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# Chapter 1: From reportage to art: The emergence of creative nonfiction

## Section 1. New Journalism: The Foundation of Creative Nonfiction

### 1. The Emergence of New Journalism

Literary journalists explore new definitions of reality, crossing the boundaries that capture the psychological connection between individuals. At the end of the twentieth century, the most vocal representative of this literary, journalistic style was Tom Wolfe (1973), who claimed that literary journalism is a New Journalism using techniques that correspond to fiction writers, such as point of view, scene, and dialogue. The framework of this seemingly newly-born genre is artful storytelling (Wolfe 1973; Weber 1974). It appeared as a response to the 1960s, when societal changes happened at such a fast pace that a new strategy for ordering contemporary events was needed (according to Eason 1982).

Eason (1984) compared literary journalism to ethnographic realism (Webster 1986; Roberts and Sanders 2005; Langness and Frank 1978) and cultural phenomenology (Backhaus 2006; Csordas 2015). Also, the literary journalist is conscious of his storytelling and of him creating a new literary form that we would not usually associate with objective journalism and facts, which are mostly opposed to the subjectivity of fiction. However, while it would be unfair to argue that this tendency towards separating fact from fiction (translated into reason versus emotion or humans versus nature) has been a permanently used technique in journalism, it would be just as unfair to say that we can ignore it as if it were inexistent.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writers were under the constraints of classicism. So, nineteenth-century journalists began questioning the oppressions of

objectivity imposed by the classic view of journalism (Wilkins 1989). This way, in the twentieth century, journalists started challenging the objectivity of the reality presented on paper (Hollowell 1977; Johnson 1971; Mills 1974). One of the first ones was Agee (1980), who could not find a way to separate his persona from the people in Alabama that he was sent to interview. He had no separation between humans and nature because he was one with his subjects. His perspective is even somewhat romantic, stating that he expressed a desire for his perspective to encompass a vast and magnificent universe, characterized by luminosity, spaciousness, and incalculable richness. He believed that it was feasible to capture and convey this universe, albeit not as effectively through artistic means as through the employment of open terms, which he endeavored to utilize in his writing (Agee 1980: 11-12). Tom Wolfe went on to call this attitude New Journalism.

Thompson (1966) made an attempt to build a bridge between fact and fiction/writer and subject in his writings about Hell's Angels and about experiencing the revelation that he was one of them: he expresses his intention to commence his running activity in Golden Gate Park, with the sole purpose of running a few extended curves to alleviate his mental state. He further elaborates on the transformative nature of fear, which can evolve into a sense of excitement and stimulate a physical response that resonates throughout the body (Thompson 1966: 345). This association allows the writers to achieve the mystical experience that the romantics longed for. However, others discovered their union with the natural element in ways that cannot be called romantic. Herr describes in painful detail how the countryside of Vietnam suffered because of the war. He wrote about when they flew over a little village that had just been bombed, and when they landed, children ran toward them while the pilot was cheerfully admitting that this was "Vietnam, man. Bomb 'em, and feed 'em, bomb 'em and feed 'em." The natural landscape around them is always poisonous, filled with "frail grey smoke" and hills that looked "charred and pitted" (1978: 10). This is nevertheless a raw contact with nature, a personal experience seen through another human's eyes, an accurate recount of what the literary journalist saw and turned into artful storytelling.

Wicker bridges this gap between fact and fiction when the inmates call him to prison, considering the reporter an ally. First, he uses the third person to describe his experience: "Tom Wicker was a disappointed man who believed he had fallen short" (1975: 10), perhaps with the purpose of a final try at distancing his objective self from his subjective one. Second of all, he is self-conscious about being part of the story, and he uses this awareness to cultivate a piece of writing within the environment he finds himself in: "He secretly doubted his character and openly questioned many of the values of the society in which he lived" (10). The lines between fact and fiction become blurry at this point. Is the writer talking about his authentic self or his self in the text? After all, this is one of the characteristics of New Journalism that we will also see in the case of

literary or creative nonfiction, and that is: “an internally defined reality” (Wilkins 1989: 189) in which emotion plays a crucial part.

Wilkin writes that Truman Capote’s In Cold Blood (1965) was the turning point for understanding literary journalism, especially because of its psychological dimension. Capote has “the audacity to put thoughts into the heads of the two men who would commit one of the most brutal mass murders of the era” (1989: 190). He used the tool of a fiction writer as a technique that shifts the point of view from an external one to an internal, subjective, well-documented one to convey emotions and thoughts. In his book, Capote dared to cross the invisible border between someone’s internal world and the external journalistic representation without access to it. It appeared that it was indeed possible for a journalist to enter that inner world through a psychological understanding of human nature, interviews, and careful observation, managing to artfully transmit to the readers the subject’s most hidden thoughts.

The maturation of an era is a prerequisite for the emergence of a novel literary genre, as is evident from the fact that a conducive environment is essential for the successful reception and propagation of a new idea, writes Wilkins (1989: 193) and he is right. Indeed, the twentieth century asked for a vision that erased the borders between fiction and reality, universalized human experience and bridged fantasy and reality in an era that created confusion about what was real and unreal. Zavarzadeh (1976) writes about the disappearance of this separating line and blames contemporary technologies for it, stating that we can transform unreal fantasies into facts; contemporary sciences would still find minor difference between the two. Until the twentieth century, this moral vision had belonged only to writers of fiction (Hollowell 1977). However, this shift can also be seen as a way for fiction writers to adapt to epistemological changes in this century (Webb 1974), helping them navigate this growing threat that would make traditional subject matters a thing of the past.

Hollowell writes that the nonfiction novel presents a potential resolution to the challenges faced by authors of realistic fiction. This literary genre has demonstrated its suitability as a narrative structure for the substantially transformed reality of the United States during a period of profound social transformation (1977: 16). What changes more precisely is the philosophical structure American journalism had followed for over two hundred years. More specifically, the external view of reality slowly shifted into an inside perspective, and the rational human being (as a writer) became emotional and led by instinct (Webb 1974). From that point of view, this new type of journalism is indeed new. However, there have been journalists in the nineteenth century who followed this romanticized way of reporting facts. For instance, Mark Twain, early in his career, wrote for New York Herald, and his lines showcased intimacy between him and the reader and a point of view that could be anything but objective:

What was the Shah to me, that I should go to all this worry and trouble on his account? Where was there the least occasion for taking upon myself such a responsibility? If I got him over all right, well. But if I lost him? If he died on my hands? If he got drowned? It was depressing, any way I looked at it. (qtd. in Snyder and Morris 1949: 198)

This type of confession is seen increasingly in American journalism, especially in the past four or five decades, when the Romantic assumptions about life and art started to make a comeback, as Roszak (1973) noted. According to Webb, there exists a broader societal movement characterized by Romantic ideals and concepts that permeate various domains of intellectual pursuits, cultural output, and ways of living (1974: 40), returning in the form of confessions and intimate storytelling.

The Romantic reporter can be seen in Hersey's account of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, as the journalist chooses six different individuals and leads us, the readers, through their eyes as the dreadful event happens. He gets into the people's minds: "From the mound, Mr. Tanimoto saw an astonishing panorama. […] He wondered how such extensive damage could have been dealt out of a silent sky; even a few places, far up, would have been audible" (1966: 24), and later on he describes the inner struggles of another individual: "Miss Sasaki grew weaker and weaker, and her spirits fell low" (101). We can observe that reality is seen from the inside, through a window different from any other windows of experience. The assumption is that "reality is to be found by focusing on the internal, rather than external, human processes and movements; […] feeling and emotion are more essential to understanding human life" (Webb 1974: 41). The breakthrough is the realization of a general truth that has existed from the beginning of time, which is that people are different and experience the same thing differently. As a journalist, it may not be enough to present the objective, outside view (similar to describing, let us say, furniture). Regarding human experience, we might need something even more than what Hvistendahl (1972) calls truth-as-I-see-it journalism.

According to Wilkins, literary journalists have reverted to a mythopoeic perspective, wherein the emphasis is placed on connections rather than categories, and reality is examined from a multitude of perspectives (1989: 195). The twentieth-century shift about the truth value of an experience consisted of a multi-faceted whole containing different—yet valid—ways of experiencing the same thing. What literary journalists did was study the nature of these affairs and encounters and find tentative solutions to the difficulties that man must face.

During the two centuries before the emergence of New Journalism, American mainstream journalism was characterized by a well-established set of philosophical assumptions (according to Siebert et al. 1956; Rivers et al. 1971; Jensen 1957), some of which describe objectivity and facts as products of the rational man. Webb (1974) breaks

this philosophical orientation into five concepts: rationality (the critical characteristic of the human being is his capacity to think and reason), externality (reality is an external phenomenon which we can only grasp via our senses); uniformity (human beings are alike, and we have to focus on their similarities); statism (society is always the same, even if it seems as if it were changing); and atomism (we have to cut reality into tiny pieces and look at them separately in order to understand the bigger picture). So, objective reporters, who closely follow these concepts, present every viewpoint as equally essential and report only what they can tell based on their senses. For instance, if they see an angry man walking down the street, they cannot assume why he is angry, but they can only report that he is furious. Only when the man tells them why he is angry can they use this newly acquired information to complete the reportage. In the case of romantic reporting, we can replace these five aspects of rational reporting with the following: emotion (the human being is presented as instinctual and experiential) instead of rationality; internal reality instead of externality; diversity instead of uniformity; dynamism instead of statism; and wholism instead of atomism (according to Webb 1974).

Benn (1991) writes that "most of the New Journalists were men—and pretty wild men at that" (108), whereas women journalists experienced this new literary and journalistic phenomenon in terms of profiling. In the 1950s and the 1960s, when journalists brought fiction techniques into an environment that was primarily meant for politics, women journalists refused "the androgynous language of the news report or political column" in favor of "an acute personal language" (Benn 1991: 107) whose purpose was to shift the conversation from private to public life. Papers started introducing profile columns, showing that the individual was now in the spotlight, not the community, and the reporter detailed psychological and physical traits as she would see fit: the person's gestures as a response to a specific question, physical appearance, the atmosphere they generate around them, and so on. For instance, Lynn Barber expressed her preference for interviewing "men of temperament" (Benn 1991: 108), asking them questions that might have seemed daring at the time and exposing an image of the subject that had not been publicly showcased: Rudolf Nureyev having holes in his shoes, Richard Harris fiddling with his genitalia, or Tony Benn looking lonely. Profile writing became a part of metropolitan culture, and this new intimacy arising between the reporter and the subject is quite revolutionary in terms of indirectly showing public vulnerability. Nevertheless, this intimacy was seen as valuable and worthy to be revealed to the readers only when the subject was famous. We can successfully oppose this New Journalism branch (of famous profiles) to the branch of the people (seen as ethnographic realism and cultural phenomenology).

## 2. Ethnographic Realism and Cultural Phenomenology

Eason (1984) discusses these two New Journalism modes regarding the relationship between image and reality, observing and living, and storytelling and experience. Wolfe, Talese, and Capote were best known for their ethnographic realism, whilst Didion, Mailer, Thompson, and Dunne are representative of cultural phenomenology. The differences between these two modes are presented by Eason as follows:

(a) Within the realm of ethnographic realism, the perception of experience is viewed through the lens of image-reality duality. It is incumbent upon the reporter to delve beyond the surface level, to penetrate the facade that often obscures the truth, and ultimately reveal the underlying reality that exists. In contrast, cultural phenomenology offers a unique perspective that recognizes the world as a combination of both image and reality, acknowledging the interplay between the two in shaping our experiences and understanding of the world around us.

(b) Ethnographic realism places great emphasis on cultural categories, particularly the experiences that are observed and those that are lived. Its fundamental assumption is that observation is a passive process, which implies that there is no existential responsibility involved. However, the cultural phenomenology perspective seeks to delve deeper into these assumptions and provide an explanation that can both legitimize decisions and offer an ethical point of view. By exploring the underlying meaning and significance of cultural categories and experiences, cultural phenomenology helps us to better understand and appreciate the complexities of different cultures.

(c) Ethnographic realism is a method that values the use of traditional interpretation techniques to effectively present reality, especially through the use of storytelling. This approach emphasizes the importance of accurate reporting, which is considered to be a natural and integral part of the process. In contrast, cultural phenomenology places significant emphasis on the role of reporting as a means of connecting the writer (typically a journalist) and the reader (often the general public), highlighting the vital importance of effective communication in this context. Overall, both approaches are highly valued in the field of journalism and are considered to be essential tools for accurately representing the world around us.

