

The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 243
“The Algonquin Roundtable”
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

*Men seldom make passes
At girls who wear glasses.*

Dorothy Parker. “News Item.”

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 243. The Algonquin Roundtable.

I want to talk about two related subjects today: American letters, and the City of New York. They aren't all that closely connected, though I will note that by the Jazz Age, New York was emerging as the national capital of the book and magazine publishing industries.

Of course, by this time New York had also become the world's most important financial center, see episode 240, the center of the broadcasting industry, episode 237, the center of musical theatre—we'll talk more about that next week—and the center of opposition to Prohibition, episode 232. It was America's most important port and the center of the US garment industry as well, though I don't think I've mentioned either of those things yet. It had been the center of the US motion picture industry, but by 1920, that had largely moved to Southern California to take advantage of the sunny weather.

That's a lot of things to be the center of, and I think one of the more interesting and neglected stories of the early twentieth century is the rise of New York City to the stature of a world city, on par with any other city in the world, even the grand old cities of Europe, like Paris or London. All the more remarkable, given that New York is not a national capital, like Paris or London. New York is not even the capital of the State of New York.

New York City as we know it today only came into being in 1898, with the consolidation of New York County, which was then Manhattan and the Bronx, plus the city of Brooklyn and Staten

Island and Queens, which were then mostly rural. At that time, the new city had a population of about 3.4 million.

This number would double by 1930. From 1900 to 1924, when the Immigration Act passed, episode 230, immigrants from Italy and Eastern Europe accounted for most of this increase. African Americans from the South began migrating to New York over this same period, with the numbers increasing sharply during and after the Great War. African Americans tended to settle in the Harlem neighborhood in Upper Manhattan, along with Afro-Caribbean immigrants, which led to the Harlem Renaissance, episode 204. It's worth noting that African-American art, music, theatre, and literature blossomed during the Harlem Renaissance, and also that New York was itself a center of art, music, theatre, and literature for the larger American culture, meaning that New York became the point of entry for African-American arts and culture into the American mainstream.

New York was the most important port in the US, both for cargo and passengers. It was the main port of departure for Americans traveling to Europe, and the main entry port for visitors and immigrants to the United States. Most of the ships that carried US soldiers to France during the war left from New York. Wartime congestion at the port facilities inspired the creation of the Port Authority in 1921, an independent agency created by the states of New York and New Jersey to supervise port operations.

Large numbers of immigrants from Europe settled in New York, notably Catholic Italians and Poles, whose arrival and settlement led to the creation of a large Catholic school system in New York, but New York is perhaps most often noted as a haven for Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire and Eastern Europe. About 1.5 million such immigrants came to the US between 1880 and 1920, and of these, about a million of them settled right here in New York City. Most of them found work in the garment industry. The lucky few with the right combination of ambition, talent, and luck built their own small businesses, usually family run.

One of the features of life in New York that made it attractive to Jewish immigrants was its education system. Progressive-era New York had emphasized making free, quality education available to all students from the elementary through college levels; in particular, the City College of New York was tuition free to city residents and was open to all. Jewish immigrant culture strongly emphasized education—for boys, that is; for girls, not so much—and the educational opportunities that New York offered their sons were a powerful draw.

This was at a time when many other American colleges and universities did not accept Jewish students or set limits on the number that could be admitted. Columbia University, for example, New York's flagship university and a major research center, limited Jewish enrollment to 20% at a time when New York was more than 25% Jewish. I'll mention in passing a few of New York's other most noted schools: New York University, Fordham University, a leading Catholic college,

the Jewish Yeshiva University, the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn Polytechnic, and a couple of newcomers, the Julliard School of Music, founded in 1905, and the New School for Social Research, founded in 1919.

Another feature of New York City that made it an attractive place to settle was its extensive transit system, which knit together the city's far-flung boroughs. There were already elevated trains. The IRT, the Interborough Rapid Transit Company, opened the first subway line in 1904; there followed the Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit Corporation, the BMT. Later came the city-owned Independent Subway System. Eventually the city took over all public transit operations. The Williamsburg and Manhattan Bridges, which opened in 1903 and 1909 respectively, added new connections to Brooklyn. Bridges, ferries, and public transit knitted the vast city together.

[music: Lawler and Blake, "The Sidewalks of New York"]

New York City grew not only horizontally, but vertically. The introduction of the skyscraper—the word was first used in this sense in the 1880s—revolutionized city life, and in the Roaring Twenties, New York had a global reputation as a city of skyscrapers.

