THE NEW JOURNALISM AND ITS EDITORS:
HUNTER S. THOMPSON, TOM WOLFE,
AND THEIR EARLY EXPERIENCES

By

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This document is dedicated to Meredith Ridenour, who provided only patience, guidance, and love throughout this project, and Hunter S. Thompson, whose wordplay continues to resonate.
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THE NEW JOURNALISM AND ITS EDITORS: HUNTER S. THOMPSON, TOM WOLFE, AND THEIR EARLY EXPERIENCES

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This study addresses an infrequently investigated aspect of the New Journalism of the 1960s and 1970s: the relationships between New Journalists Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe and the editors of the respective publications for whom they wrote. Crucial to this study is the release of two volumes of Thompson’s correspondence, detailing the development of his career over several decades.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the writer-editor relationships developed and to account for the concerns and considerations at play between these editors and writers. The scope of media scholarship on the New Journalism presents an incomplete definition, usually ignoring the relationships that necessarily developed between the editors of alternative publications that supported the New Journalism and the working reporters that constituted the source of this method of reporting.

This thesis hypothesizes that, regardless of the status of his career, Thompson struggled with lack of recognition and respect from editors like Jann Wenner, editor of
Rolling Stone, and Warren Hinckle, editor of Scanlan’s Monthly, due to the often intangible writer-editor relationship that the New Journalism encouraged. Wolfe’s experiences with editors like Clay Felker, founder of New York magazine, and Esquire’s Byron Dobell, however, proved dissimilar to Thompson’s. In fact, Wolfe often reflected that these relationships helped him develop what is recognized as the New Journalism.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This study, or at least its original intent, can be traced to 1997, when Random House released the first volume of a proposed three-volume collection of journalist Hunter S. Thompson’s correspondence.¹ That first volume covered the years 1955 through 1967, including short stories from Thompson’s youth and other letters to editors, colleagues, family, and friends. These volumes marked the first time Thompson’s complete correspondence was released, and the letters provided invaluable insight into his ambitions as a writer and journalist.

The popular image of Thompson casts him in the role of freelance writer, with only the pressure of covering the story weighing on him. What was interesting to note, in even a cursory glance at the letters in The Proud Highway, was the somewhat desperate nature of Thompson’s life as a freelance journalist and reporter, as he tried to remain financially stable while building a reputation as a daring and entertaining writer.

Like many people struggling to settle into a career or enterprise, that desperation would often lead to anger, animosity, and frustration at what was perceived as a lack of respect from various editors and publishers for whom Thompson would write. Indeed, it appeared that, at least in the early part of his career, Thompson perceived his editors as enemies who were uncompromising in their rigid demands or unwilling to appreciate his

¹ The Proud Highway, the first volume, was released in 1997, followed by the second volume of Thompson’s letters, Fear and Loathing in America, released in 2000. Curiously, the first volume was subtitled The Gonzo Letters, Vol. 1, while the second volume carried the subtitle The Fear and Loathing Letters, Vol. 2.
“vision” of good journalism. It also appeared that Thompson felt this way for most of his career. In a 1976 letter to *Rolling Stone* founder and editor Jann Wenner, Thompson made known his feelings about his relationship with the San Francisco-based magazine at a time when he had forged a successful relationship that yielded two books and a string of articles. He lamented:

Anyway, by the time you get this I assume we’ll be into another round of haggling—which depresses the shit out of me, but I can’t see any way around it unless we just take a goddamn public hammer to the whole relationship and let the bone chips fall where they may. I am frankly not in favor of this course, but I’ve given it enough thought to feel pretty certain I’ll survive the worst that can happen if you want to seriously get it on.³

This was written, incidentally, only five years after he wrote *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which was to have sealed Thompson’s reputation as “a near God to Jann Wenner.”⁴

Letters like the previous dispatch raise questions about the reality of the relationship between Thompson and Wenner, who both profited from this somewhat contentious cooperation. Were the details of this writer-editor relationship indicative of a deeper distrust? Why would that conflict exist then, and what were the contributing factors? Thompson brought significant exposure to Wenner’s *Rolling Stone* and should have benefited financially from this understanding. It was possible, however, that the truth lay somewhere in that gray world of freelance writer-editor relationships.

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² *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72* had both been published in serialized form in the pages of *Rolling Stone*.


The problematic aspects of Thompson’s relationship with editors like Wenner, but also with other editors like Warren Hinckle of *Scanlan’s Monthly*, needs to be addressed in order to reach a fuller understanding of the New Journalism. Were these problems symptomatic of flaws in the necessarily undefined parameters of writer-editor relationships in the New Journalism in the 1960s and 1970s? By necessity, the New Journalism required substantially more creative freedom for the writer, and a great deal more trust from the editor. What insight could Thompson’s correspondence provide into the realities of the New Journalism, as it was known during the 1960s and 1970s? And could these problems be seen in the experiences of other New Journalists?

As a counterpoint to this investigation, this study intends to examine the career of the writer who referred to stylized, subjective writing during this era as the New Journalism, Tom Wolfe. His experiences in the early part of his career, and the later years when he eventually drifted from journalism (having irrevocably altered how journalism could be done), will provide a more complete understanding of the writer-editor relationship in the New Journalism. While this relationship was only an aspect of the development of this type of writing during this era, it is still integral to understanding how the New Journalism developed then. The New Journalism essentially amounted to a way for writers to incorporate the techniques of novelists in their news stories. Addressing these relationships is also significant in understanding the negotiating and cooperation at play when these writers would approach various publications. Unless these editors and writers could work together, the New Journalism would logically suffer as a method of reporting that required mutual understanding between those responsible.
The question, then, of what the term New Journalism stands for must address the practical aspects of these relationships and arrangements, and it will serve as the broad purpose of this study. The specific purpose of this study, however, is to examine the careers of writers Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe and their interactions with publications and editors throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Wolfe and Thompson wrote during a similar era, when journalism was testing its literary boundaries and editors were publishing writers who were experimenting with technique. It was Thompson and Wolfe, however, who emerged as two examples recognized by historians as among the most prolific and revolutionary writers in the New Journalism. That their experiences were vastly different suggested that attitude and approach were vital to the development of the New Journalism. In the case of Hunter S. Thompson, this study will examine his interaction with editor Warren Hinckle and Sidney Zion, who managed the short-lived *Scanlan’s Monthly* (1970 - 1971) and witnessed the birth of Thompson’s “gonzo journalism,” and editor Jann Wenner, who created and managed *Rolling Stone* magazine.

In the case of Tom Wolfe, this study will examine his relationship with editors of the *New York Herald Tribune*, such as Clay Felker, who precipitated the birth of his New Journalism, and his interaction with editor Byron Dobell of *Esquire* magazine, which provided Wolfe the opportunity to write “There goes (VAROOM! VAROOM!) that

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5 As noted in the Modern Library edition of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, “*Scanlan’s Monthly* commissioned Thompson to return to his hometown to cover America’s premier Thoroughbred horse race. The result was ‘The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved,’ in which traditional reportage is skewed through Thompson’s wildly funny first-person perspective” (Thompson 1996, v). That passage also serves as a good operational definition of “gonzo journalism.” While Linn placed the origins of “gonzo journalism” as a 1957 column written by Thompson, this study will consider “The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved” as its first popular, widely accepted exposure to a large audience.

6 As recorded by Tom Wolfe, *Hooking Up* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000), when in 1965 he published a parody of the *New Yorker* for *New York Magazine*, which also gave him his first taste of journalistic in-fighting.
Kandy Kolored (THPHHHHHH) tangerine-flake streamline baby (RAHGHHHH!) around the bend (BRUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM…...”, his first large-scale contribution to the New Journalism.

**Research Hypotheses/Questions**

The first operational hypothesis considered in this study is that the relationship between the reporters and editors working in the New Journalism had an impact on the development and fruition of that genre. This study considers that a cyclical model existed on at least the surface of this relationship: the New Journalists needed to maintain a relationship with the editors of these certain magazines so that their work would be published and exposed to the largest audience possible. Likewise, the editors needed the writing of the New Journalists to popularize and support the magazines that employed them, and the editors desired to help shape and guide this emerging, highly experimental method of reporting.

Writers like Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson relied on magazines like *Esquire* and *Rolling Stone*, respectively, to make their careers, to provide them with financial support, and to establish their reputations as leading figures in the New Journalism. Thompson needed editors who could understand and excuse his occasionally irrational behavior in order to make a living as a writer in the early years of his career. Likewise, Wolfe relied on daring editors to publish writing that was non-traditional, controversial, and often subject to intense scrutiny and criticism.

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7 See Linn, McKeen, and Meyers. The main point of each of their arguments was that Thompson was a difficult writer at best.

8 See McKeen, Scura and Bloom for descriptions of Wolfe’s general approach.
The second hypothesis employed in this study asserts that the relationship between the New Journalists and editors was hardly symbiotic, and it occasionally bordered on contention and outrage. The frustrated relationships that emerged are indicative of the often schizophrenic reactions of editors to outrageous expenses and negative publicity associated with controversial writers and reflects the fact that these editors and writers were working within an imperfect (at best) interactive framework. Some editors thrived on controversy, while others shied away from it. Thompson’s own correspondence, Wolfe’s reflections, and journalism historians all indicate the complicated relationships at work here.

The implications of these two hypotheses are relevant to the fields of journalism, literature, business, and art. This study asserts that the often conflicting natures and desires of journalism and business (or, for that matter, literature and business relationships) create a field where their idea of perfection is rarely achieved, and both parties are rarely completely satisfied. This is not a situation unique only to the New Journalism, but within its context, this imbalance suggests that even though experimentation was understood, its implications were rarely recognized.

In its brief influential existence, the New Journalism as exemplified by Thompson and Wolfe demonstrated new possibilities in traditional reporting. Experimentation and stylistic techniques were utilized by both writers, and others, eventually impressing their ideas onto the mainstream press. And while the New Journalism would adapt and evolve into traditional journalism, there is significance in understanding which writers influenced its origins. For the purposes of this study, Thompson and Wolfe are the focus, given the prominent recognition of their work in the New Journalism.
Review of Literature

Almost all detailed studies involving the New Journalism of the 1960s and 1970s include at least minor analyses of the work of Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe. Beyond that, the various reporters and writers included under the umbrella term of “New Journalism” include Gay Talese, Truman Capote, Joan Didion, Michael Herr, Norman Mailer, Joe Eszterhas and other writers. Defining the New Journalism is inherently subjective given its loose system of guidelines and rules (as was intended), so it is understandable that scholars attempting to account for its salient aspects need limit their scope to a manageable objective. That necessity is not disputed in this study, as the intent here is to shed light on the demonstrable characteristics and interdependence within the New Journalism. One possible method of loosely defining the New Journalism is to assert that any writer attempting to work contrary to traditional reporting techniques could be called a New Journalist, though any scholar working from this construct will encounter difficulty as journalism adapted according to generational and literary considerations.

For the purposes of this study, the New Journalism is defined as specific magazine and newspaper journalism written during the 1960s through the 1970s that embraced experimental literary techniques through increased subjectivity, narrative usage, focus on the writer, and attention to cultural and social events. As a fairly fluid style of writing, all examples of the New Journalism and New Journalists may not necessarily fulfill all

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aspects of this definition, but the work considered in this study will closely match the broad focus discussed here.

Scholars have examined the New Journalism in both its reportorial and literary forms, and by critically examining the work of the individual writers who fall under that rubric. One of the most interesting preliminary aspects to note is where the New Journalism is *not* mentioned. In two mainstream dissident press journalism texts (*Voices of Revolution* by Rodger Streitmatter and *The Dissident Press* by Lauren Kessler), the New Journalism is not even mentioned, yet only hinted at as being relevant to the study of the dissident press movement. Yet the dissident press and the New Journalism could be seen as two different means to an end. As Streitmatter noted, “the dissident American press has, for almost two centuries, served as a robust and effectual force that has had substantial impact on the social and political fabric of this nation.”

In other words, this willingness to take risks encouraged other publications to explore alternative or literary journalism.

When it is addressed, the New Journalism emerges as an eminently unique method of fusing journalistic and literary influences with the intent of grafting these new techniques onto the traditional, mainstream press. The downside of analyzing the New Journalism according to this methodology is its assignment to literary examinations conspicuously absent of journalistic interpretations. Thomas Connery’s *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism* approached the subject of the New Journalism as a literary phenomenon, referring to literary journalism throughout the volume as a unique movement. The background Connery provided relied more on introspective examination

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of literary and artistic ideals, rather than exploring the notion that much of this new “literary form” sprang from an alternative approach to journalistic reporting, often dependent on support from dissident publications or the traditional press that embraced innovative ideals.¹¹

Following this method of examination, a number of investigations link the New Journalism with the concept of the “Nonfiction Novel,” which is inarguably a vital aspect of the mechanics of this new approach to journalism. *Fact and Fiction* by John Hollowell is an example of this approach, in that it examines the literary development and implications of the New Journalism without examining its relationship to fringe journalism or its publications. Again, Connery is an example of a study that focuses more on the artistic principles at work.

Much of the research that relates to this current study includes an examination of the impact of the New Journalism on the discipline of journalism itself. The idea that the New Journalism had a demonstrable impact on both the relationships between editors and reporters and on journalism as a whole is central to this study, and certain scholars have addressed that impact. Paul Thomas Meyers explained the New Journalism’s intent, asserting, “The New Journalism insisted that its audience discover meaning in events by suggesting what those events meant to the writer.”¹² This suggested an intensely personal and subjective discipline under examination in his study, and it provides some understanding as to the difficulty of delineating a concrete definition. The two essential


strains Meyers saw in the New Journalism was the attempt to evoke journalistic reporting as an art form, and the writer’s intent to make the work more credible in the eyes of the reader by writing from a personal perspective.

In the mind of the New Journalist, the ability of the reader to “interact” with the situation being described is vital to fulfilling their intent. For the purposes of this study, this writer-reader reaction is vital to the theoretical framework that might help explain the motivations of the New Journalist. A possible interpretation is to view the New Journalist as one who looks at traditional press coverage of an event or force in society and attempts to delve deeper into the reality of the scenario, forcing the reader to examine what it means to them on a personal level. Meyers focused primarily on individual New Journalists, namely Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese and Hunter S. Thompson, which is understandable given the scope of his examination. These three journalists figure heavily into much of the broad overviews of the New Journalism.13

The New Journalism, and the specific writers and editors who could be thought of as participating in this admittedly fringe field, is central to this study and to an understanding of its reflection on journalistic relationships. Michael Linn asserted, in his study of Hunter S. Thompson’s early sports writing, that indications of Thompson’s later contributions to the New Journalism might be evident in those first journalistic attempts. That same study suggested that Thompson grafted his own literary style onto journalism,

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rather than developing his style through his journalistic experience.\textsuperscript{14} Linn also analyzed Thompson’s sports writing for \textit{The Command Courier}, the base newspaper of Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, where Thompson served during his brief stint in the Air Force. Linn explained why Thompson’s writing would be enticing for any magazine to include: “Early in Thompson’s career, it was his copy that won the approval of his readers that propelled his career early, as he was never a trusted writer among his editors and supervisors.”\textsuperscript{15}

William McKeen, in his study of Thompson, emphasized the writer’s appeal to a wide audience of youth and counterculture activists. He noted, “Thompson’s best early association was with the \textit{National Observer}, a publication started in 1962 as a ‘Sunday edition’ of the \textit{Wall Street Journal}.”\textsuperscript{16} McKeen also noted that the \textit{National Observer} was “one of the most elegantly written and edited examples of American journalism,” and revealed how Thompson’s arrangement with the magazine helped him adapt his style and pace to journalistic writing.

Thompson’s \textit{National Observer} articles are representative of Thompson’s desire to provide a larger social commentary, while utilizing traditional journalistic technique such as interviewing grounding the story in hard news. In “Democracy Dies in Peru, but Few Seem to Mourn Its Passing,” Thompson examined South American democracy and found it lacking. He began the article as a broad commentary, noting, “If there is one profound reality in Peruvian politics it is the fact that this country has absolutely no democratic


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 20.

\textsuperscript{16} McKeen, \textit{Hunter S. Thompson}, 17.
tradition, and any attempt to introduce one is going to meet violent opposition.”

Thompson then continued by examining specific events in Peru that influenced democracy and concluded by suggesting that the American-based Alliance for Progress is “a misunderstanding.” Evident in this article is a less restrictive style of reporting that allowed Thompson to observe the larger difficulties of South American democracy while focusing on the specific problems of Peru.

As McKeen suggested, while Thompson’s work ethic caused problems with many editors, only a specific type of editor could accept this writing. He noted that Thompson’s “writing was too loose and ragged for most traditional newspapers, yet not structured enough for a slick magazine piece. The *National Observer* allowed him to be methodical in his writing and slow to build to the point, as was the practice with the *Wall Street Journal’s* column-one features. Sometimes his pieces fit well within the *Journal* tradition.”

After accumulating both clips and a reputation with the *National Observer*, Thompson moved on to the liberal magazine *The Nation*, where he would encounter culturally significant movements such as the Hell’s Angels motorcycle gang. According to McKeen’s study, this interaction proved beneficial in two ways: *The Nation* had the appropriate writer who could thoroughly investigate and relate to the group, and Thompson had a subject that could test his creative strengths. The original article for *The Nation* had brought Thompson into the good graces of the gang, and, according to

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18 Ibid., 358.


20 Ibid.
McKeen, “earned Thompson a name as a daredevil journalist for associating with the Angels,”\textsuperscript{21} an association encouraged by his writing and reputation.

McKeen also noted that Thompson’s relationship with Warren Hinckle and his \textit{Scanlan’s Monthly} would prove as beneficial as his work with \textit{The Nation}. McKeen recognized that “\textit{Scanlan’s} was a breakthrough of sorts for Thompson and the beginning of a short but influential association with the magazine,”\textsuperscript{22} and that their journalistic styles and goals meshed well. McKeen also suggested “Hinckle was one of the few editors willing to take a chance on Thompson.”\textsuperscript{23} Evident in the \textit{Scanlan’s} pieces is a much more vigorously asserted humor, as exemplified by “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved.” Most interesting in the “Kentucky Derby” article is Thompson’s attention to details, noting “moments after the race was over, the crowd surged wildly for the exits, rushing for cabs and buses…people were punched and trampled, pockets were picked, children lost, bottles hurled. But we missed all this, having retired to the press box for a bit of post-race drinking.”\textsuperscript{24} It was this inherent dark humor that attracted attention to Thompson, through his writing for \textit{Scanlan’s}.

McKeen’s study demonstrated that Hinckle was similar to Jann Wenner in that the \textit{Rolling Stone} editor was also willing to take chances on Thompson. McKeen succinctly recited the history of Wenner’s ambitious project, noting that \textit{Rolling Stone} quickly became known for pushing controversial rock and roll coverage (controversial in that few publications focused solely on rock and roll in the late 1960s). Specifically, however,

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{24} Thompson, \textit{The Great Shark Hunt}, 36.
McKeen noted that while Wenner and Thompson both benefited professionally from their relationship, their fairly intensive friendship would fluctuate due to strain and tension related to their work.\(^{25}\)

While McKeen focused on the factual background of Thompson and the circumstances of his career, his study benefited from investigating the implications of the tensions that arose between Wenner and Thompson. While evidence was scant at the time McKeen studied Thompson, material (such as the collected correspondence between Wenner and Thompson) is now available that reveals more about their personal feelings, their reactions to tense business and personal matters, and the resulting animosity.

Paul Perry, in his biography on Thompson, recounted one of Thompson’s earliest conflicts in professional journalism, while working as a reporter in Middletown. Thompson had a complaint about lasagna at a local restaurant and engaged in a fistfight with the owner, who happened to be a major advertiser in the newspaper. Thompson lost his job shortly after that incident.\(^{26}\) By focusing on both Thompson’s life and his contributions to journalism and literature, Perry provided excellent source material and interpretation of exactly how Thompson conducted his work. As an example of what Perry described, he asserted that after Thompson destroyed a colleague’s car, he fled one of his first newspaper jobs in Pennsylvania and “fearful that the publisher would deduct repair costs from his salary, Hunter immediately left the office, drove home, packed and headed for New York City.”\(^{27}\) Perry noted simply that Thompson “had trouble


\(^{27}\) Ibid., 29.
conforming to the workplace standards.” More than a rebellious attitude, however, Thompson found the inability to conform became a growing element of his reputation and work.

The freelance lifestyle appealed greatly to Thompson, which explained why his first major output, with the exception of his early Louisville Courier-Journal pieces, as a roving correspondent in South America for the National Observer worked out so well. Even though Thompson worked for the National Observer from 1961 to 1962, Perry explained that the sixteen pieces produced were excellent examples of journalistic gift. One of the early indications of possible problems with the veracity of his writing, however, also came from this period in South America when editors began questioning the facts in his articles. For example, editors doubted the existence of Puerto Estrella, Colombia, as mentioned in Thompson’s “A Footloose American in a Smuggler’s Den.” There were also doubts, according to Perry, about whether a man hitting golf balls into the streets of Cali, Colombia, (which Thompson claimed in the article “Why Anti-Gringo Winds Often Blow South of the Border” as “one of my most vivid memories”) existed. Thompson defended his writing to a friend, claiming, “A good journalist hears lots of things. Maybe I heard some of these stories and didn’t see them. But they sure as hell happened.” Thompson’s weaving of fact and fiction was hardly embraced at this point in his career, but editors, for the most part, chose to ignore possible instances of

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28 Ibid.

