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Lynd Ward's Modernist "Novels in Woodcuts": Graphic Narratives Lost Between Art History and Literature

David M. Ball

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Lynd Ward's "novels in woodcuts"—long-form narratives Ward pioneered in America between 1929 and 1937 and composed entirely in the medium of sequential wood engravings—have been widely neglected in both art historical and literary critical scholarship despite engaging crucial questions in American modernism and anticipating the contemporary rise of graphic narrative. Ward's oeuvre here is viewed through his sustained ambivalence toward the commercialization of the arts, both in his texts and his work as a publisher. His critical erasure is as much a function of modernist scholarship's continued irresolution toward the relationship between high art and popular culture as it is of the singularly hybrid status of his texts. Seen through the lens of comics studies, author/artists like Ward reside in a place at the intersection of literature and the fine arts, allowing us to reimagine many of the critical commonplaces of modernist scholarship.

Keywords: Lynd Ward / graphic narrative / novels in woodcuts / comics / modernism

The rise in recent years of scholarly interest in American comics and graphic narrative has been exponential, ushering in the publication of single-author monographs and edited volumes of comics criticism, as well as reprints of

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historical comics at an extraordinary pace. Concomitantly, contemporary comics artists are for the first time being anthologized alongside literary writers in places like the most recent edition of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* and the Norton anthology *Postmodern American Fiction*, a late acknowledgment of comics' literary and artistic richness long recognized in scholarship devoted to *bande dessinée* and manga in other national and cultural traditions. Much of this recent American scholarship has proceeded from the understandable vantage point of comics as a multimodal, but nonetheless discrete medium, one requiring a unique (if also hybrid) set of critical tools to analyze and interpret its meanings. Surprisingly little attention, however, has been given to the ways these new forms of knowledge in comics scholarship affect and alter our understanding of conventional (for lack of a better term) literary and art history. This comparativist imperative comes at a moment when comics criticism must advance beyond important questions of its own self-definition and toward comics' wider relevance for the study of literature and art history writ large.¹ At the same time, studies in these disciplines will increasingly turn toward analyses of comics as they become progressively visible in critical and theoretical genealogies.

This *Journal of Modern Literature* cluster of articles on comics and modernism, then, comes at an opportune time not only to consider how histories of modernism intersect with comics, but also to think in integrative ways about comics history, literary history, and art history in the modern period. To this point, I'd like to pose the question: how might analyses of comics history necessitate a reconsideration of the orthodox twentieth-century periodization of modernism and postmodernism? Already much-debated and -vexed terms in their own right, attention to the role of comics in these larger trajectories and intersections can help further reconsiderations of more commonplace versions of the modern and postmodern. In particular, I've been struck by the ways in which the development of twentieth-century American comics — to which I'll limit myself here, although contiguous examples abound in other national and transnational genealogies of literary and artistic modernism — can be understood as an upended history of an inexact, but nonetheless widely held trajectory of twentieth-century literary and artistic history. In such accounts, modernism's formal experimentation, desire for radical authorial autonomy, and putative disdain for mass culture give way to the playful citationality and an embrace of the market in the postmodern, be it in the move from Pound to Pynchon, or Pollack to Warhol.

In contrast to modernism, comics began as a mass-media phenomenon; it is only recently that comics have been accorded qualities typically associated with modernism, such as psychological complexity and epistemological difficulty. To take one example, compare the history of the modernist little magazine, so crucial to the development of literary modernism in the first half of the twentieth century and waning in importance after 1960, as opposed to the inverted history of comic books and later zines, which instead blaze a path for the generic conventions of the medium in the modern period and more widely represent avant-garde impulses following the rise of underground and alternative comics *after* 1960. As a result,

I'd argue, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century comics have been typically viewed as distant from the broad current of American literary and artistic modernism, while we can now see many modern-day graphic novelists reanimating what might be considered modernist anxieties in their work.² It is then worth asking: why are comics absented from conventional histories of American modernism? This is especially puzzling given the fact that scholarship on American modernist artistic and literary innovations, long held to be the province of high art and coterie audiences, has undergone a sea change with recent considerations of the roles popular culture and mass media have played throughout the modernist revolution. I'm thinking here of critics like Michael North and Lawrence Rainey, among many others, who have reoriented scholarship toward considerations of popular and mass-cultural contexts for modernist literature, and exhibitions like Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik's 1990 *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* at MoMA that have done the same for art history.