In terms of images and realities, Wolfe writes that realism is meant "to show the reader real life—'Come here! This is the way people live these days! These are the things they do!'" (1973: 33). Notice the preference for people, in general, as opposed to famous people (a characteristic prevalent in profile writing). For reality to be discovered, the reporter has to search beyond the facade that the public sees and reveal the actual subject beyond appearances and ambiguities. Moreover, this process not only involves a plain

description of the world or the subject but also places it within a social, cultural, or political framework. For instance, Talese (1966, 1972, 1980) illustrates and interprets the behavior of his subjects and the relationships and interactions he has by placing them in a social or historical framework. About him, literary critic Barbara Lounsberry wrote that his volumes are "weighty in names and miniature histories" because he intends to "preserve the unnoticed in history" (1990: xiv) and to make his narrative solid in terms of verifiable facts and names; we do not doubt his final thought about his subjects.

Capote (1965) is another example of an ethnographic realism writer because he tries to offer psychological and cultural explanations for the murder of a family in Kansas. So, ethnographic realism is based on the image-world duality, exploring alternative realities without threatening the reporter's final discovery. This mode organizes itself around different and sometimes opposing views of reality, and at the same time, it keeps its narrative conventions intact. We can say that this mode supports the idea that traditional ways of making sense of reality still apply. In contrast, cultural phenomenology does the opposite, claiming that the image-world blurs (not reveals or emphasizes) the distinction between what is fantasy and what is reality. Didion discusses a locale where individuals eschew customary practices in favor of seeking out novel ways of living, relying solely on the media outlets of film and journalism as their sources of inspiration (1968: 4). Technology plays an integral part in this shift. In Eason's words, it "cuts them [people] loose in space" (1984: 54) in the sense that reality has no way of differentiating itself from fantasy. Because of mass media, the fantastic becomes a model for daily life. For instance, Didion writes about the murder trial of Lucille Miller, which took place in California, and suggests that its true significance is that image and reality become intertwined fantastically; the case "was something that had nothing to do with the law at all, something that never appeared in the eight-column afternoon headlines but was always there between them: the revelation that the dream was teaching the dreamers how to live" (1968: 17). Thus, we encounter the dream-like nature of American reality, especially in the 1960s and the 1970s, which also interested Thompson (1971, 1973, 1979), who writes about a culture in which reality becomes so interlaced with fantasy that ethics becomes a problem. Boorstin (1961) suggests Americans return to the traditional distinction between image and reality. The cultural phenomenology mode of New Journalism does not allow such distinctions because, in contemporary society, a realm is constructed wherein individuals are unable to escape (Eason 1984: 55) and there is no way of differentiation between the image of reality and the reality of images.

If we take the observation route, ethnographic realism keeps the traditional distance of reporting, thus creating a distinction between experience as observed and experience as lived. This mode's realism tells us that reality must be "that of the other" (Eason 1984: 56). Wolfe writes: "the subjectivity that I value in the good examples of New Journalism is the use of techniques to enable the writer to get inside the subjective

reality—not his own—but the character he's writing about" (Bellamy 1974: 85). Talese expresses the same principle by calling himself "a director" operating his "own cameras," shifting the perspective and the focus as he pleases: "I'm like a director, and I shift my own particular focus, my own cameras, from one to the other. […] I find that I can then get into the people that I am writing about and I just shift" (Weber 1974: 97). Talese continues his argumentation in favor of distant observation by explaining his creative process in preparing Frank Sinatra's profile, which he wrote without ever interviewing the subject: he admits that he would not have been able to elicit responses from the subject that would have been as illuminating as the insights he gained by maintaining a certain level of detachment, and instead observing and overhearing the subject, as well as observing the reactions of those in his vicinity (Weber 1974: 94).

Wolfe (1973) is also in favor of distant observation, and he warns against the dangers of directly confronting the subject. If reporters spend too much time with their subjects, the hazard of responsibility, obligation, or guilt appears. Whilst ethnographic realism treats observation as if it were only the means to an end (the story), cultural phenomenology sees observing and observation as vital parts that compose the story. In this mode, "observing is not merely a means to understand the world," but it becomes "an object of analysis" (Eason 1984: 57). Cultural phenomenology delves into the reality constructed by the interactions between the actor and the spectator, turning observation into a lived experience. The observer looks at reality and sees a group of active participants responsible for their actions.

However, some passive spectators are not responsible for the reality they watch. In Dunne's Vegas (1974), the reporter admits that he is merely a voyeur who lives through the experiences of others, but this is not done out of the desire to live diverse experiences but to avoid his problems. To him, reporting does not stir up self-analysis but avoidance of responsibility. He writes that "reporting anesthetizes one's problems. There is always someone in deeper emotional drift, of even grift, than you" (1974: 19). Dunne also describes the reporter as a seeker of various occurrences where observation is required. However, the passivity that connects him to the act of observing is not entirely true but rather an illusion. For Eason, "observing is a form of action which implicitly encourages events to continue" (1984: 58). Dunne (1974) agrees, stating that observing entails responsibility, and so does Herr when he writes about the Vietnam War, concluding that "it took the war to teach it, that you were responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did" (1978: 20). We can observe that the two modes treat observation slightly differently, even though they both seem to encompass it in the reporting process. This does not, however, modify the relationship between the writer (journalist) and the subject. The only difference is in the observer's attitude towards the act of observation, which does not necessarily change the result: the story.

Regarding stories and experiences, we must distinguish between the two modes of aesthetic contribution. Ethnographic realism sees style as a technique of communicating that stories exist elsewhere. Cultural phenomenology sees style as a narrative strategy to show the process of constructing an interpretation, whilst, in ethnographic realism, the narrative focuses on revealing that interpretation. In the latter, the reporter has to mediate between the subject's experience and the public eye (the reader). Wolfe writes that "the most gifted writers are those who manipulate the memory sets of the reader in such a rich fashion that they create within the mind of the reader an entire world that resonates with the reader's own emotions" (1973: 48). These writers (or journalists) present the way things are with an objectivity that is taken for granted. Cultural phenomenology has an aesthetic value that arises precisely from the inability to present this state of things. Didion writes that this mode cannot "impose the narrative line on disparate images" (1979: 11), so the story encompasses the efforts put in by writers who struggle to impose order on these experiences and events. It is not a story of "out there," as in the case of ethnographic realism. Didion makes this struggle explicit by confessing that "I was meant to know the plot, but all I knew was what I saw: flash pictures in variable sequence, images with no 'meaning' beyond their temporary arrangement, not a movie but a cutting room experience" (1979: 13). The reporter has to come to terms with the disorder of events and show the process of putting them back together so that the reader understands that the timeline belongs to the events, not the story. This continuous shift between the two reminds us of what Barthes wrote in Mythologies, that the inability to attain a stable comprehension of reality undoubtedly serves as an indicator of our current state of alienation. We find ourselves in a perpetual state of vacillation between the object and its demystification, lacking the capacity to fully comprehend its entirety. This predicament appears to condemn us to an extended period of incessant discourse concerning reality (1972: 159).

It appears that the phenomenological mode of New Journalism does exactly that: it speaks excessively about reality, but to what end? We may believe that it is a form of cultural expression or continuous discovery and justification, but what it seems to be (if we consider what effects it has on the readers) is a tool that the writer uses to plant the seed of an idea connected to the cultural, historical, and social background of the reader. Eason (1984) admits that this mode shows us how fragile notions of realism are, but I say that it shows us the exact opposite: they are strong because they are so many, so various, and so widespread that we cannot possibly find their weak spot, their fragility. Realism cannot be expected to fit into a mold, and even New Journalism created a split within itself (ethnographic realism and cultural phenomenology). However, let us not forget its goal: to revolutionize a traditional form of expression to be further adapted to whatever topic and subject the public might desire.

## 3. Symbolic Frameworks and Popular Culture

New Journalism can also be looked at from the perspective of symbolic frameworks and popular culture. We can define culture as the sum of symbolic forms which society offers to its members so that they can make sense of what is happening around them. Cultural forms such as journalism, history, and literature organize experience into specific frames people use to see and understand the world. Cultural forms allow you to select and combine signs and symbols like language. And this happens due to the principles of similarity and contiguity. According to Jakobson (1971), they are represented by metaphor and metonymy. While metaphor shows a common point between two terms that belong to diverse cultural contexts, metonymy uses one term to replace another based on their closeness. In this case, both terms belong to the same cultural context. Traditional journalism, or what Eason calls "routine journalism" (1982: 145), has a dominant metonymical component. Because it is built around verisimilitude, convention holds a higher place on the importance scale than invention. The metonymical dominance of routine journalism is seen in its "doctrine of objectivity" (145), as the reporter has to briefly and objectively answer the questions, "Who? What? Where? When? Why?" using quotations and avoiding any subjective affirmations. On the opposite side of the spectrum, we have New Journalism, whose dominant component is metaphorical. The metaphor in culture can be seen as a way of supplying an identity for the members of a particular culture by locating them in time and space within a society (Fernandez 1974: 132). Following the same route, we can state that the metaphorical dominance of New Journalism is a way of locating events, writers, and readers within a society that has a particular order. While routine journalism seeks the transparency of events by minimizing language, New Journalism looks at itself and presents itself as a symbolic construction, a metalanguage. It can be defined as a set of meta-journalistic techniques:

(a) It treats events as symbols. New Journalism connects events to a deeper trend, whether it is cultural, ideological, or mythological. Their significance comes from the liaison to these frames, not from the uniqueness of the occurrence. For instance, a trip to Las Vegas becomes "a savage journey into the heart of the American dream" (the title of Thompson's 1971 book).

(b) It emphasizes the diverse views that build reality. The reporters not only call attention to the symbols and the signs that reveal what is real but also to the communication codes that organize them. In *A Time to Die*, Wicker is engulfed by the culture of Attica prison in New York and claims that he left "the ordinary world and its accepted restraints" (1975: 36), coming into contact with another communication code, one that the world "out there" does not use.

(c) It emphasizes the role of the reporter in building that reality. While routine journalism is centered on the event, New Journalism often creates the central story out of reporting itself. The reporter may very well be a character of the story, as in Wicker's *A Time to Die*, where the reporter's own past is brought up in relation to acting as a negotiation between the incarcerated men and authorities.

(d) It presents discourse as a way of interpreting reality. New Journalism points to itself, to its own production, as both a report of the actual event and as a mode of discourse that contrasts with other modes, such as the classical novel. For instance, Wolfe's *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (1965) uses illustrations and repetitive word use to differentiate it from other modes of discourse.

So, in order to fully understand and appreciate the impact of New Journalism, it is crucial to delve into its intricate connection with symbolic frameworks and popular culture. When we speak of culture, we are essentially referring to the set of symbolic forms that society provides to help its members make sense of their environment. These forms of culture may take on various shapes and sizes, ranging from journalism and history to literature and beyond. Ultimately, they all serve the same purpose: helping individuals organize their experiences into specific frames that enable them to perceive and comprehend the world around them.

## 4. Fact and Fiction

When we discuss New Journalism, it is necessary that we also mention the relationship between history and fiction. Hayden White (1978) talks about the nature of historical narratives and claims that the formal writing techniques of history and fiction are the same. The novelist makes sense of the situation seen as imaginary, and the historian does the same thing, this time of a situation perceived as accurate. White's analysis proves that narrative techniques do not belong to a factual or formal class. However, they are methods used to make sense of a situation, event, or occurrence, whether imaginary or real. In New Journalism, these seem to intertwine, yet we can manage to separate them at the narrative level. For instance, Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968) contains two parts: "The Novel as History", in which Mailer tells us about his perspective as a participant in the march, is supposedly constructed as a novel because it reflects the lived experience of an ambiguous event; "History as the Novel" is the second part, which attempts to place this event in a historical frame, in the larger context. After a few pages, however, Mailer says that because the event is ambiguous, such interpretation cannot be, and that the first part is actually "history in the guise or dress or manifest of a novel and the second a real or true novel" (184). This strategy emphasizes that "both social life and report are constructions" (Eason 1984: 61). The main difference is between the historian, who tries to gather official versions and put

together an objective story, and the ethnographic realist trying to pierce through the façade of the events, immersing himself in the reality of the Other.

