

## Funny Girls: Guffaws, Guts, and Gender in Classic American Comics

**Michelle Ann Abate**

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Michelle Ann Abate's *Funny Girls* is fascinating, focusing on an oft ignored component of Golden Age comics: preadolescent girl characters. It contextualizes and analyzes a number of wildly successful but academically ignored characters, finally affording them the limelight.

The book focuses on five extraordinarily popular characters: Little Orphan Annie, Nancy, Little Lulu, Little Audrey, and Li'l Tomboy. Each girl gets her own chapter centering on her story. Gender and age ties these characters together, and through them, such disparate topics as politics, cultural influences, generational and gender divides, Freudian psychoanalysis, and the impact of the 1950s Comics Code on the comic book industry come seamlessly together.

Extremely well-researched and well-organized, the book delves into different theoretical and critical perspectives in order to examine what each character and their comics stood for. Cited works are an opportunity to further explore the topics.

The writing is clear, concise, and engaging. A previous knowledge of comics is unnecessary; *Funny Girls* provides all the background required. When discussing the influence of the Vaudeville aesthetic on *Nancy*, for example, one of the chapters details the history and elements of this French-born yet utterly American show type.

The cover, with its illustration of Li'l Tomboy and its font, evokes the classic comics discussed within its pages. *Funny Girls* is a captivating introduction to a topic largely untouched by comic scholars: the fundamental role that little girls played in comics from the very beginning of the genre, not only as readers but as main characters as well.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (January/February 2019)

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