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“Superman has always been in my life; I remember just staring at him as a kid”: an interview with Sina Grace

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ABSTRACT

In Fall 2023, as part of the ‘Superman’s Cleveland’ celebration of 85 years of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster’s creations, Sina Grace shared his recent book, *Superman: The Harvests of Youth*. We sat down with Grace to discuss his creative process for his retelling the story of the youth of world’s first superhero in the twenty-first century, in his hometown of Smallville. During our discussion, we talked about Grace’s move from autobiography and independent comics to sharing his story through the iconic characters like Superman. He reflected on what the superhero means today, why comics and the superhero will survive the AI revolution, as well the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic and Taylor Swift on the *The Harvests of Youth*!

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Valentino Zullo and Vera Camden: Thanks for meeting with us! We’re very excited to talk about Superman!

Sina Grace: Thanks for inviting me. Let’s do this!

Camden and Zullo: Alright, first question, can you talk a little bit about what drew you to Superman personally? And why do you think Superman has this staying power?

Grace: I don’t have a clear answer as to why Superman has staying power because readers and people have become more jaded and more disenfranchised. At the core, what draws me to Superman, no matter how jaded people are, is this immense desire for hope and for answers and for that to come from within. Even though we know Superman is an alien, his solutions come from a very human place and that reflects us. The staying power is there and people still turn to Superman. The optimistic, happy ending that he provides us keeps us coming back (Figure 1).

Camden and Zullo: We personally found your autobiographical work interesting and inspiring. Is there a line from that part of yourself to the line that can tell the story of Superman as a hero?

Grace: As a comic book creator, for so long I’ve always stood by the belief that we should try to embody the traits of the characters we write about, at least with superheroes, never



Figure 1. Cover art by Sina Grace for *Superman: The Harvests of Youth*. ©DC comics reprinted with permission.

mind anti-heroes or villains. *Superman: The Harvests of Youth* (Figure 1) is this sombre book about a teenage Clark Kent learning how to use his powers as the problems around him get bigger and bigger and more complicated. When I was working on it we were in the middle of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I was making this book about hope (Figure 2), and the thing that really saved me was that mindset of embodying these characters and instilling that hope in myself that we were going to get through this weird and tough chapter of human history. I was making this book in a vacuum with just the hope that I will be out in the world promoting this and talking about this; I will be able to engage with people, and this will be a tool to connect to people one day. Having that for myself kept me going forward and it made me fall in love with the characters in a way I really hadn't before because in that book he loses hope at certain times and he doesn't know what to do. Looking at that and being like, 'okay, if he can figure it out, I can figure it out, and if he can figure the thing to say I can figure out the thing to do.' I kind of get a little too involved in my characters' lives as someone who has done autobiographical work and done a lot of memoir stuff, I definitely inject myself and my experiences, and my own feelings into these characters.



Figure 2. From *Superman: The Harvests of Youth*, pp. 4-5. By Sina Grace. ©DC comics. Reprinted with permission.

Camden and Zullo: As you know, we both study novels, and it's funny because this came up when we talked with Raina Telgemeier as well: one of our shared passions is for Jane Austen and when you look at her letters – just apropos what you're saying – she emphasises that these characters are alive. She'll say things like, 'I can only imagine that Mr Darcy prizes any Picture of [Elizabeth] too much to [want] . . . it exposed to the public eye.' Austen has a sense of their ongoing life; her involvement makes the characters come alive on the page.

Grace: Yes, you must love your characters to make them leave an impact on readers. To get that deep into them and understand them makes them all different. They don't just become extensions of you as an author but become these actual people who can really reflect all aspects of living.

Camden and Zullo: By the way, we love the title *Harvests of Youth*, can you say anything about that? It's very powerful, poetic even.

Grace: I wish I could remember exactly how I came up with that title. Circling around some words that would indicate what's going on in the book, I felt the city of Smallville is not just about Clark Kent. I wanted a sense of an agrarian world and remember at the time I started it, it was going to be a very seasonal book and each chapter would be reflective of each season, but as I got into it, I focused on Fall.

Camden and Zullo: Jane Austen's *Persuasion* has been called autumnal and compared to Keats' *Ode to Autumn*: both works are filled with melancholy. And there's something about the way your title captures that autumnal quality, there's a sadness that pervades. And even though as you say it's from the point of hope, but there is this kind of autumnal quality to it, which is so important, given the adolescence of these characters.