Yet surprisingly, the question of what role comics—that decidedly popular, mass-cultural medium—has had on our understanding of modernism has gone largely unanswered in the critical literature. Formally inventive, early-twentieth-century newspaper comics artists such as George Herriman were celebrated by canonical modernist authors and their contemporary critics. George Luks both drew *Hogan's Alley* for Joseph Pulitzer and exhibited his paintings and sketches at the signal 1913 Armory Show. Lyonel Feininger served as one of American comics' true early innovators in the pages of *The Kin-Dee-Kids* and *Wee Willie Winkie's World* and also as one of the leading instructors of the Bauhaus school. Gertrude Stein and Pablo Picasso lovingly passed American comics like Rudolph Dirks's *The Katzenjammer Kids* among their various coteries. Yet these narratives of contact and influence between comics and literary and artistic modernism have largely been elided in accounts of the modern era. How might our received histories of literary and artistic modernism have to shift if we connected Stein's clipped syntax to the comics page, or viewed the mask dropped over Picasso's portrait of Stein as derived as much from Dirks's Ma Katzenjammer as African folk art? Such histories of comics *and* modernism have yet to be written.

Paradigmatic of this critical silence is the lack of attention paid to the career of Lynd Ward, whose life work as of the first months of 2015 gets exactly four hits in the MLA database and fewer than five discrete entries in ARTbibliographies Modern. Ward rose to prominence in the 1920s and 30s as an illustrator, publisher, and the first American pioneer in what we now recognize as the graphic novel.³ Ward's chosen medium was the wood engraving, which he learned while studying in Leipzig, imbibing craft-focused, German Expressionist influences, as opposed to the more dominant formal modernism reigning in Paris at the time. Even after the Library of America reissue of his six "novels in woodcuts" brought his work back into print in 2010, Ward's career has gone almost wholly unremarked by literary scholars and art historians alike.⁴

With a strong, angular line reminiscent of Frans Masereel and Rockwell Kent, both of whom were influences and interlocutors, and the assured narrative

spacing of a Herriman or Art Spiegelman (who edited the Library of America edition), Ward stands as, in the words of Stephen Heller, a natural bridge "between mass comics and the more rarefied illustrated book" (16). Ward's work chimes with comics scholarship precisely because it eschews the conventional generic devices of comics—speech balloons, antic comedic plot devices, and so forth—yet resonates so profoundly with formal definitions of the medium. Ward's book-length, serial woodcuts aspire to what is perhaps the most cited definition of the medium, Scott McCloud's identification of comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9).⁵ In so doing, Ward's novels in woodcuts illuminate for us the intersections between comics and literary and art historical modernism, affording us an angle for more thorough and thoughtful study than the critical tradition has yet provided.

Ward's work bridges comics and modernism not simply in its navigation of widely held definitions of the medium, but in its active negotiations of the very

questions of art and commercialization that engaged modernists on both sides of the literature/art divide. Neither was Ward obscure in his day; despite his first graphic novel, *Gods' Man* (1929), being released in the week of the stock market crash, it sold 20,000 copies and achieved such notoriety that it was parodied by cartoonist Milt Gross the following year in the much more slapstick, and conventionally caricatural, *He Done Her Wrong: The Great American Novel and Not a Word in It—No Music, Too* (1930). As an innovator in a medium he singlehandedly brought to an American reading audience, winner of the Caldecott Medal, illustrator of more than 100 books over a career that spanned five decades, and founder of his own press that published such modernist titans as Thomas Mann, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway, Ward's outsized career and his subsequent critical obscurity epitomize the blind spot at the intersection of modernism and comics.

