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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

AN OUTLAW JOURNALIST'S JOURNEY THROUGH AN ERA

DECADENT AND DEPRAVED: Hunter S. Thompson in the Context of America of the 1960s and Early 1970s

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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V Praze dne 13. ledna 2015 Jiří Stárek

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na uměleckou osobnost Huntera S. Thompsona, jednu z nejvýraznějších kulturních postav poválečné Ameriky, a jeho vývoj coby autora, novináře a idolu americké kontrakultury 60. let. Tato éra je dnes z pohledu moderní americké historie považována za přelomovou, protože v jejím průběhu došlo, zejména díky nastupující generaci mladých společenských a kulturních aktivistů, k přerodu od hluboce zakořeněného a v mnohém překonaného systému společenských hodnot a norem k postoji hlásajícímu toleranci a liberalismus. Zásadní roli v těchto snahách měla tehdejší kontrakultura, z jejíchž řad pocházelo velké množství schopných intelektuálů a umělců, mezi něž patří též Thompson. Tato práce proto analyzuje roli a podstatu tehdejší alternativní kultury v Americe z pohledu jednoho z jejích nejpozornějších účastníků. Mimoto se tento text zaměřuje i na autorovu roli ve spoluvytváření nového literárního žánru zvaného nový žurnalismus, který lze také spojovat s aktivitou tehdejší kontrakultury. Kromě toho se Thompson ve svých dílech zaměřuje na různé fenomény, které tuto alternativní kulturu obklopovaly, díky čemuž divákovi předkládá osobité zachycení ducha té doby. Nicméně, na rozdíl od některých svých současníků, autor taktéž nezapomíná vyhledávat, pojmenovávat a následně prozkoumávat mnohé chyby, nedostatky a mylné představy, které byly mezi tehdejšími účastníky společenského a kulturního dění běžné. Z těchto lze zmínit ideu tzv. Amerického snu, jež pro Thompsona představovala jedno z hlavních témat jeho děl. Abychom však zanalyzovali problém kontrakultury a jejího následného úpadku v naprosté úplnosti, zahrnuje tato práce ke konci také srovnání Thompsonových textů s třemi dalšími vybranými autory, jeho současníky, kteří se ve svých dílech také zaobírají stavem kontrakultury a jejích myšlenek na konci 60. a začátku 70. let. Těmito spisovateli jsou Thomas Pynchon, Tom Robbins a Don DeLillo.

Klíčová slova: Hunter S. Thompson, 60. léta, 70. léta, kontrakultura, nový žurnalismus, postmodernismus, americký sen, Thomas Pynchon, Tom Robbins, Don DeLillo

Abstract

The thesis aims to explore the artistic personality of Hunter S. Thompson, one of the most distinctive cultural figures of post-war America, and his genesis as an author, journalist, and a counterculture idol of the 1960s. The era is now widely regarded as a turning point in contemporary American history as its deep-rooted values and norms were, over the course of a decade, gradually transformed by the young generation of social and political activists toward allegedly a more tolerant and liberal kind of community. Crucial in such an endeavor was the role of the countercultural movement that produced some of the most capable intellectual minds of the time, including Thompson. The paper thus analyzes the role and nature of the alternative culture in America as perceived by one of its most observant participants. Also, the thesis focuses on the author's role in establishing a new genre called New Journalism which can be linked with the era's countercultural efforts as well. In general, Thompson, in his texts, examines various phenomena surrounding the counterculture and provides us with a distinctive portrayal of the era's zeitgeist. However, unlike some of his contemporaries, he also remembers to examine numerous flaws and fallacies existing within contemporary American society, the American Dream idea being the most striking one. Therefore, in order to explore the issue in its entirety, the paper also includes a comparison of Thompson's texts dealing with the counterculture with selected works of such contemporary authors who were not its direct participants but who are widely known to take a specific stand on the problem – among these are Thomas Pynchon, Tom Robbins, and Don DeLillo.

Keywords: Hunter S. Thompson, 1960s, 1970s, counterculture, New Journalism, postmodernism, American Dream, Thomas Pynchon, Tom Robbins, Don DeLillo

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1. Introduction

For sure, the counterculture in the United States of the 1960s did not lack a wide variety of distinctive intellectual personae and artistic voices that were able to spread the word of intended cultural rebellion against the deep-rooted suburban consumerism that emerged after World War II all across the country. Early in the decade, it was particularly the young generation born during the Great Depression era and the early years of the Second World War which adopted and modified some of the largely nonconformist, antimaterialist and hedonistic ideas promoted during the 1950s by the Beat Generation intellectuals such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William S. Burroughs. Nevertheless, the 1960s came that brought with the inspiring persona of John Fitzgerald Kennedy a fresh wind of change and liberating feelings of exuberance among majority of people in their twenties who started to dream of a community far more egalitarian and absolutely free of any oppression by the society and authorities. Such an image thus represents a complete opposite to the lifestyle of the largely introvert community of the Beats who, to a large extent, were dealing with the topics of repression and unreasonable social norms in theory rather than in practice. The Beat philosophy of rebellion eventually became too old-fashioned and passive to be followed and as such needed to be modified by the following generation of countercultural participants so it could function better in a new sociocultural context.

Among those men of letters and public proclaimers of such essentially nonconformist and anti-establishment ideology, Hunter Stockton Thompson appeared on the contemporary cultural scene as an author and journalist who seemed to have the only goal – to mercilessly destroy anything that he saw as possibly deleterious to a healthy evolution of the American society. However, such destruction was not executed by the means of mere brute force since the author, on the contrary, produced highly innovative texts in which facts and fiction

blended together and directly addressed recent pressing problems in American sociocultural environment as well as the current condition of some of the archetypal American myths such as the fabled national ethos of the American Dream.

Throughout the first chapter of the thesis, the text will focus on the early years of the "outlaw" journalist in order for the reader to see what forces can be found behind the very formation of a mind of such a unique author and critic of sociopolitical conditions in America of his time. Thompson, whose background was middle-class, emerged out of a small city in Kentucky the oppressive environment of which stimulated his early attempts of rebellion against social norms as recognized by the generation of his parents. Later on, he was also deeply affected by the abovementioned small-town/suburban consumerism of the 1950s as his rebellious attitude was gradually amplifying throughout the decade. Also, in the initial chapter, it is necessary to focus on several fundamental literary influences on the aspiring journalist and novelist and that is why the text will examine the impact of Fitzgerald's, Hemingway's and Kerouac's writing on the literary style of young Thompson as well as on his pioneering efforts to create a valuable work of art.

In the second part of the text, we will need to concentrate on the genesis of the New Journalism genre in the mid-1960s the literary technique and topic selection of which became idiosyncratic for the counterculture of the time. The experiment was started particularly by Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer whose efforts eventually ended up in an emergence of what is sometimes called literary journalism. Nevertheless, it was Thompson who brought the journalistic experiment *ad absurdum* as he created the so-called "gonzo journalism," a seemingly chaotic and almost ludicrous sort of writing, which best matched his specific way of thinking about burning issues existing in the American society. Nowadays, such works of gonzo as *Hell's Angels* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which both combine elements of

fiction and subjective journalism, or *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72* are widely considered masterpieces of contemporary American literature.

The final chapter of this thesis will deal with the best known period of Hunter S. Thompson's life as an author – the era of the countercultural boom as well as its later abrupt decline. He reported on both phenomena in numerous contemporary writings that thus provide us with an original view on some of the most important events of the time that changed the face of America. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, he deals with the concept of the American Dream as he employs it rather often in his texts. Also, he frequently reflects on the nature of the psychedelic counterculture and questions the genuineness of its values, ideals, and lifestyle. At last, there is the omnipresent issue of politics that too seems to concern the gonzo journalist as, for example, Richard Nixon recurs as almost a diabolical persona in Thompson's articles and other literary pieces.

To sum up, since Hunter S. Thompson can be regarded as one of the most original, eccentric, yet distinguished and competent figures of the alternative culture as existing in the United States of the 1960s and early 1970s, the following text aims to explore and examine contemporary social, cultural and political situation through the lens of one of the "inside" cultural characters of the time. To be examined in its entirety, the author's most influential texts will be analyzed in order to depict and understand the initially idealistic atmosphere of social change and its ensuing transition to counterculture-wide disillusion over the failed efforts of its participants. Moreover, to portray the authentic zeitgeist of the time in its wholeness, a comparison with several other distinguished non-counterculture authors of the time will be made whose writings contain distinctive attitude to the issue of the hippie culture and its ideals as they existed in America of then. However, besides numerous primary sources of selected authors that provide us with a genuine insight on its own, the following thesis will also draw on secondary literature (scholarly articles, books, reviews, and pieces of literary

criticism) dealing with the topic of the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. The ultimate goal is therefore to create an academic paper that, via the means of utilizing information acquired from both primary and secondary sources, will capture the period of radical social, cultural and political change as perceived by Hunter S. Thompson most complexly.

2. Early Years of Hunter S. Thompson

When a boy was born on July 18, 1937 to Jack Thompson's family in Louisville, Kentucky, hardly anyone from his immediate surroundings would have guessed that a unique man of letters, who would stir both the cultural and political environments in the United States, had come into being. Nothing suggested that the newborn named Hunter Stockton Thompson, whose parents were not exactly what one might call members of local high society, would later become one of the most famous of Louisville's natives and, above all, one of the most important cultural figures of post-war America. Considered a genius writer by some and an insane junky by others, his work as well as his persona itself helped to change the image of what modern journalism looks like and how it treats its self-assigned topics. His many articles, prose pieces and ideas pervaded the way of thinking of many open-minded young Americans who looked up to the countercultural revolution of the 1960s and hoped for better future. Thompson with his work became a sort of apostle of change as he focused on revealing the real state of American society of the time and, by dealing openly with controversial and taboo topics of the era he pointed out some aspects of bourgeois hypocrisy that had pervaded the United States in the decades before. Since Hunter S. Thompson was raised in the small-city middle-class environment of Louisville, the values and rules that had been forming for decades in the family and that were strictly required of young Hunter actually helped to establish the "outlaw journalist," rebelling against the conformism of his parents and their friends.

The Thompson family was just one of many throughout the country which suffered from its economic impacts of the Great Depression. Although middle-class Americans were less often desperate and at the edge of existence than many members of the working class, the middle-income Thompson family was naturally dependent on the overall economic situation

of the country and later deeply affected by the United States' involvement in World War II. Thompson thus grew up in an atmosphere of economic uncertainty and acceptance of numerous injustices among the citizens which accentuated the backwardness of contemporary American sociopolitical system. Brought up in Louisville's first suburb[1], Thompson not only experienced, as well, the consumerist attitude of his surroundings, but also was an integral participant of it. From these roots grew his later resistance to conforming norms demanded from authorities and officials no matter at what level they occurred. His own father's pursuit of the fabled American Dream, allegedly bringing prosperity and individual freedom to anyone diligent and adaptable enough, allowed young Hunter to witness how the phenomenon is perceived by a common middle-class citizen. This would later prove to be a priceless first-hand experience when questioning the very same aspects of American society that his ancestors worshipped.

2.1 Growing Up in America during Truman's and Eisenhower's Presidencies

The United States at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s was a place that had already recovered from the Great Depression of the 1930s as well as from the effects brought about the country's participation in the greatest conflict in the history of mankind – the Second World War. America contributed significantly to the final defeat of the Axis which guaranteed, above all, its position as world's superpower and hegemon of the post-war world. The facts that the country was among the winning powers in the conflict and that its own territory was not directly affected by the cruelties of war provided the U.S. with economic and sociocultural stability. Although it did not become apparent until the end of Eisenhower's second term as the President, the society was not idyllic; however the public image seemed

[1] William McKeen, *Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009).

almost utopian to outsiders not acquainted with the inner mechanism of American social and cultural values. Thus, when Hunter S. Thompson reached his adolescence in the early 1950s, many Americans were hoping for a future in which there would be nothing else than peace, prosperity, and satisfaction. And it even seemed to some that suburban middle-class conformity might come to pervade the whole country. However, such an image was nothing more than a superficial notion of an ideal and homogenous kind of a community.

Despite the major international issues raised by the Cold War, the 1950s have been portrayed by some as an era with few domestic problems, content families all over the country, and prosperous individuals adhering to the essential rules of the free market. However, under the surface were deep fears, differences and problems within the society itself. First of all, the omnipresent and rather intense fear of a nuclear conflict between the United States and Soviet Union provided the government, under war hero and now President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961), with the means of turning public opinion towards its own plans and goals. Many of its ideological pronouncements attempted to imbue ordinary Americans with a sense of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, qualities which were highly appreciated after the burdensome experiences of the economic crisis of the 1930s. One of the results of such artificially invoked social tranquility, and of the emergence of America as a consumerist country in the economic prosperity of the 1950s, was conformity, stemming particularly from the many new suburban settlements built after the war that spread to many areas of the country and became an idiosyncrasy of the decade.

Closely associated with the general consumerist-conformist way of life were the effects of television, which now became a must-have item for every household, which, according to some critics and historians, emerged for some people as sort of a universally

acclaimed prophet of truth.[2] Moreover, in John Duvall's essay on Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, the author says that television "inverts the relationship between mediated and immediate experience, so that only what is broadcast by the media seems real."[3] Also, there is John Frow, who commented on the very same DeLillo novel in relation with Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, with his own perception that the role of television within consumer society has been, as he argues "the replacement of originals by simulations [which] has worked both to pervert and preserve American myths of origins and authenticity. One of the main forces behind this shift … is television, which, along with the consumer capitalism it serves, reduces all phenomena to mere information."[4] From this point of view it becomes apparent that the role of broadcast television cannot be underrated when examining the social situation of the period. Moreover, as we will see in our later discussion of Hunter S. Thompson's own relation to certain American myths such as the American Dream, Frow's statement indicates that for the generation growing up in such conditions and later undergoing, particularly thanks to the sociocultural changes of the 1960s, an intellectual metamorphosis from a follower to a challenger of well-established social norms, television probably provided them with the very first contacts with the notion of America as a utopian dreamland – the image which they later attacked.

The opposition which would doubt the values and rules of the mainstream society was not as numerous as a decade later when alternative lifestyle and countercultures became much more society-wide than in the 1950s. Among the few exceptions were the Beatniks, adhering to Eastern philosophies and nonconformist ways of life, and a group of young actors who acted as rebels both on the silver screen and in real life as they often despised their parents' views and values and tried to live an adventurous life the very notion of which represents the

[2] Mark Osteen, Introduction, *White Noise*, by Don DeLillo (New York: Penguin, 1999).
[3] Osteen, xiii.
[4] Osteen, xiii.

total opposite of what was common among the suburban Americans. Moreover, since they were well known due to their status as film stars, and as cinematography and television developed rapidly after the war, they eventually emerged as idols for those who were in their teenage years. It was particularly two actors in general – Marlon Brando and James Dean – who truly stirred the waters of ideologically static Hollywood and whose spontaneity aroused considerable admiration all over the Western world. Thus it is not surprising that for many teenagers and young adults they were the ultimate representatives of the youthful rebellion against rules, against oppressing society, and artificially created identity. Hunter S. Thompson himself was among the millions of young people who looked up to Brando and Dean and who could identify with the film stars easily as they shared common class background and were therefore deeply affected by the actors' position as contemporary rebels on the edge of the law when devising their own personal revolt against the social norms of the time. As Thompson later recalled, it was particularly their ability to break the law and stand up to the authorities that made his generation so amazed: "Between [Robert] Mitchum and [William S.] Burroughs & Marlon Brando & James Dean & Jack Kerouac, I got myself a serious running start before I was 20 years old, and there was no turning back. Buy the ticket, take the ride."[5]

2.2 Creating a Style: Literary Influences on Hunter S. Thompson

Although there are indications that Thompson's style of writing, which he developed in the 1960s, stems mainly from the philosophy of the Beat Generation, there were other and for him personally certainly more important authors that played the primary role in his becoming a journalist and man of letters himself. Having had his own first-hand experience with the limiting small-city middle-class environment and having been deeply affected by

[5] Hunter S. Thompson, *Kingdom of Fear: Loathsome Secrets of a Star-Crossed Child in the Final Days of the American Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003) 341.

Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, he wanted to continue with unmasking the many hypocrisies existing within American society.[6] Closely associated with such a critique of the middle-class vices was the need for a revolt against the mainstream which would be, according to him, best achieved by stirring the cultural waters with originality and controversy. In such an approach he aimed to imitate the style of some notorious literary works of their time – Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* – which were controversial, yet widely successful among the liberal cultural circles in the United States and inspiring for the young in their attitude toward drug use. Moreover, there were two widely appreciated American authors whose writings must be regarded as the crucial texts that gave rise to Hunter S. Thompson, the author, since they provided him with the necessary skills which Thompson would later utilize when attempting to describe the current status and role of the American Dream within contemporary America. They were Francis Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway – friends, colleagues, and representatives of the so-called "Lost Generation" – whose *magna opera The Great Gatsby* and *A Farewell to Arms* were both retyped by young Hunter in order for him to learn their literary styles, modify them and eventually to develop his own which would meet the requirements of the young author himself. They both remained Thompson's idols for the rest of his life, Hemingway's career being one of the reasons he later started writing for newspapers. However, it was not as much Fitzgerald's and Hemingway's literary style that amazed the young Kentuckian as the philosophy emanating from their fiction – according to some of his acquaintances Thompson's own philosophy seemed to be a coherent blending of the former's accurate insight on the nature of modern American society's values and the latter's cynicism and stoicism.[7]

[6] McKeen, 41.
[7] McKeen, 41.

Born in 1937, Hunter S. Thompson was approximately a decade younger than the most prolific authors of the Beat Generation which dominated the countercultural happening in America of the 1950s. From this point of view, he could actually be identified with a quote pronounced by Ken Kesey, who himself was born in 1935, that he "was too young to be a beatnik, and too old to be a hippie."[8] Nevertheless, although Thompson could not identify himself fully with the work and philosophy of the Beat Generation since the age gap played a considerable role, he managed, particularly through reading some of the most influential literary pieces of the time, to develop a style which, in a certain way, reminds us of the texts of such contemporary countercultural personae as Jack Kerouac or Lawrence Ferlinghetti. These two beatnik authors and founders of the 1950s counterculture provided young Thompson with some of the essential themes and motifs he later explored and adjusted in his own writing.[9]

For example, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* deals with the author's/main character's quest for the nature the American Dream and "Americanness" itself. It was the views contained within this notorious literary piece that inspired Thompson to focus on the issue closely in his own work and to attempt to examine the nature of existence in American society, which he saw as the flawed essence of its middle-class suburban conformist form. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, when Thompson was an aspiring writer and journalist, *On the Road*, the Bible of its generation, as well as its author himself, represented the most powerful influences on shaping the intellectual aspect of Thompson's personality. Nevertheless, the immense sociocultural change in the United States of the 1960s resulted in Thompson's rejection of Jack Kerouac's writing and, above all, his personal philosophy since Thompson wanted to draw upon the original aims of the 1950s rebellion in order to make it

[8] Rob Elder, "Down on the Peacock Farm," *Salon*, 16 Nov 2001 <http://www.salon.com/2001/11/16/kesey99/> 12 Sep 2014.
[9] Beef Torrey and Kevin Simonson eds, *Conversations with Hunter S. Thompson* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008) 148-149.

nation-wide, whereas Kerouac totally refused such efforts, left the countercultural center of San Francisco and eventually became a conservative-oriented critic of the cultural events of the time. Kerouac, iconic persona of the Beats and idol of the new generation of rebels, began to perceive the attempts to drastically change the social environment within American society as proclaimed by the Hippies as something "mindless, communistic, rude, unpatriotic, and soulless."[10] This signified his final and ultimate breakaway from the principles of anti-conformist endeavor to point out the many hypocrisies and flaws occurring within the United States and eventually radically to improve the social conditions. Hunter S. Thompson, on the other hand, desperately wanted to get involved in what seemed to him as fairly noble and, above all, spontaneous efforts and to end up in the middle of the countercultural action.

