with Abstract Expressionism, was to turn to the use of myth in writings by Jung—a figure outside of the Surrealist pantheon. Whether mythology diluted a Surrealist revolutionary agenda or enabled it is a matter of debate.  Michael Leja extends this debate into the forties in his discussion of the New York School and argues that film noir, mythmaking, and the primitivist discourse of the postwar years all contributed to displacing responsibility from modern man's rationality to his unconscious drives and tragic situation (109). Hare was clearly affected by these debates and all the more so from his friendship with Sartre (although their relationship was by and large personal).  He lamented in 1968 the loss of Surrealism's "political and social application; its revolutionary character" (Hare, "Dada" n.p.) and in this respect he probably would have agreed with Leja's assessment. Hare connected with the ethics as well as the aesthetics of Surrealism and continued to draw upon black humor as a tool to cope with the lingering events of the war years. He at times remarked on the strange humor in objects affected by World War II such as a resemblance he saw between a melted bottle found at Hiroshima and a skinned rabbit. The bottle functions as a "perturbed object" in the Surrealist sense, whose poetry resides in the fact that it is a manufactured

object that has undergone a deformation that has rendered it strange. Hare conceded that any melted bottle would form that configuration, but it was its origin at Hiroshima that affixed a dark, fascinating humor to the object (Hare, "Interview with Hadler" 1978). Similarly, one interviewer in 1954 recorded how Hare found material for his sculpture in the rusty remains of old World War II U.S. Army tanks.  They had an elusive quality, "which the artist himself called 'black humor'" (Stewart 51). Indeed, it was just such humor that informed so many of the mutated objects from the comic books of the war years as they too tried to come to terms with the debacle.

Robin Walz in his study of pulp Surrealism argues that the Surrealists wanted to release the fantastic elements from the crime novel with a carnivalesque strategy that operates outside of logic or moral frameworks and exploits impossible detours, displaced persons, and violence (42). In the comic books that Hare champions, right does win out, unlike in *Fantômas* where the antihero inevitably escapes. However, Hare dislikes those American comic endings that superficially resolve conflict and dilute the subversive potential of the idiom. He lauds instead the subplots where, as we have seen, the fantastical takes precedence with its carnivalesque inversions that turn humans into strange beings or anthropomorphic animals as in "Superlapin," the protector of the royal kingdom of animals, who Hare had included in his list of favored superheroes. Hare himself once quipped that he was a man in an elephant's head ("Condensed Interview").

Hare identified with animals, finding himself in wolves, elephants and, of course, hares. Here too we find traces of Lautréamont who, with his own brand of dark humor, persistently animalized his hero Maldoror referring hundreds of times to a wide array of creatures.[11] Hare's works are consistently fraught with such ambivalent and contradictory presences that Sartre described them as a form of "primitive syncretism" (Sartre n.p.). Humans and animals conjoin in a syncretic play which continues well into the seventies in the artist's mythic cycles of Cronus and of Leda and the Swan, with their rich commingling of the animate and inanimate, animal and human, male and female (Hadler, "Cronus Series" 141). One can find Surrealist precedents too in the rich hybridization of animals and humans that populate the works of Ernst or in Giacometti's sinister crustacean, *Woman with Her Throat Cut* of 1932. These hybrids populate as well the pages of the comic books that Hare admired where men appropriate the powers of wolves, bats, etc.

Not always bestial, Hare's hybrids can be marvelous in the Surrealist sense and playful as in *Magician's Game* of 1944, a tabletop sculpture where a vertical figure and horizontal support combine in a form of magical play. He wrote, "The table turns into a figure … and the whole conglomeration is really a living creature that is neither a person, nor a table, nor an abstraction. And in that sense it would be the kind of invention that a magi-

cian might be interested in making" (Hare, "Interview with Hadler" 1978). This totemic world, where the artist is a magician, and plant and animals, animate and inanimate beings conjoin naturally, nods not only Surrealism, but also to writers much prized by Hare and other New York artists in the forties such as Carl Gustav Jung and James George Frazer whose book, *The Golden Bough*, Hare admired for its discussion of magic.

