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“Strange Tales from a Strange Time”: Hunter S. Thompson (1937-2005) and His Reflection of American Society Between the 1950s and early 1990s

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Dějepis

Ročník: 2.

I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

In České Budějovice

.....

I would like to express gratitude to my supervisor Mgr. Tomáš Jajtner, Th.D., Ph.D. for his valuable advice, time, and energy he spent reviewing this work. I would also like to thank my friends and family. I could never finish this paper without their support.

Abstract

This thesis studies collected works of a special persona of American journalism, Hunter S. Thompson. The four volumes of *Gonzo Papers* gathering his articles are the main source for this study. The objective of the paper is to construct the picture of the United States as Thompson portrayed them in his articles from the late 1950s to early 1990s and point out the relation between American culture and politics in the second half of the 20th century.

Key Words:

Hunter S. Thompson, New Journalism, gonzo, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s

Anotace

Předkládaná diplomová práce se zabývá zatím neprozkoumanou částí práce speciální osobnosti amerického žurnalismu, Huntera S. Thompsona. Jako primární zdroj jsou použity čtyři sbírky jeho článků nazvané *Gonzo Papers*. Záměrem práce je podat obraz Spojených Států tak, jak je Thompson zachytil v jeho člancích od konce 50. let až do začátku 90. let, a poukázat na spojitost mezi americkou kulturou a politikou v druhé polovině 20. století.

Klíčová slova:

Hunter S. Thompson, Nový žurnalismus, gonzo, šedesátá léta, sedmdesátá léta, osmdesátá léta, devadesátá léta

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Introduction

As the topic of my diploma thesis, I chose Hunter S. Thompson, a very special persona of American literature. His life and works have become the subject of several works in the US, by scholars and movie directors too¹ which helped him to become at least as famous as his fellow New Journalists, such as Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, or Tom Wolfe, if not even more. However, some decades ago, Thompson belonged to the category that John Hellman marked as “*insufficiently explored*” (*Fables of Fact* ix) in 1981. After more than 30 years, a number of professional studies dealing with Thompson’s work occurred in the US, whereas Thompson has stayed aside of any closer insight in the Czech Republic with the exception of a few theses elaborating on the most his famous book *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* which are cited in the appendix of this work.

I have already mentioned the author of the oldest study *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism*, John Hellman. In the book, he extended his idea from the article called *Corporate Fiction, Private Fable, and Hunter S. Thompson's Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72* published in 1979. He discussed the attitudes of Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson, Tom Wolfe, and Michael Herr putting them into a broader theoretical context of American literary tradition. After Hellman’s theoretical analysis, it seemed that professional interest in New Journalism disappeared for the next 20 years.²

In 2002, Kathryn Hume drew attention to the topic of the literature of the 1960s in her book *American Dream, American Nightmare: Fiction since 1960*. However, the 1960s are present only as one part of the study. New Journalism is represented only marginally, especially in persons of Norman Mailer and Joan Didion. Furthermore, Hunter S. Thompson can be found there only as a friend to Oscar Zeta Acosta, a radical Chicano lawyer and writer.

Three years later, Marc Weingarten reopened the question of new journalism in his *Who's Afraid of Tom Wolfe?: How New Journalism Rewrote the World*. In contrast to Hellman, this book helps to understand the stories of the writers and their work better with lesser emphasis on the theory behind them. The text of *Who's Afraid of Tom Wolfe?* was published once more a year later, in 2006, but under the title *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight: Wolfe,*

¹ For example: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (directed by Terry Gilliam in 1998) or *Where the Buffalo Roam* (Art Linson, 1980). The movies and documentaries released up to 2009 were revised in Grace Hale’s article *Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson*.

² To see the complete list of work focused on Thompson, read Steven Hoover’s summary *Hunter S. Thompson and gonzo journalism: A research guide*. He searched all the books, articles, encyclopaedia entries, movies, documentaries and basically everything about Thompson at the same time as Hale gathered the information about video materials, in 2009.

Thompson, Didion, Capote, and the New Journalism Revolution and by a different publishing house. For this reason, each citation in the following text related to Weingarten's books will refer to the original text of *Who's Afraid of Tom Wolfe?*.

At the same time, Ann Charters edited *The Portable Sixties Reader*. The book serves as an anthology collecting extracts from famous works of the 1960s. The authors are divided into thematic chapters. Charters decided to put Thompson among other writers and poets of the decade in the chapter *Why Can We Not Begin New?* as one of the activists covering and participating in the anti-war protest at the Berkeley campus in 1965, next to Allen Ginsberg. An extract from *Hell's Angels* was picked as a show of Thompson's style. To take a deeper insight into the development of Thompson's work and the reflecting feature of his text, Charter's anthology would not suffice.

In interviews between Robert S. Boynton and the "new" new wave of journalists in the book *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft*, a reader can learn more about the impact of Thompson's work on the following generation of columnists. As usual, his name is mentioned next to Tom Wolfe and others. Nonetheless, this collection of interviews can offer nothing more than comments of young journalists after the break of the millennium.

Abnormal consumption of psychedelics and other drugs helped Thompson become an icon for underground subcultures. He earned his stable position amongst the professional drug addicts next to William S. Burroughs or Keith Richards. For his famous drug experiments, Lindsey Michael Banco chose him, along with Aldous Huxley and Burroughs, as a subject for his short theory titled *Travel and Drugs in Twentieth-Century Literature*, published in 2009. Banco came up with the idea of a connection between psychedelics and tourism of the American middle class two years before the *Travel and Drugs* book in his article *Trafficking Trips: Drugs and the Anti-Tourist Novels of Hunter S. Thompson and Alex Garland*. However, he focuses exclusively on the representation of "drug tourism". Thus, both the book and the article stand on the edge of my interest for I intend to explore the social and historical background of Thompson's stories.

The greatest contributions come from 2011 and 2018. The older one, *Gonzo Republic: Hunter S. Thompson's America* by William Stephenson, was designed for both scholars and students and can be understood as one of the most thorough elaborations on Thompson's work. Stephenson examined Thompson's texts to the full extent without burdening the reader with superfluous details about the drug-addled lifestyle of the outlaw journalist. He listed the biographies for those interested in the personal life of Thompson. He explores especially the

philosophical perspective of Thompson's work. Some chapters may be difficult to understand requiring readers to be well-versed in philosophy and familiar with such thinkers as Michel Foucault.

Timothy Denevi, the author of a newer book, from 2018, *Freak Kingdom: Hunter S. Thompson's Manic Ten-Year Crusade Against American Fascism*, combines the story of Thompson's life escapades in relation to his work in the years 1963-1974. The biographical function prevails in this case.

Within the Czech context, Hunter S. Thompson remains lesser known and, regrettably, often he enters general knowledge only for his wild lifestyle involving enormous drug abuse.³ Furthermore, up to this day, only a minority of Thompson's work has been analysed in the Czech academical environment. So far, only a few students explored his books and articles.⁴ Moreover, they have based their examination almost exclusively on the most famous book, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. The story of the book truly deserved a deeper analysis. Nevertheless, I think this bestseller has already been sufficiently discussed from many perspectives. Unlike the colleagues working on the *Vegas* book, I intend to focus on the collections of Thompson's articles published under the name of *Gonzo Papers* and use them as my main source. The *Gonzo Papers* edition is divided into four volumes.

The first one was published under the title *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales from a Strange Time* with the purpose to collect some of his key articles and parts of longer texts, such as *Hell's Angels*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, or *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*. As a summary of his short comments on the Reagan era, the second collection was released as *Generation of Swine: Tales of Shame and Degradation in the '80s*. Illustrating the author's development and introducing some lesser-known pieces of work, *Songs of the Doomed: More Notes on the Death of the American Dream* came out as the third containing memories and Thompson's commentaries on his texts and events behind them in retrospect from 1990. The last one, called *Better Than Sex: Confessions of a Political Junkie*, invites us to Thompson's involvement in the presidential election of 1992 and the related events.

They all gathered articles written throughout Thompson's life, from the end of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1990s. Aiming to describe the development of Thompson's visions of

³ For instance, Jakub Váša discussed the relation between drugs and, not only Thompson's, literary work in his bachelor's (*Drug (Ab)use in the Works of Hunter S. Thompson.*) and diploma thesis (*The Rebirth of Psychedelic Substances in British Literature.*).

⁴ You can find them in the section of Bibliography at the end of this work.

America and its society, I consider the *Gonzo Papers* collection the most useful source available.

On the following pages, I will deliver a study exploring Hunter S. Thompson's stories of his present and comparing them with the factual books written by professional historians. The goal will be to offer a social-historical insight into the events and American culture between the 1960s and 1990s. The historical treatises will provide the essential background; the tales by Thompson will help us to understand the emotions of an individual at the time.

In the theoretical part, I will explain a few terms and establish the historical setting. I will also mention some biographical details from Thompson's life, but only briefly since it has been already discussed in some previous works⁵ and since I agree with Stephenson's claim that especially "*the end of Thompson's life threatens to overshadow his achievements during it*" (16).

⁵ In the US, there are plenty of Thompson's biographies. Some of them I have included as my additional sources for this paper. In the Czech Republic, every student writing on the topic of Hunter S. Thompson has mentioned the writer's life. They have all done so in their unique ways, usually briefly in the theoretical part. To check the two extremes, compare these theses: Mikulínek, Jiří. *Sociocultural aspects of Hunter S. Thompson's Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. 2020. Ostravská univerzita, Bc thesis. (very detailed); and Formánek, František. *Gonzo Journalism in the Work of Hunter S. Thompson*. 2012. Univerzita Pardubice, Bc thesis. (with nearly nothing about Thompson's life).

1. The Writer in the Context of His Time

1.1 Life in the Fast Lane

First, let me briefly introduce the life story of the chosen writer, Hunter Stockton Thompson. He was born on July 18, 1937, in Louisville, Kentucky, as the first of several children. His mother led him to love literature. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to imagine an intellectual child. Thompson had been a disrespectful and wild boy since his childhood. However, he proved his qualities in his essays in high school (Stephenson 1; McKenn 16-17).

As a teenager, Thompson rebelled against every authority. Along with his friends and brothers-in-crime, he pranked a lot of people in his birthplace, Louisville, Kentucky. They also moved to violence, shoplifting, and burglary (Wenner and Seymour 33-34). Interestingly enough, one of Thompson's friends from this time was Porter Bibb (Weingarten 120), who later became one of the key staff for *Rolling Stone*, where Thompson published his articles years later.⁶ His troubled behaviour caused that he spent the day of his expected graduation, in 1956, in a cell. To avoid prison, he decided to enrol in the army where he finally graduated serving in the Air Force (Weingarten 118).

After Thompson was ordered to Eglin Air Force Base, he picked up sports writing for a military magazine. The job was exhausting, and he got under pressure since he worked as a columnist and an editor in one person. To meet the deadline, he dosed himself extremely with caffeine and nicotine (Weingarten 119). Here, perhaps, we can observe the start of his life-long passion for stimulants.

In 1957, he left the army and looked for a job in a magazine or a newspaper. He aspired to become a writer like F. S. Fitzgerald or Ernest Hemingway, nothing less. His admiration for these two members of the Lost Generation was sometimes projected into his articles when he referred to the writers or their books.⁷ He had even typed their texts to comprehend their style since he was but a boy (Stephenson 9; Wenner and Seymour 27).

He moved north, where he took a job as a sportswriter in Puerto Rico. The bowling magazine he worked there for did not make it long in the business though. He came back to the US, to California, and later to New York, as a freelance journalist. Because he did not make

⁶ Bibb appears in *Gonzo: The Life of Hunter S. Thompson* as one of the interviewees.

⁷ For example, *What Lured Hemingway to Ketchum?* (*The Great Shark Hunt* 361-365) or in many other references. Also, Thompson used characters from *The Great Gatsby* as metaphors frequently. He also employed other characters from different authors. Sometimes, Richard Nixon occurred in Thompson's articles as an incarnation of everything sad about Willie Loman from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

fortune again, he chose to travel to South America to bring first-hand stories from the smuggler's underworld. The stories were accepted by *National Observer* magazine owned by the Dow Jones company (Weingarten 120-123).

The cooperation lasted for a year until Thompson sent his article about Free Speech Movement shortly after he returned to the US. The story was turned down and he was looking for a job once more (Stephenson 9). At the end of 1964, he received a breakthrough offer to cover the story behind Hell's Angels who had just been marked a major threat by the police for their violent crimes. The editor expected him to bring another point of view on the bikers. Thompson took the chance and his book *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* established his future career, even though he made money just enough to pay off the rent despite the book has been sold in hundreds of thousands (Weingarten 123-124). E. M. I. Sefcovic described the style of the *Hell's Angels* book as a mixture of "journalistic sensationalism with an extreme form of ethnographic participant observation" (20). Thompson continued covering the stories about the rising counterculture in 1967. In the subsequent year, he got into big-time politics interviewing Richard Nixon who was then running for president. After a short time, *Playboy* assigned Thompson to another interview, this time with the Olympic French ski racer, Jean-Claude Killy. The magazine did not accept Thompson's article for its impudence, and he had to look for another publisher. In the end, he sold his Killy story to Warren Hinckle, his future editor in the *Scanlan's* magazine (Weingarten 212-216). While satirising the Kentucky horse race's culture for Hinckle's paper, Thompson met an English illustrator, Ralph Steadman, who cooperated with him on many occasions later (Weingarten 217).

In the period between *Hell's Angels* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson met one more key man for his career, Oscar Zeta Acosta, a famous radical Chicano lawyer, writer, and activist. Acosta was also the only reason for Kathryn Hume to mention Hunter Thompson in her *American Dream, American Nightmare*. As Weingarten says, "they [Thompson and Acosta] became brothers in arms, fellow troublemakers with a mutual disregard for propriety and authority" (230). Acosta initiated Thompson into the Brown Power underground. He also took an active part as the character of Dr Gonzo accompanying Raoul Duke on the journey to the heart of the American Dream in Thompson's bestseller (Weingarten 230-238).

In 1970, Thompson decided to enter the local politics of his hometown, Aspen in Colorado, himself. He joined neither of the two classical American parties. He run for sheriff on his own "*Freak Power ticket*" with a programme based on the protection of the environment,

fighting corruption, and legalizing drugs (Stephenson 71-72; Thompson *Better Than Sex* 21-23). In fact, this was his second effort in local politics which aimed rather to draw attention than to win. The whole idea of the Freak Power came a year earlier, when Thompson with his companions chose Joe Edwards, a lawyer, and biker, as a mayoral candidate (Weingarten 223-224 and 227-228; Stephenson 89).⁸

In December 1971, Thompson volunteered to cover the 1972 presidential election for *Rolling Stone* which was a bold step to take as he was selling a political story to a rock n' roll reader. Thompson spent a year in a frenzy flying from one state to another and he grew weary. Nevertheless, he accomplished his mission to bring the election to young people in an entertaining way. He also refined his writing style.⁹

Exhausted by all the action, tension, and lack of sleep, Thompson said he was going to leave politics. Nonetheless, he returned to political topics many times. He still wrote articles but not in the extent of the *Fear and Loathing* ones or *Hell's Angels*. In the rest of the 1970s, Thompson “*had written only five major articles, including the Acosta eulogy, the two-page dispatch from Saigon, the Jimmy Carter article, “The Great Shark Hunt” for Playboy, and a two-part profile of Muhammad Ali that ran in Rolling Stone in 1978*” (McKeen 273). The works from the 1970s and 1980s were gathered into the anthologies that I have chosen for this paper.

During the 1970s, his marriage with Sandy Thompson was falling apart which left both sides hurt. In comparison to Hunter, Sandy fell quickly into alcohol addiction, and it took a long time for her to recover. Even though Hunter drank heavily and consumed amphetamines to keep him awake, he could handle it. However, after studying *Cocaine Papers*, he got used to the white powder which only accelerated the alienation (McKeen 222-223). As he confessed to Steadman, the publicity he gained in the 1970s was also too much for him to carry. He thought he had become a caricature of himself (McKeen 243).

The decade of the 1980s started painfully for the Thompson couple. Finally, Sandy dared to abandon her husband. She just could not stand the drugs, violence, and even infidelity anymore (McKeen 263-264). Hunter had several mistresses later, but he lost strong support in both his professional and personal life. Some of the ladies lasted longer than others as his son Juan remembers. None of them was there to stay though (Wenner and Seymour 235 and 347-348). As it comes recognizable from *Generation of Swine*, Thompson relinquished his life on

⁸ To read some memories of the participants, see chapter *Freak Power in the Rockies* in *Gonzo: The Life of Hunter S. Thompson* by Jann Wenner and Corey Seymour (97-119).

⁹ Weingarten examines the details of the book in the chapter *Fun with Dick and George* (239-254).

the road, and he was spending more time in Woody Creek and Aspen watching the world on his TV screen.

The overall picture of Thompson varies depending on the source. Reading the oral biography titled *Gonzo: The Life of Hunter S. Thompson*, the reader gets a picture of a crazy, even mad, but still rather warm-hearted man. On the contrary, William McKeen offers a bit darker version of Thompson's professional and personal life in *Outlaw Journalist: The Life and Times of Hunter S. Thompson*, nevertheless, probably closer to the truth.

In the 1990s, Thompson did not resist working on the presidential campaign of 1992 when it came. As in 1976 (and always), he favoured Democrats. During the last decade of the 20th century, Hunter experienced sexual violence charges (McKeen 316-317); death of his political nemesis Richard Nixon (McKeen 332); and he met Johnny Depp. Together with Depp and Terry Gilliam they produced the second, and more famous, adaptation of Thompson's work in 1998 which only made Thompson more famous (McKeen 338-339).

He continued producing articles even at the break of the millennium, but he changed the platform when he began to upload his comments on a sports webpage (Stephenson 14).¹⁰ Nothing changed in his daily intoxication routine, which led to a worsening of his health (Stephenson 15).

Like Hemingway in 1961, Thompson too decided to leave this world “*on his own terms*” as a self-determinate man on February 20, 2005, killing himself by a self-inflicted shot (Stephenson 16).

¹⁰ Thompson, Hunter S. “Fear and Loathing in America.” *ESPN*, ESPN Internet Ventures, <https://www.espn.com/espn/page2/story?id=1250751>. Accessed 14 April 2023.

1.2 Strange Times

In the second part of this study, I will compare an academic interpretation of American history with the one presented in the works of Hunter S. Thompson. Before that, it appears necessary to provide a picture of the US from the 1950s to 1990s based on some history books to understand the whole story behind Thompson's persona and the subjects of his wild tales. I will focus the most on "the Aquarian age" of the 1960s since it was the time when Thompson build his career and shaped his unique style. Furthermore, he later referred to the decade often for a comparison. All the events described on the following pages should provide a better comprehension of the presidential eras that Thompson wrote about.

As a main source of information for this part, I have chosen a summary of American history by David Emory Shi and George Brown Tindall entitled *America: A Narrative History*, published in 2016 as the 10th edition. I believe it offers the most consistent interpretation of American history of the available books I have encountered. As an additional source, I picked Hugh Brogan's *The Penguin History of the USA*.

1.2.1 Happy Suburbia

To put the story into context, let us begin with the prosperous post-war era. The years of Eisenhower were not only the time of the suburban dream with an extremely spreading car culture (Shi and Tindall 1264-71; Brogan 1071-1072 and 1116). The decade also carried several painful issues. On the one hand, the American population grew quickly thanks to state-supported welfare (Shi and Tindall 1268-1269) and medical conditions. An average American could afford a fully equipped house (Shi and Tindall 1268, 1270; Brogan 1164). Many Americans also bought them a Cadillac (Brogan 1165), a symbol of "*social status and personal freedom*" (Shi and Tindall 1264). On the other hand, the positives tend to overshadow the negative side of the decade. We cannot forget that the 1950s were also the era of McCarthyism (Shi and Tindall 1264-1265; Brogan 1089-1117), idealized housewives (Shi and Tindall 1272-1275), and lasting racism (Shi and Tindall 1271-1272; 1276-77).

The material comfort may have fulfilled the expectations of many Americans, but it did not suffice to satisfy the need of all people. As a matter of fact, some of the best books critiquing American society were written exactly at this period, with J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* or John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* standing in the foreground. Still, Salinger and Updike belonged to the calmer group of critics (Shi and Tindall 1277-1278). Not emphasizing these artists and

their works would harm the theoretical background since they influenced Thompson's style. For example, John Hellman reminds us that "Newsweek *compared Thompson's writings about the sham of the conventional press's portrayal of presidential campaigns to the attacks on society made by the young Holden Caulfield*" (4).

Shortly after, another group of young men expressed their disagreement with the suburban "Levittown"¹¹ conception of the American Dream. Denying passive protest, they acted taking part in demonstrations and living on the road. These people emerged from the underground cultural scene, known as the Beats (Shi and Tindall 1278-1290). The Beatniks had a similar impact on Thompson as they did on the big beat in the 1960s, i.e., a sympathy for an outlaw lifestyle.

The distortion of the great calm rolled in at the break of the 1950s and 1960s. The white man overtook originally African-American Rhythm & Blues, called it Rock n' Roll, and made it prosperous business thanks to its wild and powerful tunes. This energy stole the hearts of the boomer generation away and alienated them from their parents (Shi and Tindall 1280-1281).

Political home affairs were sometimes dominated by greater events of international politics in the context of the Cold War. At the time when Thompson terrorized Louisville with his juvenile delinquency, the world was coming closer to the edge of a nuclear war (Shi and Tindall 1291-1304). Besides many other conflicts all around the globe, two ongoing troubles emerged in the 1950s which were about to engage Thompson for many years.

Firstly, the French asked the US for help in an attempt to keep their dominance in Indochina. The Americans agreed and supported French forces with money, military equipment, and advisers (Shi and Tindall 1295; Brogan 1182-1184). Nobody knew that Americans had entered a long war that was going to question their dominant position in the world.

Secondly, the CIA took care of another controversial process observed by Thompson, namely the situation in the Middle East and South America. With the same goal as in Vietnam, the CIA put a lot of effort into keeping the Red Menace away. Their potential included actions otherwise restricted. The officials did not hesitate to bribe or set a coup to put the right people into various leading positions (Shi and Tindall 1234; 1293-1294). The greatest trouble occurred in Nicaragua and led to a terrible affair in the 1980s.

¹¹ This prototypical suburb area with hundreds of the same looking bungalows became a symbol for 1950s' consumerism, along with sitcoms such as *Leave it to Beaver*. (Shi and Tindall 1269-71 and 1272).

1.2.2 Times They Are A-Changin'¹²

Despite several noticeable events taking place in the 1950s, for an average American the decade must have been flowing calmly and steadily. Brogan nicknamed this slow pace of both domestic and international politics “*comfortable lethargy*” (1116). Nevertheless, a few cultural and political voices brought attention to “*the great postponement*” (Shi and Tindall 1304) of equalization for American citizens. There was an open issue of the position of African Americans fighting for their rights. The Kennedys helped the black movement’s leader, Martin Luther King, from jail. This move earned John F. Kennedy many votes and got him elected (Brogan 1149). After the 1960s came, the pace accelerated with the incoming president. People hoped that this young Irish Catholic in the White House would bring noticeable and desired changes as he so decisively stated in his inauguration speech (Shi and Tindall 1313-1314; Brogan 1120).

Indeed, bold steps were taken in the sequence of the three fast years of John F. Kennedy’s presidency. To be fair, not all of them ended up as he had expected, for instance, the notorious Bay of Pigs (Shi and Tindall, 1316-1318). Some of the most crucial remained unfinished, such as the Civil Rights Movement (Shi and Tindall 1316), called by Hugh Brogan “*a rotten tooth*” of the US (1121), and the Vietnam War. Kennedy and his team entered the worsening situation in the South in 1963 urging Congress to act, without any greater impact (Brogan 1157).

Furthermore, the tension between the US and the USSR reached its peak right in Vienna at the time Kennedy was in office (Shi and Tindall 1318). The dispute about the destiny of Western Europe was sealed with Berlin Wall and the Russians withdrew their missiles from the Caribbean (Shi and Tindall 1318-1320). Despite all the threats, the scenario of *Dr. Strangelove*¹³ did not materialize. Even though JFK did not have a perfect character (Shi and Tindall 1314) and the expected process of desegregation went “*maddeningly*” (Brogan 1154) slowly, he has remained a symbol of idealistic politics until nowadays.

After the day of *Murder Most Foul*¹⁴, as Bob Dylan called the sad November day in Dallas, the guards changed quickly. Former Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson overnight became President of the US (Shi and Tindall 1339).

¹² Inspired by Bob Dylan’s album. Bob Dylan. “Times They Are A-Changin’.” *Times They Are A-Changin’*, Columbia, 1964.

¹³ Kubrick, Stanley, director. *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. Columbia Pictures, 1964.

¹⁴ Bob Dylan. “Murder Most Foul.” *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, Columbia, 2020.

Johnson tried to continue in Kennedy's legacy creating what various historians have called "The Great Society". Education, better nutrition, medical care, and above all civil rights expanded. The equality of American citizens was confirmed, at least on paper. The civil rights bill from July 1964 did not stop the violence in the Deep South and murders of blacks and activists went on (Brogan 1159-1160). All the social and medical programs, however, cost the state treasure a lot of money and not even the country so profitable as the US could have spent so much money on welfare (Shi and Tindall 1339-1349). Also, there was still one more expensive issue. Instead of leaving Vietnam soon, the war deepened and became one of the key problems of the US. Since the controversial Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, American troops had entered the land openly searching for Vietcong. The Americans recognized the threat of defeat was real on the last day of January 1968, the day of the Tet Offensive. In reaction to this attack, the Vietnamese soil suffered heavy bombing. Thanks to the growing power of media, the majority of Americans learned about the B-52 response and many disagreed (Shi and Tindall 1349-1355).

In 1968, more vicious crimes took place. If there was any hope in the 1960s, it was nearly destroyed in 1968 by several heavy blows. Five years had passed since the Dallas shooting and another Kennedy was shot dead in a hotel, shortly after the celebration of his political victory. In addition, Martin Luther King Jr. had been murdered in Tennessee only two months earlier (Shi and Tindall 1357; Brogan 1175, 1206).

