CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>
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Volume 10 Issue 1 (March 2008) Article 5
Shimberlee Jirón-King,
"Thompson's and Acosta's Collaborative Creation of the Gonzo Narrative Style" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol10/iss1/5>

Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 10.1 (2008)
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol10/iss1/>

Abstract: In her article "Thompson's and Acosta's Collaborative Creation of the Gonzo Narrative Style," Shimberlee Jirón-King presents an analysis of Hunter S. Thompson's and Oscar Zeta Acosta's works and a correction about the origins of Gonzo Journalism. Jirón-King suggests that Thompson's and Acosta's writings express the authors' disillusionment about the loss of the American Dream and that their texts suggest the revolutionary movements they hoped for would transform a disintegrating culture have only fallen prey to the shortsightedness of US-American culture. The counter culture they observe simply develops its own forms of racism, classism, power-mongering, and corruption that re-inscribe hegemonic discourses rather than creating new social forms and values. In Jirón-King's view Thompson and Acosta examine this world and come to the conclusion that no substantive changes can be made, that tyranny always reasserts itself even when the players have changed. For Thompson, the Democratic Convention of 1968 demonstrates the futility of his efforts; for Acosta, the Chicano Moratorium of 1970 leads him to the (fictionalized) bombing of the judge's chambers. These texts thus become acts of rebellion, the effort to at least articulate their dismay at the failure of the American Dream and their efforts at the restoration of a society they believe in.

Shimberlee JIRÓN-KING

Thompson's and Acosta's Collaborative Creation of the Gonzo Narrative Style

Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1972) and *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1973) offered a radicalized method of reporting that infused "the facts" with a fictional narrative in order to create a more readable and provocative text. Scholars such as James Smethurst and A. Robert Lee have emphasized Acosta's *Chicanismo* identity, tracing it to the idea of the *pachuco* of the 1940s and 1950s and the *vato loco* of the 1970s while Michael Hames García has more recently emphasized the significance of the Gonzo narrative as it relates to the *testimonio*. It is no surprise to find that many scholars identify Acosta's style with Hunter S. Thompson's "Gonzo Journalism" or to read that the Gonzo identity is borrowed from Thompson (for example, Peter Tamony traces its development of the term from Thompson's usage and the various applications of the term that become culturally significant in representations of rebellious, drug-using, journalistic figures; it is interesting that Tamony also makes the connection between Acosta and Thompson and suggests that Acosta may have had some part in coining the term). In this paper, I demonstrate that the Gonzo style of writing was more of a synthesis of mutual influence as both authors were attempting to share the spirit of protest and social revolution during the era. Scholars and critics have compared Thompson's Gonzo to other New Journalisms such as Norman Mailer's experimental fiction and John Hellman for instance defines the Gonzo as having a "unique epistemological and ontological status" that is a "comic, hyperbolic construct of disordered consciousness" (17). It seems true that Thompson's groundbreaking writings such as *Fear and Loathing* were a powerful influence upon Acosta's authorship while at the same time it must be noted that it was Acosta's deep, blood-and-guts street-level activism seems to have been just as influential on Thompson and his writing. It was Acosta who called upon Thompson when the *Los Angeles Times* activist-reporter Ruben Salazar was slain and the traditional media was incapable of investigating the cover-up. While Acosta was busy in his entanglements in the law, Thompson became busy with representing the outrage that soon preoccupied them both and wrote "Strange Rumblings in Aztlan," publishing it in the 29 April 1971 issue of *Rolling Stone*.

It would be unfair, as Acosta points out in his response to the *Playboy* Forum to call Thompson the sole creator of the Gonzo style. They often found themselves crusading together but Acosta maintained his independence as a writer and intellectual -- and it is well known that he was already engaged in the defense of the "Biltmore Six" and several other important activist cases when he invited Thompson to come and write about what was happening in the Chicano world. In "Strange Rumblings in Atzlan," Thompson writes in a narrative that has become Gonzo Journalism: "The … Murder … and Resurrection of Ruben Salazar by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department … Savage Polarization & the Making of a Martyr … Bad News for the Mexican American … Worse News for the Pig … and Now the New Chicano … Riding a Grim New Wave … The Rise of the Batos Locos … Brown Power and a Fistful of Reds … Rude Politics in the Barrio … Which Side Are You On … Brother? … There Is No More Middleground … No Place to Hide on Whittier Boulevard …No Refuge from the Helicopters … No Hope in the Courts … No Peace with the Man … No Leverage Anywhere … and No Light at the End of This Tunnel … Nada" (120). Like Thompson's, Acosta's Gonzo figure presents a controversial narrative style that incorporated stream-of-consciousness, satire, explicit language, and a scathing level of cultural critique. Some scholars have argued that Acosta's mobilization of the Gonzo narrative in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* and *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* are works of influence; however, to leave it at that would be to create an Acosta that is derivative, marginalizing the significance of his legal discourse and his literary production. One should not take lightly Acosta's agency as a writer and an active participant in the creation of the Gonzo style, for doing so would undervalue the significance of socially symbolic act(s) that transcend the text(s) and

