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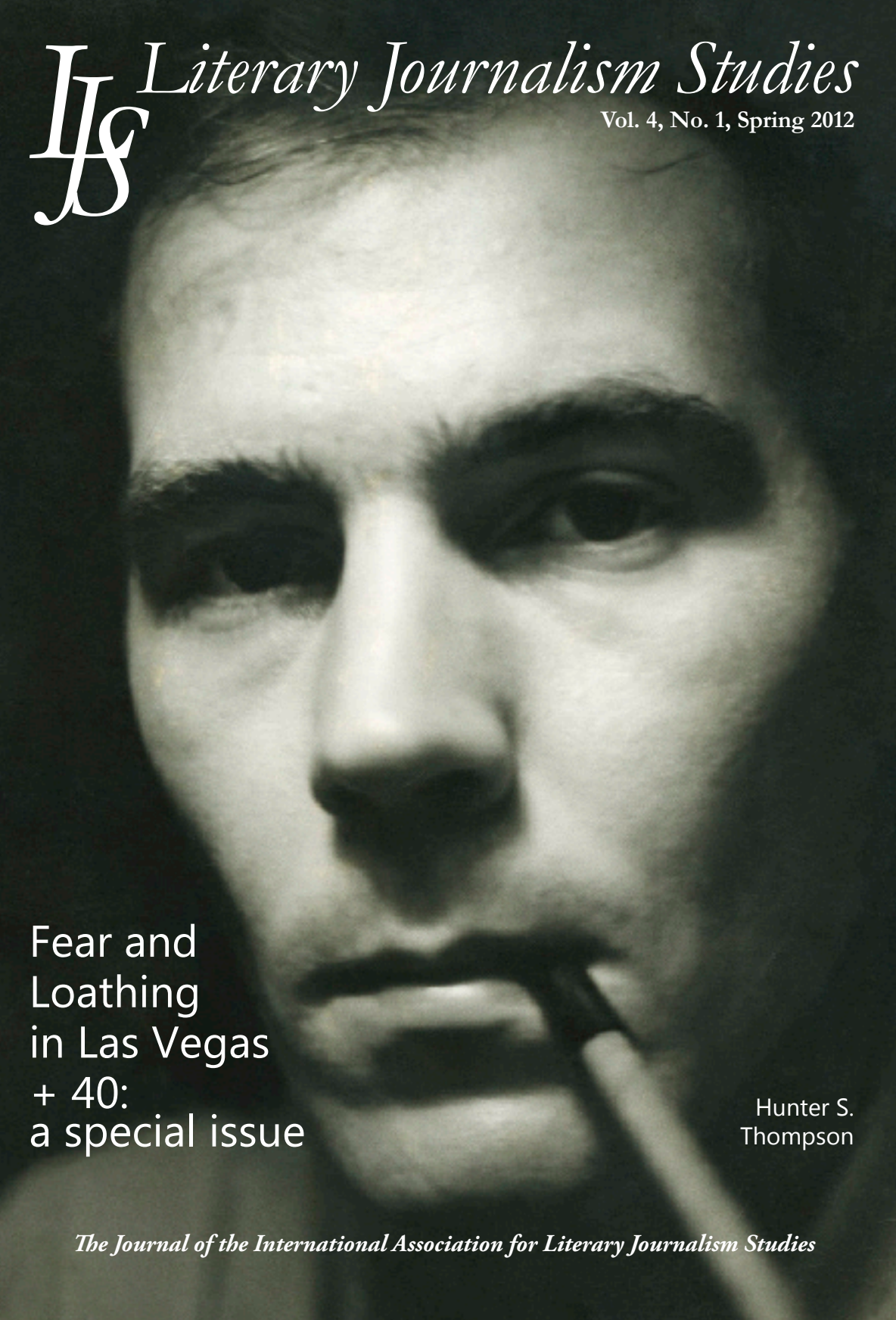
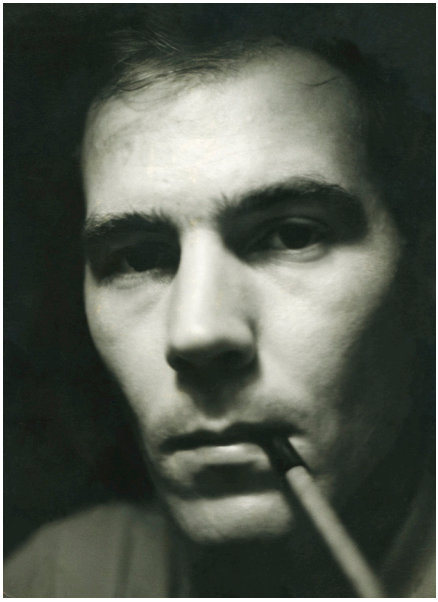
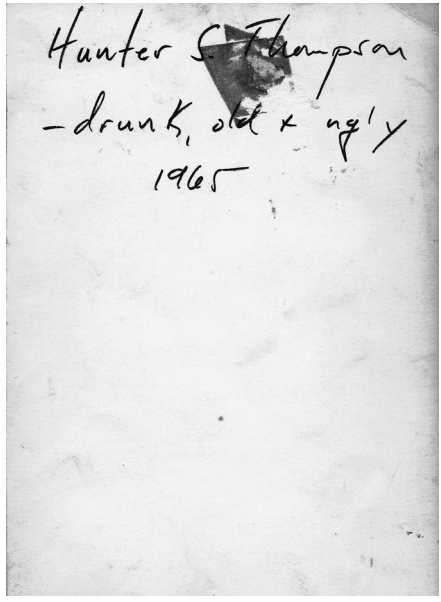


Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas + 40: a special issue

Hunter S. Thompson

The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies





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Our cover photo for this issue is a self-portrait taken by Hunter S. Thompson in 1965. It is eerily self-revealing about how he saw himself when he was younger, especially given his inscription on the back side. Contributed by Margaret Harrell, Thompson's copy editor at Random House for his volume *Hell's Angels*.

Literary Journalism Studies

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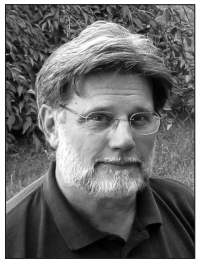
SUBMISSION INFORMATION

LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES invites submission of original scholarly articles on literary journalism, which is also known as narrative journalism, literary reportage, reportage literature, New Journalism, and the nonfiction novel, as well as literary and narrative nonfiction that emphasizes cultural revelation. The journal has an international focus and seeks submissions on the theory, history, and pedagogy of literary journalism throughout the world. All disciplinary approaches are welcome. Submissions should be informed with an awareness of the existing scholarship and should be between 3,000 and 8,000 words in length, including notes. To encourage international dialogue, the journal is open to publishing on occasion short examples or excerpts of previously published literary journalism accompanied by a scholarly gloss about or an interview with the writer who is not widely known outside his or her country. The example or excerpt must be translated into English. The scholarly gloss or interview should generally be between 1,500 and 2,500 words long and indicate why the example is important in the context of its national culture. Together, both the text and the gloss generally should not exceed 8,000 words in length. The contributor is responsible for obtaining all copyright permissions, including from the publisher, author and translator as necessary. The journal is also willing to consider publication of exclusive excerpts of narrative literary journalism accepted for publication by major publishers.

Email submission (as a Micsrosoft Word attachment) is mandatory. A cover page indicating the title of the paper, the author's name, institutional affiliation, and contact information, along with an abstract (50–100 words), should accompany all submissions. The cover page should be sent as a separate attachment from the abstract and submission to facilitate distribution to readers. No identification should appear linking the author to the submission or abstract. All submissions must be in English Microsoft Word and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* (Humanities endnote style)<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html>. All submissions will be blind reviewed. Send submissions to the editor at <literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com>.

BOOK REVIEWS are invited. They should be 1,000–2,000 words and focus on the scholarship of literary journalism and recent original works of literary journalism that deserve greater recognition among scholars. Book reviews are not blind reviewed but selected by the book review editor based on merit. Reviewers may suggest book review prospects or write the book review editor for suggestions. Usually reviewers will be responsible for obtaining their respective books. Book reviews and/or related queries should be sent to Nancy L. Roberts at <nroberts@albany.edu>

Note from the Editor…



This marks our first formal special issue of *Literary Journalism Studies*. Our subject is the lasting mark Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* has made on literature and journalism, on the occasion of its fortieth anniversary of publication in book form. To that end we are pleased and honored to have William McKeen of Boston University as our guest editor. Professor McKeen comes especially equipped to serve as guest editor because he has written two biographies on Thompson, one scholarly, the other popular. Few know the Thompson corpus as well as he does.

This is also an opportunity to thank several of my colleagues who have helped make this journal and this particular issue possible. Among them, I would like to thank Kathy Roberts Forde of the University of South Carolina for stepping in to help copy edit on short notice. Without that kind of selfless assistance, *Literary Journalism Studies* would not be possible.

I should also thank our two associate editors for bibliography, Roberta and Miles Maguire of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, who, since they took on their roles a year ago, have helped to put the journal on the scholarly map. Through their indefatigable efforts the journal is now listed in EBSCO Host, and will soon be available through the MLA International Bibliography, the largest humanities database of scholarship. These efforts surely represent a major milestone in the journal's development.

I must also thank Nancy L. Roberts of the University at Albany of the State University of New York for immediately jumping in as the new book review editor with an exceptionally strong section reflecting the excellence we have come to know from her work.

Furthermore, I want to thank Bill Reynolds of Ryerson University for a number of reasons. First, the idea for this special issue was his and he deserves the credit. Second, his efforts in copy editing the journal, both present and past, have similarly been indefatigable. He has been the last gatekeeper before the issues go to the printer. Sadly, I had to boot him off the staff because we have a general policy of not publishing the work of our editors. Moreover, as the incoming president of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, his duties now take him elsewhere. I will sorely miss him.

A final thank you must go to the outgoing president of IALJS. Alice Donat Trindade, of the Universidade Técnica de Lisboa Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, has always been generous in her warmth, optimism, commitment, and humanity as one of the original founding members of the association. Those qualities can be felt throughout not only the association, but also the journal. Thank you, Alice.

But this is our guest editor's issue, and so I turn it over now to Professor McKeen, whose discussion of Thompson starts on the following pages.

— John C. Hartsock

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas Forty Years Later: A Special Issue

William McKeen, guest editor
Boston University, U.S.A.

William McKeen is the author of two books on Hunter S. Thompson, the biography Outlaw Journalist *(W.W. Norton, 2008), and* Hunter S. Thompson *(Twayne, 1991), a biographical examination and a critical account of Thompson's work. Thompson is also a central character in McKeen's most recent book,* Mile Marker Zero *(Crown, 2011), a nonfiction narrative about the writers and artists of Key West.*

His other books include the upcoming Homegrown in Florida *(University Press of Florida, 2012),* Highway 61 *(W.W. Norton, 2003);* Rock and Roll is Here to Stay *(W. W. Norton, 2000) and* Literary Journalism: A Reader *(Wadsworth, 2000). He has also written books about Tom Wolfe, Bob Dylan, and The Beatles. He is professor and chairman of the Department of Journalism at Boston University. His major teaching areas are literary journalism, history of journalism, reporting, feature writing, and history of rock and roll.*

The Two Sides of Hunter S. Thompson

by William McKeen

There were at least two Hunter S. Thompsons.

One of them was the cartoon character, the "Uncle Duke" wild man of the comic pages, the one college sophomores impersonate every Halloween. (And can we blame them? It's an easy costume: a slouch hat, a cigarette holder and a flowered shirt. Suddenly, you're as recognizable as Spider-Man, a fairy princess, or the generic ghost in a sheet. Everyone knows who it is when the figure appears at the door, demanding, "Give me some candy, you swine.")

The other Hunter S. Thompson was the writer. He was a serious man who would sometimes labor for hours—in the company of friends and bourbon, of course—over word choice. He subscribed to that axiom of Mark Twain: "The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter; it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." He approached his writing as a composer of music, with his ear attuned for hearing the occasional bad note, always ready with the perfect fix.

Everybody seems to know that first Thompson. People who don't read might identify *that guy* as their "favorite writer."

The second one is known mostly to those who see beyond the caricature and admire the writer, political philosopher, and serious artist trapped in the clownish exterior.

Thompson's greatest literary creation was probably that exaggerated version of himself. The executor of his literary estate, historian Douglas Brinkley, calls it "the Hunter Figure." For shorthand, we can call that alter ego Duke. As a young journalist, Thompson would sometimes conjure a name to go with a quote, and the name pulled from the ether was often "Raoul Duke." Duke also appeared as the name of the protagonist in Thompson's masterpiece, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.*

The Duke persona was a brilliant invention. It was also—to borrow an image from one of his favorite writers—his albatross.

We're closing in on the first decade of Life After Hunter Thompson. The real man recedes into collective memory. He was the one who watered and manured that cartoon version of himself during television appearances and in his articles, which had often descended into self-parody.

What's left is his work.

The time has come to take Hunter S. Thompson seriously as a literary artist, and without the distraction of the overshadowing persona. There is no better time, since we mark with this issue the fortieth anniversary of the appearance of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* in book form. The book was his undeniable masterpiece, perfect in a way that few books are. (He was so fond of Scott Fitzgerald, so let's call *Fear and Loathing* his *Great Gatsby*.)

So we have assembled several scholars here to discuss Thompson's work and we present what Thompson might have called a "king-hell bastard" of a special issue to mark the anniversary of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Two pieces are explicitly devoted to the book: "The Right Kind of Eyes" by Robert Alexander offers an excellent overview and analysis of the book. And Jennifer M. Russell's "A Savage Place" shows how Thompson's literary obsessions shaped the narrative.

Photo by Lewis Gardner

Thompson signing a copy of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* at Western Kentucky University in 1978 where he was the subject of a question and answer session with William McKeen.

But where did this masterwork come from? In "On the Road to Gonzo," Bill Reynolds finds the DNA of Thompson's distinctive style in his journalism published in the decade before *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* appeared. And speaking of that distinctive style, Jason Mosser in "Parsing Gonzo" breaks down the derivation of the word that made it into the Oxford English Dictionary with Thompson's help.

One thing we can't dispute is Thompson's influence. An example here is Brian J. Bowe's "A Brain Full of Contraband: The Islamic Gonzo Writing of Michael Muhammad Knight."

Finally, we have "Apocalypse and Hell" by Nick Nuttall. The great unfinished work of Thompson's writing career carried the ponderous title *The Death of the American Dream*. He slaved on the book and struggled to articulate all of his jangled feelings about his country onto paper. Eventually he did, but rather than resorting to some blistering screed, he laid those sentiments subtly between the lines of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Thompson has legions of young admirers today. Like Bob Dylan, Thompson speaks to a time of life, and once both of those writers take residence in your soul, it's tough to move them out. Who would want to, anyway?

I was a seventeen-year-old fledgling newspaper reporter when I read "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," serialized at the time in *Rolling Stone*. Within a year, as Thompson began his revolutionary political coverage for that magazine, I was also on the campaign trail for my little newspaper, following around candidates.

Every reporter in my newsroom read *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and the book was passed around, ending up in my custody, scarred with underlining, dog-eared pages, and human bite marks. It spoke to the role Hunter S. Thompson played in our lives and in our feelings about what we did. To me, that might've been the high water mark, the place where that wave finally broke and rolled back.

The Genesis of *Fear and Loathing*

When I wrote the two biographies on Hunter S. Thompson, one for the more scholarly crowd, the other for the popular, I learned intimately about how *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* was written. Here's the story, adapted from *Outlaw Journalist:*

The genesis of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* came that spring afternoon at the Polo Lounge of the Beverly Hills Hotel, when a dwarf waiter walked up to Thompson with a portable phone and said, "This must be the call you have been waiting for all this time, sir."

Or so goes the story.

The lingering question, the one that Thompson was always asked, the one that frustrated, amused and sometimes angered him: *Is it true?* In a reflective moment he said, "*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a masterwork. I would classify it, in Truman Capote's words, as a non-fiction novel in that almost all of it was true or did happen. I warped a few things, but it was a pretty accurate picture. It was an incredible feat of balance more than literature. That's why I called it *Fear and Loathing*. It was a pretty pure experience that turned into a very pure piece of writing. It's as good as *The Great Gatsby* and better than *The Sun Also Rises*."

He might have wondered: *I bet they didn't ask Hemingway these questions . . . or Fitzgerald . . . or even Kerouac.* The comparison is apt: Kerouac claimed an essential truth for *On the Road*, but changed the names and classified it as fiction. Thompson wanted the same for his book, but for some reason it was held journalistically accountable, at least as some sort of distorted reality. In the years since *On the Road*, Thompson had realized what an influential voice

Kerouac had been to his generation. Thompson's story would be the twisted buddy saga for the next era.

Thompson and Acosta were in Vegas for the running of the Mint 400 motorcycle race on March 20. The race was lame and with motorcycles and dune buggies swarming through the desert, there was no way to witness any kind of race; everything was lost in the sand. Thompson and Acosta spent most of their time in bars and casinos and driving the Strip in their rented Great Red Shark. After the long weekend, Thompson had what he needed about Salazar and also banged out 25,000 words on the race for *Sports Illustrated*, which the magazine "aggressively rejected" (Thompson's term). There was no way to salvage a copy block or even a caption from the copy Thompson sent. So he kept going, writing his Vegas thing for pleasure, while finishing the Salazar article.

He hadn't planned to write about his Vegas adventures. In his dark moments, he remembered that he was three years overdue on some bogus bullshit called *The Death of the American Dream*. The project that would become his most celebrated book began with the simple desire to get Oscar Zeta Acosta away from his handlers so they could have some face time for an interview, hence the Beverly Hills Hotel. While having drinks with Acosta, Thompson recalled that his friend Tom Vanderschmidt had said something about a motorcycle race in Las Vegas, an opportunity for some quick-and-easy freelance money that should be a breeze for a professional writer and an opportunity for a nice expense-account weekend. He called Vanderschmidt, who was out. So Thompson hunkered down over Singapore slings with Acosta. Eventually, the dwarf came bearing the telephone and the deal was set.

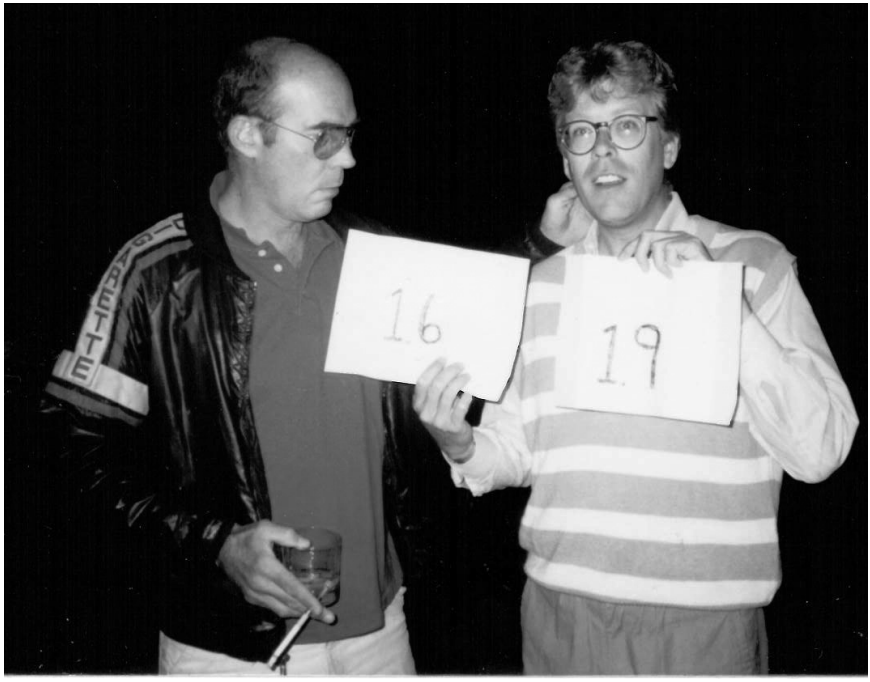
The account in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* was a heightened version of reality. While in Las Vegas, he and Acosta talked about Salazar and the merits of Acosta's case against the city. They also took a lot of drugs and ran amuck. The talks informed Thompson's reporting for "Strange Rumblings in Aztlan." The recreational madness gave him the foundation for something he called the "Vegas thing," which he was writing for his own amusement, like a five-finger exercise for a pianist . . . just something to keep loose.

Back in his shabby hotel in L.A., Thompson blasted the Rolling Stones' *Get Yer Ya-Ya's Out* while he pounded the keys. As the sun came up each morning, he set aside Salazar and began writing something fun. "I've always considered writing the most hateful kind of work," he said later. "Nothing is fun when you *have to do it* . . . so it's a rare goddam trip for a locked-in rent-paying writer to get into a gig that, even in retrospect, was a high-hell high-life fuckaround from start to finish."

During the early stages of the Salazar editing, Thompson showed up at Felton's home one morning, clutching twenty pages of the Vegas thing. "He had these *pages* in his hand," Felton said, "and he was *very excited*." Felton loved what Thompson was doing, and the first nineteen pages ended up in Jann Wenner's office almost immediately. Shaking with excitement, Wenner told Thompson, "Keep on going."

He had started out writing by hand on Mint Hotel stationery, nervously wondering how to sneak out of the hotel without paying. He retyped them later, but the words maintained their sweaty urgency. The pages were passed around the *Rolling Stone* office. Some whistled admiration, others broke out laughing, some were struck numb. "As soon as you finished it and went home," journalist and editor Charles Perry said, "life was incredibly dramatic. You expected disasters to come rolling out of the alleys, water to be boiling over."

By the time he wrapped up the Salazar article and got the *keep-on-going* message from Wenner on the Vegas thing, he knew he needed more to extend



Reprinted courtesy of Bill Dixon

Thompson and his friend, attorney, and political operative Bill Dixon hold up signs indicating their blood alcohol levels. Photo circa 1978.

the narrative of his adventure. He first wrote to Vanderschmdt at *Sports Illustrated* to thank him for the assignment and thank him for rejecting what he wrote. "Sooner or later you'll see what your call (to me) set in motion," he wrote. "The Lord works in wondrous ways. Your call was the key to a massive freak-out. The result is up in the air and still climbing. When you see the final fireball, remember that it was all your fault."

Though the eventual work focused on two events that seem to come over the course of a long, nightmarish week, there was a month between the Mint 400 and the National District Attorneys' Conference on Drug Abuse. Prosecutors and cops came for three days of fun in Sin City, hoping to learn something about the drug menace. But they didn't recognize that the menace was right there, sitting next to them during the seminars: two experienced drug users, one disguised as a journalist, the other as an attorney.

After a nearly two-month exile from [his first wife] Sandy and [son] Juan, Thompson finally returned to Woody Creek. After the shitholes and McMotels of L.A., he was ravenous to be back home, to make love to his wife, to shower 'til the hot water ran out, to fuck in the snow, to indulge himself with his strange appetites (peanut butter, mayonnaise, and garlic). He was happy. After leaving Vegas and the isolation of the California motel, it took him a while, back among the comforts of home, to get back into the crazed rhythm he'd found in exile. "This happens every time I leave the scene of a piece," he lamented in a letter to Tom Wolfe, sending him the first part of the Vegas thing. "What I was trying to get at in this was [the] mind-warp/photo technique of instant journalism: One draft, written on the spot at top speed and basically un-revised, edited, chopped, larded, etc., for publication. Ideally, I'd like to walk away from a scene and mail my notebook to the editor, who will then carry it, untouched, to the printer."

Once he got back on track, Thompson knew he was writing something manic and marvelous. He didn't lose the thread or fail to find the jangle when he came back to it. *This* writing wasn't painful. It was like being high. He bragged to Wolfe, king of the wild frontier pushers, that he—disguised as Raoul Duke—was now pushing the limits of whatever new journalism was. "I haven't found a drug yet that can get you anywhere near as high as sitting at a desk writing," he said.

Downstairs at his home, there was a large room with a stone fireplace, a thick rug and redwood paneling. Thompson set up an old door and two saw horses and planted his IBM Selectric II front and center. Armed with Dexedrine and bourbon, he worked through the summer of 1971. Thompson ate the tuna-and-bacon and grapefruit-and-eggs that Sandy made him, and they took acid and made love again on the carpet, in front of the fireplace. Sandy

Photo by Lewis Gardner

William McKeen adjusts Thompson's drink holder at the podium, during an interview he conducted with Thompson at Western Kentucky University, 1978. McKeen recalls: "He chugged a Lowenbrau before going onstage, but was not allowed a drink on stage. He had requested 30 pounds of ice. We chipped away at it. But as far as I could tell, he drank only water. He walked away from a few 'speaking' engagements at that time if alcohol was not allowed, but because he was back home in Kentucky, I think he gave them a pass."

was his protoplasm alarm clock. Whenever he finally crashed, it was her job to gently wake him with a whisper in his ear. When he finally woke, she helped him worship with newspapers at the altar of breakfast. Eventually, he headed off to the door desk in the writing room in the basement and worked eight to twelve hours at a stretch.

Thompson hid behind Raoul Duke. Acosta appeared as Dr. Gonzo and was changed to a Samoan, because Thompson liked Samoa and to protect Acosta's identity—not that any intelligent reader of "Strange Rumblings in Aztlan" couldn't put *dos* and *dos* together.

Midsummer and nearly done, Thompson called Ralph Steadman to ask him to illustrate the story. He gave him background on what brought him together with Acosta, and what he was like. "Oscar is a bit fucked up, by the way," Thompson said. "He suffers from ulcers and self doubt. . . . I asked him to accompany me on a journey to the Heart of the American Dream. I was going to ask you, but after that Rhode Island business, I reckoned you would have had enough. And I needed a lawyer—even a Samoan one."

"I thought you said he was Hispanic," Steadman said.

"Well, he is, Ralph, but for the sake of the story I have written Samoan sounds better. Anyway, what I really called you about was whether you would be up for doing some vicious drawings for it if I send you the manuscript."

When the manuscript arrived in England a week later, Steadman breathed a sigh of relief that he had not been along. What Thompson and Acosta did in Las Vegas (assuming the story was true) might have killed Steadman. Too much time with Thompson could be dangerous. "I often thought I would not come back from going places with him."

Steadman read Thompson's pages and realized it was a brilliant piece and he also felt that he had, in a way, been there. There was the "shock of recognition" as he called it. Looking from the outside in, Steadman projected himself into the car with Duke and Gonzo. "What I was doing was spewing out the fears and pent-up things that I'd had from the drug [experiences] onto paper. It just poured out." The botched America's Cup assignment had been "a dress rehearsal for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*."

Steadman set aside his current work on *Alice Through the Looking Glass* and gave frightening and memorable life to the images suggested in Thompson's writing: two hollow-eyed madmen hurtling through the desert in a car; a horrifyingly naked Dr. Gonzo vomiting into a toilet while a maid screams in terror; Dr. Gonzo again, waving a knife in a bathtub while he awaits electrocution; Raoul Duke sneaking out of the hotel lobby, leaving behind the largest unpaid room-service bill in the history of Las Vegas.

Photo and caption by Tom Corcoran

Sugarloaf Key, Florida, 1981. The year before, while "researching" a possible novel about the Mariel Boatlift exodus of refugees from Cuba to the Florida Keys, Thompson stayed at the Sugarloaf Lodge north of Key West, toured nearby waters in his powerful motorboat, and spent many hours (as seen here) in the air-conditioned bar. [William McKeen added that Key West mystery novelist Corcoran and Thompson wrote two unproduced screenplays together.]

Whatever *Gonzo* is, when it's dissected Ralph Steadman's art is part of its core DNA.

"It's hooliganism," Steadman said of Thompson's story, "but it's the finest kind of hooliganism. It's not mindless idiocy; it's something special. It's got to upset people. It's no good otherwise."

Steadman sent the art to Wenner at the end of September 1971, never realizing that he would never see the originals again. It was copyrighted as part of the planned double *Rolling Stone* issues to feature Thompson and Steadman's work.

"They were fucking beautiful," Thompson said of the illustrations. "I told Wenner right off that nobody could possibly catch the madness of this story & that I refused to let anyone else illustrate it . . . but Jesus! I was overwhelmed when I saw the shit."

Wenner promoted the work, now titled "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," with a full-page house ad in the October 28 issue, promising something new and different in the next issue. To draw reader interest, the first two paragraphs of Thompson's manuscript were printed:

> We were somewhere near Barstow, on the edge of the desert, when the drugs began to take hold. I remember saying something like, "I feel a bit lightheaded; maybe you should drive . . . ." And suddenly there was a terrible roar all around us and the sky was full of what looked like huge bats, all swooping and screeching and diving around the car, which was going about a hundred miles an hour with the top down to Las Vegas. And a voice was screaming: "Holy Jesus! What are these goddamn animals?"
>
> Then it was quiet again. My attorney had taken his shirt off and was pouring beer on his chest, to facilitate the tanning process. "What the hell are you yelling about?" he muttered, staring up at the sun with his eyes closed and covered with wraparound Spanish sunglasses. "Never mind," I said. "It's your turn to drive." I hit the brakes and aimed the Great Red Shark toward the shoulder of the highway. No point mentioning those bats, I thought. The poor bastard will see them soon enough.

Charles Perry recalled that "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" came in from Thompson as a complete manuscript. "In fact, I believe he hired a typist, so that the manuscript would be in near-perfect shape. It was very neat. We edited that in what we later realized was a more leisurely fashion that we would work with him in the future."

The article ran in two parts (November 11 and 23, 1971) and was credited to Raoul Duke, even though the manuscript made reference to an associate of Duke's named Hunter S. Thompson.

There was the usual haggling over expenses. The initial investment came from Time, Inc., but when *Sports Illustrated* kicked back Thompson's copy as unpublishable, the magazine refused to pay even the minimum expenses, necessitating a hasty retreat from Vegas. When Thompson returned for the drug convention, he was on the *Rolling Stone* dime. He also assumed that it would be OK to turn in expenses for drugs, alcohol, and weapons paraphernalia. He got an advance wired to him in Vegas from David Felton, but it turned out to be his retainer, not expense money. He ran up such a monumental credit-card bill that American Express banned him for life. Carte Blanche and the Diners Club put him on a hit list.

Wenner had started a book division called Straight Arrow and most of the early titles were from *Rolling Stone* projects. He assumed Straight Arrow would publish *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. But before Wenner could get the book contract signed, Thompson made a deal with Jim Silberman at Random House. It was the Random House money at the finish line, in fact, that had encouraged Thompson to complete the work in the first place.

On the verge of his great breakthrough, Hunter Thompson was once again staring down financial ruin.

Outlaw Journalist appeared after Thompson's death. But I was pleased to learn—and again *after* his death—how much he liked the first book I'd written about him. *Hunter S. Thompson* (Twayne, 1991) was part of a series of books about writers and their work. I am pretty sure it's been cribbed and plagiarized a lot over the years by high school and college students doing term papers on gonzo.

Thompson cooperated with me on the book and even gave me what turned out to be an extremely helpful interview.

His intern that year was one of my students from the University of Florida, and when we completed the interview, she said Thompson wanted my permission to use his answers in a book he was working on then.

Of course, I told her. *They're his words*.

He suffered writer's block during the writing of *Songs of the Doomed*, she said, and my questions helped undo his logjam. I couldn't have been happier. (He later used other parts of the interview in *Kingdom of Fear*.)

That intern was Catherine Sabonis-Bradley. When the galleys of the book were finished a couple of months later, I sent Thompson the copy he'd demanded.

Within a couple of days, my office fax machine began spewing pages—seventeen in all, most of which were about a bull-sperm auction in Colorado. But the first page contained his reaction to my book: "McKeen, you shit-eating freak. I warned you not to write that vicious trash about me—Now you better get fitted for a black eye patch in case one of yours gets gouged out

by a bushy-haired stranger in a dimly-lit parking lot. How fast can you learn Braille? You are scum. HST."

Almost as soon as I collated the pages of the mammoth fax, the phone rang. "You got the fax, right?" Sabonis-Bradley said. "That means he liked the book. You *know* that, right?"

"I figured," I said.

After his death, his longtime assistant and confidante, Deborah Fuller, told me that my first Thompson book was always within reach from his command post in the kitchen. He kept it on the shelf with the well-worn copies of his books he constantly referenced. Wayne Ewing, his cinematic Boswell (director of *Breakfast with Hunter* and other fine films), said Thompson would often ask houseguests to read aloud from it.

After his death, when I set out to write *Outlaw Journalist*, a book for the popular market (unlike the 'semi-scholarly' *Hunter S. Thompson*), I wanted to make sure the new book would have the same seriousness of purpose. Much of the literary analysis and guts of *Outlaw Journalist* is seen first in *Hunter S. Thompson*. What I wanted to do with *Outlaw Journalist*—that I had not been able to do with the earlier book—was to tell the story of his life and how he came to be the King of Gonzo.

Several of the books on him, published after *Hunter S. Thompson*, were often literary exercises that showed off the writer's skill, but didn't say all that much about Thompson. My job as biographer was to stand back and let the story tell itself. There was no need to try to write a gonzo biography. As I often tell students, "There's only one guy who can write like that, and now he's dead."

After Thompson's death, his former editor, Jann Wenner, compiled (with Corey Seymour) an oral history of Thompson's life called *Gonzo*. I thought that was a difficult way to tell Thompson's remarkable life story. Oral history is by its nature disjointed and somewhat incoherent. If ever a life needed coherence, it was this one.

When I set to work on *Outlaw Journalist*, I started out by assembling calendar pages for every month of Thompson's life and then writing down what I could document happening on those days. I wanted, to the best of my ability, to see the arc of his life. I hung up three huge bulletin boards with index cards devoted to everyone I deemed to be a close friend or an important influence on Thompson. Just seeing those cards every day pushed me to try harder and dig deeper

Through interviewing people who'd known him as far back as first grade, I felt I was watching his life unspool again. And it was great to meet his lifetime of friends, and get to know them. He amassed an impressive tribe and had an artist's ability to match people and to plant and fertilize new friendships.

But I hope the fact that I took his writing seriously is what drew some of the attention *Outlaw Journalist* received. So many people who wrote about him wrote about a clownish caricature. I wanted to write about a great American writer who had so much talent that he got away with using only a fraction of it.

It was Amy Cherry, my editor at the publishing house, who suggested that we take the *shit-eating-freak* letter and publish it, in his original scrawl, at the end of *Outlaw Journalist*, where it appears as a seeming message from the Great Beyond.

When people see that letter, they're baffled by it. Visitors to my office wonder why I'd have such a rude thing hanging on my wall. They obviously don't know that in Hunter S. Thompson's vocabulary, "you are scum" was seen as praise. I happily embrace that benediction.

Notes

"This must be the call": Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 6.

"*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a masterwork": Hunter S. Thompson, interview with William McKeen (1990).

"I've always considered writing": Hunter S. Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt* (New York: Summit Books, 1979), p. 109.

"He had these pages": Robert Draper, *Rolling Stone: The Uncensored History* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 176.

"As soon as you finished it": Charles Perry, interview with William McKeen, May 20, 2006.

"Sooner or later you'll see": Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), p. 376.

"This happens every time": *Fear and Loathing in America*, p. 375.

"I haven't found a drug yet": Thompson interview (1990).

"Oscar is a bit fucked up": Ralph Steadman, *The Joke's Over* (New York: Harcourt, 2006), p. 70.

"I often thought I would not come back": Ralph Steadman, interview with William McKeen, November 8, 2006.