Hare was attracted to the fanciful and magical in the comic books above all and singled out characters with hybrid and metamorphic qualities. Plastic man, for example, the brainchild of Jack Cole, exhibits what Hare calls an "astonishing" capacity to grow and contract at will. He embodies, we could say, a metamorphic surrealist creature that could have arisen from Hare's own sculptural imagination. In fact, in "The Granite Lady," published in February 1946, Plastic Man turns himself into a vanity table, not unlike Hare's *Magician's Game,* with malleable table "legs" morphing into human arms. Although these tales are all crime dramas—Cole loved gangster movies and Plastic Man began as a reformed criminal (Schelly 6)—they exhibit a playful sense of whimsy with the sleuth's long neck entering one frame, or his stretched body turning into a tent in another.  Superheroes conjoin animate and inanimate categories.  They morph with objects or other creatures: one character lives underwater as a human fish and the Torch, Hare muses, miraculously becomes a living flame (Color Plate 11). Hare himself had experimented with a similar aesthetic in his early photography which involved melting negatives and was at times called "Heatage."  One such work, *Marine Fire* (Figure 1), of a woman partially consumed by fire, appeared in a 1941 issue of *View,* and revealed a cataclysmic metamorphosis of flesh, fire and water so pertinent to the war years. (Hadler, "Magician's Game" 197, 201).

The anthropomorphic animal, central to Hare's practice and to comic illustration, was a loaded theme in the thirties when the Surrealists looked to noir popular culture and when Hare himself encountered the comics of his youth. Disney's Mickey Mouse, for example, so associated with consumer capitalism and Disneyland in the fifties, inspired different associations in the thirties. For Nazi critics as early as 1931 he was yet another example of American filth and Jewish vermin (Leslie 80),[12] a heinous association that was fully realized in 1940 in their propaganda film, *Der Ewige Jude* (arguably reclaimed by Art Spiegelman in his soulful portrayal of Jewish victims of the Holocaust as mice in his 1986 graphic novel, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*). In the thirties authors of the left, like Walter Benjamin, employed the mouse for an alternate agenda to the Nazis. Just as Desnos read his *Fantômas* to Weill's music, Benjamin, in conversation with Weill, in 1931 identified Mickey as a disruptive character. Benjamin's laughter had a therapeutic function.  Disney films, in fact, formed the locus of debates around the psychology and politics of mass culture, laughter and violence,

and technology and the body (Benjamin wrote about the popular Disney films).[13] For some critics of the left, early Mickey Mouse was a pesty, mischievous creature engaged in vaudeville and lowlife activities (Leslie 83). Like Ignatz, the mouse in *Krazy Kat,* George Herriman's famous American comic strip of the same era, Mickey was a complex antiauthoritarian character.



Figure 1. David Hare, *Marine Fire*, 1941.
Heat-altered photograph. The Estate of David Hare, courtesy Weinstein Gallery, San Francisco.

*Krazy Kat,* a comic strip published during the interwar years in America, was wildly popular with readers and has had a wide influence on contemporary art. Hare, the painter Philip Guston, and countless others have listed Herriman among their influences. Elaine de Kooning remembers Willem and his friend Edwin Denby waiting anxiously for the paper to arrive with the next installment the quirky Kat (Guston 301).[14] He liked the fanciful landscapes and blunt drawing style (McDonnell and O'Connell 26).[15] Not surprisingly, the famous cat and mouse take center stage in Hare's essay. Hare rightfully distinguishes between comic strips and comic books and begins by describing the strips which were, he claims, so popular that publishers would not risk discontinuing them at any cost. He praises the talent of authors such as Herriman and Crockett Johnson, whose comic strip, *Barnaby,* commenced in 1942.

