

‘Who the Hell Is Don Marquis?’



*prohibition makes you
want to cry
into your beer and
denies you the beer
to cry into*

– archy

DON MARQUIS (1878-1937) was one of the most popular humor writers in America from the 1910s through the 1930s, acclaimed for his work as a New York newspaper columnist, poet, short-story writer, novelist and playwright. He is best known today for “archy and mehitabel” (Doubleday, 1927), his fantastic tales of a cockroach with the soul of a poet and an alley cat who claimed she was Cleopatra in a former life. Archy the cockroach told stories of his lowly life by diving repeatedly on the keys of Marquis’s typewriter, but he wasn’t able to simultaneously operate the shift key, so all his dispatches appeared in lowercase letters. Marquis also gained fame for another character called “the Old Soak,” a friendly drunk who railed against the cruel provisions of Prohibition.

The writer Christopher Morley said that Marquis was, “in his own circle, the best-loved man of his time.” He was a member of at least half a dozen social clubs, most of them little more than polite excuses to meet friends for dinner and drinks. We think he would be quite at home in the Double Scotch and Prohibition Society.