To complete the picture, it seems necessary to add one more political suicide to the two assassinations. In August, the Democrats gathered in Chicago for a national convention. Though, the politicians did not come alone. Crowds of anti-war protesters appeared in front of them. The tension ran high, and the streets turned into a battlefield full of tear gas and scream from the protesters, including Thompson, who were being clubbed down by police. The police intervention tore the portrait of the Democratic Party apart over only a few days as the violence was reported on TV across the country (Shi and Tindall 1357-1358; Brogan 1207).

Nonetheless, some people celebrated in 1968. The "silent majority" spoke out. In the belief of reunion, they elected Richard Nixon as the next president after Johnson. Thanks to the "*Turmoil of the Sixties*" (Shi and Tindall 1356), Nixon, Thompson's archenemy, gained enough voters' support to beat Hubert Humphrey in the presidential election. Republicans won after 8 years.

1.2.3 Wild River with Many Streams

Throughout the 1960s, plenty of groups asking for a change arose from the college environment. Originally, the student organizations followed the idea of the Greensboro sit-in, a peaceful protest against inequality. The first formation was established at the University of Michigan in 1962 under the name of Students for a Democratic Society (Shi and Tindall 1364). Two years later, students at the University of California at Berkeley followed their Michigan peers. They tried to bring political action to the campus, but they encountered negative attitudes from the university office and the patriotic Americans in 1965.¹⁵ In response to this ban, students founded the Free Speech Movement (Shi and Tindall 1365-1366). The expansion of the Vietnam War, resulting in the growing number of drafts, in combination with racial and social injustice caused that the protests held against the war were partly turning from calm sit-ins to violent riots inspired by the speeches of Malcolm X. The biggest Black Power riot took place on August 11, 1965, in Watts (Shi and Tindall 1336; Brogan 1167). Especially the African Americans now living in the ghettos of inner cities tended to violence instead of Martin L. King's peaceful protest. Such a massive riot was possible because a great number of African Americans left the rural South and headed to cities for better living conditions. They found none and became angry and unemployed like many other nationalities living in city ghettos (Brogan 1163-1168).

Not only the African-American civil rights movement had split, but the same also happened to young white college activists. The Weather Underground, also known as the Revolutionary Youth Movement, admired the warrior approach of the Black Panthers. By bombing army buildings, they wanted to draw the attention of young white Americans and provoke them to action. As a result, thousands of young Americans attempted to change the world surrounding them. Unfortunately for them, they had the energy, but they did not know the way (Shi and Tindall 1366-1369; Brogan 1201).

Understanding this harsh reality, part of the boomers switched their approach from social activism to resignation on politics. Such philosophy gave birth to the well-known counterculture of the 1960s, Hippies. They gave up saving the country shoulder to shoulder with SDS. They would rather *drop out*, according to Timothy Leary's statement, liberating themselves from the brutal world to explore the inner universe in search of a happy life in the

¹⁵ A group of the Hell's Angels supported the patriotic crowd by beating the anti-war protesters. According to Thompson, at this event the Angels even helped the police. By taking the (ultra) patriotic stand, the gang received respect of some right-wingers. This event marked a breakpoint in relationship between the Kesey's dropouts and the bikers (Weingarten 137).

community. The commonplace picture of a hippie high on drugs diverged only a little from the real state of things. To explore your consciousness, LSD or mescaline was simply one of the shortest paths. Some of them tried to enter higher dimensions in the pattern of Eastern religions like Buddhism.¹⁶ A minority of Hippies also focused on politics. These called themselves the Yippies and pushed for anarchism, yet without any real ambition. The peak of the counterculture came in the summer of 1969 when around 400 000 hippies arrived in Woodstock to witness one of the most iconic shows in human history. Shortly after, enthusiasm faded away quickly in only a few months. Trying to repeat the success of Woodstock, the managers around the Rolling Stones scheduled another festival in California. After being refused in halls, the band decided for the Altamont Plain. There, the flower children sobered up after members of the infamous outlaw motorcycle gang, Hell's Angels, beat Jefferson Airplane band and killed one fan, who was fuelled by amphetamine and waving a gun in his hand. Besides, several other visitors died because of drugs, violence, and simply underestimation of the whole gig.¹⁷ The romantic idyll was over, and it cost a few lives (Shi and Tindall 1369-75). Anyway, even without any particular goal, Hippies managed to rock the US in politics and music.

To understand Thompson's work better, we cannot skip the issue of music in the 1960s. There are far too many references to the poets and bands of the era. The counterculture was powered not only by various chemical substances but also by the mighty Rock n' Roll. The tones of distorted electric guitar rolled over the continent. Jimi Hendrix nearly broke his teeth pulling the strings of his Fender Stratocaster maniacally and even such a diehard follower of Woody Guthrie as Bob Dylan succumbed to the New Sound and its possibilities. In fact, Dylan had a lot in common with Thompson. Their style was not overcomplicated, but they both mastered their specific expression which is impossible to copy. Although either Dylan, either Thompson stuck with the counterculture for a time, they were too complex and probably even smart to stay with the loaded stereotypical Hippies. Besides Dylan, more bands made their fortune at the time. It would take a lot of space to name them all. Therefore, here are the most famous ones: *The Beatles*, *Rolling Stones*, *Jefferson Airplane*, and *The Doors*. All these left a mark in the minds and lifestyles of many contemporaries, including Hunter S. Thompson.

The Civil Rights Movement, with all the streams stemming from its idea, stood above all. Nevertheless, other groups of people also began to demand equality. Women did not want to fulfil the ideal of a housewife anymore. Their movement suffered from the same vices as

¹⁶ Thompson, however, was not impressed by any religious aspiration of intoxication. He simply took the drugs to keep him going (Stephenson 5).

¹⁷ Caught on video in: Maysles, David, Maysles Albert and Charlotte Zwerin. *Gimme Shelter*. Cinema 5, 1970.

African-American activism, SDS, or FSM, meaning that they became fragmented and grew therefore weaker. They achieved more independence though, especially in birth control, and labour market. Through a labour union, Hispanic Americans demanded an increase in their salary and therefore political power. Also, Native Americans and gays stood up for being treated equally as other fellow citizens (read ‘the white men’) (Shi and Tindall 1375-1385). The space given to the Hispanic movement and their living conditions is much briefer than the one focused on African Americans. Whereas Shi and Tindall gave the Latin American a few pages at least (1380-1382), Brogan did not pay any attention to them.

1.2.4 Tricky Dick Kicking Around Again

The chaos of the 1960s sowed a “*fear and loathing*”¹⁸ into the hearts of many Americans, especially those belonging to the middle class, which used to flourish only a decade ago. In contrast to the loud voice of the youth, a great part of the citizens stayed silent. As mentioned before, they did, however, demonstrate their opinion in the presidential election of 1968. This lifted Richard Nixon from political oblivion straight back to the highest level, to the White House (Shi and Tindall 1385-1386).

Nixon inherited two key issues from Johnson. The fire was still burning in Southeast Asia and the battle required more finance. The question of money was connected to another major problem, namely the national debt.

Instead of the promised decreasing participation in Vietnam, the US was sinking deeper without any chance of victory in sight. Compared to Johnson’s undecisive stand, Nixon and his closest advisor, Henry Kissinger, recognized, in the end, that failure would come inevitably. Therefore, they changed their rhetoric, and strived for “*peace with honour*” and “*Vietnamization*” (Shi and Tindall 1393). Still, it took a lot of time until the truce finally came. In the meantime, an unimaginable number of various bombs were being dropped down on Vietnam soil and its border with Cambodia. Hundreds of thousands of troops’ lives, but also of civilian ones, were taken, often in a brutal way. Thousands of young American soldiers returned home in boxes, or without arms or legs (Shi and Tindall 1393-1398). The war left Vietnam in ruins, but the cruel joke was that the American army suffered the same fate (Shi and Tindall 1394-1397). Not even all the soldiers coming back and receiving medals believed in the righteousness of their deeds. Feeling guilty, several veterans joined the public demonstrations

¹⁸ Surprisingly, I have found this Thompson’s phrase already integrated into the official language in *America: A Narrative History* (1368).

against the war and shared their experiences. They called themselves the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and joined the peace marches at the break of the 1960s and 1970s (Shi and Tindall 1362). Disbelief led also to heavy drug abuse by the soldiers still trapped in various Vietnamese military bases (Shi and Tindall 1394).

Meanwhile, in the US, lots of young people had been protesting the war at university campuses since the beginning. The story of the My Lai massacre shocked the wider public and many revised their stance on the war either in 1969 or later in 1971 after Daniel Ellsberg secretly released the so-called Pentagon Papers. The students kept on pushing the authorities into action in order to stop American involvement. By doing so, they opened another battlefield in city streets. At Kent State University, outnumbered members of militia lost their nerve, and started shooting into the crowd leaving four protesters dead behind. On the one hand, Nixon was the one who put an end to the war in Vietnam, on the other, he could have done so earlier and with less bloodshed (Shi and Tindall 1394-1398; Brogan 1209-1210).

To improve his image, Nixon took a bold step in tandem with Kissinger visiting China and later Russia to calm the international tension. Indeed, he celebrated success (Shi and Tindall 1400). The fact that he was withdrawing American troops from Asia in combination with this daring feat won Nixon the second term in 1972 (Shi and Tindall 1401-1403). Despite his great achievement in foreign affairs, a botched burglary in Democrats' headquarters ordered by the president himself initiated his slow but definite fall. This affair came into history as the infamous Watergate scandal. The internal US outrage eclipsed Nixon's success in the USSR and China, along with Kissinger cooling the Israeli-Arabian relationship, and led to Nixon's resignation (Shi and Tindall 1404-1408; Brogan 1217-1220).

During the investigation, which has become a topic for several movies, the corruption at the highest position of American politics was piling up. The final blow came after the Supreme Court ordered Nixon to hand over audio tapes of the conversation between the president and his aides to justice. Even with 18 minutes erased, it sufficed to call for impeachment (Shi and Tindall 1407). To escape such a shame, Nixon chose to resign on his own terms on August 9, 1974, leaving Gerald Ford as his legal successor as Ford had overtaken the office of Vice-President after Spiro Agnew (Shi and Tindall 1408-1409; Brogan 1220).

Evaluating the Watergate scandal, the crisis proved, after all the difficulties, that the quote about equal and more equal ones from George Orwell's *1984* cannot be applied, not even to the president of the United States. Nevertheless, it did not help to recover the public image of a corrupted politician with connections to gangsters. Also, since 1973 the president of the US has become more responsible to Congress in the question of war action and since 1974 all

campaigns should stay transparent in order not to let big business influence the highest rank of the American government (Shi and Tindall 1408-1409).

1.2.5 An Accidental President¹⁹

Ford brought the ghost of Watergate back to life guaranteeing a complete pardon for Richard Nixon. By this step, he undermined the belief in justice again. Knowing it or not, Ford doomed his own political party, the Republicans, to certain defeat in the next election of 1976 (Shi and Tindall 1409-1410; Brogan 1220-1221).

He destroyed his presidency right at the beginning and did nothing special to restore his reputation anymore. The country was drowning in inflation. Kissinger, who spent most of his time in the Middle East, was the one who scored political points by negotiating with Israel and its Arabian enemies. Kissinger's work was beaten in the light of the fall of Saigon in 1975. The final victory of North Vietnam only strengthened the feeling that all the woe was worth nothing. Furthermore, since Ford continued in the politics of "détente", he lost favour of the right wing of the Republican Party. In the aftermath, during Ford's time in the White House, most Americans were waiting for a Democrat to take his place (Shi and Tindall 1410-1411; Brogan 1226).

1.2.6 A Short Democratic Interim

A bitter aftertaste remained after the events of 1974 and caused that only half of the voters came to the polls in 1976. Jimmy Carter defeated Gerald Ford, but only with a small margin of 2 million. The other half still felt disillusioned with LBJ and Nixon and abstained from voting (Shi and Tindall 1411).

Carter's career began well. In the first three months, he climbed from his farm in Georgia up to the top, especially with an open and ascetic Christian attitude. His speeches affected the public, but not in the way he supposed. Carter expressed himself too honestly and too often. Instead of calming the omnipresent fear and tension, he claimed that one of the most dangerous vices was lying deep in American culture. For this, many considered him rather a preacher than a diplomat. On top of that, Carter cooperated with some countries with a problematic human rights record. Thus, even his preacher's role failed since he ignored the

¹⁹ Borrowed from Shi and Tindall (1409).

violation of his personal values while moralizing the American society about their inner sins (Shi and Tindall 1417-1419; Brogan 1229-1247).

Carter managed to prove his modesty by cutting the White House employees by a third. Unfortunately for him, he did not pick up any chief of staff which caused him trouble in his time management. In addition, the ones he chose to advise him, turned out ineffective. One of the happy, and costly, decisions was to clean and protect the environment. Furthermore, he financed the support for the unemployed which helped him to fulfil his religious statements, but he did so in the wrong era. The country still had not recovered from the “stagflation” of the Nixon period and a praiseworthy step of helping the poor only aggravated the economic situation (Shi and Tindall 1417-1418).

Seeking favourable business conditions, Carter was keeping in touch with Shah Pahlavi who was overthrown by the Islamic radicals for his pro-American position. Afterwards, the new Iranian government led by Ruhollah Khomeini refused to negotiate with the US anymore. The Iranian fundamentalists came furious after an American doctor saved the life of the Shah after Pahlavi escaped his country. During violent protests, they broke into the U.S. Embassy in Teheran and held approximately 60 staff members in captivity. Carter denied assenting to the conditions of the Iranians asking the American allies to stop buying oil from Iran. Logically, many of them continued purchasing the oil following their own need. The negotiation froze for a time. Nonetheless, at the end of his presidency, Carter paid billions of dollars to free the hostages (Shi and Tindall 1416-1423; Brogan 1246-1247). The path for a Republican was paved by Carter’s mistakes.

1.2.7 Tough and Successful Actor

A Georgian farmer was replaced by a Hollywood actor. Ronald Reagan worked his way up from a poor family. Luckily for him, his development led through the unions, where he shaped his political instincts. Originally a Democrat, he switched sides in the 1950s when he supported such Republicans as Richard Nixon or later Barry Goldwater in their crusade against communism. In contrast to Carter, he knew how to speak thanks to his acting skills (Shi and Tindall 1424-1425 and 1444).

Reagan offered simple solutions for a very complex time; indeed, a thing people demanded. He also mastered the manner of using Christianity to complete his picture of a conservative. Even though he did not attend church on Sundays often, the religious right wing endorsed him. Christianity had undergone a noticeable change in its platform. Faith in God and

America was no longer spread in churches only. Some preachers understood the trend of television and started to appear on the TV screen. One of them, Reverend Jerry Falwell with his Moral Majority group, declared a holy war against the economic intervention of the state, racial and gender equality, abortion, and communism, of course. The fact that Reagan was nearly an atheist in comparison to Carter, only proves how skilful politician he must have been (Shi and Tindall 1425-1427). He deserved the respect of some Democrats, especially from the South, by defending traditional values close to the ideas of the Moral Majority (Shi and Tindall 1427-1428).

Reagan had to tackle inflation which had been growing steadily in the 1970s. Hoping to save a part of the budget, he decided to cut some of the expenses in social and medical care. In his effort to lower the number of the unemployed, he cut taxes supposing that the money left for employers would create new work opportunities (Shi and Tindall 1430-32). The results became clearer at the end of his first term. On the one hand, the deficit was still rising since only a few cuts were approved, and more expensive military issues arose in Asia and Europe. On the other, business was flourishing once again. At least one of the burdens of the 1970s, namely the stagflation, ended (Shi and Tindall 1434).

At the time when the US was drowning in economic difficulties, the USSR was fighting rebels in Afghanistan and spreading its nuclear warheads in Europe. Facing another possible peak of the Cold War, Reagan ordered to collect as much money for defence as required despite a major hole in the state treasure (Shi and Tindall 1430-32).

In the question of the approach to the Cold War, Reagan differed from his Republican colleagues. Nixon and Ford both relied on the politics of détente, but Reagan did not intend to negotiate. He came to defeat the Soviet Union. Therefore, he deliberately broke Nixon's disarmament treaty of 1972. A rain of critique followed, especially focusing on the danger and the price of the anti-missile system. However, the Soviets were forced to invest immense sums too. In the end, burning so much of the budget defeated the USSR and not the US (Shi and Tindall 1435-1436).

The ghost of Vietnam came to haunt America once more, this time closer. In poor countries of Central America, two groups were fighting each other, the Cuban-supported communists against the right-wing military dictators. The president of the US found himself deciding whether to intervene or not. He chose the first one. 20 years after the Bay of Pigs, in 1979, a similar strategy took place. CIA plotted coups and trained the natives to strike back at the communists. The civil war in Nicaragua turned out to be the most notorious, the Sandinistas against the Contras (Shi and Tindall 1437). Later, in 1983, Reagan demonstrated that he would

use force, if necessary, when his men successfully stormed an unstable island of Grenada with the Marine Corps (Shi and Tindall 1438).

Another conflict occurred in the Middle East where the Arabs went on attacking Israelis persistently. As an ally to Israel, the US moved to the region to keep peace along with troops from Italy and France. The main goal, ousting the radical Muslims out of Beirut, was achieved. However, massacres of civilians were not avoided. Firstly, it looked like a victory after Israeli soldiers made Arabs run to the desert. Nevertheless, desperate fundamentalists resorted to terrorist attacks. In April and October 1983, the buildings of American local authorities in Beirut were bombed by suicide Islamists leaving hundreds dead in debris (Shi and Tindall 1438). Still, there was one more bullet to bite.

In less than 3 years from the large explosion in the American Marine Corps headquarters in Beirut, strange tales leaked from the highest army ranks saying that the US was selling military equipment to Iran. The profit from these secret deals was invested in turn to the Contras in Nicaragua. The stories turned out to be true during hearings in the Supreme Court. Scars of a bomb attack from 1979 were reopened and caused the nation pain similar to the Watergate (Shi and Tindall 1439; Brogan 1263-1264).

The investigation of what has become known as the Iran-Contra Affair proved that it was not an individual action. Even though every proof led to a colonel of the marines, Oliver North. It became obvious that he did not act alone and without other officers knowing it, or even approving it. Such posts as the national security advisor, occupied by Robert McFarlane and then by Admiral John Poindexter, or a head of CIA, William Casey, were being mentioned in connection to the scandal. In reaction, President Reagan entrusted the investigation to the Tower Commission. Disgracefully, the final report pointed to the White House. The president stated that he could not remember approving North's steps. In contrast, North said he "*thought*" (Shi and Tindall 1440) he had the president's permission. The case was closed in 1988, after a year of legal procedures. Of all the accused, only Admiral Poindexter was sentenced to prison. The affair dealt a heavy blow to Reagan's reputation, which had not been questioned before, and also to American justice (Shi and Tindall 1438-1440; Brogan 1264).

On balance, approximately at the same time as the Iran-Contra Affair disclosed, Reagan achieved a breakthrough in the development of the Cold War. Thanks to the new, more open, approach of the incoming General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, negotiations could be held once more. First, Reagan and Gorbachev met in Reykjavik in October 1986, where they expressed mutual willingness to put an end to the threat of nuclear war. In December 1987, the two representatives celebrated a major success for they just had signed a crucial treaty of

nuclear disarmament. As one of the results of warming relations, the Soviets change their attitude toward Middle East politics. They tried to persuade the Palestine Liberation Organization to change its stand on Israel. From this perspective, the world came closer to peace (Shi and Tindall 1440-1442).

The negative consequences of Reagan's rule occurred at the time of his second office. The stock market crashed in October 1987. It forced the president to reappraise his stance on keeping the federal taxes as low as he had promised. No politician was willing to take this unpopular action of raising taxes, but they knew that it was necessary. Despite the downfall of the high business, Americans dreamt once more of the consumer version of the American Dream. Some of them got lost in debt since they spent more than they could afford. But still, they were fed up with the slogans essentially still conveying the notion "The more, the better". They saw the same ideology on TV. In fact, no authority warned them, as Jimmy Carter did back in the 1970s, that the dissipated consumerism may have harmed them. On the contrary, President Reagan assured them that the US is still as prosperous as it ever used to be. The opposite was true (Shi and Tindall 1444-1446).

The lack of money led to other two problems. The country could not afford to pay for the housing of the poor, and Reagan's advisers underestimated the danger of new deadly diseases, HIV and AIDS. The growing number of homeless people in combination with drug abuse and no appropriate cure from hospitals caused almost 1 million deaths (Shi and Tindall 1446-1447).

No more smiles, of handsome but already exhausted Ronald Reagan, could save the situation. A new strategy was needed to win the presidential election of 1986.

1.2.8 Four More Years for the Republicans

The strategists of the Republican Party decided to admit these new serious problems and focused on them. A promise to heal the new pains of the nation, such as poverty and drug addiction, along with "no to the taxes" helped Reagan's less charismatic vice president, George H. W. Bush, to defeat the Democratic candidate, Michael Dukakis (Shi and Tindall 1447-1448).

Despite belonging to the more conservative part of the Republicans, Bush endorsed an act of inclusion for disabled Americans, originally proposed by the Democrats. Following Reagan's pattern of spending too much money in combination with no tax increase caused the country to sink deeper into its national debt. Shortly after entering office, Bush understood that he could not avoid tax reform. Having increased the tax maximum, he lost much of his credit

in the eyes of the right-wing party members and, in a hard time of long recession, of the public too (Shi and Tindall 1448-1449).

At the time, the world was going through changes of paramount importance. One of the nuclear superpowers imploded. The USSR found itself in economic difficulties, even deeper than the US. Luckily enough, Mikhail Gorbachev favoured a new, more democratic policy. Thanks to him, the Soviet Union collapsed peacefully between 1989-1991 without any larger problems. The greatest rival of the US was gone, but some smaller countries rose against American power. Nevertheless, American soldiers blasted their enemies in a series of quick operations. In Panama, they removed General Manuel Noriega who had been trafficking cocaine from South America in December 1989. In the Middle East, they partly destroyed the forces of Saddam Hussein in the First Gulf War ended with a truce in February 1991. In Iran, however, the dictator escaped and began plotting another strike against America (Shi and Tindall 1449-1453).

Paradoxically, the world did not come close to harmony after the fall of the USSR since many hostilities erupted in several unstable countries. In response, Bush called for a new order, leading fellow Republicans to question his strategy of fighting evil all around the globe (Shi and Tindall 1453-1454).

The primary election in 1992 reflected the clash inside the Republican Party when Patrick Buchanan earned the nomination. Bush did not keep his word on the question of rising taxes, and it cost him the nomination post (Shi and Tindall 1454). As a competitor, the Democrats chose William J. Clinton, the governor of Arkansas. Making the 1992 election more special, Ross Perrot, a billionaire from Texas, joined the presidential race critiquing Reagan's economic policy (Shi and Tindall 1454).

1.2.9 Another Chance for the Democrats

Partly thanks to the fact that many voters saw Clinton as the JFK of the 1990s, he won the election promising, as his predecessors, to save state money but also not to burden an average American with heavy taxes. Other than the youthful energy, Clinton reminded Americans of John F. Kennedy, he was a known womanizer. Publicly denying any involvement in extramarital affairs, Clinton discredited himself which eventually led to his fall. In contrast to Kennedy and the other previous presidents, however, Clinton avoided entering the military service (in 1969), which his opponents held against him as well (Shi and Tindall 1455).

Clinton, a former Arkansas governor, surprised everyone. Firstly, his economic reforms celebrated success. Secondly, even though he was not as experienced in foreign politics as George W. Bush, he established peace in the Caribbean, and the Middle East, and finally helped to end the bloodbath in Yugoslavia. Thirdly, he pushed acts to support unemployed people which managed to unite the centrist forces of both parties (Shi and Tindall 1463-1470). However, his presidency did not come to an end without shame.

The 1970s had the Watergate. The 1980s were stained by the Iran-Contra Affair. Clinton's reputation was shaken by his sexual adventures in the White House. Even his political aide, James Carville, warned him not to lose his positive public image for such nonsense, but Clinton did not listen. The following scandal including young Monica Lewinski led in its consequences nearly to his impeachment in 1999 (Shi and Tindall 1470-1473).

The era of Bill Clinton was the last Thompson commented on in *Better Than Sex*. This, therefore, ends the academic interpretation of American history and starts with the one presented in the works of Hunter S. Thompson.

1.3 New Journalism and Gonzo Journalism

As described in the previous chapter, the 1960s defined numerous desirable objectives. Some of them were reached, some not. The key feature of the decade, however, was the energy behind all the sit-ins, riots, and festivals. The basic five questions (what, where, who, when, and what)²⁰ could not make a sense of the action anymore to all the readers and not even to all the reporters, even if this style did not disappear in most of the media (Stephenson 23). Simply put, the journalists and the writers saw it impossible to describe what was happening around them with the classic facts-descriptive method.

Marc Weingarten asks: “*War, assassination, rock, drugs, hippies, Yippies, Nixon – how could a traditional ‘just the facts’ reporter dare to impose a neat and symmetrical order on such chaos?*” (6), pointing out that writing down just dry facts would cause more harm than good. Accurately, he opens his work with Thompson’s quote: “*When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.*” (The opening pages of *Who's Afraid of Tom Wolfe?*)²¹.

This statement corresponds to the idea given by John Hellman that the conventional mass media could not provide an explanation for “*the surreal events of contemporary life*” since they used too rigid a style in very fluid times (2-3 and 5). The social and political reality of the era came so unbelievable that it had become a fiction of its own. Hellman also claims that the new journalists in their effort to seek the truth gave up pretending that they tried to stay objective by bringing facts only. Analogously to our situation today, an American reader did not lack the facts. Maybe, he had more facts than he could handle. The new journalism attempted to put chosen facts into a story, more or less fictional (Hellman 7-8). The need for a new form pressed not only on the journalists but also on the fiction writers. Their traditional writing styles had ossified too.