Gods' Man (see **Figure 1**) is Ward's most linear narrative, a retelling of Faustian myth where an artist-adventurer signs a devil's pact for a brush with occult powers, bringing him an instant renown that proves to be his undoing. It is also the most symbolically straightforward of Ward's narratives, equating commercial success with compromised artistic values in a manner reminiscent of other modernist expressions of impugned commercial activity. The protagonist of *Gods' Man*, basking in the economic and erotic rewards derived from the canvases produced from his newfound powers, ultimately discovers a dollar sign branded on his urban mistress, flees imprisonment in the city, and is rescued by a pastoral maiden with whom he happily starts a family until the moment he must pay the debts of fate at novel's end. Such a didactic narrative vocabulary, immediately visible in what would become the reigning aesthetic of the WPA (through which Ward later served as supervisor of the Graphic Arts Division of the New York Chapter of the Federal Art Project), has often proved an embarrassment to the few scholars who have acknowledged Ward's work. Susan Sontag lists *Gods' Man* as one of her paradigmatic works in "Notes on Camp"—an attribution Ward himself would no doubt bristle at—and Spiegelman in his introduction to the Library of America volumes speaks with notable unease about Ward's aesthetic as a cross between Thomas Hart Benton and Tom of Finland.

One of the difficulties of reading Ward, however, even in his most straightforward works, is in squaring his symbolic, even melodramatic visual vocabulary with the semantic slippage of those very symbols. Ward's texts are extraordinarily "writerly" in the sense Roland Barthes gives to the term, participating in what Perry Willett has described as German Expressionism's exploration of "*Aufbruch* (departure, break up, revolution) and revolt" ("Cutting Edge" 111). Ward's treatment of revolt inheres not merely in the subject matter of labor unrest and urban deracination, but extends to his formal decisions as well, even in the linear structure of *Gods' Man*. McCloud's much-cited notion of closure—the governing, participatory role given the reader of comics to fill in the associative and narrative gaps between what is pictured in individual comics panels—is given freer rein in Ward's work than in most examples in the medium, with gutters both on and

between the pages demarcating every image.⁶ Indeed, Ward insisted throughout his career that the meanings of his narratives were fungible and dependent entirely upon the perceptions of his readers. The novel's very title, *Gods' Man*, often considered by scholars as a typographical error of a misplaced apostrophe, might compellingly be understood as instead signifying the plural divinity of the novel's various readers animating Ward's unnamed protagonist. Objecting to narrative synopses of *Gods' Man* that appeared in contemporaneous reviews in the *New York Evening Post*, Ward wrote that "to undertake to put a book of this kind into words must necessarily fail to convey the peculiar combination of understanding and emotion that I hope this pictorial narrative at its best can achieve" (*Silent Shout* 4).

Indeed words, when they do appear in these so-called "wordless" novels, reflect the cheapening of commercial activity and the impositions of a free-market fundamentalism that were Ward's most visible targets throughout his career. Ward's narratives so insistently open up gaps they themselves refuse to resolve that images from *Gods' Man* were utilized by psychoanalyst Irving Steingart as a kind of narrative Rorschach test for assessing the capacity for empathy in normal and schizophrenic subjects. One mark of this resistance to singular interpretation, even amidst Ward's symbol-laden, at-times allegorical visual rhetoric, is the insistently negative valence given the written word throughout *Gods' Man*. Ward's novels in woodcuts bely the "wordless" misnomer through the strategic use of printed text as a harbinger of ethical compromise. The novel's protagonist signs his fateful contract at the "Slinck Inn" (see **Figure 2**), the indecipherable text of

the document itself figuring the foundational deceit of artistic talent rendered into economic exchange (see **Figure 3**).

Ward returns to this visual vocabulary again in a dealer's business card (see **Figure 4**), and perhaps most memorably, in his mistress's dollar-sign brand (see **Figure 5**), the more conventionally relational signification of printed words and glyphs a consistent portent of the protagonist's pending doom. What Ward here prizes in the image, over and above the word, is its ability to upset the expectations of universal signification.⁷

Each of these instances of text is also evidence of the novel's desire to slip out from under the weight of singular interpretation despite its melodramatic tendencies. Here we may think of "melodrama" in the light of Peter Brooks's use of the term when discussing Honoré de Balzac and Henry James in *The Melodramatic Imagination*: "descriptions of the world where the eye's photographic representation of objects yields to the mind's effort to pierce surface, to interrogate appearances" (2). While resisting the eventual victory of virtue characteristic of the melodramatic imagination, Ward offers an embodied analogue to this visual metaphor: despite seemingly rooted, Manichean avatars of the forces of good and evil, such an understanding of the epistemological complexities of melodrama point toward its potentially unsettling force.⁸