2.3 Practicing His Literary Style: *Prince Jellyfish* and *The Rum Diary*

Ever since his high school years Thompson had been flirting with the thought of becoming a journalist in order to put his presumed literary skills into effect. After all, although his discipline and study morale were far from perfect, he was rather well-read for a youth of his age and the experience with Ernest Hemingway's writings in particular provided him with a general image of what a journalistic work looks like. He did obtain his first job as a newspaperman at the age of 19 during his military service in the US Army as he was selected as sports editor for *The Command Courier* at Eglin Air Force Base and wrote articles on a local American football team.[11] After he was honorably discharged in 1958, Thompson did continue to pursue the dreamt-of literary career which would provide him with the means of affecting, or "opening", the minds of his generation. However, at the turn of the 1950s and

[10] Manuel Luis Martinez, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003) 111.
[11] McKeen.

1960s when Thompson was beginning his profession as a journalist, to win recognition required something more than enthusiasm and persistence, both of which had been typical of Thompson ever since the newspaper experience during his military service. After a few unsuccessful attempts at transition to professional journalism – at first as a copyboy in *Time* and then as a reporter for a small-town journal called *The Middletown Daily Report* – he finally settled in Puerto Rico and began working as a freelance journalist, which would later prove to be a milestone in the evolution of Hunter S. Thompson, the renowned author.

2.3.1 Young Author's Estrangement: Thompson's Early Literary Experiments

By the time he started working in the Caribbean, he had already finished his first, yet still unpublished novel which he named *Prince Jellyfish*. Set in New York City, the book, according to what we know, apparently draws upon the author's own experience in his young adult years and deals with an individual's striving to reach the unreachable, to overcome the deep-rooted and, for him, limiting ways of thinking and of judging one's potential. In his letter to William Faulkner from March, 1959, Thompson, with clarity and in his specific manner, presents his own constructed idea about what is the role of an author in the contemporary world via the means of drawing upon Faulkner's statement dealing with writer's "inherent dislocation in society"[12] as the Southern modernist claimed that "the writer in America isn't part of the culture of this country. He's like a fine dog. People like him around, but he's of no use."[13] This certainly was a feeling common to many authors of Faulkner's generation, and, in this case, even to those in younger generations, as the writer's profession in America of the first half of the 20th century did not exactly correspond with the image of American society as a hard-working and self-sufficient kind of a community. This,

[12] Louis Daniel Brodsky, *William Faulkner, Life Glimpses* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 6.
[13] Brodsky, 6.

of course, could be rather a far-fetched and somehow artificial construction, but, as we can see from a number of statements by various contemporary writers, what was obviously permeating the intellectual minds of the time was the sense of being an unsuccessful and redundant member of the society which basically requires from its members certain activity and contribution to its overall contentment and well-being. Thompson seems to share Faulkner's point of view as he writes:

> As far as I can see, the role, the duty, the obligation, and indeed the only choice of the writer in today's "outer" world is to starve to death as honorably and as defiantly as possible. This I intend to do, but the chicken crop in this area is going to be considerably depleted before I go.[14]

It is clear that what the young artist felt when writing the letter to his distinguished "colleague" was dissatisfaction with the current role of literature and with the position of those who created it. Desperately trying to make his living by writing articles and other pieces for various journals, Thompson, not very successful in his endeavor, encountered the very same inner issue Faulkner did years before – the conflict between his own artistic personality which is perceived as failing to contribute to society's welfare and the ideal image of an active person. For Faulkner, such a contributing character was a soldier who fought for the community's interests and, moreover, represented the romantic, chivalrous image of a guardian. For Thompson, on the other hand, there existed a far more realistic, even decadent type of person, which seemingly fits in the crowd but at the same time refuses either to conform to or to endorse the overall contentment since he regards the community's values as fundamentally shallow and limiting.

In the case of *Prince Jellyfish*, such a role is represented by the rather inconspicuous, yet highly individualistic character of Wellburn Kemp, who faces the misfortunes brought on

[14] Hunter S. Thompson, *Proud Highway: Saga of a Desperate Southern Gentleman, 1955-1967* , ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: Random House, 1998) 164.

him by the mainstream society for his disregard of what it valued/valorized. Still, he struggles to improve his own conditions and secretly hopes that his way of thinking, his way of dealing with things, will eventually prevail in the environment which he despises as much as it seems to despise him. Heavily influenced by J. P. Donleavy's character of Sebastian Dangerfield from *Ginger Man*,[15] Kemp combines such attributes as sarcasm, arrogance and egoism, which, as the character subconsciously knows but voluntarily suppresses, will not help him in his quest to become a man of importance. The Kemp character reflects several features of the young author that created him, and that unpleasant taste of Thompson's own anger and disillusion eventually makes the novel's character's original quest to challenge the hated social norms, subsequently to improve them, and to become an active personality in the Faulknerian sense of the word after all, unfeasible. Kemp scorns being offered what for him seem to be an inferior kind of job – he is so self-assured of his own perfection and abilities that, as a result, he himself becomes what he fights against. He ends up as a superficial mind unable to explore his identity and to develop his potential.

2.3.2 The Puerto Rico Experience

After the unsuccessful quest to publish his first long work of fiction and having had experience with the profession of journalist, Thompson started to prepare a new novel set among the journalists of San Juan, Puerto Rico. As in the case of *Jellyfish*, the second novel also draws from and emphasizes the role of his authentic experience. What author truly had lived through and the variety of peculiar characters and caricatures of the Hispanic stereotypes he had encountered were evidently reflected in the text and were meant to help to recreate the

[15] McKeen, 50.

exotic environment the image of which was, to a large extent, rather distorted among American public.

We once again meet the Kemp character – though this time the first name is not Wellburn but Paul – who leaves New York for the Caribbean island in order to start working as a reporter for San Juan's English language newspaper *The Daily News*. There he meets other Americans, who work in the country as reporters, and it is basically between Kemp and his colleagues, each one of them representing an outsider within the exotic country, where everything necessary for the development of the story takes place. One would expect, at least at the time of the book's creation, that to portray a foreign culture through the means of a semi-fictional narrative would require interaction between the "civilized" American and the "savage" Puerto Ricans. Yet, Thompson manages to abandon the standard approach and instead portrays what could be called a culture within a culture – a small group of American journalists, all well-educated and experienced, within a majority of people living in far worse conditions that an ordinary American would even tolerate. Eventually, when finished reading the novel, we do realize that there is the omnipresent stifling atmosphere of the environment and the fact that the outsider characters are forced not only to deal with it but to adapt to its inner mechanics. Also, they need to adopt some of the fundamental habits in order not to be ostracized from the community they are professionally depending on since their stories always report on issues stemming from the very same culture. This intense atmosphere can therefore be perceived as perhaps the most important element of Thompson's novel as it indeed presents its readership the specific lifestyle and way of thinking of a society that is, for most of Americans, far away and which, at the same time, depicts fellow countryman's struggle with the country's particularities.

The narrative already has many trademarks of later Thompson's writing such as odd characters, who take delight in heavy drinking, chain smoking, as well as in violence and

sexual relationships, and narrative style, which does not lack humor, pace, and expressive language. Here, from all the aspects mentioned that of drinking can be highlighted as one of the most striking ones and, from this point of view, it can be also compared with the writing of Thompson's abovementioned literary idol Ernest Hemingway, who also had already had a first-hand experience with residing in the Caribbean and whose whole personal as well as professional life was accompanied by above-average alcohol consumption. According to Doug Underwood, for both of the authors drinking represented an image heavily romanticized and therefore was misrepresented in their texts.[16] At the same time such perception and depiction of drinking adds to the overall mood of the individual work of either Hemingway or Thompson and thus became idiosyncratic for them both. To sum up, *The Rum Diary* and its main characters can be compared with Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* as "[Thompson's] novel presents the world of the expatriate Caribbean journalists in the same decadent, romantic terms as Hemingway portrayed his hard-partying characters."[17]

However, when examined more broadly, the story of Paul Kemp, his associates, his hardships and joys, is narrated from an idealistic point of view which indicates that Thompson, who was in his early twenties at the time, was still rather doubtful about his own set of values, his role within a society, and his stance towards literature in general. Still, what was already present in *The Rum Diary* as well as in his later writings, both fictional and non-fictional, was Paul Kemp's/Hunter Thompson's ultimate need to renounce conformism, to become a rebel who leaves the safety of a closed circle of mainstream society and, on the contrary, becomes an outsider unwilling to accept anything given to him by the others and representing an element the meaning of which is to oppose anything he believes to be false. As Manuel Luis Martinez mentions in his study on Thompson and his second novel, it is

[16] Doug Underwood, *Chronicling Trauma: Journalists and Writers on Violence and Loss* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).
[17] Underwood, 183.

apparent in the text that both the author and the main character refuse "to fit into the stifling faux-cosmopolitan mindset characteristic of the Manhattan/Columbia law school crowd of the 1950s. As an individual trapped amongst conformists, Thompson carefully crafts a persona that must search out the painful truth."[18] Such truth, Martinez also argues, "is not appreciated by the generation of conformist urbanites,"[19] who Thompson sees as the ones who spoil everything that remained functioning within the society and who continue to recur in his work almost every time as those responsible for the decay of America and its people.

[18] Martinez, 127.
[19] Martinez, 127.

3. Thompson, New Journalism, and His Role in Creating the Phenomenon

Generally speaking, for Hunter S. Thompson, the turn of the 1950s into the 1960s represents an era of the young author's beginning disillusionment with the current situation in both fiction and journalism. As was examined above, William Faulkner was the author's idol when forming his own set of values and views on the literary profession. However, although he was working hard on his first attempts at fiction and was forced to face rejections on a daily basis, Thompson also wanted to pursue a career as a journalist as his original idea was to examine given topics as a detached and thus unbiased observer and commentator. Yet, even when exploring the machinery of American journalism, he once again encountered incomprehension and prejudice which later lead him to developing what would later become his characteristic means of journalism that breaks away radically from the traditional notion of the newspaper work.[20]

Initially, at least, Thompson was affected by the philosophy of Joseph Pulitzer according to which a journalist should pursue maximum objectivity by any means and should serve the public instead of government or industry. Pulitzer, himself a renowned journalist of the second half of the 19th century and truly a significant innovator of the craft, fundamentally altered expectations about how a journalist should think and work as he introduced new topics to be dealt with in newspapers, several completely new journalistic techniques – e. g. the ”exposé” or the ”stunt” – and, above all, assumed a position of a sort of a modern defender of public welfare against the interests of the wealthy favoured in many other periodicals.[21] His paper, the *New York World*, turned toward what Pulitzer and his colleagues assumed would catch the public's attention by dealing with seemingly ordinary, yet serious issues as well as

[20] McKeen, 52.
[21] Christopher B. Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012) 120-129.

with shocking events. In his study of the history of American journalism, Christopher B. Daly comments on the general nature of Pulitzer's endeavour:

> Under Pulitzer, the *World* directed its reporting energies toward exposing the misdeeds of those in power, either crooked politicians or the malefactors of wealth who ran the big corporations, or the many business trusts that dominated the economy.[22]

Pulitzer's style and philosophy signified a change of American journalism, yet, the original idea of government's being "supervised" or "watched" by the press does not come from Joseph Pulitzer, as its very basis can be found as early as in 1786 in Thomas Jefferson's proclamation that "our liberty cannot be guarded but by the freedom of the press."[23] In Pulitzer's work, the well-known Jeffersonian concept finally found its use and eventually proved to be rather a functioning one which was both enabled and demanded by the sociopolitical environment in the United States of the late 19th century. Journalists were now "required to investigate perceived wrong doings and improprieties in the name of public welfare in an effort to stop the injustice and malfeasance."[24]

It can also be said, that this approach proved to be influential enough even to win recognition in fiction as, at the beginning of the 20th century, a group of innovative men of letters called the "Muckrakers" arose and dealt with the appalling conditions in industry, society, and politics. Among them was Upton Sinclair, whose ground-breaking novel *The Jungle*, published in 1906, portrayed the real situation of the lower classes in Chicago at the dawn of the century. Sinclair's work has often been labeled by critics as one of the proto-

[22] Daly, 123.
[23] Thomas Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. V: Correspondence 1786-1787* (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2010) 73.
[24] David A. Copeland, *The Media's Role in Defining the Nation: The Active Voice* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010) 100.

influences for the authors whose writing eventually gave birth to the New Journalism[25], one of whose founders was Hunter Thompson. As Morris Dickstein notes:

> By the time Sinclair died in 1968, at the age of ninety, … the sharp dividing line between fact and fiction, which he had never been willing to observe, had begun to break down. The social and political ferment of the 1960s gave rise to literary mutations such as the nonfiction novel, the novel as history, the documentary novel, the New Journalism … and finally novels like E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* that introduced real historical figures, often in an ironic vein.[26]

It is certainly no wonder that this aspect of journalistic work, the originally intended objectivity of it, emerged as one of the most important features of the new direction many young ambitious journalists took in the 1960s. Their aim, among others, was by all means to deconstruct and disrupt the deep-rooted rules and norms of the press which many young intellectuals, who emerged in the decade, saw perhaps not as stylistically or professionally ossified, but definitely as conforming to the reigning power structure and its ideology.

3.1 What is New Journalism? – Development and Nature of the Newly Emerged Movement

Putting aside all the sociopolitical aspects of the creation of the so-called "New Journalism," the term itself cannot be perceived as a phenomenon purely related to journalism. For most of literary and cultural critics, this "genre" must be closely associated with the genre of creative or literary nonfiction as well.[27] This essential blending of fiction and nonfiction was best described by John Hellman who, in his *Fables of Fact*, stated that the writings of such journalists, who were profoundly affected by the new literary/journalistic

[25] Harold Bloom, *Novelists and Novels* (New York: Chelsea House, 2005) 242.
[26] Morris Dickstein, *A Mirror in the Roadway: Literature and the Real World* (Princeton: University Press, 2005) 50.
[27] John C. Hartsock, ""Literary Journalism" as an Epistemological Moving Object within a Larger "Quantum" Narrative," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 23 (1999): 432-47.

movement, represent complete opposites of "realistically dramatized documentaries … [since they are] *transforming* literary experiments embodying confrontations between fact and mind, between the worlds of journalism and fiction."[28] Another examination of the term and what it represents came from Gay Talese's *Fame and Obscurity: Portraits* which examines the nature of the phenomenon and its aim:

> The new journalism, though often reading like fiction, is not fiction. It is, or should be, as reliable as the most reliable reportage although it seeks a larger truth than is possible through the mere compilation of verifiable facts, the use of direct quotations, and adherence to the rigid organizational style of the older form.[29]

From this statement it can be easily deduced that the authors of such a new form of journalism rely basically on the reader's response, on the reader's own conscience. It is supposed to break free from the distant style of the preceding decades in order to initiate a powerful response among the readership and therefore to start processes necessary to transform the public's thinking.

For some of the more conservative literary critics of the time the movement came into being and was gradually taking over the literary scene in the United States, New Journalism represented an experiment whose popularity and literary value was regarded by no means as long-lasting since it did not concern itself very often with what was regarded by such critics as deep and important sociopolitical issues. Yet, a few years later, a new generation of commentators on New Journalism emerged who saw the phenomenon as valuable in a society-wide context. For example, Thomas B. Connery in his 1992 commentary on literary journalism argues that its value can be found particularly in the way literary journalists such as Wolfe or Thompson comment on the culture of which they are integral members via

[28] John Hellman, *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981) X.
[29] Gay Talese, *Fame and Obscurity: Portraits* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970) vii.

narrative stories[30] concerning "real events that are newsworthy. Though they may be unimportant after a brief period of time, novelistic techniques imbue them with lasting value."[31]

As it is known today, when a large amount of its works has already been closely examined by the academic community, New Journalism can be found on the very thin line between two seemingly opposite genres – fiction and nonfiction (represented in this case by the traditional notion of journalism). Moreover, what seems rather an important fact from the etymological point of view is the addition of the word "new" to the whole term. This, at least for Pierre Bourdieu, signifies that this specific form of newspaper writing breaks away from journalism as it had been known before and that its author-journalists become representatives of the oppressed public against the official authorities and institutions.[32]

What eventually developed was a genre that has many shapes and forms and the inner operation and mechanics of which can be and very often are adjusted to suit the style and specialization of the individual author as much as possible. As a result, each author who is now considered a member of this literary movement produced his own, highly individual style of writing and focused on rather different topics than his colleagues. Nevertheless, there were overlaps in the orientation of these New Journalists – especially since the countercultural atmosphere of the era was so immense and affecting a great amount of artists and culture-oriented people that there had to be certain common interests and subjects that caught the public's attention in a nation-wide scale. Still, it can be said that New Journalism as it is known today and as it has been studied over more than four decades can be described as an amorphous and changeable, yet highly characteristic literary genre linking some of the best

[30] Thomas B. Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 1992).
[31] Sonja Merljak Zdovc, *Literary Journalism in the United States of America and Slovenia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008) 8-9.
[32] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) 104.

known features of classic journalism and experimental fiction. Therefore, it is no wonder that scholars, especially during the early 1970s, when it was still regarded as a highly innovative and sometimes even insurgent form of writing, often divided texts of such innovative authors as Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, Norman Mailer and Terry Southern into several slightly distinct (sub)genres which all together formed what we now call the New, or Literary, Journalism.

Numerous critics have tried to divide literary journalism into several categories the existence of which would prove the diversity of the genre and the ambiguity of its orientation. Often quoted is a division devised by Everette E. Dennis who distinguishes five main categories of new journalism's subject matter – the new nonfiction, alternative journalism (which stems directly from the muckraking tradition of Upton Sinclair and others), advocacy journalism, underground or counterculture journalism, and precision journalism.[33] Together these subcategories form one distinctive movement within the contemporary literary scene and help us in our examination of individual problems of the phenomenon as a whole.

The exact time and place of the birth of the style cannot be satisfactorily determined since it developed out of a vast number of influences that, for some of the critics, go back to the year 1869 when Mark Twain published his *Innocents Abroad* which have been mentioned by Wolfe and his associates on numerous occasions as a work that affected them in their own writing together with texts of such classic men of letters as Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, and John Hersey.[34]

Putting aside these noted authors, we shall focus, in our examination, on the variety of literary journalism that was closest to what later developed as a characteristic style of Hunter

[33] Edd Applegate ed., *Literary Journalism: A Biographical Dictionary of Writers and Editors* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1996) xvii.
[34] Zdovc, 15-16.