Grace: I knew that the characters would be going through a lot emotionally, and so I thought, 'what gets harvested in your youth?' that's definitely where I am coming from

with it. I wanted to talk about something ‘farmy’ and seasonal, but the irony is though it’s a very autumnal book, you have a very specific harvest at that time (Figure 2).

Camden and Zullo: There’s a bounty too, the thing about harvests is that there is a bounty. A harvest bounty, and fruit. So that’s true of our adolescence, it’s fruitful (Figure 3).

Can we go back to something you just said, though? You were talking about these characters and falling in love with them, can you talk about creating these new characters who appear in the book? How did you envision them? How did you decide who to bring in? Lana Lang is there and so is Pete Ross, but there are so many interesting new characters that are *your* characters.

Grace: I needed to fill out the cast a little bit with some roles that would not necessarily fit with the existing legacies and canons of these established characters: Lana Lang, Pete Ross, Lex Luthor (Figure 4). I knew instinctively it didn’t make sense to make Lex Luthor come from a farm family and have him be a specific kind of lost and disconnected that he would then go down sort of a rabbit hole in this online community. And same with Pete,

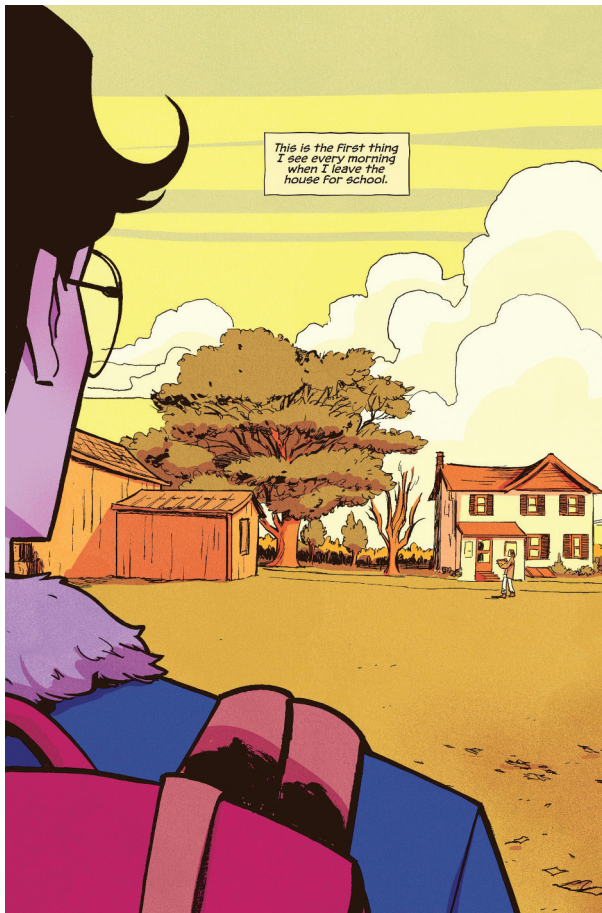


Figure 3. From *Superman: The Harvests of Youth*, p. 1. By Sina Grace. ©DC comics. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 4. *Superman: The Harvests of Youth* cast. By Sina Grace. ©DC comics. Reprinted with permission.

that's not his role in the Superman ensemble. So, I needed to create some new characters, and I knew that I wanted to tell a story about someone who was about to have it all, and a small incident in his life just changes his entire course.

That happened to a friend of mine – the same exact thing. He was going to be a skateboarding superstar, leave his farm town home, be a big deal, have sponsorships and before he was 18, he rolled his ankle and just became a record store clerk. He got really lost for a while, and it took his friends to help save him, and I wanted to tell that story so badly and put that in this. Even though I didn't grow up in a farmland, that has happened, that is real, that happened to someone in a farm town community and I knew if that was here in Southern California, that it would be recognisable across the country. Sure enough, I told another comics creator, Josh Trujillo, about this and he recognised this story. His dad was a bowling superstar, and just messed up his wrist one day, and now can't really bowl. I wanted this idea: that one little action can change everything. This determines the tone of the entire book, in terms of Superman dealing with certain small things, things that he can't punch. These feeling states have to be nuanced in so many different ways. And so, I created this character Gil, to embody and to deal with all that pain.