Those writers who wanted to reflect a contemporary picture of the US faced the same challenges as the authors from the 19th century which Weingarten considers the main period for shaping the new perspectives of journalism. He finds the roots in works by Charles Dickens and Jack London. James E. Caron added that Thompson continued in Mark Twain’s fine tradition of “the noble art of lying” (1). I believe this is also what Caron meant under the term *Tall Tale* in his article *Hunter S. Thompson's "Gonzo" Journalism and the Tall Tale Tradition in America*. Indeed, one can find parallels when reading the texts by Mark Twain and

²⁰ This technique may also be called “*the inverted pyramid*” (Weingarten 13).

²¹ Similarly to the phrase “Fear and Loathing”, Thompson used this sentence many times in various contexts in his works from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Thompson, especially in the ever-present hyperbole. According to Weingarten, the tradition went on by Joseph Pulitzer and later by George Orwell. They both reported stories from the underground. In Weingarten's opinion, Truman Capote interconnects the old guards with the new generation of canonical new journalists (10-32). Their culture was unique but also very unstable, in both the 19th and 20th centuries. As the whole society was transforming, even the novelists experimented looking for new possibilities to describe the complexities of the world.

Realizing they were incapable of covering the whole reality by putting down only pure facts or transforming it into a fictional story, the new journalists were balancing on the edge between fact-based realism and fable (Hellman 11-20).²² This statement corresponds with the explanation that the reader can find in one of the Czech dictionaries of journalism edited by Jan Halada and Barbora Osvaldová (163). The combined style, however, had occurred before (Hellman 17-20). For example, Weingarten compares Thompson's hyperboles and black humour to dark jokes hidden in Jonathan Swift's essay *A Modest Proposal* where Swift suggested ironically that the starving Irish people could have been fed with the meat of little children (10-11 and 258). To make the strategy of blending the features of journalism and fiction clearer, the authors signalled their intention to let the reader know that not everything they were going to read must be necessarily factually true, but not even an absolute fable at the same time (Hellman 14, 17). In the case of Thompson though, it often seems harder to distinguish made-up jokes from facts.

After exposing many directions taken by Wolfe, Mailer, Thompson, and Capote in Chapter 2 of the *Fables of Fact*, Hellman encloses his theory stating that the new journalism belongs to fiction, rather than journalism (21-35). Yet, this claim cannot be applied to all the works by these writers, as he adds (27).

Not only for this reason the new journalism was not a unified movement. Even if they all worked following one simple rule ordering them to forget about the conventions (Weingarten 7), their perspectives varied. Firstly, Hellman distinguishes between the two generations (66-67). The older one, represented by Mailer and Capote, wrote novels originally and moved towards journalism later. Thompson and Wolfe are regarded as the new wave emerging from the flourishing magazines where "*empathetic editors such as Harold Hayes, Clay Felker, and Jann Wenner*" gave the young and ambitious columnists a chance to break through regardless of the length of their contributions (Weingarten 7-8). In *Who's Afraid of Tom Wolfe*, Marc Weingarten emphasizes the key role of the magazines like *Esquire* and the

²² All the intersections and contradictions of the named styles are discussed on these pages for those who want to learn more.

New York Herald Tribune. He introduces the fates of the editors and the new correspondents in the chapters *The Great American Magazine* and *King James and the Man in the Ice-Cream Suit* (33-90). For using a strong parodic, hyperbolic, or even “*burlesque*” style, Thompson was compared rather to fiction writers, such as Kurt Vonnegut who is known for his dark humour and satire spiced with science-fiction, than to a high-level metaphor producer as Norman Mailer (Hellman 67-68 and 100). Also, both generations of the new journalists encountered misunderstanding from the side of the public when they came up with an innovative approach in the 1950s and 1960s (Weingarten 1-8; Hellman 66).

After Thompson strengthened his position as a freelancer by breaking through with *Hell's Angels* (1966), he moved to a very specific way of writing called “gonzo journalism”. A very fitting description by John Hellman says that this subtype is a new “*journalism which reads as savage cartoon*” (68). Comparing Thompson’s works from the first years of the 1970s, namely *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail*, with Mailer’s *Armies of the Night* (1968), Hellman points to one of the most important features of *gonzo*. While Mailer’s persona of the main character of *Armies of the Night* worked mainly as an observer, Thompson himself, or under his alter ego Raoul Duke, not only witnessed the situation but also took an active part in the story (Hoover 326; Caron 2). As Weingarten claims, that is what makes the difference between Thompson and Wolfe as well (117). Sometimes, his participation, often confused or paranoid, led to strange and unpredictable results (Hellman 68-69). The combination of a narrator and a protagonist in a single person became an inseparable part of Thompson’s tales.

Combining his own caricature with dark humour that helped him deal with reality, Thompson engaged the attention of the public. Hellman compares the character to James Bond or Sherlock Holmes. He believed that Thompson, alike the spy and the detective, had his own distinctive and charismatic features and habits (70). In the articles, the reader can encounter basically only two main characters, if we leave the only short fictional story of *Prince Jelly Fish* out. Both, “Dr” (of journalism) Hunter S. Thompson and his alter ego, Raoul Duke, as Thompson’s fellow reporter, appear in the stories as correspondents for *Rolling Stone*, haunted by deadlines and usually typing their paragraphs down in a drug and paranoid frenzy. However, all the mad, and sometimes violent, behaviour around them should not be understood more than a writer’s tool to refresh hard topics such as the politics of the US and to keep the author sane fighting the madness of the surrounding world with his own craziness (Hellman 100). By renouncing both serious fiction and non-fiction, Thompson could comment freely on such a deep topic as the American Dream and its morality (Hellman 74-75). The unusual characters

made it possible to produce, on the one hand, entertaining reports and, on the other, to leave a bitter aftertaste forcing readers to ponder the subjects of his articles.

Hellman elaborates on the development of Thompson's narrative in the articles written for the *National Observer*, then through the debuts as *Hell's Angels* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, ending with *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail* (70-100). The style from the books of *Fear and Loathing* prevailed and became a distinguishing mark for what was titled as *gonzo*, even if, in fact, it had occurred before in a smaller article. Thompson had his followers in this unchained branch of New Journalism²³ but still, as Kevin Lerner stated, in his review of Matthew Winston's study *Gonzo Text: Disentangling Meaning in Hunter S. Thompson's Journalism*, "He [Thompson] is his own genre." (241).

Thompson's stories have two basic aspects. The first one can fill the reader with depression from the corruption all around the US. The second one helps him to laugh at all the decay thanks to the exaggeration and the satirical style. The reader must know that when reading Thompson's work, he deals with fiction based on true events. If not, the articles must look like a disrespectful attack on American conservatism and also and journalist's professional code. For example, Thompson was surely aware that Nixon did not "*fuck pigs and sell used cars with cracked blocks*", but "*Those exaggerations are to make a point.*" (*Songs of the Doomed* 124). Thompson managed to dance on the edge of humorous and very frustrating. As mentioned in the biographical chapter, this aspect of sarcasm he learned probably from F. S. Fitzgerald whom he admired, and also from the classic authors of The Tall Tale originated in the 19th century.

Stephenson agrees with Weingarten on the question of the structure overtaking Weingarten's idea of "*journalism as bricolage*" (Weingarten 234). They both see Thompson's work since *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as an improvisation. As the top of the bricolage structure, Stephenson marks the third book of *Gonzo Papers*, the collection *Better Than Sex* (28 and 91).

There is one more theoretical edition about the history of American culture of the 20th century called *American Decades* where the reader can learn more about New Journalism and Hunter S. Thompson, even if not much more. In the book focusing on the 1960s, James W. Hipp highlighted the value of media and its new, extraordinary forms including magazines for the rock generation, such as Jann Wenner's *Rolling Stone* where Thompson, his old friend,

²³ These writers and the impact of Thompson's style on younger generations became subjects for the article: Lerner, Kevin. "Fear and Loathing Worldwide: Gonzo Journalism beyond Hunter S. Thompson." *American Journalism*, vol. 36, no. 3, July 2019, pp. 404-405; and for the book: Boynton, Robert S. *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft*. Vintage, 2005.

consolidated his career (367-368). In another of the *American Decades* studies, Darren Harris-Fain explained how the original counterculture assimilated into the mainstream. The erstwhile student radicals of the boom generation had grown up and they left the most radical positions, but they still called for media with a big beat spirit (370-372). The new journalists concentrated around *Rolling Stone* met their conditions, especially those like Thompson, here compared to Lester Bangs²⁴ (372-373). Harris-Fain summarised the style of these two as “*drug-induced exposition*” (372). I believe that these authors gained popularity because they *lived* the style and did not only exploit it for their writing. Therefore, the readers could identify themselves with Thompson or Bangs. For its different, and at the same time very entertaining, content, the magazine “*became a multimillion-dollar enterprise*” (372) as it was sold countrywide.

²⁴ Bangs wrote in a similar way as Thompson. They both loved pure energy, but they wrote on different topics. Bangs reported exclusively from rock concerts, not from politics. On this webpage, you can find some of his pieces: <https://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Writer/lester-bangs>.

2. Thompson's Depraved and Decadent America

In this analytical part of the work, I will proceed chronologically, the same as I did while explaining the history of the second half of the 20th century. Also, I have not used all the articles from the volumes of *Gonzo Papers*. Some of them were irrelevant since they discussed sport only or they were created only to send at least *something* to the editor.

Even though the beginning of Thompson's work dates back to the late 1950s and early 1960s, I will discuss the time between the 1960s and 1990s since the only text coming from the 1950s is a short fiction story *Prince Jellyfish (Songs of the Doomed 27-45)*. Its plot is set in New York, but it brings rather an insight into a young writer's mind than a reflection of events from American history and the atmosphere they caused. Thus, I will start with the articles from the time when Thompson struggled to find a steady position, in the first half of the 1960s, a period that he described as the "*decade that started so high and then went so brutally sour*" (*The Great Shark Hunt 118*).

2.1 The 1960s

2.1.1 On the Road

In February 1962, *Chicago Tribune* published Thompson's article *Traveller Hears Mountain Music When It's Sung* in which he commented on the wintertime in his home state, Kentucky. He describes Rock Castle County as "*cold*", "*bleak*" and "*dry*" (*The Great Shark Hunt 363 and 365*). The "*folks around here don't have much time for strangers*" (*The Great Shark Hunt 363*), and "*they don't care much for city boys, specially when they're roamin' around late at night*" (*The Great Shark Hunt 365*), which, in fact, meant after 9:30 pm (*The Great Shark Hunt 364*). One of the few occasions to meet with some other people was a short bluegrass music festival in a warm barn, however, in the cold atmosphere of Renfro Valley.

In other words, the Kentucky countryside is described as a hostile hillbilly Sleepy Hollow in the grey winter season with nearly no action at all and a lot of unfriendly people. In general, his reportage, based on a trip to Kentucky, corresponds with the very conservative, dull picture, and possibly violent, if necessary, of the American South shared by both studies of American history. Neither of the books mentions anything about the nightlife in Kentucky towns and villages at the dawn of the 1960s though, as their story develops with the political and social facts.

To point out the cultural difference between the Southern country and a Northern city, Thompson put this bleak atmosphere in contrast to Gerde's Folk City venue in New York's Greenwich Village where "*the Bluegrass banjo champs [were] warming up*" at the same time when people were already leaving the barn in Renfro Valley to go to sleep. Ten years before this article, he wrote, thousands of people had been visiting these Bluegrass festivals. Nevertheless, things had changed and the place of happening had been moved from Kentucky to New York to the centre of the emerging bohemian counterculture.

The following year, Thompson tried his luck when he travelled to South America as a correspondent for the *National Observer* magazine. There are six shorter articles from this time in *The Great Shark Hunt* book (366-386).²⁵ Mostly, they speak about the terrifying poverty of countries like Colombia, Peru, or Brazil. Nonetheless, the cultural shock led him to ponder the white American position. In *Why Anti-Gringo Winds Often Blow South of the Border* (*The Great Shark Hunt* 369-373), he disclosed how easy it was for an average white American to slip into the white-supremacist behaviour. Despite all the cultural advantages, Thompson found nothing good in these white Americans who settled in South America. Furthermore, nobody of the "gringos" knew how to solve the deep gap between the two cultures and yet they lived the life of the elite (*The Great Shark Hunt* 372).

In another travelling story, *Democracy Dies in Peru, but Few Seem to Mourn Its Passing* (*The Great Shark Hunt* 373-379), Thompson witnessed the impossibility of bringing the American pattern of democracy to other nations. In the other travelogues, he expressed a very similar idea for all the areas of Latin America. He enclosed the journey experience stating that "*the words 'justice' and 'authority' take on different meanings*" there (*The Great Shark Hunt* 386). Even if there are some comments on the US in the South American reports, the main focus remained on the Latin-American countries themselves.

2.1.2 The New Left, Berkeley, and the Hippies

The tales from abroad may seem to have only a little sense to mention them in this work. However, taking the observation of total injustice in Latin-American countries into account of Thompson's life experience, he must have realized the value of guaranteed personal security in the US, even if he mocked the American culture and politics, and even if he suffered a beating

²⁵ Namely *A Footloose American in a Smugglers' Den*; *Why Anti-Gringo Winds Often Blow South of the Border*; *Democracy Dies in Peru, but Few Seem to Mourn Its Passing*; *The Inca of the Andes: He Haunts the Ruins of His Once-Great Empire*; *Brazilshooting*.

and witnessed violence in the city streets. Maybe for this reason, he felt free to comment on America in whatever way he felt appropriate.

In only two years after the journey to South America, while travelling through the US, Thompson picked up several hitchhikers. Feeling sympathetic to the tramps, he bought them a meal. After some small talk with the hobos, he concluded that there were two current versions of the American Dream. One of them was the Gatsby money model and the other one was personified in the hikers surviving from one day to another.

Both represented freedom of enterprise in their specific ways. Thompson came up with this idea when he “*returned to the Holiday Inn – where they have a swimming pool and air-conditioned rooms – to consider the paradox of a nation that has given so much to those who preach the glories of rugged individualism from the security of countless corporate sinecures, and so little to that diminishing band of yesterday’s refugees who still practise it, day by day, in a tough, rootless and sometimes witless style that most of us have long since been weaned away from*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 400). The rambling labourers were “*still living in the era of Horace Greeley, Horatio Alger and, in some cases, Eugene Debs*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 396) which means the second half of the 19th century, and the first decades of the 20th century. Roaming across the country, they were seeking “*a place ‘where a man can still make an honest living’*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 396). They saw themselves as heroes from the books of Jack London (*The Great Shark Hunt* 398). Sadly for them, the era was gone. They roamed across the country as living remnants of the old days. The last massive wave of white labourers hit the US at the break of the 1930s and 1940s (Shi and Tindall 1122). Later, it was rather an issue for the Mexican workers (Shi and Tindall 1272).

At the time of the Civil Right Movement, Thompson also felt obliged to draw attention to the continuing suppression of Native Americans and other minorities in *Marlon Brando and the Indian Fish-In*. In March 1964, when African Americans had already been struggling for their rights for years, he wrote a piece about the Native Americans in Olympia, Washington. They protested the local government restricting their fishing territories. Various famous personalities endorsed them with words, but only Marlon Brando really came and acted. Brando rode with the Natives to fish in a newly forbidden area and let himself get arrested along with others. The action itself did not mark any greater success, but it united at least a part of the Indians to fight for their rights (*The Great Shark Hunt* 405).

As a negative outcome of this event, Thompson noticed the disunity of the individual civil rights movements. The Native Americans, for instance, denied any relation to the African

Americans since it would have made their efforts more harm than good (*The Great Shark Hunt* 404).

The revolt with Brando appears to be rather one of the first sparks that were about to light the fire of more organized and serious actions that took place at the break of the 1960s and 1970s (Shi and Tindall 1382-1383). In contrast, neither Shi and Tindal nor Brogan talk about any connection between the artist and the Native American protesters.

Only half a year earlier, in December 1963, Thompson covered the racial problems in his hometown, Louisville in Kentucky. Standing on the borderline between the North and the South of the US, the town was going through a unique development in the question of racial equality. In comparison to the Deep South, Louisville had gone farther until 1963. It was nothing strange to see an African American in a suit on a street. Unlike in Alabama, where its governor, George Wallace, personally blocked African-American students from entering a university building in the same year (Shi and Tindall 1330), Louisville was already ahead. From the interviews in Thompson's article *A Southern City with Northern Problems*, it comes clear that the black community faced difficulties in two fields, housing, and employment.

The impossibility of black and white people living next to each other as neighbours became the core of the article. A numerous part of African Americans in Louisville lived in the downtown flats. These buildings were, however, planned to be torn down and replaced by new modern ones. Hence, the inhabitants had to move somewhere else. The black families were looking for their new homes in the western suburb of the city, "*the West End*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 47). This action reopened the painful question of the coexistence of white and black Americans.

Even though segregation had been already officially banned. At the end of 1963, a black American could once again feel that his presence was unwanted in some places. The prejudice remained. When word about the black influx to their place got to white house owners in the west suburb, they began to sell the property. Nonetheless, they would not sell the house to an African American. According to one of the sellers, it was not because of racial hatred, but rather because they did not want their friends from the block to live next to a black family for the resulting economical loss. "*Personally, I have nothing against coloured people, ' a seller will explain. 'But I don't want to hurt the neighbours. If I sold my house to a Negro it would knock several thousands dollars off the value of every house on the block. ' "* (*The Great Shark Hunt* 47). As it turned out, "*the fear of falling the property values*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 49) served in most of the cases as an excuse why not to sell a house located in a white suburb to an African American.

This apology based on a clear business point of view silenced even a representative of Louisville's black community, and a real estate agent, Jesse P. Warders. Especially in more prestigious places in the centre, where Warders tried vainly to make a deal, he confessed "*Hell, I'm in business too. I might not like what he says, but I see the point.*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 48).

There was one more way how to prevent African Americans from moving to a white neighbourhood. Poor black families were not given any loans in the banks so they could not afford to buy a house. Again, "*The lending agencies cite business reasons, not race prejudice, as the reason for their stand.*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 49). Nevertheless, the situation was illustrated best when even a high officer of the City Hall admitted the importance of skin colour saying that the white middle-class neighbourhood would rather tolerate a poor Italian plumber than an African American (*The Great Shark Hunt* 49).

Besides the housing issues, the educated black citizens of Louisville faced the refusal of the city's highest class concentrated around the Pendennis Club. The white leaders of the city did not accept anybody else in their circle. This small and closed white group decided about what was going to happen and they were balancing "*simply to maintain the status quo, whatever it happens to be*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 48), in concordance with the white Louisville population. They probably could not, or did not want to, change things immediately. People there just "*don't like trouble*". And most likely for this reason that "*'freedom now' is not in the white Louisville vocabulary*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 48), as Thompson put it.

As Shi and Tindall and Brogan agreed, the housing issue in the cities lasting since the end of World War II embodied the troubles of the African Americans coming from the openly hostile South. They left the rural areas to search for a better life. Usually, they found themselves in conditions like the ones in the South, better or worse. The cities fragmented into white suburbs and the downtown with a black ghetto. In the North, blacks encountered a different kind of racism. Instead of lynching and bombing, they got isolated into their poor neighbourhood without many chances to escape crime (Shi and Tindall 1271-1272, 1277, 1281; Brogan 1165-1166). As frustration grew in these ghettos, it gave way to black radicals like Black Panthers (Shi and Tindall 1338-1339).

Although Thompson paid attention to many things, he was interested mainly in the counterculture that had been set off by the Beatniks. In the articles from the 1960s, especially between 1964 and 1967, he focused to describe the happening among the young revolutionaries.

No later than in April 1964, Thompson was convinced that the once mighty and crazy action moved along with the young hipsters to the East. He expressed his concern about the

happening in *When the Beatniks Were Social Lions (The Great Shark Hunt 417-421)*. Nevertheless, soon enough he found out that the counterculture did not disappear in the West. It only transformed the ideas. In one of his best, yet belonging to the old-style, articles called *The 'Hashbury' Is the Capital of the Hippies*, he elaborated on the process of switching from the political sit-ins at Berkeley to the resignation hidden in Hashbury drug community from the retrospective of 1967. What surely connected the attitude of the Free Speech Movement to the hippies was the leftist ideology, which could have been more understandable in the first case since the Berkeley activist students were also called “the new left”.

As Thompson witnessed in *The Nonstudent Left* in September 1965, the activities of the Free Speech Movement began originally as support to African Americans in their fight for equal rights. In time, however, it took on more political issues with the Vietnam War at the top of all. After the greatest sit-in in the Sprout Hall on the Berkeley Campus, California state authorities intervened. Blaming the ever-present nonstudents for spreading radicalism, they approved the so-called Mulford law. Based on this legislation, universities were given the right to order anybody who was neither a student nor an employee to leave the campus. As Thompson noted, this law seemed nearly unrealistic since there were too many people and chaos at the campuses all the time. Nevertheless, the Mulford law marked a significant change in the relationship between the state of California and its higher education. The unexpected outcome was that many talented students left university voluntarily considering the system too rigid.

On the one hand, Thompson condemned the Mulford law firstly for its goal to silence the protest voices among the students and secondly for ending the liberal era when the University of California was open even to other people, or at least did not obstruct the nonstudents to enter the place. On the other, he made several negative notes on the Berkeley movement as well. While watching a chaotic but “*friendly and collegiate*” (*The Great Shark Hunt 427*) hum that went on in the house of Steve Decanio, one of the eight editors for the Spider²⁶ student magazine, he spotted that “*In the midst of all this it is weird to hear people talking about ‘bringing the ruling class to their knees’, or ‘finding acceptable synonyms for Marxist terms’.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt 427*). Thompson was no communist²⁷ and he must

²⁶ The named consisted of the initial letter of “*sex, politics, international communism, drugs, extremism and rock 'n' roll*” which were the topics of focus (*The Great Shark Hunt 427*). Thompson contributed to the magazine himself with a short and very wild (in terms of both form and idea) poem/telegram titled *Collect Telegram form a Mad Dog* which was reprinted in *The Great Shark Hunt* (108-110).

²⁷ Even though he despised overwhelming majority of American politicians, Thompson, in fact, appreciated the US and the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. However, as a bad joke, he understood that at least part of the country must have seen him and his friends as members “*of a Communist drug plot to destroy their way of life, sell LSD to their children and Spanish fly to their wives*”. (*Great Shark Hunt 175*)

have realized the danger of such talks. He also pointed out the short-sightedness of the movement. While interviewing one of the visitors of Decanio's house, Thompson asked: "*What are you going to be doing ten years from now? [...] What if there's no revolution by then, and no prospects of one?*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 429). The activist replied: "*Hell, [...] I don't think about that. Too much is happening right now. If the revolution's coming, it had better come damn quick.*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 429).

The people around the Berkeley movement became the subjects of the same article in which he introduced the structure and ideas of the protesting students. Not only that the campus crowds could be divided into groups of the official students and the nonstudents taking advantage of all the possibilities at the campus. Members of both groups could be described more or less either as political radicals or as social radicals. In Hunter's point of view, even an individual could combine the two approaches in his stance. The political ones were pushing for leftist ideas and their scale started with "*an ex-Young Democrat, who despairs of President Johnson*" and ended with "*a young Trotskyist*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 426). Their social radical colleagues focused more on the bohemian lifestyle full of "*writing, painting, good sex good sounds and free marijuana*". Although the social radicals sometimes participated in demonstrations, they already stood out of the system as the "drop-outs". By resigning from politics, they set the base for the hippies to come.

As far as I can see, Thompson described a strengthening trend of the half of the 1960s here. The New Left, once a mighty movement, started to split in many interconnected branches. Shi and Tindall claimed that the New Left desired a different path than blind sticking to Marxism, and the movement had some goals (1355-1356) and now Thompson talked about flirting with radicalism and the members do not plan the future.

In the following years, a part of the former political enthusiasts left the great-scale efforts and turned to smaller social projects or simply gave up the fight for change and focused on serious drug experiments. Their ground moved from the Berkeley campus in the eastern part of San Francisco to a place called Haight-Ashbury, or as Thompson put it "*Hashbury*", located nearly in the centre. The clipped form of Haight-Ashbury carries the name of one of the favourite drugs of the Hashbury inhabitants. The things moved as he wrote both "*figuratively*" and "*literally – from Berkeley to Haight-Ashbury, from pragmatism to mysticism, from politics to dope, from hang-ups of protest to the peaceful disengagement of love, nature and spontaneity*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 414).

To get first-hand information, Thompson asked the members of the community to tell him more about the lifestyle and the ideas. Even though not everyone was convinced about the

success of their action, especially the older generation of ex-beatniks who were “*making money off the new scene*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 406), most of the interviewees showed enthusiasm or at least a great trust in their culture. The active part truly believed in the new approach to life which was based on drugs and sharing. Even if it was not applied later, the Hashbury hippies of 1967 stayed committed exclusively to the “*head drugs*” where you can count every substance that will stimulate or even expand your consciousness (*The Great Shark Hunt* 412). Thanks to drugs, the hippies could enter higher dimensions, relax to regain energy, or simply drop out of the reality of everyday life in America. Without any exaggeration, it is possible to say that psychedelics worked as one of the basic pillars of the movement.

As a negative consequence, it gave the San Francisco police an official reason to persecute them, and it also became, quite righteously, one of the stereotypes about the hippies in the articles of San Francisco (and other American) press. Nonetheless, the drug culture had already spread to a wider part of American society as well. In Thompson’s words:

“There is no shortage of documentation for the thesis that the current Haight-Ashbury scene is only the orgiastic tip of a great psychedelic iceberg that is already drifting in the sea lanes of the great society. Submerged and uncountable is the mass of intelligent, capable heads who want nothing so much as peaceful anonymity. In a nervous society where a man’s image is frequently more important than his reality, the only people who can afford to advertise their drug menus are those with nothing to lose.” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 416).

From this excerpt, it seems obvious that Thompson pointed to the hypocrisy of the authorities and the whole society, and possibly also to their ignorance of the reality in other cities. It shows that the hippies used psychedelic substances as only one of many others, but they were the only ones who did not care about doing so and talking about it in public.