Another essential matter that scholars have been looking into is the literary component of a nonfiction narrative (Hellmann 1981; Heyne 1987; Rader 1968; Searle 1975; Smith 1980; White 1980). Heyne (1987) admits that this question became important when Mailer, Wolfe, Herr, and other representative writers of New Journalism became increasingly interested in how we portray reality and realism. However, with their growing fame, much confusion arose regarding the distinction between fact and fiction and to what extent nonfiction holds literary status. Defining artistic nonfiction based on the use of fiction techniques is, according to Heyne, "simple-minded" (1987: 480). Instead, he argues that literary or creative nonfiction (a descendant of New Journalism) and fiction are highly different, and this difference is not always found in writing techniques but in our perception as to the kind of statement intended by the writer, as Searle proposes in "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse" (1975). The type of story dictates the proper response of the reader we believe we read. In turn, this decision is also influenced by our relationship with the writer (the storyteller), the context (social, cultural, political, historical) and the story's characteristics. If we are not sure as to the type of story we are being told, we might presume that it is a joke, an invention, so as not to be fooled in case we consider it a fact. However, Searle points out that we cannot always be sure, based on internal evidence, whether the story is intended as something factual or fictional. For instance, if the storyteller is mad, he intends that his story should be taken seriously, but this is not the readers' inclination. In this doubt lies the difference between fiction and nonfiction. If we claim that something is a true story, then: (a) it should be taken a certain way, and (b) it is a representation of real occurrences. Going back to the madman's example, we could say that his story is true in the first sense. The storyteller intends for the readers to take him seriously and consider the story accurate, but not in the second because there is enormous uncertainty about whether the description of the events is adequate to the reality.

This case has two distinctions: fact versus fiction and good versus bad fact. If what Searle says is taken to be valid, it follows that the writer (the storyteller) is the one who determines whether a text is a work of fiction or a fact, but it is up to the reader to decide if the fact is good or bad. Heyne uses "factual status" and "factual adequacy" (1987: 480) to distinguish between these two kinds of truth. In academic discourse, it is commonly understood that a work of fiction lacks both factual status and factual adequacy. Conversely, a nonfiction work possesses factual status, yet the determination of its factual adequacy remains subject to individual interpretation or debate among readers.

For instance, Capote's *In Cold Blood* was found to contain certain discrepancies. However, Capote himself claimed that the book was "immaculately factual" (Plimpton

1968: 26). About these discrepancies, Tompkins says that the author puts his observations and conclusions into the characters' mouths, creating an inaccurate portrait of Perry Smith (the murderer). Although this could very well be considered a form of distant observation that involves ethnographic realism, which is an experience described as lived by the other (in which case the author is somewhat forced to put words into the mouths of his subjects), Tompkins concludes that "art triumphs over reality" and "fiction over nonfiction" (1968: 57). He explains: "By imparting conscience and compassion to Perry, Capote conveyed qualities of inner sensitivity, poetry […]. It is a moving portrait but not, I submit, of the man who was Perry Smith" (57). If Capote had admitted that his book was a novel, Tompkins' research and counterarguments would have been in vain. However, because he claimed that his book contained only actual and accurate facts, *In Cold Blood* can now be the object of debate and doubt. Even if Tompkins says that he misrepresented Perry Smith, this does not show that fiction triumphs over fact, Heyne says, but it is a triumph of "lying over truth-telling, or blindness over insight" (1987: 482). However, what is left could be a "work of art" enjoyed by readers "for its own sake," despite the "discrepancies of fact" (Tompkins 1968: 58). So, through its metamorphosis into fiction, the book is an excellent example of survival as literature.

While Tompkins makes a distinction between fiction and nonfiction in terms of literary survival, Hellmann argues that the current state of journalism is characterized by the presentation of factual information in a manner that is imbued with fictional elements. This approach is executed in a more sophisticated and inventive manner, as per the definition provided by Northrop Frye, which encompasses any literary work in prose (1981: 17). Frye (1957) suggests that traditional literary genres can be placed in a larger category: literary discourse. If we follow Hellmann and Frye, we might say that fiction is synonymous with literary prose, leaving no room for distinctions between fiction and nonfiction. However, Frye also has that covered: non-literary prose, he writes, goes beyond the literary borders and into the world, manifesting social action and individual thought. Searle, on the other hand, claims that the notion of literature is distinct from that of fiction. As an illustration, the phrase 'the Bible as literature' connotes a theologically impartial stance, whereas 'the Bible as fiction' is suggestive of a biased perspective (1975: 320). Naturally, we refer to medical manuals as literature, not fiction, and the same goes for instruction manuals, scientifically proven information and facts, and so on, but then it would mean that there is a highly distinguishable line between fact (literature) and fiction. New Journalism successfully blurs this line, managing to create a threshold genre. Thus, we can say that literary journalism (or New Journalism) begins to turn into a genre of its own, that of creative or literary nonfiction quite suitable for this "age of suspicion" we live in, as Zavarzadeh (1976: 41) calls it, calling attention to the fact that contemporary life produces narratives that we cannot take as being factual or fictional, but paradoxically they both exist simultaneously.

This definition does not seem very strange because contemporaneity made us familiar with the paradox of postmodernism (Călinescu 1987; Hutcheon 1988; Agamben 2010), which describes the contemporary man as a structure that embodies but also destroys the bridge between past and future at the same time. For Călinescu (1987), the paradox consists of a diachronic and synchronic construct: postmodernism can be a continuation of modernism, but at the same time, it can be against it through the revaluation of certain negative judgements, such as romanticism. For Hutcheon (1988), this paradox goes into the sphere of history: postmodernism reinstalls the historical context as crucial and problematizes historical knowledge. If we extend this paradox to New Journalism, we see that the same simultaneous duality applies. As Zavarzadeh (1976) suggests, we must abandon the distinction between fact and fiction for more complex modes of telling the increasingly high amount of information the contemporary world faces.

Going back to the journalistic route, Hersey argues that Capote, Mailer, and Wolfe are not good reporters because "the writer of fiction must invent" and "the journalist must not" (1966: 25). However, this is a judgement based on the traditional conventions of journalism, and, as Heyne writes, "conventions are made to be challenged, in nonfiction as in fiction" (1987: 485). The way Capote challenges them is by violating the rule of accurate representation. For instance, he uses an omniscient perspective, presenting the situation from the point of view of multiple characters (subjects), which makes him also create a portrait of the killer. In his final apology, Perry Smith cries and confesses: "I'm embraced by shame" (Capote 1965: 345), but Tompkins found some witnesses who disagree with the writer's portrayal: in the course of their telephonic exchange, Mrs. Meier reiterated on multiple occasions that she had never heard Perry cry. She also clarified that she was in her bedroom on the day in question and not in the kitchen. Additionally, she denied having turned on the radio to muffle the sound of crying, holding Perry's hand, or hearing Perry utter the words, "I'm embraced by shame." Finally, Mrs. Meier asserted that she had never communicated any of these details to Capote. In a resolute yet gentle manner, Mrs. Meier repeatedly affirmed that these assertions were false (1968: 53). It is obvious how Capote violates the principles that classic or routine journalism sets up for the reporter. Naturally, we could suppose why he did so: he made up essential scenes in the book because he believed them lacking in emotion or poetry, or he "transferred his own experiences to another character," as Heyne (1987: 485) explains. From this, we can identify two types of truth: accuracy and meaning. Accuracy involves a neutral representation of events (verbally), whose goal is to universally agree with—and correspond to—the public knowledge. Meaning, on the other hand, is much more complex, blurry, and nebulous. We assign meaning to a specific, accurate fact. That meaning can differ from person to person, writer to writer, and reader to reader: it is much more personal and subjective. However, they are "claims or strategies in nonfiction narrative" (Heyne 1987: 486). Perry's motivations are the

story's heart in Capote's *In Cold Blood*. Indeed, Capote's discovered inaccuracies somewhat misshape the meaning, but we cannot argue against this version's aestheticism. After all, the value of narrativity is only that of a specific version of events. White suggests that it "arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary" (1980: 27). Similarly, Smith agrees that all narratives that are based on facts are built "by someone in particular, on some occasion, for some purpose, and in accord with some relevant set of principles" (1980: 218). Can we precisely say what the reality of a fact is one hundred per cent of the time if it is described by some person led by subjectivity and personal interests in a particular instance and time? I believe not. Moreover, I also believe that the question of fact versus fiction in this new creative nonfiction genre should be disputed by each and every author, from whom we should expect explanations and justifications for their choices.

## 5. Tom Wolfe as The 'Lead Engineer' of New Journalism

Webb (1974) calls Tom Wolfe the dean of new journalists because he is one of the few who attempted to define the term, calling it "social realism" (Wolfe 1973: 52) and placing it in a more generous framework, which gave people a more definitive idea about New Journalism and its methodologies. Wolfe is the pioneer of the New Journalism movement. Kallan writes that "few journalists have generated as much critical attention" (1979: 52) as him. Although there is polarity with regards to Wolfe's contribution to literature—whilst Macdonald (1965) describes him as a demagogical parajournalist, Karl Schapiro praises him and believes that he "writes like a master" (1968: 3)—it is clear that he called attention to himself with his "electronic rhetoric", as Kallan names it (1979: 53), his indirect pledge to McLuhan's (1964) doctrine stating that the medium is the message.

Taking this idea even further, we can claim that New Journalism's intention to engage the readers' attention via the message by letting *them* read and feel the event rather than describing or reporting what happened is a direct consequence of the ubiquity of television in America in the middle of the twentieth century (Flippen 1974; Johnson 1971). Ultimately, this style will suit the times (Kallan 1979). An audience used to the fast pace, rapid flow, and dazzle of television will naturally respond positively to a non-linear prose that challenges them as television does. David Culbert writes about this and agrees that the concept of New Journalism is essentially an endeavor to implement the methodologies of a visual medium onto the written format (1975: 70). So, the reporter-writer becomes a host, and he "really wants to be seen in print", so "he injects part of a carefully-constructed persona into his stories so that the reader is tempted to believe he can see the reporter who has written the story" (73). Wolfe's style could stem from this

desire to be a TV personality, using some particular hallmark of rhetoric: excitement, immediacy, and credibility, which coalesce into what Kallan calls "televisionic journalism" (1979: 54).

Papacharissi compares the relationship between the need for a new journalistic style and the social environment with Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*, which highlighted the liaison between modern architecture (and how we interact with buildings) and the sociocultural context of that time, which was considered to be "always in flux" (2015: 27). This is an important parallel to consider when we discuss New Journalism and (later on) creative nonfiction. The emergence of a new genre or literary technique will always be connected to some outside occurrence that obliges authors and scholars to turn their attention to a novelty in their domain. Le Corbusier posited that engineers exert an excessive influence on the architectural field, inundating it with their calculations and thereby contributing to the decline of the discipline (1931: 31). Could journalists be seen as story engineers? Naturally, how an engineer or an architect builds a space and creates a plan that would satisfy the inhabitants of that dwelling is highly similar to the techniques journalists employ to create stories. Because engineering advancements (due to the industrial revolution) allowed architects to manipulate space differently and made them consider the process of turning a mere space into a living place, journalists, too, began pondering how to reshape storytelling in a way to suit the needs of the proverbial inhabitants (the readers).

Wolfe (1973), who can be considered the lead engineer of New Journalism, claims that four stylistic devices characterize this new form of storytelling:

(a) Third-person point of view. According to Kallan, this particular stylistic device is the one that is most intricately linked with New Journalism (1979: 54). It offers numerous perspectives, and this pluri-perspectivism does not belong only to the author but to various characters. According to Wolfe, the literary approach of portraying each scene from the perspective of a specific character enables the reader to perceive the scene through the character's eyes and to vicariously experience the emotional reality of the scene as the character does (1973: 32). However, this brings up a relatively important question. How does Wolfe know what happens inside his subjects' minds? He argues that he simply asks them and gathers information from diverse sources to create a believable and realistic profile of the person. In the postscript to *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, he explains his choices by declaring that all the events and dialogues he puts on paper were recorded on tapes, films, or in writing, or they were disclosed to him during the conversations he had with the subjects or with the subjects' close friends or relatives. Although the argument is pertinent, we cannot help but wonder about the degree of subjectivity and *inventio* in those cases where the reporter cannot gather the information he needs, or there is a lack thereof. Wolfe admits to this too, in an article published in 1970: "I often enter into a kind of controlled trance —that's the only way I

can think of describing it— when I am writing a scene. What I am trying to do is relive somebody else's emotional experience in my mind" (22). The act of role-play, imagination, and empathy writing can be regarded as a form of passion that integrates both objective and subjective perspectives. According to Wolfe, this passion is essential for producing writing that is imbued with emotion and objectivity simultaneously, as the emotions are not derived from external sources but rather from within the characters themselves (22). Even if some might not be convinced by his arguments, indirectly, the third-person perspective can, at the very least, have the appearance, the texture of objectivity, and the author appears to be the scribe who reports on the matters without any emotional involvement. According to Carpenter, the potency of this viewpoint can be likened to that of television, wherein the "distance and angle constantly shift" (1960: 169). This is due to the fact that the same scene is presented from various perspectives, causing the viewer to observe it from different vantage points. As a result, the viewer is gradually drawn into the scene and eventually becomes an active participant, rather than a mere spectator. Expanding on this theory, the readers of New Journalism become part of the story and transform into silent witnesses that cannot distance themselves from the events occurring right before them.