"What I was doing": Sharon Martin, producer. *Biography: Hunter S. Thompson* (Biography Channel, 2004).

"dress rehearsal for *Fear and Loathing*": Steadman, p. 63.

"It's hooliganism": Martin, producer, *Biography*.

"They were fucking beautiful": *Fear and Loathing in America*, p. 457.

"We were somewhere near Barstow": Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, p. 3.

"In fact, I believe he hired": Perry interview.

"Hunt didn't need": Jann Wenner, interview with William McKeen, January 15, 2008.

"The Right Kind of Eyes": *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as a Novel of Journalistic Development

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Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas *describes a bildungs process in which its protagonist finds his place in relation to the dominant social order of mainstream journalism.*

"No, but we don't have to join them."
—Bob Dylan

Like the Horatio Alger novels it frequently invokes, Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* roughly describes a *bildungs* process—a process of development—in which its protagonist[1] finds his place in relation to the dominant social order, albeit as someone who finds his place because he is ultimately confident of his authority to stand *outside* of that order. The "dominant social order" in this case is mainstream journalism, and the process through which the protagonist finds his place in relation to it involves the articulation of a vision critical of the ethos of journalistic professionalism and the alienating effects of what Robert A. Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao have called the "regime of objectivity"[2] that sustains it. This critique, I'd like to argue, is developed at least in part, through the motif of "vision."

From acid-induced hallucinations of screeching attack bats in the California desert and cannibal lizards in the lobby of the Mint Hotel, to the newspaper account of the young son of "a prominent Massachusetts Republican" who "pulled out his eyes while suffering the effects of a drug overdose in a jail cell,"[3] and the inexplicably mutating array of sunglasses—Spanish,[4] Brazilian,[5] Danish,[6] and Saigon-mirror[7]—worn by the book's protagonists to shield their eyes from the brutal neon excess of Las Vegas but also the omnipresent scrutiny of the "eyes of the law,"[8] the fear of which drives the narrative on its frenzied, paranoid course, one doesn't have to look far to find references to vision in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. None, however, has received the widespread attention of the "wave" speech which is the book's thematic heart. Set between the harrowing comic scene of the protagonist's mock electrocution of his stoned Samoan attorney and his own decision to "flee" Las Vegas and a hotel bill "running somewhere between $29 and $36 per hour, for forty-eight consecutive hours,"[9] Thompson's elegy to the San Francisco acid culture of the mid-1960s and the confidence it inspired among those who were "there and alive in that corner of time and the world,"[10] offers a lucid flashback of a unique moment of surging idealism and hope:

> There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was *right*, that we were winning . . .
>
> And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply *prevail*. There was no point in fighting—on our side or theirs. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave . . .
>
> So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost *see* the high-water mark—that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.[11]

Thompson's memorable image extends the metaphorical phrase "the Great San Francisco Acid Wave"[12] which he deploys earlier in the chapter, animating it into a vision of apocalyptic grandeur which, in its historical sweep, stands in contrast to the "hired bullshit" which, in the same passage, he says makes the past so "hard to know."[13] What remains to be answered, however, is the question of the precise nature of "the right kind of eyes" that allow such a comprehensive vision of a historical moment and its aftermath. As the reference to "hired bullshit" suggests, it is probably not the perspective provided by conventional historiography; nor would it seem from the scathing representation of mainstream journalism in the text, to be anything produced by those who pound out history's first draft.

For a representation of what we might call the *wrong* kind of eyes, we need look no further than the most obvious agent of a traditional journalistic way of seeing in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, the photographer Lacerda. Although he is assigned with Thompson to cover the Mint 400 off-road race (the subject of the first of the two parts which comprise the book), we never actually *see* Lacerda. But then, we never really see the race either: with the dust kicked up from the hundreds of motorcycles and dune buggies screaming around the desert course, Thompson says "covering" the Mint 400 was "like trying to keep track of a swimming meet in an Olympic-sized pool filled with talcum powder instead of water."[14] Lacerda, however, we are told, is undaunted, aiming all the photographic hardware he can muster into the churning cloud of grit, in some abiding faith that the truth would thus somehow reveal itself to his lens. Thompson writes, "Lacerda insisted on Total Coverage. He wanted to go back out in the dust storm and keep trying for some rare combination of film and lens that might penetrate that awful stuff."[15] In this passage, we see traces of photography's—and ultimately journalism's—common root in what Sarah Kember has described as "a scientific system of thought fashioned in Enlightenment philosophy and by Cartesian dualism."[16] In its impenetrability, the dust cloud, for example, offers a fitting image of the resistance nature poses to the positivist assumption of the "unproblematic existence of an observable external reality" willing to reveal its secrets to the inquiries of "a neutral and unified observing subject,"[17] embodied here by Lacerda; in the photographer's curious absence from the text, moreover, we have a correlative for the deleterious effects of such objectivity on the subjectivity of the observer. Lacerda's efforts to "penetrate" the dust cloud also suggest the desire, articulated in the writings of Francis Bacon, for scientific modes of enquiry to force nature (typically represented as feminine), by violence if necessary, to give up its secrets before the superior rational and technical resources of the (male) inductive enquirer.[18]

The description also recalls, however, the important role which photography and photoengraving played in the rise of contemporary journalistic form, particularly journalism's emphasis on objectivity. In the apparent neutrality of the photographic image, reporters and editors of the mid-nineteenth century saw a dramatic illustration of the representational neutrality then being promoted as a corrective to the excesses of the partisan press.[19] As Dan Schiller points out, photographic mimesis became the paradigm not only for news objectivity but also a criteria for its historical counterpart—journalistic professionalism. This link between what he calls the mid-nineteenth century's common conception of the newspaper as a sort of daguerreotype of the world and the typification of the professional journalist as a neutral recording device, is evident in a passage he quotes from Isaac Pray, dated 1855:

> A reporter should be as *a mere machine to repeat*, in spite of editorial suggestion or dictation. He should know no master but his duty, and that is to give the exact truth. His profession is a superior one, and no love of place or popularity should swerve him from giving the truth in its integrity. If he departs from this course, he inflicts an injury on himself, on his profession, and on the journal which employs him.[20]

Journalistic truth, in other words, is a function of the reporter's ability to reproduce the world with mechanical accuracy; the model of this objective fidelity, which is the basis of journalistic professionalism, is the camera.

But if photography offered journalism the comforting vision of a world of independently existing truths readily available to the reporter's professional eye and pen, that reassurance came at a profound cost. As Kember notes, realist photography, informed as it is by Enlightenment philosophy and Cartesian dualism, "splits and privileges the mind over the body, the rational over the irrational, culture over nature, the subject over the object and so on along an infinite chain which continues to structure Western epistemology."[21] All of these oppositions are operative in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*: we have, for example, the irrationality inspired by wanton drug use contrasted with the ever-present rationality of "the eyes of the law"[22] whose gaze the protagonist feels constantly upon him; there is also the corrupt and artificial urban nightmare of Las Vegas and its other—the respite offered by Woody Creek, the "quiet place"[23] where Thompson lives, and the mention of which sets the tone for the chapter in which the wave speech appears.

It is, however, in the separation of mind and body that the dualism associated with photography leaves its most conspicuous imprint on the text. Early in the book, for example, the protagonist discovers a line in his notes that he has no recollection of ever having written: "KILL THE BODY AND THE HEAD WILL DIE."[24] The words are suggestive, and Thompson attempts various political and cultural explanations for their mysterious presence in his notebook. Regardless of the glosses he puts on it, though, it is clear that the precondition for this seemingly shocked statement of the obvious is precisely the sort of Cartesian separation of mind and body Kember describes. That separation is dramatically demonstrated a bit later in the text in Thompson's description of the effects of ether on the recreational user:

> This is the main advantage of ether: it makes you behave like the village drunkard in some early Irish novel . . . total loss of all basic motor skills: blurred vision, no balance, numb tongue—severance of all connection between the body and the brain. Which is interesting, because the brain continues to function more or less normally . . . you can actually *watch* yourself behaving in this terrible way, but you can't control it.[25]

In its capacity to provide the observing subject with an apparently objective view of the world, ether is the anesthetic equivalent of conventional journalism's prevailing way of seeing. The fact that that objective view, moreover, should render the observing subject a helpless spectator of his own biomechanical buffoonery strongly suggests something of the alienating effects of that particular positivistic mode of engaging with the world. This fact is underscored throughout the passage by the protagonist's use of the second person singular to describe his own actions:

> *You* approach the turnstiles leading into the Circus-Circus, and *you* know that when *you* get there, *you* have to give the man two dollars or he won't let *you* inside . . . but when *you* get there, everything goes wrong . . . .[26]

This same alienation is evident in the fact that the protagonist spends much of the book operating under a name other than his own. Given the relationship among journalistic professionalism, objectivity, and subjectivity, the circumstances under which Thompson introduces the alias "Raoul Duke" into the text are noteworthy. He first mentions the name while in the throes of a drug-related panic in the lobby of the Mint Hotel. More significantly, however, he does so while registering not only as a hotel guest, but also as a member of the press. With its protagonist thus self-identified, however ambivalently, as a reporter, the first part of *Fear and Loathing* focuses on Thompson's experience covering the race; throughout these chapters, he displays what seems to be an ironic identification with the journalistic professionalism of those other members of the press gathered for the event. In the third paragraph of the book, for example, he proclaims, "I was, after all, a professional journalist; so I had an obligation to *cover the story*, for good or ill."[27] This identification is reinforced several dozen pages later when, after watching another professional, "the correspondent from *Life*," lose his "grip on the bar" and sink "slowly to his knees," Thompson uses the first person plural to declare, "We were, after all, the absolute cream of the national sporting press."[28] Such statements *sound* ironic, but the fact is that, for the first part of the book, Thompson is lumped with the professional press.[29] Although he considers different ways he might participate in the race[30] and thus fulfill the his earlier stated desire to produce a piece of "pure Gonzo journalism,"[31] the impossibility of getting his hands on the Vincent Black Shadow he says he'd need to do so properly as well as the .38 revolver and "ugly" attitude of the person manning the race registration desk,[32] reduce him to the status of observer and thus, despite all of the excesses of the first part of the book, to the alienated subject position of the conventional professional journalist.

This identification with mainstream journalism becomes cringe-makingly clear in the register into which Thompson slips when describing the start of the race: " . . . and the first ten bikes blasted off on the stroke of nine. It was extremely exciting and we all went outside to watch."[33] "*Extremely exciting*"? Along with again using "we" to link Thompson with the "*Life* man" and the other professional journalists on the scene and repeating the text's important theme of "watching," this sentence also mimics the "calm, cultivated, and, in fact, genteel voice"[34] Tom Wolfe had identified in his introduction to *The New Journalism* with non fiction writing prior to the early 1960s. While perhaps once appropriate for "a radio announcer at a tennis match,"[35] it is a tone which has little to do with the sort of balls-out mayhem of the Mint 400, nor with anyone as "simpatico" with the crowd it attracts as is Thompson.[36] In channeling what Wolfe called the "pale beige tone"[37] of that voice, Thompson demonstrates, first, his identification—facetious as it may be—with the mainstream press at this point of the book, and, second, the total lack of rhetorical consistency of that voice with his own, which he has already clearly established in the preceding pages.

John C. Hartsock has noted that literary journalism arose specifically in reaction to the alienating effects of "modern journalistic style" on its practitioners, as well as on the subjects of their accounts and their readers.[38] Such a movement from an alienated to a more integrated sensibility is evident in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* in the change which occurs between the time Thompson gets his press accreditation for the Mint 400 and when he takes up the second assignment in the book, covering the National Conference of District Attorney's four-day conference "on narcotics and dangerous drugs."[39] Despite the parallels between the second half of the book and the first, Thompson doesn't register for the conference as a reporter—as his attorney notes, they function in this part of the book more like "infiltrators"[40] or spies, a fact signaled by the name tag Thompson wears for the conference, identifying him as "a 'private investigator' from L.A."[41] Although he retains the alias Raoul Duke, his enthusiastic response to the second assignment signals a shift from the alienated status of the conventional reporter to the more integrated subjectivity of the Gonzo journalist. "It was going to be quite a different thing from the Mint 400," Thompson writes. "That had been an *observer* gig, but this one would need *participation.*"[42]

The story, he says, would call for "a very special stance," not only because its subjects would be probably more hostile to such "stone-obvious drug abusers"[43] as he and his attorney than were the crowd at the Mint 400 but also because his method of covering the story would require him to clarify his relationship as a writer with the protocols of journalistic professionalism. In

registering *as a journalist* for the Mint 400, Thompson—regardless of his alias—is compelled to identify, however minimally, with the alienated subject position of the others in that group. As such, whatever misgivings he may have about that group, can only be expressed in the muted, ironic terms we have seen. Given his uncertain relationship with journalistic professionalism in the first part of the book, he would be implicated in any unequivocal invective he might level against the members of his own tribe.

When, however, he registers not as a journalist but as a "private investigator"—a label, he notes, "which was true, in a sense"[44]—any ambiguity which had marked his relationship with conventional journalism vanishes: he is now squarely outside of the boundaries of mainstream journalistic practice. This position, however, is a tonic for his previously indeterminate "professional" identity, restoring to him a more authentic, less alienated sense of self. "Considering the circumstances," he writes, "I felt totally meshed with my karma."[45]

The clarity of this outlaw position, moreover, frees him from the dissembling language which had characterized his relationship with journalism in the first part of the book. He's not even *pretending* to be a member of the press any more, and that new relationship frees him to launch an all-out verbal assault against journalistic professionalism:

> Journalism is not a profession or a trade. It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits—a false doorway to the backside of life, a filthy, piss-ridden little hole nailed off by the building inspector, but just deep enough for a wino to curl up from the sidewalk and masturbate like a chimp in a zoo-cage.[46]

With this scorching passage, Thompson loudly declares his independence from the guiding ethos of mainstream journalism; the fact that in the next two paragraphs he removes the conference badge identifying him as "Raoul Duke" confirms the reintegration of his previously divided identity.

But what *exactly* is responsible for this apparent restoration of the protagonist to a more authentic self? A possible answer is to be found in a recurrence of the camera metaphor in a passage from the jacket copy for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* in which Thompson recalls his original plans for the book:

> My idea was to buy a fat notebook and record the whole thing, *as it happened*, then send in the notebook for publication—without editing. That way, I felt, the eye & mind of the journalist would be functioning as a camera. The writing would be selective & necessarily interpretive—but once the image was written, the words would be final; in the same way that a Cartier-Bresson photograph is always (he says) the full-frame negative. No alterations in the darkroom, no cutting or cropping, no spotting . . . no editing.[47]

In writing the book, however, it seems as if Thompson must have had some intuition of the very conservative consequences of adopting such a traditionally conceived photographic metaphor for his work. That intuition is suggested in criticism Thompson levels at Wolfe in the same jacket copy.

In his reference to the apparent immediacy of the unedited photographic moment, Thompson repeats Wolfe's well-known account of the technique he used in his landmark story on California custom car culture of the mid-1960s, "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamlined Baby."[48] Wolfe says he wanted to write the story to challenge the insipid, cliché-ridden stories he called "totem" journalism, a common type of feature characterized by what Walt Harrington has aptly described as "a kind of feel-goodism aimed at reinforcing the most common beliefs of readers."[49] Wolfe, however, was having trouble with his material and so, in his words, he "just started recording it all" in a memo to his editor at *Esquire* Byron Dobell who, after "striking out the 'Dear Byron' at the top of the memorandum" ran the story as it was.[50]

Like Wolfe, Thompson planned in his Las Vegas story to "record the whole thing, *as it happened*."[51] Somewhere along the way, however, he seems to have recognized the limitations of this method and, more importantly, to have realized that, as innovative as it might seem to be to turn one's self into a version of the "mere machine to repeat" Pray had extolled, doing so marked a ratcheting up rather than a breaking away from dominant journalistic practice.[52]

Thompson suggests this point later in the jacket copy when he explicitly places Wolfe on the journalistic side of the literary-journalism ledger. "The only thing new and unusual about Wolfe's journalism," writes Thompson, "is that he's an abnormally *good* reporter."[53] The "fine sense of echo"[54] with which Thompson credits Wolfe is no small gift, of course, but it is hardly a defining feature of the sort of engaged and radically subjective literary artistry with which Thompson associates "The New Journalism" and for which he seems to be striving. Describing *Fear and Loathing* as "a first, gimped effort in a direction that what Tom Wolfe calls 'The New Journalism' has been flirting with for almost a decade,"[55] Thompson proceeds in the jacket copy to identify Wolfe's main shortcoming *as* a new journalist: "Wolfe's problem is that he's too crusty to *participate* in his stories," Thompson writes. "The people he feels comfortable with are dull as stale dogshit, and the people who seem to fascinate him as a writer are so weird that they make him nervous."[56] Thompson's response to the distance at which Wolfe (and others) hold their subjects is to diminish it by aggressively entering the narrative frame: where Wolfe was made nervous by his subjects and so remains largely detached from them, Thompson interacts with those about whom he's writing—often in

ways which "jangle" them "right down to the core of their spleens."[57] In doing so, he eases away from the detachment implied in the "recording" model of reporting he had originally envisioned for the Las Vegas story and thus from the vestiges of the journalistic professionalism that paradigm preserves, and towards the more subjective and radically participatory form of writing he calls Gonzo:[58]

> True Gonzo reporting needs the talents of a master journalist, the eye of an artist/photographer and the heavy balls of an actor. Because the writer *must* be a participant in the scene, while he's writing it—or at least taping it, or even sketching it. Or all three. Probably the closest analogy to the ideal would be a film director/producer who writes his own scripts, does his own camera work and somehow manages to film himself in action, as the protagonist or at least a main character.[59]

Although Thompson retains a filmic metaphor to describe Gonzo, unlike his earlier conception of the journalist "functioning as a camera,"[60] the writer in this model doesn't just compose in the viewfinder, he enters it, working both sides of the lens, "writing" both the representation *and* its original. Such an intervention complicates the clear distinction between subjective consciousness and objective reality the positivist model of representation seeks to maintain. It also reminds us, however, of the manner in which the two are imbricated: in influencing the objective scene and its players, Thompson makes explicit, albeit in exaggerated fashion, the subjective inflection of phenomenal experience which necessarily occurs, it would seem, in all but the most mechanical acts of representation.[61]

The extreme subjectivity we find in Thompson's work defines one pole of the literary journalistic response to what Hartsock calls the "epistemological crisis" provoked by "the rise of a factual or objective journalism style."[62] (The other is a more "outward-directed" or "covert subjectivity" which we might associate with Wolfe's style.) As Hartsock notes, such extreme subjectivity is always at risk of falling into solipsism.[63] Objectivity, however, bears its own risks for the subject, and these are accentuated by the camera. One particular risk is evident in the work of an American author Thompson is known to have read and emulated: John Dos Passos. In his *U.S.A.* trilogy, published in 1938, John Dos Passos intersperses the realistic narratives of his twelve main characters with twenty-seven biographies of actual individuals contemporary with the time of the novels, sixty-five "Newsreel" sections, comprised, as Juan Suárez has said, of "collages of found texts, including snatches of songs, journalistic prose, political speeches, headlines, and ticker-tape news releases,"[64] and fifty-one sections entitled "The Camera Eye." Contrary to the common association of photography with objective vision, these sections are highly

subjective, providing, it has been argued, "extremely allusive autobiographical sketches whose full intelligibility often depends on an intimate knowledge of Dos Passos's biography."[65]

Michael North has commented explicitly on the matter of these "enigmatic"[66] sections of *U.S.A.* in his book *Camera Works*. Noting an interview with Dos Passos in which the author remarks that the "Camera Eye" sections were "a safety valve" for his "own subjective feelings,"[67] North observes that such a connection of the camera with subjectivity is unusual:

> [I]t has been more common, from Fox Talbot right down to Roland Barthes, to consider the camera as essentially objective rather than subjective. At the time when *U.S.A.* was published, of course, cameras inevitably suggested documentary realism of the kind made so famous by Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. In literature, particularly in American literature, the camera is associated more usually with this kind of realism than with the sort of impressionistic interior monologues that constitute the "Camera Eye" sections of *U.S.A.*[68]

North argues, however, that the detachment which is essential to documentary realism has the effect of stranding the viewing subject in his or her own subjectivity:

> The objectivity of the camera eye becomes a kind of subjectivity, not because it is slanted or distorted but because it is isolated and detached. And this seems very close to what Dos Passos has in mind in associating his camera eye with a subjective point of view: that there is something structurally isolating in eyesight itself, something that the camera exaggerates by separating the other senses from the visual, physical presence from the act of seeing, and one moment in time from every other.[69]

The "Camera Eye" sections of *U.S.A.*, in other words, foreground the profoundly alienating effects on the observer of the strictly positivist conception of photography on which contemporary notions of journalistic professionalism are based.

Douglas Brinkley, who edited Thompson's letters, notes that the author seems to have read Dos Passos in 1956,[70] and that he was among the writers whose style Thompson "studiously" mimicked in his early years.[71] As such, Daniel Grubb sees a "direct echo" of the "Camera Eye" sections in *Fear and Loathing*.[72] Although Grubb doesn't fully work out the details of the relationship, he does make the important point that Dos Passos's example allowed Thompson to incorporate the subjectivity of the text's writer-narrator-protagonist into the story.[73]

While the precise nature of the relationship between the "Camera Eye" sections of *U.S.A.* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* remains uncertain, it

can be said that Dos Passos's association of photography with subjective isolation provides a clue to the nature of the "right kind of eyes" Thompson describes in the wave speech. In compressing five or six years of history into a single image that fuses Thompson's personal experiences with those of a generation, the passage represents an aesthetic consolidation consistent with the spirit Thompson attributes to San Francisco in the mid-1960s. Particularly important is the sense of community he describes among those who were there then and the remarkable assurance they felt that, regardless of where you went in the Bay Area, you would "come to a place where people were just as high and wild" as you[74] and whose energy, like yours, was fueling the "long fine flash" of that unique historical moment.[75] That ethos, of course, was inseparable from the drug responsible for it all, LSD, and its capacity to induce in its users a sense of the sort of inter-subjective understanding Wolfe describes in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. In this regard, the "right kind of eyes," the "wave speech" suggests, are those capable of seeing beyond the isolating effects imposed by Enlightenment paradigms and their embodiment in photography and the various regimes such as objective journalism that take their cue from its example. If ether is the drug Thompson uses to represent the alienating effects of conventional journalism on its practitioners, acid, a drug that Thompson's contemporary Thomas Pynchon said allows its users to feel "themselves integrated into everything, like mystics in deep trances,"[76] represents the possibility of resisting those effects. Gonzo is the discursive counterpart of acid and its revolutionary culture.

In abandoning a photographic model of reporting that excludes the subject from the picture, Thompson, with Gonzo journalism, seeks to recover something of the acid-inspired spirit of integration which had characterized San Francisco in the mid-1960s and, in so doing, to challenge the fragmentation which had followed "The Movement's"[77] collapse. "We are all wired into a *survival* trip now," writes Thompson, lamenting not only the decline of the community of which he had been a part but also the dissipation of its energies and with them, the "fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was *right*, that we were winning. . . . "[78]

Gonzo is, in some respects, an atavistic embodiment of the spirit that drove the acid culture;[79] but it is a mutation too, the edge in Thompson's style deriving from his inability to accept the naive "mystic" fallacies of the Acid Culture [80] and a resolve never to lose sight of the "grim meat-hook realities"[81] of temporal political life. Politically alert as it may be, though, Gonzo also represents a rearguard action, an effort to not allow to be vanquished a once-powerful force now rapidly in retreat. As Thompson remarks in the audio commentary track to the Criterion DVD of Terry Gilliam's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas:*

> All the politics, really, in this world, in the American century, has been a rearguard action. You're never going to win, but, yeah, you can slow it down. Like Dylan said to me when I said I don't know if we can beat these bastards. Same old story. He said, "No, but we don't have to join them." And I thought, "A-ha: Now that's the real voice of the sixties there."[82]

In his experience working as both a journalist and a literary writer, Thompson seems to have had some intuition of the very conservative consequences of adopting a traditional, objective camera-eye metaphor as a model for his own work. In allowing him to inject himself into the frame of his stories, however, Gonzo provided Thompson with a means of representing and thus of *reflecting on* himself, his journalistic practice, and his art. In the case of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, this reflection takes the form of a compressed literary autobiography, a "fantasy"[83] perhaps in its details but not in the accuracy of the developmental arc it describes. In its two-part structure, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* charts a movement away from the objective, camera-eye model and its entrenched relationship with journalistic objectivity and professionalism, towards a more integrated and less alienated literary-journalistic practice consistent with the spirit of the San Francisco acid culture.

It is in this sense that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* could be read as sharing some features with the *bildungsroman* or novel of development. Traditionally, the *bildungsroman* deals with the process by which its protagonist is integrated more or less successfully into the dominant social order. The rags-to-riches Horatio Alger novels to which Thompson frequently refers in *Fear and Loathing* describe such a process for their nineteenth-century American protagonists.

But what if to be successfully integrated into the dominant social order one must, as is suggested by the objective camera-eye model of journalistic professionalism, cancel or repress one's subjectivity? Professional success in such cases would necessarily involve a certain alienation and disintegration of the self. A *failure* to integrate with the status quo, on the other hand, would mark the successful integration of the self or, at least, the maintenance of some version of non-alienated subjectivity. This idea is latent in Thompson's own description of *Fear and Loathing* as "a failure," although a failure "so *complex*," he says, "that I feel I can take the risk of defending it as a first, gimped effort in a direction that what Tom Wolfe calls "The New Journalism" has been flirting with for almost a decade."[84] The text narrates a failure to fulfill its initial conception, but given that that conception was based on a flawed photographic paradigm of journalistic representation to which the author discovers an alternative, the book, in fact, succeeds, although it does so as a work of a new genre.

Just as generations of boys were encouraged to read the *Ragged Dick* stories of Horatio Alger Jr. for guidance in their own growth, Thompson offers *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as an alternative model to which "new" journalists may look for their own "professional" development. If *Fear and Loathing* is a *bildungsroman*, it is thus one in which the goal of an individual's development is (in Dylan's words) to *not* "join them." As the creator of such an alternative vision, and the writer of a book still capable of jangling the sensibilities of its readers, of disturbing the still-prevalent nineteenth-century paradigms of mainstream journalistic practice, and of stirring up the metaphors sedimented within them, Thompson may well be, as he states in the final sentence of the book, "a monster reincarnation of Horatio Alger."[85]

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Notes

1. Throughout this essay, I refer to the protagonist of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as "Thompson." The name "Raoul Duke" under which he spends much of the book is an alias he adopts at some point prior to registering at the Mint Hotel. That Duke is the assumed name for Thompson is suggested by the telegram the protagonist receives addressed to "HUNTER S. THOMPSON c/o RAOUL DUKE" in Part One, Chapter Ten. Care must be taken, however, not to associate *that* "Hunter S. Thompson" too closely with the author who elsewhere (if he is to be believed!) describes *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as, variously, a "happy work of fiction" but also a work "caught & finally crippled in that vain, academic limbo between 'journalism' and 'fiction.'" Generically, *Fear and Loathing*'s fictional dimension trumps its journalistic elements. As such, I have taken the liberty of identifying the book in

the title of this paper as a novel. See Hunter S. Thompson, "Jacket Copy for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*," in *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales From a Strange Time*. Simon and Schuster paperback edition. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 105–11.

2. Robert A. Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao, *Sustaining Democracy? Journalism and the Politics of Objectivity*. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1998), 6–9.

3. Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*. 2nd Vintage Books Edition. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 101–02.

4. Ibid., 3.

5. Ibid., 24.

6. Ibid., 32.

7. Ibid., 72.

8. Ibid., 85.

9. Ibid., 69.

10. Ibid., 67.

11. Ibid., 68.

12. Ibid., 63.

13. Ibid., 67.

14. Ibid., 38.

15. Ibid., 40.

16. Sarah Kember, "'The Shadow of the Object': Photography and Realism," *Textual Practice* 10(1) (1996), 151.

17. Ibid., 153.

18. Ibid., 151.

19. For more on the relationship between journalistic professionalism and objectivity, see Robert McChesney, *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 57–97.

20. Isaac Clark Pray, *Memoirs of James Gordon Bennett and His Times*. (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1855), 472, quoted in Dan Schiller, *Objectivity and the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 89.

21. Kember, "Photography and Realism," 151.

22. Thompson, *Las Vegas*, 85.

23. Ibid., 63.

24. Ibid., 23.

25. Ibid., 45.

26. Ibid., emphasis added. It is hard not to consider the possibility, as well, that Thompson's reference to ether in this passage alludes to T. S. Eliot's famous reference in the opening lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to "the evening . . . spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherized upon a table." Eliot may not be talking about a craps table, but the effect Thompson describes could be classed as an example of the sort of "dissociation of sensibility" Eliot wrote about in his essay "The Metaphysical Poets" to describe the integration of thought and feeling

or experience which he found in the poetry preceding the seventeenth century. In this regard, it is worth noting that the term "dissociation of sensibility" was in fact coined prior to Eliot's use of it by early experimenters who imagined "the possibility of inducing controlled, reversible anesthesia" (Richard Barnett, Review of Stephanie Snow, *Operations without Pain: The Practice and Science of Anaesthesia in Victorian Britain* in *Medical History* 51(2): 256-57). To this we might add that Eliot's first wife was addicted to ether.

27. Thompson, *Las Vegas*, 4.

28. Ibid., 37.

29. A similar identification with the professional press occurs while Thompson, out on the race course in a press vehicle, comes across "two dune-buggies full" of rowdy military types:

"What *outfit* you fellas with?" one of them shouted. The engines were roaring; we could barely hear each other.

"The sporting press," I yelled. "We're friendlies—hired geeks" (39).

The word "hired" here resonates with the "hired bullshit" Thompson will later say makes history so "hard to know" (67), confirming mainstream journalism's compromised relationship with truth. In this regard, Thompson's writing represents an attempt to work outside of the mutually reinforcing constraints of journalistic convention and journalistic professionalism.

30. Thompson, *Las Vegas*, 33.

31. Ibid., 12.

32. Ibid., 33.

33. Ibid., 37.

34. Tom Wolfe, in Wolfe and E. W. Johnson, eds., *The New Journalism: With an Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 17.

35. Ibid.

36. Thompson, *Las Vegas*, 109. Thompson remarks: "At the Mint 400 we were dealing with an essentially simpatico crowd, and if our behavior was gross and outrageous . . . well, it was only a matter of degree."

37. Wolfe, *The New Journalism: With an Introduction*, 17.

38. John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 42.

39. Thompson, *Las Vegas*, 77.

40. Ibid., 141.

41. Ibid. When Thompson later removes the badge, he reports that it identifies him as "Raoul Duke, Special Investigator, Los Angeles" (201).

42. Ibid., 109.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., 141.

45. Ibid., 110.

46. Ibid., 200. Like much in Thompson, this passage is not without its own ironies and ambiguities. For all of its vitriol, for example, the tirade is prompted by a fake news story, worthy in its surreal scene (it is datelined "*Aboard the U.S.S.*

Crazy Horse: Somewhere in the Pacific (Sept. 25)" characters (including "Dr. Bloor, the ship's chaplain" and "a hooded officer known only as 'The Commander.'), and events it describes ("five crewmen including the Captain were diced up like pineapple meat in a brawl"), of the imagination of Thompson's contemporary, the novelist Thomas Pynchon. "Why bother with newspapers, if this is all they offer?" asks Thompson, before launching into his journalist-as-"masturbating chimp" screed. Here we could venture, however, that Thompson, at this late point in his narrative, has traded irony for hyperbole as the trope most appropriate for his protagonist's new relationship with journalistic professionalism. Given that hyperbole is the opposite of the sort of "understatement" Wolfe identified with the "pale beige tone" that had prevailed among "journalists and literati ten years ago" (17), the choice is a rhetorically shrewd one, indicating that, so confident is his character in his new position, that he has no difficulty pulling out all the stops. It is also worth noting that this new attitude is signaled in Thompson's final description of his protagonist as a man "just sick enough to be totally confident" (204).

47. Thompson, *Great Shark Hunt*, 106.

48. Originally published in *Esquire* as "There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (Rahghhh!)," this article would provide the title for Wolfe's book *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamlined Baby*, a work which, along with Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood,* made 1965 a landmark year in the history of American literary journalism. See Hartsock, *History*, 195.

49. Walt Harrington, *Intimate Journalism: The Art and Craft of Reporting Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), xv.

50. Tom Wolfe, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), xii-xiii.

51. Thompson, *Great Shark Hunt*, 106.

52. It is also possible that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is Thompson's response to Wolfe's "Las Vegas (What?) Las Vegas (Can't Hear You! Too noisy!) Las Vegas!!!!," the first story in *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*. Although Thompson is critical of Wolfe in the jacket copy for *Fear and Loathing*, those comments need to be considered in the context of the "strongly positive," but ultimately unpublished, review he says he wrote of the book for the *National Observer*. For more, see William McKeen, "Interview with Hunter S. Thompson," in *Conversations with Hunter S. Thompson*, eds. Beef Torrey and Kevin Simonson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 93.

53. Thompson, *Great Shark Hunt*, 108.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Thompson, *Las Vegas*, 18.

58. Thompson's "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved," published in *Scanlan's* in June 1970, is the story most generally cited as the first example of

a fully blown "Gonzo" journalism. According to Marc Weingarten, "it mapped out the blueprint for all of Thompson's subsequent work of the decade." See Marc Weingarten, *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 235.

59. Thompson, *Great Shark Hunt*, 106.

60. Ibid.

61. In his next book, *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*, Thompson identifies the camera explicitly with objectivity, although it is a mechanical objectivity unavailable to the human subject. Noting that his own objectivity "swole up and busted about ten years ago," Thompson remarks that, "The only thing I ever saw that came close to Objective Journalism was a closed-circuit TV setup that watched shoplifters in the General Store at Woody Creek, Colorado. I always admired the machine, but I noticed that nobody paid much attention to it." Effective as a means of surveillance and for reporting "things like box scores, race results and stock market tabulations," such objective recording of raw data is admirable but not possible, he suggests, in the more complex interactions of journalists and their subjects. "[T]here is no such thing as Objective Journalism," Thompson writes in the same passage. "The phrase itself is a pompous contradiction in terms." See Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72* (New York: Warner Books, 1973), 47–48.

62. Hartsock, *History*, 51.

63. Ibid., 52

64. Juan A. Suárez. "John Dos Passos's *USA* and Left Documentary Film in the 1930s: The Cultural Politics of 'Newsreel' and 'The Camera Eye,'" *American Studies in Scandinavia* 31 (1999): 43.

65. Ibid.

66. Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 145.

67. Ibid.

68. North, *Camera Works*, 145–46.

69. Ibid., 146.

70. Douglas Brinkley, ed., *The Proud Highway: Saga of a Desperate Southern Gentleman*, *The Fear and Loathing Letters, Vol. 1*., by Hunter S. Thompson (New York: Random House, 1997), 27

71. Ibid., xxiii

72. Daniel Grubb, "The Rhetoric and Role of Hunter S. Thompson" (M.A. thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2006), 23.

73. Ibid., 22–24.

74. Thompson, *Las Vegas*, 67.

75. Ibid.

76. Thomas Pynchon, Letter to Thomas M. Hirsch, January 8, 1969. qtd. in David Seed. *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988), 242

77. Thompson, *Las Vegas*, 180.

78. Ibid., 68

79. Thompson actually refers in the jacket copy to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as "a sort of Atavistic Endeavor, a dream-trip into the past—however recent—that was only half successful." See *Great Shark Hunt*, 109.

