ENGL 4188
Major Author: Hunter S. Thompson

Texts:
Thompson, Hunter. *Better than Sex.* 0345396359, Ballantine.
—. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.* 0679785892, Vintage.
—. *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail, ’72.* 0446698229, Grand Central Publishing.
—. *The Great Shark Hunt.* 0446314404, Warner.
—. *Hell’s Angels.* 067960331X, Modern Library.
—. *Kingdom of Fear.* 0684873249, Simon and Schuster.
—. *Rum Diary.* 0684856476, Simon and Schuster/Scribners.

In addition to this material, you will be required to watch:


I will schedule viewings of my own copies of these films, we will be discussing them in class, and you are responsible for having watched them carefully enough to be able to find useful analyses of them for tests and papers.

You will also be reading critical material as it becomes clear we need it to frame or complicate our reading of the primary materials. In addition, I will be linking to letters, artwork and other materials through the online syllabus from my website, and through CourseDen. These are all required viewing/reading and are available to you for use in your assignments.

• DO NOT buy other editions of this material.
• DO NOT share books.
• DO NOT use online texts.
• If you have having trouble buying your books, speak to me privately, IMMEDIATELY.

Course Description:
We’ll be getting familiar with the works of Hunter S. Thompson, one of the original New Journalists and the instigator supreme of Gonzo journalism. As such he’s a forefather of creative nonfiction, the fourth genre. We will read his major monographs as well as many of his essays published in magazines and newspapers during the sixties and into the nineties and aughts. We
will also watch films made of screenplays he helped adapt from his life and his work, and in addition to seeing the newest documentary one HST, will read two very different biographies of his life. In the end, I hope you will get a sense of why, during the sixties and seventies HST could write as he did—why that was his cultural moment—of how he influenced and was influenced by the major cultural and political events of his day, and of how his work still makes a difference.

Course Goals as Defined by the Department:

- Students will become familiar with the career of a major figure in literature.
- Students will understand how that writer’s work both embodies the literary tradition that precedes it and influences the literature that follows it.
- Students will appreciate the ways in which a writer’s career and reputation are influenced by social, political, historical, and cultural forces.
- Students will gain an enhanced knowledge of how criticism shapes literary history.
- Students will demonstrate in both oral and written work a discipline-specific critical facility through convincing and well-supported analysis of related material.
- Students will demonstrate their command of academic English and the tenets of sound composition by means of thesis-driven analytical prose.
- Students will learn to use discipline-specific computer technologies related to the study of language such as listservs, word processing, and internet research.

Assignments and Grades

All written work produced outside class must be typed, double-spaced, in 12 point TNR font. I thank you and my old eyes thank you, too.

Class participation: Based on attendance and tardiness, preparation, willingness to talk, general attitude about the class and the work. I give attendance quizzes occasionally; these points are added to your gross daily grade points. I may also give reading quizzes if you seem to need it. Any reading quizzes will be averaged together and then averaged in with your daily grade.

Questions assignment: Each Tuesday, you have a FIVE QUESTIONS due. They must

1. Be designed for discussion: that is
   a. they must be connected directly to the text to be discussed that week;
   b. they must not be readily answerable by reference to the text (as in not “Where is Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas set?” but “Why Las Vegas?”);
   c. they must be controversial—that is, they must be questions open to debate.

   Each will be graded by check-mark only (check plus, check, or check minus). A check is 100 points for full credit. Check pluses are reserved for responses that are so superlative they make me cry with joy, so don’t expect them. A check minus is 50 points: better than a zero, but you aren’t engaging well.

Background assignment: On the day BEFORE we begin discussing each reading unit (they’re clear from the schedule), you will turn in a list of at least ten and at most
twenty questions about background information you believe would help you understand or interpret Thompson’s work. This means that each text needs to be finished at least one class period plus one day before we talk about it.

If we end up delayed (going off the schedule on the syllabus), remember: the day before we begin discussing the next reading you have one of these due.

Provide this as a list. These questions might include anything from the cost of a case of beer (adjusted for inflation) to what happened to George Wallace?

These should be questions that can be answered with information but are not already answered in the text itself. The answers may not be available anywhere, but you should be able to envision a clear, non-debatable answer.

Each will be graded by check-mark only (check plus, check, or check minus). A check is 100 points for full credit. Check pluses are reserved for responses that are so superlative they make me cry with joy, so don’t expect them. A check minus is 50 points: better than a zero, but you aren’t engaging well.

Material Culture assignment: Once during the semester, you will bring into class an object that enhances our understanding of the work/culture of Hunter S. Thompson. I have in mind things Thompson discusses, but which may not currently be available or in use. Your object can be material, as in you bring in a typewriter or a Hell’s Angel’s jacket, for instance; or virtual, in the sense that you can provide a PDF of an article, a scanned photograph, or a website devoted to the object in question. NOTE: much as I’d find it in the spirit of HST to do so, please don’t bring dime bags or drugs of any sort, guns, animals, naked girls, or alcohol to class. If you want to bring a person, car, or motorcycle, let me know beforehand. You will present your object to the class and discuss its relevance/usefulness for at least three minutes (for full credit) but not more than five minutes.

The second part of this assignment, due no later than the final exam, is a celebration/examination/critique of the multi-media career of HST. You are required to produce (make, either with stuff or with virtual stuff) a creative something that reflects your understanding of HST’s work. This must be a product of analysis and interpretation. There should be clear, intellectual engagement with HST’s writing visible in your art. You will present your art to the class and discuss how you see it engaging HST’s work for at least three minutes (for full credit) but not more than five minutes.