Even for early-twentieth-century audiences who, according to Jared Gardner, were adept at visual technologies deriving simultaneously from the comics page and silent films, Ward's narratives proved as disruptive as any of the formal experiments canonically associated with literary *and* artistic modernism. As one

critic put it after reading Ward's second novel in woodcuts, *Madman's Drum* (1930): "no concessions are made to our slow wits. The whole story is told in woodcuts, and if we lose our way amidst his uncharted seas, so much the worse for us. [. . .] I feel strongly that his experiment in form represents a retrograde movement, which, if persisted in, would lead back to hieroglyphics" (98–99). The mention of hieroglyphics both gets at a crucial distinction Ward embraced in the turn to *Madman's Drum* and misses it entirely. Ward does obscure the legibility of his narrative in places—an account of the ways in which a patriarch's foundational sin of participation in the slave trade is visited upon the declining fates of subsequent generations of his family—going so far as to reproduce the image of a sphinx at several key moments as a winking aside to acknowledge the patent difficulty of his multigenerational tale. Narrative unspools even more unpredictably in *Madman's Drum* as compared with *God's Man*, yet comparing it to hieroglyphics suggests Ward's images ultimately comprise a language susceptible to translation, but for which the reader holds no Rosetta Stone. While Ward would establish a second career as an illustrator envisioning the written text, he would resist all such efforts at narrative synopsis toward a medium he exploited for its susceptibility to polysemy. Seen as such, the correlation between this project and some of the more easily recognizable, radical formal and narrative experimentation in modernist literature and art becomes evident.

It was not just professional readers who struggled; in correspondence with the author, a Miss Elka Schrijver acknowledges the shift from the first novel to the second:

A little while ago I came across your novel in woodcuts "God's [sic] Man" with which I was so struck that I talked about it to all my friends, gave it as a birthday present to one and was promised a copy myself by another.

However, as fate would have it, instead of God's [sic] Man, which seemed entirely UNDERSTANDABLE and moreover, one of the most thrilling stories I've ever read – instead, I got "Mad Man's [sic] Drum".

Mr. Ward, however much I admire the woodcuts, after the first chapter, I cannot make head or tale [sic?] of it, nor can any of my friends. I've now tried to read it several times, but after the return of the slave trader to his native town, it becomes absolutely incomprehensible to me. Not only is it impossible for me to follow the story, but I even get mixed up in the various characters, particularly the women.

Therefore, and because I admire your work so much, I should be very glad indeed if you would put me right and let me have a key to "Mad Man's [sic] Drum", so that I can enjoy it properly. (Ward and McNeer papers)

Lamentably, Ward's response is lost to history, although Schrijver's and others' desires for hermeneutic singularity—a desire figured in her returning the titular "Gods" of his first novel back into the singular—strikes a familiar chord in the broader responses to modernist disruptions throughout the arts.

An astonishing number of these admissions are preserved in Ward's papers. Jack Thirlwall, a college friend and reviewer, confesses "I was lost after the first

half [of *Madman's Drum*] . . . Are you quite sure as to what happened to your hero?" (Ward and McNeer papers). Even Ward's first editor, Robert Ballou at Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, writes of his initial reaction to *Gods' Man*: "I had thought of it all along chiefly as a collection of beautiful wood engravings without much thought of its narrative value [. . .] I felt shaken when I had put aside the last page, as though I had just had an utterly new and rather awful (in the best sense of that word) experience" (Ward and McNeer papers).

The hermeneutic dissonance Ward created was a function not so much of his losing control of his narratives, I would argue, as it was of conspicuously relinquishing them by placing ultimate control in the readers's hands in ways that anticipate later experimental writers such as B.S. Johnson and Chris Ware. Ward is thus undertaking a radical experiment in reader response, a project whose aims might be more legible through the lens of contemporary graphic narrative, but the content of which remains less than transparent for twenty-first-century readers, as it did for Ward's contemporary editors, reviewers, and reading audience.

This resistance to hermeneutic singularity, on the one hand, and the liminal status of Ward's medium on the other—he received very little influence from mass-market comics and never fully regarded himself as having any peer artists—both help to explain the critical lacunae around his works while placing them more fully in modernist genealogies.⁹ Ward's third graphic narrative, *Wild Pilgrimage* (1932), realizing a modernist fantasy shared by his contemporary William Faulkner when composing *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), experimented with

different colors and tones to represent the conscious and unconscious impulses of his damaged protagonist (see **Figure 6** and **Figure 7**).