80. Thompson, *Las Vegas*, 179.

81. Ibid. 178.

82. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, DVD, directed by Terry Gilliam (1998; The Criterion Collection, 2003).

83. Thompson, *Great Shark Hunt*, 107.

84. Ibid., 104.

85. Thompson, *Las Vegas*, 204.

"A Savage Place!" Hunter S. Thompson and His Pleasure Dome

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Hunter S. Thompson liberally used Samuel Taylor Coleridge's letters and poem "Kubla Khan" to surreptitiously add layers of metaphor and meaning to his own narrative in Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.

Hunter S. Thompson has never been known for humility, so when he does go to extremes to admit failure, the phenomenon is worth scrutiny and, perhaps, even suspicion. In his 1971 introduction to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*—which he called the "jacket copy"—Thompson wrote that although he was pleased with *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, it was a "failed experiment" in Gonzo, his trademark journalistic style.[1] Yet within the context of this introduction, and beneath the text of failure, lies another message: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a monument to Thompson's philosophy of journalism and the creative process.

Unfortunately, this jacket-copy introduction did not appear, as Thompson had intended, in the Random House publication of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Had it done so, the subtle association Thompson was trying to make and his statement on the creative process might have been deciphered much sooner and understood more widely than it has been. As it happened, the introduction did not appear in print for another seven years, until it was included in *The Great Shark Hunt*.

Fortunately for academics, Thompson preserved copies of his correspondence during the development of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and it is primarily from these three sources—correspondence, the introduction and

the book—that I conclude that when Thompson wrote *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* he heavily infused the book with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan," as well as that poem's introduction and Coleridge's personal circumstances. Although Thompson does not state this outright, and the purpose of his mystery concerning Coleridge and "Kubla Khan" may never be revealed, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* stalwartly illustrates his philosophy that "'fiction' and 'journalism' are artificial categories"[2] and that the most truthful reportage is a marriage of these two forms. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, then, is his monument to this style of truthful reporting.

But in order to understand this synthesis of Thompson's and Coleridge's narratives, philosophies, and biographical elements, and to analyze Thompson's introduction and book, it is first necessary to review some details of Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan," its introduction, and the poet's own circumstances.

In addition to being one of the most famous poets of the Romantic period in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, Samuel Taylor Coleridge was regarded as an avid intellectual, hypothesizing at length on the imaginative process and poetic theory.[3] In his youth, his anarchic, utopian beliefs led him to organize a group of like-minded individuals, the Pantisocrats, who were determined to create an ideal society in the New World; in fact, it was to this end that he be came engaged—so that he would be able to procreate for the new colony.[4] But perhaps more famous than Coleridge's intellectual and political leanings was his drug use. Coleridge, as it is well known, was an opium addict. Like Thompson, Coleridge was a prolific epistler, and we know from Coleridge's letters that he also abused the drug ether on occasion. His letters suggest this ether use took place between 1794 and 1803.[5] These dates correspond roughly with the time frame in which he is believed to have composed "Kubla Khan"—between 1797 and 1800.[6]

Although many critics now agree that "Kubla Khan" and its introduction are a statement on the creative process of poetry, Coleridge's contemporaries viewed "Kubla Khan" as a sort of enigmatic failure on the author's part, an example of his reputation for being "great in promise, but not in performance."[7] In his own humble introduction to "Kubla Khan," which appeared with the poem's publication in 1816,[8] Coleridge repeatedly insists "Kubla Khan" is a "vision in a dream" and a "fragment" of a much larger poem.[9] He purports that "Kubla Khan" is the result of an opium dream he experienced, having fallen asleep while reading in *Purchas His Pilgrimage* about the great Mongolian emperor Kubla Khan. As Thompson does in his introduction, Coleridge attempts to explain the process of what he had hoped—but failed—to achieve. In the dream, "all the images rose up before him as *things,* with a

parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort." Coleridge claims that upon waking, he had a clear grasp of the poem, which contained several hundred lines. Unfortunately, just as he was taking pen to paper, he was interrupted by the famous "man from Porlock" and called out to business. When he returned to his farmhouse, he could remember only this "fragment" of fifty-four lines.[10]

This is the account Coleridge proffers, and it seems to be the one his contemporaries accepted; friends and reviewers derided "Kubla Khan" as a nonsense poem or enjoyable curiosity.[11] Many theories, psychological and literary, have appeared since, but most critics now agree that this introduction is fictional and that Coleridge did not receive "Kubla Khan" in an opiate stupor.[12] One critic even dismisses the introduction as "a Coleridgean hoax." Although there remains much dissension about the poem and its introduction, many critics do believe that "'Kubla Khan' is a poem about poetry and the poetic process,"[13] and that the introduction is a "prose counterpart of the poem it introduces."[14]

The poem begins by recounting the legend of the emperor Kubla Khan, who commanded the creation of Xanadu, a grand kingdom that was enchanted, both beautifully and demonically:

> In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
> A stately pleasure dome decree:
> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns measureless to man,
> Down to a sunless sea.[15]

Xanadu was a land of duality: it was at once idyllic, with forests and aromatic gardens, and "a savage place" where one might hear a "woman wailing for her demon lover." This artificial paradise of opposites was surrounded by walls and magically sealed by a dome. Through this land Alph, the sacred river, meandered and eventually plunged underground through a deep chasm into "a sunless sea." Yet, for all its fortification, Xanadu was vulnerable. Kubla could hear "ancestral voices prophesying war," which might destroy all he had created. The last stanza of the poem shifts to the poet's lament: if only he were capable of reviving his multi-sensory dream, which comprised sight, sound, and words, he could fully recreate Xanadu on the page, and he himself would be considered enchanted.[16]

Symbolically, Kubla Khan, who creates Xanadu and its gardens, is represented as an artist or poet, "whose glorious creation, as the ancestral voices from the deep caverns warn, is a precariously balanced reconciliation of the natural and the artificial." Coleridge's dream is seen as an "inspired vision" that illustrates the nature of poetic vision: the wild river that erupts from the

underground sea and meanders five miles through Kubla Khan's constructed garden before plunging back to the subterranean represents "the sudden eruption of the subconscious into the realm of the conscious mind and its eventual inevitable recession back into the deep well of the unconscious." As these images illustrate, the poet's "purpose is to capture such visions in words." However, his attempts are thwarted by two insurmountable obstacles. The first problem is that "language is an inadequate medium that permits only an approximation of the visions it is used to record." The second is that "the visions themselves, by the time the poet comes to set them down, have faded into the light of common day and must be reconstructed from memory."[17]

Of course, Coleridge's poem of artificial paradise and the creative process has no relevancy if Thompson was either unaware of or disinterested in them. But evidence proves otherwise. From an early age, Thompson read classic literature extensively, both at his mother's encouragement and for discourse in the Athenaeum, an elite literary society that Thompson belonged to as a teenager.[18] From his letters, we know that during his tenure as an airman editing the sports section for the Eglin Air Force Base newspaper, Thompson moonlighted at a civilian paper under the nom de plume "Cuubley Cohn."[19] Around this time, he appropriated an abandoned beach house, which he christened Xanadu.[20] His interest in Coleridge and "Kubla Khan" seems to have been a lifelong one. In 1986, he borrowed a line from "Kubla Khan" for the title of his article "Down to a Sunless Sea," in which he discussed Coleridge extensively while excoriating President Reagan's war on drugs.[21] He also prefaced his last collection of essays, *Kingdom of Fear*, with an excerpt from the poem. In an interview with *Spin* magazine, Thompson said, "I pride myself with having the wisdom and the taste for stealing from the right people . . . [including] Coleridge."[22] In a telephone interview with Thompson, two years before his death, journalist Corey Seymour complained that the interview was interrupted "with pit stops along the way to read a bit of Coleridge."[23]

Thompson's interest in Coleridge appears to have extended to the poet's study of the imaginative process in writing. Like Coleridge's resolute attitude toward the imagination in poetry, Thompson was adamant about the role of Gonzo reporting as a function for creating a truth more pure than orthodox journalism could offer.[24]

In his introduction to *Fear and Loathing*, Thompson claims that "'fiction' and 'journalism' are artificial categories: and that both forms, at their best, are only two different means to the same end."[25] Like Coleridge insisting that "Kubla Khan" is not a complete or worthy poem but only a fragment of a dream, Thompson insists five times that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is also

a failure—in Gonzo journalism. Gonzo journalism, as he explains it here, is rather similar to Coleridge's concept of perfect poetic process. In the last stanza of "Kubla Khan," Coleridge laments that he could not recapture the multi-sensory, perfect moment of poetic vision; if he could, he would recreate flawlessly the pleasure-dome of Kubla Khan:

> Could I revive within me
> Her symphony and song,
> To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
> That with music loud and long,
> I would build that dome in air.[26]

In Thompson's plan for Gonzo journalism as set forth in his introduction, he would "buy a fat notebook and record the whole thing, *as it happened,* then send in the notebook for publication—without editing."[27]

In its most perfect sense, Gonzo journalism would be like "a film director/producer who writes his own scripts, does his own camera work and somehow manages to film himself in action."[28] In other words, Gonzo journalism would be a virtuoso, multi-sensory, multi-talented creative process similar to the manner in which Coleridge would ultimately capture the entire vision, both the "images that rose up before him" and the "correspondent expressions."[29] Thompson's vision of perfect Gonzo journalism harkens to the major obstacles of Coleridge's re-creation of a perfect vision: that language is inadequate to express the entire vision, and that the vision must be captured as it is being experienced by the artist.

Thompson also reinforces the connection of his ideas to Coleridge's by using referent language in his introduction. He writes of "a dream trip into the past."[30] He describes *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as "a victim of its own conceptual schizophrenia," alluding to Coleridge's treatment of opposites in "Kubla Khan."[31]

Yet this allusion to Gonzo journalism as an experiment of the perfect creative process does not seem to satisfy Thompson. He is compelled to reinforce his theory with a metaphor of a Cartier-Bresson photo. Not merely any photojournalist, Henri Cartier-Bresson was a co-founder of the Magnum photography agency who famously wrote about his own work, "I craved to seize the whole essence, in the confines of one single photograph, of some situation that was in the process of unrolling itself before my eyes."[32] Likewise, Thompson's seemingly offhand remark about writing the first draft of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is not as insignificant as it might first appear. "It was sort of an exercise—like *Boléro*"[33] assumes deeper meaning when one understands that "Boléro epitomizes [Maurice] Ravel's preoccupation with restyling and reinventing dance movements."[34] It would appear that Thompson is

either going to extremes in emphasizing his preoccupation with the creative process or is interspersing his introduction with clues for a contextual analysis for the book.

In fact, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* contains a great deal of material referent to Coleridge and "Kubla Khan." It is important to note that, contrary to Thompson's claim that the book is "manic gibberish,"[35] it is a well-crafted exercise using his theory of the creative process. It is a carefully constructed story that utilizes many tools of the novel—dialogue, symbolism, foreshadowing, and exposition. As Thompson's first wife Sandy explains about his work during this period of his life: "He wanted to be read and thought of as a serious human being, a serious writer . . . *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, Hell's Angels*—he rewrote and rewrote and rewrote and rewrote those."[36]

Thompson's Random House editor, Jim Silberman, posed serious questions on the Vegas book's authenticity. When Silberman asked Thompson if the manuscript for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* was fiction or not, Thompson replied forcefully, academically, and evasively: "Under normal circumstances it should never be necessary for a writer to explain *how* his work should be read. In theory, all literature & even journalism should be taken on its own intrinsic merits—above & beyond . . . the confusing contexts of whatever reality surrounded the act of writing."[37] This was his only direct response in an 800-word letter; the remainder was devoted to a sort of essay on the state of literature and journalism in America, underscoring a point he stated in his jacket-copy introduction that fiction and journalism "at their best, are only two different means to the same end."[38] Silberman raised another thorny issue: it was "absolutely clear" to him that Thompson was not on drugs while writing the book. Thompson, clearly taken aback by Silberman's acuity, admitted he was not on drugs while working on *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and that the writing was "a very conscious attempt to *simulate* drug freakout" in order "re-create" the truth.[39]

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is a multi-layered narrative that frames itself, to some degree, around theory concerning Coleridge's poem. One reading of the poem asserts that "Xanadu is Paradise Regained and Kubla symbolizes the creative artist who gives concrete expression to the ideal forms of truth and beauty."[40] Thompson echoes this theory in his introduction when he comments on colleague Tom Wolfe's unorthodox style of journalism. Wolfe, he writes, is an "abnormally good reporter" who has "at least a peripheral understanding of what John Keats was talking about when he said that thing about Truth & Beauty."[41] Yet, in another reading of the poem, "Kubla is a self-indulgent materialist, a daemonic figure, who imposes his tyrannical will upon the natural world and so produces a false paradise of contrived artifice

cut off from the realm of [nature doing what nature does] by man-made walls and towers."[42]

In writing *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and its introduction, Thompson employs both of these theories: in the first, Thompson is Kubla, the artist who is trying to give "concrete expression" to his writing in order to recreate a more ideal truth. Thompson substantiates this image of himself as Kubla, the master of his own sunny and icy paradise, in the quirky ending to his introduction, in which he suddenly states "and now, on this fantastic Indian summer morning in the Rockies, I want to leave this noisy black machine [the typewriter] and sit naked on my porch for a while, in the sun."[43] In the second theory, Kubla is the force behind Las Vegas and its perverted version of the American Dream—Kubla may symbolize the city's governing body, President Nixon, or the owner of the Circus-Circus gambling casino. Whatever the precise meaning, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* simultaneously functions as an example of one writer's attempt to create perfect prose as well as an explication of Las Vegas as a materialistic, artificial American Dream.

Thompson appropriated many symbols and words in correlating *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and its introduction to "Kubla Khan" and Coleridge. The terms he employed from the poem are many: "pleasure dome," "savage," "ancestral voices prophesying war," "music," "mazes," "the garden," the "woman wailing" for her demonic lover, and the image of the artist. Most of these terms, such as "pleasure dome" and "savage," he used verbatim. Thompson also utilized the images of opium, ether, and anarchist politics from Coleridge's own life. His use of language and images from Coleridge's work is so substantial that to create a comprehensive list of each would be a considerable effort in textual deconstruction. What follows, then, is not a comprehensive breakdown, but a survey of correlations aimed at establishing a foundation for this argument.

Perhaps the most conspicuous of these symbols in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is the pleasure dome. "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan/A stately pleasure dome decree." In Las Vegas, Raoul Duke, Thompson's alter-ego and the main character of the book, declares that the Circus-Circus casino is the "main nerve" of the American Dream.[44] Circus-Circus, the hedonistic casino with surrealistic delights and trapeze acts, stands "four stories high, in the style of a circus tent, [with] all manner of strange County-Fair/Polish Carnival madness going on up in this space."[45] Circus-Circus is a central image in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. The event at Circus-Circus is foreshadowed in the fifth chapter, fully developed in the next chapter, and is alluded to thereafter throughout the book. In the final pages of the story, Duke returns to Circus-Circus but is removed by the bouncers, who symbolically tell him, "You don't

belong here."[46] Before he is expelled, however, he has a conversation in which he reiterates that Circus-Circus is the main nerve, or core, of the new American Dream. In this version of the dream, the owner of the Circus-Circus—similar to the materialistic Kubla creating a dark paradise—is the "model" example who now "has his *own* circus and a license to steal, too."[47]

When considering the subtitle of the book, *A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, it becomes possible to substitute "the Heart of the American Dream" with "Circus-Circus" or "Xanadu," because both are synonymous with Coleridge's pleasure dome. Either is the "savage place" of Coleridge's poem. As Duke recounts, upon his and his attorney's arrival at Circus-Circus, even though they were incomprehensibly intoxicated on ether, they were admitted, because "in this town they love a drunk. Fresh meat. So they put us through the turnstiles and turned us loose inside."[48] To keep this idea alive, Thompson uses "savage" in the title as well as throughout the book. Most notably, it appears when Duke is considering "running a savage burn" on the Mint Hotel by leaving without paying his bill.[49] It also prevails during the discussion of "Savage Henry," who receives several mentions in the third chapter, even though it is clear to the reader that he is fabricated by Duke's attorney, Dr. Gonzo.[50]

Savage Henry is a scag, or heroin, dealer. Curiously, this is one of only a few references to opiates (heroin being a derivative of opium). Another is in the case of Lucy, the deranged lover of Gonzo; Duke explains to a hotel clerk that Lucy sounds disturbed because she has "been into laudanum,"[51] a tincture of opium.

Far more explicit than opium is the use of ether. Ether receives a great deal of attention in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and is mentioned far more than it is actually used. Duke devotes much time in the first three chapters—during his and Gonzo's drive to Las Vegas—to the anticipation of inhaling ether.[52] Yet they do not actually inhale it during the drive. Duke does try to convince Gonzo, but Gonzo dismisses the suggestion: "Forget ether . . . Let's save it for soaking down the rug in the suite."[53] After this intriguing foreshadowing, ether is not mentioned again until the crucial Circus-Circus scene, in which they inhale it in the casino parking lot just prior to Duke's epiphany of Circus-Circus as the "main nerve" of the American Dream.[54] After this scene, ether is not mentioned again until Part Two, when Duke requests some from a pharmacist but is ignored[55] and then again in a passing fantasy involving a college co-ed.[56]

It is intriguing that ether is used only once in the course of the book, yet features prominently in Duke's narrative and fantasies. It may be that ether is purposely introduced as a correlation between Coleridge, the pleasure dome,

and Circus-Circus. Ether is imbibed only once, during the crucial scene of the narrative, but like Edgar Allen Poe's purloined letter, it serves as evidence that is not hidden. It might not be conspicuous if it had been a popular drug in the early 1970s, or at least in Los Angeles, where the characters began their journey and obtained their ether. However, this was not the case. In an interview conducted on December 15, 2009, Sgt. Kevin Kurzhals, of the Los Angeles Police Department's Gangs and Narcotics Division, confirms that ether was not popular on the drug circuit in the 1970s. According to Kurzhals, "If you worked in a dentist's office or someplace like that, you might steal some and take it to a party," but it was not a common drug in any social circles. Ether was, however, relatively easy to obtain because it was used to manufacture the much more fashionable drug, Phencyclidine, or PCP.[57]

If ether use was not popular in the seventies, it remains curious that Thompson would feature it prominently, symbolically, throughout the book. If he wanted his readers to make the association between Xanadu and Las Vegas, between himself and Coleridge, the obvious drug would have been opium. To do this, however, he would have had to recreate a resonating opium experience. But the simple truth was that Thompson could not handle the effects of opium; it was his Achilles heel and caused him intense panic attacks. By 1975, Thompson, the renowned drug freak, had only inhaled opium twice, with frightening results each time.[58] Because of this, Thompson could not make opium a symbolic association between his work and Coleridge's, but he could offer the next most prominent drug in Coleridge's personal history, ether. As noted earlier, ether was a useful choice for Thompson's cryptic narration, because Coleridge's ether consumption corresponded roughly with the time period during which he composed "Kubla Khan."

But ether is not the only theme that is rife throughout the book. Another is the news, especially news broadcasts amid the diversion of artificial paradise that is Las Vegas: "And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far/Ancestral voices prophesying war!"[59] It is in this same manner that Duke, like Kubla, hears television news reports of the Vietnam War. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in Duke's and Gonzo's arrival at the Mint Hotel. Once in their hotel room, Duke is compelled to switch on the television and watch the news, which "was about the Laos Invasion—a series of horrifying disasters . . . [and] Pentagon generals babbling insane lies."[60] In spite of frequent intoxication, anxiety, and sleep deprivation, Duke is frequently watching the news or reading papers.[61] Even after his harrowing experience on the highway between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, his first thought is to check into his new hotel room and watch anchorman Walter Cronkite deliver the news.[62]

But true to the plot twists of the book, Duke is distracted by the surprise waiting in his room. Opening his door, he hits Lucy, Gonzo's beastly new lover who is high on acid and has "the face and form of a Pit Bull."[63] At best, Lucy is "a strange young girl in the throes of a bad psychotic episode"[64] and Duke's instinct is to put distance between himself and Lucy. He is afraid she will bring him trouble and is worried about what she might tell the authorities when she comes down off her high: "Some acid victims . . . have a strange kind of *idiot-savant* capacity for remembering odd details and nothing else."[65] Lucy, who is an artist, paints portraits of Barbra Streisand.[66] Later, after Duke and Gonzo have abandoned her at the airport, Lucy rings their hotel, leaving a message for Duke. In Duke's exchange with the room clerk, it is revealed that Lucy has been crying. Duke lies to the clerk and explains that she is delicate and "has been into laudanum."[67] Lucy is a perplexing metaphor. On the one hand, she may be a sort of beast, Coleridge's "woman wailing for her demon lover."[68] It is more likely, however, that she is a type of the artist himself, who also drank laudanum—a tincture of opium—and claimed to have remembered only the odd fragment of the poem he envisioned in a drug reverie.

Music is another feature of the book. Like Coleridge, who remembers a "damsel with a dulcimer" in another vision, and wishes he could recreate her "symphony and song,"[69] Duke is frequently remembering lyrics such as Bob Dylan's "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again."[70] Likewise, he recounts music he hears, from the Rolling Stones "Sympathy for the Devil"[71] to Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge over Troubled Water" that emits from the jukebox at Wild Bill's Tavern on the edge of Las Vegas.[72]

One obvious metaphor that does not seem to be utilized in the book is the highway and Vegas strip symbolizing "the sacred river" Alph. Nowhere does Thompson conveniently refer to the road as a river or body of water. However, it is worth considering that Duke nicknames both his rental cars after large fish: the Great Red Shark[73] and the White Whale.[74]

Similarly, Thompson's only concrete correlation to Kubla Khan's garden is when Duke and Gonzo enter Las Vegas for the first time. Duke recounts, "I could see the strip/hotel skyline looming up through the blue desert groundhaze: The Sahara, the landmark, the Americana and the ominous Thunderbird—a cluster of grey rectangles in the distance, rising out of the cactus."[75]

As stated before, these are only some of the correlations between *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Coleridge and "Kubla Khan." Yet, as if these are not enough, Thompson drops one more hint of his similarity to Coleridge—explicitly, Thompson as poet. In the farewell scene between Duke and Gonzo, Duke yells rather arbitrarily, "You can always send a telegram to the Right People." Gonzo replies, "Explaining my Position . . . Some asshole wrote a

poem about that once."[76] Both remarks reference what is perhaps the only poem by Thompson ever to be published, "Collect Telegram from a Mad Dog," which ends in this way:

> Later, from jail
> I sent a brace of telegrams
> to the right people
> explaining my position.[77]

Immediately after this exchange, Duke pulls his car onto Paradise Road, another allusion to Xanadu, which in this instance reinforces the link between Thompson and Coleridge.

When examining Thompson's book and "Kubla Khan" side by side, it is clear that when Thompson began to write about the "pleasure dome" he encountered in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, the "savage place" of Xanadu was on his mind. He drew from Coleridge's life and work to emphasize and illustrate his own theory of the creative process in the reporting style he called Gonzo journalism.

The question that remains unanswered, and may never be satisfied, is this: Why did Thompson enshroud this monument to his theory in mystery? The reason may never be known. Perhaps he was concerned that *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* would not be popular if it was revealed as anything more than a book on the drug culture. Maybe he wanted to imbue his book with the allure of *The Great Gatsby*, ensuring that one day its clues would be unraveled by academics. Or perhaps it is because, as he stated in a letter to Silberman prior to the book's publication, "mystery is in vogue."[78]

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On the Road to Gonzo: Hunter S. Thompson's Early Literary Journalism (1961–1970)

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Hunter S. Thompson's feature-writing experiments from 1961 onward furnished the necessary tools for him to make the final leap to his iconoclastic Gonzo style in 1970.

Section I: Some Issues about Definition

1. The Origin of Gonzo, Revisited

Hunter S. Thompson has long been known as the literary journalist whose stories necessarily pivoted on his own actions in order to succeed. This excessive "Gonzo" persona, which served him spectacularly well in the early 1970s, eventually overwhelmed his content and exiled him from the journalistic main stage to a kind of sideshow of recidivist buffoonery. There he remained for a quarter century until his self-inflicted demise in 2005.

But in 2010, several scholars[1] sensed a pendulum swing back in the direction of creative strategies for literary journalism, which makes Thompson an ideal candidate for reassessment. The intention here, then, seven years after Thompson left the stage,[2] is to re-examine his work by minimizing the discussion of the usual tropes—the Herculean consumption of alcohol and pharmaceuticals as instigator of Dionysian inspiration, the cigarette holder as anachronistic nicotine delivery system, anti-fashion statements such as Hawaiian

shirts and leisure wear, the mumbled speech, and so on—and instead to investigate the literary and journalistic qualities of the texts themselves.

The generally accepted wisdom is that Thompson's cutting, original style began with "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved," published in *Scanlan's Monthly* in mid-1970.[3] *Boston Globe* Sunday magazine editor Bill Cardoso christened this new comic style "Gonzo." A bastard offspring of literature and the New Journalism so named, Thompson made a spectacular splash when "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas"[4] was published in *Rolling Stone* magazine in late 1971. *Scanlan's* had already expired by that point, a triumph of idealism over the bottom line, but the destinies of Thompson and *Rolling Stone* became symbiotically entwined as both were on the rise. According to Thompson's most recent biographer, William McKeen, Cardoso's version of Gonzo is probably a "Boston-bar derivation, referring to the last man standing after a night of drinking."[5]

Not everyone agrees with the assessment that the Derby piece is necessarily the first Gonzo piece. For instance, Tom Wolfe thinks Gonzo started one feature earlier when Thompson revised a story, intended for *Playboy*, for *Scanlan's* editor Warren Hinckle, who published it in his magazine as "The Temptations of Jean-Claude Killy."[6] The Killy, Derby, and Vegas stories all began as magazine assignments, Wolfe points out, but went elsewhere.

Long ago, John Hellman established what distinguished "Killy" and "Derby" from all previous Thompson features was the quality that led Cardoso to announce the arrival of what amounted to a new strain of the New Journalism: "[Thompson] has purposely emphasized and exaggerated certain of his traits in order to create a fictive version of himself which is essentially a self-caricature, not an in-depth representation of human being."[7]

But when Thompson's early feature writing is examined closely—the purpose of this essay[8]—various elements of Gonzo would seem to date back to 1961, to his first magazine piece, a profile of Big Sur, where Thompson was living at the time, which was published in *Rogue* magazine.[9]

2. The "Derby," Revisited

"The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved" is Hunter S. Thompson's piss-take on the Saturday May 2,1970 horse race—quite literally, for he and illustrator Ralph Steadman were drunk for most of the Derby weekend that constitutes the narrative time frame of the story. A 16-1 long shot, Dust Commander, mentioned only in passing in the story, lurked in fifth or sixth place until jockey Mike Manganello persuaded him to bolt for the lead in the stretch, opening a several-length chasm by the wire between him and second-place finisher My Dad George. The ninety-sixth running of

the Derby is a memorable race—YouTube preserves for the rest of us what Thompson missed. But, of course, the Derby story was not about the Derby. It was a near spontaneous yet tailor-made journey homeward for Thompson, back to a town whose authorities had arrested him on a rape allegation, among other charges, ten years previous and railroaded him into military duty.

I avoided teaching Thompson's stories because colleagues had warned me of the magnetic pull his rebel persona might have on a certain student type. Inevitably, I supposed, a few would fall hard for Dr. Gonzo, start to wear Hawaiian shirts, leisure slacks and aviator sunglasses—smokes dangling from cigarette holders—and emulate his reportage style. Then, three years ago, in 2009, I decided to test my theory and try one of his stories on my students. I ventured into Gonzo territory, teaching the "Derby" to successive cohorts of second-year undergraduates and first-year graduate students. To my surprise, unlike my imagined, gullible young readers, they were not spellbound by Thompson's anti-authoritarian, libertarian, hedonistic, it's-always-about-me self-absorption. They were not held captive. They were not victims of Stockholm Syndrome (or would that be Hunter Stockton Syndrome?). I did not spawn entire classrooms of Hunter S. Thompson wannabes. This, to me, counted as progress.

My students, however, may have been a little spellbound by Thompson's intense, personal writing style, which is so unlike the news form (or long-form) to which they had been lately exposed. They enjoyed the way he could pull the reader's leg at times, and would dance on filigrees of imagined scenarios for a paragraph or two before getting back to the actual, the factual, and the journalistic job at hand. In the era of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*, they had no difficulty in differentiating the two modes. They liked Thompson's lacerating self-deprecations, à la Céline.[10] They liked the echoing of Cervantes's buddy story, with the Englishman Steadman playing Sancho Panza to Thompson's Don Quixote. Thompson, especially in the first third of the story, is convinced his sidekick is an ignoramus, but eventually (as they all do in this storytelling mode), he finds out otherwise.

Students liked the Mark Twain-style satire of casting such a strong countercultural point of view on an "atavistic," reactionary occasion. Thompson may have even been employing Twain's "running narrative-plank" trick, alternating serious and humorous "plugs" along the plank.[11] Thompson's recurring gag, the $5.98 can of mace called Chemical Billy, is akin to a common film screenplay trick. When the author introduces this salient detail early on, we know, somehow or other, that Chemical Billy will figure in the narrative endgame. They also liked how the freaks-out-of-their-element tactic backfires when Thompson realizes he is actually the person who most epitomizes the

"Other" he and Steadman have been searching for and artistically trying to render.

And I had to point it out—because it is not obvious to students born between, say, 1983 and 1992—the political backdrop against which all of the tomfoolery plays out: an economic recession, with then-president Richard M. Nixon telling Americans that now would be a good time to buy stocks (Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered Canadians the identical advice in October 2008, at the start of the Great Recession); the ratcheting up of the bombing of Cambodia during the Vietnam War; the last gasp of 1960s student protest going down in bullet fire, tear gas, mayhem, and death at Kent State University, two days after Dust Commander broke away in the stretch.

"The Derby," then, is a serio-comic story about a world gone mad. It is also a Thomas Wolfe-type of story about never being able to go home again. Thompson insinuates members of his family, his brother Davison and his wife, and his school friends, into the story, but he never names them, denying them real identities. This deletion of the personal submerges the going-home theme while providing a surreal edge to the alienation of being kicked out of Louisville and never really being able to go back. Steadman, Thompson's long-time illustrator, has said as much:

> The Kentucky Derby alone was certainly no reason to be here [in Louisville]. It had been written about annually by armies of reporters since it began, but to find himself back on home ground with only a record of disillusionment in his soul, no prospects and an unfulfilled wish to have snuffed it at thirty, there had to be something else. If you add to this fact that at the time he was experiencing severe family problems too—having to have your mother placed in an institution of care is severe. The stage was set for a weird set of creative responses in the mind of anyone on that particular high wire. This was no ordinary homecoming. This was a do-or-die attempt to lay the ghost of years of rejection from the horse-rearing elite and the literati who sat in those privileged boxes overlooking the track and the unprivileged craven hordes who groveled around the centerfield where he had suffered as a boy.[12]

Elsewhere, Steadman has said:

> He was back to settle a score. They made him know he was not going to be anything, certainly not a writer. Over breakfast one morning he said, "I have to go see my mother; she's having a bit of a problem." I think she was being institutionalized for a while because she drank a lot.[13]

Although not readily apparent in the text, Thompson is not making fun of his friends and family; he loves them. When he and Steadman realize they are as or more pie-eyed than any redneck Kentuckian—when Thompson on

that Monday morning looks into his hotel room mirror and sees the bloated face of the Derby he has been searching for all weekend—he is home again: Rednecks 'R' Us.

Thompson had wanted to prove to Thomas Wolfe and everyone else, most of all himself, that he could go home again. We had to wait until 1996 when, finally, he got his very own Louisville homecoming day.[14]

3. Views of Thompson's Style

There have been several attempts to describe Thompson's style. First, here is what the New Journalism's champion Wolfe has to say about Gonzo: it is a "manic, highly adrenal first-person style in which Thompson's own emotions continually dominate the story."[15] And here is another take by Wolfe on the same page: "Thompson, for all his surface ferocity, usually casts himself as a frantic loser, inept and half-psychotic, somewhat after the manner of Céline."[16]

Scholar Ronald Weber pithily focuses on the "center-stage participatory manner"[17] of Thompson's method. In broader terms, regarding this strand of New Journalism, Weber states:

> Participation and advocacy remain the touchstones of the new insurgent journalism. The evidence now seems overwhelming that the closer a serious writer gets to his material, the more understanding he gets, the more he is there to record those decisive moments of spontaneity and authenticity. He gets inside the context and sees scenes and details that distance and neutrality deny to the more conventional reporters. . . . He is there to see and react to the human reflexes exposed late at night that illuminate a man's character.[18]

Norman Sims writes that writers such as Thompson "were sending back reports from the front lines; they ended up on the psychological barricades whether they were in Vietnam or not, and their breakdowns tended to happen in the pages of their journalism."[19] In particular, Sims writes:

> [Thompson] was an abstract expressionist among the New Journalists, adapting Jackson Pollock's drip paintings to prose. Yet, like Picasso, when he wanted to he could also paint in a representational style. His abstract journalism required the reader to interpret the artist's mind in order to understand the subject matter.[20]

And commenting on David Eason's theory of the two modes of New Journalism, ethnographic realism and cultural phenomenology, Sims says that for writers such as Thompson, "reality is something created; it exists only in the author's terms; it has all of the solidity of a movie script or a comic book. The authors in this second group were often a dominating presence

in their works. Eason called them phenomenologist or modernist (or now, postmodernist) writers."[21]

Eason himself has this to say about New Journalists who write themselves into the story:

> Observing is not merely a means to understand the world but an object of analysis. The well-ordered social dramas described in ethnographic realism [of Wolfe, Talese, Capote, (Gail) Sheehy] become in cultural phenomenology [of Thompson, Didion, Mailer, Herr, Dunne] disrupted spectacles in which the roles of actor and spectator are no longer clearly defined.[22]

About Thompson in particular, Eason says, "Thompson describes a culture where the real has become so permeated by the fantastic that knowledge and ethics have become problematic in new ways."[23] In addition, "Thompson's Americans are transformed into pre-historic monsters who consume each other as they consume the culture itself."[24]

John J. Pauly says about Thompson (as well as Wolfe, Breslin, Mailer, and Didion): "As a form of cultural politics, the New Journalism persistently disrupted taken-for-granted social relationships between writers, subjects, and readers."[25] And Pauly's take on personal voice was this: "Journalists who wrote in a distinctive personal voice wanted to be free to tell stories as they saw them, without being shackled by institutional conventions of objectivity. They thought that personal involvement and immersion were indispensible to an authentic, full-blooded account of experience."[26] Finally, here is Pauly on the politics of style: "In the New Journalism, however, culture—often experienced as the politics of style—supplied the very substance of the reporting, and the attempt to report on culture usefully complicated discussions about the truth of nonfiction writing."[27]

For John C. Hartsock, the issue is not so much the style of reporting on culture as the grayness and fuzziness of the truth border. He writes that while Thompson's work fits into the spectrum of "narrative literary journalism" well enough, "it also engages in outrageous satire and the boundary between fiction and nonfiction is unclear."[28]

A non-scholarly writer such as Timothy Crouse would agree. To Thompson's fellow *Rolling Stone* reporter on the 1972 U.S. presidential campaign, his colleague's style was "violent, satirical, epithet-studded."[29] Crouse also points out an obvious aspect of Thompson's writing persona so often forgotten, that of the satirist/humorist: "The writer I'd compare him to most is Twain—because everything he writes is so very serious and so very funny at the same time."[30] And: "Both in person and at typewriter, he is a great put-on artist."[31] To Robert Draper, in his history of *Rolling Stone* magazine, Thompson simply "sought to erase all boundaries between subject and reporter."[32]

And, finally, to allow a reference or two to drugs, *Rolling Stone* editor Rich Cohen writes that Thompson "used drugs quite deliberately to create a new kind of reportorial voice—a voice that could be listened to but never trusted, because the reporter was hammered and seeing trails. By bringing narcotics into his prose, he introduced a hallucinatory element into nonfiction writing, his own kind of magic realism."[33] Hartsock would not disagree. In his view, Thompson takes the next logical step beyond Wolfe's reporting on psychedelic drug usage and the Merry Pranksters "by reporting on the world *while on* [author's italics] drugs."[34]

Thompson himself could never settle on how to describe what he was doing. He has said:

> [Gonzo Journalism] is a style of "reporting" based on William Faulkner's idea that the best fiction is far more *true* than any journalism . . . . Which is not to say Fiction is necessarily "more true" than Journalism—and vice versa—but that both 'fiction' and "journalism" are artificial categories; and that both forms, at their best, are only two different means to the same end.[35]

Elsewhere, he says, simply, "To me it means intense, demented involvement."[36] And: ". . . I like to get right in the middle of whatever I'm writing about—as personally involved as possible."[37]

About the Kentucky Derby piece he wrote for *Scanlan's*, Thompson agrees with most historians: "The Derby piece was a breakthrough for me. Maybe because it was set in my hometown and I had to confront all my early life—you know I was a real juvenile delinquent back there, got picked up on a phony rape charge, all that. Anyway, the Derby piece was the first time I realized you could write *different*."[38]

Whatever Gonzo is, it did not happen overnight. The Derby piece's predecessor, "The Temptations of Jean-Claude Killy," as mentioned above, submitted to *Playboy* and rejected with prejudice, then accepted for publication in *Scanlan's*, contains some of the same elements we find in the Derby piece, including Cardoso playing the role of sidekick at the beginning of the piece; scene reconstructions involving the author throughout; and a confrontational, at times adversarial approach to the subject. Introducing a buddy character into the mix allowed Thompson to be more risqué with his observations and assessments of Killy's sad, empty, post-Olympic career as a Chevrolet pitchman. And like the more famous "Derby," Thompson gleefully tears away the drywall to expose the plumbing and the guts of his reporting, as if the reader is listening in on his ego's inner monologue. I would liken this exercise to the Centre Pompidou in Paris' fourth arrondissement, with its proud display of colored pipes and ducts and hardware, laying bare the inner reality of the building.

