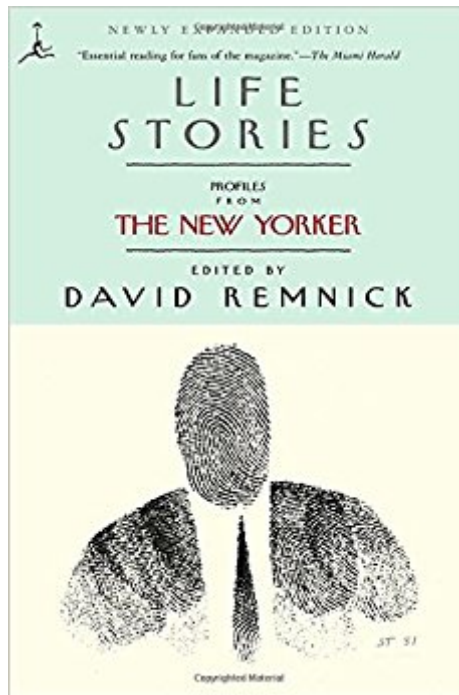




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Life Stories: Profiles From The New Yorker (Modern Library Paperbacks)



Synopsis

One of art's purest challenges is to translate a human being into words. The New Yorker has met this challenge more successfully and more originally than any other modern American journal. It has indelibly shaped the genre known as the Profile. Starting with light-fantastic evocations of glamorous and idiosyncratic figures of the twenties and thirties, such as Henry Luce and Isadora Duncan, and continuing to the present, with complex pictures of such contemporaries as Mikhail Baryshnikov and Richard Pryor, this collection of New Yorker Profiles presents readers with a portrait gallery of some of the most prominent figures of the twentieth century. These Profiles are literary-journalistic investigations into character and accomplishment, motive and madness, beauty and ugliness, and are unrivalled in their range, their variety of style, and their embrace of humanity. Including these twenty-eight profiles: "Mr. Hunter's Grave" by Joseph Mitchell "Secrets of the Magus" by Mark Singer "Isadora" by Janet Flanner "The Soloist" by Joan Acocella "Time . . . Fortune . . . Life . . . Luce" by Walcott Gibbs "Nobody Better, Better Than Nobody" by Ian Frazier "The Mountains of Pi" by Richard Preston "Covering the Cops" by Calvin Trillin "Travels in Georgia" by John McPhee "The Man Who Walks on Air" by Calvin Tomkins "A House on Gramercy Park" by Geoffrey Hellman "How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?" by Lillian Ross "The Education of a Prince" by Alva Johnston "White Like Me" by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Wunderkind" by A. J. Liebling "Fifteen Years of The Salto Mortale" by Kenneth Tynan "The Duke in His Domain" by Truman Capote "A Pryor Love" by Hilton Als "Gone for Good" by Roger Angell "Lady with a Pencil" by Nancy Franklin "Dealing with Roseanne" by John Lahr "The Coolhunt" by Malcolm Gladwell "Man Goes to See a Doctor" by Adam Gopnik "Show Dog" by Susan Orlean "Forty-One False Starts" by Janet Malcolm "The Redemption" by Nicholas Lemann "Gore Without a Script" by Nicholas Lemann "Delta Nights" by Bill Buford

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Customer Reviews

Way back in 1926 the founding editor of The New Yorker suggested that the title Profiles be registered with the copyright bureau. Harold Ross had ample reason, for though he didn't invent the word itself, he certainly invested it with new significance. Over the years, New Yorker Profiles came to represent a new kind of biography: concise, well-researched, and impeccably written sketches of personalities who were often famous--but just as often not. Take for example "Mr. Hunter's Grave," Joseph Mitchell's 1956 Profile of George H. Hunter, the 87-year-old chairman of the board of trustees of the African Methodist church on Staten Island. This delightful piece leads off a select group of Profiles culled from The New Yorker's first 75 years and collected in Life Stories, edited by David Remnick. More a study of a place and a way of life than of a particular man, Mitchell's Profile stretched the parameters of the form. The very next piece, Mark Singer's "Secrets of the Magus," is a prime example of what The New Yorker does best. In Ricky Jay, "perhaps the most gifted sleight-of-hand artist alive," Singer has hit on a quirky, eccentric, and fascinating subject--one that offers plenty of scope for writer and reader alike to dip into an arcane and little-known world of magicians, mountebanks, card handlers, and confidence men. Alva Johnston achieves similar success in "The Education of a Prince," his 1932 Profile of con man Harry F. Gerguson, who spent years masquerading as the lost Prince Michael Alexandrovitch Dmitry Obolensky Romanoff: The Prince had a glittering career in New York, Boston, Newport, on Long Island, in high-caste settlements along the Hudson, and among the aristocracies of a dozen American cities. Twice he swept over Hollywood in a confetti shower of bad checks. He was repeatedly exposed, but exposure does not embarrass him greatly. He is widely admired today, not for his title but for his own sake. He has convinced a fairly large public that a good imposter is preferable to the average prince. Of course The New Yorker covered plenty of household names, as well, and Life Stories

contains sketches of such celebrities as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Johnny Carson, Richard Pryor and Marlon Brando. The arts are well represented by pieces on Ernest Hemingway, Anatole Broyard, and David Salle, and even the contributors are stellar, including such well-known scribes as Henry Louis Gates Jr., Truman Capote, and John McPhee. But where is that famous Profile of the sea by Rachel Carson, you ask? Pauline Kael's piece on Cary Grant or Janet Malcolm's controversial study of psychoanalyst Aaron Green? In his introduction Remnick acknowledges the many great Profiles that did not make it into this volume, explaining that he decided to publish pieces only in full. "I wanted the reader to get the real thing--no excerpts, no snippets," he writes. "As a result the reader will have to go elsewhere for a range of long or multipart Profiles." What's here is choice, though, and die-hard New Yorker aficionados who turn to the Profiles even before perusing the cartoons won't be disappointed by what they find. All in all, Life Stories makes a fine 75th anniversary bouquet for the magazine's many devoted readers. --Alix Wilber --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

