



The Sincerest Form of Parody: The Best 1950s Mad Inspired Satirical Comics

John Benson

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“What, me imitated?”

When *MAD* became a surprise hit as a comic book in 1953 (after the early issues lost money!) other comics publishers were quick to jump onto the bandwagon, eventually bringing out a dozen imitations with titles like *FLIP*, *WHACK*, *NUTS*, *CRAZY*, *WILD*, *RIOT*, *EH*, *UNSANE*, *BUGHOUSE*, and *GET LOST*. *The Sincerest Form of Parody* collects the best and the funniest material from these comics, including parodies of movies (*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *From Here To Eternity*), TV shows (*What’s My Line*, *The Late Show*), comic strips (*Little Orphan Annie*, *Rex Morgan*), novels (*I, the Jury*), plays (*Come Back, Little Sheba*), advertisements (Rheingold Beer, Charles Atlas), classic literature (“The Lady or the Tiger”), and history (Pancho Villa). Some didn’t even try for parody, but instead published odd, goofy, off-the-wall stories.

These earnest copiers of *MAD* realized that Will Elder’s cluttered “chicken fat” art was a good part of *MAD*’s success, and these pages are densely packed with all sorts of outlandish and bizarre gags that make for hours of amusing reading. The “parody comics” are uniquely “’50s,” catching the popular culture zeitgeist through a dual lens: not only reflecting fifties culture through parody but also being themselves typical examples of that culture (in a way that Harvey Kurtzman’s *MAD* was not).

This unprecedented volume collects over 30 of the best of these crazy, undisciplined stories, all reprinted from the original comics in full color. Editor John Benson (who wrote the annotations for the first complete *MAD* reprints, and interviewed *MAD* editor Harvey Kurtzman in depth several times over the years) also provides expert, profusely illustrated commentary and background, including comparisons of how different companies parodied the same subject.

Artists represented include Jack Davis, Will Elder, Norman Maurer, Carl Hubbell, William Overgard, Jack Kirby, Dick Ayers, Bill Everett, Al Hartley, Ross Andru & Mike Esposito, Hy Fleischman, Jay Disbrow, Howard Nostrand, and Bob Powell.

Casual comics readers are probably familiar with the later satirical magazines that continued to be published in the ’60s and ’70s, such as *Cracked* and *Sick*, but the comics collected in this volume were imitations of the *MAD* comic book, not the magazine, and virtually unknown among all but the most die-hard collectors. For the first time, Fantagraphics is collecting the best of these comics in a single, outrageously funny volume. 208 full-color illustrations

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