

“A Savage Place!”

Hunter S. Thompson and His Pleasure Dome

Jennifer M. Russell
Independent scholar, U.K.

*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 became 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 demonic 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 ignored⁵⁵ 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 Shark⁷³ 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 ground-haze: 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

Jennifer Russell is currently applying to doctoral programs in the discipline of Journalism and Communications. In addition to the New Journalism, her research interests include narrative forms in the humanities, discourse on the American dream, and utilizing history to interpret present socio-political events and movements.



NOTES

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55. *Ibid.*, 101.

56. *Ibid.*, 172–73.

57. Interview with Kevin Kurzhals. Personal communication. December 15, 2009.

58. Michael Cleverly and Bob Braudis, *The Kitchen Readings: Untold Stories of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 46.

59. Abrams, *Norton Anthology*, 355.

60. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, 29.

61. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, 72–73, 200.

62. *Ibid.*, 109.

63. *Ibid.*, 110–11.

64. *Ibid.*, 115–16.

65. *Ibid.*, 117.

66. *Ibid.*, 111.

67. *Ibid.*, 123.

68. Abrams, *Norton Anthology*, 354.
69. *Ibid.*, 355.
70. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, 84.
71. *Ibid.*, 4.
72. *Ibid.*, 85.
73. *Ibid.*, 5.
74. *Ibid.*, 119.
75. *Ibid.*, 22.
76. *Ibid.*, 172.
77. Thompson, *Proud Highway*, 544–45.
78. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*, 422.