29 Thompson, The Great Shark Hunt, 345.

30 Ibid., 348.

31 Perry, 77.
fabrication. The writing was good, and the *National Observer* was eager to publish compelling copy.

Thompson’s work for *Scanlan’s Monthly*, which produced the first definitive piece of his “gonzo” journalism in “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved,” proceeded comparatively smoother than his other long-term assignments. Hinckle kept his distance from Thompson and his ideas, either assigning or approving Thompson’s articles and making an effort to cooperate with the notorious procrastinator. When editing the “Kentucky Derby” piece, Thompson wrote Hinckle to suggest that the *Scanlan’s* editors helped him edit out unnecessary material, and noted, “in retrospect I think that was the only way to go.”

Forcing Thompson to produce copy rarely worked (throughout his writing career, as a matter of fact) and Hinckle would only apply pressure by having his editors harass Thompson as a last resort. This relationship could have sustained itself for some time, Perry claimed, even though Hinckle’s magazine had a small circulation that precipitated its previously described collapse in less than a year.

By the end of *Scanlan’s* run, Thompson had also begun writing for *Rolling Stone*, where Thompson ultimately found fame. His first important article for Wenner’s publication was “Strange Rumblings in Aztlan” in 1971, which would prove important for several reasons. Accepting the assignment, about a Latino journalist named Ruben Salazar who was killed in a Los Angeles Police raid, demonstrated his willingness to produce copy as a staff reporter rather than a freelance writer. Apparent in the article

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32 Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*, 296.

33 Ibid., 141-142. Hinckle sent *Scanlan’s* managing editor Don Goddard to pressure Thompson to finish “The Kentucky Derby,” which naturally backfired and provoked “writer’s block.” Eventually, Thompson broke down and dispatched pages from his notebook to the copy desk, which ran the pages and gave birth to “gonzo” journalism.
itself is a steady, yet creative, exploration of the events surrounding Salazar’s death. Thompson noted that after Salazar’s death, “the very mention of the name ‘Ruben Salazar’ was enough to provoke tears and fist-shaking tirades not only along Whittier Boulevard but all over East L.A.” That passage exemplifies Thompson’s ability to engage in creative commentary, while connecting the story to a factual basis, and is indicative of the entire article. The assignment also brought him into close contact with a crucial source: Latino lawyer, writer and activist Oscar Acosta, who would eventually become a main character in Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. The clout Thompson built up after producing “Strange Rumblings” paid off for the next several years and assignments, as he pursued his varied interests with the support of editors at Rolling Stone.

The story of the origins of Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas serves as a good example of the work Thompson could produce by adhering to his nature and refusing to “conform to workplace standards.” Perry recounted how Thompson and Acosta would eventually become the crazed reporter Raoul Duke and his attorney Dr. Gonzo captured in Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. The concept for Las Vegas was rooted in Thompson’s need to disconnect from the Salazar piece, and “frustrated by the Chicano culture in East L.A., Hunter had the idea of doing a piece about the American dream in Las Vegas, a follow-up to the Kentucky Derby piece . . . An editor friend at Sports Illustrated asked Hunter if he was interested in covering the Las Vegas Mint 400 motorcycle race.”

34 Thompson, The Great Shark Hunt, 122.

35 Ibid., 158.
they contemplate the Salazar story outside of Los Angeles. That suggestion led to the trip, which would eventually be supported by Wenner and turned into an epic story.

Perry quoted a moment when Thompson brought an initial proposal of what would become *Fear and Loathing* to *Rolling Stone* editor David Felton, with whom he was working on the Salazar piece. “‘This stuff is great,’ said Felton, handing the pages back. ‘I think you are really onto something. Keep it up.’”36 Eventually consulting Wenner, Thompson found the additional support he needed to bring his personal vision, in the form of *Fear and Loathing*, to life rather than the (as Thompson saw it) unsettling experience of grinding out a piece on a murder. Unfortunately, however, as Thompson mentioned in his letters to Wenner while he was finishing the work, whatever support Thompson received in the pages of *Rolling Stone* only difficultly translated into financial support.37 As Thompson’s demands for more money on his personal project continued, Wenner eventually deducted fees from his story payment. Thompson then helped himself to one of Wenner’s stereo amplifiers.38

Thompson’s next book, *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72*, was written very differently since he was now a salaried employee of *Rolling Stone* and Wenner. Perry recounted stories, occurring during the 1970s, of Thompson’s personal triumphs juxtaposed with anger and animosity (mostly over money) directed at Wenner, who had by this time become his patron. As his letters demonstrated, Thompson would take these perceived slights very seriously, eventually severing contact with Wenner and

36 Ibid., 161.

37 Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*, 378-380 and 390-394

38 Perry, 164.
harboring long-lasting resentments. Journalist Timothy Crouse, who assisted Thompson in his articles on the 1972 presidential campaign (which would eventually become *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72*), would often find himself at the receiving end of Wenner’s wrath over Thompson’s inability to file on time.

Wenner and Thompson would frequently spar over issues such as these, as Thompson next covered the end of the Vietnam War. Thompson ended one letter to Wenner by sarcastically thanking him. Thompson angrily noted “all the help and direction you’ve given me in these savage hours, and about the only thing I can add to that is that I genuinely wish you were here.”

Perry related this bizarre situation as Thompson attempted to learn whether a rumor that Wenner dropped him from retainer was true. In fact, Wenner had taken out a massive life insurance policy on Thompson before he left to cover the fall of Saigon. The policy, according to Perry, “would make the magazine a lot of money if the Gonzo journalist were killed. When Hunter returned from Saigon, he resigned from the magazine and asked that Wenner remove his name from the masthead.”

Thompson essentially stopped writing for *Rolling Stone* after this instance, producing perhaps a handful of pieces through the rest of the 1970s and 1980s before returning briefly as a regular contributor for the 1992 presidential campaign. His experiences with Wenner, however, had proven to be more than he preferred to accept as either a freelance or salaried journalist.

From the perspective of a biographer, Perry related much of the tension evident between Wenner and Thompson, though he uses mostly chronological anecdotes to

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39 Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*, 617.

40 Perry, 214-215.
demonstrate his claims. A more detailed analysis of the working relationship between
Hinckle and Thompson, in particular, would have been especially helpful in gauging the
overall theme of Thompson’s relation to other editors. Again, Perry wrote as a
biographer, rather than a historian. This necessarily limited his scope, and demonstrates
what his study lacked when compared to McKeen’s study.

Tom Wolfe serves as one of the most potent examples of individual New
Journalists who shaped the genre into the literary style it became. Ronald Weber
declared Wolfe “a founding father of the New Journalism.”

Dorothy Scura edited a
volume that examined Wolfe’s career in detail, studying his emergence as a major figure
in 1965 with a parody he wrote for New York Magazine. Scura also included detailed
descriptions of the catalyst for his first major work in the New Journalism, The Kandy-
Kolored Tangerine Flake Streamline Baby, which grew out of an assignment he started
for Esquire magazine.

From the perspective of a working journalist, McKeen expressed a profound
appreciation for the freedom Wolfe injected into his brand of journalism, which in turn
resulted in new freedoms for other reporters. Again, in most studies, Wolfe emerged as a
leading figure and a unique example of the possibilities of the New Journalism.

Wolfe hardly became integral to the development of the New Journalism instantly,
however, and, as previous studies noted of Thompson’s own experiences, Wolfe first had
to demonstrate his journalistic capabilities. It was at newspapers like the Washington

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42 Dorothy Scura, ed., Conversations with Tom Wolfe (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1990).
Post where Wolfe began to hone his writing style. The Post was merely an early example of Wolfe’s attempt to shape his own technique. Wolfe eventually demonstrated his talent at the Herald Tribune and became a staff writer on New York, the Sunday magazine. The presence of journalist Jimmy Breslin helped Wolfe develop a sense of belonging at the Herald Tribune, but a keenly developed sense of competition with New York Times reporter Gay Talese had as great an impact on Wolfe’s writing.\footnote{Ibid.}

Wolfe’s Herald Tribune editors willingly accepted his desire to try new journalistic techniques. Herald Tribune historian Richard Kluger wrote about the paper’s initial embrace of Wolfe’s adventurous style. He noted, “For Tom Wolfe, all of New York life was a single sublime feature. He did not construct his stories like anyone else. He would plunge into them in medias res, drolly painting the scene and happily twirling images to tantalize the reader before doubling back to supply comprehensibility.”\footnote{Richard Kluger, The Paper: The Life and Death of the New York Herald Tribune (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1986), 673.} Kluger, however, also explained why the Herald Tribune, and its top editor James Bellows, embraced Wolfe in the first place. He noted “of all James Bellows’s efforts to strengthen the Tribune, none was more striking than his willingness to take chances on new young writers, whom he encouraged to work in whatever style made them comfortable and who understood… that ‘there is no mold for a newspaper story.’”\footnote{Ibid., 671.}

The mindset of the Herald Tribune clearly encouraged the kind of writing Wolfe was eager to pursue. One particular example of Wolfe’s first assignment at the paper illustrated how Wolfe must have reacted to this newfound freedom. McKeen recounted...
how Wolfe reacted to this new style, when “on his first assignment, Wolfe asked his supervising editor how long the story should be. The city editor – in Wolfe’s description – looked at him as if he were crazy. ‘What do you mean how long do I want it?’ the editor said. Wolfe elaborated: ‘Do you want six [para]graphs? Ten graphs?’ The city editor snorted, ‘Just stop when it gets boring.’”

While Thompson and Wolfe represent two individual writers examined in this thesis, they remain only one half of the complete narrative. To balance the narrative, this study will also focus on specific editors Jann Wenner, Warren Hinckle, Sidney Zion, Byron Dobell, and Clay Felker as representative of the other central aspect in the writer-editor relationship. These individual editors are, in turn, representative of the willingness of their publications to sustain the New Journalism. This aspect of the thesis has also been examined by a number of writers and scholars: namely, the debt owed to magazines such as Rolling Stone and Esquire. Linn again explicitly stated the dependence on liberally minded editors. In a personal note, he thanked “those editors who were willing to publish these subjective works. Without them, gonzo [the term applied to Thompson’s particular method of writing] journalism in printed form would not exist. They were the people who decided against traditional journalism. They chose, in essence, entertainment over news, a style of writing that readers have a difficult time putting down.”

Essayist Jan Morris explained in detail the vitality of Rolling Stone and its value in the context of journalism. She asserted that “Rolling Stone was the most thrilling phenomenon of contemporary American journalism, which had established its fortunes

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46 McKeen, Wolfe, 22.

47 Linn, 53.
upon the economics of rock music, and found its readers among the lively, restless, affluent and stereophonic avant garde of young America.” While this might be a somewhat idealized interpretation of *Rolling Stone*’s place, it provides insight into its reputation among its contemporaries.

Finally, Wolfe himself described the journalistic level of freedom he encountered at *Esquire* magazine when he first proposed to explore the precedent for what would become his *Streamline Baby*. He explained that “I went over to *Esquire* magazine after a while and talked to them about this phenomenon [of obsessively creative custom car designers], and they sent me out to California to take a look at the custom car world.” With that concise description, Wolfe embarked on forming a new method of interpreting and reporting journalism, with assistance and understanding from *Esquire*.

**Theoretical Framework**

Judging from the resources available, a clear concept of the New Journalism, on a practical and theoretical plane, emerges and provides a basis for studying the motivations and methods of New Journalists in the 1960s and 1970s. Curiously enough, at least part of that theoretical model can be derived from Marshall McLuhan, the theorist who predicted the dawning of a new interactive information age. Howard Bloom edited a volume of scholarly research related to Wolfe and included in that volume an analysis of what New Journalists were attempting to communicate. With respect to the similarities between McLuhan’s ideas and the New Journalism, Richard Kallan noted in Bloom’s volume “Marshall McLuhan’s famous dictum about the medium being the massage can

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also refer to New Journalism’s idea of massaging, or engaging the reader’s attention, by giving the feel of an event instead of simply reporting what has happened.” In other words, closely related to this explanation, an accurate description of the New Journalism maintains that a direct infusion of the reporter’s persona into the mind of the reader is a primary intention.

If regarded in the context of its era, the New Journalism owes much to the emergence of both new media theories (as with McLuhan) and new, viable media options (such as television). The comparison to McLuhan is interesting as well, given that Kallan’s study examined the rise of the New Journalism with the comparable rise of television in the same era. That is, the same ideals that made television popular might have played some role in making the New Journalism an equally accessible medium of communication. Whether the evolution of the two are related or merely coincidental remains to be examined by other studies, but for the purposes of this thesis that possibility provides a context for understanding the respective successes of television and the New Journalism.

Related to this concept of immediacy, or tangible writer-reader interaction, is what Wolfe described as his “theory of information compulsion.” As Wolfe explained to interviewer Chet Flippo, “My one contribution to the discipline of psychology is my theory of information compulsion. Part of the nature of the human beast is a feeling of scoring a few status points by telling other people things they don’t know.”


comment described a method of reporting that influenced at least Wolfe and possibly other New Journalists to undertake their own writing style.

The above theories explain the motivations and methodology of the New Journalists, which serves the purpose of this thesis by providing answers for roughly one half of the study. The other half, which will deal with the motivations of the editors, will reference established traditions of journalistic relationships, whereby editors and reporters maintain respectful and cooperative interactions in order to fulfill both their obligations.

However, in the context of the New Journalism, the theoretical model for this study must also account for any divergences that appear in both the New Journalists’ and editors’ motivations. This divergence would occur where editors appeared willing to allow experimental writing, yielding new journalistic techniques as well as new considerations. Flippo provided an example of what motivated editors in Wolfe’s case. The catalyst for experimentation came when “Lewis Lapham (now editor of Harper’s) . . . quit the New York Herald Tribune. It was there that Wolfe and Jimmy Breslin and Pete Hamill and others were encouraged by editor Clay Felker to try new avenues in journalism. New York magazine was the birthplace of New Journalism.”

Throughout the literature, a pattern emerged suggesting that editors who understood, or at least recognized, this new approach to journalism could treat it as such and provide a forum for experimentation. Wolfe himself also provided a deeper explanation of this motivation in Hooking Up, where he described his first encounter with

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52 Ibid., 132.
journalistic controversy that resulted in an early example of the New Journalism.\textsuperscript{53} A willingness to be professionally daring and an understanding of the value of experimentation became part of the theoretical guidelines that governed these editors and it provides a cornerstone of the model for this thesis.

**Methodology**

The design of this study essentially suggests that primary source material (correspondence, memoirs, interviews, essays, novels, etc.) will be the strongest indicators of the validity and detail of the hypotheses. The content produced by New Journalists Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson will be central to this study, as are the personal reflections of editors who worked in the New Journalism, such as Jann Wenner, Byron Dobell, Warren Hinckle and others. Moreover, the historical record is vital to this study, so the content of what the New Journalism produced, when and in what publication will be considered. As individual pieces, when considered with the background of how these stories were written and published, this content will provide specific examples of the interaction between these writers and editors.

Specific references to the relationship between the writer and the editor, whether it is derived from primary or secondary material, will be closely examined for validity and explication. Particular emphasis will be placed on primary information from New Journalists such as Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe and editors noted above. These sources will be examined for reflections or answers that relate to specific experiences with magazines and editors, whether those experiences were positive or negative, and whether a lasting judgment emerged from that encounter. Both Wolfe and Thompson are

recognized by most journalism and literary historians as central to the development of the New Journalism.

Perhaps the most essential explanation on why this thesis focuses on Wolfe and Thompson is to consider the body of work (both written by them and also about them) readily available to scholars and readers. These two journalists have engendered a considerable amount of analysis and writing devoted to them, as well as contributed their own work to the historical record for analysis. To conduct this type of research on other New Journalists would be more complicated in identifying relevant material and gathering insight into their experiences as the New Journalism developed.

The methodology in this study will be heavily reliant upon case study techniques of original primary source material from the publications where the New Journalism thrived, as well as those specific advances in which the underground press contributed. The specific publications and individuals to be included in this study will include Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe, who contributed to the New Journalism, and those publications that either ran the work of these writers or provided an environment in which this material could be published. Wolfe and Thompson are the focus of this study due to the volume of work they produced as New Journalists, the length of their careers, and the wide variety of available resources related to each writer. Publications such as Scanlan’s Monthly, Rolling Stone, Esquire, The New York Herald Tribune, New York Magazine and others contributing to the development of the New Journalism in the 1960s and 1970s will also be explored. These magazines and newspapers were specifically considered given their evident relationships with Thompson and Wolfe and the volume of these writers’ work that each publication provided.
Given the necessarily narrow area of investigation, approaching this thesis as a case study will yield the most accurate and efficient method of properly addressing the hypotheses and will also help make the study manageable. Case study techniques are valuable in the context of providing a precise start and end point for the time period studied, which in this case will be the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. The reasoning behind limiting this investigation to these two decades is to account for how these writer-editor relationships impacted on the New Journalism as both a literary genre and a journalistic practice.

Linn, Meyers and Gerald Boyer all approach their respective topics related to the New Journalism as case studies or “chronicles,” which refers to an attempt to account for specific aspects of either the time period or the source material, such as the 1960s and 1970s where the New Journalism once again emerged as a recognizable literary technique. These three studies employed techniques to examine both the particular time period and specific body of work (as with Meyers’ focus on Talese, Thompson, and Wolfe), which define the essential elements of this thesis as well. Every effort was made to adhere to the techniques and methodology employed in these, and similar, studies.

In particular, all sources pertaining to Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe will be studied in an effort to obtain evidence of their opinions toward the respective editors for whom they worked. In the case of Hunter S. Thompson, both volumes of his correspondence currently released were thoroughly investigated to understand all aspects of his career and interaction with editors such as Jann Wenner, Warren Hinckle, Sidney Zion, as well as editors of smaller publications such as the National Observer. In addition to those sources, works by other scholars investigating Thompson’s life will be
examined for insight and specific critiques of his relationship with the editors and publications noted above.

In the case of Tom Wolfe, scholarly studies of his development of the New Journalism and his interactions with editors at *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, and the *New York Herald Tribune* will be examined using the same techniques applied to Thompson. Source material will be searched for references to the editors of the publications noted above, as well as a careful eye toward Wolfe’s published work that reveals his own perception of how these relationships were conducted.

In a methodological sense, the basic research question under examination in this study is this: How did the relationship between reporters and editors impact the development of the New Journalism? To examine this question accurately, the variables under examination can be represented by the individual reporters, the individual editors and publications, and their specific reflections as they relate to the New Journalism. To analyze the question in detail, the necessary focus is on correspondence and information related to the prior hypotheses that can be derived from interviews, memoirs, and other primary or secondary research material related to the New Journalism.

**Implications of Research**

This study is intended to provide a new way of looking at the New Journalism as a whole, through the individual cases of Thompson and Wolfe and as an overview of how business was conducted as a New Journalist. As a way of understanding the New Journalism, focusing on individuals provides more concrete evidence of how the lives and work of these writers was conducted. Media scholars, journalism historians, and historians of pop culture in the 1960s and 1970s would find this thesis beneficial to a fuller understanding of the New Journalism.
Historians of both journalism and culture could find valuable information in this thesis. This study could also inspire deeper analysis of the New Journalism, through more intensive studies. Other New Journalists, such as Gay Talese, Norman Mailer, and Truman Capote, could also be included in a study similar to this thesis, yielding more evidence of their interactions with editors and the resulting experiences of their careers. Another aspect of similar studies must incorporate explanations of how these writer-editor relationships influenced the developing reporting techniques.

This study is necessarily only a start to a thorough understanding of how editors and writers communicated and worked together. Detailing Thompson and Wolfe’s experiences in the New Journalism provides the basis of conducting a more detailed analysis of how New Journalists altered journalism history and technique in the 1960s and 1970s.
CHAPTER 2
HUNTER S. THOMPSON

This chapter will focus primarily on Hunter S. Thompson’s early life and career. Thompson’s earliest struggles as a freelance writer contributed much to his later persona as a resilient, yet frustrating reporter constantly pushing the boundaries set by society and his editor. The period of the 1960s when Thompson became classified as a New Journalist saw social upheaval related to the evolving Vietnam War crisis, a wide-ranging civil rights debate, and a growing discontent among political liberals toward the United States government. These emerging crises all provided creative fodder for Thompson to critique American culture and government. This chapter will also focus on the development of two publications that would prove eminently critical to Thompson’s career: *Rolling Stone* and *Scanlan’s Monthly*. In the discussions of each publication, the editors involved and its historical background will be considered.

**Thompson’s Early Career**

Hunter Stockton Thompson was born on July 18, 1937, to Virginia Ray and Jack R. Thompson of 2437 Ransdale Avenue in Louisville, Kentucky, a city that would influence his career throughout his life. As a youth, he was intelligent and prone to troublesome antics. Thompson himself related that his “first face-to-face confrontation with the FBI occurred when I was nine years old.”

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on by he and his friends’ destruction of a mailbox [“it was a Federal Offense, they said, and carried a five-year prison sentence”], first described his parents’ panic at the possibility of their child being arrested by FBI agents, but also revealed Thompson’s shrewd analysis of the situation: “Never believe the first thing an FBI agent tells you about anything—especially not if he seems to believe you are guilty of a crime. Maybe he has no evidence. Maybe he’s bluffing. Maybe you are innocent. Maybe. The Law can be hazy on these things . . . But it is definitely worth a roll.”

Thompson’s first job as a reporter came in September 1947, when he and his friend Duke Rice wrote for the *Southern Star*, a paper edited by ten-year-old Walter Kaegi, Jr. While the paper lasted only for five issues, it stands as Thompson’s first venture into journalism.

As a teenager, Thompson was recognized as gifted and inducted into the Athenaeum Literary Association, a society whose members were “people distinguished for their literary or scientific achievement.” However, in 1955, “Thompson found himself convicted of robbery and sentenced to six weeks in the Jefferson County jail. On graduation day, when his classmates received diplomas, Thompson sat alone in his cell.”

After his release, Thompson joined the U.S. Air Force and was assigned to Eglin Air Proving Ground in Pensacola, Florida, in 1956. While at Eglin, Thompson soon talked his way into a position as sports editor of its *Command Courier* base newspaper.