(b) Scene-by-scene construction. Wolfe asserts that this entails a transition from one scene to another while minimizing the use of pure historical exposition (1973: 31). So, the chronological component is a technique that should not be employed too often, or else it destroys the somehow chaotic atmosphere created in the story. We notice a scene-by-scene construction in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* in which Ken Kesey seeks the absolute truth by experimenting with various drugs. The reader goes on this chaotic journey, sometimes feeling lost and confused (just as the character is), from city to city, on adventures that feel fast-paced, listening to the characters' thoughts and being right next to them when something happens. The idea that prevails is that things are happening *now*, in a present that tugs us away from historical distance or detached perspective. In a way, we are stuck in the story, the only way out is to distance ourselves from the physical piece of writing—in other words, close the book and walk away. Furthermore, Kallan's televisionic journalism comes to mind again. About the immediacy of events and the present temporal location, Seldes writes that the experience of being present in the moment is heightened in television. The immediacy of the medium creates a sense of authenticity and truth, as if the events being depicted are unfolding in real time. A skilled television director will rely on the audience's instinctive response to inform their stylistic choices, including the pacing of movement, the frequency of close-up shots, the intensity of facial expressions, and the level of vocal projection (1950: 190). Compare this need for the present in television to the need for *now* in Wolfe's journalism. This reporter needs an immediate response from the readers; he needs them not to be able to break free from the story, to follow the characters step

by step and to have the impression that, should they close the book, time stands still inside it as well.

(c) Extensive dialogue. Kallan states that "the mere presence of their [the characters'] speech—a normal, human endeavor—is a constant reminder that the characters are plausible and human" (1979: 56). While we also find dialogue in other genres conferring the characters an air of believability, in New Journalism, dialogue acquires the status of an overpowering force because characters are personified by what they are saying. So, the suspicion factor is cancelled to some extent. One characteristic that we can notice in Wolfe's writings is orality: not only does he accurately represent pauses and moments of babbling, but also cases of non-standard English, letting us know that what we read is a first-hand encounter with the subject and that nothing was modified to suit the formality of written literature or regular press reports. For example, in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, we meet a character called Mountain Girl, who describes her coveralls as follows:

"We got 'em at a uniform store," she says. "Aren't they great! There's this old guy in there, says, 'Now you ain't gonna cut them flags up for costumes, are you?' Thus, I told him, 'Naw, we're gonna git some horns and have a parade.' But you see this? This is really why we got 'em." (14)

The orality is clearly visible here, marked by non-standard English variants of "no," "get," and "and are not going to." This creates a television-like (even reality television) encounter with regular people whose speech is not regulated by some formal language standards when they find themselves in relaxed situations. Unlike Wolfe, Lounsberry (1990) believes that dialogue is not essential for the scene, at least not for other authors *except* Wolfe, because he uses it to present conflicting points of view. I believe he does so to get us near the subjects, to create the idea that we are watching and listening to someone who does not have the slightest idea that they are being listened to.

(d) Recording of status-life symbols. The act of recording status-life symbols involves the meticulous observation and documentation of all forms of communication that occur between individuals. This encompasses a wide range of elements, such as commonplace gestures, habitual behaviors, customary practices, furniture and clothing styles, decorative preferences, modes of transportation and dining, domestic management techniques, as well as attitudes and behaviors towards children, subordinates, superiors, and peers. Additionally, this includes the various visual cues, such as facial expressions, postures, walking styles, and other symbolic details that convey social status and identity (Wolfe 1973: 32). What can these symbols show? On the one hand, they show details about the subject, which can also lead to a better understanding of their persona, personality, inner judgements and justifications. On the other hand, they can show details about relationships between subjects. Wolfe names

this "a scene," and it can remind us of film and theatre. The scene is usually directed by someone (I say "usually" because there is also the case of improvisation) who gives stage directions and a script to the people in the scene, but then this would make characters actors. The scene Wolfe mentions is free of all outside control—at first glance. However, if we dig deeper, we find that the director is hidden behind the camera, controlling what we see and from what angle. He may not control what the characters do or say, but he chooses the angles from which we watch the scene unfold. Moreover, this argument brings together two opposing forces: the seemingly objective perspective (giving us the impression that what we see is everything, that nothing is missing from the scene for us to create an idea about the people and the events) and the underlying subjective perspective (because the writer is, after all, a human entity, allowed to choose what we see and how we see it). In *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* (1970), Wolfe uses these symbols to show wealth by adding popular proper nouns that readers can recognise as belonging to palpable reality: "The grape workers were all in work clothes, Levi's, chinos, Sears balloon-seat twills, K-Mart sports shirts, and so forth" (45). Again, we can see a similarity between this presentation style and television. For example, the famous signposts offer a comforting feeling to the viewer and the thought that what he sees is an accurate representation of reality. Kallan writes that "television, like popular culture generally, mirrors its audience's preconceptions of reality" (1979: 56). So, what this technique does is add to the already established "vibe" of realism by employing yet again a presentation device used in television: comforting details from popular culture or simply details that, by the method of deduction, lead to a complete portrait of how the subjects live and how they *want* to live.

## 6. Conclusion

Kallan wrote that "certainly Wolfe's journalism will not be forgotten" (1979: 62), and the truth is it was not. It solely turned into something relatively silent, expressed with less fanfare, in the form of creative or literary nonfiction, about which many scholars have been writing in the past thirty to forty years and which became the metaphorical baby of New Journalism—a larger, more silent, but just as present, baby. Creative nonfiction uses what New Journalism built in the twentieth century to create this massive dome that houses the expansion of the new literary journalism genre. Barbara Lounsberry was the first to discuss the expansion of the journalistic genre (that she describes as too narrow) in *The Art of Fact* (1990), categorizing journalists such as Gay Talese, Tom Wolfe, John McPhee, Joan Didion, and Norman Mailer as creative nonfiction writers.

The influence of these journalists, a group of writers who emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and sought to bring a more literary and personal approach to journalism, has

been far-reaching and long-lasting. Their work blurred the lines between traditional reporting and creative writing, inspiring subsequent generations of journalists and editors to delve deeper into their ideas and refine their storytelling techniques. One such movement that emerged in the early 1990s was creative nonfiction, which embodied the same spirit of New Journalism and gained momentum under the guidance of author and editor Lee Gutkind. Gutkind was instrumental in organizing an annual creative nonfiction writing workshop at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland, which attracted writers from across the country and provided a supportive community for those seeking to explore this emerging genre. In addition to his work at Goucher, Gutkind was also responsible for helping to establish one of the first-degree programs in creative nonfiction in the United States at the University of Pittsburgh. This program, which began in 1996, offered students the opportunity to study and practice creative nonfiction in a structured academic setting and helped to legitimize the genre as a serious field of study and practice.

Furthermore, Gutkind founded *Creative Nonfiction*, a highly respected journal that continues to publish some of the best examples of the genre, as well as several anthologies that showcase the diversity and range of creative nonfiction writing. Throughout the country, writers and editors in editorial rooms of newspapers and magazines, professional journalism organizations, and creative writing workshops continued to take inspiration from New Journalism and experiment with forms, styles, and practices that could lend authenticity to a genre that aspires to be both creative and true to life.

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## Section 2. Creative Nonfiction: The Birth of a New Genre

### 1 Introduction: The Beginning of Creative Nonfiction

In 1973, a literary anthology was published and edited by Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson. This anthology served not only as a manifesto for the New Journalism movement but also as a compilation of texts that embody what this genre represents. The first part of the book, which is written by Wolfe, asserts that the American novel has reached a dead end by separating itself from realism. Wolfe concedes that journalism is poised to become the new American novel, and writers can blend literary techniques to create a new form of literature. This style is known as creative nonfiction, and it has finally come into its own. The second part of the book includes twenty-four texts that have been gathered by Wolfe and Johnson. These texts have been written by renowned authors such as Joan Didion, Truman Capote, John Dunne, Norman Mailer, and Gay Talese. They have provided excerpts that have been published in both creative nonfiction books and magazines or newspapers. Wolfe accompanies each text with a comprehensive analysis, lauding this new and improved form of writing that will alter the way writers discuss their own and other people's lives and experiences.

Even in the sciences, this dilemma existed in the twentieth century. In the foreword to the 1990 collection of case studies *Awakenings*, Oliver Sacks (physician and neurologist) complains that the 1973 edition was not well received by professionals in the medical field. His type of writing was odd, something not seen before in the Sciences: personal tone, "biographic books" (xxxv), disregard for academese. Alexander Luria, widely regarded as the father of contemporary neuropsychology, corresponded with an individual and expressed his appreciation for the genre of biographical research. Luria's fondness for this type of inquiry stemmed from his desire to introduce a form of Romantic Science, as well as his opposition to a formal statistical approach. He advocated for a qualitative study of personality, eschewing any attempts to identify underlying factors that contribute to the structure of an individual's character (xxxv).

Sacks calls this style "existential and personal—an empathic entering into patients' experiences and worlds" (xxxvi), which I find quite similar to immersive creative nonfiction and New Journalism, where the writers do their best to enter the subject's mind and feel around for a story. I find it amazing that Luria and Sacks dismissed the cold and distant approach to case studies and showed humanity and empathy to their patients, ensuring that their stories reached their readers in complete form and truth.

The first time creative nonfiction was officially recognized as an independent genre was in 1983, at a meeting hosted by the National Endowment for the Arts. Finally,

people had a name for it—an accurate name, which Lee Gutkind (1997, 2008, 2012) had been pushing forward for years, even if "cataloguing nonfiction is a haphazard venture" (2003: 237), as Douglas Hesse puts it, because the confusion comes from the clash between form and content. However, only in 1990, when Barbara Lounsberry wrote *The Art of Fact*, is the name of this new genre launched into the literary orbit. She argues that the second half of the twentieth century is the age of nonfiction because people stopped believing that the highest form of imagination is the novel, making room for other prose narratives such as memoirs, autobiographies, travelogues, essays, and other works of journalism combined ingeniously (xi). She very seriously calls the *other* nonfiction „droning" (xi) and „dull or diffuse" (xv), admitting at the same time that this is not something new under the sun but that the literary world witnessed such artistic endeavors in the past, more precisely in the hands of Henry David Thoreau, Montaigne, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, but nobody was assertive enough to call a spade a spade: "I am asserting […] that there is an identifiable discourse—recognizable in its solid central particulars, though blurring (as all genres do) at the edges—that might be called literary or artistic nonfiction" (xiii). Even Sondra Perl and Mimi Schwartz admit that creative nonfiction is "a new name for an old impulse: to write about the *real* world with grace, power, and personal commitment" (2006: xi). Todorov joins them by stating that "a new genre is always the transformation of one or several old genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination" (1976: 161). Barbara Tuchman writes about the word "artist" in nonfiction and replacement with the word "realtor": "I see no reason why the word should always be confined to writers of fiction and poetry while the rest of us are lumped under that despicable term 'Nonfiction' […] I cannot very well call us 'Realtors' because that has been pre-empted—although as a matter of fact I would like to. 'Real Estate,' when you come to think of it, is a very fine phrase and it is exactly the sphere that writers of nonfiction deal in: the real estate of man, of human conduct. I wish we could get it back from the dealers in land. Then the categories could be poets, novelists, and realtors" (1981: 46). However, what are the particularities of this relatively new genre?

Lounsberry lists four (which will be developed later by the likes of Lee Gutkind and Jack Hart). An honorable mention goes to Perl and Schwartz, who list the following main characteristics of creative nonfiction: a voice that pulls us into the story; a desire for exploration (whether of the self or others); an allegiance to accuracy and truth; a commitment to use a wide range of devices to keep the reader interested; freedom of style and form; a certain rhythm of the language; the ability to find what is extraordinary in our daily lives. They also insist that creative nonfiction writers must "grapple with the boundaries between ethical and artistic clarity" because they "walk a thin line that other writers do not" (2006: 163): the line between fiction and nonfiction.

