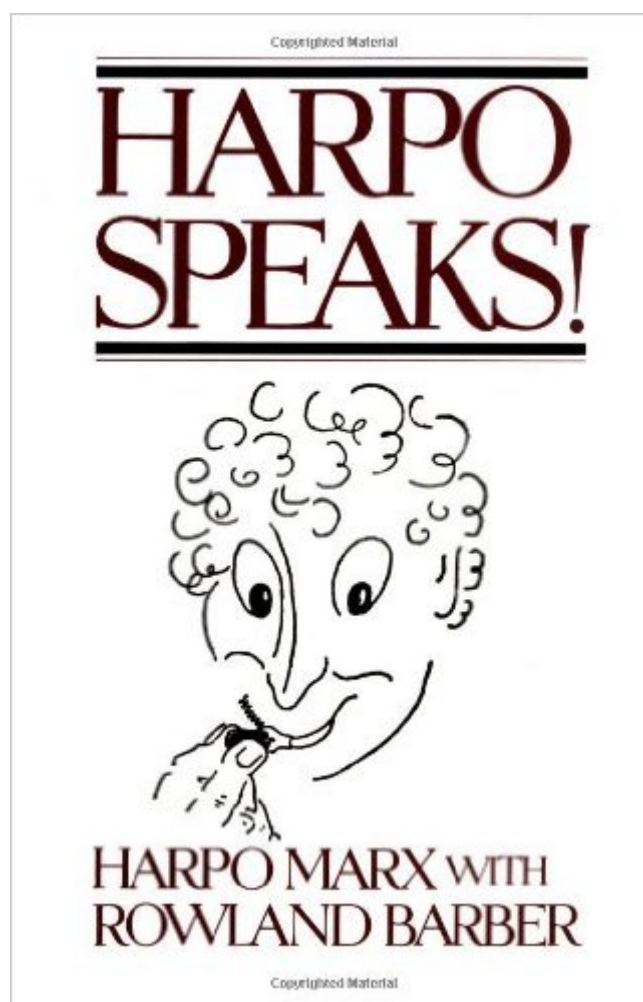


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# Harpo Speaks!



## Synopsis

(Limelight). "This is a riotous story which is reasonably mad and as accurate as a Marx brother can make it. Despite only a year and a half of schooling, Harpo, or perhaps his collaborator, is the best writer of the Marx Brother. Highly recommended." Library Journal "A funny, affectionate and unpretentious autobiography done with a sharply professional assist from Rowland Barber." New York Times Book Review

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (271 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

Autobiographies are usually enjoyable for one of two reasons. The author can possess an engaging style that piques the reader's interest regardless of the material. On the other hand, the author may have lead such an interesting life that the subject matter is fascinating despite their ability to spin a good yarn. Fortunately, in the case of HARPO SPEAKS! both conditions are satisfied, creating a well-written, intriguing look at one of the more interesting characters of the first half of the Twentieth Century. Harpo Marx was famous for being the silent clown who never uttered a word during any of the dozen or so Marx Brothers movies. However, his story is quite a fascinating one. I'll admit to being slightly surprised at exactly how engaging the prose style of this book was. Having no idea what he sounded like, even in scripted movie conversation, I was curious as to how he'd come across in print. Fortunately, either he or his co-author, journalist Rowland Barber, was quite good at the art of storytelling. The reader really feels close to the action, as though one were really there. It's a simple and straightforward style, but it's one that is quite effective. As I mentioned, the events of

Harpo's life were extraordinary in themselves. Quite literally a rags-to-riches story about a group of vaudeville brothers who made it very big, this book is excellent at reconstructing those early days when they rarely had enough to eat, but always had a laugh and a game of cards to pass the time. The autobiography goes into great detail about his early childhood, from being literally thrown out of school (from a first floor window) and never returning, to every lousy part-time job that he had.

This book is a true must-read for anyone, Marxist or not. Full of good humor, incredible experiences, an amazing childhood, and life in vaudeville, its message is one of warmth and hilarity. I first read it at 18 years of age, and still revisit its pages twelve years later. I hope that's always the case, for each time, I find something new. As you read through this book, you'll find yourself thinking, "There just aren't people like this guy anymore" - Harpo Marx was the cheerful, resourceful product of turn-of-the-century New York, and vaudeville, at that. His childhood of scrapping out a survival of relative destitution (the jobs he took are hilarious, and fascinating, to read about), in a loving, albeit quirky, family couldn't be found in fiction - it's too wacky to have been invented. And his introduction to life on the stage - well, you'll have to read for yourself. Harpo Marx's life seems never to have had a dull moment - from a hugely successful life on stage and screen, to his intimate friendships with members of the legendary Algonquin Round Table (the croquet fixation among those folks is a book in itself) - it's practically a life worthy of fairytale status. His stories about Alexander Woollcott are absolutely hysterical, and a great treat by themselves. And don't even get me started on the section about Oscar Levant - just thinking about it makes me laugh out loud. Finally, we read about Harpo's marriage to Susan Fleming, and their adoption of five children. The warmth and humanity that were such a huge part of Harpo can be summed up by the reason he chose to adopt five children - so that when he came home every day, there would be a face in each window to greet him. What a great, great man.

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