

Comic Classics Stand the Test of Time

Peter Birkemoe

At The Beguiling, a store that showcases the largest selection of graphic story telling in the country, we spend a good part of our day answering questions about the suitability of certain comics or graphic novels for given grades, particularly from primary schools. Some teachers will reminisce fondly about the comics they read as children, or recall a time when comic books, by definition, were meant for children. We are very lucky that the comics industry is going through a golden age of reprinting classic comics, both for kids and adults, and that one can find books today that will enthrall kids as much as they did in the past.

When today's greats of kids' comics are asked who inspired them when they were young, they mention only a handful of names. John Stanley, Charles Schulz and Carl Barks routinely top any list and they have had as much influence on comics as Dr. Seuss, Maurice Sendak and Beverly Cleary have had on kids' books.

John Stanley is the least well known of these names because most of his work was done on other people's creations. Just as you can now buy comic books based on popular children's cartoons, in decades past the same was true of newspaper comic strips. Stanley took the characters of Little Lulu

and Nancy and created comic book adventures that many would say improve upon the originals. Richly characterized and plotted, the stories are also often laugh-out-loud funny. While the candy and soda are ridiculously cheap, and the characters need to stand by a wall to use a telephone, the stories hold up remarkably well considering they are fifty years old. The adventures of Lulu & Tubby or Nancy & Sluggo are nearly all suitable for today's children but, in selecting volumes for schools, we take into account current sensibilities and avoid those in which they play cowboys and Indians. Canadian publisher Drawn & Quarterly is producing marvelous hardcover editions of Nancy, Tubby and some of Stanley's own creations— *0 Melvin Monster* (Imagine *The Munsters* loaded with corny puns.) and *Thirteen Going on Eighteen* (Imagine if Betty & Veronica had ever been well written.). Inexpensive paperbacks of Little Lulu are also available from Dark Horse Comics.

Loved the world over, the comic book adventures of Donald Duck, his nephews Huey, Dewey and Louie, and Scrooge McDuck are associated most with the name Carl Barks. Whether short humorous stories, or longer adventure stories, his work is known for its flawless cartooning and for giving his

