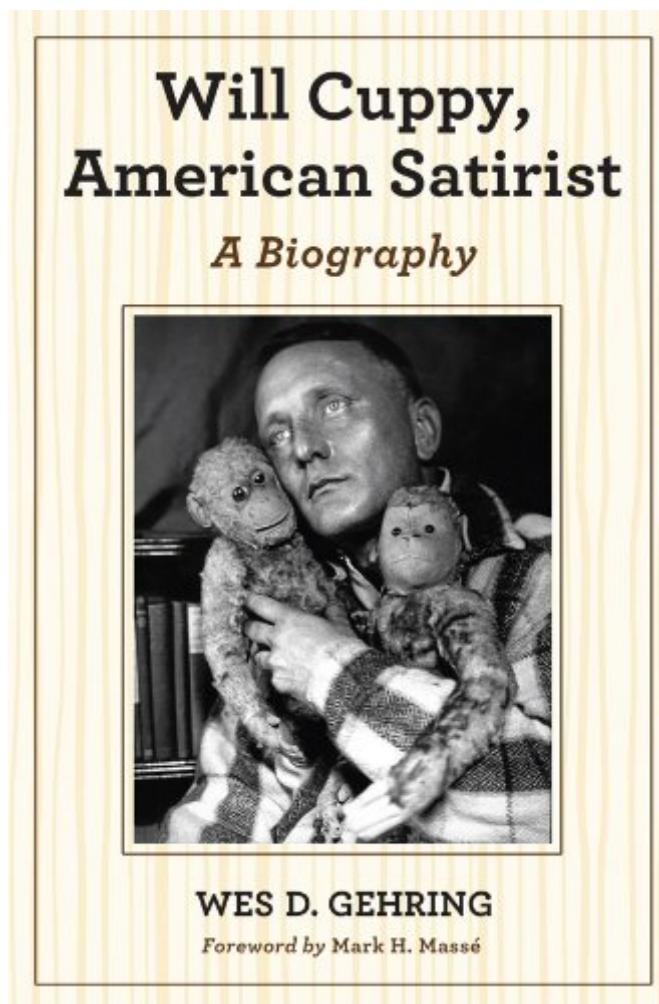


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Will Cuppy, American Satirist: A Biography



Synopsis

Back in the golden age of humor books (late 1920s-early 1950s), when wits of the pantheon like Robert Benchley, James Thurber, and S.J. Perelman were producing their signature works, there was another singular satirist who more than held his own with such fast company. Named Will Cuppy (1884-1949), this factual funnyman's metier is dark comedy that flirts with nihilism. His agenda is baldly stated in such classic Cuppy book titles as *How to Be a Hermit* (1929), *How to Tell Your Friends from the Apes* (1931), and *The Decline and Fall of Practically Everybody* (1950). This biography doubles as a critical study of a satirist whose shish-kebabbing of humanity was often done through the veiled anthropomorphic use of animals. Whether Will Cuppy directly derails man or lesser creatures on the evolutionary chain, there is always a generous helping of dark comedy. For a biographer, the man represents a treasure trove of possibilities. Cuppy is a great humorist, with most of his best work still in print, yet he has yet to be profiled in a book-length study. The interest factor of a mesmerizingly complex and eccentric private life can actually trump the accomplishments of a high achieving public persona.

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Customer Reviews

A good biography of Will Cuppy has been long overdue. I even considered writing one myself, but no need now. This one is well done. Thoroughly researched, it draws on Cuppy's books, but also on his reviews of mystery stories, his correspondence, and other sources both published and unpublished. Even his personal scrapbooks! For years I've been wanting to visit the Cuppy papers at the University of Chicago. That hasn't worked out; this book is the next best thing. It discusses his politics and his sexual orientation, concluding that he was apolitical and asexual. His curious relationship with his mentor, Isabel Paterson. His need for emotional and professional support. The "subtextual codes" in his writing. His suicidal tendencies. His creative use of footnotes. It puts him into context with contemporary satirists such as Robert Benchley, James Thurber, and S. J. Perelman. It compares him to Groucho Marx, Henry David Thoreau, and others. The author is a professor of film, and it shows. He injects films into this book more than Cuppy's life would warrant. Cuppy was not a movie star and did not write for the movies. Why then are so many of the illustrations in this book from Hollywood movies? But there are some gems, including two portraits of Cuppy in his youth. Author Gehring admires Cuppy but is critical of him, even to calling him a "man/child." This book illuminates Cuppy's enigmatic character and adds dimensions to his persona. Recommended to Cuppy fans. It will help them spot the undercurrents in his life and work. This book is indexed and lavishly sourced, with an extensive bibliography and many pages of chapter notes.

Will Cuppy (1884-1949) was a remarkable American satirist... His was a dark comedy that flirted with nihilism... This fine, carefully researched biography gives his Hoosier childhood, his stint at the University of Chicago [and] his ascent to the authorship of such works of humor as "How to Tell Your Friends from the Apes" and How to Attract the Wombat." A fine, funny read. "Reference & Research Book News," (Dec. 2013), p. 4

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