Students will respond to your MC presentation, evaluating its usefulness to them, and how well your contribution has enhanced their understanding of HST’s work. I will take into consideration their responses when assigning you a grade for your work in this category.

Tests: Test one is quote identification and discussion; test two is an in-class essay based on a series of quotations you will have to identify, then use as the foundation for your thesis. Test two is cumulative. I will give you handouts on each of these tests as they approach.
Final: Your final is a five-minute in-class presentation on your term paper.
Term Paper: A roughly twelve-page page critical paper turned in by 5pm on Dec. 4, 2009. Since there is very little critical material on HST’s writing, research will be conducted creatively. Topics will be given to you mid-semester.

Grades:
I use a standard 10-point grading scale. I don’t curve grades or drop low grades.

Class Participation: 15%
Questions Assignment 10%
Background Assignment 10%
MC Assignment (50% for each) 10%
Test 1: 15%
Test 2: 15%
Final: 10%
Term Paper: 15%
Schedule of Events

I have found that a real day-to-day schedule usually gets violated on the second day somehow; I’m much more interested in letting us have the flexibility of spending more—or less—time where we need to than being rigid and not giving you what you need in terms of discussion and instruction. Below, therefore, is only the rough order of things, which will probably change (with notice). I will be adding critical and theoretical material as we go along to enrich your reading and our discussion; these essays are considered required reading and will be on your tests (but also available for your writing). Coming to class will ensure that you know when each assignment is due. You are responsible for having the appropriate material read on the day it is due, regardless of whether or not you attended class on the day it was assigned.

NOTE: Each text must be finished the day we begin talking about it.

8/13: In class: Introductions, Syllabus
Please familiarize yourself with the Society of Professional Journalists’s Code of Ethics, at http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp; Wolfe, Introduction to The New Journalism (on CourseDen as a PDF); Begin Hell’s Angels.

8/18: In class: Code of Ethics, Wolfe
Due in class: Question assignment: Hell’s Angels
Background assignment: Hell’s Angels

8/20: Hell’s Angels

8/25: Hell’s Angels
Due in class: Question assignment: Hell’s Angels OR Part One: The Kingdom of Fear
Background assignment: Part One: The Kingdom of Fear

8/27: Part One: The Kingdom of Fear

9/1: Part One: The Kingdom of Fear
Due in class:
Question assignment: Part One OR Part Three The Kingdom of Fear
(ONLY: It Never Got Weird Enough for Me and Amor Omnia Vincit)
Background assignment: Part Three: The Kingdom of Fear (ONLY: It Never Got Weird Enough for Me and Amor Omnia Vincit)

9/3: Part Three: The Kingdom of Fear (ONLY: It Never Got Weird Enough for Me and Amor Omnia Vincit)
MC Presentations (first part)

9/8: Part Three: The Kingdom of Fear (ONLY: It Never Got Weird Enough for Me and Amor Omnia Vincit)
Due in class:  
**Question** assignment: Part One: *The Great Shark Hunt*

**Background** assignment: Part One: *The Great Shark Hunt*

MC Presentations (first part)

9/10:  
Part One: *The Great Shark Hunt*

MC Presentations (first part)

9/15:  
Part One: *The Great Shark Hunt*
Due in class:  
**Question** assignment: Part One: *The Great Shark Hunt* OR *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

**Background** assignment: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

9/17:  
**Test One**

9/22:  
*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*
Due in class: **Question** assignment: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

9/24:  
*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

9/29:  
*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*
Due in class: **Question** assignment: Part Three: *The Great Shark Hunt*

**Background** assignment: Part Three: *The Great Shark Hunt*

10/1:  
Part Three: *The Great Shark Hunt*

10/6:  
Part Three: *The Great Shark Hunt*
Due in class:  
**Question** assignment: Part Three: *Kingdom of Fear* (ONLY Foreign Correspondence)*

**Background** assignment: Part Three: *Kingdom of Fear* (ONLY Foreign Correspondence)*

*Last Day to Withdraw with a W*

10/8:  
Part Three: *Kingdom of Fear* (ONLY Foreign Correspondence)*

10/13:  
Part Three: *Kingdom of Fear* (ONLY Foreign Correspondence)*
Due in class:  
**Question** assignment: “The Great Shark Hunt” (490 in *The Great Shark Hunt*)

10/15:  
**NO CLASS: Fall Break**

10/20:  
“The Great Shark Hunt” (490 in *The Great Shark Hunt*)
Due in class: **Question** assignment: *Rum Diary*

**Background** assignment: *Rum Diary*
10/22: *Rum Diary*

10/30: *Rum Diary*  
Due in class:  
**Question** assignment: *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ‘72*  
**Background** assignment: *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ‘72*

10/27: *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ‘72*

10/29: *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ‘72*  
Due in class:  
**Question** assignment: *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ‘72*  
**OR**  
*Better than Sex*

11/3: *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ‘72*  
Due in class:  
**Background** assignment: *Better than Sex*

11/5: *Better than Sex*  
Due in class:  
**Question** assignment: Biographies OR Films/art

11/10: *Better than Sex*

Due in class:  
**Question** assignment: Biographies OR Films/art

11/17: Films and Ralph Steedman’s art: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas; and Where the Buffalo Roam.*

11/19: **Test Two**

11/24: **NO CLASS: Thanksgiving**

11/26: **NO CLASS: Thanksgiving**

12/1: Catch up day.  
**MC Presentations (part two)**

Final Exam: Tuesday, Dec. 8, 8-10am