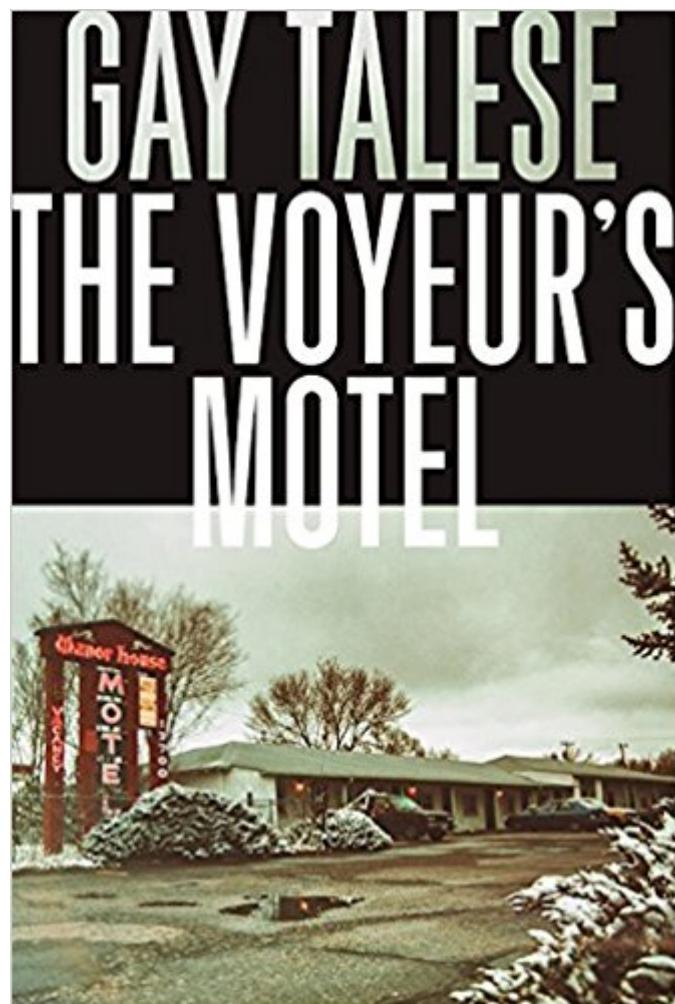


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The Voyeur's Motel



Synopsis

On January 7, 1980, in the run-up to the publication of his landmark bestseller *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, Gay Talese received an anonymous letter from a man in Colorado. "Since learning of your long awaited study of coast-to-coast sex in America," the letter began, "I feel I have important information that I could contribute to its contents or to contents of a future book." The man went on to tell Talese an astonishing secret, that he had bought a motel to satisfy his voyeuristic desires. He had built an attic observation platform, fitted with vents, through which he could peer down on his unwitting guests. Unsure what to make of this confession, Talese traveled to Colorado where he met the man, Gerald Foos, verified his story in person, and read some of his extensive journals, a secret record of America's changing social and sexual mores. But because Foos insisted on remaining anonymous, Talese filed his reporting away, assuming the story would remain untold. Now, after thirty-five years, he is ready to go public and Talese can finally tell his story. *The Voyeur's Motel* is an extraordinary work of narrative journalism, and one of the most talked about books of the year.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Praise for *The Voyeur's Motel*: Named a Best Book of the Year by the Daily Mail (Event Critics' Selection) "This book flipped nearly all of my switches as a reader. It's a strange, melancholy, morally complex, grainy, often appalling and sometimes bleakly funny book, one that casts a spell not dissimilar to that cast by Janet Malcolm's *The*

