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Fear and Loathing on the Green Hills of Africa

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Fear and Loathing on The Green Hills of Africa

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

University of New Orleans

In partial fulfilment of the Requirements for the degree of English

By

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B.A., Arkansas State University, 2015

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to establish a textual parallel between Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and Ernest Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa*. Thompson took Hemingway's novel as a challenge to write under extreme duress. Thompson twisted many passages from *Green Hills* to fit his own text. He used bitter irony to translate Hemingway's text into his own "Gonzo" reportage. Thompson's friend and traveling companion, Oscar Z. Acosta, is used as an example of how Thompson rewrote Hemingway. Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* is referenced as the nexus of the two novels, making Acosta the primary focus of Thompson's rewrite. These men, their methods, and their works fit together under Thompson's pen. Hemingway's religious, racial, and bestial imagery are included in Thompson's narrative. However, these images are made ironic and do not plagiarize the original copy.

Keywords: Gonzo, Thompson, Hemingway, Acosta, Hunting, Safari, Counter-Culture

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Graduate Thesis

Dr. Dan Doll, Dr. Elizabeth Steeby, Dr. John Hazlett

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Fear and Loathing on the *Green Hills of Africa*

By Donald Miller

For Buford Carter, my mentor and friend.

On August 5th, 2016 Hunter S. Thompson's widow Anita returned a pair of antlers to the Ketchum, Idaho home of Ernest Hemingway. These elk antlers had been stolen in 1964 by the young writer who was drawn instinctively to the location of his hero's demise. For fifty-two years the hollow elk eyes watched the writer through inspiration and defeat, culminating in vicious homage to life and death in the 20th Century; to honor the great beast and his hunter, Thompson took sections of Hemingway's travelogue *Green Hills of Africa* and rewrote them for *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Just as he stole the antlers, Thompson stole from other writers saying that "it shows his good taste" (*Ancient Gonzo Wisdom*, 159). This bit of self-deprecation belies a mind that "employed literary templates (warping) them in unusual ways" (McEneaney x).

Thompson used sections of *Green Hills* as a funhouse mirror image of himself and his travel partner Oscar Acosta. *Fear and Loathing* reworked the animalistic, racial, and religious undercurrents in Hemingway's text, particularly as the story applies to Acosta. Thompson's

warping of Hemingway's words was born from an original mind and voice. He appears to have followed T. S. Eliot's "principle of aesthetic," valued in "contrast and comparison *among the dead*" (emphasis mine, 956). Thompson's work is an introduction of the new upon the dead; it re-forms the literature of the past into the present, and into the future. Thompson's method was developing old ideas in new ways, making him one of the premiere Post-Modern writers of his day. He writes a pastiche of ideas from other writers, and reconstitutes old ideas into new ones. Thompson used his own artistic devices, mixed liberally with other writer's devices, to produce a new work of fiction that stands alongside the great novels of the American Century. If Thompson's theft could be twisted into a left-handed tribute, then this novel might also be one of the great literary tributes in American literature.

Hunter Thompson's literary training was to copy, word for word, entire novels by Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner as a means of approaching the styles of each writer. Among these writers Hemingway's influence was the greatest influence, both on the writing style and on the life (and death) of Thompson. Thompson's deep attachment to Hemingway as a journalistic "Papa" is not new to scholars.¹ Kevin McEneaney says that Thompson "notes how Hemingway takes a theme and twists it in another direction," which becomes the "critical technique" in Thompson's writing style (96). Hemingway's technique is re-twisted by Thompson who turns many of his statements into savage retellings which reflect a distorted mimicking of the original Hemingway narrative.

Thompson's "non-fiction novel" evokes a dystopian, animalistic presence inspired by Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa*. As Samuel Johnson wrote, quoting the blind Mrs. Williams: "I wonder what pleasure man can take in making beasts of themselves" (Anecdotes of the Revd. Percival Stockdale, 547). The good Doctor Johnson replied to Mrs. Williams that she did "not

[have the] penetration to see the strong inducement to this excess; for he who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man” (Anecdotes, 547). The end of this quote is the beginning of Thompson’s story; it is an epigraph that sets the tone for the book, with most every human being in the story likened to a beast. These are not furry woodland creatures, but hunted and bleeding animals driven insane by the fear of the bullet. Hemingway hunted the beasts of the wild for meat and trophies, while Thompson (and, by extension, every other beast in his story) are the hunted paranoid creatures who must remain on guard, even when there is no (apparent) danger.

Ten-thousand sheriff’s deputies’ badges sit and wait for the chance to strike at any opportunity; any beast that meets the well-trained crosshairs will be stuffed and mounted on the Clark County DA office wall. Thompson and Acosta went as far as they could, and got away with as much as they could, without being shot or incarcerated. Nixon and his men were on safari for buffalo and other wild creatures, and their Hit-Parade of the Doomed went well beyond the infamous “Enemies List.” The Freak-Beasts, Thompson and Acosta waited, in fear and loathing, to be found out. One of the beautiful (or perhaps ugly) aspects of Thompson and Acosta’s treatment of *Green Hills* is that there is no direct one-to-one correlation between hunter and hunted; any animal in Hemingway’s narrative is capable of irresistible bloodlust. A close reading of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* reveals ironic parallels of language and animal savagery with *Green Hills of Africa* by Ernest Hemingway. *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* by Oscar Z. Acosta provides many of the tendons that hold the intertextual study together, as we will see.

Thompson answers many of Hemingway’s statements with irony as he explores the mind of the hunter and the hapless animal that gets caught in the crosshairs. Both *Green Hills* and *Fear*

and Loathing are parables of failure; Hemingway, spoiled with jealousy, looks down on the “most unbelievable pair of kudu horns in the world” with the eyes of failure (291). Thompson goes after a more elusive beast called “The American Dream”; It is “sort of a wild goose chase...but we are dead serious” (165). *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is a memorial to a creature which might not have even existed; it is the funeral dirge for an ideal as unreachable as the perfect kudu. But it is also a tribute to his traveling companion Oscar Z. Acosta (The Attorney Dr. Gonzo). This tribute is one of the many nuggets drawn from the pages of Hemingway’s safari narrative by way of Acosta’s *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. Thompson rewrote sections of *Green Hills* as an homage to Hemingway and as an answer to a challenge that the young writer took very personally, also as a way of honoring his partner-in-crime, the beastly Oscar Z. Acosta.

