

Acme Novelty Library Analysis by Allen Rubinstein

Okay, I'll be the first to admit that the following is over the top. Way, way, WAY over the top. It's a cry for help, really, but I was perusing the Acme book and the other Acme issues last night and I was so impressed by the depth of it, that I felt the obsessive collector's urge to catalogue the whole thing. No one has asked for this, and I'm quite sure no one wants to read it, but what the hell. This is easily the most 'Rusty Brownish' thing I've ever done, coming as it does out of my current state of unemployment. Maybe it's the early signs of OCD setting in. I'm also aware that Ware himself would be horrified by the attention.

Most artists would approach old, out-of-print work as something to repackage and make more money off of. Ware has completely revamped material from throughout his canon into a stunning new work. First a few observations:

It's very clear to me that there's value in fans of Ware's work owning everything he publishes. Truly, you haven't read all of Ware until you've read all of Ware. I'd guess that Ware sees his body of work as a piece, not only illustrating a story and its themes, but demonstrating something recognizable about comics that develops and mutates and metamorphasizes over time. It's instructional to see which strips are left out (most of the first two issues of Acme remain un-reprinted) and which change subtly by changing their proximity to different strips in different books (I'll note more subtle changes below). You could almost say that Final Report to Shareholders, McSweeney's and his other projects amount to a campaign to prove the depth and breadth of comics' possibilities.

Accoutrement

- Cover: Gold foil design suffused with hidden letter A,C,M,E. The two edges of the cover opposite the spine contain a teeny, tiny original strip almost too small to be seen without a magnifying glass. It appears to be about the cyclical lifespan. The decorative strip refers to this as 'The World's Smallest Comic Strip'
- Decorative wraparound strip: Provides the full title: ACME Our Annual Report to Shareholders and Rainy Day Saturday Afternoon Fun Book. Quotes negative comments about Ware's work from two newspapers, The New Yorker and an NPR personality as well as quotes from abolitionist Frederick Douglas, Aristotle, Flaubert and Jack Black. Portrays Ware next to his self-deprecating bio as a light bulb bearing his abstracted features. Title, Our Spring Novelty Library, at bottom is reprinted from ACME #12, inside front cover.
- Inside decorative strip: Original strip - Apology and Souvenir Comic Strip. Apparently, there are six different punch lines in different copies.

God Narrative

- First inclusion is a single panel as part of Draw Me parody on the first page, bearing the blue-on-black quote, '(continued from issue back cover)'. This implies that the whole storyline is cyclical, with God creating, outlasting and then re-creating the universe ad nauseam.
- Panels are then seen interwoven through pages 2, 4, 6 and 17. The strip at top of page 6, called 'I Hate Myself', where he creates the Earth and human life, leads into the first of two 'history of art' segments in the book (the next panel is the caveman at his stone 'drawing table').
- 44-55 is the center of the storyline where God wreaks all kinds of capricious havoc, steals a female child, takes her as a mate, gets arrested, then draws the entire story to that point (his autobiography) in pictographs on the prison walls with a bent nail. The final panel of his 'comic' shows him flying away from the prison which he then does, leaving the Earth. The

first few pages are probably inspired by ACME #7, page 25, which both include saving an airplane and a terrified female whom God has just 'rescued'

- Story continues in short segments on pages 57, 60, 76, 77 (half page), 96, 97, 100, 101 and 104 before wrapping around to page 1 again in the final page and inside back cover. God relocates to the moon where he eats moon rock. Time progresses forward five thousand, five billion and five billion times ten to the tenth power years, until he's completely alone in the void of space and ready to create the universe again
- There's a teeny-tiny God in the center of the cover's spine.