Still, one fact remains clear. The communes, such as the one located in Haight-Ashbury, had few things in common. Firstly, the drop-out idea of fighting the unrighteous world by smoking marijuana seemed good enough. Was it sufficient to set up a new nation though? Some of the hippies (or Yippie, as Shi and Tindall call them) truly believed that. Secondly, which goes in hand with the first one, the bohemian lifestyle logically attracted a lot of lazy people and criminals (Shi and Tindall 1372-1375).

Obviously, there were two versions of the 1960s in Thompson’s work. On the one hand, Thompson depicted the 1960s as a participator. He could describe everything in detail since he took part in the concerts and protests. On the other hand, the famous decade of peace and love remained in his mind for the rest of his life, and he returned to the 1960s many times in his later

work. Usually, he compared the era of Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and Bush to the golden age of Aquarius. Even if he understood the weaknesses of the emerging counterculture, he still considered this time as the peak of freedom in the 20th century.

In 1976, five years after he celebrated his greatest success with *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, he found himself in a hotel in Las Vegas again. Feeling melancholic, he wrote his vivid memories of riding his bike to places around San Francisco. Although he put down facts as well, it seemed that he regarded emotions as more important. The following extract was used for the screenplay of the movie *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Originally, however, it was not included in the book itself. I cite this part since it explained what Thompson marked as an unexplainable:

“And that, I think, was the handle – that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn’t need that. Our energy would simply prevail. There was no point in fighting – on our side or theirs. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave ...

So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look west, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark – that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.” (*Songs of the Doomed* 120).

The romantic anarchy did not last long for the reasons mentioned before. The Aquarian Age culminated at the Woodstock festival and then, since Altamont in December 1969, it had been on the decline. Despite the sad fact that the mighty power of the 1960s collapsed and fell into drugs or stuck to the ordinary lifestyle (Shi and Tindall 1374-1375), Thompson went on fighting for the ideal anarchy-blended democracy.

2.1.3 President Nixon, Dean Reagan, and the Vietnam War

Even though Thompson saw some imperfection in the main revolt stream at Berkeley and the related counterculture, the steps of the official culture and politics disturbed him even more. Paying homage to Lionel Olay, admired by Thompson as a true freelancer, he digressed from the original topic, as digression became one of the essential features of his style, to give the reader a picture of the US coming in the late 1960s. Typically for Thompson, he did so in a paranoia frenzy. Worrying about the credit of rock’n’roll counterculture, he assumed that the genre would be exploited by a foresightful businessman. As a true anarchist, he blamed people

like Tom Wilson, a record producer who cooperated with Bob Dylan and Frank Zappa²⁸, for selling “*the honest rebellion*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 107) the same as “‘*army surplus commodities*’ in the late 1940s, ‘*special-guaranteed used cars*’ in the 1950s, *thirty-cent thumb-prints of John Kennedy in the 1960s*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 107). Such a dirty businessman would have sold everything and, unfortunately, in 1967, he “*figured out that the really big money was in drop-out revolution. Ride the big wave: folk-rock, pot symbols, long hair, and \$2.50 minimum at the door. Light shows! Tim Leary! Warhol! NOW!*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 107-108).

Thompson noticed one special aspect that can be found only in Brogan’s overview of American history, whereas Shi and Tindall considered the crash of the counterculture simply a fall to the crime scene. In the extract from the last paragraph, Thompson discovered that rock’n’roll fans were becoming a profitable subject of what Brogan called “*the Youth Market*” (1202). The original protest idea began to disappear, or at least to fade, as the counterculture was partly turning into mainstream.

The politics looked no better. The vision of “*Kennedy with his head blown off and Nixon back from the dead, running wild in the power vacuum of Lyndon’s hopeless bullshit ... and of course Reagan, the new dean of Berkeley*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 107) did not give Thompson much hope and, indeed, the bad days were just about to come soon. While “*Thirty thousand people [...] are serving time in jails of this vast democracy on marijuana charges, [...] the world we have to live in is controlled by a stupid thug from Texas*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 107). The US was doomed since “*A vicious liar [here meaning Lyndon B. Johnson], with the ugliest family in Christendom,*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 107) was sitting in the White House. Furthermore, “*California, ‘the most progressive state’, elects a governor straight out of the George Grosz²⁹ painting, a political freak in every sense of the word except California politics ... Ronnie Reagan, the White Hope of the West*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 107). One of the two greatest rapists of Thompson’s interpretation of the American Dream entered high politics.

Surprisingly enough, California epitomized the clash inside American society. On the one hand, it was the state where the Free Speech Movement, The New Left, and the hippies were born. On the other hand, the citizens of California elected Richard Nixon as their Representative in the Senate (Shi and Tindal 1261) in the early 1950s and they also caused the victory of Ronald Reagan in 1966 (Shi and Tindal 1424). Neither the local nor the country

²⁸ To see more details, visit <https://wacohistory.org/items/show/214>.

²⁹ To explore the paintings by this German Dadaist of the first half of the 20th century, visit this page: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/george-grosz>.

politics in California calmed Thompson down and another blow came with the slow fall of the rock'n'roll counterculture with whom he identified himself. Doom and gloom, or “Fear and Loathing” as he would call it, were an accurate feeling for a man like Thompson at the time since Richard Nixon came back to politics with no lesser goal than the presidency.

In July 1968, five months before the presidential election, Thompson made himself clear in his firstly larger article, *Presenting: The Richard Nixon Doll (Overhauled 1968 Model)*, dedicated exclusively to the election. He marked Nixon “as a monument to all the rancid and broken chromosomes that corrupt the possibilities of the American Dream” and titled Nixon with more wild insults (*The Great Shark Hunt* 197). Despite all the scorn, Thompson admitted professional skills Nixon had mastered during his years in politics. After a close observation of Nixon’s steps in New Hampshire primaries, Thompson confessed he regarded Nixon as “one of the best minds in politics” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 200), in this case not sarcastically. Yet, even such a capable politician as Nixon would not stand a chance “if John Kennedy hadn’t been assassinated five years earlier ... and if the GOP hadn’t nominated Barry Goldwater in 1964 ... which guaranteed the election of Lyndon Johnson, who has since done nearly everything wrong and botched the job so that now even Nixon looks good beside him” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 198). These special conditions were needful for Nixon’s successful run for president, according to Thompson. Hence, it was the situation caused mainly by others, masterfully used by Nixon, that gave him the greatest advantage.

In New Hampshire, in 1968, Thompson got a chance to travel in Nixon’s car and to speak with the candidate himself. Surprisingly, Thompson did not use the time to ask Nixon any painful questions. The two chatted about football. This made Thompson see Richard Nixon as a man and not only as another lying politician. At this meeting, they behaved like two generals respecting each other as a professional in their field, but also realizing that they still stand on the other side of the line. No matter how much they enjoyed the talk in the car, Thompson did not change his general idea of “Nixon Mark IV”, as the journalists called “the ‘new Nixon’” as a product of the poll wizards in the campaign team (*The Great Shark Hunt* 204). Even if Nixon appeared more open, Thompson “wouldn’t touch it – except with a long cattle prod” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 204).

Nixon proved his political qualities by reaching a landslide victory. Thompson belonged to those who were shocked the most. He participated in the demonstration in Washington, D.C., on the days of Nixon’s inaugural balls, at the beginning of 1969, which he described in the piece called *Memoirs of a Wretched Weekend in Washington*. In Thompson’s opinion, this was the time when the US “moved into a vacuum now, in the calm eye of the hurricane” (*The Great*

Shark Hunt 193). The politics had polarized into two radical blocks “*With Nixon and John Mitchell on the right, drumming for law and order ... and with the blacks and the student left gearing down for revolution ... the centre is almost up for grabs.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 192). American society underwent a similar process, it had radicalized. Thompson judged that Nixon was to blame for splitting the nation into implacable groups.

In the despair of the presidential election result, the counterculture held a protest ceremony in Washington. To spite the new authorities, they planned a demonstration to express their disagreement. In the end, the event got out of hand. The crowd did not consist of peaceful students. Now, the police fought the real mob. The youngsters, whom Thompson guessed to be 18 to 19 years old, were throwing stones at the police and setting things on fire. Furthermore, when some of the most raging protesters attempted to rape the American flag, the demonstrators fought each other.

Before 1969, “*the war in Vietnam has been a sort of umbrella-issue, providing a semblance of unity to a mixed bag of anti-war groups with little else in common*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 192). Despite the efforts of Ted Kennedy to create a central point to reunite the two groups of Americans, the fragmentation was growing, and “*the banshee screaming ‘Which side are you on?’ [was] going to make the Johnson years seem like a peace festival.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 193).

Walking through Nixon’s Washington, Thompson, and surely not only him, felt that he lost somehow (*The Great Shark Hunt* 194).

Lyndon Johnson was gone, but not the Vietnam War. Later the same year, Thompson visited Edwards Air Force Base, where he was introduced to the new machines and a pilot’s lifestyle. More than in machinery and the strict routine of life in the Air Force, Thompson was interested in the ongoing war. He asked several pilots about Vietnam, and he received contradictory answers. An older pilot replied: “*I’ve never thought I was put on the Earth to kill people. The most important thing in life is concern for one another.*”. But there was also a younger one with a completely different stance: “*I used to be all for it, but now I don’t give a damn. It’s no fun anymore, now that we can’t go up north. You could see your targets up there, you could see what you hit. But hell, down south all you do is fly a pattern and drop a bunch of bombs through the clouds. There’s no sense of accomplishment.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 436).

Returning from the visit, he brooded over what he had heard. He turned the radio on and listened to a chain of further unsettling news. He enclosed this article *Those Daring Young Men In Their Flying Machines ... Ain’t What They Used to Be*, putting the contrast between the two opinions on the Vietnam War into the context of what he heard on the radio:

“An hour or so later, driving back to Los Angeles, I picked up a news-cast on the radio: student riots at Duke, Wisconsin, and Berkeley; oil slick in the Santa Barbara Channel; Kennedy murder trials in New Orleans and Los Angeles. And suddenly Edwards Air Force Base and that young pilot from Virginia seemed a million miles away. Who would ever have thought, for instance, that the war in Vietnam could be solved by taking the fun out of bombing?” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 436).

The difference in opinion on the war could be perceived as a generational gap (Brogan 1203; Shi and Tindall 1395). This would be too simplified though. Although many young men condemned the war, and some of them even burned their draft cards (Brogan 1203-1204), there were even such war enthusiasts as Thompson encountered at the Air Force base. Shi and Tindall noted that the boom generation *“provided most of the U.S. troops as well as most of the anti-war protesters”* (1431).

While naming all the catastrophes he heard on the radio, Thompson depicted the final stage of the decade. The Kennedys were shot dead, the police fired into the lines of students protesting the war at university campuses, and the river in Santa Barbara was burning, causing an environmental disaster. If it seems that Thompson saw the 1960s rather negatively, even harder times awaited him later. After all, his greatest enemy had just entered the White House.

2.2 The 1970s

Along with the 1960s, the 1970s belonged to the most productive time of Thompson’s career. It was the time when he achieved the breakthrough with his bestseller *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Nevertheless, I believe there were various other articles at least the same remarkable.

Right in 1970, Thompson came up with three larger articles. Not as extended as *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, but long enough to fill more than one page in a magazine. These texts all reflected some of the sins of the American soul.

In the first one, *The Temptations of Jean-Claude Killy*, in which Thompson got assigned to interview a professional ski-racer, the winner of the Olympic games in 1968, he found himself brooding on a completely different topic than the ski-racing achievements. Even if Thompson had written several columns focused on sports and sportsmen, he was not interested in the sport itself anymore. Following the ideas of New Journalism, he was seeking a larger story behind the ski champion. And it would not be Hunter S. Thompson if he did not look for something controversial.

The first, and major, vice Thompson found typical for the US was *greed*. As it will become clear in the following pages, Thompson despised money-mongering as one of the worst human features. And how did Jean-Claude Killy get to greediness? He simply followed his career plans and Calvin Coolidge's quote that "*The business of America is business.*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 295), definitely higher game than in France. The ski champion was not alone in this field. The infamous footballer, and murderer, O. J. Simpson earned money the same way as Killy did, which meant advertising Chevrolet cars, and other goods and services. The two sportsmen, however, approached the gig differently. Simpson did not mind the show and talking to a crowd. In fact, he enjoyed it. In contrast, Killy had to suffer through the exhibition of the new Cadillacs with visible self-denial.

When confronted by Thompson's questions, Killy lost his nerves and started screaming that he did not enjoy a single advertising show, but that he had to keep it going to earn his money. For a better illustration, here is the transcript of Killy's outburst:

"You [Thompson] and me, we are completely different. We are not the same kind of people! You don't understand! You could never do what I'm doing! You sit there and smile, but you don't know what it is! I am tired. Tired! I don't care anymore – not on the inside or the outside! I don't care what I say, what I think, but I have to keep doing it. And two weeks from now I can go back home to rest, and spend all my money." (*The Great Shark Hunt* 86).

Killy could not understand that somebody, and in addition a known drug-freak journalist as Thompson was, saw his business as a kind of professional prostitution. To be fair to Killy, Thompson did not point out that Killy was the only greedy one. The champion only voluntarily entered the face-selling business in a country where his only goal was to earn as much money as possible and then move back to his home in the French Alps with the cash.

Due to all the woe that Killy had had to undergo to get the money, Thompson concluded that he did not take the racer as a stupid man. He also admitted that he sensed some inner qualities such as "*a hint of decency – perhaps even humour*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 86), or brightness and pragmatism (*The Great Shark Hunt* 104). For the clash of Killy's personality, Thompson compared the skier to Jay Gatsby (*The Great Shark Hunt* 88 and 104). Covering the story of a sportsman turned into a contemplation about selling oneself for a lot of money, a thing Thompson considered "*a very hard dollar – maybe the hardest*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 104).

2.2.1 Depraved Kentucky and Colorado

In the article *The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved*, published on June 4, 1970, which has been titled as a pioneering work for Gonzo, Thompson went far across the line he had established in his previous columns from the 1960s. This article came out a year before Thompson's masterpiece *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Both texts share the chaotic spirit of "booze and madness". Thompson came up with the idea for an article about horse races at his home when he was drinking heavily with his friends. Late at night, he called the editor of an underground paper *Scanlan's Monthly*, informed him about the idea, and was given approval. In a similarly quick and crazy manner, the deed was done (Weingarten 217).

The whole prank began by picking an English illustrator Ralph Steadman up at the airport. As in other works, for example in *The Temptations of Jean-Claude Killy*, the aim was not to observe and describe the race itself, but to depict "*a very special kind of scene*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 34) so typical for Derby Day. It meant that Thompson and Steadman "*didn't give a hoot in hell what was happening on the track*", they "*had come there to watch the real beasts perform.*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 35). Thompson decided to cover "*the whisky gentry in action*" (34). It included everybody from "*The governor, a swinish neo-Nazi hack named Louie Nunn [...] along with Barry Goldwater and Colonel Sanders*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 34) to "*the politicians, society belles and local captains of commerce, every half-mad dingbat who ever had any pretensions to anything at all within five hundred miles of Louisville*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 34).³⁰

The whole story can be summarized by saying that the two were wandering through the crowds at the stadium looking for a symbol of human corruption that Thompson had expected to find there. It should have been "*the mask of the whisky gentry – a pretentious mix of booze, failed dreams and terminal identity crisis; the inevitable result of too much inbreeding in a closed and ignorant culture.*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 36). Steadman's task was to draw, and Thompson was taking notes. He did so under pressure, and under the influence of whisky as well. Based on these notes, he later compiled the final article which reads as a stream of consciousness with several portraits from the Derby which, in Thompson's eyes, in its turmoil resembled Los Angeles Muscle Beach or even the Woodstock festival (*The Great Shark Hunt* 40).

³⁰ The short story was supplemented with pictures by Ralph Steadman which made it even more savage. To get an idea what Steadman's work looks like, visit this page: <https://www.ralphsteadman.com/>. You can also find his biography there.

In the end, they succeeded but for terrible cost. On the last day, they realized they had drunk themselves to the stage when they looked even worse than the ugliest faces Steadman had drawn in his sketches. Also, while they were jammed among the spectators, they witnessed horrible scenes (*The Great Shark Hunt* 42-43). Here, I would like to remind us that Thompson was a master of exaggeration. Therefore, the reality did not have to be so hideous as described. To give the atmosphere a darker shade, the story ends with a picture of Steadman's return to the airport. While driving fast after three days of no sleep and exhausting drinking, Thompson turned on the radio to hear that "*the National Guard is massacring students at Kent State and Nixon is still bombing Cambodia*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 43).

It may seem that Thompson resigned from the social happening and moved to little crazy enterprises such as the *Derby* piece bringing a satirical picture of the American people. However, the opposite was true. In fact, he got still stronger feeling that "*the fuckers had gone too far this time*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 177) which led him not only to attack the big-time and the local politicians viciously but also to act and enter the local politics as a good citizen of the US he considered himself to be. This corresponded with his later explanation that politics is "*the art of controlling [one's] environment*" (*Better Than Sex* 17). He thought that the violence at the Democratic Convention in Chicago in August 1968, (Brogan 1207; Shi and Tindall 1357-1358) and subsequent events ending with Richard Nixon becoming President, launched him to action (*Songs of the Doomed* 95; *The Great Shark Hunt* 179) and turned him into "*a raving beast*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 179).

Thompson got fed up with the Aspen magistrate turning the town into a tourist ski resort for the city crowds (*The Great Shark Hunt* 164 and 170-171). He decided to rock the mayor election of 1969 and established what he called "*The Freak Power*" with a biker Joe Edwards, who had remained unknown even to the campaign staff including Thompson until the polls (*The Great Shark Hunt* 177-178), to run for the office on their ticket. He was worried that Aspen would meet the same fate as Haight Street, one of the freest places in the US back in 1966, or as North Beach and Greenwich Village even earlier (*The Great Shark Hunt* 166). Some members of the "head" culture left the cities to "*rural communes*", mostly unsuccessfully, and some of them went to smaller towns like Aspen. They found low-paid jobs and became a part of the town (*The Great Shark Hunt* 167).

A year after the election, in October 1970, he dedicated one of his most outstanding articles, *Freak Power in the Rockies*, to cover the bringing of the counterculture back to life as it used to be before 1965.

“The central problem that we grappled with last fall is the gap that separates the head culture from activist politics. Somewhere in the nightmare of failure that gripped America between 1965 and 1970, the old Berkeley-born notion of beating the system fighting it gave way to a sort of numb conviction that it made sense in the long run to flee, or even to simply hide, than to fight the bastards on anything even vaguely resembling their own terms.” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 166)

Therefore, it came as a surprise that the Freak power showed strong viability. On the day of the polls, the crew recognized they were only tens of votes behind. *“There was something weird in the room, some kind of electric madness that I’d never noticed before.”* (*The Great Shark Hunt* 168). I believe this feeling of excitement kept Thompson chained to politics, and this event was one of the greatest peaks of his life. Even though he was deeply into drugs, he could finely understand the satisfaction of long-term effort which distinguished him from most of the drop-out counterculture who cared only about *“the instant reward”* (*The Great Shark Hunt* 167). Nonetheless, amid all the enthusiasm, Thompson asked himself: *“God damn! [...] Maybe we will win ... and what then?”* (*The Great Shark Hunt* 169).

They truly defeated one of the three runners, Lennie Oates, in the first round (*The Great Shark Hunt* 170). Then, the battle turned to the heads versus nearly all the rest of the city. Especially people interested in business saw the Freak Power as *“a Communist drug plot to destroy their way of life, [who wanted to] sell LSD to their children and Spanish fly to their wives”* (*The Great Shark Hunt* 175-176). Nevertheless, *“The [only] people who had reason to fear the Edwards campaign were the sub-dividers, ski-pimps, and city-based land-developers who had come like a plague of poison roaches to buy and sell the whole valley out from under the people who still valued it as a good place to live, not just a good investment.”*³¹ (*The Great Shark Hunt* 170). The goals of the Freak Power could be, contrary to the previous development of Aspen, summarized as: *“fuck the tourists, dead-end the highway, zone the greedheads out of existence, and in general create a town where people could live like human beings, instead of slaves to some bogus of progress that is driving us all mad.”* (*The Great Shark Hunt* 171).

Even if the Freak Power faced a strong competitor, they lost with honour by only a few votes. Comparing the result with Norman Mailer who ran along with Jimmy Breslin on the Democratic ticket for the mayor of New York and failed, Thompson marked the Aspen mayoral election of 1969 as a success (*The Great Shark Hunt* 172-173).

³¹ The whole programme is to be found in *The Great Shark Hunt* (184-186) and in *Better Than Sex* (21-22).

Following the “success”, Thompson suggested using “*the Aspen technique*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 174) on the state level. In reality, it meant that “*Demo’s only hope of unseating Nixon will again be some shrewd establishment candidate on the brink of menopause who will suddenly start dropping acid in the late 71 and then hit the rock-festival trail in the summer of 72. He will doff his shirt at every opportunity and his wife will burn her bra ... and millions of the young will vote for him, against Nixon.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 174).

From this perspective, Thompson confessed that “*The Edwards campaign was more an uprising than a movement.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 179). The point, however, proved far more than the Edwards people had expected. They *could* make it. This, I understand, Thompson respected as a key privilege and a part of the American Dream. In the context of frustrating events in the era of Richard Nixon, it must have been a bright spot for the surviving “freaks” in an otherwise grey time.

2.2.2 Brown Power

Even if the question of equality between the African Americans and the white majority had not been solved, at least not in everyday life, Thompson directed his attention rather to the Chicano movement. As it was mentioned before, in the part about the Native Americans defending their fishing privileges, the minorities did not cooperate despite some similarities. Thompson commented on the Latino movement in his two larger articles. The first one comes from 1971 and discloses the story behind the murder of a Latin-American journalist Ruben Salazar in East Los Angeles. The other one deals with the death of another fighter for equal rights for the Chicanos, a brother-in-crime and a friend to Thompson, Oscar Zeta Acosta.

The Chicano people lived mostly in poverty on the outskirts of the cities, in excluded localities, not differently from the African Americans. The same surrounding resulted in similar crimes which gave the majority of society reason to despise the Latinos. Thompson himself did not enjoy visiting the ghettos but he had one friend, Oscar Acosta, who was deeply interested in the Chicano movement. Acosta studied law and then became one of the main defending voices of Brown Power. Thanks to him, Thompson got a chance to go to places otherwise very dangerous for any “gringo” or “gabacho”.

In the older article, Thompson traced down the events of the crucial August 29 in 1970. Along with Acosta, they visited Silver Dollar Café where Ruben Salazar had been murdered.

³²The only reminder of the crime was a gas mask with the date hanging on the wall. It was enough. Everyone in the suburb knew what happened then. Neither did they forget, nor forgive.

“Ruben Salazar, the prominent ‘Mexican-American’ columnist for the East Los Angeles Times and news director for bilingual KMEX-TV, walked into the place and sat down on a stool near the doorway to order a beer he would never drink. Because just about the time the barmaid was sliding his beer across the bar a Los Angeles County sheriff’s deputy named Tom Wilson fired a tear gas bomb through the front door and blew half of Ruben Salazar’s head off. All the other customers escaped out the exit to the alley, but Salazar never emerged. He died on the floor in a cloud of CS gas – and when his body was finally carried out, hours later, his name was already launched into martyrdom. Within twenty-four hours, 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 LA.” (The Great Shark Hunt 131)

It happened for no good reason. Salazar came to the bar from “*Laguna Park, where 5000 or so liberal/student/activist type of Chicanos had gathered to protest the drafting of ‘Aztlán citizens’ to fight for the US in Vietnam.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 141). The gathering, however, turned into “*a Watts-style riot*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 141). When the police began to tear gas the furious crowd and beat the Chicanos in “*a Chicago mop-up with billyclubs*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 141), the angry and violent protesters ran to the surrounding streets trashing and burning the buildings around. Part of these fugitives headed to the Silver Dollar where Salazar stepped only a moment before (*The Great Shark Hunt* 141-142). He was covering the protest for *LA Times* and KMEX-TV where he had built his career. He had become known for his reportages from the barrio and police action there. The police department did not like it and “[...] *In the summer of 1970 Ruben Salazar was warned three times, by the cops, to ‘tone down his coverage’.* And each time he told them to fuck off.” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 142). His position as a courageous journalist bringing the news even from places like prisons became a subject of suspicion after his death. It seemed possible, and even likely, that he was killed on purpose.

The police officials could not explain the situation. So, they rather chose to stay silent and not leave their station. Acosta, happy to see “*the hated gringo police*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 142) afraid, laughed at them saying: “*Shit, the place looks like a prison – but with all the cops inside!*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 143). Furthermore, more eyewitnesses occurred with

³² As the reader can learn from the newer collection *Generation of Swine*, there was one more victim of investigative journalism. His name was Don Bolles and he tried to uncover ties between mafia and local politicians in Arizona. His job, done on professional level, caused that a mafia hired criminal put a bomb at the bottom of his car. The detonation “*ripped him apart*” (*Generation of Swine* 177). For this reason, Thompson feared Phoenix, Arizona, a bit because he was after all in the same branch as Bolles was (*Generation of Swine* 148 and 175-177).

stories against the police. The police chiefs defended their subordinates announcing that Ruben was a victim of a street war and he, only maybe, could have been hit by an accident. From their perspective “*His death was unfortunate*”, but Thompson added that “*if they had to do it all over again they wouldn’t change a note.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 153). The chiefs and a Los Angeles conservative newspaper, *Herald-Examiner*, also tried to connect the Chicanos with the communists (*The Great Shark Hunt* 144-146). The investigation lasted 16 days with no one charged with anything, “*a verdict that confuses many, satisfies few and means little*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 152).

Thompson believed that Salazar’s death was a second-degree murder. On the contrary, the police defended their stance that they only did what they had to, and Salazar “*happened to be in their way when they had to do their duty.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 153).