make legal and cultural history. That Thompson's and Acosta's works have much in common is no surprise but it is illuminating to find in his 1973 letter to *Playboy* that Acosta clarifies a misunderstanding regarding the inventor of Gonzo Journalism. He writes, "Your November issue, 'On the Scene' section on Mr. Hunter S. Thompson as the creator of Gonzo Journalism, which you say he both created and named … Well, Sir, I beg to take issue with you. And with anyone else who says that. In point of fact, Doctor Duke and I -- the world famous Doctor Gonzo -- together we both, hand in hand, sought out the teachings and curative powers of the world famous Savage Henry … and in point of fact the term *and* methodology of reporting crucial events under fire and drugs, which are of course essential to any good writing in this age of confusion -- all this I say came from the out of the mouth of our teacher who is also known by the name of Owl" (*Oscar* "*Zeta*" *Acosta* 109). Acosta's correction to *Playboy* is gracious in its tone and as he allows for the error, he reassures them "These matters I point out not as a threat of legalities … but simply to inform you and to invite serious discussion on the subject" (*Oscar* "*Zeta*" *Acosta* 109). He seeks no compensation or any kind of financial gain from *Playboy*; he simply wants the editors to recognize the truth to give credit where it is due. Thompson's mainstream identity and dominant-culture appeal makes it almost unavoidable that Acosta's role in the invention of the Gonzo style would be overlooked, or at the very least, considered secondary. However, Acosta maintains his sense of humor and emphasizes the authenticity of his Gonzo persona as he adds, "P.S. The guacamole and XX he got from me" (*Oscar* "*Zeta*" *Acosta* 109).

It is well-known that Thompson's 1971 debut of Gonzo Journalism with *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* featured Acosta as his drug-taking Samoan (read ethnic) lawyer. Thompson's work is followed shortly by Acosta's, both of which are reluctantly received in the Latina/o and Chicana/o community. Hames-García notes that "many critics have emphasized essentialist notions of authenticity, interpreting Acosta's writing as ethnic autobiographical self-revelation; others have stressed his works' ethical and moral indeterminacy. Both have [misunderstood] Acosta's critical project" (463). Acosta loses credibility in many circles because he refuses to conform to the ideals of El Movimiento as his brash, crude approach is exacerbated by his glorification of the drug culture, his uncritical representation of sexism and homophobia, and his endless contradictions. Yet, it is this very refusal to submit to any hegemonic form that makes it possible for the text to retain its social significance over time and to create a discourse that is consistently novel in its re-presentation of history. Acosta refuses, like Thompson, to negotiate his position; he refuses to submit to any authority. He refuses to reflect the hypocrisy which he and Thompson are committed to expose, thus the crudeness and the vulgarity of his own life are descriptively displayed. In other words, none of the deformities are edited out. Thompson's greatest fear is that in his success as a journalist he would somehow become homogenized or become some sick reflection of Nixonesque corruption and its puritanical abuse of power; Acosta's fear is that he would succumb as a tool of the state which he loathes. In Althusserian terms, he refuses interpellation by both the dominant culture and the counter-culture -- he opposes both the ideological and repressive state apparatus. Therefore, while it is true that much of Acosta's as well as Thompson's vulgarity and drug-loving overshadow and sometimes confuse the issue, the vulgarity of their actual lives is purposefully included so as not to become images of the hypocrisy and the corruption all around them. This is where the Gonzo succeeds in exposing the hypocrisy of the dominant culture. The warrant informing their work categorizes political and social corruption, bankrupt systems of government, as a much weightier moral crime than the escapades and the vulgarities that they are so willing to divulge. Ultimately, the texts produced by Thompson and Acosta function syncretically to expose and even resist corruption endemic in the US-American system. Acosta only provisionally accepts interpellation from the counter-culture of the Chicano movement. His strategic (re)positioning reflects an understanding that hegemony is built upon social negotiation and the ability of the dominant culture to absorb or otherwise silence resistant discourses. Antonio Gramsci's theorization of

hegemony becomes useful here if we are to understand that all social movements are hegemonic in some manner, and that some form of social control is always present. Acosta's provisional acceptance and resistance to social control even from within the counter-culture reflects his self-conscious conceptualization of hegemonic forms.