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3 Ibid., 6.

4 Perry, 4.

5 Ibid., 14.

It would prove to be the beginning of a highly experimental and intuitive effort by Thompson, and it provided him the opportunity to pursue his ambitious writing career. Michael Linn investigated Thompson’s *Command Courier* writing and Thompson himself included much of his personal correspondence from that era in *The Proud Highway*.

Linn placed Thompson’s first attempt at highly personal, stylized journalism (dubbed “gonzo”) to an Oct. 15, 1957 column titled “Espeland And The Dogs: A Tale of Woe.” Linn’s most compelling argument here was that “the fact that the piece was written prior to Thompson’s first civilian job in journalism may mean that Thompson didn’t develop this style after years of professional writing, but rather, brought this literary style to journalism from his very first years as a journalist.” By August 1957, however, Thompson’s patience with Air Force life was waning. A personnel report filed by Colonel W. S. Evans stated, in part, “this Airman [Thompson], although talented, will not be guided by policy or personal advice or guidance. Sometimes his rebel and superior attitude seems to rub off on other airmen staff members . . . . Consequently, it is requested that Airman Thompson be assigned to other duties immediately, and it is recommended that he be earnestly considered under the early release program.”

His brash attitude, as well as a freelance career (against Air Force regulations) with a local newspaper known as the *Playground News*, for which he published under pseudonyms, had contributed to his decline at Eglin. Thompson, however, was pleased that his Air Force career could end earlier than expected, and earnestly pursued a

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8 Thompson, *The Proud Highway*, 63.
discharge. His superiors were willing to consider him a candidate for early release, as they recognized his aversion to authority conflicted with his duties at Eglin. In November 1957, Thompson was given an honorable discharge.  

Finding an introductory job in journalism proved especially difficult for Thompson, though hardly for reasons other budding reporters encounter. While small newspapers were a traditional in-road into a career in journalism, these publications nearly froze Thompson’s progress. Rather than blame these newspapers, Thompson recognized his natural problem with authority, as noted by his previous superiors. Thompson’s first job in journalism after his discharge was at the Jersey Shore, Pennsylvania, Herald, where he took over as sports editor on Dec. 9, 1957. Perry described Thompson’s brief tenure in Pennsylvania, where he worked for only a few weeks:

One night, Hunter borrowed [a local feature] writer’s car to take [the feature writer’s] daughter through the countryside. In the course of the evening’s adventures, one of the car’s doors and the front bumper were practically torn off. The following morning Hunter and the other journalists watched as the writer, furious, drove the car into the newspaper parking lot, door and bumper grinding on the asphalt. Fearful that the publisher would deduct repair costs from his salary, Hunter immediately left the office, drove home, packed and headed for New York City.

As Thompson said in a Jan. 2, 1958 letter, “the scandal . . . made it necessary for me to flee town immediately in order to avoid being tarred and feathered by a puritanical mob.”

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9 Ibid., 62.

10 Ibid., 72.

11 Ibid., 75.

12 Perry, 29.

13 Thompson, The Proud Highway, 94.
Upon arriving in New York, Thompson took up residence at 110 Morningside Drive, began seeking employment in the city’s journalism industry and made plans to attend Columbia University. He eventually landed a $50 a week position as a copyboy for *Time* magazine, which barely paid the bills and hardly helped his trouble with debtors. In a letter to his friend Sally Williams, Thompson described his plan for avoiding debt collectors: “Tell them I left several weeks ago to go over to Gainesville, Florida to apply for a job as a religion editor on a paper there. Just as long as they never discover that I’m in New York, I’m all right.”\(^{14}\) Thompson concocted a form letter to that end, explaining that “I might be the assistant religion editor of the *Gainesville Sun* pretty soon . . . . I’m going over there next week to see about a job. If I get this thing in Gainesville I’ll be a religion editor and publish my own book in the paper. After that I’ll have a job and get well.”\(^{15}\) The whole plan, of course, was absolute fiction, but it is representative of his desperate, yet highly imaginative, humor.

During this time, Thompson developed an ever-evolving interest in pursuing writing as a career, as exemplified by an interest in Jean-Paul Sartre, Jack Kerouac, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. This period also reveals his increased confidence in his prose, both in letters to friends and short stories. He would regularly dispatch letters to the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice*, simultaneously making fun of the publications and inquiring about a job with them. As Thompson responded to a *New York Times* want ad, “somewhere there is a great warp in my training, rendering me unfit to compose eulogies on ‘togetherness,’ exposés on prostitution rings, or heart-warming revelations on the

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 114.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 115.
private life of blind folk.”\textsuperscript{16} In his personal correspondence, he “ponders whether he is a writer of “action” (Hemingway, Kerouac) or of “thought” (Joyce, Faulkner).”\textsuperscript{17} At one point in this letter, he explained that “you can either impose yourself on reality and then write about it, or you can impose yourself on reality by writing.”\textsuperscript{18} This statement succinctly demonstrates Thompson’s grasp of literature’s possibilities, even while he was struggling to find his voice.

After being fired by Time for insubordination, Thompson arranged a writing spot on the \textit{Middletown Daily Record} in New York. As Thompson described it, it was “a two-and-a-half year-old experimental newspaper,”\textsuperscript{19} but provided him an opportunity for a relatively stable reporting position. This job, however, lasted only until the end of February 1959, given his unruly attitude toward management. “Several days ago I was instrumental in the looting of an office candy machine,”\textsuperscript{20} he explained while appealing for a job at the \textit{New York Times}. Without money or a job, he ended up in the Catskills, writing short stories and trying to determine his next move. By April 1959, Thompson had the first draft of his first novel, “Prince Jellyfish,” which was never published but excerpted in his later book, \textit{Songs of the Doomed}. This was the first time he used the name “Kemp” for a character and would eventually name the main protagonist in his next novel, \textit{The Rum Diary} (eventually published in 1998), Paul Kemp.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 127.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 130.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 157.
Not content with waiting for his novel to secure financial stability, Thompson once again hunted for a newspaper job. Thompson’s first job in journalism in the 1960s was as a sports reporter for El Sportivo, located in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Douglas Brinkley explained that Thompson’s tentative plan was to fund a new novel, based in the Caribbean, by working as a writer. Much of his experience in Puerto Rico during 1960 shaped The Rum Diary, and also found him becoming closer to Sandy Conklin, whom he had met in New York and would eventually marry.\footnote{McKeen, \textit{Hunter S. Thompson} (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 6.} McKeen argued that when this magazine failed, Thompson felt he was finished with journalism.\footnote{Thompson, \textit{The Proud Highway}, 209.} In a letter to friend Ann Schoelkopf, Thompson claimed the editor was “a liar, cheat, passer of bad checks, welshing shyster, and otherwise foul.”\footnote{Ibid., 208.}

A particularly revelatory moment in Thompson’s attitude toward editors comes from his attempts to sell the manuscript “Prince Jellyfish,” and the subsequent rejections he received. One rejection letter apparently struck Thompson as worthy of a somewhat complimentary response:

> Few editors, I’m sure, would have taken the time to compose such an informative rejection slip, and few indeed could have put down their thoughts with such style and mastery of tone. It’s been said, I know, that most editors are boobs, cretins and witless crayfish who have edged into their jobs through some devious means made possible by the slothful and incestuous nature of the World of Publishing.\footnote{Ibid., 208.}

While Thompson was impatient with authority, it appeared he was not entirely ungrateful for constructive advice.
Spending much of 1960 in Puerto Rico, until finances tightened and Sportivo folded, and the first half of 1961 in Big Sur, California, Thompson published his first feature article in the men’s magazine Rogue. The piece, “Big Sur,” brought him $350 and led to his eviction because his landlady felt he was “spreading gossip in a smutty magazine.”

Thompson spent the rest of 1961 trying to finish The Rum Diary, which never found a publisher that year. In 1962, however, Thompson would find his first permanent writing assignment with the National Observer as a South American correspondent, where he decided to travel after his experiences in California.

Thompson’s association with the National Observer lasted from 1962 until 1964, producing pieces such as “Democracy Dies in Peru, but Few Seem to Mourn Its Passing.” Thompson generalized broadly about democratic movements in Peru, with passages such as “the people who need democracy don’t even know what the word means; the people who know what it means don’t need it and they don’t mind saying so.” However, he also included interviews that revealed the political misgivings of the Peruvian people. Thompson also wrote articles detailing the plight of the Indian society in South America (“The Inca of the Andes”), anti-American sentiment in Latin America (“Why Anti-Gringo Winds Often Blow South of the Border”), and military brutality in Brazil (“Brazilshooting”).

Thompson’s experiences with the National Observer helped shape his “gonzo” style of writing, as Thompson revealed. His editor, Clifford Ridley, enthusiastically welcomed Thompson’s writing, as he wrote to Thompson: “Please send more. Work this

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26 Ibid., 280.

good doesn’t come in all the time.”

Thompson’s relatively good relationship with the *National Observer* did much for his reputation in the United States, while he continued to write from throughout South America. Capturing personal anecdotes and local ‘color’ proved to be Thompson’s specialty, evident in pieces like “A Footloose American in a Smuggler’s Den,” where the reader is placed in a small Colombian village named Puerto Estrella, devoted mainly to smuggling. As McKeen explained, “much of the comfortable tone of these short pieces anticipates the tone of Thompson’s later gonzo work, a just-between-us shared language of conspiracy that would mark his work with originality.” Thompson focused on the strange experience of being an outsider in small South American communities. Of his visit to the smuggler’s village, Thompson wrote, “here was a white man with 12 Yankee dollars in his pocket and more than $500 worth of camera gear slung over his shoulders, hauling a typewriter, grinning, sweating, no hope of speaking the language, no place to stay – and somehow they were going to have to deal with me.”

Thompson preferred placing the reader in his position, facing circumstances bordering on dire, even in these early examples. His writing tone, an intensely personal focus, and his attraction to fringe lifestyles was evident in the *National Observer* pieces. Addressing the lessons he learned from his South American experience, Thompson wrote in the *National Observer* that “it is an odd feeling to return from a year in South America and read a book by some expense-account politician who toured the continent in six

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28 Perry, 71.


weeks and spoke only with presidents, cabinet ministers, and other ‘leading figures’ like himself.”

The freedom of his assignment (calling Ridley to suggest stories and then writing the pieces) was the essence of Thompson’s best writing for the *National Observer*, while Perry described situations where the writing would suffer. “Sometimes Ridley and the other editors would suggest story ideas, especially when wire service copy alerted them to upcoming elections. It was these stories that proved the most problematic for the editors. Hunter had a tendency to overlook some of the basics of a news story, focusing instead on local color.”

Demonstrative of this, articles like “Democracy Dies in Peru, but Few Seem to Mourn Its Passing” focused more on interviewing Peruvians than explaining institutional problems in South American governments. Thompson preferred writing about the working class and colorful generalities instead of political reporting. Of Peruvian financial concerns outweighing political considerations, Thompson wrote, “Even the taxi driver, who is making a good living because there are enough people on the streets with money in their pockets, does not particularly care who sits in the Presidential Palace as long as they don’t upset the apple cart.”

In late April 1963, Thompson returned to the United States, continuing his work for the *National Observer* as a roving correspondent. He continued his relationship with girlfriend Sandy Conklin as well as an interesting correspondence with Philip Graham, then-publisher of *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek*, that lasted until Graham

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32 Ibid., 352.

33 Perry, 72.

34 Thompson, *The Great Shark Hunt*, 356.
committed suicide in August 1963.\textsuperscript{35} A return to the United States focused Thompson’s writing on cultural characters, such as an examination of Ernest Hemingway’s suicide. The Hemingway piece “What Lured Hemingway to Ketchum?” was published in the May 25, 1964, issue of the \textit{National Observer}. Written in first person point-of-view, Thompson reported on his impressions of Ketchum, Idaho, and his explanation as of why Hemingway committed suicide there. Thompson introduced people who knew Hemingway while he lived in Ketchum, allowing the reader an opportunity to imagine the conversation that would unfold. Of one of these people, Thompson wrote that “Charley Mason, a wandering pianist, is one of the few people who spent much time with him, mainly listening, because ‘When Ernie had a few drinks he could carry on for hours with all kinds of stories. It was better than reading his books.’”\textsuperscript{36} Thompson then gave the reader his impression of Mason, writing that “as he talked, I had an odd feeling that he was somehow a creation of Hemingway’s, that he had escaped from one of the earlier short stories.”\textsuperscript{37}

Thompson’s relationship with the \textit{National Observer} ended over a dispute about a review he had written of Tom Wolfe’s \textit{The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby}, which Ridley refused to run. Thompson bristled at this perceived slight, according to Perry, and ended the relationship with a short note. McKeen suggested that a quarrel over a piece on the free speech movement at the University of California at Berkeley

\textsuperscript{35} Thompson, \textit{The Proud Highway}, 385.

\textsuperscript{36} Thompson, \textit{The Great Shark Hunt}, 371.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 372.
ended the working relationship. Nevertheless, Thompson’s work for the *National Observer* ended at the close of 1964.\textsuperscript{38}

Thompson’s experience with the *National Observer* and in the American West prompted Carey McWilliams, editor of *The Nation*, to pitch him an idea about writing a story on the Hell’s Angels motorcycle gang. This correspondence and relationship yielded Thompson’s first published book, *Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*. McWilliams’ idea about the story was prompted by increasing news coverage devoted to the Hell’s Angels, as their reputation and mythology grew ever more present and troubling to locals. Thompson’s research into the Hell’s Angels began in earnest, as he attended parties and rode with the group starting in early 1965. Thompson bragged to *National Observer* editor Clifford Ridley about his friendship with the Angels, declaring that “I dare say I’m the only reporter in the history of the world who ever got wound up in a story to the point of going to a Hell’s Angels meeting and then taking five of them home for a drinking bout. After all this rape/beating publicity, you can imagine how Sandy felt when we showed up; she was quietly hysterical for five hours.”\textsuperscript{39}

Thompson’s research with the Hell’s Angels also introduced him to Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters, as well as drugs like LSD, which would later form a core of his own mythology and writing. While writing the Angels story, Thompson also covered the student movements in Berkeley for *The Nation* and began pitching an idea for a book-length treatment on the motorcycle gang. In “The Nonstudent Left,” Thompson focused on Berkeley residents who contributed to the protests and demonstrations, regardless of

\textsuperscript{38} McKeen, *Hunter S. Thompson*, 7.

\textsuperscript{39} Thompson, *The Proud Highway*, 7.
their status as a student or nonstudent.\textsuperscript{40} Thompson secured a contract for \textit{Hell’s Angels} in June 1965, propelling him into a year-long sojourn with the gang that began with the purchase (using his advance contract funds) of a motorcycle that \textit{Hot Rod} magazine claimed was the fastest ever tested.\textsuperscript{41}

For Thompson, his reputation as a risk-taker and fringe writer provided him with some security in his relationship with the Angels, at least for a brief period. Thompson was also arrested with Allen Ginsberg on his way from a Ken Kesey party for the Angels, an incident Thompson noted with some pride in a letter.\textsuperscript{42} Thompson capitalized on the relative freedom of his writing arrangements to begin a correspondence with Tom Wolfe (after the \textit{National Observer} rejection of his review) and build upon his career as a freelance writer. By early 1966, Thompson was pulling together the material for \textit{Hell’s Angels}, which would establish the foundation for his reputation and would popularize his writing with other publications interested in “fringe” articles. Thompson finished the draft of the novel in March 1966, and the delivered manuscript fulfilled his editors’ initial hopes. Thompson’s ability to understand and empathize with cultural outcasts, like the Angels, was apparent to his editors, and they believed it guaranteed the book would succeed. That was Thompson’s gift, and it would eventually become his thematic inspiration.

His relationship with the Angels, however, ended in a violent attack by several members of the gang. While the Angels rarely accepted a reporter into their ranks and

\textsuperscript{40} Thompson, \textit{The Great Shark Hunt}, 398-406.

\textsuperscript{41} McKeen, \textit{Hunter S. Thompson}, 29.

\textsuperscript{42} Thompson, \textit{The Proud Highway}, 538.
clubhouses, they allowed Thompson unprecedented access. An unstable group at best, however, the Angels eventually turned on Thompson without much provocation. Thompson acknowledged after the attack in a September 25, 1966, letter that “it was a sort of drunken spontaneous outburst that I had the bad luck to get in the middle of.”

Thompson took it in stride, acknowledging the risk he accepted by studying and writing about the group. The book, in its finished state by 1967, demanded Thompson’s time for publicity purposes, which would eventually pay off in about 25,000 copies sold. The subsequent publicity attached to *Hell’s Angels* would also help with Thompson’s rising notoriety, contributing to his burgeoning friendship with Tom Wolfe and with *Ramparts* magazine editor Warren Hinckle, who would eventually provide Thompson with his next “break.” In letters to friends from early 1967, Thompson discussed being interviewed on NBC and featured in *The New York Times Book Review*. He described these possibilities for exposure as nothing more than a “rotten publicity stunt.”

By late 1967, Thompson was well on his way to securing a reputation as a rogue journalist and intuitive reporter. His highly personal, first-person account of the story proved to be his strongest technique, as was his ability to interact with the Angels on a personal level. Thompson wrote in the book about his interaction with Angels’ leader Sonny Barger, which was mostly beneficial but increasingly complicated due to the gang’s growing celebrity status. He wrote, “Barger talked steadily for nearly an hour, fully aware that he was being taped and photographed. In that respect it was the end of an era, for soon afterward he realized that the wisdom he dispensed and the poses he

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43 Ibid., 585.

44 Ibid., 608.
struck for the cameras were worth money.”

Thompson’s ability to truly interact with his subjects depended on a certain degree of intimacy, which would be honed to near perfection due to his experiences with the Angels and with assignments that were now coming in at greater intervals. The last years of the 1960s would see Thompson’s relationship begin with several magazines that would seal his reputation and create his mythology.

Rolling Stone

The evolution of Jann Wenner’s Rolling Stone occurred at the same time as Thompson researched the Hell’s Angels, in almost exactly the same place. This connection, perhaps, contributed to the famous (or infamous) relationship between Thompson and Wenner and Rolling Stone. The San Francisco area at that time was fertile ground for the alternative press and provided the perfect community for fringe writers and thinkers (like Wenner and Thompson) to flourish and build careers.

Douglas Brinkley explained, “In November 1967, twenty-one-year-old New Yorker Jann Wenner launched Rolling Stone, a hip rock-music tabloid that quickly developed into a glossy, ad-fat pop-culture magazine. When Thompson met the shrewd young publisher in San Francisco in late 1969, Wenner immediately commissioned him to write an article on the Freak Power movement in the Rockies.” The article, “Freak Power in the Rockies,” ran in the October 1, 1970 issue of Rolling Stone and reads as both a news article and political endorsement. As representative of an early collaboration

45 Hunter S. Thompson, Hell’s Angels (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), 192.


between Wenner and Thompson, however, it is interesting to note Thompson’s
established technique inherent in the piece. Of his intentions in Colorado politics,
Thompson wrote “this is the essence of what some people call ‘the Aspen technique’ in
politics: neither opting out of the system, nor working within it . . . but calling its bluff,
by using its strength to turn it back on itself . . . and by always assuming that the people
in power are not smart.”\footnote{Thompson, The Great Shark Hunt, 163.}
Thompson preferred, by this time, an interactive approach in
his stories, establishing himself as part of the action and influencing its outcome.
Correspondence from Thompson to Wenner in April 1970 also demonstrates an easy
friendship between them, as politics and culture are discussed. While business is the
primary focus of this early correspondence, Thompson felt comfortable enough with
Wenner to discuss details of his political campaign.\footnote{Thompson, Fear and Loathing in America, 288-292.}

The style and structure of \textit{Rolling Stone} articles was another important
consideration for Thompson as he pursued writing options and established relationships.
Other journalists realized the unique restrictions and demands for writing for \textit{Rolling Stone}, with its focus on current cultural events. Jan Morris really framed the style of
writing that flourished at \textit{Rolling Stone}, in her introduction to a collection of essays she
Penned for the magazine. Morris described the immediacy evident in his own \textit{Rolling Stone} articles, claiming that “they are essays, but since \textit{Rolling Stone} is a topical and
indeed urgent kind of magazine, they are not timeless—they describe places at specific
moments, in particular moods or conditions.”\footnote{Jan Morris, Destinations: Essays from Rolling Stone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), ix.}
Wenner’s own ability to interact and relate to his writers years and even decades later is evident from descriptions by fellow New Journalist Joe Eszterhas, who had a long standing relationship with the editor. Writing two decades after *Rolling Stone*’s initial impact was felt, Eszterhas believed that Wenner continued to be a force for progressive attitudes. Eszterhas claimed, “My friend Jann Wenner, the editor and publisher of *Rolling Stone*, the rock and roll bible, called me excitedly the day after Bill Clinton was nominated for the presidency. He had spent the previous night at a party, celebrating with Clinton. ‘He’s one of us,’ Jann said. ‘He’ll be the first rock and roll president in American history.’ I had come to the same conclusion.”

Wenner was able to assert himself, from the very beginning of *Rolling Stone* and throughout later decades, as a figure in alternative journalism worth writing for.

Wenner himself reflected on *Rolling Stone*’s intent in his edited volume of selected works from the magazine. He explained:

> From the very outset of the magazine in 1967, we made a point of commissioning serious, comprehensive interviews with musicians and artists, much as *The Paris Review* had done with writers . . . . The first time I met Hunter S. Thompson, he arrived in my office, two hours late, wearing a curly, bubble-style wig and carrying a six-pack of beer in one hand and his leather satchel stuffed with notebooks, etc., in the other. He was wearing the wig because he had shaved his head during his bid to become sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado.