But in terms of historical time, with "Killy" we're still in 1970, and there is a strong case to be made for searching through Thompson's sixties features for further clues to Gonzo. Well before hanging out with the world's greatest skier, Thompson's basic tool kit for feature writing contained at least some elements of Wolfe's "Like a Novel" techniques, and at least some form of his saturation reporting—what Sims later called (and what is generally now called) immersion reporting. After all, what was his first book, *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*, if not a year-long exercise in saturation and immersion?

Thompson's style, with its emphasis on ultra-subjectivity in the reporter's narration, qualifies as New Journalism friendly to American cultural scholar Morris Dickstein. Thompson exhibits a "straightforward, uninhibited intelligence that showed up the timidities and clichés that dominated the field," in Dickstein's view. "[I]n high gear Thompson paraded one of the few original prose styles of recent years, a style dependent almost deliriously on insult, vituperation and stream-of-invective unparalleled since Céline."[39]

Dickstein (let us be aware), unlike some scholars of the New Journalism movement of the sixties, takes issue with Wolfe's manifesto. Forget about this academic, scholarly taxonomy of the elements of the New Journalism, he argues, it is the personal that counts. Dickstein prizes subjectivity over checking off the boxes of literary techniques, and excuses Thompson and especially Norman Mailer from the sin of "impersonal journalism." Wolfe's enterprise, claims Dickstein, is "directed precisely against the subjective or Mailerian sort of journalism in which the writer appears as a central character, a personal factor through whom events are filtered."[40] This description of the New Journalism, less dependent on scenes, description, and details, more intensely subjective, applies to Thompson's feature writing in general in the sixties, even work produced well before "Killy" and "Derby."

So, in "Wolfean" terms, if Thompson's early features fall down in terms of fulfilling the technical obligations of the New Journalism, and hence literary journalism, it is in the over-emphasis on analysis and the paucity of scene-by-scene construction. (One has to keep in mind here that however different Thompson's New Journalism is from everyone else's, he is the only New Journalist other than himself whom Wolfe chooses to showcase with more than one piece in the seminal 1973 anthology, *The New Journalism*.[41]) Thompson rarely sits back, describes a scene, and allows the reader his or her interpretation. This penchant does not necessarily imply condescension on the writer's part, as least not intentionally—Thompson's bile knows many targets, but one of them is not the reader. It is more a case of a powerful, relentless voice not wanting to let go of the storytelling process itself.

Despite an overall shortage of scenes and an overreliance on analysis in various pieces about Big Sur, Hell's Angels, Haight-Ashbury, systemic racism in the south, the student movement, the hippies, and so on—if we look to the expanded definition of New Journalism as it is becoming literary journalism, beyond Wolfe[42] to Sims,[43] then to Sims and Kramer[44]—qualities that might include voice, accuracy, structure, responsibility, personal involvement with the materials—we see Thompson's writing contains a number of these elements right back to the initial 1961 feature, "Big Sur: The Tropic of Henry Miller."

In the fifties, Thompson was sure he wanted a literary career. He aspired to literary greatness and felt he could access literary Valhalla with a helping hand or three. In studying his early feature writing for clues to his fully flowered style a decade later, on the road to Gonzo, so to speak, we might venture a hypothesis. If only Thompson had been accepted into the American writers' establishment in the early sixties—if only Faulkner had replied to his letter; if only fiction editor Rust Hills had accepted one of his stories for *Esquire*[45]; if only Kerouac and Mailer's agent Sterling Lord[46] had agreed to take him on; if only his fiction had landed at Scribner's, the house of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Thomas Wolfe—the one community of writers he so desperately yearned for and needed. The question is, if he had, would he have forged the chaotic, vituperative offshoot of New Journalism for which he justifiably became a literary superstar—and here I mean that brief, fecund period of crystallized, highly charged, hallucinatory prose, from "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved" (June 1970), to maybe, just maybe, if we stretch a bit, "Fear and Loathing in the Bunker" (January 1974)?[47] After examining his early feature writing (1961–1969) for signs of Gonzo life, I might venture to say the answer is no, he might not have.

Section II: Analysis of Pre-Gonzo Features

4. "Big Sur: The Tropic of Henry Miller" (1961)[48]

For Thompson's first magazine feature, published in *Rogue* magazine in the fall of 1961, he wrote about what he knew: where he lived, which at the time was on a ranch located in Big Sur, California, the rugged and isolated yet gorgeous region a three-hour drive south of San Francisco, and a half hour south of Carmel. Thompson was hired to act as caretaker at the 375-acre Murphy ranch, which had been part of author Michael Murphy's family estate for most of the century.[49] Not long after Thompson left, part of the farm became the Esalen Institute, the lofty organization that invited thinkers to

discuss what Aldous Huxley might have meant in 1960 when he labelled the ninety percent of the brain we do not use "human potentialities," and how we night harness some of this unused potential.[50] Thompson took his job seriously, watching over the property accompanied by his Doberman.

None of Thompson's personal life enters the story (at least, not in the published version; in the unpublished version he discusses the lives of his friends in Big Sur in some detail). Essentially, he gives readers a routine profile of a place, with a sort of anecdotal lead, a theme (Thompson employs a quote from Big Sur writer Lillian Bos Ross, "not a place at all, but a state of mind," to define his story), historical background, a digression into the influence of Henry Miller on the area, and an analysis of the area's prospects to remain an isolated retreat (not good). For the purposes of this essay, the story is notable for a couple of factors: voice and style. Both can be observed in the lead, which isn't really a lead, more of a joke: "If half the stories about Big Sur were true the vibrations of all the orgies would have collapsed the entire Santa Lucia mountain range. Making the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah seem like the work of a piker."[51] We hear, loud and clear, in the first sentences of his initial piece of published nonfiction the rapid-fire, sports desk, play-by-play bravado that will become one of Thompson's later trademarks.

There are a couple of other Thompson ticks apparent with this piece. First, as he does over and over throughout his career, he uses unattributed quotes, usually in succession, usually to point out the absurdity of a situation and set up the rest of his story. The quotes might be made up; the quotations in the Big Sur probably are made up, as they are based in the writer's humor. Or they might be "real," or at least based in reality, as in writing down quotations from casual interviews with locals—the reader has no way of knowing for sure. Typical example: "'Say, fella, where do I find this nudist colony?'"[52]

The other stylistic tick Thompson employs over and over is of the form: "With a little luck a man can. . . ."[53] Throughout the 1960s Thompson will resort to this universalizing, third-person variant instead using the "I." When Thompson says, "a man could . . . ," what he means is that he could (and maybe you could, too, if you were lucky). Thompson has not realized yet that he can simply break this barrier, this taboo, and inject his prose with absolute, unwavering subjectivity. The stories, which contain a powerful, distinctive voice, are shackled to the depersonalizing tendency Thompson seems to believe editors and maybe even readers want.

Not that Thompson didn't know how to titillate. He mentions the word "orgy" five times, and other salacious terms and phrases, such as "nudist colony," "raving sexual beast," "sex fiend" and "everything from bestiality to touch football." Yet to read the story today is to find a tame, measured argument. Thompson wants to debunk the myth that Big Sur is a place for human

beings to engage in sexual depravity. Not that behavior outside what would then be considered the norm did not go on, but only that the innumerable thrill-seekers and gawkers who did come to Big Sur for this specific reason might well be disappointed. Local artists and writers and regulars, for obvious reasons, wanted nothing to do with them.

For a variation on the *Rogue* piece, *The Proud Highway*, Thompson's first collection of letters, published in 1997, contains a different version entitled "Big Sur: The Garden of Agony."[54] In this rendering, "queers, junkies, rapists" and "sadists" are mentioned,[55] as are "Hollywood fags" and "part-time model[s]" and "bored little rich girl[s]" who arrive on weekends and drink themselves into a state and "start orgies."[56] "Local fags"[57] are mentioned as well. Thompson in his capacity as caretaker in fact did clash with aggressive gays who had taken over the Hot Springs at night. One story proposes that he was beaten up by a mob of surly men.[58] It is no surprise, then, that Thompson's opinion in the original version was that the Murphy property had become "a pandora's box of human oddities, and a popular sinkhole of idle decadence."[59]

All of those phrases, perhaps considered too inflammatory by *Rogue*'s editors, were excised from the original draft.[60] Unfortunately for Thompson, his editors at *Rogue* did not tighten his copy enough for Bunny Murphy's liking—the phrase "genuine deviants" was still in copy, after all. The octogenarian family matriarch—who did not live on the Murphy property, but owned it—promptly fired Thompson after reading the piece. And, well, Thompson's piece was not placed in the most august of periodicals, *Rogue* being one of several imitators chasing *Playboy* to emulate its success.

Thompson sold almost the same story to *Pageant* magazine four years later. The update, titled "'It Ain't Hardly That Way No More,'" had a new peg. Plenty of publicity was generated for the neighborhood after Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer chose Big Sur as its location for the set of Vincente Minnelli's *The Sandpiper* (mistakenly referred to as *The Sandpipers* in copy), which featured acting talents Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Eva Marie Saint and Charles Bronson. Even Thompson's picture of himself, typing shirtless near a cliff, was recycled from the *Rogue* piece. His view of the area had darkened considerably, however. The outlook for Big Sur not succumbing to tourist invasions had become bleak: "Big Sur is no longer a peaceful haven for serious talent, but a neurotic and dollar-conscious resort area."[61] When Thompson brings to the story his prior knowledge of living in Big Sur he only adds to the gloom: "Joan Baez does a local concert now and then, but it's not quite the same as it was when she used to practice on her front porch and there was no admission fee."[62]

Four years have gone by and we're not, at least when strictly comparing these two Big Sur pieces, any closer to Gonzo.

5. "Traveler Hears Mountain Music Where It's Sung" (1962)

After his eviction from the Murphy property in Big Sur, the twenty-four-year-old Thompson headed home to Louisville, Kentucky to save money and continue to write fiction. He sold to the *Chicago Tribune* a travel piece about down-home guitar and banjo music in a rural part of his home state, which was published in a Sunday edition in early 1962.[63] Renfro Valley recording studio, a couple of hours southeast of Louisville by car, provided refuge for the Old Kentucky Barn dance every Saturday evening, 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Thompson's 1,150-word piece begins as straight travel journalism and features little of his strong opinion. He does, however, sprinkle this portrait of a small-town weekend pastime with unattributed quotations: "You have a thirst and they tell you, 'This here's a dry county'."[64] And there is his love of a sentence using a familiar construction: "A man without foresight will usually go thirsty."[65] Finally, halfway through the second leg he gets to the point and presents a classic, magazine-feature-style theme statement (or, in newspaper parlance, a nut graph or signpost): "So if you want entertainment in these parts, you go to Renfro Valley and you go early. The studio is warm and the music is every bit as real as the people who sing it."[66]

What's most interesting in terms of New Journalism and literary journalism is how this innocuous story shifts gear at this point, one-third of the way through. The next three miniature sections are straight reportage from the Saturday night dance—scenes with dialogue and quasi-onomatopoeic description of female vocals—constituting a significant shift away from Thompson's tendency to synthesize his reporting material into personalized analysis. Here he lets the emcee call the action: "Well, now, for all you folks out there in radioland, I want to say that we got a little gal visitin' with us this evenin'. Little Brenda Wallen, from up in Winchester, I believe . . . ." After a paragraph return, Thompson writes, "And little Brenda sings, 'Beeyooteeful lies, beeyooteeful lies . . . each with a heartbreak . . . in perfect disguise . . . ."[67]

Thompson, in these two quick paragraphs, captures the atmosphere of the dance. He does not default to his usual preference, which is to filter the experience through his own crafted description. The declensions of the words "visiting" and "evening" capture the twang of the culture, while the made-up word for "beautiful" is almost Wolfean in its attempt to convey the visceral nature of the live music inside the barn.

Thompson continues to describe just what is there. In the next miniature section he captures a conspiratorial moment between the master of ceremonies and the audience: "'This here's a long one,' says the announcer, glancing at a yellow script in his hand, 'so let's do it all at once and get it over with.' Snickers from the audience. Everybody grins as the commercial is read very earnestly into the mike that will carry it out to the Good Lord only knows where."[68]

In the next section the dance is over and Thompson interviews a knowledgeable local about the music and whether or not to call it "bluegrass." Now it's around ten o'clock in the evening and he has two choices—drive an hour to Lexington to get a drink, or find a hotel. This last section, unlike the standard soft newspaper feature of the first third of the story, and unlike the magazine-feature, near New-Journalism style of the second third, provides a glimpse into Thompson's future preference to place himself in the story. In trying to find a hotel for the night in sleepy Nicholasville just up the road, Thompson shows us life in rural Kentucky. Motel operators aren't coming to his rescue by opening their doors to him, and the first man he meets on the street happens to be the local police chief, who offers to rent him a room out of his own home. Eventually, Thompson returns to a motel he looked at earlier, helps himself to a key behind the desk and checks himself into a room. The next morning he spends twenty minutes trying to find someone to pay, at which point he is told that he "wouldn't be welcomed in the future because my car had a license plate from Louisville."[69] Note how Thompson tells the reader what is said, rather than quoting dialogue. Unfortunately, he has shifted his stance back to telling the reader by acting as our guide rather than throwing back the curtain and showing us what's on the stage.

What is impressive about the last section of this piece is its negativity. For a travel piece about experiencing authentic music in the middle of nowhere, Thompson isn't exactly rural Kentucky's finest pitchman: "Winter mornings are bleak," and, "No matter which way you go you'll drive through a lot of cold, barren country to get there," and, "Not much speed on those narrow highways . . . . Time to listen to the sermons on the radio or he lonely thump of a shotgun somewhere back from the road."[70] Thompson serves up this shot glass of Americana neat.

6. "A Southern City with Northern Problems" (1963)

A year and a half later, Thompson landed a long background feature in the *Reporter* about Louisville's attempts at racial desegregation.[71] In this era of long-form writing he resorts to using words such as "often" when describing scenes. For instance, in "A Southern City with Northern Problems," he begins:

> Quino's Café is on Market Street, two blocks up the hill from the river in the heart of Louisville's legal and financial district, and *often* [my italics] in the long, damp Ohio Valley afternoons a lot of people who might normally avoid such a place will find themselves standing at Quino's white formica counter, drinking a Fehr's or a Falls City beer, and eating a "genuine twenty cent beercheese sandwich" while they skim through an early edition of the Louisville *Times*.[72]

"Often" is the cue for the reader to understand that he is not placing the reader in a scene. The reader is not being tugged along by events, by action. In describing a typical scene, not an actual scene, Thompson uses this device to provide an overview for his story: Here is the way people act. There is no clarity here as to whether Thompson is universalizing the actions of one person or creating a composite out of his observations.

Thompson sets up his argument by describing a *typical* scene. He employs this trick often in early features. Later, in 1969–1970, when New Journalistic tendencies explode into full Gonzo mode, Thompson will wrench the reader along in action, pausing for fantasies, imaginary scenarios, goofball strategies and near-McGuffin-like recurring gadgets (such as the recurring can of mace, Chemical Billy). But at this point, in 1963, his voice strong and sure but his method of storytelling still conventional, he experiments somewhat with presentation but the end result is not yet experimental.

As mentioned above, another prominent device Thompson has used throughout his career is to put quotation marks around words that aren't actually attributed to anyone in particular. Essentially this is another version of "often"; Thompson is saying to the reader, Can you believe it—this is the kind of ridiculous claptrap townsfolk have been known to say: "Here in the mint julep country, where the Negro used to be viewed with all the proprietary concern that men lavish on a good coon hound ('Treat him fine when he works good—but when he acts lazy and no-count, beat him till he hollers'), the integration of the races has made encouraging headway."[73]

After setting the mood by generalizing community character, Thompson reverts to a standard reportorial structure, offering synopses of various opinions on how desegregation, although working better than in other southern cities, still has multifaceted problems in Louisville, with the odd quotation (real this time) or *le mot juste* from a local. Another standard operating principle in this type of conventional feature is the quotes from sources increase in length, and are more numerous, the deeper the reader goes into the story.

So, at this point, Thompson, in his first (and only) feature for the *Reporter*, even at a length nearing 4,000 words, seems to be working within the confines of the basic newspaper feature structure, à la *Time* and *Newsweek*.

Despite its length, there is no depth of feeling for the subject. There is a hint of Wolfe's novelistic qualities at the top of the piece, but nothing more. The work in question, however, even with the strong voice toned down, does display the writer's ever-present fierce determination to speak clearly on matters of injustice.

7. "The Motorcycle Gangs: Losers and Outsiders" (1965)

"The Motorcycle Gangs: Losers and Outsiders"[74] is an incisive, thoughtful debunking of the fevered response to the motorcycle gang phenomenon, as it was being reported on in newspapers and mass media publications. As Thompson is quick to point out, in no small part was the menace inflated politically by California Senator Fred S. Farr and recently appointed Attorney General Thomas C. Lynch. The story, which landed him a publishing deal to write *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (Random House, 1966), is not exactly a straight news report. For one thing, it veers into investigative reporting territory as Thompson sifts through official reports and news media secondary sources for the reader. He needs to do this for the other reason that this feature is not a straight news report. Thompson allows his own personality and style to play a significant role in the way he mocks the official view of the Angels, and this tactic moves him closer to breaking from convention. Here are a few examples of Thompson's style, which point the way toward Gonzo:

There is the classic "a man . . ." generalization in the theme statement (which is also a snide putdown): "The difference between the Hell's Angels in the papers and the Hell's Angels for real is enough to make a man wonder what newsprint is for."[75] There is the pop culture comparison: "As a historical document, it read like a plot synopsis of Mickey Spillane's worst dreams."[76] And there is the proverbial money quote—delivered by an unnamed source, naturally, known only as "one Angel"—used as a derisive attack on the mainstream and how its sensationalism has boosted the Angels' notoriety: "'Since we got famous we've had more rich fags and sex-hungry women come looking for us than we ever had before. Hell, these days we have more action than we can handle."[77] In other words, thank you Senator Farr and Attorney General Lynch.

In seeking to convey the truth behind the many charges levelled against the Angels, or at least disentangling fact from fantasy, Thompson also puts on display his characteristic idealism, even a bit of cheerleading for the underdog. For instance, Thompson looks at the various cases of violence perpetrated by the Angels and concludes: "In many cases victims have refused to testify because they were engaged in some legally dubious activity at the time

of the attack."[78] For Thompson, it's okay that the Angels beat the victim up because he was a lowlife anyway—not the most convincing argument in support of the gang.

Another reason "Losers and Outsiders" goes beyond the straight news report, indeed beyond the investigative report, is Thompson's ethnographic-style field research. In a move to counter the official fifteen-page attorney-general's report on the Angels, Thompson relays his own first-hand knowledge to the reader: "At the meeting I attended (and before they realized I was a journalist) . . . ."[79] He tells the reader he met the Angels at the DePau Hotel in San Francisco. He then says he that he hung out drinking with them until 6:30 the next morning—in his own apartment. Now that he has the reader's attention, he relays the real story he has discovered only by spending time with them: "[Group loyalty] is an admirable quality, but it is one of the things that gets them in trouble: a fellow Angel is *always* [Thompson's italics] right when dealing with outsiders. And this sort of reasoning makes a group of 'offended' Hell's Angels nearly impossible to deal with."[80]

This move is classic Thompson. Although the writing is understated, in comparison to his adrenalized Gonzo writing in five years' time, it does display his predilection for inserting himself into the story, for getting in front of the story, for actually becoming part of the story. The reason he is debunking the police reports, the media reports, the attorney-general's report, is because he is there and he is partying with the Angels and he is talking for hours and hours with various Angels. In other words, Thompson is communing with the reader: I am bearing witness, dear reader. This is the straight truth as I have seen it. Yes, the Hell's Angels are dangerous and not to be messed with, especially if they think you've shown disrespect to one of their members. But I went to get the real story because the official line is hogwash.

This is the Gonzo way.

8. "The Nonstudent Left" (1965)

Thompson tries to replicate the debunking mode of "Losers and Outsiders" a half year later for the same publication, the *Nation*. This report, about the nonstudent Left on college campuses,[81] is not as effective because, for one thing, the structure of the piece is messy, with Thompson burying the lead scene in the middle of the story.[82] Instead of showing the reader the world of one nonstudent radical, Steve DeCanio, editor of the 2,000 circulation *Spider* magazine (the acronym stands for Sex, Politics, International communism, Drugs, Extremism, Rock 'n' roll)[83]—and he could have, as he visits DeCanio's house and provides a detailed description of how the editor and his three roommates live—and then moving to the theme of the piece,

which essentially is an opinion column attacking California lawmakers for their draconian response to the student protest movement and making scapegoats of nonstudents on campus, he instead begins with his own summation of the clash between Berkeley students and lawmakers, which is not captivating and does not provide a thematic thread. Even this lead is found to be wanting because, for instance, Thompson fails to give the reader some basic salient facts, such as student Mario Savio's call for his fellow protesters to "sit down" on October 1, 1964, or Savio's famous "operation of the machines" speech on December 2, 1964, or even who Savio was in the first place—a student who was fed up with police intimidation and used Ghandian techniques to fight back.

So we never find out what the theme of the story is, except Thompson, echoing his criticism of mainstream attitudes towards the Hell's Angels and other motorcycle gangs, targets what Thompson calls Assemblyman Don Mulford's "anti-outsider law,"[84] which passed in the California legislature and Senate and was signed into law June 2, 1965. Even this part is frustrating because Thompson never properly names Mulford's bill.

As for signs of Thompson's future persona, he does drop in an anecdote about being a "nonstudent" at Columbia University in 1958. In other words, he knows what it's like to be a nonstudent hanging around campuses soaking up some free learning. Thompson occasionally flashes his word flair, as in calling the Mulford law a "defective rattrap,"[85] and "the real victims of Mulford's law will be the luckless flunkies appointed to enforce it."[86]

9. "The 'Hashbury' Is the Capital of the Hippies" (1967)

"Losers and Outsiders" and "The Nonstudent Left" might also be looked at as advocacy pieces of a sort. Thompson is not advocating for the Angels, per se, or for the rights of nonstudents on California university campuses, but he is advocating for a kind of reality check, for a new kind of truth. Thompson's persona in these types of stories is to be "The Explainer," the hip writer who cuts through the official nonsense being spread about the strange subcultures that suddenly have sprouted. He tries to lay it all out for a newspaper or magazine's possibly square, certainly middle American readership.

Of all Thompson's modes of writing, or personas, this one is the least interesting. He can be convincing in this role, as with the motorcycle gang story, because on a micro level he hung out with the Angels and what he says has the ring of truth, and on a macro level because he was there when San Francisco metamorphosed from Beat culture to acid-rock culture. Still, it's occasionally laughable. In "The Nonstudent Left," for example, he feels he must point out that the "political radical is a Left activist in one or more

causes"[87] while "social radicals" are "Left, but their real interests are writing, painting, good sex, good sounds and free marijuana."[88] In trying to explain the forces of hip subcultures at work, Thompson himself can sound a bit square. He does not employ scenes to put the reader into the action, and by telling instead of showing in this mode he is not as convincing. He never shows an officer's disgust at longhairs; he reports it anecdotally, as in he heard this story or he read that report or a friend told him about it. He analyzes and hectors and mocks—not the same effect.

There are other examples of this excessive didacticism, such as "The 'Hashbury' Is the Capital of the Hippies" (1967),[89] and "Why Boys Will Be Girls: A Special Report on How More and More HEs Act Like SHEs!" (1967).[90] In the article on the hippies, for instance, Thompson the Explainer files to the *New York Times* what amounts to a long, descriptive report about how Beat culture transformed itself into hippie culture, and how Berkeley's New Left politics gave way to Haight-Ashbury's drugs and acid-rock lifestyle. The piece has dated badly because much of what he says is so obvious now, and probably was obvious even in 1967 to any adult who was moderately alert. "The 'Hashbury' is the new capital of what is rapidly becoming a drug culture,"[91] he reports. "The word 'hip' translates roughly as 'wise' or 'tuned-in.' A hippy is somebody who 'knows' what is happening, and who adjusts or grooves with it. Hippies despise phoniness . . . ,"[92] he says. "To refuse a proffered 'joint' is to risk being labeled a 'nark'—narcotics agent,"[93] he warns. And: "Everything genuine in the Haight-Ashbury is about to be swallowed . . . in a wave of publicity and commercialism."[94] No kidding.

Unlike the Hell's Angels article, which undermined a reality manufactured by media outlets that seemed to be at least tacitly working in conjunction with political and law enforcement authorities, Thompson here is oblivious to the truth, preferring to believe that his almost 6,000-word Haight-Ashbury for Dummies exercise for *Times* readers is somehow immune from being part of the publicity campaign that will engineer the decline of this brief paradise.

10. "Why Boys Will Be Girls" (1967)

Thompson filed his feature about hippies and style, "Why Boys Will Be Girls," for *Pageant* magazine. Again he dons his Explainer cap to inform readers what hippies are *really* about. Here is a sampling of his statements of the blindingly self-evident (to many then, I would wager, and all of us now):

> "Hippy" is a broad and nearly meaningless word. Like "Beatnik," it is a newspaper term, the creation of headline writers[95] . . . . Drugs are perhaps the central fact of the whole Hippy culture[96] . . . . Rock music is both the

> language and the only art form of this "weird generation"[97] . . . . Nearly everything written about Hippies is done from an outsider's point of view[98] . . . . With the debatable exception of Martin Luther King, organized religion is a gallery of monsters in the eyes of the long-haired anarchists who are setting the styles for today's teenagers[99] . . . . [Vietnam] is viewed as a stupid, dishonorable outrage by most of the students who would normally be called leaders of the future.[100]

The obvious nature of these statements is exactly what moves this sort of piece away from literary journalism. When Thompson dons his Explainer cap, rest assured the resulting feature is destined for historical curiosity status, rather than pre-Gonzo candidacy. In this case, his editors saw fit to include a sidebar box. A picture of Thompson (with hair and aviator sunglasses; the same picture that was dredged up for the cover of the 1999 Modern Library edition of *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*), sits on top of a biographical blurb embarrassingly headlined: "Cool Facts about a Cool Cat."[101] Ouch.

One small concession to Thompson's preferred style: near the end of the article he mentions to the reader in passing a women's hat collection he amassed while in the Air Force in the middle to late 1950s. He wanted to torment his superiors by wearing them, but never did. The point he is making is that it is okay to have weird tastes—it does not make you any less of a man. It does not make him a "queer" or a "degenerate" or a "dangerous dope addict."[102] Thompson's homophobia was not unusual for the era (just under two years before the Stonewall riots in New York City's Greenwich Village), and he would not become a degenerate for many years (and maybe he never really was). But about that last charge, he may have been fibbing.

11. "Nights in the Rustic" (1967)

That same summer, Thompson took a detour—away from drugs and longhairs and student politics—into Jack London territory. "Nights in the Rustic"[103] also ranks as a pleasant excursion into Joseph Mitchell literary journalism territory, and shows Thompson's restlessness and experimentation with form.

The Rustic Inn, located in Glen Ellen, California, is a one-hour drive northeast of San Francisco. City dwellers come on weekends looking for the spirit of Jack London—who frequented the saloon and bought the locals drinks, which qualified him for sainthood status in their eyes: "Jack London is sitting today on the right hand of God, and you begin to suspect after a while that a few of them think it's the other way around."[104] Yet, for all of its historical curiosity, city people looking for a little adventure and escape back to 1914 could also find themselves drinking with a bunch of 1960s brawlers

who liked to mess up tourists for fun. This topic sounds like a natural for Thompson, who in telling the story of the Rustic takes an unusual tack (for him) by providing the reader with two scenes in a row. The first one captures quickly the flavor of the saloon:

> [Hazen] Cowan is one of those men who likes to take his drink in the afternoon. . . . The bartender, an earthy sort of country squire named Chester Womack, was holding forth with a guitar. "Hello, Hazen," he yelled. "Say, the Missouri Kid was in here yesterday. Wanted to know how you were. Wanted to know if you were still fallin' off horses like you used to."
>
> "That bum," muttered Cowan, "he couldn't ride in a wagon."
>
> Womack laughed and drew a beer. "He looked pretty prosperous, Hazen. He's livin' over in Cotati these days [15 miles west of Glen Ellen]—had a fine looking young woman with him, must have been his old lady."
>
> "He's a deadbeat," said Cowan. "He's owed me money for thirty years."[105]

The second scene also involves Womack the bartender. He notices an out-of-town couple seating themselves. They expect to be served. To retaliate for this presumption he tells a dirty joke. Thompson conveys this scene with description and dialogue and none of his interpretive filter. "Womack, who does not wait tables, picked up his guitar and began to sing: 'O the hair on her belly was a strawberry color'."[106] The husband gives Womack a dirty look and the couple immediately leave. Thompson quotes another patron, an English woman nicknamed "Fat Pat," laughing and saying, "'He's tew much, he's just tew much!'"[107]

These scenes—where the writer gets out of the way—are generally uncharacteristic of Thompson's style. We've seen the technique used in the story about Renfro Valley, but it is not the writer's preference. The dialogue, compressed and economic in terms of the number of words and amount of space it consumes, creates a quick visual for the story and places the reader inside the Rustic. These scene sketches prove that Thompson could write this way when he felt like it. In some ways, "Nights in the Rustic," as a portrait of a bar, resembles the work of Joseph Mitchell, particularly his April 13, 1940 essay on McSorley's Old Ale House in New York City, "The Old House at Home."[108]

In no way does Thompson emulate Mitchell's astonishing accretion of detail, but there are similarities. For instance, Mitchell's portrait of long-time proprietor Bill McSorley (son of founder John), goes like so: "Bill was tyrannical. Reading a newspaper, he would completely disregard a line of customers waiting to be served. If a man became impatient and demanded a drink,

Bill would look up angrily and shout obscene remarks at him in a high, nasal voice. Such treatment did not annoy customers but made them snicker; they thought he was funny."[109]

Bill McSorley not only presages "The Soup Nazi" from the *Seinfeld* television series, Chester Womack of the Rustic is awfully reminiscent of him as well (if one adds a dollop of humor to McSorley's personality). Thompson's piece, however, cannot compete with Mitchell's in terms of depth. He tells the reader directly, "When I lived in Glen Ellen I stopped in the Rustic about every other day . . . ,"[110] meaning he knows whereof he speaks. Mitchell does not need to address the reader directly; the complexity of the reconstructions, especially of the eras of the first two proprietors, show the reader how much time Mitchell has spent gathering information. Also, when Mitchell arrives in the present or recent past, he gives the narrative over to exceptionally long quotations from the then-current (as in 1940 current) owner, Mrs. Dorothy O'Connell Kirwin. Mitchell prefers to allow one of his chief sources to take charge of the narrative, a practice Thompson would be loath to imitate.

12. "The Ultimate Free Lancer" (1967)

A few months after Thompson's profile of the Rustic Inn, he contributes "The Ultimate Free Lancer"[111] to the first edition of a New Left publication called the *Distant Drummer*. He offers a rambling screed seemingly about whatever it is that is bugging him, and blames his scattershot approach on his editors at the beginning: "You asked me for an article on whatever I wanted to write about and since you don't pay I figure that gives me carte blanche."[112] The piece ostensibly is a eulogy for a friend and fellow journalist. Lionel Olay, according to Thompson, was a solid chronicler of his times who wrote a lovely, defining piece focusing on the "soul of San Francisco,"[113] but died without notice (other than penning a quickie crime bestseller novel called *The Dark Corner of the Night,* which returned to print in 2005, the year Thompson killed himself).

"The Ultimate Free Lancer," however, informative as it is about Olay, is important because it is an early, outlandish example of Thompson exerting torque on his voice. About 600 words into a rant about the sharks cruising the music business pool and the phonies capitalizing on the expanding youth culture market, Thompson flashes a glimpse of his Gonzo teeth, calling President Lyndon Johnson "a vicious liar, with the ugliest family in Christendom,"[114] before unwrapping this gem of invective:

> Jesus, no wonder Lionel had a stroke. What a nightmare it must have been for him to see the honest rebellion that came out of World War Two taken over by a witless phony like Warhol . . . the Exploding Inevitable, Lights,

> Noise, Love the Bomb! And then to see a bedrock madman like Ginsberg copping out with tolerance poems and the same sort of swill that normally comes from the Vatican. Kerouac hiding out with his "mere" on Long Island or maybe St. Petersburg . . . Kennedy with his head blown off and Nixon back from the dead, running wild in the power vacuum of Lyndon's hopeless bullshit . . . and of course Reagan, the new dean of Berkeley. Progress Marches On, courtesy, as always, of General Electric . . . with specific assists from Ford, GM, ATT, Lockheed and Hoover's FBI.[115]

In December 1967, given a wide-open editorial policy at *Distant Drummer*, Thompson allows himself to slip into a mode that is now recognized as Gonzo. The relentless diatribe, the ranting, the sneering attitude that acts as a gossamer over a deep sense of foreboding about where America's political, economic, and cultural leaders are taking the country, all drip from the page, two and a half years before the "Derby" is published. Speculation as to why this is so comes naturally here. Thompson may have felt at this point in his career that he could not get away with un-tethering his writer's id and get paid for it. But working for free, well, that was a different story. Let it howl from the page.

