

The 40s: The Story of a Decade

The New Yorker Magazine

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Including contributions by W. H. Auden • Elizabeth Bishop • John Cheever • Janet Flanner • John Hersey • Langston Hughes • Shirley Jackson • A. J. Liebling • William Maxwell • Carson McCullers • Joseph Mitchell • Vladimir Nabokov • Ogden Nash • John O'Hara • George Orwell • V. S. Pritchett • Lillian Ross • Stephen Spender • Lionel Trilling • Rebecca West • E. B. White • Williams Carlos Williams • Edmund Wilson

And featuring new perspectives by Joan Acocella • Hilton Als • Dan Chiasson • David Denby • Jill Lepore • Louis Menand • Susan Orlean • George Packer • David Remnick • Alex Ross • Peter Schjeldahl • Zadie Smith • Judith Thurman

The 1940s are the watershed decade of the twentieth century, a time of trauma and upheaval but also of innovation and profound and lasting cultural change. This is the era of Fat Man and Little Boy, of FDR and Stalin, but also of *Casablanca* and *Citizen Kane*, zoot suits and Christian Dior, Duke Ellington and Edith Piaf.

The 1940s were when *The New Yorker* came of age. A magazine that was best known for its humor and wry social observation would extend itself, offering the first in-depth reporting from Hiroshima and introducing American readers to the fiction of Vladimir Nabokov and the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop. In this enthralling book, masterly contributions from the pantheon of great writers who graced *The New Yorker*'s pages throughout the decade are placed in history by the magazine's current writers.

Included in this volume are seminal profiles of the decade's most fascinating figures: Albert Einstein, Marshal Pétain, Thomas Mann, Le Corbusier, Walt Disney, and Eleanor Roosevelt. Here are classics in reporting: John Hersey's account of the heroism of a young naval lieutenant named John F. Kennedy; A. J. Liebling's unforgettable depictions of the Fall of France and D Day; Rebecca West's harrowing visit to a lynching trial in South Carolina; Lillian Ross's sly, funny dispatch on the Miss America Pageant; and Joseph Mitchell's imperishable portrait of New York's foremost dive bar, McSorley's.

This volume also provides vital, seldom-reprinted criticism. Once again, we are able to witness the era's major figures wrestling with one another's work as it appeared—George Orwell on Graham Greene, W. H. Auden on T. S. Eliot, Lionel Trilling on Orwell. Here are *The New Yorker*'s original takes on *The Great Dictator* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, and opening-night reviews of *Death of a Salesman* and *South Pacific*.

Perhaps no contribution the magazine made to 1940s American culture was more lasting than its fiction and poetry. Included here is an extraordinary selection of short stories by such writers as Shirley Jackson (whose masterpiece "The Lottery" stirred outrage when it appeared in the magazine in 1948) and John Cheever (of whose now-classic story "The Enormous Radio" *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross said: "It will turn out to be a memorable one, or I am a fish.") Also represented are the great poets of the decade, from Louise Bogan and William Carlos Williams to Theodore Roethke and Langston Hughes.

To complete the panorama, today's *New Yorker* staff, including David Remnick, George Packer, and Alex Ross, look back on the decade through contemporary eyes. Whether it's Louis Menand on postwar cosmopolitanism or Zadie Smith on the decade's breakthroughs in fiction, these new contributions are

illuminating, learned, and, above all, entertaining.

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Thomas Carroll:

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