Journalist and the Murderer . . . Gripping . . . [Talese] lays out what he knows and does not know in sentences that are as crisp as good Windsor knots. He expresses his qualms, but trusts the reader to come to his or her own conclusions . . . An intense book. —Dwight Garner, *New York Times* —“Informative and intriguing . . . [I] was enlightened and entertained by *The Voyeur*.” Motel. —“Washington Post” —“This is a weird book about weird people doing weird things, and I wouldn’t have put it down if the house were on fire.” —“Washington Times” —“Whether Gerald Foos is telling the complete truth is almost beside the point. The Voyeur is so fascinating a character —insightful, observant and amoral— that the reader becomes caught up in his story.” —“Providence Journal” —“If you’ve ever wanted your inner voyeur to run free, vicariously at least, then *The Voyeur* is for you . . . Motel delves deeply into the taboo world with no holds barred and no excuses . . . The type of unflinching New Journalism that Talese helped found three decades ago.” —“Jackson Clarion Ledger” —“Pioneering reporter Gay Talese tells the ultimate surveillance story in *The Voyeur*. . . . Talese is a master of elegant, understated prose —uses an objective reportorial style to tell the voyeur’s story, and it’s the right approach for a narrative that requires no extra spice . . . An unforgettable book.” —“BookPage” —“Foos [is revealed] as a singularly pervy, grandiose, and strangely eloquent weirdo who would be irresistible to any writer, let alone one as talented, patient, and thoughtful as Talese . . . Those seeking a uniquely discomfiting journey couldn’t find a better pair of reprobates with whom to cast their lot.” —“Booklist” —“Undoubtedly creepy and unnerving but also an entirely compelling slice of seamy American life.” —“Kirkus Reviews” (starred review) —“[A] truly shocking story . . . Not your typical beach book, perhaps, but you may want to read this compulsive page-turner —which raises all sorts of fascinating journalistic, moral and legal issues —under cover of an umbrella.” —“Barnes & Noble Review” —“A provocative and compelling story.” —“Midwest Book Review” —“Talese is a master at finding and reporting intimate matters in a clean, fine prose style so that the pages fly by. Thus the odd subject of Talese’s book is transparently manifest, without a biased or judgmental eye, all the better to reveal what Foos has done.” —“Psychodynamic Psychiatry” —“An unsettling read . . . Foos’s notes offer a long-term glimpse into the sex lives of Americans.” —“Maclean’s” (Canada) —“The Voyeur’s Motel . . . had me hooked . . . It’s an unsettling book, like being trapped in a hall of mirrors. The

reader observes Talese observing Foos observing his guests. It might make you lose your bearings, but at the same time it's completely mesmerising, and often darkly funny, too. The Daily Mail (UK) (Event Critics' Best Books of the Year) "An eye-popping book . . . Completely riveting from start to finish . . . Darkly comical . . . It is by turns fascinating and illuminating, very creepy and very funny, and will live in my memory long after many more doggedly accurate works have vanished into thin air." The Mail on Sunday (UK) "A riveting page-turner . . . Short and brisk, it tells a compellingly sordid story, and Foos is one fascinating dude . . . The book is compulsively readable." The Winnipeg Free Press

Gay Talese was born in Ocean City, New Jersey, in 1932, to Italian immigrant parents. He attended the University of Alabama, and after graduating was hired as a copyboy at the New York Times. After a brief stint in the army, Talese returned to the New York Times in 1956. Since then he has written for numerous publications, including Esquire, the New Yorker, Newsweek, and Harper's Magazine. It was these articles that led Tom Wolfe to credit Gay Talese with the creation of an inventive form of nonfiction writing called "The New Journalism." Talese's bestselling books have dealt with the history and influence of the New York Times (The Kingdom and the Power); the inside story of a Mafia family (Honor Thy Father); his father's immigration to America from Italy in the years preceding World War II (Unto the Sons); and the changing moral values of America in the period between World War II and the AIDS epidemic (Thy Neighbor's Wife). Gay Talese lives with his wife, Nan, in New York City.