His admiration for his star writers is evident in his introduction to their contributions, though this necessarily must be examined in the context of their relationships. In Thompson’s case, Wenner sounded particularly grateful. Written as succinct praise, Wenner noted that “Hunter’s work in *Rolling Stone* became legend; it

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52 Wenner, *20 Years of Rolling Stone*, 15.
changed things for everyone. Hunter became an extraordinary and celebrated literary figure, *Rolling Stone* became a meaningful voice in national affairs, and political reporting and writing were forever restyled and reshaped. It was one of those rare, fated, supercharged collaborations.  

As with any magazine, *Rolling Stone* required dedicated writers and editors to become a legitimate vehicle for alternative journalism. Without this staff, Thompson would probably have encountered a magazine that would flounder as it struggled to find a voice. Beside Wenner, several *Rolling Stone* editors helped the magazine survive in its early years. Paul Scanlon and Ben Fong-Torres both contributed to its beginning. Scanlon became Wenner’s primary assistant with managing the writing staff, while Fong-Torres managed *Rolling Stone*’s contribution to music journalism. Of particular importance to *Rolling Stone*’s mission, according to Wenner, was Ralph Gleason, who provided the magazine with its name from an essay he wrote, “Like a Rolling Stone.” Besides its name, however, Gleason also assisted Wenner in his years as a college student.

Wenner went far in his praise to emphasize others who were involved with launching and supporting the magazine, even though he was known as its popular figurehead and leader. Fong-Torres, in his memoir, remembered his first impression of the magazine he encountered in 1967. His recollection is important because it speaks to the energy *Rolling Stone* contributed to San Francisco. Fong-Torres explained that “even in its raw first issues, sixteen or twenty-four pages of black-and-white newsprint, *Rolling Stone* became a meaningful voice in national affairs, and political reporting and writing were forever restyled and reshaped. It was one of those rare, fated, supercharged collaborations.  

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53 Ibid., 16.
54 Ibid., 18.
Stone vibrated from one set of hands to another around our flat on Sacramento Street . . . .

Solid, classic journalism, but unafraid—urgent, in fact—to be contemporary and to mess with the established rules and boundaries.”55 He also described the location where Wenner housed Rolling Stone and its miniscule staff. When Fong-Torres first started writing for the magazine, only four people, including Wenner, worked full-time. The offices were housed in a loft above a San Francisco printing plant that was rent-free.56

Fong-Torres emphasized that Wenner was the magazine’s leader, with occasional inspiration and help from Gleason, who provided financial help and stability for the somewhat eccentric young editor. Its humble beginnings would belie the importance of Rolling Stone to the New Journalism, and it would not be the only magazine integral to the development of Thompson’s reputation.

Thompson’s lasting relationship with John Walsh, a former Newsday sports editor who served as managing editor of Rolling Stone, stands in stark contrast to the tensions that arose between Thompson and Wenner. Indeed, Thompson’s final formal writing assignment before his death was as a columnist for ESPN, managed by Walsh. Walsh noted in his foreword to Thompson’s Hey Rube that “Jann accurately predicted that Hunter and I would bond over sports. (It was Jann’s last accurate prediction).”57

Scanlan’s Monthly

The second magazine that contained Thompson’s brand of New Journalism was Scanlan’s Monthly, a short-lived radical publication that provoked much controversy in


56 Ibid., 158.

its pages. *Scanlan’s*, founded by Sidney Zion, a former assistant U.S. attorney and a former legal reporter for the *New York Times*, and Warren Hinckle, former editor of the alternative journalism magazine *Ramparts*, in 1969, also provided a venue and catalyst for Thompson to truly launch his aggressively subjective version of reporting.

Hinckle and Thompson first met in early 1967, when Hinckle was still executive editor of *Ramparts*. Perry gave a basic outline of *Scanlan’s* turbulent history, which provided Thompson with even more of an infamous reputation, to say nothing of the risks Hinckle and Zion ran. Perry noted that, even in eight issues, *Scanlan’s* had succeeded in damaging an advertising campaign by Lufthansa Airlines before finally succumbing to a complicated legal battle over its final issue. American printers declined to publish the issue, focused mainly on guerilla warfare tactics. Though Canadian printers accepted the job, the issue was stopped at the border, and in the ensuing legal battle between *Scanlan’s* and its American printers the magazine went bankrupt.58

Hinckle struck a more humorous tone in his 1974 memoir, in which he devoted a mere page to his experiences while publishing *Scanlan’s*. Of its birth and death, Hinckle stated, “*Scanlan’s* began publishing in a burst of hyperpromotional glory early in 1970. It stopped dead in its tracks under cumulous clouds of confusion in 1971.”59 Hinckle made no mention of his relationship with Thompson, noting his name only once in his book, which is curious considering the gonzo journalist’s fame by 1974, when the book was written. Hinckle did, however, reflect on his friendship with Zion, in which he

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58 According to Perry, “*Scanlan’s* had ruined the multi-million dollar advertising campaign of Lufthansa Airlines, which was trying to lure tourists with the slogan, ‘Next year, think twice about Germany,’ by running the slogan over a picture of a man in Nazi costume whipping a naked woman,” p. 152-153.

sounded somewhat stunned by his friend’s later actions. Hinckle wrote, “The chemistry that made my friendship with Zion did not serve to make a magazine…I went off to write a book about guerrilla war in the United States which was, suitably, published only in Germany. Zion went on to perform the journalistically enigmatic act of fingering Daniel Ellsberg as the man who gave the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times,” a fact confirmed by Ellsberg’s own memoir. New York Times columnist Jim Bellows noted that Zion identified Ellsberg in a British newspaper article, never published, primarily to cause trouble for the Times with the U.S. government. Hinckle’s brief recitation of Scanlan’s history revealed much about its untimely end:

During the short-lived Scanlan’s carnival I became engaged in ridiculous battle with Spiro Agnew over the alleged pirating of a suspect memorandum from his office; was censored in Ireland . . . . Finally, the entire press run of Scanlan’s was confiscated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and left to rot in the snow north of the Canadian border, an absurd if outrageous act which the Montreal newspapers reported had been done at Washington’s behest, but some of my critics said admiringly I had arranged for the publicity. That issue of Scanlan’s never reached the readers, and there was never another one.

The facts of the trouble Scanlan’s caused are reflected, as well, by members of the Nixon White House. According to Michael Learmonth, John Dean, Nixon’s White House Counsel, had told a colleague, reportedly: “I’m still trying to find the water fountains in this place [and] the president wants me to turn the IRS loose on a shit-ass

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60 Ibid., 362-363.
63 Hinckle, 363.
magazine called *Scanlan's Monthly*.\(^{64}\) Zion blamed Nixon for *Scanlan’s* fall, for its subversive publishing and fringe journalism. Learmonth noted the lesson learned from the magazine’s fall, writing, “*Scanlan's* was a study in how a little magazine could cause a lot of trouble. But, after its noisy entrance, it came out just eight times before folding. ‘Can I tell you we would have survived? No,’ said cofounder and ex-*New York Times* reporter Sidney Zion. ‘But Nixon did this, and in that way I’m a bit more proud of us than if we had gone under any other way.’”\(^{65}\) Before its eight-month life ended, however, its circulation had reached 150,000. Thompson published three articles in *Scanlan’s* throughout its short life, and it was here that he first made a real name for himself. Including “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved,” Thompson also published “The Temptation of Jean-Claude Killy” in *Scanlan’s* first issue and contributed to its last issue.\(^{66}\)

The content of the eight issues contain remarkable color, including full-page color photographs and often more than fifty pages an issue. The articles are vivid personal accounts of social and cultural events, ranging from pieces on the deaths at the Altamont music festival to investigate articles on political figures like Edward Kennedy. The second issue from April 1970 contained a vinyl recording of interviews with U.S. Army Capt. Howard Turner, accused of brutality in the Vietnam War. That issue also contained an astrological portrait of President Nixon, as well as an article by Studs Turkel. The photographs and size of each issue suggest that substantial funds were used to produce

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\(^{65}\) Ibid.

each issue, and its youth-oriented coverage should have guaranteed its success. *Scanlan’s Monthly* did not become *Rolling Stone*, however, and it continued publishing articles about radical leftist movements in the United States and guerilla warfare. This eventually prodded the U.S. government to crack down, contributing to *Scanlan’s* demise.
CHAPTER 3
THOMPSON’S LETTERS

With the emergence of a strong reputation (both as a writer and a persona), Thompson sought to expand his career with a rising number of freelance assignments through the late 1960s and early 1970s. His increased fame, however, did not exactly translate into a less confrontational, problematic relationship with the various editors taking a chance on his rebellious personal style. Thompson demonstrated an increased unwillingness to become a professional journalist in order to pursue his writing. This unwillingness would eventually become a centerpiece in his public persona, as well as a substantial part of his recurring problems in the field of journalism.

Having written for the National Observer and The Nation, and with his first book Hell’s Angels finished, Thompson enjoyed considerable clout as a freelance journalist. A greater ability to command his own career in the marketplace made Thompson only more obstinate in his relationships with editors, however. Thompson was rarely hostile to editors, but he was determined to be treated, as he felt, fairly in terms of finances.

William McKeen recounted several occasions when Thompson’s personal performance cost him positions (the Air Force, his early jobs in New Jersey and New York, and Puerto Rico), yet demonstrated that losing these jobs did little to wound his ambition. Instead, it fueled him with experience and knowledge of how the game worked. Thompson, after his National Observer and Nation experiences, found he could

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exist as a writer practicing somewhere between straight journalism and fiction, and he eventually discovered he could sell his writing on his own terms, to Wenner and Warren Hinckle. While these editors welcomed his work, cooperating with Thompson through the entire process of publishing an article remained a difficult prospect. As a matter of course, Thompson’s difficulties emerged from maintaining long-term relationships with publications or editors, perhaps due to the same abrasive attitude he embraced that helped popularize his writing. For example, describing Jann Wenner’s reluctance to publish a piece Thompson wrote on the fall of Saigon in 1975, McKeen pointed out that by this time Wenner and Thompson were hardly cooperating and that the original article appeared in its entirety almost a decade later. He suggested, “Perhaps [Wenner’s] relationship with Thompson was so strained that it affected his editorial judgment.”\(^2\) The article was originally published as excerpts in the May 22, 1975 issue, a month after the event. The question of whether this proved to be a fatal Catch-22 for Thompson requires an examination of the working relationships he encountered through the peak of his career and after.

While Michael Linn examined in most detail the early part of Thompson’s career, he takes special note of Thompson’s already highly individualized reputation as a writer. His examination is important because it presented Thompson as a writer not easily persuaded to cooperate with an editor he did not agree with. Linn paraphrased Louis Menand and provided some insight into why Thompson believed it was so important to focus solely on what he saw as the strength of his convictions: “People read Thompson because Thompson’s character can teach people a certain attitude, an attitude of rebellion,

\(^2\) Ibid., 92.
a sort of ‘outcast’ type of self-absorbed behavior that is very admired by our culture.”³

Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, originally published as *Rolling Stone* articles, focused on his role as outsider journalist. In that story, he eschewed his original assignment to cover a motorcycle race in favor of abusing his privileges as a member of the press and destroying hotel rooms. Linn made the case that Thompson believed nonconformist behavior meshed well with honest writing and could only make writing better.⁴ His attitude appealed to the readers and so, necessarily, appealed (occasionally only grudgingly) to the editors.

**Examining the Correspondence**

The two published volumes of Thompson’s correspondence provide context and background in which to further understand his character and approach to journalism. However, Thompson’s letters provide much more, in that they demonstrate to the reader why he reacted the way he did to editors or made choices when it came to articles or assignments. In addition, these volumes provide evidence for concluding that Thompson experienced certain antagonistic circumstances because it was in his nature to antagonize any entity resembling authority.

The letters from the early half of Thompson’s writing career reveal an aspiring novelist who adheres to an attitude of rebellion with great relish. One of the most important aspects in addressing his career is to demonstrate how his thinking progressed chronologically, as his career rose and fell, in order to address how his career choices as a journalist and writer affected the output of his writing. Thompson, true to his nature,

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⁴ Ibid., 48.
rarely minced words when corresponding, referring to a literary agent’s rejection of his work in 1961 as “pompous and moronic.”

His commitment to his work was evident, however, when he would write letters discussing story-editing issues with the editor of the first magazine to ever publish his work nationally, Rogue magazine. The first few years of the 1960s would demonstrate that he was needy and grateful (without appearing desperate), but rarely willing to compromise on his articles.

Thompson relished the freedom his assignment as the National Observer’s South American correspondent, as well as the somewhat steady paycheck Clifford Ridley, his editor, provided him. By 1962, Thompson was expressing his dependence on this situation to Ridley in regular letters:

Man, I have not depended on anybody for a long time like I’ve depended on the Observer down here . . . . And money was only one of the reasons. You’ve given me enough space (yeah, even with the editing) to really deal with these things I’ve been writing about . . . . Naturally I’ll bitch when you cut things, but I think I’d be remiss if I didn’t . . . . I’ll do as much for you as you want, as long as I don’t have to starve or go mad in the process.

A freelance situation appealed to Thompson’s independence, as long as he could maintain some control over his work. Ridley valued Thompson’s willingness to place himself into difficult, often dangerous, situations for the sake of a story. The response to Thompson’s articles, Ridley reported to Thompson, was strong enough that the National Observer was interested in pursuing a more permanent arrangement with the writer.

Thompson recognized the debt he owed the National Observer in this early part of his career, writing in an April 1963 letter to Washington Post publisher Philip Graham “my

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6 Ibid., 354-355.

7 Ibid., 353.
relationship with the *National Observer* has been exceptionally decent. They have published all my articles…and paid me well enough so that I don’t have to write unless I feel like writing, or have something sold to write about. In return, most of the things I’ve sent to them have been incomparable.”

Articles like “Democracy Dies in Peru, but Few Seem to Mourn Its Passing” and “Why Anti-Gringo Winds Often Blow South of the Border” were among the most prominent of Thompson’s *National Observer* articles.

Thompson, at least during this early stage in his career, responded to arguments over financial matters with a fairly reasoned temper. When Ridley withheld his salary due to a lack of output, Thompson wrote him on April 28, 1963, to say that he understood, writing, “I urge you to reconsider the wisdom of plunging me into a crisis in order to get articles out of me. All it does is make it that much harder for me to get anything done.” The next day, Thompson wrote Ridley again to suggest, in a rare moment of guilt, that “I am disappointed with myself for getting like this & I daresay you are too, but don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

This financial dispute did not sour Thompson’s relationship with Ridley, however, as he continued to write for and correspond with the magazine.

Expressing his opinion of journalism to a rookie reporter writing for advice, Thompson said “most editors fear for their jobs and would always prefer to publish a mediocre pro than a talented amateur who might get him in trouble.”

Though he was addressing the difficulty of making a name and a steady career out of journalism,

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8 Ibid., 372.
9 Ibid., 377.
10 Ibid., 379.
11 Ibid., 462.
Thompson believed that reporters would necessarily face resistance unless they chose to conform to established standards. By the end of 1964, however, Thompson found his experience in establishment journalism increasing as he began corresponding with Carey McWilliams of The Nation, who was summarily impressed by his National Observer articles. Specifically, Thompson had been writing about California for the National Observer, where The Nation was based. Thompson had written “Bagpipes Wail, Cabers Fly as the Clans Gather,” a piece about a Scottish festival in California, for the September 14, 1964, issue of the National Observer, as well as pieces on California forest fires and strip joints in North Beach. This new correspondence with McWilliams would eventually take Thompson to San Francisco, where his reputation would truly solidify.

Thompson wrote his last article, which was never published, for the National Observer in 1965 and transplanted himself to San Francisco. By March 1965, Thompson was discussing what he called McWilliams’ “cycle idea,”12 which would eventually become Hell’s Angels, Thompson’s first book. The gestation period for his first published book, however, would take place over the rest of 1965 and much of 1966 as several articles for McWilliams. Specifically, Thompson would publish “Motorcycle Gangs: Losers and Outsiders” in the May 17, 1965, issue of the Nation. Thompson’s ability to relate to members of the Hell’s Angels13 amounted to nearly exclusive access. “Two guys I know on The Wall Street Journal are trying to do a piece for True [Magazine] on this thing, but they can’t get anywhere near the action,” Thompson wrote

12 Ibid., 497.

13 “These guys are the ultimate rejects from our half-born Great Society,” Thompson wrote to Ridley at the National Observer, demonstrating both an inherent understanding of the gang, as well as the courage to avoid inflating the myth that surrounded the Hell’s Angels.
to his friend Charles Kuralt. “Twice in the past week I was inside situations that they tried to crash and got turned away from.”

His reputation protected him during his initial encounters with the Angels while he wrote his articles for *The Nation*, although his continued interest in them, as a book-length project, would eventually lead to his final confrontation with its members.

In addition to his work for *The Nation*, and his occasional correspondence with Ridley at the *National Observer*, Thompson was also hired to write an article on Ken Kesey and the Hell’s Angels for *Playboy* in late 1965. Thompson expressed satisfaction in these new assignments to his friend William Kennedy in an August 10, 1965, letter, and boasted of his unique role as a journalist covering the motorcycle gang. “[T]his Hell’s Angels thing has just exploded for real on me . . . now even the *Stanford Literary Review* wants a Hell’s Angels piece. My luck on this is that the Angels dug my *Nation* piece, and now consider me the only straight press type they know,” Thompson wrote. “All that stuff I wrote for the *National Observer* apparently died on the vine, but this one job for *The Nation* paid off in real gold.”

By mid-1967, Thompson was also in regular contact with Tom Wolfe. Thompson wrote Wolfe in a May 24 letter to tell him about the end of his *National Observer* tenure, and wrote that he quit the magazine “over the Goldwater [1964 Republican presidential] convention and the Berkeley [Free Speech Movement] demonstrations. I don’t miss that gig at all.”

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15 Ibid., 537-538.

16 Ibid., 614.
from the *National Observer*. Thompson also started corresponding with Don Erikson at *Esquire* magazine, pitching occasional ideas and soliciting writing assignments. In a letter to Charles Karault, Thompson bragged about various connections he had developed. “I’m running way behind on two articles that are already paid for—one for *Harper’s* (on Aspen), and the other for *The Realist*. Beyond that, *The New York Times Magazine* calls about every four days with some new idea.”¹⁷ Though he repeatedly mentioned in his correspondence a continual lack of money, he acknowledged steady work and the sum he made from the relative success of *Hell’s Angels*.¹⁸ By late 1967, Thompson was also friends with Warren Hinckle, who at that time still worked for *Ramparts* magazine in San Francisco. As an example of his comfort with Hinckle, Thompson explained in an October 2 letter that an argument over Tom Wolfe’s book *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* ended his relationship with the *National Observer*, suggesting that the alternate version he explained to Wolfe wasn’t entirely accurate.¹⁹ It is possible that all three complaints can serve as an explanation of the situation.

Curiously, Thompson expressed only a cursory interest in the concept of the New Journalism, as it was then being developed, in letters late that year to Wolfe. In response to a letter from Wolfe asking for contributions to the emerging *New York Magazine*,²⁰

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¹⁷ Ibid., 619.

¹⁸ In fact, Thompson mentions to Tom Wolfe in this May 24, 1967 letter that “*Hell’s Angels* sales are tailing off at about 25,000, of which I got 10%. Not a hell of a lot of money for two years of my life, but I can think of worse ways to make a living.”

¹⁹ Ibid., 640.

²⁰ As a source of the New Journalism, *New York Magazine* would become essential to Wolfe and other New Journalists.
Thompson expressed only lukewarm interest, claiming the magazine was “simply an updated version of the best Old Journalism.”\(^{21}\) His opinion on the subject of the New Journalism would change only somewhat over the coming years, though ironically his future work would be considered prime examples of this new style.

**Thompson and Hinckle**

Editor Douglas Brinkley referred to Warren Hinckle as “a kindred spirit”\(^ {22}\) of Thompson’s, in that they were both politically liberal journalists who worked mainly in the alternative, underground press and championed nontraditional reporting techniques. Many of the early letters Thompson wrote to Hinckle (before *Scanlan’s Monthly* was even formed) showed a warm discussion devoted to the chaotic politics of the 1968 election. In the attempt to define a pattern or trend in Thompson’s relationship to Hinckle, a basic concept emerges. First and foremost, Thompson and Hinckle related to each other as colleagues, rather than as mere coworkers (or even writer and editor). As Thompson’s fame rose (due in part to Hinckle’s publication), contention over editorial and financial issues appeared, clouding most of the early 1970s as Thompson explored other journalistic endeavors. When *Scanlan’s* ceased publication, Thompson expressed little affection, and some anger, toward Hinckle, eventually leading to a somewhat tenuous relationship.

While Hinckle was still at *Ramparts* magazine, and almost two years before *Scanlan’s Monthly* would be introduced in 1970, Thompson related his experiences at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, held in Chicago and the scene of violent clashes

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 644.

between protesters and police. When Hinckle had asked for Thompson’s opinion of those events, he wrote that it changed his opinion about the traditional press and the propriety of the police. He told Hinckle “don’t believe anything you read about what happened in Chicago, and remember that the camera, too, can lie.”

In Hinckle, Thompson thought, he found a colleague who could understand these political developments as he had. As Hinckle’s tenure at Ramparts ended, Thompson lamented his loss at the magazine. He wrote of his disappointment at losing a connection to a respect leftist magazine like Ramparts, and suggested that “the simple fact of Hinckle sitting there in his office full of bad debts and strange animals lent a sense of possibility to the task of confronting my mail, some slim wild chance that the fiendish daily stack might yield up something with a terrible zang and rattle to it.”