“*This is the point they want to make. It is a local variation on the standard Mitchell-Agnew theme: Don’t fuck around, boy – and if you want to hang out with people who do, don’t be surprised when the bill comes due – whistling in through the curtains of some darkened barroom on a sunny afternoon when the cops decide to make an example of somebody.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 153)

Salazar’s death caused suddenly even those calm Mexican Americans to turn into angry protesters (*The Great Shark Hunt* 131). A few months after the police raid, the minority held “*the mass rally against police brutality* [on] 31 January. Many of the “*batos locos*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 139), the Latin-American violent punks with nothing to lose, joined the rally. They were known for their appetite for drugs similar to the Hell’s Angels (*The Great Shark Hunt* 138) and, as expected, they provoked police into shooting leaving one dead and thirty injured people behind along with “*a little less than a half million dollars’ worth of damage – including seventy-eight burned and battered police cars*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 139-140).

After that, three things changed. Firstly, the organizer of the rally, Rosalio Munoz, gave up such mass demonstrations and claimed to keep “*a low profile*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 140). Secondly, the East Los Angeles police department distrusted everybody living in the barrio. They saw all members of the Chicano community as enemies, similar to how the American soldiers suspected every Vietnamese of belonging to the Vietcong (*The Great Shark Hunt* 140). Thirdly, the movement split into “*student-type militants and this whole new breed of super-militant street crazies*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 140). They both demanded a fight. The question stood “*when, and how, and with what weapons*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 140).

The overall mood in the barrio was worsening in the weeks after the murder. Everybody felt it, including Governor Ronald Reagan, but nobody knew what to do. Even Acosta, who was

otherwise deeply involved in the radical Chicano action, confessed that the going went out of hand. He did not find the energy to fight the gringos in the court anymore. For Mexican Americans, the situation looked desperate. Nevertheless, the police thought they had everything under control, at least to the extent it had been before (*The Great Shark Hunt* 158-160).

The despair grew as another misstep of the East LA policemen occurred only weeks after the Salazar case. This time, the shooting had the name “*a murder of the Sanchez brothers*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 160). Now, even the city authorities admitted it went wrong but when justice was demanded, they felt insulted. The fact that nobody was found guilty and sentenced reminded Thompson of the massacre in My Lai (*The Great Shark Hunt* 161). Everything “*sounded like a replay of the Salazar bullshit: same style, same excuse, same result*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 161). The feeling of injustice felt even more bitter since the trials against the accused policemen, which ended unsuccessfully, were held for the money of all the taxpayers including the Mexican Americans. In one year after the incident in Silver Dollar Café, two bomb attacks came in response to the police indifference. The first one, stronger, “*blew a wall out of the District Attorney’s office last fall after Salazar died*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 161). The other came eight months after Salazar’s death and blasted at the LA City Hall leaving only no dead behind (*The Great Shark Hunt* 161-162). Who was the suspect group is obvious.

Unlike Shi and Tindall or Brogan, Thompson did not focus so much on the black movement but, thanks to his connections, he brought insight into radical groups of Latin Americans.

In December 1977, Thompson wrote an epitaph to Oscar Zeta Acosta in *Rolling Stone*, against the will of the editorial. While summarizing Acosta’s life, he marked him as “*the Brown Buffalo [who] suddenly transmogrified into the form of rabid hyena*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 538) and other sarcastic and hyperbolized titles. Thanks to Acosta’s preacher determination combined with a twisted mind powered mostly by amphetamines and LSD, the Chicano lawyer deserved to be compared to Richard Nixon, Mao Zedong, and Moses (*The Great Shark Hunt* 534 and 537). On 22 pages, Thompson got angrier and angrier about his former companion. He introduced Acosta’s life citing *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*.³³ All this, however, stands aside from the goal of this work.³⁴

³³ Acosta, Oscar Zeta. *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. Tangerine Press, 2018. This autobiography is the book that connects Oscar Zeta Acosta to Hunter S. Thompson in Kathryn Hume’s study, *American Dream, American Nightmare*.

³⁴ For those who want to learn about the life of the crazy, radical, drug-addled Chicano lawyer, read the whole article *The Banshee Screams for Buffalo Meat* (*The Great Shark Hunt* 523-545).

Nevertheless, in this epitaph, there is one interesting notion concerning the morality of the country in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thompson recalled one of their common drug and violence stories when he accompanied Acosta to threaten a judge at his own home. They drove to the house and set the judge's lawn on fire with litres of gasoline. Then, Acosta with his head full of acid screamed a short mad sermon onto the horrified judge. The point was that, even though Thompson realized the danger and barbarity of their deed, he justified that:

“In an era when the Vice-President of the United States held court in Washington to accept payoffs from his former vassals in the form of big wads of one hundred dollar bills – and when the President himself routinely held secretly tape-recorded meetings with his top aides in the Oval Office to plot illegal wiretaps, political burglaries and other gross felonies in the name of a ‘silent majority’, it was hard to feel anything more than a flesh of high, nervous humour at the sight of some acid-bent lawyer setting fire to a judge’s front yard at four o’clock in the morning.” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 534)

This defence says that in the times of Spiro Agnew and Richard Nixon, such a minor crime as arson could not be taken seriously. This is only one of many reasons for the title of this thesis. Thompson understood the weirdness of his behaviour but, in the era when the highest authorities acted as cheap gangsters, he felt no guilt which takes us to another topic.

2.2.3 Nixon’s Re-election, Watergate, and the Pardon

Even though Thompson commented on American politics earlier, in the 1960s, the Nixon era made him dedicate himself to politics completely. Whereas in 1968 Thompson came up with only two commentaries on the political campaign and the election of Richard Nixon, in 1972 he wrote a long analysis, compared to the previous ones, *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72*. He was not the only one with this idea. For instance, Norman Mailer covered the campaign as well in his reportage *St. George and the Godfather*. The whole text of *On the Campaign Trail ’72* is too long for the purpose of this thesis. Therefore, I will point out only some key notions and cite from the selected chapters included in *The Great Shark Hunt* collection (210-252) as a cross-section throughout the months full of speeches, conventions, and rallies that ended in failed hope in the Democratic candidate, George McGovern.³⁵

³⁵ I focused on the entire collection *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72* in my bachelor’s thesis while comparing it with the mentioned *St. George and the Godfather*. The style of *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72* was discussed even in the early studies, such as the ones by John Hellman which I have mentioned in the previous chapters.

As he looked back on the 1968 election later, in 1990, he had assumed that “*A presidential campaign would be a good place [...] to look for the Death of the American Dream*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 95) since he took the two runners as a parody on the American Dream, with Nixon as even more ridiculous caricature (*The Great Shark Hunt* 197). In 1968, many Americans, probably including Thompson, insisted “*that a choice between Nixon and Johnson*” was “*‘a choice between obscenity and vulgarity’*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 197).

In fact, it was not LBJ who competed with Nixon in 1968 in the end. The Democratic Party nominated Hubert Humphrey. This decision did not help their reputation, and besides it caused riots in Chicago. Nixon aimed his campaign at the silent majority and promised to calm the storm of the late 1960s, which got him elected (Shi and Tindall 1357-1358,1360). The choice was not so difficult to make for a great part of American society, as it was for Thompson, after all.

Four years later, however, Thompson felt that there was a candidate worth voting for. As the primaries in the Democratic Party crystalized, he bet his trust on Senator McGovern who had to face strong and famous competitors. The other runners considered McGovern far too liberal whose plan was to “*seize the reins of power and turn them over at midnight on inauguration day to a red-bent hellbroth of radicals, dopers, traitors, sex fiends, anarchists, winos, and ‘extremists’ of every description*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 221). According to Shi and Tindall, this impression prevailed and in combination with McGovern’s exhausting speeches ruined the already weak campaign (1404).

Of course, he also paid a lot of attention to Richard Nixon whom he despised and described as the Devil himself but without any class and manners calling him an “*evil bastard*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 254) and comparing him to Adolf Hitler (*The Great Shark Hunt* 251, 254). Thompson found such expressions as “*a political monster straight out of Grendel*” (*Better Than Sex* 239) putting Nixon into the Old English mythology. Furthermore, he titled the opposite runners of the Democrats like Hubert Humphrey and especially George Wallace, a racist and populist Governor of Alabama, with the wildest insults. He loathed Wallace not only for his undisguised Southern racism but also for Wallace’s hateful stance towards hippies (Shi and Tindall 1359), which could be compared to the attitude depicted in *Easy Rider*. Many times, Thompson attacked Humphrey for obstructing the candidacy of McGovern and undermining the chances of the Democrats.

Another Democrat, Edmund Muskie, occurred in the coverage as an exhausted politician intoxicated by Ibogaine babbling nonsense from his campaign train. As Thompson explained later, he made the Ibogaine story up since he had not expected that nobody would have believed

such craziness (*Songs of the Doomed* 123). As it turned out, some readers did believe which can be understood as a mark of puzzlement and a proof that the time indeed got so mad that one of the Democratic candidates would deliver a speech under the influence of some exotic hallucinogenic/stimulating herb. In this sense of twisted humour, Humphrey too should have been using amphetamines. In short, McGovern appeared the only choice for Thompson which did not mean that he got off without any insults written on his person in Thompson's articles.

As far as McGovern rolled on what journalists called "amnesty, abortion and acid" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 222) strategy, Thompson kept his fingers crossed for the Democratic nominee. Nevertheless, the hard-earned support crumbled to pieces after the infamous affair of Tom Eagleton, a Senator picked by McGovern to run as the Vice-President candidate.

In the end, despite the fierce hatred Thompson held against Richard Nixon, he had to acknowledge that there was nobody to compete with Nixon seriously. The ongoing years seemed dark for Thompson.

Fortunately for him, President Nixon made a crucial mistake that cost him his office two years later, in 1974. The Watergate burglary was first investigated by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein from the *Washington Post*. Even before Watergate, however, there was one more magazine that had published controversial material. *The New York Times* brought an untold history of the Vietnam War in the so-called *Pentagon Papers* released by Daniel Ellsberg (*The Great Shark Hunt* 347). Nonetheless, thanks to Woodward and Bernstein the Watergate affair hit the White House and opened public discussion (*The Great Shark Hunt* 261) by which the *Post* "replaced the New York Times as the nation's premier political newspaper" (343).

Now, since Watergate "was essentially a lawyer's story, not a journalist's" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 328), I will not get into details of politics for it would take too much space and Watergate is not the only topic of this paper. I will pick up the most interesting pieces, typical for Thompson's version of the story, from the four articles published in *Rolling Stone* from August 1973 to October 1974. Chronologically, the articles go in this order: *Memo from the Sports Desk & Rude Notes from the Decompression Chamber in Miami* (2 August 1973), *Fear and Loathing at the Watergate: Mr Nixon Has Cashed His Cheque* (27 September 1973), *Fear and Loathing in Washington: The Boys in the Bag* (4 July 1974), and finally *Fear and Loathing in Limbo: The Scum Also Rises* (10 October 1974).

The first published in *Rolling Stone* in August, called *Memo from the Sports Desk & Rude Notes from the Decompression Chamber*, consisted of articles, editorial comments, and letters, brought hope that Nixon would fall from his position of "the most powerful man in the world" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 262) considering himself "Zeus [...] calling firebombs and

shitrains down on friend and foe alike” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 262). On the other hand, Thompson still brooded on what will be the overall outcome of the crisis.

“*The slow-rising central horror of Watergate is not that it might grind down to the reluctant impeachment of a vengeful thug of a president whose entire political career has been a monument to the same kind of cheap shots and treachery he finally got nailed for, but that we might somehow fail to learn something from it.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 263).

Firstly, it looked like Watergate would be dropped in the eyes of the public for lack of interest from the “*network moguls [who were] not hungry for stories involving weeks of dreary investigation and minimum camera possibilities*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 266). It did not seem gripping enough in comparison to the rest of the presidential campaigns underway. However, as the strings, like Charles Colson or John Dean, gradually led to more and more people from Presidents’ surroundings, the story drew major attention. As Thompson wrote in retrospective, in his final elaboration on Watergate and the hearings parodically called *Fear and Loathing in Limbo: The Scum Also Rises*³⁶ published in October 1974, two months after Nixon resigned: “*It didn’t catch on, at first; the networks were deluged with letters from angry housewives, cursing Ervin for depriving them of their daily soap operas – but after two or three weeks the Senate Watergate hearings were the hottest thing on television.*” The case escalated a year after the botched burglary itself happened.

Despite the electric atmosphere all around the country, the mood stayed rather calm in Washington and especially in the court hearing room. This could not satisfy such a speed addict as Thompson was. After he witnessed the dullness personally in the capital, he concluded that he would stick to his TV screen at home in Woody Creek as he had been doing before watching Nixon’s closest aides contradict each other testimony (*The Great Shark Hunt* 292-293). For many, it was a hard thing to watch on a daily basis instead of soap operas. “*The plot is confusing, [...] the characters are dull, and the dialogue is repulsive.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 278). However, in the final stage of the hearings, the atmosphere looked like “*a real soap opera: tragedy, treachery, weird humour and the constant suspense of never knowing who was lying and who was telling the truth ... Which hardly mattered to the vast audience of political innocents*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 354)

Some Americans knew what was going on, but they just did not care. It felt “*like finding out your wife is running around but you don’t want to hear about it.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 278). Maybe, the process of convicting everybody involved in the big power-abusing machine

³⁶ Of course, the title refers to Hemingway’s novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926).

went slow, and not even every American citizen was interested, but one thing was coming almost clear: Richard Nixon “*kept pushing, pushing, pushing*” his luck all the time “– *and inevitably he pushed too far.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 279).

As a result, “*He will go down with Grant and Harding as one of democracy’s classic mutations.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 282) and “*as a corrupt and incompetent mockery of the American Dream*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 317). The link to Nixon’s historical predecessors, namely Ulysses S. Grant and Werner G. Harding, was highlighted several times (*The Great Shark Hunt* 282, 317).³⁷ For Nixon’s disrespect to the court system, he resembled Thompson of President Andrew Jackson who said: “*Well, the judges have made their decision – now let them enforce it.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 308).³⁸ And for the same reason Thompson recalled Joseph Stalin cursing the pope: “*‘Fuck the pope,’ Stalin mumbled ‘how many divisions does he have?’*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 308). In Thompson’s eyes, the president looked like an arrogant dictator with no self-reflection.

Nevertheless, the most noticeable analogy Thompson saw was with Nazi Germany³⁹, as he had “*been trying to finish The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 305). Then, he claimed that “*Bormann was Colson of his time, and his strange relationship with Hitler seems not much different from the paranoid fragments of the Nixon-Colson relationship*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 307). Thompson judged so from what he had read in “*the now-infamous ‘White House transcripts’ of 1974.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 307). In titling the Nixon’s White House staff, Thompson went on and marked Ken Clawson, former “*‘communications director’*” as “*Nixon’s Goebbels*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 333). Joseph Goebbels was cited one more time, this time word-to-word when Thompson borrowed his description of how the Nazi regime got to power in Germany to suggest a loose similarity with Nixon’s guard overtaking the system in

³⁷ Thompson used these two presidents as the symbols of the greatest corruption in the history of the US even in the other collections of *Gonzo Papers*. The list citing the exact locations would be too long to place it here. They appear of the evil of American politics especially in the books of *Generation of Swine* and *Better Than Sex*. To learn more about the reasons for using presidents Grant and Harding as bad examples, see Shi and Tindall, pg. 732 and 1072-1077. It can be sum up as a corrupted, arrogant behavior combined with bribery and subsequent cover-ups.

³⁸ The same case as Grant and Harding, it was the arrogance of Andrew Jackson, a natural frontier leader, that earned him a nickname „King Andrew “. While serving the presidential office, he wanted to use the federal army to force Southern states accept tax bills (Shi and Tindall 409-463).

³⁹ In fact, Thompson had begun to paraphrase the title of the Nazi anthem *Deutschland Über Alles*. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, it was the idea of “*Woodstock Über Alles!*” and later, in *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72*, it was “*Nixon Über Alles*” as an excerpt in *The Great Shark Hunt* (247). On the same page the reader can find lines saying that Nixon’s aides had done “*nazi-style gigs that would have embarrassed Martin Bormann*”. And, again on the same page, Thompson joked about the former Nazi regimes in Germany and Japan would soon call the US “*a nation of pigs*”.

the US (*The Great Shark Hunt* 293). Thus, there was not only a maniacal leader but a whole group of his loyal henchmen occupying the White House.

Thompson finally saw light at the end of the tunnel hoping that he would not “*have Dick Nixon to kick around anymore*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 297 and 326), as Nixon promised back in 1962 (Shi and Tindall 1358; Brogan 1212). After all the difficulties, the Supreme Court pushed the President into the corner, and it seemed there was no chance to skip the loose. The “*strange and terrible saga of Richard Nixon*”⁴⁰ (*The Great Shark Hunt* 308) was going to an end. Therefore, after Nixon managed to escape from answering the charges against him thanks to his resignation and the following pardon by Gerald Ford, Thompson must have had a feeling that the American justice and the morals of American politics brutally failed. From the following extract it comes clear why:

“The trial of Richard Nixon, if it happens, will amount to a de facto trial of the American Dream. The importance of Nixon now is not merely to get rid of him; that’s a strictly political consideration ... The real question is why we are being forced to impeach a president elected by the largest margin in the history of presidential elections.

So, [...] we want to look at two main considerations: 1) the necessity of actually bringing Nixon to trial, in order to understand our reality in the same way the Nuremberg trials forced Germany to confront itself ... and 2) the absolutely vital necessity of filling the vacuum that the Nixon impeachment will leave, and the hole that will be there in 1976.” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 317-318).

Here, Thompson considered bringing Nixon to justice as same necessary to deal with his heritage as the Nuremberg trials were important for Germany, to put a breaking and symbolical end to the Nazi era. Although there was a suggestion that it would be done, Gerald Ford smashed everything Thompson hoped for. He pardoned Nixon and also gave him all the tapes from the White House back, as Thompson first learned from friends and family (*The Great Shark Hunt* 319-320). Thus, “*the villain this time was not Nixon, but Gerald Ford*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 321). After the pardon, more people, not just Nixon’s sworn enemies like Thompson, were confused and disgusted by this act, including Ford’s own staff (Shi and Tindall 1409-1410). In contrast to Thompson’s sorrows over the fact that Nixon got away with all the crimes without any punishment, Brogan came up with an opposite belief. In his view, Ford did the right thing because any further investigation may have shattered the trust of American society even harder (1221).

⁴⁰ Similarly to the frequent repetition of the phrase *Fear and Loathing*, here Thompson used a part from the title of the *Hell’s Angels* book.

When Nixon was leaving the White House, Thompson could not believe it was happening. He went to Washington to see it with his own eyes. The surprise came after the helicopter with the resigned President was gone. Thompson went to a bar where he met a speechwriter once working for Kennedy and they both agreed that it felt strange and a bit depressing. This speechwriter said that then he could understand the feeling “*all those rock freaks [had] when they heard the Beatles were breaking up*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 339).

Thompson remembered the moment as “*The deathwatch was finally over; the evil demon had been purged and the good guys had won – or at least the bad guys had lost, but that’s not quite the same thing.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 339). After years of waiting for Nixon to leave, the final act came so quickly that for Thompson it “*was a wild and wordless orgasm of long-awaited relief that tailed off almost instantly to a dull, post-coital sort of depression that still endures*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 339).

As I believe, Thompson shared this impression with many other Americans. For those who fought against Nixon, the common enemy was gone. Even if there still was his heir to hate and loath for pardoning his predecessor and “*Richard Milhous Nixon [kicking] around for at least a little while longer*” still (*The Great Shark Hunt* 360), the time became somehow empty. Where was the evil to fight? Where was the real action now? Maybe answering these questions, besides his personal problems, Thompson decided to fly across half of the globe and visit Vietnam, the wound America could still have seen and felt.

2.2.4 Vietnam

The war continued as an unwanted heritage from the 1960s. The majority of the American public stood against the war still, so the President had to solve this painful issue as soon as possible. In this field “*among other things*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 263), in Thompson’s opinion, he failed since “*25,000 young Americans died for no reason [...] while Nixon and his brain-trust were trying to figure out how to admit the whole thing was a mistake from the start*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 263). The opinion that the war in Vietnam was prolonged to no effect except another tens of thousands dead or wounded on both sides is shared by both overviews of American history. Nixon attempted to change the status quo by heavy bombing at the time of Christmas in 1972, but all in vain. The peace treaty from Paris worked with even weaker conditions from the American side (Shi and Tindall 1397-1398; Brogan 1212). All agreed that four years and many lives passed for no good.

To list all the mentions of the Vietnam War would be exhausting. Thompson had been standing strictly against the war since the first student protests. Therefore, the first notes can be found in his texts from the 1960s. Most of the comments, however, were written during the coverage of the 1972 presidential campaign during which it had become a key topic for the candidates. The book, *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*, does not belong to the primary sources for this thesis. Thus, my major focus will be on the final weeks of the American presence in Vietnam in 1975 when the war was officially over, but the North Vietnamese were overtaking the Southern part which had been controlled by the American troops before.

The four articles, namely *Dance of the Doomed*, *Checking into Lane Xang*, *Whooping It Up with the War Junkies*, and the last one in form of a letter called *Confidential Memo to Colonel Giang Vo Don Giang*, were written for *Rolling Stone* in April and May 1975 in Saigon. They remained unpublished for a time due to a growing dispute between Thompson and Jann Wenner, the chief editor of the magazine (*Dance of the Doomed* 140-141).

In the first one, written on 30 April, Thompson just briefly informed that Saigon had fallen, and the Communists were taking over the control of the city. In the second, he depicted the experience from his short travel to Laos. Even if he pointed out the difference between Saigon and Laos, there was one thing the two places had in common, desperate chase for the Americans, for their dollars as the real currency in the destroyed area. At the end of the article, Thompson described the change of Saigon in the previous decades: “*The Paris of Orient*,” *had degenerated into an American military ghetto*” which, “*in the last hours*”, had turned into “*a desperate, overcrowded nightmare full of thieves, losers, pimps, conmen, war junkies, and many, many victims*” (*Dance of the Doomed* 146). By this, Thompson completes the picture provided by Shi and Tindall. The two mentioned the enormous fear of South Vietnamese president Thieu, who left the country when possible, but not much about the common people trying to survive in any way (1398). The rest of the nation stayed though and waited for their fate.

The third one mostly consisted of the conversation between Thompson and Loren Jenkins, who worked there as a correspondent for *Newsweek* and happen to be the bureau chief for the magazine in the town. Thanks to Jenkins’ position, Thompson got information about the evacuation of “*Americans, Vietnamese dependants on Americans, and other foreigners – the British embassy, the Japanese, you know, various others*” (*Dance of the Doomed* 151) which all together Jenkins estimated as “*thirty thousand, not five thousand*” (*Dance of the Doomed* 152) as the American embassy expected. This article brought the story of the tense mood and chaos of the crowds rushing to get on an army chopper and flee from the city where the Vietcong

and North Vietnamese Army were sweeping to get rid of everybody who cooperated with the enemy. The evacuation was underestimated and way too chaotic to rescue everybody. The Americans managed to save their citizens and some of the South Vietnamese, but most of the collaborators were left behind (Shi and Tindall 1399; Brogan 1226). Even if we can assume that Thompson must have been afraid for his life too, he stayed as long as possible and created a different picture in his articles from Indochina.

In the last of the four texts, he asked the colonel of the Vietcong, Giang Vo Don Giang, to meet somewhere in private and have a chat. This did not happen after all, and Thompson finally left Saigon and headed back to the US. It is not said, however, whether the letter was truly sent or received. Even if so, the text appears rather as another of Thompson's pranks. Ignoring the seriousness of the situation in the last days of Saigon, he laughed to the face of death inviting the Vietcong officer for a drink and a visit to the US.

After Thompson left Vietnam, the war that had been splitting the American nation for more than a decade was over. However, he was going to see more violence in a different part of Asia in the 1980s and 1990s.

2.2.5 Jimmy Carter

Despite Thompson's political beliefs being beaten severely several times, he was still looking for the best for his country, or at least for a lesser evil. After all, he was a political junkie, as he confessed. He found another favourite among Democrats in the person of Jimmy Carter who entered wider publicity after he addressed the American public in one of his speeches.

Without any further explanation, the reader can find this speech *Address by Jimmy Carter on Law Day* performed at the University of Georgia in 1974. It was not part of any article by Thompson. The editors, however, obviously felt obligated to incorporate the speech into the collection and it truly deserves at least a brief look as it depicted the imperfections of American society.

Following Kennedys' idealism that America can do better, he encouraged each and every American citizen not only to rely on the elected politician but also to undertake little steps to improve the situation every single day. He also mentioned that, if they do so, they could encounter difficulties or maybe even malice. According to Carter, these obstacles should not stop them. He reminded the audience of Martin Luther King who paid the highest price, but his deeds cannot be undone (*The Great Shark Hunt* 519). To highlight the importance of their

responsibility for big politics, he also cited Tolstoy's *War and Peace* with its stories of common people as he wanted to demonstrate the relationship between their everyday acts and the great moments in human history (*The Great Shark Hunt* 522).

Two years after the address, in June 1976, Thompson returned to the topic of the presidential election. In the introduction to his article *Jimmy Carter and the Great Leap of Faith*, he expected nothing good after what he had gone through in 1968 and 1972. He met with people who were involved in the campaign management for George McGovern and Ed Muskie in 1972 for a dinner and discussed the situation in 1976. Thompson gave everyone at the table a piece of paper to write the most likely candidate for the Democrats. The result did not shock anybody, but it did not improve the mood either. Most of them voted for Hubert Humphrey, the one Democrat that Thompson abhorred as one of the foul minds of the party (*The Great Shark Hunt* 483-484).

Although Thompson admitted that a journalist should not have any sympathy or close relationship with a politician (*The Great Shark Hunt* 485), he confessed that he did not follow this advice and established a friendship with Jimmy Carter (*The Great Shark Hunt* 490). The road to this relationship led through "*the back door of the governor's mansion in Atlanta*" where Thompson, completely drunk, came without any invitation for breakfast and where he ran into Carter and his family (*The Great Shark Hunt* 490-493). Despite this awkward first impression Thompson made on the faithful Christian as Carter was, they got on well with each other since they were both, in their own specific way, striving for a change in American morals.