It took a series of technological innovations to make these buildings possible. They are too big to be held up by their own walls, as buildings have been traditionally. They required a framework of iron or steel girders to support the weight, the sort of framework the French engineer Gustave Eiffel pioneered with his eponymous tower in Paris, episode 7. They needed electric lights, as lighting such a big structure with gas would have been incredibly dangerous. They also relied on new forms of heating and ventilation systems. And none of this would have mattered had it not been for the invention of the safety *elevator* (for you North Americans) or *lift* (for everyone else) by American inventor Elisha Otis.

The iconic 22-story Flatiron Building, opened in 1903. Its distinctive wedge shape is a consequence of its location, where Broadway crosses Fifth Avenue and 23rd Street. It was originally called the Fuller Building, but New Yorkers persisted in calling it "The Flatiron" until the owners gave in and went along with it. The Singer Building, built by the sewing machine company, opened in 1908. It was 47 stories tall and had an observation deck at the top, which was open to the public.

The Singer Building was the tallest building in the world when it opened, but it was overtaken the following year by the 50-story Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Tower. The Singer Building was demolished in 1968. The other buildings we're looking at still stand in our time. In 1913, the 57-story Woolworth Building opened, built by the founder of the famous chain of five-and-ten-cent stores. Like the Singer Building, the principle here was that Woolworth's would lease out most of the space in the building, enough to cover the operating costs of the entire structure, meaning Woolworth's could keep its own executive offices in the building at no cost to the company.

During the economic boom of the late Twenties, New York surpassed London to become the most populous metropolitan area in the world, which in turn led to the spectacle of multiple competing building projects, all vying for the title of “tallest building in the world.” The Woolworth Building would remain the tallest building in the world from 1913 to 1930. The 70-story Manhattan Company Building, at 40 Wall Street, opened on May 26, 1930, surpassing the Woolworth Building until the opening of the Chrysler Building the very next day.

Yes, one day. The Chrysler Building was built by Walter Chrysler, founder of the car company that by this time was the third-largest in America. This was not a company project though, but a personal project of Mr. Chrysler’s. When the builders realized the Manhattan Company Building was going to be a little bit taller than their own, they quietly changed the plans, replacing the Romanesque dome that was originally meant to crown the building with the soaring peak the building is now noted for and then crowning that with a steel spire. These elements were constructed in secret and added to the top of the building in one day, lest the Manhattan Company get wind of it and add modifications to their own building. The completed Chrysler Building had 77 floors and was the first ever to exceed one thousand feet in height, making it not only the tallest building in the world, but the tallest structure, as it exceeded even M. Eiffel’s tower. Also, the building was constructed without a single fatality, which was unusual for the time.

The iconic look of the Chrysler Building was the result of these last-minute changes necessary to win the tallest-building competition and of its striking art deco design, including steel gargoyles that evoke hood ornaments. The zoning laws in New York of the time demanded that skyscrapers be set back from the property lines, with larger setbacks as the towers grew taller. This was supposed to allow sunlight through to reach the streets of the city. This gives the towers of this era their distinctive look; they taper as they get taller. This in contrast to post-World War II skyscrapers, which, influenced by the Bauhaus architects, episode 241, resemble enormous glass bricks.

By the time the Manhattan Company and Walter Chrysler were building their competing buildings, five other projects were on the books that each planned to beat both of them. Newspapers of the time called it “the race to the sky.” But the 1929 stock market crash and the onset of the Great Depression caused the abandonment of all but one of these competing projects. The one remaining was the Empire State Building, named for New York State’s nickname, the Empire State. Once the spire went on the top of the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building’s planners realized their building would only be four feet taller than the top of that spire, so to guard against any further shenanigans over at the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building architects added five floors to bring the building up to 86 floors. Later they added 16 more and a mast at the top of the building, bringing the total to 1,250 feet and 102 floors, making the building inarguably the world’s tallest.

Also, the mast at the top of the Empire State Building, unlike the spire on the Chrysler Building, was intended to have a practical purpose. The building's designers meant it to moor dirigibles, making it possible for passengers to embark onto or disembark from airships directly to the top floor of the building. They envisioned ticketing and waiting rooms on the upper floors for the use of airship passengers. Unfortunately, this proved unfeasible. Tests soon demonstrated that mooring a dirigible to the building and keeping it there safely despite the winds, when it was fixed at only one point, was impossible.