S. Thompson personally –gonzo journalism. Therefore, we must, above all, outline and scrutinize the work of Tom Wolfe, who, as well as Hunter S. Thompson, did focus, in his two most significant works of the 1960s, on exploring the countercultural environment from the position of being an insider – more or less an active inner participant – which provided him with the possibility of really participating within its machinery and subsequently getting to know its social, political, and cultural values. For this, he first had to find a new, far more flexible form of writing, which he eventually found in his colleague Gay Talese's story about heavyweight champion Joe Louis. William McKeen writes about Wolfe's initial impulse to break the ordinary norms that, after reading Talese's article, "Wolfe was awakened to the possibilities of what could happen when journalism used the techniques of the fiction writer. Talese's account of a weekend with Joe Louis was undoubtedly true, yet it read like a short story. There was little exposition, but mostly a presentation of scene and sequel."[35]

3.2 Tom Wolfe and the Birth of the 1960s New Journalism

Features of literary journalism as they are known to us today formed during the first half of the 1960s and were fully put into effect in Tom Wolfe's pioneering piece of writing named *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, which is now considered one of the earliest literary examples of the New Journalism in its modern form. In the 1965 collection of essays, Wolfe portrays America as seen by a young and ambitious journalist and, above all, a writer willing and aiming to experiment when treating the facts he gathered during the book's creation process. For numerous scholars, this collection represents Wolfe's

[35] McKeen, 77.

personal manifesto of the New Journalism and demonstrates his "vision of modern America, of styles and attitudes reshaping the country in strange ways."[36]

Named after Wolfe's groundbreaking essay "There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored (Thphhhhhh!) Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (Rahghhh!) Around the Bend (Brummmmmmmmmmmmmm)…," which he wrote in 1963 for *Esquire* magazine, it truly succeeded in attracting the attention of many the author's fellow journalists and other writers of fiction as well. What caught the eye of almost anyone who read Wolfe's text was his highly unusual visual style of his writing as he deliberately used means of onomatopoeia which he combines with various marks, dashes, and/or hyphens. In a work that was originally intended to be a piece of nonfiction writing this certainly represented a sort of rebellion. Also, the style of his literary expression changes very often in this article as well as in several of his later works since he is able to provide us with information in a highly professional manner and at the same time present the fact that is being examined or commented upon via the means of ordinary colloquial language understandable by almost anyone. Basically, as many famous inventions did, it developed pretty much by mere coincidence, as Wolfe faced writer's block when writing for *Esquire* and, when getting closer to the date of the submission of the article, he just gathered his notes and logs and arranged them in a way that later, after many adjustments, evolved into the genre of New Journalism in the 1960s sense of the word.

In the collection of essays, Wolfe does not concentrate upon one single and unifying topic which would link all the pieces of text together. Rather, he tries slowly, carefully, yet steadily to experiment with his own style and with creating as well as thinking about the text not only as a means of mere journalistic expression but mainly as something that illustrates feelings and emotions both of the author and the event he aims to explore. Besides the

[36] Ronald Weber, "Tom Wolfe's Happiness Explosion," *Tom Wolfe*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2001) 5.

eponymous essay, in which he presents his readership a report from Burbank's custom car event, there are various accounts on contemporary American pop-cultural phenomena such as the rise of Las Vegas or stock car racing.[37] It can be said that as early as in *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* he encounters and subsequently strengthens his deep interest in commenting about contemporary culture, status, and literary form.[38]

He fully utilized this newly developed approach to the art of journalism in his two following collections of essays, in which he gives us strong evidence of the existence of the counterculture which, via the means of a literary text, ceased to be an abstract notion and became a real and functioning concept. These are *The Pump House Gang* and perhaps his best known nonfiction book, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, both published on the same day of August 1968. In the former, Wolfe targets the phenomenon of surf gangs, which rose to prominence during the early years of the decade side by side with The Beach Boys' melodies and whose influence and importance proved to be immense enough to form their own kind of subculture that was wide-spread particularly in Southern California. This piece contains as much innovative work with meaning and word play as his first collection of essays and, although overshadowed by the hugely popular and instantly best-selling *Acid Test*, manages satirically to present to the readership one of the overshadowed, yet hugely important social issues of the time: the growth of the fresh and strong activity of youth against the conforming rules of a surrounding older generation adhering to a completely different sort of social values. Such a situation caused great discomfort, which led to a society-wide ferment that manifested itself in many protests and riots during the late 1960s.

[37] Tom Wolfe, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (London: Picador, 2009).
[38] Brian Abel Ragen, *Tom Wolfe: A Critical Companion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002).

3.3 Portraying the Countercultural Zeitgeist: Wolfe, Thompson, Hell's Angels, and the Merry Pranksters

However, it is *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* which possesses a greater amount of importance when studying the processes behind what would later develop in the alternative psychedelic movement that took over the cultural scene in the whole Western world. The *Acid Test*, Wolfe's first coherent nonfiction book, takes us on a journey with the notorious Merry Pranksters, gathered around the spontaneous personality of the renowned author Ken Kesey, and at the same time, while describing the events and happenings of the troupe, provides us with great insight into the very core of the psychedelic counterculture. Wolfe himself stated that he not only "tried what the Pranksters did but to re-create the mental atmosphere or subjective reality of it."[39] A. Carl Bredahl who, in his study of Wolfe's piece about Kesey's group, compares the 1968 work with Hemingway's famous *Green Hills of Africa*:

> Hemingway speaks of pushing the art of writing prose fiction much further than it has ever gone before, and Wolfe, like Hemingway, is a writer who, instead of reporting facts for the consumption of a mass intelligence, is consuming the physical world as a part of his own nutriment. Like Hemingway eating the kudu's liver, this new journalist is thriving on the materials available to him: Ken Kesey and the Pranksters.[40]

In *Acid Test*, we, Wolfe's audience, are able to witness and understand the meaning drugs possessed for those who advocated their use as a necessary prerequisite for the spiritual catharsis of an individual and subsequent reaching of what can be labeled a modern, or, more precisely, postmodern notion of Nirvana. Moreover, it does take us to the depths of the psychology and philosophy of one of the most prominent minds of its generation and a guru for many discomfited young people all across the United States.

[39] Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (London: Black Swan, 1989) 367.
[40] A. Carl Bredahl, "An Exploration of Power: Tom Wolfe's Acid Test," *Tom Wolfe*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2001) 53-54.

Wolfe, Thompson and Kesey were all born and raised during the Great Depression and the Second World War, and it is therefore no wonder that ideologically they shared some of the views of their generation and inclined toward significant changes in the society ruled still by the generation of their parents. They were all "product[s] of a culture that believed it had figured out how to realize the American dream."[41] Being a strong advocate of LSD and experiments with its effects on human (sub)consciousness, Kesey hoped to change the prevailing approach to human existence in order to create an ideal individual who would strive strongly enough to achieve a crucial change within the society.[42]

In Kesey's and the Pranksters' philosophy the notion of the American Dream and the human pursuit of it emerge as a fundamental issue around which the whole group's deeds and actions revolve. Represented by the image of the famous bus called "Furthur," the vehicle "becomes an embodiment of Kesey's desire to follow the American Dream to its furthest extent … [and] is a symbol of journeying and the individual's search for himself."[43] Wolfe does emphasize this aspect of the philosophy of Kesey's and sees it as one of the crucial ideas closely connected to their public advocacy of LSD use.

Acid Test was indeed a great success and even a revolutionary piece of art in the literary style and form as well as innovative narrative techniques used by the author. Still, *Acid Test* was not a mere literary description of events surrounding Kesey and his group but it must be perceived as an important sociological study of the early forces behind the later nation-wide movement. When put together, the vivid style and deep analysis of the almost utopian philosophy of the Pranksters created the essential piece of writing for those Americans that felt discontent with the current state of things. Wolfe, although he remained an observer who did not participate directly in the group's activities, succeeds in his quest to

[41] Zdovc, 56-57.
[42] Wolfe.
[43] Zdovc, 57.

guide his audience through the minds of the initiators of what would become a "psychedelic revolution." When compared to Timothy Leary's careful and scientific approach to "opening the doors of consciousness," they represent a more imaginable, graspable, and therefore popular romantic image of countercultural heroes opposing official values and a monotonous life. Jack Schafer best describes the true nature of the Pranksters' existence:

> The Pranksters literally wore the flag … they imagined themselves comic-book heroes; romanticized American Indian; playfully taunted the straights; and danced all night as they immersed themselves in the mixed-media salad of rock music, tape-recorder feedback loops, whirling movie cameras, strobe lights, and cosmic light shows.[44]

To most of young Americans, they embodied exactly what they performed – a joyous and merry band of open-minded people who only wanted to spread their philosophy of society-wide happiness among the public. That is also one of the most important reasons behind the fact that another work of literary journalism that focused on another group within the contemporary countercultural movement was overshadowed by the potency and sudden glory of Tom Wolfe and his insight into America's best known "clowns."

At about the same time, a similar phenomenon had been dealt with by Hunter S. Thompson in the first book to gain him recognition: *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*. Published one year prior to *Acid Test*, it focuses on other aspects that helped to establish the counterculture of the mid and late 1960s and spread the ideology of the antisocial rebels among the lay public. However, in comparison with Wolfe's text, Thompson's piece was rather limited in appeal because of the violent behavior of American motorcycle gangs with which hardly anyone wanted to have anything in common.[45]

[44] Jack Schafer, "Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*," *Second Read: Writers Look Back at Classic Works of Reportage*, ed. James Marcus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) 64.
[45] Schafer.

3.3.1 Thompson and the Angels: Paying a Visit to an Outlaw Motorcycle Gang

Although less known by non-professionals than Wolfe's *Acid Test*, Thompson's *Hell's Angels* clearly represents another important account of the New Journalism when the movement was still in the early years of its existence. Unlike the integral accounts of Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson himself stated that when writing he usually does not even try to reconstruct a story he captures in his text.[46] A completely different approach can be seen in *Hell's Angels* when we compare it to *Acid Test* – Wolfe does try to keep himself in his writing at least to a certain extent ideologically separated from the group the existence of which he examines in his text; he does not take an active part in the events within the community and is nothing more than a closely acquainted observer of reality that is presented to him by Kesey's group. Thompson, on the other hand, aims to get exactly in the middle of the countercultural action; he wants to become at the same time an omnipresent narrator and a vivid character who is being an integral member of the commune. Not being "a reporter" but "a writer,"[47] to him the perfect documentary is his aforementioned piece of writing, *Hell's Angels*. The book and the style used during the writing process are certainly far from being "gonzo," an approach which would develop in the following years and would be utilized in some of his best known *Rolling Stone* articles. However, it may accurately be perceived as a precursor to his characteristic later literary style and should therefore be closely examined in order to understand the author's motives.[48]

It all started with an assignment from *The Nation* in 1965 for Thompson to write an article intended to explore the phenomenon of the American motorcycle gangs that had been gaining more and more members as well as notoriety ever since the end of World War II and

[46] Torrey and Simonson, 21.
[47] Craig Vetter, "*Playboy* Interview: Hunter Thompson," *Playboy*, November 1974 < http://www.journalscape.com/Please_Advise/2005-03-02-10:17> October 15, 2014.
[48] Vetter, 246.

the era of Marlon Brando's *The Wild Ones*. Namely, it was Hell's Angels, one of the best known gangs in California, which particularly interested Thompson when he was beginning to work on the assigned topic. After a month of research and writing, Thompson produced an article called "The Motorcycle Gangs: Losers and Outsiders." It proved to be so daring that it caught the attention of readers and publishers all over America – resulting in his first serious contract for publishing a book.[49]

When preparing the book, Thompson realized that perfectly to portray the environment and extremely violent aura of the Angels he needed to penetrate their ranks and become one of their very kind, which he eventually achieved with a help of his fellow reporter, former gang member Birney Jarvis.[50] Although he was a reporter, a profession which they fundamentally despised since the press was often the most bigoted of all their critics, Thompson eventually gained the Angels' trust. This provided him with a unique opportunity to create a literary work capable of changing the public's view on what was widely regarded as a criminal community of outlaws defying existing social norms. Thompson's ultimate objective was becoming more and more apparent – to refute the wide-spread stereotypes surrounding American motorcycle gangs. He did this in his own characteristic way by asking members of the gang, considered the most violent of America's motorcycle gangs: "I heard some bad things about you. Are they true?"[51]

These "bad things" Thompson mentions in his question closely relate to the omnipresent atmosphere of lawlessness existing around the gang members. At that time, in the mid-1960s, their world was far from being attractive to the majority of Americans, who saw only heavy drinking, deafening noise, hostility, and violence. However, Thompson, disillusioned by the persistent social conformism of the American public, felt rather attracted

[49] McKeen.
[50] McKeen.
[51] Vetter.

to the idea of becoming one of the active agents of the infamous subculture. The experience he gained from his stay with the Angels, which lasted for more than a year, proved to be priceless in the context of developing his own literary style and establishing a nation-wide reputation and success for the first time in his life.

In the text itself, Thompson succeeds in presenting the real and unprejudiced view of the Angels to the public. Via the means of writing in a first-person narrative, the narrator, even though he can be perceived as an outsider by the readership, actually immerses himself deeply into the subcultural phenomenon and becomes an inseparable part of it. On the other hand, he does not become a gang member for real, he fails in identifying himself fully with the gang philosophy and eventually it becomes apparent from the text that he remains a mere observer of happenings around the gang. David S. Wills writes in his article on *Hell's Angels* that the author/narrator in the text is "far more involved in the action, giving the reader someone sensible to relate to, when alienated by the depravity of the bikers. The result is a carefully observed act of journalism that reads like journalism, only with the hallmarks of Gonzo dropped in here and there."[52]

As a result, the whole work gives a reader an impression of being a collage of the author's own experience with the gang, which reads like fiction, and of seemingly unbiased police reports and both prejudiced and veracious newspaper articles which give *Hell's Angels* the feeling of non-fiction. In the end, the reader is supposed to shape his own opinion on the topic; he needs to take a stance of his own choice and let the narrator be nothing more than a mere guide through a series of the subculture's events and through a variety of the group's specific features that are neither glorified nor defamed by Thompson. Wills argues that the

[52] David S. Wills, "Hell's Angels: The Precursor of Gonzo," *Beatdom,* September 15, 2013 < http://www.beatdom.com/?p=2688> October 16, 2014.

text functions for the reader as "a cross-section of America and its opinions, while giving an insider's view, providing an accurate all-round depiction of the subject of his work."[53]

When compared to *Acid Test*, Thompson's first book-length piece of published writing actually bears some resemblance to Tom Wolfe's account of Ken Kesey's Pranksters. Above all, they both remain loyal to journalism however modified it might seem, instead of the genre of belles-lettres. However, it is apparent that Thompson fundamentally differs from Wolfe in his approach to the topic and in his treatment of the subject matter. Unlike Wolfe, he does not consider himself a reporter and thus he is able to identify himself more easily with the phenomenon he focuses on.[54] Although *Hell's Angels* is certainly not a pure and irrefutable proof of this statement, the book still serves as an illustration of Thompson's pioneering efforts of getting "as personally involved as possible"[55] in order to be able to capture the assigned/selected topic in its complexity.

Besides the fame he attained with his first publication, *Hell's Angels* functioned for Hunter S. Thompson, an author and nonconformist intellectual, on two more personal levels. First, the experience gained from his travelling with the gang and his subsequent transforming of what he had experienced on paper provided him with an appropriate space to exercise, explore and develop his own characteristic style of writing as, in the book, the readership was able to witness Thompson's application of literary features that would later become associated with gonzo journalism. For example, he works with the elements of collective utterance that replace a far more ambiguous discourse of a whole group of gang members. As a result, he manages accurately and vividly to recount the various specifics surrounding the gang and at the same time keeps the story gripping and smoothly flowing.[56] Inspired by William

[53] Wills.
[54] Torrey and Simonson, 21-22.
[55] Torrey and Simonson, 22.
[56] Wills.

Faulkner's philosophy once again, Thompson in the text proves to be a devoted follower of the motto that "the best fiction is far more *true* than any kind of journalism – and the best of journalists have always known this."[57] Also, the author's endeavour evident in *Hell's Angels* shows that both nonfiction (and journalism) and fiction are merely "artificial categories … [and] only two different means to the same end."[58] This Thompsonian blending of facts and fabrications of the author's mind results in creating a highly innovative, yet, in the context of Thompson's later works, quintessential and easily recognizable style. Here, it is once again David S. Wills who comments on the novel's being a direct predecessor of the style labeled for the first time three years after the publication of the piece about the bikers as "gonzo":

> *Hell's Angels* is significant in the development of Gonzo because it brings Thompson's writing a step closer to the style that emerged in 'The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved', but it is also important in the history of New Journalism because Thompson set out to write the article, and then the book, partly to correct some of the flaws in the media. He viewed the idea of the Hell's Angels essentially as a creation of the media, and whether this depiction was accurate or not, it was not fair that it was created by people without any real knowledge of the bikers themselves.[59]

Moreover, spending a year within a subcultural community heavily despised by the public helped him finally to reassure himself about his identity and position as an outlaw opposing and criticizing the prevailing set of social, political, and, to a certain extent, cultural values -- exactly the type of character he proves to be in his later professional as well as personal life. In the following years and decades, Thompson constantly and publicly struggles to preserve such a rebellious, yet attractive status. To achieve this, the author, in his future articles, essays and fiction (where he does appear in the form of one of his alter egos), takes sides when covering a certain issue and very often favors those who are controversial, who clearly face predominant opposition in their ideological struggle, yet who are at the same time strong and

[57] Hunter S. Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales from a Strange Time* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2010) 94.
[58] Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt*, 95.
[59] Wills.

capable individuals.[60] Behaving as what Tom Wolfe called "a frantic loser, inept and half-psychotic,"[61] Thompson underwent such a sudden and immense artistic and intellectual metamorphosis during the writing of *Hell's Angels* that, having lived through more adventure than most of Americans could dream of, a completely different Hunter S. Thompson than the one in the preceding years was born.

3.4 The Genesis of Gonzo Style

Most certainly one of the best known and widely examined aspects of the literary work and life of Hunter S. Thompson is his foundational role in creating a unique literary style, which partly derives from the classic New Journalism of Tom Wolfe but which, at the same time, perfectly and immensely utilizes some of the typical approaches of the author himself and therefore acquires a highly characteristic form in which the creative personality and individual philosophy of the writer are fully reflected. This new style of "gonzo" journalism, the first signs of which can be spotted in *Hell's Angels*, came into being at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s and was explored for the first time in Thompson's notorious article "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved," published in *Scanlan's Monthly* in June, 1970.[62]

Used for the first time in 1970 by the *Boston Globe Sunday Magazine* editor Bill Cardoso, the term "Gonzo,"[63] particularly its etymology, has been examined numerous times by scholars, yet never with any absolute and fully provable outcome. However, Cardoso himself associated the term with a South Boston Irish slang description of the last surviving person after all-night drinking.[64] Nowadays, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary,

[60] Matt Johnson, "Above the Fear and Loathing (Briefly): Hunter S. Thompson and Professional Athletics," *Aethelon* 18 (2000-2001) 65-72.
[61] William Stephenson, *Gonzo Republic: Hunter S. Thompson's America* (London: Continuum, 2012) 12.
[62] Torrey and Simonson.
[63] Martin Hirst, "What is Gonzo? The Etymology of an Urban Legend," *UQ* (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 2004).
[64] Thompson, *Proud Highway*.

"gonzo" is an adjective representing something that is unusual, strange, or odd.[65] Also, Billy Baker of *The Boston Globe* recently stated that by the term "gonzo" a specific variety of people can be described that "use craziness as a form of self-expression, who push it too far just to push it."[66] All the aforementioned explanations perfectly portray the atmosphere that the work evoked as well as the style which eventually established itself as Thompson's trademark.

The whole concept of gonzo journalism as utilized in "Kentucky Derby" for the first time must be regarded as a distinctive sub-category of literary journalism in Tom Wolfe's sense of the word. It is certainly not a style intended deliberately to differ significantly from then-extant New Journalism. After all, Thompson himself declared in one of the interviews that he himself sees gonzo as "intertwined" with literary journalism.[67] In general, "gonzo" does not deny or challenge New Journalism's fundamental principles but rather aims to reshape its procedures in order to keep the author as unrestricted as possible. The "Derby" article is clearly Thompson's first elaborate attempt to present the public with a form of journalism that is not detached from the events it focuses on; journalism that does not keep a distance from the subject matter and prefers to become absorbed by the events and only afterward to take a specific and subjective stand on the topic.