To long-time readers of the New Yorker, one of the reasons to welcome this excellent collection of 43 stories written over the past seven decades will be the recollection of their first encounters with some of the writers who were fresh new voices when their stories set in Manhattan first appeared. Such then-newcomers as Lorrie Moore, Jeffrey Eugenides, Deborah Eisenberg, Anne Beattie and Laurie Colwin portray New York in their distinctive voices. The literary Old Guard is here in solid phalanx too: stories by John Updike, Bernard Malamud, John O'Hara, Elizabeth Hardwick, John Cheever, Peter Taylor and William Maxwell define aspects of their decades with timeless clarity. Holden Morrissey Caulfield makes his debut in J. P. Salinger's "A Slight Rebellion Off Madison"(1946); Philip Roth's millionaire author Zuckerman is accosted on Second Avenue in "Smart Money"(1981); one of Isaac Bashevis Singer's innumerable group of displaced Jews and ardent lovers holds forth in "The Cafeteria" (1968) on the Lower East Side. At opposite ends of the emotional spectrum, two entries, Woody Allen's "The Whore of Mensa," (1974) and "Mid-Air" (1984), by Frank Conroy, have become classics. Published this year, Jonathan Franzen's "The Failure" defines the '90s in the city, yet Maeve Brennan's 1966 "I See You, Bianca," a quiet narrative about loss highlighted by "the struggle for space in Manhattan," could have been written today. If Dorothy Parker's wit now seems shrill ("Arrangement in Black and White," 1927), and Irwin Shaw's "Sailor Off the Bremen," from the same year, seems mannered, Jean Stafford's "Children Are Bored on Sunday"(1948), still resonates with a peculiarly New York atmosphere. Of course, there are tales from such New Yorker stalwarts as John McNulty, S. J. Perelman, E. B. White and James Thurber.

Manhattan as geographical area and emotional landscape takes visible shape as haven and hell, locus of opportunity and of dead end lives. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

These profiles are so great. Well written, insightful, on subjects both silly and profound, with lots of insight into human nature. The one about Hemingway makes him seem like a pompous, self-inflated horse's butt and a stone alcoholic. I believe it was accurate. The one about Ricky Jay, the magician's magician, is great, too. A genius. I can't wait to read the rest. This book is good to keep around, so I always have something fun to read. These are not butt-kiss profiles, like the ones you find in Vanity Fair. These are honest, objective, and true. Real journalism. Rare these days. Buy this book. You won't be sorry.

As with any anthology, there are articles/stories of great interest, some that are OK and some you stop reading after a few paragraphs. The majority of the stories were, of course, very well written. Reaching back to bios such as that of Henry Luce was worth the read while anything that Roger Angel writes I look forward to with anticipation. While I had read the one on Steve Blass some time ago, it still was enjoyable on its reread. Now that I think about it there were few stories I failed to dig into!

If you are a fan of biographies but are intimidated by 1,000-page tomes, Life Stories is a great choice. Some say the New Yorker invented the "profile," and though it does seem the magazine was the first to call its biographical pieces by that name (amazing, considering how ubiquitous the term is today), editor David Remnick is quick to assert that they hardly invented the style. What they have done for decades is find the most interesting people and have the best writers provide illumination. Nearly every profile here is profound and nearly every one of them is short enough to read in a single (long) sitting. And while it's a treat to learn intimate details of some of the most famous people of the 20th century, it's the profiles of the lesser-known people that shine: from Joseph Mitchell's encounter with an aging churchman with a penchant for baking to the story of the Chudnovsky brothers, Russian emigres who built a supercomputer in their apartment from salvaged parts. Fantastic reading from start to finish.

Liked it very much. Good variety of people. Excellent profiles

Bit dated, here and there - but still fascinating...

This is a collection of prime examples of the long gone "profile" piece in The New Yorker magazine. They just don't write 'em like this anymore! Choose Truman Capote's profile of Marlon Brando, or Lillian Ross' profile of Ernest Hemingway, or any of the 20-some other profiles in this book. You will read some of the best writing about some of the most exciting people in 20th Century history. Is there a second volume in the works? I hope so!

This is a non-fiction anthology about the rich, famous, celebrities, etc. I enjoy reading this book so much that it hard to put down and get to work on my own stuff. However, it's great entertainment and reading how the other half lives; This book satisfied my curiosity about the rich and famous.

Hemingway, Baryishnikov, and Henry Luce are the subjects of some of my favorite celebrity profiles in this wonderful book. But topping my list is "Man Goes to See a Doctor", the awesome Adam Gopnik's sweet and funny rendering of his shrink. Here's a snippet: "Your problems remind me of" - and here he named one of the heroes of the New York School. "Fortunately, you suffer from neither impotence nor alcoholism. This is in your favor." Highly recommended!

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