The Empire State Building won the race to the sky, but its competitors had the last laugh. By the time the building opened in 1931, the Great Depression had thoroughly hammered the US economy. Unlike the other buildings we've looked at, this one didn't break even until the 1950s. In the early years, the owners could only lease out the first seven floors, although they kept the lights on upstairs to obscure this fact. New Yorkers weren't fooled; they labeled the project "The Empty State Building." Tourists were willing to pay money to go up to the top floor and look out over the city. In the early years, the building's owners made as much money off of the tourist trade as they did from legitimate tenants. Also in the 1950s, a television broadcast antenna was added to the top of the building.

New York had more than a dozen daily newspapers during the Roaring Twenties. *The Wall Street Journal*, published by Dow Jones & Company, had at this time a small but influential circulation among the business elite. There was Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, archrivals that battled furiously for circulation. The papers went after corrupt politicians, landlords, and employers in their fight to gain the attention of working class readers. They also ran lurid crime stories and sex scandals and gave the world the term yellow journalism. They also pioneered contests and crossword puzzles and comic strips; anything that would sell a newspaper.

Joseph Pulitzer died in 1911. He bequeathed the world the Pulitzer Prizes in journalism, but his newspaper did not survive the Great Depression. William Randolph Hearst ran for mayor and governor, both times unsuccessfully, and eventually withdrew from the newspaper business and retired to California. His life story was the inspiration for the 1941 film *Citizen Kane*, written and directed by Orson Welles. Hearst died in 1951; his paper shut down in 1966.

Against the backdrop of these dueling newspapers of the common people arose the *New York Times*. Founded in 1851, the *Times* was on life support by 1896, when it was purchased for a song by Tennessee newspaper publisher Adolph Ochs. Ochs revived the paper, focusing on in-depth, detailed reporting aimed at a more educated, upscale audience than the one the *World* and the *Journal* were fighting over. It was Ochs who coined the paper's new motto, "All the News That's Fit to Print," which has appeared on the front page of every edition of the *Times* since 1897. It was widely seen at the time as an unsubtle rap against the scandal-mongering of Hearst and Pulitzer.

In an America of rapidly increasing income and education, Ochs had hit upon the formula for success, and the *Times* remains New York's and America's preeminent newspaper to this day.

But the most revolutionary journalism of the Roaring Twenties was going on elsewhere in New York, at the headquarters of *Time* magazine, a weekly founded by Henry Luce, which debuted in 1923. If newspapers are, as the saying goes, the first draft of history, and if the final draft of history is, well, history, then Henry Luce was the first to perceive that there was a niche for something in the middle, a second draft if you will, that would summarize the past week's news and attempt to put it into a larger context. The magazine focused on individuals, putting a single person on the cover of each issue, framed inside its signature red border and designating a "Man of the Year" and later "Person of the Year" every year.

Time did serious reporting, but it also did sports and entertainment and celebrity gossip, each in its own section, just like a newspaper, and it favored a lively, snappy writing style that depended heavily on frequent use of inverted sentences, a style *The New Yorker* magazine parodied in 1936 like this: "Backward ran sentences until reeled the mind... Where it all will end, knows God."

And speaking of *The New Yorker* magazine...well, hold that thought, because I'm not finished with the New York *Times* just yet. Alexander Woollcott, born in New Jersey, graduate of Central High School in Philadelphia and Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, got a job as a reporter at the *Times* in 1909, just after he completed his college education. Woollcott loved literature and theatre and became the *Times*' drama critic in 1914, when he was just 27 years old. He was known for his colorful and often withering reviews, to the point that some Broadway theatres banned him from their premises.

At the *Times*, Woollcott befriended fellow reporter Jane Grant. Grant was the *Times*' first woman reporter. She was from Kansas and had come to New York to pursue a singing career, but ended up in the newspaper business instead. When the United States entered the Great War, Woollcott enlisted in the Army. That option wasn't available to Grant, but she wrangled a berth on a troopship to France by joining the American Red Cross and volunteering to sing for the troops.

In Paris, Woollcott was tapped to write for the US military newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*. There he met 25-year-old Harold Ross, another reporter turned soldier, who volunteered to work for the paper and claimed to have walked 150 miles from his regiment at the front to Paris to take the job. Ross would soon be editing *Stars and Stripes*.