Two years after *Green Hills* was published in 1935, Hunter S. Thompson was born, and he grew to consider himself a great Hemingway Savage who would answer the call to be that great survivor of the wilderness. But this is only the beginning of the story; there are many statements in Hemingway’s *Green Hills* that deeply influenced Gonzo Journalism, particularly *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Hemingway instructs the hard-bitten memoirist to “be intelligent and disinterested and above all...*survive*” (Hemingway, 27 italics added). In this way, the savage hunter and the savage writer employ each other’s methods. High stakes, big game hunters will go to the very edge of their own limits to gain the savage beast. The savage writer must carry on in the same way, confronting the world as though challenged to a duel.

In “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved,” Thompson says that he and his illustrator Ralph Stedman had “come (to the Derby) to watch the *real* beasts perform” (30, emphasis in original). Both men are ignoring the race, instead noting the animal like qualities of

the racing fans. The relationship between man and beast is an obsessive theme in much of Thompson's reportage. Evolution has not removed the herd instinct, nor has it removed the natural tendency for the herd to reduce itself to animal-like qualities (especially at a sporting event). Rich or poor, it does not matter; Thompson used his screwball humor to turn the tables on "the outmoded, 19th century traditions of the (gentry) class" as they watch such a pointless spectacle as horse racing, the *real beasts* being in the bleachers (Michael Johnson 67). He does much the same in "*Fear and Loathing*" as he observed an overwhelming lack of human mercy in Las Vegas. He says that "the shark ethic prevails" with the wounded being eaten by the "brave" hunter (72).

The human herd is as singular in Thompson's novel as the animal herd is in Hemingway's tale. It was the focus of his great "non-fiction novel" and most of his other narratives. He built his whole career on searching out two-legged beasts and calling them what they really are. Hemingway was on a similar hunt: A laser-focused crosshair looking for the kudu. While other animals came and went, the kudu was there waiting. The annoying Kandisky (who scared away the animals with his truck) tells Hemingway that "to hunt for one special animal is non-sense," asking him why he does it (*Green Hills*, 8). Hemingway hunted this animal because he *wanted to*, and for no other reason. Hemingway had every opportunity to kill the best kudu on the hills; he had his shots at the beast because, unlike the American Dream, kudu are *real living creatures*. Even if the great (American) dream cannot be found, even if the kudu is never killed and skinned, the hunter will always be on the lookout for it. Even if the American Dream does not really exist, it will be found, in some form, out of sheer hubris.

Green Hills of Africa is a story that takes place in a short rush in similar fashion to the time allotted to find the "American Dream" in Thompson's text. Every second is used towards

this end using Hemingway's advice to always be "accomplishing something in less time than (one) should truly be allowed for its doing" (Hemingway 12). Such is the case when Hemingway and his safari "had only three days more because the rains were moving north" (11). The race to finish the task pushes the racer to the limit, even to the pits of doom and insanity; a drug addled Thompson considers his "burned out adrenalin reserves" which means that "the crash is coming" (89). No clock can measure this deadline as the writer was racing himself. Thompson continued looking for the flashing sign: "American Dream Here," but his weekend in Vegas led to no such discovery. Neither Thompson nor Hemingway find the great ideal. In the essay "What Lured Hemingway to Ketchum" Thompson quotes from *Green Hills of Africa*, saying that America "does not have great writers...something happens to our good writers at a certain age...we make our writers into something very strange" (Thompson 370). Hemingway's "strange writer" is trapped between rare quality and mundane quantity because of economic restraint; a "normal" writer would have written any number of "pot boilers" in the space of time it takes a single masterwork to be completed. Thompson took Hemingway's strangeness statement to heart. "Writers are forged," says Hemingway, "in injustice as a sword is forged" (71). Thompson's picaresque novel is an attempt to prove that the elusive "great American writer" exists (and thrives) under economic duress and time constraint.

Thompson attempted to take a step beyond economic and time restraints. Thompson the writer was forged in 1968 during the infamous Democratic National Convention in Chicago when he, as a member of the press, was beaten by the police. He considered himself to be a living representation of Hemingway's heroic writer who butts his head against all limits in the hellish cultural and political nadir of 1970's America. As a somewhat "straight journalist," Thompson stood outside the DNC in the middle of a failed revolution just as Hemingway, three

decades earlier, had stood on edge of the failed attempt to defend the Spanish government against Franco's fascist rebellion. Hemingway writes that revolutions are "beautiful...for quite a while, then they go bad" (*Green Hills*, 192). No revolutionary returns home the same way as he leaves it to join the fight. The failure of beauty, the end of the 1960's, is where the "wave finally broke and rolled back" (*Fear and Loathing*, 68). Both writers were at the forefront of failed revolutions; the hunt for human dignity would run cold. Acosta and his "herd of brown buffalos" would likewise fail to "start the last revolution" (*Brown Buffalo*, 199). The failure of "Zeta" to be the Chicano Malcolm X had run its course. He lives, however, as an apocalyptic figure who rises from the ashes as a twisted, drug addled Jesus Christ. As with any failed revolution, the loser is exterminated, with no chance of resurrection.

Thompson gives *Green Hills* the Gonzo treatment using Hemingway's style and imagery from the very first page. Consider the first sentence of "Green Hills:" "We were sitting in the blind that Wanderobo hunters had built of twigs and branches...when we heard the truck coming" (Hemingway 2). This is a classic Hemingway sentence that begins with a collective of like-minded individuals who embark upon the great safari adventure. The first-person account, naturally, includes the author (Hemingway) and his cohorts. Compare this introduction to the first line of "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: "We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold" (3). Thompson and Hemingway were beginning their respective safaris in the same bold and direct way, wasting no words, and getting to the heart of the matter. Both writers live in the moment in the middle of their stories.

