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Krazy Kat: The Comic Art Of George Herriman



Synopsis

The comic strip Krazy Kat first appeared in 1913, in The New York Evening Journal, and remained popular for 31 years until the death of its creator, George Herriman. This volume features over 150 comic strips, 48 colour cartoons, and drawings, photographs and letters.

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Anthologies

Customer Reviews

This book stands as the best introduction to one of the best comic strips ever produced. Not only is it packed with hard to find "Krazy Kat" strips, but it also includes a biography of the artist, George Herriman. Some consider Herriman the first African-American mainstream cartoonist. His colleagues didn't know his ethnicity (and Herriman didn't tell them) so some called him "the Greek". He felt he had to hide some of his features from the public. For example, he kept his very curly hair closely cut and hidden under a hat. Not only that, his birth certificate shows his parent's ethnicity as "colored". The prejudices of the time likely would not have allowed an African-American the mainstream status and freedom allowed to George Herriman. So through "Krazy Kat" we get a glimpse of what early 20th century American culture may have missed out on due to its racial myopia. For "Krazy Kat" stands as an absolute masterpiece of its genre. Herriman found some modicum of fame in his lifetime. William Randolph Hearst (the newspaper magnate) loved Herriman's work and rewarded him with a lifetime contract (according to the biography in the book, Hearst once read a "Krazy Kat" Sunday page and immediately demanded a raise for the artist). Herriman's success didn't come quickly, however. His first big break came in 1897 with the sale of a

sketch to the Los Angeles Herald. Around 1901 he landed his first job as a "Staff Cartoonist" (a person who literally reported to the office every day and rattled off strip after strip; very different from today's cartoonists).

KRAZY KAT IS THE FUNNIEST, MOST LUNATIC PIECE OF COMIC LITERATURE. The mechanics of Krazy Kat are time-honored and deceptively simple: there is a cat, a mouse, a dog, and the hurling of a brick. HERE ARE A FEW COMMENTS MADE BY OTHER FAMOUS PEOPLE IN TRIBUTE TO HERRIMAN: "an immediate progenitor of the Beat Generation and its roots could be traced back to the glee of America, the honesty of America, its wild, self-believing individuality", Jack Kerouac I discovered Krazy Kat when a large anthology of the strip was published in 1969. The book is an editorial disaster, but it did show a lot of Krazy Kat strips, and I admired the work immediately. Krazy Kat seems to be one of those strips people either love or don't get at all. Krazy Kat is nothing but variations on a simple theme, so the magic of the strip is not so much in what it says but in how it says it. Ignatz Mouse throws bricks at Krazy out of contempt, but Krazy interprets this as a gesture of affection instead. Meanwhile, the law - Offissa Pupp - futilely tries to interfere with a process that's completely satisfying to all parties for all the wrong reasons. This weird, recycling plot can be interpreted as a metaphor for love or politics - or it can just be enjoyed for its own lunatic charms. The strip constantly plays with its own form, and becomes a sort of essay on cartoon existentialism. The background scenery changes from panel to panel, and day can turn to night and back again during a brief conversation. Similarly, Herriman played with language and dialect, inserting Spanish, phonetically spelled mispronounced words, slang, and odd, alliterative phrases, giving the strip a unique atmosphere. The drawings are scratchy and peculiar, but they provide a beautiful visual context to the equally idiosyncratic writing.

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