And in his masterwork, the aptly titled *Vertigo* (1937), Ward used multiple narrative strands to thread a complex chronicle among three central characters whose connections to one another are only available to the reader, anticipating the metafictional, even hypertextual bent of much postmodern literature and film.

Vertigo is Ward's final and most densely visual novel in woodcuts: it contains more than 200 engravings, far more than his previous works. Set in 1929 immediately before the stock market crash, *Vertigo* is divided into three sections, each focusing on a single character—"the girl," "an elderly gentleman," and "the boy"—relaying the ways in which capitalist enterprise and global economic fortunes interpose themselves into the lived lives of average citizens during the economic upheavals of the 1930s. The girl and boy are love interests, graduating in 1929 amidst swelling (visual) rhetoric of American progress and with ambitions to become a violinist and architect respectively. Following a brief courtship and a swift engagement taking place on parade grounds (see **Figure 8**), the girl begins musical lessons, while the boy's search for work leads them to prolong their engagement before tragedy ultimately intercedes. Literally separating their stories is the middle section of the elderly gentleman, leader of the "Eagle Corporation of America" that lays off the girl's father, which in turn prompts his botched suicide attempt, the family's eviction, and the collapse of whatever musical career the girl may have imagined for herself. Visible in the surrounding sections, this

intimate violence takes place outside the gentleman's purview, his section instead focusing on class war in the struggle between organized labor, corporate interests, and the sanctioned violence used to ensure the perpetuation of asymmetries of power and wealth.

In a parallel narrative thread, thwarted at every turn in his search for work of any kind (except for one stint as an unknowing scab amidst a labor strike, a position he nobly walks away from), the boy is eventually enticed to donate blood for a transfusion that will revive the failing health of the elderly gentleman, cementing the novel's class-based account of labor being sucked dry by capital. The novel then reunites the boy and the girl after a years-long separation in the final page, although in returning them to the parade grounds encountered earlier, *Vertigo* leaves open the possibility that the fantastic setting of this union may be nothing more than the tortured memories of the boy whose section it concludes (see **Figure 9**). Nowhere else do we witness his return.

Such intersections and conjunctions, whether accomplished or failed, are solely the province of the novel's dramatic irony and are completely illegible to both its characters and its less attentive readers. As is the case in Ward's other works, the plot advances in a manner that oscillates between allegorical forthrightness and subtle, often imperceptible misdirection. The girl's section unfolds between the years of 1929 and 1935, unequally divided by year, so that some years take place over a span of many engravings, while others occur in a single page. The gentleman's passage is divided by the months of a single year, presumably 1933 based on the available visual evidence (which would mean the girl's father's firing is incidental to the economic machinations this section

chronicles). The boy's section unfolds over a single week in his life. This vertiginous acceleration of time throughout the novel's exposition is accompanied by a more complex interplay of text and image than previously seen in Ward's oeuvre, words still overwhelmingly signifying the forces bent on circumscribing the possibilities of Ward's protagonists. Yet counter-representational forces are also at play in ways not visible in *Gods' Man*: the singular artist's labor in that first novel gives way here to the voices of organized labor. (see **Figure 10** and **Figure 11**).

So whereas in Figure 5, the revelation of the mistress's branded dollar sign precipitates a panicked silence—figured starkly in the blank canvasses-cum-windows that loom over both figures like the blank eyes of a denuded film strip or a null set of sequential images, with whatever light they do shed being eclipsed by the branded shoulder—*Vertigo* enacts a more visible and organized response to the interplay of aesthetics and economics, showing scenes of words being used, however ineffectually, by organized labor.

Indeed, the tragedy of *Vertigo* is located in the arts as much as it is in missed human connections or intractable economic structures. To that end, Ward begins each section of the novel with an engraving that figures aesthetic work in economic terms. At the outset of her musical career, the girl is shown receiving her violin only after it and her lessons have been paid for (see **Figure 12**), while our introduction to the elderly gentleman takes place in either a museum or gallery, where he inspects art objects with prices visibly attached to them (see **Figure 13**). These images would seem to lead us to yet another visible critique of the commercialization of art, like the one that so powerfully introduces the boy's final section (see **Figure 14**).