Continuing, the reader notices a reference to the Crucifixion of Christ in "Green Hills" when Hemingway's guide, M'Cola quotes Christ: "It is finished" (2). This scene presents the guide with outstretched arms followed by a disdainful hatred by the narrator toward this man.

There is an inverse usage of this motif by Thompson as he and his “Samoan” attorney are driving across the desert. In this scene, the speaker of the epitaph is a disembodied voice that says “Holy Jesus! What are these goddamn animals?” (3). The speaker is revealed in the next paragraph to be Thompson, or “Raoul Duke.” M`Cola`s voice is reflected as the strained silence of two drug addled travelers. In the next paragraph, Thompson makes note of the silence which follows his fearful statement. Christ`s Passion is fulfilled in Apocalypse; the silence in heaven after the opening of the Seventh Seal is the pouring out of wrath upon the Earth. While M`Cola represents the (racially) doomed martyr, his analog Acosta represents divine wrath by way of judgment. M`Cola did not sacrifice himself in *Green Hills*, nor did he do much except assist his employers in the hunt. Acosta, particularly as a defense attorney, approached his cases with the judgement of the Almighty on his side (right or wrong). Thompson imposed M`Cola`s racial body upon Acosta`s own mercurial racial identity; M`Cola sacrificed himself as a servant while Acosta “returned” with racial vengeance.

Thompson used Hemingway`s minor biblical allusions to the crucifixion as an ironic turn toward apocalypse. Acosta fit in well with Hunter Thompson because of their radical points of view. He was called “The Brown Buffalo,” the radical attorney who would fight for his people in court. Acosta would visit Owl Farm and, in the words of William McKeen, would be “transformed into the Brown Buffalo...delivering fire and brimstone to the frightened children” (McKeen 118). The Man became Beast under the power of intoxicants. The Beast/Man fit right in with Hunter`s devotion to the Book of Revelations and “was flabbergasted by the lunatic power of Acosta`s apocalyptic visions” (McKeen 118). It has already been established that *Fear and Loathing* is a sketchbook of human beings as (hunted) animals, and the metaphor crosses paths with biblical themes later in the book.

Thompson says that “psychedelics are almost irrelevant in a town where you can wander into a casino...and witness the crucifixion of a gorilla” (190). The eschatology of Thompson borrows from Hemingway’s suffering servant M`Cola, places Revelations at the beginning of the story, and sacrifices the Beast/Man on the Cross. While M`Cola is seen (more or less) as a sympathetic servant, The Attorney is a Satanic figure whose replacement gorilla takes up the Cross and dies for the sins of the gambler. It might be an ironic twist, but Acosta claims the role of King Kong, becoming the beast who “swallowed two aspirins and became a gorilla” who did not look like one, but “was one” (*Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, emphasis in original 164). Acosta was a beast who bore the burden of one million sins, even so he was mistrusted by his militant cohorts for being “too white.” Jesus Christ, like Acosta, has been treated as a racial unknown; the art of Caravaggio bears this out as almost all of his depictions of Christ have him as a white man.

Acosta had to establish himself with the gringo, just as Hemingway established himself with the African natives. This process was settled with a handshake. Hemingway questioned why the natives would “get hold of your thumb and pull it” (293). Pop replied that it was “on the order of blood brotherhood” (293). Acosta encounters a similar situation with the Chicano Militants. Acosta proved to the militants that he was an attorney, not a gabacho spy. Acosta retells the story in *Revolt of the Cockroach People*: “I walk over, reaching for (Gilbert’s) stubby hand...instead, he locks his thumb in mine, flips the palm, then back to the thumb” (33). “Jesus” Acosta says “it feels like *the sign of the cross* (*Revolt*, my emphasis, 33). Brotherhood must be established before the work of propitiation may begin; these handshakes carried a lot of spiritual meaning in Thompson’s comparative study. It was a masterful stroke on Thompson’s part, connecting the greatest symbol of Western Civilization with a Chicano attorney and an African

gun bearer; two handshakes between two men, thirty years apart, tie these disparate figures together.

Thompson took the symbolic sacrifice of Christ and replaced it with the devilish Anti-Christ Acosta. Acosta, the former Baptist missionary, rejected God and all His earthly trappings. Acosta retained the zealous preaching, only now under the influence of multiple drugs. He reserved much of his “preaching” for the L.A. County prosecutors and judges, but was not averse to yelling his sermons at anyone. Thompson must have seen something in Acosta’s crusade against injustice that drew him to this monster of a man. Acosta’s spare and bleak human self was passionate about representing his clients. It was the one noble thing that Thompson saw his friend accomplish. The beasts in Hemingway’s story twist and bend with fear and loathing, while the “noble savage,” M’Cola, parallels the small remaining humanity left in Acosta. Thompson’s reading of *Green Hills* belies his obsession with Biblical allusion. M’Cola declared “it is finished” at the beginning of the narrative, later becoming the man who would “hold the top of the thumb and pull it” while shaking hands (*Green Hills*, 293). One month later the reader will find a scene by the sea of Galilee, Karl says that he is “not going to walk on it...it has been done already” referring to Christ (*Green Hills*, 294). Thompson recognized the allusion and applied it to Acosta who was known for taking acid and “walking with the King” (*Shark Hunt*, 505).

Acosta was the great King Kong Buffalo who would eat LSD and set the lawns of rival judges on fire, Acosta watched his transmogrification into a beast in his bathroom mirror. The beastly man felt his skin growing “fangs and grizzly hair” as he runs from the law and the drugs coursing through his large body (159). The reader follows Acosta as he remains one step ahead of Karl King (Thompson alias), even passing through Ketchum, Idaho and Hemingway’s grave. Acosta was thirty-three when he met Thompson, a fact that neither could ignore. The gravely

self-destructive Acosta had “no fear of anything at all that walks on less than three legs...and a de facto conviction that he *will* die at the age of thirty-three—just like Jesus Christ” (*Shark Hunt*, 507). Acosta, the grotesque Christ figure, died a death the circumstances of which are just as debatable. The parallel between Christ and Acosta came to a head when Acosta disappeared over the side of a boat, never to be seen again, devoured by sharks. The man could not actually walk on water after all!