In 1919, after the war, the three of them returned to the United States. In New York, theatrical publicist John Peter Toohey, who had a grudge against Woollcott for rough treatment of one of Toohey's clients, playwright Eugene O'Neil, organized what Woollcott was told would be a welcome-home luncheon at the Algonquin Hotel in mid-town Manhattan. In fact though, it was what we today would call a "roast," that is, a number of friends and associates of Woollcott's were invited to the affair for the specific purpose of giving speeches making fun of him. In a good-natured way. Maybe.

Woollcott was delighted with the event, so much so that he and Toohey agreed to meet with their friends for lunch at the Algonquin Hotel regularly, and that a good-natured exchange of barbs and witticisms would always be part of the menu. This lunch group would meet throughout the 1920s and would eventually include some of the wittiest writers, journalists, and actors in America. They called themselves simply “The Board” at first, and dubbed their lunches “Board meetings.” Later they renamed the group “The Vicious Circle.” But history would remember them as “The Algonquin Roundtable.”

More about them in a minute, because I still owe you *The New Yorker* magazine. Among the people Woollcott and Toohey invited to be part of the Algonquin Roundtable were Woollcott’s old colleagues from *Stars and Stripes*, including Harold Ross and Jane Grant. Ross and Grant married in 1920. Grant returned to the *Times*; Ross edited a couple of magazines, and together in 1925, they founded *The New Yorker*, a weekly magazine aimed at a sophisticated readership and edited by Ross. The cover of its first issue, featuring a cartoon of a foppish man examining a butterfly through a monocle, has become an icon of the magazine.

The New Yorker featured in-depth journalism, rigorously fact checked, along with short stories, poetry, essays, criticism, attentive coverage of cultural events in New York City, and those famously droll cartoons. Ross and Grant used their literary contacts, including the gang from the Algonquin Roundtable, to recruit topnotch writers for the magazine, particularly writers in sync with the magazine’s brand of humor, people like S.J. Perelman, Robert Benchley, and my personal favorite, James Thurber, who was also a cartoonist. Thurber was initially hired as an editor. Fellow editor E.B. White, who would later write the children’s classic *Charlotte’s Web* and produce a new edition of the authoritative writer’s guide *Elements of Style*, found some of Thurber’s cartoons in a wastebasket and submitted them to Ross, who published them.

Thurber’s cartoons became a regular feature of the magazine, an improbable career turn for a man who was nearly blind. His vision impairment may explain his idiosyncratic visual style of overstuffed figures defined with narrow wobbly lines. Dorothy Parker said that his figures looked like unbaked cookies. Thurber’s prose usually came as humorous essays, but his most famous prose work is certainly the short story “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,” published in *The New Yorker* in 1939 and later included in a collection of prose and cartoons published in 1943 titled *My World—And Welcome to It*. The very name Walter Mitty, the little man with the huge imagination, has become a figure of speech. The story was made into films twice, in 1947, with Danny Kaye in the title role, and in 2013, with Ben Stiller.

Thurber was not himself a member of the Algonquin Roundtable, though Benchley was. Alexander Woollcott continued to write theatre reviews, and although he was noted for his poison pen, in 1924 he gave a rave review to a musical revue called *I’ll Say She Is*. This was a song and dance and comedy revue of the sort popular at the time, its individual bits strung together by a thin plot, but Woollcott was taken with the stars of the show, four brothers, sons of Jewish immigrants from Germany—their mother was their manager—who had sharpened their

musical and comedic skills in vaudeville and were now staking a claim on Broadway. Their names were Leonard, Arthur, Julius, and Herbert Marx, but you would more likely recognize them by their stage names Chico, Harpo, Groucho, and Zeppo.

The Marx Brothers were already well known in vaudeville, but *I'll Say She Is* made them stars, and the fact of an enthusiastic review from Broadway's most famous curmudgeon surely helped. Their success spawned two more ambitious stage musicals on Broadway: 1925's *The Cocoanuts* and 1928's *Animal Crackers*. Afterward, talking pictures emerged in Hollywood at just the right moment for this team. The new Hollywood wanted to fill their talking pictures music and snappy dialogue; the Marx Brothers were noted for both. Their last two stage shows were made into their first two feature films.