13. "Presenting: The Richard Nixon Doll (Overhauled 1968 Model)"

A half year later, in July 1968, Thompson's impressionistic feature, "Presenting: The Richard Nixon Doll (Overhauled 1968 Model)," is published in *Pageant* magazine. Thompson's Republican campaign-focused story, which follows Nixon and his associates around in Manchester, New Hampshire, has numerous instances of the author coming within striking distance of full-bore Gonzo. The prose remains on an even keel, but the comic timing, the goofing with the reader, the stunts, and the insults all flirt with the kind of satiric edge "Derby" thrust upon the world two years later. As with "Losers and Outsiders" from three years previous, Thompson injects himself into the story almost immediately: "One of the handlers, Henry Hyde, presumably felt I was a threat to the Nixon camp. He called *Pageant* to check me out. This was after he got into my room somehow—while I was away, eating breakfast—and read my typewritten notes."[116]

In what will become his classic style, Thompson proceeds to tell the reader that he reassured the Nixon camp's watchdog of the "purity of his mission,"[117] before letting loose a standard tirade—Nixon's staying power has more to do with "rancid genes and broken chromosomes,"[118] Nixon is a politician without a "soul,"[119] Nixon compares favorably to a hyena and/or a "poison toad."[120] Hyde is so afraid of what Thompson will file that he perpetrates his own little, pre-Watergate vignette, breaking into the reporter's room to read his notes.

After the cheap shots Thompson settles into a standard analysis of Nixon's rebirth and how his 1968 run for the presidency—unlike 1960 versus John F. Kennedy—is a "free shot."[121] Nixon plays it cool, saying as little as possible. He says he certainly does have a way to end the war but he won't tell anyone what it is, in the name of national security. Thompson points out what a sweet cover that is, taking the high road, never articulating a position of substance, and giving George Romney, his Republican rival, nothing to attack. Then comes the coupe de grace: After the initial, negative introduction to his topic, Thompson graduates from seeing Nixon the "braying ass"[122] to Nixon possessing "one of the best minds in politics."[123] It is not all sunshine—when Thompson hangs around unannounced at a television taping session he does sense a pervasive "strange, paranoid behavior"[124] in the candidate and his minions.

What is admirable about this piece, however, in terms of pointing the way to Gonzo, is what happens in the text when Thompson finds out Nixon will not allow himself to be interviewed, photographed, or indeed even be caught in a bar or lounge. He doesn't smoke and he doesn't drink, his handlers tell Thompson, and bars make him nervous. With this set-up Thompson then drops into the text some classic Gonzo goofing: "It was Bogart who said, 'You can't trust a man who doesn't drink.' And it was Raoul Duke who said, 'I'd never buy a used car from Nixon unless he was drunk'."[125] Duke, of course, is Thompson himself, or rather his future alter ego in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*.[126]

And there are more antics. The Nixon piece for *Pageant* is semi-famous for its scene of Thompson riding in the back seat of Nixon's limousine, finding to his shock and delight that the candidate is a real human being who actually likes and is knowledgeable about football. The writer replays the scene for his readers, adding dialogue and color commentary at the same time: "The scene was so unreal . . . being chauffeured around by a detective while I relaxed in the back seat and talked about football with my old buddy Dick Nixon, the man who came within 100,000 votes of causing me to flee the country in 1960."[127] We're now just under two years away from "Derby" and Thompson's voice, style, verve, and pluck are starting to come together and fly under one banner, a banner that will have one word stamped on it.

14. "Those Daring Young Men in Their Flying Machines . . . Ain't What They Used to Be!" (1969)

In September 1969, *Pageant* provided Thompson with the space to size up the status of the American test pilot archetype after visiting Edwards Air Force Base near Lancaster, California. Like he punctured the manufactured

realities of the motorcycle gangs and, less successfully, the hippies, what he wants to do here is investigate the image versus the reality of today's elite flying man. Thompson is looking for the romantic cowboy, who flies first and asks questions later, the guy who, in Bo Diddley parlance says, "I'm twenty-two years old/ And I don't mind dying." Instead, he finds that "test pilots are very straight people."[128] Outside their daring-do during the workday they are family men who drink on Friday afternoons at the club for an hour before sitting down to dinner with their families. They make as little noise as possible. Thompson sets up his straw man, the Marlon Brando of *The Wild Ones* for flying aces, to insult the pilots and their one-dimensional lives. This is the kind of story that makes a reader recall Joe Nocera's 1981 *Washington Monthly* essay where he decides Thompson has killed the New Journalism.[129] As is his custom in this era, Thompson buries the lead, preferring to keep the reader guessing about the nature of the story until along comes the true blue Colonel Joe Cotton, who is everything today's pilots are not—long on experience, short on university degrees. So mystifying is Thompson's approach—he would rather bore the reader at the top with his pontificating than introduce his subject—use his reporting, in other words—which is usually quite interesting, until it is too late.

But in Gonzo terms there are two points to make. One, Thompson brings himself into the story early, a couple of hundred words in. He tells the reader, by way of personal anecdote, that he identifies with the old archetype, not the new:

> At one point, talking to two colonels, I lamely explained that I break my hand about once a year. "Last time," I said, "it was a motorcycle wreck on a rainy night; I missed a shift between second and third, doing about seventy on a bad curve."
>
> Zang! That did it. They were horrified. "Why would anybody do a thing like that?" asked Lieutenant Ted Sturmthal, who had just come back from flying the huge XB-70 across the country at the speed of sound.[130]

Why, indeed, unless you have a conscious (or unconscious) death wish, say. Or you consider yourself invincible. Or you are a tough-as-nails flying ace, a descendant of the "doomed, half-mythological figures"[131] from before World War Two. Or you want to show the reader how much crazier you are in relation to your subject. Here we are in range of the Gonzo persona, the puffed-up character on whom all manner of madness falls but, being the Gonzo hero he is, escapes the fate of lesser mortals, which is to say, death, maiming, or incarceration.

The other push toward Gonzo is Thompson's merciless caricature of the lives of his subjects. It is unfair, even cruel, but an effective neutering of his subjects before bringing in the counterweight, Joe Cotton, the one guy who remembers the glory days when pilots were heroes not drones:

> Today's test pilots go to bed early, and they regard big motorcycles with the same analytical disdain they have for hippies, winos, and other failure symbols. They take their risks, on assignment, between dawn and 4:30 p.m. But when their time is their own, they prefer to hunker down in the wall-to-wall anonymity of their one-story, flat-roofed, Levittown-styled homes between the base golf course and the officer's club, there to relax in front of the tube with a succulent TV dinner. Their music is Mantovani, and their idea of an "artist" is Norman Rockwell.[132]

Although not vituperative, this passage is an exaggeration of reality, a standard put-down of "straight" society common to the late sixties but still, the sort of portrait Thompson paints here allows him to develop his own outlaw persona in relation to his subject, which is the most important goal in the self-absorbed world of the Gonzo hero.

15. "The Temptations of Jean-Claude Killy" (1970)

We have arrived at the last stop on the Gonzo milk run, or at least Gonzo as it has been officially recognized. "Killy" was published in the first issue of the short-lived counterculture consumer magazine—now there is an oxymoron—*Scanlan's*.[133] This is the feature some, such as Wolfe and Hellman, have suggested, is a legitimate candidate for the birth of Gonzo, the one before the "Derby" breakthrough.

"Killy" is the heftier piece, running over 7,000 words, 2,000 more than "Derby." It follows the triple Olympic gold medalist's banal post-retirement career as a Chevrolet pitchman. Jean-Claude Killy being a French name, and Louis-Joseph Chevrolet, the race car driver for whom the Detroit car was named, being a French name, anything is possible. Perhaps it is a stroke of genius, but Thompson finds Killy so bored (and boring) he uses the occasion to indulge in a little Gonzo journalism, which is to say he inserts himself into the story in an attempt to enliven a dull story about one of the grim realities of the modern world, namely, the sordid commoditisation of heroes.

But the piece begins the way good modern features do—in medias res, with a fast-paced scene that hurls the reader into the action, that feels frantically paced but perhaps is not all that fast-paced after all, that puts the reader in Thompson's shoes, trudging among to meet Killy's entourage, drinking the team's alcohol, enduring the lies. The lead scene is classic because it plays to the focus of the piece—that the art of selling out one's good name for quick

money is as banal as a modern hotel room. Even Thompson's lead has a worthy theme statement to end the scene: "The wistful smile is still there, and Killy is shrewd enough to value it, but it will be a hard thing to retain through three years of Auto Shows, even for $100,000 a year."[134]

There are several small indications in the Killy piece that we have crossed the Rubicon into Gonzo territory, and that there can be no turning back. For instance, Thompson, in his vain attempts to size up his quarry, reverts to exasperated Gonzo-like brush strokes such as, "Was there something depraved in that face?"[135] In weighing the evidence that Killy takes advantage of his position on the road, Thompson concludes, "It was hard to imagine him as a sex freak, hurrying back to his hotel room and calling room service for a cattle prod and two female iguanas."[136] Of course, it is not the substance of what he says—that a good-looking Olympian might indulge in a few dalliances on the road to relieve the ennui—but rather the crazed nature of the description: "freak" and "cattle prod" and "iguanas." This is the hallmark of Gonzo, what makes it exciting and fresh, and supplies that frisson to the reader of, "Oh my, you can get away with saying this in journalism?"

Thompson has supplied that sensation on occasion throughout his feature writing career up to this point, with bits and pieces from the Kentucky bluegrass story to the ode to his friend Lionel Olay to the test pilot caricature, but here the writing starts to command authority.

Also, Thompson's recognition of himself and his place in the story is sharper. At one point he declares, "I called for more coffee, nodding distractedly at Killy's awkward hustle, and cursing the greedy instinct that had brought me into this thing . . . sleepless and ill-fed, trapped in a strange food-cellar with a French auto salesman."[137]

Section III: The Road Was Circular (Gonzo Was There All Along)

Hunter S. Thompson's Gonzo version of the New Journalism starts to become explicit in the stories he wrote for the *Distant Drummer*, *Scanlan's Monthly*, and *Rolling Stone*. The editors at these outlets share the trait of amiable malleability, or at least they are willing to upset the hierarchical status quo existing between writer and editor, laying bare to readers the subjectivity of the writer, thereby breaking down a wall between consumer and producer. Elsewhere in Thompson's early feature writing work, this tendency is implicit in some form, however slight.

In terms of Wolfean New Journalism tenets, Thompson is a bit wobbly. Sometimes he uses scenes to great effect, but more often he does not bother.

He generally believes in relaying various status details to the reader for shorthand description. The point of view he presents most often is his own (or of his persona). He seems to care little for any explicitly empathetic strain of literary journalism. As for dialogue, when it is real, it effectively conveys character. But he also could use dialogue in a way that is now recognized as a suspicious or bogus, or, just as problematic (from the current truth-telling orthodoxy's position), the dialogue can sound very much like a composite of voices, whether interviewees or imagined from personal experiences or originating from a deep familiarity with the topic or geography (e.g., in the stories about music in Renfro Valley, racism in Louisville, the hippies in San Francisco, etc.)

As for voice, there can be little doubt that Thompson has a powerful, original style and did so from the start. It has always been his weapon of choice. The sheer audacity of his authorial voice, its unity and vitality, ensures that he will continue to be read well beyond his 1971–1972 commercial breakthrough, even as his reporting gets lazier through the mid- to -late 1970s and beyond.

In the earlier pieces there is also a fair demonstration of immersion—Thompson writes about the Big Sur community he knew about and lived in; he writes about the Haight-Ashbury from the perspective of someone who has watched it evolve; he writes about the Hell's Angels from the perspective of someone who has hung around them for months. Thompson sells these stories to editors who are hungry to find reporters who actually know what is happening on the street and in these subcultures.

Despite the lack of scene material, and (especially) despite the writer not putting himself into the story, Thompson's future Gonzo writing persona is already in development in 1961 with "Big Sur: The Tropic of Henry Miller," mainly because his voice is, even at this point, strong and sure. If the delivery of full-bore Gonzo has to wait until the end of the 1960s, a study of its long gestation period shows that elements of the form are imbedded in its originator's literary style from inception.

Originally, Thompson aimed his Vincent Black Shadow down the highway of mainstream literary respectability. When he veered off to blaze a different trail it turned out to be a victory run—but a bittersweet one.

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Notes

1. At the Fifth International Conference of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS), Roehampton University, London, U.K., May 20–22, 2010, I moderated a panel entitled "Get Out the G_____: Re-visioning Hunter S. Thompson's Literary Journalism for the Twenty-first Century." Robert Alexander of Brock University, St. Catharines, Canada, Jason Mosser of Georgia Gwinnet College, Lawrenceville, U.S.A., Nick Nuttall of Lincoln University, Lincoln, U.K., Jennifer M. Russell of University of Warwick, Coventry, U.K., and I gave presentations on this topic. The purpose of the panel was to concentrate on developing themes about Thompson's literary journalism and avoiding (as much as possible) the infamous, caricatured persona. A follow-up panel took place in Thompson's hometown, Louisville, Kentucky, at The Thirty-ninth Annual Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, February 24–26, 2011, where revised or new presentations were offered by Alexander, Russell and myself (with Nuttall sending along his paper in absentia).

2. Thompson was born July 18, 1937 and committed suicide February 20, 2005.

3. "The Kentucky Derby . . . " was Thompson's second piece for *Scanlan's* (June 1970, 1–12).

4. "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" was originally published as a two-part serial in *Rolling Stone* magazine, 11 November 1971, and 25 November 1971. Random House and Warner Books published the story in book form the following year.

5. William McKeen, *Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 150.

6. Tom Wolfe, in Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (eds.), *The New Journalism: With an Introduction* (London: Picador, 1996; first U.K. edition London: Picador, 1975; first U.S. edition New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 195.

7. John Hellman, *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 72.

8. For the purpose of this essay I shall restrict myself to Thompson's major magazine or long-form newspaper features. I exclude his many files to the *National*

Observer as one of its foreign correspondents, knowing full well that examples of a nascent Gonzo form lurk there.

9. It should be mentioned here that the *Rogue* magazine piece, "Big Sur: The Tropic of Henry Miller" (October 1961), that is, Thompson's first published feature, was not included in his first (rather large) collection, *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales from a Strange Time (Gonzo Papers, Vol. 1)* (New York: Summit Books/A Rolling Stone Press Book, 1979). I am grateful for the existence of the website, totallygonzo.org/gonzowriting/rare-articles/ (accessed June 23, 2011), where "Big Sur" is posted, along with other pieces not included in *Great Shark Hunt* or any subsequent "Gonzo Papers" collection, such as "'It Ain't Hardly That Way No More'" (*Pageant*, September 1965); "The 450-square-mile Parking Lot" (*Pageant*, December 1965); "Why Boys Will Be Girls" (*Pageant*, August 1967); and "Nights in the Rustic" (*Cavalier*, August 1967). Stumbling across this website while researching Thompson from a restrictive, literary-journalism-only point of view (trying to ignore the Raoul Duke persona as much as possible, in other words), is what gave me the idea to shift priorities and focus on Thompson's early features for signs of literary journalism and, yes, Gonzo.

10. See Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 133; Wolfe and Johnson, 172; and McKeen, 149.

11. Harold Helwig, *Mark Twain's Travel Literature: The Odyssey of a Mind* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 46.

12. Ralph Steadman, *The Joke's Over: Bruised Memories, Gonzo, Hunter S. Thompson and Me* (New York: Harcourt, 2006), 21–22.

13. Jann S. Wenner and Corey Seymour, *Gonzo, The Life of Hunter S. Thompson: An Oral Biography* (New York: Little, Brown, 1977), 123.

14. McKeen, 329–30.

15. Wolfe, 194.

16. Wolfe, 194.

17. Ronald Weber, *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy* (New York: Hastings House, 1974), 20.

18. Weber, 65.

19. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 247.

20. Sims, 259.

21. Sims, 245.

22. Eason, David L., "The New Journalism and the Image-World: Two Modes of Organizing Experience," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1 (1984), 57. Eason revised this essay for Sims (ed.), *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008; originally published New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 191–205.

23. Eason: 1984, 55.

24. Eason: 1984, 55.

25. Pauly, John J., "The Politics of the New Journalism," Sims: 1990, 111–12.

26. Pauly in Sims: 1990, 114.

27. Pauly in Sims: 1990: 121.

28. John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 200.

29. Crouse, Timothy, *The Boys on the Bus*, with a foreward by Hunter S. Thompson (New York: Random House, 2003; originally published 1973), 312.

30. Crouse qtd in J. Anthony Lukas, "The Prince of Gonzo," in Richard Pollock (ed.), *Stop the Presses, I Want to Get Off! Inside Stories of the News Business from the Pages of [More]* (New York: Random House, 1975), 185. (Originally published in *More: A Journalism Review*, November 1972, 4–7.)

31. Crouse qtd in Lukas, 185.

32. Robert Draper, *Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 4.

33. Rich Cohen, qtd in Sims, *True Stories*, 259.

34. Hartsock, 193.

35. Hunter S. Thompson, "Jacket Copy for *Fearing & Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey into the Heart of the American Dream*," in Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas and Other American Stories* (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1996), 208.

36. Thompson, qtd in Lukas, 184.

37. Thompson qtd in McKeen, 151.

38. Thompson qtd in Lukas, 184.

39. Dickstein, 133.

40. Dickstein, 139.

41. The two pieces Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson chose for the anthology *The New Journalism: With an Introduction*, were: an excerpt from Thompson's first book, *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (New York: Random House, 1966; reprinted in Wolfe and Johnson: 1996, 373–89); and "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved" (*Scanlan's Monthly*, May 1970, 89–100; reprinted in Wolfe and Johnson: 1996, 195–211.

42. Wolfe, "The New Journalism, 3. Seizing the Power," in Wolfe and Johnson (eds.), *The New Journalism: With an Anthology*, 37–51. See especially 46–47 for Wolfe's discussion of "journalists learning the techniques of realism," the "extraordinary power" of which is "derived mainly from just four devices": "scene-by-scene construction," "realistic dialogue," "third-person point of view," and "symbolic details" of "people's status life."

43. Sims, "The Literary Journalists," in Sims (ed.), *The Literary Journalists: The New Art of Personal Reportage* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 3–25. Sims replaces Wolfe's term "saturation reporting" with an alternate, "immersion." He also identifies further qualities of literary journalism, such as structure, accuracy, voice, and responsibility. Sims also quotes literary journalist Richard Rhodes, who adds a few intriguing qualities of his own, including "symbolic realities."

44. Sims, "The Art of Literary Journalism," in Sims and Mark Kramer, *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction* (New York: Ballantine

Books, 1995), 3–19. And Kramer, "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists," Sims and Kramer: 1995, 21–34.

45. McKeen, 50.

46. McKeen, 66.

47. "Fear and Loathing in the Bunker" was an opinion piece about President Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal, published in the *New York Times*, January 1, 1974. It serves as the denouement of Thompson's most fertile period.

48. Hunter S. Thompson's "Big Sur: The Tropic of Henry Miller" was published in *Rogue* magazine, October 1961, 33–36, 50. The original story was just over 3,000 words long. There is a longer, alternate version of this story, running approximately 5,000 words—a pre-edited version most likely—entitled, "Big Sur: The Garden of Agony," which eventually was published in Hunter S. Thompson, *The Proud Highway: Saga of a Desperate Southern Gentleman, 1955–1967 (The Fear and Loathing Letters, Vol. 1)*, New York: Villard Books, 1997, 265–277.

49. Jackie Krentzman, "In Murphy's Kingdom," *Stanford Magazine*, January–February 1998, stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/1998/janfeb/articles/murphy.html (accessed 20 May 2011).

50. Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Excerpt, www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/453699.html (accessed 20 May 2011).

51. "Big Sur: The Tropic of Henry Miller," 35.

52. "Big Sur: The Tropic of Henry Miller," 36.

53. Ibid.

54. McKeen's version of the story uses "Big Sur: The Garden of Agony," the original draft that was pitched to *Playboy*, rejected, re-pitched to *Rogue*, and accepted. This longer version eventually found its way into Thompson's first volume of letters, *The Proud Highway*, published in 1997. Some of the quotes McKeen attributes to the piece never made it into the version of the story that was published in *Rogue*, "Big Sur: The Tropic of Henry Miller." Bunny Murphy never read the word "homosexuals" or the phrase "pandora's box of human oddities" in reference to people hanging around her property and at the Hot Springs. But the point is essentially the same—Bunny Murphy did not like what Thompson wrote, at all, and relieved him of his duties as caretaker of the ranch.

55. *The Proud Highway*, 265.

56. *The Proud Highway*, 271.

57. *The Proud Highway*, 273.

58. Kripal.

59. *The Proud Highway*, 277.

60. However, matching the two versions word for word, other than timidly knocking out several comments considered too raw to publish, the editor or editors did a fine job of tightening Thompson's story by 2,000 words (forty percent of its original length), as well as giving the piece the name-dropping, hence more enticing, title.

61. Hunter S. Thompson, "'It Ain't Hardly That Way No More'," *Pageant*, September 1965, 145.

62. "'It Ain't Hardly That Way No More'," 149.

63. Hunter S. Thompson, "Renfro Valley: Traveler Hears Mountain Music Where It's Sung," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, Part 6, Traveler's Guide, 18 February 1962, 1, 8. See also *Great Shark Hunt*, 343–45.

64. "Renfro Valley: Traveler Hears Mountain Music Where It's Sung," 8.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Hunter S. Thompson, "A Southern City with Northern Problems," *Great Shark Hunt*, 38–46. Originally published in the *Reporter*, 19 December 1963, 26–29.

72. *Great Shark Hunt*, 38–39.

73. Ibid., 39.

74. Hunter S. Thompson, "The Motorcycle Gangs: Losers and Outsiders," in Shalom Endleman (ed.), *Violence in the Streets* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 259–69. Originally published in the *Nation*, 17 May 1965, 522–26.

75. *Violence in the Streets*, 260.

76. Ibid., 264.

77. Ibid., 269.

78. Ibid., 267.

79. Ibid., 266.

80. Ibid.

81. Hunter S. Thompson, "The Nonstudent Left," *Great Shark Hunt*, 398–406. Originally published in the *Nation*, 27 September 1965, 154–58.

82. "The Nonstudent Left," 403–04.

83. Ibid., 404.

84. Ibid., 399.

85. Ibid., 401.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid., 403.

88. Ibid.

89. Hunter S. Thompson, "The 'Hashbury' Is the Capital of the Hippies," *Sunday New York Times Magazine*, 14 May 1967, 14, 120–25. See also *Great Shark Hunt*, 383–98.

90. Hunter S. Thompson, "Why Boys Will Be Girls: A Special Report on How More and More HEs Act Like SHEs!" *Pageant*, August 1967, 93–101.

91. "The 'Hashbury' Is the Capital of the Hippies," 29.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid., 120.
95. "Why Boys Will Be Girls," 96.
96. Ibid., 98.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid., 99.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid., 98.
102. Ibid., 100.
103. Hunter S. Thompson, "Nights in the Rustic," *Cavalier*, August 1967, 31, 80–83.
104. "Nights in the Rustic," 31.
105. Ibid., 31, 80.
106. Ibid., 80.
107. Ibid.
108. Joseph Mitchell, "The Old House at Home," in *Up in the Old Hotel* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 3–22. Originally published in the *New Yorker*, 13 April 1940, 20–26.
109. *Up in the Old Hotel*, 10.
110. "Nights in the Rustic," 83.
111. Hunter S. Thompson, "The Ultimate Free Lancer," *Great Shark Hunt*, 96–100. Originally published in the *Distant Drummer*, December 1967, 4–7, 9.
112. *Great Shark Hunt*, 96.
113. Ibid., 98.
114. Ibid., 99.
115. Ibid.
116. Hunter S. Thompson, "Presenting: The Richard Nixon Doll (Overhauled 1968 Model)," *Great Shark Hunt*, 185–92 (originally published in *Pageant*, July 1968, 6–16), 185.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid.
119. Ibid.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid., 186.
122. Ibid., 187.
123. Ibid., 188.
124. Ibid., 189.
125. Ibid., 188.
126. In his *Paris Review* interview with Douglas Brinkley and Terry McDonell, Hunter S. Thompson is asked about the provenance of his alter ego's name. He says, "Raoul comes from Castro's brother, and Duke, God knows. I probably started using it for some false registration at a hotel." Thompson offers a possible origin for his other persona: "Sometimes I'd bring Duke in because I wanted to use myself for the other character. I think that started in *Hell's Angels* when I knew that I had to

have something said exactly right and I couldn't get any of the fucking Angels to *say* it right. So I would attribute it to Raoul Duke." From "Hunter S. Thompson: The Art of Journalism No. 1," *Paris Review*, Fall 2000, http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/619/the-art-of-journalism-no-1-hunter-s-thompson (accessed 1 January 2012). Indeed, in Thompson's book, *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*, Duke appears for the first time. Thompson adds his alter ego to a serial list of famous personages: "To them ["the generation represented by the editors of *Time*"] the appearance of the Hell's Angels must have seemed like a wonderful publicity stunt. In a nation of frightened dullards there is a sorry shortage of outlaws, and those few that make the grade are always welcome: Frank Sinatra, Alexander King, Elizabeth Taylor, Raoul Duke . . . they have that extra 'something'" (172). It is not entirely clear as to why Thompson conceives of Sinatra and Taylor as "outlaws," but then Thompson would see no problem with the joke of including his alter ego's name in a pantheon of celebrities.

127. Ibid., 191.

128. Hunter S. Thompson, "Those Daring Young Men in Their Flying Machines . . . Ain't What They Used to Be!" (*Great Shark Hunt*, 406–13. Originally published in *Pageant*, September 1969, 68–78), 407.

129. Joe Nocera, "The Doctor Is Out: How Hunter Thompson Killed New Journalism," *Washington Monthly*, April 1981, 44–50.

130. *Great Shark Hunt*, 407.

131. Ibid., 408.

132. Ibid., 409.

133. *Great Shark Hunt*, 77–96. Originally published in *Scanlan's Monthly*, March 1970, 89–100.

134. *Great Shark Hunt*, 79.

135. Ibid., 80.

136. Ibid.

137. Ibid., 83.

What's Gonzo about Gonzo Journalism?

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What are the origins of the word "gonzo" and how has this word been used to describe the journalism of Hunter S. Thompson?

The word "gonzo," of course, is most closely associated with the literary journalism of Hunter S. Thompson, but let us first examine the possible origins of the word. In an article appearing in the journal *American Speech* in 1983, Peter Tamony claims that Gonzo's "earlier history is obscure."[1] While this remains true, a few sources suggest the word's origins. For example, Tamony speculates that "Gonzo looks Spanish" and asks whether the word might be an Americanization of *ganso*, meaning "'gander, lazy slovenly person, [or] dunce.'"[2] The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests another possible source, the Italian *gonzo*, meaning foolish. The OED defines the adjective form of "gonzo" as "designating a style of subjective journalism characterized by factual distortion and exaggerated rhetoric . . . bizarre, crazy" and the noun form as "a person who writes in this style."[3] The word has been used, in the United States at least, to sell everything from pizza to Muppets to motorcycles (Pollak 1975),[4] and it is commonly understood by people who have never heard of Hunter S. Thompson to mean "crazy, off the wall, out of control."

The term "Gonzo journalism" was coined by former Boston *Globe* editor Bill Cardoso who, now deceased, was never particularly helpful in tracking down the word's origins. He suggested to E. Jean Carroll, one of Thompson's biographers, that the word might be "'a corruption of g-o-n-z-e-a-u-x. Which is French Canadian for 'shining path.'"[5] However, in an article tracing the word's etymology, Martin Hirst discounts Cardoso's guess,[6] and in any case,

"shining path" doesn't seem to describe Thompson's writing, which more often assumes the form of a "savage journey," as the subtitle of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* suggests. Another Thompson biographer, Peter O. Whitmer, claims that Gonzo was a term that the "South Boston Irish used to describe the guts and stamina of the last man standing at the end of a marathon drinking bout."[7] Given the subject of Thompson's "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved," this definition seems to correlate most closely to Cardoso's reaction. Thompson himself has explained that he understood "gonzo" to be "some Boston word for weird, bizarre."[8] William McKeen explains that another possible origin for the word is a New Orleans instrumental tune with which Thompson was familiar.[9] "From the first," Tamony notes, the word "seems to have denoted 'brash, importunate, flamboyant,'" a fair description of Thompson's journalism.[10] Tamony correctly asserts that the "earliest use [of "Gonzo"] linked the word with drugs and journalism,"[11] but the journalistic method of reporting, writing, and editing that Gonzo specifically describes does not necessarily require that the writer be, as Thompson notoriously often was, under the influence of mind-altering substances.

In a letter to Jim Silberman of Random House, Thomspon confessed that he had mostly fabricated the depiction of drug use in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.[12] Tamony hedges the drug issue when he says that the term has come to denote a style of journalism rather than just Thompson's specific work,[13] which raises the obvious question: can similar techniques employed by other journalists appropriately be categorized as "Gonzo"? Examining the term in its fullest context, I would suggest that there's only one true Gonzo journalist, and that's Hunter S. Thompson.

In an article published in the short-lived *Scanlan's Monthly* in 1970, Thompson presented his first experiment with a new style of journalism, "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved." The Derby story introduces several elements that would become characteristic of Thompson's Gonzo journalism: the presence of a first-person, autobiographical narrator who assumes the role of protagonist; the participation of a male bonding figure, in this case illustrator Ralph Steadman, who, like Oscar Zeta Acosta would later do in *Las Vegas*, plays the role of Thompson's comic foil; the change of focus from the ostensible subject, the Derby itself, to Thompson's failed return to his hometown, Louisville, Kentucky, to face his personal demons; and, finally, Thompson's agonized struggle to produce a finished article by the deadline. After a frenzied bout of hard drinking and a prolonged dark night of the soul among Lousiville's Blueblood elite, Thompson confesses he had "blown my mind, couldn't work. . . . "[14] McKeen explains that Thompson's narrative "was only *fairly* coherent because, under deadline pressure, Hunter broke from

the narrative and started sending the editors scrawled pages ripped from his journal: half-formed thoughts, sketches, semi-lucid notes."[15] In "A Technical Guide to Editing Gonzo," Robert Love demonstrates Thompson's legendary practice of transmitting unedited copy via his Mojo Wire to hapless editors who scrambled to make sense of it all.[16] Upon the Derby story's publication, Cardoso, impressed with the results, wrote to Thompson, praising the piece as "pure Gonzo journalism," the first use of the word to describe a journalistic style. [17]

At least two figures in Thompson's life claimed to have co-created gonzo journalism: Oscar Zeta Acosta, author, activist, and the prototype for the Samoan attorney in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and artist Ralph Steadman, mentioned earlier. In a letter to *Playboy* Forum, Acosta insists that his direct participation in the infamous journey that inspired Thompson to write *Vegas* contributed to the creation of Thompson's Gonzo style.[18] Steadman contends in his memoir of Thompson, *The Joke's Over*, that his drawings were as much a part of the original Gonzo reading experience as Thompson's prose.[19] Of the two, Steadman, whose work will always be closely associated with Thompson's, has the better claim, having illustrated the "Kentucky Derby" story, the first *bona fide* Gonzo text.

A number of critics and journalists have helped provide us with a comprehensive understanding of Gonzo journalism. McKeen writes that Gonzo "requires virtually no rewriting, with the reporter and the quest for information the focal point. Notes, sketches from other articles, transcribed interviews, verbatim telephone conversations, telegrams—these are the elements of a piece of Gonzo journalism."[20] Jesse Jarnow adds that "as a literary style, [Gonzo] had two main tenets: total subjectivity and a first-draft/best-draft approach that jibed perfectly with the post-Beatnik literary world of the late 1960s."[21] In his "jacket copy" for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson has claimed that Gonzo is based partly on William Faulkner's observation that the best fiction is truer than fact.[22] Thompson's best-known work of Gonzo journalism is *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, a crazed account of dune-buggy races, district attorneys, and massive substance abuse in Sin City in 1971. Thompson later confessed that he regarded *Vegas* as a failed experiment in Gonzo journalism because he had to revise his prose to create the effect of raw spontaneity,[23] and yet, as multiple interviews testify, he defined Gonzo differently at different times. In a way, Thompson seemed stuck with a label that he didn't create and that he could never completely define.

Seen from one perspective, Gonzo reflects Thompson's iconic, drug-slugging lifestyle, full of "fear and loathing" and "bad craziness." Gonzo is also

a mode of perception in the sense that the deliberate derangement of the senses through drugs and alcohol de-familiarizes reality, opening the door to paradoxically clearer perceptions, a twisted perspective evoked so perfectly by Steadman's grotesquely expressionistic caricatures. Gonzo is also a narrative technique, a form of subjective, participatory literary journalism that places the narrator in the center of the narrative while it spontaneously records a dark reality, often fabricated. Gonzo also describes Thompson's style, employing a verb-driven, "running" syntax, as well as digressions, metaphors, fragments, allusions, ellipses, abrupt transitions, and gaps, all of which model the narrator's feelings of desperation, degradation, and despair. As Thompson frequently maintained, Gonzo also represents a commitment he shared with George Orwell "to make political writing into an art,"[24] an expression of his leftist-anarchist politics, best exemplified perhaps by *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*. Gonzo is even a kind of journalistic ethic, as Thompson told P. J. O'Rourke: "If I'm going to go into the fantastic, I have to have a firm grounding in the truth. Otherwise, everything I write about politics might be taken as a hallucination."[25] Finally, Gonzo was a way for Thompson to differentiate himself from other New Journalists of the same era—Wolfe, Mailer, Didion. As Thompson related to one interviewer, "I just thought if I'm going to be a journalist, I might as well be my own kind."[26]

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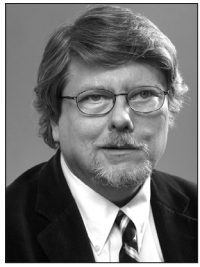

Notes

1. Peter Tamony, "Gonzo," *American Speech: A Quarterly of Linguistic Usage* 58, no. 1 (1983): 74.

2. Ibid., 75.

3. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "gonzo."

4. Richard Pollak, *Stop the Presses, I Want to Get Off: Inside Stories of the News Business from the Pages of More* (New York: Random House, 1975).

5. E. Jean Carroll, *Hunter: The Strange and Savage Life of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: Dutton, 1993), 124.

6. Martin Hirst, "What is Gonzo? The Etymology of an Urban Legend." University of Queensland, Australia, UQ eSpace, 1 January 2004, http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/eserv/UQ:10764/mhirst_gonzo.pdf (accessed 17 February 2012).

7. Peter O. Whitmer, *When the Going Gets Weird: The Twisted Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: Hyperion, 1993), 168.