Furthermore, there was one more aspect that made their friendship nearly unbelievable. They had an entirely different, I would even say opposite, approach to life. Thompson did not idealize himself alleging that he "*sinned repeatedly, as often as possible*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 490) and he has only little, if any, understanding and respect for the Christians (*The Great Shark Hunt* 513). On the one hand, Thompson saw Carter as "*a cautious, conservative and vaguely ethereal Baptist Sunday school teacher*" who, however, managed to balance at the centre of the political spectre (*The Great Shark Hunt* 503). On the other hand, he understood that this preacher's attitude helped Carter to reach the Americans after all the corruption of the previous years.

"The electorate feels a need to be cleansed, reassured and revitalized. The underdogs of yesteryear have had their day, and they blew it. The radicals and reformers of the sixties promised peace, but they turned out to be nothing but incompetent trouble-makers. Their plans that had looked so fine on paper led to chaos and disaster when hack politicians tried to implement them. The promise of civil rights turned into the nightmare of busing. The call for

law and order led straight to Watergate. And the long struggle between the hawks and the doves caused violence in the streets and a military disaster in Vietnam. Nobody won, in the end, and when the dust finally settled, 'extremists' at both ends of the political spectrum were thoroughly discredited. And by the time the 1976 presidential campaign got under way, the high ground was all in the middle of the road." (*The Great Shark Hunt* 503).

What could have got Carter some credit as a person, in Thompson's eyes, was that he often publicly claimed he was a friend to Bob Dylan and an admirer of Dylan's music (*The Great Shark Hunt* 504 and 505) since Thompson loved Dylan too⁴¹. He even used his songs as a part of his speeches (*The Great Shark Hunt* 515).

Even if there were many differences between the two men, they had also strong issues connecting them. Thompson compared the relationship with the one he had had with George McGovern, his favourite runner in 1972, and found out that he liked Carter better (*The Great Shark Hunt* 512). Recalling the devastating events in McGovern's campaign, he feared that the Democrats may have repeated their mistakes, which had ended in a total defeat by Richard Nixon. In Thompson's words: "*the only man who [could] keep Jimmy Carter out of the White House now is Jimmy Carter*" (*The Great Shark Hunt* 510).

In conclusion, Thompson decided to vote for Carter not only because he represented the least evil of the candidates, but also because he found something positive about Carter as a man. He was also not embarrassed to endorse the Democratic runner in his articles.

Carter's determination to restore honesty in the White House helped him to win. He promised a lot, but in the hard times of growing stagflation, he could not fulfil all his promises. Moreover, his speeches criticising the American weaknesses only got him more problems (Shi and Tindall 1449; Brogan 1230). Essentially, this was also what Thompson wrote about Carter when he heard Carter's performance. Despite his commitment, it was expectable that the next president would come from the Republican party.

2.2.6 Muhammad Ali

Even if the African-American movement was not Thompson's main focus, he got back to it, when he was assigned to cover a boxing match with Muhammad Ali in 1974. He travelled, along with Ralph Steadman, to Zaire in Africa to cover the heavyweight championship match between Ali and George Foreman. It was a big occasion for everybody in the business. Norman

⁴¹ He dedicated his bestseller *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* to Bob Dylan for the song *Mr. Tambourine Man* at the first pages of the book.

Mailer visited Kinshasa as well to see the fight. Both Mailer and Steadman described what Thompson did in *Gonzo: The Life of Hunter S. Thompson* (182-184). In his deep disrespect for all the acknowledged journalists and writers present there, he decided to do something different. Instead of watching the match along with others, he tried to contact the local dictator and visit the stadium with him. He failed and then he resigned. He even sold tickets making it impossible for Steadman to go there and do his work properly. They both watched the fight on TV, Thompson diving in the pool, drunk, and smoking marijuana. He did not write a single word. This gig, in the end, cost him his place in *Rolling Stone*.

Four years later, he got one more chance in the magazine, this time in Las Vegas where he wrote two articles on Muhammad Ali, *Last Tango in Vegas: Fear and Loathing in the Near Room* and *Last Tango in Vegas: Fear and Loathing in the Far Room*.

The 14-days-older one from *the Near Room* is divided, as more of his texts. The first one deals with the life story of Muhammad Ali, the African-American boy who managed to climb all the way up to the top and stay there for many years. “Six presidents [had] lived in the White House in the time of Muhammad Ali” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 582) until “a young brute named Leon Spinks [...] settled the matter” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 579). In the years of fame, Ali had created a family around him consisting of two “white hipsters” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 579), his manager Harold Conrad, the spokesman Gene Kilroy and Drew Brown, Ali’s lawyer, and others like bodyguard Pat Patterson (*The Great Shark Hunt* 579-580). After the description of the staff, Thompson briefly commented on the crucial night in Las Vegas. He saw one more icon of the 1960s falling into oblivion. Winning the heavyweight champion title, Leon Spinks put unknowingly one more nail in the coffin of Thompson’s beloved decade. Then, there comes the second part of the article written by Thompson’s alter-ego Raoul Duke. These pages, however, deal with only the sport aspect of Ali’s career and end with a humorous plot of Duke visiting the champion with a beer and a cigarette in his hands which stands aside from the aim of this thesis.

The younger and longer story from *the Far Room* brings a more complex story including serious politics and realities of the coexistence of white and black Americans. There are two points made about the latter one, about race equality. Both came from Muhammad Ali, and they explain the importance of the word “nigger”. While being interviewed by Thompson, Ali said that this word can be used exclusively among African Americans not to carry any negative meaning. In case it was used by the whites, it would be taken as an insult (*The Great Shark Hunt* 604-605). It seems that this general rule has probably lasted until nowadays. Later in the article, Thompson reminds what Ali said in 1967 “and [...] almost went to prison for it” (*The*

Great Shark Hunt 621) concerning his refusal to fight in Vietnam when his draft came due. In his famous quote “No Vietcong ever called me “nigger”.” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 621),⁴² Ali expressed thinking of many young men who tried to avoid the draft as well. He saw no point in fighting somebody who had made him no harm, especially when he thought there were people to fight in his own country.

Therefore, he chose to become a boxing champion, to beat his enemies, those who were suppressing a black man’s rights, symbolically in the ring. He strived for the title badly and, fortunately for him, it was possible without any political obstructions. Thompson points out that there was one more excellent boxer, a Cuban named Teofilo Stevenson, but this sportsman did not get his chance since Fidel Castro would not have agreed with the match between Ali and Stevenson (*The Great Shark Hunt* 618-619). Thompson considered the impossibility of the fight being held as “*a legacy of failure and shame [...] of this generation*” caused by the “*low-rent political priorities*” of his time, that implies in the Cold War era (*The Great Shark Hunt* 619). In world-scale politics, Ali understood his career not only as his own path to glory as an individual. He fought in the ring for all his “*brothers*” and their struggle for freedom (*The Great Shark Hunt* 606-607). Because of his faith, he would have asked for “*the approval of all the other African nations and Moslem countries*” in some special cases, for example, if he had been asked to fight in South Africa (*The Great Shark Hunt* 606). In Ali’s words: “*It’s too touchy – it’s more than a sport when I get involved.*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 607).

Even when staying on the level of the US, Ali had become more than a boxing champion. He represented one of the symbols of the energy remaining from the 1960s if fact at the highest position in his field. Thus, Thompson would not have bet against Ali in “the battle of New Orleans” which should have been the response to the defeat by Leon Spinks in Las Vegas. Even though he wanted to bet against the champion in Las Vegas (where he did not find anybody to gamble with), it felt different in New Orleans. He concluded that betting against Ali contrasted with his own convictions and in the case, he had won, it would have been “*rancid karma*” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 617) and an unacceptable risk.

Neither Shi and Tindall nor Brogan, connected Cassius Clay, better known as Muhammad Ali, to the Civil Right Movement or, at least, to politics. The reader would not find any information about the boxing champion at all. The approach of looking for strings between two presumably different issues was typical for Thompson who saw politics in nearly everything.

⁴² In fact, very similar sign had been used before during the student demonstrations against the war in Vietnam (Shi and Tindall 1366).

2.3 The 1980s

If there was any exaggeration and wild humour in the works from previous decades, the 1980s reached the peak in both fields. This chapter studies short articles from *Generation of Swine* and several longer ones from *Songs of the Doomed*. The first book consists of free-form commentaries, mostly from 1985, 1986, and 1987 and a few from 1988, on nearly everything that happened in the US. The second completes the picture of the time with articles from the first half of the decade. All the texts imply very clearly what Thompson thought about the era.

He felt the world was getting so much out of hand that he got himself a copy of *King James' Bible* so he could cite lines from the *Book of Revelations*. He borrowed this dramatical approach from the President himself after Reagan announced that the generation of the 1980s “*may be the one that will face Armageddon*” (*Generation of Swine* 7). It was about time for Thompson to get serious compared to those years when presidents quoted football coaches and Bob Dylan (*Generation of Swine* 254). The paranoia had strengthened the hyperboles and the bitter reality around pushed Thompson's humour to a completely different level.

Indeed, many events suggested the end of the world would come soon. Volcanoes erupted (*Generation of Swine* 53 and 102), a hurricane blew (*Generation of Swine* 24-25), Thompson got echo that there was a bad accident in Ukraine in 1986 (*Generation of Swine* 105-107), and the international politics of the US somehow backfired in some missteps of Ronald Reagan. Radical dictators such as Muammar Khadafy and Ayatollah Khomeini only made the fear stronger. No wonder Thompson encountered even such explanations for the world's happening as a story with black voodoo magic in Haiti (*Generation of Swine* 71). “*Why not? I thought. It seemed like the right time*” (*Generation of Swine* 71).

In comparison to the texts from the 1960s and 1970s, there are only a few leading topics. All of them are in some way related to politics, bets, and of course sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll. The general idea, as the title of the collection indicates, is to highlight the specific decadence of the time. One of the key sins of the era, according to Thompson, was greed. He wrote and criticized greed even earlier in the 1970s, for example in *The Battle of Aspen* (which is a chapter of the larger text *Freak Power in the Rockies*) where he lambasted the local businessmen.

Another example of such attitude from the previous career is the leading article of the first collection of the *Gonzo Papers*, called *The Great Shark Hunt*, which worked with the decadence of the rich American businessmen in Mexico. The pattern of the text had occurred before in such pieces as *Kentucky Derby Is Depraved and Decadent* or *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Thompson was invited to cover an event, usually connected to some weird sport,

but he always came to the place but mostly with a completely different idea. He desired to witness something truly outstanding that would be worth writing about. In the case of *The Great Shark Hunt*, he came to Cozumel “to cover not just a fishing tournament but a scene” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 450). What did he find there? In his own words “a living caricature of white trash run amok on foreign shores” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 451), the American millionaires riding their cruisers and enjoying the company of local “teenage whores” (*The Great Shark Hunt* 450). The abuse of power of money made Thompson sick even then, in 1974. But in the *Generation of Swine*, money-mongering, according to Thompson, should have become one of the basic principles of a man. The behaviour of Americans, and especially American politicians, “would shame every greedhead since Ebenezer Scrooge” (*Generation of Swine* 69). Therefore, the name of the chapter containing articles and memories from the 1980s reads *How much money do you have?* and the generation was introduced as “Huge brains, small necks, weak muscles and fat wallets – these are the dominant physical characteristics of the ‘80s ... *The Generation of Swine.*” (*Generation of Swine* 18).

Thompson welcomed the reader to the new era:

“Run for your life, sport, because that’s all you have left. The same people who burned their draft cards in the sixties and got lost in the seventies are now into running. When politics failed and personal relationships became unmanageable; after McGovern went down and Nixon exploded right in front of our eyes ... after Ted Kennedy got Stassenized and Jimmy Carter put the fork to everybody who ever believed anything he said about anything at all, and after the nation turned en masse to the atavistic wisdom of Ronald Reagan.

Well, these are, after all, the eighties and the time has finally come to see who has teeth, and who doesn’t ...” (*Songs of the Doomed* 168).

At the dawn of the decade, Thompson came up with his own fictional story based on the fact that “the great Cuba-to-Key West Freedom Flotilla [landed] in the spring of 1980” (*Songs of the Doomed* 192). The influx of “more than a hundred thousand very volatile Cuban refugees” (*Songs of the Doomed* 192) finished the process of turning “Miami into the Hong Kong of the Western World and the cash capital of the United States.” (*Songs of the Doomed* 192). Thompson perceived the arrival of the Cubans as “a flash of [Fidel Castro’s] high humour” (*Songs of the Doomed* 195) that “drastically altered the social, political and economic realities of south Florida” (*Songs of the Doomed* 192). In fact, he had written the basic plot of the *Scarface* movie before the film was done. Now, let us stay a while longer in Florida and its culture.

In 1983, Thompson joined the other American magazines covering the divorce of the newspaper heir Herbert Pulitzer, and his young wife Roxanne. He did so, again, with a wider idea. In the article *Bad Crazy in Palm Beach: I Told Her It Was Wrong*, he depicted the place as “long synonymous with old wealth and aristocratic style, was coming to be associated with berserk sleaziness, a place where price tags mean nothing and the rich are always in heat, where pampered animals are openly worshiped in church and naked millionaires gnaw brassieres off the chest of their own daughters in public.” (*Songs of the Doomed* 171). There was “no place for Horatio Alger” (*Songs of the Doomed* 171) and the old honest America. Only losers and the weak worked hard.

He compared the inhabitants of the 1970s Palm Beach, described as “a crowd of rich kids with too many drugs” (*Songs of the Doomed* 174), with the same place in the 1980s which changed into a “cocaine country. White-line fever. Bad craziness.” (*Songs of the Doomed* 176). In his unchained visions, Thompson added incest to complete the final picture of the madness (*Songs of the Doomed* 177). However, the cocaine frenzy with all its ups and downs represented all the article wanted to say. Therefore, Thompson called the Pulitzer divorce trial “a cocaine trial” (*Songs of the Doomed* 181). The times of LSD and marijuana were gone, they disappeared during the 1970s. Now, the time has come for the white powder and those who could have afforded it. The same people had enough money to pay the police if something went wrong (*Songs of the Doomed* 182). Still, considering later events in the world and their impact on the US, disclosing the decadence behind Pulitzer’s divorce remained only a tabloid piece.

There are some notes in the treatises that go in accordance with Thompson’s picture of Miami as a centre of drug trafficking, infested by Cuban thugs. Shi and Tindall wrote that one of the great drug lords of the 1980s was charged by authorities of Florida (1452). Thus, I suppose that Florida must have had a reason for fighting the cocaine traffickers. On the latter point, the population of Cuban refugees truly grew since the end of the 1970s in the southern states, Florida included (Shi and Tindall 1460-1461). Confrontations with the locals “were often dramatic” (Brogan 1764).

2.3.1 Change of the Media

Even if there were such big names as Bob Woodward who continued in his investigative journalism as a correspondent for the *Washington Post* (*Generation of Swine* 114-115 and 162-163), though with a great obstruction (*Generation of Swine* 114-115), the news business was undergoing a visible change. Americans were not hungry for articles in newspapers or

magazines. The culture of paper form remained but was on the decline. In contrast, the television broadcast celebrated huge success as they had become a part of the everyday life of an American family. Television entered wider popularity in the first years of the 1950s as a part of the suburban dream (Shi and Tindall 1268, 1270, 1272; Brogan 1164) and was a key instrument for working with a public opinion (Brogan 1090, 1119, 1155-1156) bringing the footage of every important event in the 1960s (for example Shi and Tindall 1311, 1323, 1326, 1330, 1351, 1353, 1388; Brogan 1199-1207).

TV stations were attempting to bring more interesting pieces of news to the audience. Thus, they decided to broaden their offer and tried to push local news besides the already well-known main programme. The “*three network stars [C.B.S., A.B.C., N.B.C. would] remain stars, they’ll have healthy audiences, but the action [was] no longer in those three shops in New York City*” (*Generation of Swine* 154). Whereas the number of viewers had been dependent on “*how deep their [reporters’] voices*” were, in 1986, “*it doesn’t matter how pretty they [were]*” (*Generation of Swine* 154) since the reporters could focus fully on the topic right in the place of happening and so they understood “*what the hell they’re talking about*” (*Generation of Swine* 154).

Thompson was aware of the significance of TV. He used it earlier in the 1970s when he did not bother to travel anymore. Therefore, he bought him a big satellite plate in 1985 (*Generation of Swine* 34-36), so he could watch all the broadcasts to get the information he desired. The screen became the main source for his various articles in the 1980s.

Television was not only entertainment but also a big business. When an American wanted to have full access to all the programmes, he had to pay a fee. One man called Captain Midnight, unknown at the time, jammed “*a prime-time movie on the H.B.O. channel and [cut] in with his own thirty-second commercial, in four colors, protesting the network’s new policy of [...] taxes and fees and mandatory high-tech deciphering machinery for millions of satellite-dish owners*” (*Generation of Swine* 115). But others understood how much money run in the business.

The need for change was quickly understood even in different circles. I would like to remind us that there was a strong appeal to Christian values which were highlighted even by President Reagan himself, even if not so honestly as Carter (Brogan 1258). The preachers comprehended that more Americans would watch their sermons, aimed basically against anything liberal, from the comfort of their living room than they would visit a church on Sunday (Shi and Tindall 1426). The most famous ones were Rev. Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, Billy Graham, and Robert Paterson. The new platform gave them larger power and, therefore, even

self-confidence. Paterson put so much faith in himself that he even considered running for president in 1988 (*Generation of Swine* 120-123). He had reason to believe it since his “massively popular cable-T.V. show called The 700 Club, the flagship production of the Christian Broadcasting Network” (*Generation of Swine* 96) reached “more people than Jimmy Swaggart and Jerry Falwell combined” or the comedian Johnny Carson (*Generation of Swine* 96). As the reader can learn in *Rise of the T.V. Preachers*, Thompson was afraid that the strong and sometimes even mad praising of the US as the chosen land may have led to fascist tendencies defended by a far-right politician Lyndon LaRouche. Thompson sarcastically commented on the perversity and shallowness surrounding the televangelists saying that, in history, there were even bigger professionals in decadence. He concluded that compared to Caligula, Genghis Khan, and the members of the Hellfire Club, the preachers, and politicians were only “Dilettantes” (*Generation of Swine* 13). Nevertheless, he titled them “*The Scum of the Earth*” (*Generation of Swine* 223) for some of their sins were just too heavy even for a sinner like Thompson. In the end, what had begun as social critique in the Christian TV shows then resulted in a holy war against all the renegades.

2.3.2 Crusade against Sex & Drugs

Thompson found one too many enemies in high politics of the 1980s, among them Ed Meese who worked as Attorney General in Ronald Reagan’s government. Meese stood strongly against drugs and pornography which he believed had poisoned the American soul. In the time of Meese, the sex industry was rising so much that it even established its own awards ceremony (*Generation of Swine* 128-130). There were booths in special bars where a customer could go to watch hardcore porn for 25 cents, “*forty seconds a hit*” (*Generation of Swine* 139). The drug market had not disappeared, only the supply and demand were different. These were hard times for Puritans and hypocrites.

In his determined fight, Meese was endorsed by some of the TV preachers, for example, Rev. Jerry Falwell, who gained noticeable influence on the screen and helped George Bush from time to time (*Generation of Swine* 120-121). To endorse the War on Sex, the reverend often accentuated “*the horror of herpes and A.I.D.S., along with the tragic epidemic of teenage pregnancy*” (*Generation of Swine* 69). It had its impact since, according to the survey Thompson used in *Expelled from the System*, most of the young single respondents replied that they would have sex with a new partner only using condoms. As he sarcastically commented,

“Rubbers are big business these days” (*Generation of Swine* 206). Furthermore, Thompson cited the *Washington Post* saying that one-third of them *“would ask a potential partner to take a test for A.I.D.S.”* (*Generation of Swine* 206). Interestingly enough, Thompson did not refer to the passive stance of Ronald Reagan on the virus (Shi and Tindall 1446-1447). The campaign to stop “free love”, as it was named back in the 1960s, could have been successful probably thanks to the new deadly disease. Nevertheless, Thompson perceived the War on Sex, boosted by the starting AIDS epidemic, as “The Death of Sex” in general, as an impotence of the new era.

It is not necessary to explain why Thompson opposed the anti-drug campaign. Later, in 1989, he advocated drug addicts against the neo-Nazi ideas of the Purity League giving Ray Charles, Keith Richards, and Thomas Edison as the examples of drug-fuelled geniuses (*Songs of the Doomed* 247-248). But why did he support the sex industry? The reasons were various. Firstly, he had some friends in this branch. Secondly, in one article he interviewed an experienced stripper who said that she had not seen any relation of violence in her career (*Generation of Swine* 124) which implies that Thompson agreed with the harmlessness of the sex-selling industry.

This opinion did not correspond with the perspective of Meese at all. The Attorney General desired *“to establish a pattern of some kind between sex and violence and child-molesting”* (*Generation of Swine* 123). He published a report based on information gathered by an *“eleven-member commission, a sleazy mix of priests, lawyers, moralists, and professional punishment freaks, [who] had spent the past twelve months roaming around the country checking out rumours of alleged sex crimes in places like Houston and Newark and the shums of East St. Louis.”* (*Generation of Swine* 123) which in Thompson’s opinion was so weird, and unreal that it would be *“a guaranteed bestseller”* (*Generation of Swine* 124). The report assaulted *“on almost all forms of sex in America except the act of procreation”* (*Generation of Swine* 135). Logically, the book was praised by the televangelists *“as the Falwells and Swaggarts”* (*Generation of Swine* 135). However, one more politician appeared to frighten Thompson even more than the preachers.

Lester Maddox, former Governor of Georgia, a *“wretched example of high-powered White Trash”* (*Generation of Swine* 135) and *“a longtime foe of sodomites”* (*Generation of Swine* 135), appreciated Meese’s effort to cleanse the nation. This represented, what I see as, Thompson’s worst fear that the most liberal country would possibly turn into a fascist dictatorship justifying itself with the fight for humanity. Even the mere fact that Maddox, a man so far right that it *“would embarrass South Africa”* (*Generation of Swine* 136), once served a

public office in the country where Thompson lived too. This made Thompson feel “*somehow worse than Richard Nixon getting reelected and moving back to the White House*” (*Generation of Swine* 136). Realizing how much Thompson hated Nixon, such a note must be taken with all seriousness.

Half a year after publishing the article *Lester Maddox Lives*, the far-right politics celebrated success when a local Republican named Evan Mecham got elected to the Governor seat in Arizona. Thompson must have been, once again, disgusted. In his view, Mecham represented “*the ghost of Hermann Goering down in Arizona*” (*Generation of Swine* 201) even for the rest of the Republican party. After entering the office, “*Mecham’s first official act was to cancel Martin Luther King’s birthday as a paid state holiday. I embarrassed everybody in the state except the K.K.K. and the Nazis. Even Barry Goldwater was horrified.*” (*Generation of Swine* 201). Thompson felt that “*The rats never die. Every time they abandon one ship, they have to move to another – and this time it is the new U.S.S. Arizona*” (*Generation of Swine* 201). However, as we will see this was only one minor problem the Republicans had to face in the 1980s. In the times when war was declared on nearly everything, such people as Maddox or Mecham got a chance to reach power.

Even if both Shi and Tindall and Brogan mentioned the dangers of the far right in the US, for example when talking about Wallace and the Deep South, there is nothing to be found about either Lester Maddox or Evan Mecham. On this point, Thompson brought a better insight to state-level politics often aiming at local moods, even (or especially) the dark ones.

If we stay in the US, there were, besides the War on Sex, two more wars – on Drugs “*and the continuing war on Democrats*” (*Generation of Swine* 141). The first one, against drugs, was led with the same fierce energy as the fight against free sex. Originally, it was “*headed [...] by Vice-President Bush*” (*Generation of Swine* 206), but later it was overtaken by Nancy Reagan, “*the President’s wife*” (*Generation of Swine* 206). She put “*so much pressure on a whole generation of confused pimply teenagers who may or may not “Say No to Drugs” that the last half of the ‘80s seems destined to produce another generation of criminals like the one that got caught on the cusp of the ‘60s, when the Jell-O conformity of the Eisenhower Era finally created so many socioeconomic rejects that it eventually became fashionable to be one ...*” (*Generation of Swine* 207). Since these crusades would have caused many Americans to serve time in prison, Thompson joked about selling his acres of land in Colorado to the prison business (*Generation of Swine* 143-145).

In the end, it turned out that not even Meese was clean as police investigated allegations of his participation in “*bribery, conspiracy and fraud*” (*Generation of Swine* 244). He was said

to take a bribe in the so-called Wedtech deal (*Generation of Swine* 273 and 295-296). “*In a Generation of Swine, Ed Meese from Oakland [had] somehow emerged as the boss pig – living testimony to George Orwell’s classic statement in Animal Farm.*” (*Generation of Swine* 297). Meese, however, faced only minor offences compared to people from the White House.

I can perfectly understand that local politicians like Maddox or Mecham stood aside from Shi and Tindall’s and Brogan’s attention. What surprises me though is the fact that Ed Meese did not deserve a single paragraph either since the former Attorney General appeared in so many articles by Thompson in the 1980s. Shi and Tindall connected the Religious Right strictly to President Reagan as a hero of these people (1425-1427). Brogan added that Reagan seemed to lead the movement himself (1258). Nevertheless, the books agree on one aspect of the Religious Right. It represented a relationship between conservative beliefs and the country’s politics with an impact on business, family life, women rights and education which lasted even in the 1990s (Shi and Tindall 1426, 1464).

2.3.3 Worse Than Watergate

Even if the reader is familiar with Thompson’s wild sense of vivid pictures of a catastrophe coming, he cannot escape the feeling that the world, or at least the US, stood once again at the edge of serious problems. At home, the national debt had been growing since the 1960s. It looked like it may have been better in the question of foreign policy. Reagan was going to meet Gorbachev in Reykjavik to talk about possible disarmament (Shi and Tindall 1441; Brogan 1264-1265). Nevertheless, the negotiation did not end as expected. In addition, the bloody riots and anarchy in the Caribbean, which had not seemed to be related to the US, were suddenly connected with bomb attacks on the American Navy forces in Lebanon ordered by Ayatollah Khomeini (Shi and Tindall 1437-1440; Brogan 1263-1264). It was time for Thompson to re-evaluate his opinion on the times of Richard Nixon and Watergate.