The documentable subject matter is chosen from the real world, not the writer's imagination. Such subjects could include natural or human phenomena, portraits of individuals, cultural groups and subgroups, and human places or events. About this, Dorrit Cohn writes in *The Distinction of Fiction* (1999) and argues that in fiction there is a relationship that forms between Story and Discourse, and in nonfiction, the Reference to the real world is added. I recognize that writing is a deeply personal and subjective endeavor. While writers inevitably bring their own experiences and perspectives to their work, the aim of creative or literary nonfiction is to mitigate the impact of the writer's persona on the finished product. This can be achieved by relying on external stimuli as the foundation for the work, rather than giving free rein to the writer's imagination. Through this approach, the resulting writing is more objective and grounded in reality, while still allowing for creative expression and interpretation. Ultimately, it is the delicate balance between personal experience and objective observation that imbues nonfiction writing with its compelling and powerful qualities.

The writer must exhaustively research the subject at hand because this creates credibility and trust between himself and the reader. The writer can also use verifiable references in the text to allow people to fact-check the information. This technique, Lounsberry says, is "crucial to establishing reader confidence" (xiv), which is one thing that fiction and nonfiction writers have always longed to achieve.

The scene's construction is fundamental in sending any information. Instead of just presenting an event as if it were a cold, brief report, the writer sets a bigger scene in narrative form to make the reader live the event and transform something possibly plain into a medium where "facts gain life, depth, and subtle reverberation" (xv).

Fine writing is one of the most (if not the most) important element for Lounsberry. She believes that even if the subject is thoroughly researched and the writer uses artful tactics to catch the reader into his web, the writing does not reach the standards of creative nonfiction if the language is dull (xv). Fine writing, she adds, is used with a lot of care and thoughtfulness because it is the "strainer" that separates creative nonfiction from "the glut of nonfiction written in pedestrian prose" (xv).

Lounsberry optimistically believes that creative nonfiction allows writers to have the best of both worlds: the facts of nonfiction—which builds a Writer-Reader relation based on trust—and the artfulness of fiction—which allows us to enjoy the experience of reality in the form of a story. "We may be witnessing, in addition, a drawing apart of the strands of narrative in order for a new synthesis to be formed" (xviii), she concludes. But my visual image of this change resembles more the grafting of two trees from the same species to create a new and exciting fruit. It might not be just as *good* or *bad* (if one can call fiction or nonfiction as such), but it is something different, meant to be seen and acknowledged.

## 2. Lee Gutkind: "The Godfather" of Creative Nonfiction

In 2010 (albeit somewhat late), Davis Sheilds feels the literary air is changing. In his work, *Reality Hunger*, the author posits the emergence of an artistic movement characterized by several key components. These include a deliberate embrace of randomness, a willingness to be open to accident and serendipity, and an overly literal tone that mimics the perspective of a detached reporter observing a foreign culture. Additionally, this movement is marked by a plasticity of form that incorporates pointillism, as well as a tendency to use criticism as a form of autobiography. Self-reflexivity, self-ethnography, and anthropological autobiography are also prominent features of this artistic movement. Finally, the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is blurred to the point of near invisibility, further emphasizing the fluidity and experimental nature of this emerging trend (2010: 5).

He feels there is some fog forming at the border between fiction and nonfiction. Michael Pickett finds creative nonfiction "the bridge from which fiction and nonfiction philosophically meet" (2013: 2). Gutkind expresses this observation with a small list of characteristics that could be attributed to creative nonfiction. Even if there is (as we will see later on) a structure that ought to be followed, the writers are still themselves, open to accidents and raw honesty, hoping to stir up unknown emotions in the readers. The partial conclusion is that genres are not set in stone, but, as Singer and Walker describe them, "constellations of rhetorical modes and formal structures grounded in varying degrees of fact" (2013: 4). If we picture an imaginary podium for those who strictly follow facts, creative nonfiction writers would be somewhere at the top.

The two words in the name describe the form and the content (the form is creative, artful, and curiosity-inducing, while the content is nonfictional, which means it is accurate and far from what fantasy would typically entail). However, we should not wrongfully believe that fiction is only make-believe. I agree that the main difference between a fiction writer and a nonfiction one is that the latter adheres to truth and does not cross the border between fact and fantasy (Maaten 1998), but they are still allowed to talk about dreams and emotions just as the former can use reality as support and inspiration. "In some ways," Gutkind writes, "creative nonfiction is like jazz—it's a rich mix of flavors, ideas, and techniques, some of which are newly invented and others as old as writing itself" (2012: 6). Gutkind's definition should be (and was) taken seriously because he is the one who founded the *Creative Nonfiction* magazine (whose first issue went public in 1993), "the godfather behind creative nonfiction", as James Wolcott (1997: 214) names him in an attempt to ridicule the power of the genre and Gutkind himself upon the readers. Wolcott was one of the journalists who opposed Gutkind advertising the new name for this genre. Apparently, the word "creative" was an issue: it was considered pretentious and troubling, especially by academics. Journalists, too, opposed it because they believed that creativity meant making things up (which is the

definition of fantasy, not nonfiction). Some even tried calling it "literary nonfiction" or "literary journalism," but these names did not catch on. In his work entitled *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, Gutkind offers a response to Wolcott's article. The latter, in 1997, had made derogatory remarks about Gutkind, referring to him as "the godfather". At the time, creative nonfiction was gaining popularity among writers and readers alike, which explains why it became a topic of interest for Wolcott. However, Gutkind argues that Wolcott failed to recognize that the majority of individuals were unfamiliar with the terminology, the writing techniques, and the publishing opportunities associated with this genre so, following the publication of Wolcott's article in Vanity Fair, which reached a readership of over one million, people began to comprehend that the literary form they were reading and producing had a name, a label, as well as a rationale and a growing audience (2012: 4).

In spite of Wolcott's apparent intent to discredit both the genre and Gutkind's involvement in it, Gutkind acknowledges that any publicity, even negative, is still publicity. In fact, the manifesto for the genre is now being exposed to a broader audience, which may pique the interest of more individuals who are willing to give it a try.

Another two voices that were going against one of Gutkind's ideas—that truth must prevail in a creative nonfiction book or essay—were John D'Agata and Jim Fingal, who co-wrote *The Lifespan of a Fact* (2012); they claimed that writers are free to change facts and alter a segment of reality if they do so for the sake of art. "This is preposterous," responded Gutkind. "The substance must nevertheless remain reliable and accurate. Fabrication is fiction" (2012: 25). So, credibility is one of the bones that make up the spine of creative nonfiction. This is also an element involved in the relationship between the writer and the reader. If you call your written creation nonfiction or creative nonfiction, the reader expects nothing less from you: that is, truth, honesty, accurate representations of the facts, and no fabrication whatsoever.

Creative nonfiction's greatest asset is that "it offers flexibility and freedom while adhering to the basic tenets of reportage" (Gutkind 2012: 12). In the case of creative nonfiction, "writers can be poetic and journalistic at the same time" (13). And being poetic does not mean you can get away with falsifying information. James Frey, an alcoholic and a drug addict, wrote *A Million Little Pieces* in 2003, an emotional story about his experience in prison, which catapulted him into the bestsellers list. *The Smoking Gun*, a website that handles investigative reportage, discovered that his stories are not real, that the events he said happened never took place, because he did not spend three months in prison, but only half a day, and he was not subjected to surgery without painkillers; he did not experience those raw and real stories that even Oprah was fascinated by. Gutkind writes about this case and says that "the moral of the Frey story is that if you make stuff up, you very likely will get caught, and there will be

consequences" (2012: 14). Once the bond of credibility between the writer and the reader is broke, I am afraid there is no going back.

Gutkind cares so much about the truthfulness of the facts in creative nonfiction that he does not even accept exaggeration for art's sake. In *The New Republic*, Alex Heard (2007) writes about exaggeration for the purpose of humor, arguing that it is fine "to use absurdly embellished descriptions for laughs—this is an essential tool for any humorist. If I write, 'I was so hung over, I threw up my own skeleton,' you know I'm kidding", but it is not acceptable "to pretend—in a long and detailed scene—that you performed outlandish, dangerous tasks at a mental hospital when you didn't". Gutkind disagrees: "Humor is not subject to another set of rules in nonfiction" (2012: 22), so there should not be any exaggeration of the truth. For him, being honest and achieving credibility are "the bone and sinew, the essential irrefutable anchoring elements of nonfiction" (22).

Naturally, the debate between truthfulness and exaggeration is much more complex than this. Think of subjectivity versus objectivity. If a writer claims that this is how subjectivity works for him (for instance, "I exaggerate things because this is how *I* see them"), is the honesty argument valid? Is honesty not relative, dependent on the eyes of the person who witnesses an event and then tries transcribing what he saw on paper? Gutkind concurs that achieving objectivity is feasible solely for robots. However, he further acknowledges that even in this scenario, the software that facilitates the cognitive processes of robots is authored by individuals who possess their own beliefs and perspectives (2012: 34). The paramount concern for creative nonfiction writers should not be focused on achieving objectivity or balance, but rather on adhering to the parameters of veracity, precision, and propriety; they are encouraged to take sides, to try and persuade the readers that what they say is better than what they read or saw somewhere else, to prove that they are capable of thinking. Moreover, it is unnecessary (besides being immoral and unethical) to make things up because the veracity of a statement is typically more evocative and undoubtedly more persuasive than a fanciful narrative. So, the real world, with its facts and verifiable information, seems to be a better fountain of inspiration than the writer's imagination.

Perl and Schwartz make the same distinction between fiction and nonfiction: "If you are changing or inventing facts to make a better story, you are writing fiction. If you are using existing facts to write the story of your experience, you are writing creative nonfiction" (2006: 9). According to Hayden White, the distinction between factual and fictional occurrences, which is fundamental to contemporary discourse on both history and fiction, assumes a concept of reality in which the authentic is equated with the actual only to the extent that it can be demonstrated to exhibit the qualities of narrativity (1998: 6). So, to the distinction between real and imaginary Hayden adds the one between what is true and what is real (which become the same thing only in the form of a narrative).

Virginia Woolf has the same opinion: "The imagination will not serve under two masters simultaneously" (1966: 234)—the two masters being fact and fiction. So, the main idea we must take from here is that creative nonfiction is built on facts, little to no exaggeration, and artistic tools that help the writer communicate the message interestingly and uniquely.

In a staple essay about creative nonfiction, Jocelyn Bartkevicius argues that each writer shows their unique self in the text, which means that truth is relative to the person experiencing it. She goes on: "In writing creative nonfiction, in order to tell the truth, I must let incongruities be. […] I must explore the gaps" (2005: 275)—the gaps in memories, that is. She calls this "the paradoxical nature of the self" (281): to remember something and replicate that memory, one must fill in the gaps that appear in one's mind because no memory is a fully completed puzzle. This is why creative nonfiction might often seem to be an "uneven landscape" made up of "misremembered and unremembered scenes" that the writer has to dig up, embrace, and "create layer after layer of incongruity" (277). This, at least, is *herself*. Other writer's self might be on the opposite side of the truth spectrum. Gutkind, for instance, does not accept any exaggeration, nor does he agree to any use of an unsure memory. You whether tell the truth or you do not. However, I believe no writer should be desperately haunted by the ghost of truthfulness to the detriment of the other elements that, combined, make for a wonderfully vivid and consciously replicated true story.

All this being said, we must keep in mind that the goal of creative nonfiction is to make real stories read like a work of fiction. Some techniques writers of this genre employ for this purpose are immersion, historical extension, research, dialogue, and scene-by-scene construction.

Immersion. The immersion experience serves to personalize nonfiction literature by imbuing it with the qualities of a memoir, while avoiding an excessive focus on the author's personal life. Through immersion, one is able to develop a deep familiarity with the environment of the subject, and may even incorporate elements of self-reflection into their writing, albeit within certain limits (Gutkind 2012: 75). This is what Tom Wolfe called "a trance" (1970: 22). It allows the writer (*and* the readers) to have an intimate connection with the subject and the environment they live in. The immersion technique is not, however, a characteristic that belongs solely to creative nonfiction. Hemingway immersed himself in the cruel and violent culture of bullfights when he wrote *Death in the Afternoon*. John McPhee spent much time in the wetlands of Florida for his book *Oranges*. Before Tom Wolfe wrote *The Right Stuff*, he immersed himself in the world of NASA, spending time with astronauts and observing their behavior, social relations, and how they react to certain situations. In *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, Gutkind admits that his first book in 1973, *Bike Fever*, forced him to join the motorcycle subculture. He "traveled cross-country, off and on, and lived on two

wheels for nearly three years" (2012: 72-73). Immersion means you empty yourself *of yourself* and let someone else take the wheel of imagination and the hand that lays it on paper. Immersion can happen in many ways: you immerse yourself into the life and spirit of someone you are writing about by spending as much time as possible with them and their family and friends, collecting memories, stories, and descriptions (as biographers usually do); you immerse yourself into the past of someone you are writing about and try to find out as much as you can about them and their relationships, fears, and passions; or you can immerse yourself into your own life (whether present or future), as memoirists do, and surround yourself with memories, phantoms of your past, and thoughts you might have had, in an attempt to recreate a vivid picture of a scene that only you can remember so precisely and portray so accurately.