Thompson establishes his Gonzo figure and the development of New Journalism with his visceral reaction to the annihilation of the American Dream. We see how he figures the madness of the socio-political landscape in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and its follow-up, *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72* as he lays out his agenda in the beginning. He opens with his contemplation of how he will embark upon this journey from California with his Samoan lawyer, Doctor Gonzo, (also known as Acosta, Oscar, Buffalo Zeta Brown, "The Brown Buffalo") with whom he shares his mad determination to maintain his independence: "'You Samoans are all the same,' I told him. 'You have no faith in the essential decency of the white man's culture … I tell you, my man, this is the American Dream in action! We'd be fools not to ride this strange torpedo all the way out to the end'" (11). But it is not long before Thompson's optimism for the American Dream turns to disdain for what has gone wrong in the world and the question of how he will narrate the events that are about to transpire: "But what was the story? Nobody had bothered to say. So we would have to drum up our own. Free Enterprise. The American Dream. Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas. Do it now: Pure Gonzo Journalism" (12). Both Thompson and Acosta emerge from a generation committed to the ethos of dissent rather than consent, one that insists upon the rights of the individual, the freedom of movement and expression, and the social significance of the independent thinker. Thompson's version of the Gonzo is a man of action, and anything that gets in the way of his freedom is an affront to his identity as an American citizen and a threat to culture as a whole. In his follow-up, *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*, it becomes clear that Thompson's disenchantment with the American Dream is complete as Washington has come to symbolize the corruption that has destroyed that dream. Everything has gone awry -- freedom of the press and political expression are suppressed in a labyrinth of bureaucracy that will never be disentangled: "After three months in Washington, I felt like I'd spent three years in a mineshaft underneath Butte, Montana. My relations with the White House were extremely negative from the start; my application for press credentials was rejected out of hand. I would not be needing them, they said. Because *Rolling Stone* is a 'music magazine' and there is not much music in the White House these days … and where the hell did I get the gall to apply for 'press' status at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions this summer?" (*Campaign Trail* 85). It is therefore no surprise when Thompson finds himself enchanted when he finds individuals like himself, who still cling to the American Dream, the ideals of freedom, and who insist upon maintaining an independent spirit. It explains Thompson's fascination with rebels like his Chicano/Samoan lawyer, who refuse convention of any kind -- perhaps because of his already complicated cultural position. It also explains Thompson's curiosity when the cultural rebel is so cynically oppressed by those whose duty it is to protect him, when he is subjected to violence, or worse, compelled to complicity and helplessness by the social and political demands of the dominant culture. For instance, in February of the 1972 Campaign, Thompson writes of the success of Shirley Chisholm's surprising second-place finish at the Massachusetts Caucus. According to Thompson, "there was no mention in the press or anywhere else that some unknown black woman from Brooklyn might seriously challenge these famous liberal heavies on their own turf … Ron Dellums, the black Congressman from Berkeley, called it 'the Nigger vote.' But he wasn't talking about skin pigment. 'It's time for somebody to lead all of America's niggers,' he said at the Capitol Hill press conference when Shirley Chisholm announced she was running for President. 'And by this I mean the Young, the Black, the Brown, the Women, the Poor -- all the people who feel left out of the political process. If we can put the Nigger Vote together, we can bring about some real change in this country'" (58).