For all his size, Acosta was afflicted with a private problem brought public: He had a small penis. There is no doubt that Thompson knew this fact very early in their strange (homosocial) relationship. Acosta was psychologically damaged by his mother convincing him that he “was obese, ugly as a pig and without any redeeming qualities whatsoever” (*Autobiography*, 82). Acosta had the size to be an All-American Football lineman, the musical talent to play the clarinet in the Air Force marching band, the charisma to be called “The Mexican Billy Graham” in Panama, and the sheer gall and determination to represent his beloved fellow cockroaches, and he did all these things. His greatness was overshadowed by a permanent, all-consuming body dysmorphia which haunted him his entire life.

Acosta greatly overcompensated for his affliction on his trip to Las Vegas with Thompson. Because of his mental issues, he lashed out with anger and fear. His weapon of choice is the Gerber Mini-Magnum knife; this racialized equipment may also be sexualized by the reader. The infamous North Las Vegas café scene is one of Acosta’s darkest moments. While watching the female server taking their orders, Acosta “*punched through her crust* with a demand for ‘two glasses of water with ice’” (*Fear and Loathing*, 158 emphasis mine). He passes her a sexually suggestive note saying: “Back Door Beauty (?)” implying anal sexual activity

(159). The woman is obviously scared and angry. Acosta stands and reaches “under his shirt...coming up suddenly with the Gerber Mini-Magnum” (159).

Acosta is afflicted with the same mindset as the one that afflicted Hemingway; both men are cornered by their perceived lack. The charging rhino Acosta compensates for his smaller horn with an overwhelmingly toxic masculinity. There is a shocking reality to the restaurant scene because the waitress is one of the few people in the novel to comment on Acosta’s actual race. She tells Gonzo and Duke that she “takes a lot of shit in this place, but I sure as hell don’t have to take it off a *spic pimp*” (159, Emphasis in original). The waitress uses racial and sexual pejoratives to strip Acosta naked of his well-crafted trappings.

Hemingway suffered the same Freudian sexual defeat on his safari; he and his fellow hunters were always playing the game of brinksmanship with each other. No kill was good enough. Hemingway had already killed a rhino, but not even this triumph would keep him from seeing that his rhino’s “smaller horn was longer than our big one” (83). The rhino’s head was not even large enough for Hemingway to mount; Karl had beaten him so badly that he “could never keep [the rhino head] in the same small town” where he lived (*Green Hills* 86).

Acosta also represents a scatological presence in Thompson’s narrative as well as in his own autobiography. From the very first page of *Autobiography* Acosta is battling against his own rebelling body. His “large, peasant hands “grip the bowl of the toilet as he waits for his ulcers to produce their bile as he bows where his “big, brown ass will soon sit” (*Autobiography*, 12). After many hours of hotel room drugs, violence, drunkenness, and insanity, the ever-detached reporter Thompson observes that “the room looked like the site of some disastrous zoological experiment involving whisky and *gorillas*” (*Fear and Loathing*, 180 Emphasis mine). Thompson’s characterization of Acosta turns ugly many times, not surprisingly. As Acosta “was doing the

Big Spit, again,” Thompson says that he “felt like Othello” and that he and his attorney had “already laid the groundwork for a classic tragedy” (*Fear and Loathing*, 122).

Thompson evokes Othello, the Moorish Shakespearian hero who has been played by mostly white men. He felt like Othello, but he could not decide whose tragic fall would be more epic, his or Acosta's. Thompson asks: “who was the Hero of this filthy drama” as the two men discuss the various powders used to cut mescaline (122). At this point, Thompson tells Acosta that Lucy had called looking for him. Lucy, the young girl artist whom Acosta fed LSD and, most likely, committed statutory rape with, was looking for him. Acosta behaves “like an animal taking a bullet” (122). The beastly Acosta was, like Dean Moriarty, the true hero of this evil drama. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is, in my opinion, the story of how a Chicano Attorney named Oscar Z. Acosta ran rampant over a weekend in Las Vegas. Acosta was on vacation; he had no responsibility to write about any races, any football games, or even the war in Vietnam. Thompson, on the other hand, was there to cover the story of the Brown Buffalo in the wild.

In *Green Hills*, the safari members were on the trail of a buffalo that was shot through the gut, ruining his meat. On the trail of this buffalo, the safari's path was crossed by a tribe of baboons that were passing through making “a nasty stink like the mess cats make” (112). The mess that the baboons made, combined with the mess flowing from the gut of the buffalo, represent a tableau of images that parallel Acosta's own mental and physical problems. Wherever Thompson and Acosta went, they left a trail of effluvial odors for the hotel staff to clean up. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* was a parable of a tribe passing through the land, looking for a home like Moses and the Jewish people in Exodus. Thompson realized the folly of the whole “trip,” but Acosta still carried the torch for a revolution that would cleanse the Earth of

racism. The “Peace and Love” themes of the 1960’s had left behind wounded entrails for others to clean up.

The relationship between *Green Hills* and *Fear and Loathing* is made complete with Acosta’s travelogue. At this point, Thompson is embedded with the Hells Angels and is racing across the West with rumors of this great, beastly “gorilla” stomping the terra. While in Ketchum, Acosta awakes from a drunken stupor “in the middle of the little tourist village where Ernest Hemingway is buried” and enters a conversation with some cowboys and an old woman (*Autobiography*, 101). The consummate attorney, Acosta tells them stories which are only marginally believable. Acosta tells these locals that he is a Blackfoot Indian. He is asked if he is a hunter, to which he replies: “not this trip” (*Autobiography*, 102). He is asked if he is the chief of the tribe, to which he replies “well, I ain’t got no feathers, but I am the head man” (*Autobiography* 102). His line of bull brings the conversation around to Hemingway. The interrogators ask him if he has any friends in Ketcham, to which he replies: “not exactly, I used to work for Mr. Hemingway” (102, *Emphasis in original*).

