

Behind the Credits: Reader Participation and the Fan Community in Bill Woggon's *Katy Keene*

By Morgan Podraza

The *Katy Keene* comic book series is deeply indebted to and intertwined with the play of its readers. Central to the success of the series were the ways in which the lives and adventures of Katy and her candy-crazed little sister, Sis, were visually and narratively shaped by drawings and ideas sent in by readers across the world. In early issues, Katy and Sis lounge among stacks of paper and envelopes as they sift through letters from readers with drawings and ideas for everything from stories and lettering to paper dolls of characters with accompanying outfits, poses, and vehicles, and the narration boxes surrounding them tout the *thousands* of

Figure 1. *Katy Keene Comics* #1 (1949)

letters received between issues (see figure 1). Katy and Sis aren't just talking about and responding to readers either. Instead they demonstrate the process in which creator Bill Woggon and his daughter Suzie—the real-life inspiration for Sis—reviewed reader submissions in order to pick out contributions that would appear in the comic. “It took a couple hours every day,” explains Suzie, “Big mail bags full of drawings were a natural part of our lives.” The piles of mail surrounding Katy and Sis reflect the reality of reader submissions and are also indicative of

the number of contributions that appeared in print. Names and addresses identify every contribution by readers throughout the series, and over the course of its publication, credits increasingly appeared in connection with individual elements. Inspired by the comics' frequent calls for contributions as well as the unprecedented appearances of submissions and accompanying credits, readers played with every element of *Katy Keene*. As Katy pursued her career as a model and actor, looked after and adventured with Sis, and dodged the marriage proposals of her extensive list of suitors issue after issue, readers supplied new visual and narrative twists in a seamless cycle of play, creation, and submission.

Readers' integral role in the series is widely discussed and celebrated, particularly among members of the *Katy Keene* fan community. Critical and popular conversations surrounding *Katy Keene* highlight the extensive reader credits that appeared with contributions and the feelings of participation and collaboration that were cultivated as a result. As Lorraine Crawford reflects, "the most unique aspect of the [*Katy Keene*] series was the emphasis placed on fan participation," and thus "[c]are was taken to acknowledge the effort made by each person who submitted a design or idea" (30). Contemporary readers saw how the influence of individual readers was framed and noted how individuals were credited and celebrated within its pages. *Katy Keene* was treated and continues to be remembered as a collaborative and reader-driven series in which anyone could take the creative reins, and the only limitations were readers' imaginations.

Despite the emphasis on the possibilities of reader participation, *Katy Keene* presents a singular vision of its narrative and visual possibilities informed by the post-war ideals of the United States. Publisher Archie Comic Publications promised parents that the Archie Series

Emblem, which *Katy Keene* displayed, was “an absolute guarantee” that the comic only represented “wholesome teenage entertainment” reflecting the publisher’s “highest moral and ethical standards” (see figure 2). When parents bought an Archie Comic, they were assured that

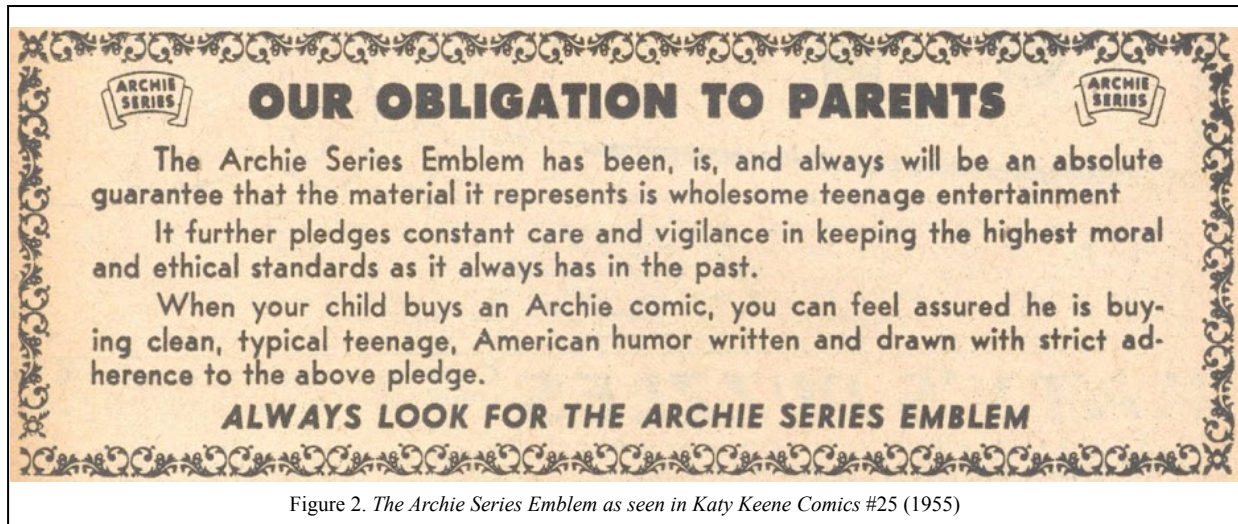


Figure 2. *The Archie Series Emblem as seen in Katy Keene Comics #25 (1955)*

they were buying “clean, typical teenage American humor” (Woggon, 1955). Characters under the Archie Comics banner were certainly typically American in that they aligned with the larger social and cultural narratives of what both normalcy and American identity looked like. At a moment when “juvenile delinquency” was part of social and political conversations—in which comics were caught in the crossfire—about the perceived decline of American morality, Archie Comic Publications offered an “idealized, tranquil, nostalgic vision” of teenage life in which “the most benign aspects of middle-class adolescent concerns” were the focus (Wright, 72). *Katy Keene* extended this image into life after graduation. Always at the age of 21, Katy offered a safe representation of life after high school in which a young, white, heterosexual, middle-class woman upheld a lifestyle that Rafael York describes as “characterized by morality, the family, economic progress and personal fulfillment”—all of which were framed as part of the “typical” American experience. As York explains, in the world of Archie Comics, it was “an America

where all teenagers behaved like Archie and the Riverdale gang” (104). The persistence of this perception of Katy Keene is visible in the reflections of Bill Woggon’s grandson, Jerico, who, in an interview about his late grandfather, says that “From Katy, people can re-connect with a sophisticated woman with old-fashioned values and etiquette. Reading Katy, it’s like immersing yourself in the good old days, and the way things were” (qtd. in Foley).

