

Follow-up to “The Fatuous Feline”

This essay serves as background to my short story, “The Fatuous Feline.”

For the benefit of those of you too young to recognize the reference, my story is a play on the “Krazy Kat” comic strip and cartoon series.

Krazy Kat was a classic newspaper comic strip published between 1913 and 1944 by artist George Harriman. It was highly unusual for its day, and it appealed mainly to intellectuals. Many general readers were confused by the strange language and references in the strip. It was not particularly popular, and it undoubtedly would have been cancelled altogether had it not been for that fact that William Randolph Hearst (the newspaper magnate) personally loved it. Nowadays it is considered a work of genius by many, and it is cited as a major influence by numerous comic strip authors.

See this link for a sample of the strip: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krazy_Kat#/media/File:Krazykat.jpg

The basic formula of the comic remained constant over its life. Krazy Kat (whose sexuality is left distinctly ambiguous) is in love with Ignatz Mouse. Ignatz despises Krazy, and pretty much everyone else as well. He throws bricks at Krazy Kat’s head. These never seem to hurt him/her, to Ignatz’s frustration. Instead, she/he takes them as evidence of Ignatz’s love.

The third main character is Officer Bull Pupp, a dog who eventually falls in love with Krazy Kat. He sends Ignatz off to jail in most of the strips. Sometimes he prevents the brick from hitting Krazy, but mostly not.

The cartoon is set in the desert, reportedly based upon the terrain in Coconino County, Arizona. The characters speak in a strange dialect using flowery expressions. Here is an example: “Ooy, He’s saying something at you – Ooy, it sims to be something in werra roughish, and werra uncootish lengwidge.” Krazy Kat often calls Ignatz her “I’ll ainjil.”

The strip also had a kind of self-knowledge, which was unusual for its time. In one cartoon, Officer Pupp berates the cartoonist for not finishing his drawing of the jail in time to lock up Ignatz. In another, Ignatz walks off leaving his word bubble behind on the page. Krazy Kat retrieves it and ties it to his tail.

A number of animated cartoons were made of the strip, none of them very good. The most well-known (which I remember watching as a child) was the King Features version. In these, Krazy Kat was clearly drawn to be female and the storylines were dumbed down. Intellectual and self-referencing, it was not, as you can see here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiXz3WMQQf0>