



THE NEW YORKER

PROFILES



Lives, up close.

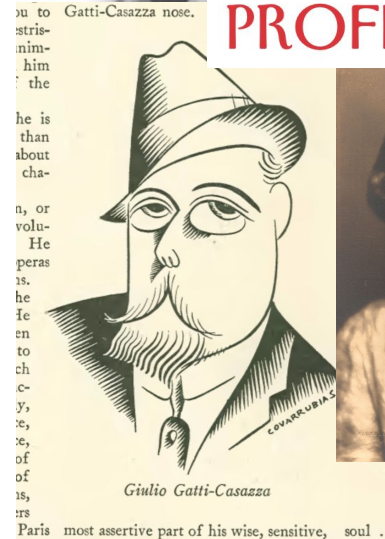
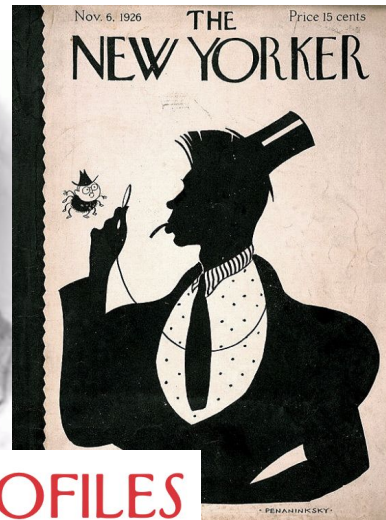


Beginnings of “the Profile”

- Early *New Yorker* staffer James Kevin McGuiness suggested the “Profiles” rubric to Ross, coined the term “profile”
- Profiles became an integral part of the magazine and appeared in nearly every issue for the first four years of publication

Did the *New Yorker* invent the Profile?

- A profile is “a concise, biological sketch,” a concept that did not originate with Ross and the *New Yorker*
- However, the *New Yorker* Profile was the first of its name and new and unusual piece of writing that would become a popular journalistic convention
- Ross wanted “something different—something sidelong and ironical, a form that prized intimacy and wit over biographical completeness or, God forbid, unabashed hero worship”
- Editor Katharine White told a prospective contributor “to give an intimate picture of the man—something more intimate and personal than the average Sunday magazine newspaper write-up”



Early Profiles

- David Remnick describes the first *New Yorker* Profiles as “fairly cursory and bland”
- Typically written by young literary types and were “characteristically brief and arch with an emphasis on getting an acute ‘angle’ on a subject” and rarely would you see a direct quotation used
- By 1927, the reporting was getting “stronger and more irreverent” and as the magazine gained more readers and sold more advertising, it produced more pages of editorial content = more articles, longer articles
- Nonfiction pieces grew very quickly and in came the **multi-part Profile**, which was usually broken up over two or more issues
 - Five-part **William Hurst** Profile & four-part **Henry Ford** Profile, 20,000-word Profile on **The Met** (the longest piece the magazine had published)
- Katharine White wrote to Ross:

“It seems to me that our profiles and other factual stuff is becoming increasingly unreadable and long, long, long...People who always used to read Profiles have given them up because they are in so many parts and are so complete and so dreary. We have got away from what the very word ‘Profile’ means—It was meant to indicate a portrait that gave just one side to a person—not a full face, a profile.”



“We’ve got to have more journalism”

- Although nonfiction pieces were getting increasingly longer, the writing and reporting was still highly respected
 - Stanley Walker wrote of Ross in 1934, “He prints Profiles which sometimes are models of the art of biography.”
- Starting in the 1930s, Ross began to hire successful newspapermen such as **Stanley Walker** and **St. Clair McKelway**, who brought in first-rate reporters and writers to the magazine
- In 1936, Ross appointed McKelway to the new position of managing editor, which was historic because it **separated the fact and fiction departments**
- In the classic Profile under McKelway, “the edges were smoothed out and all effects were achieved...in characteristically longer and longer paragraphs”
- The original idea/metaphor for the Profile became less and less tenable with the kind of in-depth reporting taking place at the time
- Contributor John K. Winkler wrote a complaint to White:
“...you don’t realize how much striving and straining there is in these Profiles. When the wolf howls I can run off a yarn for a monthly tabloid in a few hours and throw six or eight hundred words in the animal’s face. Would I do a piece for the *New Yorker* in three or four hours? Sure I would. Would it get past the Angell-Ross outpost? Nope.”