And recontextualizing Lana Lang so that she not be his love interest. That doesn't matter in the end of Superman's history, because he ends up with Lois, so Lana can really become anything else. So, I wanted to focus on these other attributes that she had and these other interests that she had, and I want to let her run around and not be beholden to either being his damsel, or his reward, or his prize or whatever. Instead, I created Amy. Amy also ended up becoming a character for me to sort of showcase friends I had in high

school who were kind of like ‘the art school girl’ because those were my friends in school. I wanted to make her the love interest and I wanted to put their dating lives into the book and sort of show young readers that the art school girl is ‘the one.’ (Figure 5) She’s the special one and you should always be paying attention to a girl who figures out how to outfit a long skirt at 16 years old. I wanted to expand the cast and also make sure that Smallville reflected a city that wasn’t so malt shop white. I love Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale’s *Superman for all Seasons*, but it’s just that sometimes when people are creating an idyllic town, it gets a little white-washed. I wanted to play with the colour and texture of the town a little bit by adding these characters.

Camden and Zullo: What you are saying about Lana is if she were the Smallville love interest again, we would read the character the way we always have and sort of not pay attention to her as much, but in turning her slightly in your hand, we pay attention to her in new ways because she’s not the love interest. In that context, can you say more about how you navigate modernising while paying respect to the characters? Was there any tension that came up?



Figure 5. From *Superman: The Harvests of Youth*, p. 44. By Sina Grace. ©DC comics. Reprinted with permission.

Grace: I got very lucky with this book. My editors at DC Comics and everyone upstairs at DC Comics were incredibly supportive and very understanding of the story I was trying to tell. I've run into issues where a publisher will meet me with some resistance, or not fully grasp what I'm trying to say with these characters, and therefore would put up some unnecessary resistance for lack of a better term. With this book however, they were totally supportive. I understood and loved these characters at their core, there was no corporate handbook for how to write these characters.

The only resistance I got was I definitely wanted to make sure that these characters spoke the way real teenagers do and act the way real teenagers do. So, there was a little bit of back and forth of Lex Luthor drinking red wine in the book, and my editor was like, 'that's an underaged kid drinking,' and I was like, 'it's Lex Luthor, like of course he breaks the rules.' So, we had our back and forth about that and it ended with 'Clark can't condone it or approve of it,' and so Clark doesn't. We just had to have some very loud dialogue, where Clark is like 'well, I would never!' He's a boy scout; similarly, there was a line where Gil Stockwell, the character we were talking about earlier, falls and re-hurts his ankle, and Clark is trying to help him and the original line was something like 'I'm not a fag, let me go', and DC to the very last day was like 'we can't do it, we can't use that word.' And I said, 'this is how teenagers talk, this is how a straight boy would talk when he's feeling vulnerable.' He would say something like that even to this day and I think I'm really firm in not straying away from ugly language teenagers use because they do, they do make those mistakes, they do say ignorant words and not understand the pain. And I thought I should put that in the book because that's real. So, we landed on 'homo,' which is still pretty good, and still something I think a kind of a teenage dirtbag would say in retaliation to sort of being helped up. So, it was just little things like that.

Camden and Zullo: But that's got to take integrity though. I mean you're really saying, 'I'm not going to self-censor, I'm wanting to show reality.' I mean this is not a little book you stick in the waiting room of a mental health clinic, it's an artistic production, and the author has some authority over how he or she wants to represent the world. Otherwise it's just propaganda.

Grace: And luckily if those were the instances then I got out with 90% victory!

Camden and Zullo: So an A, that's still an A!

Grace: It was a fantastic collaboration. You don't usually get such a net positive, happy collaborative experience with one of the biggest corporations in the world. I'm just really grateful that everything aligned, and that everyone understood what I was trying to do, it was a great process.

Part of why I think this collaborative experience with DC worked out so well is that Superman has always been in my life; I remember just staring at him as a kid. As you know, I came into comics loving X-Men, Spiderman, Batman, and the Ninja Turtles, and I would read those as a kid and draw me and my friends as different X-Men characters. I'm following the whims of a nine-year-old boy who wanted to grow up and be a comic book artist. As I grew up, I was just like, 'why not?', and I kept going. But as I explored what that meant for me, I ended up turning away from, as people