Visually and narratively, *Katy Keene* follows the logic of the Archie Series Emblem and yet the details found in reader credits, letters, photographs, and anecdotes suggest a readership far more rich than “typical America.” Readers with differing identities and backgrounds wrote letters to, contributed in, and played with *Katy Keene* comics, but, even as individual readers and contributors were celebrated, the series obscured unique social and cultural details in order to present a unified version of the fictional world. The stories of Katy’s trials and adventures with Sis, therefore, allowed for little variation beyond the established narrative and aesthetics of Archie Comic Publications. Readers’ real social and cultural circumstances shaped how they played with and within the *Katy Keene* world. Celebrating the ubiquity of reader participation uncritically further obscures the lives of the readers behind contributions and fails to consider how contributions were treated by the series. The contents, success, and continued relevance of the *Katy Keene* series are the result of its community of fans, so it is essential to not only examine how readers thought about, played with, and contributed to the series but also how readers were addressed and presented within the series.

Katy the Newsletter

Originally published from 1949 to 1961, the rate and extent of reader participation in the *Katy Keene* series was unprecedented. Among contemporary media, the series was unique in not

only its engagement of readers but also in its integration of reader contributions. Essential to the series was the understanding that every credit referred to a real individual. Not only could readers write to the printed names and addresses to build relationships across the *Katy Keene* community, the credits also indicated that real readers were seeing their own drawings and ideas in print. “When other companies began imitating the same gimmick, the usual procedure was to cheat,” explains cartoonist and writer Mark Evanier, “The artists would draw whatever they wanted, and then [someone] would wade through the mail and assign reader credits whenever some kid's sketch seemed vaguely close—or if none did, they'd make up phony names. [Bill] Woggon never did that” (qtd. in Kaplan, 89). The persistent presence of names and addresses—paired with reprinted letters, photographs, and accounts of Katy Keene Fan Club happenings across the world—cultivated feelings of participation and collaboration that fundamentally shaped the series as well as readers’ relationship to the series. When the series was abruptly cancelled due to a slowing sales trend, a sense of betrayal lingered among readers who saw themselves as an extension of the creative team.

The incredible influence of readers’ engagement is underscored by the second iteration of the series published from 1983 to 1990. Following the title’s cancellation, readers continued to write and draw content for the world of *Katy Keene* and the community that surrounded the series remained active. Particularly notable was *Katy the Newsletter*, a fan publication co-created by Craig Leavitt and Barbara Rausch, in which fans could write letters to one another as well as send in story ideas, puzzles, contest ideas, lettering for story and section titles, suggestions for articles they wanted to read or even articles they wanted to write, and artwork for pin-ups, paper dolls, and outfits for series characters. The newsletter was a significant representation of the

persistent love for the series as well as an unrelenting commitment to fan participation. “I was very distressed when the series ended,” writes reader and frequent *Katy Keene* contributor Lloyd Sensat, “I wrote numerous letters (had friends do the same) to Bill Woggon’s publisher—John Goldwater (Archie Comics, 1116 1st Avenue, NYC 10012).” Indeed, the publication of Sensat’s letter in the *Katy* newsletter is representative of fans’ network of influence. Publishing the name and address where letters could be sent encouraged unhappy readers to send in their thoughts regarding the series’s cancellation. Moreover, long-term contributors were recognizable among the most devoted *Katy Keene* fans and thus Sensat leveraged his position in the community as well as the letter-writing habits and networks that Woggon himself had built in order to encourage the publisher to revive the series.

When Archie Comic Publications started publishing the series again, the efforts of the newsletter’s editors and expansive fan community were credited for the revival. An editorial page titled “Under the Gun” containing letters from readers introduced the first issue of the revived series. The section opens with a note from editor Robin Snyder thanking readers “for the constant stream of cards and letters, each demanding the revival of your favorite fashion queen” and “for keeping the dream alive...[i]n your hearts...[i]n your fanzine work.” Letters and quotes from readers express their excitement in the return of *Katy* and her friends as well as their memories of previously-published designs and stories. Again, Lloyd Sensat appears among the printed letters: “At age 14 I could say that I finally made it by having one of my designs published. I think that few things have ever surpassed the initial thrill I felt when I opened that book and found that first published drawing.” Reaffirming the role that reader designs and ideas had in the initial series, the letters precede stories and paper dolls with reader credits that

illuminate how fans continued to send in their ideas and designs despite the initial cancellation of the series. The new series picked up as if nothing had changed, and readers were eager to once again see their names in print.

Creating the *Katy Keene* Community

The influence the *Katy Keene* community held over the present and future of Katy and her friends was the unique product of the ways in which readers and their relationship to the comic were framed. Through the comics' frequent calls for contributions, Woggon encouraged readers to play with and expand upon the content of the comics. The appearance of paper dolls and their associated clothing and accessories encouraged readers to cut the comic apart and play with the printed elements, but the credits appearing with individual elements also suggested that readers could dream up, draw, and submit their own unique poses and designs. In fact, every visual and narrative element was open to the imaginations of readers, and to preserve and continue building upon reader involvement, Woggon found ever-evolving ways to incorporate as many ideas as could fit in the limited panels and pages of each issue. The effects of reader contributions were visible in every issue, and, as a result, the rates of reader submissions swelled. While the first issue's 30 unique reader credits were surprising among the comic's contemporaries, as many as 150 credits appeared in individual issues at the height of *Katy Keene* readership. Characters may change outfits between panels as they choose among the reader-submitted options for a special event thereby packing a series of reader ideas into a short sequence. Similarly, a collection of reader submissions for an outfit could be amalgamated into a few examples drawn by Woggon and published with an extensive list of readers whose designs

inspired the examples resulting in a page mostly filled with names and addresses. “No other ‘comic’ [sic] had the level of interaction between artist and reader,” explains collector Ray Storch (qtd. in Leavitt). Indeed, the lines between Woggon and his readers, between creator and audience, were blurred to such an extent that the series appeared to be a playground for readers rather than a product of Archie Comic Publications.