Gay Talese doesn't have a cold, but he is badly slipping. This is a book that never should have been written by a major author, let alone published by a major publishing house. It is well beneath Talese's previous works of narrative nonfiction. It is a story that held up at magazine length, but not at book length. It is a lazy use of the author's talents. He gives over at least one-third of the book (maybe more) to the ramblings from the journal of his voyeur subject, who is no Gay Talese when it comes to writing. After a few pages, enough is enough. Also, the research raised some serious questions. For starters, Talese admits that property records show the man didn't buy the motel until three years AFTER he said he started looking through ceiling peepholes. Talese passes over that as if it doesn't matter. It DOES matter. Also, Talese could not nail down that the murder the voyeur claimed to have witnessed in one room even happened! None of the police agencies had a homicide case for that date, open or closed. Hello! Aren't these some red flags waving that should

have made Talese question the validity of the voyeur's story? Finally, this guy admits he wants publicity to help sell his multi-million sports card collection. That's called motive; motive to deceive. Still, Talese plowed on, telling this guy's questionable story that even if it was all true got very uninteresting; enough to ruin some damn fine fantasies. In short, this is the story about a Voyeur Masturbator told by a once huge talent who has sadly become a Literary Masturbator.

If you read the New Yorker article, you already got 90% of the story. It's basically a repetitive version of that article with a few additional anecdotes sprinkled in. I was hoping for a more thorough exploration of Foos' psychology as well as some additional historical and social context, but they were nowhere to be found. Avoid.

Gay Talese, author of two of my favorite books, *THY NEIGHBOR* and *WIFE* and *HONOR THY FATHER*, has polished off a tawdry short piece of sexual sociology with *THE VOYEUR* and *MOTEL*. Talese's piece is fifty years in the making, but was first published this spring in *THE NEW YORKER*. In 1966 Gerald Foos, a businessman in Aurora, Colorado, opened the Manor House Motel in which he installed vents above six rooms so he could observe the actions of his guests. With his wife's compliance, Foos journaled the sexual proclivities of guests for almost forty years. Talese enters the picture in 1980, when Foos sends him a letter detailing his adventures and requesting a meeting. Talese flies to Colorado and meets with Foos, even accompanying him to his viewing platform and watching a young couple fornicate. Talese realizes he can't publish the man's story because Foos does not want to be identified, due to legal issues, etc. Over the next thirty years Foos shares his detailed journals with Talese via the mail, which Talese reproduces chunks of throughout the slim book. The entries are titillating and revealing as the times change in regards to interracial sex, homosexual relations and group play. The more interesting moments are the ones where guests simply relate as people, brushing their teeth, discussing money, going to the bathroom and eating fast food. The "voyeur," and as Foos refers to himself sees rape, incest, physical abuse, drug use and even in one instance a murder. Talese adds little to the journals of Foos, simply some transitional exposition. Upon the release of *THE NEW YORKER* article Talese had his journalistic ethics called into question, but in my opinion, Talese is now outside the canon, and as one of the few gonzo journalist left, with Tom Wolfe, their views and opinions are often considered "old-fashioned" and "out of date." That being said, Foos' journal,

no matter how murkily achieved, is a sociological sexual study of changing mores amongst the middle class.

Very interesting. Controversial idea whose results should be taken into account. Valid observations. Recommended reading for all interested in the lives and behavior of common American people.

Easy read, and the story is intriguing, but for me I am skeptical of the motel owner's story. Perhaps there is some truth in it, but you read it and be the judge.

This reader will miss writers of Talese's ilk when they're gone. While it can easily be inferred that Talese is a bit uncomfortable with the motel owner's voyeurism, the tone is sympathetic and endearing. Talese is able to go along for the ride without judgement, leaving readers to judge for themselves. These days, what with social media shaming and sensationalized, demonizing headlines, the objectivity with which Talese approaches these blatant violations of privacy is a breath of fresh air. The book also provides a guilt-free window onto a wide range of Americans' most intimate moments. There is much to be learned from peeping vicariously; perhaps the most valuable lessons of one's life can be learned by reading this book.

I enjoyed the book especially since I am a native of Colorado and familiar with several of the geographical references in the book. Before the book the author repudiated the book and then backed off of his repudiation, which makes me wonder about the authenticity of portions of the book.

This is obviously a minority opinion but I rather liked this book. The "voyeur" is a creepy guy and his attempt to make his observations sound like serious sexual research are unconvincing. His interests are prurient. However, he often makes somewhat astute comments about the people he observes. That doesn't redeem him in any way but it does make for some interesting reading. There are some discrepancies in his story but it rings true on the whole. I also found no reason to be critical of Mr. Talese's conduct. His actions were appropriate for a journalist.

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