The Rhetoric and Role of Hunter S. Thompson

Daniel Jason Grubb

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

English

A. C. Colaianne
James Dubinsky
Paul Heilker

April 14, 2006
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Hunter Thompson, Hunter S. Thompson, Gonzo, New Journalism

Copyright 2006, Daniel Jason Grubb
The Rhetoric and Role of Hunter S. Thompson

Daniel Jason Grubb

ABSTRACT

An examination of Hunter S. Thompson's writing with the goal of defining gonzo journalism as a distinct entity from New Journalism. This is achieved via a rhetorical analysis of Thompson's writing, highlighting influences from literary figures such as Cervantes, Chaucer, Dos Passos, and Swift.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Literature Review
- Is It New? Is It Journalism? ............................................................. 2
- The Gonzo One: Pissed on and Praised ............................................. 4
- The Current Study ................................................................. 9
- A Note on the Texts ................................................................. 12

Thompson’s Approach: The American Dream, the Camera Eye, and Thou
- *Inventio* ................................................................................. 12
- The Preferred Assignment: The Hunt for the American Dream .......... 13
- No Wisdom, No Truth ............................................................. 18
- How to Gonzo, the H-S-T Way .................................................. 22

Thompson’s Voice: Writing Through Gonzo
- *Pronuntiatio* ............................................................................. 26
- The Unreliable Reporter ............................................................ 26
- Hunter Thompson Plays the Fool…Sometimes ............................... 30
- On the Subject of Subjectivity ..................................................... 32

The Thompson Structure: Writing Through Digressions
- *Dispositio* ................................................................................ 34
- Setting the Mood: Tone and Tangents ......................................... 37
- Wait, We Have a Campaign to Cover! ........................................... 46
- Back to Tone .............................................................................. 47
- Okay, Okay, Storyline! ............................................................... 48
- Atmosphere Revisited: The End of the Article ......................... 49
- But How Does It All Relate? ....................................................... 50
- Newsreels and Headlines: Reminders of the Day ...................... 51

The Style of Hunter Thompson: Punctuation, Percussiveness, and Pigfuckers
- *Elocutio* .................................................................................. 53
- Commas and Dashes, Ellipses and Fragments: A Broken Language .... 54
- Mugs and Further Nastiness: A Wicked Tongue, Even For a Fun Hog .... 57

Meta-Journalism: In the Wake of Gonzo
- Reporters Reporting on Reporters’ Reporting ............................ 61

Conclusion: He Was an Outlaw ....................................................... 64

Works Cited
- Primary Sources ......................................................................... 67
- Secondary Sources ..................................................................... 69