3.4.1 Gonzo Visits the Kentucky Derby

"The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved" indeed represents the final result of Thompson's journalistic experiment initiated in *Hell's Angels* as he, at last, fully succeeded in

[65] "Gonzo," *Merriam-Webster.com*, Merriam-Webster <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gonzo> Nov 2, 2014.
[66] Billy Baker, "It's Totally Gonzo," *The Boston Globe* November 21, 2010 < http://www.boston.com/yourtown/cambridge/articles/2010/11/21/historian_casts_doubt_on_origin_of_gonzo_label/> October 26, 2014.
[67] Torrey and Simonson, 130.

breaking away from the tradition of New Journalism and produced a piece in which most of his influences and artistic concepts were combined. In the process of transforming himself to a Gonzo journalist he took inspiration from the work of one of his literary idols, Norman Mailer, who, throughout the 1960s, also experimented with subjective approaches to reporting on important events. Mailer, as well as Thompson several years later, pursued the ideal harmony between facts and fiction, aiming to create a literary work which would both inform the reader and awaken his/her emotions. William Stephenson looks into the relevance of such a statement saying that "Mailer … based his work on real events reported from the subjective viewpoint of a persona more or less modelled upon himself. Unlike Thompson, Mailer tended to adopt a position of ironic distance."[68] However, the writings of both authors share the presence and indisputable importance of ego, which provide both the writers and literary characters they are embodied in with a necessary means to challenge "the authority of the newspaper text and to discover the limits of the reporter's narrative practices by counterposing a more imaginative recorder of events."[69] In relation to this, Mailer himself in his *Armies of the Night* speaks about the necessary presence of "an eyewitness who is a participant but not a vested partisan … [and who] must be not only involved but ambiguous in his own proportions."[70] This is clearly what Hunter S. Thompson had in mind (and perhaps derived from Mailer) when working on his account on the Kentucky Derby – his new gonzo narrator/participant, a journalist reporting on the given subject from its very core, truly appeared as a comic hero occupying an ironic standpoint.

However, the peculiar and uncommon nature of the narrator, which was originally meant to portray the journalist's experience with the 1970 Kentucky Derby, is not the only new aspect appearing within the essay. Bearing more resemblance to Thompson's later

[68] Stephenson, 12.
[69] Harold Bloom, *Norman Mailer* (New York: Chelsea House, 2003) 186.
[70] Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night* (New York: New American Library, 1968) 53.

writings than to *Hell's Angels* and earlier works, "Kentucky Derby" came into being as more or less a piece of fiction – a result of Thompson's experiments with style of writing, means of expression and narrative perspective of the author. Posing as a *Playboy* reporter, Thompson appears in his hometown to depict the atmosphere of the well-known horse race but instead of reporting what happens on the track, he focuses on depicting the vices hidden in the vast crowds on the grandstand and its vicinity. Since he was closely acquainted with the environment of the small town in which he grew up and the many prejudices he knew and hated, he was able fully to concentrate on examining individual qualities and dispositions of individual characters within the crowd. According to Arthur Kaul, inspecting and describing small town moral rottenness enabled Thompson fully to unleash "his pent-up rage at the bigoted, chauvinistic, and caste-bound culture of his hometown."[71] In such a depiction, omnipresent are alcohol fumes emanating from both the narrator and his object of interest as well as rather a large amount of society's hypocrisy, superficiality, and lasciviousness. This is why we read in the title of the essay two adjectives: "decadent" and "depraved." Also, as Robin Hemley notes, Thompson is evidently searching throughout the text for the ultimate representative of what he sees as typical for the event. Ironically enough, he eventually realizes that it is he himself who perfectly embodies all the drunkenness and twistedness he is witnessing in the stands.[72]

The Derby itself is covered by the author in no more than a few lines as the rest of the text often scrutinizes those who are often overlooked for their ordinariness, yet are necessary participants in the Louisville's community's great sporting event. The overall outcome is very chaotic and incoherent but does not fail in presenting the reader genuine reality, however distorted it is because of the author's specific attitude to the topic. In the role of the narrator, it

[71] Arthur Kaul, *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Literary Journalists 1945-1995* (Farmington Hills: Gale, 1997) 318.
[72] Robin Hemley, *A Field Guide for Immersion Writing: Memoir, Journalism, and Travel* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

is apparent that Thompson himself behaves highly independently and certainly does not pursue objectivity, which forms one of the firmest arguments for the newly created style. For him, the nature and role of truth within the text as well as within the real-life human community is greatly dependent on a specific individual and his/her own perspective. From this point of view, the resulting piece of writing must be considered an essay containing the author's idiosyncratic reflection on a given subject rather than an ordinary article. Unlike Truman Capote, who is also regarded as one of the important representatives of narrative journalism, "accuracy is ditched in favour of a kind of atmospheric authenticity which does not rely on the accumulation of facts so much as the accumulation of feelings, emotions, sensations."[73] That is why "Kentucky Derby" proved to be an embodiment of Gonzo, "a vehicle for outrageous semi-autobiographical narrative that did not cloak itself in any pretence of objectivity."[74]

The essay actually laid the foundations for a new trend within American journalistic tradition, which best thrived during the 1970s when it established itself as a style characterized by a very active, or even aggressive and belligerent manner of journalist's investigation that is stylistically often not very far from both the modernists' stream of consciousness and Burroughs' cut-up technique. Moreover, this newly emergent Gonzo journalism managed to reflect in the journalist/narrator figure drug and alcohol use which was an important aspect of countercultural lifestyle and at the same a taboo topic for mainstream society. The purest example of such gonzo technique would be a text written at once, without any changes or emendations made either by the author or by an editor.[75] This would also provide the author with the possibility to express most clearly, and above all genuinely, what

[73] Nick Nuttall, "Cold-Blooded Journalism," *The Journalistic Imagination: Literary Journalists from Defoe to Capote and Carter*, eds. Richard Keeble and Sharon Wheeler (New York: Routledge, 2007) 137.
[74] Stephenson, 10.
[75] Peter O. Whitmer, *When The Going Gets Weird: The Twisted Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: Hyperion, 1993).

at that time started to attract Thompson – to openly challenge the idea of the American Dream which, for him, was nothing more than a false notion and superstition spread among ordinary Americans. In Thompson's later works this would emerge as a key topic to which he relates almost all of the events he reports on.

Thompson's relation to the concept and its role in his work as a journalist has been analyzed by John C. Hartsock who sees one more important aspect of gonzo journalism as he compares it to the narrative literary journalism of Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, *et al*. Hartsock utilizes postcolonial criticism in his study and argues that while "the ideological purpose of narrative literary journalism is to narrow the gulf between subjectivities, or between Others, Thompson's gonzo journalism represents, to borrow from postcolonial criticism, the colonial Other writing back to the empire. In the satire [here *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*], the "empire" (or the American dream as the case may be) is forced to see a side of itself that only the marginalized Other can provide."[76]

This blending of styles, approaches, and individual philosophies resulted in the birth of two completely fresh and unheard of characters named Raoul Duke, representing the author's own alter ego, and Dr. Gonzo, his friend, attorney, and fellow addict. They both appeared for the first time in 1971 in Thompson's best-known autobiographical novel, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which will be examined in following sections as it possesses some of the themes and motifs that were most distinctive for the artistic personality of Hunter S. Thompson. Nevertheless, it is possible to say that the personal philosophies and lifestyles of two characters, the way they express themselves and comment respectively on various topics, projected themselves in all of the author's future texts and became greatly idiosyncratic to Thompson's writing.

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

3.4.2 Richard Nixon, Thompson's Nemesis: Gonzo Reports on Politics

Both the national and international politics of the United States government were hugely important issues for contemporary countercultural intellectuals. By the end of the 1960s, large numbers of Americans and even greater numbers of Vietnamese soldiers had already been killed during the war, which gave birth to numerous new political and social movements protesting all over the Western world against the atrocities in Indochina. The 1960s also witnesses the development of more liberal attitudes among segments of the American public, which eventually helped minorities that had been oppressed during the preceding decades finally to stand up to both physical and psychical violence forced upon them by many elements of the white community. However, besides highlighting important issues and problems of American community, these events enabled skillful journalists and writers to portray in their texts topics that were new, lively, unprecedented, and full of revolutionary overtones. Having experienced success as a writer of essays and articles, Hunter S. Thompson, who at that time already had personal experience with communal politics, decided to depict the 1972 presidential campaign of the Democratic Party, which the author supported in their goal to defeat the man Thompson despised and who for most of the countercultural community represented everything bad that had happened to America in the last four years. That man was Richard Nixon, and Thompson's narrative, which began as a series of articles and reports but was ultimately published as a book, was entitled *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*, which obviously took its name from Thompson's arguably most famous work, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, published in 1971.

In his gonzo style, Thompson followed the campaign of the Democrats across the country for a whole year, and the book ended up divided in twelve chapters, starting in December 1971 and ending in the same month of 1972. He aimed to get behind the scenes of political machinations and to penetrate the world of promises and fatal actions with a power to

change history, thus becoming an informed insider. With hindsight, Thompson managed to cover what evolved into a split between the two strongest democratic presidential candidates – Hubert Humphrey and George McGovern – a split which resulted in their loss of even a slight chance of winning the White House against the controversial, yet already established political personality of Richard Nixon.

The collection of articles is unsurprisingly typically gonzo in the way Thompson comments on the events and in his utilization of the author's subjectivity. The style of writing closely resembles Thompson's 1971 Kentucky Derby piece, since he is not afraid to work with exaggeration, humor and vulgarisms throughout a text that covered a serious political event. In his endeavor to infiltrate and understand what was going on during such campaigning, he joined the team of George McGovern who, for him, was at that time the only suitable person to inhabit the White House as President for the next four years. This authorial stance can be widely observed throughout the text and adds to the overall feeling of the text's being more Thompson's own invention than an account on what really happened. Despite the subjective nature and "off-camera" style of reporting, the events depicted by the author were rather accurate and genuine, as he did eventually find himself in the middle of the action.[77] Today, the articles are considered hallmarks of American campaign journalism as Thompson does not omit even the smallest details accompanying every speech of the candidate and every action of his team. It is Timothy Crouse, who in his *The Boys on the Bus*, analyses Thompson's situation when reporting on the campaign and argues that he was the only one from the whole bunch of reporters covering happenings of both parties who managed to get to the most reliable information imaginable, since he became an integral participant within

[77] Matt Taibbi, Introduction. *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*. By Hunter S. Thompson (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012) xviii.

anything that ever happened among McGovern's team and was not at all dependent on access and permissions given by those responsible.[78]

In general, the whole text, although heavily exaggerated by the author, basically follows the archetypal clash of ultimate evil, represented here by Nixon, and good, McGovern. Since the author clearly sides with the latter candidate, the whole portrayal of McGovern's personality seems to aim for his depiction as a Christlike figure standing alone on a pedestal, struggling against the "bad guys" for improvement and for righting of many injustices and wrongs inflicted by the diabolical antagonists of the Nixonian administration. According to numerous scholars who have examined the evolution of campaign journalism in America, Thompson's text has affected the thinking of other reporters covering presidential and other campaigns to such an extent that they either deliberately or unconsciously choose sides and make such an archetypal distinction between those who decide to run.[79] It has become a cliché over many years, yet it still remains an obvious element when we try to focus on the fashion in which presidential candidates are often presented by the media.

Moreover, when we concentrate on the role of media in campaigning, we also see that *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72* does analyze the style, perspective, and, above all, influence deployed by most national media when it comes to politics and elections. The result is rather alarming, or at least noteworthy, since it clearly shows how previously unimportant information about a candidate, no matter how popular, when used at the most expedient moment can completely destroy the efforts of an individual to succeed. What is used here by Thompson is the case of McGovern's running mate Thomas Eagleton, who had to be removed from his position at the height of the campaign, since press all over the country kept publishing allusions to Eagleton's alleged psychological problems and how he was

[78] Timothy Crouse, *The Boys on the Bus* (New York: Random House, 2003).
[79] Matt Taibbi, xvii.

supposed to have undergone therapy for depression.[80] By highlighting this event in the book Thompson pointed out the power of a press which, according to him, possessed an influence so immense that it potentially can, as in the Eagleton case, reshape public opinion and reinforce any ideology endorsed by those who control such media.

In the end, as McGovern's candidacy resulted in a huge defeat by Nixon and as he even lost his home state of South Dakota to the Republican, the disappointing outcome reassured Thompson of what he had already been perceiving during his travels through the United States – that the American Dream was, in fact, a dead and false notion and that the counterculture's power to change and improve, which had once seemed almost plausible, had already vanished into thin air and was no longer an idea worth pursuing, let alone worshipping.

3.5 Gonzo Legacy

Ever since its first appearance at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s in the form of an essay on the Kentucky Derby, gonzo journalism has remained a widely admired and often imitated style of journalistic work particularly for its innovativeness in terms of freedom of the author and individual perspective on the given problem or topic. For Gonzo journalism, objectivity represents a myth that is far away from reality; it does not really get under the surface when examining certain problems and therefore remains useless within journalistic work.[81] Instead of being objective, the gonzo journalist's goal is obviously to be as subjective as possible which can be achieved only by personal involvement of the author within the events s/he reports on. For Brian McNair, the "consequences of this participation-provocation would then be described in prose heavily influenced by alcohol and other drugs, undermining

[80] Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).
[81] Stephenson.

the reliability of the narrator but heightening the descriptive power of the prose and the force of its author's message."[82]

Rather ground-breaking also was the tone of such narrative journalism which, to a large extent, was radical, aggressive and often contrary to historical conventions. The tone of the text embodies unique particularities of the time and presents the audience its version of "counterculture values," which were, by the beginning of the 1970s, already on the decline. Thompson, who could perhaps be seen as an heir to the "angry young men" of the UK cultural tradition, created a sort of journalism the role and impact of which was nicely described by McNair in his *Journalists in Film: Heroes and Villains*:

> His [Thompson's] journalism reflected this unapologetic hedonism, as well as the ethos and lifestyle of the youth sub-culture going on around him. His style was transgressive and anti-authority, yet controlled and efficient, spawning countless imitators. To this day, Thompson's florid phrasing and stream of consciousness narration inspires journalism students to attempt emulation, if rarely with the success of the original.[83]

Gonzo journalism's subjectivity and "choosing up sides" has for over four decades exercised a ubiquitous influence in American media. The visible aura of defiance and nonconformity represented by gonzo lasts to this day as it is documented by various critics and scholars who continue to examine its effects on contemporary digital and social media like Twitter and blogs that, according to some sources, possess what was typical of Thompson's (and Wolfe's) style and way of thinking: open-mindedness, spontaneity, and often vivid and almost provocative language.[84] Today, the gonzo style's legacy can be witnessed in various forms all over the internet and thus among a wide variety of people of all ages and cultural, social, and political backgrounds.

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[82] Brian McNair, *Journalists in Film: Heroes and Villains* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2010) 129.
[83] McNair, 129.
[84] Jennifer Marinelli, "Hunter S. Thompson: The Man, The Legend, and his effect on the Digital Age," *Michigan Online News Association*, 1 May 2010 < http://web.archive.org/web/20100510034949/http://michiganonlinenews.com/?p=405> 2 Nov 2014.

4. Witnessing the Death of the American Dream: Thompson and the 1960s Counterculture

In order to uncover Thompson's motives that can be found behind his becoming a social, cultural and political commentator and critic as well as to understand his views and beliefs that significantly shaped his own writing, we need to focus on the issue of the American Dream that represents a quintessential theme within his oeuvre. It has been a recurring element not only in Thompson's work but in American literature in general as it inspired various authors who aimed to capture the essence of the American experience and forces behind the formation of what eventually became one of the world's global superpowers.

As witnessed in a wide variety of texts over the years, the established national ethos proved to be more of an idealistic and abstract term than a real way of life which would lead to success and prosperity. Originally, the American dream was seen by numerous historians and philosophers as the driving force behind establishing the country and behind its subsequent flourishing. To see the way the concept was regarded by some of the noted men of letters of the early 20th century, we should quote James Truslow Adams, who mentions the dream as the most important of elements of American history:

> American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank, which is the greatest contribution we have made to the thought and welfare of the world. That dream or hope has been present from the start. Ever since we became an independent nation, each generation has seen an uprising of ordinary Americans to save that dream from the forces which appeared to be overwhelming it.[85]

According to such view of the concept, America seems to be the fabled land of opportunity which waits to be explored and capitalized by anyone willing enough to become an active and

[85] James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2012) xx.

skillful participant within the community. However, ever since the beginning, the Dream has been questioned, ridiculed and even disproved by authors who thought they saw through the gilded surface of the idea that promised a guarantee of success and individual well-being. What many commentators, who glorified the American Dream, failed to realize was that, in a society-wide context, it does not fit the egalitarian basis of the society as it cannot be fulfilled by just any American.[86] Since America has been a selective kind of a community and has often favored those who fit certain criteria of race and social position, the trueness of the notion can thus be easily refuted.

This perspective starts to invade minds of some of America's most capable literary minds already at the beginning of the 20th century when the Black intelligentsia publicly and actively began to promote ideas of racial equality. Such renowned interwar authors as Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis or John Steinbeck do, in their writing, question the genuineness of the concept and often relate it to consumerist materialism. For Lewis, modern industrial society lacks the original "pioneer spirit … [and] the typical American dream of self-fulfillment…is a yearning that strives for no more than simple escape, which, once effected, may leave one free, but also leaves one lost."[87] Moreover, Fitzgerald's Gatsby and his associates can be seen as representatives of the ultimate corruptness of what used to be "one of the last and finest fruits of the Western culture."[88] Also, when reading Steinbeck's famous novella *Of Mice and Men*, we witness another affirmation of the true condition of the American Dream. Both main characters of the narrative, George and Lennie, want just to "live off the fatta the lan'"[89] and dream about a better life. Yet, they are not able to fulfill their

[86] Heather Beth Johnson, *The American Dream & Power of Wealth: Choosing Schools and Inheriting Inequality in the Land of Opportunity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[87] Dick Wagenaar, "Europe and America and the Fiction of Sinclair Lewis," *George Babbitt*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2004) 46.
[88] Dalton Gross and Mary Jean Gross, *Understanding the Great Gatsby: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1998) 11.
[89] John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* (New York: Penguin, 1993) 14.

dream since they are outcasts and nonconformists within a community which look down on them for they are considered poor and simple.

Finally, this Steinbeckian attitude towards the theme leads us to Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* which centres on the working-class' pursuit of a better future which, however, proves to be vain. Willy Loman, the main character of the play, does not succeed in providing his family with riches and financial independence and therefore ends up as a lost individual doomed to failure and oblivion. Most importantly, Miller highlights the relation between the abstract concept and what it concretely represents in the modern days – it must be closely associated with "socioeconomic status, or upward mobility, [that] is valorized as the *source* of spiritual worth and well-being."[90] Loman's failure results in his committing suicide, which comes at the end of the play, and functions as a partial fulfillment of his original hopes and goals and can be seen as the bleakest realization of the American Dream.