The first big trouble in the Caribbean, that Thompson wrote about, came in February 1986. A bloody coup overthrew the son of the original dictator (*Generation of Swine* 69-76). Only one month later, the politicians and the dictator installed by the US, mostly with help from the CIA, were “*on the run, from Baby Doc and Marcos, to Chun Doo Hwan in South Korea*” (*Generation of Swine* 90). The allies in the fight against communism all around the globe collapsed. The fatal step of the CIA, in reaction to the crisis, was to support the Contras in Nicaragua where a civil war between the left-wing Sandinistas and the reactionary Contras

broke up (*Generation of Swine* 92). The action swallowed a great mass of money, and the country needed some extra income to cover the issue. This was where the real trouble began.

The problem, according to Thompson, was that “*There [still was] no need for the President of the United States to be smart.*” (*Generation of Swine* 49) in these extremely unsettling times if we consider the rise of Muammar Khadafy slaughtering “*an ox “with the name ‘Reagan’ painted on the side of it.*”” (*Generation of Swine* 90) and the Iran hostage crisis. Therefore, Thompson asked whether it was still “*The American Century*” (*Generation of Swine* 57-59). One of the TV preachers, Pat Robertson, called at the time openly “*for the head of Moammar Khadafy*” (96). In Thompson’s words, Khadafy “*was being shown on American T.V. as a cheap Mussolini clone, wearing old Nazi headgear and a ragged pink babushka*” (*Generation of Swine* 96). Thompson’s doubts go in agreement with the perspective of Shi and Tindall as they talk about the decay of the US as a world power since the end of Carter’s presidency (1423). The American position was threatened.

Despite the grave danger of the Arabs, President Reagan had to deal with a few more striking issues. After the deal went down in Iceland (*Generation of Swine* 179), Dutch, as Thompson called the President throughout the whole *Generation of Swine* book, got overruled by the Senate over his veto of the bill HR4868 about the attitude of the US in the question of South Africa and its racism. Thompson elaborated on this political topic in two articles, namely *The South African Problem* (*Generation of Swine* 158-160) and *Loose Cannon on the Deck* (*Generation of Swine* 161-163). It was another of his failures, but it seemed only a small problem compared to what was going to fall on the White House in 1986. This made even “*Watergate look like a teenage prank, and Richard Nixon will seem like just another small time politician who got wiggy on greed and cheap gin*” (*Generation of Swine* 185). On this point, Brogan agreed that the Iran-Contra issue harmed American constitutionality the same as the crimes of Richard Nixon (1264).

The first clearer information Thompson brought in a series of articles from December 1986 to the summer of 1987. The case came known as the Iran-Contra scandal. At the time, Thompson pictured Reagan, “*who [told the public that] he slept through the whole thing*” (*Generation of Swine* 180), as a senile old man not capable to serve the office of the most powerful man in the world. Comparing the President to the main character of Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* Willie Loman and King Lear (*Generation of Swine* 181), Thompson predicted that “*This is the last reel of his movie, and it is not going to end like the others.*” (*Generation of Swine* 181). He did not give Reagan much more time in this world as he believed,

without mincing words, the President would follow his dead colleague from Hollywood, John Wayne, to the other side (*Generation of Swine* 181).

Thompson was not the only one using Reagan's history from Hollywood and his age against the President. As Shi and Tindall remarked, "*Democrats considered sixty-nine-year-old Ronald Reagan, the oldest man to assume the presidency, as a third-rate actor and mental lightweight*" (1428). The demonstrators against Reagan's interior policy carried a sign saying "*REAGAN, REAGAN, he's no good, send him back to HOLLYWOOD*" (Shi and Tindall 1431).

However, Thompson called for punishment for more people from the White House, namely Vice-President George Bush, head of the C.I.A. William Cassey, former National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, and the guiltiest one, lieutenant colonel Oliver North (*Generation of Swine* 183) with his associate Admiral John Poindexter (*Generation of Swine* 186).

But whose guilt it was? Who was responsible for "*a scandalous nightmare of lies, crimes, and gigantic money-laundering*" (*Generation of Swine* 182), for selling arms illegally to "*fiendish Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran*" (*Generation of Swine* 182)? At the beginning of the affair, Thompson pointed to George Bush as the man standing behind the transactions (*Generation of Swine* 182). He left Communications Director, Patrick Buchanan, out of it even though Buchanan "*was deeply involved*" (*Generation of Swine* 186). Two of the main suspects who became victims of "*Cannibalism [which] is still fashionable*" (*Generation of Swine* 208) in Washington was the former chief of C.I.A. William Casey who suffered a breakdown, and Robert McFarlane who overdosed himself on Valium. They both collapsed just before they should provide a testimony.

It was coming clear that the main protagonist of the scandal was Oliver North. Thompson once more recalled the dark days of Watergate only to deduce that the situation of the Iran-Contra case shamed America even worse.

"*Gordon Liddy was cruel, but he never did anything even remotely like running a neo-Nazi shadow government out of the White House basement, skimming millions of dollars off the top of illegal arms sales to hostile foreign governments or selling weapons to a hate-crazed international terrorist like the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, who was paying North millions of dollars for T.O.W. missiles with one hand while admittedly using the other to finance the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon, which killed nearly three hundred of North's people.*" (*Generation of Swine* 209)

This was a much higher level than "*a low-rent burglary like Watergate*" (*Generation of Swine* 210). Thompson figured out that everything pointed to the involvement of a higher rank.

He suggested that North, Poindexter, and others “*were [not] running the whole monumentally crooked circus without the consent of Vice-President*” (*Generation of Swine* 210). Thompson was convinced that “*They were guilty.*”, and that “*They were criminals.*” (*Generation of Swine* 213). Also, it would have been quite strange if the President did not know about what was going on just one floor below the White House. Though, Reagan and his spokesman announced they were not aware of anything (*Generation of Swine* 211-213).

After McFarlane woke from the coma caused by the pill overdose, which “*Jim Morrison would have laughed [at] as a chaser*” (*Generation of Swine* 215), he testified “*against the President’s fragile credibility*” (*Generation of Swine* 215). “*Ollie*”, as Thompson called North, turned to the Bible, just like Thompson had done before (*Generation of Swine* 215-216), and “*biblical*” was also the word to describe the fall of George Bush after the newspapers publish his leaked controversial correspondence (*Generation of Swine* 217-218). Before that, Bush looked like the favourite to run in the election of 1988, but not only before the release of the letter. Then, his participation in the Iran-Contra affair sat on “*his window and croaked at him repeatedly, “Nevermore.”*” (*Generation of Swine* 218) as Thompson used Poe’s famous metaphor. However, Thompson laughed too soon.

Democrats were given a chance to beat Republicans thanks to Bush’s crucial letter. The joy crashed shortly after because the greatest hope of the Democratic party, Gary Hart, was blamed for womanizing at the break of April and May 1987. Thompson discussed the rumour in the article *The American Dream*⁴³ where he pranked Hart saying that “*When it comes to “womanizing” in Washington, Hart is an amateur*” (*Generation of Swine* 236) in comparison to the Kennedys. Unfortunately, neither Hart nor his campaign manager was able to defend themselves from such an accusation. Only a few days after the womanizing story was published, Hart gave up his candidacy in 1988. Nobody, including Thompson, could grasp the reason and the speed of the surrender. “*The most intelligent Democratic presidential campaign since John F. Kennedy’s in 1960 went down in a ball of huge fire like the Hindenburg*” (*Generation of Swine* 238), and it sank “*so fast that even the lifeboats went down with it*” (*Generation of Swine* 239). But in another article from 1989, Thompson pondered the possibility that Hart may have left the 1988 election to focus on the long-distance run for candidacy in 1992 (*Songs of the Doomed* 232).

Then, the Democratic vote split between “*the Seven Dwarfs*” (*Generation of Swine* 238-240 and 259-261) making it impossible to guess who would have a “*lock on the nomination*”

⁴³ I wonder if there is any reference to the Mailer’s book from 1965.

(*Generation of Swine* 240). Thompson suggested two possible candidates, Jesse Jackson, an African American from the South, and New York Governor Mario Cuomo (*Generation of Swine* 239-240). The trouble was, that the possible front-runner Jesse “*Jackson is a black man, and the country is not ready for that.*” (*Generation of Swine* 256). The clouds were gathering above the party without Hart who had had a real chance to beat weakened Bush.

Thompson summarized the position of Democrats in the following paragraph:

“The real miracle of American politics in the ‘80s is that the Democratic Party still exists. It is the “majority party” numerically – but in truth the Democrats have not done anything except bitch and whine and fight savagely among themselves since Franklin Roosevelt was elected to a fourth term in 1944.” (*Generation of Swine* 258).

The times were not easy for everybody. The noose was tightening around the accused in the Iran-Contra affair and “Ollie” had to decide whom was he going to turn in, either the President or Vice-President (*Generation of Swine* 252). Thompson wrote about impeachment for Reagan (*Generation of Swine* 253), but I doubt that he truly believed this could happen after what he saw back in 1974.

Thompson described his own real experience of “*Ollie mania*” (*Generation of Swine* 264) in reality when he was sitting in a pub having lunch. Along with other visitors, he was watching the Iran-Contra hearings. The development of the process shocked him badly because the scandal that he thought “*looked deeper and dirtier than Watergate was suddenly transformed by North’s performance on network T.V. into something on the scale of American heroism like Valley Forge or MacArthur’s return to the Philippines*” (*Generation of Swine* 263). It made a man sitting next to Thompson weep. This was too much for Thompson who smacked the man to wake up from the “*lame Nazi gibberish*” (*Generation of Swine* 263) reminding him that, in the first place, North was responsible for the explosion that killed hundreds of people in Beirut in October 1983 and caused a terrible shock to the safety and self-confidence of the USA⁴⁴. He got an answer that it was Ayatollah Khomeini and so he replied with a question asking who “*sold all those bombs and missiles and rockets to the Iranians*” (*Generation of*

⁴⁴ Thompson wrote more about this national trauma in *Last Memo from the National Affair Desk* (*Songs of the Doomed* 211-216) in 1985. He brooded who would have taken such a radical and brutal step. “*Not even Muammar el-Quaddafi would be dumb enough to do a thing like that.*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 215). Simply, “*nobody blows up a U.S. Embassy*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 213). When Thompson watched the “*endless films of mangled bodies being carried out of the burning rubble of stretches – a sight that not many people in my generation or anybody else alive today has ever seen, on T.V. or even in the newsreel.*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 212) it felt like witnessing a stronger version of the Tet offensive from 1968 (*Songs of the Doomed* 213) or like the first encounter with Arabian radicals when the Iranian fanatics seized the American Embassy and took nearly 80 people captives in 1979 (*Songs of the Doomed* 215).

Swine 264). That was the way how Thompson treated the ones who trusted North's words and led them to understand the bitter truth.

Hart and North changed their positions which made the public confusion complete. It also paved the way for Bush to the White House. Some Americans even believed North's defence so much that they sent him enough money to cover the huge lawyer expenses (*Generation of Swine* 266 and 269). As Thompson wrote:

"In the quick and crazy window of sixty-six days and two moons, Hart and North reversed roles in a way that only Hollywood could take seriously – and Bush came out the big winner." (*Generation of Swine* 265).

Here lies the greatest difference between Watergate and the Iran-Contra affair. The ones involved in the first case, who had been convicted, had to leave in shame. In 1987, North left the court nearly as an American hero. In anger, Thompson claimed: *"If this low-rent scandal is the best this generation can do, they deserve what they're getting and they are going to live with it. They deserve to be called A Generation of Swine."* (*Generation of Swine* 266-267). From Thompson's perspective, the politicians and army officers accused in the Iran-Contra case were far worse and more corrupt than Charles Colson, and they made Henry Kissinger look like *"a true prince among men"* (*Generation of Swine* 267).

Shi and Tindall give us cold facts that after a long and disgraceful investigation, only six people were indicted. The court did not send Oliver North, who bore the main responsibility, to jail. In the end, only John Poindexter should have served six months in prison (1440). Though, Shi and Tindall's picture is not perfect as it lacks an explanation. Brogan came with a theory that *"Congress could not bear the thought of dragging itself and the country through the misery of another impeachment, this time of an immensely popular president"* (1264) which I believe corresponds with the picture provided by Thompson.

The atmosphere got so dark that the names of *"the old-time vets"* in the corruption business like *"Joe McCarthy, Martin Bormann, Caligula, Marshal Tojo, James Hoffa"* and others came up once more to haunt Thompson's mind (*Generation of Swine* 277). In his despair, he invented an award of *"the Swine of the Week"* (*Generation of Swine* 277-279), and the competitors were many in *"The Cruel and Loveless '80s, the Generation of Swine"* (*Generation of Swine* 279). In the same mood, Thompson made a sarcastic joke that in this completely mad era *"The electorate will demand a degenerate in the White House."* (*Generation of Swine* 285) so even some of the Democratic runners would stand a chance in 1988. Nonetheless, from his text titled *The Weak and the Weird*, the reader can recognize that Thompson gave up his faith in "the dwarfs" since they seemed helpless for the *"Loose lips, old grudges, and ugly personal*

infighting” (*Generation of Swine* 287). The polls confirmed what Thompson had hoped could not happen, but it could. George Bush came through all the hearings and despite the previous odds, a year before the election he appeared to be the favourite again (*Generation of Swine* 289).

The final blow for Thompson was that one of his, mostly anti-Republican, friends called him to persuade him to change his opinion on George Bush. The friend told Thompson about Bush’s love for animals, and that Vice-President could play some of Leonard Cohen and everything by Bob Dylan. Thompson cut the conversation yelling insults at his friend, asking him whether he was paid for the call. He rejected such a picture of Bush and titled the text *The Other George Bush* (*Generation of Swine* 298-301).

Only a month before the elections in 1988, Thompson, frightened by the events of the previous two years and from the transformation of the American public opinion, predicted the victory of the Republican Party, and their candidate George Bush. It was probably the last thing he wanted to write, but he realized all the weaknesses of the Democrats too well. In the article *The Dukakis Problem: Another Vicious Beating for the New Whigs*, he reflected on how it came to this. “*Something [was] wrong here.*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 221), he referred to Dylan’s *Mr. Jones*. “*There is a strange new factor at work in this election, and Mr. Jones is not the only one who doesn’t know what it is.*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 222).

Thompson guessed that “*There [was] no pulse.*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 222) as he noticed that nobody asked any serious questions or raised crucial topics, therefore no answers were given in return. In short, it lacked the energy that Thompson felt pushed the Americans to the ballots in the 1960s and, on a smaller scale but still, in the 1970s (*Songs of the Doomed* 222). Nobody seemed to care or to be afraid. “*The fun [had] gone out of it.*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 223). There were no protests, no sit-ins, and not even any riots. The only thing that Thompson ascribed to this generation was a “*dreary mess*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 223) of disillusion about justice in politics, confusion, and resignation. Even though Bush was obviously in some way connected with the Iran-Contra scandal, he managed not only to slip the noose but also to climb back to the top. Although Michael Dukakis beat him in the final public debate, it was too late to change the score. Notably, Thompson did not highlight the importance of Bush’s promise to keep taxes low, which is the step that Shi and Tindall understood as crucial (1448). In the end, Thompson bitterly summarized Bush’s rebirth as “*Veni, Vidi, Vici.*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 225). Fortunately for Bush, the Berlin Wall fell down the following year. “*He has inherited the wind once again.*” (*Songs of the Doomed* 256). However, Bush did not keep

his word on the tax issue. It cost him his reputation among Republicans and not even his successful foreign policy saved him (Shi and Tindall 1449, 1454).

There is a noticeable difference in comments on the Bush era in Thompson's articles and the book by Shi and Tindall or the one by Brogan. Thompson saw Bush simply as another evil Republican who won the office by coincidence, and especially thanks to the weakness of Democrats. His opinion is mainly based on Bush's involvement in the Iran-Contra Affair. Shi and Tindall present an entirely different picture. They valued Bush as a skilful politician, though without the charisma of Reagan (1448). Brogan gets closer to Thompson's rather negative assessment of the last decade in the US. The difficulty with his vision of the US looking for a new identity after the Cold War is that he did not give many specific examples. The generality of the last pages of Brogan's book makes it uneasy to compare his ideas with Thompson's.

The most striking distinction between the perspective of Thompson and the one of Shi and Tindall is connected to their arguments. Whereas Thompson worked mostly with moral values, Shi and Tindall evaluated Bush's political steps.

2.4 The 1990s

The last decade of the century started very poorly for Thompson when he crossed the acceptable line of violence and, while drunk and high, he run amok, and he twisted the nipples of a businesswoman from the sex business (*Songs of the Doomed* 267-270). In response, she accused him of sexual assault and Thompson was charged with eight crimes connected to sex, violence, drugs, and explosives (*Songs of the Doomed* 272-273).

Thanks to the great support of his friends, he eventually avoided jail. They managed to turn the process into an act of political revenge, and all the charges were dropped (*Songs of the Doomed* 274-293). During this court, Thompson got as close to jail as Norman Mailer when he confessed to stabbing his wife (*Songs of the Doomed* 267). Nonetheless, Thompson got off easily in the end and he could continue his work.

2.4.1 The Fall of Reagan's Heir and Rise of Mr. Bill

Getting the reader rid of any hope that the times may have changed in the last ten years of the century, Thompson recounted a parable of the fable *The Old Woman and the Snake* (*Better Than Sex* xi) and (again) a few lines from Edgar Allan Poe's *Raven* (*Better Than Sex* xv). The first tragic tale showed that some things or people, in Thompson's version most likely

politicians, can never be trusted since evil is their nature. The quotes from *Raven* set an accurate darkness for the following vicious mixture of short comments, chosen pieces of news from the world, poll survey results, and angry personal letters that create the content of the collection observing the presidential election of 1992 called *Better Than Sex: Confessions of a Political Junkie*. “Nevermore” fits here as well because, after the election of Bill Clinton, Thompson decided to leave such a brutal business as high politics for good. Now, let us see what led him out of his adrenaline addiction which had lasted since the 1960s.

Right from the first chapter of the book, Thompson began with black humour in a story where he should have confessed to his son, that he was the one who shot President Kennedy dead in his limousine in Dallas. In response, his son wanted to turn him in. “*Ye gods, what’s next?*” (*Better Than Sex* 5). I mention the crazy joke because Thompson put it there to illustrate that “*the poor bastards from Generation X have lost their sense of humour about politics.*” (*Better Than Sex* 5) and it came as no surprise. “*The joke was over*” (*Better Than Sex* 5 and 11) after what had happened since Kennedy’s presidency. The time had come for professionals of cruel humour, for instance, Marquis de Sade (*Better Than Sex* 7-9). Thompson brooded on what went wrong in the old days and, again, came back to the black day in 1972 when he was sitting, depressed after the failure of the Democrats, with some of McGovern’s staffers who told him about a young “*dingbat*” (*Better Than Sex* 12) named Clinton who had not managed the campaign in his Texts district and was fired for it.

To highlight the unlikeliness of Clinton becoming the President, Thompson cited what he heard back in 1972 in the sad November in Sioux Falls:

“*“We’ll never see that stupid bastard again,” one McGovern aide muttered. “Clinton – Bill Clinton. Yeah. Let’s remember that name. He’ll never work again, not in Washington.”*” (*Better Than Sex* 12).

I cannot guarantee that anybody said that at all. However, the truth is that Clinton worked there, in Kansas, and failed. This was not his last effort in politics though. He climbed the political ladder and was elected the Governor of Arkansas. And since “*Politics is Better Than Sex. Winning is an addiction, and Bill Clinton is a pure junkie.*” (*Better Than Sex* 13) Clinton had a serious business to deal with in 1992.

So did Thompson when he stepped into the wild and dirty river of presidential campaigns. He thought he “*had no choice but to be a part of the 1992 election*” where he “*understood [...] that the only real priority in 1992 was beating George Bush. Nothing else*

mattered." (*Better Than Sex* 14)⁴⁵. Later in the book, Thompson recalled as he was proud "to vote against Richard Nixon – and it will be an honour on November 3 to vote against George Bush and everything he stands for." (*Better Than Sex* 99). He applied the rule "The enemy of my enemy is my friend, like the Arabs say – and if he happens to be a swine, so what? At least he is our swine." (*Better Than Sex* 195). Either way, Thompson found him once more in the highest game of American politics and, again, with the same objective to choose and endorse a lesser evil.

Bush had come to the White House as an heir of Ronald Reagan. In a sense, he embodied most of the qualities Thompson could not stand. Therefore, Thompson felt insulted when George Bush met with Margaret Thatcher⁴⁶ just a few miles from his house in Woody Creek (*Better Than Sex* 34). In one of his paranoia frenzies, Thompson felt that this meeting should have been a cruel joke and an offence to him (*Better Than Sex* 30-33). He must have feared in 1991 that Bush would be re-elected since:

"George Bush was in charge that year. He walked tall and kicked ass. George and his generals were the toast of the civilized world, and later that year they became almost godlike, as "democracy" swept the world and Soviet the Union crumbled ... It was a heady time, folks; the USA was definitely Number One, and so was George Bush. He was The Man." (*Better Than Sex* 36).

It did not last long. A noticeable blow came unexpectedly from a financial scandal of George Bush's son, Neil, who eventually "avoided prison, but his father paid a heavy price for it in public esteem" (*Better Than Sex* 38). There was one more thing damaging the popularity of George Bush. He promised not to raise taxes, but he had to in the end. This attempt to balance the budget undermined his position among his fellow Republicans making it harder to represent the party in the elections (Shi and Tindall 1454). But, as usual, "all the Democratic candidates looked lame." (*Better Than Sex* 38) so the chances must have looked equal.

Here, I would like to point out two things. Firstly, despite all the imperfections, the US was once again ruling the world from the position of power, the power of a democratic state, at the dawn of the last decade of the century. Therefore, even such a hypercritical person, as Thompson was, had to admit that the 20th century may have been rightfully titled "The American Century" after the crisis in the 1980s. Secondly, even if there could have been a

⁴⁵ Here, I am not able to say whether the last part of this quote should have sarcastically referred to the famous ballad song by Metallica or not, but I strongly believe it would have fitted his style.

⁴⁶ Not even the lady Prime Minister of the Great Britain was spared of bad offences from Thompson (*Generation of Swine* 99-100).

reason for bitterness as young Neil Bush, a fraudster, remained unpunished, the scandal had a generally negative impact on the Bush presidency. It woke the mentioned idea of Orwell's inequality too much, and it cost Bush Sr a lot of votes. Eventually, they paid with the family's reputation. Thus, I judge that there was at least a small semblance of justice.

Nevertheless, 1991 marked a shock for almost everybody. In October, the first larger case of sexual harassment occurred. A Supreme Court nominee named Clarence Thomas was accused of the crime. In the end, he got the place confirmed, no matter the accusation (*Better Than Sex* 41-42). In retrospect, it could be understood as a precedent for the presidential election of 1992 where a womanizer won as well. Furthermore, Attorney General Dick Thornburgh⁴⁷, one of the successful and popular Republican politicians from the 1980s, lost his seat in Senate. Nobody had expected that, and it rocked the whole Republican Party (*Better Than Sex* 42-43). A court process against a member of the Kennedy family drew some attention too and, as a result, "Even the rich and the powerful are coming to understand that change can be quick in the nineties" (*Better Than Sex* 43). The question stands whether it was for better or worse.

In January 1992, Thompson probably felt that humanity entered the campaign after tabloids wrote of Bill Clinton as of an adulterer. He found a runner to sympathize with. Based on Thompson's advice (*Better Than Sex* 50), Clinton strictly denied the accusation but his alleged mistress, Gennifer Flowers, went on saying that the extramarital relationship was not only a one-night story. Although she even offered phone tapes to prove her story, Clinton kept denying it (*Better Than Sex* 47-48). Paradoxically, the scandal, which nonetheless appeared to "be just the tip of the iceberg" (*Better Than Sex* 50), helped Clinton according to the poll surveys (*Better Than Sex* 47 and 50). To use the affair to Clinton's advantage, it was necessary not to repeat the mistakes of Gary Hart whose ghost came to haunt the Democrats in 1992 (*Better Than Sex* 47, 62, and 101).

One month later, the media compromised the runner again. This time, the *Wall Street Journal* suggested: "that Bill Clinton may have improperly avoided the draft" (*Better Than Sex* 48) in 1968 or 1969. The newspaper had even a reliable source, "a former draft-board official" (*Better Than Sex* 48). However, Clinton denied this one either. This accusation harmed his campaign approximately as same as the "pro-adultery vote" (*Better Than Sex* 50) helped him a month before. Nevertheless, Thompson believed in the potential of "the draft-dodger issue" (*Better Than Sex* 50).

⁴⁷ Reagan's successful Attorney General in war against white-collar crime. Here is his biography provided by the University of Pittsburgh: <https://www.thornburghforum.pitt.edu/about-gov-thornburgh/biography>.

At the end of March, Clinton shocked the American public for the third time. Now, he confessed that he had tried marijuana. Defending himself, he added that he “*did not inhale*” (*Better Than Sex* 58). This last piece of information hurt Thompson in his heart (*Better Than Sex* 59-61). He did not consider such an approach to smoking “pot” the right way to reach the numerous former members of the counterculture which he later labelled as “*the rock’n’roll vote*” (*Better Than Sex* 64-65).

In the news from April to July of 1992, Thompson included a short note about a striking social issue. On April 29, “*Following a jury verdict acquitting four policemen of the assault in the videotaped beating of Rodney King, rioting erupts in Los Angeles*” (*Better Than Sex* 63). The 1990s were not so peaceful and safe after all, not even for the Americans in their own country. Shi and Tindall and Brogan did not mention this tragedy as they focused on wider-scale politics which was also extraordinary since one more runner occurred (Shi and Tindall 1454).

