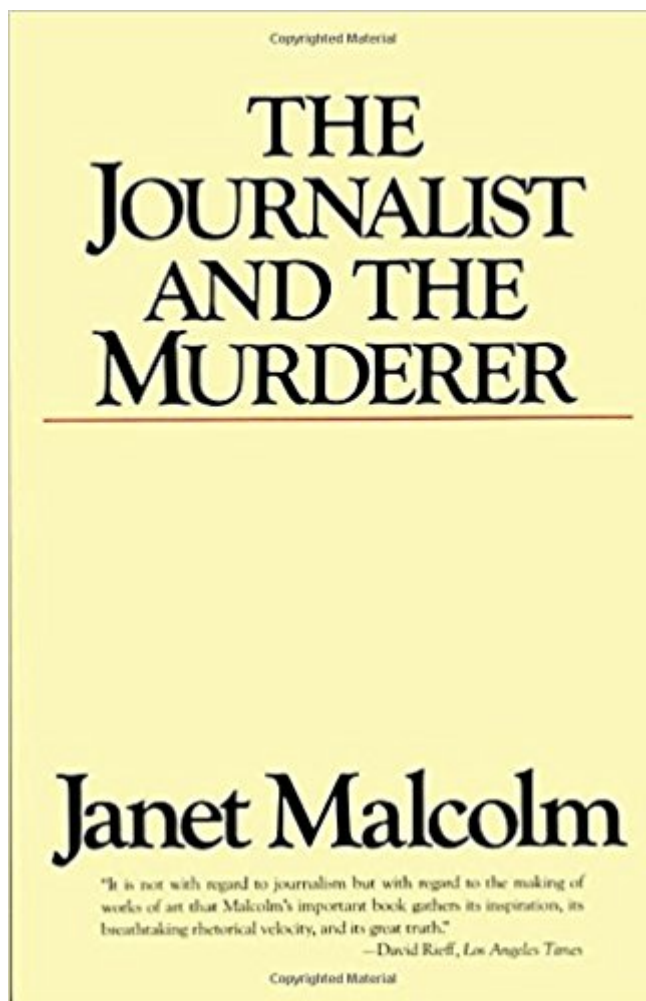


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# The Journalist And The Murderer



## Synopsis

A seminal work and examination of the psychopathology of journalism. Using a strange and unprecedented lawsuit as her larger-than-life example -- the lawsuit of Jeffrey MacDonald, a convicted murderer, against Joe McGinniss, the author of *Fatal Vision*, a book about the crime -- she delves into the always uneasy, sometimes tragic relationship that exists between journalist and subject. In Malcolm's view, neither journalist nor subject can avoid the moral impasse that is built into the journalistic situation. When the text first appeared, as a two-part article in *The New Yorker*, its thesis seemed so radical and its irony so pitiless that journalists across the country reacted as if stung. Her book is a work of journalism as well as an essay on journalism: it at once exemplifies and dissects its subject. In her interviews with the leading and subsidiary characters in the MacDonald-McGinniss case -- the principals, their lawyers, the members of the jury, and the various persons who testified as expert witnesses at the trial -- Malcolm is always aware of herself as a player in a game that, as she points out, she cannot lose. The journalist-subject encounter has always troubled journalists, but never before has it been looked at so unflinchingly and so ruefully. Hovering over the narrative -- and always on the edge of the reader's consciousness -- is the MacDonald murder case itself, which imparts to the book an atmosphere of anxiety and uncanniness. *The Journalist and the Murderer* derives from and reflects many of the dominant intellectual concerns of our time, and it will have a particular appeal for those who cherish the odd, the off-center, and the unsolved.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In a work that sparked controversy when it first appeared in the New Yorker, Malcolm suggests that journalist Joe McGinniss may have betrayed convicted murderer Jeffrey MacDonald in McGinniss's bestselling book *Fatal Vision*. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Every journalist is "a kind of confidence man . . . gaining . . . trust and betraying . . . without remorse," says Malcolm. This is an expanded and reworked version of Malcolm's New Yorker essay on the "psychopathology" of the journalist/subject relationship, sparked by Jeffrey MacDonald's libel suit against *Fatal Vision* author Joe McGinniss. Even nonjournalists will be fascinated by Malcolm's discussion of the still puzzling MacDonald case; McGinniss's rather two-faced missives to the imprisoned MacDonald; and Joseph Wambaugh's libel trial testimony about journalistic "untruths." In an afterword, Malcolm comments on the heated debate her essay invoked in the journalism community, and concludes that, like it or not, every journalist must, to some degree, tussle with this ethical dilemma. An elegantly written, thought-provoking, and sometimes outrageous essay that should be in every media collection.-Judy Quinn, "Library Journal"Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An interesting essay on journalistic ethics. However, reading the rebuttal that McGinniss has appended to the newest edition of "Fatal Vision" the argument could be made that Janet Malcolm also played fast and loose with her reporting of the MacDonald v. McGinniss lawsuit. Given her scant attention to the facts of the MacDonald murder case, you could get the impression from this book that MacDonald is innocent of the murder of his wife and daughters when in fact the evidence is overwhelmingly against MacDonald. A good read, but you need to read McGinniss' rebuttal to make a fair assessment.