The whole concept radically changed during the 1950s, which was, as mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, the time of middle-class values and lifestyle that put emphasis on consumerism and regarded the ethos of the Dream which awaits anyone daring enough to pursuit his/her happiness. Therefore, such association of the abstract (the Dream) with the concrete (property and prosperity it represented) led to what many contemporary authors as well as countercultural figures examined and criticized – that, for them, the American dream began to be a materialist set of norms and values and, as such, ceased to exist as something worth pursuing. During the seemingly tranquil eight years of Eisenhower's presidency full of adhering to such a superficial notion, it was gradually becoming more and more evident that the simple idea of the Americans obeying certain rules and working for the good of all and subsequently achieving success in their lives is actually false. For the majority of social critics

[90] Lois Tyson, *Psychological Politics of the American Dream: The Commodification of Subjectivity in Twentieth-Century American Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994) 5.

and artists, originating to a large extent from the 1950s and 1960s alternative intellectual circles, the ethos was perceived as one of the essential forces behind the decline of American society in later years. Also, since the Dream now ceased to be collective and became elitist, it can as well be declared dead.[91]

During the 1960s, the American Dream remained a key topic for those who endorsed the reigning garniture of politicians in Washington, D.C. and therefore continued promoting it as one of the fundamental fabled principles of truly democratic and free America as well as for those who voluntarily ended up in opposition to the notion as represented and advocated by the middle-class of the previous decade. The psychedelic counterculture that emerged around the mid-1960s and, by the turn of decade, evolved in a mass culture actually heavily drew on the common misrepresentation of the Dream and often contemplated about its questionable validity. Several distinguished works of art were created which criticized and/or ridiculed pursue of many Americans for what, to them, seemed as an artificially constructed and nonfunctional idea.

For example, the film *Easy Rider*, which has been widely regarded as one of the most accurate comments on the nature of the alternative culture through the eyes of its very protagonists, clearly portrays the attitude of such countercultural artistic personas toward the issue of the American Dream. The two main characters in the motion picture, Wyatt (played by Peter Fonda) and Billy (Dennis Hopper), are exactly what one would see as pure representatives of the contemporary hippie community as they combine "traditional patriotic symbols with emblems of loneliness, criminality and alienation – the American flag, cowboy decorations, long-hair and drugs."[92] As such, they pursue their own idea of the American dream; they desperately try to uncover it and get to its very core in order to understand and,

[91] Gross and Gross.
[92] Tim Dirks, review of *Easy Rider* (1969), directed by Dennis Hopper, filmsite.org, <http://www.filmsite.org/easy.html> 8 Nov 2014.

above all, experience it. However, as the movie continues, we realize that their image is, in fact, greatly blurred as they are able neither to cope with reality nor they seem to "have a sense of what liberation and freedom are."[93] This, among other things, confirms the theory of the Dream being a false and infeasible idea as it is, in reality, substituted by a lack of hope and heavy disillusion, which recurs not just in Hopper's cinematography but also in the attitude of the whole generation. In general, *Easy Rider* can be treated as an accurate and genuine representative of countercultural expression since it represents a bitter and disillusioned confession of a generation whose opinions and beliefs reshaped America.

Considered what has been already mentioned in the text above, it becomes more than apparent that when dealing with the phenomenon of the American Dream and its philosophical and ideological essence in the context of America of the 1960s and 1970s, we must not forget to include, in our analysis of the issue, the unique perception of the topic by the counterculture. Since Hunter S. Thompson emerged in the second half of the sixties as one of the prominent speakers of the disenchanted generation, it truly seems attractive to look on the phenomenon through his own eyes. In order to succeed in such a quest, we need to focus on a wide variety of his interests and, above all, on the most relevant issues of the time under the influence of which his own way of thinking about long-established American social standards and beliefs transformed considerably. Always considered a man of controversy with a fondness for breaking and denouncing contemporary taboos, Thompson's own view of the idea and problems that are closely associated with it provides us with the opportunity to see what such a phenomenon meant to one of the most original artistic minds of his time.

4.1 Thompson and the Psychedelic Culture

[93] Vincent Canby, review of *Easy Rider* (1969), directed by Dennis Hopper, *The New York Times*, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E0CE0D91538EF3BBC4D52DFB1668382679EDE> 8 Nov 2014.

Although Thompson has never been an integral member of any of the alternative groups or communities, the effects their philosophies and lifestyle had on his life and writing were immense. It could be said that he was merely a witness of the countercultural happenings, yet he was a well-informed one as he was able to penetrate its complex mysteries. Moreover, it was the journalistic profession that gave him the opportunity to meet important people and to get to the very core of any cultural, political or social event that managed to stir America powerfully enough to at least slightly alter some of its visible aspects. Eventually, he became a hero and icon for many hippies and other countercultural participants for he, at least during its early years, identified himself with and became a public advocate of some of the proclaimed values of the rebelling youth such as drug use and struggle against the official norms.

During the era of the Vietnam War escalating overseas, omnipresent was somewhat surreal atmosphere brought about by marijuana haze, psychedelic drugs, rock'n'roll, and the mighty sensation that something crucial was going on which might have projected itself to Thompson's literary style and topic selection but did not affect his worldview in general. As it is obvious from his articles and other literary works in which he looks into the problem of the American counterculture, Thompson certainly did not represent the idealistic perspective. For all those years he remained a harsh critic of the culture's commercialization and superficiality which, for him, seemed to be increasing very rapidly as did the amount of young people entering communes and hippie manifestations and starting with alternative lifestyles. Unlike Hell's Angels, whom he saw as a genuine subculture within a far more mass cultural movement,[94] the endeavor of many young Americans, who were leaving their homes and were aiming for San Francisco to share an apartment at the notorious Haight-Ashbury district with other hippies, was regarded by Thompson as something ultimately shallow and false.

[94] Torrey and Simonson.

In May 1967, Thompson published an article called "The "Hashbury" is the Capital of the Hippies" in the *Times Magazine* in which he comments on the situation in San Francisco, the intellectual and artistic center of the countercultural activity, just a few months before the famous Summer of Love.[95] In the text we see his view of those people who renounce any social and political activity which would help to improve conditions in the country and voluntarily become parts of such a movement only for pragmatic reasons and for unrestrained hedonism that the Haight-Ashbury environment provided.

Thompson does not disparage the original idea and aims of the hippie generation; he, on the contrary, clearly appreciates such efforts of the countercultural participants which would lead to certain concrete results in politics, culture, and society as a whole. For him, it was the year of 1965 in which the cultural revolution was still in its early existence and therefore was free of any shallowness since it did not yet attract so many people as in the following years and thus was able to preserve its original, pure and effective ideology of those at helm of the movement. During this early stage, the newly emerged subculture, which had partly transformed to its current form from the philosophy of social rebellion of the Beat Generation authors, was regarded as closely linked with the so-called New Left political movement the goals of which was to overthrow the "corrupted ones" from Washington, D.C. and to establish a far more rightful system based on society-wide reforms (e.g. narrowing the gap between social classes, promoting gay rights, gender equality, etc.), which would drastically transform and modernize the dominant kind of society.[96] For Thompson, only such a real political effort to actually change what he saw as a completely ossified and prejudiced system would justify the very existence and functioning of the countercultural movement as existing in San Francisco, Berkeley, and other contemporary academic, cultural, and political

[95] Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt*.
[96] John Campbell McMillian and Paul Buhle eds., *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

centers. What was originally a vision of change presented by scholars and intellectuals, transformed over the two years into more or less a lay perception of the phenomenon of a revolution not for the sake of certain collective sociopolitical improvement but for the sake of individual delight, both physical and psychological.[97]

By 1967, as the countercultural action relocated from the area of Berkeley and other intellectual centers of the West Coast to the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, it was already clear that the original perception of change had altered significantly as it left the area of intellectual discussion and, under the powerful influence of American popular culture, moved to a far more material sphere. In the article, Hunter S. Thompson comments on this event through the eyes of a progressive artist and it is more than evident that what recurs in his portrayal are feelings of disappointment and disillusion over the perishing of once a genuine idea of improvement. He openly states that "there is not much doubt that Berkeley has gone through a revolution of some kind, but the end result is not exactly what the original leaders had in mind. Many one-time activists have forsaken politics entirely and turned to drugs."[98]

As we continue reading, the author makes us realize that this rather recently acquired shallowness of the subculture and its lack of self-reliance is what makes him not able to identify himself with its fundamental ideas. Associated with this is the communal worshipping of drugs and psychedelic experience that seems to concern Thompson as well since they are often misused for selfish reasons and he blames them for leading the representatives of originally pure social struggle for improvement astray. This could be seen, considered Thompson's wild lifestyle, as a hypocritical stance, yet he proves in his later texts that he really aims to explore what is wrong with the community he has been discontent with

[97] Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt*.
[98] Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt,* 386.

and desperately strives for resolving both moral and political crises of the seemingly corrupted country.

In order to examine the article in its complexity, we must not omit Thompson's personal view on the artistic nature of the countercultural happening in Haight-Ashbury. In one part of the published text he focuses on the comparison of the artistic merit of the Beat Generation, the center of which resided in the San Franciscan district of North Beach, and the Haight-Ashbury movement. The result is highly characteristic of Thompson as he argues that the hippies, who were predominantly children of the 1940s, have basically failed in understanding and utilizing the profound ideas and vision of the beatniks, who were preaching about social and cultural transformation in the early 1950s already. What more, most of the "Hasbury" hippies openly rejected philosophy of their 1950s predecessors, whom they saw as ultimately negative in their approach to life and to metaphysical problems. That is why they, among other things, opposed politics which was seen as "just another game"[99] forcing people to act against their own will and preferred the power of nature and pacifism instead.

Thompson also argues in his comparison of the Beats with the hippies that for such Beat Generation authors as Allen Ginsberg, San Francisco represented only "a stop on the big circuit."[100] They searched for more sources of experience and inspiration, which could only be achieved by visiting all possible kinds of world's cultural centers – as the author states, "the senior beats had a pretty good idea what was going on in the world; they read newspapers, traveled constantly and had friends all over the globe."[101] The hippie generation, on the other hand, stayed inside one cultural center and in a way enclosed itself within the Bay Area which, according to Thompson, also seems to be one of the reasons it eventually failed to emerge as an intellectually significant cultural movement.

[99] Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt,* 387.
[100] Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt,* 386.
[101] Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt,* 386.

Besides helping the reader to imagine what it actually looked like in the Haight-Ashbury district at the height of the countercultural era, the article also manages to provide us with a scrutiny of author's own way of thinking about the subject and helps to uncover his contemporary worldview. In the context of the 1960s American counterculture, the article proves that Hunter S. Thompson must not be seen as a completely devoted participant within its events and actions. More precisely, he can be described as a semi-hippie, who adheres to at least some features of the hippie lifestyle (e.g. unlimited drug use), however does not identify with its later ideology and, what more, harshly rejects their lack of interest in politics which he, on the other hand, sees as corrupted but not irretrievable. Such inactivity and isolation apparent among the Haight-Hashbury's inhabitants could only lead to succumbing to commercialism and world-wide publicity which always destroys what has been valuable.[102]

In general, the article can be treated as one of the most distinctive pieces of Thompson's writing in which the author directly turns toward the problem of the hippie culture and its ideological basis. In his subsequent works, he only does report on specific events within the subculture and carefully and intentionally keeps himself intellectually separated from it.

4.1.1 Contemporary Music as a Means of Countercultural Expression

When examining Thompson's attitude toward the American counterculture, another issue of seemingly minor importance emerges which, on the contrary, in the context of the time represents a very significant cultural phenomenon – popular music. Perhaps no other alternative movement that has existed in the Western civilization of the 20th century has put such emphasis on expressing the culture's ideas via lyrics of popular rock and folk songs.

[102] Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt*.

From this perspective, the 1960s were truly a groundbreaking decade since a large quantity of young musicians emerged and began to openly comment on various contemporary American phenomena, among which were cruelties of the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the rise and spread of the psychedelic drugs among public. Numerous singers-songwriters and rock musicians that attract wide publicity since the early 1960s have remained permanent members of American music scene and their ideas and visions presented to their audience via their lyrics often go beyond the borders of art and directly address real problems and phenomena. Artists such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Jim Morrison of the Doors and even the Beatles put an end to shallowness and artificiality of popular songs and focused on educating and stimulating the audience's minds and thus aimed to make their listeners more meditative and, above all, socially active.

For Thompson, music always played a fundamental role in his texts as it inspired him during the writing process and was utilized in his writing in order to help to portray the overall mood of the given time and place. As the author himself puts it in *Kingdom of Fear*: "Music has always been a matter of energy to me, a question of Fuel. Sentimental people call it Inspiration, but what they really mean is Fuel."[103] What more, he regards contemporary 1960s rock 'n' roll music as valuable form of an artistic expression as a piece of any first-rate contemporary literature and argues that "music is the New Literature, that Dylan is the 1960s answer to Hemingway."[104] This view of Bob Dylan was not at all exceptional as Thompson was not alone in seeing in the young folk singer "the purest, most intelligent voice of our time."[105] It was particularly the rebellious folk anthem of the 1960s called "Mr. Tambourine Man" that served him as a source of inspiration and artistic energy for the rest of his life, that

[103] Thompson, *Kingdom of Fear*, 342.
[104] Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America: The Brutal Odyssey of an Outlaw Journalist 1968 – 1976* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001) 343.
[105] Torrey and Simonson, 65.

was mentioned in the dedication in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and that was even played during his funeral.[106]

In his work, both as a freelance writer and later a reporter for *Rolling Stone*, Thompson professionally dealt with the phenomenon of American popular music and examined its role within the ongoing countercultural happening. In his letters and personal essays from the late 1960s he once again mentions Bob Dylan as he analyzes his position and importance for the birth and immense grow of the alternative culture. For him, Dylan's songs represent, in the context of the era, the most genuine and original ones as they possess almost every idea crucial for the birth of the movement itself. Best described is Thompson's devotion to Dylan's music and philosophy of resistance against the values of elders in an essay collected in *Fear and Loathing in America*:

> Bob Dylan was the original hippy, and anyone curious about the style and tone of the "younger generation's" thinking in the early 1960s has only to play his albums in chronological order. They move from folk-whimsy to civil rights marches and the Mississippi summer protests of 1963 and '64. Then … Dylan switched from the hard commitments of social realism to the more abstract "realities" of neo-protest and disengagement. His style became one of eloquent despair and personal anarchism. His lyrics became increasingly drug-oriented, with double-entendres and dual meanings that were more and more obvious…[107]

Thompson explicitly confesses his admiration to the folk singer that was able, in many ways, to actually transform words of his lyrics into actions and subsequently became an icon of the revolutionary progressive efforts of the time. As Thompson continues, "any culture – and especially any sub-culture – can be at least tentatively defined by its heroes … and of all the hippy heroes, Bob Dylan was first and foremost."[108] The author obviously identify with alienation of a young "angry" man represented here by the transformation of a common boy

[106] McKeen.
[107] Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*, 5-6.
[108] Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*, 6.

named Robert Zimmerman from Duluth, Minnesota, to a defiant and sophisticated poet and voice of his generation called Bob Dylan.

However, it was not exclusively the all-pervading artistic persona of Dylan that was reflected in Thompson's own literary pieces. For example, in his fundamental novel, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, the reader witnesses the omnipresence of several noted compositions that helped to shape the so-called San Francisco sound among which Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" emerges as perhaps the most characteristic one as it evokes the already gone magical psychedelic environment of the Matrix music club, a venue which, together will the Fillmore Auditorium, best represented the acid sound of rock music of the second half of the decade. Although it appears in the novel to be a contemporary piece of music, it is evident that it is now, in 1971, only a remnant of the psychedelic years and that both main characters of *Fear and Loathing*, who revel in listening the whole *Surrealistic Pillow* album, are disillusioned outsiders in a world that has changed immensely over the course of just a few years. The presence and importance of the "White Rabbit" song in the novel, as well as Thompson's frequently witnessed focus on contemporary popular music, only adds to the fact that, for him, this art form truly stands for and helps to recall the long gone era and its already outmoded values.

4.2 Thompson's Politics of Unrestrained Individualism in the Context of the Era

If we deal with Hunter S. Thompson and his role and intellectual position within the movement of the 1960s, we must not forget that closely associated with his thorough scrutiny of the hippies, respectively its role in the American sociocultural context, is his attitude toward the current condition of politics. He treats the topic both in abstract terms, as he was reflecting upon politics as perhaps the most important of social phenomena of the

(post)modern civilization, and in concrete terms since he also focused on being a commentator on contemporary American politics and its role in some of the crucial events of the time. Moreover, politics also played an important role when working with the recurrent theme of the American Dream and thus must be regarded, at least subtextually, as omnipresent in Thompson's both fictional and non-fictional writing.

From the political perspective, Thompson was not, of course, a politician or political activist, at least not in the common sense of the word. In a specific way, he can be surely considered an anti-establishment figure denying government's politics and what he saw as restriction of one's personal liberty. He publicly supported decriminalizing drug possession and drug use, yet he believed in the ability of politicians to actually improve social conditions in the country. In order to achieve that, a person aiming to really change things needs to voluntarily break free from such kind of politics that is described by Thompson as "the art of controlling your environment."[109] This "art" may be destroyed by starting to practice it and by an individual effort of all human beings to actually be the ones who create the environment in compliance with their wishes and needs in order to control it unlimitedly.[110]

Certain scholars even argue that Thompson's view and characteristic treatment of the theme of politics can actually be related to the ideas of two renowned representatives of American Transcendentalist movement – Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau – the philosophy of whom was certainly reflected in the intellectual minds of protest of the 1950s and 1960s. He drew inspiration particularly from Thoreau's idea of living in solitude in order to achieve harmony with nature. For Thompson, however, this represented pretty much an overly idealistic sort of image to follow. What he eventually took from Thoreau's original intention was the idea to live separately from the rest of the society and thus controlling the

[109] Hunter S. Thompson, *Kingdom of* Fear, 17.
[110] Hunter S. Thompson, *Ancient Gonzo Wisdom: Interviews with Hunter S. Thompson*, ed. Anita Thompson (London: Picador, 2010).

environment and creating a place of freedom on his own. This would greatly help him with maintaining free will and nonconformist attitude for which he became famous.

Such modern version of "Walden" was a place called Owl Farm in Woody Creek, Colorado, where he settled as early as in 1967 and where he lived and worked from there on.[111] The farm gave him enough privacy to "transact some private business with the fewest obstacles"[112] and thus, with a little exaggeration and when we omit Thompson's taste for drugs and alcohol, made him sort of a bizarre contemporary embodiment of Thoreau and his philosophy. Where the latter tries to achieve harmony with nature through work and contemplations, the former pursues a different goal as he takes large doses of drugs in order to open Huxleyan doors of consciousness in a world that he sees as full of pretense and middle-class superficiality. However, his strong belief that living in solitude is an extremely important prerequisite in one's individual and unrestricted intellectual flourishing endured until the end of his life.[113]

Term that would best describe his political personality is individualism, which is also documented throughout his oeuvre. He was a very watchful observer regarding his surrounding and influences that prevailed around him. William Stephenson states that Thompson "championed the individual against the system … [was] staunchly anti-Republican and loosely pro-Democrat … [and] preferred a sceptical, non-aligned stance that allowed free thought."[114] He, at least partly, identified himself with the view of politics as promoted by some of the prominent speakers of the counterculture, which was what Theodore Roszak describes in his ground-breaking study *The Making of a Counterculture* as "the lively

[111] McKeen.
[112] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (Hayes Barton Press, 2008) 13.
[113] Stephenson.
[114] Stephenson, 11.

consciousness of men and women as they are in their vital daily reality."[115] This proves both Thompson's and counterculture's emphasis on free will and importance of behaving as a completely independent creature liable only to his/her own conscience.

Thompson always represented a highly unique set of views which conformed neither American major political parties. The only time Thompson actively became involved in the political campaigning was when he acted as a campaign manager for Aspen's mayor candidate Joe Edwards in 1969 and himself ran for Sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado the very next year.[116] It was for the first and last time that Thompson got actively involved in politics and, ironically enough, he almost succeeded in his rare attempt ever to become a community's official.