Craig Leavitt, co-editor of the *Katy the Newsletter*, often speaks about how Woggon and his creative staff “shared” their creation with readers. *Katy Keene* encouraged readers to “express their talents in a unique showcase,” Leavitt writes, and allowed them to see their own work published “as much as possible as exactly sent in.” The claim that published contributions were presented “exactly” as they appeared in the readers’ submissions is seen throughout the series and provides the impression that everything from lettering and outfit designs to jokes and storylines came straight from the hearts and minds of the *Katy Keene* community.

Though Woggon and his creative assistants re-drew and adjusted contributions, the characters and the surrounding paratexts suggest that contributions leapt directly from letters and drawings onto the page. Early in the series, submissions were foregrounded within stories and used as framing devices to create the impression that readers were not only shaping the stories but also directly drawing elements on the printed page. In *Katy Keene* #14, Katy addresses her readers: “I’m so thrilled to hear from you telling me that you are saving my pin-ups...so for those who are asking for more pin-ups, I’m doing a story with just pin-ups designed by fans.” A note precedes the story and explains that the pin-ups “are exactly as designers sent them to Katy!” The story is framed as being entirely composed of reader drawings, and the accompanying names and addresses lend credibility to the editorial note. Moreover, Katy’s



Figure 3. *Katy Keene Comics* #14 (1954)

explanation and reader address is paired with her visual presentation in which she has handfuls of drawings and sits among stacks of paper designed to imply an abundance of reader submissions (see figure 3). The illusion of the pin-up story, therefore, is that the reader is positioned to see the poses, outfits, accessories, and scenery through the eyes of Katy and exactly as they were drawn—all without the narrative or visual influence of Woggon.

The effects of the imaginative drawing-to-page transformation and perception of readers as collaborators was strengthened as the series gained traction and increasingly credited readers as writers and artists. Panels depicting Katy and Sis surrounded by and interacting with letters were replaced by stories wholly credited to readers and without any narrative or visual framing. In *Katy Keene* #42, a two-page story and accompanying “sweetheart pin-ups” page opens with the claim that “this entire story, fashions, illustrations, etc. [were] sent in by June Arnold” (see figure 4). Though the opening page still includes the “by Bill Woggon” credit following the title,

June Arnold's name is credited on all three pages of the section. Her name eclipses that of Woggon, and its repetition insists that she is wholly responsible for what the readers are seeing and leaves Woggon in a position akin to a presenter rather than a creator. Within the story itself, Katy looks through her closet to find a dress for her television appearance, and Sis suggest that she wear "that sweetheart dress by June Arnold." The dress design is transferred directly onto Katy in the next panel and she heads to the studio for her appearance. Arnold is



Figure 4. *Katy Keene Comics* #42 (1958)

framed as having full control both within the story itself and in its visual and textual presentation thereby masking the role that Woggon held as he adapted Arnold's contribution. Moreover, a note suggesting others could "write and illustrate a short story just as June Arnold did" holds a promise that readers hold creative sway, if not total control, over present and future *Katy Keene* stories.

Readers were delighted by the framing of their role in the stories and designs in *Katy Keene*. In her letter for the inaugural issue of the *Katy the Newsletter*, Thelma Rene Bernard reminisces that designs for Sis were particularly exciting due to the challenge of creating "something different on a candy theme" for the candy-crazed kid. "Each Katy issue," she writes, "would have me searching for Sis...what new thing with that candy theme was she wearing? How many readers were able to do something more unique than the last issue?" While "Katy's

adult world gave designers many choices,” she explains, designs for Sis required “cleverness.” Bernard’s letter credited “Bill Woggon and participating readers alike,” but her focus on the ways that “designers” were able to create new and exciting outfits that incorporated candy illuminates the effects of the comics’ framing of contributors. Berarnd recognized that Woggon was still present and involved in the presentation of Sis’s candy-driven wardrobe, but she credits readers with developing the ever-evolving “new” and “unique” designs that were so “clever.” Other readers, however, obscured or altogether omitted the presence of Woggon in *Katy Keene*. Trina Robbins, an established cartoonist and comics historian, remembers how she was fascinated by the published contributions and would spend hours drawing her own clothing and accessories, but she thought that her own drawings were not up to par in comparison to the perfectly polished submissions that were printed. “[L]ike many other kids, I never realized that Bill redrew the readers’ designs for publications,” Robbins explains, “I thought all the fans whose designs were published were little Da Vincis, and, thinking that I could never draw as well as them, I kept my paper dolls to myself” (qtd. in Spurgeon). While the intervening hands of Woggon and his creative team may seem obvious, the impression that designs were printed “exactly” as they submitted was shared among many readers and would-be contributors.

In fact, the perceptions that Robbins had of readers’ abilities and contributions were supported by other readers. As the series progressed, a limited number of readers saw their contributions published repeatedly, and as these contributors became well-known among other readers, they described themselves and others as “designers” for *Katy Keene*. In a letter reproduced in *Katy Keene* #37, Nancy Estes writes:

Dear Katy, I always read your comics over and over again and never get tired of them. I have hours of fun designing for you. I'm sending you a photo of me. I always get a real thrill out of seeing my designs in your comics. I received many many letters from boys and girls wanting me for a Pen Pal. I've had over a thousand letters and I'm sorry I can't answer all of them. Love, Nancy Estes

Nancy's letter calls attention to the intensive dedication that readers had to their contributions—spending hours creating and fine-tuning their drawings—as well as the ways that such readers imagined their relationship to the world of *Katy Keene*. These self-described “designers” could have long-running appearances, as Nancy Estes did, that framed them as exceptional collaborators. Publishing their letters and photographs in addition to their series of contributions highlighted individual readers and reinforced the perception that the comics were the product of reader contributions and collaborations. Letters like Nancy's fueled perceptions that contributors who were “talented” or skilled enough could rise to the level of Bill Woggon himself and, as a result, such designers sometimes developed a following that evoked the images of Katy and Sis surrounded by the pages of eager readers.