Acosta’s analog, M`Cola, is seen through a skewed racial lens. Hemingway writes about how “M`Cola shook his head...and he turned his face a little so that I saw the thin Chinese hairs at the corner of his mouth” (*Green Hills*, 2). Later in the story, Hemingway refers to him as a “black Chinaman” (276). The colonial mindset sees only difference; someone who is different enough might as well be Chinese as far as the visiting hunter is concerned. Acosta claims an interstitial racial position for himself while M`Cola had little choice in the matter. Most importantly, Acosta claims to have worked for Hemingway which equates him directly with M`Cola. M`Cola carried out his work as a guide for the safari and is portrayed as the “noble savage.” The Attorney in *Fear and Loathing* is a vomiting beast who entices young women and

offers to sell heroin to tourists. Acosta, the “Brown Buffalo” is something in the middle; the path from African native hunter to screaming, drug-addled beast Samoan passes through Ketcham, Idaho. At this point, Acosta`s travels are one step ahead of Thompson`s. He only knows that Thompson was following the Hells Angels now and was a tough literary character.

In *Brown Buffalo*, Acosta is falsely identified as a Samoan. He is recognized as neither one race or another. He is figure who questions his own racial identity due to his upbringing as a Chicano youth in America. Alexi Nowak points out that “the first four chapters of the novel take place on the day that the song ‘A Whiter Shade of Pale’ is released” (172). His lost racial identity leads him to throw out his Bar Association license and travel the country. Acosta mixed with people from various racial backgrounds, alienating himself from his revolutionary friends. In the eyes of the colonial he was “Mexican-American,” to the East L.A. barrios he was Chicano. To Hemingway, and others like him, they “looked like no negroes (he) had ever seen” (*Green Hills*, 224).

One of the great symbolic comparisons between the two narratives is the Colonial body. Acosta, the Chicano attorney, plays the role of the “doomed negro” who accompanies Thompson on his journey. The portrayal of Acosta is as a large Samoan who has “no faith in the essential decency of the white man`s culture” (11). Compare with M`Cola in “Green Hills” who carries on as the gun-bearer for the Great White Hunters. Both men are portrayed as skilled with knives, furthering the stereotype. The menacing nature of “The Attorney” and his hunting knife comes to a brutal head during the hotel bathtub scene. He “screamed crazily, thrashing around the tub like a shark after meat” (61). At this point, Acosta is under the influence of many drugs and, as Thompson says, “you can turn your back on a person, but never turn your back on a drug- especially when it`s waving a razor-sharp hunting knife in your eyes” (56). The knife makes

another appearance during the infamous diner scene where Acosta presents a threat with his “Gerber Mini-Magnum, a nasty silver blade” (158).

The knife is an object for killing and cleaning on a personal and primitive level. M`Cola is depicted as being highly skilled with this tool. Hemingway writes that “M`Cola did everything well in which a knife was used” (*Green Hills*, 222). Knives are associated with the subaltern “savage” who clears the path for the hunter and cleans the kills. Thompson uses a large knife to cut grapefruit on his flight back home to Colorado. At this point Thompson had established his complete regression into a primitive state of mind. He imagines that the flight attendant had “already decided to have me taken off the plane in a cage when we got to Denver” (203). The paranoid beast/man imagines himself as a caged animal. M`Cola and Acosta are both symbolic of the colonial savage who has the capability to slaughter with their own bare hands, the irony being that the “civilized” hunter is the beast that does the better part of the killing. M`Cola carried the guns for the white hunters, while Thompson carries Acosta`s illegal .357 Magnum with “long, nasty little slugs...painted aztec gold on the tips” (99). Thompson has the exact opposite role of M`Cola: He carries the gun for Acosta as M`Cola did for Karl, “Pop,” and Hemingway.

It would be wise to pause here and reflect deeper on the colonized and racialized body. It has already been established that Acosta was identified as Samoan by both himself and Thompson. In *Fear and Loathing* the only references to Acosta`s “actual race” is with racial pejoratives. In *Autobiography*, he compares himself to Charles Atlas, James Cagney, and Lee Marvin among others. Acosta`s father was a Durango Indian, his mother Mexican. Oscar was whatever he wanted to be; even in the futile search for his own selfhood, Acosta would not allow *anyone else* to define his racial make-up. His big brown body was truly post-colonial. Compare

to M`Cola who is often described considering Western influence. Hemingway writes that “M`Cola wore an old U.S. Army khaki tunic” and that he had “well-turned ankles *on the style of Babe Ruth`s*” (*Green Hills* Emphasis mine, 48). M`Cola`s naked body resembles the “look you see in photographs of Jeffries and Sharkey (the white boxers)” (*Green Hills*, 49).

Acosta also wore the gringo attorney uniform: “I think I see the *pattern*” he said as “he tucked his khaki undershirt into his white rayon bellbottoms” (*Fear and Loathing* emphasis in original, 8) Acosta dreaded his relationship with Anglo culture, but could not become anything other than his beastly nature would allow. Nobody would determine Acosta`s racial make-up but himself. Had he been M`Cola, and had he *truly* worked for Hemingway, he would have sued the man for being named without an alias, and for identifying him along white racial lines. As it was, Acosta did try to sue Thompson and *Rolling Stone* for royalties and co-authorial rights. Acosta, having failed this angle, sued Thompson for calling him a fat Samoan in his book (forgetting, perhaps conveniently, that he had already done the same to himself in his own book). The resulting settlement of the lawsuit was the publication of *Autobiography* and *Revolt* as a part of the settlement.

When Acosta disappeared in 1974, his estranged friend Thompson acknowledged his unknown status “dead or alive or even both” (*The Great Shark Hunt*, 496). Thompson used crisscrossing metaphors to identify Acosta as dead and alive, beast and man, hero and villain. As a racially interstitial person, he is there and NOT there. He is the Brown Buffalo, equal parts Edward G. Robinson and Cesar Chavez, a racial nobody in a country that does not want him there. Acosta was portrayed by Peter Boyle in *Where the Buffalo Roam* (1980) and by Benicio Del Toro in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998). (Interestingly, Boyle`s “Carl Lazlo” character was a better reflection on the actual life and work of Acosta than Del Toro`s.) These

portrayals further occlude the racial status of Thompson's travel partner. Acosta was of direct Spanish and Native Mexican descent, but, being born in El Paso, his status as an American trumps any bloodline.