8. Pollak, 184.

9. William McKeen, *Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 150.

10. Tamony, 73.

11. Ibid., 73.

12. Hunter S. Thompson, "Letter to Jim Silberman," in Douglas Brinkley, ed., *Fear and Loathing in America: The Brutal Odyssey of an Outlaw Journalist. The Gonzo Letters, Volume II, 1968–1976* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 205–08.

13. Tamony, 74.

14. McKeen, 148.

15. Ibid.

16. Robert Love, "A Technical Guide to Editing Gonzo: Hunter S. Thompson from the Other End of the Mojo Wire," *Columbia Journalism Review*, May 2005, 61–66.

17. Paul Perry, *Fear and Loathing: The Strange and Terrible Saga of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: Thunder Mouth Press, 1992), 11.

18. Oscar Zeta Acosta. "Playboy Forum," in Ilan Stevens, ed., *Oscar "Zeta" Acosta: The Uncollected Works*, ed. Ilan Stavans (Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, 1996), 104.

19. Ralph Steadman, *The Joke's Over: Bruised Memories: Gonzo, Hunter S. Thompson, and Me* (New York: Harcourt, 2006), 72–77.

20. William McKeen, *Hunter S. Thompson* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 36.

21. Jesse Jarnow, "Man of Action: Hunter S. Thompson Keeps Moving," in Beef Torrey and Kevin Simonson, eds., *Conversations with Hunter S. Thompson* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 196. Previously published in *Relix*, April–May 2003, 59–65.

22. Hunter S. Thompson, "Jacket Copy for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream,*" in *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales from a Strange Time* (New York: Summit Books, 1979), 106.

23. Ibid., 106.

24. George Orwell, "Why I Write," in *A Collection of Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1981), 314.

25. P. J. O'Rourke, "Interview with Hunter S. Thompson," in Anita Thompson, ed., *Ancient Gonzo Wisdom: Interviews with Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: De Capo Press, 2009), 153. Previously published in *Rolling Stone*, November 25, 1987.

26. Peter Olszewski, "Interview," in *Ancient Gonzo Wisdom*, 62. Previously published in *Loose Licks* (Australia), Spring 1976.

A Brain Full of Contraband: The Islamic Gonzo Writing of Michael Muhammad Knight

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The narrative punk rock Muslim writings of Michael Muhammad Knight can be examined through the lens of Hunter S. Thompson's Gonzo journalism. One result is a conceptual definition of Gonzo journalism.

Over the past forty-plus years, the term "Gonzo" has insinuated itself into everyday usage. What began as a style of writing rooted in 1960s drug-fueled counterculture has been transformed into the name of a popular Muppet, a style of marketing,[1] a realistic genre of participant-filmed pornography,[2] and a lecture style used in higher education business courses.[3] The precise origins of the term are shrouded in myth and difficult to determine with any certainty.[4] A common etymology of the term places it in Irish South Boston slang that denotes "those who use craziness as a form of self-expression, who push it too far just to push it."[5] Other synonyms include *insane*, *wild*, *bizarre*, *confused*, *unrestrained*, and *extravagant*.[6]

What is clear is that the term is inextricably linked to the writing of Hunter S. Thompson, who is universally acknowledged as the originator of Gonzo journalism. Since the term was coined in 1970, many writers have adopted a similar visceral, over-the-top first-person approach to storytelling. One such writer, Michael Muhammad Knight, first arrived on the literary scene in 2004 with a rude indie novel titled *The Taqwacores* before turning to a series of first-person nonfiction books.

But is Knight's work Gonzo? In order to discuss the Gonzo characteristics of Knight's work, it is necessary to thrash out a framework for the nature of Gonzo itself precisely because there is no coherent academic construct for the

term.[7] In what is possibly the most un-Gonzo endeavor possible, this article posits a framework for discussing Gonzo journalism. The ubiquity of the term would suggest that it has usefulness beyond Thompson's oeuvre. But in order to talk about it, we must understand what differentiates Gonzo from other types of reportage.

This article suggests a conceptual definition of Gonzo journalism as an energetic first-person participatory writing style in which the author is a protagonist. It also posits that Gonzo journalism draws its power from a combination of both social critique and self-satire. Using that framework, this article examines the themes of identity formation and liberation in Knight's nonfiction work. It also examines Knight's use of Gonzo writing as part of an attempt to find a place for both Muslims in America and Americans within Islam. As he wrote in *Journey to the End of Islam*, Knight attempted to negotiate his identity as a Muslim-American at a time when it was Islam's turn to be "maybe the most un-American religion in our whole history . . . Which I found amusing, because I understood Islam in such a thoroughly American way that it all but cut me off from the rest of the Muslim world."[8]

Buy the ticket, take the ride

Originally self-released in photocopied form, *The Taqwacores* combined do-it-yourself punk-rock iconoclasm with the spiritual yearnings of a young convert to Islam. It centered on a group of flamboyant young Muslim college students living communally in an off-campus house. The characters in the novel drank, had sex, smoked pot, and engaged in other behaviors typically prohibited in Islam. The soundtrack for this lifestyle was a fictitious genre of music called "taqwacore"—a combination of *taqwa* (the Islamic term for "piety" or "God consciousness") and the hardcore variety of punk rock. The novel's narrator described the connection between the two:

> Punk rock means deliberately bad music, deliberately bad clothing, deliberately bad language and deliberately bad behavior. Means shooting yourself in the foot when it comes to every expectation society will ever have for you but still standing tall about it, living who you are and somehow forging a shared community with all the other fuck-ups . . .
>
> Taqwacore is the application of this virtue to Islam. I was surrounded by deliberately bad Muslims but they loved Allah with a gonzo kind of passion that escaped sleepy brainless ritualism and the dumb fantasy-camp Islams claiming that our deen [religion] had some inherent moral superiority making the world rightfully ours.[9]

While in no way biographical, the plot of *The Taqwacores* was inspired by Knight's own life. As a child, he and his mother suffered abuse at the hands of Knight's paranoid schizophrenic white supremacist father. Mother and son fled the abuse, and after a turbulent childhood that featured his mother getting re-married and divorced, Knight converted to Islam at the age of sixteen after reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* At seventeen, Knight traveled to Pakistan to study Islam at the Faisal Mosque. While there, he flirted with the idea of joining the jihad in Chechnya, but was dissuaded. Instead, he returned to the United States, where he quickly entered a period of crisis in his faith. He went to college and began partying and started an underground wrestling ring. In the ensuing years, Knight found himself increasingly committed to Islam while at the same time flamboyantly critical of the hypocrisies he found in mainstream Islam.[10]

Knight told the *New York Times* that he wrote *The Taqwacores* "to mend the rift between his being an observant Muslim and an angry American youth."[11] In a remarkable example of life imitating art, this gritty novel provided the inspiration for other observant and angry Muslim-Americans to create a real-life taqwacore scene. Bands like The Kominas perform songs with provocative titles like "Sharia Law in the U.S.A." and "Suicide Bomb the Gap." This burgeoning scene sparked concert tours, a documentary film, and a feature film adaptation of *The Taqwacores*.

Following the success of *The Taqwacores,* Knight turned to nonfiction works, writing a series of books using a similar over-the-top taqwacore approach to detail his quest to discover a true American Islam—a hunt reminiscent of Thompson's lifelong Gonzo work chronicling the death of the American dream.[12] Knight's publisher, Soft Skull Press, even billed him as "both the Jack Kerouac and Hunter S. Thompson of American Islam."[13]

Defining Gonzo

The origin of the term "Gonzo" is typically attributed to *Boston Globe Sunday Magazine* editor Bill Cardoso, who used the adjective to describe Thompson's 1970 article for *Scanlan's* about the Kentucky Derby. As Thompson recounted, "I'd heard him use the word *Gonzo* when I covered the New Hampshire primary in '68 with him. It meant sort of 'crazy,' 'off-the wall'. . . . But Cardozo said something like, 'Forget all the shit you've been writing, this is it; this is pure Gonzo. If this is a start, keep rolling."[14] It was a development that Thompson called "an almost accidental breakthrough—a whole new style of journalism which now passes for whatever Gonzo is . . . accident and desperation."[15]

At its simplest, Gonzo journalism can be defined as a subjective form of nonfiction storytelling featuring a narrator who is also a protagonist[16] or as "a journalism that self-consciously goes over the top in challenging sacred conventions, and in the challenge lies a journalistic end in itself."[17] Wright described Thompson's trademark Gonzo style as a mixture of overstatement, wild exaggeration, and self-indulgence.[18]

One of the primary characteristics of Gonzo is a high-energy participatory writing style. Describing Thompson's style in an anthology of the so-called "New Journalism" movement, Wolfe defined Thompson's Gonzo approach as "a manic, highly adrenal first-person style in which Thompson's own emotions continually dominate the story."[19] Hames-Garcia, in his analysis of the work of Thompson's partner-in-weirdness Oscar Zeta Acosta, described the Gonzo style as "marked by an emphatic author-participant-protagonist, a figure who speaks neither from a detached position nor as a communal voice."[20]

Apart from style questions, implicit in Gonzo journalism is a strong sense of social critique. Sefcovic extended the Gonzo concept beyond Thompson to a group of British cultural critics whose approach to research "attempted to integrate, extend, and illuminate modern social and critical theory."[21] These critics applied Gonzo techniques to ethnographic research, which Sefcovic described as "a style that combined journalistic sensationalism with an extreme form of ethnographic participation."[22] Hames-Garcia noted that the Gonzo approach helps the researcher "view cultural identities as theoretical explanations that refer to causal features of a social world."[23] Similarly, John Hartsock pointed out the research utility of Gonzo journalism techniques: "Simply, we have a need, at least culturally, to account in language for what cannot be accounted for rationally—that eviscerating rational world divided into the seemingly discrete categories of the social scientist."[24]

The final characteristic of Gonzo journalism discussed here is an inward-directed satirical outlook.[25] Such self-mockery is what makes Thompson's work effective, Wolfe wrote, "because Thompson, for all his surface ferocity, usually casts himself as a frantic loser, inept and half-psychotic. . . ."[26] In Thompson's work, such self-satire particularly took the form of depictions of his own drinking and drugging. His classic book *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* begins with one of the most famous first lines this side of "Call me Ishmael"—"We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold."[27]

While Gonzo journalism draws its moral authority from its implicit social critique, the inclusion of self-mockery on the part of the author-protagonist serves to lend the work credibility. This technique suggests that even the writer is not spared disparagement, therefore lending credence to the disapproval leveled at others.

Based on this review of previously suggested meanings, a preliminary summary definition of Gonzo posited here is of an energetic and iconoclastic first-person writing style in which the author has also adopted a performative role in the text. Further, as a style, Gonzo draws its power from a combination of social critique and self-satire. And, as will be suggested in the next section, Knight's work meets that definition of Gonzo journalism.

Any kind of stupid action

One of the primary defining characteristics of Gonzo journalism is its use of a first-person writing style. As Mikal Gilmore described, Thompson "was inside his story—documenting his own reactions, state of mind, following loopy digressions until they landed in unanticipated pools of revelation."[28] Thompson himself addressed the personal nature of his work when he described his writing as "a kind of therapy," adding that "one of the few ways I can be almost certain I'll understand something is by sitting down and writing about it. Because by forcing yourself to write about it and putting it down in words, you can't avoid having to come to grips with it. You might be wrong, but you have to think about it very intensely to write about it." [29]

Similarly, Knight's work contains a large degree of therapeutic self-reflection presented in an energetic first-person writing style. Each of his nonfiction books—*Blue-Eyed Devil, The Five Percenters, Impossible Man*, and *Journey to the End of Islam*—takes on a distinct topic but features a strong stream-of-consciousness presentation and, in many ways, ends up being as much about Knight as the topic at hand. For example, in this passage from *Blue-Eyed Devil,* Knight describes a road trip to find the grave of Nation of Islam founder the Honorable Elijah Muhammad:

> It was November 19th and there was supposed to be a meteor shower that night. I made a few turns and got on Interstate 90 westbound from Buffalo feeling like I had busted out of jail and stolen that '97 Skylark and had a lusty time lined up in the Windy City with booze and coke and girls and maybe a fistfight on the sidewalk (insha'Allah). I was twenty-six years old in real life orbits of the ard around the shams but for all intents and purposes on that very night I wasn't a second over seventeen, and felt liable for any kind of stupid action with all the windows down in late November going seventy-two, slapping my knee, singing along to the Subhumans—ARE YOU PREPARED TO DIE FOR YOUR BELIEFS OR JUST TO DYE YOUR HAIR?[30]

Even though there is a strong presence of the author's internal life in Gonzo writing, it does not devolve into solipsism or narcissism. Gilmore noted that Thompson was "outside the scenes he wrote about; that is, he was a misfit, chronicling systems of accepted values that really had no value at all."[31]

Similarly, Knight's books feature strong observation and character development of the people he meets in his travels. Knight imagined a friend criticizing his work, saying: "You're in no shape to tell the story of American Muslims because you think that only weirdoes are worth writing about."[32] But Knight remained committed to the styles of Islam practiced by members of the underclass—people with whom he identifies.

Such a focus on so-called weirdoes is exactly what Thompson cited as a strength of his own work. Writing about his seminal proto-Gonzo book *Hell's Angels,* Thompson noted, "This subject was so strange that for the first time in any kind of journalism, I could have the kind of fun with writing that I had had in the past with fiction. I could bring the same kind of intensity and have the same kind of involvement with what I was writing about, because there were characters so weird that I couldn't even make them up."[33]

In many ways, Knight's work performs the role of Gonzo ethnography outlined by Sefcovic, who wrote that it "rejects the notion of any privileged vantage point for observation, insists on recognition of the participatory dimension of the researcher's role, and urges experiments with research methods and reporting practices that can liberate and empower general audiences."[34] By focusing on the Islam of the underclass, Knight provides valuable insight into the lived realities of American Muslims, rather than the institutional frameworks of the faith.

A second component of the personal nature of Gonzo narrative is that the author not only is a protagonist in the text but also performs a role. For Thompson, the role was as a deadline-pushing, doped-up gun nut with a righteous sense of justice.

Knight, on the other hand, plays the role of the uncompromising critic who is willing to criticize Islamic orthodoxy as well as American oppression as he struggles with his own relationship to his faith. Sometimes Knight's own performative role crossed into dangerous territory. In *The Taqwacores,* the burqa-wearing riot grrrl Rabeya crossed out a verse in the Qur'an that advocates wife-beating—an act that Knight himself emulated in a feature film adaptation of the novel (and wrote about in his nonfiction book *Journey to the End of Islam*). And in an article for the website ProgressiveIslam.org about a controversial woman-led prayer in which he took part, Knight wrote, "If the Prophet wouldn't have liked it, then in 2005 the Prophet is wrong, shit on him."[35] Knight's blunt language was off-putting to many Muslim scholars. It also presented a potential hazard when he visited Pakistan, a country with strict laws against defiling the name of the Prophet Muhammad and the desecration of the Qur'an.

"In the course of pinballing in and out of the faith, I've been guilty of both offenses; and now, for the first time since even considering this trip to Pakistan, I realized that I would be a criminal here, that I had smuggled in a brain full of contraband,"[36] he wrote.

A Critique of Wal-Mart Islam

In his Gonzo works, Thompson was merciless against his political enemies. "There are a lot of ways to practice the art of journalism, and one of them is to use your art like a hammer to destroy the right people—who are almost always your enemies, for one reason or another, and who usually deserve to be crippled because they are wrong," he wrote.[37] Knight also employs this technique, taking aim at prominent (and so-called "mainstream") Muslim figures in the United States Knight lashed out at Imam Siraj Wahaj for allegedly homophobic remarks and skewered Republican Muslim activist Asma Gull Hasan, who unsuccessfully sued Knight for defamation.

A perceived conflict between "America" and "Islam" is one of the defining tensions of early twenty-first century media and political discourse. Knight uses vivid description and sharp social critique to examine the personal dimensions of Islam in America and offers a blistering critique of this so-called "Clash of Civilizations" paradigm. Knight's goal is to reformulate the boundaries of Islamic identity, critiquing both American Islamophobia and the Saudi-led homogenization of Islam worldwide that oppresses local variants of the faith and excuses oppression particularly of women and the LGBT community. In the process, he hopes to uncover the potential for liberation within the faith. Knight refers to Saudi Arabia's attempt to globalize its own brand of Wahhabi Islam as "like the Wal-Mart of Islam coming in and wiping out unique downtown Islams to make it all the same convenient price-cutting religion everywhere."[38]

This homogenization of Islam runs counter to Knight's reasons for converting to the faith—"because it was the religion of Malcolm X, a language of resistance against unjust power. But in Pakistan, Islam was the unjust power, or at least part of what kept the machine running. Pakistan's Islam was guilty of everything for which I had rebelled against Reagan-Falwell Christianity in America."[39] In this short passage, Knight identifies the emancipatory power of Islam, implicitly critiques oppressive power relationships in the United States, and explicitly criticizes the hypocrisy and corruption in much of the Muslim world.

However, Knight also takes aim at some of the hypocrisies in mainstream Muslim practice, such as strict anti-apostasy laws in the Muslim world which may have had a role in the early days of Islam but seem oppressive to Knight

now. "That's fine for history, but what the seventh century ate isn't making me poop; death over a change in conscience couldn't work in the only historical setting that really mattered, the one in which I lived,"[40] he wrote.

Ultimately, while Knight decries Islamophobia in the United States, he acknowledges that his own crazy quilt of Islam was only possible in the United States:

> My relationship to Islam could fly only in America with no apostasy laws or religious police to enforce the sect of the rulers and ban the rest. I'd rather be a Shi'a in New York than in Cairo, or a Sunni in New York than Tehran. I'd rather be an Ahmadi in New York than in Lahore, and I'd rather be a Sufi in New York than in Mecca; is that a shitty thing to say?[41]

An Inconsistent Goofball

Knight frequently mocks his own background, describing himself as "a fifteen-year-old white kid with Dad a diagnosed schizophrenic, rapist and racial separatist and Mom fresh off her second divorce" when he converted to Islam.[42] Further, Knight mocks himself for his own conflicted relationship with Islam. In the Qur'an desecration scene of the film version of *The Taqwacores*, Knight himself bought a copy of the holy book and crossed out that verse with a felt-tipped Sharpie pen. Yet even as he suggested that parts of the book could be desecrated if they are incompatible with human rights, he mocked himself, writing "even after defacing the words, I still couldn't put the book on the floor; had to find a high place. What an inconsistent goofball."[43]

While Thompson's self-satire focused primarily on his own drinking and drugging, Knight centers his on fornication and self-abuse. He often depicts himself as a chronic masturbator, as in this passage from *Journey to the End of Islam* in which he re-enacts a key scene from *The Taqwacores* after filming is complete.

> I reached behind me into the plastic bin bearing the word PROPS written on a strip of masking tape, recognized the feel of Rabeya's burqa, and pulled it out. The light blue one, with her feminist patches and pins, the stained one that she had lifted up to spit semen (a vanilla frosting-and-water concoction I had made in the punk house kitchen) at the Wahhabs. I put it on, looked through the fabric grid and the windshield to the parking lot—no one around. No gas station attendants, no Hollywood actors. The parking lot and the novel belonged to me. Made the mess into a spare T-shirt but it wasn't a sex thing, it was an author-and-character thing. Ritual is imitation. Then I took off the burqa and got back on the road to go home.[44]

Conclusion

There is no question that Thompson is the primary avatar of Gonzo journalism. Yet there seems to be a desire among scholars to make use of the term in other contexts and in reference to other writers.[45] In fact, when responding to an early version of this article, a colleague suggested that Mark Twain might have practiced Gonzo journalism. The lack of a coherent definition of Gonzo journalism makes it difficult to make such comparisons with authority—a lacuna that this article attempts to address.

Based on the definition posited here, it seems appropriate to classify Knight's nonfiction writing as a current-day example of Gonzo journalism. What is perhaps most valuable about Knight's work is that it fulfills the role of Gonzo ethnography in a way that shines a light on the wide diversity that exists within Islam. That diversity, literary critic Edward Said wrote, is largely absent from media discourse on Muslims.[46]

Muslim playwright Wajahat Ali singled Knight out when he wrote of the need for American Muslims to seize the Islamic tradition of storytelling and "become heroes of our own narratives," adding that Muslims "must follow the traditions and values of Islam and America by being generous and inviting with our narratives. We must tell stories that are 'by us, for everyone,' thus accurately reflecting the spectrum of shared common values that exist simultaneously within the Muslim and American spirit."[47]

For his part, Knight continues to plumb the stories of marginalized Muslim-American communities while interrogating issues of race and class: "Imam Ali himself said that the Mahdi would come as a poor stranger unknown and uncared for, not a Ph.D. of anything, not a tenured professor of anything anywhere, and he'd start out like a tired old camel lowering its head, wagging its tail but from that point he'd build the Empire of God."[48]

Future scholars should endeavor to examine the works of other Gonzo writers using a similar approach to offer refinements to the framework suggested here. While Gonzo journalism is filled with bluster and fury, the social messages at the center of the form are important enough to merit scholarly inquiry into exactly what's going on there.

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"Apocalypse and Hell": Hunter S. Thompson's American Dream

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How the American Dream turned into Hunter S. Thompson's "Apocalypse and Hell" is a story not only of America but also of Thompson's personal quest for ultimate "safety"—a death that could be seen as a final heroic attempt to live the "dream."

I began by positing the notion that fear was central to the projected persona of Hunter S. Thompson, whether in his writings or his life, or at least his life as hinted at in his few autobiographical musings. But my "take" on this "fear" was, I discovered, too simplistic. Thompson's fear wasn't so much narcissistic as communal. It was obvious that he feared for the United States, a fear embodied in what he termed the death of the American Dream. He said of his memoir *Kingdom of Fear*, "I especially like the title, which pretty well sums up the foul nature of life in the U.S.A. in these first few bloody years of the post-American century."[1] But why should he "fear" on behalf of his fellow-countrymen when in life he displayed a certain disdain for them, often, it must be said, disguised as the exaggerated courtliness of the "Southern Gentleman"?

A Southern Gentleman

This gentlemanly guise is, I believe, a necessary prerequisite for understanding Thompson the man and supports the generally accepted notion that childhood is the determining factor in our later lives. As suggested by Graham Greene, "Everything that can happen to a person, I think, is determined in the first sixteen years of his life."[2] So what of Hunter S. Thompson's first sixteen years?

Thompson was born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1937. His father, Jack, was an insurance agent who died suddenly in 1952, leaving the family broke. His mother Virginia raised Hunter and his brothers on her own. And it's safe to say that Thompson always considered himself a Southerner, a "Johnny Reb" at heart. Indeed, his collected early letters, *The Proud Highway* (1997), is subtitled "Saga of a Desperate Southern Gentleman," and Walter Kaegi, one of Thompson's childhood friends, recalled how "as children, [they] played with rocks, bullwhips and air rifles in the woods behind Kaegi's house, terrifying their mothers. They all had a particular fascination with the Civil War; their favorite game was 'North-South.' Thompson was general of the Virginia Second Cavalry and his base was Fort Lee." Aged only ten, Kaegi "hired Hunter to write about these mock battles in his neighborhood newsletter, the *Southern Star*. This obsession stayed with Thompson into adulthood" where he continued to wear a Confederate-style hat.[3] According to Kaegi, "Hunter is very Kentucky. Kentucky is a very violent place."[4]

It is never entirely clear, however, if Thompson's distaste of democratic institutions themselves is part of his "Southern" sense of oppression about how they operate or a more personal aversion to those who operate them. Certainly his distaste of democracy harked back to a previous age and would have been understandable, for example, to many of the Founding Fathers. According to historian John Keane, Founding Father and second U.S. President John Adams "saw himself as keeping apart the conflicting ideals of republicanism and democracy." Indeed, for Adams, "Democracy invariably bred tyranny."[5]

Bums, Beats, And Bureaucrats

And, as it turned out, so it did for Hunter. And here he joined illustrious company. Although artists and democratic society, by the twentieth century, managed pretty much to rub along together, this was not the case with those who either expressed extreme views or were prepared to extend the boundaries of "taste" beyond a kind of middle-class norm. William S. Burroughs, for example, according to biographer Ted Morgan, was "fed up with America, seeing government interference everywhere."[6] Burroughs talked of "'obscenity bureaucrats'" and by 1949 he "decided to leave a country he had come to detest."[7] After the 1960 Nixon–Kennedy debates, Thompson's one-time friend Allen Ginsberg wrote: "This country is evil . . . and I now spit on it and tell it to be nice or die, because that's what's coming. I HATE AMERICA!"[8] In 1965, as if in confirmation, Ginsberg was strip-searched by U.S. Customs after a flight from London. "He was taken into a side room and

stripped down to his underwear. Agents examined the lint in his pockets with a magnifying glass but found only tobacco crumbs."[9]

Similar tactics were used on Thompson in 1990 when he was charged with four drug felonies, possession of explosives, and three misdemeanors including sexual assault. As the magazine *High Times* chronicled, "Six investigators searched Thompson's house for eleven hours for evidence of the alleged assault; they found LSD, four Valium pills and trace amounts of cocaine."[10] Eventually all charges against him were dropped. His valedictory, although delivered twelve years later, still shows his irritation at "my sleazy little morality tale about ninety-nine days of being in the grip of the provably corrupt American Law Enforcement system at its worst with provably evil intentions."[11]

Other writers, notably Charles Bukowski, expressed similar sentiments to Thompson's but without the same sense of political engagement. According to Bukowski's biographer, Howard Sounes, a philosophy of "non-participation . . . runs through his work."[12] Bukowski himself said: "My writing has no meaning. It has no moral aspect, it has no social aspect."[13] Distinctly different, the outstanding feature of most of Thompson's output is that it *has* a "moral aspect," and it shares this defining characteristic, I would argue, with what has become tagged the American Dream. For the "Dream" can only exist within a moral landscape and for Thompson it is this morality that has gone AWOL.

The American Dream

But why is the American Dream so important? Apart from the fact that it's a recurring motif in American life from the nineteenth century, Thompson alluded to it constantly in his own writings. True to Greene's dictum, most of Thompson's themes can be found in his early journalism. According to Travis Elborough in a 2005 postscript to *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*, as a "young aspiring novelist, the twentysomething Thompson would repeatedly type out pages from *The Great Gatsby* in the hope of absorbing the cadence of his hero's style."[14] For Thompson the writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald were seminal. So it was perhaps inevitable that he would also ingest the way Fitzgerald embodied in his tissue and nervous system the fluid polarities of American experience: success and failure, illusion and disillusion, dream and nightmare. The main qualities of the American Dream presented in *The Great Gatsby* are perseverance and hope together with the idea of success against all odds. Through the eyes of the story's narrator, Nick Carraway, we see how modern values have transformed such pure ideals into a scheme for materialistic power; how the world of high society lacks any sense of morals or

consequence. George Lorimer, Fitzgerald's publisher at the *Saturday Evening Post*, clearly understood this American Way of Life. Fitzgerald's biographer has Lorimer saying: "The American dream could not accommodate license or pessimism. Love that did not aspire to marriage, stories with unhappy endings had no place in the *Post.*"[15]

Despite this, the theme of *The Great Gatsby* is inescapably the death of the American Dream. The story itself is of one man's dream of winning back a girl, Daisy, he had once loved. According to Fitzgerald, "'the whole idea of Gatsby is the unfairness of a poor young man not being able to marry a girl with money.'"[16] Inevitably, therefore, Jay Gatsby uses purely materialistic means to woo her once again—his Long Island home where he gives fabulous parties. He nonchalantly takes out a pile of his shirts, sent over from England, and begins "throwing them, one by one, before us, shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel" in an attempt to dazzle.[17] Gatsby's ultimate failure is the failure of the American Dream and the theme of Fitzgerald's novel became the theme of *all* of Thompson's writing.

After living variously in Puerto Rico, Brazil, and New York writing sports and travel features for *Time* magazine, the *National Observer*, and the New York *Herald Tribune*, Thompson settled in San Francisco. In characteristic style he resigned from the *National Observer* in 1964 when it refused to publish his favorable review of Tom Wolfe's *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*. So he was looking for work when in May 1965 Carey McWilliams, editor of the *Nation* magazine, signed him up. McWilliams saw his potential and gave him the idea of writing about the Hell's Angels. The piece created a buzz despite displaying little of the exuberant, indulgent, street-rap style of his later writing, and a number of publishers expressed interest in the story. Thompson signed a contract with Random House.

For a year he rode with the Angels, went home with the Angels, chronicled the sex lives of the Angels, identified with the Angels. The book he produced, *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*, was pretty much standard journalism. Apart from one important factor. Thompson became part of the action. There was no pretence here at traditional journalism's so-called objectivity. His fiercely subjective style reached parts of society no other journalist reached. This was the era of flower power and the Summer of Love. The establishment press had no clue how to report Black Panther rallies, Grateful Dead concerts, Beat writers' happenings, or Hell's Angels burn-ups.

The first printing of *Hell's Angels* sold out within days of publication, the book going on to make the bestseller list of 1967.[18] In its final pages, Thompson elegizes the American Dream, the first time in his writings that he acknowledged both its power and its perils:

> The outlaw stance is patently anti-social, although most Angels, as individuals, are naturally social creatures. The contradiction is deep-rooted and has parallels on every level of American society. Sociologists call it "alienation," or "anomie." It is a sense of being cut off, or left out of whatever society one was meant to be a part of.[19]

It should perhaps be made clear that, strictly speaking, Hell's Angels are not alienated, for, as Thompson notes, most of them are "naturally social creatures" and possess a strong sense of fellowship. However, they do suffer from anomie—that is, they have no respect for the laws of a society and reject its given norms. In many respects he was paying homage to literary tradition and in particular to Fitzgerald, the writer he most lionized as "'a spokesman for his generation.'"[20] The aftermath of the First World War produced the jazz age and the loss of innocence recorded by Fitzgerald and for Thompson "America has been breeding mass anomie since the end of the Second World War."[21] Did he see himself as the chronicler of his age as Fitzgerald had been before him?

On Liberty

To argue such a case is to suggest that the sheer enormity of Thompson's pretensions has throughout his career enabled the enemy—towards the end of his life identified as "a fast-emerging new Oligarchy of pimps and preachers who see no need for Democracy or fairness"[22]—to dismiss him because his very mode of expression has always carried within it the potential for his own destruction. On closer examination, however, Thompson's free discussion of ideas is consonant with traditional views of liberty from John Stuart Mill onwards. According to Mill, "Strange it is, that men should admit the validity of the arguments for free discussion, but object to their being 'pushed to an extreme'; not seeing that unless the reasons are good for an extreme case, they are not good for any case."[23] No one can accuse Thompson of not pushing arguments "to an extreme." But in doing so he offered his critics a double whammy for his "extremes" were apparent in both his content and his style.

Paul Perry, author of what he termed an unauthorized biography, relates a number of incidents where Thompson's content and style caused editorial alarm. For example, in 1970, riding on the back of the success of *Hell's Angels*, "*Playboy* assigned him a piece on Jean-Claude Killy, an Olympic skier turned Chevy Pitchman."[24] *Playboy* rejected the article largely because of Thompson's failure, as they saw it, to engage with the subject. "An editor fumed in a memo, 'Thompson's ugly, stupid arrogance is an insult to everything we stand for.'"[25] In 1980, a politically correct "editor at a magazine was upset about

some of Hunter's language and changed several of his expressions to ones she found more benign." She changed

> "god-damn race" to "beastly race," and the exclamation "Jesus" to "geeze." "Shit," as in "kicking the shit" out of someone became "tar." "Bastard," as in "look at that bastard run," was now "guy." . . . At another point, she completely eliminated a sentence in which Hunter describes a black marathoner as "the fastest crazy nigger in the world."[26]

According to this editor, the story was laced with racism but Thompson's reasons were in the best tradition of Mill. For Thompson was equally ill-disposed towards "any group or type or any identifiable race, creed, or color. They all deserve mockery and shame and humiliation."[27] He called himself a "multibigot." But it was the "unibigots" who were the racists. This is often a disingenuous argument, but there is little doubt that for Thompson it was the nub of the issue. To quote from the venerable John Stuart Mill again: "The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it."[28] Thompson's "expression of opinion" being, as already noted, as much a matter of style as of content, it was inevitable that such censorship would drive him "wild."[9] But by this time, however, his fame was such that the piece was published in its original form in *Running* magazine as "The Charge of the Weird Brigade," a gonzo-style account of a marathon run in Hawaii.

In re-visioning Thompson's journalism, however, it should be borne in mind that he was also a serious critic and analyst of the American literary tradition—a tradition he always yearned to become part of. In 1964 he wrote a piece for the *National Observer* entitled, "What Lured Hemingway to Ketchum?"[30] Elegiac rather than Gonzo in tone, it rehearses Hunter's "end of the American Dream" rhetoric as a tender reminiscence of another of his boyhood heroes:

> [The] power of conviction is a hard thing for any writer to sustain, and especially so once he becomes conscious of it. Fitzgerald fell apart when the world no longer danced to his music. Faulkner's conviction faltered when he had to confront twentieth-century Negroes instead of the black symbols in his books . . . Today we have Mailer, Jones, and Styron, three potentially great writers bogged down in what seems to be a crisis of convictions brought on, like Hemingway's, by the mean nature of a world that will not stand still long enough for them to see it clear as a whole.[31]

This critique was posited three years before Thompson developed his first musings on the American Dream and twenty-six years before *Songs of the Doomed: More Notes on the Death of the American Dream* was published.

The Year Of Revolt

In any examination of Hunter S. Thompson and the American Dream, the year 1968 must be considered pivotal. Until then, mainstream politics had rarely motivated Hunter, but that year felt pretty threadbare for many on the political left. In April Martin Luther King was shot dead with one round from a .30.06 rifle at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis; in May "Bloody Monday" marked one of the most violent confrontations of the Parisian student revolt. More than 5,000 Sorbonne students marched through the Latin Quarter and rioted as police attacked with gas grenades; in June presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was shot dead at the Ambassador Hotel in San Francisco; on August 20, Alexander Dubcek's attempt at "socialism with a human face" in Czechoslovakia, the "Prague Spring," was swept away when 200,000 Warsaw Pact troops invaded the country.

In August 1968, Hunter went to Chicago for the Democratic Party convention. Random House gave him an advance of $5,000 to go and write about "The Death of the American Dream." As Hunter tells it, he had no real reason for going to Chicago apart from just wanting to be there and "get the feel of things." [32] Mayor Richard Daley opened the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on August 26. There were demonstrations all week by Abbie Hoffman's Youth International Party (Yippies), a "movement" of committed activists and demonstrators. The Chicago police response was heavy-handed and disproportionate. Mayor Daley introduced an 11 p.m. curfew, and on Wednesday evening police baton-charged the crowd without provocation. The "Movement," according to Hunter,

> was essentially an expression of deep faith in the American Dream: that the people they were "fighting" were not the cruel and cynical beasts they seemed to be, and that in fact they were just a bunch of men like everybody's crusty middle-class fathers who only needed to be shaken a bit, jolted out of their bad habits and away from their lazy, short-term, profit-oriented life stances . . . and that once they understand, they would surely do the right thing.[33]

Hunter himself only just escaped to the sanctuary of his hotel and then, shell-shocked, watched himself fleeing in "stark terror" across Michigan Drive on the TV in his hotel room. "I went there as a journalist," he recalled in *Kingdom of Fear*, "but I left Chicago in a state of hysterical angst, convinced by what I'd seen that we were all in very bad trouble."[34] Years later he recalled: "I still have trouble when I think about Chicago. That week at the Convention changed everything I'd ever taken for granted about this country and my place in it."[35]

His dedication to the American Dream project now began to falter. In a letter to Jim Silberman, his editor at Random House (July 19, 1968), Hunter acknowledged, "The massive 'American Dream' filing system that I started building on my return from NY is a bummer. The brute weight of it all has paralyzed my head. . . . There is absolutely *no humor* in the Death of the American Dream."[36] And for Hunter an essentially comic vision of the world was essential. As noted by Timothy Ferris in his foreword to *Kingdom of Fear*, "Hunter's writing is, first of all, extremely funny."[37] Finding the funny bone of America, however, was always problematic. The end of the sixties brought a flowering of dystopian art, most of which took itself very seriously. The 1969 movie *Easy Rider* had characters searching for the true meaning of America. The Lawyer George Hanson observed that Americans talk a lot about the value of freedom but are actually afraid of anyone who truly exhibits it. Simon and Garfunkel recorded their seminal track *America* a year earlier—"They've all gone to look for America" chimed its chorus. At a more rarefied level Aldous Huxley, author of *Brave New World*, had, a generation earlier, described the "United States as a somewhat benign plutocracy in which technological innovation and mass production techniques had made it possible for 'capitalists who control it to impose whatever ideas and art-forms they please on the mass of humanity.'"[38] Hunter railed against these "imposed" art forms as well as the way they manipulated the "mass of humanity."

