



Amy and Jordan

Mark Beyer

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For those of you who thought the comic strip was dead by the end of the twentieth century, here are 292 pieces of proof that you were wrong. Mark Beyer was breathing delirious, heartbreaking, otherworldly life into it by means of Amy and Jordan. Obviously, you weren't reading New York Press.

But I sure was. Voraciously. Back in 1989, when I discovered that Beyer's strips were appearing regularly in this new "alternative weekly" paper, I quickly became hooked, and a thought seized me: I had to clip and save them—they were exquisite poems of urban despair, dreamy and nightmarish. I was already a fan of Beyer's talent based on his book *Agony* (Pantheon, 1988), but these new strips revealed, week by week, a whole new dimension to his work—an ingenious reinvention of panel-design that redefined what a comic strip could be. As with *Peanuts*, it helps to try and picture these in the context which they first appeared in order to appreciate just how profoundly they emerged from anything else on the newspaper page. Even the "outré" NYP ads and listings which often ran alongside them were hopelessly dull by comparison. One of its most impressive aspects was the way Form served the Content—no matter how eccentric the layout got, it somehow never confused the narrative. And what narrative: it was as if *Candide* had been transported to the East Village and split in two like an amoeba and holed up in a squat on Avenue C. Along with giant bugs from outer space.

So I did clip and save them, and put them into an envelope, which was then placed in a shoebox with a lot of other envelopes (receipts, receipts!), which was shoved to the back of the closet of my sixth-floor walk-up studio apartment, which I moved out of three years later and in the process I unwittingly threw them all away. Which frankly is just the sort of thing that Amy and Jordan would do. Drat. "Oh well," I thought, once I'd realized it, "at some point someone will collect and publish them, and I'll get them back that way." And that was that.

Fast forward more than ten years, to the spring of 2002. During a panel of cartoonists I was chairing in Philadelphia, a member of the audience asked what Mark was working on and where he was. No one seemed to know. The discussion was transcribed and published in *The Comics Journal* that summer, and in the fall Mark contacted me with the best possible news: He'd read the panel transcript and wanted to publish again. And the Amy and Jordan strips had never been comprehensively collected. So now, as an editor, I was able to grant my own wish.

Amy and Jordan ran from 1988 through early 1996. After that, Beyer put cartooning aside to pursue other projects. This book signals his return to the realm of comics, which he says he wants to start making again. We can only hope he does. For now, I'm just thankful I finally have my Amy and Jordan collection back.
—Chip Kidd, NYC, 10/03

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