Both Thompson and Acosta are bound a common motivation and spirit, which is the reflection and critique of society and its manifold corruptions, but it is more than this--both authors aim to expose

the roots of governmental degradation. Thompson does it through his fascination with politics and his rogue ethos, which had to be strategically calibrated to coexist with the upper-class white political world that he navigated. Besides the appropriate travel passes, Thompson was hamstrung as he was consistently denied the most essential press credentials. Yet, he managed to get close to paranoid candidates like Richard Nixon and top aides carefully instructed to keep the press away. He impressed McGovern and rode in Nixon's car during the 1968 campaign because the candidate was looking for a true NFL fan with whom to discuss football while driving to the airport. And yet he was always fueled by the Gonzo style of reporting which he and Acosta had invented -- the process of investigating crucial events under fire and drugs. Despite Thompson's fascination for this world, he is never seduced and his writing is remains dedicated to exposing the deep-seated problems created by poorly thought-out policies like the drug prohibition laws championed by Nixon. While on the '72 campaign trail, he interweaves tender and complicated social commentary into his coverage. For instance, in regard to burgeoning governmental policies on drug prohibition, Thompson cannot help but discuss the irony regarding the 1972 Superbowl in which the most valuable player award was earned by an African-American running-back, Duane Thomas: "That is one aspect of the '72 Super Bowl that nobody has properly dealt with: What was it like for those humorless, god fearing Alger-bent Jesus freaks to go out on that field in front of 100,000 people in New Orleans and get beaten like gongs by the only certified dope freak in the NFL? Thomas ran through the Dolphins like a mule through corn-stalks. It was a fine thing to see; and it was no real surprise when the Texas cops busted him, two weeks later, for Possession of Marijuana … and the Dallas coach said Yes, he'd just as soon trade Duane Thomas for almost anybody … the Commissioner is outraged at this mockery of all those Government-sponsored 'Beware of Dope' TV shots that dressed up the screen last autumn … We all enjoyed those spots, but not everyone found them convincing. Here was a White House directive saying several million dollars would be spent to drill dozens of Name Players to stare at the camera and try to stop grinding their teeth long enough to say they hate drugs of any kind … and then the best running back in the world turns out to be a goddamn uncontrollable drugsucker" (74-75).

Thompson's hope throughout the 1960s and early 1970s is that the US can be salvaged through the intervention of "that huge and confused coalition of students, freaks, blacks, anti-war activists and dazed dropouts" (*Campaign Trail* 20) -- what Acosta soon calls the "cockroach people." Thompson's admiration for Acosta is clear as he writes in "The Banshee Screams for Buffalo Meat," that "Like most lawyers with an IQ higher than sixty, Oscar learned one definition of Justice in Law school, and a very different one in the courtroom," and wonders whether the disappearance of his friend has been the result of his own mad rampage or an insidious but not unfamiliar or unlikely act of foul play" (506). It is clear in Thompson's memorial that he considers it a real possibility that Acosta did not simply disappear into the deep blue ocean one day in late 1974. Thompson writes, "One of the great regrets of my life is that I was never able to introduce you to my old football buddy, Richard Nixon. The main thing he feared in this life -- even worse than Queers and Jews and Mutants -- was people who might run amok; he called them 'loose cannons on the deck,' and he wanted them all put to sleep. That's one graveyard we never even checked, Oscar, but why not? If your classic 'doomed nigger' style of paranoia had any validity at all, you must understand that it was not just Richard Nixon who was out to get you -- but all the people who thought like Nixon and all the judges and U.S. attorney he appointed in those weird years. Were there any of Nixon's friend among all those Superior Court judges you subpoenaed and mocked and humiliated when you were trying to bust the grand jury selection system in L.A.? How many of those brown Beret 'bodyguards' you called 'brothers' were deep-cover cops or informants? I recall being seriously worried about that when we were working on that story about the killing of Chicano journalist Ruben Salazar by an L.A. County sheriff's deputy" ("Strange Rumblings in Atzlan").

The inter-textual relationship between *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* becomes even more obvious when one recognizes Thompson in Dr. E.R.