Historical extension. This "connects readers with memories of their own experiences" (Gutkind 2012: 66), thus strengthening the intimate relationship between the writer and the reader. We might say that authors show selfishness when they think of more than one subculture or minority group who might read their text and find a piece of their personal history within it. Including "appropriate and relevant" historical references "is one way to expand your base audience; so too is adding fascinating ancillary information as texture, to make the facts of whatever you're describing more evocative" (2012: 66). The text is similar to a telephone connecting two people from different parts of the world: you have to know the code that you type before the number. And this code allows you to reach the person you have dialed. The code is the sensibility to culture. It represents the knowledge of what, when, and how to say a certain thing, so readers might presume you *care*; you are *one of them*. And they can trust you. In creative nonfiction, trust is essential—the thread keeping together the Author and the Reader, without which the word "nonfiction" might just as well be replaced with "fiction."

Research. "We are teaching/educating/informing our readers through stories" (Gutkind 2012: 94). We might believe that a memoirist or a biographer loses pieces of the story's emotional charge when they choose to do thorough research before writing a creative nonfiction essay or book. The truth is that they "strike a universal chord" (Gutkind 2012: 65). Their story might be too local or too general to be enjoyed by people from different world cultures, and readers might not always identify with the subjects that the book is centered on. Research offers a new layer to the creative nonfiction "cake." Moreover, this layer offers a three-dimensional experience: when you combine research and storytelling, you create what Gutkind calls the "connective tissue" (68) between us all. Research can show up in many ways in creative nonfiction: it can be in the shape of footnotes, a list of references at the end of the story, or a prologue telling readers how the writing process took place and on what information it is based. Hand in hand with historical extension, research strengthens the trust bond between the author and the reader.

Dialogue. Inherited from the New Journalism, dialogue is vital to the creative nonfiction book. As the excerpt from Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* already proved to us, dialogue captures what people say spontaneously in a raw and real manner. The reader seems to be eavesdropping on a natural and unplanned conversation. Caulley agrees that using the spoken word as people communicate every day creates "captured conversation" that "enhances action and characterization" and is a very "effective technique for involving readers, making them feel as though they are right there" (2008: 435). Jack Hart also agrees that realistic dialogue is crucial, comparing its powerful effect and voice to characterizations in a "standard newspaper story": "Bland quotations march on and through the columns of newsprint, conveying nothing beyond the modicum of information they contain. No voice. No emotion. No humanity" (2011: 86). What this does is give us the illusion that we popped in uninvited and overheard something that was only meant for the ears of those who were having the conversation: a bit of voyeurism combined with curiosity will make the reader want to stay on in the story and flip the page for another moment like this one.

Scene. Creative nonfiction "should be dramatic and cinematic" (Gutkind 2012: 122). And because of these characteristics, sometimes, the scene is elastic; it can be stretched out so that "the reader is tantalized with heightening suspense as the writer goes off on related tangents" (227). Scenes could make up a mini or sub-story or the entire story being told. About the scene, Miller and Paola argue that it is "the building block of creative nonfiction" (2004: 9). "When you write a scene," they add, "your job is to mimic the event, create an experiential re-creation of it for the reader" (13) with the help of the same techniques as fiction and great poetry employ.

To a creative nonfiction writer, the structure of the narrative is just as important as the message itself. Peter Rubie and Gary Provost compare the narrative with a skeleton to which the writer adds muscle and flesh—images and scenes. Moreover, what Gutkind calls "the creative nonfiction dance" (2012: 138) is a block of scenes that follow a specific pattern within a frame. And because "creative nonfiction is an amalgam of style and substance, information and story" (138), we need such a visual scheme to understand the skeleton of a book or an essay that belongs to this genre. The aim of this dance is to incorporate information within the scene or narrative in a manner that facilitates seamless transitions between blocks. Each scene or story should engender excitement through action while simultaneously imparting knowledge with precision. In an ideal scenario, information would be seamlessly integrated into each scene.

Gutkind dreams of a creative nonfiction piece of writing that would follow his structure to a T, but unfortunately, mathematical precision might escape some writers who dabble in this genre. Nevertheless, the structure is still of extreme importance. As Haworth puts it, "information is meaningless unless we find a structure for it" (2013: 94). I would not use the same adjective to describe information without structure—

because our brains can put the puzzle pieces together without much help from the outside—but for the sake of the argument, his affirmation is true. If this is a dance, then just like any dance, it has a rhythm; and any rhythm is cyclical, so it must have a structure (no matter how messy or complex it might be). Gutkind's is the following

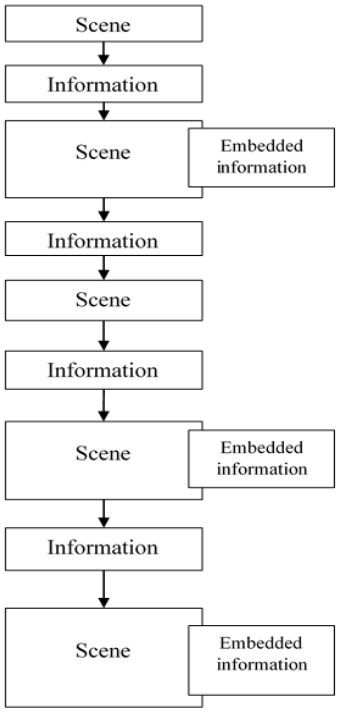


**Fig. 1.** Gutkind's structure of creative nonfiction

About the structure of the story, Gutkind makes three points: "(a) The building blocks of creative nonfiction are scenes—little stories; (b) Information is communicated through action as part of the scene or in between scenes; (c) Story is the creative vehicle to present the nonfiction. It is a style and substance dance" (2012: 218). So, creative nonfiction differs slightly from New Journalism in the care for structure, primarily visually represented structures. As we can see in Hart's and Gutkind's representations, they all follow the same rule: Do not bore the reader! The embedded information is there to create a fissure in the scene, and the main information is there to help the transitions between scenes. It all goes back to capturing the reader's attention and not letting it go. As we will see in the following excerpts, these transitions and embedded segments do indeed help bring the reader's attention and curiosity back to the story, which is, in the end, one of the main goals of creative nonfiction.

In The Art of Creative Nonfiction (1997), Gutkind writes about something called "the yellow test" (33-34), which is one of the ways of finding out whether a text belongs

to creative nonfiction or not. It involved highlighting with a yellow marker all the sections that we believe are scenes (or stories). In the end, we will have more than 75 per cent of the text highlighted in yellow.

Another critical element for Gutkind is perspective (but not the person used in the discourse): personal or private and public or social. The main distinction between the two sides of this pendulum can be understood about the memoir, which is one's particular story and nobody else's. The writer owns every single detail of that story, while the public sphere, with all its complexity and relativity, can be somebody else's story (a particular person's or just the world's). Swinging from one side to the other means that the writer goes from a more significant idea or a theory to exemplifying it using their personal story or vice versa. A good creative nonfiction writer switches from one sphere to the other unnoticeably. Gutkind encourages us to imagine "a pendulum swinging expansively from left to right" (2012: 55), from what we call public—or rather issue-oriented or the big idea of the discourse—and personal. The writer can choose to swing this pendulum fast or moderately and merge the spheres into a seamless mixture. "When that happens," he goes on, "the jazz of creative nonfiction can become a literary symphony" (55).

## 3. Jack Hart's storytelling

As an experiment during an MRI scan, Stephen Hall made up a story in his head to see what area in the brain would light up. It turned out that a small sugar-cube-sized portion of the frontal lobe reacted to what Hall imagined in his mind as a story. Hall called it "the storytelling area" and the brain "a storytelling system" connected to other brain areas—like the visual cortex. This suggests what Jack Hart calls "a biology of story" (2011: 9).

Dan P. McAdams, author of The Redemptive Self, conducted studies about the power of the story and storytelling itself. He concluded that people remember facts easily and for longer when they are part of a story. This is of extreme significance for the creative nonfiction writer, as their objective is to communicate information in a way that would help the reader remember it better and longer. Even more so, people are persuaded more effectively when ideas are presented to them in the form of a story. This, too, suits the needs of creative nonfiction, as, more often than not, writers have something to prove; they have an agenda, and they want the reader to be convinced that what they preach is valid.

Theodore Cheney remarks on the importance of storytelling in creative nonfiction: it is enveloped in emotion. Contemporary nonfiction writers of the highest caliber refrain from dictating to their readers how they ought to approach a given subject,

what sentiments they should harbor, or which emotions they should evoke. Instead, they present the concrete details in a straightforward manner. The reader's mind, to the extent that it has encountered or experienced a similar or identical situation, will be stimulated, and the previous emotional response will be rekindled. Even the most diligent and astute reader may quickly forget the factual content of a piece if it was presented without an emotional context. Cognitive research has demonstrated that humans are most likely to retain information that is delivered in an emotional envelope (1987: 36-37).

Emotion is what connects the writer to the reader. We choose to read creative nonfiction because it is a place where we connect to our voice, not just to art or knowledge, but to someone else's mind. This genre permits writers to acknowledge their beliefs and uncertainties in the first person singular about the world around them (as they see it and think their readers see it). It may be the genre where writers and readers feel most connected (Root and Steinberg 2005).

In an interview with The Washington Square News, Kazuo Ishiguro talks about the future of storytelling as he sees it nowadays, stating that despite the increasing chaos and polarization of our world, narratives possess a positive influence. It is crucial that every era produces authors capable of addressing the contemporary state of affairs. The present reality appears to be characterized by deep-seated divisions. Nevertheless, the act of writing and disseminating stories may serve as a countervailing force against such fragmentation (Wilson 2022). He underlines that stories are not only exchanges of information but also emotions, feelings, and reactions. They teach us how to become more empathetic towards the Other. He also advises us to be aware of emotions used for manipulation: "We have to be careful when we create stories that arouse emotion to make sure that there is some relationship to the truth" and guard ourselves against "emotions that aren't earned" (Wilson 2022). Creative nonfiction does (or instead should do) this most masterfully: using truth to stir up emotions in the reader, not only by enriching their brain with information but also by impacting their lives.

In an interview for Eric Harrison (1998), filmmaker Brian de Palma, who is best known for directing Dressed to Kill (1980) and the first Mission: Impossible (1996), declared that people "don't see the world before their eyes unless it's put in narrative mode". Abbott calls this "narrative consciousness" a "reflex action" (2008: 6-7) that forces our inner eye to visualize the narrative as we take it in. "In reading, your mind automatically sorts out the forward motion of the story" (17), no matter how many flashbacks or flashforwards the author uses. "All stories, like all action […], go in one direction only—forward in time. Narrative discourse, by contrast, can go in any temporal direction its creator chooses" (17). So, we should differentiate—according to what Abbott says—between story and narrative discourse. According to the author, the concept of "narrative" pertains to the depiction of events, which encompasses both the story and the narrative discourse. Conversely, the story refers to a particular event or a

series of events, i.e., the action, while the narrative discourse comprises the representation of said events (19), so it is how we represent the story. While the story always follows a forward motion (because we structure it as such in our minds; we put the events together in chronological order without even realizing we are doing it), the representation can happen in any way the author chooses.

Regarding the journalist's narrative, Abbott writes that we should not forget that it is still highly subjective. "The details we get," he writes, "if not invented, are nonetheless chosen from a great number that were left out. They are privileged details that strongly color how we see the central figure in the journalist's story" (52). And this is not odd, as something in the way Abbott phrases it would make us believe, but quite normal. This was the breakthrough of New Journalism in the twentieth century: the death of journalese. Abbott also tackles the difference between fiction and nonfiction. He argues that narrative nonfiction distinguishes itself from narrative fiction through its referential function. Its primary objective is to accurately convey the truth of factual events, rendering it falsifiable. This genre is also subject to constraints in its ability to affirm claims, particularly in instances where the truth cannot be substantiated, such as the inner thoughts and emotions of historical figures. Consequently, narrative nonfiction is limited in its utilization of narrative devices (2008: 153).