Acosta knew the feeling of being racialized by American standards; something as common as an embossed calling card is considered an Anglo-American cultural touchstone. In *Revolt*, Acosta uses the term "Chicano Attorney" on his calling cards. He adds the name "Zeta" to his own name, grafting on his own identity. Michael Hames that Acosta "was fully aware of the political salience of Chicano specificity, which manifests itself throughout his books in his attention to the impact on experience of skin color, physiognomy, language, and surname" (472). He both retained, and rejected, Chicano essentiality. He was racially predetermined by both Whites and Chicanos, but he ultimately rejected both labels. Acosta only really identified with his own people when he became the Brown Buffalo; unlike M`Cola, who had little voice outside of Hemingway`s, Acosta spoke and was heard outside the initial novel.

He left his post as a public defender and went across America to find himself, somehow. He determined his own relationships, claimed his own friends, and made his own enemies. It became clear to him that he was "neither a Mexican nor an American" he was "a Chicano by ancestry and a Brown Buffalo by choice" (*Autobiography* 199). Acosta ends his biographical self-portrait by saying that "some time later" he "would become Zeta, the world-famous Chicano lawyer who helped start the last revolution" (199). In this way, Acosta became an example to generations of individuals who self-identify against the will of the power structure. The great and wild "Freak Power" movement, formed under the auspices of the "Thompson for Sheriff" campaign, would rise quickly, and crumble just as fast, leaving a permanent mark on American

life. Acosta was, as Ilan Stavans said, “a Borgesian creation” whose goal “was utterly meaningless,” but “the act of searching was an end to itself” (*Bandido* 12).

A whole generation turned its back on the square world; they, too, were lost in an American labyrinth, a la Borges. The Haight-Ashbury spearhead had flown as far as it could, reaching “a kind of peak that never comes again” (*Fear and Loathing* 66). He questions his nostalgic timeframe: “Five years later? Six? It seems like a lifetime, or at least a Main Era” (66). The newly enabled Freak-Beast would ride “the crest of a high and beautiful wave” (68). In Hemingway’s narrative, it is Karl who will “get a kudu...and he’ll be on top of the wave” (*Green Hills*, 154). The man, Karl, is upset that he had not killed any of the coveted kudu. The following chapter (9) tells us that Karl did kill one, but it was “a very strange and unfortunate kudu” with “a freak head, heavy and ugly” (173). Typical of Thompson’s reading of Hemingway’s story, the man on the crest of the wave is reduced to the lurid freak. The whole episode of Karl and the freak kudu is remembered by Hemingway as a time that “all seemed a year ago” (176). Past and future fade into the background when there is a hunt going on. All that matters is the next shot.

Thompson is as alienated from himself as Hemingway is alienated from Karl’s kudu. The goal of piercing that animal is made weird by its freakishness. Thompson and Acosta found themselves tumbling down the peak of an era; “Strange Memories” is the elegy for the freak bull kudu that Karl killed. The remains of the beast sit covered with flies, moldering in the sun. It has become, then, like The American Dream. Marianne DeKoven says of the search for that Dream: “if they (Thompson and Acosta) find anything at all, it (will) be corrupted, absurd, betrayed, and/or dead” (*Utopia Limited*, 88). Hemingway says of the kudu that “only the skin running from the eyes...delicately marked with white, and the *big, graceful ears* were beautiful” (*Green Hills*, 173 emphasis mine). A rich amalgamation of ironic themes created Thompson’s masterwork;

while M'Cola is Acosta's direct analog, it is interesting to note that the beastly Brown Buffalo, considering his bloated and misshapen body, recognizes in the mirror "perfectly structured ears," his "single bodily perfection" (*Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, 11). Acosta was always the beastly freak on the hill; his largesse was eternally visible, perhaps even from outer space. Thompson equated an entire generation of radicals with the Brown Buffalo; the nail that stands up highest gets hammered quickest, and the freaky radical is that nail. Even the best of this generation was hammered down by Nixon's America. Like Karl's kudu, Acosta was "a high-powered mutant...never considered for mass production...too weird to live, and too rare to die" (*Shark Hunt*, 515).

From the very beginning, Thompson is drawing from animalistic themes that reflect his own epigraph and the bloodthirsty mood of Hemingway's narrative. Trying to find the American Dream is the great white whale on this journey, and he will continue until he finds the elusive creature. Death is one of the major tropes for a big game hunter such as this. Thompson creates a weird hallucinated world for us that resembles the hyena who snapped and tore as he "pulled his intestines out and then stood there jerking them out and eating them with relish" (*Green Hills*, 38). It is fair to say that this flailing and thrashing about is not too far removed from the "huge reptile...gnawing on a woman's neck" (Thompson, 24). It is not just the spare and bitter language that makes these two narratives similar. Thompson and Hemingway are both writing about a blood-sport where only the scene had changed.

A highlight of Thompson's narrative is animal hallucination. While ostensibly drug related, I argue that the "animal-that-is-not-there" is a theme taken from Hemingway's narrative. Early on in *Green Hills*, there is a discussion about the presence of kudu and how they always seem to be where the hunter is not. Hemingway tells Pop that "when I'm in the hills I'm sure the

bastards are down there on the salt” (14). The creatures are, naturally, dodging the human presence as “other new ones will come in” and “all we have to do is wait them out” (15). At this point, Karl’s previous shot had “spooked this country to hell” of course, though, “they can’t all know about it” (13). Kudu were there, and then they are gone in a flash; the whole of kudu country had been spooked by the shot.