As Hinckle pursued a new magazine in the form of Scanlan’s, Thompson expressed immediate interest in supporting the publication. As Brinkley described it, this new magazine was more than willing to accept Thompson’s experimental writing techniques, beginning with his 100-page article on skier Jean-Claude Killy’s experiences as a Chevrolet spokesman. The resulting piece, “The Temptations of Jean-Claude Killy,” was originally rejected by Playboy, because of Thompson’s brutal criticisms against Chevrolet, a potential Playboy advertiser. “The editors of Playboy roam the world by telephone, trying to get everybody down in the same bad hole where they are,” Thompson confided to Hinckle when he finally dispatched the piece to Scanlan’s.

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23 Ibid., 121.

24 Ibid., 170-171.

25 Ibid., 224.
Thompson had great hopes for the magazine itself. He wrote his friend William Kennedy to claim that Scanlan's resembled “something like the old, fire-sucking Ramparts. If their taste for my Killy article is any indication, I’d say it will be a boomer.” Hinckle, Thompson wrote, had “weird and violent tastes,” which, in Thompson’s vernacular, was a compliment. In a January 13, 1970, letter to Jim Silberman at Random House, Thompson declared, “as an editor, Hinckle is one of the few crazed originals to emerge from the jangled chaos of what we now have to sift through and define or explain somehow as ‘the 1960s.’” As a contemporary, Thompson expressed respect for Hinckle’s work and personality.

When early arguments arose over editing issues with the Killy piece, Thompson reasoned with Hinckle and allowed the editor to have the final say. Specifically, Thompson had concerns that Hinckle cut the last ten pages from his original article, but he understood the editor was in control. He submitted, however, a shorter ending that eventually ran with the piece, attempting to put Killy’s life into context. The new ending read, in part, “this is Jean-Claude Killy’s new world: He is a handsome middle-class French boy who trained hard and learned to ski so well that now his name is immensely saleable on the marketplace of a crazily inflated culture-economy that eats its heroes like hotdogs and honors them on about the same level.” Without this ending, Thompson felt, the narrative of his experiences with Killy would lack context. What is interesting to note is how Thompson pleaded his case to Hinckle, trying to strike a bargain while

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26 Ibid., 257.

27 Ibid., 260.

appealing to the editor’s literary tastes. Implicit in this bargaining is a sense that Thompson felt he was justified in reasoning with a colleague, rather than a boss. Indeed, the sense that Thompson and Hinckle often related to each other as equals becomes apparent in exchanges such as the Killy negotiations. Thompson wrote:

It seems only fair to restore at least this brutally shortened version of the ending. It seems a little on the cheap/mean side to go after people with a meat axe without explaining WHY—or at least trying to. I’m not sure what kind of magazine you’re getting out, but if you’re looking for any kind of literate audience I think this Killy piece will go down a lot easier if they find some kind of rational light at the end of the tunnel.29

At this stage in his career, Thompson demonstrated a seasoned freelancer’s point of view that he should have at least some voice in the editorial process. There was no vitriol apparent in his letters on this issue, only a concern that he expressed on a personal level to Hinckle. Thompson implored Hinckle, “For christ’s sake use my new version of the original Killy ending.”30 Ultimately, Thompson convinced Hinckle to include his revised ending, thanking him in a March 2, 1970, letter. He also complimented Hinckle on the general appearance of this first issue of Scanlan’s.31

Thompson next wrote “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved” for Scanlan’s, a far different story from the Killy piece. As an idea that Hinckle and Thompson recognized for its potential, the Kentucky Derby presented unique challenges in both attending the Derby and preparing it afterward for publication. As Thompson wrote in the piece, “with 30 hours to post time I had no press credentials and – according

29 Thompson, Fear and Loathing in America, 270.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 283.
to the sports editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal – no hope at all of getting any.”

Much of the article is focused on Thompson’s inability to properly cover the Kentucky Derby due to the chaotic atmosphere. The article itself was, for Thompson, a mixed experience that both thrilled and disgusted the writer, typical for an apparent perfectionist who often relinquished control of a piece only through force. It appeared Thompson had mixed emotions about the final product of his Kentucky Derby article. He referred to the eventual piece, in a May 15 letter to Bill Cardoso, as:

[A] shitty article, a classic of irresponsible journalism—but to get it done at all I had to be locked in a [New York] hotel room for 3 days with copyboys collecting each sheet out of the typewriter, as I wrote it, whipping it off on the telecopier to San Francisco where the printer was standing by on overtime. Horrible way to write anything.

To Hinckle, in a letter written the same day, Thompson expressed more confidence in how the article developed through the editorial process. Thompson was not equally impressed by the editors in New York, however, telling Hinckle that he detected subtle problems with how business was being conducted. Thompson wrote, “[Scanlan’s is] one of the best ideas in the history of journalism. But thus far the focus is missing.”

The lack of focus Thompson detected would prove prescient, as Scanlan’s began to encounter financial trouble early in its short life. When Donald Goddard, its managing editor, left after four issues, Thompson told Goddard that he “saw [his] departure as a very ugly & ominous event.”

Thompson still pitched ideas to Hinckle after his Kentucky Derby piece, eventually writing a review about The Police Chief magazine in

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32 Hunter S. Thompson, “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved,” Scanlan’s Monthly, 4, 4.

33 Thompson, Fear and Loathing in America, 295.

34 Ibid., 296.

35 Ibid., 304.
his new “gonzo journalism” style. The article, “The Police Chief – The Indispensable Magazine of Law Enforcement,” was a bizarre critique of a magazine meant for police officers, and it was written by a supposed “weapons advisor” named Raoul Duke. Thompson, assuming the identity of Raoul Duke, wrote in the article “it should come as no surprise – to the self-proclaimed pigs who put out The Police Chief – that most of us no longer turn to that soggy-pink magazine when we’re looking for serious information.”\textsuperscript{36} Thompson highlighted the possibilities of this “Raoul Duke” pseudonym, eventually made famous in Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, in a July 28, 1970, letter to Hinckle. Thompson wrote, “We can create, with Raoul Duke, a virtual clearing-house for information on all forms of violence.”\textsuperscript{37}

By November 1970, however, Thompson’s congenial mood had disappeared due to Scanlan’s continual problems, sounding almost desperate due to wages still owed him, money which was looking less likely to appear. Thompson wrote to McWilliams at The Nation on November 23 that he made “a last-ditch midnight effort to salvage some of the funds they owe me for things I did for Scanlan’s before the [financial] crunch…I’m about to lose my American Express card—which was very hard to get—and which will make my free-lance life very difficult in the future if I lose the bastard.”\textsuperscript{38} The financial situation continued to build to a critical mass and Thompson began to direct his anger at Sidney Zion, then co-editor at Scanlan’s. After submitting a bill in December 1970 for expenses incurred while writing for Scanlan’s, Thompson appealed to Zion to promptly


\textsuperscript{37} Thompson, Fear and Loathing in America, 325.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 336.
pay him for his time and money. Two months passed and Thompson decided to chastise Zion for slighting him. He wrote:

This debt was affirmed by Warren [Hinckle], in good faith, and it strikes me as absolutely incredible that you should have anything whatsoever to say about it. In fact I’m astounded to find you speaking for Scanlan’s in any way at all—especially to a writer. You never showed anything but total contempt and disinterest in writers up until now . . . Now you have the stupid, greedy gall to say the magazine doesn’t owe me any money . . . In ten years of dealing with all kinds of editors I can safely say I’ve never met a scumsucker like you . . . The name Sidney Zion is going to stink for a long, long time.  

Thompson went on to accuse Zion of driving Goddard from the magazine, being unprofessional as an editor and denouncing his work in journalism. Thompson wrote,

“Hinckle has at least tried to square that debt, but you—you lying bastard—have just told me to fuck off.”  

In a February 28, 1971, letter to Jann Wenner, Thompson offered to write a scathing exposé on the fall of Scanlan’s, which went bankrupt at that time. Thompson had mostly praise for Hinckle, while having nothing but contempt for Zion. Thompson claimed that “Hinckle was the only editor in America you could call at 3:00 a.m. with a sorry idea & feel generally confident that by the time you hung up you’d have a $1500 story in your craw . . . As far as I’m concerned it’s not only right but necessary to fuck Zion. But I wonder about Hinckle.”

In the end, according to Thompson, Scanlan’s owed him $5,260 when it went bankrupt, a debt that would continue to draw his wrath. Exercising his alter ego ‘Raoul Duke’ in a June 18, 1971, letter to Zion, Thompson threatened, “I get to New York now

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39 Ibid., 358-359.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 371-372.
Several years later, in July 1974, Thompson wrote a letter to Hinckle, complimenting him on an article he had recently written and extending his hand over their chilled friendship. At this time, Thompson was focusing on the Watergate scandal threatening President Nixon. This letter provided interesting insight into the friendship between the two colleagues. Gone was the fantastic, verbose wordplay evident in other dispatches, as the brevity of the letter suggested Thompson was not as comfortable with Hinckle as he once was. The fact that this was the first letter to Hinckle in several years indicated that little had changed since financial disputes clouded the end of their professional relationship. “I thought I’d sent a sort of general ‘thanx note’ or whatever for the help you’ve unwittingly given me over the past two or three years . . . . I’ll probably be hanging around the Impeachment scene this summer, so if you notice me hunkered down in a corner somewhere in the capital, give me a prod and I’ll buy you a drink,” Thompson wrote, void of the manic humor he once shared with Hinckle.

As a freelance writer, Thompson counted on his editors to fulfill their end of the bargain and pay him for his work. At times, Thompson grudgingly admitted that some expenses were unjustifiable, but the circumstances of the end of his work with Scanlan’s stands as a warning to all freelancers. When Scanlan’s went bankrupt, Thompson was left without recourse to collect the money owed to him. Thompson felt betrayed, and while it wasn’t the first, or the last, instance of financial hedging, it struck a chord with

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42 Ibid., 414.
43 Ibid., 592-593.
him that would permanently register. While Thompson’s career would move to *Rolling Stone* as his next major assignment, he was wary of any situation that reminded him of *Scanlan’s*. By 1972, Thompson expressed to his occasional journalistic partner Ralph Steadman that “[*Rolling Stone* editor Jann] Wenner acts more & more like Hinckle with every passing day.”

### Thompson and Wenner

With Wenner and *Rolling Stone*, Thompson cultivated a relationship that yielded key elements of his career, namely the novels *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *Fear and Loathing ’72: On the Campaign Trail*. With Hinckle, Thompson finally had his first big break with articles for *Scanlan’s*. In Wenner’s magazine, Thompson capitalized on that break, in the form of “gonzo” journalism, and built his reputation to its pinnacle. Eventually named *Rolling Stone*’s national affairs editor, a title he continues to hold on the masthead, Thompson became more than a freelancer during his time with the magazine. Like Hinckle, Thompson was able to cultivate a relationship with Wenner that began while living in San Francisco.

Thompson’s first assignment for Wenner was to cover the emerging “Freak Power” movement that Thompson was personally involved in, becoming its spokesman and eventual candidate for sheriff of Aspen. Their prolific correspondence began in early 1970, as Thompson began his campaign and began soliciting help from liberal circles. Two letters from April 1970 involve Thompson agreeing to write an article for *Rolling Stone*.

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44 Ibid., 491.

45 *Fear and Loathing in America* catalogs 41 letters either to or from Wenner from 1971 to 1976. Brinkley notes in the first volume that all the included correspondence is merely a sample of the many letters Thompson dispatched, and that these other letters were excluded if they dealt with strictly business or financial matters. Therefore, the letters included in these volumes are not all the correspondence to pass between Thompson and Wenner during that period.
Stone in exchange for publicity in the magazine’s pages, in the form of unique campaign advertisements Thompson referred to as the “Aspen Wallposters.” Thompson shared many of the details of his Aspen campaign with Wenner, filling him in on his various projects, including the still-developing Kentucky Derby story, and acknowledged the reach that Wenner’s new culture and music magazine had developed. These letters suggest an already formed professional relationship, if not a friendship. Thompson, for example, wrote that “the important thing here is not whether I win or not – and I hope to hell I don’t – but the mechanics of seizing political power in an area with a potentially-powerful freak population.”

Rolling Stone, Thompson noted in the same letter, could help by publicizing his Colorado campaign.

In early 1971, after he had completed his Aspen piece for Rolling Stone, Thompson and Wenner broached the topic of Thompson regularly writing for the magazine, perhaps in the form of a monthly column. Thompson wrote to Wenner on January 30 about the “double-edged idea about the notion of doing a regular sort of column for Rolling Stone, which is always a good idea, in abstract.” Thompson’s hesitation was based on the difficulty of arranging and approving a column with various editors and a freelance-based notion of writing at will. Thompson wrote, “What happens to anybody who gets into any kind of forced/regular writing is that he’s bound to make a useless fool of himself now & then.”

Thompson’s fear, then, was that he would be forced to concede perfection in

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46 Thompson, Fear and Loathing in America, 290.

47 Ibid., 354.

48 Ibid., 345.
order to complete a compulsory assignment. This sense of freedom was important to Thompson’s mindset at the time, as first and foremost a freelance writer.

Thompson did, however, find Wenner open to his next project about the death of Los Angeles Times reporter Ruben Salazar during a police raid, an article originally commissioned by Hinckle before Scanlan’s went bankrupt. Immensely proud of the article, Thompson wrote, “It offers a natural framework & a good narrative. And besides that it embodies a hell of a lot of painful research & detail that would take about two weeks to duplicate.” Like the previous letters, Thompson mixed business matters with personal gossip and his own unique sense of humor.

As their working relationship progressed through 1971, until Thompson began Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, most correspondence pertained to business, either relating to articles or new ideas about projects. Thompson was, at this point, finishing the Ruben Salazar story for Rolling Stone, debating the benefits of salvaging his Freak Power Movement after its defeat in Aspen, and observing the collapse of Scanlan’s Monthly. Writing to his agent Lynn Nesbit on February 22, 1971, Thompson reflected on his developing relationship with Rolling Stone. “Wenner wants me to become a ‘Contributing Editor’ of Rolling Stone. Which seems fine to me, but I’m not sure what it means in terms of money, obligations, time, problems, advantages, etc . . . . [M]y first assignment would be to spend six months in Vietnam, covering the U.S. retreat in a series of articles that would eventually become a Rolling Stone book,” Thompson wrote.50

49 Ibid., 360.
50 Ibid., 366.
In communicating the growing complexities of his freelance work, these early letters indicate that Thompson’s career was more and more connected to *Rolling Stone*. Thompson also made it clear to Nesbit what he hoped would come from this shift in career. Thompson noted that “[W]e’re talking about a long term relationship that could (& should, I think) involve a decent amount of money—not only in terms of article fees but also book rights & other money options that would naturally come with any contractual association with an aggressive & ambitious little bugger like Wenner & a ‘magazine’ that’s obviously looking to expand in every conceivable direction.”

What remained for Thompson to solidify his early relationship with *Rolling Stone* was an exceptionally strong assignment. While he proved to Wenner his strengths as a reporter and researcher with his previous article on Ruben Salazar, Thompson had yet to express his humor and creativity. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson’s second book, began as powerfully evocative *Rolling Stone* articles that would establish his reputation at the magazine. The assignment that would eventually make Thompson a legend, however, began as an innocuous inquiry from *Sports Illustrated* editor Tom Vanderschmidt, who offered Thompson the chance to cover the Mint 400 motorcycle race in Nevada during April 1971. On his return from Las Vegas, Thompson wrote Vanderschmidt on April 22, telling the editor his suggestion led to a perfect opportunity to advance ‘gonzo journalism.’ Thompson wrote, “sooner of later you’ll see what your call (to me) set in motion . . . your instinct was right . . . Your call was the key to a massive freak-out. The result is still up in the air, and still climbing.”

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51 Ibid., 370.

52 Ibid., 376.
of the most direct praise Thompson ever gave to an editor, it cannot be overstated that Vanderschmidt’s chance offer would lead to a masterpiece of American literature. More importantly for Thompson’s immediate career, the assignment gave him a chance to exercise his unique literary voice.  

Despite developing the classic that would eventually become *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson now had to deal with the financial realities of his time in Nevada, which would be distinguished by perhaps a thousand dollars in hotel room charges, car rentals and other expenses, some perhaps related to the drugs that may or may not have fueled his experiences. The debt accrued during his Vegas trip, added to an already present debt from other assignments, would lead American Express to cancel Thompson’s credit card in June after his second excursion to Nevada to finish the story. Thompson eventually had to ask Wenner for a loan to pay off the sizable bill before any other legal action might occur against him. Thompson wrote to Wenner, “I think the thing to do is for you to lend me the $1K-plus to pay off Carte Blanche. That way we can worry later about who should righteously pay the tab. Fuck. Maybe I should. I’ll never deny the thing was excessive. But I don’t recall spending anything, out there, that didn’t strike me as being necessary at the time.” With Wenner claiming to have sent his June

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54 Thompson would tell Wenner that “my Carte Blanche bill for both Vegas trips is $1,289.45.” Ibid., 391.

55 Thompson wrote to a representative of American Express, “I don’t need my [American Express] card. I have others. And I pay those bills. Why the hell should I worry about some gang of flunkies who keep yelling at me from New York?” Ibid., 389.

56 Ibid., 392.
retainer to cover his expenses in Vegas, Thompson now found himself in a situation similar to his days as a freelancer, even though this project was developing into a promising idea.

After his Nevada experience Thompson and Wenner became closer friends, due to their somewhat common worldview and Thompson’s rising popularity in the pages of Rolling Stone. Thompson invited Wenner out to Colorado, to help him edit Fear and Loathing, in late June 1971. “[M]y guestroom has been a standing offer for quite a while; no question about that . . . . Aim here & plan on socking in for as long as it feels comfortable. The cell is yours as long as you want it.”57 By September, however, Thompson was once again facing financial trouble even while planning with Wenner to become Rolling Stone’s political correspondent in Washington, D.C., for the 1972 presidential campaign. On September 10, 1971, Thompson told his friend Bill Cardoso that “I’ll be moving to Washington (for a year—no more) on Nov 1, as the Chief Political Correspondent for Rolling Stone… things seem to be going fast & hard for me.”58

Demonstrating how drastically Thompson’s life had changed since writing for Rolling Stone, he realized that the Washington press corps recognized him from his previous work. Important in that recognition was evidence of the strength of Thompson’s reputation, as he made the transition from a freelancer writer to a Rolling Stone correspondent. Thompson was stunned on his arrival in Washington to find his reputation preceded him. Thompson wrote to Wenner on November 18, “It never occurred to me that so many media people in Washington would know who I was. None

57 Ibid., 415.

58 Ibid., 443.
of these people had even read the Vegas stuff; their interest stemmed entirely from the [Hell’s Angels] book & two things in Scanlan’s.” 59 Thompson enthusiastically threw himself behind Rolling Stone’s plans in Washington, offering Wenner to check around the city for publicity opportunities. He mentioned to Wenner “there is . . . a first-class FM rock station here that reaches almost the entire young/music type audience. I’ll get the name & send it along. A few spots on it might work wonders. I’ll check around for other possibilities & let you know.” 60 His commitment to the details of Rolling Stone’s business in Washington was impressive, as he lobbied for an additional assistant and reported to Wenner on the specifics of delivering stories via fax from the east coast to the west. In addition, Thompson also had to contend with convincing the White House that, as Rolling Stone’s Washington correspondent, he was worthy of a press pass.

Throughout most of 1972, Thompson was kept on the road covering the campaign, yet managed to write prolifically to Wenner about his experiences. Much of his correspondence made it into Thompson’s next book, Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72. 61 By the end of January, Thompson had Timothy Crouse to assist with campaign coverage. Thompson noted in the book the stress he encountered while forced to conform to a regular deadline. He expressed both disbelief that he accomplished the coverage necessary for Rolling Stone and humor at the situation he found himself in. He wrote, “from December ’71 to January ’73 – in airport bars, all-nite

59 Ibid., 451.
60 Ibid., 452.
61 Ibid., 465.
coffee shops and dreary hotel rooms all over the country – there is hardly a paragraph in this jangled saga that wasn’t produced in a last-minute, teeth-grinding frenzy.”

The nature of a majority of the 1972 letters to Wenner had less to do with personal or financial matters and remained predominantly campaign “memos,” updates and reflections that Thompson related to his boss. “Another Wednesday morning, another hotel room, another bout with the TV Morning News,” began a May 1972 letter. “All I ever wanted out of this grueling campaign was enough money to get out of the country and live for a year or two in peaceful squalor in a house with a big screen porch looking down on an empty white beach, with a good rich coral reef a few hundred yards out in the surf and no neighbors,” Thompson confided in a June letter to Wenner. Disenchantment is evident in many of these letters, as Thompson encountered the details and minutiae of national politics for the first time.

When financial matters did rear their head on the campaign trial, Thompson reacted with ire toward Wenner over perceived slights and manipulations. He warned Wenner:

> You’re already on a nasty collision course with your notion that you can hire first-class writers and then treat them like junkie cub reporters . . . . Looking back on our relationship for the past year, I figure I’ve carried my end of the bargain pretty well . . . sorry to sound so testy, but the current atmosphere seems to call for it, and I think it’s better to deal with these problems while they’re still minor; and also while I can still afford to admit that I’ve fucked up a few times, myself.

Thompson’s desire to maintain a manageable relationship with Wenner was evident, even as he watched his financial situation rise and fall, only to return to the most

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63 Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*, 479.

64 Ibid., 484.

65 Ibid., 486-487.
comfortable situation possible: wariness and the struggle to mediate cooperation between two powerful personalities.

