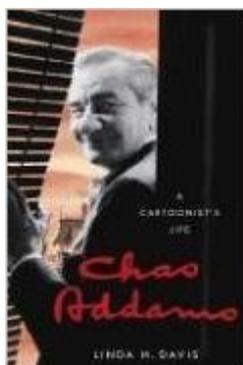


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# Chas Addams: A Cartoonist's Life



## Synopsis

“They’re creepy and they’re kooky,“ is how the catchy theme song of *The Addams Family* described everyone’s favorite nonconformists—Morticia, Gomez, Lurch, Uncle Fester, Grandmama, Wednesday, and Pugsley. But for all the novelty of the sitcom based on Charles Addams’s groundbreaking *New Yorker* cartoons, Hollywood’s Addams family paled beside the cartoonist’s. “Not half as evil as my original characters,” sighed Addams. Though the haunted-household cartoons developed a following among *New Yorker* readers long before the 1960s sitcom, and the Addams and their seedy Victorian mansion soon became recognizable types, the artist with the well-known signature “Chas Addams” remained an enigma. Called “the Bela Lugosi of the cartoonists,” Addams was the cartoonist everyone—even Hitchcock—wanted to meet. He was bedeviled by rumors. People claimed that he slept in a coffin, collected severed fingers sent by fans, and suffered bouts of madness that sent him to the insane asylum. The true Addams was even more fabulous than the wildest stories and cartoons. Here was a sunny, funny urbane man, “a normal American boy,” as he called himself, with a dog who hated children and a taste for crossbows. While producing a unique body of work featuring lovingly drawn homicidal spouses, demonic children, genteel monsters, and an everyday world crosshatched with magic, Addams raced classic sports cars, juggled beautiful women (Joan Fontaine, Jackie Kennedy, and Greta Garbo, to name a few), and charmed everyone. But though his pursuits suggest lighthearted romantic comedy, Addams’s life had its sinister side. Far darker than anything Addams created with a brush was his relationship with a dangerous woman who forever changed his life. In this first biography of the great cartoonist, written with exclusive access to Addams’s intimates and his private papers, we finally meet the man behind the famed cartoons and circling rumors. Here is his surprising childhood in New Jersey, the cartoon that offended the Nazis, the friend whose early death Addams long mourned. Here are his wives, the stories behind his most famous—and some of his most private—cartoons, and the Addams whom even his closest friends didn’t know. With wit, humor, poignancy, and insight—enhanced by rare family photographs, classic and previously unpublished cartoons, and private drawings—Linda H. Davis paints an engaging and endearing portrait of a marvelous American original. One of America’s most gifted biographers, Linda Davis has given us an engrossing, unforgettable portrait of the legendary *New Yorker* cartoonist. In Davis’s empathetic narrative and in accompanying cartoons, photographs, and drawings, the great artist lives again in all his eccentric brilliance, ghoulish sense of humor, fecund love life, and warm and gentle humanity. Beautifully written and exhaustively researched, *Chas Addams: A Cartoonist’s Life* deserves to win every literary prize there is for best biography.--Stephen B.

Oates, Paul Murray Kendall Professor of Biography and Professor History Emeritus, The University of Massachusetts at Amherst — If you don't appreciate martinis with eyeballs in them, this is not the book for you. For the rest of us here is an irresistible riot of a read, an exhilarating expertly mixed cocktail of words and images. Charles Addams's life was crowded with women — "famous women, smart women, witty women, garden-variety drop-dead beautiful women" — but in Linda Davis he has truly met his match. — Stacy Schiff, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *Vera* — Seldom have we found as satisfying a fit of subject and author as this. Linda Davis has distilled years of research, travel and interviews into a rollicking and fascinating review of Addams's astonishing life as artist, playboy and — "from time to time" — husband. We can all be grateful that Addams and Davis finally found one another. — Harrison Kinney, author of *James Thurber: His Life and Times*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Chas Addams [1912-1988], *A Cartoonist's Life*, Linda Davis; Random House (2006) "She is one of that all-too-common breed that idolizes *The New Yorker* & is constantly reminding you of cartoons that appeared in it years ago, which she then proceeds to describe in detail (guffawing) & then "Oh, dear, if I could only remember the caption!" She also remembers everything I ever wrote, & quotes passages from it written by Max Shulman & Geoffrey Hellmann..." — S.J. Perelman, "The Selected Letters of..." (p. 117 .) Not a waste of time, & informative; but Tom Kunkel, author of the great Harold Ross biography, is not even remotely in jeopardy of being eclipsed. The artist infused with an abundance of charm needed a writer equally blessed with a warm sense of humor & wit - not an

author with a compulsive need to describe each & every detail in his cartoons (particularly if the cartoon itself is on the opposite page). She did do an excellent job of it in some respects. Her exposure of the frauds of his maniacal & manipulative 2nd wife, & the inane brain of the vain Joan Fountaine (one of his paramours), was first-rate. But as with the anemic Fred Allen bio (by Robert Taylor), Davis never really got a feel for her subject until at the very end, in the chapters that describe a trip out to Connecticut taken by Addams (by now, in his mid-70s) & Frank Modell, only a few days before Addams passed away. It also might have been the subject matter, Addams himself - something along the lines of, when astonished acquaintances of Cary Grant would discover what a remarkably un-debonair man he could be, in real life.

Who was Chas (Charles) Adams? While you won't know by the time you finish this revealing biography, you'll certainly expand beyond the line sketch you probably have now of his life. If you are a New Yorker fan, you'll know him from his hundreds of cartoons and dozens of covers that expressed a most unique and other worldly perspective. If you are a fan of celebrities, you may know more about him as someone who drove classic cars, dated high-profile women, and favored allusions to death and dying. If you are a classic television fan, you'll know that his cartoon characters were the foundation for *The Addams Family*. If you favor camp, you know about his armor collection, his preferences for cross-bows, and other lethal items which he liked to display in public. The biography also reveals a kindly man who was patient with everyone, including those he didn't particularly like. You'll also learn of his fascination with the Morticia appearance (based on having married two women who met the bill). More surprisingly, you'll find him to have been victimized by his second wife . . . even long after they were no longer married. The book also portrays a heterosexual version of Truman Capote who fascinated many of the most desirable women. Most pleasingly, Ms. Davis does a delightful job of portraying the development of his cartooning style and art . . . including dozens of prime examples that are well reproduced. Even when there's no reproduction, Ms. Davis is good at capturing the essence of an image in a few words. She also provides a history of 20th century New Yorker cartooning, including how many of the final cartoons represented the influences of many people other than the artist who signed the final version.

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