The books for these two shows were co-written by George S. Kaufmann, another member of the Algonquin Round Table. Kaufmann was a playwright and director, whose work ran on Broadway every season from 1921 to 1958. Apart from *The Cocoanuts* and *Animal Crackers*, Kaufmann also co-wrote the books to the George and Ira Gershwin musical *Of Thee I Sing*, which won a Pulitzer Prize, and *I'd Rather Be Right*, a musical starring George M. Cohan as Franklin Roosevelt, while the latter was the sitting President. Among the many plays co-authored by Kaufmann are a few you may have heard of: *The Solid Gold Cadillac*, *Stage Door*, *Dinner at Eight*, and perhaps his most famous play, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, which is about an eccentric critic and radio commentator named Sheridan Whiteside who slips and falls in front of the house of a well-to-do family in a small town in Ohio. Whiteside is forced to stay for a month while he recuperates and turns the household upside-down with his wisecracks, insults, and outrageous demands. It is said that the character of Sheridan Whiteside was based on Alexander Woollcott.

I'll also mention that Kaufmann co-wrote the screenplay for a later Marx Brothers film, 1935's *A Night at the Opera*. The Marx brothers became close friends with Kaufmann and several other members of the members of the Algonquin Roundtable. Harpo Marx was a regular there for a while, and named one of his sons after Alexander Woollcott.

The kind of snappy, improvisational repartee we associate with the Marx Brothers, and especially with Groucho Marx, was also very much a part of the Algonquin Roundtable. Members of the group were constantly wisecracking, delivering joke insults to one another, and gave each other creative inspiration, and through their work, on stage, on screen, and in the pages of *The New Yorker* and other magazines, their biting and irreverent humor influenced a generation.

Alexander Woollcott was famous for his cutting wit. Probably his most famous remark is: "All the things I really like to do are either illegal, immoral, or fattening." Inspired no doubt by the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello, whose play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* appeared on Broadway in 1922, Woollcott described Los Angeles, California as "seven suburbs in search

of a city.” Woolcott also claimed that the cocktail known as Brandy Alexander was named after him. There is no confirmation of this, but no particular reason to doubt it, either.

Other regulars at the Roundtable included sportswriter and columnist Heywood Broun, whom we’ve met twice before in episodes 232 and 239, and his wife, Ruth Hale. Ruth Hale was a writer, feminist, and founder of the Lucy Stone League, named for the 19th century abolitionist and suffragist. The Lucy Stone League was an organization that fought for the legal right of women to keep their birth name after marriage, as indeed Ruth Hale did, as did Jane Grant, who was also a member. Broun and Hale had one child, a son named Heywood Hale Broun, who himself became a sports journalist and TV commentator. Edna Ferber, author of the novel *Show Boat*, which was made into a groundbreaking musical, was also a part of the Roundtable. We’ll be talking about *Show Boat* next week. Also frequently found at the Roundtable were actresses Tallulah Bankhead, Peggy Wood, and Estelle Winwood.

But the name most closely associated with the Algonquin Roundtable is surely that of Dorothy Parker. Born Dorothy Rothschild in Long Branch, New Jersey in 1893, her family later moved to New York, where she attended a Catholic school, despite the fact that her father was Jewish and her stepmother Protestant. She sold her first poem in 1914, at the age of twenty. She married a stockbroker named Edwin Pond Parker in 1917. It was an unhappy marriage. She divorced him in 1928, but kept her married name, as by then she had become known by it professionally. In 1918, she became theatre critic for the magazine *Vanity Fair*. Like Alexander Woolcott, she became famed for her acidic reviews; unlike Woolcott, the theatrical figures she offended were able to apply enough pressure to the magazine to get her fired, probably because she was a woman.

Parker went on an editorial job at *The New Yorker*. She also published poems in that magazine and elsewhere. Her most famous poem is probably the one titled “News Item,” which I read to you in full at the top of the episode. Her poem “Observation” reads:

*If I didn't care for fun and such,
I'd probably amount to much.
But I shall stay the way I am,
Because I do not give a damn.*

And her poem “Resume”:

*Razors pain you,
Rivers are damp,
Acids stain you,
And drugs cause cramp.
Guns aren't lawful,
Nooses give,*

*Gas smells awful.
You might as well live.*

At one point, she suggested her tombstone should read, “Wherever she went, including here, it was against her better judgment.” On another occasion, she proposed, “Excuse my dust.” When she had her abortion, she remarked, “It serves me right for putting all my eggs in one bastard.” Her quips were so famous and so often repeated that George S. Kaufmann once lamented that anything clever he ever said or wrote was destined eventually to be attributed to Dorothy Parker.