After the election on November 2, 1972, and with the defeat of George McGovern by Richard Nixon, Thompson wanted to regain the freedom his former life as a freelancer offered and explained his decision to Wenner in an even-tempered letter. Thompson wrote, “don’t read any malice or strange fit of drug-anger into [my resignation from Rolling Stone]; it merely formalizes the existing situation and confirms my status as a free-lance writer, vis-à-vis [Rolling Stone].” By December, however, Wenner offered Thompson the tempting deal of a permanent position, as well as a permanent place on the masthead, as national affairs editor for Rolling Stone. The opportunity of having a fixed outlet for his writing, and a fixed income and salary, ultimately did not win Thompson over, as he began 1973 seeking a reprieve from the schedule of a staff writer, “because my adrenaline reserves are too low at the moment to maintain the same kind of…schedule we somehow (more or less) sustained for the past 18 months.” Evident in this response is Thompson’s natural resistance to permanent responsibility. Thompson preferred freelance assignments, especially after the experience of the 1972 campaign, and informed Wenner that he wanted to return to his independent lifestyle.

Thompson imposed a sort of hiatus on himself for most of 1973, maintaining a polite correspondence with Wenner about the developing Watergate scandal threatening Nixon. Several projects continued for Thompson, however, including an article for Playboy he worked on from June through September 1973 that developed into “The

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66 Ibid., 497.
67 Ibid., 513.
Great Shark Hunt,” about yacht racing in Cozumel. Wenner and Thompson maintained a sparse yet continued correspondence through the year, discussing various projects involving *Rolling Stone* and the same financial disagreements they had since the beginning of their relationship. Thompson told Wenner in a September 14 letter that his patience was wearing thin with continued bargaining over payment for the occasional articles that would run in *Rolling Stone*. Thompson wrote, “I am tired beyond the arguing point with this insane haggling over every goddamn nickel, dime & dollar . . . . Ralph [Steadman, Thompson’s occasional collaborator] put his finger on it very nicely, I think, when he said: ‘Jann doesn’t seem to realize that every dime he screws somebody out of today might cost him a dollar tomorrow.’ [T]he haggling is getting pretty goddamn old, I think, and the most depressing aspect of it all is that we never seem to make any progress.”

The comfortable, semi-freelance style Thompson adopted through 1974 allowed him the opportunity to broaden his writing opportunities and become involved in political organizing for the first time since his failed bid for sheriff of Aspen. By the middle of June, with the Watergate hearings beginning and a major story clearly developing in Washington, Thompson found that he had enough clout to haggle with Wenner over money and find some humor in the process. Indeed, having written two books that developed out of *Rolling Stone* articles, Thompson felt comfortable capitalizing on his celebrity status at the magazine. “If we’re heading for a terminal haggle, I think we should at least do it on righteous terms, eh?”

68 Ibid., 537.

69 Ibid., 590
much to talk about—except to say you better hope that missing $500 gets to me before I find an occasion to do any talking—on the air or for print—about my general relationship with *RS [Rolling Stone]*.”70 This situation, coupled with his growing unwillingness to endure the grueling routine of article writing, prompted less interaction between Wenner and Thompson. Among the most glaring examples of this attitude, Thompson traveled to Zaire to cover the October 30, 1974, Muhammad Ali – George Foreman fight and returned with no publishable information. In addition, Thompson encountered recurring troubles when he embarked on the college lecture circuit, angering administrations with his antics (including drinking and drug use) and establishing a reputation as a “problem speaker.” For example, Duke University refused to pay Thompson for an appearance because he was almost an hour late.71 Over the next few years, Thompson would continue that notorious reputation. University of Colorado officials had to apologize to the increasingly hostile audience because Thompson showed up late to a November 1, 1977, speaking engagement.72

As more time passed from Thompson’s close involvement with *Rolling Stone* during the 1972 campaign, he and Wenner continued to drift from the friendship evident in their earlier letters. While Thompson continued to work for *Rolling Stone*, he became more disgruntled with his financial relationship with the magazine. As the years passed, and Thompson saw little change in his negotiations over money, their relationship became ever more contentious. The end of the Vietnam War, more than Nixon’s

70 Ibid., 592.

71 Ibid., 600.

72 Hunter S. Thompson, *The University of Colorado* (1 November 1977), compact disc recording.
resignation over Watergate, proved to be a tumultuous, and almost irreparably damaging, period in Thompson’s tenure at *Rolling Stone*. Before he even left to cover the fall of Saigon, however, Thompson attempted to level with Wenner on the perceived, continuous problems between the two. He warned Wenner:

Anyway, by the time you get this I assume we’ll be into another round of haggling – which depresses the shit out of me, but I can’t see any way around it unless we just take a goddamn public hammer to the whole relationship and let the bone chips fall where they may. I am frankly not in favor of this course, but I’ve given it enough thought to feel pretty certain I’ll survive the worst that can happen if you want to serious get it on . . . . No doubt there are numerous ambitious typists who’d be happy to ‘cover politics’ on the cheap for RS [*Rolling Stone*], and if that’s what you think you need, why not just write me a letter and say so? There’s no need to skulk around like Sidney Zion.\(^{73}\)

On his arrival in Vietnam, however, in April 1975, Thompson discovered that the worst of his relationship with *Rolling Stone* was yet to come, as Thompson and Wenner continued to argue over business affairs. The day he arrived in Saigon, Thompson was informed that his life insurance policy with *Rolling Stone* was cancelled and his expenses would not be paid. Thompson biographer Paul Perry noted that Wenner purchased a life insurance policy on Thompson that would have benefited *Rolling Stone* if the writer was killed covering the war.\(^{74}\) Eventually, Thompson discovered that his retainer had been cancelled and that he was, effectively, operating without financial protection in a war zone. Somewhat helpless, Thompson decided to write Wenner with characteristically dark humor and contempt. This episode would damage Thompson’s opinion of Wenner at a time when the writer already distrusted Wenner and was considering ending their

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\(^{73}\) Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in America*, 610-611.

working relationship. Thompson was irate about this new development in a cable to Wenner. As Thompson noted, with trademark dry humor, to Wenner:

Your obviously deliberate failure to reply in any repeat any way to my numerous requests by phone, cable and carrier for some clarification vis-à-vis what the fuck I might or might not be paid for whatever I’m doing out here makes a stupid, dimesucker’s joke out of your idea that I’m going to lounge around out here in the middle of a war at my own expense and with no idea as to what I might write, on spec, about . . . . In closing I want to thank you for all the help and direction you’ve given me in these savage hours, and about the only thing I can add to that is that I genuinely wish you were here.\footnote{Thompson, \textit{Fear and Loathing in America}, 616-617.}

Thompson’s brief stay in Saigon to witness its fall to North Vietnamese forces ended anticlimactically, as he was forced to find his way out of the country like so many other Americans. Besides vague assurances that Thompson’s expenses would be paid, however, Wenner provided no explanation as to why Thompson was essentially left on his own, financially and personally. Wenner merely reminded Thompson, in a cable, to continue writing. Wenner wrote that “I am just concerned that during that time that you continue writing so that the story keeps going on in your mind.”\footnote{Ibid., 629.}

Letters from the latter half of 1975 display little of the affection and humor that Thompson frequently injected into his dispatches to Wenner. Far from humorous, in fact, they dealt mostly with unresolved business matters and threats of litigation. Thompson continued to make clear to Wenner that he had not forgotten how he was virtually stranded in Vietnam. Thompson wrote, “you might think it’s funny to ‘unilaterally suspend my retainer’, but the federal bureaucracies of this world we have to live in like to have things in writing . . . if I have any tax, medical or unemployment problems resulting from your capricious failure to clarify my situation you can be goddamn sure they’ll
bounce back on you – in court, in person, and every other way that seems appropriate.”

Thompson began to distance himself from Wenner, both personally and professionally, though he continued to try to figure out the exact nature of their relationship while pleading his case to the editor. As Thompson explained, “I fully understand that you have a different viewpoint—the larger view, as it were—but not all of us live out our lives from the red-leather driver’s seat of a big white Mercedes sedan.”

While Thompson existed in a sort of professional limbo with Rolling Stone, however, he also began to make plans to cover the 1976 presidential campaign, communicating early and often with then-prospective candidate Jimmy Carter. Thompson’s continued willingness to move past slights and perceived mistreatments in favor of pursuing a promising story suggests a strong journalistic desire on his part, regardless of the magazine it would appear in or the financial details or realities of the coverage. He preferred to deal with those circumstances after the story was complete, until this arrangement caused problems between him and Wenner.

His last letter in 1976 to Wenner, dated June 16, read like many of their letters over the years. Referring to yet more arguments related to expenses, Thompson wrote to Wenner that “you’ve made yourself eminently clear on this matter . . . and, like you say, ‘. . . that’s that on expenses.’ How many other writers have gone to the pawn shop with that phrase (from you) ringing in their ears?”

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77 Ibid., 636.
78 Ibid., 650.
79 Ibid., 691-692.
CHAPTER 4
TOM WOLFE

Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson came from radically different backgrounds, yet emerged as two principal figures in the New Journalism. As with Thompson, it is first necessary to understand Wolfe’s background, in an attempt to understand why and how he developed as a journalist. To contextualize Wolfe’s background with his specific experiences as a journalist, this chapter will also examine his relationship with the specific publications that helped him develop the New Journalism. Related to that intent, this chapter will also examine the development of the New York Herald Tribune, and its related New York magazine, in the context of their development into a vehicle for Wolfe’s New Journalism. The evolution of Esquire magazine in the 1960s and 1970s, where Wolfe developed the majority of his most popular journalism, will also be examined.

Born Thomas Kennerly Wolfe Jr., Tom Wolfe’s father was an editor of the Southern Planter, an “agronomy journal.”1 Wolfe discussed how his earliest memories were of his father editing the Planter. Born March 2, 1931, in Richmond, Virginia, Wolfe ensured his introduction into Southern culture and language that would teach him the complexity and color of writing and speaking. In this environment, Wolfe encountered the peculiarities of language and memorized the unique nature of dialect

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inherent to the South. Wolfe’s instinctual use of creative writing would thus begin to take shape in a culture and household capable of providing continuous inspiration.

Wolfe attended college at Washington and Lee University in his home state, where he helped found its literary quarterly *Shenandoah* as part of its editorial staff. Wolfe played for the varsity baseball team, which suggests a rejection of traditional academia in favor of a more well-rounded approach. Wolfe also first encountered American studies in a class that eschewed tradition and adopted techniques such as field trips and work experience to expose the students to many facets of American culture and life. This early exposure would leave a marked impression on Wolfe and eventually shaped the rest of his academic life.

Upon graduating, Wolfe decided to pursue graduate work in American studies at Yale, in pursuit of his goal of becoming a professor. The culture of student life there confounded Wolfe’s nonconformist instincts, as he tried to stand out from an already unique community by embracing the bohemian lifestyle. Yale also introduced Wolfe to the theories of Max Weber and helped shape his views on status. While Wolfe pursued the bohemian and beatnik movement, during which time he professed some interest in Jack Kerouac but few of the other beatnik writers, Wolfe found his interest in academic life waning. Wolfe reflected on his own time in graduate school in the introduction to his anthology *The New Journalism*:

> I’m not sure I can give you the remotest idea of what graduate school is like. Try to imagine the worst part of the worst Antonioni movie you ever saw . . . or being locked inside a Seaboard Railroad roomette, sixteen miles from Gainesville,

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Florida, heading north on the Miami-to-New York run . . . and George McGovern sitting beside you telling you his philosophy of government.\textsuperscript{4}

Despite his growing disenchantment, he completed his coursework rather than dropping out completely. He had yet to finish his dissertation, however, and he would not complete it, titled “The League of American Writers: Communist Organizational Activity among American Writers, 1929-1942,” until 1957, a year after his departure from Yale. While focused on a particular organization of writers, Wolfe explored an interest in status that would eventually become an important theme in his cultural writing.

In the year between finishing his coursework and defending his dissertation, Wolfe entered what he described as the “real world,” working odd jobs while deciding what kind of writer to become. One journalist described this early period succinctly: “He drove a truck and drank ten cent beer.”\textsuperscript{5} He eventually landed his first job in journalism at the \textit{Springfield Union} in Massachusetts, building up a portfolio of traditional articles while finishing his dissertation. Wolfe explained, “I covered all the ‘beats’ for the paper. The police station. City Hall. The fire department. The railroad station to see who was coming into town. It was very good for a person as lazy as me.”\textsuperscript{6} Two years later, in 1959, Wolfe secured a position as a reporter at the \textit{Washington Post}.

Wolfe, who worked in the \textit{Post}’s “City Life” section as a general reporter, would stay in Washington only for two years before making his way to New York. The structure of the \textit{Post} proved an unsuitable match for Wolfe, since it still served a purpose as a ‘local’ paper during the late 1950s and early 1960s. As a small newspaper, the \textit{Post}

\textsuperscript{5} Dorothy Scura, ed., \textit{Conversations with Tom Wolfe} (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 3.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 16.
focused mainly on news meant for the residents of Washington, D.C., rather than larger or more unique topics.

Originally assigned to basic local stories, Wolfe continued to express a literary influence in his articles. In a July 1, 1959, article titled “Companies Scout Talent At Engineer Convention,” his first article with the *Post*, Wolfe intended to personalize the convention for his readers and place them there. He wrote, “they were telling the story yesterday of the big electronics executive who sent 50 men to the Institute of Radio Engineers convention last March in a crash program to recruit electronics engineers. Some crash program! He got no recruits and lost 12 recruiters – to a California company.”

Wolfe focused on including the reader in the story, as opposed to merely recounting the events.

Wolfe also explored the beatnik community with trademark humor and narrative. In “Beatnik Walker Never Felt So Beat,” Wolfe wrote about a beatnik under attack from the city because he owned an apparently noisy coffee shop. Describing the man, Wolfe wrote, “Wearing a kimono and shredded Levi shorts, Walker stepped over his living-room table (which is two inches off the floor), [and] sat down on a cot (the one with the dead bird under it).” In an article about beatnik poet William Meredith, Wolfe attended a reading of his poetry and wrote, “Beat Generation or no Beat Generation, a new era of poetry has begun – featuring poets who aren’t afraid of white shirts, neckties and short

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haircuts.” At this point, Wolfe was still fascinated by beatnik culture, as these articles indicate. Equally evident from these stories is Wolfe’s continued fascination with status and youth culture. Significantly, these articles also indicated Wolfe’s interest in constructing news articles as personal observations intended for the reader.

Various other Post articles also provide evidence of Wolfe’s ability to include colorful observations and interpretations into regular news items. In one article, Wolfe recounted a police standoff but focused on the reactions of spectators. When the standoff ended, Wolfe captured the reaction of the crowd. He wrote, “all of a sudden it was over. There was almost absolute silence. Then the murmur rose and the crowd charged down the hill from 4th St.” As a cliffhanger ending, Wolfe stopped at the crowd’s initial reaction, allowing the reader to imagine the aftermath. Not restricted only to serious stories, Wolfe also wrote about a visit to a nudist colony. While visiting the colony, Wolfe wrote that he was admonished to “refrain from writing ‘the bare facts are-,’ ‘the naked truth is-,’ or ‘I met a girl who was wearing a smile.’” These flashes of humor are apparent in many of the more eclectic articles assigned to Wolfe.

An assignment as Latin American correspondent for the Post would garner him a Washington Newspaper Guild Award. In these longer feature pieces, Wolfe investigated Caribbean politics and culture. In “Trujillo, Caribbean Khan, Faces Worst Crisis,” Wolfe visited the Dominican Republic to examine the embattled dictator Trujillo. As Wolfe

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noted, “the entire New World has ganged up on [Trujillo].”

As a feature writer, Wolfe intended to immerse the reader in the Dominican Republic while addressing the important aspects of its politics. The fairly long article included Wolfe’s observations of the Dominican Republic. Wolfe wrote “homage to Trujillo, in the newspapers, over the radio and on billboards along the road, is incessant. If a Dominican reporter is pressed for space, he may cut Trujillo’s title down to the bare essentials.”

More intimately, Wolfe invited the reader to consider an example of Dominican life by incorporating a restaurant scene. He wrote, “Forget about politics and go off to the town of Azua one Saturday night at fiesta time. Settle down in the back room of a restaurant. Guitar-picking folk singers are strolling among the tables. It is quaint. It is indigenous. It is the Dominican Republic.”

Details such as this description appear throughout Wolfe’s Latin American articles for the Post and indicate his desire to allow the reader greater involvement in the story.

In another, more humorous story titled “Cuba May Fall but (the) Havana Will Live Forever,” Wolfe focused on the impact of Cuban cigars on foreign policy and the elite. The rise of Fidel Castro’s regime in Cuba severed ties between the island nation and the United States, resulting in an inability of the American elite to secure Cuban cigars. As Wolfe wrote, “the Cuban crisis is exposing and endangering the Havana cigar cult—a private form of devotion that has flourished for decades at the upper levels of American

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13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., E1-E2.
life.”\textsuperscript{15} Wolfe then focused on the history and minutiae of Cuban cigar aficionados, including John F. Kennedy’s affinity for the Havana brand. Wolfe concluded with advice for Castro. He wrote, “If Fidel Castro is as smart as he acts, he will see to it that the United States never runs short of Cuban tobacco. He will parachute it in, smuggle it in by submarine, stuff it into Czechoslovakian diplomatic pouches, or storm the beaches of Florida with the stuff.”\textsuperscript{16} Castro risked alienating the American elite class, Wolfe warned, which could threaten his dictatorship. With articles like these, just as he did with his time in Massachusetts, Wolfe gathered a portfolio of news and feature pieces in preparation for his next job. In all, Wolfe wrote approximately 300 stories as a reporter for the Post.

Wolfe’s capacity to find a twist in an otherwise mundane story was honed at the Post, becoming perhaps the greatest lesson he encountered in Washington. The constant string of general stories may have been an asset, however, given his inherent desire to write in a unique way. Wolfe’s writing had been hindered as a general assignment reporter, even though his editors recognized his humor by allowing him to explore lighter articles, such as the nudist colony piece and his explorations of beatnik culture. By 1962, however, Wolfe had decided to move on to New York, where his career would flourish.

Securing a position at the New York Herald Tribune exposed Wolfe to an entirely different atmosphere than he encountered at the Post. Some of the most talented journalists were already working at the Herald Tribune when he arrived, providing Wolfe with a unique environment and instructive colleagues. His new position brought him into


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., B2.
contact with writers Jimmy Breslin and Dick Schaap, who both worked at the *Herald Tribune*, and Gay Talese, who worked at the *New York Times*. Breslin and Talese, particularly, would eventually be identified as figures in the New Journalism movement, although at the time Wolfe first met them they were simply innovative writers looking for an equally unique assignment. Indeed, Talese would prove most crucial to Wolfe’s development, as the *Times* journalist originally experimented with literary techniques applied to news stories, which would eventually become the New Journalism. This arguably new style of writing did not yet have a name, however, and Wolfe had yet to fully embrace or understand it.

**The New York Herald Tribune and New York Magazine**

The *Herald Tribune* could trace its origins to Horace Greeley and Charles Anderson Dana, who cultivated the *New York Tribune* in the nineteenth century as one of the city’s leading newspapers. The *New York Herald*, founded by James Gordon Bennett in 1835, became the second half of the Herald Tribune. As historian Richard Kluger noted in his study of the *New York Herald Tribune*, it would remain a force in New York journalism until 1966, when it eventually withered. In the century between, Kluger’s study argued, the *Herald Tribune* would profoundly change how journalism was written and what it meant to the public.

Already making a name for itself by 1848, when it covered European revolutions against the established monarchies, the *Tribune* demonstrated a resilience and confidence in its coverage that would prove its worth. In particular, Kluger wrote, its coverage of the European revolts and uprisings of 1848 proved notable. The *Tribune*, in the years leading to the Civil War, became a leading voice in the antislavery movement, placing Greeley in an increasingly public position as a target for the press in the South. The *New York*
Herald, which would eventually become the second part of the Herald Tribune, distinguished itself as well in covering Civil War battles.¹⁷

When Greeley died in 1872, the Herald Tribune’s future was far from certain as various influences within the newspaper’s structure vied for power and influence over its content and editorial slant. When World War I and II erupted, the Herald Tribune featured writers such as Joe Alsop, Walter Lippmann and Marguerite Higgins. Consumed by strikes in the early 1960s, the Herald Tribune reorganized both its staff and content. Editor James Bellows recognized the danger in competing with the ever-growing New York Times and set out to hire, according to Kluger, young writers unafraid of experimenting and producing innovative articles.¹⁸

Including Wolfe, Bellows also employed Jimmy Breslin as the Herald Tribune slowly succumbed to the competitive world of the New York newspaper business. More important that merely keeping the Herald Tribune alive, Wolfe and Breslin contributed to the newly evolving New York Magazine, a Sunday supplement. Of all his attempts to keep the Herald Tribune alive, Bellows’ development of the new Sunday edition would prove a success. According to Kluger, “the new Sunday paper was Bellows’s main achievement as editor.”¹⁹ In addition to reintroducing the newly designed Sunday edition, Bellows demonstrated that a Sunday newspaper could serve as an impressive example of journalistic design and artistic expression.

¹⁸ Ibid., 671.
¹⁹ Ibid., 678.
These new innovations produced a *Herald Tribune* more noticeable in impact, according to Kluger. The intent, Kluger wrote, was to produce a paper that could thrive beyond the Sunday edition. He noted, “its metropolitan orientation, in intentionally sharp contrast to the *Times*’s Sunday magazine, sought to capture the verve and variety of city life in stylish prose that could not be mistaken for the solid *Times* style or the cheap, inflated puffery of the *Daily News*’s Sunday supplement.”

Wolfe and Breslin would become major contributors to *New York*, while editor Clay Felker was in charge of the supplement. Despite the newspaper’s troubles, it set the bar high with the Sunday supplement, becoming what Krueger described as a publication unlike any other in style and content. He went on to note that the design of *New York* set standards rarely seen in American newspaper magazines, complete with cover art portraying New York City. When Felker took charge of the magazine, his efforts helped turn *New York* into the publication Krueger described, both in its design and content. Beside his intense interest in the design of the magazine, Felker would also bring Wolfe and Breslin to the magazine’s pages, where they would first make names for themselves covering aspects of New York culture. The intent in writing for *New York* was, according to Wolfe, to experiment with technique and storytelling in an effort to engage the reader even further. In commenting on his technique, however, Wolfe also judged Sunday supplements as having statuses traditionally “well below that of the ordinary daily newspaper.”