Thompson’s character is the only one who sees the great screeching bats “swooping and screeching and diving around the car” heading into bat country (3). Acosta, the bestial attorney, does not know what is going on with his friend or what he is seeing, but “the poor bastard will see them soon enough” (3). Telling his Attorney about the bats would have struck him at the deepest bestial level. Thompson has “The Fear” at this point and warns his partner to not stop here in “bat country” (18). Hemingway’s kudu country was “spooked to hell” keeping the beasts from coming to the salt lick. Kandisky tells Pop that “in a year a man can kill twenty (kudu)...if he lived in kudu country” (14). Kudu are there when the hunter is not and “when you want to see them you don’t” (14). Here Thompson uses irony to exchange kudu, who are desired but not seen, for bats who are seen but, decidedly, not desired.

Hemingway is further away from the kudu the closer he approaches. He remembers a story about “some man seeing the same bull every morning in the same place and never getting up on him” (256). At this point, the safari was hot on the trail of the African Sable bull, a secondary creature to the greater Kudu. Hemingway had shot the beast and followed its blood spoor, but he made the error of holding up a blade of bloody grass to be seen by his fellows, scaring off the animals. He says that the bull “was not there...he had disappeared” and “perhaps he had never existed” (262). The irony here is that M’Cola still had faith that the bull was there and that it had been taken down. M’Cola saw the beast when nobody else could while The

Attorney was kept in the dark, blissfully unaware of the fact that the animals were right at hand. M`Cola had the “savage`s disbelief in what he can no longer see” as the bull reveals itself to the hunters (263). The line between beast and man is thin, though.

Hemingway says that “the natives live in harmony with (the land), but the foreigner destroys, cuts down the trees,” ruining the landscape (284). Acosta represents the best and worst of colonial expansion. Thompson and Acosta ride the Great Red Shark with little communication, “deteriorated to the level of *dumb beasts*” (*Fear and Loathing*, 8 Emphasis in original). The “pain of being a man” is the pain of being identified as someone or something that you do not recognize in the mirror. The Brown Buffalo had to deal with his own body and mind as well as his own racial makeup. As a beast, he did not have to suffer being called something that he was not. As a man, he identified as Chicano in a nation that was pushing the title “Mexican-American.” As a man, he was M`Cola the noble batsman, as a beast he was the wild kudu, the baboon, the rhino; it is an honor to be called a beast in this context because these creatures do not have arbitrary boundary markers.

Note how M`Cola makes his original entrance: “we heard the truck coming...it moved slowly nearer...louder and louder” (2). The vehicle carrying M`Cola had scared the animals away. Survival instincts kicked in for the beasts on the green hills. Hemingway, as a hunter, desires to get out of the vehicles and shoot as his leisure. He was relatively safe during his privileged safari, and while there was a threat of animal attack, they were *safe* from any human threat. Thompson writes about “this doomstruck era of Nixon” where “we are all wired into a *survival trip*” (178). Thompson and Acosta were in possession of “a whole galaxy of multicolored uppers, downers, screamers, laughers” while driving into a city where “until about a year ago, there was a giant billboard on the outskirts of Las Vegas, saying:

DON'T GAMBLE WITH MARIJUANA! IN NEVADA:

POSSESSION-20 YEARS SALE-LIFE! (*Fear and Loathing*, 42 Capitalized in original).

In Nixon's America, the only way to survive as a drug addled beast is to remain on the run. There was no time for safari if "The American Dream" was to be found. Instead of being scattered before M'Cola's truck, these Man-Beasts got behind the driver's seat themselves.

One major instance of Thompson's rewriting of Hemingway can be found at the ending of "*Fear and Loathing*" when the failed reporter returns home without finding The American Dream. Thompson, under the influence of "poppers" sits at the bar as "a monster reincarnation of Horatio Alger...a Man on the Move, and just sick enough to be totally confident (204). In *Green Hills* Hemingway writes that "he had been quite ill" but he "knew that (he) was shooting well and...had that feeling of well-being and *confidence*" (emphasis mine, 55). At this point Hemingway was in the full swing of his expedition; he writes that "this was the kind of hunting that I liked...no *riding in cars*" (55, emphasis mine). Thompson's narrative is populated with massive vehicles which are driven to the point of demise. This section of Thompson's tale is yet another reverse image of Hemingway's. The beastly "monster reincarnation" has returned home from a morbid trip outside the comfort of Colorado, while Hemingway finds his stride out in the bushy wilds.

It is interesting to consider the names of Thompson's cars. A Great Red Shark, shamed and beaten, a candy-apple red Chevrolet convertible that Thompson and Acosta drove across the desert, and the White Whale Cadillac Coup de Ville which fails (a la Captain Ahab) to get Dr. Gonzo back to L.A. Early in the story, the Great Red Shark waits in line behind a (Corvette) "Stingray that had killed a pedestrian on Sunset Boulevard" (12-13). Thompson and Acosta

began in the Shark, and wound up in the Whale. Tom Murphy points out that “Duke and Gonzo are hardwired into the *Whale* and each other” (287). The inseparability of human and machine is in stark contrast to Hemingway who shunned vehicles during the safari saying “it’s riding in the damned cars that ruins us” (59).

Hunter and Acosta’s hitchhiker is another example of how a beast sizes up its prey. Hemingway and his safari go out of their way to find the perfect spiraling horns on the perfect kudu head. Karl’s kudu had “the biggest, widest, darkest, longest-curling, heaviest most unbelievable pair of kudu horns in the world” (*Green Hills*, 291). The disembodied head of the beast is the hunter’s ultimate trophy; Thompson’s first proposed “kill” sits in the back seat of the Shark amongst the swooping of invisible bats. A drug addled stare sets the rider into a fear induced panic as Thompson admires “the shape of his skull” (*Fear and Loathing*, 6). The innocent hitchhiker is told the backstory, with vicious detail, and escapes as quickly as any beast would when facing doom.