But is it? Fiction and nonfiction indeed differ in terms of their referentiality because nonfiction will always refer to the real world—even if we could say the same thing about fiction, which also conveys some sort of fictional truth or, as Aristotle called it, universal or philosophical truth—but its access to the wide range of narrative devices that fiction uses is not restricted, but perhaps widened. Remember that nonfiction employs meta-narrative devices, such as photographs, scanned documents, interview transcripts, and many others, which also tell a story, so they are narrative in their essence. One of the best examples of this is the true crime creative nonfiction book Zodiac written by Robert Graysmith in 1996, where the writer adds the actual letters, envelopes, and puzzles sent by the Zodiac killer to the police. Naturally, because we know they are authentic, the story is even more impactful. Of course, one could say that fiction can invent such interviews and make documents up. However, they will never be verifiable sources, so their story will have less of an emotional, it-really-happened effect on the readers.

About the story, Jack Hart, another parent of creative nonfiction, says that it has five main parts: exposition, rising action, crisis, climax, and denouement. He creates a visual diagram to represent a narrative arc. The trick is that the creative nonfiction author (Hart calls it "narrative nonfiction" and "nonfiction storytelling") does not always follow this particular order. However, the writer can always use flashbacks and flash-forwards (analepsis and prolepsis)—without dwelling on these intrusive elements that much because then the many details and the overstretched scene might bore and confuse the

reader. “Structure is more visual than logical, a pattern of parts with its own rules for fitting pieces together, and most experienced writers create some sort of visual guide to the assembly of a story” (2011: 22). And this is what Hart, Gutkind, and McPhee (among many others) do. While McPhee creates some doodles, Gutkind creates a chain of scenes, and Hart a diagram which he calls “the narrative arc” (24). It looks as follows (25):

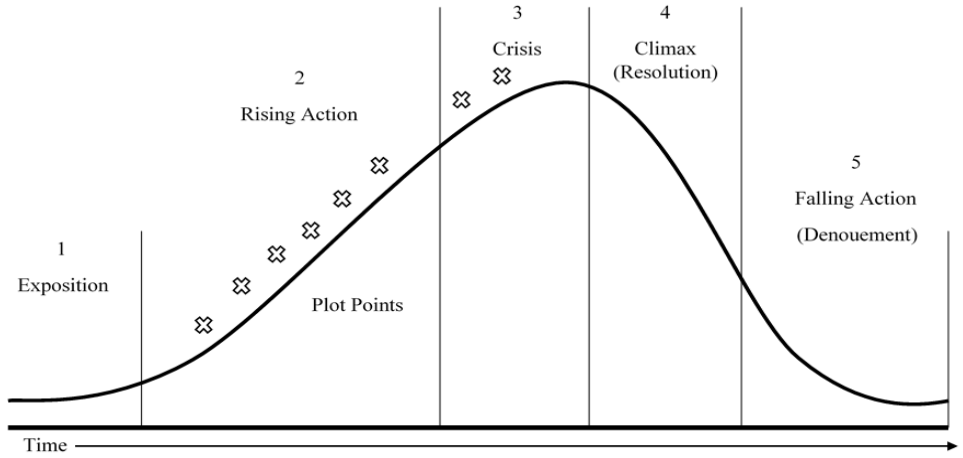


**Fig. 2.** Hart’s narrative arc or the structure of a creative nonfiction story

I do not believe there is much need for an explanation here. As we can see in the diagram, five parts make up Hart’s model of a creative nonfiction story:

(a) Exposition. “The trick to writing a good expository segment,” Hart writes, “is to tell readers what they must understand... and no more” (2011: 26). This means that the exposition must not contain all the background information that the reader can learn throughout the story, but only those elements that create a clean and clear path forward. The exposition must grab the reader’s attention; that cannot happen if the writer dumps all the background information available about the main characters and the scenery they are in or the actions they performed before ending up at this starting point of the story. This would resemble a thorough reportage that might overwhelm—and in the end, bore—the reader.

(b) Rising action. After the writer gets the reader’s attention, this is the phase in which he/she must now preserve this curiosity, and we can see in the diagram that this can be done by adding multiple plot points and also a portion of the narrative when hope, mystery, and suspense rise and fall. Next to the plot points, we might as well add explanatory narratives, which Hart describes as “digressions” and “the key to making an explanatory narrative work”: “Every once in a while, the writer stops the action, just pulls the curtains, an abstract explanation that gives depth and meaning to what the reader’s been witnessing in the narrative” (186)—what Gutkind calls embedded

information in his visual structure. And while the action happens lower on the ladder of what is abstract, the explanation is way up there, where meanings reside. Hart offers an outline for explanatory narratives, similar to Gutkind's visual representation of a narrative frame:

**Table.3**: Gutkind's visual representation of a narrative frame

| **Narrative Opening Scene** |
|---|
| Digression 1 |
| Narrative Scene 2 |
| Digression 2 |
| Narrative Scene 3 |
| Digression 3 |
| Narrative Scene 4 |
| Digression 4 |
| Narrative Scene 5 |
| Digression 5 |
| Narrative Scene 6 |
| Digression 6 |
| Narrative Closing Scene |

He also came up with "the 3+2 explainer" (194), which is "a structure containing three narrative scenes separated by two digressions" (194).

**Table:4** Gutkind's 3+2 explainer

| **Narrative 1: Introduce the lead character and pose the explanatory question.** |
|---|
| **Digression 1:** Provide the necessary background and overall context. |
| **Narrative 2:** Follow the lead character through the main body of the action line. |
| Digression 2: Complete the explanation |
| **Narrative 3:** Bring the action line to a logical stopping place. |

This structure is supposed to create a rhythmical reading of what the writer wants to communicate to the readers; the change is good because it robs us of the opportunity of getting bored and leaving the text alone. What Hart calls explanatory narrative, I believe, can measure up to what Roland Barthes (1982: 295-296) called "*noyaux*" (nuclei) and "*catalyses*" (catalyzers). In fiction, they represent constitutive events, but in nonfiction, they are pieces of information that help the story move forward. Better yet, they help the reader move forward with the story because the latter could only have a forward direction, but the reader might stop, ponder, and learn more about the event, thus creating tension and curiosity for the text that it yet to come.

(c) Climax. This is the point in the story where the crisis is the highest. Generally, the climax should be a surprise for the readers as well as for the characters (Bailey 1913). In a book about the structure of stories, McKee argues that the moments of climax should be "culminating" and "the most gratifying, meaningful experiences of all" (1997: 108). Ziegler defines it as "the turning point in the short story, the novel, and the play; the place at which the rising action starts to fall. Usually, but not always, it is the high point of interest" (1975: 127). Moreover, Hart himself writes that "good little complications make for good little stories" (2011: 13). There can be multiple climax moments throughout a piece of writing that contains more than one story (such as a memoir or an autobiography, which are usually made of multiple storylines). Gutkind writes that "stories (scenes) are elastic" (2012: 227) in the sense that they can be stretched out so that "the reader is tantalized with heightening suspense as the writer goes off on related tangents" (227). The importance of the climax is crucial: a weak climax might just as well erase all the elements of the story so far. On the contrary, a strong—or unexpected—climax might salvage what could have been a mediocre story.

(d) Denouement. "Intensity fades. The pace slows. Things wind down" (Hart 2011: 38). This is the phase that lets the reader breathe and answer the questions that arise during the rest of the narrative arc. Now, things have become clear. But the narrative nonfiction writer usually employs a "kicker": a short sentence or paragraph that sums things up, surprises a little, and leaves no doubt that this is the end of the story. Like comedy, where the punchline is what we remember after the show, creative nonfiction wants to leave with a strong ending (just like the opening might have been, thus bringing everything back home, full circle).

Sometimes, the writer can start the story with the crisis and skip right over the expository segment; this is what the Roman poet Horace calls *in media res* (or in the middle of things)—the other way to begin a story would be ab initio (from the initial point, so from the logical and chronological beginning). However, the above diagram does not dictate the strict and unchangeable order of the parts of a story. The writer is free to add flashbacks, go back and forth in time, stop, add extra information relevant to the plot, and so on. For instance, Hart adapted the diagram to the *in media res* style, and it looks as follows (2011: 35):

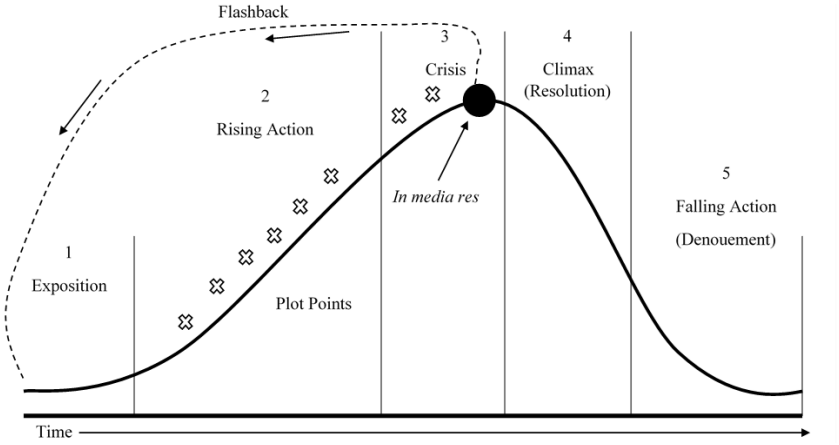


**Fig. 5.** Hart's narrative arc of the structure of a creative nonfiction story —an in media res opening

The writer can "jump around the arc in any number of ways, using flashbacks or flash-forwards," writes Hart (2011: 34), so the plot does not have to follow the strictness implied by the narrative arc model. However, he also advises writers to use the KISS principle he learnt in the Army (Keep It Simple, Stupid). The creative nonfiction writer should not get lost in extended and complicated flashbacks and flash-forwards because this might confuse the reader and tangle the main narrative arc in such a way that one might not be able to untangle it right before the climax and the denouement.

James Phelan writes in a contemporary book about narrative theory that "texts are designed by authors in order to affect readers in particular ways" (2006: 300). We should not believe that creative nonfiction writers do not have an agenda—however "Doctor Evil" this word might sound to us—and a premade structure. The organic (or the natural) structure is often put aside; this is neither good nor bad. It is solely a new way of treating the pile of information you want to convey in a preestablished frame. As it happens, these writers employ the rhetorical approach to narratives, which is a "purposive communicative act" (300). Neumann and Nünning (2008) agree that the communicative perspective means that through the narrative fiction—or in our case, nonfiction—the medium of the text offers an excellent opportunity for interaction between the Author and the Reader. Seen from a different angle, the fundamental elements of a story can be—as Kidder and Todd (2013) claim—proportion and order. Controlling proportion is an art because it is designed to make certain elements less essential and others crucial. It also creates a foreground and background and makes readers feel what the place of certain characters, events, and ideas is.

Back to Jack Hart and his contribution to the literature about creative nonfiction. He calls it "true-life storytelling," "nonfiction storytelling," and "narrative nonfiction" (2011:1-2). As we can see, stories hold a very dear place to him in this narrative puzzle

that is creative nonfiction. He also touches on the problem of truth and reality and writes that he does not believe that "the source" of the true-life story matters as much as "how well it was told" (2011: 5). In this aspect, he resembles D'Agata (2012), who justifies changing some facts in the story for the sake of the artfulness of it; as opposed to Gutkind, who places truth on the pedestal.

Another important aspect that Hart discusses is the point of view, which can dictate the depth at which we are allowed to go find out what happens in the subject's mind (whether it is us or someone else) and from what angle we can watch the event unfold. The first-person POV means using the memoir voice (Rubie 1996, 2003): the author tells us what they see, smell, hear, feel, and taste in a kind of intimacy that creates a special bond between the writer and the reader. The second-person POV is rarer but can be included in the story as a literary or stylistic device or a direct address. In this latter case, I consider it to be a case of breaking the fourth wall (not always, though) when the author stops the scene just to ask the reader a question or to make sure we are paying attention to the story. The third-person POV (as Truman Capote demonstrates in In Cold Blood) offers many possibilities. While the first-person point of view often limits us to the author's perspective, the third-person POV allows us to turn into a camera and watch the action unfold from within (as well as from outside) the subjects. This perspective has three options: the dramatic point of view, as Philip Gerard (1996) calls it—it offers us an external reality unbothered by digressions; "readers experience the story as any onlooker would", writes Hart about this option (2011: 48); the third-person limited point of view is similar to the first option in that it also describes the external reality, but this time we get to experience it from the POV of the subjects, while also going into their minds and learning what they think; the third-person omniscient point of view allows us to "gaze down at the whole of creation" (Hart 2011:48), similar to a god who perceives everything at once and is allowed to pass through any mind fortress belonging to any subject. These three types of POV (first person, second person, and third person) each have a purpose in the story; they can be all used in the same story (the writer can switch between these three as he or she pleases), and this choice also dictates the camera angle from which the reader watches everything.

