



Hunter S. Thompson: Fear, Loathing, and the Birth of Gonzo

By Kevin T. McEneaney



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A decade after Hunter S. Thompson's death, his books—including *Hell's Angels*, *The Curse of Lono*, *The Great Shark Hunt*, and *Rum Diary*—continue to sell thousands of copies each year, and previously unpublished manuscripts of his still surface for publication. While Thompson never claimed to be a great writer, he did invent a new literary style—"gonzo"—that has been widely influential on both literature and journalism. Though Thompson and his work engendered a significant—even rabid—following, relatively little analysis has been published about his writing.

In *Hunter S. Thompson: Fear, Loathing, and the Birth of Gonzo*, Kevin T. McEneaney examines the intellectual background of this American original, providing biographical details and placing Thompson within a larger social and historical context. A significant portion of this book is devoted to the creation, reception, and legacy of his most important works, particularly *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. In addition to discussing influences on Thompson's work—including Homer, Nietzsche, Spengler, Melville, Twain, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Kerouac, and others—as well as the writers Thompson influenced, McEneaney also explains the literary origins of gonzo.

With new biographical information about Thompson and an examination of his writing techniques, this book provides readers with a better understanding of the journalist and novelist. A look beyond the larger-than-life public persona, *Hunter S. Thompson: Fear, Loathing, and the Birth of Gonzo* will be of great interest to fans of Thompson's work as well as to those wanting to know more about gonzo journalism and literature.

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Editorial Review

Review

This literary study from McEneaney is a thorough if sometimes heavy-going examination of Hunter S. Thompson's place in American letters, with a focus on the 'gonzo' style he created. McEneaney spends much of the book on an extensive analysis of Thompson's autobiographical novel, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. He explores the author's complicated friendship with attorney Oscar Zeta Acosta, the inspiration for the sidekick character Dr. Gonzo, and theorizes that another character was intended as a parody of Joan Didion. McEneaney's argument that Thompson combined sincere love for country with a fractured perspective on the American dream is compelling. . . . This book will appeal to fans looking to know more about Thompson's place within literature. (*Publishers Weekly*)

In this book-length study of author and journalist Thompson, McEneaney emphasizes Thompson's literary influences and strategies, most notably the effect of Thompson's storied use of humor that 'twisted or warped' such 'literary templates . . . to create original commentary.' McEneaney mines Thompson's ample correspondence for biographical detail and social context applied toward a series of readings covering a range of forms including novels, nonfiction prose, essays, and short stories. This work may be of interest to scholars of New Journalism and US countercultural movements of the late twentieth century. (*American Literature*)

About the Author

Kevin T. McEneaney is a freelance writer and former adjunct professor. The cultural reporter for *The Millbrook Independent*, McEneaney is also the author of several books, including *Russell Banks: In Search of Freedom* (2010) and *Tom Wolfe's America: Heroes, Pranksters, and Fools* (2009), a *Choice* Outstanding Academic Title.

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