This lack of notoriety, however, hardly let a reporter working on the Sunday supplement become lazy, in Wolfe’s judgment. He wrote, “Sunday supplements

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20 Ibid., 679.

21 Wolfe and Johnson, eds., *The New Journalism*, 16
were no place for diffident souls. That was how I started playing around with the device of point-of-view.”

Out of what could have been perceived as an inconsequential forum, then, Wolfe utilized that freedom to explore other literary devices.

Wolfe commented on the newspaper culture at the Herald Tribune and how it impacted his writing and aspirations. Of the office structure, Wolfe noted, “there were no interior walls. The corporate hierarchy was not marked off into office spaces. The managing editor worked in a space that was as miserable and scabid as the lowest reporter’s.” This setup rarely created strife or political tension within the office, Wolfe reasoned, because editors and reporters were clearly established in their roles and had little desire to change their status. Wolfe wrote that very few reporters “had any ambition whatsoever to move up, to become city editors, managing editors, editors-in-chief, or any of the rest of it. Editors felt no threat from below. They needed no walls. Reporters didn’t want much . . . merely to be stars! And of such minute wattage at that!” This lack of tension, Wolfe claimed, allowed reporters to concentrate on excelling at their writing and editors to focus on improving the quality of the newspaper.

Esquire Magazine

Esquire touts an impressive number of prominent American writers in its pages, including Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Norman Mailer and Gay Talese, as well as Wolfe. After its introduction in 1933, it became part of the American literary tradition of magazines, publishing work that allowed writers to showcase their skills. Its

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 4.

24 Ibid.
place in the development of the New Journalism would be evident by its use of work by Talese, Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson.

Editors for *Esquire*, celebrating its 70\(^{th}\) anniversary in 2003, selected five stories that it considered to be its finest work. These included “Frank Sinatra Has A Cold” by Gay Talese, “Hell Sucks” by Michael Herr, “Superman Comes to the Supermarket” by Norman Mailer, and “The Last American Hero Is Junior Johnson. Yes!” by Tom Wolfe. While Herr wrote about the battle of Hué during the Vietnam War in “Hell Sucks,” Talese and Mailer focused on American icons Frank Sinatra and John F. Kennedy, respectively.

Wolfe, on the other hand, focused on a stock car racer named Junior Johnson, a relatively unknown subject when compared to Sinatra, Kennedy, and the Vietnam War. Wolfe introduced Johnson with the passage,

“Ggghhzzzzzzzzhshhhhhgsgsggzzzzeeeeeong!—gawdam! there he goes again, it was him, Junior Johnson!, with a gawdam agents' si-reen and a red light in his grille!”^25

Using his characteristic technique of evoking sound with words, Wolfe also attempted to mimic the Southern dialect he encountered while covering Johnson’s story in North Carolina. The fact that these writers would eventually become legends in the fields of literature and journalism suggested that these writers could publish a variety of stories that could showcase their respective talents and interests. When Wolfe first encountered *Esquire* in the early 1960s, however, he found a magazine that was determined to challenge the traditional models of popular journalism and writing that had defined the previous decades.

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Harold Hayes, editor of *Esquire* throughout the late 1960s, published an anthology of articles from the magazine in *Smiling Through The Apocalypse*. In his introduction, Hayes explained what he saw as the central role of *Esquire*. He noted, “A magazine is a promise, sometimes fulfilled, sometimes not. Responding to events of the day, it seeks to offer a bit more perspective than the shifting realities reported in the daily press, though the permanence of its views is only slightly less subject to change.”

The progressive attitude the *Esquire* editors embraced is evident not only in their decisions about which writers to run, but also in Hayes’ personal reflection of what the magazine meant. In particular, Hayes cited the 1950s as an era that necessitated a new way of examining the world. He claimed that:

> The present-day attitude of *Esquire* was formed out of a reaction to the banality of the Fifties . . . . The idea was to suggest alternate possibilities to a monolithic view. And how monolithic it was! The passivity of the Fifties was shared by garage mechanics and college presidents. At *Esquire* our attitude took shape as we went along, stumbling past our traditional boundaries of fashion, leisure, entertainment and literature onto the more forbidding ground of politics, sociology, science and even, occasionally, religion. Any point of view was welcome as long as the writer was sufficiently skillful to carry it off.

Hayes pictured the role of *Esquire* as more than a single voice of influence in an already crowded publication field. He imagined his magazine as a force for social change through the popularity of literature. Hayes was determined to secure the strongest writing in an effort to help readers understand the conditions of the 1960s. He wrote that, “in the Sixties, events seemed to move too swiftly to allow the osmotic process of art to keep abreast, and when we found a good novelist we immediately sought to seduce him

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27 Ibid., 156.
with the sweet mysteries of current events.” He also recognized that *Esquire* was powerless as the 1960s wore on and the political and social landscape became scarred by political assassinations, the Vietnam War, and growing distrust and resentment of government. Hayes acknowledged the difficulty he encountered and explained that “against the aridity of the national landscape of the late Fifties we offered to our readers in our better moments the promise of outright laughter; by the end of the Sixties the best we could provide was a bleak grin.”

Gerald Boyer, in his analysis of magazine journalism, grouped *Esquire* with *Life*, *Harper’s*, and the *Atlantic Monthly* as magazines willing to take chances on promising young writers in the 1960s, when Wolfe first began writing for the magazine. Indeed, it was Gay Talese’s article on Joe Louis in 1962, according to Carol Polsgrove, that convinced Wolfe to branch out as a writer and explore different ideas, with support from *Esquire*. Polsgrove, in her history of *Esquire*, claimed that Wolfe “admired the way Talese could write a magazine article, all based on facts, and have it come out sounding like a short story, like that opening to the Joe Louis profile, with Louis’s wife meeting him at the airport.” The opening recounted a conversation between a wife and the husband Joe Louis, rather than a famous boxer and his wife, beginning with “‘Joe,’ she said, ‘where’s your tie?’ ‘Aw, sweetie,’ he said, shrugging, ‘I stayed out all night in New York and didn’t have time—.” Wolfe would aspire to this type of writing at *Esquire*.

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28 Ibid., 160.

29 Ibid., 156-157.


31 Ibid.
On his arrival in New York City and at the offices of the *New York Herald Tribune*, Tom Wolfe encountered a professional and literary experience drastically different from his time with the *Post* in Washington. The New York newspapers were engaged in a “war” of sorts by 1962, each competing for a larger (but diminishing) readership, which forced them to explore unique options in order to attract attention. This necessity would assist in the development of the New Journalism, as literary technique became another method of gaining publicity. The *Herald Tribune* had the history of being a prestigious newspaper, but it still lagged behind the *New York Times* in circulation and readership. Wolfe’s arrival, however, coincided with the *Herald Tribune*’s willingness to experiment with different techniques, all in the hopes of surviving in an increasingly competitive environment.

Wolfe’s introduction to the *New York* magazine supplement in each Sunday’s *Herald Tribune* would prove the beginning of his definitive experience at the newspaper. While he was not able to focus solely on the magazine, given his employment as a staff reporter for the newspaper itself, Wolfe still considered his magazine assignments the most interesting work he conducted. Wolfe said, “Five days a week I worked at the beck and call of the city desk as a general assignment reporter. In our so-called spare time, Jimmy [Breslin] and I were supposed to turn out a story apiece each week for this new Sunday supplement, *New York*. I’d heard of skeleton staffs before, but this one was
bones.”\textsuperscript{1} Despite the grueling writing schedule, Wolfe quickly discovered that his New York articles, rather than his Herald Tribune assignments, allowed him to express his creativity. Wolfe and New York editor Clay Felker’s personalities would mesh well, allowing some extraordinary writing, and some of the earliest examples of what would become the New Journalism, to find a wider audience. Wolfe was described as having “thrived on the stylistic freedom granted him by Felker.”\textsuperscript{2}

Felker’s background was in magazines, as he vied for editorial control at Esquire magazine only to be driven out by politics. Described as an emotional editor, Felker was “one who screamed out his frustrations at the office and could not mask his boredom with people who had no information or talent that might somehow be useful to him.”\textsuperscript{3} Felker had a profound impact on Wolfe. According to Wolfe biographer William McKeen, “Wolfe’s stylistic breakthrough may have come in the pages of Esquire, but his refutation of journalistic conventions began with Felker’s New York.”\textsuperscript{4}

\textit{Dear Byron: A Missed Deadline Leads to the New Journalism}

In 1962, Wolfe visited the Hot Rod and Custom Car Show in New York, on assignment from the Herald Tribune to cover one of his emerging specialties: popular culture trends. The story would not remain only as a newspaper piece for long, however, as Wolfe decided to expand upon the original article to create a lengthier article for Esquire. Esquire’s reputation was as a venue for literary figures to explore topics in its...


\textsuperscript{3} Kluger, 704.

pages and as a magazine where editor-writer relationships were notably strong, according to Carol Polsgrove, and it motivated Wolfe to pursue article possibilities.\(^5\)

Wolfe found his forum at *Esquire*, partly because editor Harold Hayes and managing editor Byron Dobell had reputations as advocates for writers. Polsgrove noted, “Many of the writers Hayes worked with admired him and understood his gifts as an editor, especially as years passed and they never encountered any other editor as good.”\(^6\) Wolfe originally presented his idea of expanding his car customizer story to Dobell, suggesting that California would provide even greater examples of customizers at work. He had only to convince Dobell of his certainty that this new trend was indicative of a larger movement.\(^7\) Soon convinced of its potential, Dobell commissioned an article from Wolfe about the custom car world and sent him to California.

The trip to California went well enough, but it ended with Wolfe unable to write the article. In his introduction to the 1965 book *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine Flake Streamline Baby*, a collection of his articles, Wolfe explained:

> I came back to New York and just sat around worrying over the thing. I had a lot of trouble analyzing exactly what I had on my hands. By this time *Esquire* practically had a gun at my head because they had a two-page-wide color picture for the story locked into the printing presses and no story. Finally, I told Byron Dobell . . . that I couldn’t pull the thing together. O.K., he tells me, just type out my notes and send them over and he will get somebody else to write it. So about 8 o’clock that night I started typing the notes out in the form of a memorandum that began, “Dear Byron.”\(^8\)

\(^5\) Carol Polsgrove, *It Wasn’t Pretty, Folks, But Didn’t We Have Fun? Esquire in the Sixties* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 137.

\(^6\) Ibid., 138.

\(^7\) Ibid., 86.

As he wrote throughout the evening, listening to a steady stream of rock music, Wolfe realized he was writing more and more with a strange energy, and it clearly paid off as far as pages were concerned. By the time he had to turn the memo in to *Esquire* the next morning, the memo totaled some 49 pages. Wolfe steadied himself for any reaction and went off to work at the *Herald Tribune*. He recounted, “About 4 p.m. I got a call from Byron Dobell. He told me they were striking out the ‘Dear Byron’ at the top of the memorandum and running the rest of it in the magazine.” With that, the story “There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Bay around the Bend” found its way into the pages of *Esquire*, and a new form of journalism began to emerge.

Wolfe adopted first-person perspective in this story, placing the reader beside him while he explores the background of car customizers. He wrote, “We are back at the Teen Fair and I am talking to Tex Smith and to Don Beebe, a portly young guy with a white sport shirt and Cuban sunglasses. As they tell me about the Ford Custom Car Caravan, I can see that Ford has begun to comprehend this teen-age style of life and its potential.” Wolfe decided to reveal the inside story of these car customizers as he realized their intentions, again including the reader in the action. Revealing his viewpoint forced the reader to encounter Wolfe’s own personal judgment, a notable difference in approach to journalism. Wolfe explained in the foreword what he realized as he started writing the article, as the energy of the process itself fueled what went on

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9 Ibid., xii.

10 Ibid., 80.
the pages. “The details themselves, when I wrote them down, suddenly made me see what was happening,” Wolfe wrote.\textsuperscript{11}

Had Dobell not trusted Wolfe’s talent, and perhaps had he not invested so much money in Wolfe’s trip to California, the custom car story might have been canceled on the spot. Like Jann Wenner, Dobell was willing to give talent the opportunity to prove itself with just a little more leeway than an average newspaper or magazine editor would have allowed a writer. Certainly this piece provoked enough reaction from readers to justify added patience. As McKeen noted, “Reader reaction ranged from outraged…to puzzled, to fascinated. The division between his readers was established from the start: Wolfe’s admirers and Wolfe’s detractors.”\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{The New Yorker Parodies: Wolfe’s Exposure to New York Celebrity}

Wolfe’s first major exposure to newspaper publicity in \textit{New York} started off as a proposal from Felker in 1965 to write a parody of \textit{The New Yorker}. Wolfe recounted the moment when he, Felker, and the \textit{New York} staff decided on the parody. He wrote, “One day Clay, [assistant editor] Walt [Stovall], Jimmy [Breslin], and I were crowded into the little bullpen of a cubicle that served as \textit{New York}’s office, when Clay said, ‘Look…we’re coming out once a week, right? And \textit{The New Yorker} comes out once a week…Is there any reason why we can’t be as good as \textit{The New Yorker}? Or better. They’re so damned dull.’”\textsuperscript{13} Evident in that quote is Felker’s respect and devotion to his fledgling \textit{New York}, a commitment that convinced his writers and editors. Also evident is a

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., xiii.

\textsuperscript{12} McKeen, \textit{Wolfe}, 26.

\textsuperscript{13} Wolfe, \textit{Hooking Up}, 250.
healthy sense of competition, as Felker improved New York at a dramatic pace, with the goal of surpassing The New Yorker driving his ambition.\(^{14}\)

The idea of the parody was simple enough. According to Wolfe, “Our idea was to take a page from The New Yorker’s early days, back when [New Yorker founder and editor Harold] Ross was running the show and the sheet was alive, and do a parody in the form of a profile of [New Yorker editor William] Shawn.”\(^{15}\) Shawn’s character was worthy of a profile, as Wolfe noted that there was “only one known photograph of the man, the official New Yorker portrait, which he had commissioned, paid for, and controlled.”\(^{16}\) Wolfe enthusiastically threw himself into the project, conducting the initial interviews with New Yorker employees and people familiar with Shawn and trying (in vain) to meet Shawn in person to question him. The news peg for the article was that it also happened to be The New Yorker’s fortieth anniversary, providing Wolfe an opportunity to surreptitiously observe the birthday party as it unfolded. Wolfe approached writing the parody by researching The New Yorker’s background and its inherent writing style. As Wolfe described it, the magazine style “was one of leisurely meandering understatement, droll when in the humorous mode . . . constantly amplified, qualified . . . until the magazine’s pale-gray pages became High Baroque triumphs of the relative clause and the appository modifier. The only solution, it seemed to me, was to turn all that upside down . . . and come up with a counter-parody.”\(^{17}\)
The reaction of Wolfe’s editors to the article was adulation and mischievousness. According to Wolfe, “Clay [Felker] showed them to the Herald Tribune’s editor, Jim Bellows. Bellows read them, rubbed his palms together, and smacked his lips.”18 Bellows appreciated the jab to The New Yorker, and the piece would eventually be titled “Tiny Mummies! The True Story of the Ruler of 43rd Street’s Land of the Walking Dead.” Wolfe described Shawn’s attempts at imposing an attitude on the New Yorker staff. Wolfe wrote, “Shawn’s greatest task, of course, was . . . preserving the style, the tenor of the magazine. The tenor, the atmosphere, is important. Newcomers are schooled in it immediately. To begin with, getting hired at The New Yorker is nothing merely personnel-office-like or technical. It is more like fraternity rushing.”19

Shawn reacted with surprising outrage, apparently unable to understand or accept the joke. An accompanying piece, “Lost in the Whichy Thickets: The New Yorker,” sent Shawn into an equal rage. Shawn took the fight to Herald Tribune publisher Jock Whitney in the form of a terse letter, but Whitney acquiesced to Bellows’ judgment. Bellows then approached Time and Newsweek with the letter, all for the purpose of starting a New York press fight. The plan worked, and the accusations and in-fighting began almost immediately after the two magazines published articles about the incident. Time wrote that “breaking all the rules of clean, lean journalism, Wolfe writes in a buoyant, overstuff, baroque style filled with grunts and guffaws; participles and expletives that fly in all directions; metaphors that are launched, mixed and sometimes hopelessly scrambled.” Time referred to Wolfe as a noteworthy reporter for the Herald

18 Ibid., 253.
19 Ibid., 266.
Tribune, which suggested that he had already begun to establish a reputation as a creative writer. In their final analysis of the incident, Time wrote, “Shawn is charged with nothing more serious than being too quiet and unassuming.” The article also noted that Wolfe’s story captured “some of the magazine’s musty-fusty atmosphere” and served as “the latest volley in a mock-serious shooting match between the Trib’s Sunday magazine and The New Yorker.”  

Among the most famous detractors of The New Yorker parodies was author J.D. Salinger, who emerged from a self-imposed silence to condemn New York. Wolfe quoted Salinger as writing to Whitney, “With the printing of that inaccurate and sub-collegiate and gleeful and unrelievedly poisonous article on William Shawn, the name of the Herald Tribune and certainly your own will very likely never again stand for anything either respect-worthy or honorable.”

The most interesting examples of editor courage to come out of this incident were Whitney, Felker, and Bellow’s attitudes during the whole debacle. Whitney, according to Wolfe, never wavered in his support of his writers, and Bellows could barely conceal his excitement at the whole ordeal. Apparently, they never questioned their initial actions, even when criticism came from Lyndon Johnson’s White House. Johnson administration aide Richard Goodwin called Felker to complain about the article. Felker asked him to put his complaint in writing and he would print it in the pages of New York. As Wolfe

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explained, “We never heard another word from Richard Goodwin there at the White House.”

An analysis of this incident presents the Herald Tribune editors, and its publisher, as eager to support their writer for several reasons. First, the publicity, both in New York and nationally, was invaluable to the newspaper and New York magazine, which could only help their business concerns. Second, the fact that Wolfe was willing and talented enough to write a story, achieving this level of publicity, only convinced his editors to allow their developing star reporter to continue his work. If Wolfe could create this kind of publicity from one profile, what else could he write?

As his career progressed, Wolfe demonstrated the kind of work of which he was capable, developing the New Journalism as almost a side effect. Kluger, however, provided another side to the analysis, concluding that Whitney “found Wolfe’s pieces gratuitously abusive, done for the sport of it, and overstepping the bounds of propriety.” Whitney was eventually persuaded to support Wolfe, Kluger noted, “although his editors got a dressing-down from Bellows, and while they would ever after regret the factual errors and distortions, Wolfe and Felker believed the lampoon had captured the figurative truth and accurately lanced the magazines bloated reputation.”

While his 1964 piece, “The Girl of the Year,” may have been his “New York breakthrough,” it was the New Yorker parody that demonstrated to Wolfe just how protective and supportive his Herald Tribune editors had become. After “The Girl of the

22 Ibid., 291.
23 Kluger, 708.
24 Ibid.
25 McKeen, Wolfe, 23.
Year,” Wolfe’s editors allowed him to pursue stories without necessarily adhering to the usual criteria of deadline-driven news. By the time the *Herald Tribune* became the *World Journal Tribune* (lasting only eight months) and folded on May 5, 1967, Wolfe had tested the limits of newspaper writing, and he chose to pursue magazines and books as his way of boosting the presence of the New Journalism. There were fewer risks, perhaps, and more freedom in testing the boundaries in a longer, creative format.

Editors, Deadlines, and the Necessity of Reaching Out to “Sunday” Readers

Wolfe made a strong case that the craft of journalism, as it existed with its “rules” and guidelines for reaching readers, had a hand in shaping the New Journalism, as he practiced it. Wolfe’s work in the early to mid-1960s was defined by both his writing for *Esquire* and the *Herald Tribune* and its Sunday magazine, *New York*. While the schedule proved grueling at times for Wolfe, he did not discount the value of his experience with *New York* and its willingness to run longer, more intellectually engaging pieces common for a Sunday supplement. He explained:

Sunday supplements had no traditions, no pretensions, no promises to live up to, not even any rules to speak of. They were brain candy, that was all. Readers felt no guilt whatsoever about laying them aside, throwing them away or not looking at them at all. I never felt the slightest hesitation about trying any device that might conceivably grab the reader a few seconds longer. I tried to yell in his ear: *Stick around!* . . . . Sunday supplements were no place for diffident souls. That was how I started playing around with the device of point-of-view.²⁶

Wolfe noted the unique opportunity he had with *New York* magazine in the introductory chapters to his 1973 anthology, *The New Journalism*, which established him as “its most celebrated and prolific practitioner and its reluctant historian.”²⁷ In the early

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²⁶ Wolfe, *New Journalism*, 16.

²⁷ McKeen, *Wolfe*, 35.
1960s, however, the term “New Journalism” had little meaning, emerging infrequently when applied to writers such as Jimmy Breslin, Gay Talese, and Tom Wolfe. Wolfe recounted, “Seymour Krim tells me that he first heard [the term “New Journalism”] used in 1965 when he was editor of Nugget and Pete Hamill called him and said he wanted to write an article called ‘The New Journalism’ about people like Jimmy Breslin and Gay Talese. It was late in 1966 when you first started hearing people talk about ‘the New Journalism’ in conversation, as best I can remember.”

In the mid-1960s, Wolfe was still very much a salaried reporter and occasional magazine contributor. At that time, Wolfe noted, “[I] had the feeling, rightly or wrongly, that I was doing things no one had ever done before in journalism. I used to try to imagine the feeling readers must have had upon finding all this carrying on and cutting up in a Sunday supplement. I liked that idea.”

