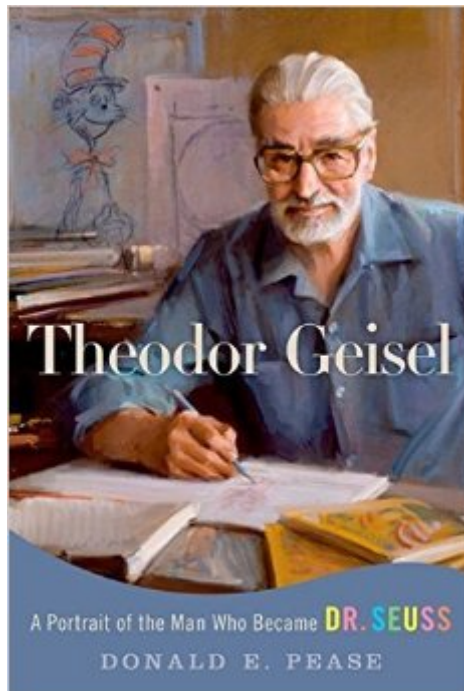


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# Theodor Geisel: A Portrait Of The Man Who Became Dr. Seuss (Lives And Legacies Series)



## Synopsis

Dr. Seuss's infectious rhymes, fanciful creatures, and roundabout plots not only changed the way children read but imagined the world. And to Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street, Green Eggs and Ham, The Cat and the Hat, these and other classics have sold hundreds of millions of copies and entertained children and adults for decades. After graduating from Dartmouth, Theodor Geisel used his talents as an ad-man, political provocateur, and social satirist, gradually but irrevocably turning to children's books. Theodor Geisel tells the unlikely story of this remarkable transformation. In this compact and engrossing biography, Donald Pease reveals the evolution of Dr. Seuss's creative persona while offering an honest appraisal of his life. The book also features many of Dr. Seuss's lesser-known illustrations, including college drawings, insecticide ads, and wartime political cartoons--all of which offer a glimpse of his early artistic style and the visual origins of the more famous creatures that later populated his children's books. As Pease traces the full arc of Dr. Seuss's prolific career, he combines close textual readings of many of Dr. Seuss's works with a unique look at their genesis to shed new light on the enduring legacy of America's favorite children's book author.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although well-researched and rife with literary analysis, it was remarkably short on psychological insight into Ted Geisel's personality and personal life. I finished the book still asking what was

Geisel really like and how was that reflected in his work. I was also left wanting much more detail on how he and his first wife developed ideas together, which is mentioned in passing but never illustrated, if I can use that phrase. Pease spends much time analyzing the construction of Geisel's best known books, so I imagine this would be worthwhile for literary scholars, but to a fan of Dr. Seuss's whimsy, the book is dull and lifeless.

Theodor and Henrietta Geisel were a prosperous lot whose family business, the Kalmbach and Geisel Brewery, "provided [them] with their livelihood as well as their social standing." (p. 5) Their children, Theodor and Marnie, benefited from their elevated social status and were nurtured in a loving family. Theodor's mother, "Nettie" as she was called, encouraged his creatively with "language games," instilling in his a love of language through "the music of words." His unusual artistic expression evidenced itself when caricatures of wild, imaginative animals were drawn into the wallpaper in his room. Undoubtedly, "the bilingual environment in which Ted grew up fostered his knack for making up nonsensical-sounding names for the fantastic creatures" he set into the wallpaper as a child and later his drawing board. (p. 10) For all intents and purposes, it appeared to be an idyllic childhood, but circumstances would soon change all that. The winds of war soon found themselves entering the streets of Springfield, Massachusetts where anti-German sentiment quickly forced its way into ten-year-old Theodor's life. He began to experience the bullying verbal abuse of his classmates at school, a place where the once privileged child felt no different than any other. He, like any other American, wanted to show his patriotism for his country and began to sell U.S. Liberty Bonds. He sold so many, including \$1,000 worth to his grandfather, he was selected to receive a medal from Theodore Roosevelt, but they ran out of them when it came for the then fourteen-year-old boy to receive his. He was not the recipient of a cheap metal pin, but rather the wrath of a man he admired. "What's this little boy doing here?" It was an "emotional scar that stayed with Ted throughout the remainder of his life." (pp. 15-16) The family misfortunes had only just begun. Ted Seuss Geisel's privileged life was gone as was his German-American identity. Prohibition has destroyed the underpinnings of the family's financial security and in an effort to cope he "retreated behind a series of masks." His youthful antics at Dartmouth would heighten his feeling of loss as the "violation of liquor laws" with his friends lost his coveted position of the campus humor newspaper, "The Jack-O-Lantern." He adopted his mother's maiden name, Seuss, as a moniker and defied the dean as he continued to pen cartoons for the paper. As in keeping with the times, "no ethnic group was spared lampooning in Ted's contributions to the `Jack-O-Lantern.'" Later, after his graduation from Dartmouth, a chance meeting during his short stint at Oxford University would

"significantly [alter] the direction of his life." (p. 40) Ted would meet Marian Helen Palmer. This is an amazing look at the intellectual and psychological underpinnings of Theodor Seuss Geisel, Dr. Seuss. The first and latter parts of this book contain much of the standard biographical information that many people may be looking for. The first part deals with a light overview of his ancestry, childhood, the family misfortune, and youthful foray into the adult world. The latter part primarily deals with Helen's departure from his life, his "quest for a substitute family," and the entrance of Audrey Stone Diamond. If one wants a more complete, intimate biography of Seuss, they might want to look elsewhere. Mind you the reading of this book is quite smooth, but does seem to be subtly sectionalized. The central theme of this book deals with the motivation behind his writing. I thoroughly enjoyed the intellectual banter and speculation as to why he penned certain stories. For example, we are able to read about the opinions of others such as Henry Jenkins: "He emphasized with children's struggle against the corrupting influence of grown-up hatreds, and he trusted that writing children's books would enable him go better the world." (p. 75) The book is liberally illustrated with black and white cartoon drawings, including the now racist and xenophobic kind Theodor later tried to make amends for. There is an excellent index in the back matter and literary citations. If you are into literary biographical psychology that reads extremely well, you'll find this book about one of the best children's writers, Dr. Seuss, to be especially enlightening.

Highly readable, deeply informative, this is a lively take on the life of our most famous children's author. Much less academic - or heavy - than previous works on Seuss, it covers both his life and work while unraveling aspects of his life readers probably don't know much about: his relationship with his mother (who gave him the name Seuss), his rowdy days at Dartmouth, his work for the New Yorker, his first wife's suicide and, of course, how he came up with some of the most memorable characters in all of literature.

Good short read about the life of the man behind the many classic short stories and characters including the Cat in the Hat and the Grinch Who Stole Christmas. Interesting read about a very interesting person. If you want to know more about where he started and how he became so well know, this is a great place to start.

Pease ties many elements of Geisel's life and works into a coherent biography. Geisel was under appreciated in his time, and now we have a well researched biography that gives us a clear picture of the man and his significance to our culture.

Professor Donald Pease has captured the genius of Theodor Seuss Geisel, along with the profound brilliance of Dr. Seuss' creativity and legacy. Children throughout the world have learned to laugh with Dr. Seuss and the Cat in the Hat and others. Lesser known, but equally brilliant, are Dr. Seuss political cartoons which spanned four decades. Don Pease captures it all, and we all laugh a bit deeper from reading his account of this one of a kind, Dr. Seuss. Dave Halloran, Altamonte Springs, Florida

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