Yet, while all of these occasions of the commercialization of art are negatively valenced—the advertisements surround the young man in the last figure with a future relentlessly made unavailable to him—it is worth registering that they aren't entirely distinguishable from the reigning aesthetic of the novel as a whole. The gentleman considers his purchases and receives aesthetic instruction in part to commission a war memorial (see **Figure 15**), a monument that both participates in a rank nationalism that Ward would critique throughout his career, while also upholding a notion of the public arts that Ward directed in his work with the Federal Art Project. Even the logo for the "Eagle Corporation of America" in Figure 11 recalls the federal eagle so omnipresent in the Works Progress Administration's public arts and its own iconographic self-presentation, for example in the logo of the National Recovery Administration (see **Figure 16**).

By allowing for a proximity between the arts and commerce, even amidst his most strenuously leftist critiques, Ward embodies precisely the tensions between mourning and melancholic modernism so forcefully presented in Seth Moglen's analysis of the injuries of American capitalism.¹⁰ Ward here acknowledges, however obliquely, his participation in the very structures his narratives so strenuously critique—what Moglen terms a melancholic "literature of pained acquiescence to destructive social forces" (7)—while mourning in forthright, starkly visible

terms the ongoing depredations of an American capitalism that both buffets and undergirds American modernist practice.

Ward's disappearance into the critical blind spot occasioned by modernist scholarship's continued irresolution around the role of popular culture in the high modern canon might best be understood then in the terms of his own acute ambivalence around such questions. On one hand, Ward's graphic narratives are replete with motifs of heroic, masculine artists singularly confronting an uncaring, urban landscape, one fraught with feminized figures of popular culture and the taint of material, economic concerns.¹¹ Indeed, it was just such austere distance from popular print culture that Gross parodied in *He Done Her Wrong*, transforming Ward's artist-protagonist into a lumberjack, exchanging the aesthetic work of wood engraving for the very material labor of a woodsman, and substituting Ward's alternately scheming or idealized women figures for a comically imperiled ingénue of the first order.

Ward himself had a fraught relationship to the wide popular reach of his own work. He lamented the high cost of art books in his chosen medium, advocating and organizing throughout his career for public and government-sponsored art and epitomizing a leftist politics that sought to forge both a democratic aesthetic and a decentered means of production. Writing in 1938 in an article titled "The Future of Book Illustration," Ward stated: "It is only in [. . .] utilizing the powers of the present that there can be any future for the artist and those for whom, in

the final analysis, all artists work—the People” (1–2). Yet he wrote this in the *Book Collector's Packet*, a fine arts magazine geared toward collectors of carefully limited editions of art books.

Ward's own Equinox Press was a passion project staffed by colleagues drawn in part from the establishment publishing industry that nevertheless operated with a similar business model and assumptions to the coterie press. Ward would for several years publish his wood engravings in unlimited editions appropriate for “people who like the prints [and wish] to be able to have them and afford them,” avowing that “to artificially produce scarcity is *wrong*” (*Vertigo* 674). Yet he simultaneously illustrated thirteen books for the Limited Editions Club, which described itself as: “The Limited Editions Club, Incorporated: your favorite books, the classics of the world's literature, illustrated by the foremost artists and made into volumes of beauty by the foremost designers of books, produced solely for members of the Limited Editions Club.”¹² With a pricing structure premised on scarcity—even the bibliography of the Limited Editions Club was limited to 800 copies, and bound in Nigerian Oasis Goatskin with hand-marbled papers—such productions highlighted the keen ironies under which Ward produced his engravings.

Ward thus dwells not only between the spaces of the library, the gallery, and the museum, but also between the masterwork and the illustration, and the novel and the short story—divisions that have long delineated the boundaries between high and popular culture so perpetually vexing to modernist production in *both* art and literature. Ward thus inverts our expectations of modernism, this time with literary modernists' relationship to the mass-media venue of the short story. Figures like Faulkner and Fitzgerald spring to mind here: in spite of their professed disdain for popularity, they were required to address the broad audiences of glossy monthly magazines to make ends meet. Ward conversely desires to make prints affordable to all but must cater to the narrow audiences for limited editions from fine presses to make ends meet.¹³

Such considerations of the imbrication of popular cultural and artistic and literary productions—whether between short stories and novels, magazine illustration and work in the studio, comics and canvases, or in Ward's particularly rich example, among children's books, independent publishing, and novels in woodcuts—simultaneously enrich and complicate our understanding of modernism's relationship to the market. Tracing these ambivalences and contradictions in Ward's oeuvre allows us to reexamine his graphic narratives as riven between high-art and mass-cultural pressures. These are the very ambivalences that animate many of the debates within contemporary modernist criticism, a fact that makes Ward—and comics more broadly—deeply relevant for a reimagined understanding of the American modernist landscape.