Logistically, Wolfe recognized the inherent differences between traditional journalism and the type of writing he and writers such as Breslin and Talese were attempting. In addition to considering the stylistic differences evident in long-form, narrative-dependent, subjective reporting, Wolfe believed that being a “New Journalist” required more from those used to regular journalism. More work, as well as more ability to delve in-depth into topics and situations, was required than even exhaustive investigative reporting. Wolfe defined what was expected of writers attempting to become “New Journalists”:

28 Wolfe, New Journalism, 23.

29 Wolfe was salaried, except for a brief time in 1963 when the Herald Tribune staff went on strike. That strike prompted Wolfe, in need of a paycheck, to approach Dobell about writing a story on car customizers.

30 Wolfe, New Journalism, 20.
It was more intense, more detailed, and certainly more time-consuming than anything that newspaper or magazine reporters, including investigative reporters, were accustomed to. They developed the habit of staying with the people they were writing about for days at a time, weeks in some cases . . . . The most important things one attempts in terms of technique depended upon a depth of information that had never been demanded in newspaper work. Only through the most searching forms of reporting was it possible, in non-fiction, to use whole scenes, extended dialogue, point-of-view, and interior monologue. Eventually I, and others, would be accused of “entering people’s minds” . . . . But exactly! I figured that was one more doorbell a reporter had to push.31

It was clear from this description, and from his previous declarations, that Wolfe believed in the importance of a few reporters’ ability to take journalism into the style of novel writing: the ability to stay with a real story long enough to understand each character and their motivations and reach a conclusion about the events’ inherent meanings. Only a few proven, gifted reporters produced stories to be considered under the rubric “New Journalism,” given an editor’s responsibility to ensure regular articles were written by his staffers. Had Wolfe not been with the Herald Tribune and proved a reliable regular reporter, his goal of producing in-depth, feature-style stories might have been hindered. Talent was a necessary consideration, but so was Wolfe’s ability to produce the regular stories required of him by the Herald Tribune.

Wolfe as a Free Agent

After the collapse of the New York Herald Tribune and its successor the World Journal Tribune by late 1968, Wolfe was established as a regular contributor to Esquire and New York magazine. August 1968 also saw the publication of two Wolfe books on the same day, The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test and The Pump House Gang. Acid Test was based on an extensive article Wolfe had written about writer Ken Kesey, while The Pump House Gang was a collection of Wolfe’s magazine writing. Wolfe covered

31 Ibid., 21.
California surfers, Hugh Hefner, San Francisco burlesque, and Marshall McLuhan. Of McLuhan’s visit to New York, Wolfe wrote, “McLuhan excelled at telling important and apparently knowledgeable people they didn’t have the foggiest comprehension of their own bailiwick. He never did it with any overtone of now-I’m-going-to-shock-you, however. He seemed far, far beyond that game, out on a threshold where all the cosmic circuits were programmed.”\(^\text{32}\) It was *Acid Test*, in particular, that established Wolfe’s voice as a hybrid journalist-novelist, with interesting implications. When Wolfe encountered counterculture icon Ken Kesey, he attempted to understand the reality behind the legend. Wolfe wrote, “About all I knew of Kesey at that point was that he was a highly regarded 31-year-old novelist and in a lot of trouble over drugs.”\(^\text{33}\) Wolfe was also not afraid to reveal his fascination with Kesey’s writing, specifically letters written to Larry McMurtry. Wolfe wrote, “They were wild and iconic, written like a cross between William Burroughs and George Ade, telling of hideouts, disguises, paranoia, fleeing from cops, smoking joints and seeking satori in the Rat lands of Mexico.”\(^\text{34}\)

Writer A. Carl Bredahl, in Howard Bloom’s collection of critical essays on Wolfe, placed the New Journalism squarely in line as revolutionizing the novel. Bredahl claimed that Wolfe helped counter the perception that journalists were observers rather than artists. This new acceptance of journalists as artists similar to novelists allowed the New Journalism to be taken seriously as an art form. This almost natural progression, from journalist to novelist, adhering to journalistic, non-fiction form, was exemplified in Wolfe


\(^{34}\) Ibid.
but was evident in other New Journalists, such as Hunter S. Thompson, for instance. This transition was apparent by the late 1960s, as Wolfe appeared to tire of traditional journalism and found inspiration in long-form, narrative structures consistent with novel writing. While most of his novels had their foundation as longer magazine stories, Wolfe still felt restricted by journalism and its institutional resistance to change. While Wolfe continued to find the necessary inspiration for his stories in concrete events, such as the emergence of Kesey’s psychedelic movement and the hippie movement in general for *Acid Test*, he refused to restrict himself merely to the facts, exploring the situation and cultural mentality shaping those events.

*Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* is another example of reality shaping mythology for Wolfe, as he attempted to understand what occurs beneath the surface of his characters. Originally a piece for *New York* magazine titled “Radical Chic,” this next novel started as an account of Leonard Bernstein’s fund-raising gala for the Black Panthers in 1970. Wolfe attempted to account for the thoughts of those attending the gala, eschewing the traditional role of journalist in favor of a more creative approach. His appearance as a journalist allowed him to slip in and out of situations with ease, presenting himself as a professional even while he examined the situation for insight into the cultural implications of the moment. Wolfe’s self-perception as a Southern gentleman was also important to the shaping of his own character in this story. Wolfe noted his own perception of what the gala guests were thinking. He wrote, “God, what a flood of taboo thoughts runs through one’s heads at these Radical Chic events . . . . But it’s delicious. It is as if one’s nerve endings were on red alert to the most intimate
nuances of status. Deny it if you want to! Nevertheless, it runs through every soul here.”

Building a “temple” of sorts to the New Journalism, Wolfe compiled examples of journalism he felt pushed creative boundaries in a volume titled simply *The New Journalism* in 1973. Selecting the pieces with the help of E.W. Johnson, Wolfe sought to declare the New Journalism as a bold new movement in writing, to the anger of more “traditional” writers. Included in the volume were examples of writing from Gay Talese, Hunter S. Thompson, Michael Herr, Truman Capote and George Plimpton, among others. Wolfe stated, “In this book [The New Journalism] I think I have managed to antagonize everybody in the fiction world—plus uncounted members of the nonfiction establishment, who at first I thought would be pleased. But when you pass the fail-safe point in the Alienation Derby, a few more vendettas, dirks in the arras, don’t really signify.” This volume established Wolfe as the earliest New Journalism historian, even if it did hurt him in the eyes of celebrity writers.

With *The New Journalism*, Wolfe essentially declared the novel a relic, exhorting his readers to examine journalism for definitive statements on the 1960s and 1970s. The fresh territory of journalism provided at least a starting point to what he saw as its ultimate goal: expressing, rather than simply describing, cultural movements to the reader. “There are really no traditions in journalism worth observing. It’s a low-rent form—always has been a low-rent form—and there’s always been room for a lot of

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37 McKeen, *Wolfe*, 35.
brawling about and a lot of mistakes,” Wolfe explained in an interview. “I think that the only future for the novel is reporting, which means there’s not going to be much difference between the best novels and the best nonfiction.” 38

By the end of the 1960s and with the arrival of the 1970s, with technology and culture moving faster as the U.S. – Soviet race to the Moon finished (with the United States the winner), Wolfe’s notoriety as an excellent long-form writer was not lost on Jann Wenner’s influential *Rolling Stone*. Wolfe was convinced that this opportunity would allow him to examine a truly unique group of individuals, similar to stock-car racers and other fringe groups he had examined in the past. Assigned by *Rolling Stone* to cover the last U.S. Apollo moon mission in December 1972, though he had been examining the earlier Mercury missions as well, Wolfe imagined a possible book-length project. What he found, however, was that astronauts were more difficult to understand psychologically and socially. Wolfe explained, “I very quickly found out that there’s nothing really very unique about the background of astronauts . . . . The way to approach it was to find out what test pilots were like—and this led to the whole theory of ‘the right stuff’.” 39

Evident in these stories is Wolfe’s new freedom, resulting in part from his natural talent and his original ability to explore the New Journalism before it even had a name. His personal revelations after completing each project, however, forced Wolfe to rethink whether his “originality” was simply a new tactic for other writers to imitate. Wolfe


noted this cycle of original writing yielded unsuccessful imitations of his own New Journalism while he was finishing The Right Stuff. “I supposed I’m probably the most parodied writer in the last 15 years,” Wolfe claimed.\footnote{ibid., 110.} By this time in the 1970s, Wolfe also expressed displeasure with the term “New Journalism,” telling interviewers that he didn’t like the term anymore and wanted to stop using it. Those journalists he admired, such as Breslin and Thompson, hardly appreciated being ordained as New Journalists without their approval. Wolfe claimed Thompson told him, “I wouldn’t touch New Journalism with a ten-foot pole. I’m a gonzo journalist.”\footnote{Chet Flippo, “The Rolling Stone Interview: Tom Wolfe,” in Conversations with Tom Wolfe, ed. Dorothy Scura (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 137.} The alienation he experienced from his own colleagues, such as Thompson, a friend whom Wolfe respected, must have worn on Wolfe as he considered his next career step.

In addition to feeling that his own writing style was being parroted, he felt the concept of the New Journalism he had enthusiastically endorsed in the 1960s was becoming increasingly useless. Chet Flippo wrote that Wolfe was “reluctant to talk about New Journalism; he caught flak for it from everyone, especially the writers he anthologized.”\footnote{ibid., 134.} This supposed disdain suggested that Wolfe wanted to consider other avenues of creative expression. All these factors combined to drive Wolfe further from considering himself a journalist and more of a novelist during the late 1970s.

While the end of the 1970s marked the end of Wolfe’s journalistic work and his increasing interest in novels, the parallels between the fields of reporting and novels are remarkable in most of his books. A clear trend emerged by the 1970s, as he would
undertake a magazine or newspaper assignment for the purpose of conducting initial research, before returning to shape his research into a longer narrative structure. Two of Wolfe’s early novels, the non-fiction *The Right Stuff* and his fictional *Bonfire of the Vanities*, were both serialized in *Rolling Stone*. Jann Wenner hired Wolfe to publish the individual chapters of *Bonfire of the Vanities*, for example. Wolfe already understood the historical precedent of novelists acting as prototypical journalists, interviewing and gathering information (only for a larger and more permanent purpose than publishing in newspapers). Wolfe explained, “Novelists in the nineteenth century understood that no one writer had enough material, and they would go out and do reporting as a matter of course…The *material* leads you to the story.” As Wolfe saw it, novelists were already journalists who simply skipped the newspaper article aspects and delivered long-form narratives based on their information.

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44 Flippo, 157.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

The ascension and popularity of the New Journalism revolutionized the stylistic
techniques available to reporters. These new techniques, however, had to be first
codified and tested, which is precisely where Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe fit
into the framework of the New Journalism. While they and others, such as Gay Talese,
Norman Mailer and Truman Capote, recognized the potential for grafting a literary
structure onto journalism’s necessarily rigid form, it remained the duty of editors to
decide the limits they would allow the New Journalism to test. No easy task to demand
of an editor, who must consider both the interests of the publication and the reader, a
delicate interplay emerged between them and the various reporters responsible for
producing the stories.

In each of these New Journalist cases, a compelling story would surely emerge that
would rely on several circumstances: how the reporter interacted with the editor, how the
editor would respond to the story and the journalist, and whether the interaction would
result in unique, interesting copy or frustration between the two actors. If this interaction
was positive and the story moved forward, the concept of the New Journalism would
obviously benefit, the writer would continue to solidify his reputation as a vital and
unique contributor to the publication and the editor could rightly say that he or she had
attempted “something new.” If the interaction broke down at any level and antagonism
emerged, the New Journalism could suffer, as could the writer/editor relationship, as they
grew more wary of each other and less willing to test the boundaries of their craft and their relationship.

While many writers were engaged in what became known as the New Journalism in the 1960s and 1970s, this study determined that the most manageable way to examine its early development was to explore the experiences of two of its earliest innovators, Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe. This study found that these writers ultimately had vastly different experiences, throughout their careers, with their respective editors and publications. Addressing these differences and attempting to account for Thompson’s and Wolfe’s experiences in this study yielded results suggesting that personality characteristics of both the editor and writer, the circumstances of the writer (where they were in their career, their reputation and experience, etc.) and the details of the story would ultimately dictate the outcome.

In the case of Thompson, a portrait of a problematic and troublesome relationship with most of his editors emerges. From the beginning of his newspaper career in the 1950s as an Air Force sports writer, Thompson’s superiors noted his brash attitude and obstinate nature. Rather than become a more cooperative employee, however, Thompson embraced his outcast tendencies and utilized them as key aspects of his reputation. What this decision meant for his experiences as a career journalist became the source of continuous struggle with his various editors.

In the late 1950s, Thompson moved through several different newspaper jobs, establishing an early pattern of starting and leaving positions relatively quickly (often lasting not even a year). Before becoming a South American correspondent for the *National Observer* in 1962, Thompson had in fact considered leaving journalism
permanently and pursuing a career as a novelist. His experiences with the Observer and its editor Cliff Ridley prompted Thompson into staying with the publication until late 1964, the longest he was employed with a single paper up until that time. It would be his position at the liberal magazine The Nation that would establish Thompson as a promising and bold reporter, covering the motorcycle gang the Hell’s Angels and eventually producing his first book from his research on the group. Indeed, these first few writing jobs would each produce a singular experience that would help propel Thompson’s career forward.

It would be the first of these publications, Scanlan’s Monthly, that would allow Thompson to claim his first historic contribution to the field of literary journalism, with the development of his highly personal, subjective “gonzo journalism.” With an early 1970 article in the short-lived Scanlan’s, a piece appropriately named “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved,” Thompson demonstrated his flair for a veritable free-form technique that only tangentially could be referred to as traditional journalism. This early experience amounted to only more experience, however, as Scanlan’s folded after several issues and Thompson was again left to find another outlet for his writing. In this search, Thompson came to rely on Wenner (and, eventually, vice versa).

While serving as Rolling Stone magazine in a National Affairs capacity, Thompson explored the depth of his skill, culminating in Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas and Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72, two novels that secure his reputation and make him an institution among writers and readers. The details of Thompson’s relationship with both Scanlan’s and Rolling Stone, as recounted earlier, hardly mesh with the popular notion of success and fame, as he encountered constant in-fighting and
financial difficulty with both magazines and their respective editors. As Thompson’s career plainly progressed, his relationship with editors remained static and often suffered. As evident in Thompson’s own letters and many investigations into these complicated situations, the writer’s relationship with editors like Warren Hinckle and Jann Wenner nearly always suffered as they continued to work together. Also evident in all this literature is why the details of these relationships clearly speak to a troubled situation: Thompson’s difficult personality contributed to the strife, as did the personalities of his editors.

Perhaps most crucial to understanding the complexities of Thompson’s career is one particular aspect of his approach to professional journalism. Thompson’s letters suggest, after careful analysis, that he would grow uncomfortable with a working relationship as it became more permanent and more of a demand on his time. As evident in some of his correspondence from his early involvement with *Rolling Stone*, Thompson distrusted Wenner (perhaps due to his previous experience with Hinckle) and resisted attempts to be made a permanent member of the magazine’s staff. He eventually relented, of course, and writing for *Rolling Stone* would become the most secure long-term position Thompson would ever have. Becoming a permanent staff member would not solve Thompson’s problems, at least in his own mind, and tension would continue to build between him and Wenner until the relationship eventually imploded.

Thompson’s pattern, therefore, is remarkably clear when examining the details of his career. While his was a reputation and career built on chaos and ever-impending disaster, Thompson proved to be a meticulous and obstinate reporter. And while he never shied away from a fight with an editor, Thompson clearly preferred an attempt at
friendship but rarely followed through on that preference. Central to his ideas of the writer/editor relationship, then, was the belief that his editors were almost always trying to subvert and control his work. Even though Thompson could befriend his editors, he refused to allow any fondness to hinder his ability to secure the support he deemed necessary from his editors.

Wolfe, as a counterpoint, flourished under nearly all his editors, although he eventually deemed journalism too restrictive and embraced fiction as his method. After a graduate education in American Studies at Yale, Wolfe started his “pseudo-bohemian” nonconformist lifestyle before deciding on newspapers as a career. After false starts at the Springfield Union in Massachusetts at the Washington Post, where he learned the journalistic style but felt his natural talents were wasted, Wolfe started at the New York Herald Tribune. After finding a home in its pages and a niche in the companion New York Magazine, Wolfe began experimenting with new techniques in his articles: greater use of narrative, a more subjective style and even adopting the tools of a novelist in the creation of a story line.

New York magazine editor Clay Felker saw Wolfe’s potential, as did the Herald Tribune editors. Certainly it was in these pages that Wolfe first made a major name for himself as a journalist, but it was the introduction to New York that allowed him an opportunity to formulate the New Journalism. In Esquire, for example, Wolfe and Byron Dobell stumbled upon the origins of what Wolfe would term the New Journalism, with a story about California hot rod car designers. Wolfe also recognized the potential in advocating a more experimental literary approach to traditional journalism. Appointing himself as a virtual “New Journalism historian,” Wolfe committed his energies to
supporting this new movement and recruiting other journalists to adopt similar
techniques. While Wolfe believed that the New Journalism made the novel a moot point,
reality soon ordained that they would coalesce as similar artistic endeavors. Far from
ushering in the novel’s impending demise, Wolfe would leave the New Journalism
behind to attempt a revolution in the literary world. As a novelist, however, he would
adopt the reporter’s research methods to advance his future fictional stories.

As representatives of the New Journalism, Thompson and Wolfe established a
variety of relationships with editors and publications that allowed them to advance their
writing and their intentions to try “something new.” Rather than assert that these
relationships were solely responsible for the evolution of the New Journalism, this study
intended to show how it progressed as a result of these experiences. No scholar or
researcher would assert that, without these particular relationships, Wolfe and Thompson
would have been unable to advance journalism as they did. Simply put, they probably
would have succeeded as writers regardless of the particular newspapers and magazines
that published their work. Institutional conflict and resistance would only hinder these
writers’ careers, but could not restrain them from producing writing. While these hurdles
could serve to make their lives more difficult, their careers ultimately owed much to their
natural talent. This study was concerned with the peculiarities of Thompson and Wolfe’s
individual experiences, as examples of their contribution to the New Journalism and
evidence of their respective methods in interacting with their editors and advancing their
work.

A more extensive investigation could take into account a wider selection of
journalists from the 1960s and 1970s that are associated with the New Journalism.
Broadening the scope of investigation would contribute to a more robust understanding of the New Journalism. In order to account for its salient aspects, a future study could examine the specific motivations of other editors and publications instrumental in the New Journalism, using similar methods employed by this study or other historical investigative techniques. In particular, interviews with Wolfe and surviving editors involved with the New Journalism could yield interesting new evidence, although all claims emerging from these interviews should be carefully weighed with the current historical record. While a wider selection of research material exists for the more famous New Journalists, a rigorous study could examine the historical record in detail, extrapolating greater evidence of their intentions and motivations. A crucial goal of any such study should be an attempt to account for the salient aspects of the New Journalism, beyond its various celebrity personalities and with a focus on its historical evolution as a result of collective efforts.

Researchers and critics continually debate the impact of the New Journalism on the discipline as a whole. The evidence, however, supports the conclusion that the techniques used by writers like Thompson and Wolfe have lasting influence on journalism as it evolved through this and the last century. Techniques such as narrative, subjectivity and literary license were once wholly owned by novelists; now, everyday journalists use these methods to add interest and entice the reader. As journalism constantly evolves and struggles to shape its meaning in a new era, its history demonstrates what succeeded as a tool and what failed. While the overall influence of the New Journalism is debatable, aspects of it remain and will continue to be used by innovative reporters. Its structure hardly emerged from a void, however, and this study
reiterated the influence Thompson and Wolfe had on its development, through trial-and-error and complicated, conflicting experiences. Through their pioneering efforts, the New Journalism exists today in varying and broad forms.

Hunter S. Thompson’s suicide on February 20, 2005, as this thesis was being prepared, brought an end to his career, yet resulted in renewed national interest in his life and work. Thompson’s death was a blow to this study, even while media attention focused on Thompson’s place as a writer and journalist. *Rolling Stone*, for example, devoted almost its entire March 24 issue to Thompson, including personal reflections from friends of the writer, including Douglas Brinkley, Jack Nicholson, Johnny Depp, and various other celebrities, as well as a reflective essay from Jann Wenner. Wenner wrote, “This morning I cried as I struck ‘National Affairs Desk: Hunter S. Thompson’ from the masthead.”\(^1\) Wenner reflected on his long and turbulent friendship with Thompson and claimed the two never fought about editing issues. Wenner reiterated several times in his essay that Thompson worked best under various crises, conflicts and pressures. In particular, Wenner wanted to dispel rumors related to him and Thompson. Wenner wrote, “For the record, I never canceled his life insurance when he went to Saigon.”\(^2\) Of necessity to Wenner, then, was setting the record straight.

\(^1\) Jann Wenner, “My Brother in Arms,” in *Rolling Stone* #970, March 24, 2005, 33.

\(^2\) Ibid., 34.
LIST OF REFERENCES


The University of Colorado. 1 November 1977. Compact disc recording.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Eli Justin Bortz was born on April 11, 1980, and raised in Virginia Beach, Virginia. A resident of Florida since 1993, Eli graduated from Flagler College, in St. Augustine, with a degree in communication in 2002 and entered the master’s program at the University of Florida’s College of Journalism and Communications in January 2003.

Eli was assistant editor-in-chief of the Flagler College student newspaper until his graduation, and is currently employed as an acquisitions assistant with the University Press of Florida. He is also a contributing writer to the St. Augustine Record. Upon completion of his degree, he will continue with the University Press of Florida and pursue a career in publishing or journalism.