The story and circumstances of Hunter S. Thompson's pursue of the Sheriff office in the Rocky Mountains is rather an exciting one since it enables us to see and assess whether his highly specific political beliefs actually possessed any value, whether they could have been functional when put into practice, and what was their position within the counterculture's own perception of politics. From Thompson's perspective, this was of course seen as an experiment the original purpose of which was to mock the serious and traditional way of functioning by confronting it directly with almost grotesque countercultural bizarreness and spontaneity represented by the author himself. He named this "experiment" of his, with a bit of his characteristic sense of exaggeration, "The Battle of Aspen" and even wrote an eponymous article for *Rolling Stone*.[117]

In the text, which focuses on Joe Edward's candidacy for Aspen's mayor as well as the author's pursue of the Sheriff office in Pitkin County, Thompson highlights the term "freak

[115] Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 54.
[116] McKeen.
[117] McKeen.

power" which embodied this typically 1960s intransigence and non-conformism resisting the pressure made by the dominating society. In the end, although Edwards' campaign did not end up as successful, it aroused a positive response among a wide variety of voters. This encouraged Thompson in his adopting the platform and utilizing its principles when running for the Sheriff in 1970. As it is evident from the article, the author is not at all skeptic in his endeavor to withstand the rules and norms made by the despised conformists – on the contrary, he becomes aware of the fact that in the United States there clearly are millions of malcontent who could identify themselves with the seemingly preposterous, yet a platform able to provide them with alternatives to what can be regarded as a mainstream sort of American lifestyle.[118] However, typically enough for Thompson, he was looking for improvements of his political program in order to appear at least partially realizable and functional – his goal was to create a better organized campaign which combined elements of radicalism, controversy, and frivolity.[119] Among six fundamental points of his platform were such ideas as general prohibition of motor vehicles, free drugs for all citizens, or breaking free from the commercial basis of the city of Aspen by renaming it to "Fat City" and thus making it resistible to any commercial interest imaginable. Moreover, when already running his campaign, he shaved his head bald and called the shortly trimmed Republican candidate his "long-haired opponent,"[120] which also proves his mocking attitude toward the affected seriousness of the contemporary politics.

Although his effort did not result in him becoming a county official, the whole experience was very beneficial as it provided him with the possibility to verify and publicly formulate his political views and at the same time enabled him to discover how politics works in practice. Via the means of making his program real, he thought he would finally realize, or

[118] Hunter S. Thompson, „The Battle of Aspen," *Rolling Stone*, 5 (1970).
[119] Stephenson.
[120] David Wood, "Hunter S. Thompson Shrine One of Two Documented," *The Aspen Times*, 29 Nov 2011 <http://www.aspentimes.com/article/20111129/NEWS/111129983> 29 Nov 2014.

helped to realize, an American utopian community according to his own image and individual perception of the American Dream. The poster supporting Thompson's run for the Sheriff created by Tom Benton on which there is a six-fingered hand holding a peyote button remained from there on a distinctive symbol of the author as well as of his writing and gonzo journalism he created and even today remains the most significant representative of.[121]

4.3 Experiencing the End of the Counterculture in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

By autumn 1971, when his ground-breaking novel hit the stands, Thompson had already been enjoying considerable success as an established American journalist and commentator on various social and political events. Therefore, from this point of view, his new book, which he named *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*, was not a piece of writing which would help him significantly to engage the audience's attention. Contrarily, he managed, through the medium of fiction, to achieve what was inevitable – to create a text which would eventually embrace the whole wide range of his interests and experiences, which he had gone through during his early years as still a naïve and idealistic young man. Therefore, the novel is a literary synthesis as it incorporates within itself Thompson's political beliefs and individualist approach to such matters, his personal notion of the already languishing counterculture, individual portrayal of the psychedelic experience, and, above all, his thorough and weirdly poetic scrutiny of the nature of the American Dream. Moreover, it can be seen as Thompson's own subconscious literary response to Kerouac's *On the Road*, in which the legendary beatnik focuses on self-discovery and treats the theme of the American Dream through calling for "a reconsideration

[121] Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt*.

of values and a reinvigoration of spirit."[122] On the other hand, the author of *Fear and Loathing* prefers to imagine a different sort of vision which contains "the American Dream … that embraces the absurdity, alienation, and despair of modern culture and revels in it."[123]

In the early months of 1971 Thompson had already had in mind a subject matter which, in the end, proved to be his lifelong obsession – this was the so-called "Death of the American Dream," which he mentions in several of his letters in 1968 already.[124] However, his interest in examining the decline of the phenomenon was fully aroused three years later, when, together with his friend-attorney Oscar Zeta Acosta, he took two trips to Las Vegas, Nevada. It was particularly the decadence and omnipresent superficial brilliance of the place which made him remember his earlier contemplation about the nature of the widely followed national ethos. A place such as Las Vegas, which is full of hedonism, decadence, pretense and wild and unrestrained life, seemed to be a perfect environment for him to try to analyze how such unimaginably commercial machinery works and what it represents. Moreover, from the point of view of one of its victims-customers, he seems to be driven by the spontaneity of passion as he manages to investigate and uncover the ideological and immoral foundations of modern Mecca of modern consumerist society. The author's original aim is therefore to transmit, through his literary text, the feeling and mood of the time and place, of "the brutish realities of this foul year of Our Lord, 1971."[125]

In the novel, it is apparent that Thompson was inspired by the tradition of roman á clef in which fiction overlaps with real events and people and is defined in *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* as "a novel that has the extraliterary interest of portraying

[122] Luther Riedel, "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream," *Encyclopedia of Beat Literature* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007) 97.
[123] Riedel, 97.
[124] Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*.
[125] Hunter S. Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt*, 544.

identifiable, sometimes real people more or less thinly disguised as fictional characters."[126] Therefore, when we follow the book's storyline, we meet characters named Raoul Duke, who, besides Paul and Wellburn Kemp, functions as Thompson's current alter-ego, and Dr. Gonzo, allegedly a Samoan attorney and the closest associate of the main character the name of whom is clearly derived from the author's aforementioned specific journalistic genre developed only a while before the publication of *Fear and Loathing*. Both doppelgangers of their living models, Duke and Gonzo enter the real world of Las Vegas, the world's largest casino, and do not hesitate to take all sorts of psychedelic drugs in order to best experience its hectic and lively atmosphere and at the same time to be able to get over the city's glittering exterior, to look through its surface and get to its corrupt core. At the same time, they are both incarnations of dreams and hopes of the previous decade and as such, although they are both autobiographical, are presented as caricatures of the 1960s countercultural participants. Still, Thompson portrays Duke as "no modernist holy fool … [he is instead] privileged with profound insight into a deeper truth beyond the superficial perceptions of the well-adjusted and conventional."[127]

For Thompson, whose personality is embodied in the novel's main protagonist, it is necessary to deconstruct the visible reality through the means of psychedelic experience – hence the necessary presence of mind altering drugs on almost every page of the book. Although drug usage could appear as only an auxiliary element of the narrative serving merely as useful means of enhancing the humorous, yet strangely disturbing mood within the book, their role must be taken far more seriously and should be definitely seen as crucial when attempting to interpret Thompson's novel. Not only psychedelic visions of both main protagonists drive the flow of the narrative forward, but manage to constantly remind us of

[126] *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1995) 962.
[127] Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) 93.

the contemporary environment and of counterculture's declining activity and ultimate loss of influence on intellects of the majority of alternative-thinking Americans.

When examining the narrative, our thinking about the role of psychedelic drugs within the text consequently leads us to analyzing the contemporary situation of the counterculture as its ideas and products often recur throughout the story and accompany Duke's and Gonzo's search for either presence or absence of the American Dream. Actually, it is the very setting of this archetypal Thompsonian search for America's beloved ethos that signifies the real condition of the society. Las Vegas itself is a sort of a drug induced vision of neon lights, cocaine, alcohol and tobacco haze and still represents the official and admired. By this it contrasts with genuine, yet scorned countercultural lifestyle and values that cannot resist to pressure from contemporary mainstream, hypocritically conservative attitude to human existence. It is Marianne DeKoven, who in her study called *Utopia Limited* explores Thompson's novel in relation to the 1960s counterculture:

> Hunter Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is, self-consciously, and by critical consensus, an epitaph for the sixties … Thompson makes Las Vegas the graveyard of the sixties. Las Vegas begins in the book as the antithesis of all that the sixties counterculture stands for, and this repudiation of Las Vegas – the primary meaning of "fear and loathing in" – persists in Thompson's overt narrative accounts of Vegas culture. Thompson's most apparent, overt narrative self-positioning is in alignment with a countercultural, anti-Vegas, sixties sensibility, ethos, and aesthetic.[128]

Moreover, there are numerous other scholars who, as well as the author himself, see the main protagonists' journey to Nevada's largest city as sudden and definitive end of the previous decade's idealism. After all, they leave San Francisco, until then the center of the flower power thought, and aim for American gambling capital, which, for them, possesses "a hallucinogenic potency that is definitely stronger than any drug Timothy Leary might

[128] DeKoven, 86.

concoct."[129] We learn that even from Raoul Duke himself as he explicitly presents his impressions of Vegas' reality as "too twisted."[130]

The setting of the novel proves to be very powerful as it presents us the contrast of two totally opposite environments as well as two different notions of the American Dream. Through Thompson's characteristic portrayal of Las Vegas, we learn that there is now no chance of dreaming about any possible kind of a utopia which would be workable and draw upon the principles of the Dream idea as it was imagined in the years when the countercultural activity reached its peak. Highly noticeable in the novel is the shift from the idealistic utopian visions of the Summer of Love era to the pessimistic concept of flawed and opportunistic world embodied in the image of Las Vegas. Thus, the Nevadan city acts as a tomb of the previous decade's idealism and at the same time as a newly erected temple of the 1970s materialist capitalism, the blinding glare and colorful gambling machines of which clearly represent "a coarse, capitalist analogue to tripping."[131] However, in comparison with LSD and aura which surrounds it, gambling itself now emerges as a nation-wide bewildering experience promoted even by the officials because gamblers visiting Las Vegas do not threaten social and cultural stability in America as hippies did by their way of life but, on the contrary, they act as participants of what could be described as a capitalist propaganda of wealth and overall contentment. This can be witnessed in Thompson's text as we read about "a town full of bedrock crazies, [where] nobody even *notices* an acid freak."[132] From this point of view, the two decades do not differ from each other as each era had its "freaks" and "weirdos"; what only matters is on which side are they on – the establishment or anti-establishment one. For several critics, the City of Las Vegas, clearly a representative of the

[129] Bruce Bégout, *Zeropolis: The Experience of Las Vegas* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003) 52.
[130] Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1998) 47.
[131] Stephenson, 53.
[132] Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, 24.

1970s values, possesses this "brash vulgarity [which] stands metonymically for the consumerism of America as a whole, which drives its citizens into a cycle of rapidly alternating ecstasy and corruption, and thereby makes them in some ways indistinguishable from LSD users."[133]

4.4 The Role of Drugs in Relation to the Counterculture and the American Dream

While searching for the American Dream, Thompson simultaneously uncovers features of America in the early seventies that, from the point of view of the sixties, can certainly be regarded as dystopian. Omnipresent are feelings of paranoia, madness, injustice and social stiffness which are all brought about by the excessive use of drugs within the hippies. In Thompson's work, we feel that through taking all sorts of psychedelic drugs we buy a one-way ticket "to a state of unbridled apprehensiveness."[134] It is actually here where Thompson's approach to writing about drug experience is almost identical with what, for example, Bob Dylan, the author's countercultural hero and favorite singer-songwriter, expresses through his music lyrics.[135] Although hidden behind an attractive curtain of motley colors and dreamlike shapes, the psychedelic experience and its effect on a person's mind is really the ultimate key which opens the door toward another perception of reality – this time a far more paranoid and overcautious view of our world. By writing about hallucinogens and the effects they usually bring, Thompson also makes, in *Fear and Loathing*, an unambiguous statement against another countercultural icon and, for many young hippies, a psychedelic prophet of an expansion of consciousness and thus a better and unbridled life in the future – Dr. Timothy Leary – as well as against the whole 1960s perception of drug taking. In the

[133] Stephenson, 53.
[134] Mike Marqusee, *Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005) 198.
[135] Marqusee.

book, it is evident from the author's words that the idealism surrounding psychedelic experience as promoted by Leary or Ginsberg in the second half of the 1960s has no place in the harsh reality of the following decade. For the author, the 1970s are all about survival; they are no more a decade for creating a utopia, but more precisely a most appropriate time to fight the dystopia gradually emerging in America ever since Nixon's election to the White House in 1968.[136] In the novel, he addresses this problem directly as he writes:

> [Timothy Leary] crashed around America selling "consciousness expansion" without ever giving a thought to the grim meat-hook realities that were lying in wait for all the people who took him too seriously … No doubt they all Got What Was Coming To Them. [*sic*] All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit.[137]

According to Thompson, it is obviously necessary, in the early 1970s, to leave behind all the false hopes of the previous decade and to start to focus more on our existing selves which function in reality and thus possess at least some power to achieve anything really valuable and worth pursuing. Although such a coming to terms with our identities is often a difficult and unpleasant action to undertake, the nature of the decade makes it a prerequisite of an adequate and justifiable life. Here, we need to return a few years back to the time the author was associated with the Hell's Angels and Ken Kesey's La Honda settlement since it is particularly the approach of the gang of bikers and the psychedelic troupe to the use of LSD that seems best to Thompson himself. In *Gonzo Republic*, William Stephenson describes the writer's notion of the psychedelic experience, or rather the role it should occupy within the society as well as its relation to the counterculture and the American Dream concept:

> Thompson distances himself from the self-conscious rationalizing of the psychedelic experience. By celebrating the approaches of the Angels and the Pranksters to LSD, he positions them in the tradition of those frontier Americans who were doers, not thinkers. The

[136] Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.
[137] Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, 178.

> La Honda trippers were carving out a new chemical frontier in a world when the literal one had vanished, and thus aspiring to a contemporary form of the American Dream of self-realization in a social order sufficiently mobile and permissive to make it possible: however, both the Angels and the Pranksters were typical of the counterculture in that they would never realize the Dream in any sustainable way.[138]

Besides being an important commentary on the specific role of psychedelics throughout recent years, the text is also focused on the current situation in American society which is thoroughly examined by the author – Thompson intentionally avoids "the idealistic rhetoric of what the American Dream is supposed to be"[139] and concentrates more on exploring "the real American obsessions with violence, drugs, sex, and commercialism."[140] As a result, in such a world, there is no place for an independent individual whose idealistic effort to pursue the Dream would eventually come true one day. Moreover, when seeing the novel as a work of dystopia, we must not omit the fact that throughout the book "the id reigns supreme."[141] In the end, according to Luther Riedel, "to be realized most fully, the individual must take self-indulgent egoism to its furthest limits."[142] America of the 1970s thus seems to completely leave behind all the efforts and dreams of the previous decade and to focus more on what is regarded as far more beneficial and easily attainable – entertainment and capital. As depicted by Thompson in *Fear and Loathing*, such a situation was achieved by nothing more than by the authorities' repression of what used to be free thought – for the participants of the happening of the 1960s, including Hunter S. Thompson, a deed worth condemning.

4.5 Postmodern Perspectives on the Counterculture's Decline: Thompson and His Contemporaries

[138] Stephenson, 66.
[139] Riedel, 97.
[140] Riedel, 97.
[141] Riedel, 97.
[142] Riedel, 97.

What also arises in the process of examining Thompson's best known literary work is the role and influence of postmodernism, respectively what perspective does he, as a writer utilizing certain postmodernist techniques, maintain toward the counterculture, its values and gradual decline at the turn of the sixth and seventh decade of the 20th century. Throughout the whole text of *Fear and Loathing*, the author basically utilizes what is nothing more than the classical genre of an epic. However, he manages to modify it according to his own, to add the characteristic Thompsonian feeling of the bizarre and grotesque, and to present what, with a bit of exaggeration, could be seen as a noble quest of uncovering the true nature of certain mysterious phenomena. The result is therefore a piece of work where the man of letters skillfully intertwines two basic levels – that of reality and that of fiction – via the means of surrealist imagery. Also, the witnessed (or allegedly witnessed) events are presented by Thompson as "ostensibly an exploratory journey through the mind of the author," who willingly searches "for … transcendental reality that reaches beyond the "objective" and offers a perspective glimpse of the Real."[143]

It is James N. Stull, a noted literary critic, who identifies *Fear and Loathing* with Thompson's apparent postmodern identity crisis as he observes certain recurrent patterns within Thompson's personality and way of thinking. According to him, the author's personal and professional lives are both "ritual re-enactment[s] of deviant behavior."[144] This, for him, seems closely associated with the fact that Thompson was fundamentally against any establishment – both official and unofficial – and it is from there his apparent dislike of any institutionalized values originates from. Now, at the beginning of the 1970s, he therefore finds himself in a position of a total outlaw and recluse whose intellectual side actually needs to

[143] Charles C. Rainey, "Challenging the Social Imaginary with Fear and Loathing, with Decadence and Depravity," 5 Jan 2002 < http://www.raineydevine.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Hunter-S.-Thompson-Challenging-the-Social-Imaginary-with-Decadence-and-Deprevity.pdf> 1 Dec 2014, 38.
[144] James N. Stull, "Hunter S. Thompson: A Ritual Reenactment of Deviant Behavior," *Connecticut Review* 13.1 (1991), 87.

remain in opposition to all collective set of values he encounters in order to remain productive and, above all, sane. The critic clearly confirms this as he writes that "Thompson is all too willing to identify himself in opposition to virtually any cultural norm."[145] As a result, the author "finds himself inextricably caught up in a system he wishes to criticize and separate himself from."[146] It is apparent that the system mentioned by Stull does not relate exclusively to government but also to the alternative psychedelic movement which shaped the 1960s California culturally, socially, and politically. It is therefore no wonder that Thompson, as an artistic personality, often found inspiration and even partly identified himself with certain community's principles until the very moment they became pursued by a larger mass of people. Still, according to Charles C. Rainey, Hunter S. Thompson carried "the representative symbols of these countercultural sects, and these symbols eventually provide the foundation for his literary persona."[147]

Postmodern elements are not present solely in the author's personality but can be observed throughout his style and employment of specific techniques and approaches. For example, the very fact that the narrator, who is an unreliable narrator who, in fact, rejects objectivity on principle, insists, on the contrary, on bias, and prefers "subjectivity of politics/politics of subjectivity,"[148] signifies that the final outcome of the author's effort is certainly closer to the sobering of the 1970s than to the idealized 1960s. Moreover, the era the text emerged from was itself utterly postmodern, denying the rather modernist utopian legacy of the 1960s which shifted, over the few years, into "egalitarian postmodern commercial

[145] Stull, 88.
[146] Stull, 97.
[147] Rainey, 40-41.
[148] DeKoven, 91.

culture … rather than to modernity's agenda of anticapitalist social and cultural transformation."[149]

In general, *Fear and Loathing* represents a postmodern epic – it is a portrait of the previous epoch which is accurate as it absorbs all the significant influences of the early 1970s and at the same time blurred as it looks back to what was at the time of its creation already a long gone era of false hopes. However, a phenomenon was born since what emerged was a novel which was tremendously ironic and which mocked the newly established set of values as well as the outdated ideals of the hippie generation. Moreover, it managed to uncover the actual situation of the world after the wide sociocultural stir which had, in the previous years, changed the face of the Western world. What is presented there is Thompson's characteristic depiction of what Jean Baudrillard would call a world of hyperreality, where Las Vegas acts as a genuine evidence of where the postmodern society's values lie. Also, the book from "an era when religion (together with art and ideology) has failed"[150] manages, to an extent, to provide its readers with satisfactory answers and to remind them of the beliefs and ideals from what was then already a utopian past.