Profiles during the Shawn era

- The magazine's journalism continued to expand under William Shawn, who broadened the sense of what was acceptable subject matter
- Shawn had less restrictions on who or what could be Profiled and was more receptive to posthumous pieces and Profiles that weren't exactly "of the moment" — in 1951, Liebling wrote a three-part Profile of the city of Chicago and the same year, Shawn altered a manuscript by environmental writer **Rachel Carson** and made it into a three-part Profile of the sea
- The traditional Profile changed once again under Shawn
 - **John Hersey** developed a "fly on the wall" approach, which was a significant departure from a normal *New Yorker* Profile
 - **Lillian Ross** ("the girl with the built-in tape recorder") proved that dialogue and direct quotations could enhance a Profile piece because of her "special talent for truly listening to the way people talk and writing it down in unvarnished form"
- In 1950, Ross wrote a Profile of Ernest Hemingway entitled "**How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?**" which drew a lot of attention
 - Thurber wrote to Ross, "After all these years she has added a new dimension to the rigid Profile form, and a new spark."
 - Another wrote to Ross, "...the piece on Hemingway is perhaps the best piece of reporting I have seen in the magazine in a long, long time. I can't imagine a more difficult assignment, because it had to be pulled off with an objectivity that could leave no room for argument..."



Profiles: Shawn vs. Ross

- Shawn also brought in new writers to the fact department, which included less newspapermen and traditional reporters and more literary writers and intellectuals
 - A perfect example is **Truman Capote** (previously fired by Ross), who was never able to sell a short story to the *New Yorker* but “got in through the back door” with his experimental narrative journalism
 - Had never written nonfiction but Shawn took a chance on him and he became a brilliant and innovative Profile writer because “he generally disregarded the statements his characters made on ‘on the record,’ concentrating instead on the ways they revealed themselves when they assumed they weren’t being observed”
 - Another example is **Susan Sheehan** and her 1975 story “A Welfare Mother,” a piece of “startling intimacy” which took two years to publish after extensive interviewing, something that “could only have been done for Shawn’s *New Yorker*, with its commitment to as-long-as-it-takes deadlines”
- Shawn refused to print articles that criticized or mocked individuals, whereas Ross took pleasure in publishing “scathing and sometimes devastating Profiles” (Henry Luce, Walter Winchell)
- Also, the caricatures paired with Profiles under Ross changed under Shawn to more flat illustrations that were “naturalistic, muted, and designed to blend into the editorial background”

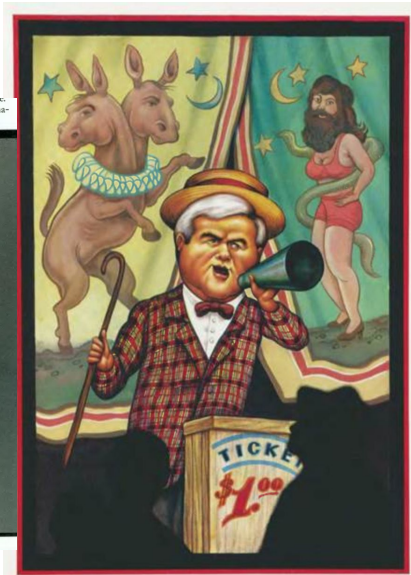
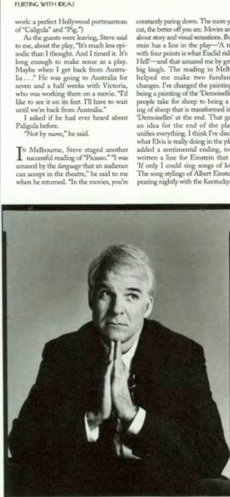
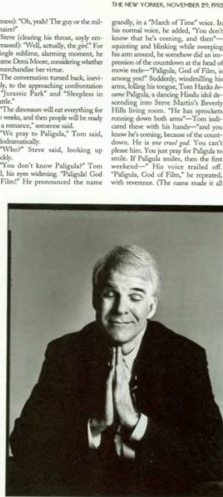
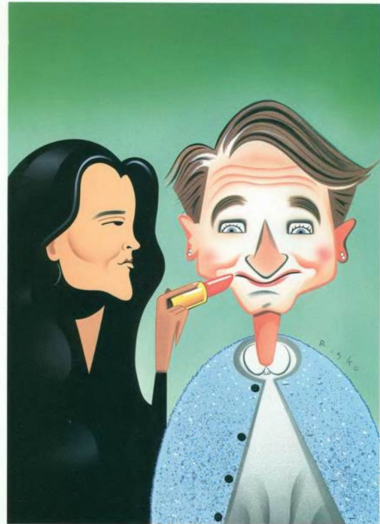