call them, the 'Big 2' publishers, Marvel and DC. I went to UC Santa Cruz and got a very liberal arts education and ended up exploring a lot of slice of life work, and my way into professional comics ended up being through Image Comics. So, there was a long time where I was very much like, 'I don't need those characters to tell my stories, I'm just telling my stories.' And I built a little bit of a foundation for myself, almost an equilibrium in terms of I have just enough fans to validate just enough work that I want to do. But then at a certain point I had that and I ended up kind of thinking what fun it would be to actually take on characters that have sort of established legacies. I wondered what it would be like if I took my sensibilities and applied them to actual symbols, instead of building mine from the ground up. What would it be like if I took all these things I learned about myself and making these smaller stories and taking them on a bigger scale? So, Superman had always been there, and I just never thought about him for me because I never thought I would be the kind of person to tell one of his stories. And it took this one editor at DC, Diegs Gomez, to kind of just sit me down and we had a whole meeting about some Green Arrow and Black Canary book, but after a while she was like 'yeah sure, but like what would you do with Superman dealing with issues of masculinity?' He'd been there my whole life, I just never thought he and I would have such a great relationship.

Camden and Zullo: Can you say more about Superman and masculinity? It's a fascinating part of the book.

Grace: The funny thing about why everyone loves Superman is he's a straight white guy, he's doing just fine, and he's also hot as hell. It's funny that there's no creative 'me too' situation that the character of Clark Kent ever has to undergo. He's perfect.

Camden and Zullo: Right, he would never violate anyone.

Grace: Exactly. He would never ever violate anyone. So that's what was so fun to me was staring at him and being like other guys would hate this guy. I wanted to explore how would Clark fail, even as Superman, under the weight of masculinity and what that entails. And so, it ended up becoming fun. First, I was doing a triangle, where it was going to be Clark, Lex, and Gil representing different areas of how every man fails under masculinity in very different ways. Lex was going to be perceived as a failure to his father from the get-go, and then you have Gil dealing with it on a romantic front, and then you have Clark dealing with it in terms of wanting to be a boy scout, like craving being a Labrador then failing in that department, here and there as a friend, and as a boyfriend. Then it kept expanding even more and suddenly it was, how does Pa Kent fail under this? And how can the whole idea of a family fail under it? Suddenly the whole thing was collapsing. I had a lot of fun with that. I had a lot of fun with the collapse. I think at the end of the day the main thing that I think shows up in all of my work is that men just need to communicate, it doesn't ruin anything. Vulnerability doesn't ruin anything. Vulnerability is a strength. I think that's something I have used as a sword and shield in my own work: bearing it out in front of you and actually letting that be something that doesn't hurt me and something that can actually disarm you, and putting that in Superman was really cool. To have Superman be like, I don't know what to do and I'm scared, and I'm scared in all these different ways, and if I'm scared you must be scared.

I think that was what sort of helped land planes in the book, showing how great he can be and then also letting him admit that he can get scared, too.

Camden and Zullo: It really shows in your art too in this book. Superman feels more physically vulnerable here. He's not as defined and thus not as distant from us visually.

Okay, so shifting gears a bit, but we wanted to talk about the role that Cleveland played in your work. Can you talk about how the city inspired you, both as the city where Superman was created also just as a place itself?

Grace: Cleveland as a place itself made this book make sense to me. I knew from the get-go that Smallville would be a little bit bigger than it's normally perceived as in history. I didn't want it to be as big as Cleveland, but something that really fascinated me on my first visit was when you were showing me around town and you had shown me these old factories that had been turned into breweries, and we were driving around different communities where there was little neighbourhoods that were refusing to sort of get lost. There were examples where it was like, 'we're going to slap some millennial pink on the store front, and we're going to get a hipster font for the name here.' I know there's a better word than 'scrappy', and there's a different word than 'resilient,' but those two words scrappy and resilient is what I saw in Cleveland. The city was just like, 'We're great. This industry left, and this industry no longer works, but we're still here and we're stronger for it, and you can't really stop us.'

Camden and Zullo: We're here, we're queer, get used to it!

Grace: Yes! We're here, we're Cleve. But that scrappiness really sang to me, in terms of just thinking about Smallville as an economic beast. Just thinking about Smallville economically opened me up to, again, just different layers to how this cast lives in the town. I had a friend who grew up in Ohio, and he was like, 'we were the poor kids' and I was like, 'oh, it wasn't like the farmer's kids?' He said, 'no, they were rich.' They were the rich kids with the trucks, and he was like, 'me and my family we were the poor kids with the food stamps.' And so, that also helped me think too about this character Gil being the wealthy one.