Barbara Rausch was among the more frequently credited and influential designers. Her contributions appeared consistently after 1953, and in 1959 she was crowned “Designer of the Year” (“Fellow Fans”). The extent of her influence is made clear not only through her repeated credits and her exemplary title but also by her position as co-creator of *Katy the Newsletter*. Rausch's credits as a top designer combined with her role in the revival of the series perfectly demonstrates the inextricable ways that readers were involved in the success and persistence of *Katy Keene* as well as the ways in which narratives about readers' relationship to the series would develop. The entangled way that Rausch was framed and perceived by others is further emphasized by her role in the creation of *Vicki Valentine*, a short comics series written by

Woggon and illustrated by Rausch featuring fashion and paper-doll cut-outs. Altogether, her success as an exceptional designer and community member—framed and celebrated by Woggon himself as well as other fans—acts as a touchstone by which perceptions of fan contributions are measured and solidified.

Crediting the *Katy Keene* Community

Bill Woggon was particularly proud of the role that *Katy Keene* played in the lives and careers of readers—some of whom would go on to be illustrators, comics creators, clothing designers, and animators—but he tried to include the ideas and drawings of as many readers as possible. Cassie Bill, one of Woggon’s art assistants for the series, explains that they were always excited to receive envelopes from the “outstanding [readers]” who repeatedly submitted their designs “and really showed extraordinary talent,” but Woggon made an effort “to use something from every fan” (Woggon, “Behind the Scenes”; Rausch, “A Memory”). As a result, reader credits, supported by memories of experiences reading, drawing, and playing with the series, provide insight into the community diversity that is otherwise invisible in the narratives and aesthetics of the series.

Credits for reader contributions almost always include a name and address, and occasionally the ages of readers are published as well. This small collection of details—name, location, and age—reveal that readers expanded far beyond the “typical American teenager” Archie Comic Publications considered to be their audience and, moreover, that the romance and career comics of *Katy Keene* created to entice more girls and young women to buy comics also captured the attention of other readers too. *Katy Keene* #25 is a classically packed example

highlighting the diversity of reader credits. On the cover, “Katy’s pose, sailor outfit, etc.” is credited to Jane Machemer from Bethlehem, PA, and the individual stories include, among many others, contributions by Eunice McLaclin from Tupperville in Ontario, Canada; 16-year-old Dixie Carr from Cloudcroft, NM; Gary Paul Jackson from Antlers, OK; 11-year-old Eddie Miller from Needham, MA; and Curtiss Kery from Herreid, SD. The credits in issue #25 include masculine, feminine, and gender-neutral names, locations across the United States and Canada, and readers at least as young as 9 and as old as 19. These qualities in themselves are indicative of a wide range of readers, but it is also necessary to consider the more nuanced realities of credits as well as the ways in which credits are organized within the series.

Names of contributors are given significant weight in *Katy Keene*. Because printed names allowed readers to connect with one another and recognize the privileged designers within the community, the series cultivated the expectation that names genuinely reflected the person they were associated with. However, the contributions of Charles Ventura not only challenge the widely-accepted perception of printed names but also assumptions regarding the gender identity behind those names. Ventura was a prolific contributor to Dale Messick’s *Brenda Starr, Reporter*, but his name also appeared in *Katy Keene*. Initially inspired by a call to submit ideas for a formal for a Brenda Starr paper doll, Ventura eagerly drew and successfully submitted his drawings to a variety of comics with paper dolls, but he didn’t always sign his own name. He explains, “I used the name of my daughters, Cathy, Nancy, Liz or my sister” (19). Though Ventura doesn’t explain his logic for submitting under the names of his feminine family members, his revelation destabilizes the unified surface of *Katy Keene*. His contributions were, of course, genuine, and he was a genuine member of the fan community. However, the way he played with the names on his

submissions undermines the series's presentation of normative gender roles and dynamics.

Masculine names certainly appear in connection with fashion designs—and several men would go on to have careers in fashion after *Katy Keene*—but they are overwhelmingly represented in stories and sections that highlight vehicles.

Katy Keene #25 is representative of the gendered ways in which reader contributions were organized. “Katy Keene in Dream Boat Voyage” opens with “Katy’s pose, outfit, luggage, car, etc.” as designed by Sheila Patricia Thrush from Fort Garry, Manitoba, Canada, and the story itself follows a dream in which Katy joins long-time suitor Randy Van Ronson on an unexpected trip to space. However, while other stories in the same issue are filled with reader-submitted designs for clothing and accessories, the reader credits in “Dream Boat Voyage” are almost entirely for the outlandish vehicles, including the rocket car that propels Katy and Randy “smack into Mister Moon.” The focus on reader-submitted designs for vehicles makes clear the gendered organization of credits across the series more broadly when a sudden list of masculine names is printed within the sea of otherwise feminine names credited in other stories.