Amazing book. The author explores the behaviour of a journalist who ingratiated himself into the life of a man (a doctor) on trial (and convicted) for murdering his wife. The journalist misrepresented himself to the doctor as being a supporter of his innocence; but actually fussed and exploited what he learned to write a book completely crucifying the doctor. Malcolm's book looks at the ethics of what the journalist did. This book is incredibly compelling and fascinating. Highly recommend!

The Journalist and the Murderer is really a must-read for aspiring journalists, and writers, and anyone interested in what goes into postmodern character development. Malcolm - with whom I disagree, as a human - asserts that there is a cynical and manipulative relationship that governs all interactions between interviewer and interviewed, and to ignore this is to either be disingenuous or naive. The story follows how she came to conclude that journalist and author Joe MacGuinness was a jerk, and the subject of a book of his, a convicted mass murderer, was innocent. The book makes for compelling reading. It's well written. It examines terrifically interesting topics from an interesting perspective. Paradoxically, it espouses and falls victim to many of the very biases and assertions that Malcolm herself describes as bad, or in poor taste, and, ultimately, one is left with the sense that she doesn't like herself very much.

Malcolm seems to have an ax to grind.

I found this to book by Janet Malcolm to be a fascinating read, especially for anyone interested in journalism and the relationship between journalist and subject. Using the murder case of Jeffrey MacDonald as a backdrop, Malcolm looks at the unethical deal Joe McGinniss made for exclusive access to MacDonald to write his book. The initial murder case is overshadowed by a case of fraud and Malcolm suggests that McGinniss is guilty of misleading MacDonald. How do we make sure journalists remain ethical in their reporting. Does Malcolm give us all the facts? Is she herself participating in the very thing she accuses McGinniss of? This book left me with many questions.

Malcolm is at her best when she gets under the surface of her subject, and she her writing, insight and perceptions are brilliant in this particular arena. She brings light to often neglected issues of honesty, intent and outcome in reporting. Joe McGinniss fell into that murky area of journalism while deceiving Jeffrey McDonald because he needed to guarantee a financial success for his publisher and himself. This ruse may have cost him his integrity and literary career. I purchased his book immediately after reading Malcolm's criticism, needing to see the book myself before reaching a final conclusion. This is not an easy subject, nor is McDonald a sympathetic character. Janet Malcolm exposes the amazing and elaborate deception used by McGinniss to trap and crucify his subject. Her investigation into this relationship is so brilliant that you're hooked from the beginning!

Written in the style of a journalist, it's an interesting "meta" journalistic style of novel. She has a

refreshing writing style that is precise and thoughtful , every word exactly where it should be. And, did I mention that her subject matter is fascinating too?

One of my favorite books ever written. Malcolm is a force of journalistic nature. This woman has a timeless perspective and I'd love to meet her someday.

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