4.5.1 American Counterculture in Thomas Pynchon's Writing

Hunter S. Thompson's portrayal of the death of the countercultural dreams and visions in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as well as in some of his other writings is without any question a remarkable insight into one of America's most vivid and influential eras of the 20th century. Since Thompson's gonzo journalism is now widely regarded as a genre of postmodern writing at its best, what seems logical is a comparison of his own views of the

[149] DeKoven, 92.
[150] Darryl V. Caterine, "Terry Gilliam," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Film*, ed. Eric Michael Mazur (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011) 197.

situation in America at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s with those of some of his literary contemporaries and postmodernists themselves, who also occupied certain stance toward the ideology of the counterculture and who, at the same time, were not direct participants within its events. Among those authors, in the writing of whom the theme of counterculture and its gradual decay commonly recurs, are, above all, such noted men of letters as Thomas Pynchon, Tom Robbins, and Don DeLillo. They all managed, each in his specific literary manner, to employ as fundamental elements of some of their texts the nature and current position of the values created and promoted by the people who were either beatniks or hippies. Also, they all were aware of the fact that the times had changed rapidly over the years and that such a transition from idealism to pragmatic materialism brought about disillusion and inability of many young and hoping people to identify themselves with what emerged as a completely opposite kind of society. The ultimate result of this sociocultural shift was often paranoia and hopelessness which all can be found in the books of all four authors mentioned.

The first of them, Thomas Pynchon, is now globally considered a master of postmodern literature and at the same time as a man whose personality as well as writing is veiled in mystery. Nevertheless, his prose is unbelievably complex as he manages to employ in his texts various sorts of influences and references. According to Andrew Dickson's examination of Pynchon's work, he frequently "presents us with a world which is strangely familiar, and yet there is a willful disjunction between what we know, or believe to know, and what is possible to know."[151] Therefore, his characters, no matter who they seem to be, are often trapped within the narrative; they are unable to escape whichever force threatens them and, at the same time, need to cope with a wide variety of problems that stem out of such a situation. However, such an endeavor often ends up as forlorn and the emerged problems as unsolvable. Here, what follows is the presence of conspiracy which is typical of Pynchon and

[151] Andrew Dickson, *Beyond the Zero: Thomas Pynchon and the Postmodern Scene* (Fort Collins: Colorado State University, 1997) 6.

which recurs throughout his oeuvre and acts as perhaps the most significant of his themes as it is closely associated with the feelings of paranoia originating in the late 1960s.

In 1966 already, Pynchon publishes his first prose to gain general acclaim – *The Crying of Lot 49*. The novella introduces the reader to the first and perhaps the best known of Pynchon's apparent conspiracies – the long and worldwide struggle between two mail companies, Thurn and Taxis and the Tristero (the former really existing, the latter being Pynchon's invention) – which is followed through the character of Oedipa Maas. Oedipa's adventure is set in California, in the Bay Area as well as in Los Angeles, which makes the book partly a documentary on the cultural happening of the time. She is obsessed with uncovering the ostensible conspiracy and during her investigation she meets all sorts of eccentric characters, through which Pynchon often presents his readership a wide variety of cultural references related to certain cultural phenomena of the time and thus introducing the reader to the era's zeitgeist. For example, Pynchon employs in the text a rock band called the Paranoids, whose members resemble the real Beatles and are avid marijuana smokers as well – this implies that they represent the blending of popular and alternative psychedelic cultures of the time.

The name of the band clearly symbolizes paranoia – a state of mind which recurs in most Pynchon's texts and can also be clearly observed in Thompson's own accounts on the counterculture from the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. For both authors, such sense of incredulity that fundamentally bounds one's judgment and throws an individual into the void of fear, confusion and blurred perception of our world must be closely associated with the contemporary counterculture, especially with those who used to revel in psychedelic experience. That is why we so often follow disillusioned characters that are unwilling to completely abandon some of the crucial aspects of the 1960s lifestyle and utopian thoughts and therefore are unable to deal with the harsh reality of the post-countercultural era which

focuses more on an individual's material need than on idealistic communal principles promoted in the previous decade.

In the work of Hunter S. Thompson, Raoul Duke is such a character and so is Dr. Gonzo, whereas in the 1965 Pynchon's novel the disillusion is not present within a single character. He rather employs it within the whole narrative and is truly ubiquitous as we follow Oedipa's investigation. As she uncovers what she believes to be a conspiracy, we become aware of the gradually increasing sense of paranoia and anxiety that, for Pynchon, seem to be necessary elements of the alleged plot. Also, this conspiracy, no matter whether artificially constructed or not, leads us to the ultimate realization of the fact that any being perceptive enough cannot escape the system and power of this world's functioning, which is actually an idea close to the counterculture as well. Even Christopher Gair argues that it is *The Crying of Lot 49* in particular that articulates "a sense … of alienation amidst abundance in a world where it is ever harder to locate the centres of oppressive control."[152] It is both Pynchon and Thompson, the former being perhaps far more explicit about it than the latter, who share this vision of one's hopelessness when facing the state apparatus as well as the everyday reality of the era itself. The lifestyle practiced in California of the time, which is superficial and pretentious for Thompson, is altogether banal and needs to have an adequate alternative that, in the book, could be represented by the Tristero organization, the existence of which is, however, doubtful. Oedipa Mass herself tries to reflect on the problem as she, at the end of the novel, says:

> Either you have stumbled indeed, without the aid of LSD or other indole alkaloids, onto a secret of richness and concealed density of dream; onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system; maybe even onto a

[152] Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2007) 143.

> real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie.[153]

Although neither Oedipa nor the readership succeeds in finding out whether the Tristero is real or not, the main protagonist, as Gair once again writes, shares and practices her vision, her dream with "the counterculture of the time, especially in West Coast communities like the San Francisco of the Diggers and The Grateful Dead, who were keen to develop networks as independent of hegemonic institutions as possible."[154]

Moreover, in texts of both authors compared, paranoia also seems to be the ultimate outcome of excessive psychedelic drug use – in 1965 already, Pynchon was able to portray one of the minor characters of *The Crying of Lot 49*, the main protagonist's husband, as a typical "acid head" – a person deprived of the common sense of reality. Although paranoia is, together with the notion of a worldwide conspiracy, perhaps the most striking element of Pynchon's fiction, it is certainly not the only one as we see on the following examples.

Among all novels and other prose pieces of Thomas Pynchon, there are two in particular that explicitly deal with the role and history of the counterculture in America. These are *Vineland*, published in 1990, and *Inherent Vice*, 2009, in which the author turns to the legacy of the sixties era in the two following decades and examines the possibility of survival of the already gone lifestyle and individuals that had lived by it in a far more pragmatic, individualist, materialist, and thus unfriendly world of conservative values. Two main characters of these novels, Zoyd Wheeler and "Doc" Sportello, are both pursued for their activity during the times of the counterculture and need to deal with the repression practiced by the officials on a daily basis.

[153] Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012) 170.
[154] Gair, 143.

Of the two abovementioned protagonists, it is Wheeler of *Vineland*, a former hippie and apparently a drug addict, who seems to be the nation's most wanted criminal for crimes that are not exactly crimes and who is constantly being forced to finally get rid of the set of beliefs despised by those who hunt him – a D.E.A. agent, Brock Vond, and a *federale*, Hector Zuñiga, whom he has known ever since the time of the flower power revolution. The story is set in 1984 and takes place in a fictional area in Northern California called Anderson Valley. Both these facts are highly important – the year relates to the reelection of Ronald Reagan, the well-known U.S. President from the Republican Party, and the place commemorates the location of the countercultural happening from more than fifteen years ago. In *Vineland*, Pynchon explores the overall ideological transformation of the country – of its ordinary inhabitants as well as of its intellectual elite.

The author's view of Reagan's politics and his dealing with the past values as presented in the 1990 novel is very close to Thompson's writing about Nixon and the negatively authoritative aura that surrounded him as a first-rate politician. It is possible to say that these two authors share the opinion that both abovementioned U.S. Presidents can be identified with a sort of postmodern neo-fascism that exists, pervades and, at certain times, controls and regulates American democracy and its traditional principles. Although dealing basically with one's eternal endeavor to escape the boundaries of the consumerist and fully materialist society of America in the 1980s, *Vineland* is at the same time Pynchon's most political novel.[155] Shawn Smith, in his examination of the author's interpretation and handling history called *Pynchon and History*, argues:

> *Vineland* constantly negotiates the border between the real and the fantastic, the political and the illusory, and the workaday and the preternatural to demonstrate Pynchon's metahistorical perception of the postmodern moment, which the novel portrays as the temporary victory of

[155] Shawn Smith, *Pynchon and History: Metahistorical Rhetoric and Postmodern Narrative Form in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

> the anti-democratic, fascist strains of American thought that have co-existed throughout our history with democratic ideologies.[156]

From this perspective, what we witness is a certain shift from the ultimate hopelessness, disillusion and paranoia as introduced in *The Crying of Lot 49* to what Pynchon presents us as a notion of temporariness of such a situation which, although being evil and harmful to countercultural ideas as well as to ordinary Americans, can be overcome with just a little well-aimed effort and endurance. However, as depicted by the postmodern writer, that year's bleak atmosphere signifies, through Reagan's reelection and anti-pacifist politics, the definitive decline, if not the very end, of the idealistic values and utopian visions of the Californian 1960s.

The issue of national politics as well as the significant sociopolitical change in America, which transformed over the two decades "from anarchic but healthy hedonism to neo-Puritan repression,"[157] act as pervasive issues of the whole novel thanks to which it resembles both Thompson's *Fear and Loathing* titles – *Las Vegas* and *On the Campaign Trail '72* – which deal with the decline of the countercultural values and its replacement by what David Cowart calls "the Nixonian and Reaganite reactions that put an end to the polymorphous perversity of the 1960s and ushered in the return to materialism and political conservatism."[158] To sum up, for Thomas Pynchon, Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s represented the exactly same character and the ultimate antagonist to any remaining countercultural efforts as did Richard Nixon ten years before for Hunter S. Thompson.

It is through reading and subsequent analyzing *Vineland* that we learn of the actual nature of Reagan's America, which appears to be and is portrayed by the author as adhering to fascist model of social norms, which heavily draws upon the Nixonian legacy of anti-drug

[156] Smith, 98.
[157] David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012) 13.
[158] Cowart, 13.

persecution and suppression of the 1960s social protests. Throughout the novel, Pynchon acts highly sympathetically toward the fate of the counterculture and its eventual downfall as he portrays the D.E.A. agent Brock Vond, a typically oppressive and "fascist" anti-hero of the whole narrative who emerged as a powerful police persona in the aftermath of Nixon's policies at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s.[159] In the novel, he plays, in fact, a role in which he is a concrete representative of the oppressive consumerist lifestyle promoted in the contemporary America of the time and both the prophet and sole executor of Reagan's War on Drugs campaign. Thompson, on the other hand, did not, in his two abovementioned works dealing with sociopolitical changes in America during Nixon's presidencies, employ such a distinctive and real character who would represent the establishment and could be accusable of crimes against counterculture's utopian idealism. Unlike Pynchon, he focuses more on the general effects and overall atmosphere of repression as it reflected among the Americans, no matter whether they adhered to mainstream or alternative culture.

Also, it is the year 1984 in which the novel is set which refers to Orwell's dystopian classic and at the same time provides Pynchon with the opportunity to consider the actual state of the society and its potential imminence to the Englishman's dreary visions.[160] The author comments on the current situation through his own perspective near the end of the novel which enables us to get to know his genuine view of the overall condition of the society he has been a member of as he writes:

> And other grandfolks could be heard arguing the perennial question of whether the United States still lingered in a prefascist twilight, or whether that darkness had fallen long stupified years ago, and the light they thought they saw was coming only from millions of Tubes all showing the same bright-colored shadows. One by one, as the other voices joined in, the names began--some shouted, some accompanied by spit, the old reliable names good for hours

[159] Bill Brown ed., "Raptor, Rapist, Rapture: The Dark Joys of Social Control in Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*," *Not Bored: Anthology 1983-2010* (Cincinnati: Colossal Books, 2011) 384.
[160] Brown.

> of contention, stomach distress and insomnia--Hitler, Roosevelt, Kennedy, Nixon, Hoover, Mafia, CIA, Reagan, Kissinger, that collection of names and their tragic interweaving that stood not constellated above in any nightwide remoteness of light, but below, diminished to the last unfaceable American secret, to be pressed, each time deeper, again and again beneath the meanest of random soles, one blackly fermenting leaf on the forest floor that nobody wanted to turn over, because of all that lived, virulent, waiting, just beneath.[161]

To complete the "trilogy" of Pynchon's novels that look into the problem of American counterculture, or more precisely portray its hopelessness in the years following Nixon's 1968 presidential election, what remains is *Inherent Vice*, ranging chronologically between the dawn of the countercultural happening in the mid-1960s as depicted in *The Crying of Lot 49* and Reagan's sharp resistance to any antimaterialist and pacifist values remaining among Americans as employed in *Vineland*.

The novel, published in 2009, is another of Pynchon's Californian novels since it is almost entirely set in the area of Los Angeles and its outskirts in 1970, a short while after the infamous murders executed by Charles Manson's Family. Via the character of Larry "Doc" Sportello, a private investigator and, considering his appearance and lifestyle, a hippie, the reader follows the protagonist's effort to uncover once again what is a typical Pynchonian conspiracy – yet presenting the plot and trying to uncover it is presented rather differently than, for example, in *The Crying of Lot 49* as it is written as a pure detective story, "a maniacally incoherent pseudo-noir hippie-mystery."[162] Although Doc tries to solve seemingly a simple task of kidnapping that involves his ex-girlfriend and a rich real estate tycoon at first, he then encounters a far more dangerous and global plot directed by an organization called the Golden Fang. However, in the context of current social and cultural events, Doc's odyssey through various quests, locations and character encounters is accompanied by several

[161] Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland* (London: Vintage, 2000) 372.
[162] Sam Anderson, "Inherent Vice: Mr Thomas Pynchon Problem," *New York Magazine*, 2 Aug 2009 <http://nymag.com/arts/books/reviews/58182/> 5 Dec 2014.

contemporary phenomena such as popular music, psychedelic drug use, and, once again, governmental "witch hunt" against "dopers" and drug dealers.

Although paranoia and schizophrenia is clearly present throughout the narrative, Pynchon manages to portray the end of the hippie era with certain wit and Pynchon's characteristic sense of humor. The author introduces us to a wide variety of more or less eccentric characters, to the F.B.I. office as well as to an LSD den, to contemporary music scene in general and goes as far as to describe the main character's psychedelic trip through which he refers to the psychedelic experiments and its literary descriptions as written by Aldous Huxley and Timothy Leary. It is exactly as one review of the novel tells us:

> Pynchon brings readers to far-off lands, investigates hundreds of characters in as many pages, meticulously researches esoteric and inane subjects, comically employs jingles and songs much to the effect of James Joyce, and presents plots that refuse to fold together neatly.[163]

Moreover, Pynchon in the novel reveals the superficial nature of the counterculture. A highly important element of the book is the presence and author's symbolic portrayal of a music band called The Boards, the story of which relates to the fate of the hippie movement in general. Over the few years, the band have transformed from a traditional surf band – the genre was greatly popular in California of the time – to a heterogeneous sectarian group of former hippies who eventually succumbed to psychedelic drugs and ended up as puppets of the psychedelic experience. They all became outcasts and drug addicts who, by 1970, have completely forgot the original values that the countercultural participants fought for during the early days of the movement. Yet, in comparison with Thompson's view, Pynchon does not seem so critical – for him, these people are mere victims of the outer forces represented by the

[163] Salvatore Ruggiero, "The Closed Circuit Game: a Hippie Noir," *The Critical Flame: A Journal of Literature & Culture*, 2 Sep 2009 <http://criticalflame.org/the-closed-circuit-game-a-hippie-noir/> 5 Dec 2014.

climate change in American society and nation-wide hysteria surrounding psychedelic drug use.[164]

For our analysis of Pynchon's portrayal of the counterculture, respectively his own stance toward its ideas and way of life, *Inherent Vice* also possesses several crucial clues that significantly help to document the countercultural decline in the year 1970 as perceived by the author through the eyes and (mis)adventures of Doc Sportello, himself a former active participant of the contemporary events and experiments. The very rendering of the private eye signifies that the times have changed; although a marijuana smoking hippie, he is and behaves as a citizen who actually makes a living and is no more just one of those promoting communal living and common wealth. As it can be observed throughout the novel during Doc's wandering through various LA's neighborhoods, the old-fashioned hippies ceased to be the merry groups unburdened with earthly problems. They have transformed into a disillusioned and paranoid community unable to fit either the mainstream society or the alternative one. The oppressive power of the government, that came with Richard Nixon's entering the White House and embodied in the institution of police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, is omnipresent throughout the novel and it is obvious that an individual needs to fit at least some officially acknowledged standard, or else he or she is, regarding the existence of an individual within a functioning society, doomed.

Critics have indeed brought some light on the issue of politics in *Inherent Vice* which could appear as less political than, for example, *Vineland*, but which at the same time provides us with reaffirmation of Pynchon's view of Nixon and shift from almost anarchic idealism to unscrupulous materialism.[165] Here, the former novel has to be associated with the latter one as they both utilize the personality of Richard Nixon as a sort of an archenemy to all

[164] Joanna Freer, *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[165] Cowart.

hopes and dreams of Pynchon's generation. In the 1990 novel, he aimed, via the means of using flashback, to evaluate Reagan's 1980s conservative politics and aggressive style as a consequence of the American politics in the early 1970s. Nineteen years later, he does exactly so, yet the personality of Ronald Reagan is substituted by George W. Bush, whose presidency has just ended at the time of the novel's publication. However, the author does not blame anyone concrete for what has happened in America since 1969 as he is well aware of the inevitable failure of, for example, the New Left to fully gain control over the social stir of that time and thus yielding to a far more organized effort of the strict and aggressive Republican Party.[166] From the political perspective, Pynchon seems almost identical to Thompson in his view of American government and of conservative and repressive stances all the aforementioned presidents held.

From analyses of three Pynchon's novels set in California and dealing directly with the phenomenon of the American counterculture in the 1960s, we are able to state that although he was a mere observer to the evolution of the hippie thought and to countercultural happening of the late 1960s, he was highly sympathetic with its effort to put through certain social changes which would help the Americans to live in an imagined land which would promote far more liberal values and egalitarianism in its ideal form.