The Main body

- Pagination is confusing. There're five pages leading up to the page labeled page four..
- Inside front cover: Ad parody from ACME #10 on back cover of the heavy cardstock 'insert' Corrigan comic. Be My Guest parody below it is new
- Page -2. Make Mistakes/Get Children ad parody from ACME #1, back cover. (some of his funniest spoof text ever if you ask me). DRAW ME parody below it is new.
- -1. Sell Drugs ad parody from ACME #6 back cover. The text is heavily edited down even though the font size, for once, is much bigger. Your Name on Everything You Own above it is new.
- If the FRIEDS ad parody was printed anywhere in the series, I can't find it. Anyone? I know the Pep Up candy ad is new.
- Top tier of parody ads and left column down to 'Fat Folks' is from ACME #7, page five. Have You figured out what you're going to do with your life? and Break into Surgery are from ACME #5, the first Jimmy Corrigan issue. You can now make more money' is from ACME #2, Page 38. The G.I. Jim strip is from ACME #10 back cover with the 'bottom row' (coupon and Rusty addresses the reader) transposed from another strip in the same issue. Somebody to Trust ad is new, and I think Odor of Childhood and Everything's Going to Be All Right are also new.
- 'Say, Gang' ad parody is from ACME #15, page two enlarged in size and all the color stripped away in favor of shades of red. DO YOU and Meaning of Life parodies are also from ACME #15, page 2. G.I. Jim Strip is from ACME #10, inside back cardstock cover of the 'insert' Jimmy Corrigan comic. Ad Parody, Free Book about Lust is from ACME #2, page 39 shrunk down a bit. I can't find Feudalism anywhere.
- 4-5. Obviously inspired by the MUCH cruder constellation diagram on page seven of ACME #7. A few of the drawings seem taken from that image, but are not identical.
- 6-9. First history of art section is new
- 10-11. Front and back cover of ACME #15 with major changes. The color has all been removed, and the entire image seems to have been flipped. The (very bizarre fonted) title ACME Novelty Library has been replaced with more wacko pictographics. They appear to be very abstracted male bodies, complete with flaccid and erect penises, representing the positive and negative sides of human temptation, i.e. sobriety/imbibement, lust/abstinence. The right and left sides, previously text describing the volume, are replaced with images of various life settings (hospital bed, igloo, drawing board, construction site) absent the people. Next to the Summer, Spring, Winter Fall images inside circles at the NSEW poles, Ware has added four more images representing four of his characters.
- 12. Big Tex from ACME #7, inside front cover.
- 13. Rocket Sam from ACME #7, page 3
- 14. Tales of Tomorrow (#12) is from ACME #15, Page 5
- 15. Rusty Brown is from ACME #15, page 4
- 16. Quimby the Mouse is from ACME #15, page 25
- 17 Rusty Brown is new
- 18-23. Center globe logo is from ACME #15, page one. Bit building cutaway on pages 20-21 is from ACME #6, inside back cover. Tower image on page 21 is from ACME #2, inside front cover, without the text. Page 23 has ad parody, ACME and

Mr. Mexican want to put you in the movies! from ACME #9 back cover. The color scheme is radically changed and washed out, I presume to better match the somber tones of the historical section. I haven't gotten around to reading all the tiny type, but obviously the Dick Public, Letterer, single panel comics and all the photos are here for the first time.

