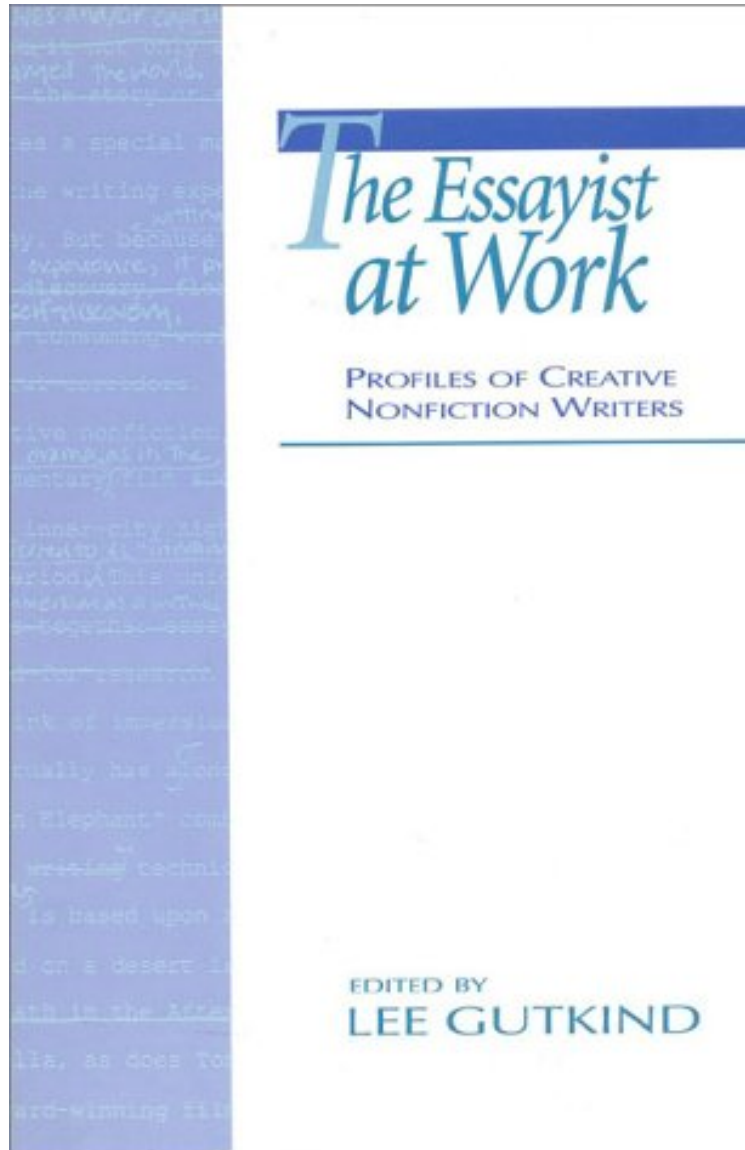


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## The Essayist at Work: Profiles of Creative Nonfiction Writers

*From Heinemann Drama*

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**From Heinemann Drama : The Essayist at Work: Profiles of Creative Nonfiction Writers** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Essayist at Work: Profiles of Creative Nonfiction Writers:

27 of 29 people found the following review helpful. Inspirational Practical Exploration of Creative Nonfiction By Tara N. Mahady Compiled by the founder and editor of the journal, Creative Nonfiction, this book is a must-read for any writer interested in the practical and theoretical aspects of writing creative nonfiction. The anthology offers a diversity

of contemporary literary voices ranging from John McPhee to Terry Tempest Williams. Although the writers profiled have sometimes conflicting opinions about the role of the essay in society or the way in which it should be written or approached, they are all passionate about and intimate with the form. Each writer discusses their process of creating an essay, offering personal and candid experiences that provide a great deal of guidance and support. Through reading this book, my understanding of the form expanded and deepened, as did my patience with my own writing practice.

New insight into the lifestyles, techniques, and literary philosophies of some of the genre's most respected writers, including Annie Dillard, John McPhee, and others.

.com As is typically the case with anthologies, the quality of the writing in *The Essayist at Work* varies significantly. But the many fine essays--by the likes of Annie Dillard, Gay Talese, and Tracy Kidder--far outweigh the few that seem to limp along. Lee Gutkind, the book's editor, is an English professor at the University of Pittsburgh and a seemingly tireless proponent of the burgeoning field of creative nonfiction; most of the essays included here are reprinted from the journal *Creative Nonfiction*, which he edits. In the book's introduction, Gutkind addresses the differences between creative nonfiction and other types of writing. "In creative nonfiction," he says, "writers can be poetic and journalistic simultaneously." In journalistic prose, the writer is invisible; in creative nonfiction, says Gutkind, "a writer's feelings and responses about a subject are permitted and encouraged." One of the more illuminating pieces in *The Essayist at Work* is Michael Pearson's interview with John McPhee, a master of the essay form. According to Gutkind, it is the use of the intimate detail that sets creative nonfiction apart, and McPhee, says Pearson, "is a lover of small details." He has also been described as having "total recall," which is partly why, perhaps, he discourages Pearson's use of a tape recorder during their interview. But the main reason he disdains the tape recorder, McPhee says, is that "you'll get a better story without [it].... Writing is selection. It's better to start choosing right here and right now." While writing fiction is a process of invention, writing nonfiction is one of discovery, and part of its allure, as McPhee says, is that "nonfiction writers go out not knowing what to expect." McPhee likens the nonfiction writer to "a cook foraging for materials.... In many ways, like a cook, you're only as good as your materials." That may well be, but where one cook sees a funky fungus another may see a prized wild mushroom; and a mediocre cook with fabulous materials will still turn out a mediocre meal. It helps, as a nonfiction writer, to come upon a good story, and then it helps to be John McPhee to make it a compelling one. --Jane Steinberg  
From *Library Journal*  
This exciting compilation gives readers a look at major nonfiction writers and their craft. Creative nonfiction as a form involves telling the truth as the author sees it. Not always the easiest path to follow, but one which, when many of these writers discovered it, became their passion. Writers could look here for ways to improve their own writing as well as for inspiration from the likes of Gay Talese, Ellen Gilchrist, and Tracy Kidder. Scott Chisholm's piece on William Least Heat Moon is, by itself, worth the price of the book. Annie Dillard's essay, "Schedules," is a wonderful look at how she works as well as what it means to live by a schedule. The writing in this book is even and thoughtful as well as thought-provoking. This should be used as an introduction to the essay form in high school and college English classes. Highly recommended for all libraries. ?Lisa J. Cihlar, Monroe P.L., Wis. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.