Twitter Thread by of arms and the devil-man i sing



of arms and the devil-man i sing
@swimming_blerd



===CORN POP CRITICAL EXEGESIS===

first, the fabula:

1. a young, Joseph R. Biden becomes the lifeguard at an integrated community pool (a rarity at the time)

@Rahmeljackson 2. this community pool, located in Wilmington, Delaware was a frequent haunt of a Black gang of local toughs called "The Romans". The Romans were led by the notorious and redoubtable, Corn Pop.

@Rahmeljackson 3. Joseph Biden, one of the few white employees at the community pool, is keen to establish himself as the legitimate authority of this space. He singles out his mostly likely presumptive challenger, Corn Pop, and instigates a conflict with him by calling him "Esther Williams".

@Rahmeljackson Footnote to 3.

There are 2 highly contextual story elements endogenous to the chronotype of early 1962 Wilmington. Biden, in recounting the story in 2017, stresses their peculiarity-"And to show you how things have changed,"

He's not talking about race relations, but Pomade.

@Rahmeljackson (con't)

Pomade was a water-based styling gel made from lanolin, beeswax, or petroleum jelly, and was popular (along with hair relaxer) in 1950s-60s African-American young men's fashion.

This detail is not simply "cosmetic', but ironically integral to the story's main conflict.

@Rahmeljackson (con't)

Although popular imagination attributes more "natural" hairstyles to the '60s, pomade was still in vogue as a styler, as William Morris--AKA "Corn Pop" illustrated. However, it's the likely conjunction of Pomade and some unknown chemical relaxer, which sets the stage:

@Rahmeljackson (con't)

At the time, hair relaxing or a "perm" invented in 1906 was a treatment popular in Black communities as a way to straighten hair with by chemically "relaxing" the natural curls, using a strong alkali, usually ammonium thioglycolate or even formaldehyde, every 8-11 weeks.

@Rahmeljackson Though the cultural controversy of this fashion choice--famously and critically lost on young joe biden--is integral to the story's implicature--the immediate contingencies of using pomade & relaxer are more relevant:

a perm is ruined by water, necessitating here, a Swimming Cap

@Rahmeljackson This is a crucial point in the exegesis, as we can now specify where its causal and material contingencies are supplanted with certain affective contingencies; this departure into the dramatic space of fabula--by his own admission--ensues internally, in 20-year old Biden

@Rahmeljackson more clearly:

it's absolutely critical to understand that although Corn Pop was indeed by all third-party accounts, "a Bad Dude", young Joseph Biden was absolutely the instigator of this conflict, as his reflection in the story's 3 sequential episodes, reveals progressively:

@Rahmeljackson with this we may return to 4.

Corn Pop violates a minor safety rule on the pool's diving board. Having presumably had his hair relaxed and pomaded, is wearing a swimming cap.

And while for new lifeguards diving boards are an item of frequent accidents and special anxiety..

@Rahmeljackson ...the liabilities of which for pools demand (still) strictness from employee lifeguards

however, while story itself is dependent upon a host of highly contextual and historical elements, its dramatic impetus of the story notably does *not* follow from any of them but instead,

@Rahmeljackson but is squarely (and admittedly) a function of young joe biden's immaturity, insecurity, and rashness--no doubt suited by his anxiety at being one of the few, nominal white authority figures in a mostly Black setting (one with a peculiar set of draconian rules all swimmers now)

@Rahmeljackson (From here the subsequent breakdown of the predictive, normative (no pun intended) chain, and its departure into dramatic conflict ensues from this point--which again, is expressly affective)

5. Biden publicly rebukes, humiliates Corn Pop, derisively calling him "Esther Wiliams"

@Rahmeljackson (again, due to the highly peculiar nature of the story's chronotype and its relative profusion of endogenous detail, another excursus is necessary)

Esther Williams was a competitive swimmer and hollywood starlet quite famous in the late 40s and 50s, and in 1962, a household name

@Rahmeljackson (fun fact: the plucky and foul-mouthed mermaid DeeAnna Moran from the Cohen Bros' "Hail Caesar!", is based on Esther Williams)

yet what is critical at this affective, contextual juncture is Biden's crude analogy--the association of her signature swimming cap, and Corn Pop's own

@Rahmeljackson recap: the fascination of this anecdote is its ostensible convolution, which we may expedite as 1) the robust contextual obscurity of its chronotype furnished by 2) its highly internal, "affective' dynamics, which lead to 3) its ironic reversal of nominal, normative transgression

@Rahmeljackson this ironic, transgressive reversal occurs in 5) wherein Biden, attempting to assert himself as the Pool's nominal authority against Corn Pop's concrete transgression of its explicit rules, blunders into a much more major (and dangerous) transgression of implicit, social rules

@Rahmeljackson this blunder's doubly ironic character ensues from its unpredicated *and* affective nature

not only did biden overstep his authority as lifeguard--unwisely and unfairly choosing to publicly shame and punish where mere discipline was necessary to enforce reasonable rules...

@Rahmeljackson ...by comparing Corn Pop's meticulous hair-care contingencies to that of a bygone, white hollywood starlet, Biden's emasculating joke has not only made this otherwise dry, *impersonal* matter *personal*--i.e. Biden has caused Corn Pop to lose publicly lose Face, and seek redress

@Rahmeljackson 6. Corn Pop initially gives way, yet intimates to Joe Biden he will meet him later, in the parking lot. Biden, mindful of Corn Pop's reputation as a verifiably Bad Dude, anticipates a physical confrontation, and is reasonably, afraid

@Rahmeljackson ...by the rows of public housing near where he is parked, Biden sees three men with straight razors. He realizes again (with bitter irony) that this indeed is Not a Joke

@Rahmeljackson this brings us to 7)

Biden, panicked, seeks out Bill Wrightmouse, a pool mechanic, who immediately furnishes him with a 6-foot length of chain to use as a weapon, along with its own bombastic flavor-text:

"You may gut me, man, but I'm gonna wrap this chain round your head."

@Rahmeljackson Bill Wrightmouse is a fascinating supporting character in this anecdote, as he literally (and figuratively) supplies the conditions for its 2nd and 3rd ironic reversals:

Biden seeks him out for help in defusing and/or avoiding the confrontation he has provoked with Corn Pop...

@Rahmeljackson ...but instead--to Biden's horror--Bill ostensibly provides all the precursors for its escalation and acceleration from misunderstanding, to violent confrontation

to Biden, this is out of character for wrightmouse, who was for biden, a trusted elder and presumably a Cooler Head

@Rahmeljackson notably--something Bill Wrightmouse cryptically poses to Biden is that if he acts otherwise, he "won't be able to come back"--to resume being a lifeguard

the hypothetical imperative posed by the supposed mentor here is significant, but only in its careful ambivalence...