Bloomquist's discussion of the "cockroach theory." Bloomquist categorizes "'four states of being' in the cannabis society: 'Cool, Groovy, Hip & Square'" where only the "cool" and the "groovy" can bring themselves to approve of the use of cannabis (*The Revolt of the Cockroach People* 138-39). Thus, it follows that Acosta's "cockroach people" are among the cool and the groovy, those who are rebellious enough to transgress cultural imperatives or who are so outside of mainstream society that the assertion of their identity and their claim for justice is transgressive in itself. In *Cockroach People* the cockroaches demand justice of the dominant culture and are arrested for conspiracy against the state, but it is their very status as "cockroaches" that make such demands illegal in the dominant culture. In his essay "Reason of the Other: 'Interpellation' as Speech-Act," Enrique Dussel describes demanding or appealing for justice in Latin-American liberation philosophy. Instead of appealing to the masses to revolt, the subaltern speaker, in this case Oscar Zeta Brown, publicly articulates his or her suffering and appeals to the dominant culture (or members of the dominant culture with the potential to listen to the speaker) on an ethical plane, seeking inter-cultural discourse and the possibility that a dialogue for justice may be opened (26). This is precisely the project articulated in *Cockroach People* where Acosta expresses both a legal and literary discourse exposing the injustices that he and Thompson witness and write about as they become entangled in the political upheaval with regard to legal scholar Ian F. Haney-López's study of institutional racism in Los Angeles: the study historicizes Acosta's project in its context that "the numerical evidence of discrimination, which shows that while Mexican Americans accounted for one of every seven persons in Los Angeles County during the 1960's, they accounted for one of every fifty-eight Los Angeles County grand jurors" (1728). Thompson's narrative, "Strange Rumblings in Aztlan" confirms Haney-López's study and underlines the significance of the act to the Chicano community: Oscar's contention, throughout, was that all Grand Juries are racist, since all grand jurors have to be recommended by Superior Court Judges -- who tend naturally to recommend people they know personally or professionally. And that therefore no ratbastard Chicano street crazy, for instance, could possibly be indicted by a "jury of his peers." The implications of a victory in this case were so obvious, so clearly menacing to the court system that interest in the verdict had filtered all the way down to places like the Boulevard, the Silver Dollar, and the Sweetheart (*Great Shark Hunt* 124-25). Acosta's assertion of racism in the legal system seems to have stood the test of time. According to Haney-López's study, 1990's statistics show that superior court judges' exclusion of Latina/os from grand juries stood at a six-to-one ratio "that rivals the eight-to-one exclusion of Mexican-Americans in the 1960's" (1728). Acosta's courtroom antics of the 1960s are often not taken seriously, but they turn out to reflect a long-lasting problematic and systematic form of institutionalized racism. Similarly, Thompson's Bloomquist anecdote demonstrates how legal and legislative discourses permanently marginalize a counter-cultural/minority identities, represented by "the cockroach theory." Thus, the "cockroach attorney," Oscar Zeta Brown, disrupts the courtroom and interpellates the judge, the jury, the District Attorney, and the press with persistent demands for justice. Perhaps, for both Thompson and Acosta, it is left to the cockroaches to survive, to resuscitate the American Dream from what has clearly become something much worse than just a bad trip.

Thompson's 1970 article, "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved," is one of the first important examples of the Gonzo style in its fullest bloom. Thompson's assignment, centered ostensibly upon a neutral sporting event, is saturated with the political unconscious. The historical context of the Derby -- a decadent, depraved context -- includes the Black Panther rioters at Yale in confrontation with the National Guard, the ominous spread of the Vietnam war into Cambodia, and the violence at Kent State. These violent moments unmask the ruptures in U.S. culture and inform the strange representation that Thompson offers of the Derby: while the insensible elite enjoy a horse race, Thompson sees the deformity of US-American culture and exposes the brutality of the cheering crowd as they admire pedigreed horses and ignore what has become a nightmare. While the rich gamble and get richer, the masses live like animals or worse. The Gonzo style thus becomes Thompson's rejection of the current hegemonic form -- it becomes what Fredric Jameson termed a

socially symbolic act as he self-consciously does violence to an innocuous sporting event just as its willfully ignorant onlookers have done violence to the US-American Dream. Thompson's aesthetic for Gonzo Journalism rejects conventional reporting and its orderly style as he sees a national culture in crisis. Gonzo Journalism, instead, zeroes in on the social periphery where the standards of culture and order have so unmistakably deteriorated that the normative narrative underwriting traditional journalism and its putative objectivity has become unsustainable. Thompson seeks out incongruities and creates a disruptive discourse as a form of literary/journalistic intervention. The text itself becomes an act of protest; the Gonzo narrator becomes a protestor-participant as he calls attention to the crisis of conventionality and the inability of the normative narrative to account for the continuous fissures in the social and economic domain. War, riots, political scandal, the increasing suppression of information -- and the demise of critical consciousness. Gonzo writing is akin to setting oneself on fire in a crowded square. Instead of delivering a disinterested account of events, Thompson selects his details and unapologetically creates a "spin," insisting upon the importance of authorial insight, favoring interpretation, intuition, and a cinematographic ideal that emphasizes a narrative of disruption.

