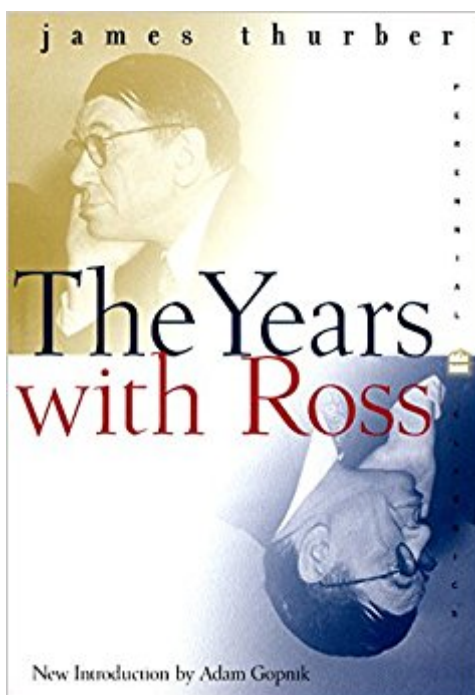


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The Years With Ross (Perennial Classics)



Synopsis

At the helm of America's most influential literary magazine for more than half a century, Harold Ross introduced the country to a host of exciting talent, including Robert Benchley, Alexander Woolcott, Ogden Nash, Peter Arno, Charles Addams, and Dorothy Parker. But no one could have written about this irascible, eccentric genius more affectionately or more critically than James Thurber -- an American icon in his own right -- whose portrait of Ross captures not only a complex literary giant but a historic friendship and a glorious era as well. "If you get Ross down on paper," warned Wolcott Gibbs to Thurber, "nobody will ever believe it." But readers of this unforgettable memoir will find that they do.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

8 1-hour cassettes --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

James Thurber was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1894. Famous for his humorous writings and illustrations, he was a staff member of The New Yorker for more than thirty years. He died in 1961.

Many years ago, I read in the previous edition of The Portable Dorothy Parker Mrs.

Parker's review of The Years with Ross by James Thurber, which she wrote for Esquire magazine, if I recall correctly. How I wish I had her gift for writing a witty, concise review, because hers made me want to read that book and, back then, it was out of print. Finally, though, I

found myself a copy because the book was reissued and I was the opposite of disappointed. The Years with Ross is all about James Thurber's experience at The New Yorker when that magazine was being organized as something brand-new and completely different by a rather unexpected man, Harold Wallace Ross, who was its first editor. Thurber, of course, wrote for the magazine and drew a lot of the single-panel, one-liner cartoons it printed, so he was there when the magazine came into existence, and he knew Ross well, as did Dorothy Parker. Parker's review in very few sentences lets you know what an oddball Ross was. He was ignorant on a wide variety of subjects and he amazed people by what he didn't know. However, when people told him about those things they considered common knowledge, Ross was all ears and always fascinated. Parker stated that Ross's ignorance was a veritable Empire State Building among ignorances if nothing else, you had to admire it for its size. She once took him to see a performance of Anton Chekhov's play The Cherry Orchard. Not only had Ross never heard of the play, he'd never heard of Chekhov, yet he enjoyed the play, repeating throughout the evening, "This is quite a play! Quite a play!" It is an interesting memoir by Thurber, beautifully written. It is telling, I think, that I couldn't put this book down. I had to keep reading, because I found it as entertaining as any novel. Ross had virtually no budget when he started his magazine. The funding he'd organized was wholly inadequate and they had not nearly enough office space for what needed to be done, yet it somehow got done and The New Yorker became a resounding success and still exists today. (Parker, who was famous for her wisecracks, once was asked by Ross why she was late handing in her copy and she replied, "Someone else was using the pencil.") Thurber wrote this book in his final years, after his eyesight had failed completely. I think he must have dictated his copy for transcription by typists. However he did it, the results are excellent. If you're a fan of The New Yorker, I think you'll be as fascinated as I was to read about how the whole thing began and the unlikely man whose brainchild it was. It was definitely worth my time.

We all know Thurber as a great wit and that reputation hampers appreciation of this book. It is simply not as witty as Thurber intended it to be, and Harold Ross, who Thurber intends to portray as an irascible, but lovable, founder and owner of The New Yorker, comes across in this book as quixotic, insecure, manipulative, and sometimes unreasonable. At times, the book is even deadly dull. Worse, for dramatic effect, the chronology of events is altered, which can be disconcerting. Of

course, this book does not purport to be a biography, but rather a chronicle of Thurber's wry impressions and recollections of his decades working for Ross, a man Thurber clearly respects and admires, even as he pokes fun at his many flaws and insecurities. But Ross's endearing attributes are barely apparent in this book, and the reader finds himself asking himself repeatedly why any sane writer would continue in his employ for long. In my view, the book does no favors for its author or its subject. However, there are numerous examples of Thurber's New Yorker cartoons, which are in themselves rich compensation for the book's shortcomings.

Rereading this book more than forty years since I first read it was entertaining and interesting. I had not realized how much of it was about Thurber rather than Ross. And there were many things that jumped out at me as things that I once took for granted about society.

James Thurber originally wrote this book as a series of magazine articles for the "Atlantic" in the late 1950s. (The copyright page states that the book was first published in 1957, but in the forward and elsewhere in the book Thurber mentions events taking place in 1958, so the book was presumably actually published in that year.) Thurber joined the staff of the "New Yorker" shortly after Harold Ross founded it in the late 1920s and worked closely with Ross until the time of Ross's death in 1951. Because each chapter began life as a magazine article, the narrative is a bit jumpy, which makes it a little hard to follow the development of the "New Yorker" or Ross's career as an editor. By and large, I found the book an enjoyable and an interesting account of Harold Ross's rather eccentric editorial style. It also provides a picture of a bygone era in magazine publishing and in the literary life of New York City. There is a fair amount of the patented Thurber humor, but the majority of the book is a more or less straight account of Ross and the magazine. Most of the anecdotes are interesting, some -- such as the account of Ross's final days -- are poignant, and a few -- such as an account of a dinner party with Ross and H. L. Mencken -- are clinkers. Thurber was near the end of his life, blind, and apparently suffering from a brain tumor when he wrote this book, which may explain the relatively sober tone compared with some of his fiction. It's probably worth mentioning that although I'm not an expert on this subject, my impression is that many people think that Thurber exaggerated Ross's eccentricities for effect. In any event, if you are a fan of the "New Yorker" or of James Thurber, you should find this book a worthwhile read.

One wonders if Harold Ross was a genius or just incredibly lucky. Hiring Thurber was one of the best moves any editor has ever made. The New Yorker is still one-of-a-kind and Ross and Thurber set

an original stage that would be hard to top. Anyone who likes this magazine should own this book.

I like Thurber but I thought he was snippy about "The New Yorker" so I didn't enjoy the book as much as I expected. Still, if you have an interest in the early days of "The New Yorker" you'll enjoy this.

These are the recollections by James Thurber of the years he spent with the New Yorker's founder, Harold Ross (as you can tell from the title). It is really funny stuff. Thurber is a marvelous writer. Ross is the star - an enormously eccentric, hilarious figure. The whole thing is great. Just get it.

Two greats in the history of a great magazine.

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