- 24-25. Second history of art segment and Draw Cartoons and Doom Yourself strips are new
- 26. Big Tex from ACME #7, page 9
- 27. Rocket Sam from ACME #7, page 11. Colors are much more vivid.
- 28 Rocket Sam from ACME #15, page 2. It's much bigger
- 29. Rocket Sam from ACME #7, page 16. Wow those colors are vivid.
- 30. Big Tex from ACME #7, page 12
- 31. Rocket Sam from ACME #7, page 13. Color changed from pale blue to sepia tone.
- 32. Big Tex from ACME #7, page 19
- 33. Big Tex from ACME #7, page 17.
- 34. Rocket Sam from ACME #7, page 10
- 35. Rocket Sam from ACME #7, page 18. Color changed from purplish grey to pale green.
- 36. Rocket Sam from ACME #7, page 20
- 37. Rocket Sam from ACME #7, page 21
- 38 Rocket Sam from ACME, #7, page 26
- 39. Big Tex from ACME #7, page 27
- 40. Big Tex from ACME #8, page 28
- 41. Motion Picture Machine cutout toy is from ACME #2 with formatting changes. Panels that go inside the machine have been changed from the Potato Man stabbing his eyes with scissors to God juggling. The suggested projects at top are new, but, get this, the image next to the 'Life-Size Magic Moving Picture Theater' is actually taken from an identical drawing of the miniature Machine in #2, with the ladder and people added to make it 'Life-Size'.
- 42. Rusty Brown, Dr. Science and Dick Public strips are new
- 43. Frank Phosphate from ACME #7 back cover. Strip is nearly three times bigger and reoriented from two rows of three panels to three rows of two each. In contrast to the rest of the book, the colors are less saturated, from being enlarged.
- 56. Quimby the Mouse is from ACME #15, page 3
- 57. Rusty Brown is new
- 58-59. Rusty Brown calendar is from ACME #15, page 16-17. The calendar is impossible since the days leave off from one month and pick up the next month on consecutive days in different years.
- 60. Young Rusty Brown is new, and I presume linked to the upcoming novel
- 61. Quimby the Mouse is from ACME #15, page 9
- 62. Tales of To-Morrow is from ACME #15, page 5
- 63. Rusty Brown is from ACME #15, page 6
- 64 - 69. The center of these ad parody spreads are all taken from ACME #10 with the odd format change. Right and left columns on 64-65 and left column on 66 are from ACME #15, page 1. The right column on page 67 (creating instructions for using the star chart all the way back on 4-5) appears to be original, not taken from the aforementioned ACME #7, page 6. On page 68 left column, also original, Ware dedicates the book to Ivan Brunetti and Charles Kidd. It also has an estimate of how much moon rock could be consumed by an ordinary human in 100 years in case anyone's interested in such facts.
- 69. G.I. Jim Action Club Rusty Brown strip from ACME #10, cardstock inside front cover of 'insert' Jimmy Corrigan comic. Changed from red tones to black and white. Bottom strip is transposed from G.I. Jim strip on the back cover of #10. Rocket Sam strip is from ACME #15, page 29. Changed from blue to red. Four coupon parodies in left column are from ACME #6, changed to red from pale blue and green.
- 70. Big Tex miniature cutout story book from ACME #7, page 22. Title from #7, 'Three pages of cut-outs to busy the little hands and little head' has been replaced with 'Our Special Saturday Afternoon Rainy Day Activity Section. The rest of the text is the same.

- 71-72. Miniature 'Novelty Library' from heavy card stock back cover and inside back cover of ACME #7 with several pieces removed.
- 73. page from ACME #7, page 23. Quimby four-panels have gone from a murky black and white to a patchwork of pastel red green and purple.
- 74. 'Picture Scroll' was created from strip on page 8 of ACME #7 - a plain, ordinary strip that wasn't intended to be any kind of activity book gimmick. Original strip was pale blue.
- 75. 'Collectors Comics' strips: The Rusty Brown and Chalky White are from ACME #15, page 28. They're laid out end to end instead of a nine-panel grid. Putty Gray is from ACME #15, page 13
- 76. Tales of Tomorrow (#27) is from ACME #15, page 29. Rocket Sam Strip is from ACME XXXXXXXX
- 77. Rusty Brown is new
- 78. Tales of Tomorrow (#9) is from ACME #15, page 21
- 79. Tales of Tomorrow (#16) is from ACME #15, page 22
- 80-84. Moonrisk 7, Dick Public, Dr. Science and Frank Phosphate strips are new.
- 84. Tales of Tomorrow (#8) is from ACME #15, page 8
- 85. Rusty Brown is from ACME #15, page 10
- 86. Tales of Tomorrow (#7) is from ACME #15, page 11
- 87. Rusty Brown is from ACME #15, page 23
- 88. Tales of Tomorrow (#11) is from ACME #15, page 24
- 89. Tales of Tomorrow (#15) is from ACME #15, page 26
- 90. Rusty Brown is from ACME #15, page 27
- 91. Tales of Tomorrow (unnumbered) and Toni Baloni strips are new
- 92-93. Hilarious Tales of Tomorrow (#10) is from ACME #15, pages 30-31
- 94. Tales of Tomorrow/Rusty Brown single panel image is from ACME #15, page 28. It's enlarged to five or six times its size, and the trees are now yellow instead of green. G.I. Jim strip is new.
- 95. Rusty Brown is from ACME #15, page 32
- 96-100. Chalky White sequence is new
- 101. Rusty Brown strip from ACME #11 back cover. A Batman logo has been added to the poster on the wall and the Mr. Peanut thought balloon has been relocated to panel 7 from panel 8, leaving panel 8 as a silent pause.
- 102-104. Chalky White and Young Rusty Brown strips are new
- 105. Quimby the Mouse is from ACME #15, page 20. The punch line in the final panel, 'She's probably all fat now anyway,' has been deleted, and is now just a silent panel.
- 106. Rocket Sam from ACME #15, inside front cover
- 107. Big Tex from ACME #15, inside back cover. Changed from a very deep, murky purple to a much clearer grayish-blue.
- 108-109. Jimmy Corrigan is from ACME #15, pages 14 and 19 straddling the pull-out Rusty Brown calendar. The snow in the bottom half of the strip has been almost completely removed (it's barely visible outside the window).