Camden and Zullo: Yeah, that's actually really interesting in terms of Cleveland because the rural is never really far away. I mean we're in Cleveland, but you go less than an hour and you're in a very rural area, it's still got a huge rural dynamic. And you're absolutely right, the people who own farmland actually are quite wealthy, as in compared to those who drive into the city to work in a wage based job. But I think that sense of the rural is never very far from Cleveland, so that's a perfect linking with your narrative.

I think this leads nicely into another influence you have shared: you have said Taylor Swift influenced the book, can you say more about that?

Grace: I'm always happy to talk about Taylor Swift.

Camden and Zullo: We're so happy to hear that you're a Swiftie. We're so thrilled.

Grace: Life is better as a Swiftie, let me tell you.

Camden and Zullo: We agree with you – the joy, the power!

Grace: I ended up falling in love with Taylor Swift in the pandemic and that was right when her *Folklore* album came out, and it was such, talk about autumnal, it is just sort of sweet and sombre (Figure 6).

Camden and Zullo: You’ve probably seen those videos of her where she’s out in the garden with Jack Antonoff—

Grace: And actually, specifically that album, it’s called *The Long Pond Studio Sessions*, and it’s even more stripped back, and it’s even more raw, and painful and bare. And I just wanted to capture – I don’t know how to describe it, but like choking up in front of someone, like your own emotion is preventing you from saying words coming out of your mouth. And that’s the thing I was trying to draw, which I don’t think I succeeded at necessarily, but I think the attempt was just how do we get these characters there? How do



Figure 6. From *Superman: The Harvester of Youth*, p. 134. By Sina Grace. ©DC comics. Reprinted with permission.

we make them feel that? How do I draw that? How do I get them saying things? Because, you know, they're teenagers, so of course they're going to say some really emotional shit and they're going to say some really maudlin stuff. I tried to capture that, and the only way I could really do that was aesthetically and also that lent itself to why I ended up having it not be seasons, and kind of everything was very firmly in Autumn. I didn't even want it to be rainy, I just wanted to have it be cold and dry in the air, and that everyone has to wear their layers. I don't exactly know how to describe how I tried to marry that relationship, but I would just play that album over and over again whenever it would come to drawing the pages. I'd be like, 'alright, time to put on Folklore and get sad!'

Camden and Zullo: I mean, one of the things that you know that Taylor talks about in the concerts is how she was a lonely millennial covered in cat hair during the pandemic, so she imagines something different for herself she moves from autobiography and tells others stories with the feeling she knows. The point being that also you said you just did that with the narrative of Superman.

Grace: Circumstantially too, I had every intention of the minute I got my first advance, I was going to go fly back to Cleveland and spend days there and take all these pictures, and Valentino was going to introduce me to some farmers, and I was going to have it be so real and so authentic to the experience, and then we got locked down in our homes, and I wasn't going to get on a plane.

And so, what's funny about you saying all of that is, I don't think it was conscious but if that had to happen where I had to give myself the liberty of playing a little bit of fanfiction with how a farm town works. I never lived it, but the one thing I didn't want to do was sort of play fairytale and make-believe as to what a farm town would be like and get it completely wrong. I did have to do a little bit of make believe in terms of how would those types of people get around and what does their community look like? I am grateful, though, because at the same time Craig Thompson was releasing *Ginseng Roots*. I was able to see a little bit of what the reality would be, but I didn't tether myself to the reality of it. The Kents have a very make-believe farm, where it's like, 'oh, we have this many chickens, this many apple trees, and this many cows.' That's not really how it is anymore.

Camden and Zullo: This was an opportunity for you to really imagine and to create something that's reasonable, but within your imaginative universe. Siegel and Shuster imagined Superman in an uncertain time as well. They imagined someone who could save the world. To that point, though, Superman needs to be a different hero today. Some of our greatest threats come from technology as you make clear in your book, so can you share your thoughts on the role of the superhero today?