The popularity of the comic strip made it an accepted profession for young artists. Several of the Abstract Expressionists such as Philip Guston, David Smith, and Franz Kline began as comic illustrators in their youth. On

one level it offered potential job opportunities, just as house painting did for the young de Kooning (Berkson 65). It might also have supported the blue collar pretensions of an artist such as Smith who identified with industrial welders and railroad workers.  It was no coincidence that both Smith and Guston enrolled in the correspondence course of the Cleveland Art School, in 1923 and 1926 respectively, since it was reported to have trained thousands of comic artists. Charles N. Landon, the head of the school, capitalized on the popularity of the medium, and advertised in magazines for the general public such as *Popular Mechanics, Popular Science Monthly,* among others. Young aspiring artists took the bait. "Graduates" of his program included: Jack Cole of *Plastic Man,* Floyd Gottfredson of *Mickey Mouse,* and Vince Hamlin of *Alley Oop* (Garvin 11-12). Musa Mayer, Guston's daughter, has recorded Guston's impatience with the rote techniques: "I became bored with lessons in cross-hatching, 'how to draw,' etc. and gave up the course after about three lessons" (Mayer 13). Guston's was an understandable response given Landon's methodical pedagogical practices.  He admonished students to draw "carefully," asked them to send him three shaded figures for the first lesson, and characterized the aim of the school as teaching "the right way to do things" (Garvin 24, 32). The pros and cons of the school aside, many young artists began as illustrators, a practice which must have honed their graphic skills and fueled their imaginations.  Hare himself began as a photographer, not an illustrator, but he was an avid draughtsman and frequently drew incisive portraits of friends and of himself.  His sculptural forms are often marked by piquant outlines and linear finesse even before he turned to welding as a form of three dimensional drawing.

   *Young Shadow* (also called *Young Girl*), for example, a 1945 sculpture by Hare, is marked by its spiky and whimsical outline (Figure 2).  It also suggests a kind of phantom creature in cement and white marble that calls to mind comic characters such as the figures in *Barnaby,* a comic strip that Hare singled out along with *Krazy Kat* in his essay. *Barnaby* appealed to him for its strange imagination and phantom beings such as Mr. O'Malley, a winged creature imagined by Barnaby. Krazy Kat, however, had emotional significance for Hare. He loved the sympathetic cat, mouse, and dog set against a black or blue sky that was both strange and terrifying.  In an essay on Surrealism in the comics, Franklin Rosemont lauds the "gentle, wistful, poetic, eccentric, innocent, impractical, exuberant, inspired, idealist, and amorously passionate" Kat for his lowbrow tastes and the mouse for his disrespect for the law (119-20). These themes plus a shared sense of fantasy loosely link the comic strip to Surrealism although numerous alternate readings of these characters abound in the literature. Hare, himself, was drawn above all to the strip's tragicomedy, fueled both by the warmth and the desperation of desire arising from the unrequited love of a cat for a mouse.
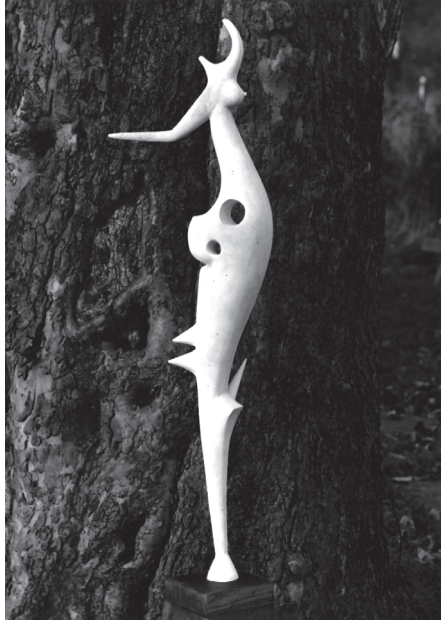
Figure 2. David Hare, *Young Shadow*, c. 1945.
Cement and marble, 32 in. The Estate of David Hare, courtesy Weinstein
Gallery, San Francisco.

Desire, as much evil, links Hare to the Surrealist movement for it was desire that sparked much rumination on freedom and love.[16] Desire forms an overarching theme in Hare's work, from the early Surrealist pieces, through the cycle of dark lust in Leda and the Swan, to the theme of the murderous Cronus in the seventies. In his early works from the forties, such as *Dancers* (1944), *The Two* (1945), or *The Duel* (1946), slender figures court in a surrealist dance of desire, teasing, piercing, or intermingling. The pairing of the lithe, androgynous figures calls to mind Charles Duits's description of Hare and Lamba's supple nude bodies on the beach, like chaste animals or Egyptian statues (Duits 126). Desire plays La Ronde in Hare's art, circling from playful cavorting and teasing slender figures, to the transgressive body, to the union of Leda, to an abject story of deadly desire, and in its many manifestations embodies much of the spirit of Surrealism.