Furthermore, unlike Thompson, who repeatedly critically examined the contemporary condition of the American Dream, Pynchon seems to identify himself with its countercultural interpretation in *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice* and, to a lesser extent, even in *The Crying of Lot 49*. According to Murray Bookchin, a social ecologist examining the socioeconomic relation of the 1960s and 1930s, the alternative culture of the sixth decade "stressed the *utopian* aspects of the "American Dream" as distinguished from its *economic* aspects: the

[166] M. Keith Booker, "America and Its Discontents: The Failure of Leftist Politics in *Vineland*," *Literature, Interpretation, Theory*, 4.2 (1993).

eschatological ideal of a "New World," of frontier mutualism, of decentralized power and "participatory democracy," of republican virtue and moral idealism."[167] These elements, or agenda of the movement he sympathized with, can be observed in all three books and gives us the ultimate evidence of Pynchon's essential hope for the American Dream's existence and ability to function as only through the power of the Dream the attack of consumerism and corruptness in its modern form can be repelled.[168] Moreover, although Pynchon differs from Thompson in his view of the national ethos, they both share the image of California as "the final frontier of the American Dream,"[169] the only place in the United States that has proved to be able to conserve at least some of the crucial ideals of any countercultural activity that occurs. However, as it is evident in *Vineland* in particular, the author and the reader are both witnesses to the event that "the frontier closes for good and the long descent into betrayal and greed begins."[170]

4.5.2 Counterculture and the Spiritual: Tom Robbins and *Another Roadside Attraction*

When reading one of Robbins' best known novels, which he started writing in his home state of Washington in 1968 and published it three years later[171], an uninitiated reader could wonder how it relates to the 1960s cultural movement as the author does not refer directly to such terms as "counterculture" or "hippies." Yet, it is the very technique and surrealistic imagery of his that both form the actual foundations of what the era's active

[167] Murray Bookchin, "Between the '30's and the '60's," *The 60s, Without Apology*, ed. Sohnya Sayres et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 249.
[168] Sarah Churchwell, "Review: Inherent Vice," *The Guardian*, 26 Jul 2009 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jul/26/pynchon-churchwell-inherent-vice> 15 Dec 2014.
[169] Scott Macleod, "Playgrounds of Detection: The Californian Private Eye in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Inherent Vice*," *Pynchon's California,* eds. Scott McLintock and John Miller (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014) 131.
[170] Churchwell.
[171] Scott MacFarlane, *The Hippie Narrative: A Literary Perspective on the Counterculture* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2007).

participants stood up for and represented. Also, its characters are often highly reminiscent of the stereotypical flower child as imagined by the majority of readers. According to many critics, *Another Roadside Attraction* is perhaps the most accurate accounts on the counterculture as it manages to depict the essence and zeitgeist of the time.[172] We all need to be aware of the fact that the book does not attempt to be a realistic portrayal as perceived by Robbins – it is exactly the other way around since its apparent chaotic structure act as a literary documentary on what America and its spiritual aspects at the end of the decade, which itself was very disordered, really looked like. It is indeed the spiritual rather than either the material or the political that, for Robbins, represents the only genuine basis of the alternative movement and the true motive of its actual goals. The author himself presents us his viewing of the time in an essay called "The Sixties," included in *Wild Ducks Flying Backward*, which is clearly reflected in *Another Roadside Attraction* as well as in his several other texts:

> It was a dizzy period of transcendence and awareness: transcendence of compromised and obsolete value systems, awareness of the enormity and richness of a previously unsuspected inner reality. Its zeitgeist … was only secondarily political. As much as it's been emphasized by uncomprehending journalists, the political movements of the time (be they pacifist, feminist, environmental, or racial) were largely the result of fallout from a spiritual explosion.[173]

From the perspective of spirituality, Robbins' view has much in common with Thompson who also searched for the immaterial and, although unsuccessfully, aimed to gain the access a spiritual realm through psychedelic drug use.[174] For both of them, the only genuine and possibly functioning counterculture with a power to become able of social transformation into a far more affable kind of community would be the one focused on and devoted to the spiritual side of our existence, to the exemption from consumerist hypocrisy that, for both

[172] Catherine E. Hoyser and Lorena Laura Stookey, *Tom Robbins: A Critical Companion* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1997).
[173] Tom Robbins, "The Sixties," *Wild Ducks Flying Backward: The Short Writings of Tom Robbins* (New York: Bantam, 2005) 94.
[174] Stephenson.

authors, seemed to pervade minds of the ordinary as well as ostensibly countercultural Americans.

Another Roadside Attraction, that besides other themes utilizes this perspective on spirituality, is set in the area of the state of Washington at the turn of the sixth decade. In what has been described as disjointed narrative, the author presents his audience grotesque characters that are central to Robbins' quest of "exploring questions of Western and Eastern spirituality."[175] From these two, the author, as well as his characters, always chooses the latter one as it is the Eastern values and spirituality that represent purity and incorruptness.

When we take a close look at the structure of the narrative, we see from the very beginning of the novel that the author's writing is actually constant oscillating between flashbacks, different non-linear plotlines, and peculiar characters. However, what soon emerges from Robbins' seemingly disordered and confused text is the crucial role of the contrast of the East and West that is present in the novel on many levels. We meet a young married couple named John Paul Ziller and Amanda, who both can be considered hippies by the very nature of their appearance, behavior, for their eccentric lifestyle, and way of thinking. They are former nomads of the 1960s who managed to settle in order to finally reach what could be labeled as full self-realization. They open an obscure enterprise next to one of the Washington State's highways called "Captain Kendrick's Memorial Hot Dog Wildlife Preserve" which stands for both a hot dog stand and a nearby roadside zoo, which however consists of only a few rather ordinary animals. From these two, it is Amanda, the wife and "priestess of modern spirituality,"[176] who becomes a deliberately chosen central figure of the whole text, representing the spiritual foundations of the previous decade.

[175] MacFarlane, 202.
[176] Hoyser and Stookey, 44.

Present in the text are also other bizarre counterculture characters, some of which are essential from the perspective of spirituality and the abovementioned dissimilarity of the two sides. The first of these two is Marx Marvelous, an East Coast scientist and intellectual, who arrives in Washington to explore the theoretical aspects of such contrast and to involve it in his comparison of existing belief systems. Eventually, as Hoyser and Stokey note, "his stay with the Zillers leads him to understand belief by discovering his own spiritual harmony with the intuitive."[177] The second one, Plucky Purcell, perhaps the most important of the novel's main male characters, is throughout the text investigating the potential existence of the "Corpse," or the body of Jesus Christ, in the catacombs of Vatican. He eventually succeeds in this quest, steals the body, and through this deed Purcell, here intermediary of Robbins' own thoughts, openly challenges the institutionalized system of the Western Christianity as he confronts the Christian public with certainly the greatest fraud in history of modern religion.[178] Also, the Corpse becomes the roadside zoo's main

It is also the very personality of Plucky, who is a psychedelic drug dealer and therefore provider of the psychedelic religious experience, the notion of which is often associated with Eastern philosophies and which thus radically contrasts the Western notion of institutionalized religion. Robbins here is clearly anti-establishment and anti-institutional and therefore creates a text that is fundamentally countercultural. Unlike the many rules required by no matter which institutionalized church in the world, sensuality and exuberance seem to be, for Robbins, the issues worth pursuing and glorifying. In an interview with Michael Strelow, the author expresses this view without restraint as he states that "with the exception of Tantric Hinduism, every religious system in the modern world has denied and suppressed sensuality.

[177] Hoyser and Stookey, 44.
[178] MacFarlane.

Yet sensual energy is the most powerful energy we as individuals possess."[179] In the novel, it is of course Amanda who was intended by the author to be the embodiment of this energy and who serves as an actual power that regulates motives of other protagonists that surround her. Moreover, what originates in such emphasis on sensuality is the novel's characters' inclination to an abstract perception of spirituality, to adhering to a personalized religion which would embrace both spiritual and ideological aspects prevailing among the counterculture participants of the time.

Although it is mainly the themes employed within the novel that basically created the whole poetics of the countercultural thought, we also need to focus for a bit on the stylistic aspect of the work and on Robbins' characteristic technique of storytelling. As we read through *Another Roadside Attraction*, the author proves to be a true follower of the surreal humor in the Vonnegutian sense of the word and seems to revel in placing a story within a story, thus creating a complex multilayered novel that draws more on psychedelic atmosphere of the late 1960s and sensory impulses associated with it rather than on addressing chosen topics and themes in an old-fashioned way of the earlier writers.[180] Also, the novel possesses the tone of being a personal and, as the narrator wants the reader to think so, objective record of a sequence of events – a diary presenting the story as it really happened. However, Marx Marvelous eventually proves to be an obvious representative of the author in the text and therefore must be considered a most proper example of an unreliable narrator subjectively modifying what really happened into a completely new kind of reality.[181] From this point of view, a comparison can be made between Robbins' text and its possible association with the New Journalist writing of the late of the decade.

[179] Liam O. Purdon and Beef Torrey eds., *Conversations with Tom Robbins* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011) 100.
[180] Louis Filler, *Vanguards & Followers: Youth in the American Tradition* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995).
[181] MacFarlane, 203.

For some critics, *Another Roadside Attraction* constitutes the author's personal opinion on the relatively newly emerged journalistic movement – Robbins' work is considered a parody, not at all malicious, of, among other works, Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.[182] In the exactly same way as the noted gonzo journalist, he also introduces his readership to what is apparently an objective record of what occurred. However, subjectivity of the author/narrator soon takes over and, for Robbins, forms a desired element that elevates the story to a completely different level – Marx Marvelous is a deliberately invented fictional new journalist who, throughout the novel, functions as "the chronicler and "objective" reporter of events through which the tenuousness of Marx's linear and rational "objectivity" become an overriding theme of the novel."[183] Furthermore, in comparison with Thompson, Robbins does not adhere to the principle of keeping the narrative factual.[184] He enjoys playing with the reader's mind and often takes advantage of his/her naivety; also, he wants and needs to move within the given borders of his fictional narrative. Once again, in this way, Robbins is very unlike Thompson as the latter actually prefers to create and maintain his literary text on both levels of its existence – on intellectual, or literary, as well as actual reality in which the author is physically present.

4.5.3 Counterculture's Succumbing to Commercialism: Don DeLillo's *Great Jones Street*

Shifting further in time and place from the Pacific Northwest in 1971, the location and year of *Another Roadside Attraction*, to New York City two years later, we discover *Great Jones Street*, a novel through which we meet the third author to be examined, Don DeLillo. Launching his literary career only two years before the publication of the abovementioned

[182] MacFarlane.
[183] MacFarlane, 203.
[184] MacFarlane.

novel, DeLillo, particularly for his widely distinguished 1985 masterpiece *White Noise*, eventually emerged as one of the leading voices of postmodern American fiction and has remained in this role until these days. However, in 1973, he was still a young and inexperienced aspiring author whose thematic focus was not at all stabilized. In regard to the 1960s countercultural movement, as the author himself claims in one of the interviews, he "was never either pro-culture or counter-culture … [he] was in a kind of middle state … [and] was ignoring the movements of the time."[185] One almost wonders how it could be possible that DeLillo's third novel so clearly and accurately depicts the decline of the countercultural thought, lifestyle, and morality.

The name of the novel is derived from one of the streets in the New York City's borough of Manhattan in which the main character and narrator of the story, Bucky Wunderlick, resides. Wunderlick is a former rock star who, as we learn almost immediately during the first few pages of the book, suddenly realized that his public life and manner, although rich and spontaneous, was nothing more than a façade to a disillusioned individual unable to cope with everyday reality of the post-hippie era. In order to escape the harsh and uncompromising world of the early 1970s, he retreats from the stage to a simple and almost completely unfurnished apartment in a house located in the aforementioned street. The image that DeLillo presents his audience via Bucky's fate is fairly depressing and emanates feelings of hopelessness and laments over the perishing of the previous decade's idealistic optimism and its subsequent substitution with depression and attempts to ruin humanity's endeavor to resist outer authoritative forces. The principal character's voluntary leaving the limelight behind "demonstrates how seclusion can be a catalyst for pervasive change."[186]

[185] Mark Binelli, "Intensity of a Plot, Mark Binelli Interviews Don DeLillo," *Guernica: A Magazine of Art & Politics*, 17 Jul 2007 <https://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/intensity_of_a_plot/> 19 Dec 2014.
[186] Stephen Paul Miller, *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) 141.

For several critics, Bucky's involvement in rock music is essential for the overall development of the novel's themes as it is the genre itself that is a genuine representative of the 1960s social rebellion. However, as the times change, rock is no longer able to resist the powerful influence of the capitalist culture and as such loses its original role as the principal mode of countercultural expression.[187] The main protagonist of *Great Jones Street* is fully aware of that and that is why he leaves what has become a commercialized branch of culture. Peter Boxall in his study of DeLillo's prose sheds some light on the actual motives of Bucky Wunderlick's seclusion from contemporary music industry:

> Bucky Wunderlick, the Cobainesque figure at the heart of the novel, is eloquent about the attenuation of countercultural musical forms available to the 1970s artiste. For Bucky, the only way to strike an authentically radical note is to produce music which physically wounds the audience.[188]

Within the narrative itself, we also find a large quantity of various countercultural references and symbols embodied in the novel's characters who are all remnants of the 1960s and who, over the years, transformed into nothing more than caricatures of once functioning individuals. Among those, there is particularly the iconic persona of Bucky Wunderlick, whose narcissistic manner and cult status among the public largely resembles Bob Dylan as do his Mountain Tapes he plans to release during his stay in Great Jones Street.[189] Against all odds, Bucky's seclusion leads only to an increased interest from the counterculture public as well as from various groups that regard him as a potential symbol of their efforts no matter what they are. This is how we meet the Happy Valley Farm Commune whose name refers to the idealistic rural communes of the late sixties but whose real specialization is no more to promote free love and happiness. Settled on the Lower East Side, they emerge as a materialist urban community with a purpose to spread a new powerful drug that destroys one's ability to

[187] Peter Boxall, *DonDellilo: The Possibility of Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).
[188] Boxall, 36.
[189] Catalina Neculai, *Urban Space and Late Twentieth-Century New York Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

speak among the public. DeLillo reduces the previous decade's crucial role of psychedelic drug use to absurdity as "in the desperate environment of a culture that has reached the breaking point, all extreme experience is desirable"[190] – even such that people have no control over and that leads them to deliberately giving up one of the fundamental abilities that distinguish mankind from the animal kingdom.

Also, the new drug is the crucial element in portraying the environment of the decaying counterculture in the early 1970s as, under the influence of consumerism that prevailed after 1968, its genuine values transformed into nothing more than a mass materialist desire for a fabled, yet still only imagined product. According to Anthony DeCurtis, at the very moment when the package containing the product gets mixed up with the Mountain Tapes, the audience learns that "the drug and Wunderlick's music, no matter how authentically conceived or individually created, are both products, and the buying and selling products is what makes the world of *Great Jones Street* turn."[191] After the final death of the countercultural idealism, it becomes evident that what eventually emerges is a force that makes people pursue only the material instead of the ideal; unlike Bucky, who perhaps does not fully realize this fundamental change, the characters in *Great Jones Street* all share the ultimate goal of achieving profit.

However, we ascertain near that end of the narrative that Don DeLillo does not spare the main character from this process of commercialization. Although Bucky bravely fights the surrounding environment, he becomes "irresistibly incorporated into mainstream culture" and the protagonist's eventual testing the newly invented drug signifies his "comic refusal of the language of punditry [that] can be effortlessly reclaimed and commodified as a highly

[190] Anthony DeCurtis, "The Product: Bucky Wunderlick, Rock'n'Roll, and Don DeLillo's Great Jones Street," *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 136.
[191] DeCurtis, 137.

marketable characteristic of bad-boy superstardom."[192] This DeLillo's view, as embodied within *Great Jones Street*, can also be considered as reminiscent of Hunter S. Thompson who, in a similar manner, as early as in 1967 also criticized the forthcoming commercialization of the American counterculture and was aware of its immense potential as a commodity serving the interests of the mass society. Where Thompson reports on that period's hysteria caused by the contemporary sociopolitical atmosphere via the means of gonzo journalism, DeLillo describes the exactly same topic from the perspective of a prose author. On top of that, according to Joseph Dewey, DeLillo's fiction's merit is particularly in presenting a daring, yet obviously true argument that, in comparison with the three authors examined above, perhaps best corresponds with the sociocultural transformation as it really happened between the Beat movement era of the 1950s and the 1970s. For the author, "Western traditions have uncomplicated the self into a commodity, have substituted a surfeit of carnal itches for the soul, and have encouraged faux-interior explorations via clichéd escapes, specifically alcohol and drugs, bad poetry and sports cars."[193]

[192] Boxall, 36.
[193] Joseph Dewey, *Beyond Grief and Nothing: A Reading of Don DeLillo* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006) 18.

5. CONCLUSION

Although this year, 2015, marks the tenth anniversary of Hunter S. Thompson's voluntary death, his literary work remains highly popular among those who search for an unrestrained, unscrupulous, yet truthful documentary on what was happening in America of the 1960s and early 1970s. During the decade that managed to change the nation, the author's long-lasting nonconformity could finally be fully utilized and, what more, transformed into an advantage as within the era itself embodied were liberalism, idealism, and defiance against authorities. In the context of the time, such an artistic and character metamorphosis was nothing exceptional, but in the case of young Thompson it resulted in emergence of a completely new literary style as well as a unique approach to numerous pressing issues within the American society.

When we analyze Thompson's philosophy and the way it reflected in his literary texts throughout the years, it becomes clear that what he, as well as his generation of young artists and intellectuals, fought was the conformist attitude of the generation of their parents together with the superficiality and hypocrisy represented by the 1950s materialism as embodied in the suburban way of life. Therefore, as it is documented in Thompson's writing as well as in texts of numerous other countercultural authors, the origins of the widely spread need for liberalization and improvement of social conditions can be found as early as in the post-World War II years, when the country emerged as world's prosperous superpower. Still, there was a rapidly increasing number of discontent intellectuals and artists who, thanks to the progress in filmmaking and television broadcasting, publicly questioned validity of contemporary social norms and rules as promoted by the government via the means of open rebellion against conformist culture. As it is documented in his pioneering as well as later literary pieces,

Thompson did personally identify with this attitude of fighting authorities and never really left it.

Thompson voluntarily adopted the position of an outlaw which, in fact, helped him to establish himself as a widely respected literary persona in the late 1960s. As it is evident from the text, his role in creating a new literary genre called New Journalism, in which classical journalism adopts some of the essential elements of fiction, is undeniable as he helped to form its boundaries. Moreover, his own invention called gonzo journalism, which evolved out of New Journalism, provided him with a style which proved to be most suitable to his highly characteristic way of ruminating about the problems that were of particular interest to him. Ever since *Hell's Angels*, Thompson cultivated his style the final and almost perfect representation of which are the *Rolling Stone* article "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved," the notorious novel *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and his account on 1972 presidential campaign *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*. Recurrent in these texts is the author's near-obsession with the national ethos known as the American Dream. For Thompson, the Dream emerges during the 1960s as the crucial theme of his oeuvre as the liberal atmosphere of the countercultural rebellion reveals the true nature of the concept, which, in fact, is quite different from how it had been presented to ordinary Americans in previous decades. He frequently employs the ethos when reporting on the countercultural phenomena and events of the time as well as in his scrutiny of contemporary American politics which he sees as fundamentally corrupt.

Thompson's texts also capture the gradual decline of the countercultural efforts to improve conditions in the United States of then. He does not hesitate to present the views of its participants as utterly flawed and superficial and, as such, doomed to oblivion. The situation among the counterculture members in the early 1970s, which is presented once again with bitter irony and contempt, also forms one of the crucial themes in his writing. Here, what

suggested itself in the third chapter was to employ comparisons with three selected postmodern authors who all are members of the same generation and who were not directly involved in the hippie movement of the time, yet some of their work focused more or less on the actual nature and condition of the counterculture after it reached its peak and was already in decline. Therefore, the chapter further analyzed selected works of Thomas Pynchon, who portrayed contemporary paranoia and disillusion as existing in the post-1960s California in several of his novels (*Vineland* and *Inherent Vice*), Tom Robbins, who searched for remnants of the spiritual as perceived by the hippies in *Another Roadside Attraction*, and Don DeLillo, whose *Great Jones Street* sheds light on the counterculture's decay as perceived by a rock star and on the transition from boundless idealism to pragmatic materialism. Although Thompson and the three authors differ in their view on various problems that afflicted the counterculture in the early 1970s, they share the feeling that the eventual decline of the 1960s idealism was inevitable. It strikes us as apparent from their writing that genuine countercultural ideology and the American Dream are unable to resist outer forces, represented mostly by established social norms and the authorities, which are so persuasive and powerful that a large majority of people must inevitably succumb to the blinding attractiveness of the material instead of adhering to a noble, yet materially invisible ideal.

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