

= Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary =

Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary is a comic @-@ book story by American cartoonist Justin Green , published in 1972 . Green takes the persona of Binky Brown to tell of the " compulsive neurosis " with which he struggled in his youth and which he blamed on his strict Roman Catholic upbringing . Green was later diagnosed with obsessive ? compulsive disorder (OCD) and came to see his problems in that light .

In the story , sinful thoughts that he cannot control torment Binky Brown ; to his alarm , phallic objects become literal penises and project what he calls " pecker rays " at religious objects such as churches and statues of the Virgin Mary . He develops an internal set of rules to obey and punishments for breaking them . The torment does not subside , and he comes to reject the Catholic Church in defiance as the source of it . The work combines a wide variety of visual and narrative techniques in a style that echoes the torment of its protagonist .

Binky Brown had an immediate influence on contemporaries in underground comix : such cartoonists as Aline Kominsky , Robert Crumb , and Art Spiegelman soon turned to producing similarly confessional works . Binky Brown has gained a reputation as the first major work of autobiography in English @-@ language comics , and many aspects of its approach have become widespread in underground and alternative comics .

= Background =

Justin Green (b . 1945) was born to a Jewish father and Catholic mother and raised Catholic . As a child he at first attended a Catholic parochial school , and later transferred to a school where most students were Jews . He rejected the Catholic faith in 1958 as he believed it caused him " compulsive neurosis " that decades later was diagnosed as obsessive ? compulsive disorder (OCD) .

Green was studying painting at the Rhode Island School of Design when in 1967 he discovered the work of Robert Crumb and turned to cartooning , attracted to what he called Crumb 's " harsh drawing stuffed into crookedly @-@ drawn panels " . He experimented with his artwork to find what he called an " inherent and automatic style as a conduit for the chimerical forms in [his] own psyche " . He dropped out of an MFA program at Syracuse University when in 1968 he felt a " call to arms " to move to San Francisco , where the nascent underground comix scene was blossoming amid the counterculture there .

At the time , comic books had a reputation in the US as low @-@ brow children 's entertainment , and the public often associated them with juvenile delinquency . Comics had little cultural capital and few American cartoonists had challenged the perception that the medium was inherently incapable of mature artistic expression .

= Synopsis =

Green takes the persona of Binky Brown , who opens the story writing a confession of the neurosis that has tortured him since puberty . In his childhood , he knocks over a statue of the Virgin Mary and feels intense guilt over this affront to his mother and to God . Binky is raised a Catholic and undergoes the religious indoctrination of nuns at a strict Catholic parochial school that commonly employs corporal punishment . He forms an image of a vengeful God , which fills him with feelings of fear and guilt .

Binky 's intrusive thoughts bring him to believe his body is trying to lead him to sin and eternal punishment . He develops an internal system of rules to cope with these thoughts and punishes himself for violations . He wards off thoughts and fantasies he cannot control and that give him guilt by silently repeating the word " noyatin " to himself , a contraction of the repentant " not a sin " .

As he approaches adolescence and becomes aware of his sexuality , he begins to see common objects as phalluses ? phalluses that project unholy rays . These objects include his fingers , his toes , and his own penis , and he obsessively tries to deflect their " pecker rays " from reaching holy

items such as churches or statues of Mary . Binky finds his anguish all @-@ consuming as he imagines the destruction he cannot avoid , and spends hours praying to God for forgiveness . As an adult , Binky confronts his faith and by smashing a set of statues of the Virgin Mary declares himself free of the Church and its influence on him .

= = Composition and publication = =

Green spent about a year working on the 44 @-@ page Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary . He took a few months making cards of what he called " factual incidents or neurotic habits " to incorporate . During the seven months he drew the work Green received a monthly stipend of \$ 150 from Ron Turner , the founder of underground comix publisher Last Gasp Eco @-@ Funnies . Last Gasp published the story as a one @-@ shot comic book in 1972 ? Green 's first solo title . It went through two print runs of 55 @,@ 000 copies each with a " Youngsters Prohibited " label on the cover .

In 1990 , Green had an essay published entitled " The Binky Brown Matter " in The Sun . In the essay , he describes the OCD with which he was diagnosed years after completing Binky Brown . Last Gasp reprinted the story in 1995 in The Binky Brown Sampler , a softcover anthology of Binky Brown strips with an introduction by Art Spiegelman and an expanded version of " The Binky Brown Matter " .

Green sold the original artwork to the strip in the 1970s ; McSweeney 's staff contacted the owner of the artwork , Christine Valenza , to make fresh scans for a standalone reprinting in 2009 , overseen by McSweeney 's editor Eli Horowitz . It had a print run of 5 @,@ 000 copies and reprints the artwork at the full size of the originals ; the page reproductions mimic the actual pages , including marks , smudges , and corrections . In 2011 , the publisher Stara published a French translation by Harry Morgan titled Binky Brown rencontre la Vierge Marie , and La Cúpula published a Spanish translation by Francisco Pérez Navarro titled Binky Brown conoce a la virgen María .