Even the two favourites, Bush and Clinton, must have felt endangered after Ross Perot, a billionaire reminding Thompson of Adolf Hitler (*Better Than Sex* 72 and 86), decided to run for the presidency as well at the break of spring and summer of 1992 (*Better Than Sex* 54, 57 and 62). He created a third possible choice running on the independent ticket. The polls gave him a chance as he showed that he had a stable base electorate and as he hired some professionals formerly working for Ronald Reagan (*Better Than Sex* 63). Perot’s decision to join the race drew more of Thompson’s attention than the scandals of Bill Clinton. For a gambler like Thompson, Perot’s participation brought a certain level of chaos to the usual two-side election which would have equalled “*a choice between a Leech and a Gila Monster*” (*Better Than Sex* 74), or “*a rerun of ’76: Another self-righteous, New Age, boll-weevil Southern Democrat against another greedy dimwit, corrupt, caretaker Republican*” (*Better Than Sex* 75) from Thompson’s perspective in 1992. He even considered running the ticket with Perot, of course only to prank American politics, after Perot was given a chance by the public surveys. However, the thrill did not last long. Perot quit the race in only a few weeks (*Better Than Sex* 80).⁴⁸ Thompson, on the one hand, viewed the independent candidate as “*a greedy little dingbat with no balls at all*” (*Better Than Sex* 86) but, on the other hand, also as the man who fulfilled his own vision of the American Dream (*Better Than Sex* 86). On October 1, Ross Perot

⁴⁸ To spice the story of Perot’s withdrawal, Thompson came up with a fictional crime plot that Perot was blackmailed (*Better Than Sex* 80) and then, as his alter-ego Raoul Duke, he wrote another made-up column saying that a member of the Crips gang shot the independent candidate “*point-blank 13 times in the face with a huge shotgun*” (*Better Than Sex* 84).

relaunched his campaign despite only a few percent would have voted for him (*Better Than Sex* 149). The candidacy of the third person, and the real chance that polls ascribed him, showed that the classic two parties should have tried harder.

Nevertheless, neither of the common parties showed much strength. The Democrats argued among themselves, as many times before, and the second man of the Republicans, Dan Quayle, showed that he could not even spell “potato” correctly (*Better Than Sex* 65). Considering this election as extraordinary, Thompson wrote that “*The fat is in the fire ... This ain’t no normal election year.*” (*Better Than Sex* 69), and that “*It may be the last fun we’ll have for a while.*” (*Better Than Sex* 69) in case George Bush would win four more years in the White House.

Along with his three colleagues from *Rolling Stone*, Thompson flew to Little Rock in Arkansas to encounter the presumable new President in his home state. When “*the Four Stooges*” (*Better Than Sex* 85 and 100) met Bill Clinton in a restaurant, Thompson found out the terrifying fact that his favourite candidate had no sense of humour (*Better Than Sex* 100, 211 and 219). Even his political enemy, George Bush, had “*a better sense of humour than Bill Clinton.*” (*Better Than Sex* 100), as Thompson believed. According to Thompson, the atmosphere came unbearably heavy after the Governor behaved in a very strange and even rude way (*Better Than Sex* 103-104). Although, Thompson appreciated that the candidate was willing to come to the meeting at all (*Better Than Sex* 102).

Two months after the billionaire, Ross Perot, gave the race up, Clinton appeared to be winning in surveys as a more trustworthy candidate than George Bush (*Better Than Sex* 138). This development must have made the Republicans worried. Thompson knew that, and he enjoyed that George Bush had to struggle for his place in the White House selling his own country and “*the remains of his wretched ass to a band of God-spewing religious Nazis and stupid hate-mongers...*” (*Better Than Sex* 142). However, after he watched a TV discussion between the two runners he was disturbed by the self-confident jokes of Bush, and even more, feared that Clinton could not compete with his Republican opponent in the field of immediate action in front of the camera (*Better Than Sex* 150-151).

At the same time, Thompson pointed out that, on the one hand, it was Ronald Reagan and his follower George Bush, both high politicians, who gutted Thompson’s idea of the American Dream. On the other hand, though, the ones carrying responsibility were the American voters who let these people, for whom Thompson found only the rudest words, get to power (*Better Than Sex* 151). He thought that a lot of his fellow citizens lacked literacy (*Better Than Sex* 151). Numbers changed a bit in favour of Bush after he and his campaign team

raised doubts about Clinton's years of study in Britain, trying to seed the picture of Clinton as a Soviet spy into the minds of American voters. Clinton's staff denounced the rumour as a new McCarthyism (*Better Than Sex* 162). Some people believed the accusation giving their vote to Bush in the polls, and they did not mind that Bush was sinking into the Iran-Contra Affair again. The odds showed Bush on the slow rise, and Clinton on the decline but still winning (*Better Than Sex* 165).

Then, we can observe an interesting (but probably already known) feature of many political campaigns. The headlines full of sexual scandals and extramarital relationships changed the numbers in the polls before the election by the whole points whereas a new testimony in the Iran-Contra affair had only negligible effect on those odds. Therefore, I assume that the influence of tabloid articles mattered more to a part of the American electorate in those times described by Thompson, beginning with Lyndon B. Johnson and his dirty campaign in the election to Congress in 1948 when he accused his "*high-riding opponent (the pig farmer) of having a carnal knowledge of his barnyard sows, despite the pleas of his wife and children*"⁴⁹ (*Better Than Sex* 160). At least that was Thompson's version of the story.

When the date of the election came due, Thompson arrived in Little Rock to Clinton's headquarters to see everything with his own eyes as same as he had always done, except for Muhammad Ali's match in Zaire, Africa. His first impression was the calm atmosphere in a bar full of anticipated winners (*Better Than Sex* 174). As expected, Clinton won. His team celebrated as "*the American Dream had come true right in front of their eyes*" (*Better Than Sex* 183). In contrast, Thompson "*couldn't crank up much joy*" for "*Politics is very nasty business, win or lose, and you never really know whose side you're on, especially when you win.*" (*Better Than Sex* 183). He did not know if this new order would be of his taste; rather no than yes. For this reason, he wrote *The Inaugural* for the new President. The text consists of promises of Clinton's supporters, submitting and devoting themselves to him with everything they had (*Better Than Sex* 186). It came only as another from a series of Thompson's characteristic jokes.

For Czech readers, it may be quite noteworthy that, among many other pieces of news, Thompson perceived it important for some reason to bring a brief line about Václav Havel getting elected President of the Czech Republic (*Better Than Sex* 189).

In the first months of 1993, Thompson already marked the President as "*a disciplined, Razorback pig*" (*Better Than Sex* 189) who can play the saxophone. He called Clinton by many

⁴⁹ Thompson used even more straight language explaining the accusation simply as "*fucking pigs*" (*Better Than Sex* 161). I guess that was the base for one of the Thompson's favourite insults addressed to politicians, a "*pigfucker*".

other vulgar and comical titles. He even joked that he was not the only one mocking the new President when he wrote: *“He has bungled his first three weeks so badly that senators and generals tell twisted “homo” jokes about him over lunch ... Even his wife calls him a “pussy,” and switched back to her maiden name.”* (*Better Than Sex* 195). However, this made-up tale depicted the general mood in Washington shortly after Clinton moved to the White House. After the common enemy represented by George Bush, the once united and coworking team of Clinton was falling, and *“The enemy [seemed] to be everywhere.”* (*Better Than Sex* 196). Thompson was most of all afraid that history would have repeated itself, and that Clinton’s office would have hurt the Democratic Party, as it happened during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, and resulted in another 12 years of Republicans in power, or a Perot victory in 1996 (*Better Than Sex* 198, 201 and 213); a nightmare for Thompson that would most likely have driven Thompson out of the country, and made him hide in Paraguay, as he put it (*Better Than Sex* 151).

Besides the politics, Thompson referred to the infamous shooting in Waco, Texas. A group of heavily armed Christian fanatics fortified their compound and when police came to arrest them for sexual crimes the battle started. It lasted more than a month, and about 80 died there (*Better Than Sex* 206). Despite the apolitical aspect, the massacre represented what was possible at the time. Thompson used the bloody incident to remind his friends in the White House that the time had come to restore justice on every level. It was necessary to build the picture of Clinton as a strong, decisive, and courageous man and politician (*Better Than Sex* 209 and 213). The President should have, in Thompson’s opinion, also responded appropriately to the crumbling of his subordinates after General Harold Campbell resigned for personal reasons as he despised Clinton, and a White House lawyer committed suicide (*Better Than Sex* 216-218).

The generation of the 1990s looked like the one of the 1980s:

“The standard gets lower every year, but the scum keeps rising. A whole new class has seized control in the nineties: They call themselves “The New Dumb,” and they have no sense of humor. They are smart, but they have no passion. They are cute, but they have no fun except phone sex and line dancing.... They are healthy and clean and cautious and their average life-span is now over 100 years (with women at 102 and men slightly under 100).” (*Better Than Sex* 226).

Thompson prophesied only the worst. People would be connected to virtual reality all the time, and Ross Perot would become the President of the US (*Better Than Sex* 216). Furthermore, the worst was about to come, as Thompson wrote: *“Generation X got off easy*

compared to the hideous fate of the poor bastards in Generation Z. They will be like steerage passengers on the S. S. Titanic, trapped in the watery bowels of a sinking “unsinkable ship.” (*Better Than Sex* 229). In this gloomy mood, he came back to his memories of an old friend and enemy at the same time, Richard Nixon. After a brief revision of American history since Herbert Hoover (*Better Than Sex* 224-228), Thompson, once again, ended up comparing Bill Clinton with Richard Nixon. All the similarities and differences can be summarized as: “Nixon was so bad that he could get innocent people in to politics, but Clinton is bad in a way that will get all but the worst ones out.” (*Better Than Sex* 229).

Symbolically, the book ends with a letter of “condolence” to Richard Nixon in *Chapter 666: The Death of Richard Nixon* since the editors would have understood the book incomplete without this obituary (*Better Than Sex* 237). They lost the man that had brought them to politics and activism. Perhaps, they even felt a kind of *Sympathy for the Devil*. The former president plotted and ordered various crimes so naturally and with humour that the *Rolling Stone* staff admired it in a way (*Better Than Sex* 237-238). “Read it and weep, for we have lost our Satan. Richard Nixon has gone back home to hell.” (*Better Than Sex* 237). At the funeral, he was canonized by Bill Clinton. Thompson remarked that “It was Nixon’s last war, and he won.” (*Better Than Sex* 242). Henry Kissinger ascribed Nixon “the status of an American Caesar” (*Better Than Sex* 243) which Thompson attacked as nonsense reminding all the victims of Nixon’s rule both abroad and at home, in the US. Likening Nixon to Nero or Caligula would possibly have fitted better from Thompson’s perspective. Naming all the evil of the Nixon era, he explained that it was Nixon who forced journalists to leave objectivity since the time became too crazy to describe it without a subjective perspective (*Better Than Sex* 243).

In many respects, Thompson lost his focus on Clinton’s policy as he brought more vivid pictures from other topics or even from other parts of the world. He stuck to the campaign, which was after all his specialization. However, he lost his interest in Clinton after the election. In my judgement, Clinton soon turned to another professional balancer on an unstable rope of public opinion. I believe that Thompson sympathized with Clinton’s weaknesses, such as chronic womanizing, avoiding the draft back in the 1960s, or the confessed smoking of marijuana. All these activities would have created a picture of a rock’n’roll politician that Thompson hoped for. It looked like it even on the inauguration day when Bob Dylan and Jack Nicholson came to Washington to celebrate (*Better Than Sex* 227). In the end, Thompson witnessed that this ideal vanished as Clinton learned that he had to behave appropriately in his position. Shi and Tindall remarked that Clinton resembled Reagan in his charismatic appearance and public performance and that Clinton, like Carter years before him, promoted

centrist ideas (1462). I suppose that this compromising attitude made Thompson lose his sympathy for Clinton (*Better Than Sex* 230).

Most of the larger Clinton's troubles came in his second term, from 1996 to 2000, (Shi and Tindall 1468-1472) which is the reason why we cannot read about the so-called Monicagate or about possible impeachment for lying to the court in *Confessions of a Political Junkie*.

Thompson symbolically enclosed the book saying that with every step Nixon had taken, he “*broke the heart of the American Dream*” (*Better Than Sex* 246), and “*Nixon's spirit will be with us for the rest of our lives – whether you're me or Bill Clinton or you or Kurt Cobain or Bishop Tutu or Keith Richards or Amy Fisher or Boris Yeltsin's daughter or your fiancée's 16-year-old beer drunk brother with his braided goatee and his whole life as a thundercloud out in front of him.*” (*Better Than Sex* 245). Even if he originally wrote a book of fierce comments on Bill Clinton, he slipped back to his old nemesis Richard Nixon.

3. A Conclusion – From San Francisco to the White House at Top Speed

In the articles collected in the *Gonzo Papers* edition, the reader visits many places, including countries such as Peru, Mexico, and even Vietnam. But still, most of the covered action took place in the US. Here, let me highlight the word *action* since the overwhelming majority of Thompson's work describes demonstrations, riots, drug counterculture, violent motorcycle gangs, horse races, American football, and bars in his savage half-fictional stories full of whiskey, amphetamines, LSD, Mace⁵⁰, insults, sex, aggression and, above all, paranoia. Soon, he realized that the most serious business is politics, and moved his attention to the highest spot of the American political culture, the White House. He dealt only with the real “*weird going*” as he wrote many times and he found it often in high politics.

Thompson brought the reader only chosen and subjective views of America, all of them extreme in their own way. From the pictures he offered in his articles, it seems that freedom and action peaked in the 1960s, despite all the imperfections he observed, and then, since 1968, it was on the decline. He explained that the decay of social activism came as a result of the same fall of morality in politics. From his perspective, the Americans did not believe in justice since Nixon's presidency. In the 1980s, Thompson felt that moral corruption got deeply among the citizens. They could not elect a good person simply because they lacked the values of the original American Dream, especially fairness, themselves. However, after years when Republicans were repeatedly connected to the Iran-Contra scandal, most Americans decided to put a Democrat in the White House once again. Nevertheless, the heartlessness and the humourlessness of the 1980s remained.

Comparing the moments from American history we can learn from Thompson with the ones provided by Shi and Tindall or Brogan, we can quickly notice one fact. Thompson rarely commented on the economic situation, if at all. Even though Thompson was a betting man, the topic of banking or national debt can be found only seldom. While the historians stuck to the great-scale picture and, logically, chose the issues to fit this purpose, Thompson offered the readers a different perspective, an insight, we can call it. In the vast majority of his articles, he worked with a topic that interested him without any objectivity that would only have bothered him, and perhaps even the readers of his articles. It was usually an event where he could feel the enthusiasm, desire for a change, disappointment, hate, or any strong emotion behind the

⁵⁰ A powerful pepper spray.

happening. He called this energy “*the pulse*” and that is what he missed in the 1980s. In those cases that bored him, he intoxicated himself and wrote down what happened after.

It would be wrong though to think that all his articles were written in a mad speed rush. In some of the texts, Thompson pondered the situation and position of the US and the American Dream which often occurred in his works. In this respect, he even asked a deeper question: “What’s the American Dream now?”. For this reason, I feel that there’s more than sarcasm, crazy humour, and mocking the US of his time. He had never doubted that he lived in a free, developed, and civilized country, but he witnessed too much barbarity around him to ignore the danger of it. He feared stupidity and uniformity urged by some of the politicians of his time, mostly originating in, and belonging to the Republican party, which he thought could easily lead to fascism.

All his life he stood against such tendencies, fought them, and mocked them on the pages of *Rolling Stone* and other magazines. He participated in the activism of the 1960s, but he saw the break and fall of the counterculture and the following dissipation into only another drug culture. Therefore, there was nothing he could truly believe in anymore. Everything fine about his vision of the American Dream somehow failed, though Thompson had never stopped fighting for the Dream. Sadly, he usually found it in a wretched and twisted form, perhaps because for most of the time he was searching for it in politics, where the events of the 1960s led him.

Thompson’s America was always imperfect for what he experienced in his life. However, in comparison to some Beatniks, who escaped to fantasy and fiction, he strived for change for the better, or at least he tried to warn against the evil present in his fellow citizens. He did so actively, like Norman Mailer who appeared in Thompson’s tales a few times. They both reported from the anti-war demonstrations, covered presidential elections, and Black and Brown Power movements. Nevertheless, while reading their books, the reader can distinguish between their styles. Whereas Mailer expressed himself often in intellectual metaphors, Thompson threw the reader straight into his wild imagination but also not without his relieving humour based on exaggeration, no matter how dark. And indeed, dark it was.

The trouble with Thompson’s picture of America is that he focused on only a few topics and none of them was positive. This may disappoint everybody who expects to find an objective and thorough portrait of America between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1990s. There are only two major themes, counterculture, and politics, that sometimes overlap each other. Even if it may appear that the members of the underground represented good and the politicians served evil, Thompson did not describe either of these groups in such a simplified

way. Although there was strong sympathy for the counterculture, he was not afraid to name its faults. He could do so because he *was* there and saw it as he often highlighted in his work.

The only way how to explore the atmosphere beyond politics and movements of the 1960s in Thompson's work is to read these two leading topics as a reflection of the public's opinion and, for all the time, be aware of the ever-present exaggeration. All the protest gatherings, (anti)political law practice of Oscar Zeta Acosta, violence in the African-American and Mexican-American districts, and even the rise of the media and new approaches such as New Journalism were, after all, responses to the political settings and steps made by the country or individual states. Thompson sought power and he found it firstly in its unchained form while riding with Hell's Angels. Then he observed the energy in the liberal circles around the Berkeley campus which remained rather calm, at least compared to the bikers. And thirdly, he dealt with the most extreme kind of power held in the hands of the President of the US. Again, all three topics have something in common.

These three worlds met at a time of high tension caused by the ongoing War in Vietnam in the 1960s. Members of Hell's Angels, who had sometimes partied with the counterculture and the rebellious students, then joined the supporters of war and the far-right patriots. Paradoxically, the steps of Lyndon Johnson and his generals forced the two fractions of the counterculture, the hippie students, and the outlaw bikers, to fight each other in the streets which leads me to another characteristic feature of Thompson's texts.

He viewed his country and its society on the one hand quite black and white, but on the other hand, he admitted the truth was more complicated than that. After all, he represented a bright example of complexity himself. However, after 1968, the year that Thompson considered the breakpoint, everybody got slowly more confused. For some time, the enemy had remained clear, but only until Nixon left the White House. Thompson wrote about the years after Nixon as a time of great greed and looting of the American Dream. This disillusion became only stronger because he had expected that Nixon's end would have closed the era of corruption, or at least that the political culture would heal slowly. This hope is another aspect that distinguishes him from professional history scientists. All the emotions involved in the text help the stories flow more naturally and more entertainingly. Soon, he understood an unsettling fact that the depravity was still with the US even after Nixon whom Thompson blamed for bringing the criminal behaviour to high politics of the second half of the 20th century.

In the articles from the 1960s, he covered very similar topics as are discussed in the treatises by Shi and Tindall and by Brogan. He wrote about the students' movements, racial equalization, the war in Vietnam and several key politicians. The stories feel like a reportage

mixed with a memoir of an anarchist. The liveliness is what makes the interpretation so entertaining.

After the 1960s, Thompson found only a little encouragement. It came in the presidential election in 1976 when he supported Jimmy Carter because the candidate openly criticized the wrongs of all the Americans and appealed to them for more responsibility. In his typical paranoia, Thompson brooded over the Democratic victory in 1976 as if it should have been a trick from the side of the Republican party. He thought that Republicans let Democrats win and inherit the country in a poor state after the office of Nixon and Gerald Ford who hurt Thompson's sense of justice severely as he pardoned his predecessor in 1974. Carter's presidency, however, did not help Thompson feel better about politics. Although he sympathized with Carter, he found only a little respect for him in the 1980s as he believed Carter was a weak fighter and an unskilled politician who opened the door of the White House for another 12 years for Republicans.

This picture of Jimmy Carter corresponds with the version of Shi and Tindall (1415-1423) or with the Brogan's one (1248). They agree with Thompson that despite openness, ideals, and few successes in foreign policy, Carter was not strong enough. Nevertheless, the historical books talk about all the steps, both successes, and failures. On the contrary, Thompson picked rather the positive acts of Carter before the presidential election of 1976. After then, he focused more on Carter's missteps. Therefore, I get the impression that Thompson was convinced that any satisfaction in politics was impossible. It should not remind any resemblance of learned helplessness though because Thompson never gave up. It is true, though, that he became more embittered and generally disappointed by politicians in time.

His frustration continued further as American culture was only going to worsen in the 1980s, a decade of pigs in his opinion. According to Thompson, Americans did everything for money and dosed themselves with cocaine. A new social culture came with the generation of smart but cold-hearted people. He pictured the era of Ronald Reagan and the following four years of George Bush as even worse than the time when the country was ruled by Richard Nixon. He explained his stance that Nixon was at least straight in his criminal acts and had a sense of humour. Also, after Watergate Nixon was forced to leave the White House. Nothing similar happened in the Iran-Contra affair where some of the convicts were seen as heroes, for example, Colonel Oliver North, by the far-right Americans. The confusion got too high and the epidemic of AIDS made it only worse. The threat of chaos allowed the televangelists to demand controversial acts that they claimed to be based on Christian values. These TV preachers were closely related to the Religious Right, a political movement that openly supported Ronald

Reagan. Therefore, President Reagan embodied everything Thompson condemned about the 1980s.

This Thompson's picture of President Reagan stands in contrast to the facts we can learn in Shi and Tindall or Brogan. They both evaluated Reagan as a successful politician, even if they admitted that he had several problems during his office, peaking with the Iran-Contra scandal. The portrait of Reagan differs a lot but with few exceptions. Even Thompson regarded Reagan as a charismatic persona, which fits the historians' description. They all agree on one more point, although Shi and Tindall do not express their opinion much. In all the texts, the televangelists are assessed negatively, as a step back. However, the presence of a visible group of Americans, who raise their voice against trends of their time after years since the hippie revolt, contradicted what Thompson said about the inactivity of Americans after the 1960s. These conservative Christians were, after all, an example of such a group. This time he could not logically sympathize with the televangelists for his liberal values. Also, Thompson somehow missed protest marches against the cuts in healthcare led by the Act Up! Group (Shi and Tindall 1446). At least, there is no mention of any anti-Reagan movement in the *Gonzo Papers* collections.

After Reagan, Americans elected another conservative Republican, George Bush. Like in the times of Gerald Ford, Thompson withdrew himself and saved his energy for another election. There was one event though, that not even Thompson could miss. While Bush serving in the presidential office, the Soviet Union fell, which made Bush look like a winner, and Thompson had to acknowledge that. Nonetheless, Thompson despised Bush for his participation in the Iran-Contra affair, which Thompson never forgave him. I cannot find much to balance the overall negative picture of Bush in the articles because Thompson described the end of the Cold War more as a coincidence than a result of Bush's work. The gulf war was mentioned but rather in the sense that it may have become another Vietnam. According to Shi and Tindall, the triumph over communism and a victory in the Middle East brought some points for Bush, but not enough to beat the frustration over the stagnating economy despite the president's promises (1454). Even in the historians' opinion, depression prevailed.

The second hope for Thompson arose with the Governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton. Thompson found himself in a situation like in 1976 when he endorsed Carter in the candidacy. Therefore, he proceeded more cautiously this time. He claimed right from the start that he stood behind Clinton only because he perceived the candidate as a lesser evil. Thompson could not fully identify himself with Clinton since he lacked humour in Clinton as same as he did in Carter.

However, Clinton had a history that, in Thompson's eyes, could earn him the so-called rock'n'roll vote. After Clinton confessed to smoking marijuana and avoiding the draft, Thompson began to see him in a different light. Perhaps, the sexual adventures could have made Thompson feel for him as well. After Clinton won, Thompson felt no joy. He got satisfaction seeing Bush defeated. But who won? It was not Thompson. It was a humourless and most likely rather a bad man named Bill Clinton, but it ended still better off with him than with George Bush or Ross Perrot in the White House, according to Thompson. The collection is enclosed with the obituary for Richard Nixon, for whom Clinton expressed his grief and respect. I believe that Thompson stopped writing at this point on purpose since hearing his favourite (despite all the criticism of the president) saying this was simply too much. Hence, we cannot read anything more about the entire first term of Bill Clinton in the White House. Thompson left out the actions that Shi and Tindall highlighted as the greatest achievements, namely the unsuccessful effort of reforming health care, a change of welfare laws, and the slow healing of the national economy. Again, Thompson put a lot of his own beliefs and disappointment into the story. His sense of justice influenced all his articles. However, when the reader considers Thompson's personal stance, beliefs, and specific kind of humour, he can get a better understanding of what happened in the US some decades ago. I assume that Thompson influenced the opinion of many American rockers. Therefore, studying Thompson's text means exploring the perspective and the surviving heritage of the 1960s.

In conclusion, every era described in this thesis was somehow corrupted. As far as I can see, even if the time of Richard Nixon is represented as a dark period (and possibly the darkest), Thompson saw a specific style in it, not elegant or graceful, but recognizable enough. According to the studied texts, Nixon's attitude should have been far more distinguished than the ones of his successors in the Oval Office, including the Democratic presidents who could have appeared closer to Thompson's political philosophy. The post-Nixon era brought only a few bright moments, often only hopes, usually connected to the Democratic runners. Still, when Thompson looked back in time, he missed all the liberal action and energy of the 1960s that waned as years passed. Though, Thompson refused to give up the anarchistic approach in both his personal and professional life. He kept the spirit of counterculture in his articles until the end of his life, which is observable even in the collections of the *Gonzo Papers* used for this thesis. Although his articles carried a strong grotesque feeling and absurdity, the reader can find many worthy notes on the high politics of the US as well as commentaries on everyday life. These stories are presented by an extraordinarily sensitive man with a talent for insight, but also with a tremendous taste for drugs and crazy humour. As a result, we may read half-factual and

half-fictional stories depicting the US in the second half of the 20th century as a very strange place to live, indeed.

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