The contributors to the designs in “Dream Boat Voyage” simultaneously reflect the variety among readers and the gendered division of their printed contributions. Credited readers for this story are: Maurine McCall from Nashville, TN; Curtiss Kery from Herreid, SD; Jerrie A. Beasley from Ft. Worth, TX; Karen Lee Hiker from Tomah, WI; CPL. A.F. Corders from Selma, AL; Dayton D. Holmes from Ansonia, CT; David Klinger, age 9, from Richland, MI; Richard Lyle Andrews from Redville, CO; Eddie Edwards from Anniston, AL; Timothy Tarzier from Green River, WY; Alvin Russell from Moriches, NY; Sharon Andersen from Traverse City, MI; Mr. and Mrs. Harold “Bill” Drennen from Tucson, AZ; Stephen R. Brown from Henderson, KY;

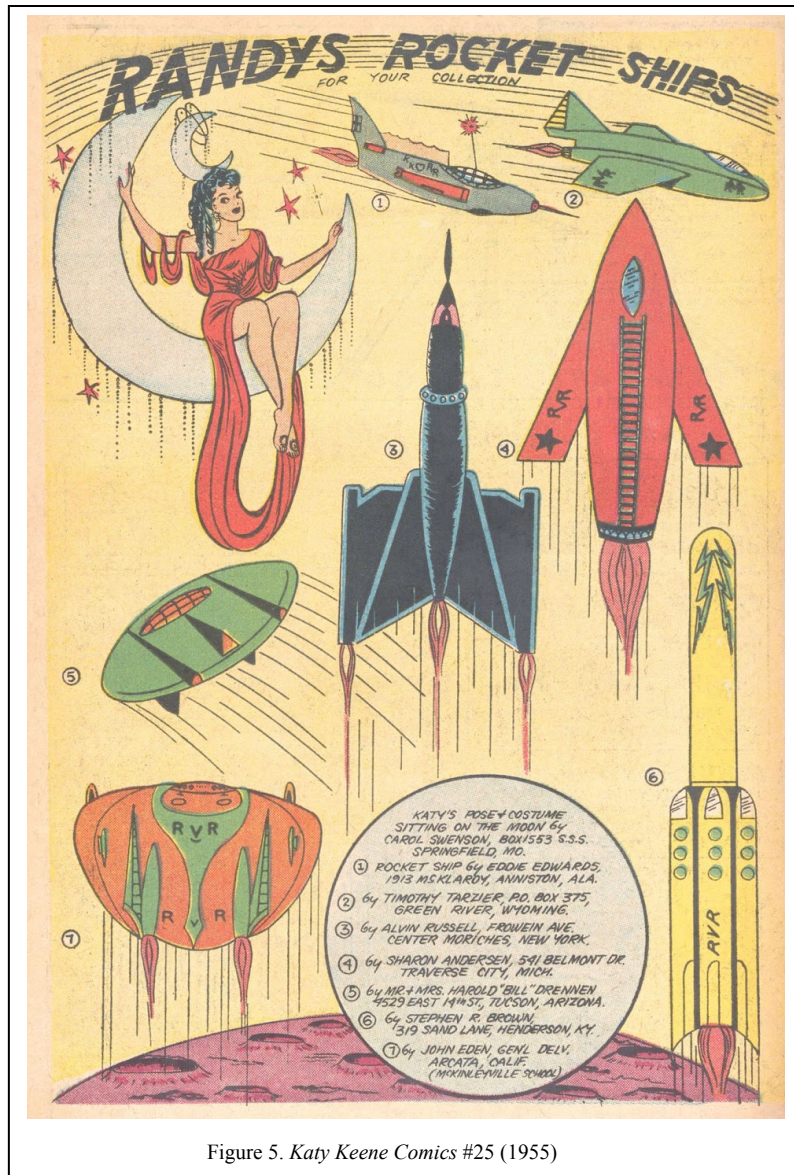


Figure 5. Katy Keene Comics #25 (1955)

and John Eden from a McKinleyville School in Arcata, CA. The credits are noticeably packed into the four-page section and are indicative of reader differences: thirteen states are represented, and a glimpse into the age range of readers is seen in the credits for 9-year-old David Klinger; Air Force Corporal Corders, who is at least 18; and Mr. and Mrs. Harold “Bill” Drennen, who are old enough to be married. However, the names credited for the relatively few number of

reader-submitted outfits and accessories are feminine while the majority of credits for the otherworldly vehicles are masculine names—even the credit for Mrs. Drennen is printed under the masculine title of “Mr. and Mrs. Harold ‘Bill’ Drennen” (see figure 5). The gendered organization of reader credits in “Dream Boat Voyage” returns to the “moral and ethical standards” of the United States’s post-war culture in which “wholesome teenage entertainment” required adherence to strict gender roles. The frequent crediting of masculine names for vehicles

recognizes that boys and men were reading, playing with, and contributing to the series while also aligning them with normative expectations regarding the nature of their interests. In the world of *Katy Keene*, men court women and drive them to-and-from dates in their flashy vehicles while women are preoccupied with how the latest fashions can help them land a date or succeed in their career, and readers' contributions were sorted accordingly.

The organization of reader credits also highlights the treatment of international contributions. *Katy Keene* #25 includes eleven acknowledgements for Canadian contributors printed in conjunction with an illustrated and written story, a list of contributors for flower fashions as well as a list for a gown with an enormous bow, one of Randy's rocket cars, and several poses and outfits. Canadian credits throughout the issue give an impression that international participation was welcome throughout the many elements of *Katy Keene*, but a review of the organization and frequency of contributions from other countries illuminates a racial and ethnic divide defined by the Archie Comic Publications concept of what "wholesome teenage entertainment" of the post-war United States should look like. As a country with which the United States shares a border as well as legible social and cultural norms, Canada appears as a friendly extension of American perceptions in the series. As a result, ideas and designs from Canadian readers are among the very few international contributions to be seamlessly integrated into *Katy Keene* narratives. In contrast, the majority of international credits are presented in separate storylines in which Katy and Sis tried on a series of outfits from "fans in foreign lands," and while such storylines were part of the larger publishing cycle, versions of the international fashion show appeared in print only about twice a year.