The Shark is ambiguously amphibious, and, by extension, so is Thompson. He considered flying off someplace, renting another Shark “for a drug-addled, top-speed run across the water” with the “last stop in Key West” (*Fear and Loathing* 17). Thompson did not want to go to Las Vegas. He would have much rather sat at home in Woody Creek and shot his pistols off the front porch. The closest thing to safety that he could approach outside of his cabin was behind the wheel of a car. On his failed attempt to return to Las Angeles, he runs afoul of a police officer who tells him to get some rest. Even in the Shark, he had to face the predatory CHIPs out on patrol. It is interesting to consider how Thompson characterizes the desert locals: “And if these righteous outback predators ever got their stories together...that would cash my check” (*Fear and Loathing*, 94). He fears the impending legal crisis, which he had already talked his way out

of. He also fears being “dragged onto the prison bus by angry natives” (94). For a short time, Acosta and Thompson switch roles; Acosta is at the hotel in Vegas, trying time and again to get Thompson where he is *supposed to be*. He lies and says that he is “beside the pool at the Flamingo...talking on a portable phone (95). He gets behind the wheel and heads East again, back to the hunting fields, back to the story. Hemingway’s challenge to survive triggered Thompson to continue pushing forward. Despite all this, Thompson would have gladly ridden “The Shark” all the way to Sloppy Joe’s bar, all the way to Hemingway’s island home.

Part two of *Fear and Loathing* begins with Thompson leaving his great whale of a car to shoot lizards in the desert “firing at nothing, for no reason at all” (99). The animalized vehicles are a *means to escape* from Las Vegas in the same way that a vehicle brought Hemingway *into the wilds*. Hemingway pined for Africa saying that “all (he) wanted to do was *get back to Africa*” (*Green Hills*, 72 Emphasis mine). Thompson hated the city, and only went because “he had no choice” (96). The story MUST be written; the roving reporter, as one with his vehicle, had to carry on Hemingway’s charge to *survive* at any cost, and *maintain control*. In many ways, Thompson is comparable to the ringmaster in his own circus. He handles his cars masterfully, and describes in detail the differences between the Shark and the Whale.

Thompson also handles the “herd of pigs” who mill around the hotel lobby before the District Attorney’s conference begins. He is the “Head Beast” in this scene, Acosta not being present, and he takes the opportunity to “put the horn into a cop” (*Fear and Loathing*, 108). Stepping in line in front of a cop, who was in the wrong, was a delight for Thompson. At this point he had mastered the art of controlling the human animal. He had come to COMPLETE the story, and no creature would be around to forbid his task. The cops were flummoxed as they were “side-swiped by some rusty drifter who looks like something out of an *upper-Michigan*

hobo jungle” (*Fear and Loathing*, 108, emphasis mine). Much like the “upper-Michigan hobo” Hemingway, he could make his way against all odds and numbers.

Returning to M`Cola, Hemingway says that “for shoes he used sandals cut from old motor-car tires” (47). M`Cola is a “beast on wheels” much like his Chicano counterpart. *Fear and Loathing* is a picaresque; it is a non-fiction novel about beast-like picadors on the move from place to place. Thompson uses minor points from Hemingway to continue his metaphoric depictions; Acosta is beast, man, and vehicle. Thompson, being white, could never get very close to Acosta. After the police murder of journalist Ruben Salazar, Los Angeles became a sociological powder keg. Thompson waylaid Acosta, picking him up in the Red Shark, and collecting a weekend`s worth of high powered drugs. Thompson, the white and distinctly Southern, writer was in imminent danger by remaining in East Los Angeles. Their journey East to Las Vegas was an escape from direct danger, and an escape to paranoid danger. Thompson carried the existential threat of destruction with him that weekend.

Control of environment is paramount for the reporter and the novelist. To Hemingway in Africa, a vehicle represents a loss of control, while to Thompson in Vegas, a vehicle IS control. Waiting outside the hotel, Thompson begins to lose control “and felt (his) whole act slipping” (75). It was not until the Shark is seen that he is able to regain control of the situation. He has trashed his hotel room, stolen hundreds of bars of Neutrogena soap (which his son, Juan, discovered over thirty years later in his father`s personal effects), and must *leave*. The only way he can have full control of himself, and his beastly surroundings, is to be behind the wheel of a car. Thompson attempts to run from the police, bobbing and weaving in and out of traffic to earn the respect of his pursuer. “The idea,” Thompson says, “is to show him that you were always in

control of yourself and your vehicle--while *he* lost control of everything” (*Fear and Loathing*, 91 Emphasis in original).

After the failure of George McGovern to defeat Richard Nixon in 1972, Thompson, who had been following the campaign across the country, wrote at the end of *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*: “Around midnight, when the rain stopped, I put on my special Miami Beach nightshirt and walked several blocks down to La Cienega Boulevard to the Losers’ Club” (505). Thompson biographer William McKeen points out the similarity to the end of *A Farewell to Arms* where Frederic “went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain” (Hemingway 322). Thompson owed a debt to his literary doppelganger that he could only repay through succeeding in the goals that Papa set forth in *Green Hills*. Thompson and Hemingway both failed to live up to their highest ideals, but recorded the artistic journey as a pair of monumental lost souls in the American Century. But it would have never been this way, the connection would not have been as close, had it not been for the influence of Acosta, and his work, on Thompson.

Thompson certainly made a beast of himself, but unlike Acosta he survived his beastliness, developing relationships that lasted until his death. He was brash, brilliant, loud, loving, scary and hateful, but, like Hemingway, he was rarely out of his league. Both planned their deaths well, preparing for years their final note to the world. It had been made clearly known that Hunter wanted his ashes to be shot out of a cannon “in the bowl of a valley in front of the bluffs that bounded his land (McKeen 363). All the best and worst of Hunter Stockton Thompson was burned and put into a cannister to be shot off with a blast of fireworks. Thompson positioned his funeral blast so that as “the guests stood holding their glasses, the ash floated and settled in their drinks” (McKeen 365). Consider, finally, the lament by Hemingway

that “the damned wind started to go round in a circle... (blowing) our scent every bloody direction” and that “Abdullah took an ash can today” (*Green Hills*, 15). The wind whipped and broadcast the smell of the hunter just as it blew the ashes of the beast on all who came to mourn that day.

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¹ See Stephenson, page 36

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