= = = Editions = = =

= = Style and analysis = =

The story takes the form of a guilt @-@ ridden confession . In the opening , the adult Binky hangs over a sickle , bound from head to toe and listening to Ave Maria as he draws with a pen in his mouth . He declares his intention : " to purge myself of the compulsive neurosis which I have served since I officially left Catholicism on Halloween , 1958 . " He justifies the work to communicate with the " many others [who] are slaves to their neuroses " and who , despite believing themselves isolated , number so many that they " would entwine the globe many times over in a vast chain of common suffering " .

Though Green built Binky Brown on an autobiographical base he fabricated many scenes ? such as one in which Binky is bullied by two third @-@ graders ? " to suggest or convey a whole generalized idea about some subjective feeling , such as order or fear or guilt " . To critic Charles Hatfield Binky Brown displays a " radical subjectivity " that calls into question the notion of objectivity in autobiography . The presentation is insistently subjective and non @-@ literal in its visuals .

Despite the heavy tone , humor is prominent . The work is conscious of its own creation ? Green 's drawing of it frames the narrative proper and there are constant reminders of it throughout . Green patterned the opening after those featuring the Crypt @-@ Keeper in EC Comics ' Tales from the Crypt series from the 1950s . Green used the adult Binky as the narrator of the captions and as a way to tie together the past and present timeframes . There is a disconnect in that the narrator refers to his younger self as " he " . Other references to comics include a Sinstopper 's Guidebook , which alludes to Dick Tracy 's Crimestopper 's Textbook and a cartoon by Robert Crumb in the background .

Green employs numerous Catholic symbols , such as a word balloon adorned with symbols of

Christ 's martyrdom to represent the depth of Binky 's desperation . Catholic works such as a catechism and Treasure Chest parochial comics appear throughout the work .

Despite strict censorship in other media in the US , explicit sexuality was common in underground comix . Binky Brown was the first work of autobiographical comics to depict explicit sexuality : penises appear throughout , and Binky masturbates in one scene . The central symbol of the penis recurs sometimes subtly as in the images of pencils used to craft the work , and more often explicitly , as every phallic @-@ like object Green sees because a literal " pecker ray " -projecting penis in Binky 's mind .

Art Spiegelman described the artwork as " quirky and ungainly " . Though it appears awkward , Green put considerable effort into elements such as graphical perspective , and draws attention to his craft by depicting himself drawing and by placing the drawing manuals *Perspective* and *Fun With a Pencil* in the backgrounds . Green makes wide use of visual metaphors , in contrast to the mundane tales of Harvey Pekar , another prominent early practitioner of autobiographical comics . In Binky Brown symbols become literal , as when Binky imagines himself becoming a snowball hurtling into Hell or as a fish chased by a police officer who wears a crucifix . The work displays a wide array of visual techniques : diagrammatic arrows ; mock @-@ scholarly documentation ; a great variety in panel size , composition , and layout ; and a range of contrasting mechanical and organic rendering techniques , such as screentone alongside dense hand @-@ drawn hatching . The symbolic and technical collide where the Virgin Mary becomes the vanishing point of Binky 's converging " pecker rays " .

Critic Joseph Witek sees the shifting between different modes of traditional comics representation at times presents a literalist view through " windowlike panels " , and at others " representational , symbolic , allegorical , associative , and allusive " , an approach analogous to " Binky Brown 's massively and chaotically overdetermined subjectivity " . Witek finds roots for the fractured psychological landscape of Binky Brown in the comics of earlier eras : the unrestrained psyches in the dreams of Winsor McCay 's *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend* , the irrational , shifting landscapes of George Herriman 's *Krazy Kat* , and Superman 's obsessively contrarian nemesis Bizarro .

In Binky Brown Green blames the Catholic Church for his psychological troubles ; years later , he was diagnosed with OCD , and came to see these episodes in that light rather than as the fault of the Church . He nevertheless continued to blame the Church for contributing to his anxieties and maintained that religion has a magnifying influence on the condition . He said the abandoning of both religion and recreational drugs made it easier to cope with his condition . In 1990 a Catholic priest raised concerns that Binky Brown may be harmful to minors ; Green countered that he believed it was the Church that was harming minors . Green has likened his OCD to a " split vision " which made him " both the slave to the compulsion and the detached observer " .

Literary scholar Hillary Chute sees the work as addressing feminist concerns of " embodiment and representation " as it " delves into and forcefully pictures non @-@ normative sexuality " . Chute affirms that despite its brevity Binky Brown merits the label " graphic novel " as " the quality of work , its approach , parameters , and sensibility " mark a " seriousness of purpose " .