In *Katy Keene* #27, the story containing international contributions opens with an image of Katy sitting on top of a globe with a patriotic red, white, and blue outfit decked out in stars and stripes (see figure 6). The world beneath her inconsistently labels different countries and continents in order to highlight some of the areas from which submissions were received. On the map, Canada and the United States are visually combined under the label “America” with a shared yellow coloring while Mexico is unlabeled with the color green and “South America” is a large block of orange. Visually North America is divided between the shared labeling and coloring of the United States and Canada and the stark, unlabeled green of Mexico. The opening pose,

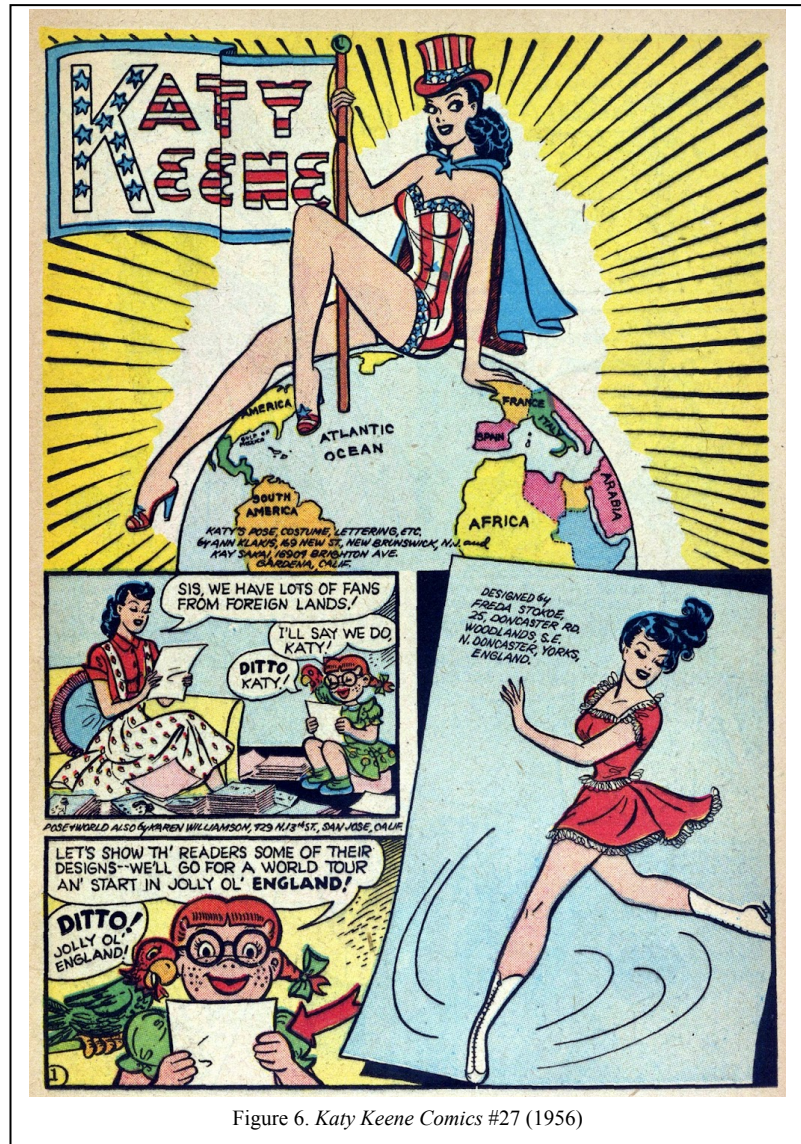


Figure 6. *Katy Keene Comics* #27 (1956)

costume, and lettering are attributed to two contributors from the United States—Ann Klakis of New Brunswick, NJ, and Kay Sakai from Gardena, CA—and thus set the tone for the story in which Katy and Sis “go for a world tour” by trying on internationally-submitted designs.

Designs in the six-page story reveal the truly international reach of the *Katy Keene* series, and yet the story maintains the perspective of its all-American characters. On their world tour, Katy and Sis review designs from England, France, Germany, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Peru, Australia, Taiwan, Mexico, and Canada—though smaller details, such as a bracelet and lettering, by readers from the United States are also included. Drawings from “foreign designers,” as Katy says, are each given a single panel in which Katy and Sis hold the drawings rather than wearing them within the story itself. The narrative description of the series as a “world tour” suggests that Katy and Sis are acting as tour guides who can safely take the reader around the world, but the quick turnover of individual designs doesn’t allow readers to dwell on any particular place. In fact, designs are presented without any backgrounds or other cultural markers beyond the credits and thereby present a surface-level reading experience. Again, the narrative framing suggests that readers are viewing the designs through the eyes of Katy and Sis exactly as they are received, and thus the international experience presented to the reader is directed through the vision of Katy and Sis. Stripped of their contexts and framed through the perspective of these “typical American” characters, international contributions serve to highlight the far-reaching influence of the United States and its *Katy Keene* content while also privileging an uncomplicated American view of exoticized locations. The story culminates when Katy and Sis “return home” to a full page of fashion cut-outs for a Katy paper doll designed “by our friends and neighbors in Canada.” Beyond the combined borders of the United States and Canada, readers could contribute to the world of *Katy Keene* and see their names in print and yet their isolated contributions have no influence on the world itself and are contained by the vision of Katy and Sis.

Acknowledgement and inclusion of *Katy Keene* readers across the world was necessary because international readers were also active members of the fan community, but their role in the larger narrative surrounding Katy and her friends served Archie Comic Publication's vision of wholesome entertainment for the typical American teenager. "Everyone knows their role... Everyone stays within their box," Tiffany Babb writes of the various characters within Archie Comics, "Archie is full of regular people, but only of a certain kind" (31). International readers supported and enhanced the worldwide reputation of Katy Keene, the fashion queen, by contributing to and appearing in the series, but their role within the larger social and cultural narrative of the series limited their contributions to an aesthetic.

Babb's assertion provides further insight into the reality of reader credits by calling attention to the visual domination of whiteness in the series. As she explains, "It's hard to talk about *Archie* without also talking about whiteness," and the visual aesthetics of *Katy Keene* reveal how the post-war logic of white America extends to the larger scope of Archie Comic Publications (31). She notes that Riverdale is severely lacking in Black characters—Chuck Clayton first appeared in the fictional town in 1971—and Latinx, Asian American, and Middle Eastern characters are missing altogether (33). The *Katy Keene* series exemplifies this erasure. Reader credits and accompanying details reveal that readers of color were present and active in the fan community and their contributions were being published, but the entire series is almost entirely devoid of characters of color. The few representations that are found narratively and visually are stereotypical and brief, such as "Swami Rivah" whose fortune-telling abilities, jewel-enhanced turban, and textually-marked accent are designed to frame him as ambiguously foreign. In addition to the international contributions that point toward a culturally diverse

readership, photographs sent along with reader letters and printed in the series as well as anecdotes surrounding the series illuminate the otherwise obscured presence of readers of color.