Grace: I think the role of the superhero in the modern age, even while we're dealing with technology, just always has to come back to the perseverance of the human spirit and drawing us back to the things that make us human. Which is also – I really never connected this until this conversation – but the importance of the Amy character is that she's an art student, and that's how Clark helps her connect back to people when she's dealing with the death of her brother. He says, 'Hey why don't you go draw people it makes people feel special, everyone likes getting drawn.' She also creates this big mural

that gets shown at the end of the book. And I know we've talked about AI and I'm worried about AI getting rid of artists, but I'm not worried! Because people have always responded more to when I draw something that is loose, or rough, or imperfect (Figure 7), and all we're trying to do with AI is get it to do something perfect. We don't like when AI gives people 6 thumbs. So, I'm not particularly scared because at the end of the day art and music – back to music – will survive because we love the human component. I love bedroom demos; I love talking about Taylor Swift and *The Long Pond Studio Sessions* where it's just her in this little cottage with a couple musicians. You can't just take that away. With superheroes, it's just going to be always about that. Batman is always sort of bankable because he is just a guy who figured it out, he learned how to be a hero, and Spiderman is always dealing with the weight of stuff that makes him human, the responsibilities of just being a person in the world on top of saving the world. And so, that's the stuff that's going to keep superhero stories going in the future.

Camden and Zullo: That's really interesting as you're saying it because in the age of streaming when the access to music is unlimited, we seem to have also returned to vinyl.



Figure 7. *Superman: The Harvests of Youth* character sketches. By Sina Grace. ©DC comics. Reprinted with permission.

That limitless potential also seems to create an interest in a physical experience of media and music, the finite experience of it. With vinyl it's the sound of the scratch of putting the needle down, you long for that weirdly. That's the sign of what's about to come, it's like a preamble. The ears sort of long for and gravitate to that because you know the music is about to follow.

Grace: Anything with intentionality anchors a person back to life. For me, it's the intentionality of getting up changing sides on a record, or the intentionality of 'I'm going to listen to these 5 songs in a row.' I think also for the artist to be like 'someone is going to turn the record at this point, so what is the story from Side A to Side B?'

Camden and Zullo: It takes the hands into the equation too. It's haptic, like the way comic books are haptic.

Grace: This this is sort of tangential, but *Harvests of Youth* was the first time I got spot gloss done on one of the covers of one of my books, and just that tactile feeling, I was like 'oh my god, I have this thing. I've never been able to feel this before.' My books have never warranted it, I've never been able to ask a publisher to do this for one of my books because that tacks on a price. So that made me so happy because it just makes it more real.

Camden and Zullo: We do want that sense of feeling something, holding something. We've talked to some other cartoonists about the fact that holding the book can be something that creates a certain feeling in the reader, too. For example, if something bad happens on page 12 but then you're holding 200 more pages in your right hand you know it's not always going to be that way for that character. There's hope. That really leads us to our next question. In comics, autobiography is often pointed to as the place where we can really talk about mental health, but as you've shown, you can do it in just as well in autobiography and in superhero comics, so can you talk about what is it about the form of comics itself, beyond the genres, what is it about the medium itself that lends itself thinking about the mind?

Grace: It's the marriage of static images and words and in a sense the ability for a very loud broadcast for what you are supposed to feel in the moment. And in turn, the power of subtlety that you can hide within all of that as well, that you can broadcast something super loud and then right under a person's nose, there's this undercurrent event of something else that they can find if they want, or you can subconsciously manipulate them. A huge piece of pop art makes it easy for anyone to grab and pick up and look at. It's just such an easy entry, all you need is eyes. For you to be able to manipulate someone's moodscape with just their eyes, not their ears, not their nose, it's powerful. I don't know how else to say it. If we're going to talk about the mind, even from a standpoint where people are on the spectrum, you're conveying the message so clearly. Because even if they can't read the face, then the character is saying how they're feeling through just the layout or the word balloons, thought bubbles, or other shapes, it's just a really great way to broadcast messages to all types.

Camden and Zullo: You know, that's such an interesting idea because in the mental health field, there's this treatment EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), which is an eye movement therapy. I don't think we've ever thought about it until you just said that, but comics involve eye movement and what you're doing

is activating an emotional experience through eye movement. What you're saying essentially is that comics uniquely correlate eye movement to verbalisation of feeling. I've never really heard anybody think of that the way you just did, that's pretty interesting because I think it's probably true. And that may be part of the power. For our students, for instance, when we got to the end of Bechdel's *Fun Home*, a lot of them said they were crying. They didn't say they were crying after Tolstoy (though maybe they should have!) That's one of the things that you're kind of pointing to is there is a dynamic that is correlating to what we know now therapeutically has a certain impact.

Grace: I used to call it choreography, but yeah, you're choreographing the eye's journey with your panel laid out.

Camden and Zullo: Alright, we're running out of time, but two more fun questions. Can you tell us a little bit about what you're working on now?

