

STUDY GUIDE:

BUDDY IN SEATTLE by Peter Bagge

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Introduction

In reference to cartooning, the terms “underground” and “alternative” are often used interchangeably, but in the case of Peter Bagge the moniker “alternative” is particularly appropriate, for no other work of printed media is more closely intertwined with the so-called “alternative” culture that emerged from the Pacific Northwest throughout the nineties than his comics series *Hate*, which launched as that decade began and drew to a close thirty issues later as it ended. Like his protagonist Buddy, Peter Bagge moved from the East Coast to Seattle just as that city began to emerge as a focal point of American youth culture. Through the characters of Buddy, Lisa, Valerie, George, and Stinky, Peter Bagge continues the grand tradition of cartoonist as humorist, social critic, and documentarian. In striking parallel to the paradoxical assimilation of this alternative movement into our current mainstream culture, Peter Bagge's *Hate* became more a part of mass media culture at the time than any cartoonist's work since that of Robert Crumb, when similar social forces drew American culture to San Francisco some thirty years previous.

Although he is best known for *Hate*, Peter Bagge's cartooning career began in the early eighties with the publication of *Comical Funnies*, a series in which many of *Hate*'s main characters first appeared. He then spent three years as editor of Robert Crumb's *Weirdo* magazine before revisiting the Bradley family in his series *Neat Stuff*, which ran for 15 issues and concluded in the late eighties. The most compelling character from that series was Buddy Bradley, a semi-autobiographical twenty-something slacker. With Buddy as its centerpiece Bagge launched *Hate* in 1990.

Peter Bagge is part of the “second wave” of underground cartoonists; he, along with creators like Chester Brown, Mark Beyer, Dan Clowes, Dave Sim, and the Hernandez Brothers, was influenced by and expanded upon the stylistic and narrative foundation of the original underground cartoonists of the late sixties and early-to-mid seventies. Eschewing the first generation's proclivity for self-indulgent personal rumination though, Peter Bagge's *Hate* employs autobiography simply as a jumping off point for its hyper kinetic and hilarious tales of personal relationships and human nature gone awry. No less manic than its storylines, Bagge's artwork is a nonstop barrage of comic exaggeration and movement. Like many of the second wave underground cartoonists, Peter Bagge cites Robert Crumb and his contemporaries as stylistic influences; unique to Bagge, though, is a combination of influences as disparate as John Stanley's *Little Lulu*, Harvey Kurtzman's work for *MAD Magazine*, Bob Clampett's Warner Brothers animated films, the children's books of Ted Geisel (Dr. Seuss), Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* newspaper strip, and *Car-Toons* magazine.

Although *Hate* later expand its page count and appeared in full color, many regard these first fifteen black and white issues collected here as some of Bagge's finest work,

stylistically and narratively showcasing the creator at his best.

Study Questions

1. Peter Bagge's drawing style is often characterized as “cartoony” as opposed to more realistically rendered action/fantasy comics. Would these characters and stories be as interesting, as funny, if they were drawn in a more realistic style? Why or why not?
2. Often writers are wary of making too many references to a particular era for fear that it may “date” the work. Are you able to identify with the characters in *Hate*, which is so firmly rooted in its time period, or do you find that their concerns are too different than your own to be of interest?
3. Unlike many traditional protagonists, Buddy Bradley often exhibits behavior that is not admirable--as do a number of other characters. Pick a character and write a defense of his or her behavior, as if you were in a court of law.
4. At the end of the book, Buddy is leaving Seattle with Lisa, whom he has chosen as a partner instead of Valerie, despite the fact that Valerie would most certainly be a more sensible choice. Is this a realistic or unrealistic depiction of human behavior? Why?
5. How would you describe the triangular relationship between Buddy, Valerie, and Lisa? What does this suggest about the author's ideas about personal relationships?
6. *Hate* has been often been described as “cynical” or “depressing.” Either defend or refute this characterization of the work.
7. The term “serious” is used to mean both “not funny” and “artistically valuable.” Is *Hate* lacking in artistic value because it is a humorous work? Briefly elaborate on the role of humor in art/literature.
8. What do you think of George's lambasting of Buddy in his fanzine? Is this behavior warranted? Defensible? Would your answers be different if they were not roommates?
9. Is Buddy a racist? A misogynist? Why or why not?
10. If you found out that the events in *Hate* are verbatim autobiography by the author would it change your opinion of the work? What about if you found out it was entirely fictitious? Why or why not?

Studio Exercises

First, have students attempt to convey the following emotional states using only a single black line on white paper: anger, ecstasy, sadness, frustration, and mania. For example, a thick jagged line might be used to denote anger.

Now, divide the students into groups of two. Have them trade off drawing each other in full body poses, attempting to depict each of these states. Be sure to emphasize body position, as opposed to simply facial expression: position of arms and legs, arch of spine, angle of the hips.

These first drawings will likely be somewhat realistic renderings for the most part.

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Have the students do the same exercise again, this time push them to really emphasize and exaggerate. Tell the student posing to think of actors in silent films, or mimes who have to convey emotional states without vocalizing. Likewise, encourage those drawing to push the pose and expression as far as possible—even if it seems ridiculous.

Now have the students revise these drawings and push poses to the point that they are uncomfortable with the degree of exaggeration. Refer them back to the original “single line” drawings and encourage them to incorporate graphical elements from that into their poses.