Reader photographs appeared four times in the initial publication of the *Katy Keene* comic book series as part of Katy's "personal pin-up board" and were also present in the



Figure 7. *Katy Keene Annual* #6 (1959)

supplemental *Katy Keene Annual* printed from 1954 to 1960. Among the photographs included in the pin-up boards, almost all readers appear with light skin and only two readers have darker skin: a photograph of Brenda Haywood from Houston, TX, is printed in issue #47, and a photograph of an unnamed young woman is printed in *Katy Keene Annual* #5. These two young people look out from the surrounding light-skinned readers with

smiles that remind readers that the world of Katy and her friends extends far beyond its white-washed pages. In the final issue of the *Katy Keene Annual* series, which shared readership with the main publication, a photograph of Grace Garcia from Tucson, AZ, is published alongside her

letter and three designs for movie-inspired pin-ups of Katy (see figure 7). In her letter, Grace writes,

I am a slim, 5'6½" brown-eyed brunette, seventeen years old. I have a fashion column in our school paper in which I have featured some of your designs. The radio is on all the time at our house, and when I hear Spanish music with castanets I join in singing and dancing my own castanets. I love rich foods which I can eat because I don't have to hold to a diet. I love sports but most of all I love to draw, draw, draw!

Grace's description of herself as brown-eyed juxtaposes other letters in which readers describe themselves as having blue eyes, and her reference to Spanish music calls attention to the absolute absence of non-English languages in the entirety of the series. Thus the brown-eyed Grace listening and singing along to Spanish music provides an image that is not otherwise seen in the experiences and perspectives of Katy and her friends. Moreover, Grace is an active member of the fan community who is not only drawing and submitting her work but also sharing Katy with her school mates and thus encouraging others to join the community as well.

The real and present community of diverse readers in combination with the extensive rates and influences of reader participation in the *Katy Keene* series should have resulted in a richly-textured fictional world in which differing identities and experiences were visible. Craig Leavitt describes the series as a "fantasy directly expressed by the readers" and as a "real mirror of the people," and yet the fantastic vision supported only the dreams of readers whose lives and aspirations aligned with post-war American ideals. Thus when Leavitt continues by explaining that the series exhibits "a timelessness, objectivity, logic, and a constant positive attitude," he ironically anticipates Tiffany Babb's later assertion that the world of Archie Comics "exists within a bubble of sacred timelessness, a perfect example of the rewriting of American culture post-war, when an imagined life, an imagined America was required. Something safe and

understood. A desperate imaging of a life that never really existed, and if it did exist—existed for the few and at an enormous cost to others” (Leavitt; Babb, 32). The fiction of *Katy Keene* presents the “typical teenager” as one who inhabits their gender role, one who can enjoy the aesthetic variations of international cultures without fully participating in them, and one who fits into white beauty standards. Others can support the success of the all-American teenager, but they can never be the example. No matter how readers pitched their ideas or the care with which they created fashion designs, their ideas would always be adapted, adjusted, or altogether cut to align with the promise of the Archie Series Emblem. Through its visual and narrative content, *Katy Keene* suggests that its many different readers were imagining and fantasizing about a single version of Katy and her friends.

Beyond the Credits

The people behind the many names, addresses, and ages printed in *Katy Keene* are so much more complicated and expansive than they appear within the boundaries of the series. Supplementary materials, including photographs and letters, printed along with the individual acknowledgements within every issue gesture toward the richness of the series’s readership and act as stepping stones toward a more in-depth understanding of the people who make up the community as well as how they have previously and continue to participate in that community. The minimal details printed about most readers make it difficult to make accurate connections between the names in each issue and the real lives of contributors, however, and while photographs and letters can provide further clues about the identities of individuals, such details are comparatively limited in contrast to the extensive lists of names. Learning more about

individual creators is no small task, but such endeavors are essential to breaking down the ways in which the series promoted and preserved an idealized fantasy.

Leavitt claims that that the fantasy of the series freed “everyone who participated in the spirit of the series to enjoy (and accept) beauty, luxury, and the creative process,” and yet the series itself promoted only a singular vision of what that enjoyment could look like and how different contributors could participate in that fantasy. Babb explains that the “imagined world of *Archie* and other similar images of Americana have been used as a weapon in our own world, against anyone who doesn’t fit into the neat little boxes of Riverdale” (32). The fantasy of *Katy Keene* in which characters fit squarely into their gender roles and navigate a world designed to serve a white-centric image of beauty, success, and luxury necessarily obscures the play and participation of any reader whose experiences are not reflected in the imagined world. As a series that is still discussed as a demonstration of “the way things used to be” before life became “complicated” or “messy,” preserving the image of *Katy Keene* is harmful because it asserts that only the “typical” and “wholesome” American can achieve and enjoy the beauty, luxury, and influential creativity that the series actively promotes (Babb, 32).

However, it is not enough to examine how readers were excluded. The fans who spent hours of their lives writing, drawing, and playing with the pages of *Katy Keene* deserve to have their experiences of play and enjoyment recognized, even if that recognition must happen outside the established narrative and aesthetic boundaries of Archie Comic Publications. Making clear and direct connections between reader credits and the real readers behind them is the first step to a more nuanced and complete understanding of the series’s readership, but the next step is to

learn more about how readers played with and within the world that Bill Woggon maintained as well as how those experiences of play shaped the lives and memories of fans.