Freak Power Candidate

Hunter's immediate response was to engage in political action of his own. Returning home to Woody Creek, he built up a head of steam and ran for Sheriff of Pitkin County on what he dubbed the Freak Power ticket. He seemed deadly serious in his political ambitions, toying briefly with the idea of running for Congress. He said that Aspen was ready for

> a whole new style of local government—the kind of government Thomas Jefferson had in mind when he used the word 'democracy'. We have not done too well with that concept—not in Aspen or anywhere else—and the proof of our failure is the wreckage of Jefferson's dream that haunts us on every side, from coast to coast, on the TV news and a thousand daily newspapers. We have blown it.[39]

But the satirical mood was seldom far below the surface—his manifesto pledges included changing the name "Aspen" by public referendum to "Fat City," decriminalizing the possession and sale of drugs, and ripping up the city streets and replacing them with bike paths and footpaths.[40] Even more bizarre than his political platform was that he lost by fewer than 400 votes.

More significantly, perhaps, Thompson produced what became the defining book of his oeuvre, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. It is subtitled "A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream," but this sub was probably more to keep his publishers quiet than a true reflection of the book's ultimate rationale. Random House had been pursuing Thompson for some time for his "American Dream" book, and, as already noted, he had pretty much given up on it. *Fear and Loathing* started life as an exposé for *Rolling Stone* magazine of the killing in Los Angeles of a Mexican television journalist. One of Thompson's sources was Oscar Zeta Acosta, a prominent Mexican-American activist and lawyer described throughout the book as "my attorney." They decided to head for Las Vegas so they could talk more freely and used Thompson's assignment to report the Mint 400 motorcycle race as cover. There are references to the American Dream throughout the book, but it is difficult to ascribe much potency to them apart from their ability to assuage an editor who had given Thompson $300 up front in cash for the trip.[41]

In 1972 Thompson returned to the world of politics and covered the Nixon–McGovern presidential campaign for *Rolling Stone*. The articles were collected in his most significant political opus, *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*. He had assessed Nixon as early as 1968 for *Pageant* magazine: "Nixon's mind is programmed, from long experience, to cope with difficult situations. The fact that he often distorts the question—and then either answers it dishonestly or uses it to change the subject—is usually lost in the rhetoric."[42] Apart from the fact that this observation seems as apposite of modern politics as when he wrote it, he was among the first to understand in any sustained way that the exposure of "shrewd technique" required a closeness to the politician rather than the political process, a need to see him or her working, rather than a mere perusal of manifestos or a rifle through press releases.

Thompson dogged Nixon's footsteps from the 1972 presidential campaign, through Watergate, to his death in 1994. He dedicated *The Great Shark Hunt* "To Richard Milhous Nixon, who never let me down," and wrote a coruscating coda for *Rolling Stone* when Nixon died. "Read it and weep," he commanded, "for we have lost our Satan. Richard Nixon has gone home to hell."[43] Arguably Nixon implanted in Thompson the cynicism with which he approached most political figures from then on (apart from Bill Clinton who he initially disliked until the Gennifer Flowers "affair"). He sent a "Bill Clinton Fights Back" poster to the Clinton headquarters and noted that "the Clinton camp took my advice and denied everything. Which worked nicely. The net result of the Gennifer Flowers flap was a nine-point gain for Clinton in the New Hampshire popularity polls. The pro-adultery vote had spoken."[44]

Outlaw Man

This sardonic tone, a vital ingredient from which much of his humor sprang, is evident even in his earliest writings such as the high school essays he wrote for the Athenaeum Literary Association yearbook, the *Spectator*. "Let us visualize the secure man," the eighteen-year-old Thompson wrote in his essay "Security":

> He has pushed ambition and initiative aside and settled down, so to speak, in a boring, but safe and comfortable rut for the rest of his life . . . he is accepted as a respectable, but average and prosaic man. But is he a man? Has he any self-respect or pride in himself?[45]

This "desperate southern gentleman" was haunted by the fear of being "average" and "prosaic." And here arguably is the central dichotomy of Thompson's own life. Pride and self-respect do not sit comfortably with "security." "Average" and "prosaic" have become synonymous with the American Dream as it slowly turns into nightmare. Were the drugs, liquor, guns, and outrageous behavior the weapons he enlisted in the fight against these harbingers of failure? With mock pretension he noted: "Every culture needs an Outlaw god of some kind, and maybe this time around I'm *it*." And Thompson in life as in his writing capitalized Outlaw and lower-cased god.

Interviewed by George Plimpton for the *Paris Review* in 2000, Thompson said: "An outlaw can be defined as somebody who lives outside the law, beyond the law, not necessarily against it."[46] This may be a fine distinction—in sociological terms the difference between alienation and anomie—but for Thompson it embodied the very essence of his survival instinct. He bought Owl Farm in Woody Creek, Colorado, a 100-acre "home-base fortress" where he lived "outside the law," protecting his privacy with electric fencing and an arsenal of guns and other offensive weaponry. In his recent biography of Thompson, William McKeen noted how "life in Woody Creek had Hunter sounding like a satisfied man." But McKeen then asked the question: "Had he bought into it, the 2.5-kid Rotarian American Dream?" Thompson's own response seemed to suggest that he might have: "When I made that hairpin turn up the hill onto Woody Creek Road, I knew I was safe."[47] This was about as close as Thompson ever came to the life of "Security" alluded to in his youthful *Spectator* essay.

So, in spite of all his bravado, Thompson seemed to harbor a real trepidation of the outside world—its institutions, its rules and regulations, its people. His journalism and letters are sprinkled with the bad karma of people and place: "Nicole was not optimistic about loading up the Cadillac and driving 1,200 miles through hostile territory, just to get to Little Rock."[48] And

the paranoia really took hold during his bid for sheriff: "The word had come that afternoon from the Colorado Bureau of Investigation, and the word was extremely grim. Tonight . . . Mr Thompson, the Freak Power candidate for sheriff, was going to be killed."[49]

Without question, however, he surely stands alone as the manufacturer of the apocryphal moment, in life as in his writings. Whilst Thompson anecdotes abound, they are often useful when trying to get the measure of his lived personality as distinct from his literary persona. Who else would go to a birthday party, for example, even if it was Jack Nicholson's, loaded up with a bleeding elk heart from his freezer, an outdoor amplifier, a tape recording of a pig being eaten alive by bears, a 1,000,000-watt spotlight, a 9mm Smith & Wesson semi-automatic pistol, and a 40 million-candlepower parachute flare that would light up the valley for forty miles and forty minutes?[50]

Yet ultimately it is not as a man of the counter culture that Thompson must be judged. And here it's reasonable to ask: on what exactly does his reputation rest? Is it deserved? What does it mean to the wider community—especially the parasitic, internecine worlds of journalism and politics? As early as 1963 with the death of Kennedy, Thompson believed that the commentator/novelist who traditionally covered politics had nothing to say. "Fuck that crowd,"[51] was his strident lament. He decided there would have to be somebody to carry the flag. And that somebody, almost by default, turned out to be him.

Although almost as much has been written about him as by him, no writer can remain alive solely through his biographers. There must be something in the work, the oeuvre, which demands posterity's attention. In Thompson's case it is the way he transformed not only political writing, allowing the private to invade the public, but also the very way we think about a journalist's role as producer of the first draft of history. By his own lights he was "'the most accurate journalist you'll ever read.'"[52] For the real drug that fuelled him was a desire to tell the truth as he saw it—"a demented kind of honesty."[53]

To conclude, I want to return to that Hemingway piece of May 1964 for the *National Observer*. It was certainly prescient. Written forty-one years before Thompson's own suicide, it could almost be his epitaph, too. The last paragraph reads:

> Like many another writer, Hemingway did his best work when he felt he was standing on something solid—like an Idaho mountainside, or a sense of conviction.
>
> Perhaps he found what he came here for, but the odds are huge that he didn't. He was an old, sick, and very troubled man, and the illusion of peace

> and contentment was not enough for him—not even when his friends came up from Cuba and played bullfight with him in the Tram [a local Ketchum bar]. So, finally, and for what he must have thought the best of reasons, he ended it with a shotgun.[54]

The American Dream is dead, long live the American Dream.

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NOTES

1. Hunter S. Thompson, *Kingdom of Fear: Loathsome Secrets of a Star-Crossed Child in the Final Days of the American Century* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), xix.

2. Marie-Francoise Allain, *The Other Man: Conversations with Graham Greene* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 37.

3. E. Jean Carroll, *Hunter: The Strange and Savage Life of Hunter S. Thompson* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 24.

4. Ibid., 25.

5. John Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), 126.

6. Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw: The Life and Times of William S. Burroughs* (London: Bodley Head, 1991), 169.

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11. Ibid., 271.

12. Howard Sounes, *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (Edinburgh: Rebel Inc.), 221.

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15. André Le Vot, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography* (London: Penguin, 1985), 79.

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19. Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (London: Penguin, 1967), 306.

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30. Hunter S. Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales from a Strange Time* (London: Picador, 1979), 394.
31. Ibid.
32. Thompson, *Kingdom of Fear*, 78.
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36. Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America: The Brutal Odyssey of an Outlaw Journalist 1968–1976* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 109.
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38. Robert S. Baker, *Brave New World: History, Science, and Dystopia* (Boston: Twayne, 1990), 73.
39. Hunter S. Thompson, *Better Than Sex: Confessions of a Political Junkie* (London: Black Swan, 1995), 18.
40. Ibid., 21.
41. Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (London: Flamingo, 1993), 4.
42. Hunter S. Thompson, "Presenting: The Richard Nixon Doll (Overhauled 1968 Model)," Pageant, July 1968, 15.
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45. Hunter S. Thompson, *The Proud Highway: Saga of a Desperate Southern Gentleman, 1955–1967* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 4.
46. Thompson, *Kingdom of Fear*, 51.
47. William McKeen, *Outlaw Journalist: The Life & Times of Hunter S. Thompson* (London: Aurum Press, 2009), 85.
48. Thompson *Better Than Sex*, 171.
49. Thompson, *Kingdom of Fear*, 73
50. Ibid., xvi.
51. Thompson, *The Proud Highway*, 421.
52. Thompson, *Kingdom of Fear*, xiv.
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Literary Journalism Studies

A Hunter S. Thompson Bibliography

Prepared by William McKeen

Books by Hunter S. Thompson

Hell's Angels (New York: Random House, 1967).

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas (New York: Random House, 1972).

Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1973).

The Great Shark Hunt (New York: Summit Books, 1979).

The Curse of Lono (New York: Bantam Books, 1983).

Generation of Swine (New York: Summit Books, 1988).

Songs of the Doomed (New York: Summit Books, 1990).

Screwjack (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Neville, 1991).*

Better than Sex (New York: Random House, 1994).

The Proud Highway (New York: Villard Books, 1997).

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas and Other American Stories (New York: The Modern Library, 1997).

Mistah Leary, He Dead (Pasadena, Calif.: X-Ray Publishing, 1997).*

The Rum Diary (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

Fear and Loathing in America (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

Screwjack and Other Stories (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

Kingdom of Fear (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003).

Hey Rube (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

Fire in the Nuts (Tucson, Ariz.: Sylph Publications, 2004).*

Fear and Loathing at Rolling Stone (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011).

The Mutineer (New York: Simon and Schuster, in press).

[*] denotes limited edition

Books Featuring Hunter S. Thompson

(as a character or with an example of his work), with occasional annotations.

Acosta, Oscar Zeta. *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1972). Acosta was the model for Dr. Gonzo in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

Amram, David. *Upbeat: Nine Lives of a Musical Cat* (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers, 2007). Amram, the gifted musician, was a longtime friend. *Upbeat* contains his reminiscences of Thompson up through and including the blast-off funeral of August 2005.

Anson, Robert Sam. *Gone Crazy and Back Again* (New York: Doubleday, 1981). Includes rich detail of Thompson's early years at *Rolling Stone*.

Barger, Ralph "Sonny," with Keith and Kent Zimmerman. *Hell's Angel* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001). Barger offers his theory that Thompson provoked the Hell's Angels in order to get stomped and help the sales of his book.

Bingley, Will, and Anthony Hope-Smith. *Gonzo: A Graphic Biography of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: Abrams, 2012). Bingley, the writer, and Hope-Smith, the artist, tell Thompson's life story in graphic format.

Brinkley, Douglas. *The Majic* [sic] *Bus: An American Odyssey* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993). This cross-country trip led to Thompson's collaborations with Brinkley, the noted historian.

Carroll, E. Jean. *Hunter: The Strange and Savage Life of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: Dutton, 1993). Carroll's odd take on Thompson's life was a combination of oral history and a false memoir.

Cleverly, Michael, and Bob Braudis. *The Kitchen Readings* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008). Cleverly is an artist who lived up the road from Thompson, and Braudis, the sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado, was his closest friend the last three decades of his life. There are a lot of great stories in this book, and they are well told.

Clifford, Peggy. *To Aspen and Back* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980). Foreword by Hunter S. Thompson.

Corday, Simone. *9 1/2 Years Behind the Green Door: A Mitchell Brothers Stripper Remembers her Lover Artie Mitchell, Hunter S. Thompson, and the Killing that Rocked San Francisco* (Minneapolis: Mill City Press, 2007).

Cowan, Jay. *Hunter S. Thompson: An Insider's View of Deranged, Depraved, Drugged Out Brilliance* (Guilford, Conn.: The Lyons Press, 2009). Cowan was the one-time caretaker of Owl Farm and a friend long thereafter. Few had such a vantage to witness Thompson at work.

Crist, Steve, and Laila Nabulsi, eds. *Gonzo* (Los Angeles: Ammo Books, 2006). Features writing and photography by Hunter S. Thompson. Nabulsi lovingly produced this visual biography that contains words and pictures unavailable elsewhere.

Crouse, Timothy. *The Boys on the Bus* (New York: Random House, 1973). Crouse was hired by *Rolling Stone* to "babysit" Thompson during the 1972 presidential campaign. Thompson ended up encouraging Crouse to cover the press, and this masterful book was the result. Thompson appears as one of the members of the campaign press corps, the "boys on the bus."

Dickstein, Morris. *Gates of Eden* (New York: Basic Books, 1977). The sociologist and historian sees Thompson as one of the avatars of change in the 1970s.

Draper, Robert. *Rolling Stone: The Uncensored History* (New York: Doubleday, 1990). A thoroughly reported history of *Rolling Stone* that offers a decade more material and hindsight than the earlier book by Anson.

Early, Gerald, ed. *The Muhammad Ali Reader* (New York: Ecco Press, 1998). Thompson's Ali profile is reprinted.

Hale, Dennis, and Jonathan Eisen, eds. *The California Dream* (New York: Collier Books, 1968). An excerpt from *Hell's Angels* is included.

Harrell, Margaret. *Keep This Quiet: My Relationship with Hunter S. Thompson, Milton Klonsky and Jan Mensaert* (Raleigh, N.C.: Saeculum University Press, 2011). Thompson loved Harrell's work as the line editor on *Hell's Angels* and she here details the nature of their relationship.

Hart, Gary. *Right from the Start: A Chronicle of the McGovern Campaign* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973). Hart offers a view of the McGovern campaign that parallels Thompson's *Campaign Trail* book.

Kerrane, Kevin, and Ben Yagoda. *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998). Thompson's "The Scum Also Rises" from 1974 is included.

Love, Robert, ed. *The Best of Rolling Stone* (New York: Doubleday, 1993). An excerpt from *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is included.

Mailer, Norman. *The Fight* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977.) Thompson went to Zaire to cover the fight between George Foreman and Muhammad Ali. Thompson never wrote a word about the fight, but Mailer, of course, wrote several. He also wrote about the press corps in Zaire, including Thompson.

Mankiewicz, Frank. *Perfectly Clear: Nixon from Whittier to Watergate* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973). Another view of the McGovern campaign from the trail boss, a man for whom Thompson had the greatest respect.

McKeen, William. *Hunter S. Thompson* (Boston: Twayne, 1991). This first book on Thompson is more of a study of his work than his life, though it has elements of biography.

——. *Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008). Built on the serious study of his work in the earlier book, this was the first full-length biography of Thompson to be published after his death.

——. *Mile Marker Zero: The Moveable Feast of Key West* (New York: Crown, 2011). This nonfiction narrative concerns the literary life of Key West in the seventies and primarily focuses on Thomas McGuane, Jim Harrison and Jimmy Buffett. But no party was over until Hunter S. Thompson showed up.

McWilliams, Carey. *The Education of Carey McWilliams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979) McWilliams recounts giving Thompson his breakthrough assignment to write about the Hell's Angels.

Miller, John. *San Francisco Stories* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990). Thompson has two pieces in the book, "Generation of Swine" and "When the Beatniks Were Social Lions."

Murphy, George, ed. *The Best of Key West's Writers, 1830-1990* (Marathon, Fla.: Tortugas Limited Publishing, 1990). Thompson's "The Gonzo Salvage Company" is included.

National Observer editors. *The Observer's World: People, Places, and Events from the Pages of* The National Observer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965). These five Hunter S. Thompson pieces are included: "End of the Beatniks," "The Extinct Hitchhiker," "Across a Frozen Desert," "The 'Gringo' and Culture Shock," and "A Footloose American in a Smuggler's Den."

Nocentia, Annie, and Ruth Baldwin, eds. *The High Times Reader* (New York: Nation Books, 2004). Contains a Hunter S. Thompson interview.

Perry, Charles, ed. *Smokestack El-Ropo's Bedside Reader* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1972). Two Thompson articles from the 1972 campaign appear in book form first in this anthology.

Perry, Charles. *The Haight Ashbury* (New York: Random House, 1984). Thompson was there at ground zero for the birth of the counterculture. Perry's excellent book provides context.

Perry, Paul. *Fear and Loathing: The Strange and Terrible Saga of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: Thunder's Mouth, 1993). Perry started the ball rolling for what became *The Curse of Lono*. This is a more coherent attempt at biography than Carroll's, though both Thompson and his girlfriend, Laila Nabulsi, felt Perry abused their trust.

Plimpton, George. *Shadow Box* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977). Thompson admired few people more than Plimpton. Plimpton writes elegantly about the Ali-Foreman fight and details Thompson's non-role in covering that fight. (Thompson chose to skip the fight and float in a swimming pool of marijuana instead.)

Pollack, Richard, ed. *Stop the Presses, I Want to Get Off* (New York: Random House, 1975). Contains a brilliant profile of Thompson by a brilliant writer: "The Prince of Gonzo" by J. Anthony Lukas.

Rolling Stone editors. *The Rolling Stone Reader* (New York: Warner Books, 1974). Thompson's "Strange Rumblings in Aztlan" is included.

Steadman, Ralph. *America* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1974). Foreword (hilarious) by Hunter S. Thompson.

——. *The Joke's Over* (New York: Harcourt, 2006). A soul-searching autobiography by Steadman, during which he examines the complicated nature of his relationship with Thompson.

Stephenson, William. *Gonzo Republic: Hunter S. Thompson's America* (London: Continuum, 2011). That rare thing, a serious academic study of Thompson.

Thompson, Anita. *The Gonzo Way* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Publishing, 2007). His widow collects wit and wisdom and some of her thoughts about her late husband.

——. *Ancient Gonzo Wisdom: Interviews with Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: DaCapo Press, 2009). Anita Thompson unearthed and transcribed long-forgotten interviews and commentaries, adding a great deal to our understanding of Thompson's philosophy.

Thompson, Toby. *The 60s Report* (New York: Rawson Wade, 1979). Thompson (no relation to Hunter) checks in on some of the great cultural forces of the Sixties about a decade later, and Thompson is in the cast of characters.

Torgoff, Martin. *Can't Find My Way Home* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004). A book about the drug generation would be remiss for not including Thompson. This is an excellent book overall.

Torrey, Beef, and Kevin Simonson. *Conversations with Hunter S. Thompson* (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2008). This collects most of the major interviews of Thompson's life, including his terrific Playboy 1974 interview with Craig Vetter.

Trudeau, Garry. *Action Figure: The Life and Times of Doonesbury's Uncle Duke* (Riverside, N.J.: Andrews-McMeel Publishing, 2001). A bow to the caricature. The original edition came with an Uncle Duke action figure.

Weingarten, Marc. *The Gang that Wouldn't Write Straight* (New York: Crown, 2005). An amusing historical account of the rise of Literary Journalism.

Wenner, Jann, and Corey Seymour. *Gonzo* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2007). An oral biography of Thompson's life and work that despite its disjointed nature, includes some great stories.

Whittmer, Peter. *Aquarius Revisited: Seven Who Created the Sixties Counterculture that Changed America* (New York: Macmillan, 1987). Thompson appears as part of the cast of characters before he showed up as the main attraction in . . . .

——. *When the Going Gets Weird* (New York: Hyperion, 1993). Of the first wave of Hunter Thompson biographies, this was probably the most coherent and conventional.

Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968). Thompson appears briefly and was, of course, the source of much of Wolfe's material on the *Hell's Angels.*

——. *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). Features two selections from Thompson, the only writer with more than one piece in the anthology.

Films

Ewing, Wayne, director. *Breakfast with Hunter* (Ewing Films, 2003).

——, dir. *When I Die* (Ewing Films, 2005).

——, dir. *Free Lisl* (Ewing Films, 2007).

——, dir. *Animals, Whores and Dialogue* (Ewing Films, 2010).

Finch, Nigel, director. *Fear and Loathing on the Road to Hollywood* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1978).

Gibney, Alex, dir. *Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson* (HDNet Films, 2008).

Gilliam, Terry, dir. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Universal Pictures, 1998).

Linson, Art, dir. *Where the Buffalo Roam* (Universal Pictures, 1980).

Martin, Sharon, prod. *Biography: Hunter S. Thompson* (The Biography Channel, 2004).

Robinson, Bruce, dir. *The Rum Diary* (Film District, 2011).

Thurman, Tom, dir. *Buy the Ticket, Take the Ride* (Starz Entertainment, 2006).

Major Interviews

(compiled by Beef Torrey and Kevin Simonson)

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Book reviews . . .

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor
Stepping Up to the Book Watch, page 126

Stepping Up to the Book Watch

Nancy L. Roberts,
University at Albany, SUNY, U.S.A.

This issue marks my first as book review editor for *Literary Journalism Studies.* I can't thank enough my predecessor, Thomas B. Connery of the University of St. Thomas, U.S.A., for his hard work to set a standard of excellence for this section. I will do my best to uphold it, with your help. Please contact me at nroberts@albany.edu to suggest books for possible review in this section and to offer to review them. We seek to publish reviews of at least three different types of books (including non-American titles): works of literary journalism, scholarly studies of literary journalism, and books about "doing" literary journalism.

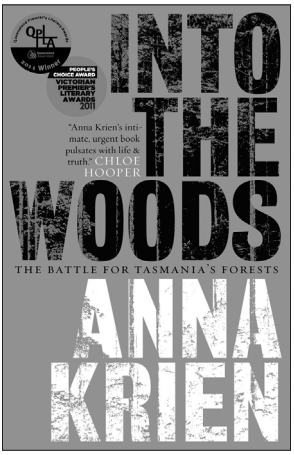
In reviewing these and other types of books, the aim is to illuminate the connection to our field in a way that less specialized journals do not. That means, for instance, that a book such as Janet Malcolm's *Iphigenia in Forest Hills* should be discussed as a work of literary journalism and placed within that context. A scholarly work such as Leonora Flis's *Factual Fictions: Narrative Truth and the Contemporary American Documentary Novel* should be considered vis-à-vis how it is connected to the field's scholarship and what it contributes to that body of knowledge. And books about writing literary journalism should be evaluated with an eye toward clarifying how they might inform the student writer (particularly of literary journalism).

So, if you have suggestions for books to review and/or wish to volunteer to review, do get in touch. We are particularly grateful when our readers bring relevant books to our attention that do not get readily reviewed elsewhere because of their specificity.

Discovering a New Voice

Into the Woods: The Battle for Tasmania's Forests
by Anna Krien. Black, Inc., 2010. Paperback, 304 pp., $30.

Reviewed by Lindsay Morton, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand



For almost two decades, much of the scholarship and public discourse surrounding Australian literary journalism has been centered on the nonfiction of Helen Garner. Recognizable as much for the controversial ethical debates her reportage engenders as for her highly literary approach, Garner is arguably better known internationally than investigative journalists such as David Marr, Estelle Blackburn, and Margaret Simons. At 69, Garner may be characterized as the matriarch of the form in Australia. More recently, however, three emerging female voices are joining Garner in the spotlight with their own styles of literary journalism: Anna Funder (*Stasiland*), Chloe Hooper (*The Tall Man*), and, most recently, Anna Krien (*Into the Woods*).

The youngest of this trio, Krien has written in a variety of forms for various iconic Melbourne publications, including *The Age* broadsheet. Like Garner, Funder, and Hooper, she prefers the general title "writer" to the more specific and politically charged "journo." Her first book-length work, however, is undeniably journalistic in practice, as well as a fine example of the self-aware, literary style reminiscent of Garner's work. *Into the Woods: The Battle for Tasmania's Forests* (2010) focuses on the most recent developments in a decades-long conflict between government, loggers, and protestors ("ferals" or "ratbags" in the Australian vernacular), and uses current protests as a platform to investigate the wider issues surrounding the logging of old-growth forests.

Krien becomes involved in the issue after receiving a text message from a close friend—a feral—informing her of disturbing footage in which loggers smash the windows of a car containing nonviolent protestors. In less than an hour after viewing the footage, Krien has booked passage from her native Melbourne to Launceston, Tasmania's northern port city, where she will begin what initially is a three-day investigation of the protest. Invariably, three days stretches into a month, and one trip into four, as Krien immerses herself in the issues, the factions, the stories, and the landscape.

A mainlander, Krien's initial impressions of the island are informed by writers and filmmakers. As she ruminates on this on the ferry across Bass Strait, a fellow traveller interrupts her thoughts:

> It is a gothic place with a bloody undercurrent, where behind every magic faraway tree is a logger kicking in the head of an activist . . . a place where Exclusive Brethren and pig farmers alike fund thousand-dollar advertising campaigns, and where a 2000-year-old protected tree is axed, drilled and filled with diesel before being spray-painted with the words 'Fuck You Greenie Cunts' and set alight.
>
> "It's nice out here, isn't it?" a voice says behind me, parts of it disappearing in a gust of wind (10).

Such brazen irony is typical of Krien's writing, although she relies less on structural playfulness than her open, searching, yet self-effacing narrative voice to guide the reader through the moral and political complexities of Tasmania's timber wars. Arriving at the ferals' home base, Krien is surprised at what she finds:

> To the uninformed eye, Camp Florentine looks like a shit heap. Which is how it looks to me. The torched cars are still lingering like a hangover next to the road. Rectangles of sunlight spill through the axe wounds onto melted seats and burnt calico shopping bags. The stink of rubber catches on the wind (34).

The picture that emerges of "Camp Flozza" is an example of quintessential literary journalism. Krien's eye for detail is ravenous, which should not be surprising, as she lists Tom Wolfe and Joan Didion among her strongest influences. In Wolfean tradition, she uses the camp as entry point to the physical space the ferals inhabit, but also as to symbolically introduce their position in wider political and social contexts. Krien writes:

> At first I assume [the ferals] all know each other, but in time I realise that some don't know the first thing about their companions. There is an odd lack of curiosity in the camp. People float in and out, asking few questions of one another, as if the past is erased and this, what they are not, is all that matters. I find this depressing (38).

Her unease becomes a motif throughout *Into the Woods*; as Krien moves through stages of understanding the issue from different perspectives, she becomes more deeply concerned about the transience and disconnectedness of the protestors' lives. At times she openly confronts her friends, Ula and Wazza, about their goals, and the means they employ to reach them; at other times she is simply an outsider observing, "People breathe out, others are thinking hard. A sea of dirty dark hoodies, all accustomed to talk of the cops and bail and bunnies" (283), but with a tangible sense of disappointment in what the movement could be—and is not. Krien's great achievement here is that she does not take the moral high ground; at most she is disillusioned. In the epilogue she makes friends "with a girl who has nothing to do with trees. She is a rare find" (281) and together they explore a beach for remnants of settlers' broken tea sets. Krien writes, "The broken plates looked like shells, just as curious and gentle, not like they don't belong at all. It is a relief to find beautiful traces of us" (282).

While Krien uses the ferals as both an entry and through line for the narrative, a great journalistic strength of the book is its even-handed representation of the stakeholders. The five sections of the narrative: Ratbags, Loggers, The Company, Groundswell, and The Mill are reported firsthand by Krien, as she employs her own

subjectivity to create the narrative drive and explore the complexities of the industry. While the initial representation of the loggers is damning—the recount of the blockade action is a chilling opening to the narrative proper—Krien spends time in pubs, homes, and the workplaces of loggers to get their perspective, at times at her own peril. The only female in the bar of the National Park Hotel, she walks in and orders a beer: "Ignoring the hush, I try to act as if I always walk into pubs full of men in the middle of nowhere" (75). When asked, "Are you a greenie?" by a logger, she shrugs and offers:

> "I dunno. Are you?"
> His mates semi-shriek and fall over themselves, while he puffs himself up.
> "No way!"
> I tell them I'm a writer and that I've been staying at the Florentine blockade up the road. The men recoil (76).

In a later interview, Krien admits she has no doubt that if she were a man she would have been beaten up outside the hotel, but as a woman and a writer, she is afforded some level of respect from the workers. She chats with a local, John, who is "a thoughtful presence amid the fluoro rowdiness" (77) and educates her on the some of the essential inside workings of the industry. This is not only Krien's initiation, but also the reader's, and is easily digestible in dialogue form in preparation for the more dense expository detail of later chapters. John is a personable character and a third-generation logger, and is paralleled later in the narrative by Matthew, another third-generation logger who is twenty-six years old and has mortgage and child-support payments to make. Krien draws the reader into the loggers' world as she is, despite being wary of making alliances:

> I got a shock once when, while I was travelling in a logger's car, a wheezing old Datsun pulled up long side us at a red light, carrying a bunch of Pink Palace crew. Carefully I pressed myself into my seat and turned my face away, feeling like an adulterer, but not sure who I was cheating on (294).

Even out of the view of her friends, she seems conflicted about loyalties: "Later . . . I'm standing next to my car when a truck comes out of the coupe and starts down the main road. I see Matthew in the passenger seat. Instinctively, we wave" (296).

A classic feature of literary journalism, this tag-line at the paragraph break is loaded with implication—but Krien's conflicting sympathies are never resolved.

Perhaps the least love is lost on politicians and corporate executives in *Into the Woods*, although Krien has good reason to be wary about her interviewees. She records:

> My repeated attempts to speak to Gunns [Gunns Limited: Tasmania's largest logging company] are not simply refused—they are ignored. . . . When I ask locals and state reporters if Gunns speaks to them and why its representatives won't speak to me, I get a reply that induces a sinking feeling: Oh, they will. After you publish (158).

This passage seems Garneresque: both her first and second book-length journalistic efforts were impeded by subjects who refused to be interviewed. But, unlike Garner, who uses introspection to bridge the gap in content, Krien turns to archives.

Snatches of interviews continue the narrative line while expository passages provide detailed background to the political and big business aspects of the timber industry. Here a disturbing picture is painted of corporate greed and rogue-mateship, coupled with mind-boggling mismanagement of taxpayers' money. Krien deftly handles the facts and figures, largely exchanging her distinctive narratorial voice for a more neutral, objective exposition that anchors the text, and provides balance to what might otherwise be an unhealthily emotional narrative (Krien does not shy away from reporting bodily functions and spontaneous outbursts of tears).

Despite Gunns' eventual capitulation on building a controversial pulp mill—a victory for the greenies, albeit a temporary win—one does not feel that a resolution has been achieved at the end of *Into the Woods*. Loggers continue to log, politicians continue to plot, groups of ferals and ratbags disband and melt into the ether, and Krien is soon to return to her beloved Melbourne. But like all great works of literary journalism, this book signals a story beyond itself: Tasmania is only one small battleground in the war for the world's forests. Through the investigative process, Krien has found that blockaders versus loggers is in fact a false battleground; it is the environment versus the economy where the real war is being waged both locally and globally, and she can see no end in sight on either front.

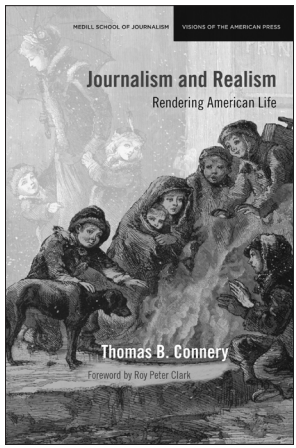
The book finishes on a distracted and slightly ambiguous note: is Krien distancing herself from all of the stakeholders, including the ferals, determining not to side with any of the camps? The final passage suggests as much. Again, in the tradition of Garner, Funder, and Hooper, Krien has used her own curiosity as the medium through which to navigate an emotionally and politically charged arena for all Australians, and ultimately refuses to represent the issues as any less complex than she has found them. For Krien, objectivity is "a disguise to hide behind," thus her transparent subjectivity not only refreshes, but also produces currency in an economy where self-interest is endemic.

Into the Woods is a distinctly Australian-flavored book, peppered with vernacular and private jokes about the mainland's embarrassing relative across the Strait, but these are assets for the growing canon of national literary journalism. Anna Krien has proven herself a willing student, a brave and balanced reporter/researcher, a gifted writer, and an exciting new voice in the tradition of female literary journalists. Garner has led the way for subjective, personal investigative journalism of controversial issues in Australia, and as she redirects her efforts back to her roots in fiction, Funder, Hooper, and Krien are worthy recipients of her mantle.

How Real Life Came to Be Told

Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life
by Thomas B. Connery, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011. Paperback, 306 pp., $24.95.

Reviewed by Jan Whitt, University of Colorado, U.S.A.



Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life is a sweeping study of journalism, literature, illustrations, and photography that will appeal to readers across the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Employing historical analysis, literary criticism, and visual communication, Thomas B. Connery explores the role of journalism in the emergence of realism in nineteenth-century America.

