

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

Bill Reynolds  
Ryerson University, Canada

*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<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> *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"<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup> 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."<sup>7</sup>

But when Thompson's early feature writing is examined closely—the purpose of this essay<sup>8</sup>—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.<sup>9</sup>

## 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 Mintense, 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup>

### 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.”<sup>15</sup> 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.”<sup>16</sup>

Scholar Ronald Weber pithily focuses on the “center-stage participatory manner”<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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.”<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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.”<sup>23</sup> In addition, “Thompson’s Americans are transformed into pre-historic monsters who consume each other as they consume the culture itself.”<sup>24</sup>

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.”<sup>25</sup> 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 indispensable to an authentic, full-blooded account of experience.”<sup>26</sup> 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.”<sup>27</sup>

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.”<sup>28</sup>

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.”<sup>29</sup> 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.”<sup>30</sup> And: “Both in person and at typewriter, he is a great put-on artist.”<sup>31</sup> To Robert Draper, in his history of *Rolling Stone* magazine, Thompson simply “sought to erase all boundaries between subject and reporter.”<sup>32</sup>

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.”<sup>33</sup> 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.”<sup>34</sup>

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.<sup>35</sup>

Elsewhere, he says, simply, “To me it means intense, demented involvement.”<sup>36</sup> And: “. . . I like to get right in the middle of whatever I’m writing about—as personally involved as possible.”<sup>37</sup>

**A**bout 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*.”<sup>38</sup>

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.”<sup>39</sup>

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.”<sup>40</sup> 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*.<sup>41</sup>) 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, at 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<sup>42</sup> to Sims,<sup>43</sup> then to Sims and Kramer<sup>44</sup>—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*<sup>45</sup>; if only Kerouac and Mailer's agent Sterling Lord<sup>46</sup> 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)?<sup>47</sup> 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)<sup>48</sup>

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.<sup>49</sup> 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 might harness some of this unused potential.<sup>50</sup> 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.”<sup>51</sup> 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?”<sup>52</sup>

The other stylistic tick Thompson employs over and over is of the form: “With a little luck a man can. . . .”<sup>53</sup> 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."<sup>54</sup> In this rendering, "queers, junkies, rapists" and "sadists" are mentioned,<sup>55</sup> 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."<sup>56</sup> "Local fags"<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> 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."<sup>59</sup>

All of those phrases, perhaps considered too inflammatory by *Rogue's* editors, were excised from the original draft.<sup>60</sup> 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."<sup>61</sup> 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."<sup>62</sup>

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.<sup>63</sup> 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'."<sup>64</sup> And there is his love of a sentence using a familiar construction: "A man without foresight will usually go thirsty."<sup>65</sup> 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."<sup>66</sup>

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, 'Beeyooteful lies, beeyooteful lies . . . each with a heartbreak . . . in perfect disguise . . .'"<sup>67</sup>

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.”<sup>68</sup>

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.”<sup>69</sup> 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.”<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup> 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*.<sup>72</sup>

"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 townfolk 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."<sup>73</sup>

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"<sup>74</sup> 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."<sup>75</sup> There is the pop culture comparison: "As a historical document, it read like a plot synopsis of Mickey Spillane's worst dreams."<sup>76</sup> 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."<sup>77</sup> 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.”<sup>78</sup> 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) . . .”<sup>79</sup> 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 ‘of-fended’ Hell’s Angels nearly impossible to deal with.”<sup>80</sup>

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,<sup>81</sup> 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.<sup>82</sup> 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)<sup>83</sup>—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,"<sup>84</sup> 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,"<sup>85</sup> and "the real victims of Mulford's law will be the luckless flunkies appointed to enforce it."<sup>86</sup>

### 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”<sup>87</sup> while “social radicals” are “Left, but their real interests are writing, painting, good sex, good sounds and free marijuana.”<sup>88</sup> 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),<sup>89</sup> and “Why Boys Will Be Girls: A Special Report on How More and More HEs Act Like SHEs!” (1967).<sup>90</sup> 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,”<sup>91</sup> 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 . . . ,”<sup>92</sup> he says. “To refuse a proffered ‘joint’ is to risk being labeled a ‘nark’—narcotics agent,”<sup>93</sup> he warns. And: “Everything genuine in the Haight-Ashbury is about to be swallowed . . . in a wave of publicity and commercialism.”<sup>94</sup> 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<sup>95</sup> . . . . Drugs are perhaps the central fact of the whole Hippy culture<sup>96</sup> . . . . Rock music is both the

language and the only art form of this “weird generation”<sup>97</sup> . . . . Nearly everything written about Hippies is done from an outsider’s point of view<sup>98</sup> . . . . 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<sup>99</sup> . . . . [Vietnam] is viewed as a stupid, dishonorable outrage by most of the students who would normally be called leaders of the future.<sup>100</sup>

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.”<sup>101</sup> 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.”<sup>102</sup> 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”<sup>103</sup> 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.”<sup>104</sup> 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."<sup>105</sup>

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.'<sup>106</sup> 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!"<sup>107</sup>

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."<sup>108</sup>

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.”<sup>109</sup>

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 . . . ,”<sup>110</sup> 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”<sup>111</sup> 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.”<sup>112</sup> 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,”<sup>113</sup> 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,”<sup>114</sup> 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.<sup>115</sup>

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.”<sup>116</sup>

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,”<sup>117</sup> before letting loose a standard tirade—Nixon’s staying power has more to do with “rancid genes and broken chromosomes,”<sup>118</sup> Nixon is a politician without a “soul,”<sup>119</sup> Nixon compares favorably to a hyena and/or a “poison toad.”<sup>120</sup> 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.”<sup>121</sup> 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”<sup>122</sup> to Nixon possessing “one of the best minds in politics.”<sup>123</sup> It is not all sunshine—when Thompson hangs around unannounced at a television taping session he does sense a pervasive “strange, paranoid behavior”<sup>124</sup> 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.’”<sup>125</sup> 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*.<sup>126</sup>

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.”<sup>127</sup> 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."<sup>128</sup> 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.<sup>129</sup> 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.<sup>130</sup>

**W**hy, 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"<sup>131</sup> 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.<sup>132</sup>

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*.<sup>133</sup> 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."<sup>134</sup>

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?"<sup>135</sup> 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."<sup>136</sup> 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."<sup>137</sup>

### 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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*Bill Reynolds's most recent work is Literary Journalism across the Globe, co-edited with John S. Bak and published by University of Massachusetts Press. His focus is literary journalism, but he also looks at the relation between ideas, memes and journalism, as well as magazine and newspaper feature writing styles.*



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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/](http://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 foreword 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](http://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](http://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.