In the spirit of Surrealism too, desire takes a masculinist position in this narrative, as it does in Hare's characterization of the rape of Leda as an act of mutual fulfillment. He first rendered the theme in 1946 in an alabaster work and later again in a large series from the sixties. His first "Leda" was in all likelihood inspired by Lamba, his love at the time. Surrealist liberation, however, did not always trickle down to the women artists who formed the

objects of desire.  For example, Lamba, who left her husband Breton in the early forties to marry Hare, complained about both of them and asserted that she only painted for herself when she lived on her own after her divorce from Hare (Grimberg 11).

That Hare would find in the whimsical and philosophical *Krazy Kat* a tragicomedy of desperate desire links him yet again to the Surrealist camp and helps us to formulate an alternate context to understand the comic strip and the comic books of the thirties and early forties for those whose visions were honed on Surrealism. The sculptor Lee Bontecou, whose ominous constructions were exhibited in New York in the early sixties, provides a companion case study to this one. She too found inspiration in the visionary side of Surrealism and admired the Batman comics of her youth. Later on she encountered the comic genius of Robert Crumb and was drawn primarily to his erotic and strange side (Hadler, "Lee Bontecou" 17). For artists like Bontecou and Hare**,** who cut their teeth on Surrealism, the comics could be a place of the dark imagination where hybrid and carnivalesque inversions occur and the personal and the ideological collide.  Drawing away from a focus on comics and the culture wars, constructing a new genealogy of evil inflected by Surrealist ideas, and then contrasting this genealogy to the Cold War evils imagined by Wertham and others, allows us to examine comic books as a protean form of crime drama or pulp culture that is at once dark, proletarian, fanciful, and free.

## Notes

1. Desnos published this image and focused on Fantômas's appearance in "Imagerie Moderne."
2. See my article "David Hare: A Magician's Game in Context" (196-201), for Hare's relationship to both Surrealism and Existentialism.
3. See Hare's "Comics" (353-61). This essay was published in French from a translation by Catherine Le Guet.  For a discussion of censorship of the comics in postwar Europe see Jobs (687-725).
4. "Sculptures à n dimensions" appeared in October 1947 in a four-page unnumbered insert for *Derrière Le Miroir*, 5. An anonymous translation published in *Women: A Collaboration of Artists and Writers*, New York, 1948, unpaginated, is used in this text.
5. Hare continued to reiterate the importance of black humor for the Surrealists. See for example Hare's "Dada and Surrealism," written for a panel at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, held in conjunction with the 1968 exhibition, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage.*
6. Interview with David Hare, New York, April 26, 1975. I held many discussions and formal interviews with Hare between 1975 and 1980. Primary information used in this text comes from these sources as well as from informal conversations. Key sections are cited throughout. See also Russotto's

chronology in *David Hare, opere dal 1940-1992*.

7.  This quote comes from a tape compiled by Hare himself from a series of interviews with Rosanne Livingston in 1978. Hereafter cited as "Condensed Interview."

8. The section referring to Bataille appeared  in "Charles Duthuit  a' André Breton" (45).

9.  For more on Bataille and crime in *Documents* see Ades and Baker's *Undercover Surrealism* (102-05).

10.  See Eburne's *Surrealism and the Art of Crime* (242).

11.  See Lomas (170) for a discussion of Lautréamont's dark humor.

12.  Leslie cites Laqua (33).

13.  See Hansen's subtle discussion of Benjamin and Adorno in "Of Mice and Ducks."

14.  Interestingly, when Guston returned to a comic inflected figurative style around 1970, he complained that abstract artists wouldn't talk to him, with the exception of de Kooning and Hare. See Guston, "Interview with Mark Stevens, 1980" (301).

15.  For more on *Krazy Kat's* influence and the comic tradition, see Varnedoe and Gopnik's *High and Low*.

16.  See for example Mundy's *Surrealism* (11).

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