Grace: I'm working on the completely fun and totally zany book about pet grief. It's just a bummer. I had to put down my dog last year and I'm sort of still in the throes of grief. I don't know what else to do besides chronicle it and maybe build out that story. It's funny because a publisher called it a 'memoir,' but I don't think it's a memoir. I think it's a gift book and someone was like 'who would you give this to?' I said, anyone that's put a dog down. That sucks and no one really talks about it in a real way, there are just sort of silly-goofy texts about it, or a little too up-its-own-butt texts about it. So that's where I'm at right now, I want to do that. And I'm working on a middle-grade book series at Penguin Random House, called *The Big Deal*, which is really exciting too, but right now pet grief!

Camden and Zullo: It will be a gift in the sense that you'll help other people go through something by saying what you're going through.

Grace: I am giving people the space to say there's no timeline. I will not – what is not right for me – is getting another dog and that's the thing I hear. Everyone's like 'oh you know the quickest way of getting over a dog is getting another dog', and it's too morbid. I tried dog sitting, I hated it. That is sort of what's going on, that's the main project in my head as of this conversation.

Camden and Zullo: So do you know when it will come out? How far along are you?

Grace: I don't have a publisher yet. This is actually the first time in a long time where I've just been like, 'I'm going to make this thing regardless if someone wants it.' Usually the way things go, you do a sampling and then you show a publisher, and I've done more than enough of a sampling. I know what its page count is, and it's already 40% done, so I think I'm just going to finish the whole thing. But I'm showing it to some people, again it goes back to one of those things where if I have to self-publish it then I have to self-publish it, I don't want to, but I know that's the art I have to pursue is when I'm doing it regardless of anybody telling me to do it or to not do it.

Camden and Zullo: We're looking forward to it. Now this is the hard question, what are you reading?

Grace: I wrote it down in my notes, I have to pull it up my notes hold on. I am currently reading *Somna* By Becky Cloonan and Tula Lotay, which is a very lurid series from

a *DSTLRY* about this woman during the Salem Witch trials era. I think it takes place a little bit earlier than that, but she's having these naughty dreams from the devil, and there's a bit of a witch hunt happening. It's just erotica, it's really smart erotica, but it's an erotica book that I'm having a lot of fun reading. I'm reading in terms of DC, *Nightwing* by Tom Taylor and Bruno Redondo as well as *Wonder Woman* by Tom King. I'll read anything that Mariko Tamaki writes and she just put out *Roaming* with her cousin Jillian. I picked up, but I haven't started reading *Mall Goth* yet by Kate Leth, and I just finished *Monica* by Dan Clowes. I was so mad that that book is as good as it is. In the sense where you want someone to be over the hill, and if they're still making great work it's like 'okay, they're still making great work, good.' But *Monica* is good, it lives up to its hype, it's a good book.

Camden and Zullo: It was the number one book of last year on so many comics lists.

Grace: Yeah, it's a lot of familiar tropes and themes, but when you realise that this is actually an incredibly personal book for him. After the fact knowing that this is very close to the relationship he had with his mother, it then grounds you all the more and warms you up to what you're reading just a little bit more than I had originally granted that book.

Camden and Zullo: He's brilliant. That's important that it's not just a rehash. Well, I think that's everything that we had, but this was super fun, thank you for doing this!

Grace: Yeah, I always have fun talking to you guys. It's always fun to take myself seriously. Some comics readers just take things at one layer, and so it's always nice to be like, 'right, but there were other layers. I forgot.'

Camden: Well, we're both psychoanalysts so leave it to us to analyse the heck out of everything. This was loads and loads of fun, and like you were saying with Taylor, life is easier if you're a Swiftie, it makes it worth living, right? That's the point. The joy that seems to be needing to be revived all the time these days.

Grace: It's constant CPR with the joy. I was even talking about that with a friend where I was like 'I keep seeing these headlines that this movie saved the box office, I think the box office is saved?' Like okay, how come every three months it's being saved. Maybe it's okay? It was *Barbie*, and then there was *Oppenheimer*, and then there was Taylor, and then there was Beyoncé, and now there's *Dune*. Anyway, it's like we're living in constant resuscitation mode of joy and of the economy recently.

Well, anyway, I have to jump into some work stuff. But it was really great chatting with you both. Have a great weekend!

Camden and Zullo: You too, we'll see you soon. Take care.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).