The continued interest in *Katy Keene* and the creation of new stories and characters from its world make the legacy of the series clear and call attention to how its narratives and aesthetics continue to shape conversations and perceptions of the series. The *Paper Doll Review*, a pillar for the contemporary paper-doll community, published a tribute to Katy Keene in April 2022 that included seven pages of newly-created wardrobe options for a Katy Keene dress-a-doll cut-out and 16 letters from readers. The “memories and tidbits” from people across the country illuminate how the series influenced everything from friendships and family interactions to wedding dress designs to career paths. Every letter references the pleasure of playing with the various elements of the series and many highlight how sharing *Katy Keene* with others was and continues to be an important part of reader’s lives. The fact that readers mailed or e-mailed their letters for the tribute makes it clear that participation and community remains inextricable from the culture of the series, and a call out from Wanda Metz in Leonard, MN, looking for pen-pals to “talk about Katy Keene” shows how the network of readers that was cultivated over 70 years ago remains an active avenue for participation.

Indeed, the contemporary relevance of people’s relationship to the series is illustrated by the visual aesthetics of the now-cancelled *Katy Keene* television series. Lead actress Lucy Hale explains that “Katy Keene is based off of the *Archie* comics, so in the pilot, they really wanted to replicate a lot of the outfits within the comic” (Vartan). Given the proliferation of reader contributed designs, it is likely that original contributions from readers were further transformed by the screen, and the CW series was already thinking about how to replicate that kind of

participation. Creators Michael Grassi and Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa aspired to include viewer-submitted fashion designs into the show. “These shows are social media-driven and so many of these shows are about passionate fan bases,” says Aguirre-Sacasa, “[Fan participation] is a really unique part of Katy’s history and legacy, so we’re definitely, definitely going to figure out a way to use it” (Lenker). The show did not return after the first season, but the importance of fan participation and collaboration remains a necessary element of the larger culture surrounding the lives and adventures of Katy and her friends. Moreover, the inclusion of a more diverse cast and character list signal that there is an interest in expanding the fantasy of *Katy Keene* to more closely reflect the realities of viewership and readership, and design contributions from viewers would have offered additional opportunities for the recognition of those realities than the original series provided.

The community surrounding *Katy Keene* continues to remember, play with, and connect over the series. As a result, recognizing all of the members of that community is both necessary and just. Readers of all identities and backgrounds are an essential part of the legacy of the series and its contemporary effects and products, and thus critical and scholarly discussions about the visual and narrative possibilities of the series as well as the importance of participation need to include more informed and nuanced considerations of *Katy Keene* readership. Endeavors to identify and learn more about the people behind the innumerable designs, lettering, stories, and jokes that appeared in the series will certainly open up new avenues to celebrate the experiences and contributions of readers.

Works Cited

Babb, Tiffany. "Searching for Riverdale: My relationship with Archie and Americana."

PanelxPanel no. 60, July 2022, pp. 29–34.

Crawford, Lorraine. "Paper Dolls from the Silver Age of Comic Books." *Doll World*, Oct. 1994, pp. 28–32.

Estes, Nancy. Letter. *Katy Keene* #37, Nov. 1957.

Foley, Maureen. "Humble Man Versus the Diva: The Story of Cartoonist, Bill Woggon, and

Retro Comic Book Diva, Katy Keene." *Cherry Meltdown*, [http://](http://www.cherrymeltdown.com/galleries/katy/index.html)

www.cherrymeltdown.com/galleries/katy/index.html. Accessed 14 Sept 2022.

Leavitt, Craig. "Katy Keene: Myth or Monument?." *Katy the Newsletter* #5, Fall 1981.

Lenker, Maureen Lee. "Katy Keene creators eventually want fans to design her costumes—just like the comics." *Entertainment*, <https://ew.com/tv/2020/02/06/katy-keene-fan-designed-costumes/>. Accessed 12 Sept 2022.

"Memories and Tidbits from Our Readers." *Paper Doll Review* #83, April 2022, pp. 47–52.

Rausch, Barbara. Editorial. *Katy the Newsletter* #1, Winter 1980.

—. "A Memory of Cassie Bill." *Katy the Newsletter* #5, Fall 1981.

Sensat, Lloyd. Letter. *Katy the Newsletter* #1, Winter 1980.

—. Letter. *Katy Keene Special* #1, Sept. 1983.

Snyder, Robin. "Under the Gun." *Katy Keene Special* #1, Sept. 1983.

Spurgeon, Tom. "Obituary: Bill Woggon 1911–2003." *The Comics Reporter*, [https://](https://www.comicsreporter.com/index.php/resources/longbox/62)

www.comicsreporter.com/index.php/resources/longbox/62. Accessed 12 Sept 2022.

- Vartan, Kristin. "Lucy Hale and *Katy Keene* costume designer Jen Rogien on the fab four's style." *Entertainment*, <https://ew.com/tv/2020/01/27/lucy-hale-katy-keene-costume-designer-jenn-rogien-fab-fours-style/>. Accessed 15 Sept 2022.
- Ventura, Charles. "An Acquaintanceship with Dale Messick." *Midwest Paper Dolls and Toys Quarterly* #29, Winter 1981, pp. 17–19.
- Woggon, Bill. "Katy Keene: The Pin-Up Queen." *Katy Keene* #14, Jan. 1954.
- . "Katy Keene in Dream Boat Voyage." *Katy Keene* #25, Nov. 1955.
- . "Behind the Scene with Katy Keene." *Katy the Newsletter* #5, Fall 1981.
- Woggon, Bill, and June Arnold. "Katy Keene." *Katy Keene* #42, Sept. 1958.
- Woggon, Suzie. "What Katy Keene meant to me as the daughter of Bill Woggon." *Katy the Newsletter* #1, Winter 1980.
- Wright, Bradford W. "Confronting Success: Comic Books and Postwar America." *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. John Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- York, Rafiel. "Rebellion in Riverdale." *Comic Books and the Cold War, 1946–1962: Essays on Graphic Treatment of Communism, the Code and Social Concerns*, edited by Chris York and Rafiel York. McFarland and Company, 2012, pp. 103–114.