Also, what Gutkind calls "the pendulum" which swings from the private sphere to the public one, creating a literary symphony, Hart describes as a "summary and scenic narrative" (2011: 58):

**Table 6**: Gutkind's summary versus scenery narrative

| Summary Narrative | Scenic Narrative |
|---|---|
| Abstract | Concrete |
| Reaches across Space | Unfolds in One Place |
| Collapses Time | Seems to Happen in Real Time |
| Employs Direct Quotations | Employs Dialogue |
| Organized Topically | Organized Scenically |
| Omniscient Point of View | Specific Point of View |
| Deals with Outcomes | Deals with Process |
| Conveys Information | Reproduces Experience |

Naturally, most creative nonfiction writers choose and combine traits from both universes, as Gutkind (2012) says when he talks about the pendulum constantly swinging from the private to the public side: the writer can use the first person POV and at the same time discuss information that concerns the general public; also, they can employ dialogue and, two paragraphs later, use quotations to introduce a scientifically proven or a historical reference that supports the arguments presented up to that point in the story. Contrary to the "show, don't tell" motto, creative nonfiction authors can do both simultaneously.

In an interview for *Etude* (Radostitz 2003), Ted Conover—an ethnographer who crossed the border illegally for *Coyotes* (1987) and got a job as a correctional officer when he wrote *Newjack: Guardian Sing Sing* (2000), admitted that he found a balance between writing about his surroundings and also about himself. The author expresses that his writing centers around his subjective experiences, yet he does not intend for his work to revolve solely around himself. He acknowledges the vastness of the world and believes that there are more captivating subjects to explore beyond his own life. However, he recognizes that his encounters in unfamiliar territories serve as a means to engage readers. Specifically, he notes that it can be challenging to entice the average reader to delve into topics such as prison or illegal immigration due to their unpleasant connotations. Therefore, he assumes the role of a tour guide, utilizing his voice to provide readers with an entry point into these worlds.

So, the personal sphere is just an open door to a more significant public issue. While telling us about his experience in the world of immigration and prisons, Conover is—as he says—a "tour guide" willing to turn into a vessel for the story's sake. This is what Hart calls immersion, favored by modern writers whose approach is rather ethnographic: "like an anthropologist, they visit a culture, immerse themselves in it, and then describe it for the folks back home" (2011: 65). This way, "they avoid academese and let their personal voices come through" (65). And this brings us to the matter of language.

Academese or journalese or "the institutional voice" is a "swamp of passive voice, stilted vocabulary, indirect syntax, and weak verbs" (65), which Hart does not like in the least in creative nonfiction. This can be recognized as long and complicated sentences that are not balanced by short ones, lengthy introductory phrases that might bore the reader, and impersonal tone—all seen as clichés by Hart and are subsequently replaced with "something fresh" (73). Figurative language, for instance (when used sparingly), acts like embroidery on "the cloak of style" (72). The texture is another outcome of using language consciously. Some elements contrast to create a rich experience for the reader, who now does not see only sameness in the narrative landscape. Focusing on key details and using verbs that signify action to push the story forward (such as "jerk," "lurch," or "fly") gets the reader out of the exposition and into the narrative. Hart even indirectly suggests not using too many linking verbs because they do not suggest action—and "narrative hinges on action" (113). Naturally, this does not mean that every writer must obediently follow this specific set of rules; they should bring humanity. Do you remember what Conover writes about him being "a tour guide" in his books? Let us imagine that the city we visit is the same but that we are, in turn, accompanied by three different guides on three different days. Is it not true that our experience will differ with each of them, even if what we see with our eyes is still the same as the previous day or the day yet to come? Hart advocates for writers to adhere to the following principles: when embarking on a journey through the real world, readers seek a guide who possesses both authority and expertise. Furthermore, if the journey is extensive, readers desire a companion who is personable and capable of infusing the experience with a sense of humanity. So, language should be something personal. No tour guide will describe the city the same—unless they are not authentic—and each will add their "flavor" to the mix because it is not the writer himself that comes through when we read something, but the writer's voice.

And this brings us to another element that Hart adds to the creative nonfiction landscape: the protagonist. "Great narratives rest on the three legs of character, action, and scene," Hart argues, "and character comes first because it drives the other two" (76). Now, we get a glimpse of the protagonist with the help of characterization, which Janet Burroway (2019) says divides into two categories: indirect characterization (which is the commentary offered by the writer) and direct characterization (the writer lets the character's persona speak for itself). About this second method, Hart writes that the "additional layer of careful reporting" leads the reader to "inevitable conclusions" about the character described by the author (2011: 82). Because this is what creative nonfiction brings to the table: writers do not create the character but report it, and what they report are what Wolfe called status life symbols. According to Hart, the concept of "status indicators" (84) should not be regarded as a groundbreaking idea, as humans are inherently social creatures who have evolved to survive in small, vulnerable communities of hunter-gatherers by accurately assessing their position in the social

hierarchy (85). However, humans are the sum of their behaviors, values, and possessions; we see them as distinctive because we attribute to them different status life symbols, so, of course, we are going to read into the way a person walks, talks, and dresses, or into the way they connect to other people in their lives, and this inevitably leads to a particular judgement. The same happens in creative nonfiction: the writer only reports what he/she sees, and the readers fill in the blanks with their judgement. At the other end of the line, we have what Hart calls "ghosts, transparent images that shimmer faintly in the air" (76); these characters help drive the action forward, devices used to get the point across. Even if they "reveal only the faintest outline of a complete human being" (76), they are beautiful ways for the reader to complete the story's puzzle without ever leaving the main intended road. And this road leads to one thing only: the understanding of the world. Hart is evident in his explanations of the purpose of creative nonfiction. Its potency is evident when we perceive its ability to divulge the secrets of prosperous living by demonstrating how our fellow human beings overcome the obstacles that we all encounter. This discernment may be deemed as the writer's most valuable contribution, as it justifies the arduous labor, vexation, and upheaval that accompany an earnest endeavor to identify the patterns that characterize our shared experiences (240). Because the writer takes a stab at reality, we do too. Whatever they experience, we do too. And we cannot deny that this does not enrich our view of the world. Creative nonfiction's—not necessarily "moral" but—higher purpose is to help us all cope with this challenging world. And just as we might not get everything absolutely right or we will never find an absolute truth about anything, it is still a step forward on a shaky bridge.

According to Theodore Cheney, a skilled creative nonfiction writer serves as a mentor and guide to their readers. They have the ability to educate and inform through their writing, imparting valuable knowledge and insights on a variety of subjects. Their words have the power to inspire and enlighten, encouraging readers to see the world in a new light and perhaps even prompting them to take action. Ultimately, a successful creative nonfiction writer is a teacher at heart, using their craft to empower and uplift those who read their work. Cheney (2001) argues that creative nonfiction is a genre of writing that employs factual information while utilizing various techniques commonly associated with fiction to create a compelling and emotionally vibrant narrative. Rather than simply presenting information, creative nonfiction aims to engage the reader on a deeper level, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. To achieve this, creative nonfiction writers must possess both the skills of a storyteller and the research abilities of a conscientious reporter. In addition to accurately reporting facts through the use of quotes, they must also delve beyond the surface level to uncover the underlying meaning of the information and present it in an interesting, evocative, and informative manner, much like a skilled teacher would.

Besides being a tour guide, the creative nonfiction writer is also a teacher because a significant part of writing in this genre is excellent storytelling skills, which readers recognize because of the existing patterns. As Bret Lott puts it, "because we are human beings, as such we are pattern makers, a species desirous of order", so when we look back at our lives in order to find that order, it "must not be an effort to reorder our lives as we want them to be seen" (2000: 193), but to understand what happened, however chaotic the order may seem. Moreover, creative nonfiction allows us to try and "divine from what we have done, who we have known, what we have dreamt and how we have failed" (193). Lott emphasizes order and chaos and their peaceful yet paradoxical coexistence. Structure, as it is in creative nonfiction, is neatly calculated—if not from the beginning, then later, during the editing stage. Just like Gutkind and Hart show us, structure plays a crucial part in designing and building the rollercoaster that the reader will ride in an attempt to reach the end of the story.

Wanting to define creative nonfiction, Bret Lott gives us some of its traits: "Creative nonfiction cannot be self-serving" (2000: 196). It must serve a higher purpose and create a bridge between the writers and those they address, regardless of the topic. This connects very well to what Philip Lopate writes about the personal essay (the branch of the tree that is creative nonfiction today): "the enemy of the personal essay is self-righteousness, not just because it is tiresome and ugly in itself, but because it slows down the dialectic of self-questioning, what Cioran calls 'thinking against oneself'" (1994: xxx). Near the end of his essay, Lott reaches a final definition of creative nonfiction: "a desire not to let slip altogether away our life as we have known it; to put an order, for better and worse, to our days" (2000: 198) and the desire to keep on questioning any kind of truth we might reach in the process.

In other words, to write creative nonfiction, the author has to present their life while also making order out of chaos, without only doing it for themselves, but for a bigger purpose, constantly questioning themselves and the world around them, continuing to discover themselves as if their life were a continent and they were its first explorer. The purpose of creative nonfiction, besides not boring the readers and entertainingly offering information, is "[the] responsibility to answer for and to ourselves" (200) while admitting and accepting that the truth I, as an author, write about, "will finally and always and only be my truth" (200). As Virginia Woolf put it: the "backbone" of writing is in "some fierce attachment to an idea" (1992: 40-49). If you have nothing to say, you cannot write creative nonfiction.

Norma Tilden (2004), in an article, highlights several key features of creative nonfiction while simultaneously lauding the literary prowess of Joan Didion, a prominent creative nonfiction writer of the twentieth century. Tilden notes that creative nonfiction often begins with memoirs before transitioning into essays, though many works never make this transition. Furthermore, creative nonfiction typically revolves

around an idiosyncratic story and is always in pursuit of some manner of understanding or revelation. Finally, Tilden likens creative nonfiction to a literary form of thrifting, as the stories presented are never entirely one's own but instead are pieced together from various sources. Tilden's markers sum up what almost all creative nonfiction authors have been writing about their art: they are trying to write about their own experience by presenting their version of the truth and constantly questioning things while also minding the fact that it will reach other people as well, so they must choose a style that is not boring in order to present ordinary facts so that they seem eccentric and unique.

## 4. Conclusions

The genre of creative nonfiction is a hybrid of fiction and nonfiction, incorporating elements from both to produce a unique and captivating form of literature. It provides authors with a platform to engage with readers on a more personal level, enabling them to express their thoughts and experiences candidly. For authors seeking to promote a particular message, creative nonfiction can serve as a powerful manifesto, particularly for those in the death-positive movement (to be discussed in the next chapter).

Creative nonfiction is a literary genre that encompasses a wide range of writing styles. Often referred to as the fourth genre, creative nonfiction includes memoirs, personal essays, biography, narrative history, and long-form narrative reportage. In recent years, the genre has expanded to include offshoots such as speculative nonfiction, auto(biographical) fiction, lyric essay, and visual essay. Despite the diversity of writers who produce creative nonfiction, they share a common goal of presenting true stories that offer insights into a variety of subjects. To achieve this, writers provide relevant information, thoughtful ideas, and personal insights that offer intimate perspectives on life and the world we inhabit. This breadth of scope and variety is what makes creative nonfiction such a significant and popular genre today.

The shift towards a more creative and imaginative nonfiction genre was not an immediate one and was met with resistance and conflict from literary, journalistic, and academic communities. This was primarily due to their traditional and conservative approach that had long resisted change. However, the change itself was not drastic and had already been witnessed in the works of well-known writers such as Daniel Defoe, George Orwell, and Charles Dickens for centuries. What changed was the approach and attitude towards nonfiction, with creative and nonfiction being considered non-mutually exclusive. This change is still ongoing, with the scope of nonfiction, particularly creative nonfiction, continuously evolving to provide accurate, captivating, revealing, and always surprising stories.

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