Digression in Gonzo reporting go beyond what the eye can see. It is not unusual for the inner eye -- and perhaps the psychedelic eye -- to present a vision that is skewed in realistic terms but surprisingly accurate in other ways. The intuitive perception gains precedence and speculation becomes more credible than mere facts on the grounds that surface appearances in this corrupt and deteriorating American Dream run amok can no longer be the basis of truthful reporting. Journalism scholar Michael E. Staub emphasizes the significance of New Journalism and Thompson's Gonzo reporting as "an alternative to … more standard media renderings of social reality, promising to deliver a 'more real' reality, the truer story of the many social crises splitting American society" (54). This new narrative form bears a close resemblance to *lo real maravilloso*, a genre described by Alejo Carpentier and often mobilized in third-world context in which the real conditions of existence have become so violent and the standards of justice so perverted that the only reasonable response become unreasonable -- and perhaps, (un)real. The political unconscious of the scenes represented are thus rendered tangible through the associative thinking and digressive commentary because the center-periphery dialectic has become so frayed that the dominant culture now suffers tremors that were once only experienced on the margins. In this Gonzoed world, crazy Samoan lawyers like Acosta, longhairs, hippies, blacks, druggies, and the disenfranchised suddenly gain purchase because it is they who best understand the disruptive forces in-play, and it is they who have the cognitive map with which to demand justice for the exploitation and corruption perpetrated for the rich and powerful. Thompson's digressions are not the only linguistic extreme to which he exposes his reader. He bypasses the subtle nuances of understatement and critical allusions in favor of overstating the facts and exaggerating the monstrous and the bizarre, which underscores the use/abuse of drugs and alcohol. At the opening of *Fear and Loathing*, Thompson begins his trip to and through Las Vegas with Acosta and takes a very clear-headed approach to his own hallucination: "And suddenly there was a terrible roar all around us and the sky was full of what looked like huge bats, all swooping and screeching and diving around the car, which was going about a hundred miles an hour with the top down to Las Vegas…then it was quiet again … no point in mentioning those bats, I thought. The poor bastard will see them soon enough" (3). The Gonzo's drug-induced exaggeration becomes mimetic for the state of the world; the world surrounding him is out of control, but he sees it for what it is and responds as calmly as can be expected. Acosta, on the other hand, takes the drugged-out representation of Americana and makes a more direct commentary, offering no romanticization of the 60's, allowing no accommodation for the commodified version of youth culture in his rejection of Kerouac's and Ginsberg's hyper-aestheticized representation of the counter-culture: "I speak as a historian, a recorder of events with a sour stomach. I have no love for memories of the past. Ginsberg and those coffee houses with hungry-looking guitar players never did mean shit to me. They never

took their drinking seriously. And the fact of the matter is that they got what was coming to them. It's their tough luck if they ran out and got on the road with Kerouac, then came back a few years later with their hair longer and fucking marijuana up their asses, shouting Love and Peace and Pot. And still broke as ever" (*The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* 18). For Acosta, Ginsberg and Kerouac do nothing for the battered women sitting in his office at the Legal Aid Society nor the massive body of disenfranchised people who know how it feels to be in the street -- rather than on the road. The Gonzo reporter does not accommodate distortion for his reader; rather, he reframes it, relying upon juxtaposition and irony to create a jarring sense of sobriety in his audience. He seeks not a chemical sobriety, but a meta-cognitive rejection of the social opiates offered by hegemonic discourse. *Fear and Loathing* -- whether in Las Vegas or On the Campaign Trail -- makes use of the unexpected metaphor in order to exploit disjunction and shock the reader into the recognition of his or her own narcotic slumber. It is not that things are going badly or that particular individuals are to blame, it is that corruption saturates the entire governmental apparatus, and no conventional remedy will improve the situation. The latest craze on the local high-life front is mixing up six or eight aspirins in a fresh Coca-Cola and doing it all at once. Far more government people are into this stuff than will ever admit to it. What seems like mass paranoia in Washington is really just a sprawling, hyper-tense boredom-- and the people who actually live and thrive here in the great web of Government are the first ones to tell you, on the basis of long experience, that the name or even the Party Affiliation of the next President won't make any difference at all, except on the surface. The leaves change, they say, but the roots stay the same. So just lie back and live with it. To crank up a noisy bad stance out in a place like San Francisco and start yelling about "getting things done in Washington" is like sitting far back in the end zone seats at the Super Bowl and screaming at the Miami linebackers, "Stop Duane Thomas!" (*Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72* 73-74).