Strips from ACME not reprinted elsewhere

- ACME #1
 - Entire issue. Boy does this look rudimentary now. The only part of it that's been reprinted is at the beginning of Jimmy Corrigan when as a little boy he meets the guy playing the superhero at the mall who ends up banging his mom.
- ACME #2 - inside front cover: full page add parody of 'sand kicking' ad.
 - Page 24 - Jimmy Corrigan self-reflexive parody, crude.
- ACME #3

- all the Potato Man strips and one Quimby. I'm sure Ware can't even look at this stuff at this point.
- ACME #4
 - page 24 - Jimmy Corrigan, looks to be about thirteen or fourteen, cures aging
- ACME #6
 - page 16, crazy diagrammatic, Quimby strip
- ACME #7
 - page 2 - Joins us for a Better Tomorrow: The Story of ACME Cartoon Company
 - Page 3 - Rocket Sam: Rescue Mission, Planet X-9 (He arrives on a planet and sets up home there)
 - Page 4 - GOD
 - Page 6 - Rocket Sam in Shipwrecked. He draws until running out of oxygen and dies
 - Page 14-15 - Jimmy Corrigan, He visits a comics shop, makes his own autobio comic and gives it to Peggy in the mailroom
 - Page 24 - Rocket Sam rocket ship cut-out toy
- ACME #8,
 - page 18-19 - Jimmy Corrigan, Summary of our story so far. Obviously superfluous in the novel.
 - Page 25 - God strip used as inspiration for larger God story. I assume cut for redundancy.
- ACME #10
 - center section - 24 page Corrigan strip in which the poor boy is mercilessly tortured, traumatized and degraded. Too bad this didn't fit the format for the new book. It's a beauty, and deserves to be seen.
- ACME #11
 - Cover, inside front and back covers - very silly strips. One recaps the story and the others are A Visit to the Acme Novelty Library (how many times has he pulled out this trope?) in which Ware himself bemoans his fate and attempts suicide and Dr. James Corrigan.
- ACME #14
 - Inside front cover - Summer at Home Can Be Fun! Supposedly an innocent ad for the latest ACME, containing lots of depravity for the young 'uns.
- ACME #15
 - Pages 12-13, 15, 18 - huge cut-out project of another Picture Movie Viewer, put in for no other reason than it's neat, and the joke that the 'movie' they supply you with is the Man of Tomorrow sitting perfectly still watching television.

Apology

Sorry if the (lack of) formatting for this makes it unreadable. I may follow up with another post seeing if there are any conclusions to be drawn about the individual storylines from this mishmash. Or I may not. You'll all just have to wait and see, won't you?