Especially striking in Connery's detailed historical analysis is his ability to tell a story with emotion and energy. Excerpts from both popular and obscure writers of the period suggest Connery's desire to engage the reader; to deal compassionately with class issues, especially the "marginalized working class and the poor" (10); and to explain how human interest and snapshots of real life would come to define much of literary journalism and New Journalism.

Following a foreword by Roy Peter Clark, a senior scholar at the Poynter Institute, the book is divided into eight chapters: "A Paradigm of Actuality," "Searching for the Real and Actual," "Stirrings and Roots: Urban Sketches and America's Flaneur," "The Storytellers," "Picturing the Present," "Carving Out the Real," "Experiments in Reality," and "Documenting Time and Place." *Journalism and Realism* is ambitious in its scope: although Connery focuses upon the nineteenth century, he introduces writers from Charles Dickens to Ted Conover.

In the preface and first chapter, Connery clarifies his objectives and addresses particular genres, including essays, fiction, news reporting, and sketches. He writes:

> This study makes no attempt to consider the validity of nineteenth-century realism; nor does it assess realism or its impact. First, it explores the role of journalism in participating in this broad, significant cultural shift, and secondly, it considers the ways that journalism both helped create that shift and reflected it with its content and commentary. I call this shift a paradigm of actuality (6) . . . While many histories of journalism tend to look at how newspapers covered major events and people, or at how certain publications served their readers or shaped attitudes toward gender, race, or ethnicity, this study examines and reexamines a selection of writers, journalists, and illustrators in order to connect them to an important development in American cultural history (9).

And although he addresses confluences and developments from the 1830s to the turn of the century, Connery is especially interested in 1890 to 1910, when realism held sway.

As a professor of communication and journalism who worked for newspapers and the Associated Press, Connery is passionate about the role of reporting in a free society, close observation and effective interviews, class consciousness and social movements, and published chronicles of everyday life.

Most importantly, Connery addresses the symbiotic relationship between journalism and literature, arguing that "journalism wasn't merely linked to realism; it was part and parcel of a realistic movement with repeated attempts to record life observed" (xx). Furthermore, Connery focuses on observed life and the writers who employ "facts and accurate detail" to create meaning "around themes and well-defined characters" (82).

Connery is especially adept in his analysis of contributions by Stephen Crane, George G. Foster, Mark Twain, and Walt Whitman. In a discussion of *Innocents Abroad,* for example, Connery celebrates Twain's "questioning of myth, legend, and the ideal," but especially admires the humorist's "persistent advocacy of and belief in the personal observation of things—and life—as they are rather than as they should be." Connery argues that these abilities make Twain "not just a practitioner of the real and actual but a critical voice as well" (99-100). Most importantly, Connery suggests Twain's influence on A. J. Liebling, Hunter S. Thompson, and Tom Wolfe.

Connery's portrait of Walt Whitman is similarly sound. Especially in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Whitman "absorbed the urban spectacle and regularly shared his wonder and pleasure at this passing parade of people and activity" (41), Connery writes. As other historians and literary critics have noted, Whitman the poet relied upon his time as editor of the *New York Aurora* (1842) and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (1846-48) for much of his subject matter. Connery writes of Whitman:

> He clearly was enamored by the ordinary—whether people or an everyday street scene. His writing, however, treated them as extraordinary by their very nature, but never in a sensational way. Whitman, enamored with democracy and America's potential, was celebrating America and Americans, the one in many (48).

However, as much as he admires Whitman, Connery finds Foster more central to the themes he develops in *Journalism and Realism.* He writes:

> Despite Whitman's later role as a cultural mediator and influential iconic poet, it is Foster's work, which documented the urban underbelly, that more specifically anticipates the growing number of written and visual portrayals that exposed urban poverty and vice, as well as the emerging chasm of class in America (70).

The breadth and depth of Connery's study can be illustrated by even a partial list of those whom he features. The editors, photographers, illustrators, novelists, and reporters include: Nellie Bly, Mathew Brady, William Cullen Bryant, Abraham Cahan, Francis X. Clines, Stephen Crane, Rebecca Harding Davis, Richard Harding Davis, Theodore Dreiser, Edward Eggleston, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Others are Josiah Flynt, George G. Foster, Hamlin Garland, Alexander Gardner,

Hutchins Hapgood, Oliver Wendell Holmes, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Jack London, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Frank Norris, Timothy O'Sullivan, Frederic Remington, Upton Sinclair, Lincoln Steffens, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Walter A. Wyckoff.

Connery does not allude to morality plays, but in his analysis of the writers who addressed crime, drunkenness, poverty, and prostitutes, and who devoted column inches to immigrants, women, and workers of the lower classes, he is clearly interested in texts that encourage what Foster calls "Philanthropy and Justice" (62). Connery praises the self-deprecating humor some nineteenth-century writers employ and celebrates their interest in the actual and the real—as opposed to the ideal or the imaginative—and focuses upon their *"observation* of life being lived" (15).

In addition to his astute analysis of the contributions of individuals, Connery makes particular time periods such as the Penny Press and the Progressive Era come alive. For example, he argues that journalism during the Penny Press "had been covering the range of city life, telling tales about real people and events to the working-class and middle-class urban population before fiction started to do so" (23). Referring to columns such as the "Office Report" and to the sensational local news for which the Penny Press is known, Connery writes: "To a large extent, this type of writing and reporting resembled the conventions in the popular pamphlets that told stories of actual crimes, but it also resembles the conventions of the sentimental novel of the early nineteenth century" (30).

It is paradoxical and unfair to praise a scholar for the scope of his or her study and then request additional material. Ambitious and meticulously researched, *Journalism and Realism* does, however, suggest at least two possibilities for future research. First, some nineteenth-century journalistic texts might be better explicated by introducing naturalism as a subset of realism; and second, introducing more women writers (or explaining why they do not play a prominent role in the journalism and literature of the period) would enrich the study.

The distinctions and similarities between naturalism and realism bear mention, especially when dealing with Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Lafcadio Hearn, Frank Norris, Jacob Riis, and Upton Sinclair, whose stories of "urban helplessness and broken dreams" (167) are so darkly evocative. For example, Hearn, who is best known for his descriptions of Cincinnati and New Orleans, wrote about "murders, hangings, dissections, abortion houses, the 'Stink Factory' where dead animals were processed, suicides, opium dens, autopsies, building hauntings, and grave robbing" (136), Connery writes. The bleak and godless landscape that motivated naturalists is light years away from the colorful, bustling crowds that enchanted Whitman and others like him.

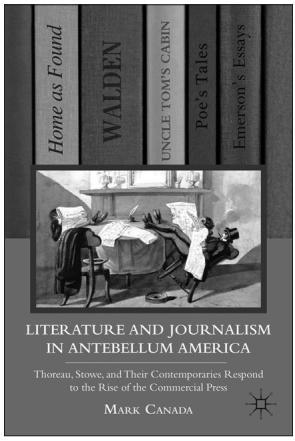
Journalism and Realism also points to the potential for additional research about women journalists. Connery's portrayal of Rebecca Harding Davis—who wrote about workers who breathed "from infancy to death an air saturated with fog and grease and soot" (73)—is especially noteworthy. References to social reformer Helen Campbell and to female *Washington Post* reporters also suggest compelling research possibilities.

Part of the Medill School of Journalism's "Visions of the American Press" series, *Journalism and Realism* is cultural commentary, historical analysis, and literary criticism at their best. The authors, editors, and reporters who contributed to the rise of social movements defined a century and deserve to be remembered in Connery's sprawling and engagingly written tribute.

The Roots of Truth Instability in American Journalism

Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America: Thoreau, Stowe, and Their Contemporaries Respond to the Rise of the Commercial Press
by Mark Canada. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Hardcover, 203 pp., $80.

Reviewed by Karen Roggenkamp, Texas A&M University-Commerce, U.S.A.



Since the publication of such groundbreaking studies as Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *From Fact to Fiction* (1985) and David Reynolds's *Beneath the American Renaissance* (1988), a growing number of scholars have worked to untangle the complex web that intertwines the histories of journalism and literature in nineteenth-century America. Mark Canada adds to the effort in his concise book, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America*, which offers an analysis of what he calls the "sibling rivalry" between the two forms of writing during the antebellum period.

Canada argues that as the literary marketplace exploded in the third decade of the century—fueled in no small part by the rise of the Penny Press—the once-comfortable relationship between journalism and literature became strained. Both forms of writing pursued "the same things: the story and the truth" (11), but the discrepancies between how various writers *defined* "truth" signaled a widening gap between types of writing that had in earlier decades lain rather comfortably side by side. Where journalists defined truth in terms of factual information, imaginative writers turned toward more metaphysical understandings of truth, or the "truths beneath or beyond the facts" (3)—what Nathaniel Hawthorne would famously call the "truth of the human heart" in his 1851 novel, *The House of the Seven Gables*. While journalists and imaginative authors generally shared common purposes and even narrative tech-

niques, they increasingly disagreed "over which discipline is better equipped to tell the truth" (13). From the 1830s on, then, the literary marketplace played host to a sometimes heated competition between the news and the imagination as each sought to establish the superiority of its truth claims—and to delineate the very definition of "newsworthy" itself.

Canada divides *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America* into two sections. Part I details the narrative intertwining of journalism and literature as seen through sensation-mongering pens of such editors as James Gordon Bennett, and the more contemplative pens of novelists such as James Fenimore Cooper. Journalists and imaginative authors alike saw the writer as a mediator of reality, and both the newspaper and the novel privileged stories built on human interest, "conflict, novelty, and irony" (20). Similarly, both kinds of writers marketed their wares to a readership that was bombarded by an exploding number of print resources. In terms of publications that purported to have the truth, supply outstripped demand, and competition between journalism and literature was the inevitable result.

Even as some authors tried their hand at both journalism and fiction (Canada calls them "crossover writers"), the act of producing the news turned some of "its practitioners into some of its harshest and most penetrating critics" (44). Taking a cue from the scholars who have preceded him, like Fishkin and Reynolds, Canada reads the skepticism toward journalism as expressed by canonical figures of American literature like Edgar Allan Poe, Henry David Thoreau, and Herman Melville against the backdrop of a newly story-driven news narrative. In the face of novel ideas about delivering the news to a mass audience, imaginative authors lobbed their criticisms against what they saw as the excesses of mass-market newspapers, and Canada points out that at the heart of these negative critiques lay literary authors' skepticism about the ability of journalism to achieve any substantive or meaningful "truth," criticism that drove their attempt to show how literature "was better equipped to pursue and capture the truth" (64).

Part II of *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America* trains its lens more closely on four literary figures of the time and their efforts to craft what Canada calls "news of their own," an "alternative form of journalism" expressed through imaginative creations (87). One chapter, for instance, examines how Thoreau and Dickinson manipulated journalistic language and concepts to offer an alternative "news" outlet through literary nonfiction and poetry. In the hands of these authors, readers could encounter "journalistic" language that ultimately undercut journalism, and writing that exposed underlying "truths" or principles rather than merely sensational, superficial, time-bound facts. Another chapter looks at Poe's engagement with journalism through his crafting of hoaxes and investigative fictions. Although scholars have studied such famous (and infamous) cases as the "Balloon Hoax" and "The Mystery of Marie Roget," Canada offers a fresh reading of these moments in literary and journalistic history, which is particularly strong in his discussion of Poe's 1835 story, "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall." The theme of investigative fiction as an alternative to superficial journalism extends, for example, to a consideration of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Rebecca Harding Davis, who crafted *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

and "Life in the Iron Mills," respectively, to assert the "superiority of literature in investigating and exposing hidden realities" (121).

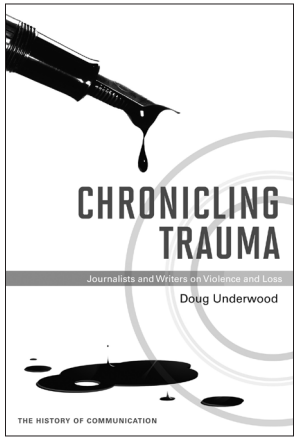
As Canada confesses, any study of journalism and literature risks oversimplification, given the diversity and complexity of the two fields in the nineteenth century, and he warns against "suggesting that a group of diverse people over the course of nearly three decades spoke with a single voice" (59). Still, the book sometimes verges on presenting a binary between journalists and imaginative authors, with the former standing "for" journalism and the latter "against." The truth, so to speak, is of course more complex, and to his credit Canada does strategically remind his audience about the intricacies of the literature-journalism interplay. Similarly, Canada sometimes associates "indirect, ambiguous, suggestive language" exclusively with literary expression. Yet, this kind of language was frequently employed in journalistic contexts as well, and a longer study might have taken up, even further, truth claims as envisioned by antebellum journalists who composed their own forms of "literary journalism" or who approached newspaper work from a solidly "literary" ethos. To provide one example, Canada writes that newspaper editor Charles Dana "espoused a common journalistic view of truth—that of objective, visible reality" (42). While doubtless true to a degree, a reader wonders what the word "objectivity" signified in the antebellum period. And how would a figure like Dana, who adhered to transcendentalist viewpoints and projects during the antebellum period, understand a phrase like "visible reality"? How might consideration of a transcendentalist/editor figure like Dana complicate our understanding of journalism in the 1830s-1850s? Continued exploration of such questions could extend Canada's study and enrich its thesis.

In the end, though, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America* has much to recommend it, and the book is at its strongest when it focuses on the details of how specific literary works portray and critique newspapers. Readers interested in literary journalism specifically, as well as the histories of literature, journalism, and American print culture more generally, will find Canada's concise work an engaging and useful study of this time period. The book's accessible and energetic style will appeal to a broad audience, and while it is directed principally toward an academic readership (from undergraduate to professional levels), it could attract a general audience as well. Ultimately, as contemporary print media outlets in America face their own crises about relevance and truth claims (or, as comedian "newscaster" Stephen Colbert puts it, "truthiness"), Canada's book goes far in establishing some of the national roots of truth's instability. As Canada notes, consumers in the early twenty-first century "stand on the threshold of a new age in information and communication" (7), with the fate of traditional print journalism—and, I would add, perhaps even literature itself—in question.

Mom and Dad, Suffering and Literary Journalism

Chronicling Trauma: Journalists and Writers on Violence and Loss
by Doug Underwood. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, History of Communication series, 2011. Hardcover, 210 pp., $50.

Reviewed by Linda Kay, Concordia University, Canada



Essayist Charles Lamb, who worked as a journalist for the *London Magazine,* struggled to maintain equilibrium in a difficult life punctuated by a deeply traumatic episode. Lamb cared for an invalid mother, a senile father, and a manic-depressive sister who killed their mother with a carving knife one evening in 1796 as dinner preparations were underway.

Poet Walt Whitman, a newspaper editor, came from a family riddled with dysfunction: his father drank heavily, his mother was a hypochondriac, a brother was retarded, a sister may have been psychotic, another brother became an alcoholic, and a third died in an insane asylum.

Novelist Ernest Hemingway, who worked as journalist for the *Kansas City Star* and the *Toronto Star,* could be considered the poster-boy for writers whose early life experience led to an emotionally imbalanced life. His mother dressed him as a girl from a young age, and his father, a physician who was prone to convulsive rages, committed suicide, as did Hemingway's sister and brother—and the writer himself.

Lamb, Whitman, and Hemingway are among 150 journalist-literary figures living in the United States and Great Britain from the 1700s until today that Doug Underwood considers in a book documenting traumatic episodes "that can be viewed as contributing to their emotional struggles, the vicissitudes of their journalism careers and *their development as artists*" [Italics are mine].

Chronicling Trauma: Journalists and Writers on Violence and Loss builds on Underwood's earlier work, *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700-2000*, which examined the intertwined relationship of journalism to literary writing. In that earlier book, Underwood, a professor of communication at the University of Washington, defined the term 'journalist-literary figure' as a writer of fiction and/or nonfiction who had an important career in journalism and built literary work on that foundation. It was while doing research for *Journalism and the Novel* that Underwood first noticed "how often issues of trauma, emotional instability, and substance abuse have played a role in the lives and the careers of these journalistic writers."

While traumatic experience is commonly defined in dramatic terms and associated with catastrophic events (war, terrorist attacks, violent crime, and natural disasters), Underwood takes a different approach. He identifies with the work of literary scholars who've expanded the meaning of trauma into the realm of psychological issues that can be connected with childhood stress and emotional loss, which then interact with what Underwood terms "inherited psychological attributes and temperamental proclivities that can have a powerful and often lifetime impact on the individual." For his study, he adopts the definition of trauma used by Janice Haaken in her 1998 work, *Pillar of Salt,* which she defines as "an acute subjective distress response to an unbearable reality and/or an overwhelming external event . . . Trauma may take the form of a discrete event, such as the loss of a parent or birth of a sibling, or chronic strains and stresses, such as neglect and abuse."

Underwood's work chronicling these patterns of personal loss, childhood stress, family disturbance and inherited characteristics in the lives of 150 journalist-literary figures—some of them literary giants, others lesser known—is an admittedly fascinating exercise for the reader, akin to devouring psychologically probing personality profiles of the type that appear in the magazine *Vanity Fair*. There's Edgar Allan Poe (drunkard father abandons family when Poe is an infant; mother dies before his third birthday); Mark Twain (mentally unstable mother); Willa Cather (imperious and depressive mother); Nellie Bly (lost her father at age six); Jack Kerouac (older brother died when Kerouac was a young child); Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (mother committed suicide), and Jimmy Breslin (two alcoholic parents).

Underwood argues that his study suggests that these points of psychological and emotional stress played an important role in driving these figures to artistic accomplishment—and may have led them to the profession of journalism in the first place, since journalism, he argues, with its exposure to risky situations and potential danger, could be seen as a magnet for unstable personalities seeking a way to fulfill their literary ambition.

I'm not sure. In my opinion, Underwood's broad definition of trauma is too broad, too all-encompassing, somewhat of a grab bag. Is it a stretch when Underwood notes that more than two-thirds of these 150 journalist-literary figures suffered some form of "employment trauma" while working in journalism, including being fired from a job, having their writings censored or suppressed, covering military conflicts or other stories in dangerous circumstances, or having an emotional breakdown while in the journalism job? Should all these "traumas" be considered in the same category as other psychological trauma—and are they traumas at all?

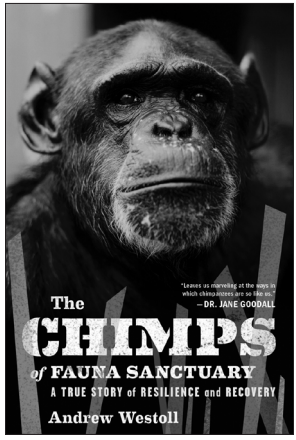
Traumatic incidents vary widely by degree. Certain traumas are more particular to an era—losing a parent at an early age, for instance, was not uncommon in the 1800s—and responses to the same traumatic event can vary person to person, as Underwood duly notes. Moreover, very few lives are trauma-free, if governed by the generalities that Underwood applies. I would venture to guess that the type of traumatic episodes Underwood describes have marked the early lives of many people in the helping professions—police officers, firefighters, nurses, doctors, and social workers—and perhaps mark the lives of many people no matter what profession.

Underwood notes that his list of journalist-literary figures is selective and should not be viewed as statistically or scientifically representative of all journalists who have engaged in fictional or literary writing. In his consideration of the family dynamics at work in the early lives of journalist-literary figures, Underwood really seems to be revisiting an age-old question: Does the production of great art require great suffering? The notion of the tormented and emotionally unbalanced artist has been around for centuries and, as Underwood notes, many contemporary studies have found evidence of an association between creativity and predisposition to mental illness. Underwood's book, then, provides food for thought in linking an early childhood trauma to that predisposition in journalist-literary figures.

Hanging with Chimpanzees, Agee-style

The Chimps of Fauna Sanctuary: A True Story of Resilience and Recovery
by Andrew Westoll. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2011. Hardcover, 268 pp., $25.

Reviewed by Nancy L. Roberts, University at Albany, SUNY, USA



In the best participant observer tradition of literary journalism, Andrew Westoll spent ten weeks living and working as a volunteer caregiver at Fauna farm, a rural sanctuary outside Montreal for chimpanzees retired from a New York State biomedical research laboratory. The result is this first-rate addition to the corpus of contemporary literary journalism. *The Chimps of Fauna Sanctuary*, recently awarded the 2012 Charles Taylor Prize for Literary Non-Fiction in Canada, establishes Westoll as an able contributor to the genre. The book is richly informed by immersion research, participant observation, sharp storytelling in service of a distinct point of view, and a literary sensibility that takes the reader from everyday facts (i.e., the history of biomedical research on great apes) to ultimate reflections (on the philosophical meaning of our shared evolutionary history with chimpanzees).

A remarkable animal rights advocate, Gloria Grow, with her veterinarian husband rescued fourteen chimpanzees in 1997 and brought them to Canada to found the sanctuary. Eventually she invited Westoll, a Canadian journalist who had once studied primatology in the South American rainforest among wild capuchin monkeys, to write the chimps' biography. Westoll adroitly characterizes these great apes,

easing us into a disarming recognition of their uniqueness. There is Sue Ellen, "a senior citizen whose teeth were knocked out with a hammer and chisel when she was young" (13), who "has a weakness for large, bearded men," perhaps "a remnant of her childhood in the circus" (35). And epper, Sue Ellen's best friend and protector, who is extremely intelligent and terribly claustrophobic" (13). And Binky (aka "the Bub"), who resembles "a boxer crossed with a gymnast," Westoll writes, ". . . his thighs like industrial pistons" (10). And there is "Regis, the diabetic who refuses to take insulin [years as a biomedical research lab subject have made needles an object of terror to him]; Jethro, the alpha male who runs around mediating everyone's disputes . . ." (13), as well as Chance, who spent the first five years of her life in total isolation in a lab in a tiny baboon cage. (Like humans, chimps suffer severe psychological stress when they are socially isolated.) The most disturbed Fauna resident is Rachel, who suffers from lab-induced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that makes her rock incessantly and mutilate herself. When Westoll observes her, "She shivers wildly, as if being stung by a thousand bees" (172). Yet, "Before being abandoned by her human owner at the age of three, Rachel enjoyed taking bubble baths and wearing frilly dresses" (caption, following 114). Her best friend is Toby, who likes to chase geese and sports a scrunchie on his wrist, like a bracelet.

Typical of lab primates, the chimpanzees had been removed from their mothers only days after their birth and kept for years in small cages, sometimes in isolation for years, where they were repeatedly infected with lethal diseases such as HIV and hepatitis for research study. Infected apes then underwent repeated "punch biopsies" of the liver under general anesthesia, in which a long needle was pushed through the abdominal wall to retrieve a fresh sample of liver for analysis. Even a routine blood draw required the chimp to be knocked unconscious (in lab lingo, to be "knocked down"), usually with a dart gun.

Westoll, who has watched videos of these scenes, describes how:

> The target chimpanzee goes berserk with terror inside his cage as the technician lines him up in the sights . . . As he spins and crashes his body against the steel bars, the other chimps in the unit—his friends, perhaps his family—begin screaming and howling and banging with all their might. Every time a chimpanzee is shot with a dart gun, those in nearby cage watch him grow groggy and lethargic and then crash to the floor in a matter of minutes, sometimes from high up on a resting bench. As far as these innocent bystanders, know, a dart gun equals something close to death. When they see a chimp about to be shot, they react as if their friend's life is about to be taken (70).

Tom, whom Westoll describes as Fauna's quiet, wise old man, endured being injected with different strains of HIV for thirty years, during which time he was knocked down at least 369 times. Because Tom and other lab chimps endured severe trauma, both physical and mental, for so long, they arrived at Fauna Sanctuary with a deeply felt distrust of humans. Throughout the book, Westoll's perspective is plain: he wants us to be sobered by considering that the United States is the world's only country that still conducts biomedical research on chimpanzees, our closest evolutionary relatives. In fact, a one-page appendix details "How You Can Help the

Chimps," i.e., through donations to chimpanzee sanctuaries and through political action. Interestingly, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), historically a major U.S. funder of primate research, announced just late last year that it will not fund any new projects for biomedical and behavioral research involving chimpanzees (http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-12-025.html). It is impossible to connect Westoll's advocacy directly with this development, but his book certainly raises the alarm.

However, *The Chimps of Fauna Sanctuary* is also an uplifting account of how these troubled apes slowly come, in retirement, to reclaim their lives as chimpanzees. Their hair grows back, their color improves, and they put on healthy weight. And learning to play simple games of tickle-chase, to groom each other, to roughhouse are all ways that the chimps show they are on the mend.

The Chimps of Fauna Sanctuary is both about the healing triumphs of these great apes and the attendant spiritual growth of their caretakers. Ultimately it is a story about resilience and compassion, both human and ape, and the triumph of the wild spirit.

Westoll reveals the story in many layers, most appropriate for this setting that is, as Grow tells him in one of many interviews, part "maximum security prison, a Zen retreat, an old folks' home, and a New York deli during the lunchtime rush." The troubled chimpanzees' histories are complicated, but the remedies that Grow and her staff try to help the apes transcend their longstanding residue of anger, insecurity, and depression are fairly simple: patient, loving kindness.

Westoll segues seamlessly from straightforward science reporting to vivid sensory description. He paints a picture of the detritus he captures during one cleaning day in the chimphouse that evokes James Agee's gift for environmental portraiture in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men:*

> I shovel, sweep, and bag a surreal cornucopia: yogurt cups, urine-soaked hay, torn cardboard, soiled tambourines, mini-pianos, plastic xylophones, baby bath toys, Lego people, stuffed animals, paper bags, peanut shells, pistachio and walnut shells, hollowed-out pumpkins, lettuce leaves, lettuce hearts, apple cores, mango pits, empty water bottles, full water bottles, half-empty water bottles with a hole toothed in the cap, children's magazines, adult magazines, young adult novels, crayons, markers, necklaces, bracelets, headbands, socks, gloves, dress-up dolls, wide-brimmed sun hats, cotton cardigans, faux-silk scarves, paintbrushes, painting palettes, paintings by a Chimpson Pollock (159).

He also zeroes in on the most telling details, such as the particulars of chimpanzee mourning rituals, so much like human ones: "When Donna Rae died of kidney failure, . . . Pepper, Susie, Rachel, Petra, and Chance [all chimps] gathered around Donna and spent the next three hours preparing her for her final journey. They groomed her fingernails and toenails, tried to feed her water, occasionally tickled her to make sure she wasn't just sleeping" (161).

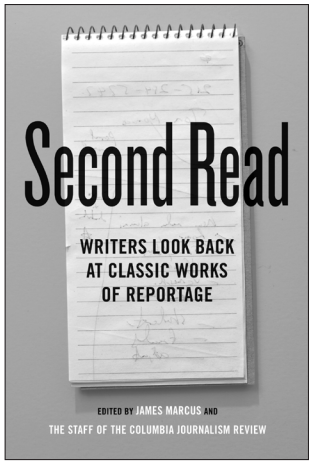
Westoll has also written *The Riverbones* (*Surinam* in the United Kingdom), a travel memoir about his search for a rare frog in the Surinam jungles. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia and has written

for many publications, among them the *Globe and Mail*, the *Guardian, Utne Reader, Canadian Geographic,* and the *Walrus.* His work has been included in *Cabin Fever: The Best New Canadian Non-Fiction* and his science column can be heard occasionally on CBC Radio One. Clearly, *The Chimps of Fauna Sanctuary* propels him into a prominent place among Canadian literary journalists.

Some Clues to Origins of the Literary Imagination

Second Read: Writers Look Back at Classic Works of Reportage
edited by James Marcus and the Staff of the *Columbia Journalism Review*. New York: Columbia Journalism Review Press, 2012. Paperback, 184 pp., $24.50.

Reviewed by Brian Gabrial, Concordia University, Canada



We all have our favorite pieces of literary journalism, so what makes *Second Read* a welcome addition to the bookshelf of the literary journalism scholar or anyone else loving great reporting is that it gives today's top literary journalists a chance to pay homage to the reporters and the work that inspired them. Its editor James Marcus, also a deputy editor at *Harper's*, writes that *Second Read* took root in 2004 with the purpose of allowing "distinguished journalists to look back at the books that truly fired their imagination" (*vii*). While several essayists pay their respects to literary journalism's familiar voices (Didion, Mailer, McPhee, or Wolfe), others reacquaint us with the overlooked and neglected writers whose nonfiction is worth a first read. That is what makes this book with its twenty-three sharply written essays stand out. The reader is reminded, for example, that Betty MacDonald, a writer remembered best for introducing Ma and Pa Kettle to Americans, was a wonderfully comedic memoirist and that Cornelius Ryan's *The Longest Day* is not only a substantive work of history but remains today an exemplar of excellent reporting technique and research. Every essay here deserves mention, so it's a challenge to review adequately such a stellar collection. Some general comments, instead, may suffice.

First, *Second Read* is useful because it cuts to the core of what makes good journalism. Yet, as anyone who practices, teaches, or studies journalism knows, the definition of good journalism—literary or otherwise—can be fluid, depending on who is doing the defining. According to Marcus, the essays "suggest a number of contrasting models for contemporary journalism" (*viii*), from the participatory journalism of Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night* to A. J. Liebling's hands-off approach in *Earl of Louisiana*.

These essayists with their own style and tastes argue persuasively about their subjects as great reporters. In the book's opening selection, for example, Rick Perlstein writes about Paul Cowan's *The Tribes in America*, a story of America's 1970s culture wars, telling how Cowan, who died in 1988, stepped into worlds mostly filled with people whose ideas he disliked. In Perlstein's view, "He did so brilliantly—eyes open, with a courage I can scarcely believe" (3). It is the mark of a great reporter to test, as Cowan did, his or her own "prejudices against reality" while holding onto the values and principles "worth keeping" (8). He gave his subjects, whether he agreed with them or not, a sense of dignity. For different reasons, Michael Shapiro's essay on Cornelius Ryan's *The Longest Day* is another reminder about a reporter doing great journalism. Ryan, who was in Normandy on D-Day, did not write a memoir, choosing instead to retell the day based upon exhaustive research and extensive survivor interviews. According to Shapiro, who tells us his affection for the book is partly due to its being the first "grown up" book he ever read, "Something was taking place in the telling of this story that transcended the journalistic equivalent of mere looks—a richness, a depth" (96). Ryan got the details right in his set pieces, in Shapiro's view, arguing that *The Longest Day* stands as an early example of what the later New Journalism came to represent.

Each essay serves an important dual purpose, offering biographical insight into the essayists, their subjects, and their literary motivations and connections. Ted Conover's piece on Stanley Booth's *Dance with the Devil: The Rolling Stones and Their Times*, for example, informs the reader that Conover's editor suggested the book when Conover began writing his classic piece of literary nonfiction, *Coyotes*. He says that Booth's immersion into the rock 'n' roll life of his subjects "seemed similar to what I had in mind with Mexican migrants: participate and immerse rather than simply interview and observe" (52). He credits Booth's tale for getting him through a writer's block, breaking "a dam and start a flow" (53). The essay also reflects a cautionary tale about participatory journalism's dangers. In Booth's case, the rock 'n' roll life left him immobilized as a writer, forcing him to wait years until he could clearly reflect on that life and write about it.

Second Read offers varied perspectives about what makes journalism literary. John Maxwell Hamilton's essay, for example, on Vincent Sheean's *Personal History* persuasively advocates for its resuscitation in the canon. "What elevated Sheean among luminaries in journalism," Hamilton writes, "was the literary quality of his reporting, his uncanny abilities to situate himself in the slipstream of monumental news, and the intensity of feeling with which he viewed those events" (125). Marla Cone also makes a strong case for the literary merits of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. While an

exceptional book—"No other environmental book has had such a far-reaching impact" (34)—it is not considered, in this reviewer's opinion, particularly literary. Yet to challenge Cone's assessment would miss the point and the point of the book. Her essay and others like it reveal that what makes something literary is linked intimately to personal sensibilities.

Connie Schultz's essay on Michael Herr's *Dispatches* is another case in point because it adds to the continuing debate over truthfulness in literary journalism. While Herr's composite approach in *Dispatches* has offended the orthodox—and Schultz doubts that it could pass muster in today's world of "online fact-checkers and self-anointed 'citizen journalists'" (91)—she argues that most of us have never been to war and that the book, despite its "flaws maybe as straight journalism," stands as a testament to those who served in Vietnam. While Schultz's essay naturally brings to mind John Hersey's "Legend on the License" essay, warning against even truthful inventions, she counters, "I have neither the right nor the will to pass judgment on how he [Herr] brought home the war to millions of Americans who had yet to face it" (91).

The book is not perfect, because no collection like this can be. It shows, for example, a strong gender bias with the contributors and their choices being mostly male (no Martha Gellhorn or Lillian Ross showcased here). And, despite the inclusion of a few writers like Miles Corwin (his piece on Gabriel García Márquez's *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*) or Naresh Fernandes' Palagummi Sainath (*Everybody Loves a Good Drought: Stories from India's Poorest Districts)*, the essays favor American writers. Despite these limits, Marcus and his fellow editors have put together an impressive, satisfying grouping. *Second Read* is a highly recommended testament to great reporters who did (and are doing) great literary journalism. For that reason alone, we need *Second Read II*.

Mission Statement
Literary Journalism Studies

Literary Journalism Studies is an international, interdisciplinary blind- reviewed journal that invites scholarly examinations of literary journalism, a genre also known by different names around the world, such as literary reportage, narrative journalism, the New Journalism, *nuevo periodismo*, reportage literature, literary nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, and creative nonfiction that focuses on cultural revelation. Published in English but directed at an international audience, the journal welcomes contributions from different cultural, disciplinary, and critical perspectives. To help establish comparative studies of the genre, the journal is especially interested in examinations of the works of authors and traditions from different national literatures not generally known outside their countries.

There is no single definition of the genre, but the following descriptions help to establish a meeting ground for its critical study:

• "The art and craft of reportage—journalism marked by vivid description, a novelist's eye to form, and eyewitness reporting that reveals hidden truths about people and events that have shaped the world we know." —*Granta*

• "Reportage Literature is an engagement with reality with a novelist's eye but with a journalist's discipline." —Pedro Rosa Mendes, Portugal

• "I think one of the first things for literary reportage should be to go into the field and to try to get the other side of the story. —Anne Nivat, France

• "A good reportage must not necessarily be linked with topical or political events which are taking place around us. I think the miracle of things lies not in showing the extraordinary but in showing ordinary things in which the extraordinary is hidden." —Nirmal Verma, India

• Literary journalism is a "journalism that would read like a novel . . . or short story." —Tom Wolfe, United States

Such definitions are not comprehensive and may at times conflict, but they should help to establish an understanding of this fundamentally narrative genre, which is located at the intersection of literature and journalism.

At the critical center of the genre lies cultural revelation in narrative form. Implicit to the enterprise are two precepts: (a) that there is an external reality apart from human consciousness, whatever the inherent problems of language and ideology that may exist in comprehending that reality; and (b) that there are consequences in the phenomenal world, whether triggered by human or natural agency, that result in the need to tell journalistically-based narratives empowered by literary technique and aesthetic sensibility. Ultimately, the emphasis is on the aesthetics of experience.

International Association for Literary Journalism Studies

The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies is a multidisciplinary learned society whose essential purpose is the encouragement and improvement of scholarly research and education in literary journalism (or literary reportage). For the purposes of scholarly delineation, our definition of literary journalism is "journalism as literature" rather than "journalism about literature." Moreover, the association is explicitly inclusive and warmly supportive of a wide variety of approaches to the study and teaching of literary journalism throughout the world. The association's web address is http://www.ialjs.org.

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