The power behind the Gonzo is not in his exactitude or journalistic accuracy, but in his brash, feckless truth-telling. The Gonzo will say what needs to be said; he will say what others are thinking but are afraid to say. What is more, the Gonzo will say what others are afraid to think. Thus, Gonzo (non)fiction re-invokes the US-American Dream, shocking the somnambulant public with an antagonistic narrative in the effort to resist complicity. Acosta's texts are characteristically a mixture of Gonzo Journalism, fictionalized reporting, and self-revelation in which the author/speaker is the protagonist. Most critics make the distinction in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* between Acosta the author and Oscar, the character-speaker in the text. Certainly in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* there is some confusion because of its claims of genre, and the affinity between author and speaker is significant, but the Gonzo style complicates the issue further because of its irreverent disposition towards convention -- literary or otherwise. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I will refer to the narrator-speaker of *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* as Oscar, while Acosta will be how I refer to the author of the texts involved. Acosta defines his style as "the reporting of crucial events under fire and drugs," which is the only way he sees it as possible to make sense of the chaos and injustice that surround him (109). Oscar, at the opening of *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, is figured as a psychologically vexed, chemically dependent legal aid attorney suffering more from his sexual dysfunctions than with concerns with his clients' problems. Oscar suffers from severe ulcers, and is frequently pictured spitting up blood. He seems to be at the end of his rope from the outset. Oscar follows the opening chapter with a series of narrative digressions and flashbacks that inform the reader that he, like Thompson, has sought the American Dream and found it missing from the American Landscape. Thompson's 1989 introduction and encomium describes Acosta as "a profoundly angry Chicano lawyer with no fear of anything that walks on less than three legs and a *de facto* suicidal conviction that he will die at the age of thirty-three" (6). Oscar's escapades in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* take us through his disorienting experience as a Texas Mexican transplant to Modesto/Riverbank, California, where his identity is immediately in conflict because he does not fit the categories: "Riverbank is divided into three parts, and in my corner of the world there

were only three kinds of people: Mexicans, Okies and Americans. Catholics, Holy Rollers and Protestants. Peach pickers, cannery workers, and clerks" (78). Oscar and his brother find that they must fight everyone in their new corner of the world because according to their peers they were not "real Mexicans" because they did not speak English and they wore short pants. However, they certainly would not fit in with the "Oakies" because they were Mexicans (78). In the end, his brother beats up Jimmy Pacheco so that even though they are never accepted, they are at least left alone. In this chaotic world of Northern California, Oscar eventually becomes captain of the football team, joins the high school band, and attends Modesto Junior College where he is told that he should never write. Later, he joins the military, rejects Catholicism, and becomes a Baptist missionary -- but in the end he rejects religion altogether and tries to write the great American novel instead. After being on the road, Kerouac-style, he returns home to find that his brother beat him home from serving in the Coast Guard and has taken most of the money in their account to pay for law school, but Oscar is not too angry because he has been left twenty-seven dollars and he comments philosophically: "I could see the poetic justice in his stealing the money to go to law school. Besides, now that the war was over, it was time that the Acostas showed their true potential" (144). Oscar then decides to reject the advice given to him by his college advisor and pragmatically decides to be a lawyer, but "Not to practice law. But just to get a job so [he] could write [his] life history without having to put up with scags who thought only they knew what literature was all about" (155). We find in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* a dialectical tension between order and chaos. When Oscar finds himself in ordinary situations, the speaker more readily invokes the Gonzo style. *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* is generally located in more ordinary circumstances on the US-American landscape, so Oscar's Gonzo figure underlines the cultural contradictions that he experiences as a perpetual outsider in his community. On the other hand, the circumstances and events that Oscar witnesses and experiences in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* are more politically charged and certainly comparable to the absurdities Thompson describes in *On the Campaign Trail*. The need to push the Gonzo-style dissipates as Oscar simply describes the realities of the situation.