1992-98



- # Gottlieb and Brown

1992-98

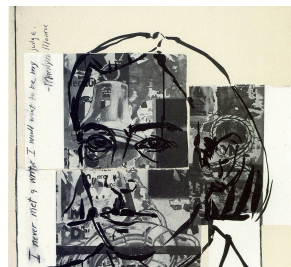
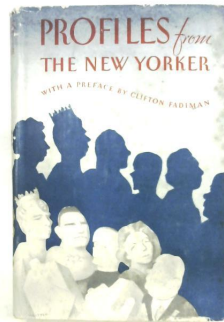
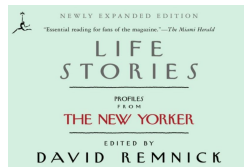
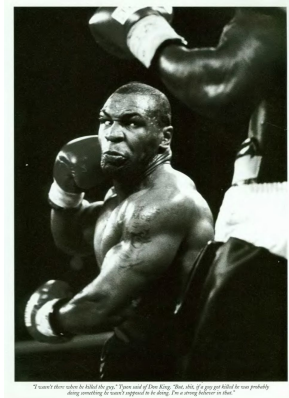
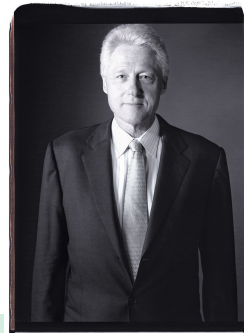


The question that seems to be always in the forefront of Gingrich's mind is: How can this best be marketed?



Remnick

- Editor since 1998 and a staff writer since 1992, Remnick has contributed several Profiles to the magazine including pieces on Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, Mike Tyson, Ralph Ellison, and Bruce Springsteen
- He has also edited several anthologies of *New Yorker* pieces, including *Life Stories: Profiles from The New Yorker*
 - Only one previous anthology Profiles exists, edited by Ross in 1938
- In the introduction to *Life Stories*, Remnick writes:
 - “What had been conceived of as a form to describe Manhattan personalities now travels widely in the world and all along the emotional and occupational registers.”
- Some notable Profile writers from the Remnick era include **Mark Singer**, **Larissa MacFarquhar**, and **Janet Malcolm**
- “The Profile is ubiquitous in modern journalism. We are awash in pieces calling themselves profiles that are about the inner thoughts of some celebrity; more often than not they are based on half-hour interviews and the parameters set down by a vigilant publicist...the Profile is a terribly hard form to get right.”



FORTY-ONE FALSE STARTS



PROFILES OCTOBER 18 & 25, 1999 ISSUE

SOPHIE'S WORLD



“My grandma and grandpa always say, ‘You need to know what is going on.’ But I don’t want to know what is going on,” Sophie says.



When white phosphorus touches skin, it can burn through to the bone. As the particles ignite, they emit a garlic-like odor and melt everything in their path.

Significance of the *New Yorker* Profile

- Profiles have an important place in the *New Yorker* fact department and have helped shape the magazine's **fact-checking procedures**
 - The magazine's rigorous fact-checking system began in 1927, when a Profile of Edna St. Vincent Millay was so riddled with errors that the poet's mother stormed into the magazine's offices and threatened to sue if an extensive correction was not run
 - After the incident, Ross issued a memo which read, "What with our making fun of the mistakes in other publications...*The New Yorker* ought to be free from typographical errors than any other publication...**A SPECIAL EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO AVOID MISTAKES IN THE NEW YORKER.**"
- Established the "profile" as a new journalistic form that was perfected under Ross and matured under Shawn
 - Ross wrote in 1938, "After the *New Yorker* started [publishing Profiles], other magazines got onto the fact that it was possible...to write history about living people"
- Set the *New Yorker* apart from other publications with the Profile's "unique mix of intimacy and irony" and "literary commitment to tiny details, combined with a comedic eye for social types"
- 94 years' worth of Profiles "will continue to be fodder for biography and history for decades and centuries to come"



ANNALS OF BIOGRAPHY

PERSONAL HISTORY

A REPORTER AT LARGE Essays and memoirs.

THE END