



# **The Art of Fact: Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction (Contributions in Criminology and Penology)**

*Barbara Lounsberry*

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The artistry of nonfiction is the great unexplored territory of contemporary criticism. Although the American book clubs now emphasize nonfiction and *The New York Times Book Review* publishes almost three times as many reviews of nonfiction as fiction, critical appreciation of this work has lagged behind. *The Art of Fact* is the first comprehensive examination of five of today's most popular and important nonfiction artists: Gay Talese, Tom Wolfe, John McPhee, Joan Didion, and Norman Mailer. By discussing contemporary literary nonfiction in relation to the early prose narrative forms and to the news/novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the opening chapter defines the discourse known as literary or artistic nonfiction. Dr. Lounsberry then describes four characteristics of literary nonfiction and grounds these characteristics in contemporary works.

The five chapters which follow this introduction thoroughly examine the works of five prominent, contemporary nonfiction artists. While critics to date have tended to focus on only one or two of each writer's works, these chapters trace themes across each writer's entire body of work and even project likely future directions, given current artistic trajectories. Also addressed is the role of literary nonfiction in the American literary tradition and how each of the five writers exemplifies a strand of nonfiction narrative. *The Art of Fact* draws from personal interviews with Gay Talese and John McPhee and includes new interpretations of the works of Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion and Norman Mailer as well as unpublished material from Gay Talese's current book-in-progress. *The Art of Fact* is a timely call for critical appreciation of the artistry of nonfiction and offers valuable insights to both students and fans of contemporary nonfiction.

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