= = Reception and legacy = =

Green recounted " a strong energy " that Binky Brown drew from his readership , the first significant response he got from his work . The story has had a wide influence on underground and alternative comics , where its self @-@ mocking and confessional approach has inspired numerous cartoonists to expose intimate and embarrassing details of their lives . Under the influence of Binky Brown , in 1972 Aline Kominsky published her first strip , the autobiographical " Goldie : A Neurotic Woman " in *Wimmen 's Comix* # 1 . Other contemporary underground cartoonists were soon to incorporate confessional autobiography into their work . Robert Crumb followed the same year with " The Confessions of R. Crumb " and continued with numerous other such strips . Art Spiegelman , who had seen Binky Brown in mid @-@ creation in 1971 , went as far as to state that " without Binky Brown there would be no Maus " ? Spiegelman 's most prominent work . The same year as Binky Brown 's publication , Green asked Spiegelman to contribute a three @-@ page strip to the first

issue of Funny Aimals , which Green edited . Spiegelman delivered the three @-@ page " Maus " in which Nazi cats persecute Jewish mice , inspired by his father 's experiences in the Auschwitz concentration camp ; years later he revisited the theme in the graphic novel of the same name . Comics critic Jared Gardner asserts that , while underground comix was associated with countercultural iconoclasm , the movement 's most enduring legacy was to be autobiography .

The strip went out of print for two decades after selling its initial print runs , during which time enthusiasts traded copies or photocopies . Rather than through cartooning , Green made his living painting signs , and contributed occasional cartoon strips to various publications . Aside from occasional one @-@ off strips , his more regular cartooning appeared in the ongoing strips The Sign Game in Signs of the Times magazine and Musical Legends in America in Pulse ! Such later work has attracted far less attention than Binky Brown .

Though autobiographical elements had appeared earlier in the work of underground cartoonists such as Crumb , Spain , and Kim Deitch , Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary has gained credit as the first important work of autobiographical comics in English . To Charles Hatfield Binky Brown " the ur @-@ example of confessional literature in comics " ; for Paul Gravett Green was " the first neurotic visionary to unburden his uncensored psychological troubles " ; Douglas Wolk declared Green and his work " ahead of the memoirist curve " ; Art Spiegelman declared : " What the Brontë sisters did for Gothic romance , what Tolkien did for sword @-@ and @-@ sorcery , Justin Green did for confessional , autobiographical comix [sic] " ; and Publishers Weekly called the work the " Rosetta Stone of autobiographical comics " . Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary strip has appealed mostly to comics fans and cartoonists and has gained little recognition from mainstream audiences and arts critics . Spiegelman has speculated this neglect comes from the nature of the comics medium ; in contrast to explicit works such as Philip Roth 's Portnoy 's Complaint , the penises in Green 's work are visual .

According to underground comix historian Patrick Rosenkranz , Green represents a break with past convention by being " the first to openly render his personal demons and emotional conflicts within the confines of a comic " . Green denied credit , calling confessional autobiography " a fait accompli , a low fruit ripe for the plucking " , examples of which abounded in literary works he had read by James Joyce , James T. Farrell , and Philip Roth . He has accepted credit for " anticipat [ing] the groundswell in literature about obsessive compulsive disorder by almost two decades " , for which he knew of no precedent . Green used the Binky Brown persona over the years in short strips and prose pieces that appeared in underground periodicals such as Arcade and Weirdo . " Sweet Void of Youth " in 1976 follows Binky from high school to age thirty @-@ one , torn between cartooning and more respected forms of art .

To cartoonist Jim Woodring , Green 's autobiographical work " has never been surpassed " . Woodring 's own autobiographical work in Jim draws from his dreams rather than his waking life . British @-@ American cartoonist Gabrielle Bell sympathized with Brown 's approach , which she described as " talking about his feelings or his emotional state when he was illustrating it with striking images that were sort of absurd or a weird juxtaposition " . Green 's influence extended overseas to cartoonists such as the Dutch Peter Pontiac , who drew inspiration from Binky Brown and Maus to produce Kraut (2000) , about his father who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II . Chute sees major themes of isolation and coping with OCD recurring in autobiographical works such as Howard Cruse 's Stuck Rubber Baby (1995) and Alison Bechdel 's Fun Home (2006) . Hatfield sees echoes of Green 's unrestrained approach to dealing with a mental condition in Madison Clell 's Cuckoo (2002) ? about Clell 's dissociative identity disorder ? and in David B. 's Epileptic (2003) .

The story ranked No. 9 on The Comics Journal 's list of the best hundred English @-@ language comics of the 20th century , and featured as the cover artwork for the autobiographical comics issue of the journal Biography (Vol . 31 , No. 1) . Artwork to Binky Brown appeared in an exhibition of Green 's work at Shake It Records in Cincinnati in 2009 .

Autobiographical cartoonists inspired by ' ' Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary ' '

= = = = Books = = = =

===== Journals and magazines =====

===== Web =====