In *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, Oscar transforms his identity; he becomes Buffalo Zeta Brown, radical Chicano lawyer. He has lost weight and abandoned the Legal Aid Society in order to write about the Chicano Movement taking hold in Los Angeles, becomes enmeshed in the Chicano Protests of the Los Angeles School System, and finds himself defending those arrested on conspiracy charges. As the narrative progresses, Zeta Brown's involvement in the Movement grows, and he leads an investigation into the death of a young man who dies in police custody. He also takes up the defense of twenty-one people protesting outside a Catholic Church that will not open its doors to Chicanos on Christmas, as well as the defense of Corky Gonzales, a Chicano activist from Denver. Zeta Brown's behavior in the courtroom drives the judge -- *el juez* -- to wit's end, and it is not uncommon to find Brown in jail for contempt. He responds that his courtroom conduct is outrageous only because the conduct of the Court is outrageous. These events are not unlike those of Thompson's Kentucky Derby or those represented in *On the Campaign Trail*. The difference is that Thompson's narrative grows out of a drug-induced consciousness while Acosta's Gonzo-ing does not depend upon drug consumption to render the events outrageous or surreal. Instead, the narrative of *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* becomes more linear and the structure grows more traditional while the discourse itself becomes more and more radical in its critique of hegemony. However, Acosta is not only critical of the dominant culture and its racism towards those he calls "cockroaches," but he is also considerably satirical when it comes to Chicano nationalist naïveté in its assumptions about ethnic authenticity. Acosta-Oscar-Buffalo Zeta Brown knows full well from his experiences in Riverbank/Modesto what happens when identities are essentialized and people insist upon simplistic definitions of who does or does not belong. Thus, he finds that his earlier proclamation holds true: "My single mistake has been to seek an identity with any one person or nation or with any part of history … I am neither a Mexican or an American. I am neither Catholic nor a Protestant. I am Chicano by

ancestry and Brown Buffalo by choice" (*The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* 99). It is this self-recognition as being outside of any reified identity that makes it possible for him to grasp the constant friction between Chicano nationalism and the dominant culture -- what Gloria Anzaldúa came to define as an identity that comes from the borderland. His position therefore makes it possible to be antagonistic towards the dominant culture while simultaneously skeptical of Chicano nationalism. Zeta Brown, even in his identity as a rogue lawyer, rejects the idea that he might become wholly affiliated with a community that suffers its own inflexibilities and lacks tolerance for difference as well. In the end, Zeta Brown calls himself a "revolutionary lawyer," and wholly rejects the court as a possible place of justice. Acosta writes that in real life he never charges for his legal work, and he never considers his future as an attorney at all. Instead, he subpoenas all 109 Superior Court judges in Los Angeles and examines them under oath about their racism. He writes, "When I got here I decided that if I was going to become anything legal I couldn't use the profession as it was. Lawyers are basically peddlers of the flesh. They live off of other people's misery. Well, I couldn't do that. I made a decision that I would never charge a client a penny. As a matter of fact, I end up supporting some of my clients. I end up begging, borrowing, and stealing. Sometimes I get a grant from some foundation like Ford" (*The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* 14). At the end of *Cockroach People,* Oscar resumes the Gonzo role, becomes wholly contemptuous of all rules, and bombs the judge's chambers, flees Los Angeles and abandons the bar. This becomes the ultimate break with conventional law as well as his rejection of the Chicano movement as having any real libratory potential at all.

Oscar's rejection of the judiciary system and his abandonment of El Movimiento can be understood as his disenchantment with the social revolution of the 1960s as Acosta describes as coming apart at the seams in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. The Gonzo offers an account of absurdity and injustice that ends in recognition that despite all of the uproar of social protest, resistance, grassroots movements, and chaos, and what Thompson had articulated in *The Campaign Trail*. Thompson's and Acosta's texts conclude that the 1960s failed to restore the US-American Dream and suggest that the revolutionary movements they hoped would transform a disintegrating culture have only fallen prey to the shortsightedness of US-American culture. The counter culture they criticize simply develops its own forms of racism, classism, power-mongering, and corruption that re-inscribe hegemonic discourses rather than creating new social forms and values. Each writer examines his world and sees that no substantive changes can be made, that tyranny always reasserts itself even when the players have changed. For Thompson, the Democratic Convention of 1968 demonstrates the futility of his efforts; for Acosta, the Chicano Moratorium of 1970 leads him to the (fictionalized) bombing of the judge's chambers. Thompson's and Acosta'a texts thus become acts of rebellion, the effort to at least articulate their dismay at the failure of the US-American Dream and their efforts at restoration of a better society.

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