James Grove Thurber Biography

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Biography

James Grove Thurber (1894-1961) was an American writer and artist. One of the most popular humorists of his time, Thurber celebrated in stories and in cartoons the comic frustrations of eccentric and statureless people.

Born in Columbus, Ohio, James Thurber attended Ohio State University--though he never took a degree--and worked for some years in Ohio as a journalist. He moved to New York in 1926. In 1927 he met writer E. B. White and was taken onto the staff of the *New Yorker* magazine. In collaboration with White he produced his first book, *Is Sex Necessary"* (1929). By 1931 his first cartoons began appearing in the *New Yorker* seals, sea lions, strange tigers, harried men, determined women, and, most of all, dogs. Thurber's dogs became something like a national comic institution, and they dotted the pages of a whole series of books. His book *The Seal in the Bedroom* appeared in 1932, followed in 1933 by *My Life and Hard Times*. He published *The Middle-aged Man on the Flying Trapeze* in 1935, and by 1937, when he published *Let Your Mind Alone!*, he had become so successful that he left his position on the *New Yorker* staff to free-lance and to travel abroad.

The Last Flower appeared in 1939; that year Thurber collaborated with White on a play, *The Male Animal*. The play was a hit when it opened in 1940. But this was also the year that Thurber was forced to undergo a series of eye operations for cataract and trachoma. His eyesight grew steadily worse until, in 1951, it was so weak that he did his last drawing. He spent the last decade of his life in blindness.

The last 20 years of Thurber's life were filled with material and professional success in spite of his handicap. He published at least 14 more books, including *The Thurber Carnival* (1945), *Thurber Country* (1953), and the extremely popular account of the life of the *New Yorker* editer Harold Ross, *The Years with Ross* (1959). A number of his stories were made into movies, including "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" (1947).

Thurber's comic world was peopled by his curious animals, who watched in resignation as predatory women ran to ground apparently spineless men. But beneath their docile exteriors, Thurber's men dreamed of wild escape and epic adventure and, so, in their way won out in the battle of the sexes.