

Among the Funniest Books Ever Written - How to Tell Your Friends from the Apes and How to Become Extinct

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Once every few years, when I think funny is on the way out, I like to reread the writings of Will Cuppy. Not so much for the content; it's the style that brings me back.¹

The content of my favorites (*How to Tell Your Friends from the Apes* and *How to Become Extinct*) has to do largely with animals and birds with a few prehistoric men thrown in.²

This is an author who can still³ write the kind of sentence that from word one is clearly headed for Poughkeepsie, but near the end takes sharp turn that leads directly to Flagstaff. This is called talent. Perhaps in this case we should elaborate and call it a talent for misanthropy. After all, where's the pleasure in a sentence that heaps scorn upon the heads of the entire human race, if you can see it coming from word one?

Some people will not like this book. Mr. Cuppy tells it like it is.⁴ He says⁵ of the baboon:

The family life of the Baboon is known as hell on earth. The males grow meaner and stingier and the females fade at an early age. The children scream, stamp, roll on the ground and will not eat their Centipedes.

Furthermore⁶ he can "*comb his hair with his lower front teeth*".

¹Mr. Cuppy liked lots of footnotes. Just you watch.

²These short articles contain a wealth of interesting scientific information, but you can skip over all of that and get to the jokes faster.

³Or COULD still, had he not left this world some 58 years ago. He writes much less nowadays.

⁴Or was. Or will be.

⁵Or said. Get it?

⁶And even worse.

If this refers to the hair on the baboon's head, then what does that tell us about some people?⁷

Of the prehistoric Java Man, Cuppy wrote:

Professor Dubois made him a face which proves that he was dolichocephalic or long-headed instead of brachycephalic or square-headed and that he was 5 feet 6½ inches high and that Barnum was right. The Java Man was more Manlike than Apelike and more Apelike than Manlike. He had immense supraorbital ridges of solid bone and was conscious in spots. Does that remind you of anyone?

I believe the funny book should not only amuse us, it should in a way comfort us. Reading about the Java Man makes me very comfortable. Insufferable, but comfortable.⁸

In *How to Become Extinct*, the reader can celebrate and enjoy the disappearance of certain members of the animal kingdom which when not, apparently, such good ideas:⁹

The Dodo never had a chance. He seems to have been invented for the sole purpose of becoming extinct and that was all he was good for

In closing, reading the works of Will Cuppy will not make you a better person. But at this late date, how much better can you expect to get?

⁷The idea is so awful I may have to go lie down.

⁸My own supraorbital ridges are nothing to sing about. But they are nothing to laugh about either. They seem to be made out of Tupperware.

⁹Not that this aspect can predictably be tied to extinction. Just look around.