Notes

1. Two scholarly monographs that stand out as important first steps in this regard are Gardner and Beaty, both published in 2012, the same year the University of Oregon established the first minor in comics studies.
2. In addition to the essays collected here, compare my claims in "Comics Against Themselves: The Graphic Narratives of Chris Ware as Literature" for Ware as part of this reinhabitation of modernist imperatives in contemporary graphic narrative.
3. Lynd Ward's novels in woodcuts pose difficulties for historians of comics as well, eschewing a more conventionally caricatural visual vocabulary and deriving little influence from what are widely perceived as the early-twentieth-century innovators of the medium. His novels' reliance upon serial images as visual language, however, places them firmly within the ken of comics scholarship, as I hope this essay will demonstrate.
4. The few remaining works of criticism not otherwise cited here include Cohen, Beronā and Lanier, Beronā ("Pictures Speak," "Woodcut Novels," "Wordless Novels"), and Scott.
5. McCloud's definition of comics, of course, is one of many and not without its detractors. It is perhaps more capacious than an intuitive sense of the medium would allow for—by this definition, every art exhibition and installation might be defined as comics—and excludes other compelling narratives of comics' genealogy as tied to the caricature and the doodle (Spiegelman and Brunetti, respectively). Yet I have found such a broad notion intellectually productive for exactly the kinds of comparative research I put forward in this essay.
6. Ward need not be understood as singular in this impulse. Frans Masereel, who served as Ward's introduction to the medium of the novel in woodcuts and perhaps his greatest influence, eschewed linear narrative altogether in works such as *The City* (1925), which has drawn comparisons to silent, experimental films like Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929) for its montage effects capturing modern urban life yet divorced from narrative conventions of character and plot. Although Spiegelman in the Library of America introductions announces silent films as a "direct catalyst for the silent book" (xiii)—works that were themselves being displaced at the very moment of Ward's most productive years in novels in woodcuts—there is little concrete evidence in the Ward archive, to my knowledge, of his knowingly responding to these changes in cinema or to his readers responding in kind.
7. This contrary to the logical positivist ideas being developed simultaneously by Otto Neurath in his conception of the universal pictorial language of Isotype, or even the representational fidelity accorded icons over and above words in the published lecture notes of Ferdinand de Saussure that became *Course in General Linguistics*, that singular examination of the work of the relational signification Ward explores with such assiduity in his novels.
8. The force of Brooks's argument for conventional fiction here draws on these writers' desire to visualize the referent world, a tension no less keenly felt in Ward's graphic narrative: "Gesture is read as containing such meanings because it is postulated as the metaphorical approach to what cannot be said. If we often come perilously close, in reading these novelists, to a feeling that the represented world won't bear the weight of the significances placed on it, this is because the represented world is so often being used metaphorically, as sign of something else" (11).
9. Despite such claims, Ward did seriously consider an offer to compose newspaper comics in the early 1950s, writing in a manuscript draft letter to Maxson F. Judell that his hopes to create a work rivaling Milt Caniff was a "project [that] interests me immensely" (Ward and McNeer papers). To my knowledge, Ward's attempts at drawing a newspaper comic, if made, do not survive.
10. Ward might rightly be viewed here as the inverse of Moglen's John Dos Passos: an artist who at first can only register melancholy when faced with the losses capital has enacted on the imaginative arts (as figured by the protagonist's blankness and retreat in the face of his mistress in *Gods' Man*), but

who becomes able to fully mourn such losses (in scenes like those of workers' speech being violently silenced) in his later work.

11. For a frequently cited account of the feminization of mass culture in modernism, see Huyssen, esp. 44–62.

12. Published alongside Ward's harrowing images of privation that illustrated his Limited Editions Club edition of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1942), was the Club's newsletter for September of that year, detailing how the selection committee chose the novel over roast beef hash at the Plaza and toasted their decision at the Waldorf-Astoria, all during a time of war rationing.

13. I make similar claims for literary modernists such as Faulkner and Fitzgerald. See Ball, *False Starts*.

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