Parker also wrote acerbic book reviews for *The New Yorker* under the pseudonym Constant Reader. Her famous review of A.A. Milne’s 1928 children’s book, *The House at Pooh Corner* included the assertion that Constant Reader “fwowed up.”

But perhaps her all-time most famous witticism came from a game they often played at the Algonquin Roundtable, in which members were given a word and challenged to come up with a sentence using that word on the spot. Parker was assigned the word horticulture. Her response was “You can lead a horticulture, but you can’t make her think.”

In the 1930s, Dorothy Parker moved to Hollywood with her second husband, Alan Campbell. There the pair wrote screenplays. Parker had a hand in the script for the 1937 film *A Star Is Born*, for which she was nominated for an Academy Award. She became involved in left-wing and anti-fascist politics, and after the war was blacklisted in Hollywood.

In 1952, she divorced Campbell and moved back to New York City. She died there in 1967, at the age of 73. With no family, Parker willed her estate to the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. The two had never met and it appears King didn’t really know what to do with her estate. He was himself assassinated less than a year later, and her estate was granted to the NAACP.

Upon her death, her remains were cremated, but were left unclaimed at the crematorium until 1973, when they sent them on to the office of Parker’s former attorney. They were held in a filing cabinet in that law office for the next 15 years, until 1988, when the NAACP claimed them and they were interred on the grounds of the organization’s national headquarters in Baltimore, under a memorial plaque that included the words, “Excuse my dust.”

In 2020, the NAACP moved its headquarters. Dorothy Parker’s remains were disinterred and moved to a family plot at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, at her family’s request.

We’ll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I’d especially like to thank John for his kind donation, and thank you to Hovannes for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like John and Hovannes help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have

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And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we continue this thread and talk about musical theatre in New York of the 1920s. Before the Great War, London was the capital of English-language musical theatre, while New Yorkers waited impatiently for the latest hit show to cross the ocean. By the 1920s, it was more or less the other way around. Anything Goes, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I have to come back to James Thurber, because I have a special affection for his work. In 1960, a number of Thurber stories and cartoons were adapted for the stage and presented in a revue called *A Thurber Carnival*, the title echoing that of one of his collections. James Thurber died the following year, at the age of 66.

In 1969, the NBC television network premiered a half-hour comedy series titled *My World...and Welcome to It*, starring William Windom as John Monroe, a character based on Thurber. He lives in Connecticut with his family and writes and draws cartoons for a magazine called *The Manhattanite*. Windom's character is grumpy but imaginative, frequently losing himself in his own creative world, in contrast to his sensible, down-to-earth wife Ellen and their precocious daughter, Lydia. Several of the episodes were based on Thurber's stories and cartoons, and the show included animated sequences based on Thurber's drawings. Sometimes these drawings would interact with their live-action creator. I was twelve years old when the show debuted, and I loved it. This was my introduction to James Thurber.

My World...And Welcome to It won the 1970 Emmy Award for Outstanding Comedy Series in its debut season and Windom won an Emmy for Outstanding Performance in a Comedy Series. By the time the awards had been made though, the network had already cancelled the show. So it goes.

But William Windom was not finished with James Thurber. Throughout the 1970s, he toured the United States, performing a one-man show in which he portrayed Thurber and acted out some of Thurber's most famous stories, including "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." I am pleased to be able to tell you that I had the privilege of seeing William Windom perform this show at Rutgers University in 1978, alongside the future Mrs. History of the Twentieth Century, and he was wonderful. So was she.

I don't have the playbill for that show anymore, but I clearly recall that Windom's printed biography inside, in which he listed his acting credits, included this line: "Mr. Windom supposes that he is best known for his performance on an episode of *Star Trek*..." It sounded as if he was a little bit unhappy about that, but he did indeed appear on a particularly memorable episode of the original *Star Trek* TV series that first aired in 1967, in which he portrayed Commodore Matt Decker, a Captain Ahab-like starship commander in a science fictional retelling of *Moby Dick*.

William Windom also appeared in many films, beginning with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, his motion picture debut, and he made dozens of other guest appearances on TV series, notably a long stint as the semi-regular Dr. Seth Hazlitt on the CBS series *Murder, She Wrote*, beginning in 1985. It is probably that role for which he is best remembered today. And despite whatever misgivings he may have had over his appearance on *Star Trek*, he reprised the role of Matt Decker in the 2004 Star Trek fan series, *New Voyages*, one of the last performances of his career.

William Windom died in 2012, at the age of 88.

[music: Closing Theme]